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Characterizing Mary Stuart in David Hume's *History of England* and Jacobite Historiography

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Abstract

In the 1773 edition of his History of England, David Hume claimed that among the 'touchstones' of party prejudice were Jacobites who, against all reason, sought to prove the innocence of Mary Queen of Scots. Hume was reacting to critics who disagreed with his historical evaluation of Mary Stuart, specifically Jacobite historians who wished to exalt Mary's memory in favor of their cause. Those debating the sixteenth-century queen's alleged crimes made up what literary critics referred to as the Marian Controversy. Debates centered around one mystery in particular: had Mary written the Casket Letters used to implicate her in the murder of her second husband? Jacobites purported to prove her innocence through strict empirical examination, yet they often cemented their arguments with an appeal to Mary's character, as did Hume. While both sides manipulated interpretations of Mary's character for their own agenda, Hume's method also emerged from his theoretical positing of the role of character in our understanding of human nature. This paper thus considers how both Jacobites and David Hume interpreted Mary's character, and how each applied such interpretations to their arguments as a bottom line for understanding Mary's actions, revealing both the centrality of character and its several applications in the Scottish Enlightenment.

In 1757, David Hume wrote to physician John Clephane with concerns over the critical reception of his *History of England*. Hume was relieved that his friend, at least, remained supportive: 'I always knew you to be a good friend, though I was afraid that I had lost you, and that you had joined that great multitude who abused me, and reproached me with Paganism, and Jacobitism, and many other wretched *isms*, of which I am only guilty of a part.'[1] While he

[1] David Hume to John Clephane (Edinburgh, 3 Sept 1757) in J. Y. T. Greig (ed.), *The Letters of David Hume* (2 vols, Oxford, 1932), vol. 1, 263–64.

https://doi.org/10.57132/jst.494

felt public reproaches of paganism might be irreparable, Hume was at least hopeful that the public might acquit him of an association with Jacobitism, the 'most terrible *ism* of them all'.[2]

Hume's critics thought him far too sympathetic toward the exiled Stuarts.[3] A considerable exception was perhaps the most contentious Stuart monarch, Mary Queen of Scots. Hume was one of several Scottish historians engaged in debate around the vices and virtues of the controversial sixteenth-century queen, especially concerning the veracity of the infamous 'Casket Letters' used to implicate Mary in the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley. These historiographical debates—labeled the Marian Controversy by critics—were waged between the pens of Edinburgh's literati from 1754 until the turn of the century. Opinions on Mary's guilt, however, were largely decided not by rational debate over the source evidence, but by one's opinion on a Stuart restoration; to show sympathy for Mary Stuart was to reveal one's sympathy for the Jacobite cause.[4]

Here I add to recent scholarship on the Marian Controversy[5] by considering what these debates reveal about the concept of character in eighteenth-century Scotland. Although

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2 Hume to Clephane, 3 September 1757, in Greig, *Letters*, 1, 264.

3 From the 18th century until Duncan Forbes' reinterpretation of Hume as a 'skeptical Whig' in the 1970s, Hume was viewed as a Tory historian. For an overview of modern interpretations and criticism, see Mark G. Spencer, 'Hume the Historian' in Angela M. Coventry and Alexander Sager (eds), *The Humean Mind* (London, 2019), 287–299.

4 For literature tracing Mary's memory from her execution to the modern day, see especially Jenny Wormald's candid 1988 biography: *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, which opens with a critical reflection on the development of 'Mariography' and its tendency toward intrigue and spectacle over the centuries. Her substantial contribution is to analyze Mary's reign on political grounds—asking what the relationship was between monarch and Scottish nobility, crown, and people—and showing how Mary, largely owing to her French upbringing, was unsuited for the role. This, she argues, is in direct contrast with centuries of literature which have, for example, centered around unproductive topics such as the Casket Letters or plots to overthrow Elizabeth. Jenny Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh, 2017). Other interpretations and applications of Mary's historical memory outside the historiographical ones in this paper have been considered by Jayne Elizabeth Lewis in *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation.* Lewis traces Mary's social role within a new moral sensibility in Britain to show how women in particular admired a romanticized version of Mary, to the point where there was an 'epidemic of impersonations' of Mary in ballrooms, theater, and women's writing. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* (London, 1998), 125. See also Lewis, 'Hamilton's "Abdication," Boswell's Jacobitism and the Myth of Mary Queen of Scots,' *ELH*, 64 (1997), 1069–90; and Lewis, 'The Reputations of Mary Queen of Scots', *Études Écossaises*, 11 (2005), 41–55.

5 Especially that of the collaborative academic and public-facing work of British scholars in the 'Mary Queen of Scots Project' led by Steven J. Reid at the University of Glasgow. This research began with a series of blog posts, found on the project's website: https://mqs.glasgow.ac.uk/, and culminated in Steven J. Reid (ed.), *The Afterlife of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Edinburgh, 2024).

Hume is central to any discussion of the Marian Controversy, little has been done to understand how his position was shaped by his philosophical perspective. These debates around Mary were debates around her character, and character was central to Hume's theory of human nature. This paper thus considers the Marian Controversy from a new angle—one that can teach us about eighteenth-century concepts of character and virtue within historical analysis with, on the one side, Hume analytically reducing Mary's actions to character traits, and on the other, Jacobites moulding Mary's character to suit their ideological commitments to divine right and hereditary Stuart hegemony.

With its Jacobite association, 'Marianism' in eighteenth-century Scotland held both political and cultural connotations. Colin Kidd refers to mid-century 'Mariolatry' as a 'litmus test of royalist-Jacobite support,' where vindications of the queen were considered a sign of Jacobite sympathy.[6] Consequently, the Marian debate consisted of Whig historians pointing to the incriminating Casket Letters as proof of Mary's guilt, while Jacobites believed that they could empirically prove the letters had been forged by Mary's enemies intent on falsely incriminating the queen.[7] In his work on Jacobite material culture, Murray Pittock interprets the collecting and preservation of Marian relics as 'a mute but definite statement of eighteenth-century politics in sixteenth-century terms'.[8] By the end of the eighteenth century—Kidd and Pittock agree—there is a shift to sentimental Jacobitism within Scottish culture that, consequently, softened popular representations of Mary, especially those by Whig intellectuals.

An alternative view comes from Cailean Gallagher, who considers Mary's representation in the writings of James Steuart, an exiled Jacobite who wrote but never published a substantial collection of notes on Hume's treatment of Mary in the *History of England.* Gallagher argues that because Jacobites like Steuart hid or suppressed their Marianism by choosing not to publish their writings, we can see instances where Jacobitism continues to play an active partisan role even after its seeming sentimental turn.[9] The reality likely lies somewhere in between. While an increasing number of Marian vindications appeared as the century progressed, exiled and previously persecuted Jacobites were hesitant to publish and further exacerbate their precarious positions and reputations.

More recently, *The Afterlife of Mary Queen of Scots* emphasizes how Mary's reputation functioned less as a stable historical legacy than as a continually restructured and repurposed cultural memory. Considering what can be learned from the collection of essays, Steven J. Reid draws attention to the fact that Mary's story is 'continually repurposed to reflect

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6 Colin Kidd, 'The Rehabilitation of Scottish Jacobitism', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 77 (1998), 58–76, https://doi.org/10.3366/shr.1998.77.1.58.

7 Ibid., *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–1830* (Cambridge, 1993), 96.

8 Murray Pittock, *Material Culture and Sedition, 1688–1760: Treacherous Objects, Secret Places* (Hampshire, 2013), 73.

9 Cailean Gallagher, 'Lies, Liberty, and the fall of the Stuarts: James Steuart's Commentary on Hume's "History of England"', *History of European Ideas*, 46 (2020), 438–457. See also ibid., 'Re-assessing Mary Stewart in Jacobitism: Sir James Steuart's notes on David Hume's "History of England"', In Search of Mary Queen of Scots–Blog, 20 August 2020, https://mqs.glasgow.ac.uk/index.php/posts-page/.

the society telling it',[10] not only as a collective, but among different groups. So, while eighteenth-century women were more inclined to imitate, impersonate, and identify with Mary, historians like Hume and William Robertson primarily sought to pass judgement.[11] Jacobite historians went further by not only defending Mary but by constructing a *usable* historical character applicable to their ideologically driven goals.

Also changing throughout the long eighteenth century were the *methods* used for interpreting Mary's history. These shifts can be mapped onto the work of several contributors to *Afterlife*. At the start of the century, in what might best be understood as Scotland's 'first' enlightenment,[12] Mary's memory was one of empirical investigation. Historians collected, edited, and exhibited original source evidence while beseeching the public to interpret the evidence for themselves.[13] Later, mid-century Jacobites were especially keen to attach their work to this tradition. But by the time of their involvement in the Marian Controversy of the 1750s, interpretations of Mary's guilt also reflected contrasting ideologies within an 'enlightened' climate and emerging moral culture. While source evidence continued to be central to any credible historical work, the actions it revealed were understood against interpretations of character.[14] By the end of the century, Mary's memory was absorbed into romanticism. Her association with Jacobitism, alongside her victimization, created an appealing figure that perfectly suited the idea of the 'losing cause' so enthralling to early nineteenth-century readers and writers.[15] Historical source evidence was overshadowed by a demand for romantic depictions of Mary, whose virtues, as one contemporary put it, formed one of the 'most illustrious characters'.[16]

Regardless of intellectual or political concerns, both Hume and his Jacobite interlocutors were foremost concerned with Mary's character, even if they disagreed on what exactly that meant or how it could be determined. This paper first introduces eighteenth-century approaches to character and methods of character-writing before examining how Hume the philosopher-historian derived character traits from historical sources. It then introduces the Marian Controversy while turning our attention to several unpublished Jacobite writings that show a determination to paint Mary as a virtuous woman and queen, while their

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10 Reid, 'Introduction' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 3.

11 Ibid., 7–8. For more on the gendered response to Mary, see Lewis, '"Dozens of Ugly Mary Queen of Scotts": The Women of Great Britain 1725–1785', *Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1998), 124–146.

12 Kelsey Jackson Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests, and History* (Oxford, 2020).

13 Michelle H. Craig, 'Editing and Collecting Mary, Queen of Scots in the Eighteenth Century: James Anderson (1662–1728) and Dr William Hunter (1718–83)' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 125–141.

14 Rhona Brown, 'The Battle for Memory: The Reception of Mary, Queen of Scots in the Eighteenth-century British Periodical Press' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 142–159.

15 Gerard Carruthers, '"Deeply impressed upon the imagination": The Return of Mary in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 160–178.

16 William Tytler, *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, Into the Evidence Against Mary, Queen of Scots*, 4th edition (London, 1790), 33.

unpublished status reveals an unwillingness to risk further social ostracization by announcing their Marian-Jacobite sympathies. The paper concludes by turning to the end of the century and the work of a lesser-known Marian historian, Thomas Robertson, whose *The History of Mary Queen of Scotland* suggests a shift away from the Marian partisan divide, even though it remained so that the best way to interpret Mary's actions was an appeal to her character.

Eighteenth-Century Character Writing

At the turn of the eighteenth century, character analysis was represented predominantly by philosophical character sketches. These sketches were often brief, satirical summaries of different 'characters' one might encounter in their everyday interactions. This genre of character sketch was influenced by a resurgence of the Theophrastan tradition in the seventeenth century.[17] Theophrastus (372–287 BC), the student and successor of Aristotle, wrote *Characters* as a moral guide for the youth. His approach was not to provide aspirational virtuous characteristics but to show the dangers of unvirtuous types. Thus, Theophrastus warns against the 'boorish' and 'shameless', and explains how such types can be recognized. This approach inspired such works as Jean de La Bruyère's *The Character or the Manners of the Age* in France and, later, Samuel Johnson's essays *The Rambler*, *The Adventure*, and *The Idler*.

These works did not directly reflect Theophrastus' approach but rather represent a shift towards an interest in understanding *why* and *how* character develops in particular ways. La Bruyère admired Theophrastus and his *Characters*, a copy of which he translated to include in his own publication on character types in 1688 (London, 1699). La Bruyère's character analysis, however, was less concerned with censuring immorality via maxims, but was rather interested in observing habitual behaviour of individuals to understand character types. And so, with 'the subject-matter of this work being borrowed from the public,' he shares his gratitude, and offers in return 'a picture drawn from life'.[18] Johnson's work, while inspired by the Theophrastan practice of focusing on individual types, also attempts to explain *why* it is that certain characters act the way they do, and the importance of the individual will in developing virtuous character.[19] Thus 'the complainer,' likened to a screech-owl, cannot only be recognized, but understood: he reflects on the complainer's motivations—to seek 'help from

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17 Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning, 'Introduction' in Ahnert and Manning (eds), *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York, 2011), 1. See also Benjamin Boyce, *The Theophrastan Character in England to 1642* (Cambridge, 1947) and Katie Ebner-Landy, *The Character Sketch as Philosophy: Manners, Mores, Types* (Cambridge, 2025).

18 Jean de La Bruyère, 'Preface' in Henri Van Laun (trans), *The 'Characters' of Jean de La Bruyère* (London, 1885), ii.

19 While character is and has always been a versatile concept, this is especially the case in the eighteenth century. Between 'character', 'to character', and 'to characterize', *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) gives twelve different definitions. For an example of how character was versatilely applied, see James Harris, 'Reid and Hume on the Possibility of Character', *Character, Self, and Sociability*, 31–47.

his fellow-creatures'—and reduces their actions to human nature—'it cannot be denied, that he who complains acts like a man, like a social being'.[20]

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Theophrastan tradition was breaking down in favor of a more analytical approach to understanding human behaviour. However, to understand Hume's analytical method for understanding character, we must look to the tradition of the Roman historian Tacitus (c. 55–120 AD), whose character sketches were not separate philosophical tracts, as with La Bruyère and Johnson, but counterparts to historical analysis. Following the death of historical figures, Tacitus concluded his narrative by examining character so that we might better understand behavior and actions.[21] Like the Theophrastan tradition, this approach was also revived in the early-modern period through the historical work of Niccolò Machiavelli and Francis Bacon, among others.[22]

While character was a central component to Hume's theories of human nature, we find his character sketches not in his philosophical works, but, following the Tacitean tradition, in his *History of England*.[23] It is here, I argue, that we can see Hume's application of theories developed in works like the *Treatise of Human Nature*, *Essays*, and *Enquiries*.[24] Within these philosophical works, we see how crucial a close study of the past is to Hume's theoretical development. He held, for instance, that 'the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy [by] showing us the original qualities of human nature'.[25] For Hume, character is the bottom line for understanding human nature; we can understand why people do the things they do by tracing actions to motivations and distilling constant character traits. While character can be observed in everyday experience, history offers a much broader pool of experience from which Hume could draw. Historical distance meant that Hume could evaluate character in its most revealing representations, after the actions stemming from character have had time to reveal their historical consequences.

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20 'There is … among the various anomalies of character, which a survey of the world exhibits, a species of beings in human form, which may be properly marked out as the screech-owls of mankind.' Samuel Johnson, 'An account of Suspirius, the human screech-owl', in *The Rambler*, 59 (1750).

21 Stephen G. Daitz, 'Tacitus' Technique of Character Portrayal', *The American Journal of Philology*, 81 (1960), 40.

22 Niccolò Machiavelli, *History of Florence* (Florence, 1532); Francis Bacon, *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (London, 1622).

23 David Hume, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (6 vols, Indianapolis, 1983).

24 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Edinburgh, 1739–40); idem, *Essays, Moral and Political* (Edinburgh, 1741–42); idem, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1748); idem, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (London, 1751).

25 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2007), 359.

Hume not only utilized the historical record[26] to develop his theories, but he then applied these theories within his character sketch as causal historical explanations. Hume believed he could understand the actions and motivations of historical figures, since he held that, in history, 'The same events follow from the same causes', so much so that if you wish to 'know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the Greeks and Romans' you ought to 'Study well the temper and actions of the French and English', for human nature is predictable across time and place.[27] Character traits and historical circumstances can thus be used to understand the course of historical events. It is through this reasoning that Hume can 'shed a generous tear' for Charles I[28]; he saw the Stuart king not as having vicious character traits but, instead, lacking virtues necessary to rule effectively, particularly those needed to adapt to changing political circumstances.[29]

We might assume that Hume held similar sympathies for Charles' grandmother, Mary. After all, their political trajectories follow a similar course, even before approaching the executioner's block. As we will see, Hume lauds several of Mary's virtuous character traits. But despite her alleged virtues, Hume found several occasions to refer to Mary as violent, bigoted, and allegedly 'a whore'.[30] Hume concluded that Mary was the instigator of her own demise. This was not, however, based on his analysis of the Casket Letters, which he relegated to a footnote (albeit, ironically, a substantial one), but on his evaluation of Mary's character.[31] Hume's seemingly contradictory account of Mary's virtues and vices can be explained, I argue, by his aversion to the Jacobite attempt to downplay Mary's vices in order to exalt her character. While Max Skjönsberg has shown Hume's cordiality and close friendship with high-profile Jacobites,[32] Hume was also repulsed by the fanatical behavior he associated with their cause, which he believed blinded rationality; not least in what Hume believed was a fairly clear case of Mary Stuart's guilt.

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26 For recent work challenging the traditional view that Hume did not engage with primary sources, see forthcoming Pamela Yunger, 'The Marian Controversy and Hume's Use of Original Sources', *Hume Studies*, 52 (2027); Roger L. Emerson and Mark G. Spencer (eds), 'A Bibliography for Hume's "History of England": A Preliminary View', *Hume Studies*, 40 (2014), 59, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/hms.2014.0009.

27 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2000), 64.

28 Hume, *The Life of David Hume, Esq.* (London, 1777).

29 The point is further developed by Richard H. Dees, 'Hume on the Characters of Virtue', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 35 (1997), 45–64. See especially pages 59–60.

30 Ernest C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford, 1980), 251.

31 Contrary to Wormald's assertion that 'Those great figures of the Enlightenment, William Robertson and David Hume, both argued for Mary's guilt of adultery (with Bothwell) and murder (of Darnley), on the grounds that the Casket Letters were genuine'. Wormald, *Study of Failure*, 6.

32 Max Skjönsberg, 'David Hume and the Jacobites', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 100 (2021), 25–56, https://doi.org/10.3366/shr.2021.0496.

The Marian Controversy

The Marian Controversy comprised literary debates between several of Scotland's most eminent historians and thinkers. These Scottish literati were divided on the question of Mary's guilt; a division which hinged, in part, on the veracity of the letters allegedly written to her third husband, Lord Bothwell, which suggested a joint conspiracy to murder Darnley. With sparse evidence to prove her innocence or guilt, Marian polemics were often interpreted as politically driven attacks on their authors, leading an exasperated Hume to quip that the touchstone of Jacobite prejudice was Marian sympathy. This section introduces the Marian Controversy as it unfolded between four acquainted historians: Walter Goodall and William Tytler as 'Jacobite' Marian apologists, and David Hume and William Robertson as their notorious adversaries. It establishes the public-facing characterization of Mary as one which revolved around a narrow scope of her involvement in the Casket Letter conspiracy, while showing how character evaluation was nonetheless applied as the bottom-line evidence for or against her complicity.

In 1754, Goodall was working as assistant keeper of the library for the Faculty of Advocates when Hume, recently appointed head keeper, found him drunk and asleep atop a desk of papers. With characteristic good humor, Hume allegedly bellowed 'Queen Mary was a whore and had murdered her husband'![33] The papers, which seemingly put Goodall to sleep, were translations of the infamous Casket Letters, which Goodall was researching for his vindication of Mary, published in 1754 as *An examination of the letters, said to be written by Mary Queen of Scots, to James Bothwell: shewing by intrinsick and extrinsick evidence, that they are forgeries*.[34] His title plainly conveyed his empirical approach to Marian history, popular among Scotland's enlightened literati by the mid-century.[35] It also explicitly labeled him a Jacobite, as the single word *forgeries* left no doubt as to which side of the debate he landed.

Over the next six years, three additional major publications formed the mid-century Marian Controversy. Hume published the first Tudor volume of his *History of England*—and Robertson his *History of Scotland*—in 1759, followed shortly by Tytler's *An historical and critical enquiry into the evidence…against Mary Queen of Scots. With an examination of the Rev. Robertson's Dissertation, and Mr. Hume's History, with respect to that evidence*, in 1760.[36] Together, these 'most masterly pens of the age', as one reviewer put it, cast Mary as a central figure of his-

[33] Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 251.

[34] Walter Goodall, *An examination of the letters, Said to be Written by Mary Queen of Scots, to James Bothwell: Shewing by Intrincick and Extrincick Evidence, That They are Forgeries* (Edinburgh, 1754).

[35] Craig, 'Editing and Collecting Mary' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 125.

[36] Hume, *The History of England*, IV (London, 1759); William Robertson, *The History of Scotland, During the Reign of Queen Mary and King James VI* (2 vols, London, 1759); Tytler, *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence of Murray and Morton, Against Mary Queen of Scots* (Edinburgh, 1760). For its second edition, Tytler's work was renamed *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, Into the Evidence Against Mary Queen of Scots* (2 vols, London, 1767).

torical debate within the formative years of Scotland's enlightenment.[37] While all four lauded Mary's character in varying degrees, it was the question of the Casket Letters that brought this controversy to the forefront of historiographical debate and set the stage for further analysis of Mary's virtues.

Hume was appointed keeper of the Advocates Library in 1752 to a stir of public disapproval. His philosophical works on morality, human nature, and politics—published since 1739—shaped Hume's reputation for espousing 'profane and irreligious principles.'[38] Despite opposition from the 'excessively holy,' Hume became the next head librarian and Goodall's direct supervisor.[39] The two shared a friendly relationship yet were divided over the issue of Mary and the Casket Letters. Hume was, at this point, preparing to publish the first volume of his *History of England*—the first of six volumes that would elevate him to literary fame, though not without significant controversy. When critics of his first volume accused him of favoring a Tory interpretation of Stuart history, Hume responded in his second volume with a markedly less sympathetic approach to the plight of seventeenth-century Stuarts. In an undated letter, likely written around the time of this second volume's publication in 1756, Hume wrote to a friend: 'If you do not say, that I have done both Parties Justice … I shall burn all my Papers, & return to Philosophy'.[40]

When Hume's second volume failed to alter public perceptions of his alleged Tory agenda, an exasperated Hume later lamented to his close friend, Adam Smith, that 'if my past writings do not sufficiently prove me to be no Jacobite, ten Volumes in folio never would.'[41] The two were discussing Hume's recently published Tudor volumes which, once again, placed Hume at the center of debate, this time around the Casket Letters. Not intending to focus on the letters as part of his historical narrative, Hume's analysis was placed in a footnote as a response to Goodall, who published his *Examination* confident that he was publicizing empirical proof of their forgery, thereby exonerating Mary from crimes plaguing her reputation for centuries. While Goodall's original intention was to write a biography of the queen, he 'soon perceived that the chief controversy'—that of her involvement in Darnley's murder—'was a matter that might be easily settled with certainty; and required neither no great labour, nor so deep disquisition, as hath been commonly imagined.'[42] Indeed, his examination of the 'paltry French letters' procured, to his 'great astonishment … more ample and palpable marks and evidences of forgery, than one could readily have imagined.'[43]

Confident in his unshakeable, empirically derived conclusions, Goodall further defended Mary's guilt based on her character. He found the letters so 'mean and base' that it was 'absolutely impossible' that such ink could 'have dropped from the pen of this accomplished

37 *The Critical Review*, 9 (London, 1760), 421.
38 Hume to Clephane, 4 February 1752 in Greig, *Letters*, 1, 165.
39 Ibid., 167.
40 G. Birkbeck Hill, *Letters of David Hume to William Strahan* (Oxford, 1888), 177.
41 Hume to Adam Smith, 28 July 1759 in Greig, *Letters*, 1, 314. Skjönsberg has shown how Hume used the terms Jacobite and Tory interchangeably in 'David Hume and the Jacobites', 38.
42 Goodall, *Examination*, i-ii.
43 Ibid., iv.

Princess; one possessed of a soul so noble, born in a station and character so highly exalted' and determined of 'never resigning but with her last breath, the conscious sense of virtue and decorum.'[44] He went on to say:

> For Mary Queen of Scots so far excelled all other sovereign Princes who ever yet appeared on the face of the earth, that, as if she had not been of mortal nature, all the arts and contrivances of her numerous and malicious enemies have not availed to fix upon her one crime, shall I say, nay, not one single foible, either while on the throne, or in the jail, from her cradle to her grave, unless the want of omniscience or omnipotence shall be reckoned in her a defect.[45]

With this hyperbolic characterization, Goodall betrayed his prejudices in favor of the exiled Stuarts. His meaning was not lost on readers; in London, one reviewer cautioned readers against taking his work seriously, stating 'With regard to this writer's professed design, it is obvious, that he is not disinterested enough to be depended on as to facts, and therefore his performance merits not a serious refutation.'[46] In 1758, the historian David Dalrymple, after drawing attention to Goodall's extravagant claims of Mary's otherworldliness in a previous letter, wrote to Horace Walpole that Goodall's biased 'work left me fully convinced of what he endeavored to disprove'.[47]

Adverse to Goodall's interpretation, Hume believed a delineation of Mary's character would ultimately explain her 'gross' conduct. First, Hume set out to settle his position concerning the letters through empirical examination, treating them as 'nothing more than a historical puzzle' in a way that, he hoped, was objective and free of political factionalism.[48] Responding to Goodall's conclusions of their forgery, Hume made his opinion clear, if not as succinctly as he hoped: 'We shall not enter into a long discussion concerning the authenticity of these letters,' opens his multi-page footnote. He lists fifteen points that seemingly rationalize the Casket Letters' veracity, including their physicality ('it is very difficult, and almost impossible, to counterfeit several pages' which are 'much longer than they needed to have been'); their style ('they are not so gross and palpable, as forgeries commonly are' yet 'The letters are indiscreet; but such was apparently Mary's conduct'); and their content ('They contain such a variety of particular circumstances, as no body could have thought of inventing'). Undermining Goodall's argument, Hume concludes that 'the Scotch translation is full of Gallicisms, and is clearly a translation from a French original.'[49]

The following year, Tytler published his *Enquiry* challenging both Hume and Robertson's histories. In his preface, Tytler balances their approach to character against their analysis

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44 Ibid., 77.

45 Ibid., xxviii.

46 *Monthly Review*, 13 (1755), 300.

47 David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes to Horace Walpole, 5 July 1758 and 11 July 1758 in W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven, 1938), 28, 31–32.

48 James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2015), 378.

49 Hume, *History*, 4, 390–393.

of the letters, explaining how, though they both assert the letters to be forgeries, Hume and Robertson's evaluation of Mary's character differed.[50] Robertson's treatment of the queen was indeed more moderate, causing less of a stir than Hume's more abrasive representations of her character. Regardless, Tytler published his provoking polemic against both authors, with the 'design, by tracing the history of those letters from their very first appearance, to detach them from that confused heap of rubbish under which they have artfully been buried'.[51] Tytler concludes of the letters that 'neither she, nor indeed any woman of common prudence or modesty, could have written them.'[52]

In the end, Hume presented a sound argument against Goodall and Tytler's preoccupation with the letters—not necessarily proving that Mary wrote them, but revealing flaws in their reasoning.[53] But to Hume, the question of the letters' veracity was, on the whole, unnecessary to prove Mary's guilt, as 'to men of discernment', rather than the irrational interpretation of Jacobite Marianists, Mary's complicity was clearly exhibited by a 'conduct … so gross as to betray her'.[54] Such conduct was explained and understood by Hume to be the outward manifestation of Mary's character, exhibited by her actions in his *History* and explained in the concluding character sketch.

A Humean Character Sketch

While Hume relegated his analysis of the Casket Letters to a footnote, the character sketch served as the crucial concluding synthesis within his narrative of Mary's behavior. Considering Hume's incriminations in this footnote, his account of Mary's character might come as a surprise, for she was:

> a woman of great accomplishments both of body and mind, natural as well as acquired; but unfortunate in her life, and during one period, very unhappy in her conduct. The beauties of her person and graces of her air combined to make her the most amiable of women; and the charms of her address and conversation aided the impression, which her lovely figure made on the hearts of all beholders. Ambitious and active in her temper, yet inclined to chearfulness and society; of a lofty spirit, constant and even vehement in her purpose, yet polite, and gentle, and affable in her demeanour.[55]

But to Hume, manifestations of character, or at least what we believe to be manifestations, can be deceptive. Actions do not necessarily originate from constant character traits. To

50 Tytler, *Historical and Critical Enquiry*, I.
51 Ibid., 2.
52 Ibid., 4.
53 Laurence L. Bongie, 'The Eighteenth-Century Marian Controversy and an Unpublished Letter by David Hume', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 1 (1964), 238.
54 Hume, *History*, 4, 393.
55 Ibid., 251.

understand human actions, then, Hume first considered individual motivations before tracing such motivations back to character traits. He found that motivations sometimes stemmed from 'violent passions' inherent to human nature that were aggravated by external causes. Thus, despite Mary's amiable qualities, we must consider the circumstances which shaped her motivations:

> In order to form a just idea of her character, we must set aside one part of her conduct, while she abandoned herself to the guidance of a profligate man; and must consider these faults, whether we admit them to be imprudences or crimes, as the result of an inexplicable, though not uncommon, inconstancy in the human mind, of the frailty of our nature, of the violence of passion, and of the influence, which situations, and sometimes momentary incidents, have on persons, whose principles are not thoroughly confirmed by experience and reflection.[56]

Mary was guilty, but her guilt was due, in part, to the 'inexplicable … inconstancy of the human mind'. Her contemporaries judged her, Hume argued, not based on her entire character, but on Mary's 'preceding behaviour, which seemed to remove her from all suspicions of such atrocious inhumanity'. For 'the characters of men [are] extremely variable, and persons, guilty of the worst actions, [are] not always naturally of the worst and most criminal dispositions'.[57] And so the moral failings that led Mary to commit crimes were not necessarily a reflection on Mary's character. Rather, Hume argued that a fair evaluation depended on a consideration of the more durable and constant traits. Such durable traits included Mary's sense of honor:

> It was in vain to employ menaces against her: The fear of death or other misfortune would never induce her to make one step or pronounce one syllable beyond what she had determined: She would rather perish with honour, in maintaining the dignity, to which God had raised her, than degrade herself by the least pusillanimity, or act what was unworthy of her station and of her race.[58]

By depicting Mary's 'constant' character as virtuous, Hume conceded to Marianists who defended the queen's innocence based on her virtue. Meanwhile, his method of determining character and how it shapes our actions allowed him to argue for her guilt while navigating accusations of party prejudice.

In addition to the circumstances that may have motivated Mary to act contrary to her character, Hume implies that she did not have the character traits best suited for an effective ruler. Hume's analysis of England's monarchs, especially the Stuarts, showed how virtuous means do not always result in virtuous ends. Those traits Hume believed were most effective for rule—prudence, adaptability, maneuverability—were instead exhibited by Mary's cousin

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56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 94.

58 Ibid., 398.

queen, Elizabeth. In the *History*, Elizabeth's character serves as Mary's contrast. Her 'singular talents for government were founded equally on her temper and on her capacity' from which she merited 'esteem by her real virtues, [while] she also engaged their affections by her pretended ones.'[59] Elizabeth's affected tolerance for and consideration of the opinions of her council, for instance, allowed her to manipulate policy. Mary's refusal to demean herself by adapting to Scottish reforms, or to the unique power held by Scottish nobles, reflected a harmful pride unsuited to the role of monarch.

Hume's critical opinion of Mary's character can also be found in his treatment of her son, James I and VI. Similar to his forgiving attitude towards Charles I, Hume sympathizes with James and the difficulties he faced as monarch because he understood his faults to be otherwise virtuous character traits—just not those best suited to the particular circumstances of his reign. In Hume's depictions of James and Mary's relationship, we no longer see the virtues presented in Mary's character sketch, but a violent and uncaring mother. When, for instance, Mary threatened to bequeath her right to the Scottish and English throne to Spain if James did not convert to Catholicism, Hume concluded that such a 'violence of spirit is very consistent with Mary's character' by explaining how 'Her maternal affection was too weak to oppose the gratification of her passions, particularly her pride, her ambition, and her bigotry.'[60] In another example, when Mary's supporters proposed a scheme to capture the young James and deliver him to Catholic Rome or Spain, Hume, seemingly without evidence, argued that Mary consented to this plan, and concluded that 'A mother must be very violent to … dare to make such a proposal: But it seems she assented to it. Was not such a woman very capable of murdering her husband, who had so grievously offended her?'[61]

Hume wanted his *History* to appear balanced and free of party prejudice, but it seems he expressed something closer to his genuine opinion to William Robertson in 1758: 'I am afraid that you, as well as myself, have drawn Mary's character with too great softenings. She was, undoubtedly, a violent woman at all times.'[62] Hume's character analysis ultimately led him to believe that Mary was an unfit ruler, and that her character was marred by pride and bigotry. In contrast, his character sketch makes concessions to Jacobite Marianists who relied on Mary's virtues to depict her as an honorable and admirable Stuart queen. While this then gave Hume room to purport an objective reading of the Casket Letters as likely genuine, this reading was built on a foundation of character—a character he viewed as incompatible with an effective monarch. Despite himself, Hume returns to Mary's violent nature and unvirtuous character that appear to contradict the character sketch, reflecting his opinion on the Jacobite effort to exonerate Mary: 'a Scotch Jacobite, who maintains the innocence of Queen Mary, must be considered … beyond the reach of argument or reason, and must be left to their prejudices.'[63]

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59 Ibid., 352.
60 Ibid., 398.
61 Ibid., 399.
62 Hume to William Robertson, February or March 1759 in Greig, *Letters*, 1, 299.
63 Hume, *History*, 4, 395.

Unpublished Jacobites and Marian Character

While Goodall and his followers examined the Casket Letters to prove Mary's innocence on empirical grounds, they, along with others, also appealed to a sympathetic reading of her character. This section considers the writings of three unpublished Jacobites who—unlike Goodall, who did not directly participate in the risings—were hesitant to publicize their Marian sympathy. In her analysis of Marian representations in the British periodical press, Rhona Brown draws attention to a review of Tytler's work which claimed, in 1760, that one could now support claims for Mary's innocence without 'the risk of being stigmatized as a Jacobite.'[64] Despite such an assertion, a view which Brown is also hesitant to embrace, it is clear that Marian sympathy was still very much associated with Jacobitism, and passionate defenses of the queen were often reduced to party zeal. While the battle over Mary's memory was fought between interpretations of the Casket Letters, the real war was over what certain interpretations said about Mary's character.

One such Marianist was James Steuart, who wrote copious notes on Hume's *History of England*. Steuart was exiled to the Continent after the failed 1745–6 rising for his support of Charles Edward Stuart, but gradually distanced himself from the cause in hopes of a pardon and return to Britain.[65] While exiled, and perhaps influenced by his host, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Steuart wrote his commentary on Hume's history, most of which was to do with his treatment of Mary.[66] Since Steuart never published his commentary—based on the several revised copies, we can guess this was his original intention—Gallagher points to Steuart as an example of how Jacobites were hesitant to betray their ideologies. Steuart's reluctance to publicize such views suggests to Gallagher that Jacobitism moved underground rather than fading into sentimentality.[67]

Much like Steuart and others who were unwilling to publicize their true opinions on Mary, Hume also refrained from sharing provocative opinions in such a permanent platform as his *History*. Where Hume's provocations *do* appear are in his cordial interactions, both in letters and recorded meetings with friends. Hume seems to have enjoyed bantering with Jacobites who defended Mary. In one instance, while he and Steuart were discussing Steuart's notes, Hume joked that his friend clearly thought him 'very credulous,' to which Steuart responded

64 Brown, 'Battle for Memory' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 151–152; *Monthly Review*, 23 (July 1760), 30.

65 Andrew S. Skinner, 'David Hume and Sir James Steuart' in Peter Jones (ed.), *The Reception of David Hume in Europe* (London, 2005), 142.

66 Gallagher, 'Lies, Liberty, and the Fall of the Stuarts', 445.

67 When Gallagher turns to Hume's involvement in these debates, however, I believe he misrepresents Hume as an unwelcome participant in the Marian Controversy. For instance, in considering a conversation with Steuart, despite Hume's expressed 'good humour', Gallagher uses the friendly exchange to argue for Hume's 'tenacity—verging on intellectual tyranny—with which he protected his anti-Marian line.' On the contrary, Hume's representations of Mary were often intentionally balanced, as we can see in his character sketch. Gallagher, 'Lies, Liberty', 440, 445, 449.

'Why, David, I do think you a very ready believer—IN THINGS PROFANE,'[68] a prod likely not only towards Hume's opinion of Mary but, as many of his friends enjoyed, a provocation toward his general skepticism and reputation for irreligiosity.

Gallagher uses this anecdote to argue that, confronted with Steuart's analysis, what Hume feared most of all was that 'his [historical] account would be crushed by something closer to the truth.'[69] But I believe that what this and other examples best display is that, what Steuart feared most was, ultimately, that Mary's character would be tarnished by Hume's critical account—that she would be remembered for actions stemming from 'fatal passion' rather than those admirable 'principles which underpinned her politics'.[70] While Hume often pointed to Mary's character defects as explanations for her failure, Steuart sought to reevaluate Hume's conclusions to draw attention to the virtues in her character that, although not resulting in virtuous effects, were nonetheless noble.

Following Goodall's analysis of the letters, Steuart made his case by laying out the evidence for empirical evaluation. While Hume believed party prejudice was influencing Jacobite interpretations of the Casket Letters, Steuart asserted that he and Mary's vindicators thought the same of their opposition. Considering Hume's favorable character sketch of the queen, Steuart asserts that one must have a predetermined bias to possibly conclude that she was guilty.[71] In introducing the debate over the letters, Steuart accused Hume and those who agreed with him of ignoring the blatant evidence in favor of abstract ideas about character and virtue: 'Whoever inclines to form a judgement upon this historical problem, has two parties to take.' Referring first to that of Hume, Steuart argues that:

> He may either without examination, join issue with the most impartial writers upon the subject, and form his opinion after that of such contemporaries, who may appear to him to have been the most unbiased, as well as most discerning. Or he may lay together the circumstances of the trial proved by original documents, the nature of the evidence produced, and the weight of presumption upon all sides, where evidence is wanting, and form his opinions from his own knowledge of the cause. The first party is by far the easiest, and the most commonly followed, especially where the prejudice takes place of pure curiosity to unravel a controverted historical event.[72]

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68 Gallagher, 'Lies, Liberty', 449. The anecdote is found in a collection of Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, though not recounted by Montagu herself, in Mary Wortley Montagu, *Original Letters from the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montague, to Sir James & Lady Frances Steuart; Also, Memoirs and Anecdotes of those Distinguished Persons*, ed. John Dunlop (Greenock, 1818), 142n.

69 Ibid., 456.

70 Ibid., 449.

71 James Steuart, 'Notes on Hume's History', ed. Cailean Gallagher, *History of European Ideas*, 46 (2020), 506, https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1735201.

72 Ibid., 508.

Steuart's analysis reveals a virtuous queen succumbing to the vices of others, concluding that 'She was not naturally cruel' but yet 'her enemies set out … to defame her' while 'acknowledg[ing] that she had been formerly endowed with many good and excellent gifts and virtues.'[73] Following this clear evidence of foul play among her enemies, Steuart begs his readers: 'Now I desire any impartial man, to lay all the circumstances of character … together, and then to declare whether it be rational to decide as to the queen's guilt, upon any other grounds than plain evidence.' To Steuart, all evidence pointed toward a virtuous character which, he emphasized, even Mary's 'fiercest enemies' testified to prior to turning against her.[74] The question over her involvement in Darnley's murder was therefore straight forward: Mary resented her husband, 'but if this fact be thought a presumption that she murdered him, the behaviour of Elizabeth and the character of her accusers is as strong a presumption that they did all they could to charge that crime upon her true or false.'[75] Anyone who believed Mary to be involved in such crimes was feeding into the tales of her enemies. For 'If the universal clamour against the Queen as a murderer be attended to' we must also consider the absurd fact that 'the same clamour had long before declared her to be a gezabel or a harlot from the form of her petticoat'.[76]

While Steuart's work is the most visible and extensive among unpublished pro-Marian Jacobites, two others offer similar examples of private attempts to exalt Mary's character. The first was another close friend of Hume's, Lord Elibank. In 1759, Hume sent Elibank drafts of his upcoming Tudor volumes. While Elibank's response does not survive, a few years later Hume received a letter from his brother, Alexander Murray, who had gained notoriety for his instigation of the so-called Elibank Plot in 1750 to bring about an exiled Stuart restoration.[77] In what was a bewildering turn of events for Hume, Murray addressed him as the 'former friend of my brother' on account of his abusive treatment of Mary, 'that most divine and amiable creature'.[78] Alarmed by this news, Hume immediately wrote his friend. He lamented that Elibank had 'always display'd such an unaccountable Violence in this silly Controversy about Queen Mary,'[79] and worried that Elibank, who shared his plans to write a vindication of Mary, would do so under the influence of party zeal: 'I dreaded the Consequences of a Pamphlet published by one of your Lordship's Temper, in a Fit of Rage, on a Subject where you are naturally heated.'[80] In a letter to their mutual friend William Robertson, Hume expressed that he 'hopes his Lordship [Elibank] has forgot his vow of answering us; and of washing Queen Mary white.' Referring to Elibank's Jacobitism, Hume concluded: 'I am afraid that is impossible; but his Lordship is very well qualified to gild her.'[81]

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73 Ibid., 510.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Alexander Murray to David Hume, 12 August 1764 in Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank, 1748–1776', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (1962), 453.

78 Alexander Murray to Hume, 12 August 1764, ibid., 454.

79 Hume to Patrick Murray, Lord Elibank, 14 August 1764, ibid., 456.

80 Hume to Patrick Murray, 3 November 1764, ibid., 457.

81 Hume to William Robertson, 8 February 1759 in Greig, *Letters*, 1, 297.

Despite Hume's exasperation from the zeal around Mary, and his concerns that his Jacobite friends would undeservedly exalt her character, he hoped to clear himself of Murray's accusations by explaining:

> I wrote my [previous] Letter in a Spirit of Cordiality & Amity, that I might prevent a Rupture, most disagreeable to me. I have no Objection to the publishing any thing against my Opinions: On the contrary, there is nothing I desire more than these Discussions. I was far from threatening your Lordship with the Loss of my Friendship, which, I was sensible, cou'd never be of any Consequence to you: I only foretold, with infinite Regreat, that, if you wrote against me in a Heat, without allowing your Passion to subside, it would be impossible for us to be any longer Friends. I employ'd every pathetic, every engaging Expression & Sentiment to induce your Lordship to embrace this way of thinking … I compos'd my Letter with great Care, because I see a Value on your Lordships Friendship.[82]

Hume was concerned that Elibank's 'passion' would lead him to publish a portrait of Mary that was blindly sympathetic—one that would be met with dismissive responses like Goodall's exaggerated characterization—a fate he did not wish for his friend.

Marian sympathizers were not only determined to persuade the *public* of Mary's virtue. Robert Forbes, the non-juring bishop of Ross, for instance, reflected on and defended Mary's character in private marginalia written in his copy of Thomas Pennant's travel journal, *A Tour in Scotland*.[83] Forbes would later attract fame for his multi-volume *The Lyon in Mourning*, in which he recorded testimonies of the failed 1745–6 rising and its aftermath.[84] When it came to Mary, Forbes' Jacobite interpretation contrasted with Pennant's mild yet unsympathetic representation. Reacting to Pennant's assertion that Darnley's charm had captivated 'the heart of the amorous *Mary*', Forbes' response reflects the broader debates over Mary's character:

> This author has a splenetick pleasure in his impotent attempts to bespatter one of the brightest characters. Mary demeaned herself with the greatest Decency of Manners, & Dignity of person. Her exquisite Beauty of Countenance, Elegance of Person, & Graceful appearance … by the Testimony of all the contemporary writers, rendered her the admiration of the age![85]

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82 Hume to Patrick Murray, 3 November 1764, Mossner, 'New Hume Letters', 457; Gallagher misinterprets this exchange to mean that Hume threatened to end his friendship with Elibank if he published. But Hume is clear that this was never his intention, and he was rather worried over their potential rupture. Gallagher, 'Lies, Liberty', 443.

83 Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland* (1769), with annotations of Bishop Forbes, Acc.5146., National Library of Scotland, https://manuscripts.nls.uk/repositories/2/resources/8327.

84 Published in three volumes in 1895–96, *The Lyon in Mourning* is currently being researched and developed into a digital humanities project by Leith Davis at Simon Fraser University. https://www.sfu.ca/people/leith/research/jacobite-networks-and-the-lyon-in-mourning-project.html.

85 Forbes in Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*, 61.

Of course, not 'all contemporary writers'—John Knox being the most illustrative—testified to Mary's virtues, as Forbes would have well known. Yet he nonetheless claims that Mary 'maintained the most unblemished character of virtue & reputation'.[86] Forbes makes it clear that his opinion of Mary's character was not only a personal matter but was representative of the Jacobite cause: 'Pennant's 'whole performance, aims a deadly Blow, in a mean sarcastical Way, at the Royal Family of Stewart, the most virtuous Race, that ever sat on the Throne of England'.[87]

In contrast, Horace Walpole, who built his family's notoriety and success supporting the Hanoverian regime, viewed Mary as representative not of a virtuous lineage, but 'that despicable race' and 'Enthusiastic Drivers of Slavery,' the Stuarts.[88] His commentary shows how opinions on Mary's character were still a deeply partisan affair in 1759. In his private journals, Walpole remarks on a newly published *Parliamentary History of England*, 'written by many hands,' which he complains ought to have been written with a 'view … for liberty,' but was instead 'written by a Jacobite, whose chief view, as Hume's … is to deny Q. Eliz[abeth and] to exalt the Stuarts'.[89] Walpole's ire toward Jacobites extended to Mary and any who sought to exalt her, although it is curious he included Hume—who very much admired Elizabeth for her political acumen—in this classification. Walpole argued that if roles had been reversed between the imprisoned Mary and her captor Elizabeth, Mary was of such a character that she would not have shown Elizabeth the kindness of imprisonment before committing regicide. His comments on Mary's character, like Forbes and several others involved in these debates, were not only linked to Mary's moral virtues, but were believed to also derive from her physical appearance. Whereas Jacobites doted on Mary's famed beauty, and even her critics did not deny it, Walpole was not impressed, commenting drily that Mary's portrait was 'not handsome'.[90]

Conclusion: Sentiment and Character

Nearing the end of the eighteenth century, Mary's political association receded while interest in the Casket Letters remained, and intrigue over Mary's character only grew.[91] In 1793, the Scottish minister Thomas Robertson published *The History of Mary Queen of Scotland* with a fresh approach to the letters: rather than assume the status of all Casket Letters, he

86 Ibid., 62.

87 Ibid., inserted leaf 1.

88 Horace Walpole, *Book of Materials*, 1759, vol. 1, 47–48. Horace Walpole Collection, Lewis Walpole Library, https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/17198446.

89 Ibid., 47.

90 Ibid., 112.

91 A second wave of Marian debate occurred toward the end of the century, starting with Gilbert Stuart's *History of Scotland* (1782) and leading to Tytler publishing a new edition of his *Inquiry* in 1790. With Hume passing in 1776, the debates now targeted Robertson's *History*. See Brown, 'Battle for Memory' in Reid, *Afterlife*, 153–159.

would attempt to determine which were genuine and which were forged.[92] He presented his project as a service to the public who, despite possibly reading interpretations of the letters and forming opinions from their armchairs, never had the opportunity to read the controversial letters for themselves:

> They are alluded to, in every history of England or Scotland: Opinions have been delivered upon them: The character of the Queen has been in part, decided by them; But still the writings themselves have not been presented in a state fit for the perusal of mankind in general; who, have thus, not had the means of judging for themselves.[93]

Above all, Robertson was concerned with determining Mary's character: his 'two principal objects in view, have been, to Ascertain, what was the real character of that Princess; and, To explain, what were the actual principles of her conduct'.[94] Establishing a baseline for Mary's character was simple, for 'Queen Mary was descended from a race of Princes in Scotland, of a brilliant character.'[95] Robertson exalted the virtues passed down through the Stuart line, while acknowledging that character is not necessarily inherited through lineage. But 'from a review of her life' he concludes that she was indeed fortunate enough to inherit the 'Stuart character', described as 'A majesty, which was mild, but still commanding; a spirit, which from being impetuous, was still permanent and hardy'.[96] Mary was thus naturally 'majestic, wise, generous, and affable' yet did suffer from 'occasional deviations' from her principles due to the intrigues of those who wished to exploit her power. Such intrigues 'could not fail to make an impression upon a young mind, however otherwise disposed by nature.'[97]

Robertson's analysis reflects Hume's approach to evaluating Mary to determine the probability of her guilt, yet in doing so they each reached opposite conclusions. While Robertson hoped to provide an impartial analysis, he occasionally reminds us, in brief parentheses, of his pro-Marian conclusions. In perhaps a slight against the then-deceased Hume, Robertson includes a footnote proudly claiming that such conclusions were supported by Hume's friend and ally, Adam Smith.[98] But while Robertson is happy to share his opinion on the letters, he

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92 Emma Macleod, 'Robertson, Thomas (d. 1799)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

93 Thomas Robertson, *The History of Mary Queen of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1793), Appendix I, 3.

94 Ibid., xiii–xiv.

95 Ibid., 1.

96 Ibid., 2.

97 Ibid., 5.

98 Ibid., xvi. Robertson was pleased to report that his friends agreed with his assessment, including the rare mention of Smith's opinion: 'I embrace this opportunity, of mentioning, in particular, the late Dr Smith. The friendship of that great man and philosopher, which I enjoyed, and which never will be effaced from my memory, gave me the advantage of obtaining, his deliberate and particular examination of my Manuscripts; and it was a circumstance singularly gratifying, to me that he declared (to use his own words) That I have 'satisfied' him.'

asks why we are so focused on only two points of Mary's reign: whether she murdered her husband and whether the documents were forged, for 'Queen Mary, might have actually composed the writings, and yet have been innocent of the murder … On the other hand, the writings might have been forged by her adversaries; and yet the Queen, have been guilty of that very charge which was brought against her.'[99] By publishing the letters in their most accessible form, Robertson hoped to show that there was nowhere else to go, and that the matter ought to be laid to rest. He believed the only real question was whether Mary was a virtuous queen or not, determined by the evidence of her character. While we cannot be sure of Robertson's sympathies for the Jacobite cause, his seemingly genuine attempt at impartiality purported to quell the 'zeal' around the subject of Mary's involvement in Darnley's murder.

Robertson's history demonstrates a shift in Marian representations away from their Jacobite association towards a deepening moral literary culture favoring the marginalized over the progressive, for which Mary's narrative was well suited. Although the mid-eighteenth-century debates were famed for their preoccupation with the Casket Letters, it was Mary's character that was under scrutiny and which could ultimately explain her actions and determine her guilt. The resulting sympathetic defenses of her noble 'Stuart character' found a natural home in romantic nineteenth-century narratives, while Hume's critical evaluation became a target of, for instance, a young Jane Austen's satirical *History of England*.[100]

While both Hume and Jacobite Marianists accepted character as the necessary explanatory criteria for interpreting Mary's history, they disagreed on how, exactly, to interpret her character. Under scrutiny for showing sympathy for the Stuarts, Hume had hoped to present a balanced view while harboring an aversion to the pro-Marian arguments that he viewed as determined by party prejudice. His counter-approach to interpreting character clarifies the different ways that character was understood: from an innate inheritable idea—'the Stuart character'—to something that is constructed by circumstance. Hume used the latter approach to suggest that Mary was fully capable of committing the crimes levied against her due to her circumstances and social pressures, not necessarily because she had a fundamentally wicked character. Thus, Hume could argue, 'the harsh and preposterous usage, which this princess met with [by Scottish nobility] may, in part, be ascribed those errors of her subsequent conduct, which seemed so little of a piece with the general tenor of her character.'[101]

Acknowledgements

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99 Ibid., xii.

100 Jane Austen, 'The History of England', in Peter Sabor, *Juvenilia*, vol. 2, (Cambridge, 2006), 176–89.

101 Hume, *History*, 4, 42.