

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Second Sight in Early Modern Scotland

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requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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DEDICATION

For my mother, the storyteller.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library (London, England)
BOD	Bodleian Library (Oxford, England)
EUL	University of Edinburgh Library (Edinburgh, Scotland)
NLS	National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh, Scotland)
NRS	National Records of Scotland (Edinburgh, Scotland)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Second Sight in Early Modern Scotland

by

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This dissertation examines beliefs and practices related to second sight in Scotland, with a particular focus on the period from c. 1600 to c. 1800. An influential strain of historiography has asserted that this period was characterized by “disenchantment,” a process of increasing rationalization and secularization that progressively eradicated superstition. According to conventional wisdom, this process was due to the influence of the Protestant Reformation, the

Enlightenment movement, and the Scientific Revolution. However, this dissertation argues that the persistent relevance of “superstitious” belief systems, such as second sight, within the conversations of reformers, Enlightenment thinkers, and early modern scientists contradicts the theory of linear disenchantment in early modern Scotland. Because the term “second sight” was defined and used in various ways by early modern people, I argue that a broad and inclusive definition is necessary for understanding second sight belief. Second sight was a multivalent concept that encompassed several supernatural phenomena, such as the ability to see visions and spirits, predict the future, and access hidden knowledge. While I claim that accounts of second sight were likely rooted in physiological experiences, I emphasize the significance of culturally specific belief systems to interpreting those experiences. Though second sight was demonized by reformers during the witch trials, some Christian seers managed to reconcile second sight with their own prophetic and visionary traditions. In these ways, the Reformation involved cultural synthesis between pre-existing and reformed systems of belief. Early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers also engaged with second sight in order to investigate the relationship between the natural and supernatural. Scientists’ theories about second sight were heavily informed by prevailing beliefs about spirits, demonstrating the significance of religion to scientific research. This dissertation concludes that early modern people developed a variety of theories about the essential nature and causes of second sight, rendering it a malleable concept that was readily incorporated into debates about religion, science, and human knowledge. Far from being subject to disenchantment, second sight maintained relevance and utility across this period as part of a broader matrix of early modern beliefs about spirits, supernatural abilities, and the invisible world.

Introduction

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
And an angry woman was she: ...
‘[H]ad I kend, Tam Lin,’ she says,
‘What now this night I see,
I wad hae taen out thy twa grey een,
And put in twa een o tree.’

— The Ballad of “Tam Lin” (1549)¹

[O]f a Woman taken out of her Child-bed, and having a liveing Image of her substituted in her room, which resemblance decay’d, dy’d, and was buri’d, but the person stoln returning to her husband after two years space... Among other reports, she gave her husband, this was one, that she perceiv’d litle what they did in the spacious hous she lodg’d in; until she annoynted one of her Eyes with a certan unction that was by her, which they perceiving to have acquainted her with their actions, they fann’d her blind of that Eye with a puff of their breath.

— Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth* (1691)²

The vast majority of early modern European people believed that their eyes could not actually see everything that existed. Those who claimed that human eyes were capable of seeing all that was real were often denounced as atheists and heretics. Rather, it was widely acknowledged that our world overlapped with an invisible reality, and some people under some circumstances were able to glimpse or gaze into this reality. Stories about the relationship between perceptive eyes and supernatural knowledge appear to have been both a source of intrigue and anxiety in early modern Scottish popular culture. These stories, and the beliefs and practices that underpinned them, are the topic of this dissertation.

¹ “Tam Lin,” in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Vol. 1 of 5*, ed. Francis James Child (Forgotten Books, 2007), 270-310.

² EUL, La.III.551, fols. 34-35.

The Scottish ballad of "young Tam Lin" relates the tale of a kidnapped knight who escapes captivity in the fairy realm with the help of his human lover. Through his lover's tenacity and courage, Tam Lin manages to return to the human world against the fairies' wishes. In the final lines of the ballad, the fairy queen laments that she did not have the foresight to remove Tam Lin's eyes, which now have knowledge of the fairies, and replace them with eyes of wood.³ Similarly, a relation recorded by the Scottish minister and folklorist Robert Kirk told of a woman who was kidnapped by fairies in childhood and taken to their world. While dwelling among them, the woman accidentally anointed one of her eyes with an unguent that allowed her to see her kidnappers and the fairy world. Upon discovering that she could see them, the fairies blinded this woman's perceptive eye.⁴ She related this story to her husband after her restoration to the human realm, though she never recovered the use of the eye through which she had once witnessed the invisible world.

These tales both emerged from the folklore traditions of the late medieval and early modern British Isles.⁵ While the ballad of Tam Lin can be dated to at least 1549, Robert Kirk did

³ "Tam Lin," 270-310. Scottish fairies were sometimes believed to strike individual body parts (or even whole people) and leave useless wooden substitutes in their place. Replacing Tam Lin's eyes with eyes of wood would be a version of this practice that would render him blind. See G.F. Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore concerning the Orkney and Shetland Islands*, ed. Northcote W. Thomas (London: David Nutt, 1903), 36, 44.

⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 34-36.

⁵ It is worth noting that other European folktales share motifs with these stories, and there is no way to verify whether aspects of these tales may have originated elsewhere. However, it is significant that they were repeated and recorded by Scottish people during this time period. For a similar tale, see Gervase of Tilbury's story of a woman's kidnapping and blinding by *dracs* in *Otia Imperialia*, an early 13th century encyclopedic work. See Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, eds. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 718-721.

not collect his tale of the one-eyed woman until about 1691.⁶ Despite the almost century and a half between these two sources, they both share this theme of human eyes that possess a dangerous, perceptive potential. In both tales, the protagonists' eyes have the ability to see a reality that normal people cannot, and this ability may be acquired or taken away again by a brush with the supernatural. The repeated threats of violent blinding tell us that early modern Scottish people were unsure whether supernatural sight was a desirable ability, and were therefore convinced that knowledge gained by such means may ultimately be costly. These stories locate beliefs about perceptive eyes within broader understandings of human contact with the invisible world, and the existence of individuals who can see more than most.

I: Argument

The belief that people could possess "second sight" was widespread in early modern Scotland, and perhaps throughout the British Isles. People gifted, or cursed, with second sight were attributed a wide range of abilities including seeing apparitions, accessing hidden knowledge, predicting future events, or communicating with the spirit world. The term "second sighted" was employed to describe such disparate figures as men who could foresee the deaths of others, people who were capable of seeing fairy spirits, and witch-finders who could identify sources of malefic magic. There does not seem to have been a cultural consensus about what

⁶ The ballad of Tam Lin is likely older, but it can certainly be dated back to at least 1549, the publication date of the anonymously authored *Complaynt of Scotlande*. This text mentions "The Tayl of the 3ong Tamlene" among a list of medieval romances. See *The Complaynt of Scotlande (1549)* (London: The Early English Text Society, 1872), lxxix.

second sight was, how it was acquired, by what means it functioned, or even what exactly the second sighted were "seeing." One cluster of early modern sources may agree on a *single* definition or theory of second sight, while other sources reference *various* definitions of second sight— some even contradictory. The body of knowledge that informed early modern perceptions and interpretations of second sight was vast. As a topic that moved fluidly across conversations about morality, theology, science, and nature, second sight was an exceptionally good subject with which to develop and test various theories. This malleability was directly related to the lack of cultural consensus about how to define or interpret second sight.

Beliefs about second sight were inextricably entwined with other early modern understandings of supernatural abilities, spirits, and people who could perceive the invisible world. An exploration of the experiential dimension of second sight reveals that some second sighted people may have entered altered states of consciousness in order to induce visionary experiences, as did some practitioners of magic, shamans, and accused witches. While second sight accounts were likely rooted in genuine physiological experiences, this dissertation emphasizes the significance of culturally specific frameworks of belief for interpreting those experiences. A survey of early modern spirit belief demonstrates that the realm of spirits was populated by a variety of beings, many of whom had overlapping attributes and behaviors. Because of these ambiguities, early modern processes of discernment that were meant to facilitate interpretations of visionaries and their experiences frequently proved arbitrary and subjective.

For this reason, second sighted people often found themselves assuming and being cast in a variety of roles. Some second sighted people were persecuted as religious and social deviants

during the Reformation and witch trials in Scotland. In their mission to create a godly society, many reformers demonized second sight and various other aspects of folk belief, which were seen as threats to widespread and complete acceptance of Protestantism. Beliefs about second sight, fairies, and witchcraft intersected in the popular imagination, casting suspicion on individuals who laid claim to supernatural abilities. However, this dissertation also emphasizes the role that folk belief played in the development of literate conceptions of witches and their powers. Through an examination of references to second sight in Scottish legislation and disciplinary records, it becomes evident that aspects of second sight belief influenced demonological theories of diabolic witchcraft.

Conversely, some seers were religious visionaries who managed to reconcile their own prophetic traditions with popular beliefs about second sight. Accounts of these visionaries' experiences illustrate that second sight and Scottish Christianity were not incompatible systems of belief, as both emphasized the reality of a world of spirits and individuals who were uniquely receptive to it. The existence of pious visionaries who laid claim to abilities associated with second sight demonstrates that early modern Scottish Christianity may have been more flexible and adaptive to local culture than has previously been recognized. Therefore, in the realms of both prophecy and witchcraft, second sight was not unidirectionally influenced by the Reformation, but rather there was reciprocal interaction between second sight belief and early modern Scottish Christianity.

There was also a surge of educated interest in second sight during the years associated with the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, two social movements that have often been considered synonymous with rationality and secularization. Some scientists and

Enlightenment thinkers believed that second sighted people could provide valuable evidence about the existence of spirits and the limits of human knowledge and perception. Therefore, second sight became a test case for a number of learned individuals who were interested in developing theories about the boundary between the natural and supernatural. Despite the widely-held opinion that early modern science was characterized by increasing secularization, scientists' theories of second sight emphasized their rational conviction in the existence of spirits who could interact with humans. Therefore, scientific inquiry into second sight was often used in pursuit of religious goals, and evidence gathered from the second sighted was offered as proof of the existence of an invisible world.

Contrary to historiographical arguments that emphasize Protestantism's role in disenchanting the early modern world, "superstitious" belief systems such as second sight continued to remain relevant and prevalent in the writings of theorists throughout this period and after. While this dissertation makes use of historiographical terms to describe various early modern social movements ("Reformation," "Enlightenment," and "Scientific Revolution"), it does not adopt wholesale their traditional meanings. Rather, this dissertation analyzes and uses them critically in order to both confirm and revise commonly accepted ideas about this time period. In doing so, this dissertation adds to the near-consensus of modern historiography that rejects the thesis of linear disenchantment across the Reformation and post-Reformation periods.⁷ Instead, this project adopts a model proposed by Alexandra Walsham in her article "The

⁷ For this consensus, see the bibliography for publications by P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, Julian Goodare, Alexandra Walsham, Lizanne Henderson, Diane Purkiss, Emma Wilby, Owen Davies, Edward J. Cowan, Ronald Hutton, Louise Yeoman, Margo Todd, and Liv Helene Willumsen, to name only a few.

Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed.”⁸ This model emphasizes the ways in which systems of belief experienced cycles of sacralization and desacralization in early modern European culture.⁹ Walsham’s model is applicable to second sight belief, which underwent processes of both sacralization and desacralization throughout the early modern period in the British Isles. In this way, this project challenges historians to have a more nuanced view of this era and its religious and intellectual movements. The recurrence and re-shaping of interest and belief in second sight throughout this period contradicts traditional historiographical readings of this era, particularly those that champion the rise of rationality and the fall of superstition.

II: Early Modern Sources and Evidence

Because second sight belief was filtered and reworked through a variety of molds, any scholarly study of early modern second sight must be willing to approach it with a broad definition in mind and seek out references to it in a wide range of historical records. When analyzing these sources, it is important to avoid making too many assumptions about what a source may mean by "second sight" until that source has clearly told us itself. There was no apparent consensus about how second sight was defined, and so any definition that historians adopt must recognize the diverse and complex ways in which the term was employed in the past. We must also acknowledge that interest in second sight is not necessarily the same as belief in it,

⁸ Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (2008): 497-528.

⁹ Walsham, “‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” 497.

though interest should not be seen as excluding the possibility of belief. Assumptions about the belief or disbelief of an individual author based on his or her cultural background, religious affiliation, level of education, or social status should also be discouraged. Both skeptics and believers hailed from various backgrounds, and people who wrote about second sight approached the topic from numerous perspectives with many objectives in mind.

References to second sight appear in a wide variety of early modern documents such as ballads, folktales, theological or scientific treatises, personal letters, travel journals, early ethnographic works, and judicial records. The earliest sources that contribute to this discussion were manufactured during the beginning stages of the Scottish Reformation and the first major wave of witch-hunting in Scotland, just before the year 1600. The latest sources that are relevant to this dissertation taper off a little after 1800, as sources on second sight from a Romantic perspective begin to dominate the conversation. In general, Romantic sources may be less reliable when it comes to accurate transmission of early modern folk beliefs and practices.¹⁰ While discussing this body of sources, this dissertation makes reference to several religious, intellectual, or social movements that were culturally influential in early modern Europe. To help the reader orient these movements in the greater span of Scottish history, 1560 is the established date for the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. However, this dissertation argues that reform was far from a simple or immediate process, as evidenced by Scotland's witch trials which were aimed at prosecuting various forms of religious and social deviance. The Scottish trials occurred in waves or "panics," which largely took place over the period between 1590 and 1727. Notably,

¹⁰ See Julian Goodare, "Boundaries of the Fairy Realm in Scotland," in *Airy Nothings: Imagining the Otherworld of Faerie from the Middle Ages to the Age of Reason*, eds. Karin E. Olsen and Jan R. Veenstra (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 163-166.

the years spanning the trials overlapped with the years associated with the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution in Scotland, which are generally located at the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century. As was the case with Protestant reform, this dissertation calls into question commonly-held assumptions about these social movements, and thereby seeks to provide a more nuanced perspective of the early modern era.

Throughout these various social movements, the early modern debate about the merits or reality of second sight attracted the attention of figures across the spectrum of society. Among the defenders and deniers, the believers and the skeptics, were kings, peasants, scientists, tourists, ministers, and practitioners of magic. As such, the topic of second sight offers a wide vantage on early modern Scotland, its culture, and its people. While some of these sources on second sight come from cultural “outsiders,” like the English scientists of the Royal Society, others come from “insiders,” such as the Scottish writers Martin Martin and Robert Kirk. Yet even the utility of this insider-outsider dichotomy may break down when we ask, who had greater knowledge of second sight beliefs: the Scottish King James VI, or English cunning woman Mary Parish?

This dissertation will often make reference to two cultural levels present in early modern society: “elite” and “popular.” For the most part, elite culture was educated and literate, while popular culture (also referred to as “folk culture” or “folk belief”) was largely the purview of the

illiterate majority.¹¹ While these are useful labels for thinking about authors' and sources' backgrounds, purposes for writing, and influences, topics such as second sight readily illuminate the overlaps and fractures between these two cultural levels. By definition, all surviving sources on second sight were written by literate individuals who belonged to a minority group of elites. However, many of them were actively interested in illiterate or popular culture, and therefore provided valuable records of the beliefs and practices of individuals who would otherwise be unrepresented in the historical record. The early modern period witnessed increasing contact between members of different social levels, and ideas and beliefs were more readily transmitted between the two than in previous eras.

A good example of an overlap between elite and popular culture can be found in early modern books of magic. By definition, magical practices that were recorded by magicians in grimoires or books of experiments were part of elite magical culture. However, as is discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, formulas for conjuring fairies begin to appear with increasing frequency in early modern manuals of magic. From an educated, Protestant perspective, fairies did not exist. However, belief in the existence of fairies and their ability to be summoned to the aid of humans was alive and well among members of popular and illiterate culture, as evidenced by records of magical practices taken down by prosecutors during the early modern witch trials. While belief in fairies was largely the purview of members of popular culture, it is clear that

¹¹ R.A. Houston has claimed that during the early eighteenth century, about twenty percent of women in the Lowlands were literate, compared to around sixty percent of Lowland men. Percentages were notably lower in the Highlands. See Owen Davies, "A Comparative Perspective on Scottish Cunning-Folk and Charmers," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 200; R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 56-57.

early modern fairy belief sometimes found its way into the realm of elite, literate culture as well. Though most educated, written sources condemned or scoffed at belief in fairy beings, it is clear that some elite magicians felt it was worth their while to attempt conjuration of these potentially useful spirits that were neither angels nor demons. In this way, fairy belief is a useful tool for examining the overlaps and fractures between elite and popular notions of ambiguous spirits.

Second sight belief is much the same, though perhaps even more valuable than fairy belief for examining early modern interaction between levels of society. While few elite individuals were willing to openly discuss their belief in fairies, belief in second sight seems to have been more widely entertained by members of educated, literate culture. As with aspects of popular magic, evidence for second sight belief among members of illiterate culture has a strong presence in the records of the early modern Scottish witch trials. Though belief in second sight was largely regarded as the purview of members of popular culture, it is also clear that many literate and educated individuals believed in the validity of this ability. While ethnographer Martin Martin was ridiculed by some of his peers for credulity, his published works describing Scotland and the culture of its inhabitants attested to the fervency of his belief in second sight. Likewise, Lord Reay's accounts of second sight were widely cited in early modern scientific circles as sources that plainly exhibited belief in second sight, yet were composed by an educated and noble individual. Scottish minister and folklorist Robert Kirk was exceptionally well-educated, yet his treatise on second sight advertised his belief in fairy spirits, as attested by Scottish seers. The malleability of second sight as a concept lent itself to motion across levels of society, as belief in supernatural or visionary abilities was present among even the most elite and educated individuals. In this way, belief and interest in second sight defied social stratification,

and it is a particularly useful concept for examining interactions, congruences, and dissonance between social levels in the early modern British Isles.

Because second sight is uniquely situated at the intersection of early modern levels of social class and categories of knowledge, sources on second sight are surprisingly diverse when it comes to their authors, reasons for composition, and intended audiences. For the purpose of this dissertation, writers who discussed and formulated theories about the essential nature and causes of second sight are often referred to as “second sight theorists.” Second sight theorists had many reasons for engaging with the topic of second sight, as evidenced by the numerous theories and perspectives that they produced. The sources that these authors drew on were even more varied, giving us a valuable window into the spectrum of beliefs and cultural viewpoints present in the early modern British Isles. Second sight is situated between pre-Christianity and Christianity, magic and science, human and supernatural, holy and demonic. Discussions of second sight adapted to the concerns of both Reformation and Enlightenment authors, moving easily between the realms of folk belief and intellectual discourse. It is precisely because second sight is both elusive and adaptable that it appears across so many early modern sources on such diverse topics.

While this dissertation focuses mainly on Scottish sources, it also references English sources when relevant. Scottish people were frequently in communication with English acquaintances and friends, and popular works that circulated in Scotland were often being read in England as well. The early modern English also appear to have shared some beliefs about supernatural abilities with their Scottish neighbors, and some overlaps in culture, religion, and folklore are certainly to be expected. In the case of second sight, educated interest was often

cross-cultural and transnational as well, as several English scientists and travelers speculated about the source of the secrets witnessed by the eyes of Scottish seers. Further research that looks at second sight from a British or even Atlantic perspective could be fruitful, but the sources that would make this possible are currently outside the scope of this project.

While illiterate people could not leave any records of their own about their beliefs and practices, some sources do allow us to have first-hand information about their opinions of second sight. Folk ballads provide valuable insight into oral culture, as do records of folklore and folktales.¹² Though some early modern folklorists and antiquarians may have had somewhat condescending views of their subjects, these writers were still interested in preserving folk culture and as such their publications are important sources of information about traditional beliefs and practices. British antiquary John Aubrey recorded a significant amount of information about second sight and its relationship to relevant popular beliefs. In particular, his *Miscellanies* and *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme* are valuable sources, as are his collection of letters from James Garden on the topics of popular belief and folklore. Similarly, Welsh antiquary Edward Lhuyd preserved records of early modern Scottish beliefs through both his personal accounts and correspondences. His collection of notes and letters provide valuable information, particularly those that contained questionnaires on the topic of second sight, which he sent to reliable friends and acquaintances whom he considered well-informed on the subject. Lhuyd's copy of *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, whose author is still unidentified, is also a

¹² Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2001), 5; Lizanne Henderson, "The Road to Elfland: Fairy Belief and the Child Ballads," in *The Ballad in Scottish History*, ed. Edward J. Cowan (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 56-57.

rich source of material on early modern Scottish culture. Like Lhuyd, Robert Wodrow also sent questionnaires on the topic of second sight in personal letters, and the responses he received contain detailed accounts of second sight belief. A similar impulse to collect records of popular beliefs, including second sight, resulted in John Beaumont's *Gleanings of Antiquities*, G.F. Black's *Examples of Printed Folk-lore concerning the Orkney and Shetland Islands*, John Brand's *Observations on popular antiquities*, Francis Grose's *A Provincial Glossary*, John Dalryell's *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, and Walter Scott's *Manners, Customs, and History of the Highlands of Scotland*, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, and *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*.

Some references to second sight also appear in chronicles of notable events or individuals, particularly those produced in Scotland and England. Scholars of popular culture have often recognized the utility of memoirs, autobiographies, and annals towards an understanding of events, beliefs, and people that early modern people found significant. In particular, this project has found numerous relevant references to second sight in Robert Chambers' *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, Robert Law's *Memorialls*, Robert Wodrow's *Analecta*, Sir John Lauder's *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs*, William Bond's *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell*, and Duncan Campbell's autobiography, *Secret Memoirs of the late Mr. Duncan Campbell*. Some of the seers mentioned in these sources were ministers or lay prophets who were operating within their own Christian framework, while others were practitioners of popular traditions or magic. Accounts such as these often contain valuable information about the lives and public perceptions of second sighted individuals who gained widespread recognition or notoriety, and therefore were considered noteworthy by their

contemporaries.

Judicial records of disciplinary hearings also contain references to second sight belief and practice, as well as testimony from second sighted individuals. In particular, the records of the early modern witch trials contain detailed descriptions of numerous popular beliefs and practices related to magic, spirits, and second sight. As such, they are valuable sources for scholars interested in these topics, and their utility for historians of early modern popular culture has been well-established. Furthermore, some practitioners of popular magic who were prosecuted as witches clearly identified as second sighted people, and therefore these sources provide crucial records of first-hand accounts of individuals who believed they possessed this ability.

Disciplinary records are also vital for understanding how authorities reacted towards practitioners of popular magic, as well as providing insight into village-level disputes featuring individuals who were believed to have supernatural powers. In this way, disciplinary records preserve evidence of second sight belief, as well as opinions of second sighted people held by individuals of various social levels.

Personal accounts of ministers and lay prophets are also relevant sources of material on second sight, though their visionary abilities were often framed within biblical traditions of prophecy. The chapter of this dissertation on Christianity and second sight, in particular, makes use of the records of early modern prophets and prophetesses. These individuals were regarded by some as divinely inspired, but their accounts also reference aspects of second sight. Prophets whose accounts meet these criteria include Grizell Love, Barbara Peebles, Jonet Fraser, Robert Jameson's wife, and Donald Macgrigor's daughter. Notably, A.B. MacIennan's and Norman Macrae's accounts of the Reverend John Morrison, also known as the Petty Seer, contain

numerous comparisons of the Reverend's prophetic gifts to Scottish second sight. Accounts of heretics and false prophets also provide valuable information, despite the fact that these individuals were rejected by their communities or authorities. All of these seers, both visionaries and heretics, claimed to be devout Christians who were operating within their own traditions of spiritual gifts. However, their accounts contain some notable features of second sight belief, illustrating the ways in which religious visionaries reconciled their devout perceptions of their own abilities with cultural motifs related to second sight.

Some second sight theorists were generally interested in the wider field of spirit belief, particularly the nature and activities of spirits. The later part of the early modern period witnessed the production of an increasing number of treatises on spirits, in response to a supposedly growing number of proclaimed atheists and deists. In order to combat this spiritual and societal threat, numerous authors marshaled accounts of ghosts, poltergeists, and visionary experiences as evidence of the reality of an invisible world. As individuals who were believed to be able to see spirits, second sighted people were regarded as eyewitnesses to this cause. For this reason, second sight appears in numerous early modern treatises on spirit belief. Among such sources that discussed second sight were John Beaumont's *A historical, physiological and theological treatise of spirits*, Joseph Glanvill's *Saducimus Triumphatus*, and John Ferriar's *An essay towards a theory of apparitions*. In particular, two early modern theorists composed treatises entirely devoted to the topic of second sight and spirit belief, intent on proving that second sight was evidence of the reality of an unseen world. Their efforts resulted in Theophilus Insulanus' *A Treatise on the Second Sight* and John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia*. Fraser was a minister, and therefore personally invested in the debate over the existence of spirits and anxious

about what he perceived to be a rising tide of atheism. While Insulanus clearly shared Fraser's concerns, his identity has never been satisfactorily established and so his personal motives may be impossible to recover.¹³ Other second sight theorists were demonologists, and were therefore interested in interactions between humans and demons in order to prove the existence of spirits. These theorists tended to emphasize the testimony of witches as eyewitnesses to demonic activity. However, because second sight was demonized during the witch trials, demonological treatises also provide valuable insight into elite opinions about second sight. Some relevant sources were King James VI's *Daemonologie* and Sir George MacKenzie's *A Treatise on Witchcraft*, both of which recorded popular beliefs about second sight as well as learned interpretations of these beliefs.

Some second sight theorists who discussed spirit belief should be more precisely regarded as early modern scientists, many of whom were intrigued by stories of Scottish people who could predict the future, know hidden things, and see spirits. Early modern science was field of study that encompassed all human knowledge, including the spiritual. Therefore, investigation into the world of spirits and whether humans were capable of perceiving it was considered a worthy scientific pursuit. Notably, Robert Boyle interviewed educated acquaintances and wrote letters to friends requesting information on second sight. Samuel Pepys also composed a number of personal letters through which he collected instances of second sight. Both Boyle and Pepys

¹³ Edward Cowan noted that there is a "boring debate" about the identity of Theophilus Insulanus, which is still unresolved. See Edward J. Cowan, "The Discovery of the Future: Prophecy and Second Sight in Scottish History," in *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 22 n.69. See also Michael Hunter, ed. *The Occult Laboratory* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 47.

emphasized the necessity of obtaining reliable testimony that met standards for early modern scientific inquiry. George Sinclair also penned his treatise *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* with an eye to proving the existence of spirits, and recorded a large amount of information on second sight belief and several accounts of second sighted individuals. Robert Kirk, minister at Aberfoyle, also collected many accounts of second sight from his parishioners with the objective of constructing a scientific treatise on second sight and fairies. His treatise was not published within his lifetime, but it remains one of the most valuable extant sources on second sight belief in early modern Scotland.

The later part of the early modern period witnessed a surge of tourism to Scotland, with many travelers expressing interest in the “superstitions” of the Scottish people. By this time, Scotland had acquired an international reputation as a haunted country, whose superstitions survived among the wild landscape and supposedly uncivilized people. Ethnographic works on Scottish culture and daily life were also being produced for popular consumption, many of which featured accounts of Scottish second sight. James Boswell's and Samuel Johnson's respective records of their joint journey to Scotland illustrate that both individuals made particular enquiry into the topic during their travels. Consequentially, their published accounts yield valuable information about second sight that they gleaned from the natives they encountered. Similarly, Thomas Pennant produced two accounts of his tours in Scotland and the Hebrides, both of which contained numerous stories about second sight and relevant beliefs. Martin Martin's *A Voyage to St. Kilda* preserved a detailed record of popular beliefs there, as well as an account of a second sighted man who had gained a local following. Daniel Defoe's *A Tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain* made note of some relevant information, and therefore also contributes to this

genre of publications that describe second sight from the perspective of travelers and tourists.

Several ethnographic works on early modern Scottish culture also provide important insight into second sight belief, some of which were written by native Scots or Gaels, though these are not in the majority. Among early ethnographic sources that describe second sight are Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, John MacCulloch's *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland*, George Waldron's *The History and Description of the Isle of Man*, Lord Grange's *An Account of the Highlanders and Highlands of Scotland*, and Dr. Beattie's "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland."

Primary sources on second sight are therefore numerous and diverse, and approach the topic from many perspectives for a wide variety of reasons. Secondary sources on second sight are fewer and tend to be more narrowly focused, being mostly composed by historians of folklore, popular culture, and religion. While the body of secondary sources on Scottish second sight is small, thankfully there are quite a few excellent works on related topics such as witchcraft, magic, and spirits. These sources provide an essential framework for orienting and understanding the importance of second sight to both early modern people and modern historians. This dissertation's thorough exploration of second sight from a scholarly perspective both reinforces significant findings made by other researchers, and challenges previously held assumptions within the historiography of early modern Europe. While this project is heavily indebted to the work of other scholars in the field of Scottish popular belief, it also seeks to question and revise a number of assumptions that have been made about Scotland and Europe during the early modern era.

III: Historiography: Second Sight

Scholarly interest in topics such as witchcraft, second sight, spirits, and magic has only increased since the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1970s. Previously written off as merely the products of peasant superstition, these subjects are now seen as important and legitimate to an understanding of the past. “History from below” has taken its rightful place alongside works of military history, biographies of monarchs, and studies of exploration and conquest. This development has illuminated the circumstances of the everyday lives of people who made up the majority of Europe’s population, rather than focusing on the details of the lives of a select, privileged few. Second sight is a topic that spans across this class divide, not solely the purview of either the illiterate or educated men. In this sense it is a tricky topic, but it is in good company. Especially in recent years, scholarship on topics related to second sight— such as witchcraft, demonology, ghosts, fairies, and magic— have proven valuable for illuminating the congruities and incongruities between elite and popular belief.¹⁴

While second sight has received mention in scholarly works on early modern witchcraft, science, and popular culture, no lengthy comprehensive study of early modern Scottish second sight currently exists. Not only is second sight an under-explored topic, but it also appears that scholars’ discussions of second sight are not in conversation with one another. While quite a few experts on the history, culture, and literature of early modern Scotland have noted that second sight appears in their sources, they have rarely cited other scholars on the topic. We are left with

¹⁴ See bibliography for relevant publications by Owen Davies, Julian Goodare, Diane Purkiss, Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, Emma Wilby, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, Margo Todd, Peter Marshall, and Ronald Hutton.

individual assertions about second sight and its relevance to each work's core topic of discussion, but we are lacking a cohesive conversation about second sight. These disparate mentions of second sight are rich and deserve our attention, but the historiography of early modern Scottish popular culture has suffered from the lack of a focused, comprehensive study of second sight belief.

Scholars who have discussed second sight in their work have rarely contextualized their claims amongst the claims of others. Despite this, the historiography of Scottish second sight can be assembled and these works can be placed into conversation with each other. After a general overview of scholarship on second sight, this dissertation reconstructs relevant historiographical conversations surrounding several themes in subsequent chapters: how to define second sight; second sight's relationship to early modern witchcraft and fairy belief; second sight beliefs under religious reform and "disenchantment;" and second sight within the context of the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. These are the points of intersection where scholars have made assertions about second sight's relationship to other important historiographical conversations about the early modern era. However, these mentions of second sight have generally been brief and far-between. This is despite the fact that second sight was a subject that early modern people found worthy of investigation, as well as second sight belief's significance to these historiographical debates. Regardless, preceding research on second sight is undoubtedly valuable and important, and no current work on second sight would be complete without a discussion of the scholarly foundation upon which it is built.

Early Examinations by Folklorists

Some of the earliest works that engaged with second sight were written by folklorists in the twentieth century. While their observations are, on occasion, a bit dated and tend towards the condescending, they were among the first to approach topics such as second sight, witchcraft, and popular belief as serious subjects worthy of academic attention. John Gregorson Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland* (1900) and *Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands* (1902) are impressive works that cover a wide range of topics.

Campbell was one of the first scholars to devote serious and detailed attention to fairy belief, and his work also contains substantial information on the topic of second sight. Campbell emphasized that the visions experienced by the second sighted were believed to be glimpses of a very real, yet generally invisible, world. This world was independent of the seer, yet only observable under particular circumstances.¹⁵ Campbell also provided a highly useful survey of the various Gaelic words that were used to describe second sight and seers.¹⁶ These two publications place second sight within its cultural context, painting it as part of a larger tapestry of popular Scottish beliefs about fairies, dreams, prophecies, divination, and witchcraft.

Folklorist Andrew Lang also contributed to these early scholarly perspectives on second sight in *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894). Like Campbell's books, this work covered a wide variety of topics from popular culture, orienting second sight within a broader field of beliefs about the

¹⁵ John Gregorson Campbell, *Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands & Islands*, in *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed. Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2008), 240-241.

¹⁶ Campbell, *Superstitions and Witchcraft*, 240-245.

supernatural.¹⁷

After these early contributions, second sight received little serious attention until it appeared in the work of folklorist Lewis Spence, in the mid-1900s. Spence, like Lang, was a prolific author on a wide variety of curious topics that included (but were not limited to) witchcraft, fairies, and second sight. Second sight appeared in Spence's *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (1948), and received greater focus in *Second Sight: Its History and Origins* (1951). Spence concluded that Scottish second sight was the product of a "cult" of seers of "Druidic origin" who collectively practiced ancient rites.¹⁸ Departing from the Scottish context, Spence argued that second sight was a near-universal phenomenon, and he traced similar phenomena through the ancient world, as well as among "barbarous and savage peoples" of other continents.¹⁹ Spence was eager to illustrate that second sight was an ongoing, though perhaps dwindling, psychic ability that could still be verified at the time of his writing.²⁰ Much of Spence's body of work has been written off because of an ill-advised and lengthy foray into the topic of Atlantis and the "New World." However, *some* of his assertions about early modern second sight don't look as far-fetched in light of recent research that incorporates second sight belief into a broader matrix of beliefs about spirits, supernatural abilities, witchcraft, and shamanism in Scotland and northern Europe.²¹ A concise chapter devoted to second sight also

¹⁷ Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1984).

¹⁸ Lewis Spence, *Second Sight: Its History and Origins* (New York: Rider and Company, 1951), 92-103.

¹⁹ Spence, *Second Sight*, 111-136.

²⁰ Spence, *Second Sight*, 173-184.

²¹ See Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft, and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

appeared in Francis Thompson's *The Supernatural Highlands* (1976), but this volume offered little original material compared to the more exhaustive publications of Campbell, Lang, and Spence.²²

Modern Scholarship

While it is undoubtedly indebted to the work of these folklorists, modern scholarship on second sight provides a bit more for the historian to digest. An unpublished thesis by Athol Gow entitled "Prophetic Belief in Early Modern Scotland 1560-1700" (1989) incorporated second sight belief into a wider tradition of popular prophecy in early modern Scotland. Gow argued that second sight faced hostility and suspicion from both religious and secular authorities because it represented a form of prophecy that was outside of these authorities' control. Because its sources appeared to lie outside of the church's domain, it was often perceived to be demonically inspired.²³ Sadly, as Gow's thesis remains unpublished, it is not readily available except to the dedicated researcher. Despite the fact that it is written for a more popular audience, Elizabeth Sutherland's *Ravens & Black Rain: The Story of Highland Second Sight* (1985) also provided some illuminating observations about second sight in the Scottish context.²⁴ However, like Spence, Sutherland's personal investment in connecting second sight to supposedly verifiable

²² Francis Thompson, *The Supernatural Highlands* (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1976).

²³ Athol Gow, "Prophetic Belief in Early Modern Scotland, 1560-1700" (MA thesis, University of Guelph, 1989), 60.

²⁴ Elizabeth Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain: The Story of Highland Second Sight, including a new collection of the prophecies of the Brahan Seer* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1985).

paranormal occurrences in the modern world makes it harder to take her work seriously. This aside, Sutherland's book is admirable because its strong organizational framework provides an excellent starting point for anyone interested in second sight. Sutherland managed to marshal a remarkable number of sources on the topic and then arrange them chronologically, as well as provide brief summaries of their respective arguments. Therefore, her book is a valuable reference for researchers looking for sources on second sight.

A more scholarly publication, produced around the same time as Sutherland's, is a collection of essays edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson entitled *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions* (1989).²⁵ This edited volume brings together a number of relevant essays on second sight from a Scottish, Welsh, and British perspective. John MacInnes provided a valuable essay on Gaelic seers and the link between prophecy, poetry, and divination in Gaelic culture.²⁶ Like Gow, MacInnes engaged with the question of whether seers were culturally demonized or sanctified, but MacInnes additionally noted the existence of several well-known clergyman seers.²⁷ John MacQueen's contribution analyzed the legacy of St. Columba as a medieval example of a second sighted person,²⁸ while Davidson examined the motif of seers placing their

²⁵ Hilda Ellis Davidson, ed. *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989).

²⁶ John MacInnes, "The Seer in Gaelic Tradition," in *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), 10-23.

²⁷ MacInnes, "The Seer in Gaelic Tradition," 21-22.

²⁸ John MacQueen, "The Saint as Seer: Adomnan's Account of Columba," in *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), 37-49.

thumbs in their mouths as a means of acquiring wisdom.²⁹ An intriguing essay by Samuel Pyeatt Menefee described the British tradition of watching the church porch at night during a certain time of year in order to see the specters of the still-living who would die in the coming year.³⁰ Together, these essays paint a fascinating portrait of Celtic seers as practicing diverse traditions that demand further research and synthesis.

A cluster of sources with a different objective were produced by University of Edinburgh researcher Shari Cohn. These take the form of several articles and an unpublished dissertation on the topic of second sight from a psychological and biological perspective (1994-1999). While one of her articles did discuss early modern second sight, her work was largely oriented in the fields of psychology and psychical research, and was therefore more interested in comparisons between early modern and modern second sight.³¹ Like some other psychical researchers, Cohn issued questionnaires to living second sighted people in hopes of illuminating and legitimizing a phenomenon that had long been an aspect of Scottish popular culture. For a more scholarly approach to modern second sight, including explorations of its relationship to mesmerism,

²⁹ Hilda Ellis Davison, "The Seer's Thumb," in *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), 66-77.

³⁰ Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, "Dead Reckoning: The Church Porch Watch in British Society," in *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), 80-95.

³¹ See Shari Cohn, "A Historical Review of Second Sight: the Collectors, their Accounts and Ideas," *Scottish Studies* 33 (1999): 146-185; Shari Cohn, "Second Sight and Family History: Pedigree and Segregation Analyses," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 13, no. 3 (1999): 351-371; Shari Cohn, "A Questionnaire Study of Second Sight Experiences," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 63, no. 855 (1999): 129-157; Shari Cohn, "Second Sight: Fact or Fiction?," *The University of Edinburgh Magazine*, Summer 1998, 28-31; Shari Cohn, "The Scottish Tradition of Second Sight and Other Psychic Experiences in Families" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1996); Shari Cohn, "A Survey on Scottish Second Sight," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 59, no. 835 (1994): 385-400.

phrenology, spiritualism, and animal magnetism, one should instead consult the well-researched volume *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century: Prophecy, Imagination, and Nationhood* (2017) by Elsa Richardson.³²

Scholarship since 2000

Scholarly research on early modern second sight that meets modern academic standards appears to be somewhat rare. Aside from Davidson's edited volume of essays, published work that meets these standards cannot be found before the turn of the millennium. Among these, Michael Hunter's *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science and Second Sight in Late Seventeenth Century Scotland* (2001) is a massively important work. This book is an edited collection of primary sources on the topic of second sight. Hunter, a scholar of the history of science, was largely interested in early modern scientific analyses of second sight. In his introduction to these sources, Hunter argued that the British scientists of the Royal Society were intrigued by Scottish second sight because they saw the Highlands as an "occult laboratory" full of strange phenomena that were ripe for experimentation. According to Hunter, early modern science could be characterized by an interest in the boundaries of the natural world, including but not limited to the question of whether it was possible for humans to see premonitions of the future.³³ The

³² Elsa Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century: Prophecy, Imagination, and Nationhood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³³ Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 1-31.

introduction of this book, as well as a subsequent article based on the introduction,³⁴ are invaluable to any researcher interested in early modern second sight. Hunter brought together a number of important primary sources that discussed early modern second sight, and his skills in editing and providing interpretive footnotes are to be commended. However, his introduction and source collection are mostly focused on British reactions to Scottish second sight, and as such still leave a lot of room to ask how second sight was understood within Scotland by Scottish people themselves.

The subject of second sight from a Scottish perspective does appear in some historical publications on early modern popular culture and belief. Second sight is explored in Edward J. Cowan's "The Discovery of the Future: Prophecy and Second Sight in Scottish History," a highly informative chapter in Lizanne Henderson's edited volume *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (2009).³⁵ In this contribution, Cowan argued that the early modern period witnessed an increased interest in prophecy and omens, including second sight. It was during this time that second sight and prophecy entered mainstream Scottish political culture, as people widely accepted the "reality and efficacy of prognostication."³⁶ Second sight also received mention and some moderate analysis in a few recent works on Scottish witchcraft and magic. Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan's *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (2001) is a praise-worthy source that examines fairy belief in early modern Scottish

³⁴ Michael Hunter, "The Discovery of Second Sight in Late 17th century Scotland," *History Today* 51, no. 6 (2001): 48-52.

³⁵ Lizanne Henderson, ed. *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009).

³⁶ Cowan, "Discovery of the Future," 1-4.

culture, and goes a long way towards filling a gap in the historiography of Scottish folk belief. In this book, Henderson and Cowan drew connections between fairies and second sight, claiming that the two were often related or mentioned together in primary sources. The authors argued that second sighted people frequently spoke of association with the fairies, as did accused witches, illustrating the connections between these related belief systems.³⁷ Second sight also received passing mention in P.G. Maxwell-Stuart's *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (2001), in which the author compared it to other magical powers associated with the fairies.³⁸ Similarly, Liv Helene Willumsen's *Witches of the North, Scotland and Finnmark* (2013) categorized second sight as a form of beneficent magic which was linked with the fairies,³⁹ whereas Julian Goodare's "The Boundaries of the Fairy Realm in Scotland" (2014) associated second sight belief with ghosts and other death messengers.⁴⁰ While these are all highly valuable contributions to the scholarly conversation, these cited examples of second sight in modern historiography lean more towards brief mentions than substantial analyses.

One scholar who has integrated second sight belief into her research in a more in-depth manner is Emma Wilby. Her books *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (2005) and *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie* (2010) connected second sight to shamanic practices in early modern Scotland

³⁷ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 83, 137.

³⁸ P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2001), 23-24.

³⁹ Liv Helene Willumsen, *Witches of the North, Scotland and Finnmark* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 4, 96, 356.

⁴⁰ Goodare, "Boundaries of the Fairy Realm," 149.

and Britain. Though her assertions are sometimes speculative, Wilby's research is highly innovative and she drew strong conclusions about the relationship between fairy belief in Britain and Scotland and the early modern witch trials. Wilby analyzed practitioners of popular magic who made pacts with spirit beings in order to gain supernatural abilities, such as second sight.⁴¹ In particular, Wilby characterized famous Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie as a "dark shaman" who may have possessed second sight and engaged in death prognostication via this ability.⁴² Wilby's assertions, and the evidence she used to support them, are significant and worthy of further investigation.

Indeed, the entire topic of second sight demands a closer look from a historical perspective. While their work contributes to the historiography of early modern second sight, Henderson and Cowan pointed out that "the scholarly study of Scottish second sight and prophetic belief is a relatively overlooked phenomenon."⁴³ Ronald Hutton concurred, arguing for the value of further research into second sight when he stated that a close examination of second sight accounts would provide a "case study of the range of sources claimed by Scottish service magicians for their powers."⁴⁴ Second sight has been an emerging aspect of research into early modern Scottish witchcraft, magic, popular culture, and science in recent years. However, none of the sources mentioned in this section can be characterized as a lengthy investigation of second

⁴¹ Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 99.

⁴² Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 323-339.

⁴³ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 192.

⁴⁴ Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, from ancient times to the present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 222.

sight that meets standards for modern historical research. While other similar topics like shamanism, fairy belief, and popular prophecy are receiving attention from scholars of Scottish and British history, second sight is still a relatively under-explored topic that deserves close examination and contextualization. This examination would not only cast light on a major aspect of supernatural belief in early modern Scotland, it would allow for scholarly intervention in several crucial historiographical debates about the early modern era.

IV: Historiographical Debates and Interventions

Before second sight is discussed in its historical context, the first chapter of this dissertation establishes how historians and scholars have used the term “second sight” in their own research. This is perhaps the most important site of disagreement within the academic study of second sight. Secondary sources that mention second sight have tended to approach the subject from a narrowly defined perspective, and therefore failed to recognize the diverse ways in which early modern people used the term “second sight.” Because of this, our current scholarly understanding of Scottish second sight is far from complete, necessitating further study in order to obtain a realistic view of how the term was understood by early modern people. Ultimately, the first chapter of this dissertation reveals that scholars cannot agree on a single, precise definition of second sight because one does not exist. Rather, a multivalent definition is required because early modern people freely applied the term to a surprising variety of supernatural abilities.

This disagreement over how to define second sight is closely related to the

historiographical debate about whether second sight was associated with witchcraft or fairy belief. Research into witchcraft and fairy belief are two important pillars within the historiography of popular culture in early modern Scotland. Particularly in recent years, the significance of fairy belief to early modern Scottish culture, and subsequently its influence on the Scottish witch trials, has received considerable attention. However, scholars have been unable to agree whether second sight played a role in early modern witchcraft theory. Scholars have also been unable to reach a consensus about whether there was a relationship between second sight and fairy belief, despite recognizing the connections between Scottish witchcraft and fairies.

This dissertation sides with the majority of scholars who claim that there were profound connections between second sight, witchcraft, and fairy belief in early modern Scottish culture. All three were intersecting belief systems within the popular imagination, and were dependent on the existence of individuals with supernatural abilities who had relationships with the invisible world. Second sight does appear in a number of Scottish witch trial records, both explicitly as “second sight” and implicitly through recognizable themes and motifs. Similarly, second sight is frequently mentioned alongside fairy belief in early modern sources, and some second sighted people attributed their ability to association with the fairy folk. This dissertation even goes so far as to argue that second sight and fairy belief both influenced demonological notions of witchcraft. Like other forms of folk belief, second sight was persecuted by authorities in their mission to create a godly society during the Reformation. However, this interaction between elite and popular culture was not unidirectional, and second sight ended up being more influential on theories of diabolical witchcraft than has previously been acknowledged.

Despite this persecution from religious and state authorities, references to second sight

belief continued to appear in early modern sources throughout the Reformation and afterwards. The persistence of belief in second sight during and after the Protestant Reformation in the British Isles contradicts an influential strain of historiography, which emphasized the success of the Reformation and the eradication of folk culture through a process known as the “disenchantment of the world.” Far from being disenchanted, belief in second sight was adapted and re-shaped throughout the early modern period, surviving in the conversations of numerous theorists who approached it from both religious and scientific perspectives. Some theorists and seers sanctified aspects of second sight belief, and incorporated them into a religious framework that accepted the reality of visionaries and revelations. In this way, Scottish Protestantism was reconciled with popular spiritual traditions, confirming historians’ arguments about a long, slow Reformation that involved adaptation to and negotiation with pre-existing local systems of belief.

Enlightenment thinkers and early modern scientists also developed theories of second sight, and saw its potential for exploring the boundary between the natural and supernatural. For these theorists, second sight was relevant to a variety of subjects of great interest, including the limits of human knowledge, optics, mental health, and the existence of a spiritual world. Though some theorists were skeptical about the validity of second sight, others were intent on using the second sighted as eyewitnesses to the heretofore “unseen.” These individuals collected accounts of second sight in order to combat atheism and what they perceived to be a rising tide of disbelief in spirits. Therefore, though scientists’ theories of second sight were rational, they did not represent a move towards secularization or disenchantment. Instead, they were clearly informed by prevailing beliefs about the existence of spirits and supernatural abilities.

Through an examination of second sight belief across the early modern period, this

dissertation's conclusions create a compelling case for rejecting the thesis of linear disenchantment. Belief in second sight continued to be relevant to early modern Scottish and English people, despite the supposed rationalizing effects of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution. Early modern people found ways to accommodate belief in second sight within evolving ideas of both witchcraft and divine revelation, by incorporating popular culture into demonological theory and orthodox Christianity. Similarly, second sight belief was an aspect of the early modern scientific pursuit of factual knowledge, and was implicated in scientists' mission to prove the reality of an invisible world. In these ways, early modern folk beliefs became influential within the realm of elite, intellectual theory.

Instead of emphasizing the eradication of enchantment, this project adopts a model proposed by historian Alexandra Walsham. Walsham asserted that rather than characterizing this period by linear disenchantment, we should instead be looking for cycles of sacralization and desacralization.⁴⁵ This dissertation emphasizes that second sight belief experienced processes of both sacralization and desacralization, which are observable in the writings of second sight theorists who participated in significant early modern religious, social, and intellectual movements. The Reformation, the Enlightenment movement, and the Scientific Revolution have all been characterized as disenchanting forces. However, this dissertation's examination of second sight reveals that these movements were subject to their own cycles of sacralization and desacralization, particularly when it came to supernatural belief systems. While second sight was demonized during the witch trials, it was also sanctified by some reformers, and legitimized by early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers. Through this dissertation's exploration of

⁴⁵ Walsham, "The Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed," 497.

Scottish second sight, we are forced to modify any perspective of the early modern period that sees science, rationality, religion, and superstition as categories that were in binary opposition.

V: Methodology

This dissertation's methodology dictates how sources from the past will be approached from the present. The most important methodological issue to dispense with is the question of whether second sight was "real." This is a question that comes up frequently enough whenever this project is discussed with laymen, but truthfully it is of little interest to the historian. Whether or not second sight existed or does exist is immaterial to this project. What is relevant is the question of whether some people believed it was real, why they did or did not believe this, and how they expressed this (dis)belief. It is important for the historian not to take a lofty approach, looking down on early modern people and marveling at their credulity. It is also equally important to acknowledge that we cannot know with complete and utter certainty that such things as second sight do not exist. Therefore, we must take a stance of agnosticism and admit that we can only know or not know what our sources attempt to tell us about the past.

Studying the past is almost always a strange affair. Darren Oldridge, in his book *Strange Histories*, deals deftly with the issue of how to approach the past, particularly a past that seems hard to understand. Oldridge argued that our frequent inability to understand the beliefs of people in the past is a measure of the distance that separates us and them. Yet it is the strangeness of

these beliefs that makes them worth investigating and legitimizes their academic study.⁴⁶ In defending the thought systems of people in the past, Oldridge cited anthropologist Clifford Geertz who claimed that people have always understood their experiences by contextualizing them within a “system of belief.” In this way, the irrational past can be made rational by seeing how people reconciled their experiences with the prevailing knowledge of their day, and justified their actions within these systems of belief.⁴⁷

This dissertation approaches the past in the manner outlined by Oldridge— namely, by emphasizing the importance of being willing to study the past in all its strangeness, and attempting to understand the mentalities of historical actors using their own terms and logic. In this way, this project is primarily interested in the culturally specific belief systems through which the experiences of the second sighted were interpreted. These belief systems informed early modern actors, thinkers, and writers who discussed second sight, all of whom found it a useful concept or label for describing phenomena that were known to them. Second sight was closely related to many topics of interest during this period, and was itself a hotly debated subject at the center of much theorization. Early modern people certainly viewed it as a phenomenon worthy of serious study and discussion. As such, this historical exploration of second sight also takes it seriously, and contextualizes second sight within the systems of belief, logic, and knowledge that guided early modern people.

⁴⁶ Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The trial of the pig, the walking dead, and other matters of fact from the medieval and Renaissance worlds* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), ix.

⁴⁷ Oldridge, *Strange Histories*, 4.

VI: Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized along thematic lines. There are five core chapters, bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter explores foundational aspects of second sight belief in early modern Scotland, both how it was understood by observers as well as how it was experienced by second sighted people. In doing so, this chapter references various definitions of “second sight” found in primary documents and argues for the utility of a broad, multivalent, and inclusive definition of this concept. This chapter also examines the experiential dimension of second sight, and proposes that some accounts of second sight were the product of genuine physiological experiences paired with culturally informed interpretations of those experiences. The second chapter discusses relevant beliefs about the inhabitants of the spirit world. This overview of Scottish spirit belief illustrates that different types of spirits were believed to have overlapping attributes and behaviors. Therefore, interpretations of both visionaries and their experiences were dependent on individual and communal processes of discernment. The third chapter engages with the demonization of second sight belief during the early modern witch trials. This chapter argues for a relationship between second sight, fairy belief, and witchcraft in early modern Scottish culture, and demonstrates the ways in which folk belief influenced elite demonological theory. The fourth chapter explores accounts of devout Scottish visionaries who reconciled aspects of second sight belief with their own prophetic traditions. Therefore, early modern Christianity may have been more flexible and adaptable than has previously been recognized. As with the chapter on witchcraft, this chapter on Scottish Christianity demonstrates that the Reformation in Scotland was a process of cultural synthesis

between pre-existing and reformed spiritual traditions. The fifth chapter focuses on the Enlightenment movement and the Scientific Revolution, whose historical actors developed numerous theories about second sight. Contrary to historiographical trends that hail these movements as secularizing forces, scientific theories of second sight were heavily informed by prevailing beliefs about the world of spirits. In this way, scientific inquiry into second sight was profoundly rational, yet also invested in proving the validity of scientists' religious convictions. Overall, these chapters assert that second sight was part of a broader matrix of early modern beliefs about spirits and supernatural abilities. For most early modern people, these beliefs significantly shaped their worldviews, and second sight was an integral part of the early modern conversation about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. Contributors to this conversation approached the topic from a wide variety of perspectives with one shared assumption in mind: the invisible world did exist, and some people were capable of perceiving it.

Chapter 1: Foundations of Second Sight Belief

Some pretend to prophetic Inspirations & foretel very fortuitous events. Their Responses are deliver'd in very ambiguous Terms, so that they are not known til the event. They call these that have that Foresight Fisich i.e. Sciens. Such persons are very reserv'd; and give not Answers when asked but of their own Accord. The Second Sight descends from Father to Son for some Generations. These who have it can prevent the Evil which doth threaten others, but cannot save themselves. It's so very troublesome to many, that theyd be gladly free from it.

These persons observe that Spirits are great Lovers of Flesh & they see them some times taking Flesh out of the pots, putting that which is worse in its place, of whilk they'l not taste.

These who have this foresight by compact give Responses being ask'd. Sometyms they bring back to life these who are giving up the Ghost; but an other dies in his place, & it always provs fatal.

They come (as some say) by the 2d Sight thus: They look through the Knot of a piece of Tree & the boals of sheers at a Southdoor upon a Burial as it passeth by.

— *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* (1685)⁴⁸

The Bodleian's manuscript of *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* passed through the hands of a number of individuals who contributed to the early modern conversation about second sight. While its authorship is unclear, it was obtained by Robert Boyle from a correspondent and was later annotated by Welsh naturalist and antiquary Edward Lhuyd. Lhuyd took a copy of it on his tour to Scotland in the late 1690s. J.L. Campbell and Ronald Black have speculated that the pamphlet may have been written by Robert Kirk, though historian Michael Hunter has denied the plausibility of this claim.⁴⁹ This pamphlet documents various scattered observations about Highland culture, belief, and daily life, including second sight.

⁴⁸ BOD MS Carte 269, fols. 8-9v. For a discussion of the dating of this manuscript's composition, see Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 36.

⁴⁹ Ronald Black, ed. *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2008), xxiv; Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 35-36.

What is most striking about its passage on second sight is the disjointed claims it makes about the phenomenon, with little attempt at reconciling or connecting these various statements. If we are to believe what it records, the second sighted can foretell future events (though not for themselves, only others), see and understand the actions of otherwise invisible spirits, and take deadly sickness off of one being and transfer it to another. Some second sighted people appear to possess this ability involuntarily, as it is passed down hereditarily. Others appear to have it “by compact,” though with whom or what is unclear. Still others seem to be able to gain this ability by performing a rite where they gaze at a funeral procession through a small aperture. It is curious that anyone would willingly acquire this ability at all, since the author claims it is “very troublesome to many, that theyd be gladly free from it.” Lastly, there is some distinction between the second sighted who give answers to questions when asked, and those who do not. The details contained in this passage hardly amount to a clear definition of second sight, let alone an identification of the source of the second sighted’s abilities. However, while aspects of this source’s description of second sight are contradictory, it provides a broad overview of some of the ways in which second sight was conceptualized and experienced by early modern people.

Early modern sources demonstrate that second sight was part of a complex matrix of beliefs about people who had contact with the supernatural. Some descriptions of second sight emphasized that seers did not induce trances or encounter spirits voluntarily. However, other sources identified second sight as part of a broad range of abilities attributed to practitioners of popular magic, many of whom entered altered states of consciousness and conversed with familiar spirit beings. Both were valid early modern perspectives of second sight, and the selection from *Highland Rites and Customs* contains both theories of the ability with no apparent

concern for their potentially contradictory nature. These overlapping and entangled beliefs about supernatural abilities and spirit encounters illustrate that in order to understand second sight as early modern people did, we must approach its study with a broad definition in mind.

This chapter explores foundational aspects of second sight belief in early modern Scotland, both how it was understood by observers, as well as how it was experienced by those who laid claim to the ability. In establishing a definition of “second sight,” this chapter discusses the various ways in which early modern people understood the term, and thereby illustrates the wide range of supernatural abilities which were attributed to Scottish seers. After laying this crucial groundwork, this chapter examines the experiential dimension of second sight, and looks to early modern sources to uncover evidence of the role of altered states of consciousness in visionary experiences and encounters with spirits. Some accounts of second sight featured recommended methods for gaining the ability, or descriptions of seers engaging in rites to induce trance experiences. Many sources, like the selection from *Highland Rites and Customs*, emphasized the cultivation of fixed attention on an object or small aperture in order to obtain visionary abilities or catch sight of spirits. While this chapter argues that evidence of genuine physiological experiences can be identified in early modern descriptions of second sight, it also emphasizes the significance of culturally specific belief systems to interpreting those experiences, and locating them within the realm of what was believed to be “second sight.”

When comparing early modern texts that discuss second sight, it is common to discover discrepancies between authors and sources when it comes to defining second sight or making claims about its potential origin. However, there are also often discrepancies on these themes *within* individual sources themselves, as with the paragraph from *Highland Rites and Customs*.

The term “second sight” appears to have encompassed a surprisingly wide variety of abilities, and not only those limited to vision. The selection from *Highland Rites and Customs* encapsulates many of these beliefs and places them alongside one another. Some sources claimed that the second sighted were able to perceive the activity of spirits, or perhaps communicate with them. Some second sighted people were believed to predict the future, or observe people or events in distant places. The second sighted were frequently believed to have access to knowledge above the ordinary, and some were specifically consulted by others for this talent. Some second sighted people were also practitioners of popular magic, and were believed to possess the variety of skills that were attributed to members of that profession. While some second sighted people engaged with their abilities voluntarily or on the behalf of others, other seers seemed to experience their second sight spontaneously.

These multiple, or sometimes contradictory, descriptions of second sight can be found within the large body of texts written by early modern second sight theorists. A close examination of second sight belief in early modern Scotland and England reveals that primary sources on the topic offer scattered and varied definitions of “second sight.” This is hardly surprising; early modern people held diverse opinions about many supernatural phenomena such as witches, fairies, and ghosts. What is more surprising is that modern scholars have not managed to see these various definitions as equally valid when examining second sight from a historical perspective. While primary sources seem to be relatively open about the multiple aspects or apparent contradictions inherent in the term “second sight,” secondary sources that examine the phenomenon appear to be less willing to accept the tangled ways in which term was used. This dissertation does not technically disagree with any of the narrower definitions put

forward by the scholars consulted and cited in this chapter; however, it does seek to incorporate these various definitions into a multivalent definition of second sight that recognizes the complex and diverse ways in which early modern people used the term.

I: Scholarly Definitions: Debating the Term “Second Sight”

Scholarly definitions of second sight tend to share some overlapping ideas about the term, yet there is also quite a bit of dissonance between sources and authors. While scholars of early modern Europe have made individual assertions about the nature of second sight, they have almost never engaged with the arguments of others who have discussed the same topic. Therefore, each of the scholarly definitions cited in this chapter has been offered in isolation within each scholar’s respective work. However, for the purpose of putting these works into conversation with each other, this chapter groups their various definitions around relevant themes. Aside from failing to engage with one another’s work, another commonality between these scholars is their tendency to assert that their definition of second sight is the single, correct one. This rather limited perspective may be attributed to scholars obtaining their definitions from individual early modern sources or clusters of sources, as opposed to the entire body of written literature that discussed second sight. When viewed as a whole, this range of sources reveals that “second sight” was a term that was used to refer to a variety of supernatural abilities and phenomena. Therefore, simply by failing to acknowledge the term’s complexity from an early modern perspective, each of these scholars has created an unnecessarily narrow definition of second sight that only recognizes one aspect of a multifaceted idea.

Contested Terms: “First,” “Second,” and “Sight”

Though the term “second sight” is somewhat ambiguous, it does imply the existence of two forms of sight that are accessible to human beings. Perhaps many of the differences between scholars’ definitions of “second sight” can be attributed to the term’s vagueness and lack of clarity about how to interpret what constitutes the “first” and the “second” sight. In his exhaustive exploration of Scottish popular culture, John Gregorson Campbell claimed that the “two sights” referred to “vision of the world” as well as vision of the “world of spirits.”⁵⁰ He added that second sight was “the same as being ‘spectre-haunted,’ or liable to ‘spectre illusions,’ when that condition occurs— as it often does— in persons of sound mind.”⁵¹ In an unpublished thesis on prophetic belief, Athol Gow argued that the “two sights” were actually “the visions of the world of sense and another world or plane of existence.” Therefore, this second type of vision was “not seen as originating within the Seers, but thought to be a genuine perception of an external reality.”⁵² Witchcraft scholar P.G. Maxwell-Stuart argued that the “first” and “second” sights should be understood as perception of “two different worlds, either the one immediately present to the physical sight, or the physical world and another coexistence with it: the world of the Spirits and the dead.”⁵³ Elizabeth Sutherland also referred to second sight as the ability to

⁵⁰ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 241.

⁵¹ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 240. The question of whether second sighted people were mentally ill was hotly debated by early modern people. This topic is discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

⁵² Gow, “Prophetic Belief,” 53-54.

⁵³ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 24.

“see normally and also see the world of apparitions.”⁵⁴ In this way, scholars have agreed that the second sighted must be able to see two objective realities; however, what constitutes the “second” reality is less clear.

There also appears to be some disagreement over whether “second sight” was only about the sense of sight, or whether it could involve seers’ other senses. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart asserted that second sight was not simply limited to sight, but could also make use of other senses such as smell.⁵⁵ Edward J. Cowan also adopted this perspective: “Some seers employed second smell, detecting the odour of fish or meat in the fire though neither commodities were in the house.”⁵⁶ John MacInnes agreed that a seer’s abilities could include a sense of supernatural smell.⁵⁷ Shari Cohn also argued that second sight could engage with other senses, as some people reported being physically knocked aside by phantom funeral processions, which foretold a coming death. These processions were also sometimes heard, but not seen.⁵⁸ Similarly, Elizabeth Sutherland cited seers’ experiences with funeral processions in which they were forced to join the procession and required by the specters to physically carry a bier pole.⁵⁹ J.G. Campbell noted numerous instances of second sight that involved audible omens, such as hearing the sounds of hammers making coffins before they were built, or the clinking of glasses that were later used at funerals.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 33.

⁵⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 24.

⁵⁶ Cowan, “Discovery of the Future,” 21.

⁵⁷ MacInnes, “The Seer in Gaelic Tradition,” 16.

⁵⁸ Cohn, “A Historical Review,” 147.

⁵⁹ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 34.

⁶⁰ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 255-256.

While it would seem that most scholars could agree that sight was not technically the only sense involved in “second sight,” Juliet Feibel disagreed and asserted that second sight “grants a visual experience, and that alone.”⁶¹ In this respect, scholars are undecided as to whether “second sight” necessarily had to include the sense of sight, or whether experiences mediated through other senses could be understood as “second sight” too.

Knowledge at a Distance

While some scholars have emphasized that second sight was the ability to perceive two realities, others have focused on defining it as a predictive gift. Some scholars have claimed that second sight was only foresight, while others have acknowledged that some seers had additional supernatural abilities. Michael Hunter defined “second sight” as simply “the uncanny ability of certain individuals to foresee future events.”⁶² Julian Goodare supported this perspective and argued that second sight was an ability to receive “prophetic visions.”⁶³ Edward J. Cowan decided that it was “a moot point whether prophecy and second sight are the same thing, but both are concerned with discovery of the future.” Therefore, Cowan defined second sight as a form of “premonition or even precognition, often with reference to a single event.”⁶⁴ Pawel Rutkowski

⁶¹ Juliet Feibel, “Highland Histories: Jacobitism and Second Sight,” *Clio* 30 no. 1 (2000), 51.

⁶² Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 1.

⁶³ Julian Goodare, “Between Humans and Angels: Scientific Uses for Fairies in Early Modern Scotland,” in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits: ‘Small Gods’ at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 179.

⁶⁴ Cowan, “Discovery of the Future,” 6.

also considered second sight to be “a mysterious propensity for some Scots to be capable of occasionally seeing near future events.”⁶⁵ Martha McGill specified that while second sight was a gift that allowed people to see into the future, they most often “saw apparitions presaging oncoming marriages, deaths, or grander affairs such as battles.”⁶⁶

Some other scholars have argued that though foresight was the primary way to characterize early modern second sight, there were often other accompanying abilities such as possessing knowledge at a physical (rather than just temporal) distance. Euan Cameron quoted John Aubrey’s *Miscellanies* which defined second sight as a gift whereby people could “foresee the future, predict the outcomes of illnesses, and describe events far distant.”⁶⁷ Jay Johnston asserted that second sight was “an extra-sensory ability that enabled those who possessed it to see into the future and/or perceive actions taking place at a distance.”⁶⁸ Sarah Tarlow also described second sight as an talent that “enabled some people to see the future, or events happening far off or spirits of the other world.”⁶⁹ Similarly, A.J.L. Busst defined the ability as “the supposed faculty of discerning while awake, as if through the senses and above all visually,

⁶⁵ Pawel Rutkowski, “Scotland as the Land of Seers: The Scottish Second Sight at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century,” in *Facets of Scottish Identity*, eds. Izabela Szymanska and Aniela Korzeniowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2013), 186.

⁶⁶ Martha McGill, “Ghosts in Enlightenment Scotland” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2015), 76.

⁶⁷ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, & Religion 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 283.

⁶⁸ Jay Johnston, “Stone Agency: Sense, Sight and Magical Efficacy in Traditions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland,” *Religion* 47, no. 3 (2017), 451.

⁶⁹ Sarah Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 175.

objects, people and events remote in space or time.”⁷⁰ Shari Cohn provided a more detailed definition of second sight as spontaneous, awake prophetic visions, “mentally seeing events at a distance,” and “telepathically thinking or knowing the same thing at the same time as another person.”⁷¹ Folklorist Andrew Lang noted that second sight was the ability to foresee events before they happened, or see events that are happening far away.⁷² However, he also somewhat unhelpfully defined it as “only a name which covers many cases called telepathy and clairvoyance by psychical students, and casual or morbid hallucinations by other people.”⁷³ These definitions all emphasize the role of knowledge at a distance, either temporal or physical, through the ability to see the future, know about events happening elsewhere, or understand the thoughts of a distant individual. While these varying definitions of second sight can be supported by early modern sources, they hardly amount to a clear, succinct definition that can be applied to all cases. Furthermore, while these definitions all share a limited agreement that second sight involved knowledge at a distance, continued examination of scholars’ definitions of second sight only yields more complexity and disagreement.

Death Prognostication

One of the most commonly cited definitions of second sight characterized it as the ability

⁷⁰ A.J.L. Busst, “Scottish Second Sight: the Rise and Fall of a European Myth,” *European Romantic Review* 5, no. 2 (1995), 149.

⁷¹ Cohn, “A Historical Review,” 147.

⁷² Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense*, 227.

⁷³ Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense*, 227.

to predict forthcoming death, specifically. By this definition, belief in second sight was related to omens and death divination. However, the signs or methods through which second sighted people were believed to predict death have often been discussed in unclear terms. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart claimed “the heart of the faculty is a premonition of a death that will occur,”⁷⁴ and described second sight as “an ability to see the living as though they were on their way to being dead, appearing as it were in a transitional state between two worlds.”⁷⁵ Julian Goodare concurred that second sight was “mainly a propensity to see visions of approaching death.”⁷⁶ Similarly, Owen Davies claimed that second sight most often referred to visions of the recently dead, or people whose death was imminent.⁷⁷ Sarah Tarlow asserted that the second sighted were “particularly likely to see those that died suddenly before they should have died in the natural way,”⁷⁸ while Juliet Feibel claimed that “the future perceived by second sight consisted mostly of unlucky and unhappy events, usually violent or painful deaths.”⁷⁹ Campbell disagreed with this emphasis on death prognostication, and instead argued that second sight visions were not always about melancholy things. Rather, seers also foresaw significant events such as the arrival of visitors or upcoming marriages, and predicting death was only a part of a seer’s duty.⁸⁰ While

⁷⁴ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 23.

⁷⁵ P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts: A History of Phantoms, Ghouls, & Other Spirits of the Dead* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2006), 67.

⁷⁶ Goodare, “Boundaries of the Fairy Realm,” 149.

⁷⁷ Owen Davies and Willem de Blecourt, eds. *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 87.

⁷⁸ Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead*, 175.

⁷⁹ Feibel, “Highland Histories,” 51.

⁸⁰ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 244.

prognosticating death was considered a significant aspect of the second sighted's ability, it was far from the only talent for which seers were recognized. However, because a number of second sight accounts do feature death prognostication, various scholars have come to define second sight as solely the ability to predict an imminent death. Additionally, scholars' opinions about the means through which these predictions were generated have often been divided.

Some scholars have questioned whether second sight visions consisted of foresight of literal events, or rather the interpretation of signs and symbols. The presence of symbols in visions of second sight often appear in conjunction with predictions of death or disaster. For example, a shroud wrapped around a recognizable individual may portend his or her coming death, or a black dog seen by a second sighted person may be an ill omen.⁸¹ Juliet Feibel claimed that second sight was characterized by these symbolic visions, as it was "the ability to see symbols and signs, invisible to all others, that foretell the future."⁸² Athol Gow's opinion was more absolute, and he argued that the foreknowledge of the second sighted "did not consist of direct relations of actual events." Rather, it was entirely "symbolic, and subject to traditional interpretations."⁸³ While symbols did play a role in second sight visions, it is also evident that not all second sight visions were symbolic, and a number of second sight accounts involved literal foresight of events that would transpire. David Stevenson favored a definition that de-emphasized the symbolic, and claimed that second sight was "the ability literally to 'see' the

⁸¹ Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense*, 227.

⁸² Feibel, "Highland Histories," 51.

⁸³ Gow, "Prophetic Belief," 56.

future, through visual images of future events.”⁸⁴ This division represents yet another site of disagreement in the historiographical conversation about how to define early modern second sight. To emphasize only the literal or the symbolic aspects of seers’ visions constitutes an unnecessary simplification of the perceived abilities of the second sighted, and therefore creates a deceptively narrow definition that is not supported by primary sources.

Seeing Spirits

Some scholars have claimed that second sighted people were uniquely able to see spirits or gaze into the spirit world. Despite the heavy emphasis that many scholars have placed on foresight or death prognostication, the ability to see spirits was undoubtedly an aspect of early modern second sight. Sarah Tarlow argued that the second sighted were “more likely to see wraiths, siths or spirits than others, and some kinds of spirits were more likely to show themselves in this way.”⁸⁵ P.G. Maxwell-Stuart also asserted that second sight “represents the ability of certain living individuals to act as involuntary channels of communication anent what is happening in the realm of of the dead, or about to happen in that of the living.”⁸⁶ Combining some of these ideas, Edward Larrissy emphasized that second sight was “the ability to see

⁸⁴ David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland’s Century 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 126.

⁸⁵ Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead*, 175.

⁸⁶ Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, 69.

visions, often premonitory, often of the dead, sometimes of spirits or ‘fairies.’”⁸⁷ J.G. Campbell claimed that seers most often “see the ghosts of the dead revisiting earth, and the fetches, doubles or apparitions of the living.”⁸⁸ Likewise, Ronald Hutton made this connection between second sight and spirit belief when he asserted that “the main Gaelic name for [the second sighted] indicated somebody who conversed with ‘the fairies or fairy-folk.’”⁸⁹ Liv Helene Willumsen broadly defined second sight as “an ability to foresee the future and experience places not possible to see for ordinary people.” Willumsen claimed that this concept of second sight fit “easily” with early modern beliefs about witches’ metamorphoses and flights to the Sabbath, as both were dependent on belief in the world of spirits.⁹⁰

Early modern sources do support the idea that second sight was believed to be the ability to see non-physical beings, voluntarily or otherwise. However, scholars are clearly not in agreement as to what kinds of beings were generally believed to be seen, and how these experiences were interpreted by visionaries and their peers. Some scholars appear to emphasize ghosts or doubles, while others reference fairies or ambiguous spirits. A relevant debate between scholars also demonstrates that opinions are divided about whether early modern second sight was related to fairy belief, or if the second sighted were often believed to be in communication with the fairy folk. While some of the scholars quoted here clearly associated second sight with

⁸⁷ Edward Larrissy, “The Celtic Bard of Romanticism: Blindness and Second Sight,” *Romanticism* 5, no. 1 (2010), 46.

⁸⁸ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 241.

⁸⁹ Hutton, *The Witch*, 222.

⁹⁰ Willumsen, *Witches of the North*, 96, 356.

fairy belief, others that are cited in Chapter 3 of this dissertation plainly disagreed.⁹¹ Therefore, this debate is simply part of a larger disagreement among scholars about the relationship between second sight and the ability to perceive the world of spirits.

Voluntary or Involuntary?

Some scholars and historians have discussed whether second sight was believed to be voluntarily gained or exercised by early modern seers. The fact that some second sighted people were preceded by their reputations as visionaries begs the question of whether anyone would desire to be second sighted, or perhaps go to lengths to acquire the second sight. The debate over whether second sight visions could be voluntarily induced was prevalent in early modern sources. Following in the footsteps of these sources, scholars again appear to disagree on this topic rather than acknowledge that different primary sources offer different perspectives. Shari Cohn argued that second sight was “sometimes used intentionally to help people locate loved ones or lost objects.”⁹² Cohn also claimed that individuals acquired reputations as second sighted people, and these reputations were based their communities’ judgements about the accuracy of the information they provided.⁹³ Emma Wilby’s work also engaged with this question, and Wilby asserted that the second sighted openly advertised their ability to “specifically generate visions in

⁹¹ The historiographical debate about the relationship between second sight and fairy belief is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

⁹² Cohn, “A Historical Review,” 150.

⁹³ Cohn, “A Historical Review,” 157.

response to client demands.”⁹⁴ Others, such as John MacInnes, have claimed that the visions of second sighted people were “involuntary” and “rarely welcome.”⁹⁵ Similarly, Hilda Ellis Davidson argued that second sight ought to be distinguished from divination because a diviner uses a technique to inspire visions, while the second sighted experienced theirs spontaneously and without effort.⁹⁶ These scholars’ opinions about second sight directly contradict each other. If the second sighted were consulted for their ability, then some must have claimed they could engage with their second sight or obtain requested knowledge on demand. However, if their visions were involuntarily received or unwelcome, then the second sighted would be unable to offer information on specific topics when asked. As with other aspects of second sight belief, scholars’ divided opinions are likely a reflection of their focus on a single early modern source or body of sources, rather than the wide range of literature on second sight that provided many different answers to this question.

Numerous early modern sources described methods of acquiring second sight, inviting the interpretation that some saw it as desirable. Simultaneously, others emphasized that it was a troublesome faculty and recommended methods for curing it. Early modern people developed a wide range of theories and interpretations of second sight that involved the question of whether the ability was voluntarily or involuntarily possessed. For both modern scholars and early modern theorists, this question was relevant to the debate over whether second sight was

⁹⁴ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 268.

⁹⁵ John MacInnes, “The Church and Traditional Belief in Gaelic Society,” in *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 191.

⁹⁶ Davidson, *The Seer*, 3-4.

associated with witchcraft.⁹⁷ From an early modern perspective, a voluntary supernatural ability could be construed as diabolism, since witches were believed to gain their supernatural powers through voluntary pacts with Satan. However, an involuntary or innate ability could be interpreted as a gift from God, or perhaps as an unfortunate burden. Scholars have also disagreed about whether second sight was related to early modern witchcraft, and their debates have tended to involve the voluntary/involuntary question. In actuality, some primary sources theorized that second sight could be acquired voluntarily while others claimed that it could not. Likewise, some claimed that the second sighted were guilty of witchcraft, while others insisted that seers were innocent, and had no direct role in the acquisition of their abilities. These many theories of how second sight was acquired or exercised are discussed in every subsequent chapter of this dissertation, and there was no early modern consensus on this topic. The question of whether second sight was subject to the seer's own control was hotly debated by early modern people, so it is somewhat surprising to see modern scholars replicating these debates rather than acknowledging the fact that our sources are undecided on this topic.

A Modern Analogy

So how do we reconcile these various definitions of “second sight?” How have scholars managed to define the concept in so many clearly related, yet also distinct, ways? Where did they get these many different definitions? The answers to these questions must lie in the sources that

⁹⁷ The historiographical debate about the relationship between second sight and witchcraft is discussed more fully in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

these various scholars are examining. As evident in the selection of *Highland Rites and Customs* at the beginning of this chapter, early modern theorists lacked a cohesive, succinct definition or theory of second sight. Therefore, any single or narrow definition being offered by a secondary source is likely echoing a single definition offered in one primary source or cluster of sources, rather than the many definitions present in the corpus of early modern literature that discussed second sight.

When trying to define early modern second sight, it may be most helpful to think of “second sight” as a term that was employed by early modern people in much the same way that modern English-speakers use the term “psychic.” To say that someone is a psychic or possesses psychic abilities is a very vague assertion. Opinions about where these abilities come from, what these abilities constitute, and whether they are voluntarily exercised may vary widely based on individual belief and practice. A modern psychic may claim that his or her abilities come from guardian angels, fairy spirits, ghosts of dead humans, or far-distant alien beings. These abilities may encompass communication with any number of spirits or invisible entities, supernatural knowledge of the future or distant events, insights into the condition or (non)existence of the afterlife, and much more. Therefore, it is ultimately somewhat pointless for modern people to argue over what it means to be “psychic.” Rather, we must acknowledge that the term has been employed in a variety of ways and circumstances, and we cannot entirely be sure what “psychic” means to an individual until he or she tells us.

The term “second sight” is much the same. Scholars cannot agree on many points of definition because early modern people could not either. Any attempt at reconciling these many, sometimes contradictory definitions of second sight will simply end in frustration. The only way

to move forward is to acknowledge that “second sight” possessed a multivalent definition. Each of these scholars has tended to assert that his or her own single definition of second sight is correct and appropriate, while hardly any have argued that second sight was a term that referred to a variety of phenomena. In this sense, none of these scholars are wrong in their definitions of second sight, as all of the phenomena that they described were acknowledged aspects of the ability. However, none of them are actually right either, in that hardly anyone has been willing to argue that “second sight” was a multifaceted and complex term. In this respect, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart hit closest to the mark when he admitted that second sight could refer to several supernatural abilities such as “clairvoyance, telepathy, [and] pre- and retro-cognition,” as well as the ability to see spirits.⁹⁸ Maxwell-Stuart is one of the only scholars willing to wrestle with the unclear nature of the term and acknowledge that it was used to refer to various related, though also distinct, phenomena.

Because of this term's complexity, each primary source and its author must be examined critically in order to determine what he or she meant by the term “second sight.” We must recognize that it is hardly up to us to claim that what is being discussed is not *really* second sight if it does not fit a particularly narrow definition that we have constructed. Instead, we must follow the sources and take them at their word. As long as the term “second sight” is used in a source, the way that the source defines it must be seen as valid for the purpose of study. Occasionally, the term itself is not used but the phenomenon is quite recognizable through relevant second sight motifs, many of which are identified in this chapter. Early modern people had numerous ideas of what constituted second sight, and they related it to other belief systems

⁹⁸ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 23-24, 24 n.62.

that were also somewhat fluid and loosely defined. The malleability of the term “second sight” actually made it a particularly good concept with which to develop and test theories, allowing second sight to be readily adapted to a wide variety of early modern conversations about spirits, magic, religion, science, and nature.

II: Early Modern Definitions of Second Sight

Just as with modern scholarly definitions of second sight, early modern understandings of the phenomenon were diverse. While early modern definitions and descriptions of second sight are far from succinct, they can be grouped into a few general categories around relevant themes. The most broad theme that unifies these categories is “hidden knowledge,” meaning that a second sighted person was believed to have access to knowledge that an average person did not. Within this broader idea of access to hidden knowledge, there do appear to be a few themes around which accounts of second sight cluster. One of these themes involves death or death prognostication. Another is knowledge of future events that are not necessarily related to death, such as upcoming marriages or soon-to-arrive visitors. Some second sight visions can also be understood as a form of remote viewing, meaning the ability to have knowledge of events that are currently ongoing but in a remote location. There was also a prevalent belief that second sighted people could see spirits or even sometimes communicate with them, though the identity of these spirits was dependent on the seer’s cultural interpretations. While most of these accounts did feature the theme of sight or vision, it is worth noting that some episodes of second sight involved other senses, such as smelling or feeling. Some accounts were not about literal sight at

all, but rather about knowledge in a general sense. In these various ways, second sight was regarded as a complex concept with many different, yet often simultaneously valid, definitions.

The following pieces of evidence all make explicit use of the term “second sight,” so as to establish the diverse ways that the term was employed by early modern people. However, once the parameters of the phenomenon are established, this dissertation cites evidence that may not make use of the specific term “second sight.” The later inclusion of evidence not explicitly called “second sight” is justified by the identification of motifs that are frequently present in accounts of second sight. These motifs make it possible to identify second sight belief even when the term itself is not invoked. Historical research into early modern fairy belief must be able to include accounts of unnamed nature spirits, night-riding courts, spirits that abduct humans, and spirits that wear green clothes, even when the term “fairy” is not explicitly used. Similarly, research into second sight must first identify relevant motifs present in obvious accounts of second sight, in order to later identify beliefs about second sight that are detached from the name itself.

Death Prognostication

A significant number of second sight accounts relate to death and death prognostication. These accounts are so widely recorded and have generated so much discussion that they have tended to eclipse some other aspects of second sight belief. While this category of accounts is important for understanding second sight from a historical perspective, death prognostication was not the only way that second sight was defined by early modern people. Many of these stories described visions of a symbolic nature, which were then interpreted by the one having the

vision and the people to whom the vision was described. These visions foretold an imminent death, and often included symbols of death in proximity to the individual who was soon to die. These symbols included, but were not limited to, seeing the person stretched out as a corpse, seeing the person in his or her burial shroud, or seeing the person in circumstances that would resemble his or her means of dying.

These visions that predicted approaching death were somewhat diverse in content, though they all had about the same meaning. In a letter to James Garden from John Aubrey, Garden replied to Aubrey's request for information about second sight, claiming that it "relates only to things future," and that "sad and dismall events are the objects of this knowledge: as sudden deaths, dismall accidents."⁹⁹ The author of *The History of Witches, Ghosts, and Highland Seers* described the vision of a woman who was selling fish in Berwick upon Tweed. While speaking with a customer, the fish seller suddenly began to tremble violently and claimed that a man on a nearby cart would die soon, since she saw a black coffin following behind him. In accordance with her prediction, the man fell from his cart and died.¹⁰⁰ Another premonition received by a second sighted woman involved some boards of wood that were intended to be made into a bed. The woman predicted that they would instead be used to build a coffin, as she had a vision of a corpse stretched out upon them.¹⁰¹ Second sighted people also attested to seeing other portents of

⁹⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

¹⁰⁰ *The History of Witches, Ghosts, and Highland Seers: Containing Many Wonderful Well-Attested Relations of Supernatural Appearances, Not Published Before in Any Similar Collection. Designed for the Conviction of the Unbeliever, and the Amusement of the Curious* (Berwick: R. Taylor, 1775), 186-187.

¹⁰¹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

death, such as funeral processions that traveled along the path that they would soon take.¹⁰² Dr. Beattie's description of Scotland included a derisive account of second sighted people who commonly claimed they saw "corpses, funeral processions, and other subjects of terror."¹⁰³ Somewhat curiously, some seers also claimed that seeing a man shrink down to a child's size, then grow back to adult size, was a forerunner of that individual's approaching death.¹⁰⁴

Often, second sighted people attested that they saw specters accompanied by details that presaged the manner in which those people would die. Edward Lhuys recorded some relevant folklore concerning apparitions, second sight, and death portents: "The men with the second sight see a man... with fish [scales] over his hair and his clothes, if he is to be drowned; bloody, if he is to be wounded; in his shroud if he is to die in his bed."¹⁰⁵ James Garden also described the symbolic nature of seers' premonitions of death: "if a man's fatal end be hanging; they'll see a gibbet or a rope about his neck; if beheaded; they'll see the man without a head: if drowned; they'll see water up to his throat: if unexpected death; they'll see a winding-sheet about his head."¹⁰⁶ Thomas Pennant's record of his travels in Scotland included the account of a second sighted man who saw men with wet clothes and dripping hair, and by this he predicted that these

¹⁰² BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

¹⁰³ Dr. Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland, and Remarks on the Second Sight of the Inhabitants," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, August 1791, 457.

¹⁰⁴ Theophilus Insulanus, *A Treatise on the Second Sight* (Edinburgh: Rudiman, Auld, and Company, 1763), 6, 155.

¹⁰⁵ J.L. Campbell and Derick Thomson, eds. *Edward Lhuys in the Scottish Highlands 1699-1700* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 54.

¹⁰⁶ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

men would die by drowning.¹⁰⁷ John Ferriar related the story of a second sighted Scottish chieftain who saw a vision of a headless woman enter his room. The chieftain immediately sent out riders to enquire after the health of two women he knew whose manner resembled the headless woman's.¹⁰⁸ Another account by Martin Martin told of some second sighted people seeing a vision of a corpse floating in the water off the island of St. Kilda, and subsequently a man in the same clothes as appeared in the vision fell and drowned.¹⁰⁹

These visions were not always absolute in meaning, and their interpretation was dependent on the perspective of the individual seer, as well as his or her cultural context. James Garden noted that some second sight visions were ambiguous, and interpretations of them could differ from seer to seer. His solution to this problem was to claim that "all such as profess that skill are not equally dextrous in it."¹¹⁰ Garden followed this assertion with a story about two seers who both saw a vision of a woman, who was known to be ill, wrapped up in a sheet. One seer interpreted this vision as a sign of her imminent death, since she was wrapped in a shroud. The other seer disagreed, and claimed that as her linens were wet, it was a sign that she was sweating out her fever and would presently get well.¹¹¹ The corpse in its winding sheet or shroud is a common motif in second sight accounts, but as this anecdote illustrates, second sight visions

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland 1769* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2000), 117. In the British Library, Pennant's book can be found shelf-marked as BL, 976.i.6.

¹⁰⁸ John Ferriar, *An essay towards a theory of apparitions* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1813), 64-65.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda: the remotest of all the Hebrides or Western Islands of Scotland* (London: D. Browne and L. Davis, 1753), 68.

¹¹⁰ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132v.

¹¹¹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol 132v.

were subject to individual and cultural interpretation. Furthermore, the apparitions that appeared to the second sighted did not always presage death. Rather, second sight also involved predicting various future events, such as whether an individual would survive an illness.

Knowledge of the Future

A common theme in second sight accounts is knowledge of general future events, not necessarily related to death. Samuel Johnson, who travelled to Scotland and enquired amongst the natives about second sight, recorded that one facet of the phenomenon involved distant or future things being seen as though they were present.¹¹² Similarly, John Fraser's treatise on second sight argued it should rather be called "first sight," since "for the most part it sees things before they are."¹¹³ James Garden claimed that second sighted people saw events that were "not only sad & dismall; but also joyfull & prosperous: thus they foretell of happy marriages, good children, what kind of life men shall live, & in what condition they shall die: also riches, honour, preferment, peace, plentie & good weather."¹¹⁴ This quote alone illustrates the wide range of topics, both significant and mundane, on which second sighted people were able to prognosticate. James Boswell, who was Samuel Johnson's travel companion, noted a "strong

¹¹² Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland 1775* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 89.

¹¹³ John Fraser, *Deuteroscopia, or A brief Discourse concerning the Second Sight, Commonly so called*, in *The Occult Laboratory*, ed. Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 190. In the British Library and Bodleian Library, Fraser's book can be found shelf-marked as BL, 8630.a.31 and BOD, 265.k.203, respectively.

¹¹⁴ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

instance” of second sight in which a woman predicted the return of her master to his home at a certain time and in a certain manner, and it came to pass.¹¹⁵ Lord Tarbat related to Robert Boyle the account of a second sighted man who claimed he saw some English horsemen feeding their horses barley on a hillside, but the hillside was currently being sown with barley and it had not yet sprouted. Some months later, a company of English people rode through the area and allowed their horses to feed on the mature barley.¹¹⁶ Some other early modern travelers and tourists to Scotland recorded their experiences with the second sight of the Scottish natives, some of whom told the travelers that their arrival had been foreseen or predicted by a seer. Upon Martin Martin’s arrival in St. Kilda, a woman attested that she had seen, some weeks before his coming, a boat with strangers in it drawing near her island.¹¹⁷ According to Garden, second sighted people were also capable of predicting the outcome of violence between individuals, or larger clan conflicts.¹¹⁸ In this way, second sighted people’s ability of foresight was believed to be far-reaching, and there does not seem to have been any type of future event that they could not foresee.

Just as some second sighted people could predict an impending death, they were also

¹¹⁵ James Boswell, *The Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (London: Dent, 1958), 222.

¹¹⁶ Robert Boyle, “Robert Boyle’s notes on his interview with Lord Tarbat, 3 October 1678,” in *The Occult Laboratory*, ed. Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 52; Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences mostly relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, vol. 4, ed. Matthew Leishman (Edinburgh: The Maitland Club, 1842-3), 156. In the National Library of Scotland, *Analecta* is shelf-marked as NLS, Wod.Anal 1-6, in six volumes.

¹¹⁷ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 69.

¹¹⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132v.

frequently said to be able to foresee upcoming marriages. Lhuyd's account of second sight, obtained from the Reverend Beaton, included the claim that "The men with the second sight see a man... with his sweetheart on his right hand if he is to marry [her], but on his left hand if he is not to win his sweetheart."¹¹⁹ A similar account was recorded by Walter Scott who, in the context of telling tales about second sighted people, described a youth known as the "fairy boy of Leith." The fairy boy told one of Scott's acquaintances that this man would be married twice, as the boy could see two wives sitting on each of his shoulders, and "both would be very handsome women."¹²⁰ This account bears similarity to one of Garden's stories of a second sighted woman who told her friend that she saw "a lord upon each shoulder of you," thereby predicting that the friend's first marriage would be brief but would leave her with a dowry to marry another, better match.¹²¹ Dr. Beattie's description of second sight also cited seers' ability to predict "marriages or the arrival of strangers, and such like matters of more agreeable curiosity."¹²² Garden's letter to Aubrey recorded accounts of second sighted people foreseeing marriages. In particular, Garden related the story of a second sighted woman who saw a vision of a young man attending her friend as she moved up and down the house, and within three months the friend found a husband.¹²³ While scholarly explorations of second sight tend to have been dominated by an emphasis on death prognostication, it is clear that second sighted people were believed to be able

¹¹⁹ Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 54.

¹²⁰ Walter Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1807), 312-315.

¹²¹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

¹²² Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands," 457.

¹²³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

to predict future events of various kinds, with death being only one of them. However, death and marriage are life events that are both mundane and significant, which is why they likely appear in so many second sight accounts.

Remote Viewing

Some second sight accounts attest that the ability allowed people to see events that were currently transpiring in remote locations. These accounts illustrate that the second sighted were considered capable of obtaining knowledge at a spatial, and not just temporal, distance. John Cockburn claimed that “some people in the Highlands of Scotland, particularly, have what is called the “second sight” by which sometimes they have imparted to them those things which happen at a distant place, or will happen soon.”¹²⁴ Cockburn offered examples of the second sighted providing detailed accounts of battles as they were being fought, hundreds or thousands of miles away. By way of assurance, he claimed that these visions are “undoubted,” and attested by “both credible histories and living witnesses.”¹²⁵ John Brand made a similar claim when he observed that “many of the inhabitants of the Western Islands of Scotland are said to have second sight,” which is “a faculty of seeing things to come, or at a great distance, represented to the imagination as if actually visible and present. This strange thing has been well attested by

¹²⁴ John Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected, or the delusions and errors of Antonia Bourignon, and her growing sect which may also serve for a discovery of all other enthusiastical impostures* (London: C. Brome, 1698), 62.

¹²⁵ Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected*, 62.

authors of credit.”¹²⁶ Lhuyd claimed that the Reverend Beaton shared with him the account of a seer who had a vision of another man carrying a large amount of cheese away from the seer’s house. The seer recognized the individual, and went back to his home and apprehended the thief.¹²⁷ Similarly, James Garden related the account of a second sighted man who had the ability to tell an earl where his ship was sailing at the present time. When asked for evidence that his knowledge was accurate, the second sighted man replied that “he had lately been at the place, & had brought away with him on[e] of the seamen’s caps, which he delivered to his Lord.”¹²⁸ When the ship arrived in port at the predicted time, one of the sailors confirmed that the lost cap was his.¹²⁹ All of these accounts emphasized that second sighted people were believed to be able to view remote locations, and thereby provide accurate information about people or events from a distance.

Hidden Knowledge

A cluster of second sight accounts attested that seers had access to hidden knowledge, meaning that they could simply know things that an average person could not. Technically, death prognostication, knowledge of the future, and remote viewing can all be considered ways in

¹²⁶ John Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities: including the whole of Mr. Bourne’s Antiquitates Vulgares, with addenda to every chapter of that work: also an appendix, containing such articles on the subject, as have been omitted by that author* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: J. Johnson, 1777), 94.

¹²⁷ Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 55.

¹²⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 134v.

¹²⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 134v.

which second sighted people had access to hidden knowledge. However, some accounts of second sight do not fit cleanly into any of those other categories. These other forms of hidden knowledge were wide-ranging in nature, and some second sighted people appeared to have control over what knowledge they chose to obtain, and when. Others seemed to have experienced their visions spontaneously, and perhaps were therefore unable to conjure hidden knowledge at will. Robert Kirk's treatise on second sight recorded the story of two women who lived apart yet spontaneously experienced the same vision at the same time. This vision revealed to them the existence and location of a hill in which treasure was hidden. The women encountered each other at the hill, and together dug up the treasure they had seen in their visions.¹³⁰ The second sighted Duncan Campbell described his ability as "palpable and immediate Inspiration from the supreme Source of all Knowledge." Campbell claimed that when inspired, a seer "sees, and comprehends Millions of Things at once."¹³¹ Though Campbell's own memoirs argued that second sight descended on seers spontaneously and with no warning, Campbell also claimed some degree of control over his ability and the knowledge that he obtained, since he made a living by providing information to paying clients, who consulted him with specific questions in mind.¹³²

Other second sighted people also laid claim to the ability to access a wide variety of hidden knowledge and, like Duncan, some were consulted because of this specific talent. The

¹³⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 23-24.

¹³¹ Duncan Campbell, *Secret Memoirs of the late Mr. Duncan Campbell, The Famous Deaf and Dumb Gentleman, written by Himself, who ordered they should be publish'd after his Decease* (London: J. Millan and J. Chrichley, 1732), 129.

¹³² Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 129; Eliza Haywood, *A Spy on the Conjurer. or, a Collection of Surprising and Diverting Stories, with Merry and Ingenious Letters. By way of Memoirs of the Famous Mr. Duncan Campbell, demonstrating the astonishing Foresight of that Wonderful Deaf and Dumb Man* (London: W. Ellis, J. Brotherton, J. Batly, T. Woodward, and J. Fox, 1725).

practice of consulting second sighted people was recorded by James Garden: “It is likewise ordinary with persons that lose anything, to goe to some of these men, by whom they are directed; how what persons & in what place they shall find it.”¹³³ Some examples of this practice appear in the accounts of Janet Douglas, a seer whose abilities were widely discussed by early modern theorists. Janet purported to be a second sighted witch-finder, and she acted in this capacity during a witch hunt in the Western Islands in the 1670s. Referring to this particular witch-hunt, George Hickee recorded that the accused witches were “discovered by one Jannet Duglass, who pretends to have the Second Sight; but is believed to have a Familiar Spirit. And it is Observable, that both sir George and the Laird of Barnes, both Zealous Covenanters, consulted with her for the recovery of their health.”¹³⁴ It would seem that not only could Janet identify witches and causes of misfortune, but she was also consulted as an authority on whether someone would recover from illness. Similarly, the “fairy boy of Leith” was said to answer astrological questions “with great subtlty,” and aside from predicting future romantic pairings for clients, he revealed to a woman that he knew about the two illegitimate children that she had conceived before she was married.¹³⁵ The Cameron Kirk Session records from 1752-1792 contain a reprimand against some villagers who consulted a man named Archibald Roddie, “one

¹³³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132v.

¹³⁴ George Hickee, *The spirit of popery speaking out of the mouths of phanatical-Protestants, or The last speeches of Mr. John Kid and Mr. John King, two Presbyterian ministers, who were executed for high-treason and rebellion at Edinburgh, August the 14th, 1649 with animadversions, and the history of the Archbishop of St. Andrews his murder, extracted out of the registers of the Privy-Council, &c.* (London: Walter Kittleby, 1680), 35.

¹³⁵ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 312-315.

that is commonly repute a Charmer.”¹³⁶ Marlown Rad asked Roddie about her horses that were sick, while David Mar was accused of consulting Roddie about the identity of a thief.¹³⁷ When questioned, David Mar claimed that he had consulted Roddie because of his reputation as a second sighted man.¹³⁸ Belief in Roddie’s ability to consciously access many forms of hidden knowledge is evident in this source. These various accounts indicate that some second sighted people were believed to be able to summon hidden knowledge at will, on a desired topic, and for the benefit of others. Based on this evidence, some second sighted people may have been practitioners of popular magic who were consulted for a wide variety of purposes, and as such they also advertised themselves as able to perform a range of functions that included revealing hidden knowledge about the past, present, or future.

Seeing Spirits

Second sighted people were generally believed to be able to see spirits, though what sorts of spirits these actually were was dependent on individual and cultural interpretation. Some people believed that the second sighted could see the dead, while others thought that they could see the specters of people that were alive, yet very near death. Other people asserted that second sighted people actually saw fairies or other similar spirits that populated the human world. A number of accounts of second sighted people indicate that they were able to see subtle bodies,

¹³⁶ NRS, CH2/49/3, fol. 32.

¹³⁷ NRS, CH2/49/3, fols. 32-33.

¹³⁸ NRS, CH2/49/3, fol. 33.

which were believed to be a part of living humans that was neither their body nor their immortal soul. Subtle bodies could detach from their owners' physical bodies, travel to remote locations, or act out events that were to transpire in the future.¹³⁹ Numerous sources attested that the second sighted were able to see several different types of spirits, and some even believed that seers were especially adept at interpreting the operations of incorporeal beings.

The belief that second sighted people could see spirits can be found in both Scottish and other European sources. Joseph Glanvill's anti-atheist treatise *Saducimus Triumphatus* argued that some people, such as the second sighted, were uniquely able to see spirits: "Many other well attested Relations of this kind speak of the like, and there are Innumerable Stories of people that have their second sight as they call it, to wit, a faculty of seeing Spectres when others cannot discern them."¹⁴⁰ The second sighted Duncan Campbell described his own ability as "the Power of discerning incorporeal Beings."¹⁴¹ Technically, wraiths which portended the deaths of individuals were a type of spirit, and therefore accounts of second sighted people interpreting apparitions as wraiths should be seen as evidence of the belief that the second sighted could see spirits, as well as predict the future and prognosticate death.

Numerous accounts also claimed that second sighted people could see various kinds of ambiguous spirits, such as fairies, ghosts, or unnamed spirit beings. Walter Scott believed that the Highland seers boasted of intimacy with elves "as an innocent and advantageous

¹³⁹ Second sight and subtle body belief is discussed more fully in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, as it is an important and under-explored aspect of spirit belief in early modern Scotland.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Glanvill and Henry More, *Saducimus Triumphatus* (London: J. Collins and S. Lownds, 1681), 52-53.

¹⁴¹ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 63.

connexion.”¹⁴² Scott also attested that the second sighted “fairy boy of Leith” claimed that he would beat a drum at a feast under a hill each Thursday night, with a great company of men and women, and that he was often carried with them to distant lands.¹⁴³ In his treatise on spirits, John Beaumont defined a second sighted person as “one that converses with Ghosts, or Spirits, or as they commonly call them the Fairies, or fairy-folks.” The thesis of Robert Kirk’s treatise on second sight was that seers were uniquely able to see fairies and understand their operations.¹⁴⁴ Kirk also argued that each person had a fairy double, or a fairy that looked just like the individual and was in some sense tethered to him or her throughout their natural lifespan. These fairy doubles were most often observed by seers, who gave testimony about their appearance and activities.¹⁴⁵ Aside from being associated with doubles, fairies were also ambiguous beings whose identity overlapped significantly with those of ghosts, demons, and angels.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, any assertion that the second sighted could see into the spirit world must also consider the tangled way in which spirits were categorized in early modern Scotland.

Senses Other than Sight

The most commonly invoked sense when discussing second sight is, obviously, sight. However, a number of early modern accounts described seers acquiring knowledge through their

¹⁴² Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 305.

¹⁴³ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 312-315.

¹⁴⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 1-6.

¹⁴⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 5-7.

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on fairies and ambiguous spirits.

other senses, such as smell, hearing, or touch. Martin Martin claimed that sometimes events could be foretold through smell, as in the case of two second sighted women who smelled meat cooking over a fire before it happened.¹⁴⁷ John MacCulloch recorded similar stories, and argued that “a kind of Second, or rather anticipatory Smell, also existed; broiling fish or flesh being thus predicted, long before the salmon was caught or the sheep killed.”¹⁴⁸ On a grimmer note, Increase Mather’s discussion of second sight and witchcraft recorded the belief that some individuals were capable of smelling a corpse in the house of someone who was going to die.¹⁴⁹

Just as smell played a role in second sight accounts, sound and hearing also appeared on occasion. Martin Martin believed that the second sighted would sometimes hear a cry outdoors, and the sound of the voice would resemble that of the person whose death it foretold.¹⁵⁰

Theophilus Insulanus also recorded numerous instances of second sight that involved sound, such as seers hearing a person at work before the worker was present, hearing tools that would later be used to make a coffin, and hearing a boat before it had arrived.¹⁵¹ Insulanus also described second sighted people hearing crying outdoors and knowing that a drowning would

¹⁴⁷ Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, 2nd ed. (London: A. Bell, 1716), 305-306.

¹⁴⁸ John MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, containing descriptions of their scenery and antiquities, with an account of the political history, present condition of the people, &c founded on a series of annual journeys between the years 1811 and 1821 in letters to Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 4 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1824), 74.

¹⁴⁹ Increase Mather, *A further account of the tryals of the New-England witches with the observations of a person who was upon the place several days when the suspected witches were first taken into examination to which is added: Cases of conscience concerning witchcrafts and evil spirits impersonating men* (London: J. Dunton, 1693), 13.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 305.

¹⁵¹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 11, 14, 114.

soon occur, hearing a shot before someone was accidentally shot later, and hearing sounds of mourning preceding a death.¹⁵² Noel Taillepied, a French Capuchin monk, mentioned second sight in his treatise on ghosts. In this instance, Taillepied cited the belief that the second sighted were capable of hearing windows or doors opening or shutting, which were regarded as omens of a coming death.¹⁵³ George Waldron recorded the belief that visitors could be foretold by the sound of their horses' hooves coming to the gate of the house where they would arrive.¹⁵⁴ James Garden claimed that a member of a spectral funeral procession audibly spoke to a second sighted woman and told her whose funeral it was to be: "a woman in that countrey who is reputed to have the 2nd sight... declared that, eight dayes befor the death of a gentleman there, she saw a beere or Coffin covered with a cloth, which shee knew, carried, as it were to the place of buriall, and attended with a great companie on of which told her that it was the corps of such a person naming that gentleman who died within 8 dayes after."¹⁵⁵ Similarly, George Waldron asserted that spectral funeral processions were sometimes heard, because "they sing Psalms in the same Manner as those do who accompany the Corps of a dead Friend."¹⁵⁶ In these various accounts, information gained through the senses of smell and hearing were used as examples of established aspects of second sight, such as foresight, death prognostication, and the ability to see spirits.

This connection between various aspects of second sight belief and senses other than

¹⁵² Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 26, 48, 112.

¹⁵³ Noel Taillepied, *A Treatise of Ghosts*, trans. Montague Summers (London: The Fortune Press, 1933), 85.

¹⁵⁴ George Waldron, *The History and Description of the Isle of Man* (London: W. Bickerton, 1744), 75.

¹⁵⁵ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

¹⁵⁶ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 75.

sight also appeared in accounts that emphasized the sense of touch. In some of these stories, second sighted people described being pushed aside by funeral processions or being forced to help carry the bier, both of which were associated with the belief that second sighted people could prognosticate death and see spirits.¹⁵⁷ When discussing the second sighted inhabitants of the Isle of Man, George Waldron claimed he had been told that “as they have been passing the Road, one of these Funerals has come behind them, and even laid the Bier on their Shoulders, as tho’ to assist the Bearers. One Person, who assured me he had been served so, told me, that the Flesh of his Shoulder had been very much bruised, and was black for many Weeks after.”¹⁵⁸ In this account, the bruising of the seer’s shoulder emphasized the tangibility of his experience. A similar detail appears in an account by Robert Kirk, who described a second sighted man who attempted to move his minister out of the path of a “wight of a known village person,” meaning the double or subtle body of a recognizable man. The minister “who misbelieving a man who said he saw such sights invisibl to others” refused to move, and presently both the minister and seer were violently thrown off the path and “by the fall were lame all their life after.”¹⁵⁹ Once again, the assertion that these visions could involve the sense of touch was emphasized through descriptions of seers’ injuries at the hands of spirits. In these examples, it would seem that senses other than sight were included in definitions of second sight when they engaged with accepted aspects of the ability, such as foresight, death prognostication, access to hidden knowledge, or contact with spirit beings.

¹⁵⁷ Cohn, “A Historical Review,” 147; Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 34.

¹⁵⁸ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 74-75.

¹⁵⁹ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 24v.

While these various definitions of second sight can all be regarded as distinct, many of these motifs overlap with one another. For example, the ability to foretell the future could be seen as having access to hidden knowledge. Similarly, a correct prognostication of death could come from information gained by seeing spirits, while the ability to see into the spiritual realm is itself a form of accessing hidden knowledge. These examples prove that the talents of the second sighted did not fit into neat, labelled categories. Rather, these popular understandings of second sight were often fluid and interchangeable, providing insight into the reasons why both modern scholars and early modern people possessed so many definitions of second sight. Furthermore, while many second sight accounts featured the sense of sight, or foretelling the future, or death prognostication, other references to second sight did not include any of these. Second sight must therefore be viewed as a multifaceted concept that encompassed a variety of beliefs about supernatural abilities.

From these sources, it is evident that early modern people lacked a unified or perfectly cohesive definition of second sight. In his memoirs, the seer Duncan Campbell attempted to define second sight in a chapter dedicated to the topic. Campbell wrote, “It will doubtless, be expected that I, who have the Gift of Second Sight, should say something by way of defining it... to do that is utterly impossible.”¹⁶⁰ Campbell further asserted that “The Second Sight is an Inspiration wholly Supernatural, and none but those really possess of it, can form any Idea what it is.”¹⁶¹ It would seem that even those who laid claim to second sight struggled to define their ability. The elusive, complex, and multivalent nature of early modern second sight may not be

¹⁶⁰ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 129.

¹⁶¹ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 47.

convenient for modern scholars, but the past is rarely neat and sometimes the historian's task is to complicate rather than simplify. Further compounding the issue, there was also no clear consensus among early modern people as to the cause of second sight, whether the second sighted possessed the ability voluntarily, or whether the condition could be "cured." The plurality of beliefs held by early modern people about these topics appears frequently in this dissertation, and the debates that surrounded these subjects were sometimes fierce. Ultimately, these facts should be unsurprising. Early modern people held diverse beliefs about God, humanity, and the spirit world, all of which were subjects that had implications for individuals' entire worldview. Rather, these sources do agree that many early modern people believed in something called "second sight," which some of their contemporaries claimed to experience. The basis for these experiences, and how they were subsequently interpreted, is explored in the rest of this chapter.

III: The Experiential Dimension of Second Sight

In 1555, Scottish minister William Hay composed some lectures on the topic of marriage, in which he entertained the question of whether the experiences of people who believed they encountered spirits had a basis in reality. Hay's original purpose for writing was to discuss various theories about whether witches or spirits could interfere with sexual relations between married people. However, his diversion provided a valuable window into the realm of early modern ideas about the ways in which people were believed to have contact with spirits, and one interpretation of these experiences. Hay observed,

...there are certain women who do say that they have dealings with Diana the

queen of the fairies. There are others who say that the fairies are demons, and deny having any dealings with them, and say that they hold meetings with a countless multitude of simple women whom they call in our tongue *celly vichtys*. [The decree] condemns such fantasies and those who imagine them... for men frequently imagine many things of this kind which have no reality whatever. This is evident in dreams, for men dream that they are among the dead, speaking with them... So too people suffer the incubus sometimes think they are oppressed by a man known to them... In fact there is no truth in this at all, for this is either caused by the pressure of blood round the heart when sleeping on one's back or by a slight exhalation arising to the head, which oppresses and interferes with the sense organs.¹⁶²

In the process of discussing Scottish spirit belief, Hay ended up concluding that these various encounters with apparitions were neither real nor unreal. This wasn't because Hay didn't believe in spirits, and he certainly didn't argue that these people were lying about their experiences.

Rather, Hay proposed a third option: their accounts were the combined result of genuine physiological experiences and cultural interpretations. Hay's description touched on a range of spiritual encounters to which early modern people attested, such as flying with the fairies, visiting with the dead, and being oppressed by incubi. However, according to Hay, all these experiences could be traced back to physiological causes that interfered with human senses. In this way, Hay took a serious approach to testimony of Scottish people's spiritual experiences by arguing that they did have a basis in reality, and were also informed by cultural interpretations.

Though our modern world is far from disenchanted, it would seem that early modern people attested to seeing spirits more often than people do now. This section discusses why that may be, with a particular emphasis on the role of altered states of consciousness in visionary experiences. Early modern people claimed they encountered spirits both voluntarily and

¹⁶² William Hay, "Lectures on Marriage," in *William Hay's Lectures on Marriage*, ed. and trans. John C. Barry (Edinburgh: The Stair Society, 1967), 127.

involuntarily, sometimes seeking them out and other times being terrified at their sudden materialization. Second sighted people appeared to fit into both categories; some early modern authors argued that second sight troubled individuals greatly, while others claimed that the second sighted could activate their gift when they chose. For this reason, this section also investigates the ways in which early modern people made contact with spirits or induced encounters with them when they so desired. The experiences of second sighted people are comparable to accounts of other early modern individuals who claimed they were mediators between the physical and spiritual realms, such as shamans, accused witches, and practitioners of magic. Beliefs about second sight did not exist in a vacuum, but were actively shaped by various early modern beliefs about spirits and people who were capable of seeing them. Therefore, the rest of this chapter explores the idea that early modern accounts of second sight described genuine physiological experiences, that were then interpreted through culturally specific belief systems about human and spirit interaction.

Consciousness in Early Modern Europe

While there are certainly people today who attest that they see spirits, the everyday person in the early modern world does seem to have been more likely to encounter a spirit than we are now. The reason for this appears to be a combination of cultural and physiological factors. Early modern people believed that spirits inhabited the world around them, and as such were more receptive to interpreting their experiences through this lens. Furthermore, though early modern people were almost evolutionarily identical to modern people, their day to day lives were

quite different. These differences, which began since they were born and continued throughout their entire lives, account for some physiological differences between early modern people and modern people.

One of the most fundamental differences arose from early modern people's sleep patterns. Sleep is necessary for all people, but how we sleep, when, and our quality of sleep affects not only our daily lives, but the biology of our brains. Historian A. Roger Ekirch's research on this topic has illuminated the ways in which pre-modern people's sleep patterns differed from our own.¹⁶³ Ekirch argued that, up until the modern era, people in western cultures practiced a bi-phasic sleep cycle rather than a mono-phasic one. This means that, rather than attempting to sleep all through the night, pre-modern people routinely woke up for an hour or more midway through the night. They engaged in a variety of activities during this interval, and this type of sleep cycle appeared to have affected both their conscious and unconscious experiences. While this waking interval allowed early modern people to experience dreams and visions, the practice of segmented sleep "afforded the unconscious an expanded avenue to the waking world."¹⁶⁴ Ekirch argued that the implications of this are profound, especially given the significance that early modern people attached to visions and dreams for explanatory and predictive purposes.

Modern studies that reproduced this bi-phasic sleep cycle have concluded that a period of consciousness during the night possesses "an endocrinology all of its own."¹⁶⁵ The waking interval between the "first" and "second" sleep causes a noticeable increase in the brain's

¹⁶³ A. Roger Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost: Pre-Industrial Slumber in the British Isles," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (2001): 343-386.

¹⁶⁴ Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost," 344.

¹⁶⁵ Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost," 368.

production of prolactin, the pituitary hormone that allows chickens to sit peacefully on their eggs for long periods of time. This causes the human brain to be in an altered state of consciousness, not unlike meditation.¹⁶⁶ Early modern people did appear to describe this interval as a tranquil, restful time in which they were receptive to dreams, visions, and reflection on their waking lives. Without artificial lighting, we must also remember that most pre-modern people experienced a significantly longer and deeper period of darkness at night.¹⁶⁷ It wasn't until the eighteenth century that street lighting emerged in larger cities, creating a divergence between rural and urban sleep patterns.¹⁶⁸ This fundamental difference between how pre-modern and modern people experienced the nightly occurrences of darkness and sleep likely had a significant impact on not only their times of rest, but also their times of wakefulness.

Pre-modern life was also fraught with hardship. Complaints about difficulty sleeping are common enough now, and also seemed to have been a problem for people in the past. Ekirch noted that people in the past did not necessarily sleep well,¹⁶⁹ and they also lacked many of the modern comforts that alleviate our bouts of insomnia such as modern mattresses and over-the-counter painkillers and sleep aids. Furthermore, most early modern people were far less well-

¹⁶⁶ Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost," 368.

¹⁶⁷ Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

¹⁶⁸ Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 17, 201, 229-230, 234. Around 1700, many urban people, through the influence of street lighting, better domestic lighting, and late-night consumption of coffee, tea, and chocolate, began to move towards a single, compressed session of nightly sleep. However, rural people continued to sleep in two nightly sessions, with a waking interval in-between. Because of this divergence in rural and urban sleep patterns, the length and profound darkness of the rural nighttime came to be associated with superstitious peasant fears of ghosts and witches by urban elites. See Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 17, 230.

¹⁶⁹ Ekirch, "Sleep We Have Lost," 345.

nourished than modern people, and their overall health and access to helpful medical care was poor. Because of the nature of their day to day work and the hardship of survival, their bodies underwent significantly more physical suffering, on average. All of these factors may have influenced pre-modern people's propensity to experience altered states of consciousness, during which they were more likely to witness visual and auditory disturbances.

Modern studies of human consciousness have revealed experiences that are subsequently identifiable or diagnosable in early modern documents. Like us, pre-modern people appeared to have experienced sleep paralysis, hypnagogic states, trances, and autoscopy. Sleep paralysis occurs when a person is either in the process of falling asleep or waking up, and the body is not yet moveable (hence, paralysis). However, the individual feels as though he or she is conscious. When in this intermediate stage between sleeping and waking, people are prone to experiencing visual or auditory hallucinations. Victims of sleep paralysis also often report a heavy pressure on their chests and a strong sense of a physical presence in the room with them. Sleep paralysis is not rare, with global surveys estimating that between twenty to forty-five percent of people experience at least one episode during their lifetime.¹⁷⁰ Scholars of early modern witchcraft have noted that a number of descriptions of witchcraft episodes that involve spectral bewitchment seem to actually be describing episodes of sleep paralysis, in which the victim believed that he or she was being attacked by a witch at night.¹⁷¹

While the physiological experience of sleep paralysis induces the episode, it is the

¹⁷⁰ Owen Davies, "The Nightmare Experience, Sleep Paralysis, and Witchcraft Accusations," *Folklore* 114, no. 2 (2003), 182.

¹⁷¹ Davies, "The Nightmare Experience," 181-203; Margaret Dudley and Julian Goodare, "Outside In or Inside Out: Sleep Paralysis and Scottish Witchcraft," in *Scottish Witches and Witch-hunters*, ed. Julian Goodare (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121-139.

cultural background of the person experiencing it that shapes the visionary aspects of the experience. The significance of both biological and cultural factors to altered states of consciousness holds true for other experiences that are applicable to early modern people. Research conducted by anthropologist Tanya Luhmann has asserted that the experience of hearing voices and other auditory hallucinations is heavily affected by cultural context. Luhmann's study of modern-day schizophrenia in the United States, Africa, and India concluded that non-Western cultures do not stigmatize the experience of hearing voices as heavily as Western cultures do. As a result, Luhmann's American subjects were more likely to cite their voice-hearing experiences as evidence of illness, and therefore to perceive the voices as intrusive. Consequentially, many of the American individuals in Luhmann's study described their auditory hallucinations as assaulting, threatening, and disturbing, while the African and Indian subjects were more likely to report that their voices were helpful, playful, or benign.¹⁷² The implication of Luhmann's research is that culture may have a direct impact on the nature of an individual's experience with hallucinatory phenomena, and these conclusions could be applied to early modern Scottish people who believed they experienced visions or saw spirits.

Scholars who study the early modern supernatural have also emphasized the significance of both physiological and cultural factors when studying the experiences of historical subjects. Some of Julian Goodare's work on visionaries and spirits in early modern Scotland has taken an experiential approach that "attempted to investigate the nature of visionary encounters as they were experienced, understood, and reported by the experient... by correlating historical reports

¹⁷² T.M. Luhmann, R. Padmavati, H. Tharoor and A. Osei, "Differences in voice-hearing experiences of people with psychosis in the USA, India and Ghana: interview-based study," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 206, nos. 41-44 (2015): 41-44.

of visions with present-day psychological studies.”¹⁷³ Goodare concluded that people must interpret their experiences using the assumptions and vocabulary of their own cultures, and that these experiences are far from isolated to those with psychological problems.¹⁷⁴ Goodare has argued that a number of accounts of fairy abduction bear some resemblance to episodes of somnambulism, a sleep disorder that can be found in otherwise healthy individuals.¹⁷⁵ Both Edward Bever and Goodare have also pointed to the potential role of illusory motor experiences, out of body experiences, and autoscopy in early modern accounts of magical flight.¹⁷⁶ The present chapter of this dissertation argues that autoscopy, the experience of seeing oneself from “outside” one’s own body, likely also played a role in early modern subtle body belief. Yet early modern Scottish people were still free to interpret the experience of seeing their own doubles through their own cultural filters and within the context of their own belief systems. The physiological elements of these experiences are relevant insofar as they indicate that early modern people’s visions likely had a strong basis in reality. However, the content of these visions and how they were interpreted was heavily affected by their cultural beliefs.

¹⁷³ Julian Goodare, “Visionaries and Nature Spirits in Scotland,” in *Book of Scientific Works of the Conference of Belief Narrative Network of ISFNR*, ed. Mela Mosia (Sugdidi: International Society for Folk Narrative Research, 2015), 113.

¹⁷⁴ Goodare, “Visionaries and Nature Spirits,” 113-114.

¹⁷⁵ Goodare, “Visionaries and Nature Spirits,” 111.

¹⁷⁶ Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 118-129; Julian Goodare, “Flying Witches in Scotland,” in *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters*, ed. Julian Goodare (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 169-171.

IV: Trance

Recent historiography of the Scottish witch trials has revealed the existence of beliefs and practices that indicate early modern people's engagement with altered states of consciousness. Much of this scholarship has focused on shamans and shamanism in northern Europe, as shamanism often involves trance and trance techniques in order to induce altered states of consciousness. Shamans are practitioners of traditional rites or magic who engage in these experiences for the purpose of helping others. As is discussed later in this chapter, it is possible that second sighted individuals may have fulfilled the role of a form of shaman within their communities. Regardless, there is evidence that second sighted people sometimes entered into altered states of consciousness or trances in order to experience their visions. Trances were recognized phenomena in early modern Scottish culture, which acknowledged that altered states of consciousness could be experienced both voluntarily and involuntarily.

Trance for the purpose of experiencing visual or auditory phenomena may not have been as rare in the early modern world as we may think, and there is evidence that some second sighted people may have engaged in trancing in order to induce their visions or see spirits. In their description of the "fantasy-prone personality," Sheryl C. Wilson and Theodore C. Barber argued that as much as four percent of the existing population possess such strong hallucinatory and hypnotic abilities that they are able to see, hear, touch, smell, and experience whatever they fantasize.¹⁷⁷ The fact that trances are states of consciousness that are absorbing and immersive

¹⁷⁷ Sheryl C. Wilson and Theodore X. Barber, "The Fantasy-Prone Personality: Implications for Understanding Imagery, Hypnosis, and Parapsychological Phenomena," in *Imagery: Current Theory, Research and Application*, ed. Anees A. Cheikh (New York: Wiley, 1983), 340.

seems to accord with Martin Martin's description of second sight experiences, when he claimed that "the Vision makes such a lively impression upon the Seers, that they neither see nor think of any thing else, except the Vision, as long as it continues."¹⁷⁸

Trancing, even under that name, was a known phenomenon in early modern Scotland. In 1675, the synod of Aberdeen rebuked some people for "under pretence of trances goeing with these spirits commonlie called the fairies."¹⁷⁹ The records of the experiences of a Scottish Christian visionary, dated 1651, also described spending the night in prayer and falling into "a trance... as in a Lethargy."¹⁸⁰ In this trance, the visionary saw the throne of God and the coming apocalypse.¹⁸¹ The Dictionary of the Scots Language defines "trance" as "an abnormal state of mind; a state of excitement, abstractedness, rapture, ecstasy or terror, a stunned or dazed state; a state of semi-consciousness, between sleeping and waking; a state of unconsciousness."¹⁸² By these definitions, early modern Scottish people understood that trance was an altered state of consciousness that various people could experience, both holy and unholy. Trances could involve visions or encounters with spirits, and trance states were often observable or identifiable by onlookers. Subsequent chapters of this dissertation explore the idea that second sighted people's trances and visionary experiences were demonized or sanctified by observers, depending on the context. This chapter discusses the experiential dimension of the visionary experience, and

¹⁷⁸ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 300.

¹⁷⁹ John Stuart, ed. *Selections from the Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: The Spalding Club, 1846), 306.

¹⁸⁰ NLS, Wod.Oct.XV, fol. 22.

¹⁸¹ NRS, GD157/2637/1.

¹⁸² "Trance, n.," *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/trance_n.

argues that second sight experiences may have been rooted in these physiological phenomena.

Trance Technique

The idea that Scottish seers engaged in trance techniques in order to induce visions gains plausibility in light of evidence involving trance and fixed attention. Richard J. Castillo's research into trance and meditation argued that "Trance phenomena result from the behavior of intense focusing of attention, which is the key psychological mechanism of trance induction."¹⁸³ This process involves "holding the attention of the participating self on a certain object."¹⁸⁴ By focusing on an object or image, an individual is able to "block cognition of external reality and allow a mental image to dominate the conscious awareness of the individual."¹⁸⁵ This means that, for some people, altered states of consciousness and visions can be induced through the practice of fixing one's focus on a particular idea or object for a length of time. Castillo also claimed that repeatedly engaging in practices to induce trances allows the practitioner to cultivate the ability to enter altered states of consciousness.¹⁸⁶ For Castillo, "The near universal incidence of institutionalized forms of trance lends weight to the idea that trance is a universal human behavior."¹⁸⁷ This process of engaging in trance technique through fixed attention is identifiable

¹⁸³ Richard J. Castillo, "Culture, Trance, and the Mind-Brain," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 6, no. 1 (1995), 17.

¹⁸⁴ Richard J. Castillo, "Trance, Functional Psychosis, and Culture," *Psychiatry* 66, no. 1 (2003), 12.

¹⁸⁵ Castillo, "Trance, Functional Psychosis, and Culture," 13.

¹⁸⁶ Castillo, "Culture, Trance, and the Mind-Brain," 17.

¹⁸⁷ Castillo, "Culture, Trance, and the Mind-Brain," 17.

in accounts of early modern second sight, and the characteristic gaze of a person fixing his or her attention appears to have been recognizable to onlookers. If practicing this behavior can facilitate repeated trance experiences, then it is reasonable to suggest that some seers gained reputations as second sighted individuals because of their ability to enter altered states of consciousness at will.

While not all second sight accounts described seers using fixed attention in order to induce visions, some certainly seemed to mention this type of trance. In one of James Garden's letters to John Aubrey on the topic of second sight, Garden described,

a very honest man & of right blameless conversation. he used ordinarily by looking to the fire, to foretell what strangers would come to his house, the next day or shortly thereafter, by their habit & arms; & sometimes also by their names; and if anie of his goods or cattell were amissing; he would direct his servants to the very place where to find them, whether in a mire or upon dry ground; he would also tell if the beast were already dead, or if it would die ere they could come to it: and in winter if they were thick about the fire-side; he would desire them to make room to some others that stood by tho they did not see them, else some of you would be quickly thrown into the midst of it.¹⁸⁸

In this instance, the second sighted man appeared to be cultivating fixed attention by gazing into a fire in order to induce his second sight ability. Through this process, he was believed to foretell the future, access hidden knowledge, and see spirits that others could not. Similar details can be found in Robert Boyle's notes on his interview with Lord Tarbat, who told him about a man that Tarbat had seen who "seem'd to look very attentively at the middle of a very high hill that was not far from them, and this way he look'd so stedfastly." By his fixed gaze, Tarbat guessed that the man was second sighted and approached him, but "the fellow that either saw or minded them not before appeared suprised, and being asked what he gazed att so stedfastly, he told them, that he

¹⁸⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

saw a great body of English horse coming down that hill.”¹⁸⁹ A different account, also by Tarbat though related by Robert Kirk, described a man who Tarbat also guessed was a seer, because “... he lett the spade fall, and looked toward the hill, he took notice of us as wee passed neer by him, which made me look at him, and perceiving him to stare a litle strangely, I conjectured him to be a Seer.”¹⁹⁰ In this example, Tarbat was again able to identify the seer by his fixed stare. John MacCulloch also claimed that people with second sight were recognizable by their appearance during a visionary experience: “The trance was obvious to the bystanders, by its effects on the inspired patient: causing him to stare and produce other grimaces, such as all Seers have indulged in.”¹⁹¹ John Ferriar’s account of a second sighted man in Scotland described how the man was reading aloud when he experienced a vision, and “stopped suddenly, and assumed the look of a Seer.”¹⁹²

This characteristic type of gaze appears in various descriptions of second sight and the ability to see spirits. In a different account, this time recorded by Kirk, Tarbat described second sight in this way: “The sight is of noe long duration, only continueing so long as they can keep their eye steady without twinkling. The hardy therefore fix their look, that they may see the longer, But the timorous see only glances, their eyes alwayes twinkling at the first sight of the object.”¹⁹³ William Collins’ poem “An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands” described “the gifted wizzard” whose

¹⁸⁹ Boyle, “Robert Boyle’s notes,” 51-52.

¹⁹⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 46.

¹⁹¹ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 69.

¹⁹² Ferriar, *An Essay towards a Theory*, 64.

¹⁹³ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 42.

...piercing glance some fated youth descry,
Who, now perhaps in lusty vigour seen
And rosy health, shall soon lamented die.
For them the viewless forms of air obey
... [They] see the phantom train their secret work prepare
... The seer's entranced eye can well survey.¹⁹⁴

In this instance, the poet placed emphasis on the “piercing glance” and “entranced eye” of the seer, who possessed the ability to see forthcoming death. In Francis Grose’s *A Provincial Glossary*, he also described the fixed gaze of second sighted men: “During the appearance of a vision, the eyelids of some of the Seers are so erected and distended, that they cannot close them otherwise than by drawing them down with their fingers, or by employing others to do it for them.”¹⁹⁵ An onlooker observed the trances of the second sighted Duncan Campbell, during which Campbell claimed he encountered his familiar spirit and received supernatural knowledge. This writer noted that Campbell’s trance was evident from his “steadfast gaze, which lasted about seven minutes.” Entering Campbell’s room, “I found him sitting up in his bed, with his eyes broad open, but as motionless as if he had been asleep... the eyelids of him were so fixed and immovable, that the eye-lashes did not so much as once shake, which the least motion imaginable must agitate... I, who had been frequently informed by people who have been present at the operations of second-sighted persons, that, at the sight of a vision, the eyelids of the person are erected, and the eyes continue staring till the object vanishes.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ William Collins, “An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 1 (1788).

¹⁹⁵ Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary with a collection of local proverbs and popular superstitions* (London: S. Hooper, 1790), 34.

¹⁹⁶ William Bond (misattributed to Daniel Defoe), *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell*, ed. George A. Aitken (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1895), 45.

This emphasis on fixing one's gaze and avoiding blinking also appears in folk wisdom about how to catch sight of fairy spirits. According to Scottish folklore, the fairies are only visible "from the twinkle of the eye-lid to another."¹⁹⁷ This belief was echoed in G.F. Black's *Examples of Printed Folklore concerning the Orkney and Shetland Islands*, which described the belief that if a person keeps his or her eyes fixed on the fairies, they cannot disappear. In keeping with this piece of knowledge, Black recounted the story of a boy who was watching the trows, but as soon as he blinked they vanished.¹⁹⁸ Coupled with descriptions of the characteristic gaze of seers, all of these accounts share the belief that visions or sight of spirits are induced and prolonged through fixed attention.

This method of fixing one's gaze in order to obtain a vision can also be done using a device as the object of focus. Examples of this appear clearly in early modern accounts of second sight. Some accounts feature a small object, while others describe focusing one's gaze on an aperture in order to induce visionary states. In *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, the author described a method of gaining second sight: "They come (as some say) by the 2d Sight thus: They look through the Knot of a piece of Tree & the boäls of sheers at a Southdoor upon a Burial as it passeth by."¹⁹⁹ Robert Kirk described a similar method of obtaining second sight, whereby a man must "run a tedder of hair (which bound a Corps to the Bier) in a Helix about his midel from end to end, then bow his head downward... and look back thorow his legs untill he

¹⁹⁷ Walter Scott, *Manners, Customs, and History of the Highlands of Scotland; Historical account of the clan MacGregor* (Glasgow: TD Morison, 1893), 122.

¹⁹⁸ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 26.

¹⁹⁹ BOD, MS Carte 269, fols. 8-9v.

see a funerall advance... or look thus back thorow a hole where was a knot of fir.”²⁰⁰ William Grant Stewart recorded the belief that, if one could gaze through the hole in the bridle of a kelpie, he or she would be able to see the world of fairies, “the same as if you had been gifted with the second sight.”²⁰¹ Actual practice of a similar method appears in the records of an accused witch named Bessie Skebister, who was locally famous for her ability to tell others what was happening in remote places. In her confession, Bessie described gazing at a coin dropped in a bowl of water in order to determine if a distant friend was well.²⁰² Second sight is also associated with the quasi-legendary Brahan Seer, whose visions were supposedly obtained by looking through the hole in a bored stone. Depending on the legend, this stone was either acquired from a fairy hill,²⁰³ or it was given to the seer’s mother by a ghost.²⁰⁴ Bored stones are associated with second sight, as well as fairies and witchcraft,²⁰⁵ as it was believed that their hole formed an aperture through which one could see the fairies.²⁰⁶ One of James Garden’s letters to

²⁰⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 26-27.

²⁰¹ William Grant Stewart, *The popular superstitions and festive amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851), 106.

²⁰² John Graham Dalyell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (Norwood: Norwood Editions, 1973), 512.

²⁰³ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 93.

²⁰⁴ MacInnes, “The Seer in Gaelic Tradition,” 22.

²⁰⁵ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 93. Accused witch Euphame Mackalzne claimed that she laid a bored stone under her pillow in order to take labor pains off of her own body and place them onto one of her animals. The ability to transfer illness from one being to another was also associated with second sighted people. See Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, eds. *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2000), 266. For more on second sight and transferring illness, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

²⁰⁶ Katharine Briggs, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 353.

John Aubrey described a second sighted man named John McGrigor who, in reply to another man declaring his intention to go to an alehouse, responded by “taking up a slate-stone at his foot & looking to it, replied: Nay saith he, ye will not go in thither, for there is but the matter of a gallon of ale in it even now, & ere we come to it, it wilbe all near drunken... which fell out so.”²⁰⁷ All of these accounts mention second sight alongside the practice of cultivating fixed attention on a designated object, or through a small hole in an object.

One of the most common objects into which second sighted people gazed was the shoulder bone of an animal, most often a sheep. Just as with other objects that were used to induce visions, gazing into the shoulder bones of animals could have been a recognized method of cultivating fixed attention and engaging with second sight. In his treatise on second sight, Theophilus Insulanus described second sighted people as practicing a “kind of divination, by looking in the shoulder-blade of a sheep, goat, &c... by which some skillfull in that occult science, pretend to read future events, such as the death of some remarkable person, in particular tribe or family; foretell general meetings, battles, bloodsheds, &c... my private opinion of this kind of prediction, which if I mistake not, is another species of the Second Sight, tho’ less frequent, and seems to arise from the same source.”²⁰⁸ *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* also referenced how second sighted people gazed into shoulder bones: “They foretell Events by looking on the Shoulderbone of a Sheep. They have a care not to touch it with the Teeth or a Knife. They by it foretell Deaths, Commotions, and Tumultuary Conversions within

²⁰⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

²⁰⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 77-78.

the bounds... The bone onely servs for that moon.”²⁰⁹ Thomas Pennant, in his tour of Scotland in 1769, made note of this practice during his discussion of second sight: “There is another sort of divination, called sleinanachd, or reading the speal-bone, or the blade-bone of a shoulder of mutton well scraped. When Lord Loudon was obliged to retreat before the rebels to the isle of Skie, a common soldier, on the very moment the battle of Culloden was decided, proclaimed the victory at that distance, pretending to have discovered the event by looking through the bone.”²¹⁰ Robert Kirk also described how “the minor sort of seers prognosticate many future events, only for a moneth space, from the shoulder-bone of a sheep, on which a knife never came... this science is called slinnenacd.”²¹¹ In his discussion of second sight, demonologist George Sinclair claimed that he was, “undoubtedly informed that men & women in the Highlands can discern fatality approaching others by seeing them in waters or with winding sheets about them, and that others can lecture in a sheeps shoulder bone a death within the parish, seven or eight days before it come.”²¹² This practice may well have been more widespread, as telling the future using a sheep’s shoulder bone is also noted by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*,²¹³ Gerald of Wales in

²⁰⁹ BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 8v. The belief that the bone must remain unmarked could also be used to prevent seers from using these bones. *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* described a man known as “Harry the Hermitt” who was suspected of being a witch. In order to prevent him from “coming out of his cave... upon a bone of a shoulder of mutton,” the locals had been instructed “to pierce a hole in that bone as soon as the flesh was eaten of it.” See BOD, MS Carte 269, fols. 41-41v.

²¹⁰ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 118.

²¹¹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 32. Kirk also listed “slinnenacd” among “instances of the operation of the Second Sight” in his commonplace book of 1689. See EUL, La.III.545, fol. 129.

²¹² George Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered* (Edinburgh: John Reid, 1685), 216.

²¹³ A mocking reference to this practice appears in the prologue to “The Pardoner’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: G. Routledge, 1857), 332-333.

his description of Wales,²¹⁴ John Brand in his *Observations of Popular Antiquities*,²¹⁵ and a brief reference to “diviners by shoulder bone” even appears in the *Malleus Maleficarum*.²¹⁶ From these descriptions it is quite reasonable to conclude that a shoulder bone, like a bored stone or a knot in a tree, was an object that Scottish seers used to cultivate fixed attention, and thereby induce visionary experiences. However, the content of those visionary experiences, and how they were interpreted, was dependent on individual and cultural factors.

V: Autoscopy

Just as trance experiences can be used to shed light on the physiological basis of second sight visions, autoscopy can help explain various aspects of second sight that involve seeing a double of oneself. Numerous accounts of second sight describe belief in the double: a perfect copy of each individual that is sometimes visible as an externalized spirit. Sometimes, people would see their own doubles, perhaps even mimicking their movements perfectly. Some people believed that this was a bad omen, while others seemed to have had a less sinister interpretation of these apparitions. Belief in the double is related to early modern Scottish beliefs about wraiths

²¹⁴ Gerald of Wales claimed that the Flemings who immigrated to Wales used the shoulder blades of rams in order to divine the future or access hidden knowledge. In the examples recorded by Gerald, the shoulder blades could be used to prophesy about war or peace, murders, thefts, infidelities among married people, and the health of the king. See Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 145-147.

²¹⁵ Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (1777), 93. Brand also described similar beliefs involving shoulder bones practiced by the Dutch and the English.

²¹⁶ Jacobus Sprenger and Henricus Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 242.

and subtle bodies. Essentially, early modern people believed that humans possessed an aspect of the self that could leave their bodies and move about independently. This part was neither the physical body nor the immortal soul, but rather something in between. For this reason, some scholars have referred to this aspect as a “subtle body,” since it was believed that it could interact with both the physical and spiritual worlds. The apparition of a double was believed to be a person’s subtle body moving about independently and visibly. This pre-modern conviction that humans were tripartite beings is fundamental to understanding both second sight and spirit belief in early modern Scotland.

Autoscopy, the experience of seeing a double of oneself, has a genuine physiological basis. “Autoscopy” comes from the Greek words *autos* (self) and *skopeo* (looking at). Autoscopic hallucinations occur when people feel that they stand outside of themselves,²¹⁷ or believe that they see themselves from an outside perspective. This is likely the same phenomenon behind out of body experiences.²¹⁸ On a simplified level, all people have a basic awareness of where their bodies begin and end, allowing us to navigate the world around us. This awareness is referred to as a “body schema,” and it permits us to approach objects while still avoiding them, pick up objects with some dexterity, and have a general understanding of where a point on our body is without being able to see it (such as touching the back of our heads, or scratching an itch in the dark). A proper body schema is essential to safely and dexterously

²¹⁷ This is also the root of the term “ecstasy,” from the Greek *ek-stasis*: to stand outside oneself. Ecstatic experiences are a form of altered state of consciousness or trance, and are discussed later in this chapter.

²¹⁸ Olaf Blanke, Theodor Landis, Laurent Spinelli, and Margitta Seeck, “Out-of-body experience and autoscopy of neurological origin,” *Brain* 127, no. 2 (2004), 243.

interacting with the world around us.²¹⁹ However, autoscopic hallucinations may be the result of our body schema becoming distorted or dislodged, creating an out of body experience.

Therefore, to feel that we are standing outside of ourselves is likely a product of our body schema being disturbed, when the aspect of our brains that allows us to understand where the parameters of our bodies are, now believes that our bodies are standing in a different location.²²⁰

Like sleep paralysis, autoscopic hallucinations are often accompanied by a strong sensation of a presence nearby.²²¹ Autoscopic hallucinations can be the result of various disorders, both mental and physical,²²² but they are also experienced by healthy people.²²³ Autoscopy can also be induced by intense stress (physical or mental), sleep deprivation, or sensory deprivation.²²⁴

For some people in early modern Scotland, autoscopic experiences indicated that they were going to die soon. Catching a sight of one's double was widely regarded to be an omen of death. Theophilus Insulanus related the story of a man who was ill and constantly haunted by an

²¹⁹ P. Haggard and D. Wolpert, "Disorders of body schema," in *High-order Motor Disorders: from neuroanatomy and neurobiology to clinical neurology*, ed. H.J. Freund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261-271.

²²⁰ Blanke, Landis, Spinelli, and Seeck, "Out-of-body experience," 243.

²²¹ Francesca Anzellotti, Valeria Onofrj, Valerio Maruotti, Leopoldo Ricciardi, Raffaella Franciotti, Laura Bonanni, Astrid Thomas, and Marco Onofrj, "Autoscopic phenomena: case report and review of literature," *Behavioral and Brain Functions* 7, no. 2 (2011): 1-11.

²²² T.R. Dening and G.E. Berrios, "Autoscopic Phenomena," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 165, no. 6 (1994): 808-817; James S. Grotsein, "Autoscopic Phenomena," in *Extraordinary Disorders of Human Behavior*, eds. C.T.H. Friedmann and R.A. Faguet (Boston: Springer, 1982), 65-77; Giovanni Zamboni, Paolo Nichelli, and Carla Budriesi, "'Seeing oneself': A case of autoscopy," *Neurocase* 11, no. 3 (2005): 212-215.

²²³ Anzellotti, Onofrj, Maruotti, Ricciardi, Franciotti, Bonanni, Thomas, and Onofrj, "Autoscopic phenomena," 1-11; Peter Suedfeld and Jane S.P. Mocellin, "The 'Sensed Presence' in unusual environments," *Environment and Behavior* 19, no. 1 (1987): 33-52.

²²⁴ Suedfeld and Mocellin, "The 'Sensed Presence,'" 33-52.

apparition of himself, mimicking all his activities. This man interpreted the apparition as a sign that his illness would be fatal. According to the author, seeing this type of spirit “is always a fore-runner of their approaching end. Some months before they sicken, they are haunted with an apparition resembling themselves in all respects, as to their person, features, or cloathing: This image (seemingly animated), walks with them in the fields, in broad day-light; and if they are employed in delving, harrowing, seed-sowing, or any other occupation, they are at the same time mimicked by this ghostly visitant.”²²⁵ To see oneself must undoubtedly be an uncanny experience, and if the accompanying sense of an outside presence resembles that of sleep paralysis, then many people must have found their autoscopic hallucinations very disturbing. Perhaps then it is unsurprising that autoscopic hallucinations engendered a sense of dread or impending fatality. Furthermore, if we recognize that early modern people saw themselves as multidimensional beings who had both physical and non-physical aspects, it was likely upsetting to believe that one aspect had become divorced from the integrated self. After all, the separation of body and soul is one way to conceptualize the experience of dying. This is also likely the logic behind interpreting a wraith as a sign that an individual was near death. A wraith was the apparition of a spirit belonging to a person who was still alive, yet soon to expire. Wraiths appeared to friends of the living individual just before or at the time of death. Like doubles, wraiths were often interpreted as death omens.

For some, seeing one’s own disembodied spirit or the spirit of others was not necessarily an experience associated with death. Robert Kirk argued that the ability to see people’s doubles was the very essence of the gift of second sight, and Kirk provided a proper framework for

²²⁵ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 8.

interpreting these apparitions. Kirk claimed that while all people had doubles, it was only the second sighted who were capable of seeing them. Kirk called these doubles “co-walkers,” as they were tied to their original people throughout their natural lifespans and were destined to sometimes appear exactly as they did and mimic all their movements.²²⁶ To Kirk, these doubles were fairy spirits who inhabited a parallel world to our own.²²⁷ Their existence and interaction with humans was completely natural and often benign, as observed by the second sighted. While many people were inclined to interpret the uncanny experience of seeing their doubles as a dark omen, Kirk argued that it was the specific purview of the second sighted and therefore the apparition of a double did not give cause for concern.

While the physiological dimension of autoscopic hallucinations provides a basis in reality for the experiences of some people with second sight, their personal interpretations and cultural backgrounds were the lens through which these visions were filtered. Autoscopic hallucinations, out of body experiences, and apparitions of wraiths can all be contextualized within early modern Scottish beliefs about subtle bodies. Subtle body belief is an under-explored yet important part of spirit belief in early modern Europe, and it has particular relevance for second sight. The belief that everyone had an essential aspect that could move independently from the physical body was a popular way of interpreting several forms of early modern apparitions, including those frequently believed to have been seen by the second sighted. Subtle body belief was also an important foundational theory that informed understandings of shamanic practices in early modern Scotland.

²²⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 5-6.

²²⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 5-6.

VI: Shamanism

In recent years, it has become increasingly plausible for scholars of early modern European culture to argue that shamanism was an aspect of European witchcraft. The term “shamanism” was first applied to practitioners of popular magic in Siberia and was imported to Western Europe in the late seventeenth century by traveler Nicolaes Witsen, who published a description of his journey among the indigenous people of Siberia in 1692.²²⁸ The term itself was first used within the academic study of religion by German authors in the late eighteenth century and it has since been applied to a variety of groups and individuals, leading one scholar to claim that its definition no longer represents a classification, but rather a “semantic field.”²²⁹ The modern academic study of European shamanism is beholden to historian Mircea Eliade’s influential book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, in which Eliade attempted to argue that shamanic practices were ancient and formerly universal. While aspects of Eliade’s argument have received criticism, his theories about shamanism and altered states of consciousness have remained relevant to later studies of the phenomenon. In his book, Eliade claimed that “A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = ‘technique of religious ecstasy.’”²³⁰ This primary statement referenced the “ecstatic” states of mind into which shamans entered as they sent their souls out of their bodies. According to

²²⁸ Ronald Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 32.

²²⁹ Hutton, *The Witch*, 74.

²³⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 4.

Eliade, shamanism was founded on a set of beliefs about spirits and how humans were able to interact with them. Eliade emphasized belief in a world of spirits to which shamans could gain access, particularly through trances and techniques to incite visionary experiences. The shamanic vocation was also dependent on the belief that shamans could leave their bodies and enter this spiritual world, as well as perform acts of divination in order to foretell the future.²³¹

Other historians of religious history have also engaged with the term. Like Eliade, Ronald Hutton defined shamanism as a practice involving human relationships with the spirit world: “At its widest application, it is used to describe the practice of anybody who is believed, or claims, to communicate regularly with spirits.” Hutton added that the term has usually been applied in a non-Western context to denote “the techniques of a person who regularly communicates with spirits... and does so for the benefit of other members of [his or her community]. It is accorded even more frequently to such a person who apparently makes the communication with spirits in an altered state of consciousness, most commonly described as a trance.”²³² Hutton’s earlier research on shamans had also emphasized the role of altered states of consciousness,²³³ as well as the significance of “rite techniques” in order to enter these trance states.²³⁴ Commonalities between the trances, spirit beliefs, and rite techniques of early modern practitioners of popular magic have prompted scholars to apply the term “shaman” to the subjects of European witchcraft beliefs.

²³¹ Eliade, *Shamanism*, 3-7.

²³² Hutton, *The Witch*, 74.

²³³ Hutton, *Shamans*, vii-ix.

²³⁴ Ronald Hutton, “Shamanism: Mapping the Boundaries,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 2 (2006), 210-211.

In his groundbreaking work *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Carlo Ginzburg revealed the role that shamanism played in European witchcraft and notions of the witches' sabbath. Ginzburg argued that various aspects of the witches' sabbath, such as magical flight, animal transformation, nocturnal assemblies, and ritual combat were actually rooted in European shamanic practices and beliefs. People who believed they went to the sabbath were actually experiencing altered states of consciousness, which were subsequently influenced by their cultural understandings of humans' interactions with spirits. While previous historiography had emphasized that the sabbath was an elite, demonological invention, Ginzburg revealed the folkloric roots of this particular aspect of European witchcraft.²³⁵

Ginzburg's work opened the door for other scholars to consider the ways in which altered states of consciousness and regional cultures influenced witchcraft theory and trials. Éva Pócs and Gábor Klaniczay have revealed the existence of ecstatic visionaries in early modern Hungary and central Europe who were implicated in the early modern witch trials.²³⁶ These shamans entered trances, interacted with spirit beings, traveled to other worlds, and engaged in spiritual combat on behalf of their communities. Pócs emphasized that these practices were related to a

²³⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

²³⁶ Gábor Klaniczay, "Shamanism and Witchcraft," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 1, no. 2 (2006): 214-221; Gábor Klaniczay, "Shamanistic Elements in Central European Witchcraft," in *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 129-150; Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age*, trans. Szilvia Redey and Michael Webb (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999); Éva Pócs, *Fairies and Witches at the Boundary of South-Eastern and Central Europe* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1989); Éva Pócs, "Small Gods, Small Demons: Remnants of an Archaic Fairy Cult in Central and South-Eastern Europe," in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits: 'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 255-276.

regional belief in the double, or soul image, which departed the body during altered states of consciousness.²³⁷ Seers were believed to be different from normal people, since they had these innate abilities to go on soul journeys, communicate with spirits, and see the otherworld.²³⁸ Claude Lecouteux also argued that shamanism and witchcraft were inherently linked to pre-modern beliefs about the double, which could leave the physical body behind and travel to another world.²³⁹ Mircea Eliade observed that the *benandanti* and the Romanian *strigoi* shared some similarities in that both were believed to fly out at night in trance states and engage in ritual combat,²⁴⁰ while Zoran Čiča has also noted the existence of a fairy cult of shamans in Dalmatia or Croatia who both combated and identified witches.²⁴¹ Gustav Henningsen's work on the Sicilian *donas de fuera* has focused on the existence of a group of people who believed they journeyed out at night in spirit to celebrate with fairy beings,²⁴² and Wolfgang Behringer's book *Shaman of Oberstdorf* analyzed the fascinating trial of herdsman Chonrad Stoeckhlin, who claimed he fell into trances and flew out at night to join the "phantoms of the night."²⁴³

²³⁷ Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 32; Pócs, "Small Gods, Small Demons," 270.

²³⁸ Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 32-33.

²³⁹ Claude Lecouteux, *Witches, Werewolves, and Fairies: Shapeshifters and Astral Doubles in the Middle Ages*, trans. Clare Frock (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2003).

²⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade, "Some Observations on European Witchcraft," *History of Religions* 14 (1975), 158-159.

²⁴¹ Zoran Čiča, "Vilenica and Vilenjak: Bearers of an Extinct Fairy Cult," *Narodna Umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 39 (2002), 31-63.

²⁴² Gustav Henningsen, "'The Ladies from Outside': An Archaic Pattern of the Witches' Sabbath," in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 191-215.

²⁴³ Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H.C. Erik Midelfort (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

Alternatively, a few scholars have discussed the role that trance played in Christian visionaries' descriptions of the journey of the soul to heaven during mystical visions. Gábor Klaniczay specifically compared witches' ecstatic experiences to descriptions of trance in Johannes Nider's *Formicarius*.²⁴⁴ Similarly, Louise Yeoman has drawn comparisons between the trance experiences of Christian visionaries and Scottish beliefs about journeys to fairyland.²⁴⁵ All of these scholars emphasized that while altered states of consciousness played an important role in these accounts of shamans or visionaries, cultural interpretations of their experiences were regional and diverse.

Modern scholarship has also been interested in the experiential dimension of shamanism, whether it was engaged in by the mentally healthy, whether it required a rite technique or means of inducing visions,²⁴⁶ and how shamans interpreted their visions. Mircea Eliade has argued that shamanism should be viewed as a psychological tendency rather than a religious belief, and that the ecstatic experience is not the result of a particular historical moment or culture. Rather, it is "fundamental in the human condition."²⁴⁷ Julian Goodare's work has also emphasized that such experiences are not solely restricted to people with mental illnesses, and subsequently discussed the ways in which people made sense of their visionary experiences or hallucinations.²⁴⁸ Edward

²⁴⁴ Gábor Klaniczay, "The Process of Trance: Heavenly and Diabolic Apparitions in Johannes Nider's *Formicarius*," in *Procession, Performance, Liturgy, and Ritual*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Ottawa: Institute of Medieval Music, 2007), 203-258.

²⁴⁵ Louise Yeoman, "Away with the fairies," in *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 29-46.

²⁴⁶ Hutton, "Shamanism: Mapping the Boundaries," 209-213.

²⁴⁷ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 183.

²⁴⁸ Goodare, "Visionaries and Nature Spirits," 113.

Bever has also drawn connections between aspects of European witchcraft and dream states, trances, and drug-induced experiences.²⁴⁹ Likewise, Norman Cohn entertained the possibility that stories of witches' flight could be traced back to narcotics or other drugs found in early modern recipes for flying ointment.²⁵⁰ Another publication by Goodare discussed magical flight, and considered the role that out of body experiences may have played in early modern transportation to the Sabbath.²⁵¹ These scholarly attempts to identify physiological causes for shamanic experiences indicate a growing interest in the ways in which the testimony of early modern visionaries reflected genuine experiences.

The role of shamanism and altered states of consciousness in the Scottish witch trials has also received attention in recent years. Julian Goodare has uncovered the existence of a cult of people who engaged in shamanic practices where they entered trances and believed they flew in groups to meet with fairy beings.²⁵² Goodare referred to them as “the cult of the seely wights,” and located their existence in various early modern sources including witches' confessions.²⁵³ Goodare discussed the cult of the seely wights alongside other comparable groups such as the Italian *benandanti* and the Sicilian *donas de fuera*.²⁵⁴ Emma Wilby has also emphasized the

²⁴⁹ Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 118-129.

²⁵⁰ Norman Cohn, “The Night Witch in Popular Imagination,” in *Witches of the Atlantic World: An Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Elaine G. Breslaw (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 123.

²⁵¹ Goodare, “Flying Witches,” 169-171.

²⁵² Julian Goodare, “The Cult of the Seely Wights in Scotland,” *Folklore* 123, no. 2 (2012): 198-219.

²⁵³ Goodare, “Cult of the Seely Wights,” 204-208.

²⁵⁴ Goodare, “Cult of the Seely Wights,” 208-210.

importance of shamans and their contact with spirit beings to an understanding of Scottish witchcraft. As had been the case with the witches' sabbath, historiographical conversations about the witches' familiar had largely emphasized that this feature of early modern witchcraft was an elite invention. However, Wilby's research has revealed that, at least in the British Isles, demonological theories about relationships between witches and their familiars may have simply reflected elite interpretations of relationships between practitioners of popular magic (or "cunning folk") and fairies.²⁵⁵ According to Wilby, cunning folks' relationships with fairies were often mediated through a trance experience that involved the cunning folk's double, which could leave his or her body and make contact with other spirit beings. For both shamans and cunning folk, the dichotomy of humans' physical and non-physical selves was essential to understanding how they interacted with the spirit world.²⁵⁶ In these ways, scholars have argued that shamanic beliefs and practices existed in early modern Scotland, and may have influenced beliefs about witches and spirit beings.

Wilby's most recent work, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, explored shamanism in the trial records of accused Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie. In particular, Wilby argued that Isobel's trial documents drew connections between shamanism, witchcraft, altered states of consciousness, and second sight belief. Wilby claimed that Isobel was functioning within a visionary tradition that allowed her to believe that she left her physical body and engaged with spirits.²⁵⁷ The author specifically related these experiences to the visions of people with second sight, whom she

²⁵⁵ Emma Wilby, "The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland," *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000): 283-305; Wilby, *Cunning Folk*.

²⁵⁶ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 149-152.

²⁵⁷ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 252, 297.

argued could generate visions for a variety of purposes.²⁵⁸ Wilby was particularly interested in a phenomenon she referred to as “dark shamanism,” which she defined as a form of “ritual predation.”²⁵⁹ Dark shamanism, like second sight, was a form of death divination which offered foreknowledge about which individuals were soon to die.²⁶⁰ Wilby’s and Goodare’s research has proven that there are aspects of Scottish belief in fairies, spirits, and the double that can be located in witch trial records. While Wilby’s comparisons of second sight, shamanism, and witchcraft are valid, further research into the relationship between these three phenomena is surely necessary. This is corroborated by Ronald Hutton’s assertion that “there may be dimensions of witchcraft beliefs and persecutions, even in the British Isles themselves, which can only be understood if approached within a framework of distinctive and persistent regional cultures rooted in much earlier history.”²⁶¹ While scholars have made revolutionary discoveries about regional witchcraft in recent years by turning their gaze towards shamanism and fairy belief, little attention has been paid to the relationship between shamanism, witchcraft, and second sight.

Both shamanism and second sight may be rooted in physiological experiences such as trance, altered states of consciousness, and autoscopy. While second sighted people may have entered trances, particularly through cultivating fixed attention, shamans and witches may have used various rite techniques in order to experience spiritual flight, contact spirits, or engage in

²⁵⁸ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 268.

²⁵⁹ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 324.

²⁶⁰ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 337-341.

²⁶¹ Ronald Hutton, “Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies,” *Past and Present* 212 (2011), 46.

ritual combat. Also, as already established, some second sight experiences can be attributed to autoscopy. However, autoscopic hallucinations can also be used to explain some experiences described by European shamans. Most of the authors referenced here have asserted that early modern shamanism was dependent on an understanding of humans as beings with physical and non-physical aspects, and that the non-physical aspect could leave the body and move independently. The sensation that one's consciousness has left his or her body and can go elsewhere is often described as an out of body experience, a form of autoscopy. While autoscopy can occur as a result of illness or stress, it has also been experienced by healthy people. Autoscopy and out of body experiences can also be induced or entered voluntarily,²⁶² just as shamans have described experiencing spirit journeys at will. Some encounters with familiar spirits can also likely be traced back to autoscopic experiences. For example, the "third man factor" or "third man syndrome" is the result of autoscopy, when people report sensing an externalized presence accompanying them through a stressful or traumatic situation. In these ways, the experience of autoscopy likely lies behind some early modern descriptions of soul flight and encounters with spirit beings.²⁶³ While experiences such as shamanism and second sight are likely the product of specific physiological realities, it was still necessary for these experiences to be interpreted by visionaries and their peers.

Any analysis of Scottish shamanism, second sight, and witchcraft is enriched by an

²⁶² Jane E. Aspell and Olaf Blanke, "Understanding the Out-of-Body Experience from a Neuroscientific Perspective," in *Introduction to Psychological Scientific Perspectives on Out of Body and Near Death Experiences*, ed. Craig D. Murray (New York: Nova Science, 2009), 73-88; O. Blanke, S. Ortigue, T. Landis, M. Seeck, "Stimulating illusory own-body perceptions," *Nature* 419 (2002): 269-270; R. Crookall, *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection* (London: Aquarian Press, 1961).

²⁶³ John Geiger, *The Third Man Factor* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2009).

understanding of early modern beliefs about subtle bodies, which informed the cultural context through which visionary experiences were understood. Belief in the subtle body, a spiritual aspect of the self that could move independently, was a fundamental component of early modern second sight. Subtle body belief, as it relates to second sight, has been discussed by several scholars of early modern Europe such as Sarah Tarlow,²⁶⁴ Liv Helene Willumsen,²⁶⁵ Claude Lecouteux,²⁶⁶ Éva Pócs,²⁶⁷ and Emma Wilby.²⁶⁸ These scholars all asserted that seers' visions were tied to their ability to leave their bodies at will (via their subtle bodies), and see or engage with the subtle bodies of other people. Descriptions of these seers' experiences are comparable to those of early modern shamans, whose vocations hinged on the same belief system. These beliefs were also directly related to the folkloric basis for witches' flights to the sabbath, relationships with familiar spirits, and ritual combat with spirits. In this way, the underlying foundation of subtle body belief permits the comparison of second sight, shamanism, and witchcraft within the Scottish context. The fact that many of these experiences also involved altered states of consciousness further strengthens the assertion that culturally specific belief systems informed individuals' interpretations of physiological phenomena.

A number of stories about second sighted people appear to share similarities with stories of early modern shamans. According to some authors, second sighted people were also reported to enter trances, fly or travel to remote locations, or even engage in combat with spirit beings.

²⁶⁴ Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead*, 174-177.

²⁶⁵ Willumsen, *Witches of the North*, 96.

²⁶⁶ Lecouteux, *Witches, Werewolves, and Fairies*, 127.

²⁶⁷ Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 32.

²⁶⁸ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 149; Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 290.

Thomas Pennant claimed that the second sighted experienced trances during their visions, which the author compared to the ecstatic fits of the seers in Wales: “The pretenders to the second sight in the Hebrides, and the *Awenyddion*,²⁶⁹ or the Inspired, among the Welch, are seized with the same exstasies.”²⁷⁰ Kirk also asserted that seers experienced an altered state of consciousness, in which they were “put in a rapture, transport, and sort of death, as divested of his body and all it’s Senses.”²⁷¹ The same author also related the story of a second sighted woman who “tarry’d in the fields over night, saw, and convers’d with a people she knew not, having wandred in seeking of her sheep, and slept upon a hillock, and finding hirsselfe transported to another place befor day.”²⁷² This account in particular sounds uncannily like those of people who believed they experienced flight to other locations, where they encountered spirit beings such as fairies or the dead. The second sighted boy known as “the Fairy Boy of Leith” also claimed an association with the other world, and that he beat a drum under a hill every Thursday night along with a great company of men and women. He attested that he would travel to France or Holland and feast there, and return home later. The fairy boy said that no one could prevent him from

²⁶⁹ Gerald of Wales described the *awenyddion* or “inspired people” as individuals who were frequently consulted by others for their reputed access to hidden knowledge. These practitioners of magic would enter trances, become possessed by spirits, and have to be awoken from their altered state by another person, who would shake them violently. These seers apparently claimed that their gifts were the result of Christian piety, and they invoked the Trinity and saints before entering their trances and uttering prophecies. Gerald compared these seers to both the pagan oracles of the ancient world, as well as the Hebrew prophets of the biblical tradition. See Hutton, *The Witch*, 78.

²⁷⁰ Thomas Pennant, *The literary life of the late Thomas Pennant, Esq. By himself* (London: Benjamin and John White, Robert Faulder, 1793), 62.

²⁷¹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 84. This belief can also be found among Kirk’s writings on second sight in his commonplace book of 1689. See EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

²⁷² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 36.

attending these night meetings. When asked how he got under the hill to the feast, he replied that “a great pair of gates opened to them, though they were invisible to others; and that within there were brave large rooms.”²⁷³ While all of these experiences come from accounts of second sighted people, they are comparable to descriptions of activities ascribed to early modern shamans.

In particular, there appears to be significant overlap in stories about second sighted people’s transportation, accused witches’ testimonies of spiritual flight, and folklore about journeys with fairies. James Garden recorded the account of a “common fellow, who was reputed to have the 2nd sight,” who was able to tell the precise location of a ship that was currently at sea. When others requested proof that his knowledge was true, the second sighted man produced a cap that he claimed belonged to one of the sailors on the boat.²⁷⁴ Later, the ship arrived on time according to the seer’s prediction, and its owner went to greet it, taking the cap with him. During conversation, one of the sailors reported that he had lost his cap in a whirlwind that had arisen in the place where the seer claimed he had vantage of the ship. The sailor then positively identified his lost cap as the one produced by the seer.²⁷⁵ The fact that the seer not only saw, but somehow invisibly travelled to the location of the ship in a whirlwind is reminiscent of folktales of

²⁷³ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 312-315; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 62.

²⁷⁴ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 134v.

²⁷⁵ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 134v.

whirlwinds in which fairies, or sometimes witches, are said to travel.²⁷⁶ Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* recorded the belief that "when an eddy of wind raises loose dust and sand, the vulgar believe that it announces a Fairy procession."²⁷⁷ This seer's story is also comparable to another account shared by Garden, this time about fairy transportation. Garden described a man who was suddenly transported by fairies in a whirlwind. He was caught up among them, and travelled to Paris where he feasted and fell asleep. This man later awoke with a silver cup in his hand, a token of his trip to the otherworld.²⁷⁸ In both sets of stories, the transported people are caught up in a whirlwind, travel to another location, and return with physical evidence of their journeys. This pattern is common in stories of fairy transportation, though it also appears in stories of second sighted people who had access to hidden information from a distance. Significantly, both seemed to hinge on the belief that all people had an aspect of self that could leave the body, interact with the world, and return at will.

The details of the account of this second sighted man can also be compared to confessions of accused witches in Scotland, illustrating the persistence of subtle body belief in the descriptions of trances or altered states of consciousness by which witches left their bodies and traveled in spirit. In the North Berwick trials, John Fian confessed that "he was stricken with

²⁷⁶ Accused witch Isobel Gowdie claimed to travel with the fairies in a whirlwind, though her interrogators interpreted the fairies as demons. See NRS, GD125/16/5/1/1. For more examples of witches and fairies traveling in this manner, see James Hutchisone, "Sermon, Preached by Mr James Hutchisone Before the Commissioners of Justiciary appointed for triall of several persons Suspected Guilty of Witchcraft: Att Pasley the 13 Aprill 1697," in Geo Neilson, ed., "A Sermon on Witchcraft in 1697," *The Scottish Historical Review* 7, no. 28 (1910), 393; J.R.N. Macphail, ed. "Papers relating to witchcraft 1662-1677," in *Highland Papers*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1920), 27; NRS, JC2/2, fol. 105v; Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 324.

²⁷⁷ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 315.

²⁷⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 134.

great ecstasies and trances, lying by the space of two or three hours dead, his sprite taken and suffered himself to be carried and transported to many mountains as though through all the world.”²⁷⁹ The pamphlet “Newes from Scotland” also described Fian's journeys: “by a wonderful manner he was in a moment conveyed at midnight from Scotland to Bordeaux in France (being places of no small distance between) into a merchant’s cellar there.”²⁸⁰ Influenced by Fian’s testimony, King James VI argued that the Devil deceived witches into believing that they were transported in spirit: “some saith their bodies lying still as in an ecstasy, their spirits will be ravished out of their bodies and carried to such places. And for verifying thereof, will give evident tokens.”²⁸¹ These “tokens” described by James are comparable to the physical evidence that people believed they brought back from fairyland, or the seaman’s cap retrieved by the second sighted man who observed the ships from a distance. While James was aware of witches’ altered states of consciousness, he argued that “the devil illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures in making them believe that they saw and heard such things as were nothing so indeed.”²⁸² To James, these claims of flying in spirit were evidently the delusions of devils, since “the soul once parting from the body cannot wander any longer in the world, but to their own resting place must it go immediately.”²⁸³ Despite being elite demonological interpretations of

²⁷⁹ Normand and Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland*, 226.

²⁸⁰ *News from Scotland*, in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, eds. Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2000), 310.

²⁸¹ James VI, *Demonology*, in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, eds. Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2000), 389.

²⁸² James VI, *Demonology*, 419.

²⁸³ James VI, *Demonology*, 390.

shamanism or spirit flight, these descriptions still illustrate that early modern people recognized the significance of altered states of consciousness to subtle body belief.

Accused witch John Fian may well have been a second sighted person who also believed he engaged in spiritual flight, further affirming a relationship between Scottish second sight, witchcraft, and subtle body belief. Fian's trial documents illustrate that he had a reputation as a prognosticator of death, and was found guilty of claiming he could "declare to any man how long they should live and what should be their end." As evidence of this, it was cited that he had told Marion Weddell "that her son should not live fifteen days, which came to pass as he spake." He had also told Alexander Bovis' wife that "her son should be short while in her, aucht as he died within a short space thereafter."²⁸⁴ In these ways, Fian's abilities of trance, spiritual flight, and accurate death prognostication would have fulfilled early modern expectations of a second sighted person. Through a comparative analysis, it is evident that accounts of second sighted seers, people who went with fairies, and accused witches all contain evidence of early modern understandings of shamanism, altered states of consciousness, and subtle body belief.

Second sighted people may have even engaged in spirit flight to ritual combat, as numerous other groups of shamans did across Europe. Robert Kirk described a second sighted man who appeared to enter trances and fight with fairies in a similar manner as the shamans described by other European scholars:

The men of the second sight, do not discover strange things when asked, but at fits and Raptures, as if inspyred with som Genius at that instant, which befor did lurk in, or about them. Thus I have frequently spok to one of them who in his transport told, he cut the bodie of one of these people [the fairies] in two with his iron weapon, and so escaped this onset yet he saw nothing, left behind, of that

²⁸⁴ Normand and Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland*, 230.

appearingly divided bodie, at other times he outwrestled som of them. His neighbours often perceivd this man to disappear at a certan place, and then about one hour after to become visible, and discover himselfe neer a bow-shot from the first place, : it was in that place where he becom invisible, said he, that these subterraneans did encounter and combate with him.²⁸⁵

This second sighted man may be the same individual that Kirk referred to in his commonplace book of 1689, where he listed one “M. Mcintyr who fought with spirits in aery bodies” among “instances of the operation of the Second sight.”²⁸⁶ This seer’s account bears a strong resemblance to Ginzburg’s descriptions of the shamanic *benandanti*, who experienced magical flight and engaged in ritual combat against evil spirits. Eliade’s notion of shamanism also involved ritual combat performed by warrior magicians, whose souls left their bodies to battle against evil forces for the benefit of their communities, aided by the spirits they commanded.²⁸⁷ The second sighted man’s tale can also be compared to the testimony of accused witch Isobel Gowdie, who claimed that she flew with the fairies and shot arrows at people and animals in acts of “visionary aggression.”²⁸⁸ Emma Wilby has argued that Isobel’s ritual combat was a form of death divination that helped foretell what misfortune would soon befall humans and animals.²⁸⁹ Like the fairies of Isobel’s visions, Goodare’s Scottish “cult of the seely wights” were morally ambivalent spirit beings that flew with human shamans and sometimes injured people with a

²⁸⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 20.

²⁸⁶ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 129.

²⁸⁷ Hutton, *The Witch*, 75.

²⁸⁸ NRS, GD125/16/5/1/1; NRS, GD125/16/5/1/2; NRS, GD125/16/5/1/3; NRS, GD125/16/5/1/4; Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 323.

²⁸⁹ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 337.

fairy blast.²⁹⁰ The second sighted man in Kirk's account may have been engaging in combat with these fairy beings to prevent them from doing harm to others or himself, and thereby would have been fulfilling the role of a shaman within his community. In this way, his account fits with descriptions of early modern shamanism, transportation, and violence against spirits.

These themes of ritual combat, death prognostication, and second sight also appear in the confessions of Scottish witches who were "dark shamans," and engaged in ritualistic acts of death prognostication. Wilby's account of Isobel Gowdie's ritual combat contained the argument that both second sight and arrow-shooting were forms of death divination that hinged on a fatalistic view of human mortality. Just as seers who prognosticated death were not directly responsible for causing the deaths of their fellow villagers, Wilby has argued that witches who entered trances, engaged in spiritual flight, and shot arrows at fated individuals were engaging in a form of shamanistic death prognostication by which those who were shot were both chosen and destined to die.²⁹¹ Aside from death prognostication, other aspects of second sight belief are present in accounts of witches who shot arrows during trances and spiritual flight. The motif of shooting arrows with elves also appeared in the trial records of Margaret Newilliam and Jonet Morison.²⁹² Jonet Morison's account included the interesting claim that the Devil taught her how to bring home a man who was ill, and put another in his stead by shooting him with a magical arrow.²⁹³ Jonet repeated this ritual numerous times, shooting selected victims in the place of

²⁹⁰ Goodare, "Cult of the Seely Wights," 205.

²⁹¹ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 320-350.

²⁹² Macphail, "Papers relating to witchcraft," 19, 21-23.

²⁹³ Macphail, "Papers relating to witchcraft," 21-23.

others who were dying, thereby sparing one individual at the cost of another.²⁹⁴ This detail indicates that while shooting elf arrows may have been a means of prognosticating death, it is also possible that it was associated with the deliberate transfer of illness by practitioners of popular magic. The ability to transfer illness or death from one being to another was ascribed to second sighted people,²⁹⁵ and it is therefore possible that Jonet's description of entering a trance, engaging in spirit flight, and shooting arrows at chosen victims in order to kill one individual and spare another was a description of a shamanic version of this practice associated with second sight. While both dark shamanism and second sight were linked to death prognostication, the inclusion of the belief that some dark shamans could transfer illness supports the claim that second sight, shamanism, and witchcraft were all part of the same matrix of cultural beliefs.

It seems as though second sighted people may have also had working relationships with familiar spirits that they were accustomed to seeing, just as some shamans or cunning folk did. Robert Kirk claimed that "The Tabhaisder or Seer that corresponds with this kind of Familiars, can bring them with a spel to appear to himselfe or others when he pleases... He is not terrified with their sight when he calls them. But seeing them in a surprise (as often he dos) frights him extreamly."²⁹⁶ Similar details appeared in one of James Garden's letters to John Aubrey, in which Garden related the story of a second sighted man who, in the company of some other men, drank too much alcohol and "began to tell stories & strange passages he had been att."²⁹⁷ Suddenly, the

²⁹⁴ Macphail, "Papers relating to witchcraft," 23.

²⁹⁵ BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 9; EUL, La.III.551, fol. 17. See also Chapter 3 of this dissertation, which has a section on accused witches, second sight, and transferring illness.

²⁹⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 14.

²⁹⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

man was thrown across the room and “almost strangled,” and after recovering a little the others asked him what it was that had done this to him. According to Garden, the man replied that “he durst not tell: for he had told too much already.”²⁹⁸ Garden immediately followed this by asserting that some people are believed to possess the second sight “by converse with those Demons, we call Fairies.”²⁹⁹ The spontaneous violence against this man may explain Kirk’s claim that seers were frightened by the sudden appearance of their familiar spirits, despite the fact that seers were in the habit of conjuring spirits when they pleased. It can also be explained though the popular belief that those who spoke too much about their dealings with the fairies would incite their anger, or cause seers to lose the benefits of the fairies’ good company.³⁰⁰ In this way, the second sighted man’s indiscretion can be seen as a punishment from the spirits who gave him his knowledge through familiar association. This interpretation fits with beliefs expressed by shamans and cunning folk who had working relationships with spirits, and through them gained knowledge or supernatural abilities.

This chapter has oriented second sight within the greater realm of beliefs about individuals who were believed to have contact with the invisible world. In doing so, it has argued that second sight was broadly conceptualized and defined by early modern people, and that various early modern definitions of second sight were fluid and interchangeable. This chapter has also claimed that there was a genuine experiential dimension to early modern accounts of second sight, which was often apparent to both early modern seers and recorders who observed their

²⁹⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

²⁹⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

³⁰⁰ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 90.

trances. It seems that early modern people saw spirits fairly frequently, and some people (such as the second sighted) experienced these interactions more often than the average person. This association with the world of spirits was often mediated through an altered state of consciousness, a detail which also appears in accounts of early modern shamans, accused witches, and practitioners of magic. Emma Wilby has argued that Western culture's unfamiliarity with altered states of consciousness has caused us to pathologize spirit encounters as described by cunning folk and witches: "In some ways, the lives of cunning folk and witches are less comprehensible to the modern western mind than the lives of tribal shamans, for we are more ready to accept our 'differentness' to the shaman, and therefore make allowances for it, than we are to accept our differentness to the cunning woman or witch."³⁰¹ By examining the experiential dimension of early modern second sight, we are able to recognize that experiences such as trances or autoscopy were not necessarily the purview of the ill, deluded, or "different." Rather, belief in second sight and other supernatural abilities sat within a coherent cultural framework that was built around people's lived experiences. While physiological phenomena such as trances, autoscopy, and shamanic experiences can be identified as the basis for some of these visions, it was still up to the second sighted and their communities to interpret their experiences using their own culturally specific vocabulary and logic. Because of this, any scholarly approach to second sight must be willing to place it within its cultural context, and be mindful of the plurality of beliefs that were attached to this term.

³⁰¹ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 204.

Chapter 2: Spirits and the Supernatural in Early Modern Scotland

I then asked [Janet], if indeed she had the second sight, and if by it she knew those things she had discovered, to which she answered in the affirmative. I then asked her if she thought it proceeded from a good or evill cause, upon which she turned the question upon me, and asked me what I thought of it; I told her plainly I fear'd it was from an evill cause, but she replied quickly, she hoped it was from good.

— George Hickes, in a letter to Samuel Pepys (1700)³⁰²

The Sprite appeared six times to [Agnes]. The first was in a mill when she gave herself to him. He bad her let alone her moaning. If she would be his servant she should not want. Before she knew what spirit it was she consented.

— Witch trial record of Agnes Sampson (1591)³⁰³

The spirit world of early modern Scotland was a densely packed location. If all the stories were to be believed, the houses, the ocean, and the land itself were swarming with spirits of various kinds who occasionally bumped into the humans they lived alongside. Sometimes, these spirits were readily identifiable as ghosts, fairies, angels, or demons. However, at other times, it would seem as though the identity of a spirit was not always clear or even necessarily relevant. The first passage quoted above comes from a correspondence between George Hickes and Samuel Pepys, who had written to Hickes to ask about Scottish second sight. Hickes had personally interviewed Janet Douglas, a second sighted witch-finder, while she was in prison. Hickes described the interview to Pepys and related his concern over the source of Janet's supposed power, inquiring whether she believed her knowledge and visions came to her from a morally good source. Janet, a sagacious young woman, quickly turned the question upon Hickes

³⁰² Samuel Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters on Second Sight," in *The Occult Laboratory*, ed. Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 176.

³⁰³ NRS, JC26/2/13.

and asked him what he thought. While Hickee feared that her power may have an evil source, Janet seemed untroubled by the fact that she did not actually know from where it came. Rather, she said she optimistically *hoped*—not knew—that its origins were good.

A similar ambiguity can be found in the trial records of Agnes Sampson, one of the most famous accused witches in Scotland. She was a popular healer and practitioner of magic whose reputation preceded her, before she was tried by King James VI and sentenced to death in 1591. Some of the earliest records of her examination for witchcraft relate her encounter with a spirit being that was naturally interpreted by the court as the Devil. However, Agnes claimed that she made a pact with this being and swore herself to his service “before she knew what spirit it was.” Agnes’ lack of knowledge about the identity of her familiar spirit did not seem to trouble her, at least not enough to dissuade her from taking him up on his promise that she wouldn’t want for anything. It is possible that Agnes never believed that this spirit was the Devil until she was persuaded by the hostile court. Rather, Agnes may have been operating within a spiritual tradition that allowed for humans to have relationships with spirits that were ambiguous or morally ambivalent, as opposed to angels or demons who had clear moral positions.

Both these accounts feature women who were in touch with traditions of popular magic and spirituality that were well-known in early modern Scotland. To an orthodox examiner, Janet’s and Agnes’ uncertainty about whether their powers came from good or evil sources was highly troubling. However, neither Janet nor Agnes seemed particularly bothered. This could be because they were not overly preoccupied with morals themselves, but it could also be because some spirits were hard to identify. Because of this, humans (even those who were in the habit of seeing spirits) did not always pursue the question of who exactly a spirit was. Of course, to their

examiners, the identity of a spirit being was absolutely the most essential characteristic it could possess. However, neither Janet's nor Agnes' spirits were exceptional when it came to their ambiguous nature. The spiritual landscape of early modern Scotland was rife with ambiguous spirits such as these.

This chapter makes a somewhat vain attempt at laying out the taxonomy of spirits that were known to early modern Scottish people, particularly as they relate to second sight belief and individuals who were believed to see and interact with spirits. However, these supposed divisions among spirit types end up falling apart the more closely they are examined. One of the kinds of spirits that comes up most frequently in this dissertation are the fairies. The fairies were believed to live alongside humans, and encounters with fairies feature heavily in early modern sources about second sight. Yet "the fairies" was also a rather vague grouping which included spirits that were somewhat like people, but also quite a few monsters, as well as spirits that were more like angels and demons. The realm of fairyland also appeared to overlap with the realm of the dead in popular belief, meaning fairies could be confused with ghosts. As such, the categories of angels, demons, ghosts, and fairies do not end up being distinct categories at all. They bleed into one another and characteristics shared by one category frequently show up in another. Similarly, this dissertation makes frequent reference to subtle bodies, a category of spirits that were relevant to second sight belief. Yet manifestations of subtle bodies were often difficult to categorize, and their behaviors sometimes closely resembled those of ghosts or various omens of death.

These spiritual ambiguities demonstrate why it is ultimately unsurprising that Janet and Agnes didn't know exactly what type of spirit granted them their powers. However, the consequences of these ambiguities take on new significance in subsequent chapters of this

dissertation. Frequently, interpretations of visionaries and the nature of their experiences were dependent on individual and communal processes of discernment. For a visionary, to claim association with the “wrong” type of spirit could prove fatal, while allying with the “right” type would confer legitimacy. But there was no early modern cultural consensus about which spirits were “wrong” or “right,” and various spirits were ambiguous and therefore liable to be interpreted demonically or divinely by different individuals. For these reasons, the discernment of spirits had high stakes in the early modern world— an unfortunate truth which both Janet and Agnes learned.

I: The Spiritual Landscape

This section describes some of the spirits that frequently appeared in second sight accounts, as well as second sight beliefs that were associated with these spirits. Scottish fairy belief strongly informed early modern interpretations of second sight, since supernatural abilities were often associated with the fairies. Some theorists even argued that second sight was the specific talent for seeing fairies, as well as other spirits. Some key aspects of second sight, such as foresight and death prognostication, were grounded in Scottish beliefs about subtle bodies, another category of spirits discussed in this chapter. Subtle body belief is an important and under-explored facet of spirit belief in early modern Scotland, and the ability to see subtle bodies and interpret their meaning was a significant part of what it meant to be a second sighted person. During this exploration of the spiritual landscape, we should be mindful that the way a spirit was interpreted or categorized depended on both the individual who had the visionary experience, as

well as his or her cultural context. Furthermore, there was often disagreement among early modern people about how to categorize or interpret different types of known spirits. For example, what seemed to be a fairy to one person might have plainly been a demon to another; while many early modern people did believe in ghosts, others may have been suspicious of any spirit that claimed it had once been human. So while labels such as “fairy,” “angel,” “demon,” or “ghost” are indeed helpful, they are in no way absolute and both seers and visionary experiences were the subject of significant debate during this era.

II: Fairies

We begin with fairies because, along with wraiths and subtle bodies, they are some of the most frequently mentioned types of spirits in second sight accounts. The fairies went by many names, among them the “*siths*,” “*sluagh maith*,” “the good people,”³⁰⁴ and the “seely wights.”³⁰⁵ Robert Kirk described them as being “of a midle nature betwixt man and Angell (as were daemons thought to be of old; of intelligent studious Spirits, and light changable bodies (lik those called Astrall) somewhat of the nature of a condens’d cloud, and best seen in twilight.”³⁰⁶ In this way, fairies were believed to be characterized by their liminality, and therefore subject to ambiguous categorization. Fairy belief existed all across Europe, though it appeared to be especially strong in the British Isles. Scottish people believed that different types of fairies

³⁰⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 1.

³⁰⁵ Goodare, “Cult of the Seely Wights,” 198-219.

³⁰⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 1-2.

existed, and while some fairies sort of resembled humans, others appeared to be more like monsters.³⁰⁷ While some fairies were benevolent, fairies were generally regarded to be dangerous beings who sometimes harmed humans. Some people claimed that they were capable of seeing or interacting with fairies regularly, and some believed that second sighted people could see fairies in particular. Another popular belief was that second sight, and other supernatural abilities, could be gained through contact with the fairies.

Fairies were believed to engage in a wide variety of activities, including having families and a civilization that operated by rules not unlike human society.³⁰⁸ Some people believed that fairies had a royal court, with a king and queen, and this court was taken to riding abroad at certain times of the year.³⁰⁹ One of the best-known activities that the fairies engaged in was abducting humans.³¹⁰ Sometimes, they left behind an enchanted object that had the appearance of the abducted human. This object wasted away and died, and everyone believed it to be the abducted individual.³¹¹ For this reason, sudden illness or death was sometimes blamed on fairy abduction. Fairies were also known to abduct human children and leave changeling children in their place.³¹² They also sometimes shot at humans or livestock with something called “elf-shot,”

³⁰⁷ Stewart, *Popular Superstitions*, 101-106.

³⁰⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 5.

³⁰⁹ See *A Description of the King and Queen of Fayries, their habit, fare, abode, pomp and state*, (London: 1635); Hay, *Lectures on Marriage*, 127; “Tam Lin,” 270-310.

³¹⁰ See “King Orfeo,” in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Vol. 1 of 5*, ed. Francis James Child (Forgotten Books, 2007), 190-191; Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 325; “Tam Lin,” 270-310; “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice,” in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Vol. 1 of 5*, ed. Francis James Child (Forgotten Books, 2007), 311-312.

³¹¹ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 36, 44.

³¹² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 25; Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 71.

which caused disease, injury, or death.³¹³

Not all fairies were malevolent; some were benevolent. A number of practitioners of popular magic in early modern Scotland claimed an association with the fairies, or even fairy familiars who aided them in their practice. Julian Goodare has revealed historical references to the existence of a Scottish cult of people who believed they regularly went with the fairy folk.³¹⁴ Some people even claimed they had fairy lovers.³¹⁵ Fairies as familiar spirits also appear in a number of witch trial records in early modern Scotland, as is discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Some accused witches were consulted for their ability to communicate with the fairies, or because it was believed that they had magical powers that came from the fairies. Fairies were even the subject of early modern scams, as some people extorted money from paying clients in exchange for promises of meeting and seeing fairy beings.³¹⁶ It is likely that some second sighted people, as practitioners of popular magic, were consulted or revered because of their perceived relationship with the fairy folk, as well as their ability to see these supposedly invisible beings.

Some second sighted people claimed an association with the fairies, and fairies were sometimes believed to be the origin of the gift of second sight. In one of James Garden's letters

³¹³ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 18-19; Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 71; Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884), 120.

³¹⁴ Goodare, "Cult of the Seely Wights," 198-219.

³¹⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 66. Intriguingly, John MacInnes has claimed that the early modern Gaelic translation of the Bible described the "Witch of Endor" as "a woman who has a fairy lover," rather than the more traditional translation, "Woman that hath a familiar spirit." See MacInnes, "The Church and Traditional Belief," 192.

³¹⁶ *The Several Notorious and Lewd Cozenages of John West and Alice West falsely called the king and queen of fairies* (London: 1613).

to John Aubrey, Garden wrote that some people claimed they had the second sight “by converse with those Demons, we call Fairies.”³¹⁷ Accused witch Isobell Sinclair attested that across a period of seven years, “sex times at the reathes of the year, shoe hath bein controlled with the Phairie; and that be thame, shoe hath the second sight.”³¹⁸ In discussing the abilities of the second sighted Janet Douglas, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe speculated that “possibly, then, mrs dumby hath some correspondence with some of Mr Dryden’s changelings of heaven, his aerial sprites, which have taught her all this skill, and which probably, are intimately acquaint with the power of natur, and have easy access to all our little business here below, and are able to give their favourites clear information thereof.”³¹⁹ Adam Donald, also known as “the Prophet of Bethelnie,” was said to have been a changeling left by the fairies.³²⁰ Similarly, the “fairy boy of Leith” possessed second sight and was able to predict the future, as well as reveal hidden knowledge about the past. He also claimed that he regularly consorted with the fairy folk every week, and that nothing could keep him from this meeting.³²¹ Of course, when it came to imputations of witchcraft, any ability gained through association with a spirit was interpreted as evidence of a demonic pact.

The relationship between fairies and second sight also thrived in England. A number of practitioners of popular magic claimed they had the ability to see and converse with the fairy

³¹⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

³¹⁸ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 470.

³¹⁹ Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Company, 1884), 141.

³²⁰ Davies and de Blecourt, *Beyond the Witch Trials*, 86.

³²¹ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 312-315.

folk, and that they had gained supernatural talents through this contact. One girl named Ann Jeffries received a considerable amount of public attention after she experienced “a kind of Convulsion-fit” caused by catching sight of several fairies.³²² From that point on, Ann claimed she was cared for and fed by fairies, and generally refused other food that was offered to her.³²³ After her acquaintance with the fairy folk, Anne supposedly possessed the ability to heal illnesses by touch and foretell the future. She appeared in sources as a “prophetess of Bodmyn,”³²⁴ and one writer described widespread public interest in Anne and her predictions: “there is much Discourse here of the Prophecies of a Maide in Cornwall.”³²⁵ Similarly, cunning woman Mary Parish had little trouble convincing her client and Member of Parliament Goodwin Wharton that she had the ability to see fairies that he could not, even standing among them in the same room.³²⁶ Mary’s narrative of how she gained her powers involved being acquainted with the fairies when she was a child, a singular experience which Goodwin interpreted as a sign of her visionary gifts, “to shew that God had plac’t something in her or intended her for something not comon to others.”³²⁷

Formulas for conjuring fairies were common in magical texts, illustrating educated mens’

³²² Moses Pitt, *An Account of one Ann Jeffries, now living in the county of Cornwall, who was fed for six months by a small sort of airy people call’d fairies, and of the strange and wonderful cures she performed with salves and medicines she received from them, for which she never took one penny of her patients, in a letter from Moses Pitt to the Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. Edward Fowler, Lord Bishop of Gloucester* (London: Richard Cumberland, 1696), 10.

³²³ BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2443, fol. 102.

³²⁴ BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2466, fol. 148v.

³²⁵ BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2478, fol. 165.

³²⁶ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 48.

³²⁷ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 21.

interest in obtaining sight of spirits that were associated with second sight belief. Spirit conjuration was far from being a practice that was only engaged in by common people, witches, or the illiterate. Historian Keith Thomas has claimed that many early modern university students were interested in magic, “both in the natural variety, and in the conjuration of spirits, which seems to have been the equivalent of drug-taking today as the fashionable temptation for undergraduates.”³²⁸ Frances Timbers has speculated that “dabbling in magic was even linked to university initiation practices.”³²⁹ While angels and demons were the most popular spirits for elite magicians to conjure, fairies also appear in a surprising number of grimoires alongside procedures for summoning them. These texts and their described practices illustrate that belief in fairies and a sense of curiosity towards seeing them was not just the purview of the lower classes or the illiterate. Records of a political conspiracy led by Sir William Stewart of Luthrie and Sir Archibald Napier of Merchiston described their attempts to summon the spirit “Obirion,”³³⁰ as well as their consultation of accused witch Janet Boyman for her prophetic gifts.³³¹ Janet, for her own part, testified in her trial that she regularly went with the fairies, and by them she could

³²⁸ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 226.

³²⁹ Frances Timbers, *Magic and Masculinity: Ritual Magic and Gender in the Early Modern Era* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 57.

³³⁰ Oberon was famously the King of the Fairies in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as well as the thirteenth century *Les Prouesses et faitz du noble Huon de Bordeaux*. His name appears in various other early modern sources on fairies. Fairylore scholar Katharine Briggs has claimed that “Oberon” was related to “Auberon” and “Oberyorn,” which were known names of familiar spirits in the late medieval period. See Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 314; also Katharine Briggs, *The Vanishing People: Fairy Lore and Legends* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³³¹ Goodare, “Between Humans and Angels,” 174.

diagnose and cure illnesses as well as summon them to her aid.³³² These two lords' consultation of Janet was in line with the belief that some second sighted people were practitioners of popular magic, or could summon fairies at will.³³³

Aside from the information they may have received from Janet Boyman, William Stewart and Archibald Napier likely obtained their instructions for conjuring Obirion from one of many formulas in early modern books of magic.³³⁴ A small book of rituals currently held by the National Records of Scotland contains a number of English and Latin formulations for conjuring spirits, among them a spirit named "Oberion."³³⁵ The incantation makes use of sacred names and invocations of the angels "to make Oberion obey me."³³⁶ Conjurations of "Oberion" or "Oberon" appear to have been decently popular, despite the traditional opinion that the educated did not believe in fairies.³³⁷ A grimoire kept at the Bodleian Library describes "an excellent way to gett a

³³² NRS, JC26/1/67.

³³³ See EUL, La.III.551, fol. 14.

³³⁴ An amusing anecdote about an English attempt to conjure Oberion appears in a letter from William Stapleton to Thomas Cromwell. A conjurer allegedly told William that a parson in Lesingham had recently called up the spirits of Andrew Malchus, Oberion, and Inchubus. However, when Oberion appeared he refused to speak to the parson, and the other spirits told him that it was because Oberion was already pledged to the lord Cardinal (Wolsey). See Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A Dark History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and Other Troublesome Things* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 130.

³³⁵ NRS, GD188/25/1/3, fols. 147, 158-159, 162.

³³⁶ NRS, GD188/25/1/3, fols. 159, 162.

³³⁷ For more conjurations of Oberon or Oberion, see BL, Sloane 3824, fol. 98; BL, Sloane 3826, fol. 98; BL, Sloane 3851, fols. 115-116; BL, Sloane 3853, fol. 208; BOD, MS Ashmole 1491, fol. 1362v; BOD, MS Douce 116, fols. 174-178; BOD, MS.e.Mus.173, fol. 72; BOD, MS Rawlinson D 252, fol. 144.

fayrie,”³³⁸ and descriptions of how to catch sight of fairies using elite magic appear in numerous other books of experiments.³³⁹ Therefore, this fascination with fairies and individuals who were able to see them defied social stratification. Grimoires that contained supposedly tested and proven methods for gaining sight of spirits illustrate educated involvement with second sight belief through the application of early modern experimental methods.

Brownies

Fairies were believed to dwell everywhere, both in nature and in civilization. Robert Kirk claimed that they lived in every conceivable place, and that there was “no such thing as a pure wilderness in the whol Unviersse.”³⁴⁰ It was believed that they migrated lodgings quarterly during the year, and it was during these times that they were particularly prone to being seen by second sighted people. Kirk described these encounters as “verie terrifying.”³⁴¹ However, not all fairies were necessarily terrifying figures. As is discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, some people had working relationships with fairy beings. Some fairies appeared to have been independently interested in helping humans, for one reason or another.

One of the most domestic and helpful forms of fairies were the brownies. Brownies were

³³⁸ BOD, MS Ashmole 1406, fols. 50, 51v-53, 53v-54v.

³³⁹ For more elite conjurations and spells to do with fairies (explicitly by that name), see BL, Sloane 1727, fol. 23; BL, Sloane 3824, fol. 98; BL, Sloane 3825, fols. 38, 86v; BL, Sloane 3826, fol. 100; BL, Sloane 3851, fols. 129, 130v-131; BOD, MS.Add.B1, fol. 20v; BOD, MS Aubrey 24, fol. 95; BOD, MS.e.Mus.173, fol. 71v; NRS, GD188/25/1/3, fol. 203.

³⁴⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 3. See also EUL, La.III.545, fols. 23v-24v.

³⁴¹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 4.

believed to live in or around human dwellings and help with domestic work. George Sinclair described how, “in the time of Popery,” brownies used to be employed to do tasks in the house.³⁴² James VI made a similar claim, arguing that brownies chiefly appeared during the “time of Papistrie,” and that they haunted houses which were subsequently viewed as fortunate.³⁴³ Some people even believed that every great family possessed its own brownie.³⁴⁴ Robert Kirk mentioned how brownies were seen by people with supernatural sight,³⁴⁵ and listed both second sight and brownies among the “five curiosities of Scotland” that he claimed were not observed elsewhere.³⁴⁶ These fairies also sometimes functioned as familiar spirits, because of their comparatively benevolent nature. John Beaumont described the story of a seer who habitually saw a Brownie, and his recurring encounters with this being amused the seer greatly.³⁴⁷ Therefore, while brownies were a form of fairy spirit, their status as domestic or familiar beings meant they were often perceived as friendly.

Brownies (and a related spirit known as Meg Mullach or “Hairy Meg”) were also

³⁴² Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 213.

³⁴³ James VI, *Demonology*, 411.

³⁴⁴ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 20; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 334.

³⁴⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 2.

³⁴⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 69. See also EUL, La.III.545, fol. 129.

³⁴⁷ John Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise of spirits* (London: D. Browne, J. Taylor, R. Smith, and T. Browne, 1705), 125.

associated with the gift of second sight, as brownies were believed to be able to see the future.³⁴⁸ Folklorist Ronald Black has argued that the origin of the word *urisk*, a fairy that was a type of brownie,³⁴⁹ originally meant “endowed with second sight, able to see ghosts and apparitions hidden from the common eye.”³⁵⁰ Early modern ethnographer Martin Martin related the account of a man who had a second sighted butler who helped his master win at gambling. Their secret lay in the butler’s ability to see a brownie, which used to reach its arm over the table and indicate where the mark would fall.³⁵¹ John Beaumont’s treatise also contained the story of a second sighted man who was regularly attended by two knowledgeable spirits, called Brownie and Meig Malloch.³⁵² In a letter to James Garden, a student of divinity referenced the belief that these spirits could see the future when he claimed that it was unknown whether a second sighted man “saw anie more than Brownie and Meig Mullach.”³⁵³ The second sighted Duncan Campbell also

³⁴⁸ This belief about Meg Mullach (various spellings) seems to have also been associated with the Scottish rite of “Taghairm,” which was thought to conjure this spirit and compel it to provide requested information or hidden knowledge. J.F. Campbell described the rite and claimed “It seems if you make a “Taoghairm” the “Mac Mollach” will come and tell you anything you ask him.” See NLS, Adv.MS.50.1.13 (ii), fol. 387. This rite is also mentioned in *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, directly after the description of second sight. See BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 9v. See also Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 495; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 111-112. For scholarly discussions of the Taghairm, see MacInnes, “The Church and Traditional Belief,” 191-192; Andrew E.M. Wiseman, “Caterwauling and Demon Raising: The Ancient Rite of the Taghairm?,” *Scottish Studies* 35 (2010): 174-208. Wiseman has argued that the rite may have involved its practitioner entering a trance or altered state of consciousness, as well as engaging in shamanism, in order to obtain the ability to see the future.

³⁴⁹ Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 420.

³⁵⁰ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 363 n. 350.

³⁵¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 320.

³⁵² Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 85.

³⁵³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

mentioned brownies in connection with his own ability. When challenged by a group of friars about the origin of his talents, the friars cited the prevalent knowledge that Campbell had a familiar spirit. These friars claimed against the seer that “you have a genius too that attends you, as we are informed.” In descriptions of his second sight, Campbell normally referred to this spirit as an angel or good genius, but in this circumstance, he compared it to a brownie. Campbell replied to the friars, “So... have all persons that have the second-sight in any eminent degree; and to prove this I will bring no less a witness than King James, who, in his ‘Demonology,’... mentions also a spirit called Brownie.”³⁵⁴ Campbell’s statement appeared to apply to not only his familiar spirit, but all familiar spirits that attended people who had second sight “in any eminent degree.” Though references to fairies in second sight accounts are more numerous than references to brownies specifically, these few mentions of helpful brownie spirits and their purported abilities are noteworthy.

Fairies and Magical Eye Ointment

One method of gaining second sight was through the application of an ointment to the eyes, which allowed those eyes to be able to see spirits or fairies. Robert Kirk, in his treatise on second sight, described the story of a woman who was kidnapped by fairies and forced to be a midwife and nurse to the fairy children. When living among the fairies, she couldn’t see her surroundings clearly until she anointed one of her eyes with “a certain unctiōne that was by

³⁵⁴ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 159-160.

her.”³⁵⁵ Once the fairies realized this woman had gained the ability to see them and their world, they blinded her perceptive eye.³⁵⁶ This story bears an uncanny resemblance to one recorded by G.F. Black, as a piece of folklore from the Orkney and Shetland Islands. In this story, a woman who was among the trows accidentally rubbed her eye with some trow ointment that had been intended for a baby. From that point on, her sight in that eye surpassed its previous natural ability. One day, she saw the trowman on a hill, and he complimented her on her agility for a person of her age. The woman replied that, “It’s my gude sight that helps me along.” The trow asked her, “And which eye do you see best upon, gude wife?” When she indicated the eye that had been anointed, the trow stuck his finger in her eye and blinded her.³⁵⁷ In accordance with this popular belief about the properties of magical eye ointment, English cunning woman Mary Parish convinced her client Goodwin Wharton that she knew how to make an oil by which she could see spirits. She also told Goodwin that the fairies normally made an ointment to give to humans, which allowed the humans to have fairy sight. It was partially because of these ointments that Goodwin believed Mary could see spirits that he could not. After learning the

³⁵⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 35-36.

³⁵⁶ This story shares motifs with other European folktales, particularly those that feature a “midwife to the fairies.” For a similar tale, see Gervase of Tilbury’s story of a woman’s kidnapping and blinding by *dracs* in *Otia Imperialia*, an early thirteenth century encyclopedic work. See Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 718-721.

³⁵⁷ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 27. J.G. Campbell related a similar (possibly later) story of a man in Perthshire who entered a fairy hill and discovered a woman making porridge. The porridge boiled and a splash of it struck the man in the eye. From that day forward, he saw the fairies through that eye. He once made the mistake of commenting on the many fairies present in a marketplace, and one of them asked with which eye he saw them. He told the fairy, who then put out his perceptive eye. See Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 77.

recipe, Goodwin attempted to make his own ointment but was unsuccessful.³⁵⁸

Belief in magical eye ointment appears throughout different types of discussions about second sight, and interest in formulas for ointment that granted sight of spirits thrived among early modern people of all social levels. The records of accused witches describe their use of magical eye ointment to see fairies and spirits, though these spirits were generally interpreted as demonic. Accused witch Agnes Cairnes was known for her habit of “going away with the fferrie.” When she was imprisoned in the tollbooth, the court recorded that the Devil visited her, but she claimed that no one else could see him because of something that he had rubbed in her eyes, so that she could see him when and how she pleased.³⁵⁹ Elspeth Reoch also met two fairy men by a loch side who taught her a formula for magical eye ointment. The fairy men told her to roast an egg, take the sweat, and apply it to her eyes for three Sundays, and then she could see and know any thing she desired.³⁶⁰ Elspeth confessed that she had gained the “secund sight” by this means. Demonologist Increase Mather discussed the belief that people could gain sight of specters by rubbing their eyes with bewitched water. After doing this, they could immediately see that which others could not, and by this they had “a strange spectral sight.”³⁶¹ These examples represent the demonization of folk beliefs that were originally associated with second sight and the gift of seeing fairies or spirits. As fairies and ambiguous spirits were considered demons by

³⁵⁸ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 86.

³⁵⁹ NRS, JC10/15/3/1, fol. 1.

³⁶⁰ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts, within Orkney and Zetland, from the year 1602 to the year 1644,” in *Miscellany of the Maitland Club*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Maitland Club, 1840), 188.

³⁶¹ Mather, *A further account of the tryals*, 12.

religious authorities, magical eye ointment was interpreted as a means of communicating with devils.

Experiments for magical eye ointment were also one of the ways in which early modern scientists and educated men expressed their curiosity about second sight and the ability to see spirits. In theory, rubbing magical eye ointment over one's eyes would allow the applicant to "try on" the ability of being second sighted, and thereby experience how it felt to see with the second sight. Early modern scientists and elite magicians appeared to be especially interested in methods of obtaining the ability to see spirits, and despite their educated backgrounds, belief in fairies and magical eye ointment was one aspect of popular culture that gained traction in other levels of society. A grimoire held in the Bodleian contains a recipe for "an ungt to annoynt under the eyelids and upon the Eylidds." Among the ingredients listed are herbs gathered from a fairy hill.³⁶² An interesting manuscript titled "Of Fairies" provides a recipe for an "oyle or cream" with which to anoint one's face in order to attract a fairy.³⁶³ Another book of spells written by a Gloucestershire conjurer contains several instructions on how to make ointments to see spirits.³⁶⁴ Ointments to gain sight of spirits appear in numerous other grimoires that document early modern literate belief in angels, demons, and fairies.³⁶⁵ In this way, recipes for magical eye ointment and conjurations of fairies thrived in the elite, experimental culture of books on magic

³⁶² BOD, MS Ashmole 1406, fol. 51.

³⁶³ BOD, MS Douce 116, fols. 11-11v.

³⁶⁴ BOD, MS Rawlinson D 253, fols. 106-107.

³⁶⁵ BL, Sloane 3851, fol. 129v; BL, Sloane 3853, fol. 30v.

and science.³⁶⁶

Fairies and Disability

In many accounts of second sight, this supernatural ability is associated with physical disability of various forms. These disabilities include blindness, deafness, muteness (referred to as “dumbness” and the unfortunate term “dumbie” in early modern sources), and loss of power in the body. As mentioned already, some fairy stories feature a theme of blindness or a threat of blinding against someone who is capable of seeing the fairy world. Blindness as an accompaniment to second sight makes sense poetically, as the sense of sight has often been associated with knowledge in various legends and stories since ancient times. Thus, Odin gave up one of his eyes in exchange for wisdom,³⁶⁷ and Oedipus blinded himself upon receiving the knowledge that he had fulfilled a dreadful prophecy. Tiresias, the seer who ambled his way

³⁶⁶ Early modern people's interests in magical and scientific experiments were not mutually exclusive. Books of magic were essentially collections of scientific experiments and knowledge of various forms. This was the experimental culture in which recipes for magical eye ointment were shared and popularized. For an example of an early modern book of magic and science that contains a wide variety of experiments, see the two volumes written by physician, astrologer, and alchemist Simon Forman in the Bodleian Library: MS Ashmole 1491 and BOD, MS Ashmole 1494. For more on the overlap between science and magic in early modern culture, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

³⁶⁷ “Odin,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Odin-Norse-deity>. In one version of the legend of the second sighted Brahan Seer, he exchanged the natural sight of one eye for supernatural vision. See Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 202.

through most notable Greek tragedies, was blind yet supernaturally informed.³⁶⁸ This reflexive logic seemed to appeal to early modern Scottish people as well, and some argued that it was because of innate deficiencies that a higher power allowed people with disabilities to have the second sight. For others, disability was explained by a brush with the supernatural that caused both the disability and the emergence of second sight.³⁶⁹

Muteness, known by early modern people as “dumbness,” appeared to be a trait associated with people who possessed supernatural abilities, including second sight. Janet Douglas, the young girl who claimed she had second sight and could thereby identify the cause of bewitchment, initially seemed to be mute. Later, after she recovered her faculty of speech, many people believed that her disability had been a pretense, and naturally her contemporaries speculated that her contrivance was a deliberate attempt to cultivate credibility.³⁷⁰ For the purpose of political propaganda, Daniel Defoe recorded the story of a likely fictional character named Dickory Cronke, who was supposedly born mute but generated numerous prophecies of a political nature.³⁷¹ This detail about Cronke’s disability was probably meant to confer a similar

³⁶⁸ The deaf and mute seer Duncan Campbell was specifically compared to Tiresias in *The Spectator*; which claimed that “the blind Tiresias was not more famous in Greece than this dumb artist has been for some years last past in the cities of London and Westminster.” See J. Addison and R. Steele, *The Spectator*; vol. 4, ed. D.F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 512.

³⁶⁹ The motif of an individual being blinded during an intense supernatural encounter also appears in Biblical sources, which could have made it appealing to early modern Christians. Famously, the apostle Paul’s miraculous conversion and subsequent career as missionary began with his sudden blinding during a vision of Christ. See Acts 9:3-9 in the Bible.

³⁷⁰ Sir John Lauder, *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1848), 143.

³⁷¹ John Robert Moore, “Defoe’s Political Propaganda and “The Dumb Philosopher,”” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 4, no.1 (1940), 107.

credibility on Defoe's tale. The pairing of disability with supernatural ability appears in numerous Scottish sources. Duncan Campbell, a famous Scottish seer who claimed he had second sight, was reportedly both deaf and mute.³⁷² Robert Chambers recorded legends about the deaf and mute Laird of Duntreath, who was known for his accurate predictions. Chambers claimed that there was a general belief that many people born deaf or mute possessed the gift of second sight or the ability to converse with spirits.³⁷³ Robert Law's *Memorialls* contained numerous instances of individuals of both genders who were mute, deaf, or both and possessed the ability to predict the future.³⁷⁴ Law theorized that this ability was a gift from God: "Its hard to defyne how these dumbies that are so naturally come at this knowledge. It would seem that it is a property given them by God, to make up these two defects of speaking and hearing, But how things are made known to them it is not so well made kent to us."³⁷⁵ John Dalrymple discussed how some people were struck mute or senseless by visions,³⁷⁶ and John Fraser's treatise on second sight plainly claimed, "it is found that many Dumb persons foretell many things before hand."³⁷⁷

Second sight also appears to have been associated with other forms of disability, such as

³⁷² Christopher Krentz, "Duncan Campbell and the Discourses of Deafness," *Prose Studies* 27, nos. 1-2 (2005), 44.

³⁷³ Robert Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: W&R Chambers, 1858-1861), 384; vol. 3, 491.

³⁷⁴ Robert Law, *Memorialls; or the Memorable Things that fell out within this Island of Brittain from 1638-1684*, ed. Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1818), 109-110, 113, 115-119, 129-130.

³⁷⁵ Law, *Memorialls*, 113. William Cheyn shared Robert Law's perspective on this topic: see William Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism Discovered* (Edinburgh: 1720), 232.

³⁷⁶ Dalrymple, *Darker Superstitions*, 443.

³⁷⁷ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

blindness, seizures, or birth defects. Lord Reay cited the account of a blind woman who possessed the second sight,³⁷⁸ and Theophilus Insulanus also mentioned that some seers experienced visions despite being blind.³⁷⁹ Robert Wodrow described a man who was known for diagnosing illness by gazing into his patients' urine, and this individual was also subject to occasional "dumb fits."³⁸⁰ James Beattie recorded evidence of belief in the relationship between birth defects and second sight: "In the highlands of Scotland, where you know the gift of second sight is in great estimation, when a child happens to be born with two or more thumbs on one hand, it is always expected that he will distinguish himself by his sagacity in regard to future events, and that his prophetic abilities will be in proportion to the supply of his thumbs above the usual number."³⁸¹ Occasionally, disabilities signified that these individuals had contact with spirits or the otherworld, conferring on them both the disability and the supernatural ability at once.

As already established, second sight was a gift often associated with the fairies. This belief intersects with popular beliefs about disabilities, given the fact that encounters with the fairies were also sometimes known to leave people blind, mute, or without power in their bodies (which is often understood to signify paralysis).³⁸² In the Scottish ballad of Tam Lin, the fairy

³⁷⁸ Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters," 163.

³⁷⁹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 36.

³⁸⁰ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 262-263.

³⁸¹ James Beattie, "The Castle of Scepticism," in "Beattie's "The Castle of Scepticism": An Unpublished Allegory Against Hume, Voltaire, and Hobbes," ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Studies in English* 27, no. 1 (1948), 137.

³⁸² This motif appears in various witch trial records. See NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 254; NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v. It is also recorded in other early modern Scottish sources. See Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 68.

queen lamented her inability to fulfill her plan to blind Tam Lin before he left fairyland.³⁸³ Similarly, the ballad of Thomas Rymer recorded belief in the prohibition of speaking while in fairyland, rendering the abducted individual temporarily mute.³⁸⁴ Robert Kirk also described how fairies may strike people with a puff of wind and cause them to become blind or mute.³⁸⁵ A young boy in Orkney who wanted to watch the trows was threatened by them with blindness if he didn't look away.³⁸⁶ A Scottish broadside recorded the account of a man who reportedly had contact with a mermaid, and was struck mute while he was with her. The mermaid gave this man an accurate prophecy of the future, and after he returned home he fell ill and died.³⁸⁷ Accused witch Jonet Morison healed a fellow villager's daughter who was sick with an "unnatural disease" that caused her to be without power in her hand and foot, as well as speechless. Jonet diagnosed this disease as the result of a fairy blast.³⁸⁸ G.F. Black recorded the belief that, when a limb had lost its use, it was suspected that the fairies took away the good limb and left a wooden

³⁸³ "Tam Lin," 270-310.

³⁸⁴ "Thomas Rymer," in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vol. 1, ed. Francis James Child (Forgotten Books, 2007), 258-263.

³⁸⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 10-11.

³⁸⁶ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 27.

³⁸⁷ *Wonder of Wonders Being, A strange and wonderful Relation concerning a Mermaid that was seen and spoke with on the Cliff of Cromarry, near Inverness in Scotland, by a young gentleman, a Merchant, named Lauchland Mackintosh, who was tossed on the main Ocean for four Days and Nights. Together with an account of his wonderful Dream, and the strange Conversation he had with the Mermaid, and how he was preserved but died in five days after his Return to Inverness* ([Edinburgh?]: 1760).

³⁸⁸ Macphail, "Papers relating to witchcraft," 23.

log in its place.³⁸⁹ According to the trial records of Thomas Cors, to be struck mute or have one's limbs deprived of their vigor was referred to as "the phairie."³⁹⁰

Similarly, people who were believed to be changelings were sometimes attributed special powers. However, through their association with the fairies, changelings were often believed to be marked in some way, sometimes by physical or mental disability.³⁹¹ Francis Grose recorded that the term "changeling is used to signify one almost an idiot."³⁹² Adam Donald, also known as the "prophet of Bethelnie," was of such a large stature and build that he was believed to be a changeling, "supernatural in mind as well as in body."³⁹³ The North Berwick kirk session records described an accusation from one woman against another who called the accused witch a "fairy lady runt that the Devil rode on,"³⁹⁴ an ableist slur which was surely insulting on various levels. George Waldron's account of changeling belief in the Isle of Man described a changeling baby as "a poor, lean, withered, deformed Creature... it neither spoke, nor could stand or go, but seemed

³⁸⁹ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 36, 44. This belief is likely relevant to the Fairy Queen's threat against Tam Lin, when she claimed that she would have liked to remove his eyes and replace them with eyes of wood, effectively making him blind.

³⁹⁰ NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 223.

³⁹¹ For a thorough examination of the intersection between early modern changeling belief and disability, see Susan Schoon Eberly, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy," and Joyce Underwood Munro, "The Invisible Made Visible: The Fairy Changeling as a Folk Articulation of Failure to Thrive in Infants and Children," both in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narvaez (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

³⁹² Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 30.

³⁹³ Gordon Goodwin and Philip Carter, "Donald, Adam [called the Prophet of Bethelnie] (1703–1780), spiritualist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7797>.

³⁹⁴ David M. Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All: The Sourcebook of East Lothian Witchcraft* (Glasgow: The Grimsay Press, 2008), 70.

enervate in every Joint.”³⁹⁵ Waldron was also taken to see a child reputed to be a changeling, and claimed that though “nothing under Heaven could have a more beautiful Face... his Complexion was perfectly delicate, and he had the finest Hair in the World,” the child “was so far from being able to walk, or stand, that he could not so much as move any one Joint: his Limbs were vastly long for his Age, but smaller than an Infant’s of six months.”³⁹⁶ These examples illustrate that the connection between disability and second sight was also likely tied to the perceived relationship between disability, supernatural abilities, and the fairies.

Disability can cause an individual to be seen as a peripheral figure in society. However, some cultures have ways of “making room” for disability and liminality by contextualizing it through their own explanatory devices, such as the fairies. Historian Margo Todd has argued that fairy belief allowed Scottish culture to carve out a permissible space for outsiders and people with disabilities by using the fairies to explain why some people were different than others.³⁹⁷ Similarly, Susan Schoon Eberly and Joyce Underwood Munro have discussed the ways in which changeling and fairy belief may have overlapped with interpretations of disability and congenital disorders.³⁹⁸ In this way, fairy belief allowed people with disabilities to have a comprehensible and acceptable place in early modern Scottish society by explaining their disabilities as a result of a brush with the supernatural. Fairy belief even endowed them with certain special abilities

³⁹⁵ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 61.

³⁹⁶ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 57.

³⁹⁷ Margo Todd, “Fairies, Egyptians and Elders: Multiple Cosmologies in Post-Reformation Scotland,” in *The Impact of the European Reformation: Princes, Clergy, and People*, ed. Bridget Heal (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 204.

³⁹⁸ Eberly, “Fairies and the Folklore of Disability,” 227-250; Munro, “The Invisible Made Visible,” 251-283.

that permitted them to have livelihoods or societal roles as visionaries or practitioners of popular magic.

The powers associated with disability also led to the rise of practices that involved ritual silence, in hopes of gaining supernatural abilities through voluntary muteness. Descriptions of ritual silence appear in the trial records of Scottish practitioners of popular magic who were accused of witchcraft. Accused witch Isobell Haldane engaged in a ritual in which she went to a well without speaking and also returned in silence in order to fetch water to wash an ill child.³⁹⁹ Likewise, Marioun Grant described bringing south-running water to a client's house in silence, washing the ill individual with it, then casting the water from the house.⁴⁰⁰ Katherine Craigie attested to partaking in a ritual that involved walking around a loch and the four corners of the churchyard in silence. She also obtained sea water for this ritual, going back and forth to the ocean with the help of a man whom she had forbidden from speaking.⁴⁰¹ A Scottish witch trial record describes a charm to prevent misfortune against children. One has to take the child to the place where a certain herb grows, and gather the herb without speaking to anyone or meeting anybody along the way. Then, the herb is to be boiled and given to the child.⁴⁰² In line with these beliefs, Alesoun Pierson's familiar spirit always forbade her from speaking when she was among the fairies,⁴⁰³ as did Bessie Dunlop's familiar Thome Reid who told her she must not speak while

³⁹⁹ P. Hume Brown, ed. *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 2nd series, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1908), 354.

⁴⁰⁰ John Stuart, ed. *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, vol. 1 (Aberdeen: The Spalding Club, 1841), 171.

⁴⁰¹ Brown, *Register of the Privy Council*, 67-68.

⁴⁰² Macphail, "Papers relating to witchcraft," 9.

⁴⁰³ NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v.

visiting the “gude wychtis” in the court of Elfame.⁴⁰⁴ Presumably, this prohibition of speaking while among the fairies conferred a certain protection on the human visitor during his or her contact with the otherworld. In these various cases, it appears that ritual silence was believed to allow temporary access to the supernatural. This belief likely arose from the cultural understanding that people with disabilities, particularly the mute, had an affinity for supernatural abilities such as healing or second sight.

Ritual silence was also invoked in popular magical practices such as love divination. Francis Grose recorded a ritual during which the participants made what was called a “dumb cake,” baked on Midsummer’s Eve in silence, and afterwards the individuals went upstairs backwards and placed the cake under their pillows in hopes of dreaming of their future romantic partners. Similarly, a ritual existed for making a “dumb supper” in silence, in order to divine the identity of a future lover.⁴⁰⁵ George Sinclair claimed that some “too curious” women were in the custom of going to bed on All Hallow Even, without speaking to anyone, and after eating a cake made of soot in hope of dreaming of the man that they would one day marry.⁴⁰⁶ Beliefs that strongly associated second sight and disability likely gave rise to these various practices that hoped to temporarily confer supernatural knowledge through ritual silence.

⁴⁰⁴ NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r.

⁴⁰⁵ John Aubrey, *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, in *Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 207-208; Samuel P. Menefee, “‘Master and Servant’: A Divinatory Class Dream,” *Folklore* 99, no. 1 (1988), 91.

⁴⁰⁶ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 215.

Fairies and Bards

There is a notable intersection between second sight and the bardic profession in Celtic culture. Poets and bards, or “rhymers,” were believed to possess supernatural knowledge and sometimes second sight. This motif also intersects with the theme of disability, as blind poets and bards were believed to be especially inspired. Legendarily, half-blind Odin was a great magician whose blindness conferred on him the knowledge of the secret runes. He was also the god of poets and bards.⁴⁰⁷ The famous Scottish poet Ossian was reputed to be both blind and in possession of second sight.⁴⁰⁸ There is evidence that because of this belief system, blind children were trained to be harpers, pipers, and musicians in the Scottish Highlands, based on the assumption that they possessed musical talent as compensation for their blindness.⁴⁰⁹ There also appears to have been an association between fairies and musical or poetic talent, illustrating the relationship between second sight, fairies, bards, and disability in early modern Scottish beliefs about supernatural abilities.

Early modern sources indicate that there was a strong cultural association between second sight and bards, who were professional storytellers, poets, and musicians. John Aubrey recorded the belief that the bards, also known as “rimers,” were both poets and soothsayers.⁴¹⁰ Martin described a purported seer named Roderick, who for a time held great esteem on the

⁴⁰⁷ “Odin,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Odin-Norse-deity>.

⁴⁰⁸ Larrissy, “The Celtic Bard,” 43; Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century*, 44.

⁴⁰⁹ Larrissy, “The Celtic Bard,” 44, 50.

⁴¹⁰ BOD, MS Top.Gen.c.24-25, fol. 107v.

island of St. Kilda. Roderick was a poet, and was also believed to possess second sight.⁴¹¹

Similarly, the Petty Seer, also known as the Reverend John Morrison of Petty, was called “the bard” and was known for writing songs.⁴¹² Even the medieval saint Columba, who was reputed by some to have second sight,⁴¹³ studied under a bard and became a bard himself.⁴¹⁴ Walter Scott referred to the second sighted fairy boy of Leith as a “drummer to the elves.”⁴¹⁵ When interviewing the fairy boy, George Burton observed that the boy drummed his fingers on the table as he spoke: “I asked him, Whether he could beat a drum? To which he replied, Yes, sir, as well as any man in Scotland; for every Thursday night I beat all points to a sort of people that used to meet under yonder hill... a great company both of men and women, and they are entertained with many sorts of musick, besides my drum.”⁴¹⁶ These various accounts bring together the themes of second sight, fairies, and musical aptitude.

The most famous connection between second sight, poetry, musical talent, and the fairies comes through the legend of Thomas the Rhymer. The ballad of “Thomas Rymer” tells the tale of a man taken away to fairyland by the Queen of the Fairies. Before he is restored to the human

⁴¹¹ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 81.

⁴¹² Norman Macrae, ed. *Highland Second-Sight with Prophecies of Coinneach Odhar and the Seer of Petty* (Dingwall: George Souter, 1909), 129-130.

⁴¹³ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, and a voyage to the Hebrides 1772*, vol. 1 (Chester: John Monk, 1774), 278-279; John Trusler, *Chronology; or, the historian's vade-mecum*, vol. 1 (London: John Trusler and R. Baldwin, 1792), 64.

⁴¹⁴ Adamnan, *The Life of Saint Columba (Columb-Kille) AD 521-597: Founder of the Monastery of Iona and First Christian Missionary to the Pagan Tribes of North Britain*, trans. Wentworth Hayshe (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd, 1905), xv, xlvi.

⁴¹⁵ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 312.

⁴¹⁶ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 313.

world, he is given the dual gift of prophecy and poetry. The fairy queen's gifts are referred to as the abilities to "harp and carp," that is, the talents of music and storytelling—the specific purview of Scottish bards.⁴¹⁷ Folklorist Emily Lyle has argued that Thomas' gift of poetic ability was also explicitly linked with the gift of prophecy in the popular imagination.⁴¹⁸ The ballad of Thomas Rymer is associated with the historical figure Sir Thomas of Ercildoun, a Scottish laird who was famous for his prophetic abilities and from whom numerous folk prophecies were recorded.⁴¹⁹ Thomas of Ercildoun's historical presence is entirely intertwined with his status as a legendary prophet, and beliefs about his association with the fairies are hard to extricate from records of his life. The romance of "Tomas off Erseldoune" dates to about the year 1440,⁴²⁰ though his reputation as a prophet dates to at least the late 13th or early 14th century.⁴²¹ His prophecies and legend maintained popularity throughout the early modern period, even during

⁴¹⁷ "Thomas Rymer," 258-263.

⁴¹⁸ Emily Lyle, *Fairies and Folk: Approaches to the Scottish Ballad Tradition* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), 28.

⁴¹⁹ Cyril Edwards, "Thomas of Erceldoune [called Thomas the Rhymer]," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-8833>; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 146-150. See also James A.H. Murray, ed. *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London: The Early English Text Society, 1875). Thomas appears as "Thome Rimor de Ercildun" in one medieval charter (see BL Harley 3960, fol. 109a), and as "Thomas de Ercildoun, filius et heres Thome Rymour de Ercildoun" in another (see NLS, Adv.MS.34.4.1). He is also associated with the Middle English romance *Sir Tristrem*, in which he is named as the source of the tale. See NLS, Adv.MS.19.2.1, fol. 1.

⁴²⁰ Cowan, "Discovery of the Future," 14.

⁴²¹ Lyle, *Fairies and Folk*, 18; Emily Lyle, ed. *Scottish Ballads* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, Ltd, 1994), 9. Prophecies from the fairy queen and attributed to Thomas appear in BL, Arundel 57, fol. 8; BL, Cotton Vitellius, E.x; BL, Harley 2253, fol. 127; BL, Lansdowne 762; BL, Sloane 1802; BL, Sloane 2578.

the height of the Enlightenment.⁴²² Thomas' story is also attached to the legend of a sleeping messianic warrior, who will supposedly awake and return to Scotland, though Thomas reportedly still appears in disguise to some people from time to time.⁴²³ Beliefs about Thomas as a legendary prophet, poet, and second sighted person inspired other popular prophets, who hoped to style themselves in his likeness.⁴²⁴ Thomas' legend signifies that great musical talent was itself viewed as supernatural, and therefore could also be attributed to spiritual agents such as the fairies. Furthermore, Thomas' poetic and musical gifts were believed to be paired with second sight, orienting these various supernatural abilities within the wider field of Scottish fairy belief.

III: Angels

The spirit world of early modern Scottish belief was populated by more than just fairies. In some second sight accounts, spirits that were interpreted as angels also appeared to visionaries or endowed them with supernatural knowledge and abilities. Angels were a type of benevolent spirit created by God, and they mostly dwelt in heaven, though some people believed that they also carried messages from God or fulfilled his divine will on earth. Reformed doctrine in Scotland denied belief in the active role of angels in the human realm, and formally angels were

⁴²² Cowan, "Discovery of the Future," 11.

⁴²³ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 148; MacInnes, "The Seer in Gaelic Tradition," 22. A much later tale, dating about 1861, relates how Thomas blinded a woman's perceptive eye through which she had seen and recognized him. See Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 403. This is almost certainly related to the legends of fairies blinding humans in their perceptive eyes. See the section in this chapter on fairies and disability.

⁴²⁴ Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden*, 133-137.

no longer considered spiritual intercessors.⁴²⁵ Despite the fact that orthodox Protestants rejected the idea that angels still appeared to people, some early modern individuals claimed association with familiar angelic spirits, and belief in angelic intervention persisted in some aspects of elite and popular culture. Accounts of angelic apparitions in post-Reformation Scotland were likely a remnant of Catholic devotion, and therefore demonstrate the existence of a certain degree of confessional conflict among a “reformed” population. However, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the identity of a spirit could be highly ambiguous, and the interpretation of apparitions as angels was not always decisive.

Some spirits described by early modern people during accounts of second sight may have appeared to resemble angelic spirits, but were instead interpreted as fairies or demons for a variety of reasons. For example, in the ballad of Thomas Rymer, Thomas first hails the beautiful woman he encounters as the “Queen of Heaven.” However, she corrects him and tells him that she is simply “the queen of fair Elfland.”⁴²⁶ Similarly, Edward Poeton’s treatise *The Winnowing of White Witchcraft* described a man who had regular contact with a familiar spirit who he claimed was “an holy Angell, which God had geven him for his guardian, guide, and conductor.”⁴²⁷ This same man supposedly also concurrently believed that “his famyliar was a greate prince of the Fayries.”⁴²⁸ Owen Davies has argued that fairies likely fulfilled the role of angels in popular magic, as both were sources of healing and inspiration that could be

⁴²⁵ Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 329-330.

⁴²⁶ “Thomas Rymer,” 258.

⁴²⁷ BL, Sloane 1954, fol. 34.

⁴²⁸ BL, Sloane 1954, fol. 36.

benevolent.⁴²⁹ Davies also claimed that fairies may have actually been a form of angel in popular belief, as fairies were sometimes believed to be the spirits of the ancient dead, or fallen angels that were not evil enough to fall all the way down to hell.⁴³⁰ This is certainly in line with Robert Kirk's explanation that fairies were "of a midle nature betwixt man and Angell."⁴³¹ Similarly, William Stewart referred to fairies as "unhappy angels whose diabolical deeds produced their expulsion from paradise," and when cast down, they landed on earth.⁴³² Robert Kirk even speculated that someday, humans would have regular correspondence with the world of benevolent spirits, such as had already occurred in the accounts of the voice in Glenluce (a well-publicized haunting) and stories of "spirits that wander sporting and troubling houses." Kirk argued that such encounters were the work of "invisible good angels,"⁴³³ who plausibly appeared to men's sight, since "Abraham conversd with visibl angels, so others."⁴³⁴ These examples illustrate that early modern accounts of popular belief in angelic spirits were often muddled with descriptions of other types of spirits.

Orthodox Protestants held the belief that the age of miracles had ended, and as such

⁴²⁹ Owen Davies, "Angels in Elite and Popular Magic, 1650-1790," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, eds. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302.

⁴³⁰ Davies, "Angels in Elite and Popular Magic," 302.

⁴³¹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 1.

⁴³² Stewart, *Popular Superstitions*, 39-40.

⁴³³ EUL, Dc.8.116, fols. 112v-113.

⁴³⁴ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

angels no longer appeared to humans.⁴³⁵ In *Daemonologie*, King James VI plainly argued that “all miracles, visions, prophecies and appearances of angels or good spirits are ceased.”⁴³⁶ Therefore, “all spirits that appear in these forms are evil.”⁴³⁷ In this way, Protestants argued that angelic appearances should be interpreted as demonic tricks, since the actions of angels were not discernible to human eyes.⁴³⁸ Despite this, some early modern people still believed they had contact with angelic spirits. John Dee, advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, expended a considerable amount of effort attempting to contact angels and speak with them in holy languages.⁴³⁹ Belief and interest in guardian angels surged during the early modern period, as the Catholic Reformation engaged in its own move towards personal devotion and mysticism.⁴⁴⁰ Debates about the existence of guardian angels in Scotland also illustrate that belief in divine apparitions still had a place in both the popular and elite imaginations of Protestants.⁴⁴¹ Early modern

⁴³⁵ Peter Marshall, “Deceptive Appearances: Ghosts and Reformers in Elizabethan and Jacobean England,” in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, eds. Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 198.

⁴³⁶ James VI, *Demonology*, 411-412.

⁴³⁷ James VI, *Demonology*, 409.

⁴³⁸ Alexandra Walsham, “Catholic Reformation and the Cult of Angels in Early Modern England,” in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, ed. Joan Raymond (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 278.

⁴³⁹ Stephen Clucas, “False Illuding Spirits & Cownterfeiting Deuills: John Dee’s Angelic Conversations and Religious Anxiety,” in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, ed. Joan Raymond (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 151-167.

⁴⁴⁰ Walsham, “Catholic Reformation and the Cult of Angels,” 274.

⁴⁴¹ Martha McGill, “Angels, Devils, and Discernment in Early Modern Scotland,” in *Knowing Demons, Knowing Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Michelle D. Brock, Richard Raiswell, and David R. Winter (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 248-250.

discussions of angels around the deathbed and the *ars moriendi* also saw increased popularity.⁴⁴² The authors of numerous grimoires recorded invocations of angelic spirits, as elite magicians hoped to see angels and make use of their powers.⁴⁴³ These examples demonstrate that belief in angelic apparitions was not eradicated, and rather continued to be influential within early modern culture in various ways.

Some practitioners of magic claimed their inspiration and knowledge came directly from angelic spirits. A book of charms by "dyvers authors" kept at the Bodleian Library contains "a charme sent to King Charles by the Angel Gabriel to charm all," and claims that this charm can cure many diseases including canker, fistula, and gout.⁴⁴⁴ Similarly, another early modern grimoire contains "a perfect prayer revealed and taucht by the Angels of God, for the saifguard of the soull of man."⁴⁴⁵ In his commonplace book, Robert Kirk speculated that some people's ability to cure the king's evil may be "by the revelation of an angel to let see that God can cure diseases."⁴⁴⁶ Goodwin Wharton claimed that he knew a man who had regular converse with an angelic spirit, and that "it was not difficult to procure a familiar conversation with a good angel."⁴⁴⁷ While some people may have readily interpreted these spirits as fairies or demons, the authors of these texts plainly believed that humans could have benevolent correspondence with

⁴⁴² Walsham, "Catholic Reformation and the Cult of Angels," 274.

⁴⁴³ BL, Add.MS.36674, fol. 85v; BOD, MS.e.Mus.173, fol. 72; BOD, MS Rawlinson D 253, fols. 66-67, 122; BL, Sloane 3851, fols. 35, 39, 40; NRS, GD188/25/1/3, fols. 32, 162, 221, 222, 225.

⁴⁴⁴ BOD, MS.e.Mus.243, fols. 11v-12.

⁴⁴⁵ BOD, MS Rawlinson D 252, fol. 144.

⁴⁴⁶ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 9.

⁴⁴⁷ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 18.

angels.

Mentions of angels appear in some descriptions of second sight. However, at times, these angelic spirits were ambiguous in nature and descriptions of these beings overlap with belief in fairies, familiar spirits, and doubles or co-walkers. Robert Kirk's theory of second sight held that each person had a double who accompanied him or her throughout life. However, this spirit was actually a fairy that resembled the individual in all ways. In his treatise on the topic, Kirk claimed that these fairy spirits that were seen by the second sighted were sometimes mistaken for guardian angels.⁴⁴⁸ St. Columba, who was regarded by some to be second sighted, had numerous recorded visitations from angels,⁴⁴⁹ and he also believed that angels accompanied him everywhere that he went.⁴⁵⁰ This conflation of co-walkers and guardian angels also appeared in records of the second sighted Duncan Campbell, who often referenced his relationship with his familiar spirit, a "good genius or guardian angel."⁴⁵¹ Indeed, Campbell believed that all people were accompanied by both a good genius and a bad genius their entire lives, an assertion that had echoes of belief in both co-walkers and familiar spirits.⁴⁵² Campbell characterized his second sight ability as a particular receptiveness to the signs of "those ministring Spirits, which the Divine Goodness sets over us as Guardians."⁴⁵³ Campbell's descriptions of his experiences with his good genius, who he also referred to as "the friendly demon," further emphasized the

⁴⁴⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 187-223.

⁴⁵⁰ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 190-192.

⁴⁵¹ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 249.

⁴⁵² Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 118.

⁴⁵³ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 63.

ambiguity of this being.⁴⁵⁴ This spirit was supposedly a “pretty youth” with a little bell in his hand, and he was always accompanied by a lamb. Campbell's angel would come and visit him at regular appointments, and the seer swore that "I would not lose their company for the whole world; for they and I are mighty familiar together, and the boy tells me everything."⁴⁵⁵ Campbell attested that his “good angel”⁴⁵⁶ revealed many secrets to him across the years, including how to cure his illnesses using a lodestone.⁴⁵⁷ In this way, Campbell’s description of his second sight and spiritual encounters blended together traditions of belief in angels, co-walkers, and familiar spirits, all of whom accompanied individual seers and provided supernatural information and abilities.

Other theories of second sight also permitted for the second sighted to be informed by angelic spirits. John Fraser’s *Deuteroscopia* described how second sighted people were capable of foreseeing disaster or death, and asserted “there may be visions of this kind administered by good or bad angels.”⁴⁵⁸ For Fraser, the distinction between visions created by good or bad angels required discernment and knowledge of whether the visionary was a pious and sensible person.⁴⁵⁹ Ultimately, he concluded that it was possible that “good Angels may forwarne this

⁴⁵⁴ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 245.

⁴⁵⁵ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 46-47.

⁴⁵⁶ Eliza Haywood, *The Dumb Projector: being a surprising account of a trip to Holland made by Mr. Duncan Campbell, with the manner of his reception and behavior there. As also the various and diverting occurrences that happened on his departure* (London: W. Ellis, J. Roberts, Mrs. Bilingsley, A. Dod, and J. Fox, 1725), 21, 23.

⁴⁵⁷ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 249.

⁴⁵⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195.

⁴⁵⁹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

way, as well as by other Signs and tokens.”⁴⁶⁰ Janet Douglas’ activities as a second sighted witch-finder caused a considerable amount of speculation, and Robert Knox theorized that she received her knowledge from correspondence with the angels.⁴⁶¹ However, according to some demonologists, any prediction communicated by angels ought to be viewed with suspicion. King James argued that neither the Devil nor angels could predict the future, though the angels sometimes possessed knowledge “by looking upon God as in a mirror.”⁴⁶² This demonological approach was likely applied to the testimony of accused witch Andro Man, who claimed his familiar spirit was named Christsonday, and was both an angel and God’s godson. Christsonday gave Andro the gift of second sight, and he regularly appeared to Andro in the form of an angel in white clothes.⁴⁶³ Despite this attestation, Andro was convicted of diabolical witchcraft in 1598.

Various early modern Scottish Christian visionaries whose accounts contained second sight motifs, such as the trance experience and access to hidden knowledge, also mentioned angels. Reflecting on his childhood experiences with second sight, Duncan Campbell claimed that his angelic familiar used to visit him during trance experiences.⁴⁶⁴ During these encounters, the angel “tells me everything, that gets me my reputation among the ladies and nobility.”⁴⁶⁵ Christian visionary Jonet Fraser’s account described that she first entered a trance and lay “as

⁴⁶⁰ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

⁴⁶¹ Law, *Memorialls*, lxxvi.

⁴⁶² James VI, *Demonology*, 360.

⁴⁶³ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 120-121, 124.

⁴⁶⁴ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 45.

⁴⁶⁵ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 46.

dead” before she saw the angel Gabriel and received prophetic messages.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, the account of the visions of Donald Macgrigor’s daughter claimed that she fell into trances regularly, in which she encountered angels who answered her questions and gave her spiritual instruction.⁴⁶⁷ Christian visionary Grizell Love’s experience with the supernatural first involved serious illness, in which she looked “sick unto death,” but then she fell into a trance in which she was taken up by two angels in “long whyt robes.”⁴⁶⁸ These angels revealed future events to her, including details of the apocalypse. However, while Grizell wanted to believe that her vision was divinely inspired, she was also scared and apprehensive because she knew that Satan was capable of appearing as an angel of light.⁴⁶⁹ These experiences illustrate that belief in angelic spirits did intersect with early modern second sight beliefs. However, Protestant skepticism about the intervention of angels in earthly matters also created suspicion about visionaries who claimed contact with angels. After all, angels and demons were closely related beings, and demons were widely believed to be adept at deception. Because of this, a number of spirit beings that appear in second sight accounts were also interpreted as demons.

IV: Demons

Unlike the case with angels, both Protestants and Catholics agreed that demons appeared

⁴⁶⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 8, 12.

⁴⁶⁷ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 2-2v, 7-9.

⁴⁶⁸ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 108v.

⁴⁶⁹ NLS, Wod.Qu,LXXII, fol. 110.

to people. Demons were believed to be fallen angels and evil, deceitful spirits. Their intentions were never good, and they were capable of disguising themselves in various forms for deceptive purposes. Fairies were interpreted as demonic spirits by orthodox Protestants, as were ghosts and various other apparitions. Belief in a relationship between fairies and demons also seems to have existed on the popular level, though it is possible that this was due to the influence of demonological opinions. Because demons engaged in a wide variety of activities in the human world, they did not necessarily only appear to second sighted people. Anyone could see a demon if a demon chose to appear to him or her. For this reason, unambiguous apparitions of demons appear less frequently in second sight accounts. However, as is discussed more fully in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, various spirits that appeared in second sight accounts were sometimes demonized and interpreted as evil spirits by religious authorities. This interpretation is the basis for James Garden's declaration that some people were believed to possess second sight "by converse with those Demons, we call Fairies."⁴⁷⁰

For Protestants, the relationship between fairies and second sight was highly problematic. According to orthodox Protestant doctrine, fairies did not exist. As such, any spirit that claimed to be a fairy was plainly a demon in disguise. This logic underpins many Scottish witch trials that refer to humans having converse with fairies, which were subsequently interpreted as demons by religious and state authorities. In *The Winnowing of White Witchcraft*, Edward Poeton described a man who believed he had a relationship with an angelic spirit who was also a fairy prince.⁴⁷¹ However, the author of this text had his own interpretation, claiming that "for every holy angell

⁴⁷⁰ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

⁴⁷¹ BL, Sloane 1954, fols. 34, 36.

that appeared, there would likewise a devill appeare in the same forme.”⁴⁷² Similarly, the *Malleus Maleficarum* argued that fairies were demons that belonged to a lower order of damned angels.⁴⁷³ King James VI claimed that demons only pretended to be fairies to gain the trust of humans, so that they could insidiously deceive and destroy mankind.⁴⁷⁴ This orthodox opinion that fairies were actually demonic spirits was well represented in early modern Scottish legislation, demonological sources, and records of church discipline.

The educated belief that fairies were demons may have even infiltrated the realm of popular discourse and legend, if it did not exist there already. The young Scottish Christian visionary known only as Donald Macgrigor’s daughter was prone to falling into trances, in which she encountered angelic spirits and received prophetic abilities. However, “several of her Neighbours said to her that she was taken away with the Fairies & that it was but the Devil yet that was dealing with her.”⁴⁷⁵ The fact that this local gossip seemed to associate the Devil with the fairies indicates that demonological interpretations of fairies had gained a foothold among some groups of people in early modern Scotland. A relationship between fairies and demons also undergirded the popular belief that fairies paid a tithe to hell of one human soul either annually, or every seven years. By this logic, fairyland was a form of satellite state or colonial province of Hell, and the fairies were compelled to pay a tribute or tax to their higher authority, Satan. This belief appears in the ballad of Tam Lin, who pleads with his lover to aid him in his escape from

⁴⁷² BL, Sloane 1954, fol. 38.

⁴⁷³ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 296.

⁴⁷⁴ James VI, *Demonology*, 416.

⁴⁷⁵ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 12-12v.

the fairy realm before he is offered as a tithe:

And pleasant is the fairy land,
But, an eerie tale to tell,
Ay at the end of seven years
We pay a tiend to hell;
I am sae fair and fu o flesh,
I'm feard it be mysel.⁴⁷⁶

King James VI made reference to this belief in *Daemonologie* when he described the fairy lifestyle and social structure, how they had a court with a king and queen, as well as “a teind and duty, as it were, of all goods.”⁴⁷⁷ Walter Scott explained that “The reason assigned for this kidnapping of the human race, so peculiar to the elfin people, is said to be that they were under a necessity of paying to the infernal regions a yearly tribute out of their population, which they were willing to defray by delivering up to the prince of these regions the children of the human race, rather than their own.”⁴⁷⁸ Belief in the fairy tithe can also be located in Scottish witch trial records. Accused witch Alesoun Pierson’s familiar spirit William Sympsoune was the ghost of a dead man who claimed he had been carried away by the fairies. Because he cared for Alesoun, William would appear and warn Alesoun before the fairies arrived in a whirlwind, and he also taught her how to bless herself “that scho be nocht tane away with thame agane; for the teynd of thame gaise ewerie zeir to hell.”⁴⁷⁹ While the conviction that fairies were actually demons appeared to be largely an elite, demonological opinion, belief in a relationship between fairyland

⁴⁷⁶ “Tam Lin,” 272.

⁴⁷⁷ James VI, *Demonology*, 418-419.

⁴⁷⁸ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 109.

⁴⁷⁹ NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v.

and Hell can be identified in records of popular culture.⁴⁸⁰ While it is possible that these beliefs represent demonological impositions onto popular understandings of the spirit world, it is also possible that belief in an overlap between fairies and demons also existed within popular or oral tradition.

As far as second sight was concerned, demonological theory held that demons were responsible for providing supernatural knowledge to practitioners of magic. Therefore, second sighted people were interpreted as diabolical diviners and witches, particularly those who claimed contact with fairy beings. John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia* entertained the possibility that second sight visions and predictions were the product of demons who deluded men into seeing future things that later turned out to be true.⁴⁸¹ King James VI claimed that the Devil could foretell some things to come, but only in part and not all, and that these half-truths were passed on to witches.⁴⁸² A number of accused witches who were consulted because of their reputation for having second sight were also prosecuted because of their contact with fairies, as well as the access to hidden knowledge that their ability granted. Because orthodox Protestants interpreted all appearances of fairies (and most apparitions) as contact with demons, we should be wary of sources on second sight that immediately assert that that the second sighted saw demonic spirits. While some spirits that second sighted people saw were ambiguous, few individuals claimed that they had willfully allied with demons.

⁴⁸⁰ The perceived relationship between fairyland and Hell may have also been due to the belief that both were potential destinations for souls in the afterlife. See the next section on ghosts for more on the overlap of fairyland and the realm of the dead.

⁴⁸¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

⁴⁸² James VI, *Demonology*, 360.

V: Ghosts

Ghosts were believed to be apparitions of dead humans, appearing to the living. Like fairies, ghostly apparitions were interpreted as demons by orthodox Protestants. However, some visionaries were reluctant to interpret apparitions of seemingly human spirits as demonic, and so belief in ghosts persisted. Some ghosts had functional relationships with human beings, particularly as the dead were believed to have access to supernatural knowledge outside the reach of the living. Claims of association with ghosts were common among practitioners of popular magic, who sometimes had familiar spirits of various forms. As second sighted people were operating within this traditional belief system as well, some spirits described in second sight accounts were interpreted as ghosts. The relationship between second sight and ghosts is strengthened by the existing belief that second sight was associated with the fairies, some of whom also resembled ghosts or dwelt among the dead. Because ghosts were subject to interpretation as demons or fairies, they also frequently eluded categorization.

From an orthodox Protestant perspective, ghosts did not appear to humans and any apparition that claimed it was a dead human spirit was actually a demon in disguise. Catholics had believed in and actually emphasized the existence of ghosts, since ghosts affirmed the existence of an afterlife, a system of universal justice, and the doctrine of Purgatory.⁴⁸³ However, Protestants denied that Purgatory was a potential destination after death, and so any ghost that appeared was certainly a lying spirit.⁴⁸⁴ The dead were either in heaven or in hell; if they were in

⁴⁸³ R.C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead & Cultural Transformation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 51-81.

⁴⁸⁴ Finucane, *Ghosts*, 91-92.

heaven, they would have no desire to leave and if they were in hell, they would not have the option. Because of the Protestant demonization of ghosts, any prediction of the future or access to hidden knowledge granted by a dead human spirit was immediately regarded as suspicious. Scottish reformer John Calvin plainly condemned anyone who took counsel from the dead, claiming that there could be no true commerce between the living and deceased.⁴⁸⁵ The Protestant opinion of ghosts meant that such apparitions were liable of being interpreted as demons by authorities, though some individuals still insisted that ghosts appeared to people.

Some practitioners of popular magic claimed they had relationships with ghosts, and believed that they gained knowledge or supernatural powers through this association. Though they are not in the majority, some people also believed that the second sighted could converse with ghosts and obtain knowledge from them. The number of sources that took this perspective expands when we consider that fairies were sometimes considered to be the dead, or among the dead. English cunning woman Mary Parish had a long-term working relationship with the spirit of a man she had met while she was in prison, and she arranged to continue seeing him after he was executed.⁴⁸⁶ Mary angrily discharged this man's spirit after he failed to inform her of a maid's intentions to rob her.⁴⁸⁷ In the years leading up to her death, Mary promised her client Goodwin Wharton that she would eventually become his familiar spirit.⁴⁸⁸ Some relevant

⁴⁸⁵ John Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin upon the Fifth Booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*, in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A documentary history*, 2nd ed., eds. Alan Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 269.

⁴⁸⁶ BL, Add.MS.20006, fols. 31-32.

⁴⁸⁷ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 64.

⁴⁸⁸ BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 77.

accounts come from individuals who were tried for witchcraft, illustrating the impact of demonological interpretations of ghosts. Accused Scottish witch Alesoun Pierson also had a familiar ghost, named William Sympsoune, and she claimed he had been her acquaintance when he was alive.⁴⁸⁹ Bessie Dunlop also knew the spirit of a dead man named Thome Reid, who was capable of predicting when others would die or where someone's stolen goods were.⁴⁹⁰ Bessie recognized that Thome was a spirit because he came and went through a small hole in a dyke "nor ony erdlie man culd haif gane throw."⁴⁹¹ When Andro Man met with his familiar angel who gave him knowledge of the future, there were also various dead men carried along in his company.⁴⁹² Janet Boyman was able to predict forthcoming death with the help of a dead woman named Maggie Dewand, who had also taught her healing arts.⁴⁹³ A number of these spirits, however, also appeared to have been fairies or had association with the fairies.

There appears to have been a significant overlap between the realm of the dead and fairyland in Scottish popular belief.⁴⁹⁴ According to some people, fairyland was a possible destination for human souls after death. The ballad of King Orfeo reworks the myth of Orpheus

⁴⁸⁹ NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v.

⁴⁹⁰ NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r.

⁴⁹¹ NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r. Diane Purkiss interpreted Thome's exit into the earth as an indication of his status as both a fairy and a dead person who lived in a mound. See Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden*, 108.

⁴⁹² Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

⁴⁹³ NRS, JC26/1/67; NRS, JC40/1.

⁴⁹⁴ See K.M. Briggs, "Fairies and the Realms of the Dead," *Folklore* 81, no. 2 (1970): 81-96; K.M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 117-145; Goodare, "Boundaries of the Fairy Realm," 139-170; Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden*, 102-104.

and Eurydice within a Scottish cultural context. The underworld that Eurydice is swept away to is fairyland, while her captors are simultaneously both the host of the dead and the court of the fairies.⁴⁹⁵ Several popular ballads also feature the “three roads” motif, in which the protagonist is shown the three roads to three possible afterlives: heaven, hell, and fairyland.⁴⁹⁶ Historians Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan have argued that there is likely a relationship between the Wild Hunt (a procession of the dead) and the Fairy Rade that rode out at night.⁴⁹⁷ Traveler Thomas Pennant related the story of a “poor visionary” who was suddenly transported through the air and

found himself surrounded by a crowd of men and women, many of whom he knew to have been dead some years, and who appeared to him skimming over the tops of the unbended corn, and mingling together like bees going to hive: that they spoke an unknown language, and with a hollow sound: that they very roughly pushed him to and fro; but on his uttering the name of God, all vanished but a female spirit, who seizing him by the shoulder, obliged him to promise an assignation, at that very hour, that day sevenight: that he then found that his hair was all tied in double knots, and that he had almost lost the use of his speech.⁴⁹⁸

While these spirits were described as being the ghosts of dead men and women, they also had some fairy characteristics. The ghosts dispersed when they heard the name of God, as fairies were believed to do,⁴⁹⁹ and an encounter with them also struck the visionary mute. The spirit’s demand for an assignation with the visionary also resembles accounts of people who are caught up in fairy processions, and subsequently summoned out on certain nights to join the fairy folk.

⁴⁹⁵ “King Orfeo,” 190-191.

⁴⁹⁶ “Thomas Rymer,” 258-263; “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice,” 311-312.

⁴⁹⁷ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 62.

⁴⁹⁸ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 67-68.

⁴⁹⁹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 13; NLS, MS 3932, fol. 37v.

Some people who worked with fairies or ghosts readily recognized the ambiguity between these two classes of beings. Accused witch Elspeth Reoch had an encounter with a man in black who “callit him selff ane farie man quha wes sumtyme her kinsman callit Johne Stewart quha wes slane be McKy at the doun going of the soone And therfor nather deid nor leiving bot wald ever go betuix heaven and the earth.”⁵⁰⁰ While Elspeth attested that this spirit was a “fairy man,” he was simultaneously her dead kinsman. Similarly, Bessie Dunlop's familiar ghost Thome Reid told her that his mistress was the queen of the fairies, and that she had sent him to wait upon Bessie and provide her with aid.⁵⁰¹ Bessie once saw Thome going in the churchyard of Dalrye, where the dead are buried, and he also told her that the Laird of Auchinskeyth was riding with the fair folk, though Bessie knew that this man had died nine years before. Thome also took Bessie to meet “the gude wychitis” that were in the court of Elfame and though the fairies desired Bessie to go with them, she refused.⁵⁰² Alesoun Pierson's familiar ghost William Sympsoune claimed that he had been carried away by the fairies out of middle earth, and so he taught Alesoun how to bless herself and thus prevent being caught up in the fairy whirlwind.⁵⁰³ Janet Boyman learned her craft from the ghost of a dead woman named Maggie Dewand, though Janet also attested that she had acquaintances among the fairy folk, and could heal diseases that

⁵⁰⁰ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189.

⁵⁰¹ NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r. This belief that a human ghost could act as a liaison between humans and fairies seems to have existed in England as well. Magic practitioner Mary Parish had a ghost familiar named George, who was a man she knew when he was alive. George acted as a mediator between Mary and the fairies, and he spoke to the fairy folk on her behalf. See BL, Add.MS.20006, fol. 69.

⁵⁰² NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r.

⁵⁰³ NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104-105v.

were caused by fairies.⁵⁰⁴ Andro Man's angelic spirit Christsonday not only rode with the procession of the dead, but also often appeared with the queen of the fairies and Thomas Rymer.⁵⁰⁵ Because of the prevalent ambiguity between ghosts and fairy spirits, apparitions of the dead do feature in some second sight accounts.

Some assertions by second sight theorists specifically blend descriptions of fairies and ghosts, further problematizing attempts to see the two as distinct within the system of second sight belief. John Beaumont defined a second sighted individual as "one that converses with ghosts, spirits, or the fairy folks."⁵⁰⁶ Likewise, Robert Kirk claimed "the Seers avouch that severals who go to the Sith's... before the natural period of their lyf expyr, do frequentlie appear to them,"⁵⁰⁷ and justified this belief by asserting that "Jesus denyd not appearing ghosts, but said they had no flesh & bones as wee."⁵⁰⁸ In this way, belief in ghosts was incorporated into theories about second sighted people as individuals who regularly had contact with the spirit world. As people who were privy to the operations of the spiritual realm, it was common for second sighted people to see not only the spirits of the dead, but also omens of forthcoming death and wraiths.

VI: Death Portents

As death prognostication was a prominent aspect of second sight, it is not surprising that

⁵⁰⁴ NRS, JC26/1/67; NRS, JC40/1.

⁵⁰⁵ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

⁵⁰⁶ Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 84.

⁵⁰⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 54-55.

⁵⁰⁸ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

death portents of various forms came to be associated with second sight belief. Various death portents associated with second sight have already been mentioned in this dissertation, such as seers' visions of corpses or funeral processions, seeing specters in winding sheets, seeing people shrink and then grow again, or seeing the soaked specters of people soon to drown. Other common portents involved seeing daggers or arrows sticking out of the breasts of people who were soon to die,⁵⁰⁹ seeing ropes around the necks of men who would be hanged,⁵¹⁰ seeing blood on men who would soon suffer violence,⁵¹¹ or seeing headless apparitions.⁵¹² However, these were not the only death omens that were believed to be seen by the second sighted. These portents often required interpretation by seers, illustrating the significance of culture to an understanding of second sight and apparitions presaging death.

Among various omens witnessed by the second sighted were glowing lights associated with impending death. These lights had various names, including "corpse candles," "ignis fatuus," or "will o' wisp." Edward Lhuyd claimed that second sighted men saw people who were soon to die in proximity to "a light like the light of the glow-worm."⁵¹³ Martin Martin called

⁵⁰⁹ John Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, in *Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 125; Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 191; Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters," 161; Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 100-101.

⁵¹⁰ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

⁵¹¹ Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 54.

⁵¹² Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 125; John Evelyn, *Memoirs of John Evelyn, Esq FRS: comprising his diary, from 1641 to 1705-6, and a selection of his familiar letters*, ed. William Bray (London: F. Warne, 1871), 485; Ferriar, *An Essay towards a Theory*, 65-66; *The St. James surprizing and a frightful Apparition/ Being a fearful and terrible Account of a wonderful Vision that appeared at St. James's Park, near St. James's House on Saturday Night, being the 13th of January 1722* ([London?]: 1722); Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 3, 264.

⁵¹³ Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 54.

them “corps-candles”⁵¹⁴ or “dead-mens lights,” and told the story of a man who knew that thirteen sailors had been lost in a violent storm because he saw thirteen lights come into the churchyard.⁵¹⁵ This belief was also recorded on the Isle of Man, where William Sacheverell discussed a clerk of a parish who commonly foresaw people’s deaths, often through witnessing apparitions of funeral rites or lights that presaged death.⁵¹⁶ The memoirs of Matthias d’Amour described the islanders in the Hebrides as famous for their second sight, and related the tale of a second sighted servant who correctly predicted a death in a family after seeing a flame of fire come out of the sea and rest over a certain house.⁵¹⁷ Corpse candles or ignis fatuus are also discussed in John Fraser’s treatise on second sight,⁵¹⁸ Thomas Pennant’s description of his tour in Scotland,⁵¹⁹ Anne MacVicar Grant’s *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland*,⁵²⁰ and G.F. Black’s *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*.⁵²¹ Interest in corpse candles even extended to early modern scientists or naturalists, who hypothesized that the lights could be the

⁵¹⁴ This term was also used by Increase Mather. See Mather, *A further account of the tryals of the New-England witches*, 13.

⁵¹⁵ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 313.

⁵¹⁶ William Sacheverell, *An Account of the Isle of Man* (London: J. Hartley, 1702), 14.

⁵¹⁷ Matthias d’Amour, *Memoirs of Mr Matthias d’Amour*, ed. Paul Rodgers (London: Longman, 1836), 135-136.

⁵¹⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 194.

⁵¹⁹ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 122.

⁵²⁰ Anne MacVicar Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811), 260-261.

⁵²¹ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 162.

result of insects, vapors, or phosphorus.⁵²²

Sometimes, death portents appeared in other forms that also required interpretation by seers. Martin Martin recorded the belief that seeing sparks fall from fires onto a person's arm or breast indicated that a dead child would soon be seen in that person's arms.⁵²³ Martin later claimed that a seer accurately predicted the death of a child by this means.⁵²⁴ Another death portent that appeared to be less frequently associated with second sight was the apparition of a black dog or a little rough dog.⁵²⁵ Theophilus Insulanus described the apparition of a "mighty black dog" that preceded the death of a Cardinal.⁵²⁶ Robert Kirk also argued that the "deaths Messenger" sometimes appeared "as a little rough dog; and if crossed, & conjur'd in tim will be pacified by the death of any other creature instead of the sick Man."⁵²⁷ Because belief in death portents was so strongly associated with prognostication of death, one acknowledged aspect of second sight was the ability to see and interpret death omens. As some second sighted people were also practitioners of popular magic, part of their repertoire was the ability to take sickness off of one person and cast it onto another being (as described by Kirk), thereby preserving the lives of their clients. In this way, second sighted people may have been considered to be both diagnosticians and preventers of death.

⁵²² William Derham, "Of the meteor called the ignis fatuus, from observation made in England, by the Reverend Mr. W. Derham, FRS and others in Italy, communicated by Sir Tho. Dereham, Bart. FRS," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 36, no. 411 (1730): 204-214.

⁵²³ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 33; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 304.

⁵²⁴ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 321.

⁵²⁵ Dalzell, *Darker Superstitions*, 182.

⁵²⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 56-57.

⁵²⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 17.

VII: Wraiths

Wraiths were considered to be highly ambiguous spirits, located somewhere between ghosts and death portents. While a ghost was the spirit of someone who was already dead, a wraith was the apparition of someone who was soon to die. Wraiths appear often in discussions of second sight, as death prognostication was an aspect of the ability. Wraiths could simply be recognizable apparitions of individuals, but sometimes wraiths also provided indications of how these people would die. These apparitions were seen by second sighted people, who interpreted their visions for others. Some accounts featured individuals who claimed they saw their own wraiths, an experience that was generally considered to be a bad omen. Wraiths were part of a belief system that acknowledged the existence of subtle bodies, in which wraiths were technically a particular type of subtle body that prognosticated coming death. Subtle bodies that foretold other types of future events, aside from death, are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

While wraiths were sometimes seen by regular people under special circumstances, they seem to have appeared most frequently to people with second sight. Second sight accounts contain numerous stories about second sighted people seeing apparitions of individuals who died shortly thereafter. Robert Wodrow's *Analecta* recorded a story in which a man saw the apparition of a sickly friend in his bedroom in the early hours of the morning. The apparition gazed at his friend with a mournful countenance, then turned and walked out of the bedroom door. The seer was immediately filled with dread, and traveled to Edinburgh to enquire after his friend. He was informed that his friend had died in the early hours of the morning, at the same time that he had

seen the apparition.⁵²⁸ Wodrow also related the account of some servants who saw the apparition of their master walking in the garden on the morning that he died.⁵²⁹ Similarly, John Ferriar shared the story of a man who was in Paris and saw the apparition of his wife, who was then in London, walk across the room carrying a dead child in her arms.⁵³⁰

In some stories such as these, the apparition is silent. In others, the seer both sees and speaks to the wraith. Theophilus Insulanus' *A Treatise on the Second Sight* contained the story of a man who was walking in the fields before sunset (a liminal time), when he saw a neighbor whom he knew had been sick. The second sighted man greeted his neighbor, and asked him how far he was traveling that day. After conversing for awhile, the neighbor went on his way. The next day, the second sighted man was invited to his neighbor's burial, which surprised him since he saw the neighbor only the day before. The seer was then informed by a messenger that the deceased man had been confined to his bed for many weeks and had died only the day before, a little before sunset, just at the time that the second sighted man had experienced this vision.⁵³¹ Apparitions of wraiths were so numerous reported in reference to second sight that Daniel Defoe felt the need to dedicate a section in *An essay on the history and reality of apparitions* to refuting them. This chapter was entitled, "Of apparitions being said to happen just at the time when the person so happening to appear is said to be departing; the Fiction of it confuted."⁵³²

⁵²⁸ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 98.

⁵²⁹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 3, 194.

⁵³⁰ Ferriar, *An Essay towards a Theory*, 63.

⁵³¹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 14.

⁵³² Daniel Defoe, *An essay on the history and reality of apparitions* (London: J. Roberts, 1727), 26.

The strong popular association between wraiths and second sight accounts likely led to the mistaken belief that second sight was only the ability to prognosticate death.

A wraith's visual appearance sometimes indicated how a person would die. Second sight accounts described seers seeing wraiths in wet clothes or with soaking hair, and knowing that those people were soon to drown.⁵³³ Similarly, some second sight accounts described apparitions of headless wraiths, which indicated that someone would soon be beheaded. Naturally, the identity of a headless wraith was harder for a seer to discern than that of a wraith that retained more of his or her recognizable features. John Ferriar related the story of a Scottish seer who saw the apparition of a headless woman open a door and enter his room. The seer was immediately concerned for the welfare of two women he knew whose appearance was similar to the headless wraith's, though of course he wasn't entirely sure to whom the wraith belonged.⁵³⁴ Martin Martin recorded an account of some seers seeing the apparitions of two men hanging from the ropes of a mast of a ship, and later two criminals were sentenced to death and hung from the same mast.⁵³⁵ In all these accounts, the appearance of the specters provided information about their impending means of death.

At other times, a wraith simply indicated a forthcoming death by appearing as a corpse lying down or in a winding sheet. One of the letters in Pepys' collection on the topic of second sight described a seer accurately predicting another man's death because he saw him in his winding sheet, which came to pass even though the man had no indication of illness at the time

⁵³³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129; Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 54; Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 117.

⁵³⁴ Ferriar, *An essay towards a theory*, 64-65.

⁵³⁵ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 321.

of the vision.⁵³⁶ Walter Scott claimed that the clan of the MacGregors, despite being outnumbered, were rallied to attack their enemies because a seer attested that he saw the opposition wrapped in their shrouds.⁵³⁷ Martin Martin also recorded the story of a seer who was eating supper and suddenly started because he saw a vision of a corpse in a winding sheet lying on the table in front of him. Later, one of the present family members died and his corpse was laid out on the same table.⁵³⁸ Theophilus Insulanus shared a similar story of a seer seeing a corpse lying by the fireside in a winding sheet, with a piece of linen tied under his chin. It came to pass that a man in the house later died stretched out by the fire.⁵³⁹ Visions of wraiths in winding sheets appear across most texts that discuss second sight, with details of beliefs about wraiths varying.⁵⁴⁰ Robert Kirk argued that seers could actually tell how soon a person would die by observing the amount of the wraith's body that was wrapped in the winding sheet.⁵⁴¹ Martin Martin recorded a similar belief: "When a Shroud is perceiv'd about one, it is a sure Prognostick of Death: The time is judged according to the height of it about the Person."⁵⁴² This belief is confirmed in a letter from a divinity student to James Garden, in which the student described a woman predicting that another was not long to live, since "I see him saith be, all inclosed in his

⁵³⁶ Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of letters," 171.

⁵³⁷ Scott, *Manners, customs and history*, 122.

⁵³⁸ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 314.

⁵³⁹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 3.

⁵⁴⁰ See also Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 193, 194.

⁵⁴¹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 43.

⁵⁴² Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 302.

winding-sheet, except his nostrils & his mouth, which will also close up within 6 moneths.”⁵⁴³

One of the more disturbing types of wraith accounts involved people seeing their own wraiths and knowing that they would die soon. The ill omen of seeing one's own double is discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, and beliefs about the double are relevant to both subtle bodies and wraiths. Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe claimed that Sir Richard Napier saw his own apparition laid out on a bed just a bit before he died. Similarly, Lady Diana Rich was supposedly walking in the garden when she encountered her own apparition “as in a looking-glass.” She died a month later.⁵⁴⁴ A popular ballad that recalled the events of the Battle of Otterburn described James, Second Earl of Douglas and Mar, foreseeing his own death and the victory of his company: “But I have seen a dreary dream,/ Beyond the isle o Sky;/ I saw a dead man won the fight,/ And I think that man was I.”⁵⁴⁵ French monk Noel Taillepied made reference to belief in this ill omen when he wrote, “It is often said that if a man’s double is seen it is a sign he will not live long.”⁵⁴⁶ A variant of this belief appeared in an account by Martin Martin that described a woman in Skye who was frequently haunted by a vision of a woman wrapped in a shroud, but this vision always had its back to the seer. The vision was also always wearing the same clothes as the seer. One day, the woman experimented by dressing differently and putting on some of her clothes backwards. This time, the wraith appeared to the woman facing her so she

⁵⁴³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132v.

⁵⁴⁴ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 124-125.

⁵⁴⁵ Edward J. Cowan, “Sex and Violence in the Scottish Ballads,” in *The Ballad in Scottish History*, ed. Edward J. Cowan (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 96.

⁵⁴⁶ Taillepied, *A Treatise of Ghosts*, 86.

saw that it “prov’d to resemble her self in all points,” and she died shortly thereafter.⁵⁴⁷

Theophilus Insulanus shared a similar story from St. Kilda, about a man who was ill and dying but also reported seeing an apparition of himself, accompanying him everywhere and perfectly mimicking all his movements. In order to test the apparition, the man put on straw rope garters one morning, instead of his regular garters. He saw “his other self” wearing the same garters, and concluded that he would die soon.⁵⁴⁸

This motif in which a person alters or reverses his or her clothing in order to “test” the apparition may be related to a practice that was meant to force a fairy or ghost to reveal its true nature. Walter Scott, in *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, cited a poem that referenced the practice of turning a cloak in order to compel a fairy to reveal itself. By means of commentary, Scott argued that the turning of the cloak was often recommended in cases of second sight in order to obtain certainty of the spirit that is “imperfectly seen.” Scott claimed that, if a person was haunted by a specter whose face he could not see, he should “turn his cloak or plaid, [and] he will obtain the full sight which he desires, and may probably find it to be his own fetch, or wraith, or double-ganger.”⁵⁴⁹ This practice was also discussed by William Grant Stewart, who claimed that “a ghost may be recognised, in the appearance of his human partner... by the reversing the cuff of his own coat, or any other part of his raiment, which puts an instant stop to the ghost’s career, and clearly exposes him to the recognition of the courageous experimenter.”⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 311. A very similar tale is reported in Theophilus Insulanus’ *A Treatise on the Second Sight*. See Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 21-22.

⁵⁴⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 8.

⁵⁴⁹ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 148.

⁵⁵⁰ Stewart, *The popular superstitions and festive amusements*, 19.

By these interpretations, the turning or altering of clothing could have two purposes. Firstly, it could prove to the seer that the specter was his or her own double, since its clothing always resembled that of the original person. However, if Walter Scott and William Stewart are correct, the turning of clothing was also believed to compel the specter to face the seer and thereby reveal its identity, or perhaps dissipate. While both these writers claimed that the rite of reversing clothing was meant to reveal the true nature of a spirit, this practice was alternatively applied to beliefs about wraiths, doubles, fairies, or ghosts. In this way, popular beliefs about human perception of various types of spirits were all intertwined.

VIII: Subtle Bodies

Belief in subtle bodies was an essential framework through which early modern people interpreted many visionary experiences, such as seeing wraiths or doubles, engaging in spirit flight, and falling victim to spectral bewitchment. All of these experiences rested on the belief that humans had both a physical and non-physical aspect, and that the non-physical aspect could leave the physical behind and move independently. When a wraith or a double was seen, it was because the subtle body was moving independently of the physical body, and was then perceived and recognized by others. Similarly, experiences of out-of-body flight to the spirit world indicated that the subtle body could take off and roam to other places on its own. In cases of spectral bewitchment, people believed that the subtle body of the witch had traveled outside of its physical restraints and was actively oppressing other people with its malevolence. These experiences were all explained through belief in the existence of the subtle body, which was

neither the physical body nor the immortal soul, but rather a third aspect that all people possessed.⁵⁵¹

Subtle body belief appeared in a wide range of early modern sources, and proved malleable to theories about second sight, witchcraft, and divination. Subtle bodies were highly ambiguous spirits, and therefore their descriptions sometimes overlapped with those of fairies, wraiths, or other liminal beings. Wraiths were technically a form of subtle body that predicted a forthcoming death. Relevant to this, Scottish people believed that subtle bodies sometimes acted out events that the physical body would take part in, before these events happened. Since second sighted people were believed to be able to see subtle bodies, their awareness of the operations of these spirits allowed them to predict the future or reveal the present to others. Subtle body belief also had a place in early modern divinatory practices, as certain rituals were believed to summon or make visible the subtle bodies of others, and compel them to act out future events. In this way, subtle body belief was a significant aspect of Scottish culture that undergirded various other systems of popular belief.

Doubles

Not all accounts of a person seeing an apparition of his or her own image indicated that this person would die. Rather, while some regarded the experience of seeing one's own wraith or

⁵⁵¹ Historian Sarah Tarlow has noted that wraiths and subtle bodies were sometimes also called “fetches,” though this name seems to have been most common in Ireland. See Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead*, 175. Francis Grose also noted the use of the term “fetch” in “the North.” See Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, E2.

double as an omen of death, other culturally accepted explanations did exist. Robert Kirk's theory of second sight incorporated belief in subtle bodies and doubles with his own conviction that fairies existed all around us and were observed by the second sighted. Robert Kirk claimed that every person actually had a double who accompanied him or her throughout their shared natural lifespan. Kirk had many names for this apparition, including "double-man," "reflex-man," "*coimimechd*," and "co-walker."⁵⁵² According to Kirk, a co-walker existed for each person that was on Earth, yet most people could not see them. Co-walkers were mostly perceived by second sighted people who attested to their existence, appearance, and activities. Kirk argued that this spirit was actually a benign fairy that followed and mimicked the individual, and therefore the apparition of one's co-walker was not necessarily a cause for concern.⁵⁵³

While some accounts of seeing one's double do illustrate that this experience caused distress to the individual, not all second sight accounts featuring the double end in the demise of the seer. Martin Martin recalled the experience of a woman who was "troubled at the frequent sight of a vision, resembling her self in Stature, Complexion, Dress, &c. and seem'd to stand or sit, and to be always imployed as the Girl was."⁵⁵⁴ After prayer and supplication, this woman stopped seeing her double and was not troubled by it any more. The same author also described a man who was "haunted by a Spirit, appearing in all points like to himself."⁵⁵⁵ This spirit would vex the man by asking him "many impertinent Questions" when he was out working in the

⁵⁵² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 6.

⁵⁵³ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 6-7. See also EUL, La.III.545, fol. 32.

⁵⁵⁴ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 316.

⁵⁵⁵ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 316.

fields, but wouldn't speak to him at all when he was at home. This spirit also liked to appear to him at night in his house, but it was seen by "no other person."⁵⁵⁶ On the advice of a neighbor, the man cast a live coal into the face of his double when it appeared, and the next day when the spirit materialized in the fields, it beat the man so severely that he was confined to his bed for two weeks. This man received prayer from his minister and friends, but was still haunted by his own specter.⁵⁵⁷ Another second sighted man frequently saw his double wearing a red coat. The seer was compelled to conscript himself into military service soon after, though he had no inclination for that career before.⁵⁵⁸ While all of these accounts feature belief in the double, none were interpreted as presaging forthcoming death. Rather, they indicate that wraiths and doubles were both part of the broader category of subtle bodies, which were spirits that belonged to individual people but could also move independent of their physical forms.

Spectral Funeral Processions

Subtle bodies appear in numerous accounts of second sight, and the activities that subtle bodies were observed to perform often provided means of interpreting these apparitions. A prevalent motif in second sight accounts is the witnessing of a spectral funeral procession. This funeral procession resembled in every way an actual funeral procession that would take place at a future time. The participants were the same, and the procession took the same route to the same

⁵⁵⁶ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 316.

⁵⁵⁷ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 317.

⁵⁵⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 67.

graveyard where the dead person would eventually be buried. In this way, accounts of second sighted people witnessing spectral funeral processions engaged with the belief that second sighted people could see spirits as well as prognosticate death. Martin Martin recorded the story of a second sighted man who saw a spectral funeral procession coming towards the church by a different route than was customary, since that path was much harder to take. His neighbors rejected the truth of the vision, but it soon came to pass that a neighbor died and his procession followed an uncommon path, since the road was filled with deep snow.⁵⁵⁹ An account related by James Garden to John Aubrey even described a member of a spectral procession speaking to a second sighted woman and telling her who was soon to die: “a woman in that countrey who is reputed to have the 2nd sight... declared that, eight dayes befor the death of a gentleman there, she saw a beere or Coffin covered with a cloth, which shee knew, carried, as it were to the place of buriall, and attended with a great companie on of which told her that it was the corps of such a person naming that gentleman who died within 8 dayes after.”⁵⁶⁰ Like accounts of wraiths in winding sheets, reports of foresight through spectral funeral processions appear in the majority of early modern sources that discuss Scottish second sight.⁵⁶¹

Belief in spectral funeral processions was inherently linked to early modern subtle body belief. Subtle bodies were implicated in these accounts because it was believed that the spirits of

⁵⁵⁹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 318.

⁵⁶⁰ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

⁵⁶¹ See Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 100; Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 3, 282; Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 7, 17, 25, 42, 69, 157, 160, 163; Samuel Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 89; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 304, 318, 322, 324; Sacheverell, *Account of the Isle of Man*, 14; Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 75.

the actors in the procession were engaging in an activity in which they would indeed participate in the future, independently of their bodies and visible to second sighted people. The connection between spectral processions and subtle body belief is reinforced by accounts that contain both spectral processions and apparitions of doubles. John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia* related the account of a man of "singular Piety and considerable Knowledge" who saw a spectral funeral procession that included his own double, though he did not recognize it at the time. Fraser wrote, "one morning walking in the Fields, he saw a dozen of men carrying a Bier, and knew them all but one, and when he looked again, all was vanished: the very next day, the same company came the same way carrying a Bier, and he going to meet them, found that they were but eleven in number, and that himself was the twelfth, though he did not notice it before."⁵⁶² William Grant Stewart specifically argued that belief in spectral funeral processions was the result of subtle body belief and belief in the double. He claimed that Highlanders believed that they had a "ghost" that was "allied to him from his birth, one of those airy beings in the character of an auxiliary or helpmate, who continues during all his days and also for an indefinite time after his decease."⁵⁶³ Stewart claimed that these ghosts looked exactly like their original people, and grew with them throughout their lives, accompanying them everywhere. According to Stewart, these ghosts could appear as wraiths in shrouds near the time of death, and were also sometimes destined to appear in funeral processions, as a precursor of events to come.⁵⁶⁴ These ghosts were naturally invisible to anyone who was not second sighted.

⁵⁶² Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 194.

⁵⁶³ Stewart, *The popular superstitions and festive amusements*, 2.

⁵⁶⁴ Stewart, *The popular superstitions and festive amusements*, 10-21.

Spectral funeral processions were also associated with fairy belief, and some argued that the actors in the processions were actually fairy beings. William Cheyn claimed that many people believed in the fairies because these spirits had been attested by seers, who had witnessed them “carrying a Beer, or Dead Corps.”⁵⁶⁵ Robert Kirk linked together fairy belief, belief in the double, and spectral funeral processions by arguing that men’s doubles (which were actually their fairy counterparts) were “clearly seen by these men of the second sight to eat at funerall banquets... so are they seen to carry the Bier or coffin with the Corps, among the midle-earth men, to the grave. Some men of that exalted sight... have told me they have seen at those meetings a double-man, or the shape of the same man in two places, that is a Superterranean and a Subterranean Inhabitant perfectly resembling one another in all points.”⁵⁶⁶ George Waldron’s account of the Isle of Man likely contained a description of spectral funeral processions acted out by fairies, but the story was filtered through the author’s interpretation of these spirits: “...the Procession of the Funeral is acted by a sort of Beings, which for that End render themselves visible... which so little differ from real ones, that they are not to be known ‘till both Coffin and Mourners are seen to vanish at the Church-Doors. These they take to be a sort of friendly Demons, and their Business, they say, is to warn People of what is to befall them.”⁵⁶⁷ The prevalence of accounts of spectral funeral processions, as described by second sighted people,

⁵⁶⁵ Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism*, 152.

⁵⁶⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 5.

⁵⁶⁷ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 74-75. Funeral processions were not the only predictive rites that fairies were believed act out. Waldron also claimed that the inhabitants of the Isle of Man believed that the fairies would make a mock-Christening of a child when anyone nearby was pregnant. The gender of the child could be foretold by observing the fairy mock-christening. See Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 63-64.

naturally led to various interpretations of these experiences that fit with their recorders' worldview. Regardless of embellishment, these accounts clearly indicate overlap between popular beliefs about subtle bodies, doubles, and fairies.

Predictions of Visitors

The motif of second sighted people predicting the arrival of visitors is also tied to belief in subtle bodies. By these accounts, subtle bodies or doubles would take the same actions and follow the same routes as their original people eventually would, just as with spectral funeral processions. By observing the subtle bodies of visitors before they came, second sighted people could predict who would be traveling, what they would look like, and when they would arrive. Martin Martin related the story of a seer who saw some visitors coming on horseback up the road and ran to greet them, but there was no one actually there. The next day, the same number of men and horses came up the road but the seer did not speak to them, since he thought they were apparitions again. Once the visitors spoke to the man, he recognized them as the people whom his vision had presaged.⁵⁶⁸ Robert Kirk claimed that when a man's co-walker was seen "to enter a house... the people knew that the person of that liknes was to visit them within a few days."⁵⁶⁹ George Waldron also attested that frequently, when visiting friends or returning to his own home after being away, the table was already laid and his arrival had been anticipated because it was

⁵⁶⁸ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 314.

⁵⁶⁹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 6.

foreseen.⁵⁷⁰ Martin Martin also claimed that he himself had been the subject of second sighted people's visions before he arrived to visit them: "I have been seen thus my self by Seers of both Sexes at some hundred miles distance; some that saw me in this manner, had never seen me personally, and it happened according to their Visions, without any previous design of mine to go to those Places, my coming there being purely accidental."⁵⁷¹ Like accounts of spectral funeral processions, stories of second sighted people foretelling the arrival of visitors are very numerous across multiple sources.⁵⁷² According to the logic of subtle body belief, these visitors could be expected because their specters had been observed before their arrival. This kind of prediction could only be possible because humans were believed to have an aspect of self that could leave the body and act out its future movements.

Predicting Pairings and Love Divination

Another aspect of second sight was the ability to predict romantic pairings of individuals. These predictions could be made by observing subtle bodies and interpreting that their movements or positioning indicated a future romantic pairing. In a letter from James Garden to John Aubrey, Garden described the vision of a second sighted woman who predicted that her master would die and his wife would marry another. This woman was a nurse to their baby, and the couple discovered her crying one day. The nurse claimed she had seen the specter of a man

⁵⁷⁰ Waldron, *History and Description of the Isle of Man*, 75-76.

⁵⁷¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 303.

⁵⁷² See Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 85; BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 328, 333.

with a scarlet cloak and a white hat standing between the master and his wife, giving the wife a kiss over her shoulder. By this, the seer interpreted that her master would die and his wife would marry a man of that appearance. According to Garden's account, the master did die and his wife married a man who was "in that same habit" that the seer described.⁵⁷³ Similarly, a man with the second sight told a bishop with five daughters that soon the eldest would wed because he saw a "tall gentleman in black walking on the Bishop's right hand whom she should marie."⁵⁷⁴ Martin Martin described an account of a young widower who was told by a second sighted man that he would soon marry a woman of a certain description, though this woman was not known by anyone. However, this woman was recognized immediately when she arrived in the area, by the description that the seer gave.⁵⁷⁵ Accounts of seers predicting marriages are common in sources on second sight, illustrating that the ability to foresee love pairings was a recognized aspect of the ability.⁵⁷⁶ Often, the ability to predict romantic partnerships also intersected with subtle body belief.

Sometimes, the location of the lover's specter relative to the person being observed indicated something about their future relationship. Martin Martin described a method that the second sighted used for determining love pairings by observing the positioning of subtle bodies: "If a Woman is seen standing at a Man's left hand, it is a presage that she will be his wife whether they be married to others, or unmarried at the time of the Apparition. If two or three

⁵⁷³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

⁵⁷⁴ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

⁵⁷⁵ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 330-331.

⁵⁷⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 66; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 322.

Women are seen at once standing near a Man's left hand, she that is next to him will undoubtedly be his Wife first, and so on."⁵⁷⁷ Edward Lhuyd's account of second sight claimed that a woman's specter would be seen standing at a man's right hand if they were to be married, and at his left hand if the relationship was not to end in marriage.⁵⁷⁸ Another second sighted woman predicted that her friend would eventually marry twice, as she saw "a lord upon each shoulder of you."⁵⁷⁹ Similarly, the fairy boy of Leith prognosticated a man's future marital prospects by observing the "forms" of two wives sitting on the man's shoulders, both "very handsome women."⁵⁸⁰ All of these various accounts of second sight relied on belief in subtle bodies which were recognizable as the individuals to whom they belonged.

Another form of magical practice related to subtle bodies was love divination. According to some sources, various ritual actions could compel the subtle body of one's future spouse to appear visibly. One did not necessarily have to be a second sighted person in order to hope to see subtle bodies, in this case. Rather, the supernatural ability to see specters was conferred through rituals done at liminal times (with St. Mark's Eve, Midsummer's Eve, and Halloween being popular options), or under certain circumstances, such as through ritualized silence.⁵⁸¹ If any sound was made or any words spoken during the preparation of the ritual, then the entire venture would be ruined.⁵⁸² The use of liminal times and ritualized silence was likely an attempt to

⁵⁷⁷ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 302-303.

⁵⁷⁸ Campbell and Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, 54.

⁵⁷⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

⁵⁸⁰ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 314.

⁵⁸¹ Menefee, "Master and Servant," 88, 91.

⁵⁸² Menefee, "Master and Servant," 91.

temporarily harness the supernatural abilities associated with second sighted people, who were sometimes believed to have been born at liminal times or gained their gifts through disability, such as muteness. Like disability, liminality could be conferred through circumstances of birth. Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* recorded the belief that children born "between watches" were capable of seeing the otherwise invisible, while children born at the stroke of midnight possessed the second sight.⁵⁸³

Rituals of love divination that required ritual silence during times of liminality were recorded by multiple early modern writers. Francis Grose described a particular ritual practiced by unmarried women on Midsummer's Eve. According to Grose, an unmarried woman should lay a down a clean cloth and prepare bread, cheese, and ale. She must also leave the door open. If done correctly, the man whom she will marry will be seen to come in and drink, bow, fill the glass again, and depart.⁵⁸⁴ Similar rituals were recorded by John Brand, in which young women went in silence on Midsummer's Eve at sunset, gathered sage, and returned to place it in a bowl of clean water on a stool. There must also be a clean shift turned inside out hanging in the room. These women must remain silent until midnight, and then each one's sweetheart will appear and take the sage out of the water and sprinkle the shift with it. Women who will never marry will not see their sprigs of sage moved by a specter.⁵⁸⁵ Another rite on Midsummer's Eve involved dipping shifts in water and turning them inside out, hanging them on chairs before the fire, and

⁵⁸³ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1900), 263.

⁵⁸⁴ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 38.

⁵⁸⁵ John Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities*, vol. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 333.

laying salt on another chair. These actions must be performed in silence, and then the apparition of the man whom a woman will marry will appear, turn the shift right ways in, and drink to her. If he does not appear, it is because the woman will never marry.⁵⁸⁶ Samuel P. Menefee's article "Master and Servant: A Divinatory Class Dream" reflected on several of these types of rituals intended to call up the subtle body of one's future husband in hope of catching a glimpse of him.⁵⁸⁷ Menefee claimed that these kinds of rituals "were often believed to exert a compulsive summoning power" upon the specter of the beloved.⁵⁸⁸ As with wraiths, doubles, spectral funeral processions, and predictions of visitors, love divination relied on the belief that subtle bodies existed, could be visually identified, and could be seen performing their future actions.

Spectral Oppression

The idea of the specter of an individual appearing and oppressing another person has most often been discussed in conversations about early modern witchcraft, and for good reason. Within this context, the phenomenon has often been referred to as "spectral bewitchment." Records of witch trials across Europe contain accounts of witches' spirits appearing to their victims and oppressing them, often at night. These accounts also appear in Scottish witch trial records. In 1661 in Dalkeith, a woman claimed that accused witch Janet Cock "and many utheris

⁵⁸⁶ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 333-334.

⁵⁸⁷ Menefee, "Master and Servant," 88-97.

⁵⁸⁸ Menefee, "Master and Servant," 89.

came in and lay above her.”⁵⁸⁹ Similarly, a woman in Dundas accused Janet Millar “with uther notorious witches” of coming to attack her. They “blew up the doore, and came in upone her, essayed to tacke [her] young chyld from her, bot not having the power, went to the doore in a confusione.”⁵⁹⁰ Another woman in Dumfries in 1671 attested that “Elspit thomson come to her bed, endeavouring to destroy her.”⁵⁹¹ Belief in spectral bewitchment rested on an understanding that humans have an aspect of themselves that can leave their bodies and do their will at a distance. This is the same as belief in subtle bodies, and similar stories as those from the Scottish witch trials appear in accounts of second sight.

These accounts are referred to here as “spectral oppression,” since witchcraft is technically not involved. However, it is clear that the same belief system is foundational to both. Martin Martin recorded the story of a second sighted person who accurately diagnosed the illness of another man by observing the specter of an “ill-natur’d Woman” oppressing him. After this man fell ill suddenly, the seer identified the oppressive woman by recognizing her specter. This woman lived in the adjacent village, and her specter “came before him in a very furious and angry manner, her Countenance full of Passion, and her Mouth full of Reproaches, and threatened him with her Head and Hands, until he fell over... This Woman had a fancy for the Man, but was like to meet with a disappointment as to his marrying her.”⁵⁹² The same author also related the account of a man who frequently was troubled by the specter of a man threatening to

⁵⁸⁹ Dudley and Goodare, “Outside In or Inside Out,” 125.

⁵⁹⁰ Dudley and Goodare, “Outside In or Inside Out,” 125.

⁵⁹¹ Dudley and Goodare, “Outside In or Inside Out,” 125.

⁵⁹² Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 317.

hit him, but the seer couldn't recognize the man by his appearance. One day, the seer was traveling on orders from his master and encountered the man who often appeared to him in his vision. Within a few hours, the two men came to quarrel and fell to blows, and one of them was wounded.⁵⁹³ While none of these accounts of second sight ended in an accusation of witchcraft or a trial, it is clear that the seers believed that the oppressors intended harm, because their subtle bodies shared the intention.

Not all accounts of spectral projection are quite as anxiety-inducing as the last two. On a more playful note, Robert Kirk described the account of a seer who, when sitting at a table with many others, suddenly jerked his head to one side. When asked why he did this, he answered that a friend who was currently in Ireland had "threatn'd immediatly to cast a dish-full of butter in his face."⁵⁹⁴ Some bystanders wrote down the day and hour, and sent them to the friend in Ireland who then confirmed that he had done so at the very time. Knowing his friend was a seer, the traveler had decided he would "make sport with it."⁵⁹⁵ A story shared by Theophilus Insulanus recorded the account of a woman who was able to project her double and accompanying intentions out towards a seer, much like the prankster with the dish of butter. This woman placed a piece of cheese and several apples in her hand, and "wished it in a Seer's hand." That night, by the second sight, the seer saw the woman standing before her holding out some cheese in her hand, but the seer couldn't understand the nature of the several round objects the woman was holding. The vision was only clarified when they met each other again, and the woman told the

⁵⁹³ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 319.

⁵⁹⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 40.

⁵⁹⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 40.

seer about her intentions.⁵⁹⁶ While the subtle bodies of the traveling prankster and the generous woman had far less malevolent intentions, these stories share an important similarity with the cases of spectral oppression and bewitchment. All involved the belief that the non-physical aspect of a person could travel outside of the body and express intentions at a distance.

The Church Porch Watch

Subtle body belief was undoubtedly related to the British practice of watching the church porch or the churchyard on certain nights of the year. Like love divination, this practice was not only limited to second sighted people; it was believed that some ordinary people could see the subtle bodies of others during certain liminal times of the night and year. The best times for this vantage appeared to be on St. Mark's Eve or Midsummer's Eve, between eleven and one, or precisely at midnight.⁵⁹⁷ Edmund Spencer, in a letter to Richard Baxter dated 1673, described this practice undertaken by "poor ignorant souls" on St. Mark's Eve. People would go to the churchyard and watch the front porch of the church, and "at a certain time of night (they say) the likenes of all those of the parish that shall dye that year, passeth by them into the Church, and in that order they will dye, and when they are all in they hear a murmuring noise in Church for awhile, and then they have power to return."⁵⁹⁸ Spencer claimed that, one year, one hundred and

⁵⁹⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 41-42.

⁵⁹⁷ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 192; Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 37-38; A.R. Wright and T.E. Lones, *British Calendar Customs*, vol. 2 (London: William Glaisher, 1938), 192, 190-191.

⁵⁹⁸ Mrs. Gutch, *County Folklore VI: Examples of Printed Folklore Concerning the East Riding of Yorkshire* (London: David Nutt, 1912), 47.

forty people were seen to pass into the church, and that was also the year that the plague came into the town.⁵⁹⁹ John Aubrey, in *Remains of Gentilism and Judaism*, also recorded this practice. Aubrey claimed it was the purview of “some people that were more curious than ordinary” to sit all night and watch the porch on Midsummer’s Eve (also known as St. John the Baptist’s Eve) hoping to see “the apparitions of those that should die in the parish that yer come and knock at the dore.”⁶⁰⁰ Historian Samuel Menefee has asserted that the church porch watch was practiced in northern England and Wales from at least the late seventeenth century until almost the end of the reign of Queen Victoria.⁶⁰¹

Some claimed that these specters would provide evidence of their means of future death, as some wraiths did in accounts of second sight: “those that come to an untimely end, are represented by their ghostly proxies, in the very article of dissolution. If a person is to be hanged, or to hang himself...his last gasp his gab will gape. If the person is to be drowned, his representative will come as if struggling and splashing in water, and so on in other cases of premature death.”⁶⁰² A variant of this belief held that only the specters of those who went into the church and did not come out again would die; those who entered and exited again would only fall ill but recover.⁶⁰³ In accordance with the belief that seeing one’s own double was a bad

⁵⁹⁹ Gutch, *County Folklore VI*, 47.

⁶⁰⁰ Aubrey, *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, 207.

⁶⁰¹ Menefee, “Dead Reckoning,” 81.

⁶⁰² William Hone, *The Every Day Book, or, A guide to the year: describing the popular amusements, sports, ceremonies, manners, customs, and events, incident to the three hundred sixty-five days in the past and present times*, vol. 2 (London: W. Tegg, 1878), 275.

⁶⁰³ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 193; John Glyde Jr., *Folklore and Customs of Norfolk* (Wakefield: E.P. Publishing Ltd., 1973), 24-25.

omen, some porch watchers were concerned that they would see their own wraiths among those doomed to die in the coming year. This fate befell the Luggar brothers in Devon, who saw their own specters and died soon after,⁶⁰⁴ as well as a woman named Hetty who was terrified to see her own apparition enter the church porch on Midsummer's Eve.⁶⁰⁵ Robert Hunt claimed, "every one of the stories relate that, coming last in the procession, they had seen shadows of themselves; that from that day forward they have pined, and ere midsummer has again come round, that they have been laid to rest in the village graveyard."⁶⁰⁶ People often attested that they could recognize the specters they saw, and by this they had foreknowledge of who was going to die in the coming year. Some even recognized their family members or friends among the procession.⁶⁰⁷ The specters appeared just like the people whom they represented, "in their usual dress."⁶⁰⁸ All of these details fit perfectly with the logic of early modern beliefs about wraiths and subtle bodies who could move about independently, and were recognizable by their appearance.

These visions also appear to overlap with beliefs about spectral funeral processions. One watcher predicted "you will see in a vision the coffins carried into the church containing the bodies of all who are to die within the year."⁶⁰⁹ A woman in Northorpe claimed that, on St.

⁶⁰⁴ Mrs. Bray, *Traditions, legends, superstitions, and sketches of Devonshire on the borders of the Tamar and the Tavy, illustrative of its manners, customs, history, antiquities, scenery, and natural history, in a series of letters to Robert Southey, esq.*, vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1838), 127-128.

⁶⁰⁵ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 331.

⁶⁰⁶ Robert Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England, or The Drolls, Traditions, and Superstitions of Old Cornwall* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), 385.

⁶⁰⁷ Gutch, *County Folklore VI*, 136; Menefee, "Dead Reckoning," 90-91.

⁶⁰⁸ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 193.

⁶⁰⁹ Menefee, "Dead Reckoning," 82.

Mark's Eve, she saw a procession of men who "walked about the churchyard with the flesh rotting from their bones."⁶¹⁰ In one procession, "the wraiths of the doomed walk... in solemn procession around the churchyard, preceded by the parish clerk."⁶¹¹ One ominous report from Wiltshire held that "men without heads have been seen in the church, and a little child."⁶¹²

Sometimes, the specters would foretell marriage as opposed to death. Some church porch watchers claimed that they saw the specters of husbands and wives pass together into the church, and sometimes there were multiple apparitions if they were to be married more than once.⁶¹³ Poet John Clare wrote that some people could witness "their own persons hanging on arms of their future husbands with the priest &c as if going [to] be married & as many couples as bridemen & Maidens as they shall see following them so many months shall it be ere they are married."⁶¹⁴ A version of this belief claimed that while the specters of couples who would marry entered the church together, those who would remain unmatched entered on their own.⁶¹⁵ This belief is reminiscent of second sighted people's ability to predict marriages by seeing the specter of a person's intended near him or her.

The ability to successfully watch the church porch appears to have also intersected with the idea that people with disabilities were particularly receptive to supernatural knowledge. One

⁶¹⁰ Menefee, "Dead Reckoning," 82.

⁶¹¹ Rev. Geo. S. Tyack, *Lore and Legend of the English Church* (London: William Andrews & Co., 1899), 60.

⁶¹² John U. Powell, "Folklore Notes from South-West Wiltshire," *Folklore* 12, no. 1 (1901), 73.

⁶¹³ Michael Aislabie Denham, *The Denham Tracts*, vol. 2 (London: David Nutt, 1895), 283-284.

⁶¹⁴ George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983), 203-204.

⁶¹⁵ Glyde Jr., *Folklore and Customs of Norfolk*, 24-25.

Joe Brown in Yorkshire used to watch the church porch as a boy, and would later intimate what he had seen there. Joe reportedly had “a hare-lip, which caused him to speak through the nose, or *snaffle*, as they term it... He would never directly acknowledge that he watched the church; but a mysterious shrug or not tended to convey the assertion... At the fair-tide he quarreled with a young man, who put him out of the room in which they were drinking; he told his antagonist that he would be under the sod before that day twelve months.”⁶¹⁶ Another reputed watcher named Michael “had a stammering, hesitating tone, with a peculiar lisp in certain words.”⁶¹⁷ More than once, Michael “was heard to say to his wanton persecutors, that ‘he should have them some day, and he would, certainly, bury them with their faces downward.’ Versed in the superstitions of the vulgar, he regularly observed the periodical return of St. Mark’s eve... To one of his abusers he said that he had seen him on St. Mark’s eve, and should have him soon. Observations of this nature obtained him enemies... his approach to the dwellings of the afflicted [was] forbidden.”⁶¹⁸ In both these accounts, people with disabilities, or who were otherwise regarded as different, appeared to be adept at gaining supernatural knowledge through watching the church porch. This is much like the cultural association between disability and second sight. Also, while most traditions held that the church porch watch could be undertaken by normal people, in some regions, the ability to see the specters go into the church was specifically limited to those with

⁶¹⁶ Hone, *The Every Day Book*, 275.

⁶¹⁷ William Hone, *The Year Book of Daily Recreation and Information, concerning Remarkable Men, Manners, Times, Seasons, Solemnities, Merry-makings, Antiquities and Novelties, forming a Complete History of the Year; and a Perpetual Key to the Almanac* (London: William Tegg & Co., 1878), 409-410.

⁶¹⁸ Hone, *The Every Day Book*, 410-411.

the second sight.⁶¹⁹

These last two accounts illustrate a theme that is discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation: the distinction between an ominous prediction and a threat. One of the skills second sighted people were said to have was the ability to tell who was going to die by interpreting omens, signs, or the apparitions of specters that revealed the future. However, as in the two cases cited above, *telling* people they are going to die can sound an awful lot like *threatening* to kill them. Even if the prophecy is not interpreted as a threat, people who predict the death of others may be viewed with suspicion or hostility, just as the porch-watchers Joe and Michael were. One man named Willan, who was believed to keep vigil on St. Mark's Eve, was said to be a "terror to his neighbors; for, on the least offence received, he is apt, by significant hints and grimaces, to insinuate the speedy death of some cherished friend or relation."⁶²⁰ As is discussed in the next chapter, predictions of this kind had the potential to sound much like threats of malefic witchcraft. People who predicted ominous outcomes were prone to gaining enemies, or in turn, individuals with reputations for predicting the future may have weaponized their reputations against adversaries.

Practices such as watching the church porch to determine who would die or marry in the coming year also experienced demonization during the Reformation years, as folk belief in general came under fire. In 1608 in Walesby, Katherine Foxegale was chided for being "a daylie scolde & curser of her neighbours & for watching uppon Sainte Markes even at nighte laste in the Church porche to presage by devillishe demonstracion the deathe of somme neighbours

⁶¹⁹ Kenneth Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), 233.

⁶²⁰ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1853), 193.

within the year.”⁶²¹ Not only was Katherine publicly disliked for her ominous predictions, her practice of attempting to see spirits and divine the future was considered a “devilishe demonstracion.” In this way, a once-widespread folk belief was demonized, and individuals who had reputations for engaging in it were prosecuted and disciplined as threats to their communities. A similar pattern of demonization and prosecution would be directed towards second sighted people in Scotland, particularly in the years associated with the witch trials.

As this chapter demonstrates, the spirit world of early modern Scotland was a disorganized place. Because various types of spirits shared overlapping attributes, the identity of a spirit was sometimes unclear, and spirits of different kinds were subject to interpretation as benevolent or malevolent. Consequentially, people who dealt with spirits and predicted the future, such as the second sighted, were also subject to being characterized as good or evil individuals by their peers and authorities. Just as with spirits, the moral identity of seers and the nature of their encounters with the invisible world were interpreted using individual and cultural frames of reference. The church porch watch was considered by some to be a harmless, though perhaps superstitious, pastime. Yet others clearly considered it to be a diabolical practice, and those who engaged in it were subject to suspicion from neighbors and discipline from authorities. Therefore, both visionaries and visionary experiences were highly contested during this era, and judgements about them often seemed arbitrary and subjective. Various early modern processes of discernment were involved in reaching judgements about seers and spirits, and as is discussed in the next chapter, some cases ended disastrously for individuals who laid claim to second sight.

⁶²¹ Aelred Watkin, *Dean Cosyn and Wells Cathedral miscellanea* (Frome: Butler & Tanner, 1941), 157.

Chapter 3: The Demonization of Second Sight

[A]lleged against Isobel Sinclair that during seven years, “sex times at the reathes of the year shoe hath bein controlled with the Phairie; and that be thame, shoe hath the second sight...”

— Witch trial record of Isobel Sinclair (1633)⁶²²

That fourth kind of spirits, which by the gentiles was called Diana and her wandering court, and amongst us was called the fairy (as I told you) or ‘our good neighbours,’ was one of the sorts of illusions that was rifest in the time of papistry. For although it was holden odious to prophesy by the devil, yet whom this kind of spirits carried away, and informed, they were thought to be sonsiest and of best life.

— King James VI of Scotland, *Daemonologie* (1597)⁶²³

After experiencing violent storms on the way to fetch his Danish bride Princess Anne, King James VI returned to Scotland convinced that he had been the victim of witchcraft. What followed was the first major wave of witch hunting in Scotland, known as the North Berwick trials.⁶²⁴ These trials and their interrogations were presided over by the king himself, and the North Berwick witches were accused of both witchcraft and treason, as it was argued that they had conspired against the king. James’ experiences in North Berwick inspired him to write a treatise on the topic of witchcraft, called *Daemonologie*. This source was both a witch-hunting manual and a demonological treatise, and as it was written by such an authoritative pen its influence on Scottish witchcraft theory should not be underestimated.

The contents of James’ treatise were undoubtedly colored by his elite status and educated

⁶²² Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 470.

⁶²³ James VI, *Demonology*, 418.

⁶²⁴ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 5-10.

background, as evidenced by his invocation of the classical “Diana” as the queen of the fairies; however, he was also clearly in touch with some of the popular beliefs of his subjects. His description of people who went with the fairies and were “informed” by them fits well with early modern accounts of second sighted people such as Isobel Sinclair, who was tried for witchcraft in 1633. As established in the previous chapter, association with the fairies was believed to confer supernatural knowledge or abilities, among them second sight. Isobel may have thought that her confession was evidence of her innocence. She was likely claiming that she wasn’t a diabolical witch who divined the future through the Devil, but rather a woman who went with the fairies and had the second sight. Her peers may have even believed that her status as a second sighted woman made her “sonsiest”⁶²⁵ and “of best life.” Yet according to James and the prosecuting authorities, fairies were demons and second sight was an “odious” attempt to “prophesy by the devil.”⁶²⁶ This tension between elite and popular notions of second sight appears in witch trial records, and the willingness of some accusers to turn on their second sighted neighbors illustrates that elite demonological theories about second sighted people did infiltrate the realm of popular belief.

This chapter explores the various ways in which second sight was demonized during the early modern period, both in theory and in practice. Second sighted people faced heavy criticism in the writings of second sight theorists and demonologists. In particular, second sight theorists questioned the moral nature of the second sighted, and argued that the ability was only attributed to imposters or people whose lifestyles were characterized by dishonesty and vice. Theories such

⁶²⁵ This word meant “luckiest” or “holiest.” See James VI, *Demonology*, 418.

⁶²⁶ James VI, *Demonology*, 418.

as these were relevant to assertions that second sight could be “cured” or exorcised from individuals through the application of Christian rites. Second sight also came to be associated with members of secret societies, who were demonized because they were believed to be privy to forbidden secrets and supernatural abilities.

Laying claim to abilities such as second sight, or consulting individuals believed to possess them, was criminalized by early modern Scottish legislation. As a result, some seers and visionaries faced disciplinary action from religious and state authorities, who were intent on eradicating both folk belief and aspects of surviving Catholicism in their mission to create a godly society. While second sight was not a primary factor in the Scottish witch trials, this chapter argues that second sighted people do appear in trial documents. Furthermore, the prosecution of second sight belief coheres with larger patterns of Scottish witch-hunting, which is likely due to the overall uniformity of beliefs about witchcraft on the national level. Some of the many magical talents that witches were believed to possess were the abilities to see the future and access hidden knowledge that was otherwise unknown to normal people. Witches were also believed to be able to see spirits and communicate with them, and these gifts were sometimes accompanied by physical disability. In these various ways, beliefs about second sight intersected with beliefs about witches, and second sighted people were characterized as vicious, diabolical, and deserving of prosecution.

Examples of second sight may also appear in witch trial records in less obvious ways. This chapter discusses accused witches who weaponized their reputations as people with supernatural abilities, particularly through uttering ominous predictions against individuals whom they disliked. These ominous predictions were sometimes interpreted as threats and intent

to cause harm, and could therefore result in accusations of malefic witchcraft against second sighted individuals. Second sight belief may also appear in witch trial records that describe accused witches swearing themselves to the Devil's service through rites that involved the placement of their hands and feet in an act of implicit surrender to a spiritual authority. These procedures are comparable to rites of contact to confer second sight, both between seers and novices, and between fairies and humans. A comparison of these various rites illustrates that popular notions of pacts with spirits that conferred supernatural abilities, particularly second sight, may have influenced demonological theories of witchcraft. In this way, the influence of witchcraft theory on second sight belief was not unidirectional, but rather reciprocal.

This chapter's conclusions call for a greater acknowledgement of the role that belief in fairies and second sight may have played in literate conceptions of witchcraft. Fairy belief, second sight, and witchcraft were intersecting belief systems in the popular imagination. All three were dependent on the existence of individuals with supernatural abilities who had access to the invisible world, and all three played a role in beliefs about practitioners of popular magic. Folk beliefs about magic and spirits were demonized during the Reformation years, yet also exerted influence on demonological theories of diabolical witchcraft. As a result, evidence of belief in fairies and second sight is present in accounts of witches and their accusers, illustrating the role that popular culture had in shaping early modern demonology. However, modern scholars have generally been unable to agree whether second sight played a role in witchcraft accusations or trials. While witch trial records have been considered rich sources for historians interested in fairy belief or popular magic, opinions as to their utility for studying second sight have been divided.

I: Historiography: Second Sight, Witchcraft, and Fairy Belief

Witchcraft and fairy belief, particularly in Scotland, are inarguably related topics. Scottish witch trial records contain numerous references to fairies and in recent years, scholars have been eager to explore this aspect of popular religion in Scotland and the British Isles utilizing trial sources. It is also undeniable that Scottish witch trial records contain information about popular magic and belief. However, the relationship between witchcraft, fairies, and second sight remains contentious in modern historiography. Julian Goodare, in particular, has argued that second sight was not frequently associated with fairies or witchcraft. In making this argument, Goodare directly challenged an assertion made by Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan in their book *Scottish Fairy Belief*, which argued for a connection between fairies, witches, and second sight. Goodare rejected Henderson's and Cowan's claim that these three had "motifs in common," and instead argued that "second sight was in fact rarely associated either with fairies or with witches. The possession of second sight hardly ever put the possessor at risk of being reputed a witch."⁶²⁷ This was a partial reassertion of a claim that Goodare had made in an earlier publication, in which he argued that second sight was not commonly associated with fairies. Citing an early modern treatise on second sight by Robert Kirk, Goodare claimed that Kirk was an outlier in his inclusion of fairy material: "[Kirk] departed significantly from popular belief... by combining ideas about fairies with ideas about second sight; usually these were considered separate topics."⁶²⁸ Julian Goodare's assertions have been backed by Thomas

⁶²⁷ Goodare, "Boundaries of the Fairy Realm," 161 n. 79.

⁶²⁸ Goodare, "Visionaries and Nature Spirits," 105. For a repetition of this opinion, see also Goodare, "Boundaries of the Fairy Realm," 161 n. 79.

Brochard, who argued that “Second sight tended to be free from imputations of witchcraft.”⁶²⁹

Similarly, Jane Dawson optimistically claimed that “[the Gaelic clergy] made a sharp distinction between witchcraft and the hereditary gift (or curse) of second sight. The tradition of the seer was an integral part of Highland life. The Gaelic clergy saw no reason to condemn it nor to associate it in any way with the Devil.”⁶³⁰

These scholars’ perspectives appear to be in the minority; a number of other historians and academics have asserted that there were strong associations between early modern second sight, witchcraft, and fairy belief. John MacInnes drew connections between second sight and the fairies, saying “the capacity to see fairies must have been a form of the second sight now lost to us.”⁶³¹ Folklorists Katharine Briggs and Lewis Spence have both claimed that the second-sighted were known to see fairies,⁶³² and historian Ronald Hutton has also cited a relationship between the fairies and gifts of magical ability, including second sight.⁶³³ Margo Todd’s research has referred to early modern “fairy healers” who worked for clients practicing “fairy cures and second sight,”⁶³⁴ while Emma Wilby has argued that second sighted people were among various

⁶²⁹ Thomas Brochard, “Scottish Witchcraft in a Regional and Northern European Context: The Northern Highlands, 1563-1660,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 10, no. 1 (2015), 67.

⁶³⁰ Jane Dawson, “Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland” in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620* eds. Andrew Pettegree, Alasdair Duke, and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 251.

⁶³¹ MacInnes, “The Seer in Gaelic Tradition,” 12.

⁶³² Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 350-351; Lewis Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (London: Rider and Company, 1948), 158-160.

⁶³³ Hutton, *The Witch*, 222.

⁶³⁴ Todd, “Fairies, Egyptians and Elders,” 199.

seers and visionaries who used their abilities to help their communities.⁶³⁵ Wilby's books have certainly emphasized that second sight beliefs in Britain and Scotland are recognizable in witch trial records. She has also claimed that rites to gain second sight invite comparison to magical practitioners' pacts with fairy beings, as well as witches' pacts with the devil.⁶³⁶

Several other scholars have also made connections between practitioners of popular magic, second sighted people, and accused witches. In her analysis of popular belief in the British Isles, Sarah Tarlow linked together second sighted people, people who had contact with fairies, and popular healers and spell-casters. Tarlow argued that for all such individuals, "the consequences of Establishment distrust could be grave. The persecution of witches in early modern England has been well described by social historians."⁶³⁷ Athol Gow made a similar claim when he described second sighted individuals as popular prophets who also attempted to cure diseases and work charms. Gow went on to acknowledge that "prophetic abilities could be used as proof of the guilt of a suspected witch."⁶³⁸ Shari Cohn has also observed that some women may have been afraid to admit they had second sight because of potential witch persecution,⁶³⁹ while Andrew Lang has asserted that some second sighted people may have been victims of witch trials.⁶⁴⁰ P.G. Maxwell-Stuart has urged scholars to turn to witch trial records to find more elusive examples of second sight, as the early Scottish Witchcraft Acts appeared to

⁶³⁵ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 268.

⁶³⁶ Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 99; Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 420-424.

⁶³⁷ Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead*, 177.

⁶³⁸ Gow, "Prophetic Belief," 197-201.

⁶³⁹ Cohn, "A Historical Review," 149.

⁶⁴⁰ Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense*, 232.

legislate against a wide variety of magical practices that included second sight and contact with the fairies.⁶⁴¹ Contrary to Goodare's assertions, all of these scholars have observed fundamental ties between fairy belief, second sight, and accusations of witchcraft.

This dissertation on second sight sides with the majority of scholars who claim that there was a relationship between the overlapping cultural systems that sustained belief in fairies, second sight, and witchcraft in early modern Scotland. Numerous early modern authors, theorists, and demonologists made associations between these three phenomena. Fairies frequently appeared in discussions of second sight, and some second sighted people attested that their ability came from the fairies specifically. Still others claimed that second sight *was* the ability to see various spirits, including fairies. Fraternizing with fairies was viewed suspiciously by prosecuting authorities, who believed that fairies were demons. The belief that second sight could be gained through a relationship or pact with a spirit, particularly a demonic one, interested witchcraft theorists who were intent on equating second sight with witchcraft. Supernatural abilities were often attributed to witches, and it is likely that some practitioners of magic were accused of witchcraft because of their reputations for being able to do or know more than other people. Overall, second sight beliefs suffered a similar fate as other aspects of folk belief and magical practice during the Reformation: they were demonized and their practitioners came under suspicion.

Early modern references to second sight are easy enough to locate when the term is explicitly used in primary sources. However, there are also clear instances in which aspects of second sight belief appear in early modern sources, yet the term itself is not invoked. For

⁶⁴¹ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, 25, 36.

example, it is likely that most court recorders of the early modern Scottish witch trials would not have written down the term “second sight,” though it does appear occasionally. Rather, they would have considered an accused witch guilty of unlawful foreknowledge or engaging in divination. Similarly, attestations of going with fairies or encountering familiar spirits were all interpreted by religious authorities as confessions of consorting with the Devil. Scholars of early modern fairy belief have been ready to read “against the grain” of sources written by literate authors *about* the beliefs of the illiterate. In these instances, scholars have analyzed stories about spirits dressed in green, nature spirits that abduct humans, or royal courts of spirits living underground as clear instances of fairy belief. However, these examples are only identifiable because scholars of fairy belief have already established some common motifs within the field of fairy belief: namely, that fairies often wear green, are interested in abducting humans, live underground, and are believed to have their own royal court. A similar project must be undertaken here, wherein common motifs that are associated with second sight are identified so that we can locate instances of second sight in early modern sources, and not just those that use the term outright. These motifs have largely already been established in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation. Through an identification of second sight belief in early modern sources, this chapter and the next emphasize the importance of a multivalent definition of second sight, as it would have been understood by early modern people. This definition includes a variety of supernatural abilities such as foresight, access to hidden knowledge, and the ability to see spirits.

II: Demonization in Second Sight Theory

Second sight was viewed with suspicion by some early modern writers and theorists. This often involved demonizing the moral and spiritual character of second sighted individuals. Theorists who were keen on disparaging second sight claimed that those people granted this ability also had an aversion to godliness and a general tendency towards vice. This perceived association between second sight and vicious individuals proved that the ability was worthy of reproach. Another foundational theory that contributed to the demonization of second sight was the belief that it could be “cured” through religious remedies. Published descriptions of individuals who had been relieved of their second sight through the application of prayers, blessings, or Christian rites portrayed second sight as a form of spiritual disease or malignant superstition. This belief that second sight could not persist in the presence of the holy was rooted in the logic of exorcism, and consequentially characterized second sight as a form of demonic manifestation. Lastly, theorists demonized second sight by drawing connections between second sight, secret societies and diabolism. Some asserted that members of secret societies collectively engaged in unholy rituals in order to gain access to hidden knowledge, not unlike early modern witches were believed to do. This theory was strengthened by the belief that some members of secret societies had second sight, and were privy to diabolical knowledge about the invisible world. In these various ways, second sight was demonized in the writings of second sight theorists, who made associations between it and lifestyles of vice. These theories laid the groundwork for the persecution of second sighted individuals in early modern disciplinary courts.

Not Virtuous, but Vicious

The demonization of second sight necessitated disparaging the moral character of second sighted people, though some theorists would not outright call them witches or religious deviants. However, some early modern second sight theorists did claim that the second sighted were generally among the worst types of people. This was part of a broader pattern of belief that the second sighted were abnormally prone to vice, and that as a result they had bad reputations among their peers. John Beaumont asserted that “The Persons that have this Gift, are observ’d, for the most part, to be vicious.”⁶⁴² In a letter to John Aubrey, James Garden flatly denied that second sight was generally had by the virtuous. In answer to Aubrey’s query “if any person or persons truly godly, or who may be justly presumed to be such; have been known to have had this gift or faculty?,” Garden replied, “Negatively, not any godly but such as are vitious.”⁶⁴³ John Fraser also admitted that “I have observed many Vitious persons to have it who foretold truth, oft enough.”⁶⁴⁴ John MacLean told Robert Wodrow that it was known that people with second sight were “not of the best livers.”⁶⁴⁵ A friar once insulted the seer Duncan Campbell by telling him that second sight “affected none but persons of vicious lives and ill character.”⁶⁴⁶ Dr. Beattie’s ethnographic work on the Highlands featured his denial that that second sight could be considered a miraculous ability, as the second sighted habitually gave “intimation of frivolous

⁶⁴² Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 88.

⁶⁴³ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

⁶⁴⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

⁶⁴⁵ NLS, Wod.Qu.Lett.ii, fol. 12.

⁶⁴⁶ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 157.

things.”⁶⁴⁷ In these various ways, second sighted people were portrayed as vicious individuals who were prone to bad lifestyles, and certainly not godly people.

Similar sentiments were reflected in arguments about second sight presented by members of the clergy. Numerous second sight theorists appeared to have had acquaintances or informants among the clergy, who freely discussed their ideas about second sight with these writers. While some ministers seemed to have been able to reconcile their religious beliefs with second sight, many were suspicious of the second sighted and their visions. When they met in London, Bishop Stillingfleet told Robert Kirk that he believed second sight was “not an art or faculty in use or of good fame among men, or recommended of God.”⁶⁴⁸ Similarly, during his tour through the Hebrides, Samuel Johnson noted that belief in second sight appeared to be universal except among the clergy, who seemed determined against it.⁶⁴⁹ Theophilus Insulanus received a letter from a clergyman friend who was skeptical about the reality of second sight. Among the questions he asked, the clergyman wanted to know, “How, pray, comes it to pass, that these seers of visions, are neither remarkable for the purity of their manners, the rectitude of their hearts, the extent of their knowledge, or strength of parts? Are they the devoutest, are they the wisest, are they the honestest and most undesigning part of our contemporaries, who have pretended to make apocalyptical discoveries? One can scarce venture to say so.”⁶⁵⁰ Some ministers claimed their disapproval of second sight was based on first-hand knowledge, particularly their poor

⁶⁴⁷ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands,” 457.

⁶⁴⁸ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 19v.

⁶⁴⁹ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 152.

⁶⁵⁰ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 126.

opinions of their second sighted parishioners. Ethnographer Martin Martin related a tale of a minister in Skye who enquired of one of his parishioners whether “he still retain’d that unhappy Faculty of seeing the Second-Sight.” The minister told the man “he wished him to lay it aside, if possible; for, said he, it is no true Character of a good Man.”⁶⁵¹ Ministers were influential figures in their communities, and the disapproval of religious leaders doubtless had an impact on the demonization of second sighted people, both in theory and practice.

By portraying second sighted people as prone to vice and devoid of godliness, second sight theorists were constructing a justifiable basis for the prosecution of people who laid claim to supernatural abilities. In denying that they were virtuous, this strain of second sight theory was contributing to the belief that second sighted people were religiously and socially deviant. As with other aspects of second sight theory, these ideas would find application in the trials and discipline of people who were considered to be heretics and witches.

Christianity and “Curing” Second Sight

Assertions that second sight was caused by bad morals or demonic influence were supported by the belief that the second sighted were in need of spiritual deliverance. Some second sight theorists portrayed the ability as a spiritual condition that could be “cured” through the application of religious rites, encouraging the belief that second sight was a form of

⁶⁵¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 229-330. This opinion was shared by Lord Molesworth, who annotated a copy of Martin Martin’s book in which this account is recorded. In the margin next to the minister’s words, Molesworth wrote, “No indeed.” See BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 329.

malignant spiritual disease. This perspective on second sight was evident in the popular claim that it could be banished through the application of prayer, blessings, or Christian rituals. Christians, and in particular Protestants, liked to argue that their religion had successfully eradicated various superstitious practices and beliefs from their respective countries. This argument not only made their faith look powerful and effective, but it made other competing belief systems look weak and inferior. Various early modern authors who wrote on the topic of second sight insisted that some second sighted people had effectively gotten rid of this intrusive ability by appealing to God or the church. This argument had roots in the logic of exorcism, and in the idea that holy people could have dominion over demons through the power of God. The belief that Christian rites could exorcise superstition was applied to various beliefs and practices associated with second sight, including prognostication and the ability to see apparitions.

Prominent witchcraft theorists and demonologists often argued that wherever Christianity went, it had effectively eradicated superstition. Numerous early modern treatises on demonology and magic gestured to the widespread belief that demonic presences had been chased away by the arrival of proper religious doctrine. In his treatise *Daemonologie*, King James specifically argued that all oracles and illusions had been abolished by the coming of Christ, and that the pagan oracles uttered by demons had been silenced by the nativity and the crucifixion.⁶⁵²

Demonologist Johann Weyer made similar claims about wraiths and omens of death that were associated with second sight belief. Weyer referred to “spirits who... give signs to many special individuals that someone is going to die. This they do... by groaning or making some commotion, or noisily nailing shut the coffin of the future corpse, or even by showing the

⁶⁵² James VI, *Demonology*, 400.

somberly clad train of a funeral procession as yet unrecognized but destined to occur.”⁶⁵³

According to Weyer, these “mocking deceptions of the Devil were observed during the infancy of our age, before the teaching of the Gospel was purified, no longer deriving from the darkness of superstition... But since a purer and more fervent preaching of the gospel has been ringing in men’s minds, the problem seems to have disappeared completely.”⁶⁵⁴ George Sinclair, like some others, claimed that spirits used to keep more familiar converse with people before the coming of the gospel to Scotland.⁶⁵⁵ Walter Scott also contended that belief in fairies and other superstitions had been banished by Scottish Christians and reformers.⁶⁵⁶

Similar arguments were applied to second sight belief. On the topic of second sight specifically, Daniel Defoe asserted that it “decays in Proportion as Christianity increases among them, and as they improve in Knowledge.”⁶⁵⁷ A friar once confronted the seer Duncan Campbell and claimed that his second sight “must be therefore sinful, because it remained no longer among the people when the doctrines of Christianity were fully propagated, and the light of the gospel increased among them.”⁶⁵⁸ Similarly, John Beaumont had heard that second sight was widespread in the Isle of Skye “before the Gospel came thither.”⁶⁵⁹ All of these theorists recorded

⁶⁵³ Johann Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum*, eds. Benjamin G. Kohl and H.C. Erik Midelfort, trans. John Shea (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998), 35.

⁶⁵⁴ Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum* (1998), 35.

⁶⁵⁵ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 213.

⁶⁵⁶ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 144.

⁶⁵⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A tour thro’ the whole island of Great Britain*, vol. 4 (London: J. Osborn, S. Birt, D. Browne, J. Hodges, A. Millar, J. Whiston, and J. Robinson, 1742), 277.

⁶⁵⁸ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 157.

⁶⁵⁹ Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 87.

the prevalent belief that, as the influence of Christianity grew, belief in superstition dwindled. Some of these claims were directed as second sight belief specifically, while others were focused on relevant aspects such as apparitions, oracles, or death prognostication. Arguments such as these were foundational to claims that Christian rites could exorcise superstition, and they would find application in prescriptions of practices to rid the second sighted of their ability.

Numerous authors who wrote on the topic of second sight also recorded anecdotes and procedures for “curing” it, often featuring Christian rites, prayers, or ritual objects. By portraying second sight as something that could be eradicated by Christian rites, second sight was classified as a supernatural ability with potentially demonic origins. Some accounts did not offer specific means of curing second sight, but rather simply argued that it was possible to rid the second sighted of their ability through religious means. In Bellesheim’s *History of the Catholic Church*, a report of Bishop Nicolson’s visit to the Isle of Barra recorded that many people there were “under the power of a kind of vision called by the native, second sight, in virtue of which they foresee and predict unexpected and wondrous events... The Bishop proposes certain spiritual remedies with a view to delivering these poor people.”⁶⁶⁰ John Beaumont also described a second sighted man’s vague recourse to a spiritual cure. In his account of second sight, Beaumont included stories of people who flew in the company of dead souls and prognosticated death.⁶⁶¹ Beaumont specified that a man of his acquaintance who believed he participated in these nocturnal flights in spirit was freed of the compulsion by resorting to prayers and blessings

⁶⁶⁰ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 63.

⁶⁶¹ Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 102.

from a priest.⁶⁶²

These general beliefs that the second sighted could be cured through spiritual remedies led some theorists to exhort seers to actively seek spiritual means of shedding their abilities. One recommended method encouraged personal examination, confession, or renunciation on the part of the second sighted individual. John Fraser argued that second sight could be due to the “influence and Operation of external Agents, namely an Angel, good or bad.”⁶⁶³ While he admitted that good angels may help men, he also was concerned that evil angels “may perturb, confound, and hurt our External and Internal senses.”⁶⁶⁴ In defense of this theory, Fraser cited biblical evidence: “evil Angels presented Visions, as well as audible Voices, to the four hundred and fifty false Prophets of Ahab, the four hundred Prophets of the Groves, is as little to be doubted.”⁶⁶⁵ Therefore, Fraser adjured “all of them that have the Second Sight, to examine themselves; and to Pray earnestly to God, that no evil Angel should have power to abuse their senses.”⁶⁶⁶ Similar advice for curing second sight appeared in a letter from James Garden to John Aubrey, in which Garden claimed, “I heard lately of a man very much troubled in his soule therewith; and by serious begging of God deliverance from it; at length lost the faculty of the 2nd sight.”⁶⁶⁷

Some theorists prescribed not only action on the part of the individual, but also spiritual

⁶⁶² Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 102-103.

⁶⁶³ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195-196.

⁶⁶⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195-196.

⁶⁶⁵ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195-196.

⁶⁶⁶ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 203.

⁶⁶⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

support from his or her religious community. In a letter to an acquaintance, a minister near Inverness claimed that some local people were greatly troubled by having second sight, since they thought it was a sin and came from the Devil. Wishing to be rid of it, they petitioned their ministers to pray for them and these people were offered up in public prayer in several churches, and had sermons preached on their behalf. After the confession of their sins and renouncing “any such gift or faculty which they had, to God’s dishonour, and earnestly desired the Minister & people to pray for them, & this their recantation recorded, & after this they were never troubled with such a sight any more.”⁶⁶⁸ According to these sources, the belief that second sight descended from diabolical sources was not just a vain supposition. Rather, it was supported by the fact that numerous second sighted people had been “cured” through prayer and renunciation. Whether these second sighted people were convinced of the demonic origin of their abilities on their own or through the influence of others is unclear. As in the cases of disapproving clergymen, it is possible that second sight was demonized by local ministers. This may have caused some second sighted people distress, and prompted them to seek deliverance from their ability.

Other authors had even more specific remedies in mind, and described Christian rites that they had personally heard were effective. A divinity student told James Garden that one of the only ways to be free of the hereditary curse of second sight, particularly when both the mother and father were second sighted, was “if in the very act of delivery, upon the first sight of the child’s head, it be baptised, the same is free of it; if not, he hath it all his life.”⁶⁶⁹ Martin Martin

⁶⁶⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

⁶⁶⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

made a similar claim when he related the story of a woman who had the second sight and, in an attempt to get rid of it, her mistress had baptismal water poured over the second sighted woman's face after a church service. This cure was apparently effective, though Martin contended that it was likely "one of Satan's Devices, to make credulous People have an esteem for Holy Water."⁶⁷⁰ Martin also shared the account of a second sighted woman who was troubled by seeing her own double everywhere she went. In the course of her quest for a cure, this woman was asked if she was "instructed in the Principles of her Religion." When it was discovered that she was not, a learned friend "bid them teach her the Creed, ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, and that she should say the latter daily after her Prayers. Mr. Morison and his family join'd in Prayer on the Girls' behalf, begging that God of his goodness would be pleas'd to deliver her from the trouble of such a Vision: after which, and the Girl's complying with the advice as above, she never saw it any more."⁶⁷¹

Such prescriptions involving baptism or the recitation of religious creeds and prayers hinged on the logic that second sight could be effectively exorcised by the invocation of Christian rites or doctrine. In this way, second sight was portrayed as something demonic that could not coexist alongside something holy. Therefore, second sight was an inherently evil condition, akin to demonic possession or a spiritual disease, since it was believed that religious rites could exorcise it. In light of more general claims that proper belief or doctrine was capable of purging superstition, some sources that discussed second sight were clearly placing it alongside other supposedly pagan or demonic belief systems that could be chased away by the

⁶⁷⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 315.

⁶⁷¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 316.

presence of true religion.

Secret Societies and Diabolism

Second sight was also demonized through its perceived association with secret societies, whose members were often characterized as suspicious at best, and diabolical at worst. In particular, theorists frequently associated second sight with the Freemasons or Rosicrucians, both of which were organizations that were generally viewed with distrust by the religiously orthodox. The relationship between second sight and members of secret societies rested on the belief that both were privy to hidden secrets acquired through potentially magical means. This association seems to have developed into the belief that some members of secret societies had supernatural abilities, like second sight. However, the popular demonization of secret societies also involved rumors that their rites and secrets involved worship of the Devil. Through its association with members of secret societies, second sight was demonized in the popular imagination as providing access to knowledge that was forbidden, unholy, or diabolical.

The belief that the Scottish Freemasons dabbled in sorcery and diabolism was evident in early modern sources, both inside and outside of Scotland. Conversations about Freemasons also often involved discussions of something called “the Mason word.” Early modern people used this term to refer to a secret or potentially magical password known only to Masons, and shared among their brethren. This word allowed Masons to recognize each other and greet one another without any outsiders knowing what was happening. The fact that Masons were able to communicate in this hidden way encouraged the belief that their rites and operations involved

access to hidden knowledge, possibly through sorcery or diabolism. This belief was expressed by John Evelyn in his commonplace book when he wrote,

That the Company of Masons have a word which through all Christendome they deliver to divers of their trade, by which they immediately have the knowledg of any man throughout the world, that hath that word, and it is so powerfull that if a stranger be never so farr off that hath that word, they cannot forebear but must leave their worke, & goe to meete such a one... The Assembly of Scotch divines hearing of this did lately call diver of the Trade before them, & would have known the word; but they told them they had no powre to tell it: but withall that if they would appoynt any particular person amongst them, to receive it, they would tell it him: which (fearing it was some witchcraft) they all refused: but a learned & religious gentleman, whose curiosity prompted him to desyre it, after he had bin acquainted with it, was infinitely troubled in conscience, for a long while: I suppose there was something of vile Blasphemy in it, & sorcery, in so much as they confesse that no one alone can speake it.⁶⁷²

In this anecdote, the Scottish divines mentioned by Evelyn felt it necessary to investigate the Mason Word because they were concerned that it seemed to be a form of witchcraft and magic. Moreover, the man who agreed to learn the word became “infinitely troubled in conscience” after receiving it, due to his conviction that there was “something of a vile Blasphemy in it, & sorcery.” In particular, this man was horrified by the fact that it was commonly held that “no one alone can speake it.” This belief conjures up ideas of the collective, secret society (not unlike the society of witches) which functions as a group bound together by unholy rites. Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty also made note of his contemporaries’ suspicion about the Mason word, and openly scoffed at their credulity: “[this man] (for being able, by vertue of the Masson word, to make a Masson, whom he had never seene before, without speaking, or any other apparent signe, come, and salute him) reputed, by many... to have had a familiar, there grosse ignorance moving them, to call that supernaturall, or above the naturall reach of meere man, whereof they

⁶⁷² BL, JE C4, fol. 24.

knew not the cause.”⁶⁷³ As with the case of the Scottish divines, non-Masons appeared to have been both intrigued and afraid of the mechanisms of the Mason word, which allowed Masons to invisibly recognize and hail each other. Furthermore, Urquhart cited the belief that knowledge of the Mason word and invocation of its powers amounted to having a familiar spirit, since the operation of the word appeared to be “above the naturall reach of meere man.”

This relationship between the Mason word and the supernatural forces of evil also appears in a pamphlet by Alexander Telfair, describing a mysterious spirit haunting a house in Scotland. The owner of the house, called Andrew Mackie, was a mason by employment and it was reputed that when he took the Mason word he also devoted his first child to the Devil. However, the author of the pamphlet defended Mackie’s innocence, not by asserting that the Masons do not sacrifice children to the Devil, but rather by claiming that Mackie never took oaths or learned the word and was instead an outwardly moral man.⁶⁷⁴ In these various examples, the fact that having knowledge of the Mason word might mean that one was guilty of blasphemy, sorcery, having a familiar spirit, or even offering a child to the Devil reflects negatively on the moral or spiritual status of members of secret societies. Indeed, the enemies of John Stewart, Earl of Traquair, spread the rumor that “he had the Masone word, among the nobilitie” in order to cast doubt on his loyalty to Charles I.⁶⁷⁵ Similarly, when James Ainslie was considered as a candidate for minister of the kirk of Minto in Rosburghshire, the kirk session was forced to inquire about a

⁶⁷³ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 129.

⁶⁷⁴ Alexander Telfair, *A True Relation of an Apparition, Expressions and Actings of a Spirit, which Infested the house of Andrew Mackie (in Scotland) by Telfair, Minister, and attested by many other persons (witnesses)* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1696), 5-6.

⁶⁷⁵ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 127.

piece of hearsay which alleged that he knew the Mason word.⁶⁷⁶ It would seem that rumors of association with a secret society could damage an individual's reputation as morally or spiritually upright.

The ability of second sight was frequently associated with members of various secret societies and mystical traditions, both in the writings of second sight theorists and in popular culture. Because members of secret societies were sometimes rumored to be endowed with unholy powers, it is significant that second sight and secret societies appear in conversation together. In a letter from Lord Reay to Samuel Pepys, Reay seemed to argue that the Masons in Scotland were believed to have second sight. Specifically, he claimed that there were Scottish people called "Mansone who sie this sight Naturally Both men and womane tho they commonly deny it, But affirmed by all ther Neighbours."⁶⁷⁷ Second sight theorists also drew connections between second sight and the Mason word. Specifically, Robert Kirk forged an association between the two when he cited both the Mason word and second sight among a list of five "curiosities" found only in Scotland.⁶⁷⁸

A perceived relationship between the Mason word and second sight also seemed to have existed outside of Scotland. While dining with Dr. Edward Stillingfleet and other company in London in 1689, Robert Kirk was asked by his host whether he knew anything about the Mason word or Scottish second sight. Kirk made note of the conversation with Stillingfleet in his diary, writing, "The Dr called the Mason-word a Rabbinical mystery, when I discovered somewhat of

⁶⁷⁶ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 127.

⁶⁷⁷ Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters," 163.

⁶⁷⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 69-70. See also Kirk's diary, EUL, La.III.545, fols. 19v, 129.

it.”⁶⁷⁹ This perspective on the Mason word seemed to have been embraced by Kirk in his later treatise on second sight, since he wrote that the Mason word “which... some make a Misterie of,” is “like a Rabbinical tradition in the way of comment on Iachin and Boaz the two pillars erected in Solomons Temple; with an addition of som secret signe delivered from hand to hand, by which they know, and become familiar one with another.”⁶⁸⁰ The former part of Kirk’s comment refers to the two ornate pillars that stood in Solomon’s first temple, whose names and symbolic significance were incorporated into Masonic ritual practices.⁶⁸¹ The latter part is likely a reference to the secret handshake shared by Masons in order to identify one another, along with use of the password. These comments point to the fact that some early modern second sight theorists believed that there was a relationship between the secret traditions of the Masonic order and the ability of second sight.

Just as second sight was supposedly associated with “Rabbinical mysteries,” it was also popularly discussed alongside secret societies other than the Freemasons. Early modern writers seemed to have believed in a link between second sight and Hermeticism,⁶⁸² as well as other ancient mystical traditions. Further confirmation of the popular connection between second sight and secret societies appeared in written references to the Rosicrucian order. A poem by Henry Adamson, a reader and the master of the school song in Perth, specifically drew a connection

⁶⁷⁹ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 19v.

⁶⁸⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 69-70.

⁶⁸¹ For biblical descriptions of the temple pillars, see Jeremiah 52:21-22 and 1 Kings 7:13-22, 41-42. The two pillars were destroyed during the destruction of the First Temple. See Jeremiah 52:17 and 2 Kings 25:13. For the significance of the two pillars to early modern Scottish Freemasonry, see Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 143, 145-147.

⁶⁸² Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 126.

between second sight, the Mason word, and the Rosicrucians: “For what we do presage is not in grosse,/ For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse;/ We have the Mason Word and second sight,/ Things for to come we can foretell aright.”⁶⁸³ Secret societies and Rosicrucians are also mentioned in one of James Garden’s letters to John Aubrey on the topic of second sight. In this letter, Garden claimed “As strang things are reported with you of the 2nd sighted-men in Scotland, so with us here of the Rosicrucians in England.”⁶⁸⁴

These descriptions of Rosicrucians, the Mason word, and second sighted men appear to point to a popular belief that Rosicrucians and Masons may have had second sight, or as cited by Adamson and Garden, at the very least the ability to “foretell” or know about “strang things.” In *The Origins of Freemasonry*, David Stevenson argued that the perceived relationship between the Mason word and second sight hinged on the belief that both conferred on their possessors the ability to see in the invisible, in some sense.⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, both were also regarded as particularly Scottish, and especially Highland, phenomena. Second sight was believed to endow its possessor with the ability to see the future, perceive spirits, or access hidden knowledge. Similarly, the Mason word was believed to permit Freemasons to see the invisible since it endowed them with the power to identify fellow Masons through utterance of a word that was not understood or known by others. Just as with the Mason word, Stevenson argued that the connection between second sight and the Rosicrucians “conjure[d] up the world of the occult

⁶⁸³ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 126.

⁶⁸⁴ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

⁶⁸⁵ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 126.

quest for hidden knowledge and the concept of invisibility.”⁶⁸⁶ In saying this, Stevenson is citing the popular belief that the Rosicrucians possessed supernatural powers, particularly the power of invisibility. This was interpreted to mean that though they existed they could not be identified, or alternately that they could literally make themselves invisible.⁶⁸⁷ The belief that the Rosicrucians were purview to abilities beyond the ordinary also appears in the glossary appended to Robert Kirk’s treatise on second sight, where Kirk defines “Rosicrucian” as “a possessor of a magical-like art.”⁶⁸⁸ As with the Freemasons, the association between the Rosicrucians and invisibility invited comparison to second sighted people’s ability to have knowledge of invisible things. In this way, both second sighted people and members of secret societies were believed to have unique access to supernatural abilities.

The connection between second sight and secret societies likely served to demonize the ability in popular culture, as association with a secret society could bring a man’s moral or spiritual reputation into question. Because of the perceived association between the two, claiming to have second sight or being a member of a secret society could have been interpreted as a confession of obtaining dangerous occult (in both senses of the word) knowledge. For some, admitting to being a member of a secret society may have been equivalent to confessing to devil worship. Furthermore, both second sight and secret societies were associated with early modern witchcraft, as apparent in the writings discussed here, and early modern authors’ conversations about both phenomena invoked themes of blasphemy, diabolism, and familiar spirits.

⁶⁸⁶ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 126. See also Timbers, *Magic and Masculinity*, 67-68.

⁶⁸⁷ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 126; Timbers, *Magic and Masculinity*, 72.

⁶⁸⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 122.

Both witchcraft and secret societies also brought to mind fears of the collective, or conspiratorial groups of people operating in hidden ways outside of the realm of godly society. Secret and esoteric societies were, and may still be, the subject of suspicion and speculation.⁶⁸⁹ Exclusive groups have long been accused of such wide-ranging and sinister activities as devil-worship, incest, and cannibalism. Throughout ancient, medieval, and early modern history, these accusations were directed towards sectarian groups such as early Christians, medieval heretics, Jews, and ultimately early modern witches.⁶⁹⁰ Participation in diabolical witchcraft was, above all else, tantamount to joining an anti-social secret society that was bent on overturning society, nature, and God's dominion over all of creation. Stories about witches were essentially early modern conspiracy theories that revolved around the evil activities of hidden, yet powerful, organizations. Witches were reputed to sneak off at night to clandestine gatherings where they engaged in unholy rituals that afforded them access to supernatural abilities and knowledge. Furthermore, just as with members of secret societies, witches were "invisible" in that they could be anyone: a neighbor, close friend, or even one's family member. In this way, beliefs about secret societies and witchcraft were fluid and interchangeable, with both capitalizing on early modern fears of conspiratorial groups of people who worshipped the Devil in exchange for access to supernatural knowledge or power.

⁶⁸⁹ Numerous modern conspiracy theories revolve around the hidden operations of powerful groups such as the Illuminati, the Freemasons, the Skull and Bones, etc. Furthermore, many Christian churches and denominations forbid their members from joining secret societies.

⁶⁹⁰ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (Sussex and London: Sussex University Press, 1975), 7.

III: Second Sight, Demonology, and Witchcraft

During the years associated with the Scottish Reformation and witch trials, second sighted people were prosecuted for advertising or using their abilities, either for themselves or for clients. In order for second sight to be considered a prosecutable crime, it had to first be demonized by witchcraft theorists and demonologists, as well as criminalized and legislated against. Demonologists and witchcraft theorists were generally of the opinion that abilities attributed to second sighted people such as seeing the future, accessing hidden knowledge, and communicating with spirits were examples of demonic powers at work in human beings. As such, they condemned laying claim to abilities associated with second sight, as well as consulting anyone who claimed to be a second sighted person. Evidence for fairy belief and second sight in legislation and demonological sources illustrates the role that popular belief systems had in shaping elite conceptions of diabolical witchcraft.

In keeping with official condemnation of second sight belief, the records of the early modern Scottish trials contain evidence of the prosecution and execution of second sighted people who were accused of witchcraft. Some of these individuals specifically applied the term “second sight” to their abilities, while others are recognizable through relevant motifs such as association with fairies, access to supernatural knowledge, disability, or the talent for transferring illness from one being to another. The persecution of second sighted individuals cohered with larger national patterns of Scottish witch-hunting, which is attributable to the cultural uniformity of these intersecting belief systems about witchcraft, fairies, and second sight. The attempt to eradicate second sight, folk belief, and surviving aspects of Catholicism was undeniably a part of

Protestant authorities' mission to create a godly society, which necessitated the prosecution of all forms of religious and social deviance.

Legislation and Demonology

Many aspects of the ability of second sight, as recognized by early modern Scottish people, were specifically demonized and legislated against during the Reformation years. New laws prohibited attempting to foretell the future, make contact with spirits, or access hidden knowledge through supernatural means.⁶⁹¹ Though legislation that regarded witchcraft and the consultation of spirits as crimes had previously existed in the British Isles, it was the Witchcraft Act of 1563 which laid the ground for how witch trials would be handled during the Reformation era in Scotland. Scotland officially converted to Protestantism in 1560, and from 1563 to 1736, witchcraft was considered a statutory crime.⁶⁹² According to the Witchcraft Act of 1563, no person should “seik ony help response or consultation at ony sic usaris or abusaris foirsaidis of Witchcraftis Sorsareis or Necromancie under the pain of deid alsweill to be execute aganis the usar or abuser as the seikar of the response or consultation.”⁶⁹³ Witchcraft scholar P.G. Maxwell-

⁶⁹¹ An appendix to *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* cited many of these laws against witchcraft and fortune-telling, and specifically argued that none of them should apply to the second sighted Campbell or his consulters. See Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 211-228.

⁶⁹² Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller, “Some Findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 57.

⁶⁹³ Christina Lerner, *A Source-book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow: SSRC Project on Accusations and Prosecution for Witchcraft in Scotland, 1977), 283.

Stuart has interpreted this legislation as outlawing “all acts of maleficent magic, charming and divination ... which relied upon the second sight as a means of looking into the future; and as *sithean*⁶⁹⁴ were sometimes associated with the dead,... a belief in them, and the ritual acts associated with that belief.”⁶⁹⁵ The Act of 1563 therefore criminalized all forms of popular magical practices, including consulting a second sighted person or practitioner of magic, especially one who claimed to have contact with fairies or the dead.

Practices and beliefs related to second sight were also prohibited in subsequent legislation. In 1574 and again in 1579, the Scottish parliament passed legislation against anyone who claimed “knowledge of prophecie, charming or utheris abusit sciences quhairby they persuaid the people that they can tell thair weirdis, deathes and fortunes and sic uther fantasticall Imaginations.”⁶⁹⁶ The punishment for violating this law the first time was loss of an ear, and a second infraction received the death penalty.⁶⁹⁷ The Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1604, which followed James’ accession to the English throne, ordered the death penalty for anyone who invoked spirits or communed with familiars.⁶⁹⁸ This act also forbade “Witchcraft, Enchantment, Charm, or Sorcery to tell or declare... where Goods or Things lost or stolen should be found or be come.”⁶⁹⁹ By these laws, aspects of second sight such as foretelling the future, engaging in

⁶⁹⁴ A Scottish Gaelic term for the fairies.

⁶⁹⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 36-37.

⁶⁹⁶ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 182.

⁶⁹⁷ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 182.

⁶⁹⁸ Larner, *Source-book of Scottish Witchcraft*, 283-285.

⁶⁹⁹ Donald Tyson, *The Demonology of King James I* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2011), 302-303.

death prognostication, communicating with spirits, and accessing hidden knowledge were illegal and dangerous to practice. Furthermore, earlier legislation in 1597 forced courts to regard consultants of witches as guilty as the witches themselves, and deserving of the same punishment.⁷⁰⁰ Therefore, consulting a second sighted person was just as illegal and immoral as claiming to be second sighted. Because of this, Scotland was considered to have one of the harshest legal codes against beneficent magic in all of Europe, given its aim of punishing both practitioners and their clients.⁷⁰¹

These laws were based on theories espoused by witchcraft theorists and demonologists, both of whom denounced belief in the abilities of people with second sight. Both John Calvin and King James VI denied that humans were able to predict the future with accuracy, thereby denying that anyone actually could be second sighted. While Calvin argued that “soothsayers” did not actually possess any skills of their own, he did assert that “God does now and then allow satan to tell of things to come, and this is for the hardening of those who will not obey the truth.”⁷⁰² King James VI was also convinced that the Devil could only partially see into the future, and thus his prognostications would be imperfect. For James, these half-true predictions were only possible because the Devil was “worldly wise” and very observant throughout all of human history.⁷⁰³ Second sight theorist John Fraser also claimed that the predictions of the second sighted could be due to the influence of demons.⁷⁰⁴ Like James VI, Fraser believed that

⁷⁰⁰ Normand and Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland*, 430.

⁷⁰¹ Davies, “A Comparative Perspective,” 202.

⁷⁰² Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin*, 268.

⁷⁰³ James VI, *Demonology*, 360.

⁷⁰⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195-196.

“the evil Angels, who were Created in a degree above us, must have a more penetrating Witt than ours is, and having Experience from their Creation to this very day, and can be present to ev’ry Experiment found out, or that is committed to Writing by the Art of Man.”⁷⁰⁵ Fraser was also concerned about the possibility that God, for his own reasons, may allow both good and evil spirits to have access to foreknowledge that they could then share with humans.⁷⁰⁶ Multiple witchcraft theorists also offered commentary on the biblical episode in which Paul exorcised a demon from a slave girl who was able to foretell the future.⁷⁰⁷ On this topic, King James argued that the girl was plainly guilty of witchcraft, since her relationship with the demon was “of her own consent” and because of her “conquesting of such gain to her masters.”⁷⁰⁸ The *Malleus Maleficarum* also regarded this girl as one of a class of people who were frequently “seized” by demons, and by this means they could tell the future.⁷⁰⁹ By these interpretations, any accurate predictions offered by second sighted people were based on information conveyed by demons, and not through any innate talent of seers. Rather, listening to and passing on this demonic information was a form of witchcraft, and therefore not a natural or morally neutral ability.

Other abilities attributed to second sighted people also came under fire in the writings of Scottish demonologists. King James VI in particular recorded his belief that various skills associated with second sight were accomplished through the Devil’s power, since the Devil could carry news from distant parts of the world quickly, or reveal secrets to soothsayers once they had

⁷⁰⁵ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 199-200.

⁷⁰⁶ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 201.

⁷⁰⁷ See Acts 16:16-19 in the Bible.

⁷⁰⁸ James VI, *Demonology*, 380.

⁷⁰⁹ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 246.

been spoken aloud by other people.⁷¹⁰ Among acts condemned as witchcraft, James also included prognostication of whether someone would live or die.⁷¹¹ According to James, what appeared to be second sighted people's accurate predictions, death prognostications, or access to hidden knowledge were actually tricks accomplished through the skills of the Devil, for the purpose of deceit. Therefore, both advertising such abilities and consulting second sighted people as practitioners of magic were illegal and worthy of condemnation.

Belief in fairies and laying claim to skills acquired from them were also demonized during the Reformation years. This amounted to a condemnation of numerous second sighted people who attested that their abilities had been bestowed on them through contact with the fairies. As is discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, such a condemnation was made possible through the widespread belief among elites that fairies were actually demons. This educated opinion stretched all the way back to St. Augustine, who famously argued that all pagan gods were actually demons who desired worship and veneration from humans, and so sought to deceive and entrap mortals by telling them "of past and future things, which happen exactly as predicted."⁷¹² Using Augustine's interpretive logic, attestations of going with fairies or gaining supernatural abilities from them were essentially confessions of having consorted with demonic beings. Other theologians and demonologists shared Augustine's belief, and subsequently interpreted all encounters with fairies as contact with evil spirits. John Calvin plainly condemned

⁷¹⁰ James VI, *Demonology*, 374.

⁷¹¹ James VI, *Demonology*, 382.

⁷¹² Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A documentary history*, 2nd ed., eds. Alan Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 46.

all people who worked with familiar spirits and consulted the dead.⁷¹³ King James VI specifically argued that fairies were demons who abused mankind in many forms, and that these spirits could be summoned by witchcraft.⁷¹⁴ However, he also noted that some people believed that fairies were good beings who conferred luck on the homes they inhabited.⁷¹⁵ This observation was very similar to one made by Martin Luther, when he claimed “Some believe that they have demonic familiars...and they believe that the house that is occupied by these illusions of the demons will be the most fortunate, and they fear more to offend these demons than they fear God and the whole world.”⁷¹⁶ The *Malleus Maleficarum* also categorized fairies as demonic spirits,⁷¹⁷ as did George Sinclair, who publicized his belief that fairies were a demonic delusion purposefully directed towards simple people.⁷¹⁸

Many demonologists and witchcraft theorists cited the supernatural abilities of fairies or people who consorted with them as evidence of witchcraft. In his treatise on spirits, Randall Hutchins described “specters” who inhabited the land, haunted hidden places, and danced in human forms. These spirits enjoyed striking terror into people or alternatively winning their admiration by offering predictions of things to come. By this, we could be confident that soothsayers’ predictions came from demons as did the Gentiles’ oracles, whose gods were

⁷¹³ Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin*, 267.

⁷¹⁴ James VI, *Demonology*, 403-404.

⁷¹⁵ James VI, *Demonology*, 411.

⁷¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Decem praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicta populo*, in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A documentary history*, 2nd ed., eds. Alan Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 264-265.

⁷¹⁷ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 296.

⁷¹⁸ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 214.

demons.⁷¹⁹ Similarly, William Grant Stewart claimed that the fairy queen and her court actually had Satan as their chieftain, and by him they were able to endow people with the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the second sight.⁷²⁰ By these interpretations, second sighted people were at the very least guilty of seeing and consorting with demonic spirits, as well as laying claim to powers bestowed on them by demonic beings. Walter Scott had argued that fortunetellers and charmers often claimed that they had an association with the fairies, and that it was common for them to assert they had obtained a gift of “prescience” or other powers from these beings as a means of pleading innocence.⁷²¹ However, while some accused witches did claim they went with the fairies, this defense ultimately did them little good. Thus, witnesses in the trial of Bessie Carnochan in 1657 testified that she boasted to one neighbor, “she had some skill indeed, but that she had got it from the fairies.” Despite this claim, Bessie’s trial documents record the conviction that “[you have] many years bygone taken yourself to the service of the Devil.”⁷²² As fairies were considered to be demonic spirits, claiming to be a second sighted person with fairy connections was judged an act of witchcraft by Scottish courts. In these numerous ways, second sight belief was demonized by theorists and demonologists who argued that supernatural abilities must have demonic origins.

Often, rhetoric which demonized folk belief and second sight specifically associated them with Catholicism and witchcraft. From a Protestant perspective, all of these were intolerable

⁷¹⁹ Randall Hutchins, Virgil B. Heltzel, and Clyde Murley, “Of Specters, ca. 1593,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1948): 407-429.

⁷²⁰ Stewart, *The popular superstitions and festive amusements*, 49, 56.

⁷²¹ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 120.

⁷²² Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 392.

forms of social and religious deviancy. Examples of this can be found in post-Reformation legislation, demonology, and doctrine. These sources claimed that various beliefs and practices to do with familiar spirits and popular magic, including second sight, had been strongest during the time of Catholic ascendancy. In doing so, these sources were demanding the eradication of both Catholicism and folk belief through religious and social reform. King James VI plainly argued that familiar spirits and fairies were “one of the sorts of illusions that was rifest in the time of papistry.”⁷²³ A similar association can be found in the writings of John Calvin, who claimed that familiar spirits were actually demons employed during acts of sorcery and divination by the dead, both of which were practices that had been “held for great devotion in Poperie.”⁷²⁴ By drawing connections between Catholicism and practices associated with second sight, Calvin was able to characterize both as forms of witchcraft, maintaining “It is true that in Poperie all are witches in their idolatries.”⁷²⁵ Relevant assertions were also expressed in reformed doctrine, which was written to replace the Catholic liturgies in post-Reformation Scotland. The Larger Catechism of 1648, which replaced the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, Ten Commandments, and Apostle’s Creed, equated the worship of saints or angels with covenanting with the Devil: “the sins forbidden in the first commandment are... praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures: all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions.”⁷²⁶ Notably, the Catechism placed saints, angels, and “any other creatures”

⁷²³ James VI, *Demonology*, 418.

⁷²⁴ Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin*, 268-269.

⁷²⁵ Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Calvin*, 269.

⁷²⁶ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 418-419.

within the same category of beings, thereby asserting that contact with familiar spirits and praying to the saints and angels were the same form of “consulting with the devil.” In this way, folk beliefs and popular magical practices were strongly associated with Catholicism, and both were regarded as forms of social and religious deviance.

Demonologists also made associations between Catholicism and practitioners of popular magic, some of whom were second sighted individuals. English demonologist Reginald Scot noted that practitioners of popular magic or “witches” were prevalent across the British Isles, and claimed that he had heard local ministers complain “they have had in their parish at one instant, xvii or xviii witches.”⁷²⁷ Scot specifically linked accused witches with Catholicism by claiming that after the Reformation, these practitioners of magic took over the role that had previously been occupied by saints.⁷²⁸ In this way, Scot was arguing that practitioners of popular magic were acting as intercessors for their communities, and thereby mediating the human relationship with the spiritual realm. Furthermore, Scot contended that not only had practitioners of magic adopted the roles of saint and priest, but they had even attempted to cast themselves in the role of Christ. Like Calvin, Scot believed that this made their consulters guilty of idolatry: “We flie from trusting in God to trusting in witches, who doo not onelie in their coosening art take on them the office of Christ in this behalfe; but use his verie phrase of speech to such idolaters, as com to seeke divine assistance at their hands, saieng; Go thy waies, thy sonne or thy daughter, &c. shall doo well, and be whole.”⁷²⁹ Though Scot denied that accused witches were guilty of the

⁷²⁷ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), 3.

⁷²⁸ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft: A Discourse Concerning Devils and Spirits* (London: Andrew Clark, 1665), 22.

⁷²⁹ Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1972), 7.

impossible and diabolical crimes of which they were accused, as an elite Protestant he generally considered practitioners of magic to be superstitious and religiously deviant. This was especially true insofar as they attempted to act as mediators between the human and spirit worlds.

Protestant doctrine held that Christ was the only mediator between man and God, and therefore all veneration of saints, angels, priests, and practitioners of magic was idolatrous. The arguments expressed in Scot's demonological treatise reflect the wider elite opinion that practitioners of popular magic were a threat to Protestant reform, which sought to eradicate surviving aspects of both Catholicism and folk belief.

Demonologist George Sinclair also expressed his disapproval of practitioners of popular magic, particularly charmers, whose rites he associated with the Catholic church. In *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, Sinclair claimed that "The word Charm, or Incantation comes from the Latine word Carmen, signifying a verse, because the Roman/Southsayers gave their Charms in Verse... Charming is much practised by the Pope, and the Romish-Church. Their whole form of Religion both in private and in publick consisting of Charms of all sorts."⁷³⁰ Sinclair argued that charming was a deception engineered by the Catholic church to "blind the Vnderstanding of People" in order to make them believe in the power of words to impact the physical realm. For Sinclair, such a thing was plainly impossible because "It is only the power of Almighty God."⁷³¹ In his discussion of Catholic charms to make holy water, protect soldiers, dedicate churches, and

⁷³⁰ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 125.

⁷³¹ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 125. A similar opinion was recorded by minister and second sight theorist Robert Kirk in his notebook from 1678. Kirk asserted that "all charming is unlawful," and "Any good words that be used in Charming... are but Satan's watch-word to the actor, imploring his aid to do the feat. They have no natural operation, or cure, nor affinity to the purpose & pray not for God's help." See NLS, MS 3932, fols. 181v, 99v-100.

bless homes and food, Sinclair directly compared these rites to charms performed by “Witches” in order to protect themselves, that “no Devils or Fairy shall have power, to medle with them.”⁷³² In this way, Sinclair claimed that there was no distinction between the Pope blessing holy water and an accused witch warding off a fairy. This section of Sinclair’s treatise also contained two charms used by practitioners of magic which invoked the power of the four gospel writers and Saint Peter, respectively. One charm had the purpose of blessing a bed before lying down, while the other was meant to help butter churn.⁷³³ For Protestant demonologists like Sinclair, charms uttered by Catholics or witches were entirely the same. Therefore, the prosecution of individuals who practiced charming, even when those charms invoked Christian figures, was an attempt to eliminate both popular magical practices and Catholicism from reformed Scottish society.

Concern with Catholic beliefs and practices also appeared in early modern Scottish legislation. Historian Julian Goodare has suggested that Scotland’s aggressive anti-witchcraft legislation, which targeted both practitioners and consultants, revealed a deep preoccupation with the influence of individuals who provided magical services or access to supernatural abilities, as opposed to a concern over *maleficium*. In this way, Goodare has argued that the Scottish Witchcraft Acts served as a weapon for reform, which was directed towards eradicating both Catholic belief and popular superstitions.⁷³⁴ Therefore, anti-witchcraft legislation was written with an eye to rooting out religious and social deviancy in all its forms, and eliminating individuals who threatened the widespread adoption of Protestantism.

⁷³² Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 127.

⁷³³ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 127.

⁷³⁴ Julian Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Act,” *Church History* 74, no. 1 (2005), 57-59. See also Davies, “A Comparative Perspective,” 190.

Evidence for this interpretation can be found in trial records of practitioners of popular magic, some of whom also expressed sympathy for the older form of worship. As is discussed in this chapter and the next, some individuals were prosecuted because they made use of Catholic rites or prayers, or recited charms that invoked angels, the saints, or the Trinity. However, trial transcripts also illustrate that some practitioners of popular magic voiced dissatisfaction with the new religious system. In some cases, their desire to see the return of Catholic traditions found expression in the mouths of their familiar spirits. In 1616, second sighted witch Elspeth Reoch claimed that her familiar fairy spirit John Stewart had implored her to leave Orkney because “this cuntry wes Priestgone.”⁷³⁵ Similarly, in 1576 Bessie Dunlop attested that her familiar ghost Thome Reid once claimed that the “new law” was not good, and that he desired for the old faith to come home again.⁷³⁶ While Elspeth and Bessie claimed that these were technically the opinions of others, the fact that their familiar spirits longed to see the return of Catholic doctrine and practice is significant. It demonstrates that while both of these women were prosecuted for practicing magic, having familiar spirits, or claiming to have second sight, they were also prosecuted for their anti-Protestant sentiments. These women's dissatisfaction with Protestant reform points to a certain degree of confessional conflict in early modern Scotland, as well as authoritative attempts to eradicate it. While the association between folk culture and Catholicism was intended to demonize both from an elite perspective, confessions of accused witches such as Elspeth Reoch or Bessie Dunlop likely shaped and cemented Protestant conviction in the relationship between folk belief, Catholicism, and witchcraft.

⁷³⁵ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 190.

⁷³⁶ NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r.

Patterns of Scottish Witch-Hunting

Witchcraft cases that contain aspects of second sight belief generally cohere with the larger patterns and trends of the Scottish witch trials. This is likely due to the overall uniformity of beliefs about witchcraft on the national level, which overlapped and intersected with beliefs about fairies and second sight. The Scottish trials occurred in several waves throughout the early modern period. These waves of witch-hunting involved accusations against numerous individuals, some of whom laid claim to abilities within the scope of second sight. Trials that prosecuted aspects of second sight belief occurred all across Scotland, in both the Highland and Lowland regions, despite the popular association between the Highlands and second sight. In this way, second sight can be seen as part of a broader, national system of belief that intersected and overlapped with beliefs about witchcraft, rather than a distinctly Highland phenomenon. As in other European countries, women in Scotland were more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men. However, second sight was an ability that was believed to be possessed by both genders, inviting the question of why more second sighted women were prosecuted than men. Among other factors, this dissertation suggests that a partial answer may lie in second sight's relationship to fairy belief, and the fact that women may have been more likely to claim the fairies as the source of their power. Coupled with the demonization of fairies in legislation and demonological theory, this could have led authorities to focus their efforts on individuals who claimed association with familiar spirits. In these various ways, the early modern demonization of second sight belief fit within broader national patterns of Scottish witch-hunting, and can be seen as cohering with religious and state authorities' drive to create a godly society.

The witch trials in Scotland largely occurred in the period between 1590 and 1727. However, trials were not continuous across this span of time, but rather seem to have occurred in waves or bouts, often referred to as “panics.” Early modern Scotland experienced several observable waves, around 1591, 1597, 1628-30, 1643-4, 1649-50, 1658-9, and 1661-2.⁷³⁷ Trial data on individuals whose documents contain aspects of second sight belief affirm these same peaks and valleys of witch-hunts or panics. If laid out chronologically, the cases used as evidence in this dissertation form waves that correspond with overall national trends, rising in 1588-91, 1597-98, 1616, 1628-33, 1643-4, 1649, and 1660-1. After 1661, this dissertation cites several cases that appear in isolated, spread-out years. Therefore, cases of witchcraft featuring second sight motifs have largely followed the same pattern as major waves of witch-hunting in Scotland, though they generally taper off in number as we move forward chronologically.

Witch trials occurred across all of Scotland, and transcended geographic and cultural boundaries. Similarly, the prosecution of second sight belief also appears to have been an aspect of the national pattern of witch-hunting. In the past, scholars have debated the question of whether witch-hunting or witch beliefs were relatively similar across the Highland/Lowland divide. Some historians have claimed that witch trials were largely absent from the Highland region, and only really occurred in the Lowlands. Various theories have been offered as to why this may have been the case, some of which involved studying the intersections between witchcraft and other systems of folk belief. Witchcraft scholar Ronald Hutton has asserted that the Highlands experienced very few trials overall, and suggested that this may have been because fairy belief was stronger in the Highlands than the Lowlands, allowing the fairies to serve as a

⁷³⁷ Martin and Miller, “Some Findings from the Survey,” 57.

source of blame for misfortune instead of witches.⁷³⁸ However, Lizanne Henderson has contributed to this historiographical debate by arguing that the Highlands did experience witch trials, particularly if this region is defined in a linguistic and cultural (as opposed to geographical) way. Using quantitative data from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, Henderson has claimed that Highland Scotland was well-represented in the national trials.⁷³⁹ In particular, she has observed that trials in the Highlands and Islands composed six percent of all total Scottish witch trials, a figure which is “certainly not insignificant” when compared with the percentages of trials in other regions of Scotland.⁷⁴⁰ Similarly, witchcraft scholar Lauren Martin has argued that the percentage of witchcraft cases per head of population was actually higher in the Highland region than in some others.⁷⁴¹

The existence of witch trials in both the Highlands and Lowlands is likely due to the relative cultural uniformity of Scottish folk beliefs, including beliefs about witchcraft. Addressing Hutton’s fairy belief explanation, Lizanne Henderson has demonstrated that fairy belief and beliefs about witchcraft were consistent across the country, and therefore were not unique to any particular Scottish region. Henderson has also argued that fairy belief was just as culturally influential in the Lowlands as the Highlands, and yet it did not prevent the Lowlands

⁷³⁸ Ronald Hutton, “The Global Context of the Scottish Witch-hunt,” in *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 32.

⁷³⁹ Lizanne Henderson, “Witch Hunting and Witch Belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*,” in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 99, 96.

⁷⁴⁰ Henderson, “Witch Hunting and Witch Belief,” 99.

⁷⁴¹ Lauren Martin, “Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined,” in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 125.

from witnessing large-scale witch panics.⁷⁴² Because fairy belief was demonized during the trials, Henderson has asserted that it is possible that cultural belief in fairies actually exacerbated witch-hunting, rather than prevented it. With these facts in mind, Henderson's survey of Highland witch-hunting concluded that while there may have been slightly more emphasis on second sight, dreams, and the evil eye in the Highland trials, there do not appear to have been unique Highland witch beliefs. Rather, when discussing witch-hunting in Scotland, we can refer to Scottish witch beliefs, and therefore Scottish witch trials, generally.⁷⁴³

Like fairy belief, second sight belief appears to have been common in both the Lowlands and Highlands, and contrary to some historiographical claims, it does not appear to have protected seers from imputations of witchcraft. Actually, as with fairy belief, cultural belief in second sight may have exacerbated rather than prevented witch-hunting. Cases of witchcraft that contain second sight motifs can be found in both the Highland and Lowland regions, especially if "second sight" is afforded an inclusive definition, as argued in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. This is significant in light of the fact that second sight was strongly associated with the Highlands in early modern popular culture. The presence of second sight in records of popular belief, such as witch trial transcripts, contradicts both the common opinion that second sight was a Highland phenomenon, as well as the historiographical claim that second sight was not related to witchcraft. Studying the role that second sight belief played in the Scottish witch trials allows us to see the demonization of various forms of folk belief during this period, and regard second sight as a national, rather than regional, belief. It also permits us to explore the relationship

⁷⁴² Henderson, "Witch Hunting and Witch Belief," 101.

⁷⁴³ Henderson, "Witch Hunting and Witch Belief," 113.

between various intersecting belief systems, such as second sight, fairy belief, and witchcraft. Despite being associated with the Highland region and its local culture, beliefs about the relationship between second sight and witchcraft appeared to transcend linguistic, cultural, or geographical boundaries, and can be discussed and analyzed at the national level. In this way, trials that contain aspects of second sight belief cohere with larger patterns of early modern Scottish witch-hunting, and provide evidence for the demonization of many aspects of folk belief.

Like most European countries, women were accused of witchcraft far more often than men during the Scottish trials. In Scotland, women made up eighty-five percent of accused individuals.⁷⁴⁴ The gender disparity in accusations of witchcraft can largely be attributed to the influence of misogyny on elite demonology which, stretching back to the medieval era, had long emphasized belief in women's intellectual and spiritual frailty that rendered them vulnerable to influence from satanic sources. Beliefs such as these were influential in the Scottish trials, and were readily articulated by authoritative demonologists. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, both in its title and diction throughout the text, revealed a clear bias towards the belief that witches were inherently female.⁷⁴⁵ The *Malleus* also contained a passage on the topic of "why a larger number of sorcerers is found among the delicate female sex than among men." In answer to this question, the authors provided numerous but related answers about the nature of evil and women's

⁷⁴⁴ Martin and Miller, "Some Findings from the Survey," 59.

⁷⁴⁵ When composing the title, the authors deliberately opted to use the female, plural version of the Latin noun "malefica," which in the context of medieval demonology was translated as "heretical sorceress" or "female witch." The male version could have been used to signify both genders, so the use of "maleficae" reveals the authors' belief that witches were, by definition, women. Therefore, the translation of the entire title is "The Hammer of [Female] Witches." This gendered version of the noun is used throughout the text.

predilection towards it.⁷⁴⁶ However, the authors' first response to this question simply stated, "it would certainly not be helpful to cite arguments to the contrary, since experience itself makes such things believable more than do the testimony of words and of trustworthy witnesses."⁷⁴⁷ A similarly self-evident approach was adopted by King James VI in *Daemonologie*, where he addressed the question of why "there are twenty women given to that craft where there is one man." James contended, "that sex is frailer then man is, so it is easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the devil, as was over-well proved to be true by the serpent's deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine."⁷⁴⁸ As far as James was concerned, this was all to be said on the matter, and immediately after this statement one of the characters in his dialogue pivots the conversation by requesting that the other "Return now where ye left."⁷⁴⁹ Similar opinions about women and witchcraft were widely shared by many other demonologists and witchcraft theorists across the confessional divide, and the relationship between gender and witchcraft is the subject of a massive body of historiography.

In accordance with available data, this dissertation's evidence regarding accused witches and second sight belief is largely extracted from the trial records of female victims. However, some male practitioners of magic who were accused of witchcraft also appear in this dissertation, and statistically they are better represented here than they were in the overall Scottish trials. This may be because second sight was believed to be a gift that either gender could possess,⁷⁵⁰ which

⁷⁴⁶ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 160-170.

⁷⁴⁷ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 160.

⁷⁴⁸ James VI, *Demonology*, 392.

⁷⁴⁹ James VI, *Demonology*, 392.

⁷⁵⁰ For more on beliefs about second sight and gender, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

in turn may have caused more men to be implicated in trials that involved the prosecution of second sight belief. In Scottish and British culture, both men and women appear to have had access to supernatural or visionary abilities, and both genders were in danger of being prosecuted for deviant social or religious behavior. For example, both men and women were cited as engaging in the widespread practice of watching the church porch on St. Mark's Eve, and both genders were sometimes shunned by neighbors or authorities for doing so. Early modern historical records attest to the existence of seers of both genders, and documentation of their lives indicates that as famous second sighted individuals, both Janet Douglas and Duncan Campbell had to defend themselves against imputations of witchcraft.

However, if both men and women could have second sight yet the vast majority of accused witches were women, this begs the question of why more second sighted women were accused of witchcraft than men. In his examination of practitioners of popular magic in Scotland, Owen Davies claimed that the gender ratio of early modern practitioners appeared to be fairly evenly balanced, though he believed that there were more women who identified strictly as healers.⁷⁵¹ However, Davies has argued that women were more likely to attribute their supernatural abilities to contact with the fairies, while men were more likely to claim their powers came from literate sources such as books of charms or magic.⁷⁵² If this pattern holds true, then this may provide one explanation for why witchcraft accusations that feature second sight motifs were largely directed towards women. Second sight and fairy belief were closely related and often overlapped in the popular imagination, as many second sighted people attributed their

⁷⁵¹ Davies, "A Comparative Perspective," 198.

⁷⁵² Davies, "A Comparative Perspective," 199-200.

ability to association with the fairy folk. Fairy belief was demonized during the years associated with the witch trials, which often contributed to the demonization of second sight. If women were more likely to claim fairy spirits as the source of their supernatural abilities, including second sight, then this may provide a partial accounting for why second sighted women were more likely to be accused of witchcraft than their male counterparts. Because of the intense focus on relationships with demonic spirits in patterns of Scottish witch-hunting, practitioners of magic who attributed their powers to contact with the fairies may have been at an increased risk of inviting suspicion and experiencing persecution at the hands of religious and state authorities.

Broadly speaking, the witch hunts in Scotland were part of an attempt to create what scholars have referred to as a “godly society.” Historian Stuart Macdonald has argued that the Scottish witch-hunts should not be viewed “in isolation, but as part of a far broader programme intended to control the thoughts, values and behaviours of the entire population.”⁷⁵³ Therefore, the creation of a godly society necessitated the prosecution of deviancy in all its forms. For authorities, this meant the active persecution of folk beliefs and surviving Catholicism, particularly various aspects of both belief systems that emphasized the existence of intermediary spirits and their relationships with humans. Fairies were clearly viewed as demons by religious and state authorities, and therefore any association with fairy spirits was construed as witchcraft and diabolism. Various related belief systems, such as second sight, also experienced demonization in theory and in practice. The demonization of folk belief explains the presence of practitioners of popular magic, including the second sighted, among the ranks of accused

⁷⁵³ Stuart Macdonald, “In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560-1705,” in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 49.

witches. Witch trial records and demonological texts are valuable sources for the study of second sight belief, as the early modern mission to create a godly society brought illiterate beliefs to the attention of the literate. As demonstrated in the rest of this chapter, these sources illuminate not only elite perceptions of witchcraft, but also aspects of folk belief and practice that otherwise would not survive in the historical record.

Previous literature on European witchcraft has disproportionately directed our attention towards the ways in which elite beliefs about the Devil were imposed on the victims of the witch trials, without significant recognition for the role that belief in fairies or second sight may have played in literate conceptions of diabolical witchcraft. It is clear that demonological sources and trial transcripts contain evidence of popular beliefs about spirits, supernatural abilities, and the limits of human perception. This chapter will continue to argue that these beliefs, as attested by accused witches, affected elite understandings about what kinds of things witches did, how they accomplished their deeds, and to whom they attributed their powers. By reading witch trial sources in a manner that is attentive to folk beliefs to do with fairies, familiar spirits, and second sight, we are able to arrive at a greater awareness of the role that popular culture had in shaping early modern demonology. To that end, this chapter aims to illustrate not only how folk belief and second sight were demonized by authoritative sources, but also the ways in which second sight belief affected elite conceptions of diabolical witchcraft.

Second Sight and Practitioners of Popular Magic

Especially during the years associated with the Scottish Reformation and the witch trials,

second sighted people were tried in disciplinary courts as diabolical witches. The demonization of second sight did not just take place in the pages of literate theorists; it also existed in practice, and affected both authorities' and communities' relationships with individuals who laid claim to abilities associated with second sight. Under reformed law, these people were considered guilty of communicating and conspiring with Satan, as were those who consulted them for their reputed supernatural abilities. Despite historiographical claims to the contrary, the term "second sight" does explicitly appear in the trial records of witches and practitioners of magic, and even in some cases where it does not, aspects of second sight belief are identifiable through relevant themes and motifs. The fact that individuals who specifically claimed that they had second sight were subject to church discipline indicates that second sight belief was being targeted for demonization during this era.

Analysis of trial sources also demonstrates the intersection between second sight, fairies, and diabolic witchcraft, in direct contradiction to scholarly claims that second sight was rarely associated with fairies or witches in early modern belief. Some of these seers likely defended their innocence by claiming to be second sighted or supernaturally gifted through fairy association, both of which were not necessarily considered demonic by some non-literate people. However, condemnation did not only come from elite sources, as witch trials also required the accusations and testimony of witches' neighbors and fellow villagers. Therefore, while some people did not regard second sight as witchcraft, others were likely influenced by authorities' condemnation of practitioners of magic and their consultants. The records of Scottish witch trials illustrate this tension between elite and popular understandings of second sight and fairies, as well as the growing influence of demonological interpretations of supernatural abilities.

While second sight was demonized by religious authorities, there does seem to have been a belief on the popular level that second sight was distinct from witchcraft. This may have been connected to the belief that second sight was a natural ability, innate and not necessarily invited or desired by the second sighted. Second sight may have also been considered closer to beneficent magic than maleficent, in the sense that the abilities of the second sighted could be utilized towards moral purposes, rather than immoral. Alternately, this belief may be attributed to second sight's association with the fairies, who were on the popular level considered to be neither angels nor demons, but some form of intermediary spirit. Some second sighted people also invoked Christian rites or words in their magical practices, demonstrating that they may have believed that their abilities were not in opposition to their identities as seers. The claim that the second sighted were not guilty of magic-related crimes, and therefore it was not wrong to consult them, also appears in some early modern Scottish disciplinary records. Descriptions of second sight in records of church discipline illustrate the wide range of abilities to which second sighted people laid claim, as well as the potential uses that these abilities presented to those that consulted them.

The 1595 trial records of an accused witch named Margaret Campbell demonstrate that some people believed in a distinction between second sight and diabolical witchcraft. Margaret claimed she was a member of a group of Highland women who were practitioners of popular magic. As is discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, the Highlands were especially associated with second sight, and therefore Highlanders were considered uniquely predisposed to the faculty. These women of Margaret's acquaintance were specifically consulted for their ability to foresee events before they happened. The descriptions of these accused witches seem to indicate

that they used their ability to predict the future as a means of enhancing their reputations as practitioners of magic. Furthermore, Margaret and her companions likely believed that their religious allegiance lay with Christianity, as Margaret attested that throughout their charms and practices, “the witches namit God in thair words.”⁷⁵⁴ Their belief in the distinction between these practices and diabolical witchcraft appeared in Margaret’s description of the powers of a Lismore woman “Mary voir Nicvolvoire vic Coil vic Neil, quha as the Deponer declairs is not ane witch but sche will see things to cum be sum second sicht.”⁷⁵⁵

A similar claim was made by the consulters of a man named Archibald Roddie, who were accused in 1723 of visiting “one that is commonly repute a Charmer.” One of Archibald's clients was concerned about her horses that were “ill with the Scab.” However, this client insisted that she had “imployed the foresaid Archibald Roddie about her horses as the best skilled man, and not as a charmer, and further said that others had imployed him, and therefore why might not she do it also.”⁷⁵⁶ Another of Roddie’s clients had wanted to know about the location of a thief who had stolen some clothes. When questioned, this man “denied that he knew he was a Charmer, and only thought he had the second sight.”⁷⁵⁷ It would seem that practitioners of popular magic who had second sight were consulted by members of their own communities for a wide variety of purposes. Furthermore, it appears to have been general knowledge that second sighted people

⁷⁵⁴ Henderson, “Witch Hunting and Witch Belief,” 103. Edward Poeton’s *The Winnowing of Witch Witchcraft* also noted that “white witches” were believed to have gifts from God, and they often invoked the name of God in their charms and spells. See BL, Sloane 1954, fols. 3, 5, 25.

⁷⁵⁵ J.R.N. Macphail, ed. “Papers relating to the Murder of the Laird of Calder,” in *Highland Papers*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1914), 166-167.

⁷⁵⁶ NRS, CH2/49/3, fol. 33.

⁷⁵⁷ NRS, CH2/49/3, fol. 33.

were consulted by clients who hoped to benefit from their ability, rather than harm others. The prevalent consultation of second sighted people was recorded by James Garden, who was told by one of his correspondents that “It is likewise ordinary with persons that lose anything, to goe to some of these men, by whom they are directed; how what persons & in what place they shall find it.”⁷⁵⁸ In this way, some people clearly perceived second sight to be a skill, rather than diabolical witchcraft. The Highland witch Mary and the charmer Archibald Roddie both laid claim to talents as far-reaching as prognostication, the discovery of hidden knowledge, or the ability to see things done at a distance, none of which seem to have been used for evil purposes. These details indicate that some popular conceptions of second sight did not necessarily overlap with demonological understandings of witchcraft. The commonality between these cases, which are separated by more than a century, was the claim that these seers were not witches or practitioners of illicit magic, but rather just second sighted people. However, the prosecution of such individuals or their consulters demonstrates that this belief was not shared by elite demonologists or state authorities. Furthermore, the accusations and testimony brought by accused witches’ neighbors indicate that demonological interpretations of second sight did sometimes filter down to the village level.

Numerous aspects of second sight belief can be found in early modern Scottish witch trial records, and many accused witches laid claim to far-reaching abilities that were associated with second sight. While some accused witches protested their innocence, the fact that claiming to be second sighted was considered synonymous with diabolical witchcraft indicates that second sight belief was actively demonized by authorities. Furthermore, the popular association between

⁷⁵⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132v.

second sight and the fairies was strong during this period, while the elite interpretation that fairies were actually demons only served to further condemn practitioners of magic who claimed they had contact with fairy spirits. As fairies were associated with both disability and second sight, the existence of accused witches who attested to gaining supernatural abilities and experiencing disability through contact with spirits demonstrates that this aspect of second sight belief was also coming under scrutiny.

The 1591 trial records of Agnes Sampson feature many aspects of second sight belief, including her claims that she was able to communicate with spirits, see the future, prognosticate on death, and access hidden knowledge. Agnes Sampson was a locally famous practitioner of popular magic, and she was tried by King James VI during the first major wave of witch-hunting in Scotland. Agnes and many of the individuals who consulted her likely believed she was a practitioner of largely beneficent magic, in that she used her abilities for the benefit of her clients. In particular Agnes was frequently consulted for her ability to predict if people would live or die.⁷⁵⁹ Agnes reputedly had a charm which she claimed she had learned from her father, and she would use this charm to determine if an ill person would survive or die.⁷⁶⁰ Agnes would repeat the charm over the person, and if she stumbled during her recitation, it meant that the

⁷⁵⁹ NRS, JC26/2/3.

⁷⁶⁰ NRS, JC26/2/12. Agnes' case is comparable to the account of a second sighted woman described in John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia*. Fraser claimed that this seer was specifically consulted by others for her ability to "give Responses" to questions, and Fraser attested that very often the responses she gave were true "even in future contingent events." This seer's method of predicting the future was also via a charm that she knew from her father, who conveyed it to her on his death bed. A few hours after a question had been asked of her, the answer would appear "in live Images before her eyes, or upon the Wall." See Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

individual would not recover.⁷⁶¹

Despite the fact that both second sight and charming were condemned by religious authorities, Agnes likely viewed herself as both a Christian and practitioner of magic, and therefore not a diabolical witch. Demonologist George Sinclair claimed that Agnes' charm made use of long scriptural passages, "containing the main points of Christianity, so she may seem to have been not so much a white Witch, as a holy Woman."⁷⁶² In a statement compatible with Sinclair's commentary, historian David Robertson has noted that the charm appears to be a "vernacular rhyming "folk" version of the Apostle's Creed."⁷⁶³ Agnes was also accused of charming clients' cows by walking between them while they were in pairs, striking their backs, and repeating "Ave Maria."⁷⁶⁴ Both of these charms were recorded in her trial documents as evidence of her witchcraft and deviance. Though Agnes' knowledge of the Creed or invocation of Mary were likely rooted in a certain degree of piety, both belief in Mary as an intercessor and the recitation of the Apostle's Creed were aspects of pre-Reformation doctrine. As such, especially because she incorporated them into her magical practices, Agnes' prosecution represented an attempt to fulfill authorities' dual goals of eradicating folk belief and surviving aspects of Catholicism in their mission to create a godly society.

In accordance with her abilities as a second sighted individual, Agnes' trial documents illustrate that she was accused of multiple counts of predicting the deaths of others. Death

⁷⁶¹ NRS, JC26/2/12.

⁷⁶² Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 22.

⁷⁶³ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 23-24.

⁷⁶⁴ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 26.

prognostication was considered a significant aspect of second sight belief, and the fact that Agnes had a reputation for being able to predict forthcoming death supports the interpretation that she had second sight. Through her talents, Agnes foretold a man named William Markestoun that he was “bot ane deid man,”⁷⁶⁵ as well as predicted that a man named Patrick Porteus would only live for another eleven years.⁷⁶⁶ She also told a woman named Mary Nicolsoune that she would wager her life for hers.⁷⁶⁷ Agnes was frequently consulted for her diagnostic and healing abilities, and reportedly was able to discern that a boy’s illness was caused by elf-shot.⁷⁶⁸ Because of the Catholic nature of Agnes’ charms, she was accused of attempting to work magic by her “devilish prayers”⁷⁶⁹ and her trial records specifically claim that she used her charm to tell a number of named individuals if they would recover from illness or die.⁷⁷⁰ These details support the belief that Agnes was condemned for her Catholic sympathies, as well as because authorities interpreted the practices of charming and prognosticating on the topic of death as engaging in diabolical witchcraft.

Aside from her ability to prognosticate on death and its circumstances, Agnes’ trial records demonstrate her profound knowledge of secret things, including events that had happened remotely from her in time and space. The pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* contained a remarkable instance in which Agnes displayed her ability to access hidden knowledge. During

⁷⁶⁵ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 21.

⁷⁶⁶ NRS, JC26/2/12.

⁷⁶⁷ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 21.

⁷⁶⁸ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 21.

⁷⁶⁹ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 22.

⁷⁷⁰ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 21-22.

her interrogation, Agnes revealed hidden knowledge to King James VI, who was so impressed by the secrets she knew that he became wholly convinced of her supernatural abilities. When Agnes was examined by the king, she

confessed... sundry things which were so miraculous and strange as that his Majesty said they were all extreme liars. Whereat she answered she would not wish his Majesty to suppose her words to be false, but rather to believe them, in that she would discover such matter unto him as his Majesty should not any way doubt of. And thereupon taking his Majesty a little aside, she declared unto him the very words which passed between the king's Majesty and his queen at Upslo in Norway the first night of their marriage, with their answer each to other; whereat the king's Majesty wondered greatly, and swore by the living God that he believed that all the devils in hell could not have discovered the same, acknowledging her words to be most true.⁷⁷¹

It is possible that Agnes was eager to her display her ability to the king, hoping that it would be interpreted as proof of her innocence rather than diabolism. However, this did not prove to be the case, as James interpreted her true revelation as evidence of her pact with the Devil.

Recorded accusations against Agnes also revealed her to be a person well-versed in early modern Scottish beliefs to do with spirits and subtle bodies. Agnes certainly believed she had the ability to see spirits, and evidence for this can be found in her claim that she often saw the Devil in various forms, including as a black dog named Elva.⁷⁷² The fact that Agnes' devil could shift shapes and had the name "Elva" (which sounds quite similar to "elf") may indicate that she believed her familiar spirit was a fairy being. Like many accused witches, Agnes described her

⁷⁷¹ *News from Scotland*, 316.

⁷⁷² Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 25.

first encounter with spirits as occurring during a period of hardship.⁷⁷³ Agnes claimed that she entered the Devil's service after he appeared to her in the night, following the death of her husband, when she was alone and worrying about her babies. The Devil promised her that if she gave herself to him she would lack nothing, and so she committed herself to him.⁷⁷⁴ Most intriguingly, Agnes attested that she promised herself to his service before she knew what spirit he was.⁷⁷⁵ This confession indicates that Agnes believed she was able to see spirits in a general sense, and was therefore not particularly troubled about what kind of spirit had appeared to her. While her interrogators interpreted Agnes' descriptions of her familiar spirit as the Devil, this detail also reveals that (at least initially) she did not necessarily believe this spirit was demonic. Agnes' trial records also make reference to Scottish beliefs about subtle bodies. Reportedly, Agnes once threatened a woman that if "she refused to come unto her self would compel whether she would or not the pith of her body to come unto her."⁷⁷⁶ This threat hinged on the belief that people could leave their physical bodies behind and engage with the world through their subtle bodies. In these numerous ways, the trial records of Agnes Sampson contain a variety of aspects of Scottish popular beliefs about second sighted people. Despite her claims to being a

⁷⁷³ The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft database claims that the "want nothing" motif is present in forty-three Scottish witch trial records. This motif is almost always connected to a period of hardship in a witch's life before first encountering the Devil, whereupon the Devil promises the accused witch that he or she will "want nothing" in exchange for joining the Devil's service. See Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller, and Louise Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft," <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/>.

⁷⁷⁴ William K. Boyd and Henry W. Meikle, eds., *Calendar of State Papers, Scotland: Volume 10, 1589-1593* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1936), 464-467.

⁷⁷⁵ NRS, JC26/2/13.

⁷⁷⁶ NRS, JC26/2/10.

practitioner of magic or a Christian, Agnes was executed for being a diabolical witch.

Evidence that some accused Scottish witches were believed to be second sighted people also appears in the 1597 trial records of Margaret Bane, who laid claim to the ability to see spirits, especially wraiths, as well as interpret these omens of death. Margaret's trial records describe her encounter with the headless wraith of a man she knew: "thow mett the said vmquhile Thomas cuming out at his awin yett, as apperit to the and they said sister, ane heidles man."⁷⁷⁷ Within traditional lore associated with second sight belief, to catch sight of a wraith was a sign that the individual to whom it belonged would soon die. However, authorities interpreted Margaret's vision of this apparition as evidence of a Satanic conspiracy between Margaret and her sister to kill the man: "Vmquhile Jonet Spaldarg, quha was thy sister, and the mother of all vitches, maist expert in the devilische socerie and inchantmentis, and thy teacher and instructor vndir thy maister Satane, scho and thow, be his instigatioune, devyset the death of vmquhile Thomas Forbes of Cloack... he contractit sic ane seiknes quhairof he departit and deit."⁷⁷⁸

In his demonological treatise, King James VI had argued that the Devil could appear as a wraith or the spirit of a person who was soon to die: "When they appear upon that occasion they are called wraiths in our language. Amongst the gentiles the devil used that much to make them believe that it was some good spirit that appeared to them then... And this way he easily deceived the gentiles because they know not God. And to that same effect is it that he now appears in that manner to some ignorant Christians."⁷⁷⁹ James had also contended that the Devil

⁷⁷⁷ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 158.

⁷⁷⁸ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 158.

⁷⁷⁹ James VI, *Demonology*, 407.

was able to borrow the “shadow or similitude” of individuals, a deceptive ability which the king believed could be used to impersonate people who were seen at the witches’ sabbath or witnessed at fairy gatherings. James also found evidence for this belief in accounts of spectral bewitchment, in which the spirit or appearance of a witch oppressed another person.⁷⁸⁰ These arguments about the Devil’s ability to assume the likeness of wraiths or doubles represented a significant demonization of second sight belief, which held that the apprehension and interpretation of such beings was the specific purview of seers. Therefore, while Margaret’s claim to seeing and interpreting omens of death reflected her identity as a second sighted person, this visionary experience was interpreted by authorities as demonic, and as evidence of maleficent witchcraft.

Some accused witches were prosecuted because they had prominent reputations as individuals who had access to supernatural knowledge, including the ability to tell the future and know hidden things. Aside from her ability to see wraiths, other evidence from her trial records indicates that Margaret Bane may have been accused of witchcraft because of her ability to foretell the future.⁷⁸¹ Accused witch Isobel Crawford was also a practitioner of magic who was consulted by others because of her reputation for accessing hidden knowledge. Her trial records claim that Isobel was disciplined in Aberdeen in 1727 for being “a woman guiltie of charmes and a teller of fortunes, such as telling what a man any woman will be married with, and what a woman a man will be married with: as also that she could give ane account that if any person had any thing stolen from them, she could tell them if it could be got back againe; and that if any

⁷⁸⁰ James VI, *Demonology*, 423. For more on the early modern conversation about the Devil’s ability to assume the likeness of another individual, see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 144-150.

⁷⁸¹ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 159.

persons who went abroad, she would give an account if they were dead or alive, and the lyke.”⁷⁸² These wide-ranging abilities that correspond with beliefs about second sighted people likely indicate that Isobel had second sight, though the authorities viewed these talents as evidence of her relationship with the Devil. Just like Margaret, Isobel’s abilities are readily identifiable as second sight from the perspective of popular belief, yet because such abilities were criminalized, they were associated with diabolical witchcraft by religious and state authorities.

There appears to have been a popular demand for Isobel’s specific ability to see people who were in remote places, and thereby tell others if the travelers were doing well. Accused witch Bessie Skebister was also likely a second sighted woman, given her reputation for being able to see events happening far off, especially if others were in danger or would come home well. Her reputation for being able to view events remote in space or time was well-attested in her disciplinary records, dated 1633. These documents claim that Bessie had a procedure of engaging her second sight abilities, possibly through a method that allowed her to cultivate fixed attention on an object and enter an altered state of consciousness. In order to do this, she would drop a coin into water and gaze upon it, and thereby determine if a distant person was well or not.⁷⁸³ Once, Bessie was found weeping and a man named James Chalmers recognized that Bessie’s distress was an ill omen for some fellow villagers that were currently far away. However, Bessie told James that she “weipit for the truble they wer in, but not for their death, for

⁷⁸² NRS, CH2/1020/12, fols. 51-52.

⁷⁸³ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 512.

they wold come home.”⁷⁸⁴ This came to pass as she predicted. In another circumstance, an oar from a boat was found cast ashore, and so the wife of a man who was aboard the boat sent for Bessie in order to ask if the men were well. Bessie answered, “goe your way home, for they ar all weill, and will be home or they sleep: and so it was that they came home that same night.”⁷⁸⁵ The fact that her fellow villagers believed Bessie’s distress was an ill omen or consulted her to ask if distant friends were well indicates that belief in her abilities was based on her established reputation as a second sighted individual. This belief is supported by the allegation that “all the honest men of the Yle declarit, that it was ane usuall thing quhen thay thought boatis war in danger, to come or send” and ask of Bessie “how thay war, and if thay wold come home weill? quhairvpoun ane common proverb is, vsit ‘Giff Bessie say it is weill, all is weill.”⁷⁸⁶

Accused witch Jonka Dyneis also laid claim to this ability to view events remotely, as attested in her 1616 trial documents. Jonka’s husband was on a fishing boat at sea, and when the boat became imperiled, Jonka was “fund and sein standing at hir awin hous wall, in ane trans, that same hour he was in danger; and being trappit, she could not give answer, bot stude as bereft of hir senssis: and quhen she was speirit at quhy she wes so movit, she answerit, gif our boit be not tynt, she is in great hazard— and wes tryit so to be.”⁷⁸⁷ According to this accusation, Jonka’s vision came to her during an altered state of consciousness, in which she claimed she was able to see events happening far off. The correspondence of these details indicates that both Bessie and

⁷⁸⁴ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 474.

⁷⁸⁵ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 474.

⁷⁸⁶ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 491.

⁷⁸⁷ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 473-474.

Jonka were believed to be second sighted people, and consequentially both were prosecuted for their claims to supernatural abilities. The fact that her neighbors resorted to Bessie in order to learn of the welfare of their loved ones illustrates that some people must not have believed she was actually a diabolical witch. However, her interrogation and trial at the hands of state authorities demonstrates this tension between elite and popular understandings of second sight.

Trial records of second sighted witches also confirm the relationship between disability, the fairies, and second sight in popular belief. In 1644, accused witch Barbara Bowndie confessed that she came into the Devil's service "of necessitie in Zetland," when she was traveling with a young unbaptized child and she "fainted by the way, she came speechless, and so remained for the space of 24 houres and was sore tormented, and the people said, that she had been with the Farie."⁷⁸⁸ Despite her interrogators' claims that she had entered the Devil's service during a period of hardship, Barbara's neighbors clearly believed that her temporary disability was the result of contact with the fairies. This belief would have been further confirmed by the fact that Barbara had recently had a child, and this baby was unbaptized. Women near their time of childbirth and unbaptized children were both considered especially vulnerable to fairy assault or abduction, illustrating the intersection of popular beliefs about fairies and second sight in Barbara's witch trial narrative. Barbara laid claim to the ability to see spirits, as she supposedly saw the Devil in "apparitions in diverse shapes," not unlike other witches such as Agnes Sampson. Furthermore, accusations against Barbara cite that after she emerged from her period of disability, she gave herself out as a detector of witches, thereby demonstrating that she believed her brush with the supernatural conferred on her the ability to access hidden knowledge.

⁷⁸⁸ NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 254.

As in the case of Barbara Bowndie, the link between fairies and second sight was strongly represented in witch trial records. The judicial courts of early modern Scotland prosecuted numerous individuals who claimed they went with the fairies, from whom these people supposedly received information or supernatural abilities.⁷⁸⁹ Some individuals had reputations for being able to see spirits, particularly fairies, and public awareness of their subsequently acquired gifts was cited in their trial records. In 1616, Katherine Jonesdochter was specifically accused of “haunting and seeing the trowis ryse out of the kirkyeard of Hildiswick, and Holiecrosse kirk of Eschenes, and on the hill called Greinfaill.” Katherine exhibited her knowledge of the operations of spirits when she claimed that the trowis would come to any home in which there was “feasting, or great mirrines and speciallie at Yule.”⁷⁹⁰ Her trial records attest that Katherine met the Devil for the first time when she was a young girl, when he came to her mother’s house.⁷⁹¹ Katherine’s relationships with spirit beings prompted her neighbors to consult her for her reputed ability to transfer illnesses. Similarly, in 1633 it was alleged against Isobel Sinclair that across a period of seven years, “sex times at the reathes of the year, shoe hath bein controlled with the Phairie; and that be thame, shoe hath the second sight: quhairby shoe will know giff thair be any fey bodie in the hous.”⁷⁹² A “fey bodie” meant someone who was fated to

⁷⁸⁹ See also the cases of Stein Maltman (NRS, CH2/722/5), Harry Wilson (NRS, CH2/113/1), Christian Lewistoun's daughter (NRS, JC2/3, fols. 224-229), Alesoun Pierson (NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v), Bessie Dunlop (NRS, JC2/1, fols. 15r-18r), Janet Boyman (NRS, JC26/1/67; JC40/1), Isobel Gowdie (NRS, GD125/16/5/1/1, 2, 3, 4), Agnes Cairnes (NRS, JC10/15/3/1), Janet Rendall (NRS, SC11/5/1646/10).

⁷⁹⁰ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 532-533.

⁷⁹¹ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.”

⁷⁹² Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 470.

die, which references Isobel's ability to prognosticate on death through her second sight.⁷⁹³

Isobel was also reputed to be knowledgeable about rituals for protecting cattle at Halloween (a liminal times in which fairies were believed to be abroad), for which she was consulted by her fellow villagers.⁷⁹⁴

Themes of second sight, disability, and relationships with fairy beings come together in the 1616 trial records of Elspeth Reoch, who was convicted of “committing and practising of the abominable and divilesch cryme of witchcraft in giveing ear and credite to the Illusiounes of the Devell.”⁷⁹⁵ Elspeth's narrative of how she came to obtain her supernatural abilities began when she was a young girl and she was waiting by a loch-side. Two men came to her, one wearing black and the other green tartan plaid.⁷⁹⁶ The man in plaid told Elspeth that she was pretty and that he would teach her to know and see any thing she would desire. The other man told his companion to be quiet, because Elspeth would not be able to keep their counsel. However, because Elspeth was eager, the man in tartan instructed her to roast an egg and take the sweat of it for three Sundays, with unwashed hands, and apply the sweat to her eyes “quhairby she sould sie and knaw ony thing she desyrit.”⁷⁹⁷ As proof of Elspeth's newly acquired second sight, her fairy familiar instructed Elspeth to go the house of a certain woman, look her in the face, and tell

⁷⁹³ See *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*: “If one go out to hunt Venison for the use of any man in particular, & easily find it They say that such a person is Fey & will not live long; but if it be found with difficulty he'l live long.” BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 16v. See also Robert Kirk's definition in EUL, La.III.551, fol. 20.

⁷⁹⁴ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.”

⁷⁹⁵ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 187.

⁷⁹⁶ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 188.

⁷⁹⁷ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 188.

her “she is with bairne to ane uther wyfers husband.”⁷⁹⁸ The woman was astonished and upset that Elspeth knew about her unborn and illegitimate child, and pleaded for Elspeth’s help in procuring an abortion. This event confirmed Elspeth's belief that she had gained second sight through contact with the fairies.

Elspeth’s second sight permitted her continued relationship with the fairies and access to supernatural knowledge, though at a price. The man in black came to Elspeth a second time, when she was in her sister’s house, and “callit him selff ane farie man quha wes sumtyme her kinsman callit Johne Stewart quha wes slane be McKy at the doun going of the soone And therfor nather deid nor leiving bot wald ever go betuix the heaven and the earth.”⁷⁹⁹ This statement illustrates the overlap between fairies and ghosts in popular belief, as well as the liminal status of Elspeth’s familiar spirit. The man in black coerced Elspeth into sleeping with him, and then struck her “dum for haveing teacheit hir to sie and ken ony thing she desyrit.”⁸⁰⁰ After this, Elspeth had “na power of hir toung nor could nocht speik.” Consequentially, Elspeth’s brother beat her and took her three times to the church on Sunday to receive prayer. These acts of violence and resorting to prayer may indicate that Elspeth’s brother thought she was a changeling, as evidenced by her sudden muteness, and through these actions he hoped to force the changeling into revealing itself. Despite the abuse and prayers, Elspeth continued “dumb going about and deceaveing the people Synding telling and foir shawing thame quhat they had

⁷⁹⁸ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 188.

⁷⁹⁹ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189.

⁸⁰⁰ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189.

done and quhat they sould do And that be the secund sicht grantit to hir in maner foirsaid.”⁸⁰¹

Elspeth’s narrative and abilities met early modern expectations for a second sighted individual. She had contact with the fairies and was able to see spirits, though this cost her the ability to speak. Her ability also seems to have been conferred through the application of magical eye ointment, further entrenching the details of Elspeth’s story in the realm of popular beliefs about second sight. She was believed to be able to predict the future and reveal hidden knowledge, as well as prognosticate on the topic of death. During her trial, Elspeth claimed she had seen several men with the apparitions of nooses around their necks, presaging their coming deaths. Like some other accused witches who had second sight, Elspeth’s familiar spirits also revealed knowledge directly to her. Her fairy contacts once pleaded with her to leave Orkney, and warned her that if she stayed there “she wald be hurt.” This prediction came to pass, as Elspeth was convicted of witchcraft and executed in 1616. Elspeth also had a charm to tell “quhatsoever sould be speirit at hir.” She would sit on her right knee, and pull a stalk of herb called Merefow between her middle finger and thumb, reciting the phrase “In nomine patris filii et spiritus sancti.”⁸⁰² These details illustrate the profound connections between Elspeth’s understanding of herself as a second sighted person and relevant themes of fairies, disability, and charming. Furthermore, like Agnes, Elspeth’s abilities of foresight also involved the recitation of Christian words and prayers, demonstrating that she may not have felt that her abilities were opposed to her identity as a Christian. As her charm invoked the Trinity using Latin phrases, Elspeth’s interrogators likely prosecuted her for not only claiming to have second sight, but also

⁸⁰¹ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189.

⁸⁰² “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189.

for retaining devotion to pre-Reformation beliefs and practices. Elspeth's condemnation and execution as a diabolic witch confirms that authorities were deeply concerned about the survival of Catholicism in reformed Scotland, and that claiming to be a second sighted person was not considered a legitimate defense against imputations of witchcraft.

While many second sighted people and their consultants may have believed that second sight was not tantamount to diabolical witchcraft, demonologists were unconvinced. The trials and executions of people who laid claim to abilities related to second sight illustrate that second sight belief was systematically condemned and demonized by religious authorities, and beliefs related to second sight, fairies, and witchcraft were becoming increasingly interconnected during this period. The conviction that second sight was actually witchcraft likely infiltrated the realm of popular belief over time, as condemnation from authoritative sources intimidated and persuaded common people that second sight had a demonic source. Accusers' willingness to believe that second sighted people were actually witches may have been facilitated by the fact that many second sighted people were prone to making ominous predictions, which could be interpreted by their recipients as threats or intent to perform malefic magic. The belief that second sight was indeed witchcraft does appear in the mouths of everyday people, as apparent in an account by Robert Chambers who recorded that in 1686, a group of people witnessed showers of objects and spectral companies of men marching in the air over the River Clyde. A man standing nearby who was unable to see the visions cried out against his fellow spectators, saying, "A pack of damned witches and warlocks that have the second sight!"⁸⁰³ This belief that "witches and warlocks" were privy to the gift of second sight was well-established in the records of the

⁸⁰³ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 486.

early modern Scottish witch trials. While not all people agreed that the two were synonymous, this lack of consensus demonstrates that elite demonological beliefs did have influence beyond the theoretical.

People with Disabilities and their Consulters

As in the cases of Barbara Bowndie and Elspeth Reoch, second sighted people also appear in witch trial records as individuals whose supernatural powers were associated with disability. As is discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, there was a strong cultural association between disability and second sight. Sometimes, this disability was believed to have been acquired through an encounter with the supernatural, particularly fairy beings. As such, witch trial documents that reference people with disabilities who have supernatural powers contain evidence of aspects of second sight belief among practitioners of popular magic and those who consulted them. The consultation of “dumb” people or “dumbies” makes frequent appearance in judicial records, and points to the continued belief that people with disabilities had access to knowledge above the ordinary. However, the presence of such people and their consulters in the disciplinary records of early modern Scotland indicates that practices related to second sight belief were demonized and categorized as social and religious deviance during this period.

Some second sight theorists believed that people with disabilities were naturally gifted with faculties of knowledge, and therefore should not necessarily be punished for using their talents. In his treatise on witchcraft, demonologist Sir George Mackenzie claimed that some mute

people pretended to tell fortunes, but that they were often not punished as harshly as witches.⁸⁰⁴

While this belief seems to have held sway among some elites, the practice of consulting practitioners of popular magic was still strongly condemned. In *Memorialls*, Robert Law discussed people who actually had disabilities, as well as those who simply pretended to be mute, deaf, or blind for the purpose of making a living as a practitioner of popular magic. Out of these two, Law acknowledged that some people who actually had disabilities were also genuinely gifted in supernatural ways that were not demonic. However, Law also believed that consulting these individuals for the purpose of discovering the future was still sinful, since “self-seeking to find out their fortunes by them and events of things, either from these that are truly dumb, or feinedly so, is certainly impius.”⁸⁰⁵

The practice of punishing consulters of people with disabilities more harshly than the “dumb” fortune-tellers themselves does seem to have been prevalent. Disciplinary records illustrate that authorities were often more interested in extracting information about clients who consulted people with disabilities than the practitioners of magic themselves. In 1651, the Presbytery of Haddington heard several cases of people within their boundaries consulting mute individuals. It had somehow been discovered that several people had consulted a mute woman for the purpose of finding some lost things. While it does not seem that the mute woman was summoned, her consulters were called, appeared, and rebuked for their sin. The presbytery also wrote a letter to the parish of Ormestoune to learn who may have consulted a mute boy there about the location of lost objects. Eventually, an answer to the presbytery’s letter was received,

⁸⁰⁴ Sir George MacKenzie, *A Treatise on Witchcraft*, in *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire. who were burned on the gallowgreen of paisley* (Paisley: J. Neilson and John Millar, 1809), 35.

⁸⁰⁵ Law, *Memorialls*, 113.

explaining that the father of the mute boy had been summoned and forced to reveal the names of the people who had consulted his son. The named individuals were made to “satisfy church discipline.”⁸⁰⁶ In both these clusters of cases, the presbytery seemed more interested in locating the consulters, rather than the practitioners of popular magic.

The public’s consultation of “dumb” individuals because of their reputation for having access to supernatural knowledge was a cause for widespread concern among religious and state authorities. Numerous cases of consulters appear in the witch trial records of early modern Scotland, illustrating the demonization of such practices from the perspective of the church. The reason for consulting people with disabilities seems to have largely centered on the belief that as second sighted individuals, they could locate hidden things or see actions done at a distance. The records of the presbyteries in East Lothian contain numerous counts of disciplinary action for consulting mute people between 1598 and 1698.⁸⁰⁷ In 1653, Robert Paiston and his wife confessed to consulting a mute man about some stolen cloth, upon the advice of a neighbor. The same man had also been consulted by Helinor Stevenson, who was concerned about some missing money.⁸⁰⁸ Likewise, Henry Marshal, William Cleland, and some companions in Kilsyth were punished in 1723 for consulting a mute man about some stolen clothes and goods.⁸⁰⁹ James Russell of Peebles and two of his friends were also accused of consulting “witches, charmers, and such as have familiar spiriters particularly the dumb man in the correction house of

⁸⁰⁶ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 168-169.

⁸⁰⁷ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 505-506.

⁸⁰⁸ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 104.

⁸⁰⁹ NRS, CH2/216/2, fols. 148-149.

Edinburgh in October 1678.”⁸¹⁰ This last entry is particularly interesting because of the inclusion of the belief that the “dumb man” had a familiar spirit, which would have doubtless been regarded as an act of witchcraft. In this circumstance, it is likely that the “dumb man” (and not just his consulters) was also punished, particularly given the fact that he was being detained in the correction house.

The records of early modern Scottish witch trials include numerous individuals such as this man, who both had a disability and was also known for communicating with familiar spirits. In particular, some second sighted people were believed to have gained access to supernatural knowledge during their encounters with these spirits, and that these encounters sometimes also resulted in disability, both permanent and temporary. Though he taught her “all thingis,” including how to heal diseases and use charms, accused witch Alesoun Pierson attested in 1588 that her ghostly familiar William Sympsoune also took the power out of her hand and foot. When William introduced Alesoun to the fairies and their court, a man clad in green clothes took away the power of her left side.⁸¹¹ It seems that Alesoun was specifically consulted for her healing and charming abilities, since her documents record that she was accused of “dealing with charmes, and abusing the commoun people thairwith, be the said airt of Witchcraft.” In 1644, Barbara Bowndie was supposedly struck speechless for one day and her neighbors claimed she had been taken by the fairies, but she denied this, along with the accusation that she had been giving herself out as a finder of witches.⁸¹² Jean Campbell’s 1660 trial documents claim that she was

⁸¹⁰ NRS, JC10/3, fols. 26v, 50r.

⁸¹¹ NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v.

⁸¹² NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 254.

popularly believed to go with the fairies, though she also denied this in court. Jean claimed that the rumors began when she fell sick three years ago, and could neither speak nor see but “stounded constantly for the space of two or three days and was pitifully tormented.”⁸¹³ Jean’s supposed brush with the supernatural led to her reputation as local healer, and her records say she was consulted about the illnesses of her fellow villagers.⁸¹⁴ Therefore, while it is likely that some people with disabilities were not punished for telling fortunes or revealing hidden knowledge to clients, any association with a familiar spirit would have been regarded as an admittance of witchcraft by the authorities. As established in legislation and demonological writings, all fairies and ghosts were interpreted by authorities as demons. While some records only illustrate authorities’ interest in punishing consultants, some individuals with disabilities do appear as accused witches in trial records.

As cited by Robert Law, there was also some concern from authorities about whether people with disabilities were deliberately pretending, in order to lend credibility to their claim to supernatural abilities. According to early modern sources, some individuals were certainly suspected and accused of doing so. Sir George Mackenzie claimed that he had witnessed practitioners of popular magic who had disabilities tortured before judicial councils in order to discover if they were truly mute, or if it was a pretense in order to deceive others.⁸¹⁵ Janet Douglas, the second sighted witch-finder, was supposedly mute when she first appeared in the historical record. However, after a while she began to speak and it was suspected that she was

⁸¹³ NRS, CH2/890/1, fols. 78, 80

⁸¹⁴ NRS, CH2/890/1, fol. 81.

⁸¹⁵ MacKenzie, *Treatise on Witchcraft*, 35.

guilty of pretense and attempting to bolster her reputation as a second sighted person.⁸¹⁶ The revelation of her purported pretense resulted in her discipline and eventual exile. Celebrity-seer Duncan Campbell was supposedly both deaf and mute, though some questioned whether he was truly neither. Numerous attempts were made to discover whether his disabilities were genuine, including people firing pistols behind his head to see if he would react, and men assaulting him to see if he would cry out. A woman once slammed a door on Duncan's fingers for the same reason, but he just stamped his foot and made an "inarticulate Noise."⁸¹⁷ Despite no revelations that indicated pretense, Campbell came to be widely regarded as an imposter and charlatan.⁸¹⁸ Similarly, accused witch Elspeth Reoch was also accused of feigning muteness in order to lend credibility to her claim that she had second sight.⁸¹⁹ Despite these allegations, Elspeth maintained that her disability was caused by her contact with a familiar spirit, and that it was also the means by she had acquired her supernatural abilities.⁸²⁰

While it is impossible to determine whether any of these early modern individuals were genuinely disabled, or simply pretending, the fact that it was believed that a practitioner of magic might fake a disability in order to make others believe he or she had supernatural powers indicates that aspects of second sight belief are present in early modern Scottish records of church discipline. While some presbyteries were more interested in punishing consultants rather than practitioners of popular magic, the fact that some people with disabilities were tried as

⁸¹⁶ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 142.

⁸¹⁷ Haywood, *A Spy on the Conjuror*, 146-147; Krentz, "Discourses of Deafness," 40-41.

⁸¹⁸ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for more on Campbell's reputation as an imposter.

⁸¹⁹ "Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts," 187.

⁸²⁰ "Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts," 189.

witches illustrates that this practice was not always maintained. Rather, accusations of witchcraft leveraged against practitioners of magic demonstrate that second sight and the matrix of beliefs that sustained it were being demonized by religious and state authorities during the era of witchcraft prosecutions.

An Ominous Prediction versus a Threat

Perhaps the most elusive way that second sight may appear in witch trial records is in references to witches' ominous predictions. One of the key features of second sight was the ability to tell the future, and sometimes these predictions were on the topic of death or disaster. As people who were sometimes prone to uttering ominous predictions, the second sighted may appear in witch trial records simply because they told someone about an impending demise. It is likely that people who made ominous predictions were sometimes treated with dislike or hostility by others, as in the cases of the people who watched the church porch in order to determine who would die in the coming year.⁸²¹ These people sometimes shared their ominous predictions with others, and were subsequently met with antagonism. An example of this same pattern occurring in the account of a second sighted person appeared in Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth*. According to Kirk's account, a seer told another man that this individual "should die within two dayes, at which news the named [man] stabb'd the seer and was himselfe executed two dayes after for the fact."⁸²² Kirk included this story as an example of an accurate prediction that was

⁸²¹ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on the practice of watching the church porch.

⁸²² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 38.

fulfilled in a timely manner. However, this story also illustrates the fact that second sighted people were sometimes subject to hostile and violent reactions as a result of their ominous predictions.

The possibility that some second sighted people used their reputations as prognosticators to intimidate their neighbors should also not be ignored. Rather, witch trial records illustrate that some accused witches may have capitalized on their neighbors' fears that what they predicted tended to come true. Scottish ethnographer Martin Martin recorded the account of a second sighted man who was mocked for his ugliness by a child. This child taunted the seer for "being black by Name and Nature. At last the Seer told him very angrily, My Child, if I am black, you'll be red e'er long... next Morning the Boy being at play near the Houses, fell on a Stone, and wounded himself in the Forehead, so deep, that to this day there's a hallow Scar in that Part of it."⁸²³ This story demonstrates another similarity between people who watched the church porch, second sighted people, and accused witches: they all seem to have been prone to telling people who displeased them that some unhappy fate was soon to befall them. In this vein, we also cannot say with any certainty that some second sighted people did not revel in uttering ominous predictions against people whom they disliked. Some seers may have even sincerely hoped that their dark predictions would come true. These unkind actions on the part of accused witches were not necessarily in conflict with the belief that as reputed prognosticators, they could actually see the future. Because of the tangled intersections between an ominous prediction, a threat, and a prediction of a tragic (yet desired) outcome, it may be hard to distinguish between an ominous prediction and an act of malefic magic in witch trial records. Indeed, early modern

⁸²³ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 325.

people may not have made a strong distinction between the two, since an ominous prediction can be understood as both a prediction and the intent to fulfill it. In this way, ominous predictions that came to pass were likely to be interpreted as proof of witchcraft, since these predictions could also be understood as intent to cause harm.⁸²⁴

Witchcraft scholar P.G. Maxwell-Stuart acknowledged the tension between predictions and threats in Scottish trial sources, claiming “Sometimes it is difficult to know whether the action of a witch is the record of second sight or of sorcery.”⁸²⁵ Historian David Robertson has also admitted that “it is often difficult to discern to what extent these predictions were considered simply as “unlawful” foreknowledge of an event, and to what extent they were believed to be the cause of the event.”⁸²⁶ In reference to this tension, Maxwell-Stuart cited the 1661 case of accused witch Beatrix Leslie, who came to the house of John Wathenstone and urinated in front of his fire. Beatrix then said, “There shall be fewer folk here ere long.”⁸²⁷ The Wathenstone’s house caught fire a week later, and John was informed of what had been said during Beatrix’s visit.

⁸²⁴ John Toland and Lord Molesworth expressed skepticism about second sight in their annotations of Martin Martin’s *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*. In particular, they shared the belief that seers maintained their reputations by causing their ominous prophecies to come true. On the topic of a predicted kiln fire, Toland remarked “I should not like such a prophesy as this, for fear the seer should think himself obligd to keep up his credit, by accomplishing it.” Molesworth agreed, saying “who knowes that he did not fire it? I should certainly have accused him of the fact.” Molesworth also criticized a seer who predicted a woman’s death that came to pass, writing “he ought to have him put in Jayl for his predictions if they were such.” It is likely that some other early modern people maintained similar opinions about seers. If it was believed that they caused their predictions to come true (by magic or otherwise), it could have led to an accusation of witchcraft. See BL, C.45.c.1, pgs. 318, 323, 321.

⁸²⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 24.

⁸²⁶ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 507-508.

⁸²⁷ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 24.

Upon receiving this news, he became very upset and declared, “My well days are done.” He subsequently became ill and attempted suicide multiple times, which his wife prevented. John was successful at taking his own life a year later. Maxwell-Stuart argued that there are two ways to read this case. The act of urination could have been a maleficent ritual that was intended to set fire to the house or perhaps kill its owner. However, Maxwell-Stuart has declared that this interpretation is unlikely, since “there is no precedent for such a piece of magic’s being employed for such a purpose.” Rather, he argued that Beatrix was probably just relieving herself, and this act appears in her trial records because it was shared by witnesses. This alternate interpretation informed Maxwell-Stuart’s argument that Beatrix’s ominous prediction may have caused John significant distress, specifically because of her reputation as a second sighted person. Therefore, his subsequent illness and suicide were a result of John’s conviction that Beatrix’s prediction would come to pass, as opposed to being the consequence of maleficent magic.⁸²⁸

This type of reading of witch trial records coheres with what is known about both witchcraft and second sight. Both witches and second sighted people had reputations as individuals with supernatural abilities. When it came to witchcraft, a witch was referred to as *mala fama*, that is, having a bad reputation that preceded her. However, people with second sight were also on the receiving end of hostility from others, as a result of their acquisition of reputations for saying things that were generally displeasing. Cases containing this type of ambiguity appear in numerous witch trial records, where an ominous declaration could be interpreted as a threat or vice versa, with both interpretations relying on the bad reputation of the prognosticator. Beatrix Leslie (the accused witch who urinated on the fire) was also charged with

⁸²⁸ Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan’s Conspiracy*, 24-25.

causing multiple deaths by collapsing a coal pit, which she had previously and publicly warned others was dangerous.⁸²⁹ Similarly, in 1643 accused witch Thomas Cors told a man that he was the highest now that he should ever be,⁸³⁰ and Thomas' neighbors confirmed that all his predictions were known to come true.⁸³¹ The 1597 trial records of Margaret Bane, the same witch who was accused of seeing a headless wraith and thereby causing a man's death, also include examples of her reputation for second sight being weaponized against her neighbors. A man once greeted Margaret, calling her out as a witch and saying "Gett fyre to the." Margaret then told the man that he would drown before she was burned. It did come to pass that this man drowned in the water of Done while washing his horses with some other men, on "ane haitt symmeris day."⁸³² When she was told of his death, Margaret was publicly heard to say that she had gotten her heart's desire, since this man "is drownd befoir I be brint." Beatrix Watson reportedly foretold her husband's death, saying to him one night "lye still a while with me for this will be the last Friday that ye will rise from my side."⁸³³ She also told a friend that she was to come and drink with her, then take her leave of her, because they would never see each other again.⁸³⁴ When summoned in 1649 and asked how she had known these things would happen, Beatrix Watson impertinently referred the authorities to the slanderous rumors that she was a witch.⁸³⁵

⁸²⁹ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

⁸³⁰ Black, *Examples of Printed Folk-lore*, 55.

⁸³¹ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 493; NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 223.

⁸³² Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 161.

⁸³³ NRS, CH2/124/1, fols. 27-29.

⁸³⁴ NRS, CH2/124/1, fols. 27-29.

⁸³⁵ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

The records of some accused witches demonstrate that they developed strong public reputations for uttering ominous predictions or threats, depending on how these declarations were interpreted by others. These reputations may have even have been enjoyable to the accused, as they could be used to intimidate others. Accused witch Alexander Hunter⁸³⁶ was reputed to be both a healer and prophet, and his predictions were regarded as credible by his neighbors.⁸³⁷ In 1629, Alexander was accused of predicting that a man who owed him money “would not live long and that he would be dead within a week, and in fact he died about the end of the week.”⁸³⁸ The utterance of this prediction likely struck fear into the indebted man, since another of Alexander’s accusers claimed it was known that “the Fellows Prophecies to hold true.”⁸³⁹

⁸³⁶ Alexander Hunter appears to have been a vagrant who went by many names. Some scholars, such as David Robertson, have posited that his accounts are actually taken from the records of several different individuals who were Alexander’s contemporaries and tried for witchcraft in the same time and place. However, this dissertation considers it more likely that these various accounts and accusations are all referring to the same individual. Even within single records of this individual’s crimes, new names appear that are not mentioned elsewhere. A 1629 record in Haddington refers to him as “Alexander Sinclair alias Hunter,” but in the body of listed accusations the recorder claims, “You called yourself Seaton, for this was your usual habit, to change your name and surname as it suited you.” See Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 190. In various records, Alexander is known as Alexander Sinclair alias Hunter, or as Sandie Hunter alias Hamilton, also known as Hatteraick (supposedly a nickname given to him by the Devil, or his fellow villagers). It is possible that Alexander also went by different combinations of these names and surnames, or others that are not mentioned. The various accusations that are attached to this individual can be identified as referring to the same man because of the overlapping surnames (Hunter, Sinclair, and Hamilton); his cited reputation as a “vagabond,” prophet, and healer; and records of specific accusations involving named victims, particularly the Lady Samuelstoun and her brother, William. For the sake of continuity, this dissertation will refer to the accused man as Alexander Hunter, regardless of how he is named in various individual records. Walter Scott also identifies him by this name. See Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 242-244.

⁸³⁷ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 124.

⁸³⁸ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 190.

⁸³⁹ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 124.

Alexander was also reportedly a vagrant and “Whatever House he came to, none durst refuse [him] an alms, rather for his ill, than his good.”⁸⁴⁰ An altercation with a young man at a house where Alexander had come begging resulted in the young man beating Alexander “about the ears” with a switch, saying “You Warlok Cairle, what have you to do here?” Alexander departed “grumbling, and was overheard say, you shall dear buy this ere it be long.” The young man rode home where he was supposedly filled with “dreadful consternation,” and his servants “observed Terror and fear in his Countenance. The next day he became distracted and was bound for several days. His Sister the Lady Samuelstown hearing of it, was heard say, suerly that knave... is the cause of his Trouble.” The afflicted man’s sister called for the healer who prescribed a remedy in exchange for goods, after which “the Gentleman recovered his Health.”⁸⁴¹

This account appears to affirm Maxwell-Stuart’s interpretation of Beatrix Leslie’s trial documents, in that both Alexander and Beatrix were people whose predictions were generally believed to come true. In both cases, the recipient of the ominous prediction was struck with dread following his encounter with the accused witch. In the case of Alexander, since he was a beggar, he may have used his reputation as a second sighted person to intimidate others with ominous predictions if they refused him alms or abused him. However, while Alexander was popularly regarded as a prophet and healer, demonologist George Sinclair’s account of his deeds plainly illustrates that the authorities believed Alexander had the Devil as his master, and through this demonic association he had learned all his art and talents.⁸⁴² In cases that contain this

⁸⁴⁰ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 123.

⁸⁴¹ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 123-124.

⁸⁴² Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 122-123.

ambiguity over threats or ominous predictions, it is unsurprising that the reputations and talents of the second sighted were interpreted as evidence of witchcraft.

The details of Alexander's case also correspond with accusations against Catharine Mactargett. The 1688 trial records of Catharine Mactargett in East Lothian are rife with predictions of disasters, and Catharine reportedly "gloried in" her reputation for terrifying her neighbors. Like Alexander, Catharine also sometimes went about as a beggar, and her records claim that "out of fear and terror people felt forced to satisfy you. If anyone refused, you used to threaten and predict damage to them for refusing, which many times accordingly came to pass."⁸⁴³ Catharine Mactargett once predicted the demise of the child of a doctor whose home she went to seeking alms. She told the doctor that his wife would never be well until either the wife or her child were dead. The child was nursing at the time and it took ill and died within a month, while the wife recovered from her illness. The doctor and his wife feared Catharine after this event.⁸⁴⁴ She also told a man who outbid her for a sheep's head that the head would do his family no good. Subsequently, the man's wife fell ill. Catharine was consulted on this matter, and she prescribed a broth which made the woman well again.⁸⁴⁵ Catharine predicted the death of a horse that trampled some of her plants,⁸⁴⁶ and allegedly said, "it will be a long goodnight" to a man who died in a shipwreck several days later.⁸⁴⁷ She reputedly told another man that he would

⁸⁴³ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 255.

⁸⁴⁴ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 257.

⁸⁴⁵ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 257-258.

⁸⁴⁶ Henry Paton, *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 3rd series, vol. 13 (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1932), 249.

⁸⁴⁷ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 259.

never thrive, and accordingly his possessions “vanished away until he came to a state of extreme poverty.”⁸⁴⁸ Catharine warned a woman that “some of her relatives would choke before long,” and subsequently that woman’s father choked on a piece of beef and died that same night.⁸⁴⁹ When she heard a calf crying, Catharine predicted to its owner that it would “roar till it dies,” and the calf did continue to bawl for several days before it expired.⁸⁵⁰ Most intriguingly, Catharine’s records contain her claim that she had learned all of her art from a Highland woman.⁸⁵¹ As is discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, the Highlands were a region that was especially associated with second sight. The ability was believed to be more prevalent there, and therefore Highlanders were believed to be more likely to be second sighted. If Catharine had acquired her skill from a second sighted Highland woman, then she may have been in a unique position to inspire fear in her neighbors through uttering ominous predictions.

Some trial documents also demonstrate that accused witches may have used their knowledge of hidden things in order to intimidate others into giving them what they wanted. Often, these accounts of intimidation through the revelation of hidden knowledge are present in the cases of accused witches who also laid claim to other abilities associated with second sight. The fact that so many aspects of second sight belief coincide in these individual witches’ testimonies further supports the idea that the second sighted may have weaponized their reputations, sometimes resulting in accusations of witchcraft. Alexander Hunter once stood

⁸⁴⁸ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 258.

⁸⁴⁹ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 255.

⁸⁵⁰ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 259.

⁸⁵¹ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 259.

accused of telling a woman who owed him money that she could indeed pay him, despite her claims to the contrary, since she had a coin hidden in a chest at home. This woman was startled by his declaration, since she “thought nobody knew about [it] but herself.”⁸⁵² Another woman had supposedly offered Alexander food and drink as payment for a debt, but he refused and instead demanded that she give him the gold coin that she had put away amongst her clothes. He also told this woman that her husband had hidden money of which even she was unaware.⁸⁵³ Likewise, it was reported that Bessie Skebister had asked a woman to sell her a ladle that she desired, which shocked the woman since no one knew about the ladle because it was hidden.⁸⁵⁴ Her 1629 trial documents attest that when Issobell Young wanted to buy some butter from a neighbor, she was turned away and told that there was no butter available. Issobell then told the woman that she knew she had three pounds of butter already churned. The neighbor claimed that she hadn’t even weighed the butter yet, so it was impossible that Issobell should know how much she had. When the butter was weighed, it was found to be exactly three pounds, so Issobell “went away with it.”⁸⁵⁵

These cases illustrate that accused witches’ revelations of hidden knowledge could be used to intimidate their neighbors into paying debts or giving them things that they desired. Just as in cases of ominous predictions that also sounded like threats, neighbors were intimidated by the superior knowledge of second sighted people because of their reputations as individuals with

⁸⁵² Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 189.

⁸⁵³ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 190.

⁸⁵⁴ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 474, 479.

⁸⁵⁵ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 289.

supernatural talents. The fact that these ominous utterances were *predictions* should not exclude the possibility that accused witches actually desired that a tragic end should befall people whom they disliked. Similarly, these stories of accused witches' unsettling revelations of hidden knowledge are compatible with the interpretation that some second sighted people used their talents or reputations to threaten their fellow villagers or obtain things that they wanted. The utilization of their talents to fulfill personal desires does not invalidate their or their neighbors' belief that they genuinely had second sight.

In these ways, it can often be hard to parse out whether witches were convicted for being endowed with supernatural knowledge or enacting maleficent magic, or perhaps even if there was a need to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, if accused witches had reputations for being able to predict the future or access hidden knowledge because they had second sight, the utterance of an ominous prediction or the revelation of hidden knowledge could generate hostility from neighbors, resulting in an accusation of witchcraft. Because of these ambiguities, the presence of second sighted people in the records of accused witches may be underestimated, given the evident compatibility between speaking with supernatural knowledge and threatening behavior. The proliferation of the belief that second sight was actually witchcraft may have been facilitated by the malcontent of villagers who grew resentful or afraid of their second sighted neighbors, who sometimes used their abilities to menace or threaten people they disliked.

Transferring Illness

Another talent ascribed to second sighted people was the ability to transfer illness or

death from one being to another. This belief appears in early modern writings on second sighted people, as well as in the disciplinary records of practitioners of popular magic. In particular, accounts of accused witches that contain multiple aspects of second sight belief also sometimes describe their talent for transferring illness, confirming that this was an ability that was associated with second sighted individuals. While this ability was likely a recognized aspect of second sight belief, the prevalent claim that Scottish witches were able to move illness or death from one being to another illustrates that this practice that originated in popular magical belief was demonized by religious authorities during the Reformation years.

The ability to transfer illness or death from one being to another appears in the writings of second sight theorists, confirming that this gift was especially associated with second sighted individuals in the realm of popular belief. In *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, the author described seers “who have this foresight” and claimed that “Sometymes they bring back to life these who are giving up the Ghost; but an other dies in his place, & it always provs fatal.”⁸⁵⁶ Second sight belief was also deeply intertwined with subtle body belief, particularly beliefs concerning wraiths and omens of death. In connection with the belief that the second sighted were capable of transferring illness from one being to another, Robert Kirk argued that when second sighted people saw wraiths, they had the opportunity to save the life of the person to whom the apparition belonged by offering a substitute: “a Wreath... or deaths Messenger... if crossed, & conjur’d in tim will be pacified by the death of any other creature instead of the sick Man.”⁸⁵⁷ Some sources claimed that both the abilities of second sight and transferring illness

⁸⁵⁶ BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 9.

⁸⁵⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 17.

were uniquely Scottish, and in his commonplace book of 1689, Kirk described second sight and the “curing of very many diseases, sometimes by transferring” as two among five “curiosities” in Scotland that were not observed elsewhere.⁸⁵⁸

The practice of transferring illness or death from one being to another also appears frequently in Scottish witch trial records. While many of these accounts likely describe the consultation of practitioners of popular magic for the purpose of gaining access to their healing powers, the practice of transferring illness or death was regarded by demonologists as a form of witchcraft. Witchcraft theorist Sir George Mackenzie described popular perceptions of transferring illness and condemned the practice when he argued that “Some think they may innocently employ a witch to take off the disease imposed by another... but since all commerce with devils is unlawful, this practice is justly reprobated.”⁸⁵⁹ Mackenzie’s comments indicate that people commonly believed that consulting a practitioner of magic in order to transfer illness was done “innocently,” and was not in itself maleficent magic. However, keeping with elite demonological interpretations of magical practices, Mackenzie argued that any consultation of a practitioner of magic was “commerce with devils.” Therefore, while this practice was likely a traditional rite associated with second sight belief, authorities interpreted it as a form of witchcraft and devilry.

Some witches who had reputations as prognosticators or seers also seemed to have been consulted for their ability to heal, particularly to transfer illness. This motif appears in numerous cases of witches who laid claim to abilities associated with second sight, illustrating the popular

⁸⁵⁸ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 129; EUL, La.III.551, fols. 69-70.

⁸⁵⁹ MacKenzie, *Treatise on Witchcraft*, 29.

connection between second sighted people and the ability to transfer illness and death. Demonologist George Sinclair claimed that famed wise woman Agnes Sampson was capable of transferring pains and sicknesses onto herself for a time, then moving them again to a third person.⁸⁶⁰ This is confirmed by Agnes' trial documents that say she cured Robert Kerse in Dalkeith through a process in which "she took the sickness upon herself, and kept it till morning with much groaning and obvious pain. She cast the sickness out of herself into the close so that a dog or cat might get it, but it landed on Alexander Douglas of Dalkeyth who wasted away with it and died, while Robert Kerse was healed."⁸⁶¹ Catharine Mactargett, the same witch who reveled in her *mala fama* and uttered numerous ominous predictions, supposedly also told a woman to "take good heart, for that quhich was etled for you shall light upon ane uther, and within four dayes ye shall be also weill as ever you was."⁸⁶² The woman recovered four days later, but her neighbor then fell ill. Catharine was accused of transferring the illness from the sick woman onto her neighbor. Alexander Hunter, who was notorious for both his threats and his talents as a healer, was accused of taking deadly sickness off of Issobel Turnbull and laying it onto a greyhound which "instantly fell down dead," as well as an ox that "died at the same moment."⁸⁶³ In his 1598 trial documents, Andro Man confessed he was able to take sickness and witchcraft off of people, and cast it onto others. In one instance, he took illness off of a man and cast it onto a cat.⁸⁶⁴ Andro's confessions also indicate that he considered himself to be a second sighted

⁸⁶⁰ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 22.

⁸⁶¹ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 23.

⁸⁶² Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 258.

⁸⁶³ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 190.

⁸⁶⁴ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 120.

person and prophet.⁸⁶⁵ Katherine Jonesdochter had a reputation for being able to see spirits, and also admitted to moving a disease off her husband and onto a visiting merchant from Craill.⁸⁶⁶ Similarly, though Margerat Bane used her reputation as a second sighted woman to threaten rude men, she also transferred a client's labor pains onto the pregnant woman's husband.⁸⁶⁷

These examples illustrate that numerous practitioners of popular magic whose accounts include aspects of second sight belief also claimed that they had the ability to transfer illness from one being to another. Furthermore, while some second sighted people may have taken illness from one person and cast it onto another, other cases described accused witches attempting to perform rites that could be interpreted as beneficent magic. This is evident through their claims that they attempted to take illness off of people and cast it onto animals instead, which could be seen as a morally good action done for the benefit of their clients (and to the harm of no other person). Furthermore, some witches such as Agnes Sampson chose to take their clients' pains and sicknesses into their own bodies for awhile, illustrating that these second sighted practitioners of magic may have understood their own actions as self-sacrificial rather than maleficent. Therefore, while some seers and second sight theorists clearly believed that this talent was one facet of the gift of second sight, religious authorities demonized the ability to transfer illness, and prosecuted it as a form of witchcraft.

⁸⁶⁵ See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for more on Andro's second sight.

⁸⁶⁶ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 6.

⁸⁶⁷ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 157.

IV: Spiritual Pacts, Rites of Contact, and Conveying Second Sight

The question of whether supernatural abilities could be gained through contact with spirits was an issue of pressing concern to both witchcraft theorists and people who wrote about second sight. In particular, some second sight theorists and demonologists were interested in the theory that second sight could be gained through a pact with a familiar spirit, or through the invocation of spirits using certain rites. However, second sight theorists were divided in their opinions about whether second sight was gained through a pact, particularly with an evil spirit. Some denied that second sight could be obtained through a pact of any kind. A third group of theorists defended the demonic pact theory, yet argued that this agreement was likely entered into by the second sighted's ancestors, and therefore second sighted people were personally innocent of paction.

The hypothesis that second sight was gained through invocations or pacts with spirits was not limited to works of literate or demonological theory; rather, some accounts of second sighted people illustrate that they believed that their abilities were obtained during encounters with spirits, some of whom were morally ambiguous or leant themselves to interpretation as demonic beings. Therefore, the theory that second sight was obtained through pacts or relationships with spirits was not a wholly elite invention, but can also be found in sources that describe popular beliefs. In most Scottish witch trials, the act of witchcraft was defined as making a pact with Satan, an unholy inversion of God's covenant with mankind. Sometimes, this pact traded the witch's allegiance and soul for material gain or supernatural abilities. The fact that both second sight and witches' supernatural powers could be gained through spiritual pacts encouraged the

belief that possessing second sight was essentially the same as witchcraft from a demonological perspective, and therefore should be punishable in the same way. Furthermore, according to demonological theory, all ambiguous spirits including fairies or ghosts were actually demons. Therefore, any pact with a spirit was a diabolical pact.

While there was not a theoretical consensus about whether second sight was obtained through a pact, evidence for the demonic pact theory of second sight was bolstered by the fact that descriptions of rites to gain second sight and witches' pacts with the Devil bear some strong similarities. In particular, popular beliefs about rites involving physical contact between seers and novices in order to convey second sight invite comparison to descriptions of witches who renounced their baptism in what is referred to as a "crown-sole" pact. Just as rites to convey second sight involved the specific placement of seers' and novices' hands and feet in rites of implicit surrender or submission, some accused witches confessed to performing a rite in which they placed a hand on their head and a hand on their feet and thereby offered up their entire beings to the Devil. The merits of comparing these two rites have been supported by witchcraft scholar Emma Wilby, who has argued that there may be a relationship between witches renouncing their baptism and rites to transfer second sight, but "the links between the two have not been exploited by scholars exploring the Scottish demonic pact."⁸⁶⁸

Through a comparative analysis, this section argues that both rites to gain second sight and accused witches' crown-sole pacts were part of a wider practice of popular rites that drew mystical boundaries around the invoker's entire being, and thereby offered him or herself up in an act of ritual surrender to a spiritual authority. While practitioners of magic were likely

⁸⁶⁸ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 420. See also Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 99-100.

describing culturally acknowledged practices for the transmission of supernatural powers, these rites were interpreted by demonologists and state authorities as confessions of making diabolical pacts. In this way, popular beliefs about second sight actually influenced elite demonological theories about witchcraft. Just as the belief that witches could transfer illness made its way into demonological discussions and definitions of witchcraft, the fact that some demonologists defined witchcraft as a crown-sole pact with a spirit demonstrates that second sight belief was not unidirectionally influenced by demonology, but rather the two engaged in reciprocal influence and exchange. Through the demonization of spiritual pacts and rites for conferring of second sight, second sighted people and witches were considered synonymous in both demonological theory and disciplinary action.

Pacts with Spirits

The theory that second sight could be gained through a pact with spirits was widely discussed in early modern sources. However, opinions were somewhat divided as to whether second sight could indeed be gained through a spiritual pact, whether these spirits were undoubtedly evil, or even whether all demonic pacts made early modern seers guilty of witchcraft. While some theorists were suspicious of the origins of second sight, others denied that it could be gained through a pact with a spirit at all. John Fraser wrote to Robert Wodrow on the topic of second sight, confirming that “you may fully persuade yourself that severall persons hes it, that is free of paction.”⁸⁶⁹ Similarly, Martin Martin claimed that second sight was not

⁸⁶⁹ NLS, Wod.Qu,Lett.ii, fol. 5.

gained “by any previous compact.”⁸⁷⁰ When the question of the origin of her abilities was put to her, witch hunter Janet Douglas specifically “denied any explicit or implicit Paction” as the source of her second sight,⁸⁷¹ though many of her contemporaries speculated she had her gift by converse with a familiar spirit.⁸⁷² After visiting the Island of Barra in 1700, Bishop Nicolson implied that the second sighted must not have gained the talent voluntarily, since they experienced it “quite beyond their own control.”⁸⁷³ Therefore, while many hypothesized that second sight was gained through pacts with spirits, this was far from the only mainstream theory about the acquisition of the ability. Rather, the spiritual pact theory was rejected by some second sighted people and early modern writers who engaged with the topic.

Some sources promoted a theory of second sight that combined the idea that it was gained through a pact with a spirit with the conviction that seers were innocent of witchcraft. According to this theory, some people inherited second sight from their parents or ancestors who had themselves made a pact with a spirit in order to acquire the ability. However, because the pact was not personally entered into by their descendants, second sighted people who inherited their talents from their ancestors were not guilty of witchcraft. In this way, second sight was considered to be the result of a pact with a spirit, but often in the distant past and through no action on the part of the present-day individual. This theory was also a way of acknowledging the prevalent belief that second sight was a hereditary condition.⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 301.

⁸⁷¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

⁸⁷² Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 380.

⁸⁷³ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 63.

⁸⁷⁴ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for more on the hereditary theory of second sight.

Despite the fact that this theory did not advocate for the prosecution or oppression of second sighted people, it still maintained that the origin of their ability was through a pact with a demonic spirit. George Sinclair claimed he was “undoubtedly informed that men & women in the Highlands can discern fatality approaching others... It is not improbable that such preternatural knowledge comes first by a compact with the Devil and is derived downward by succession to their posterity, many of such I suppose, are innocent and have this sight against their will and inclination.”⁸⁷⁵ After reading Sinclair’s treatise, clergyman Increase Mather was convinced that this theory of second sight was correct: “As for Mr. Sinclaire’s Notion that some Persons may have a second Sight (as ’tis termed) and yet be themselves Innocent, I am satisfied that he judgeth right.”⁸⁷⁶ James Garden also recorded the belief that in the Highlands, second sight “comes by compact & descends to children to the 10 generation, which is the cause of their trouble.”⁸⁷⁷ Robert Law subscribed to the same theory of second sight, claiming, “that which they call the second sight, or a representation of things by the devill unto them as they shall fall out in the future time, [is] because such have that representation of things from Satan by a compact with the devill, either made by themselves or their ancestors; so that even the posterity of these that have made a covenant with the devill, may have this second sight, though themselves be free of any sic bargan, as experience does manifest.”⁸⁷⁸ According to Law, these people differed from people who consulted with familiar spirits, charmners, and witches, all of

⁸⁷⁵ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 216.

⁸⁷⁶ Mather, *A further account of the tryals of the New-England witches*, 14.

⁸⁷⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

⁸⁷⁸ Law, *Memorialls*, 120.

whom received their powers directly from a compact with Satan. By this “hybrid” theory, second sight certainly had its genesis in a pact with Satan and was therefore evil. However, some individuals were not guilty of making this pact themselves, since it had been made by their ancestors and passed on to them, like a hereditary disease. This theory likely appealed to individuals who struggled to reconcile diabolical theories of second sight with their acquaintance with second sighted people, many of whom appeared virtuous or religiously inclined.

While these theories were well-represented in literate discussions of second sight, many theorists and demonologists appeared to be convinced that second sight was indeed acquired through a pact with spirit beings, though not all were certain that such spirits were necessarily evil. In a letter from James Garden to John Aubrey, Garden described the hypothesis that second sight could be gained through a demonic pact. When Aubrey asked what caused some people to have second sight, Garden replied, “some say by compact with the devill: some say by converse with those Demons we call Fairies.”⁸⁷⁹ In keeping with elite demonological interpretations of fairies, Garden asserted that all pacts with spirits of any kind were contracts with the Devil. This demonic pact theory of second sight was also proposed in John Beaumont’s treatise on spirits.⁸⁸⁰ However, some other theorists were not convinced that all forms of second sight obtained through contact with spirits were necessarily demonic. Demonologist George Hickes made a distinction between what he believed to be second sight conferred by good spirits, or “spirits of light,” and second sight that was gained through witchcraft. For Hickes, this latter form of second sight was found “in those who come to have it by certain forms of words which we call

⁸⁷⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

⁸⁸⁰ Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 87.

charmes, or by doing, and performing such ceremonies... one would think it proceeded from evil spirits... i.e. black spirits.”⁸⁸¹ By this logic, not all people who laid claim to supernatural talents acquired from spirits were guilty of witchcraft; rather, Hickeys argued that this judgement was dependent on the method of acquiring second sight, as well as the moral character of the seer. However, Hickeys’ theory still allowed for the belief that some second sighted people gained their talents from demons. A third and rather ambiguous description of second sight and pacts appeared in the pamphlet *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*. The author of the pamphlet acknowledged that some second sighted people may have their ability through some kind of vague compact, and that these people could provide answers to questions when asked.⁸⁸² However, he or she did not specify whether these conferring spirits were necessarily evil. These examples illustrate the range of possible explanations that theorists ascribed to second sight gained through spiritual pacts. While the diabolical pact theory was popular, second sight theorists were not in complete agreement as to whether second sight obtained through a pact with a spirit was undeniably demonic.

Some early modern sources described second sighted individuals whose supernatural powers were conferred through relationships with spirit beings. While these seers likely did not believe that their familiar spirits were demons, aspects of their accounts indicate that others did indeed interpret these spirits as demonic. Robert Wodrow recorded the account of a second sighted man named Gardiner, who was supposedly able to tell anyone the answer to any question. Gardiner had this ability from childhood, and he was also subject to “dumb fits for

⁸⁸¹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 174.

⁸⁸² BOD MS Carte 269, fols. 8-9v.

days.” While it was well known that Gardiner had a familiar spirit, Wodrow noted that a “woman of religion” publicly speculated that Gardiner actually had a relationship with a devil.⁸⁸³ Other spirits mentioned in second sight accounts were also somewhat ambiguous, and details of these accounts overlap with orthodox Protestant understandings of demonic spirits. While these spirits were not intended to be understood as demons, aspects of their descriptions would have invited authorities to interpret them demonically. Robert Kirk’s treatise on second sight was based on material that he gathered from his parishioners in his time as a minister in Aberfoyle. Therefore, descriptions of second sight contained in this treatise are largely extracted from the realm of popular belief and often constitute personal accounts of second sighted people, albeit moderated and recorded by an educated theorist. Referring to spirits that were familiar to second sighted people, Robert Kirk claimed that “The Tabhaisder or Seer that corresponds with this kind of Familiars, can bring them with a spel to appear to himselfe or others when he pleases... He tells they are ever readiest to go on hurfull errands, but seldom will be the Messengers of a great good to men.”⁸⁸⁴ Kirk’s account of seers who are able to summon spirits would correspond with George Hicckes’ description of second sight that was actually a form of witchcraft: “those who come to have it by certain forms of words which we call charmes, or by doing, and performing such ceremonies.”⁸⁸⁵ Hicckes’ demonic interpretation of Kirk’s seers would be further strengthened by the fact that Kirk claimed that these familiar spirits were eager to go on “hurtfull errands,” but reluctant to depart on more moral missions.

⁸⁸³ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 262-263.

⁸⁸⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 14.

⁸⁸⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 174.

Elsewhere in his treatise on second sight, Robert Kirk described a seer who would almost certainly have been interpreted as a witch by demonologists. According to Kirk, this second sighted woman was “singularly wise in these matters of for-sight.” Kirk offered this explanation for the origin of her ability: “Being asked who gave her such sights and warnings, she said, that as soon as she sett three crosses of straw upon the palm of her hand, a great ougly Beast sprang out of the Earth, neer her and flew in the air, If what she enquired had success according to her wish, the Beast would descend calmly, and lick up the crosses: If it would not succeid, the Beast would furiously thrust her and the crosses over on the ground, and so vanish to his place.”⁸⁸⁶ Numerous aspects of this account would have been suspicious for demonologists. Among these would be the claim that the seer’s method of gaining information involved a procedure or rite, and also that this rite summoned a spirit to appear before her. Furthermore, the spirit was an “ougly Beast” that gave responses and sometimes knocked the seer down, and therefore could easily be interpreted as a demonic spirit (though Kirk may have intended his reader to believe it was some more monstrous form of fairy).

Though demonologists were keen on the idea that second sight was gained through a relationship or pact with a demonic spirit, this theory was not entirely out of place in accounts of second sighted people or the spirits with whom they associated. Furthermore, descriptions of rites to summon familiar spirits and thereby gain second sight would have corresponded with elite understandings of witchcraft and pacts with demons. Therefore, though we tend to think of the demonic pact theory of witchcraft as an elite demonological invention, pacts and relationships with ambiguous spirits that conferred supernatural abilities had a place in popular

⁸⁸⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 32-34.

beliefs about second sight. Indeed, it is likely that popular notions of pacts with spirits actually influenced elite demonological theory in ways more profound than has previously been acknowledged.

Rites of Contact

According to popular knowledge, second sight could also be transferred through touch from one individual to another. Some interpreted this rite of contact as involving an implicit pact of surrender from the novice to the seer. This rite could take place through a general form of contact, but most often it was described as a specific action in which the novice placed his foot on top of the seer's foot in order to obtain second sight. Alternately, the seer would place his hand on the novice's head while the novice placed his foot on the seer's foot. Belief in a means of ritualized contact in order to obtain second sight had a long history in Scotland, and appeared in numerous sources on the topic. However, what is suggested here is that this ritual may be related to a form of the witches' pact in which the witch lays one hand on her head and the other on her feet in order to swear herself to the Devil's service. Comparisons are also drawn between these rites and folkloric accounts of humans gaining magical sight by touching a fairy being. The motif of surrendering oneself from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot is also to be found in Christian charms for obtaining sacred protection from Christ, the angels, or the saints. Comparative analysis reveals that these various rites of contact were all part of a larger belief system in which touch and ritual surrender put a novice under the control of a spiritual authority. However, authorities interpreted accused witches' descriptions of these rites as confessions of

entering into pacts with the Devil, representing a demonization of folk beliefs associated with second sight. While both popular and elite sources support the idea that some second sighted people believed that their abilities were obtained through pacts with spirits, the presence of popular rites to confer second sight in the records of accused witches illustrates that these practices were incorporated into the demonic pact theory of second sight.

Several early modern authors discussed a rite for the transference of second sight, always involving physical touch. Some of these practices involved the specific positioning of hands, feet, or both. Rites like these are recorded as early as the fourteenth century. In Ranulf Higdon's *Polychronicon*, a work of universal history and theology, the author notes a ritual by which travelers gained second sight from native Scots. In his chapter "De insulis Britanniae adjacentibus," Higden claims that "There oft by daye tyme, men of that islonde seen men that bey dede to fore honde, byheded or hole, and what dethe they deyde. Alyens setten theyr feet vpon feet of the men of that londe, for to see such syghtes as the men of that londe doon."⁸⁸⁷ Comparable practices appear in numerous early modern sources on second sight. In his treatise on the topic, Robert Kirk described how "the usuall method for a curious person to get a transient sight of this otherwise invisible crew of Subterraneans (if importunately & overrashly sought) is to put his foot on the Seers foot, and the Seers hand is put on the Inquirers head, who is to look over the Wizards right shoulder (which hes an ill appearance, as if by this ceremonie, an

⁸⁸⁷ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 481; Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden maonachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2006), 43. An approximate transcription may be, "There often by daytime, men of that island see men that are dead beforehand, beheaded or whole, and what death they died. Aliens set their feet upon the feet of men of that land, in order to see such sights as the men of that land do."

implicite surrender were made of all betwixt the Wizards foot and his hand ere the person can be admitted a privado to the art.)”⁸⁸⁸ John Aubrey also described a similar means of imparting second sight, through the placing of the seer’s right foot on the novice’s left foot, holding one hand above his head and gazing over the seer’s right shoulder.⁸⁸⁹ Lord Reay told Samuel Pepys that a second sighted man related to him a common method of conveying second sight: “the maner of shoeing them to ane other is, The seer puts both his hands and his feet above yours, and Mutters some words to himselfe which Doone both sies them alike.”⁸⁹⁰ James Garden wrote to John Aubrey and cited an acquaintance who claimed “if at the time when they see these strange sights, they sett their foot, upon the foot of another person who hath not the 2nd sight that other will for that time see what they ar seeing, as also that they offered, if he pleased, to comunicat the 2nd sight to him.”⁸⁹¹ This rite of contact was also described by the author of *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, who attested that the second sighted “can let others see very strange Things in the [sheep’s shoulder] Bone by setting their Foot on the persons Foot, to whom they make the Discovery.”⁸⁹²

Other means of transmission involved simple physical contact between the seer and the one desiring to see visions. Robert Chamber’s *Domestic Annals of Scotland* cited the belief that

⁸⁸⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 27.

⁸⁸⁹ Dalzell, *Darker Superstitions*, 469.

⁸⁹⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163-164.

⁸⁹¹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fols. 129v-130.

⁸⁹² BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 8v. A similar rite to convey visionary abilities was also practiced in England. In his *History of his Life and Times*, William Lilly claimed that astrologer William Hodges showed another man the likeness of his future wife by having the man to set his foot on Hodges’ foot and gaze into a crystal. See William Lilly, *William Lilly’s History of his Life and Times, from the year 1602 to 1681* (London: Charles Baldwin, 1822), 117-118.

“It was considered a rule in second-sight, that a vision seen by one seer was not necessarily visible to another in his company, unless the first touched his neighbour.”⁸⁹³ Similarly, John Macculloch argued that “though many prophets should be assembled together, they did not all see the same vision; unless the chosen Seer should touch his neighbours, when it was communicated to them like an electric shock.”⁸⁹⁴ Francis Grose also made reference to this practice: “All those that have the Second-Sight, do not see these appearances at the same time; but if one having this faculty designedly touches his fellow Seer, at the instant that a vision appears to him, in that case it will be seen by both.”⁸⁹⁵ Despite some differing details, all these rites of contact appear to be referring to the same practice of obtaining second sight through touching a seer. While some argued that specific positioning of hands or feet were necessary, these various practices were all rooted in the belief that second sight could be conveyed by contact.

Access to supernatural vision through touch also appears in early modern popular ballads about fairies. In these stories, the prospective seer must lay his or her head on the knee of a fairy in order to gain sight of the paths to the afterlife. In the ballad “Thomas Rymer,” the titular character is instructed by the “queen of fair Elfland” to “lay yer head down in my lap,/ And I will tell ye farlies three.”⁸⁹⁶ The action of laying his head on her lap permits Thomas to be able to see the three roads to the afterlife: one that leads to heaven, another to hell, and the third to

⁸⁹³ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 282.

⁸⁹⁴ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 69.

⁸⁹⁵ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 33.

⁸⁹⁶ “Thomas Rymer,” 258, 260.

fairyland.⁸⁹⁷ The ballad “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice” involves the same motif in which the Fairy Queen commands the novice to “lay your head/ Upo my knee:/ See ye na that narrow road/ Up by yon tree?”⁸⁹⁸ The physical contact between the novice and Queen of Elfan allows the novice to see the roads to heaven and hell. Historians Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan have argued that this rite involving touch “seems to be a variant of the idea that non-seers could have access to visions through touching the seer’s foot or shoulder, or both.”⁸⁹⁹

These various rites of contact most likely involved the symbolic surrender of the novice to the seer. In the examples from the ballads, the rite of contact necessitated the novice taking a submissive stance in respect to his or her fairy host. The command to lay the novice’s head on the fairy’s lap was issued by an authority (the fairy queen), and it was only after this submissive stance was taken that the novice could gain supernatural sight. The belief that early modern rites to convey second sight also involved the implicit surrender of the novice to the seer was supported by Robert Kirk when he wrote that, “as if by this ceremonie, an implicate surrender were made of all betwixt the Wizards foot and his hand ere the person can be admitted a privado to the art.”⁹⁰⁰ By Kirk’s interpretation, the stance taken by the novice involved surrendering his or her entire self, all that was between the hand on the head and the foot, to the seer in exchange for conveying the gift of second sight. However, Kirk’s comment that this stance and ritual surrender “hes an ill appearance” only makes sense in in light of comparisons to accused

⁸⁹⁷ “Thomas Rymer,” 258-263.

⁸⁹⁸ “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice,” 311-312.

⁸⁹⁹ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 36.

⁹⁰⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 27.

witches' descriptions of pacts with the Devil.

From Crown to Sole

A prevalent motif in Scottish witch trials was the spiritual pact between the witch and the Devil, often involving the renunciation of the witch's baptism. Through the act of renouncing their baptism, it was believed that witches were disavowing their allegiance to God and entering into a new unholy covenant with the Devil. Some trial records further claim that witches engaged in a rite which entailed putting one band on their heads and another on their feet, and swearing themselves to the Devil's service. This rite offered the Devil dominion over everything between their two hands, that is, their entire selves. This practice was cited by Sir George MacKenzie in his treatise on witchcraft, where MacKenzie claimed that the witches' pact involved placing one hand on the crown of their heads and the other on the sole of their feet, and then renouncing their baptism "in that posture."⁹⁰¹

Descriptions of this practice are indeed recorded in numerous trial documents, and the statistical database *The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* cites "head and foot" pacts in sixty-eight separate cases of witchcraft prosecutions.⁹⁰² There are slight variations on the placement of hands and feet, but these testimonies all share the commonality that this action meant that the witches were surrendering their entire selves to the Devil. In 1678, Jennet Burtoun confessed that she swore herself to the Devil's service by putting one hand on the crown of her head and the

⁹⁰¹ MacKenzie, *Treatise on Witchcraft*, 16.

⁹⁰² Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

other under the sole of her foot, and promising to “deliver to the Devil all between her hands.”⁹⁰³ Likewise in 1661, Bessie Todrig claimed that she renounced her baptism to the Devil, who laid his hand on her shoulder, then on her head, and again on her shoulder and “said she was his own.” She swore to become his servant by laying “one hand on her head and the other on her feet, and gave soul and body to him.”⁹⁰⁴ A group of witches at Salt Preston confessed in 1678 that they had renounced their baptisms and dedicated themselves to Satan by laying one hand on the top of their heads and the other on the sole of their feet, and “gave up everything between the two to his service.”⁹⁰⁵

In some witches’ confessions that involve this form of ritualized pact, the witches appear to be describing a pact with some form of folk spirit or fairy, rather than a demon. However, in keeping with elite demonological interpretations, the authorities believed that such spirits were the Devil. Therefore, while literate recorders described witches entering into crown-sole pacts with the Devil, some of these confessions may record accounts of practitioners of popular magic entering into pacts with familiar spirits. This interpretation provides an alternate reading of the 1597 witch trial records of Elpeth Reid and Thomas Leyis. Accused witch Elspeth Reid’s lover Thomas Leyis may have been a second sighted man. His trial records claim that he had access to hidden knowledge, could make accurate predictions of the future, and was knowledgeable about the operations of spirits. In particular, Thomas was accused of telling Elspeth that she was with child, though she did not know it at the time. He also told her what night the child was

⁹⁰³ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 488.

⁹⁰⁴ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 238.

⁹⁰⁵ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 448.

conceived, and that it would be a girl, born on Christsonday after Martinmas. The recorder of his trial attested that it “came truly to pass in all thingis as thou spak, the revelation quhair of thow hed of thi master the Dewill.”⁹⁰⁶ Among the acts of witchcraft of which he was accused, Thomas supposedly instructed Elspeth to go to a hill where a man would rise and appear to her in any likeness that she pleased. Thomas told her that she wasn’t to fear, but to become the man’s servant, swear herself to him, and do as he commanded. Particularly, Thomas instructed Elspeth to engage in a rite in which she took the man by the ear, and put her foot on that man’s foot.⁹⁰⁷ Elspeth did as Thomas told her, but also attested that the spirit vanished when Elspeth blessed herself.⁹⁰⁸ While this account was interpreted by authorities as a confession of entering the Devil’s service, it sounds more like a description of a pact with a fairy being, who lived in a hill and could assume various shapes. Furthermore, the fact that the spirit vanished when Elspeth blessed herself may seem suspicious from a demonological perspective, but it was actually a common folk belief that fairies disappeared at the utterance of the name of God.⁹⁰⁹ Therefore, the case of Thomas Leyis and Elspeth Reid appears to involve the intersection of themes of second sight, familiar fairy spirits, and ritual surrender involving rites of contact, all of which were interpreted by religious authorities as confessions of having made a pact with the Devil.

The trial records of accused witch Jean Weir also contain a very curious version of the crown-sole pact, involving a female spirit who appears to be a fairy or ambiguous spirit from

⁹⁰⁶ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 98.

⁹⁰⁷ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 98-100.

⁹⁰⁸ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 98-100.

⁹⁰⁹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 13; NLS, MS 3932, fol. 37v.

folk belief. Jean Weir was reputed to be a practitioner of popular magic in Edinburgh, and in 1670 she confessed that a “little woman” came to her home and gave her a herb that would endow her with the ability to do whatever she desired. This woman also “did lay ane cloth upon the floor near the door, and caused the declarant set her foot upon the samen, and her hand upon the crown of her own head, and caused the declarant repeat these words thrice, viz. “All my cross and troubles goe to the door with the;” which accordingly she did.”⁹¹⁰ After performing this rite, Jean sat down to spin and discovered that she had an immediate talent for the task, and she was able to spin yarn much more quickly than she did before. The rapid acquisition of this supernatural talent caused Jean to sit alone in her home for a period of twenty days, where she was “exceedingly troubled, and wept because she thought what she had done in manner forsook was in effect the renouncing of her baptism.”⁹¹¹

While authorities interpreted Jean’s confession as evidence of her pact with Satan, the “little woman” was likely the queen of the fairies, from Jean’s perspective. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the little woman appeared to Jean the day after Jean saw the spirit of a “tall woman,” who asked Jean if she would like her to speak on her behalf to the “queen of ferrie,” to which the court recorder appended the phrase “meaning the devell.”⁹¹² The likelihood that Jean’s account does not actually describe a pact with the Devil is amplified by the inclusion of the cloth on the floor and the thrice repeated charm. These details are not common in descriptions of witches’ pacts with the Devil, and likely represent some unknown aspects of folk

⁹¹⁰ NRS, JC2/13, fols. 9v-12v.

⁹¹¹ NRS, JC2/13, fols. 9v-12v.

⁹¹² NRS, JC2/13, fols. 9v-12v.

belief that were understood by Jean and other practitioners of popular magic. In particular, the words “All my cross and troubles goe to the door with the” sounds like a charm of unburdening or exorcising hardship from the life of the utterer. Furthermore, after making this ritualized pact with the fairy queen, Jean was endowed with a supernatural ability. Jean’s case once again brings together the acquisition of supernatural abilities, fairy beings, and ritual surrender involving rites of contact, all of which were understood by religious authorities as describing a pact with the Devil. Just as in the case of Elspeth Reid, Jean Weir’s account illustrates that crown-sole pacts had a place in the culture of popular magic and contact with spirits, as opposed to being a purely demonological invention.

Rituals of surrender to spiritual authorities that also involve the crown of the head and the sole of the feet appear in other early modern sources. While the witches’ pact involved surrender to the Devil, some Christian rites appear to relinquish a person’s entire being to the control of God or a saint. The documents of the presbytery of Islay and Kintyre in 1697 describe the following ritual recited by a cunning man for an ill client: “I place the protection of God about thee,/ Mayest thou be shielded from every peril,/ May the Gospel of the God of grace/ Be from thy crown to the ground about thee.”⁹¹³ Similarly, a charm that invokes Saint Columba and the angel Michael draws protection over the utterer, from the crown of the head to the sole of the feet:

Be the cowl of Columba over thee,
Be the cowl of Michael militant about thee,
Christ’s cowl, beloved, safeguard thee,
The cowl of the God of grace shield thee;

⁹¹³ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 421.

To guard thee from thy back,
To preserve thee from thy front,
From the crown of thy head and thy forehead
To the very sole of thy foot.⁹¹⁴

These various rites of blessing and protection appear to involve drawing a mystical boundary around the individual, from the top of the head to the soles of the feet. This boundary is then used to hand over the entirety of the individual to the dominion of a spiritual authority, just as when witches were said to renounce their baptisms. After all, to renounce one's baptism is to transfer complete allegiance of the body and soul from one spiritual authority to another.

However, these examples involve surrender to a Christian spiritual authority, rather than a fairy, ambiguous spirit, or the Devil.

The key similarities between rites of contact to gain second sight, Christian charms over the utterer's head and feet, and crown-sole pacts made by accused witches are too unusual to ignore. Rather, it is likely that all were recognized aspects of rites performed by Scottish practitioners of popular magic, who drew mystical boundaries around their entire beings or the bodies of their clients, then surrendered all within the boundary to a spiritual authority. Crown-sole pacts or rites of contact therefore had a wider association than the purely demonological, including being an aspect of early modern second sight belief. If we are to accept that some aspects of the early modern Scottish witch trials had a popular rather than entirely demonological origin, then it is reasonable to suggest that the crown-sole pacts supposedly made by witches with the Devil were related to stories of people who gained supernatural sight through touching a fairy, as well as accounts of rites to convey second sight. However, rites like these may have

⁹¹⁴ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 421.

been readily demonized by suspicious observers. This is confirmed by Robert Kirk's claim that the rite to convey second sight "hes an ill appearance, as if by this ceremonie, an implicite surrender were made."⁹¹⁵ During the Reformation years, these actions that designated implicit and total surrender to a spiritual authority were demonized and adapted to narratives of witches' supposed renunciations of their baptisms. This demonization of second sight belief necessitated the incorporation of various aspects of magical rites of contact into the demonic pact theory of second sight.

In these various ways, the cultural systems that underpinned belief in second sight and fairies were folded into early modern witchcraft theory. Practices such as seeing the future, accessing hidden knowledge, communicating with spirits, and transferring illness were recognized as diabolical witchcraft, despite being associated with second sight belief. These beliefs and practices were demonized, legislated against, and prosecuted by witchcraft theorists, demonologists, and state authorities. Demonological descriptions of pacts with spirits and the acquisition of supernatural abilities through rites of contact were plucked from the realm of popular belief, where they were first associated with practitioners of magic. While demonological theories of second sight worked to demonize popular beliefs, popular beliefs about second sight also clearly influenced demonological theory. As analyzed here, the evidence for these intersections undermines scholarly theses that deny a relationship between second sight and either witchcraft or fairy belief during this period. Rather, Christian demonology and second sight belief engaged in reciprocal interaction and exchange, rendering the demonization of second sight a complex process of cultural synthesis.

⁹¹⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 27.

Chapter 4: The Reconciliation of Christianity and Second Sight

... her dayly trances continued & he did hear her speak in her trance for the space of one hour & one half or thereby, even of the most parts of Christianity & received an Answer of some question, she was desired to require, of these glorious creatures which she did see, for so she called the Angells who appeared by hir, And I was convinced, that there could not be any Delusion therein... Several of her Neighbours said to her that she was taken away with the Fairies & that it was but the Devil yet that was dealing with her...

— *Admiranda et Notanda* (1683-1684)⁹¹⁶

Donald Macgrigor and his family lived in Perth in the mid 1600s. When his daughter was about ten years old, she began to fall into trances and see angels. Donald Macgrigor's daughter claimed that her spirit was being carried away from her body, and that she could not see or hear the people around her. These trances became a daily occurrence for the girl, and the angels appeared only to her. The attending spirits answered questions that were put to them by the visionary, who communicated with the angels on the behalf of her friends and family. The content of her visions and utterances are contained in a small volume entitled *Admiranda et Notanda*, recorded by an author who assures his readers of their veracity. The girl's name is never mentioned in this source and we will never know it; she is simply identified by her relationship to her closest male relative.

While the content of her visions was certainly influenced by her devout Christian beliefs, the details of her experiences bear resemblance to accounts of second sighted people and practitioners of popular magic. This observation was evident even to her contemporaries: the girl's neighbors gossiped and claimed that she was taken away with the fairies, or perhaps the

⁹¹⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 2, 12-12v.

Devil was dealing with her. These rumors illustrate that people who entered trances were believed to be with the fairies in their subtle body form, while their physical bodies lay at home. Also, the perceived association between fairies and the Devil demonstrates that reformed opinions about fairies were becoming influential on popular belief. These different interpretations of the visionary's experiences should not be surprising. In many ways, the girl's experiences were reminiscent of early modern shamanism or second sight. She entered an altered state of consciousness, and couldn't see or hear while she was experiencing an other world. She saw spirits that became familiar and recognizable to her, and returned from journeys of spirit flight with supernatural knowledge that she imparted to her community. While her family and the author of *Admiranda et Notanda* clearly regarded this girl as a good Christian who was seeing angels and experiencing trances by the will of God, it is also easy to see how her neighbors possessed a different perspective.

This girl's story is not the only one that contained such ambiguities and tensions. A number of accounts of early modern visionaries or people who laid claim to supernatural powers integrated both Christian themes and aspects of second sight belief. Some of these visionaries attested that they experienced trances in which they were taken out of their bodies or were unaware of their surroundings. During these trances, they often made contact with spirit beings who provided them with supernatural abilities or knowledge. Yet their accounts also record their attempts to orient their experiences within a Christian framework. These trances were often entered into after periods of prayer or fasting, and some spoke of their familiar spirits as angels or spirits from the biblical tradition. They laid claim to the prophetic ability to predict the future, describing details of the coming apocalypse and styling themselves as devout prophets and

prophetesses. In predictions of death or descriptions of the otherworld, they emphasized Christian notions of heaven, hell, divine justice, and the eternal destinations of all souls. These seers often returned from their spiritual journeys with divinely inspired messages, exhorting those who would listen to lead more pious lifestyles. Some visionaries engaged with the popular belief that people with disabilities had access to the supernatural, and reasoned that this belief could be applied to seers who used their abilities to further the purposes of God. While some Christian seers were specifically associated with the term “second sight,” others simply incorporated aspects of second sight belief into their accounts. In these ways, this chapter explores the experiences of early modern Scottish visionaries who reconciled their Christian beliefs with popular traditions of second sight. This reconciliation illustrates that the process of religious reformation in Scotland involved a certain degree of adaptation to pre-existing systems of belief. Therefore, an examination of these accounts reveals that early modern Christianity may have been more flexible and receptive to folk belief than has generally been recognized.

This chapter’s analysis of Christianity and second sight demonstrates that some theorists approached popular beliefs about visionary experiences from a religious perspective. Some second sight theorists argued that seers were generally virtuous and devout individuals, whose reputations and characters were attested by all who knew them. The significance of seers’ religious and moral reputations was emphasized in numerous accounts of early modern visionaries, and it was often an important aspect of the criteria by which the second sighted were judged. Some second sighted people were ministers, whose status as holy individuals shielded them from imputations of being heretics or false prophets. Others were parishioners, whose experiences were attested and protected by their immediate religious authorities. Visionaries who

were not ministers themselves or who did not enjoy the spiritual protection of a minister were sometimes understandably anxious about how their experiences would be understood and interpreted by others. In particular, the accounts of several early modern Scottish prophetesses reveal concern about the origins of their familiar spirits and visions. These women, aware of the precarious line between mystic and witch, provided justification for believing that their visions were divinely inspired.

Some Christian visionaries ended up being labelled as heretics, imposters, witches, or false prophets by their communities or authorities. However, such labels were a reflection of how they were interpreted by others, and not necessarily how they intended to be perceived by those around them. As with some accused witches, some of these visionaries were guilty of sympathy towards pre-Reformation doctrine or practice, revealing a certain degree of confessional conflict within Scotland's "reformed" population. Indeed, many early modern Christian visionaries attested to contact with angelic spirits, whom Protestants no longer regarded as spiritual intercessors. When analyzing these various visionaries' experiences, the reasons for their acceptance or condemnation by their communities and authorities often seem arbitrary or obscure. The early modern era witnessed intense debates over visionary abilities and their religious significance. Therefore, processes of discernment about visionary people and their experiences often had high stakes. Some visionaries were successful at being accepted by their communities as prophets or Christian mystics, while others were rejected or punished for communicating with evil spirits. Overall, this exploration emphasizes the contested nature of visionary experiences and divine inspiration during this period.

A prominent strain of historiography has argued that Protestantism was a progressive

force that “disenchanted” early modern Europe. However, the prevalent inclusion of themes relevant to second sight belief in accounts of early modern Christian visionaries contradicts the idea that conversion to Protestantism was an inherently rationalizing process. This same historiographical trend was also quick to claim that Protestantism was embraced by local populations swiftly, eagerly, and in its totality. Rather, the conclusions of this chapter demonstrate that Protestantism was successful at gaining the devotion of the Scottish people because it adapted to existing systems of belief and culture. Both Christianity and second sight belief accepted the reality of a world of spirits and individuals who were uniquely receptive to it. In this way, second sight and Christian doctrine were not entirely at odds, and had potential for reconciliation. The compatibility of second sight belief with Christianity was not lost on visionaries or those who recorded their accounts. Far from being eradicated by reformers, second sight continued to have utility for Christian visionaries by allowing them to express their experiences using an established system of popular belief. Therefore, second sight belief and Scottish Christianity engaged in reciprocal influence and exchange during the era of supposed “reform,” as narratives of Christian visionaries reconciled aspects of both systems of belief.

I: Historiography: Second Sight, the Protestant Reformation, and Disenchantment

The persistence of belief in second sight during and after the Protestant Reformation in the British Isles contradicts an influential strain of historiography, which emphasized the total success of the Reformation and the eradication of folk culture through a process known as the “disenchantment of the world.” The term “disenchantment” is often attributed to Max Weber,

though he first borrowed it from Friedrich Schiller. Weber emphasized a linear progression of history and society, moving steadily towards a modern secular world in which science was valued more than superstition. For Weber, Western history had undergone and was undergoing a continuous process of rationalization and modernization.⁹¹⁷ Weber's thesis was impactful, and widely praised and cited. Within the historiography of the British Isles alone, the disenchantment thesis shaped historians' interpretations of how Protestantism converted the religion and culture of the English and Scottish peoples.⁹¹⁸ Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, whose title belies its central argument, argued that the Reformation drew strong distinctions between magic and religion. Thomas claimed that Protestants framed Catholic practices as "magic," which was superstitious, as opposed to Protestant belief, which was inherently rational. Over time, magic declined as intellectuals ceased to believe in it and the world became a less dangerous place, reducing the need for magical practices and superstitions.⁹¹⁹ The influence of Weber's arguments on Thomas' book is evident, though Thomas' book is still to be recommended because of its exhaustive exploration of early modern magical beliefs and practices.

Weber's thesis was supported by primary sources insofar as early modern Protestants claimed that their rival Catholics were superstitious conjurers. Of course, Protestants saw themselves and their beliefs as wholly rational, and were prone to demonizing all distinctly

⁹¹⁷ See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

⁹¹⁸ For another scholar who was clearly influenced by Weber's thesis, see A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: BT Batsford Ltd, 1964).

⁹¹⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 51, 75-76, 278, 643-644.

Catholic practices as “witchcraft.” The process of converting Scotland and reforming early modern Christianity created an “us versus them” mentality throughout the British Isles and across the European continent. This is precisely why King James VI cited fairy belief as “rifest in the time of papistry,” as he was eager to argue that Protestantism was responsible for a newer, purer, more rational and less superstitious form of devotion to God.⁹²⁰ Other Protestant writers also emphasized the total success of their superior faith and argued that it was readily and gratefully embraced by the people wherever it was preached. The issue with Weber’s conclusions is that he was too eager to believe these claims of Protestant victory.

Increasingly, historians who study the early modern British Isles have concluded that this region underwent a slow and perhaps even begrudging Reformation. After all, converting an entire people group was a massive task that required a combination of persuasion and force. Numerous scholars have noted the ways in which British and Scottish people were reluctant to give up their religious customs, including devotion to the saints, Virgin Mary, and other Catholic icons. J.J. Scarisbrick argued that, on the whole, the English people were slow to accept reform, preferring the rites of the late medieval church to which they were accustomed.⁹²¹ Both Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy claimed that the English were forced to witness the destruction of their established beliefs and ritual practices by a seemingly arbitrary state authority.⁹²² Similarly, Gordon Donaldson emphasized continuity across the period of supposed Scottish reformation, and pointed to scholars’ bias towards Protestant triumphalism beginning with John Knox’s

⁹²⁰ James VI, *Demonology*, 418.

⁹²¹ J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

⁹²² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

History of the Reformation in Scotland (1587).⁹²³ Ian B. Cowan has also argued that the Scottish Reformation was the result of a minority regime, and it lacked popular support and appeal.⁹²⁴ Audrey-Beth Fitch concurred, claiming that many Scots continued to demand Catholic rites and baptisms even after the Reformation.⁹²⁵

A number of scholars have also asserted that Protestantism's attempts at conversion were most successful when it was willing to adapt to local culture. Jane Dawson has persuasively argued that the early modern Gaelic clergy adapted Calvinism to the regional culture and systems of belief in order to spread Protestantism throughout the Highlands and Islands.⁹²⁶ Ultimately, Gaelic Calvinism had to capitulate to pressure from the lowland Kirk and its interest in centralization and uniformity. However, Dawson has shown that without the adaptations that Gaelic ministers made to the gospel of the Highlands, Protestantism would not have gained any degree of widespread popularity in Scotland's northernmost regions.⁹²⁷ Similarly, John MacInnes has highlighted the ways in which the Gaelic church managed to tolerate some forms of "harmless superstition," including aspects of second sight and fairy belief.⁹²⁸ MacInnes argued that the church tended to only exhibit hostility towards belief systems that were in competition

⁹²³ Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

⁹²⁴ Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

⁹²⁵ Audrey-Beth Fitch, *The Search for Salvation: Lay Faith in Scotland, 1480-1560* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009).

⁹²⁶ Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd," 231-253.

⁹²⁷ Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd," 252-253.

⁹²⁸ MacInnes, "The Church and Traditional Belief," 185-195.

with the church's teachings, as opposed to those that could be adapted to Christian doctrine.⁹²⁹ In doing so, MacInnes claimed that "human beings can accommodate more than one system of ideas simultaneously in the mind, even if they could be considered logically mutually exclusive."⁹³⁰ This dissertation adds to the near-consensus of modern historiography that rejects the thesis of linear disenchantment across the Reformation period.⁹³¹ Belief in second sight continued to be relevant to early modern Scottish and English people, despite the supposed rationalizing effect of Protestantism on the local culture. Furthermore, second sight was adapted to and reconciled with Christian doctrine through accounts of visionaries who oriented their experiences within existing frameworks of popular belief.

II: Second Sight and the Righteous

One of the first steps to accommodating second sight belief within traditions of Scottish Christianity was to characterize it as something that could be possessed by virtuous individuals. While some early modern sources believed that second sight was the purview of the sinful, others argued that second sight was frequently found among the righteous. Robert Kirk asserted that seers' accounts were credible because of the virtuous lives they led, comparable to those of the ancient prophets: "The goodnes of the Lyfe, and designes, of the ancient Prophets and Seers

⁹²⁹ MacInnes, "The Church and Traditional Belief," 185.

⁹³⁰ MacInnes, "The Church and Traditional Belief," 186.

⁹³¹ For this consensus, see the bibliography for publications by P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, Julian Goodare, Alexandra Walsham, Lizanne Henderson, Diane Purkiss, Emma Wilby, Owen Davies, Edward J. Cowan, Ronald Hutton, Louise Yeoman, Margo Todd, and Liv Helene Willumsen, to name only a few.

was one of the best proofs of their Mission. Nor have our Seers bad lives and designes... yet it is well known every where, that our Seers are no way Scandalous men.”⁹³² On the topic of seers’ character, John Fraser claimed that “men having this Second Sight are found to tell truth, and to be innocent in their Lives & free of any Paction either implicit or explicit; Likeways free of any Fraudulent design.”⁹³³ Fraser also provided assurances that, “I have observed many honest men, free of all Scandal that ever I could learn, to have it.”⁹³⁴ When accused of impiety by a group of friars, the second sighted Duncan Campbell retorted that “men of undoubted probity, virtue, and learning, both of their own religion, (viz., the Roman Catholic), and also of the reformed religion, and in several nations, had been affected, and continued all their lives to be affected with this second-sighted power, and that there could be, therefore, no room to fix upon it the odious character of being a sinful and vicious (not to say that some called it still worse, a diabolical) talent.”⁹³⁵

Numerous theorists defended their second sighted sources, who had provided them with accounts of their abilities. Theophilus Insulanus described one of his sources as “a person of known courage and honour,”⁹³⁶ while elsewhere others were “persons untainted with corruption, craft, or want of candour.”⁹³⁷ A letter from a divinity student to James Garden argued for the virtue of two second sighted acquaintances, one of whom was described as “a very civill discreet

⁹³² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 86.

⁹³³ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

⁹³⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

⁹³⁵ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 157.

⁹³⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 111.

⁹³⁷ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 129.

man, & some say he was of good deportment,” and the other “a very honest man & of right blameless conversation.”⁹³⁸ Likewise, a letter to Theophilus Insulanus from the Reverend Malcom MacCaskil promised that the included accounts of second sight were “vouched only by persons of undoubted veracity and established character.”⁹³⁹ These many statements by both seers and second sight theorists framed second sight as a gift that was possessed by upstanding individuals of excellent moral and religious character, who were neither deceptive nor inclined to sinful lifestyles. This was intended to make accounts of second sight believable while highlighting the righteous nature and reputations of seers.

Early modern theorists also cultivated favorable opinions of second sight by emphasizing that it was believed in and supported by good Christian individuals. This was imperative, since second sight was sometimes perceived as an ability with a potentially diabolical origin. In a letter to an acquaintance, a minister near Inverness declared his certainty “that persons that have a sense of God & religion, & may be presumed to be godly, ar known to have this faculty.”⁹⁴⁰ Likewise, Theophilus Insulanus cited that many of his sources for accounts of second sight came from “several of the clergy.”⁹⁴¹ Fraser described one of his informant seers as “a Gentleman of singular Piety and considerable knowledge, especially in Divinity,”⁹⁴² while others were known to be “sound enough in the necessary Articles of their Salvation.”⁹⁴³ When Fraser wrote to

⁹³⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

⁹³⁹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 168.

⁹⁴⁰ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

⁹⁴¹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 85.

⁹⁴² Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 194.

⁹⁴³ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

Robert Wodrow, he assured him that “severall persons hes it, that... are found to be pious.”⁹⁴⁴ In keeping with this pattern, Anne MacVicar Grant described a believing acquaintance as “a devout and rigid Presbyterian.”⁹⁴⁵ These statements were part of a broader attempt to prove that second sight belief was attested by people of faith, who had knowledge of proper Christian doctrine. Furthermore, many of these descriptions were applied directly to seers, emphasizing that second sight could be possessed by pious individuals.

Some early modern writers were convinced that second sight visions were conveyed by good spirits to human beings. In this way, the second sighted could be understood as individuals who had the ability to receive communication from angelic beings for divine purposes. Duncan Campbell described his own second sight as “the Power of discerning incorporeal Beings,” especially those “which the Divine Goodness sets over us as Guardians.” According to Campbell, seers’ perception of these beings was so that they might “communicate their Instructions, excite us to good Actions, deter us from bad ones, or give Notice of the extraordinary Events that shall befall us.”⁹⁴⁶ When this opinion was shared by second sight theorists, such assertions were often supported by references to the devout and virtuous nature of seers. George Hickeys wrote to Samuel Pepys that, “one would hope that in good men, who contribute nothing towards the having of it, it should be from good spirits... i.e. spirits of light.”⁹⁴⁷ Likewise, Theophilus Insulanus argued that second sight among the devout must be

⁹⁴⁴ NLS, Wod.Qu.Lett.ii, fol. 5.

⁹⁴⁵ Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders*, 257.

⁹⁴⁶ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 63.

⁹⁴⁷ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 174.

“communicated to the inhabitant within us, by a supernatural agent.”⁹⁴⁸ While he was generally concerned that some second sighted people’s visions may come from “evil angels,” John Fraser also admitted that “so likewise tis probable that it may be done by good Angels... moreover I conceive that there are many good Christians, if they would advert well, that have some secret tokens and signs, of notable alterations to come, Suggested to them before hand.”⁹⁴⁹ Fraser supported this belief by referencing the piety of the visionaries that he knew: “I can not be so uncharitable to several men that I have known to be of considerable sense, and Pious and good conversation, As to conclude them to be given over to be deluded continually by an evil Angel.”⁹⁵⁰ As in these examples, some theorists emphasized that the visions of second sighted people amounted to communication with good spirits. This belief was built on the foundational idea that seers were generally men of good character and faith.

One of the approaches that early modern theorists used to reconcile traditions of second sight and Christianity was to find justification in holy scripture. Robert Kirk was especially adept at this task, as he was both a minister and the author of a lengthy treatise on second sight. In this treatise, Kirk recorded numerous biblical instances that he believed corresponded to early modern second sight, and argued “Hence were the prophets frequently called Seers, or men of a

⁹⁴⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 35.

⁹⁴⁹ A similar belief was recorded in a 1722 broadside. The author of the broadside defended the idea that apparitions of wraiths were a form of communication from good spirits, by which “the Divine Power may... make use of the Ministry of Spirits to indigitate some extraordinary Events that may happen.” See *The St. James surprizing and a frightful Apparition*.

⁹⁵⁰ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

second & more exalted sight than others.”⁹⁵¹ Kirk cited biblical references in which he claimed prophets foresaw death by seeing wraiths in winding shrouds,⁹⁵² as well as evidence for the belief that the second sighted could see events in remote locations.⁹⁵³ The title page to his treatise on second sight featured a number of biblical passages about spirits and visions, the first among them being, “This is a Rebellious people, which say to the seer see not; and to the prophets, prophesie not unto us right things but smooth things. Isa.30.9, 10.”⁹⁵⁴

Theophilus Insulanus also appealed to the Biblical tradition of prophecy to justify the existence and virtuous nature of second sight. Insulanus expressed his astonishment that some Christians “who profess to believe in the Sacred Oracles as they are handed down to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, should discover any scruple to admit the truth of apparitions; which so powerfully prompt and enforce the important belief of revelation.”⁹⁵⁵ In hope of changing these doubtful Christians’ minds, the author cited numerous biblical passages, including the prophecy in Acts that God would “pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”⁹⁵⁶ By orienting second sight within the biblical tradition, both Kirk and Insulanus were

⁹⁵¹ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 27-29. This corresponded with John Beaumont’s assertion that second sight was caused by a “prophetick Energy,” and that no doubt “the true Prophets were in these extatick Dreams when they prophesied.” See John Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities* (London: W. Taylor, 1724), 192.

⁹⁵² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 28.

⁹⁵³ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 28-29.

⁹⁵⁴ EUL, La.III.551, title page, verso.

⁹⁵⁵ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 50.

⁹⁵⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 51.

hoping to characterize it as a form of prophetic ability. Furthermore, identifying potential references to second sight in scripture lent legitimacy to the ability, from the perspective of the devout.

All of these arguments by second sight theorists were deliberately constructed to frame second sight as an ability that was attested by righteous individuals. Contrary to the belief that second sight was the work of demons and people of bad character, numerous writers sought to convince their readers that the hidden knowledge that the second sighted were privy to was conveyed by good spirits for divine purposes. The existence of early modern seers who regularly received messages from angels or the spirit of God was legitimized through references to scripture and the prophetic tradition, both of which held that good spirits sometimes conveyed visions and information to chosen individuals. These arguments were the basis for the theory that second sight belief could be reconciled with orthodox Christianity and a devout lifestyle.

III: The Debate over “Enthusiasm”

The early modern period witnessed a debate over the validity of individuals who claimed they had direct divine inspiration. People who argued that God still spoke to individual people and thereby communicated his will and messages through latter-day prophets were liable of being labelled “enthusiasts,” while the entire belief system was pejoratively referred to as “enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm was primarily associated with people who were believed to be delusional about their communication with God or spirits, and the term “enthusiastic” was often applied to individuals who were considered too zealous, superstitious, or eager to display

emotion in religious settings. Concurrently, early modern elite society was also concerned about the perceived threat of growing deism and atheism in educated circles. This forced a number of second sight theorists to seek a middle ground where they were free from imputations of enthusiastic credulity or impious skepticism, and compelled them to distinguish between true and false inspiration.⁹⁵⁷ Numerous prominent early modern writers and theorists weighed in on the debate over enthusiasm,⁹⁵⁸ and concerns related to enthusiasm also appeared in discussions of second sight.

Christian proponents of second sight argued that the ability was God-given, and therefore represented a form of divine revelation in the early modern world. These proponents were inevitably aware of some of their contemporaries' scorn towards enthusiasts, and therefore attempted to guard themselves against such imputations. Often, enthusiasm was associated with

⁹⁵⁷ See Michael Heyd, "The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Towards an Integrative Approach," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 2 (1981): 258-280; Colin Kidd, "The Scottish Enlightenment and the Supernatural," in *Fantastical Imaginations*, ed. Lizanne Henderson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 91-109.

⁹⁵⁸ See Archibald Campbell, *A Discourse Proving that the Apostles were no Enthusiasts, wherein The Nature and Influence of Religious Enthusiasm are impartially Explain'd* (London: A. Millar, 1730); David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Sir George MacKenzie, *Synopsis Apocalyptica; or, Explication of Daniel's Prophecy, and of St. John's Revelation, in concert with it* (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1707).

“imposture” or pretense to having special powers for vain purposes.⁹⁵⁹ Second sight theorists who invoked counter-arguments against enthusiasm also rejected the idea that second sight was accomplished through deception. The political pamphlet *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded* contained a section on “the visions seen by John Ferguson a man endued with the Second Sight.” The author of the pamphlet acknowledged that second sight was commonly believed to be the purview of “pretenders to divination,”⁹⁶⁰ but urged his readers to seek a medium position between “enthusiastic credulity” and “obstinate infidelity.”⁹⁶¹ In his treatise on second sight, Theophilus Insulanus also asserted that second sight “is not carried on by enthusiasm, or imposture, nor from a certain levity of mind to appear singular.”⁹⁶² Insulanus emphasized the credibility of the seers he consulted, claiming “most of them are of my own acquaintance, are not tinctured with superstition, craft, or enthusiasm.”⁹⁶³ The widespread and pejorative use of the terms “enthusiasts” and “enthusiasm” prompted anyone discussing

⁹⁵⁹ Lord Molesworth specifically drew a connection between imposture, the Camisards, and second sight. In the margins of a book that described children that had second sight, Lord Molesworth wrote, “just so little children had the Agitations among, the late French Prophets preached. this imposture is catching.” See BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 306. The Camisards, popularly known as the “French Prophets,” had been exiled from France and were active in London in the eighteenth century. One pamphlet purported they were individuals “addicted to strange Enthusiasms,” who “pretended to have the Spirit of Prophecy.” See *A Full and True Account of the Apprehending and taking Six French Prophets, near Hog Lane, in Soho* (London: T. Bland, 1707). See also *The wonderful narrative; or a faithful account of the French Prophets, their agitations, exstasies, and inspirations* (Glasgow: Robert Foulis, 1742).

⁹⁶⁰ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded* (London: M. Cooper, 1745), 15.

⁹⁶¹ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 7.

⁹⁶² Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 44.

⁹⁶³ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 129, 24.

visionary abilities to protect themselves from being painted with the same brush.⁹⁶⁴

Even those who were skeptical of some sources of prophetic inspiration were insistent on distinguishing enthusiasm from Scottish second sight. A pamphlet by John Cockburn on the followers of a woman named Antonia Bourignon denounced them as believers in “enthusiastical impostures.”⁹⁶⁵ This woman’s followers claimed that she was a prophet, and could know secret thoughts and things that were happening far away. While the author of this pamphlet found stories of Scottish second sight to be “undoubted testimonies from both credible histories and living witnesses,” he claimed that Antonia’s followers were party to their own deception.⁹⁶⁶ In this way, the author sought to advertise his skepticism towards visionaries who seemed tainted with enthusiasm in order to gain his readers’ trust, and assure them of the validity of second sight.

Because the debate over enthusiasm appears in early modern discussions of second sight, it can be inferred that the visionary abilities of Scottish seers were subject to significant scrutiny and processes of discernment by the public and authorities. Processes of discernment appeared in conversations about enthusiasm, and some theorists prescribed means of discerning the experiences of visionaries. In his treatise *A Short View of Enthusiasm: and of Light and Dark Magic*, Archibald Campbell argued that there were two forms of enthusiasm: light and dark,

⁹⁶⁴ For more pejorative views of Scottish enthusiasts, see Dalyell’s comments in Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 493-494; also NRS, GD124/15/1081/1, which is a personal letter from Jean Forbes to Lord Justice Clark in 1712. In this letter, Forbes expressed concern over a mutual acquaintance’s daughter who “follows the modern (mock) prophets & agitates with them.”

⁹⁶⁵ Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected*, 61.

⁹⁶⁶ Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected*, 62.

which were the work of the two heads of the spiritual world, Jesus and Lucifer.⁹⁶⁷ While light enthusiasm was due to the operations of the Holy Spirit to lead us towards divine truth, dark enthusiasm was caused by malignant spirits for the purpose of deception.⁹⁶⁸ According to Campbell, these two could be distinguished by the character of the visionary, whether the visions exhorted others to live more virtuous and godly lives, and a comparison of the visionary's revelations to the content of scripture.⁹⁶⁹ This process of discernment was similar to the means by which second sight theorists justified the ability as godly: seers were judged based on their perceived moral and religious characters, as well as on the content of their visions.

The debate over enthusiasm emphasizes the fact that all early modern visionaries underwent these processes of discernment which determined whether or not they were regarded as divinely inspired, demonically informed, or pretenders to supernatural talents. While these guidelines seemed simple in theory, they were often more complex in practice. Some seers did incorporate aspects of second sight belief into their visionary experiences without being accused of diabolism, and sometimes this was made possible by the seer's existing reputation as a virtuous or holy individual. The belief that seers could also be good Christians was doubtless bolstered by the records of the life of St. Columba, a significant converter and intercessor for the Scottish people, whom some also regarded as being the first to have the gift of second sight.

⁹⁶⁷ NRS, CH12/21/10, fol. 4.

⁹⁶⁸ NRS, CH12/21/10, fols. 9-10.

⁹⁶⁹ NRS, CH12/21/10, fols. 17-20.

IV: St. Columba: A Medieval Antecedent

St. Columba was remembered as both a holy individual and a second sighted person. Columba, also known by his Irish name Colum Cille, was an Irish missionary to Scotland in the sixth century. The definitive source for his life's events is Adamnan's *Life of Columba*, written in the seventh century. Columba was born to the highest rank of Irish nobility, but decided to become a monk or priest. He founded a monastery on the Scottish island of Iona, where he remained until his death in 704. Adamnan's account of Columba's life on Iona described him as an abbot, seer, bard, and prophet. The *Life of Columba* is organized thematically into three books, one containing his prophecies, another describing his miracles including his gift of foreknowledge, and the last describing his visions of angels. It is considered one of the most important works of early medieval Scottish literature. While Adamnan argued that Columba was a profoundly blessed individual with prophetic and visionary abilities, he did not claim that Columba was the only person who had such talents, making it relatively easy for the saint's legend to be incorporated into a framework of belief in second sight.⁹⁷⁰

Columba has a legendary place in Scottish history that was well-established in early modern popular culture. The records of his prophecies, insights, and miracles led to the belief that Columba was "the first" to have second sight. John Trusler's encyclopedic work *Chronology; or, The historian's vade-mecum* described St. Columba as "the first on records that had the gift of second sight."⁹⁷¹ Similarly, traveler Thomas Pennant also claimed Columba was

⁹⁷⁰ MacQueen, "The Saint as Seer," 44.

⁹⁷¹ Trusler, *Chronology*, 46.

the first to have “the faculty of second sight,” since he foretold the victory of a battle at the instant that it happened.⁹⁷² John Macculloch also believed that Columba was in possession of second sight, and claimed that the ability must have descended on the saint through the quality of the Highland air and the influence of Iona’s environment.⁹⁷³ Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* recorded a popular ballad called “Glenfinlas, or Lord Ronalds Coronach” which contained several stanzas describing the saint as a seer, prophet, and bard.⁹⁷⁴ Scott included a footnote to these stanzas, clarifying the concept of second sight for his readers by referring them to Samuel Johnson’s definition of “an impression... by which things distant and future are perceived and seen as if they were present,” to which Scott added, “the spectral appearances, thus presented, usually presage misfortune.”⁹⁷⁵ In this way, both the ballad and Scott’s commentary applied an early modern definition of second sight to the visionary abilities of the medieval saint.

Adamnan’s description of Columba’s prophecies and visions do indeed appear to fulfill early modern expectations for a second sighted individual. While some of Columba’s prophecies related to major events such as battles and victories,⁹⁷⁶ they largely centered around

⁹⁷² Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1772*, 279.

⁹⁷³ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland*, vol. 4, 68.

⁹⁷⁴ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 4, 170-171.

⁹⁷⁵ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 4, 170-171.

⁹⁷⁶ Columba could describe the battle taking place elsewhere, as well as predict the number of slain men. See Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 27-29.

foreknowledge of daily mundane events.⁹⁷⁷ Adamnan's account contained numerous stories of Columba engaging in death prognostication,⁹⁷⁸ which was a recognized aspect of second sight in Scottish culture. Columba was also proficient at predicting the likeness of individuals who would soon arrive at the monastery and the reasons for their journeys.⁹⁷⁹ These accounts would have fit cleanly with early modern descriptions of seers who predicted the coming of visitors before their arrival. The saint was also supposedly able to describe numerous events in detail before they happened, as well as events at a spatial distance from himself.⁹⁸⁰ Columba was proficient at revealing personal hidden knowledge to others, much to their surprise.⁹⁸¹ Some of these accounts emphasized his dual role as both a seer and saint. For example, he revealed secret sins to unrepentant individuals,⁹⁸² and uncovered hidden corruption in the life of a priest.⁹⁸³ Furthermore, Adamnan described Columba as studying under a bard and eventually becoming a bard himself.⁹⁸⁴ This would have appealed to early modern readers who believed in an affiliation between musical and poetic abilities, and the gifts of prophecy and second sight. In these ways, Columba's abilities would have corresponded with culturally recognized understandings of early

⁹⁷⁷ For example, the saint once predicted how a man's voyage would unfold and who would greet him upon his arrival. Columba also predicted the appearance of a great "whale" (though it sounds more like a ferocious sea monster) near the island, and the arrival of a white crane of unknown origin. See Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 39-41, 86-87.

⁹⁷⁸ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 32, 33-34, 35, 36, 37, 56-58, 63, 69, 70, 72, 76, 82, 85.

⁹⁷⁹ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 24, 26, 49-51, 54.

⁹⁸⁰ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 60-61, 72-73, 83-84.

⁹⁸¹ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 80.

⁹⁸² Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 37, 44.

⁹⁸³ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 71-72.

⁹⁸⁴ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, xv, xlvi.

modern second sight and access to supernatural knowledge.

Aspects of Columba's visionary abilities also cohered with early modern beliefs about second sight and the world of spirits. Columba once revealed to other monks that certain rooms in a nearby monastery were frequented by angels that no one else could see,⁹⁸⁵ fulfilling the early modern conception of second sight as the ability to see spirits. In a story reminiscent of early modern subtle body belief, some distant monks who were toiling arduously reported sensing the spirit of Columba among them as they worked, watching and comforting them in a time of difficulty. They described their awareness that, "he comes not in body to meet us, his spirit meets our steps, and that it is which so much consoles and makes us glad."⁹⁸⁶ Descriptions of Columba's frequent visions of angels also hearkened to early modern expectations of visionary seers and familiar spirits. In particular, Columba was described as having angels that walked along side him everywhere he went,⁹⁸⁷ not unlike seers who were always accompanied by their doubles or familiar spirits. Columba also saw apparitions of angels that appeared to him repeatedly and gave him directions and prophecies to impart to others, while in another instance he sent an angel to aid a man who had fallen from the roof of a nearby monastery.⁹⁸⁸ These apparitions could alternatively be interpreted as familiar spirits who provided aid and guidance to seers, who in turn engaged with the spirit world for the benefit of their communities.

Even Columba's own description of his ability would have appealed to the interpretation

⁹⁸⁵ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 22.

⁹⁸⁶ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 66-67.

⁹⁸⁷ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 190-192.

⁹⁸⁸ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 193-194, 209-210.

that he numbered among those chosen individuals who had second sight. When asked by another “about these so wonderful prophetic revelations, how they are manifested to thee,” Columba replied, “Some there are, though very few, to whom Divine grace has granted this: that they can clearly and most distinctly see, at one and the same moment, as though under one ray of the sun, even the entire circuit of the whole world with its surroundings of ocean and sky, the inmost part of their mind being marvellously enlarged.”⁹⁸⁹ This description is comparable to one offered by the early modern seer Duncan Campbell, who in his memoirs described his second sight as an “Emanation of the Divine Prescience,”⁹⁹⁰ and “a palpable and immediate Inspiration from the supreme Source of all Knowledge... [the seer] sees, and comprehends Millions of Things at once, which other Mortals are incapable even of conceiving... there is nothing shut from the Second Sight.”⁹⁹¹ Therefore, Columba’s explanation of how he received his visions corresponds with his image as both a holy man and a second sighted individual, as his words could be interpreted as his own perspective on second sight as well as a description of divine revelation. Furthermore, Columba specifically stated that he was among some few who were granted this ability by “Divine grace,” lending credence to the belief that he was simply one among many holy individuals who had second sight. In these numerous ways, Adamnan’s account of Columba's visionary and spiritual powers provided a clear basis for claims that he was both a saint and a second sighted person. Columba’s visions were legitimized by the holy life he lived,

⁹⁸⁹ Adamnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, 77. John MacQueen specifically compared Columba’s words to those of St. Benedict of Nursia, “the patriarch of Western monasticism,” who described a vision of celestial light through which he saw the entirety of creation through one ray of the sun. See MacQueen, “The Saint as Seer,” 47-48.

⁹⁹⁰ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 130-131.

⁹⁹¹ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 129-130.

his purported proximity to God, and his knowledge of Christian doctrine. Similar criteria would be used to judge subsequent Christians who claimed access to visionary powers, though Columba's legendary status as both saint and seer established the precedent that second sight could be found in godly individuals.

V: Ministers and Parishioners

As with Columba, individuals who had reputations for being in close proximity to the holy were able to incorporate aspects of second sight belief in accounts of their visionary experiences, while still being regarded as divinely inspired seers. The authority of a religious calling also allowed ministers to act as discerners of the visionary experiences of their parishioners, and accounts of seers whose ministers attested to the veracity and virtue of their spiritual encounters sometimes make reference to second sight belief. Records of the visions of ministers and parishioners, compared to accounts of early modern Christian prophetesses, reveal significantly less anxiety and concern that their experiences would be misinterpreted or demonized. Rather, their visionary experiences are reported more matter-of-factly, with less justification and focus on the necessity of discerning the nature of their visionary experiences. This confidence may have been at least partially inspired by ministers' reputations as godly and virtuous individuals, making it more likely that their visions would be believed to have a holy origin. This assertion is further supported by the fact that accounts of minister-seers and their parishioners often emphasized the dual role of ministers as both visionaries and spiritual shepherds.

Aspects of second sight that appeared in accounts of ministers and parishioners included the belief that some individuals were particularly perceptive to seeing spirits, predicting future events, prognosticating on death and death circumstances, and accessing hidden knowledge. In the case of some Christian visionaries, they attempted to orient these experiences within the tradition of biblical and apocalyptic prophecy. Some accounts of their visionary experiences also resembled early modern shamanism, including spirit flight to other worlds or the realm of the dead. However, ministers and their parishioners often spoke of the otherworld as heaven or hell, and provided a perspective on the afterlife that emphasized God's mastery over life and death and the existence of divine justice. In these numerous ways, Christian ministers and their parishioners engaged with second sight belief and reconciled it with their own understanding of what it meant to be a devout visionary.

The fact that some notable Scottish ministers acquired reputations as seers⁹⁹² was made possible not only by the legend of the saint-seer Columba, but also facilitated by arguments that framed second sight as a gift possessed by the singularly righteous. Minister Robert Kirk's treatise on second sight expressed his conviction that "it is not unsuitable to Reasone nor the Holy Scriptures" that some chosen individuals witnessed spirit activity that others could not.⁹⁹³ By this logic, it was quite reasonable to believe that some holy people would have particular access to divine revelations and visitations from spirits that fit within the popular tradition of second sight. The Reverend John Morrison's own explanation for his prophetic ability attributed

⁹⁹² Some Scottish ministers who had reputations as seers were the Reverends John Morrison, Lachlan MacKenzie, and Ninian MacVicar. See Cowan, "The Discovery of the Future," 5; Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd," 251; MacInnes, "The Seer in Gaelic Tradition," 21.

⁹⁹³ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 67

it to his proximity to God, since “he is a poor servant indeed to whom his Master will reveal nothing of his mind.”⁹⁹⁴ Because ministers were considered to have more profound relationships with God than the average person, they were in a unique position to incorporate aspects of second sight into their roles as prophets and visionaries, while also avoiding scrutiny.

The theory that some visions and supernatural abilities were conveyed by divine spirits also fit readily with accounts of ministers and second sight. Second sight theorist John Fraser had suggested that some signs interpreted by the second sighted were due to “our Tutelary Angels that have the charge of us at the time,”⁹⁹⁵ while Robert Kirk claimed that some second sighted people believed that their doubles that followed them everywhere were actually guardian angels.⁹⁹⁶ These theories found application in accounts of early modern ministers who were visited by spirits. Some ministers attested that their callings began with visionary experiences of spirits or angelic visitations, fulfilling the belief that second sighted people were exceptionally perceptive to the operations of the spirit world. Minister Samuel Rutherford was rescued from a well in his childhood when “a bonny young man pulled him out by the hand. There was nobody nearby at the time, and so they [his family] concluded it was no doubt an angel.”⁹⁹⁷ Minister William Cowper claimed he knew he would soon be called to a post in Perth after experiencing a vision “in my thoughts of the night” in which an angel led him in spirit throughout the entire

⁹⁹⁴ A.B. MacLennan, *The Petty Seer*, 3rd ed. (Inverness: The Highland News Printing and Publishing Coy., 1906), 12.

⁹⁹⁵ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 202.

⁹⁹⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 6.

⁹⁹⁷ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 57.

city.⁹⁹⁸ Seers with less reputable callings may have interpreted these spiritual encounters differently, but visionaries with strong backgrounds in Christianity and the discernment of spirits were inclined to believe that helpful apparitions could be angels. Ministers' persistent belief in angelic visitations is somewhat curious given that reformed doctrine had officially rejected the idea that angels could be intercessors. The fact that apparitions continued to be interpreted as angels lends credence to the thesis that Protestantism had not managed to thoroughly eradicate various Catholic beliefs in Scotland, even among the clergy. It would seem that some members and leaders of early modern Scottish Protestantism were more flexible and accepting of both pre-Reformation doctrine and folk culture than has previously been recognized.

Minister-seers often exhibited their prophetic abilities before their congregations and parishioners, blending traditions of second sight with divine inspiration and enhancing their reputations among their flock. The recorded accounts of the Reverend John Morrison, who was active from 1749 until his death in 1774, illustrate his dual role as a minister and second sighted person as attested by his parishioners. Morrison had a reputation as a visionary, and was known as the Petty Seer because of the region in which he ministered: Petty, near Inverness. Just like Columba, Morrison was supposedly privy to supernatural knowledge about the sins of others.⁹⁹⁹ He was also renowned for having the ability to know future events and secret things done at a distance.¹⁰⁰⁰ The Petty Seer once reproved a servant for reporting that all the cattle on the hill were well, when in actuality the servant had not checked on them as he said he did. Morrison

⁹⁹⁸ Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 394.

⁹⁹⁹ Maclellan, *The Petty Seer*, 12-14, 16-18, 34-39, 45-46; Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 131-132, 135, 137-139, 142-143.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Maclellan, *The Petty Seer*, 18-19; Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 138, 140-141.

knew this because, through the virtue of his supernatural sight, he saw at a distance that one of the cattle was lying in a ditch with two legs broken. While his ability to see things at a distance reflected his reputation as a second sighted person, his admonition of his servant was that of a minister to a parishioner: “You must pray for forgiveness for this transgression, or it may be against you at the Day of Judgement.”¹⁰⁰¹ The servant repented of his sin, as well as concluded, “I might not have tried to conceal anything from Mr Morrison, for he knows everything full well beforehand.”¹⁰⁰²

Another account also featured the Petty Seer’s awareness of the secret sins of others, and of events done at a distance. As in most stories of his second sight, Morrison often used his abilities to further the purposes of God and minister to sinners. In this story, the seer exercised his ability to prevent a dreadful sin being done, and to instill godly love in the heart of a potential sinner. One evening, the seer commanded that his horse be saddled so that he could ride out on important business. This mission was impelled by his secret knowledge that a woman along the road desired to kill her newborn child, which she was concealing in her bosom. Upon encountering this woman, Morrison told the desperate mother that before she parted with the thing she had hidden in her clothes, she should kiss it and say “May God bless you.” The woman did as he told her and kissed the child, after which a divine blessing fell upon the child and the woman chose to preserve her infant’s life.¹⁰⁰³ A similar impulse to act once caused the Petty Seer to rise in the night and discover a man sleeping outdoors who had been turned away by one of

¹⁰⁰¹ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 135.

¹⁰⁰² Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 135.

¹⁰⁰³ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 137.

Morrison's parishioners. The minister took the man to his parishioner's home, and reprimanded him saying "You turned this man... away from your door this evening. This was very unchristian of you to do. Take him in at once and give him food and a bed. Ministers and elders ought to be hospitable to strangers; they may in this way entertain angels unawares."¹⁰⁰⁴ In both these instances, Morrison's display of supernatural knowledge was in line with popular beliefs about the second sighted and their abilities. However, he also acted as one would expect a minister to behave, exhorting his parishioners to virtuous actions, admonishing them for un-Christian behavior, and encouraging them to turn away from sin. The accounts of the Petty Seer also do not seem to contain any hint of concern that his prophetic abilities would be misunderstood as witchcraft or unlawful foreknowledge. Rather, Morrison's gifts were protected by his devout reputation as a prophet and minister, as well as the holy purposes to which he applied them.

The Reverend Morrison was also a typical second sighted person in that he was privy to knowledge about death and its circumstances. However, the accounts of this ability also emphasize his belief in divine justice and the Christian afterlife, as well as his concerns about the condition of his parishioners' souls. Stories about Morrison's knowledge of death combine the fatalistic belief that the second sighted could predict (but not prevent) forthcoming death, with his role as a prophet who had privileged knowledge of the eternal fate of others.¹⁰⁰⁵ Morrison claimed that he knew which individuals would be admitted into heaven, and once correctly

¹⁰⁰⁴ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 141-142.

¹⁰⁰⁵ This theme is also present in accounts of minister-seer Ninian MacVicar, whose reputation for prophecy persisted until his death by drowning, the circumstances of which he had accurately predicted. See Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd," 251.

predicted to a companion that a person who was at that time in good health would “be in eternity before you return to Inverness.” This event came to pass, as the predicted individual soon drunkenly fell down the stairs to his death.¹⁰⁰⁶ At another parishioner’s request, Morrison played his violin so some women could dance. One of the elders reproved him for this “unseemly conduct,” to which Morrison replied, “How could I... refuse to play a tune for the woman who asked me to do so? The holy angels themselves will before long tune their harps for her. It would be better than a thousand worlds to hear the melodious music in the midst of which her soul will before this day week pass into glory.”¹⁰⁰⁷ The woman of whom he spoke died several days later. In yet another instance, Morrison lamented that one of his parishioners “has had many invitations and opportunities to attend the Gospel ordinances, but he has lost them now for ever.” Later that day, the man of whom he spoke fell out of a boat and drowned.¹⁰⁰⁸ Morrison predicted the deaths of numerous of his acquaintances and parishioners, and the accounts of his predictions claimed that they all came to pass as he foretold.¹⁰⁰⁹ While the accurate fulfillment of predictions of death was a traditional aspect of second sight belief, the inclusion of messages about salvation, heaven, and divine justice reinforce Morrison’s joint reputation as a seer and holy man.

The accounts of the Petty Seer also contained some stories of his parishioners’ visionary experiences, which were encouraged or interpreted by the seer himself. Accounts of these experiences were clearly influenced by popular beliefs about second sight, yet maintained an

¹⁰⁰⁶ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 136.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 136.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 139.

¹⁰⁰⁹ MacLennan, *The Petty Seer*, 10-11, 12, 16, 22-24, 33-34; Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 136, 139, 144.

absolute confidence that they originated from God. One parishioner had a premonition of his own death in the form of a vision of the Lord's table at which "a beautiful man... [in] a white robe" walked about the table, placing his hand on the head of some individuals and not others. The man in white came and put his hand on the visionary's head and told him, "Be a good lad till I come. I will come for you a year from to-day, and will bring you to the beautiful place where I dwell." Morrison had previously urged his parishioner to seek invitation to the Lord's table for a vision, and once this had taken place, the minister told his parishioner to "remember what you were told by the good Lord of the heavenly land, and be ready waiting for His coming." According to this account, the parishioner did die exactly a year from the day of this vision.¹⁰¹⁰ In this instance, it would seem that the Lord placing his hand on some people's heads and not others was a designation of which individuals would die soon. This vision invites comparison to the experiences of second sighted people who were communicated knowledge about death by familiar spirits. However, like Morrison's own intimations about death, this vision reinforced the notion that God was in control of who would live or die, and also confirmed the Christian view of the afterlife. Morrison's reputation as a prophet encouraged others to seek his counsel about visionary experiences, which he provided in his dual role as a minister and second sighted person. Through Morrison's spiritual guidance and relationship with his parishioner, this vision was interpreted within a Christian framework.

Another account featuring the Petty Seer also combined his status as a minister with his reputation as a second sighted individual. This story featured Morrison's ability to have access to hidden knowledge, as well as interpret spirit encounters within the culturally accepted

¹⁰¹⁰ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 145-146.

framework of subtle body belief. In this account, a second sighted herd boy had been sent to the well to retrieve water when he encountered a specter standing with its back to him. In order to compel it to turn around and reveal its identity, the boy turned down the cuffs of his sleeves. Upon sight of the spirit's face, the boy turned and ran back to the house with the spirit in pursuit. The Reverend Morrison called for the boy and, having hidden knowledge of what had transpired, he asked the boy, "Why, as you were so foolish as to turn up the cuffs of your sleeves, did you not turn them down again when you saw the apparition following you, for then its progress would not have been hindered. Prepare, my dear boy, for eternity. Within eight days from to-day you will have appeared before the 'Great White Throne' on which the Lord Jesus Christ sits as Judge of all." The boy died soon thereafter, and "the supposition was that it was none other than his own ghost that he saw."¹⁰¹¹ The belief that a spirit could be forced to reveal its identity by the turning of an article of clothing had a place in Scottish popular culture regarding subtle bodies, as did the dark omen of seeing one's own double.¹⁰¹² Though he was a minister, this story illustrates the belief that John Morrison was also a second sighted person who had access to hidden knowledge, including the ability to prognosticate death. Morrison also appeared to be well-versed in the folklore of popular culture that understood how to interpret wraiths and other omens of death. However, his status as a minister allowed for the accurate fulfillment of his prediction to be considered prophetic. Furthermore, his devotion to Christian doctrine caused him to emphasize an orthodox view of judgement and afterlife in his prediction of this boy's death.

¹⁰¹¹ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 144.

¹⁰¹² See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on the belief that wraiths would reveal their identities to their beholder following a rite of turning or inverting clothing.

Accounts of other Scottish ministers also described their visionary experiences as influenced by second sight and subtle body belief. Minister Andrew Cant experienced a vision that was both prophetic and firmly seated in the tradition of wraiths and death prognostication. Based upon this vision, Cant can be interpreted as a second sighted individual who was believed to be able to see the subtle bodies of people that were soon to die, and by this means predict impending deaths. In 1638, when both his sons were at Aberdeen college, Cant “was looking out at his chamber-window, which looked towards the Cross, and saw about two hundred, as [he] guessed, of the children of the town, all in white, singing and playing most melodiously, and his two sons on the head of them; and in a very little after, the small-pox came to the town, and his two sons, and multitudes of other children, were carried off by them.”¹⁰¹³ Cant saw the wraiths of many children, but he also saw the specters of his sons whom he recognized. These details permit Cant’s vision to be contextualized within traditions of second sight, which emphasized both death prognostication and the ability to see spirits, particularly subtle bodies. The fulfillment of Cant’s vision through the death of the people whose wraiths he saw enhanced his reputation as a visionary who could predict the future and perceive spiritual activity. Furthermore, Cant’s status as a minister encouraged his community to regard this vision as prophetic or divinely inspired, as opposed to an instance of unlawful foreknowledge.

Some ministers reported experiencing trances or altered states of consciousness that accompanied their visions, just as some second sighted people did. Sometimes, these trances permitted their spirits to journey to the otherworld or the land of the dead, and return to tell others of what they had seen there. In 1717, John Gardner, a minister near Elgon, supposedly fell

¹⁰¹³ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 374.

into a trance for two days and was actually put into his coffin and prepared for burial. On the way to the churchyard, he began to wake and make noises “to the wonderful astonishment of all there present.” Gardner was taken home and put into bed, and he presently “related many strange and amazing things which he had seen in the other world.”¹⁰¹⁴ He even preached a final sermon to his congregation after his recovery. A similar story appears in a 1717 pamphlet entitled “Scotland’s Timely Remembrance,” which related the account of a minister named Richard Brightly. This pamphlet claimed that while the minister was praying he “fell into a trance, and saw the state of the damned in everlasting torment, and that of the blessed in glory; and being then warned of his death by an angel, he afterwards ordered his coffine and grave to be made, and invited his parishioners to hear his last sermon.”¹⁰¹⁵ According to this pamphlet, Brightly died in the pulpit after delivering his final message.¹⁰¹⁶ In both accounts, ministers fell into trances and were transported to the Christian afterlife, not unlike second sighted people or practitioners of popular magic that traveled in spirit to the realm of the dead. However, these ministers’ out of body experiences had the divine purpose of giving the ministers a message for their congregations about their own impending deaths and the condition of the afterlife. Through descriptions of their experiences and final messages, these accounts emphasize their dual role as both ministers and seers. While their visionary experiences were doubtless influenced by their religious convictions, their communities’ interpretations of these experiences were facilitated by the ministers’ reputations as godly men.

¹⁰¹⁴ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 201.

¹⁰¹⁵ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 201-202.

¹⁰¹⁶ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 202.

Some ministers' knowledge of the future included intimations about the end of the world. Revelations of the apocalypse were a weighty aspect of the biblical prophetic tradition, and by contributing to the belief that the end times were near, second sighted ministers and parishioners were orienting their visionary abilities within a Christian framework. During his trance, minister Richard Brightly saw the figure of Death as a rider on a pale horse. Upon recovery, Brightly reported that his vision had been a warning to the "inhabitants of the earth of the wrath to come."¹⁰¹⁷ Similarly, in 1719 a farmer named William Rutherford was granted a vision of the end times. An angel appeared to Rutherford while he was praying in his corn-yard, and desired that he should summon the minister of his parish and "four honest men."¹⁰¹⁸ After the arrival of the minister and witnesses, the angel "opened up to [Rutherford] strange visions unknown to the inhabitants of the earth."¹⁰¹⁹ This took the form of a vision of war and famine, and "an eclipse of the Gospel and the great death that shall befall many," as well as the "glorious deliverance the church will get after these sad times are over; with the great plenty that will follow immediately thereafter, with the conversion of the heathen nations."¹⁰²⁰ This revelation of the apocalypse to a layman was protected by the presence of his minister, who was a reliable and devout source who could attest to the appearance of the angel and the interpretation of Rutherford's vision. Christian belief held that the apocalypse was an inevitable, and always imminent, event. By constructing their access to knowledge of the future within the tradition of apocalyptic revelations, Christian

¹⁰¹⁷ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 201-202.

¹⁰¹⁸ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 204.

¹⁰¹⁹ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 203.

¹⁰²⁰ Sharpe, *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 204.

visionaries were reconciling beliefs about second sight with orthodox religion.

Parishioners who experienced visions and encounters with spirits seem to have often sought the advice of their ministers, who could provide them with assurances or interpretations of their visionary experiences. This is apparent in the account of the farmer Rutherford, as well as the story of a visionary named Robert Dunlop. Dunlop's account was recorded by Robert Wodrow in 1704, as part of his multi-volume collection of providences revealed to "Scotch ministers and Christians." Dunlop reported that one night, after praying and reading in his loft, he was visited by an incredible company of people in the loft with him. The visionary began to recite a Psalm, and the apparitions "sang most melodiously and sweetly" along with him.¹⁰²¹ After this, one of the singing people came near to him and asked, "Whom are you for? Are you for God?" Dunlop was very alarmed, and began to proclaim that he was for God and told the vision to go away if it was from Satan, but "The appearance did not remove."¹⁰²² The visionary was subsequently very troubled about the nature of these apparitions, and went to his minister to earnestly enquire whether Satan could ask if he was for God.¹⁰²³

While the content of this man's vision was not particularly disturbing, the sudden appearance of musical beings may have reminded him of warnings he had heard about deceptive spirits, such as fairies or angelic apparitions.¹⁰²⁴ According to orthodox Protestantism, fairies

¹⁰²¹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 53-54.

¹⁰²² Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 54.

¹⁰²³ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 54.

¹⁰²⁴ This motif of otherworldly music that draws seers into their visions also appears in cases of early modern Scottish prophetesses, as well as people who were believed to see fairies. See the section on "Prophetesses" later in this chapter.

were actually demonic spirits in disguise who enjoyed deceiving humans with their seemingly benevolent appearance. Therefore, any contact with spirits that seemed like fairies may have been troubling for a Christian visionary.¹⁰²⁵ Similarly, the denial of angelic apparitions had been an aspect of orthodox Protestantism in reformed Scotland. Despite this, some visionaries attested to continuing to see angels. While some visionaries managed to blend popular and religious traditions rather effortlessly, others like the visionary who was “for God” were concerned that their experiences seemed too close to the type that were condemned by orthodox belief.

While visions that were reported by ministers (either on behalf of themselves or their parishioners) were often protected by the minister’s reputation as a holy person, some laypeople were clearly anxious about their visions or encounters with spirits. A number of Scottish ministers and their parishioners seemed to have been in possession of visionary abilities that were compatible with second sight belief. However, their experiences were not demonized or interpreted as representing unlawful foreknowledge because ministers’ reputations as discerners and prophets defended their accounts against such imputations. Because of this, they were able to accommodate aspects of pre-Reformation or popular beliefs within their understanding of their own visionary abilities. However, accounts of the visionary experiences of some Scottish prophetesses reveal more intense anxiety about what their visions represented and how they would be interpreted. These women’s concern about how their experiences would be understood by others likely stemmed from their lack of authoritative protection from a minister, as well as

¹⁰²⁵ Others appeared to have had no difficulty reconciling Christian virtue and seeing fairies. Mary Parish’s patron Goodwin Wharton interpreted her story of seeing fairies as a child as foreshadowing of her supernatural talents, “to shew that God had plact something in her or intended her for something not comon to others.” See BL, Add.MS 20006, fol. 21. Mary Parish also recalled hearing sweet music before she caught sight of the fairies.

their female gender, which predisposed them to suspicion of witchcraft or heresy. Like the visionary Robert Dunlop, many of these seers were anxious that the spirits who contacted them could be deceptive or evil, though they seemed to be “for God.”

VI: Prophetesses

Among the many visionaries of early modern Scotland were a number of prophetesses who oriented their experiences and encounters with spirits within the Christian and biblical tradition. Some of these visionaries were involved in the Covenanting movement, a Scottish Presbyterian movement that was intent on maintaining Presbyterian doctrine as the sole form of religious expression in their country. Covenanters openly exhibited belief and interest in “special providences,” which included acts of divine intervention, visions, and apparitions of good spirits.¹⁰²⁶ Regardless of their exact denominational affiliation, all of these seers’ experiences incorporated aspects of second sight belief in their attestations of meeting with angels, entering trances, accessing hidden knowledge, prognosticating death, journeying to other worlds, and foreseeing future events. As with the ministers and their parishioners, knowledge of the future sometimes took the form of revelations of the apocalypse. However, unlike most of the stories of second sighted ministers, the accounts of these prophetesses record their families’ and their own anxiety about the nature of the spirits that appeared to them and the sources of their inspiration. As a means of justifying their experiences, accounts of prophetesses often featured descriptions of their devout character, proximity to God, and sanctioned means of discerning the nature of

¹⁰²⁶ McGill, “Angels, Devils, and Discernment,” 246.

their visions. Overall, perhaps because they lacked the protection of ministers or they were of the “weaker” sex, prophetesses, their families, and the recorders of their visions felt the need to defend and justify their belief that these experiences were from God. While these prophetesses reconciled aspects of second sight belief with divine inspiration, some details of their stories resembled accounts of practitioners of popular magic. This ambiguity and tension in their sources was not isolated to accounts of Scottish prophetesses, but was also present in experiences of ministers and parishioners, as well as some seers who were regarded as heretics and false prophets.

Quite a few Scottish female visionaries described encounters with spirit beings, fulfilling the expectation that second sighted people were able to see spirits. Of course, being devout Christians, most of the spirits that they encountered were described as angels. Interpreting apparitions as angels proved popular among early modern Scottish visionaries, representing the continued relevance of pre-Reformation beliefs about intercessory spirits. The young seer known only as Donald Macgrigor's daughter experienced her visions in 1683-1684, during which she described seeing “glorious creatures... for so she called the Angells who appeared by hir.”¹⁰²⁷ Likewise, Covenanting visionary Grizell Love attested in 1651 “there appeared to me to my uptaking two Angells in long whyt robes.”¹⁰²⁸ In 1684, a visionary named Jonet Fraser described seeing “three persons (as to my sight all in white) and they goe round about me the way the sun goeth.”¹⁰²⁹ Jonet later reported being visited by a spirit who announced himself as “Gabriel that

¹⁰²⁷ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 2

¹⁰²⁸ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fols. 108v-109.

¹⁰²⁹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 9.

stands in the presence of God.”¹⁰³⁰ While most of the spirits that appeared were angels, some female visionaries also reported being tormented by the Devil or witches. The appearance of such specters represented a spiritual challenge to the visionaries, who rejected and dispersed these apparitions. Donald Macgrigor’s daughter saw a black man who was accompanied by some women. These spirits attempted to take her with them and offered her money to go with them, but she “refused constantly.”¹⁰³¹ Grizell Love was tormented by witches who came into her bedroom at night, and the Devil prevented her from sleeping by making a noise like a pistol shot.¹⁰³² Jonet Fraser also saw the Devil, who appeared to her in the form of a black man, a bee, and a bony hand.¹⁰³³ As Christian visionaries, these prophetesses interpreted apparitions of spirits within a religious framework that permitted for the appearance of angels, but also challenges in the form of torment from the Devil and witches.

As was prevalent in accounts of second sight, some attending spirits provided supernatural knowledge to visionaries. In this way, their experiences fulfilled popular expectations for second sighted people as individuals who could both see spirits and have access to hidden knowledge. The angels that appeared to Donald Macgrigor’s daughter were particularly informative, and furnished answers to any questions “she was desired to require.”¹⁰³⁴ The girl claimed to be “filled with wonder & exclamation, about the Knowledge [the angels]

¹⁰³⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 12.

¹⁰³¹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 3-3v.

¹⁰³² NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fols. 108-108v.

¹⁰³³ NRS, GD157/1880, fol. 1.

¹⁰³⁴ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 8.

gave her.”¹⁰³⁵ In response to her questions, the angels informed the girl that the Devil would not prevail against her father, who had been doubtful of the visionary’s abilities. The girl was also asked to enquire whether a minister who had recently been accused of murdering a child was guilty, to which the angels replied that he was, despite any appearance of outward piety.¹⁰³⁶ Because the girl asked the angels questions both for herself and for others, Donald Macgrigor’s daughter was serving as a mediator between the physical and spiritual realms, a role fulfilled by some second sighted people and shamans on behalf of their communities.

Access to supernatural knowledge of various forms was a prevalent theme in accounts of Scottish prophetesses, and these accounts illustrate that Christian visionaries laid claim to abilities traditionally associated with second sight. Robert Wodrow’s accounts of Christian providences described a young seer named Elizabeth Graham, who supposedly survived on little food but was physically sustained by reading Scripture. By 1713, this girl had acquired a reputation for her ability to predict future events. Among other predictions, she once told her pregnant mother that all would be well and she would have an easy delivery, which came to pass.¹⁰³⁷ Devout seer Jonet Scoular’s abilities also fit within the scope of second sight, and Wodrow’s account from 1705 attested that she was called upon by her minister to predict whom he should marry. Jonet provided this supernatural knowledge on demand, and “told him that person of the three should be his wife whom he should meet in his road going to

¹⁰³⁵ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 12.

¹⁰³⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 22v.

¹⁰³⁷ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 240-241.

Kilmarnock.”¹⁰³⁸ Like Columba, Jonet was able to detect hidden sins in the hearts of men. After hearing two ministers preach, she said, “They preached weel, but wanted the bonnie thing,” (soe she termed grace).” Soon after, one of the ministers fell to fornication and was deposed, while the other was revealed to be an adulterer.¹⁰³⁹ These prophetesses’ revelations of hidden knowledge were often attributed to their proximity to the holy, illustrating one of the ways in which Christian visionaries and their communities reconciled belief in supernatural abilities with orthodox religion.

Some prophetesses were believed to be able to predict death and its circumstances, a significant aspect of second sight belief. One morning, Elizabeth Graham shared with her mother the knowledge that a mutual acquaintance was dead. It was later discovered that this woman had indeed died during the previous night.¹⁰⁴⁰ Grizell Love obtained knowledge from the angels about the illness of her minister, and his impending death.¹⁰⁴¹ Donald Macgrigor’s daughter passed on a question from her mother to the angels, enquiring about the fate of unbaptized children. The angels answered rather unsettlingly that “some of them may go to Hell as well as others.”¹⁰⁴² However, the angels later reassured the girl that there were places in heaven for herself, her mother, and her father when they eventually died.¹⁰⁴³ As in the cases of the ministers and parishioners who were able to predict forthcoming deaths, accounts of prophetesses often

¹⁰³⁸ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 61.

¹⁰³⁹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 61.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 241.

¹⁰⁴¹ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 110.

¹⁰⁴² EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 8v.

¹⁰⁴³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 13, 20v.

emphasized their belief that God was in possession of the knowledge of who would live or die, and that seers were simply a conduit to share this knowledge with others. Furthermore, as in the case of Donald Macgrigor's daughter, Christian visionaries' knowledge of death often featured religious notions of the afterlife and the justice of God, thereby reinforcing orthodox opinions about death.

Some of these female visionaries attempted to orient their experiences within the biblical tradition, thereby constructing identities as prophetesses. Jonet Fraser frequently asked God about the meaning of her visions, and claimed that clarification came in the form of a "still small voice" that would repeat scripture to her.¹⁰⁴⁴ The "still small voice" is undoubtedly a reference to the revelations presented to the prophet Elijah, who experienced the presence of God in this form on a mountain.¹⁰⁴⁵ Jonet also described receiving an angelic visitation while she rested near a bush, as well as seeing lightning and doves around the bush.¹⁰⁴⁶ Historian Louise Yeoman has claimed that the dove may be a reference to Jesus' baptism, while the lightning evokes the image of Moses' burning bush.¹⁰⁴⁷ These references were also part of Jonet's attempt to style herself as a prophetess, as both Jesus' baptism and the burning bush were witnessed by notable biblical prophets: John the Baptist and Moses, respectively. By associating her visionary experiences with biblical instances in which God directly appeared to chosen individuals (in the form of a dove, a burning bush, or a still small voice), Jonet's biblical knowledge of prophetic experiences

¹⁰⁴⁴ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 38-41.

¹⁰⁴⁵ See 1 Kings 19:11-13 in the Bible.

¹⁰⁴⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 63.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Yeoman, "Away with the fairies," 39.

clearly influenced her narrative of her encounter with the holy.

Aside from alluding to scriptural passages, one of the primary ways in which Christian visionaries attempted to style their visions as biblical prophecy was to claim that they had seen revelations of the apocalypse. In this way, visionaries were engaging with second sight belief (which held that seers could predict the future through their visions), as well as Christian tradition (which saw the apocalypse as an anticipated future event). Donald Macgrigor's daughter warned the people "to repent in times of these abominable sins whereof both Kirkman & people were very guilty. That thereby the Judgement like to fall upon the Land might not come."¹⁰⁴⁸ Jonet Fraser also styled herself as an apocalyptic prophet, and in her trances her neighbors heard her call out "Lord what shall the end of these things be?" A voice told Jonet, "if thou wist believe, thou shall see the end, & I said I believe, help my unbelief."¹⁰⁴⁹ The angel Gabriel then came to Jonet and revealed to her that "the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the Earth for there Iniquity... for my sword shall be battled in Heaven behold it shall come down."¹⁰⁵⁰

Some apocalyptic visions drew even closer to the Biblical tradition in that they were replete with imagery that required interpretation.¹⁰⁵¹ Some of this imagery directly reflected descriptions of Biblical revelations about the end times. Jonet Fraser's visions involved "the sword of Gods judgement but also pestilence and famine," and a "black throne & a man on it

¹⁰⁴⁸ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 2v.

¹⁰⁴⁹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 8-9.

¹⁰⁵⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 12.

¹⁰⁵¹ This is an apparent pattern in Biblical prophecy. An image or scene will be revealed to the prophet, and then that image will be interpreted by either the spirit of God or an attending angel.

with a bloody sword in his hand & all the four corners of the throne was running blood.”¹⁰⁵² Jonet received an interpretation of these symbols within her vision, as she was informed by a nearby angel that it represented “Popery.”¹⁰⁵³ The 1651 account of Covenanting visionary Robert Jameson’s wife (who was also only identified by her primary male relative) also saw a “Bloody Throne, streaming Blood from the four corners of it, & a great black cloud covering the throne.”¹⁰⁵⁴ It was revealed to her that this vision meant the sufferings of “all his precious ones in all the corners of the land” would be great, and “the cloud over the throne is the tempest of the Lords indignation against the Shedders of the blood of the Saints.”¹⁰⁵⁵ Grizell Love described seeing angels pouring vials of blood into the sea “to declare Gods righteousness in giving them blood to drink who had shed the blood of Saints and prophets as was done in these lands,”¹⁰⁵⁶ and Christ told her “I have troden... in the winepress of his indignation.”¹⁰⁵⁷ These images, such as the sword of God’s judgement, pestilence, famine, thrones, the blood of the saints, and the winepress of God’s wrath were taken directly from biblical revelation about the apocalypse. While second sighted people often described their ability to see future events before they transpired, prophetesses and Christian visionaries frequently turned their anticipatory gaze towards the ultimate destiny that was believed to await all people: the judgement of God at the end of the world.

¹⁰⁵² NRS, GD157/1880.

¹⁰⁵³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 8.

¹⁰⁵⁴ NLS, Wod.Oct.XV, fol. 22.

¹⁰⁵⁵ NLS, Wod.Qu.XCIX, fol. 50v.

¹⁰⁵⁶ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 122.

¹⁰⁵⁷ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fols. 117-117v.

Other prevalent themes in the accounts of early modern Christian visionaries were trances and spiritual journeys to other realms. While these stories attempted to provide a Christian context and justification for altered states of consciousness and spiritual flight, their accounts were also recognizably influenced by popular understandings of subtle body belief. In this way, their stories resembled those of second sighted seers and people who experienced transportation to fairyland. Donald Macgrigor's daughter was described as having "dayly trances," "fitts," and at other times she "fell as if were asleep, having her eyes close & kept close all the time, for she did neither see nor hear what was about her."¹⁰⁵⁸ It was in these trances that her angels spoke to her. The record of Jonet Fraser's visions repeatedly described her entering a state in which she was "to the sight of friends who were present for the space of nine or ten hours without motion, or breath that could be observed, but as one dead."¹⁰⁵⁹ In 1707, John Fraser recorded the account of a second sighted woman who could predict future events through visionary experiences. This seer also claimed she visited heaven nightly, and Fraser cited her children's testimony that she would fall "at any time in a *Syncopa*" and "continued for a whole night, so that they thought that she was truly Dead, and this is the time she alleged she was in Heaven."¹⁰⁶⁰ Robert Chambers related the account of a young woman named Mitchelson "who had been subject to fits," and in 1638 she "attracted attention in Edinburgh by becoming a sort of prophetess or Pythoness of the Covenant."¹⁰⁶¹ Many people came to hear her speak, and to pray with her. She was subject to

¹⁰⁵⁸ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 2, 4, 7-7v.

¹⁰⁵⁹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 6.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

¹⁰⁶¹ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 122.

bouts of illness, and “when her fits came upon her, she was ordinarily thrown upon a down bed, and there prostrate, with her face downwards, spoke such words as were for a while carefully taken from her mouth.”¹⁰⁶² These accounts clearly describe altered states of consciousness, at least feigned or legitimate. Trances and similar experiences were frequently recorded among second sighted people, though these visionaries’ descriptions of angels or heavenly locations were oriented within the Christian tradition.

Some of these visionaries’ trances involved journeys to other realms and out of body experiences, just like those described by the second sighted or early modern shamans. These accounts were part of a wider belief in spirit flight among early modern visionaries. Belief in spirit flight was heavily tied to belief in subtle bodies, in that both relied on the understanding that humans had a component of self that could leave the physical body behind and go independently to other places. Jonet Fraser’s trances in which she was “as one dead” were also described as “whither in the body or out of the Body, the Lord knows.”¹⁰⁶³ Donald Macgrigor’s daughter claimed that her trances included Angels that “seem to carry her spirit to Heaven.”¹⁰⁶⁴ This separation between body and spirit had precedence in the biblical tradition of prophets who travelled to heaven in spirit, but it was also an aspect of popular belief about subtle bodies and the visions of the second sighted.

¹⁰⁶² Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 122.

¹⁰⁶³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 6.

¹⁰⁶⁴ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 9.

Ambiguous Details

Though their visionary experiences were undeniably shaped by their religious devotion, some accounts of Christian prophetesses contain ambiguous details that bleed into the realm of popular beliefs about fairies, second sight, shamanism, or witchcraft. The inclusion of fairy-related motifs in these accounts is significant, given that many early modern people who had second sight attributed their gift to the fairy folk, or dated its acquisition to a visit to fairyland. While these visionaries interpreted their attending spirits as divine beings, the fact that some of their attributes coincided with those of fairies illustrates the ambiguous nature of the inhabitants of the early modern spirit world. The previous chapter of this dissertation has also shown the ways in which fairy belief, second sight, and witchcraft were overlapping belief systems within the popular imagination. These overlaps account for the presence of ambiguous details in records of Christian visionaries, as well as demonstrate that early modern Scottish Christianity may have been more flexible and accommodating to aspects of popular belief than has previously been recognized. Therefore, ambiguous details not only point to Protestantism's failure to "disenchant" the religious landscape of Scotland, but also its success at adapting to existing belief systems. Lastly, these ambiguous details demonstrate that the distinction between prophetess, practitioner of magic, and witch was often subjective or vague, resulting in some visionaries being hailed as inspired while others were condemned.

While the story of Donald Macgrigor's daughter is particularly rich in details that could be interpreted in light of Christian understandings of heaven, her account also bears some resemblance to descriptions of fairyland, or perhaps even a meeting with the king of the fairies.

Donald Macgrigor's daughter described that the angels took her to a "castle which afterwards appeared like a great City something like that she could not express and when she came near she saw as it were very beautiful ones looking out at windows & singing so sweetly."¹⁰⁶⁵ On successive nights, the child visionary was brought through the castle up stairs and through rooms, and saw many more of the singing children before she was brought to a "large Room, where there was only one Man sitting in a golden chair with a book before him." The girl was then permitted to sit in a golden chair at his right hand.¹⁰⁶⁶ While hosted in the heavenly castle, Donald Macgrigor's daughter drank the water of the otherworld "that everyone in this country drinks of... and tasting it she cried out, O! I never tasted so sweet a thing & its sweeter than sugar or honey."¹⁰⁶⁷ Some of these themes were also found in the account of Fraser's female visionary who claimed that she traveled to heaven during her trances, where she was "kindly entertained with Meat and Drink." She described heaven as a "Rich Earthly Kingdom, abounding with Meat, Drink, Gold, and Silver."¹⁰⁶⁸ Both of these visionaries' descriptions of the otherworld strongly resembled those of individuals who spent time with the fairies in their lavish kingdoms where they enjoyed rich food and sweet wine.

The theme of otherworldly music that draws the seer into his or her vision is also prevalent in stories of fairies and fairyland, and humans that somehow permeate the boundary

¹⁰⁶⁵ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 9v-10.

¹⁰⁶⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 10-10v.

¹⁰⁶⁷ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 11.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

between our world and theirs.¹⁰⁶⁹ However, in the case of Christian visionaries, the music usually ended up having a spiritual significance. Donald Macgrigor's daughter was first drawn into her visions by music so beautiful that her "spirit fainted."¹⁰⁷⁰ This music turned out to be the sound of little heavenly children singing psalms "so sweetly, that is not like the singing in our country."¹⁰⁷¹ Similarly, Grizell Love also saw angels with harps in their hands "to sing the praises of the Lamb."¹⁰⁷²

Other fairy-related motifs appear in Christian visionaries' descriptions of their experiences, illustrating the incorporation of popular beliefs about second sight and visions of fairies in their accounts. Barbara Peebles received two divine revelations in 1660 and 1666. However, aspects of her story sounds uncannily like the accounts of people who went to fairyland at night and returned to their beds in the morning,¹⁰⁷³ as well as the story of a second sighted woman who "tarry'd in the fields over night, saw, and convers'd with a people she knew not, having wandred in seeking of her sheep, and slept upon a hillock, and finding hirselve

¹⁰⁶⁹ Yeoman, "Away with the fairies," 40. This fear that fairies would kidnap people to the otherworld during a trance or dream induced by sweet music is also found in records of central European beliefs about shamans, doubles, and witches. See Pócs, "Small Gods, Small Demons," 262.

¹⁰⁷⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 12v.

¹⁰⁷¹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 5v.

¹⁰⁷² NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 110.

¹⁰⁷³ For a comparison, see the records of the trials of Alesoun Pierson (1588) and Isobell Haldane (1623). Aside from having a familiar spirit through whom she gained access to hidden knowledge, Alesoun alleged that she went with the fairies and had friends that were related to her among their court. She would be with the fairies, but be well in her bed in the morning. See NRS, JC2/2, fols. 104v-105v. Isobell described being carried out of her bed to a hillside, which opened and she entered. There, she stayed for three days and met a man with a gray beard who returned her to her home. See Brown, *Register of the Privy Council*, 353.

transported to another place before day.”¹⁰⁷⁴ In the record of her visions, Barbara described lying in bed one night when she was caught up to heaven and dwelt “all night in glory,” until the morning when she was back in her body and bed.¹⁰⁷⁵ Fairy-related details also appear in the cases of Donald Macgrigor’s daughter and Jonet Fraser, both of whom claimed that the angels came to them at night and twelve noon,¹⁰⁷⁶ the times when fairies are most likely to appear.¹⁰⁷⁷ Historian Louise Yeoman has argued that there is a relationship between fairy belief and Jonet Fraser’s first vision that occurred as she fell asleep near a bush, since fairies were often believed to appear near thorn bushes.¹⁰⁷⁸ The inclusion of fairy-related motifs in the accounts of Christian visionaries further blurs the line between prophetesses and second sighted people, both of whom were known for having associations with spirits and the otherworld.

Illness and disability, both temporary and permanent, also feature in the accounts of numerous Christian visionaries. These stories bear a strong resemblance to those of people who went with the fairies and were struck ill or injured by this contact with the supernatural. Furthermore, these Christian visionaries often received their ability to see spirits or predict the future following a bout of ill health or physical suffering, just like many second sighted individuals who received their gift from the fairies. There is also a relationship between experiencing hardship and making first contact with the Devil in the trial records of accused

¹⁰⁷⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 36.

¹⁰⁷⁵ NLS, Wod.Qu.XXVI, fols. 283v-286v.

¹⁰⁷⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 25, 32, 36, 38.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Yeoman, “Away with the fairies,” 39.

¹⁰⁷⁸ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 63. For some corresponding details, see the witch trial documents of Agnes Thomson (1661), who met the Devil as he was lying in a brown bush at noon. NRS, JC26/27/2, item 6.

witches, which invites comparison to these cases.¹⁰⁷⁹ In the 1650s, Covenanting visionary Katharine Collace claimed that her visions of Christ began after she had lost “two fine children” and entered a period in which she was “for the most part... sick.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Barbara Peebles’ revelations also began after a period in which she was “dumb four dayes before.”¹⁰⁸¹ This disability seemed to have been caused by three nights of sickness and a fortnight of fasting.¹⁰⁸² After her first revelation, Barbara described her visionary experience with a phrase common in descriptions of fairy contact: “all the power went out of my body.” After praying with a friend, Barbara reported that “presentlie all the strength of my body returned againe.”¹⁰⁸³ Grizell Love’s visions began on a night that she “looked on as sick unto death,”¹⁰⁸⁴ having already been in this state for two days. Donald Macgrigor’s daughter sometimes rose from her trances “weaker & sicker than before,”¹⁰⁸⁵ while Jonet Fraser’s visions were often accompanied by a condition in which she “lay as one dead... & I was under his Rod of Sickness for severall days.”¹⁰⁸⁶ While all of these visionaries intended to be perceived as devout prophetesses, this motif of illness, disability, and hardship links their experiences to the popular belief that people who went with

¹⁰⁷⁹ For cases of accused Scottish witches that contain both hardship before first meeting the Devil and aspects of second sight belief, see the entries for Bessie Dunlop (1576) and Agnes Sampson (1591) in Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.”

¹⁰⁸⁰ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 261.

¹⁰⁸¹ NLS, Wod.Fol.XXVII, fol. 152.

¹⁰⁸² NLS, Wod.Qu.XXXV, fol. 144.

¹⁰⁸³ NLS, Wod.Qu.XXVI, fols. 283v-286v.

¹⁰⁸⁴ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 108v.

¹⁰⁸⁵ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 13v.

¹⁰⁸⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 39.

the fairies sometimes attained the gift of second sight, though often at a cost to themselves.

In some accounts, Christian visionaries claimed that during their trances, they saw known individuals in otherworldly places who were able to inform the seers about the state of the afterlife. These tales are reminiscent of the experiences of early modern shamans, or people who went to fairyland and saw dead friends or kin there. While she was “all night in glory,” Barbara Peebles saw someone that she once knew who was now dwelling in heaven: “There was one which appeared unto me whom I knew upon the earth and shee was cloathed with the righteousness of the lamb and I thought shee was more glorious than I.”¹⁰⁸⁷ In her memoirs, which were published in 1762, visionary Elizabeth Cairnes recounted having a near-death experience as a child. During this experience, she saw people walking past her, including a dead acquaintance who told her that he was in hell. Elizabeth recovered from this episode and continued to seek the will of God through prayer, and “sometimes in meditation, on spiritual mysteries, I was carried so far above myself, that I would have forgotten where I was, and whither I was going.”¹⁰⁸⁸ The seer described in Fraser’s *Deuteroscopia* claimed that she would enter trances in which she could visit heaven and dine with her dead daughter, as well as Jesus and God the Father. The seer’s daughter told her that “though she was allowed to goe there, that she behooved to come back and serve out her Prentiship on Earth, but would shortly be called for, and remain there for ever.”¹⁰⁸⁹ Apparitions of the dead in their afterlife destinations are

¹⁰⁸⁷ NLS, Wod.Fol.XXVII, fol. 153v.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Elizabeth Cairns, *Memoirs of the Life of Elizabeth Cairns, written by herself some years before her death; and now taken from her own original copy with great care and diligence* (Glasgow: John Brown, 1762), 13, 17-18.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

common in accounts of both Christian visionaries and practitioners of fairy magic. However, like the ministers and parishioners, these prophetesses emphasized religious perceptions of the afterlife and the condition of souls there.

Further overlap between Christian visionaries and practitioners of popular magic appears in details in prophetesses' accounts that are indicative of their personal motives. Personal motives seemed to have played a role in some accounts of second sighted people who were accused of witchcraft, as they may have predicted harm to individuals whom they disliked.¹⁰⁹⁰ However, prophetesses' personal motives are concealed within their descriptions of meeting angelic spirits or conveying divine messages. Just as with early modern witches who delivered ominous predictions, the choice to interpret a vision in a manner that fulfilled a personal desire did not exclude belief that the vision was actually genuine. We should not view the presence of personal desires in accounts of visionary experiences as incompatible with the belief that these seers actually communicated with spirits or foresaw the future. In this vein, Donald Macgrigor's daughter insisted that the angels commanded her to learn to read "with all convenient haste,"¹⁰⁹¹ so that she could read the Bible.¹⁰⁹² She was also informed that the Devil was trying to "winnow her every day, because he saw her learning at the school."¹⁰⁹³ Because of these messages from the angels, the girl was permitted to stay in school and learn to read, a choice that otherwise may not have been viable. However, this does not mean that she or those who recorded her visions did

¹⁰⁹⁰ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for more on accused witches, second sight, and ominous predictions.

¹⁰⁹¹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 5.

¹⁰⁹² EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 2v.

¹⁰⁹³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 13.

not actually believe that she received this command from the angels, or that her acquisition of literacy would not spite the Devil.

Others visionaries had even greater ambitions that stretched towards the fate of their nations. Barbara Peebles was very concerned about the monarchy, and stated that God had wanted her to “show salvation to the King.”¹⁰⁹⁴ This mission involved a narrative in which the king played the role of prodigal son: “And I thought Christ weeped tears of blood over him and when the King saw the tears of blood he fell downe and none could comfort him... Christ said to him ‘My prodigal king, great shall be the day of Israel and my prodigal kingdome... he turned his face to the Kirk and answered the prayers of his people and cast open his prison doors and there was great joy in Heaven for the turning home of the prodigal King.”¹⁰⁹⁵ Barbara apparently believed that God would bring her to the king personally to pronounce this message, as evidenced by her proclamation, “Lord will thow bring me out and I shall manifest it to the greatest of them.”¹⁰⁹⁶ Similarly, Robert Chambers claims that Mitchelson the “prophetess or Pythoness of the Covenant... was acquainted with the Scripture, and much taken with the Covenant, and in her fits spoke much to its advantage, and much ill to its opposers, that would, or at least that she wished to befall them.”¹⁰⁹⁷ In both these instances, visionary women used their reputations as prophetesses to pronounce political and spiritual outcomes that they personally desired, or reprimand individuals and organizations that they disliked. However, these

¹⁰⁹⁴ NLS, Wod.Fol.XXVII, fol. 71.

¹⁰⁹⁵ NLS, Wod.Fol.XXVII, fol. 72.

¹⁰⁹⁶ NLS, Wod.Qu.XXVI, fol. 289v.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 122.

predictions were couched within biblical references that emphasized their roles as divinely inspired visionaries. While the circumstances are not identical, there is a notable relationship between Christian visionaries interpreting their visions to fulfill personal desires and accused witches predicting death or misfortune to their enemies.

Justifications

Certain aspects of female visionaries' encounters with the holy seem to have been particularly gendered. For example, the entry into altered states of consciousness or the acquisition of a temporary disability during a religious experience seems to have largely been the purview of visionary women. In his discussion of gender and Scottish practitioners of magic, Owen Davies has asserted that female practitioners were more likely to attribute their magical powers to "ecstatic experiences of a more religious nature."¹⁰⁹⁸ Similarly, in her book *Visionary Women*, Phyllis Mack has claimed that female Quaker visionaries in seventeenth-century England were often characterized as "empty vessels," which allowed the spirit of God to enter and move within them.¹⁰⁹⁹ Becoming an empty vessel meant the transcendence of self and the destruction of the individual in order to gain proximity to God. Early modern men, who were more readily seen as rational individuals, were perceived as less able to divest themselves of self and identity. In this way, Mack has argued that the same demonological arguments that made women more likely to be witches, in that they were viewed as morally ambiguous, porous, and

¹⁰⁹⁸ Davies, "A Comparative Perspective," 199.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1992), 33.

receptive to spiritual influence, also allowed them to be regarded as holy visionaries.¹¹⁰⁰ The same logic that made witches' words dangerous granted validity to female prophets who were "dumb," "meaning both stupid and mute, empty of everything but God."¹¹⁰¹ This fluidity between female visionaries and accused witches partially accounts for the ambiguities present in accounts of their visionary experiences, as well as emphasizes the somewhat subjective and arbitrary nature of processes of early modern religious discernment. Their contemporaries' concerns about women's permeable natures and receptivity to spiritual influence made female visionaries much more likely to come under scrutiny, and therefore seek and require justification for their visionary experiences.

Quite a few prophetesses and their communities were nervous about the origins of their visions and experiences. Their accounts revealed anxiety about their trances, and their ability to discern whether the spirits who appeared to them were good spirits, particularly given the general knowledge that demons were intent on deceiving people. Donald Macgrigor expressed concern about the trances and visions that his daughter was experiencing. The girl's father "being still afraid of the Devil and his devices questioned much with her when they [the angels] were gone & desired her to ask there names, & whether we should pray to them."¹¹⁰² Donald Macgrigor's neighbors also gossiped about the child visionary: "she was told by some the day befor that she had no more grace than others for all that she saw,"¹¹⁰³ and "several of her

¹¹⁰⁰ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 32-35.

¹¹⁰¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 32.

¹¹⁰² EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 6.

¹¹⁰³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 13v.

Neighbours said to her that she was taken away with the Fairies & that it was but the Devil yet that was dealing with her.”¹¹⁰⁴ The girl later communicated these concerns to her angels: “she said to them that her father was afraid of the Devils devices for he can transform himself into an Angel of Light.”¹¹⁰⁵ Grizell Love also expressed a similar anxiety after her angels first visited her, and they asked if she would go with them (and she refused). Grizell reflected on the nature of her visions, recalling “soon after they were removed my fear began because its said Sathan transforms himself into an Angel of Light.”¹¹⁰⁶ At one point, Covenanting visionary Barbara Peebles’ husband expressed a clear desire that she stop speaking publicly about her prophetic visions: “my husband rebuked me and bade me be quiet, to whom I replied, not so, for when the Lord God did speak who then can but prophecie?”¹¹⁰⁷

Protestant visionaries inherited a Christian tradition of testing or discerning spirits, which was described in a biblical passage that commanded them to “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”¹¹⁰⁸ The stakes for such discernment were higher in the case of visionaries who claimed they had contact with angels, which were likely a remnant of pre-Reformation religious belief. Technically, belief in the active role of angels was not an aspect of reformed Protestant doctrine,

¹¹⁰⁴ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 12-12v.

¹¹⁰⁵ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 6-6v.

¹¹⁰⁶ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 110. The belief that “white witches” were deceived by Satan in the form of an angel of light was also expressed by Edward Poeton in *The Winnowing of White Witchcraft*. See BL, Sloane 1954, fol. 45.

¹¹⁰⁷ NLS, Wod.Qu.XXXV, fol. 144.

¹¹⁰⁸ 1 John 4:1, King James Version.

and they were no longer regarded as spiritual intercessors.¹¹⁰⁹ Despite this, numerous Christian visionaries still attested that they saw and communicated with angels. In line with this, visionaries and their communities sometimes tested the spirits that communicated with seers and also attempted to provide justification for believing that the apparitions that visited them were indeed good spirits. The account of Donald Macgrigor's daughter claimed the angels assured the child that "the Devil knows little of the great works of God," and she was comforted that they "commanded only to pray to there Master."¹¹¹⁰ This was in response to a test from the girl, whose father had instructed her to ask the angels if she should pray to them. The implication was that if they were demons, they would crave worship and readily agree to this sacrilegious action. Grizell Love also tested the angels that appeared to her, asking "how it was that they were on the earth, seeing it was not ordinary for them to be on it to our seeing and uptaking."¹¹¹¹ Grizell's angels proved their identities by revealing to her "that scripture which on the Sabbath before I had gotten for my comfort: they were of that innumerable company of Angells and here they adduced severall Scriptures where Angells had appeared for the good and comfort of the heirs of Salvation."¹¹¹² Jonet Fraser also reported that the angel Gabriel proclaimed he was "sent to speak unto the[e]" and quoted passages to her from the book of Isaiah.¹¹¹³ The fact that these angels justified their intentions and actions through references to holy scripture was comforting for these visionaries.

¹¹⁰⁹ Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 329-330.

¹¹¹⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 6-6v.

¹¹¹¹ NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 109.

¹¹¹² NLS, Wod.Qu.LXXII, fol. 109.

¹¹¹³ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 12.

The justification of prophetesses also sometimes came in the form of descriptions of their pious lifestyles and reputations among their peers as righteous individuals. A seer named Jonet Scouler was described by Wodrow as “an eminent Christian... who was an instrument of the conversion of many in that parish,”¹¹¹⁴ as well as someone who “had somewhat of the discerning of spirits.”¹¹¹⁵ The recorder of Jonet Fraser’s visions claimed that she was “for a long time A Person in the judgement of all that know her a Serious Christian, & was for a good time before this befell her, more than ordinary exercised in private condition with God.”¹¹¹⁶ The recorder of Donald Macgrigor’s daughter’s visions observed the girl’s trances, stating “I was convinced, that there could not be any delusion therein.”¹¹¹⁷ This certainty was based on the fact that “[I] did hear her speak in her trance for the space of ane hour & ane half, or thereby, even of the most parts of Christianity.”¹¹¹⁸ This recorder also made note of the character of the girl’s father, “whom I found to be no Stranger to Scripture but ane Earnest Reader thereof, & he told me divers passages of his Daughters strict seeking of God since her trances.”¹¹¹⁹ Jonet Fraser’s visions normally manifested after she had been in prayer,¹¹²⁰ or at other times when she was reading her Bible in the fields.¹¹²¹ Similarly, other Christian seers described their visions coming

¹¹¹⁴ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 374.

¹¹¹⁵ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 61.

¹¹¹⁶ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 3.

¹¹¹⁷ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 2.

¹¹¹⁸ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 2.

¹¹¹⁹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 8v-9.

¹¹²⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 9.

¹¹²¹ EUL, Dc.8.110, fol. 42.

to them at times of prayer or meditation on scripture, making it all the more likely that their revelations had divine origin.

Some visionaries even appeared to have induced altered states of consciousness or trances through fasting, prayer, or meditation on spiritual topics. The entry into an altered state of consciousness while engaged in pursuit of proximity to God enhanced the legitimacy of these seers' visions. Like numerous other early modern visionaries, Barbara Peebles described her trance experience in terms of "falling dead," and being "speechlesse" and "dumb."¹¹²² For Barbara, this state came upon her after the "last three nights of my sicknesse, after a fortnight's fasting and waking."¹¹²³ Covenanting visionary Robert Jameson's wife "fell into a Trance and continued untill eleven of the clock without sense or motion but as in a Lethargy."¹¹²⁴ She re-entered this trance multiple times, which her recorder repeatedly described with the words "she fell over again, as at the last time."¹¹²⁵ This state of unconsciousness had been induced by spending "the greater part of the night in prayer."¹¹²⁶ The devout young visionary Elizabeth Graham was routinely "refreshed with the Scripture brought into her mind, even in the time of her fitts."¹¹²⁷ As with other forms of justification, these descriptions were meant to help legitimize the visions of these prophetesses, emphasizing that their encounters with the holy often overtook them during time set aside for devotion to God.

¹¹²² NLS, Wod.Qu.XXVI, fols. 283v-286v.

¹¹²³ NLS, Wod.Qu.XXVI, fol. 283v.

¹¹²⁴ NLS, Wod.Oct.XV, fol. 22; NRS, GD157/2637/1.

¹¹²⁵ NLS, Wod.Qu.XCIX, fols. 50-50v.

¹¹²⁶ NLS, Wod.Oct.XV, fol. 22; NRS, GD157/2637/1.

¹¹²⁷ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 240-241.

Some of these visionaries also urged their peers to take up more righteous lifestyles and be more attentive to their spiritual condition.¹¹²⁸ The apocalyptic imagery in the visions of Robert Jameson's wife led her to command onlookers to seek God and engage in prayer.¹¹²⁹ Similarly, Donald Macgrigor's daughter reported Christ's displeasure at the people for "swearing & breaking of oaths... he was angry for Sabbath breaking, that the people have no exercise."¹¹³⁰ Such righteous exhortations were likely to be interpreted as the will of God, since it seemed unlikely that the Devil would instruct visionaries to speak of the need for prayer or attendance to the Sabbath. These numerous justifications of the character of prophetesses and the divine nature of their visions reflects anxiety on the part of visionaries and their communities as to how their experiences would be understood. This anxiety was not unfounded; the disciplinary records of the Scottish church illustrate that the early modern period was a time in which the interpretation of visionary experiences was contentious and fraught with ambiguous criteria.

VII: Heretics and False Prophets

A number of early modern Scottish visionaries clearly attempted to orient their experiences with spirits and the supernatural within the Christian tradition of prophecy and divine inspiration. Despite these efforts, some were still rejected by their communities or the

¹¹²⁸ Similar justifications were made by some accused witches. Bessie Dunlop claimed that her familiar spirit Thome Reid told her that her recent misfortunes were due to the fact that "thou hast crabbit God and askit something you should not have done; and therefore I counsel thee to mend to him." See Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 1, 109; NRS, JC2/1, fol. 15r.

¹¹²⁹ NRS, GD157/2637/1.

¹¹³⁰ EUL, Dc.8.110, fols. 11v-12.

authorities as heretics and false prophets. The female seer described in John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia* was instructed by the author that her visions and spiritual transports to heaven were the result of the Devil taking advantage of her senses.¹¹³¹ Fraser refused to believe that this woman's experiences were genuine, and he visited the seer with "two or three of the most intelligent of my Parish" in an attempt to convince her that she was mistaken. Eventually, "This Poor Woman was reclaimed, and was taught fully the danger and vanity of her practice."¹¹³² Jonet Fraser's visions were also subject to condemnation, despite the strong resemblance between her account and those of the other female visionaries mentioned in this chapter. In 1691, Jonet was disciplined by her presbytery, who claimed that she "pretended to a spirit of prophets and revelation of things to come." Her accusations included "having a compact with the Devil," "prophesying and seeing of visions," and that "she had sinned greatly in being deluded by Satan."¹¹³³ It is unclear why Jonet was singled out for this scrutiny and punishment. Her visions were strongly oriented within a Christian framework, and she and others were initially convinced that she had been the recipient of messages from God. Despite the comparative similarities between the accounts of these two prophetesses and some of their peers, their claim to divine inspiration was deemed heretical and diabolically influenced.

¹¹³¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

¹¹³² Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196. The account of Fraser's visionary shares similarities with the case of a widow named Jean Crie, who reported entering trances after fasting for seventeen or eighteen weeks. These trances transported her to heaven and hell, and she attested that through her journeys to the otherworld, she "hath attained to great skill of all diseases, and of things to come, so that there is a great resort of the people to her." Jean Crie was disciplined by her presbytery in 1643. See John Hunter, *The Diocese and Presbytery of Dunkeld 1660-1689*, vol. 1 (London, New York, and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 266-267.

¹¹³³ NRS, CH2/298/1, fol. 5.

This seemed to be the case for other visionaries as well, such as some accused witches and seers disciplined by religious and state authorities. Some heretics described their familiar spirits as angels or biblical figures, or couched their predictions of the future within the Christian tradition of apocalyptic revelations. Some conformed their descriptions of the otherworld to their knowledge of the Christian afterlife, and compared their abilities to the legacies of the biblical prophets. All claimed that the messages they received were for a divine purpose, and did not turn away from delivering these messages to others. In these many ways, the experiences of early modern Scottish heretics and false prophets shared some important similarities with the visions of ministers, parishioners, and prophetesses. This is because the designations of “heretic” and “false prophet” are not dependent on visionaries’ personal intentions, but rather how they were received and interpreted by their communities and religious authorities. All represented popular attempts to reconcile second sight belief with Christianity, though some were less successful than others.

Some visionaries, like Jonet Fraser, initially gained a devout following but were later condemned or rejected as false prophets. After his voyage to St. Kilda in 1697, Martin Martin recorded a detailed account of a seer called “Roderick the Imposter,” a man who Martin claimed was a “false prophet.”¹¹³⁴ Roderick’s account incorporated many aspects of the Christian prophetic tradition, as well as second sight belief. The latter is evident through Martin’s observation that “this Imposter is a Poet, and also endued with that rare Faculty of enjoying the Second Sight, which makes it the more probable that he was haunted by a familiar Spirit.”¹¹³⁵

¹¹³⁴ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 70.

¹¹³⁵ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 81.

Roderick did indeed claim that he had a familiar spirit, but said that this spirit was John the Baptist whom he had first encountered while Roderick was out fishing on a Sunday. John the Baptist appeared to Roderick as a man in Lowland dress who wished him good tidings.¹¹³⁶ According to John the Baptist, the inhabitants of the archipelago had been “for a long time kept in Ignorance and Error,” and he desired to instruct Roderick on “the Laws of Heaven for the Edification of his Neighbours.”¹¹³⁷

Roderick’s religious decrees were undeniably influenced by Christianity, yet Martin described the doctrine of the false prophet as combining “the laudable Customs of the Church with his own diabolical Inventions.”¹¹³⁸ These included strict fasting on Fridays and the celebration of the anniversaries of all saints.¹¹³⁹ Roderick also imposed penances on the people that they had to endure “under the Pain of being expelled from the Society of his Fraternity in Worship, which he pretended to be founded upon no less Authority than that of St. John the Baptists’s.”¹¹⁴⁰ Though Roderick clearly attempted to style himself as a Christian visionary, Martin considered the penances to be “Evidence enough, that [Roderick] was sent by him who is the Father of Lies, and was a Murtherer from the Beginning.”¹¹⁴¹ Further evidence of this was Roderick’s prohibition of the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostle’s Creed, and the Ten Commandments, and instead he “prescribed Diabolical forms of his own.” Roderick also apparently taught the

¹¹³⁶ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 71.

¹¹³⁷ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 71.

¹¹³⁸ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 71.

¹¹³⁹ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 72.

¹¹⁴⁰ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 72.

¹¹⁴¹ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 72-73.

women a hymn he claimed was imparted to him by the Virgin Mary, and persuaded them that if they recited it they would not die during childbirth.¹¹⁴²

From these descriptions it is evident that, like some accused witches, Roderick was sympathetic to various pre-Reformation beliefs and practices. Many of the rites that he instituted, such as Friday fasting, the celebration of saints' days, and penances, were aspects of Catholic devotion. Furthermore, Roderick's emphasis on relationships with spiritual intercessors such as St. John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary indicates that pre-Reformation systems of belief still held sway on St. Kilda. This points to a certain degree of confessional conflict in reformed Scotland, as both Roderick and his followers still accepted the religious authority of figures such as the Virgin and St. John the Baptist. Roderick's designation as a heretic proves that Protestants recognized this conflict, and desired to eradicate surviving aspects of Catholicism. Martin clearly believed that Roderick was diabolically inspired, and that his public following was to the spiritual detriment of all. Despite this, Martin asserted that Roderick's influence over the people continued for several years, until it was discovered he was using his charisma to afford him "a fair Opportunity of debauching the simple Women."¹¹⁴³

Roderick claimed that he was a second sighted person, and Martin's account of Roderick's supposed abilities did conform to various aspects of second sight belief. However, Christian themes are woven throughout Roderick's account of his own experiences and abilities, making his belief in both his own second sight and status as a prophet completely inextricable. Roderick claimed that he had the ability to see spirits, as evidenced by his contact with John the

¹¹⁴² Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 74.

¹¹⁴³ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 74.

Baptist. He was also privy to hidden knowledge through his relationship with this spirit, as well as via his talents as a second sighted individual. Roderick once revealed the invisible cause of an earthquake to a terrified villager: “When the above-mentioned Earthquake was over, one of the Inhabitants enquired of the Imposter with Admiration, How the Rock was made to tremble? He answered, that it was the Effect of pleasant Musick played by a devout Saint in a Church under Ground.”¹¹⁴⁴ This explanation combined popular belief in Roderick's access to hidden knowledge with his desire to attribute mysterious phenomena to religious causes.

In keeping with traditional accounts of second sight, the Imposter also appeared to be in possession of knowledge about death, its circumstances, and the afterlife. However, once again Roderick's perception of his own abilities blended religious and popular themes. He prophesied that one of his fellow villagers would “be killed in a Battle... within a limited space of Time.”¹¹⁴⁵ While this man did die presently, it was not in the manner of Roderick's prediction: “this poor unthinking Man relying so much on one whom he thought an infallible Oracle, ventured more desperately on the Rock than ever before, fancying he could not fall, but it happened that he tumbled over and was drowned.”¹¹⁴⁶ Despite the inaccuracy of Roderick's prediction, it would seem that the fact that this man died was considered fulfillment enough for Roderick's followers.¹¹⁴⁷ The strength of belief that Roderick's followers, including the drowned man, placed on his ability to predict death emphasizes his role as a seer in his community. However,

¹¹⁴⁴ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 79-80.

¹¹⁴⁵ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 77.

¹¹⁴⁶ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 77.

¹¹⁴⁷ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 77.

his other intimations on the topic of death point to his desire to style himself as a Christian visionary. His charm that was intended to help childbearing women avoid death was supposedly communicated by Virgin Mary herself, one of the most popular Christian intercessors for devout women. Roderick also provided the local people with hope of a heavenly afterlife if they were virtuous, as he promised some of the women that if they followed his religious instruction they would be carried to heaven and “pass through the Firmament riding upon white Horses.”¹¹⁴⁸ Roderick persuaded some of his fellow villagers that he had contact with some of their deceased neighbors, who were now enjoying their status as saints in heaven.¹¹⁴⁹ These projections of a saintly life after death, transported to heaven on white horses, were evidently meant to strengthen Roderick’s reputation as a Christian visionary.

Roderick also clearly attempted to model himself after biblical prophets. He laid claim to discipleship under the spirit of John the Baptist, and some aspects of his account illustrate that he also tried to associate himself with Moses. Roderick took up residence on a little hill with a bush that he called “John the Baptists’ bush.” He claimed that he frequently spoke to his familiar spirit in this place, who had declared the area “consecrated ground.”¹¹⁵⁰ Roderick’s bush and its surrounding holy ground is a reference to the story of Moses’ initiation as a prophet, after hearing the voice of God from within a burning bush.¹¹⁵¹ Roderick attempted to flex his power as a prophet during a conflict between the seer and some of his followers, when some local sheep ate

¹¹⁴⁸ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 75.

¹¹⁴⁹ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 72.

¹¹⁵⁰ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 75.

¹¹⁵¹ See Exodus 3 in the Bible.

part of the bush and the sheep's owner refused to slaughter his sheep. For the shepherd's refusal to acknowledge this desecration, he was excluded from communal worship and his fellow villagers apparently believed that a "speedy Judgement" would "befall this Recusant." This anticipation of the shepherd's demise illustrates Roderick's followers' belief in both the prophet's predictions and proximity to the holy. However, "when nothing ensued upon his Disobedience, all of them began to have less Veneration for the Imposter than before."¹¹⁵²

Though Roderick made these evident allusions to the biblical prophetic tradition, some aspects of his account bear strong resemblance to those of practitioners of fairy magic. Some practitioners of fairy magic claimed that they were summoned out of their bodies at night to join the fairy host, and various early modern shamans also described being compelled to go out in spirit at certain times of the night or year. Both claimed that when they were summoned, they were unable to resist the call. Similarly, Roderick the Imposter described his nightly experience of hearing a voice calling "come you out" to him, which once he heard he had no power to refuse. After responding to the call, Roderick would be met by the spirit of John the Baptist who instructed him as to what he should tell his community in the morning.¹¹⁵³ Roderick also persuaded the people that each person had his or her respective "Advocate" saint in heaven, and that all these saints were dead individuals that the living had known in life.¹¹⁵⁴ In this respect, Roderick also espoused belief in some combination of familiar spirits, intercessory saints, guardian angels, or perhaps co-walkers who watched over each living individual. Roderick's

¹¹⁵² Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 78.

¹¹⁵³ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 79.

¹¹⁵⁴ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 72.

understanding of the relationship between familiar spirits and human beings blurred the line between Christian and popular traditions.

Though Martin and an accompanying minister were most concerned with the “diabolical” doctrine that Roderick had been preaching, it seems that his followers were more troubled by his solicitation of their wives. According to Martin, Roderick was rejected by his community not because of his attempts to reinstitute some variation of Catholic devotion, but because it was revealed that he had been seducing the local women. Personal motivations such as these also played a role in the visionary experiences of early modern Scottish prophetesses, as well as accused witches. Spurred on by the revelation of Roderick’s proclivities, Martin and the minister pleaded with the locals to turn away from Roderick’s teachings. Martin’s account claimed that many of the villagers were glad of the minister’s arrival and his plan to rid them of the false prophet.¹¹⁵⁵ Martin and the minister demolished a small wall that been built around the sacred bush, and took Roderick in a boat to another location to await trial.¹¹⁵⁶ While Roderick’s reputation as a second sighted individual afforded him the possibility of also styling himself as a biblical prophet, this attempt was likely undermined by his use of his talents for personal gain.

Another heretic who faced discipline was Jean Brown, a woman accused of blasphemy before the Wigtown Presbytery in 1706. Jean’s account of her experiences and abilities also emphasized multiple aspects of second sight belief, Christian devotion, and popular magical practices. Jean claimed she could see spirits, and that she was regularly visited by familiar spirits who were “the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” Jean insisted that these were “good spirits” whom

¹¹⁵⁵ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 70, 81.

¹¹⁵⁶ Martin, *A Voyage to St. Kilda*, 82.

she conversed with every night, and affirmed that they “are her maker and she would serve and believe her maker and would believe none that contradicts them.”¹¹⁵⁷ However, among other details, her interrogators seemed most concerned about her claim that the Trinity did “ly carnally with her as man and woman do when they beget children.”¹¹⁵⁸ In response, the presbytery told Jean that she was “under powerful and satanicall delusions,” but this insistence was “without any success.”¹¹⁵⁹ Jean was defensive about the allegations made by her interrogators, and argued that she was certain that her familiar spirits were really the Trinity. As in the cases of prophetesses, Jean claimed that she had evidence that these spirits were good spirits: “she knows that they are God because none but God can lift persons from sickness to health.”¹¹⁶⁰ Jean’s emphasis on her relationship with familiar or intercessory spirits may have indicated that, like Roderick, she was sympathetic to Catholic belief.

Aside from her argument that only God could have healed her illnesses, Jean made other justifications for her belief that these familiar spirits were really her maker. Like some Scottish prophetesses, she claimed that her first experiences with these spirits were during times of prayer or mediation on spiritual topics. In her testimony, Jean recalled that she felt godly fear in the presence of the Trinity, who “came first to her which was when she went out to pray.”¹¹⁶¹ One encounter also happened when she was returning home after hearing a sermon from her

¹¹⁵⁷ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 220.

¹¹⁵⁸ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 220.

¹¹⁵⁹ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁶⁰ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁶¹ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

minister.¹¹⁶² Jean even attempted to orient her visionary experiences within the biblical tradition by claiming that the Trinity had revealed to her signs of the apocalypse. Her familiar spirits once told her that “this world is to be destroyed,”¹¹⁶³ and showed to her a vision in which she learned that “all should go to judgement, the heavens were as thunder and fire and like the day of judgement.”¹¹⁶⁴ Jean also recalled that three men came to her father's house when she was a child, and told her that the mark of the beast would soon come upon the earth.¹¹⁶⁵ Jean does not explicitly say that these *three* men were the Trinity, but given her claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were her familiar spirits, the number seems significant.

While Jean attempted to style herself as a prophetess, some aspects of her account indicate her familiarity with traditions of popular magic and second sight. In addition to her ability to perceive spirits and know future events that would transpire at the end of the world, Jean was privy to other forms of hidden knowledge. She traced her supernatural abilities to an event in her childhood when these three men came to her father's house and gave her a paper. After this, she “always knew more than other people did.”¹¹⁶⁶ Aside from the more obvious interpretation that these men were the Trinity, these ambiguous spirits could also be read as fairies or angels since Jean described them as “the prettiest men ever she saw.”¹¹⁶⁷ Jean also supposedly had knowledge of death and its circumstances. Just as the angels had assured Donald

¹¹⁶² NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 222.

¹¹⁶³ NRS CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁶⁴ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁶⁵ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 222.

¹¹⁶⁶ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 224.

¹¹⁶⁷ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 222.

Macgrigor's daughter of her eternal destination, the Trinity assured Jean Brown that "they will take her to heaven in a way of their own."¹¹⁶⁸ These spirits also told her that her minister "would not live long,"¹¹⁶⁹ and that a local woman would soon be widowed.¹¹⁷⁰ Jean also experienced a trance or altered state of consciousness when she was walking home from a sermon. She described that she "fell down dead and heard a voice."¹¹⁷¹ The voice specifically cautioned Jean against the plans of the Devil, and informed her of the coming death of her minister. These details involving visitations of spirits, acquisition of supernatural knowledge, predictions of death, and altered states of consciousness incorporate both Christian themes and traditional understandings of second sight abilities.

Some details in Jean's account also bear a strong similarity to aspects of the testimony of accused witches, or practitioners of popular magic who claimed that they went with the fairies. Jean's attestation that she and the Trinity "ly carnally" together can be compared to accounts of practitioners of magic who claimed that they had sexual relations with familiar spirits, or witches who attested that they slept with the Devil. Jean recalled that her familiar spirits acquainted themselves with her after a period of hardship in her life when she had fallen sick, and "after those days sickness they [the spirits] lift her out of it."¹¹⁷² This illness came on suddenly after she had been "designed to be married to one Hugh McSkimmin and for some causes she would not

¹¹⁶⁸ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁶⁹ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 222.

¹¹⁷⁰ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁷¹ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 222.

¹¹⁷² NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 220.

do it, and afterward she fell sick and these spirits came and lifted her out of her sickness.”¹¹⁷³

This pattern of a period of hardship or illness preceding a visionary experience was common in accounts of early modern Scottish prophetesses, as well as those of witches.

Another similarity between accused witches, prophetesses, and heretics was the apparent inclusion of personal motives in their accounts. While Roderick debauched women, the prophetesses desired to learn to read or present their cases to the king. In Jean’s account, the visitations from the Trinity yielded the knowledge that Robert McCane’s wife had gossiped and told lies about her, and as a result the spirits killed this woman’s husband “in revenge of her quarrel with his wife.”¹¹⁷⁴ Compounded by the Catholic, heretical, and sexual aspects of Jean’s testimony, the presence of personal motives in her account likely contributed to her condemnation. Despite Jean’s disciplinary hearing “when the Presby exhorted her to repent and believe that those were evil spirits and that the things she had confest were dreadfull blasphemies against God, she said she would believe no such thing asserting they were good spirits and that she would not want the pleasure of them for all visible things of the earth.”¹¹⁷⁵ She was eventually excommunicated for her refusal to repent, but Jean’s insistence that these familiar spirits were actually the Trinity illustrates her firm belief that she was a prophetess, and not a heretic.

Religious motifs also appear in a number of trials of accused witches, pointing to the ambiguity between practitioners of popular magic and Christian prophets in early modern

¹¹⁷³ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 221.

¹¹⁷⁴ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 220.

¹¹⁷⁵ NRS, CH2/373/1, fol. 229.

Scottish society. Both often discussed contact with spirits, revelations of hidden knowledge, and access to supernatural powers. However, as in the cases of Jean Brown and Roderick the Imposter, the designation of “heretic,” “witch,” or “false prophet” was a reflection of the interpretations of these seers’ communities or authorities, as opposed to their personal intentions. In this way, some accused witches described themselves as both second sighted people and Christian visionaries, yet were rejected by their communities or punished by authorities as religious deviants. The 1598 trial records of accused witch Andro Mann demonstrate his attempts to style himself as both a prophet and a second sighted individual. Like Jean, Andro traced the origin of his abilities to a childhood experience in which the Queen of Elphen came to him and told him that he would know all things, and would be able to help others and cure all sorts of diseases.¹¹⁷⁶ As evidence of his gifts, Andro cited that he had the ability to look at a man’s hand and tell him whom he would marry.¹¹⁷⁷ According to Andro, the fairy queen specifically compared his destiny and supernatural abilities to those of Thomas Rymer, the medieval second sighted Scottish laird. This particular reference is strong evidence that Andro was drawing on popular beliefs about second sight in his trial testimony.

Aside from his ability to predict love pairings, Andro laid claim to many abilities associated with second sight. Andro attested that he was sensible to spirits, particularly fairies, who had shapes and clothes like men did but “thay ar bot schaddowis.”¹¹⁷⁸ He also claimed that he went with the fairies, who had fair tables and playing and dancing, and the fairy queen freely

¹¹⁷⁶ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 119.

¹¹⁷⁷ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

¹¹⁷⁸ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

laid with whom she pleased. Andro's descriptions of visits to fairyland may have also been references to trances or altered states of consciousness. Andro said that the elves could make it appear as though men were in a beautiful chamber, but in the morning they would be in the moss and all the lavish trappings of their celebrations would be gone.¹¹⁷⁹ He often visited with the company of the elves, and Andro proclaimed that he was not afraid to go with them. Andro also shared the popular belief that fairyland and the realm of the dead were overlapping worlds, since he claimed that he saw his familiar angel Christsonday ride with a company of "sundrie dead men," including the king who died at Flowdoun and Thomas the Rhymer, who was once stolen away to fairyland.¹¹⁸⁰ The inclusion of Christsonday in the procession of the fairies and dead men is a significant blurring of Christian and popular traditions, since Christsonday was supposedly an angelic spirit.

Despite these numerous references to popular belief systems that acknowledged the existence of fairies and second sight, Andro's descriptions of his prophetic abilities were strongly oriented within a biblical and Christian framework. Andro claimed that he had a familiar spirit whose identity was distinctly holy. This spirit was named Christsonday, and he was both an angel and God's godson.¹¹⁸¹ Christsonday was described as coming to Andro "in the liknes of ane fair angell, and clad in quhyt claythis."¹¹⁸² This spirit was raised by the utterance of a blessing:

¹¹⁷⁹ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

¹¹⁸⁰ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121. The king that died in Flowdoun (Floddon) is James IV of Scotland, who perished in a battle at that location.

¹¹⁸¹ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 120.

¹¹⁸² Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 124. Demonologist George Sinclair noted that the Devil also appeared to accused witch John Fian in white raiment, rather than black, perhaps to deceive him into believing that he was a good spirit. See Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 27.

“Benedicite.”¹¹⁸³ Christsonday told Andro “that he was ane angell, and that he suld put hys trust in hym, and call hym hys lord and kyng.”¹¹⁸⁴ Andro firmly believed Christsonday’s claim that the angel was endowed with “all power under God.”¹¹⁸⁵ Just as Roderick and Jean Brown cited that their familiar spirits hailed from the biblical tradition, Andro’s attestation that his spirit was a powerful angel (albeit with fairy and ghost connections) pointed towards his perception of himself as a devout Christian. Andro also claimed that he could cure many forms of illness in people and animals by baptizing them, striking them in the face, and saying “Gif thow will leiff, leiff, and gif thow will die, die.” Andro’s rites of healing also included “sindrie uther orisonis, sic as of Sanct Johne, and of the thrie sillie brethrene.”¹¹⁸⁶ The incorporation of the rite of baptism or calling upon saintly figures was a clear attempt to utilize Christian powers for the purpose of healing. However, Andro’s attestation of having a familiar angel and his use of the names of saints in his charms indicate that Andro was sympathetic to Catholic rites and beliefs, and therefore he retained aspects of pre-Reformation devotion in his own religious practice.

Andro also styled himself as a prophet within the Biblical tradition. Andro attested that his angel Christsonday had revealed to him that the present year would be a lean year, but there would be seven good years after that.¹¹⁸⁷ This prophecy has clear echoes of the knowledge given to the biblical Joseph, who foretold the seven prosperous years and seven lean years of famine in

¹¹⁸³ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 120.

¹¹⁸⁴ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 124.

¹¹⁸⁵ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

¹¹⁸⁶ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 119-120.

¹¹⁸⁷ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 121.

Egypt.¹¹⁸⁸ Just as Jonet Fraser compared herself to Elijah and Roderick associated himself with the spirit of John the Baptist, Andro's attempt to compare himself to Joseph was dependent on his biblical knowledge of the prophetic tradition. Like numerous other Scottish visionaries, Andro also engaged with the belief that individuals who could see the future were able to describe the coming apocalypse. His trial records cited his belief that “at the day of judgement Christsonday wilbe nottar, to accuse everie man, and ilk man will have his awin dittay, wretin in his awin buik to accuse him self, and alss that the godlie wilbe schowred fra the wicked.”¹¹⁸⁹ Andro also disclosed his revelation that on the day of judgement, “the fyre will burne and the watter and the earth, and mak all plain.”¹¹⁹⁰ In this way, Andro was contributing to a greater tradition of Christian prophets who predicted what would happen as the world neared its end. Because of this, he likely expected that his attestation of having knowledge of the apocalypse through his familiar angelic spirit would designate him as firmly seated among the chosen elect. Despite this, Andro’s use of charms and magic, his descriptions of familiar spirits and fairies, and his continued devotion to Catholic rites resulted in his conviction as “a manifest vitcher.”¹¹⁹¹

Andro, Jean, and Roderick were far from the only individuals who laid claim to divinely inspired abilities or attempted to orient their second sight within the Christian tradition. The trial records of numerous witches and heretics in early modern Scotland contained descriptions of Christian practices, charms, and prayers, as well as meetings with familiar spirits that blurred the

¹¹⁸⁸ See Genesis 41:25-32 in the Bible.

¹¹⁸⁹ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 122.

¹¹⁹⁰ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 122.

¹¹⁹¹ Stuart, *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, 123.

line between the popular and religious traditions. While the accounts of Andro, Jean, and Roderick contain details that are unambiguously heretical, it is harder to understand why someone like the prophetess Jonet Fraser was condemned by her presbytery for having a compact with Satan. For equally unclear reasons, Donald Macgrigor's daughter was never examined, disciplined, or condemned by any official bodies despite the rumors that she went with the fairies while in her trances, or that the Devil was dealing with her. In this way, the distinction between visionaries, heretics, and false prophets was often obscure and subjective. The account of Janet Douglas, a Christian visionary with a disability, describes yet another seer who initially gained a popular following but was later condemned by authorities. Janet's case illuminates the ways in which some Christian theorists and second sighted individuals adopted the popular belief that seers with disabilities had a special affinity for supernatural gifts. However, her story also illustrates the all too familiar fact that characterizing second sight as a righteous ability was attainable in theory, yet often difficult in practice.

VIII: Disability and Christian Visionaries

Various early modern writers and visionaries engaged with the belief that people with disabilities had privileged access to supernatural knowledge and abilities. This was a popular opinion that was often associated with fairy belief, since fairies were believed to both cause disabilities and bestow supernatural abilities on people who consorted with them. However, the relationship between disability and supernatural knowledge was also present in early modern sources that discussed second sight from a Christian perspective. Minister and second sight

theorist Robert Kirk found precedent for disability caused by contact with the supernatural in the Bible. In defense of the popular connection between disability and seeing spirits, Kirk cited Luke 1:20, when Zacharias was “struck speechless at seeing of apparitiones,” and also Elisha “to have had the sam, and disclos’d it thus unto his servant, in 2 King.6.17. when he blinded the Syrians.”¹¹⁹² For Kirk, the fact that brushes with the supernatural sometimes caused disability and second sight was unproblematic from a religious perspective, since similar events had been occurring since ancient times and were recorded in biblical literature.¹¹⁹³

Another popular belief was that supernatural talents were granted to people with disabilities as a form of “compensation” for their perceived deficiencies. For some, this was evidence of God’s grace and generosity in action in the world.¹¹⁹⁴ Robert Law’s *Memorialls* contained numerous references to this belief, as espoused by the author. Law posited that “God hath taken away the tongue and ear of the dumb, and hath given them a rich gift of knowledge in the room of it; and by this would teach all of us his goodness to his creatures, and that we should study humility and sobriety of mind.”¹¹⁹⁵ Similarly, William Cheyn listed several legitimate

¹¹⁹² EUL, La.III.551, fols. 27-28.

¹¹⁹³ While Kirk detected two viable Biblical examples of people whose disabilities were caused by contact with the supernatural, he also appears to have overlooked several more: Paul blinded on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9); Jacob lamed by wrestling with “a man” who renamed him Israel (Genesis 32:24-25); Ezekiel struck mute by a revelation (Ezekiel 3:25-26); and Daniel who experienced sudden loss of strength and muteness following a vision (Daniel 10:15-17).

¹¹⁹⁴ This belief is also found in the accounts of the Petty Seer. The seer's parishioner Jamie, who foresaw a vision of his own death as revealed to him by God, was described as “an idiot.” The Reverend Morrison encouraged Jamie to seek admission to the Lord’s table for a vision, “believing that the Lord might manifest Himself in some special manner to such a person, and being anxious to ascertain if it should prove to be so.” See Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 144-145.

¹¹⁹⁵ Law, *Memorialls*, 119.

forms of prophecy, among which were predictions offered by

dumb persons, whereof some by Signs, and others by Writting, have given such admirable and clear Responses concerning the most casual and contingent Events imaginable, the success whereof, has exactly corresponded with their Predictions... Whereof also there has been in all Ages, and also at this present Day are, such a Multitude scattered through the world among us, so wonderfully endued with this unaccountable Gift (and that in the Vice and Place of the Faculties of Speech and Hearing, which are denyed them) by the wise Governour of Heaven and Earth.¹¹⁹⁶

John Fraser also suggested that second sight was more common among people with disabilities because “God might compensate the want of many other gifts to poor men by giving them this Minor Sort of foreknowledge.”¹¹⁹⁷ Fraser later asserted that “many Dumb persons foretell many things before hand: and it is hard measure to conclude all to be from evil Spirits... good Angels may forewarne this way, as well as by other Signs and tokens.”¹¹⁹⁸ For writers such as Law, Cheyn, and Fraser, the prevalence of prophets with disabilities was proof that their talents were not unnatural, but rather God-given or due to the operations of benevolent spirits.¹¹⁹⁹ In this way, numerous second sight theorists reconciled the popular belief that people with disabilities were more likely to have supernatural abilities with the Christian understanding of prophetic gifts.

¹¹⁹⁶ Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism*, 232.

¹¹⁹⁷ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 203.

¹¹⁹⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

¹¹⁹⁹ An alternative explanation appears in a story recorded by Wodrow about a minister named Mr. Dickson, who was going to preach in Edinburgh. Many people were coming from far and wide to hear him, and “he was presently struck dumb and could say nothing, but only that God was jealous of his own glory, and would not give it to any creature.” See Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 3, 8.

The Witch-Finder Janet Douglas

Accounts of Christian visionaries with disabilities were popular during this period, and some gained near celebrity status and were widely discussed.¹²⁰⁰ One of the most famous of this group was a young girl named Janet Douglas, who was supposedly mute, second sighted, and a witch-finder. Aside from the common belief that the second sighted were privy to hidden or supernatural knowledge, Janet's claim to being a second sighted witch-finder seems somewhat singular. However, it is possible that Janet was operating within a poorly documented tradition of witch-finders who were believed to have the second sight. Martin Martin's accounts of second sight included the story of a man whose illness was caused by a woman in a nearby village, whose visage appeared before the ill man cursing and reproaching him.¹²⁰¹ The source of this illness was detected by a second sighted man, who witnessed the afflicting spirit. While this case did not result in a witch trial, in a different social or religious climate it certainly could have resulted in an accusation of witchcraft against a woman who supposedly caused illness with her "visage." Further evidence comes from Allan Cunningham, who in his *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* made reference to the "insensible marks, which the second

¹²⁰⁰ For an example of a popular pamphlet featuring a Scottish Christian seer with a disability, see *An Account of Some Strange Apparitions Had by a Godly Man in Kintyre, who hath been blind Six Years* (Edinburgh: 1734). Cases of blind seers were also discussed by early modern scientists who were interested in the mechanisms by which the second sighted "saw." For more on this, see the section in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, "How did the Second Sighted "See"?"

¹²⁰¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 317.

sighted searchers of witchcraft... found on the human frame.”¹²⁰² This quote referred to early modern witch-pricking, a practice in Scottish witch-hunting that involved pushing pins into marks on an accused witch’s body in order to determine if the blemish was “insensible,” and therefore a Devil’s mark. In this case, second sight is specifically associated with the ability to detect witches.

A similar connection between second sight and witch-finding can be inferred through sources that relate witch-finders and people with disabilities. In the 1688 trial records of Catharin Mactargett, it was reputed against her “as also evidence that you are guiltie of the said black airt and have the marks thereof” that “ther came a dum man to you and put a great and long pin in your shoulder, at quhich tyme ye did not speik a word that ye fand ounie paine and quhen he took it out and held it up befor severall persones ye called him a dum devill and went away from him.”¹²⁰³ This record notes that a “dum man” publicly acted as a witch-pricker in Catharin’s case, and it was held as evidence against her that she did not react when he stuck her witch’s mark with a pin. Accused witch Barbara Bowndie’s 1644 trial documents describe an experience in which she “fainted by the way, she came speechless, and so remained for the space of 24 houres and was sore tormented, and the people said that she had been with the Farie.”¹²⁰⁴ Barbara’s experience can be interpreted as a temporary disability, not unlike those experienced by Scottish visionary prophetesses and other accused witches. Because disability was sometimes caused by

¹²⁰² Allan Cunningham, *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, cited in Lizanne Henderson, “Folk belief and Scottish traditional literatures,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Traditional Literatures*, eds. S. Dunnigan and S. Gilbert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 6.

¹²⁰³ Paton, *Register of the Privy Council*, 250.

¹²⁰⁴ NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 254.

contact with the supernatural, it was rumored that Barbara's condition was the result of going with the fairies. However, Barbara denied all rumors that she had been with the fairies, as well as the report that she had been "giving her selfe out for a discoverer of witches."¹²⁰⁵ Barbara's case once again brings together the overlapping themes of fairy contact, disability, second sight, and witch-finding. These themes also appear in the account of Adam Donald, the "Prophet of Bethelnie," who was both a person with disabilities and a reputed changeling.¹²⁰⁶ His biographer claimed that Adam was frequently consulted for the curing of diseases that were believed to have been caused by witchcraft.¹²⁰⁷ Similarly, recorded accounts of famous seer Duncan Campbell, who was supposedly both deaf and mute, attested that he diagnosed the illnesses of numerous clients as caused by witchcraft.¹²⁰⁸ Therefore, while Janet's claim to being a second sighted witch-finder may seem unusual in the historical record, some surviving details indicate that there may have been a popular connection between disability, second sight, and the ability to detect witchcraft.

¹²⁰⁵ NRS, CH2/1082/1, fol. 254.

¹²⁰⁶ In the context of discussing Christian visionaries who were also second sighted people, it may be significant that Adam Donald was popularly known as the *Prophet* of Bethelnie, a title which usually carries religious connotations. Similarly, Anne Jeffries in England was a young girl who was believed to have gone with the fairies and returned with the gifts of healing and foresight. One source refers to her as a "prophetess of Bodmyn" (where she lived), while another claims "There is much Discourse here of the Prophesies of a Maide in Cornwall." See BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2466, fol. 148v; BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2478, fol. 165. One writer justified Anne's status as a prophetess with the claim that she was examined by "three able Divines," who found that "shee gives a good accompt of her Religion, and hath the Scriptures very perfectly... shee prayes very much & bids people keepe ye old forme of prayer." See BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2443, fol. 102.

¹²⁰⁷ Goodwin and Carter, "Donald, Adam [called the Prophet of Bethelnie]."

¹²⁰⁸ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 176, 219, 227; Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 39, 41; Haywood, *A Spy on the Conjuror*, 151.

Janet Douglas may or may not have actually been mute; regardless, she initially convinced a large number of people that she was a person with a disability who possessed second sight and the ability to detect sources of witchcraft. At some point in her career, Janet began to speak and claimed that she had recovered from her muteness. This reversal of circumstance cast doubt on her abilities, and likely contributed to her later condemnation by religious and state authorities. However, from her own recorded statements and accounts written about her, Janet evidently contextualized herself and her abilities within both Christian belief and folk culture. While there was already a popular demand for individuals who diagnosed illnesses caused by witchcraft, Janet's claim to this ability was intended to seat her firmly within the company of the righteous, as she set herself up in opposition to witches and the operations of Satan. Despite this, Janet was subject to intense scrutiny by the authorities. This scrutiny took the form of numerous recorded accounts, interviews, and interrogations revolving around the nature and origin of her abilities. Opinions of Janet's talents varied widely, with some claiming that she was an imposter, others that she was in league with the Devil, and still others contending that she was a righteous seer. Janet was accused of a wide range of deeds including faking her disability, having a familiar spirit, and attempting to deceive people by pretending to have second sight. She was imprisoned twice, and probably exiled from Scotland. Despite her punishment at the hands of religious and state authorities, it seems that Janet had a large public following, and even convinced some learned men that she was a second sighted person who used her talents to confute the plans of Satan. Therefore, accounts of Janet's abilities document her partially successful attempt to construct an identity as a Christian seer, with emphasis placed on the popular connection between disability and second sight.

The record of Janet's ascension to both fame and notoriety documents the wide variety of theories that early modern writers had about the relationship between second sight and Christian visionary abilities. Janet first appears in the historical record around 1676 as a "young dumb Girle" who advertised herself as being able to detect the source of illnesses caused by witchcraft.¹²⁰⁹ Specifically, she assisted the family of an afflicted man named George Maxwell by signifying to them that several wax or clay figures had been made against him, with pins stuck in their sides "for taking away Sir George his life."¹²¹⁰ In a series of accusations that spanned months, Janet pointed out individuals who had made figures against Maxwell, and aided his servants in the discovery of these figures hidden in the houses of the accused.¹²¹¹ After each discovery of a figure, the accused were searched for "insensible marks" and "very many" were found on their bodies.¹²¹² During this drawn-out process of witch-finding, Maxwell's health took a turn for the better and he began to recover from his illness. This is the moment in which Janet's reputation as both a second sighted person with a disability and a Christian seer began to develop, evidenced by Maxwell's son's comment that "This poor creature proved thereafter through Gods favour a key to the detection of making both the Pictures."¹²¹³

¹²⁰⁹ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 2.

¹²¹⁰ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 6. Claims that witches used images or figures to perform sympathetic magic and harm other people do appear in accounts of early modern Scottish witchcraft. The North Berwick witches were accused of doing precisely this, and King James VI described their supposed activities in *Daemonologie*. See James VI, *Demonology*, 392-393, 395. Accused witches Isobel Gowdie and Janet Breadheid also confessed to making images of individuals to use in malefic magical practices. See NRS, GD125/16/5/1/1, NRS, GD125/16/5/1/3, NRS, GD125/16/5/1/4, NRS, GD125/16/5/1/5.

¹²¹¹ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 2-9.

¹²¹² Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 5, 7, 9.

¹²¹³ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 7.

At some point after Maxwell's recovery, likely around 1677, Janet appears to have regained her ability to speak. It is uncertain whether her muteness was a pretense or some kind of temporary condition,¹²¹⁴ but many of her contemporaries openly expressed the opinion that her purported disability had been a deliberate deception. Despite the admittedly suspicious recovery from her disability, Janet appears to have become something of a celebrity, causing people to flock around her and inviting the attention of the authorities. She was imprisoned and interrogated twice, but still persisted in witch-finding and making assertions that she was a second sighted person. Janet was first imprisoned in Glasgow on order of the bishop for being "a snare to the country."¹²¹⁵ When she was brought to Glasgow, the people "went out to meet her in vast crouds, and as she was surrounded with them, she accused severall persons of witchcraft."¹²¹⁶ While being kept in the tollbooth, Janet looked out of the window and saw some children playing nearby. Janet apparently said that two of the children were "witch getts, and discovered some malefices their mothers had done." These women were apprehended and witches' marks were found on them.¹²¹⁷ Similarly, when Janet was brought to Edinburgh in 1678 to be questioned, people flocked to her as she was arriving and she began to "exercise her art of witch-finding amongst them."¹²¹⁸ She called out to individuals in the crowd, revealing to them

¹²¹⁴ A "discreet understanding Gentle-man" who was a fellow scholar at Glasgow wrote to George Sinclair and claimed that Janet's muteness had been the result of a swelling in her throat and tongue, that was subsequently healed by the application of *Album Graecum*. See Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 203-204.

¹²¹⁵ Law, *Memorialls*, 133-134.

¹²¹⁶ Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters," 175.

¹²¹⁷ Law, *Memorialls*, 133-134.

¹²¹⁸ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 380.

that their misfortunes had been caused by “images” made against them.¹²¹⁹ These people claimed that her instructions on where to find the images were indeed accurate, and that their fortunes improved. Janet’s imprisonment and discipline by authorities is at odds with the popular following that she acquired. Throughout all this, her supposedly accurate detections of witchcraft only served to further strengthen Janet’s popular reputation as a second sighted person.

While witch-finding appeared to be the most widely discussed aspect of Janet's abilities, other writers claimed it was not the only supernatural talent to which she could lay claim. Janet was reputed to have access to many forms of hidden knowledge through her visions and intuitive sensations. Janet claimed that she was generally receptive to spiritual guidance, since she had “an impression on her spirit” to come to Pollock three years before she was required for identifying witches.¹²²⁰ John Fraser attested that during her career, she also “had given many Responses by Signs and Words, and foretold many future events.”¹²²¹ A friend of George Sinclair claimed she actually predicted her own imprisonment and punishment in detail.¹²²² John Maxwell described her ability to know “what was done in distant places,” and that she had personally given him an account of some events transpiring two miles away “without any information given to her, which I know of.”¹²²³ Maxwell also asserted that Janet “understood Languages,” and that she was “a Person that most wonderfully discovers thinges past, and doth also understand the Latine Tongue

¹²¹⁹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 175.

¹²²⁰ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 379.

¹²²¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196-197.

¹²²² Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 206.

¹²²³ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 2.

which she never learned.”¹²²⁴ John Lauder also recorded the belief that she “heard and understood, not only Scots, but all other languages.”¹²²⁵ Furthermore, George Hickee claimed that two well-known individuals, “both Zealous Covenanters,”¹²²⁶ were reputed to have consulted Janet concerning “the recovery of their health.”¹²²⁷ In these ways, Janet considered her second sight to be a far-reaching ability which encompassed many known aspects of second sight in early modern belief. This evidence from Janet’s account supports the idea that a multivalent definition of second sight is necessary in order to recognize the complex ways in which the term was used and understood by early modern Scottish people. Furthermore, Janet’s emphasis on her ability to detect witches demonstrates one of many varied and creative ways in which early modern visionaries reconciled traditions of second sight with Christian belief.

Janet’s numerous abilities were the source of significant debate and speculation by early modern writers and authorities, and she proved to be a highly controversial figure. Accounts of Janet’s talents as a witch-finder, in particular, illustrate the many disparate interpretations that her contemporaries had of her. While the public appeared to be quite taken with Janet and eager to employ her skills as a second sighted witch-finder, the authorities were suspicious of Janet’s claim to supernatural abilities. The 1677 warrant from the Privy Council for her arrest illustrates the wide range of options that the authorities considered when interrogating Janet about the

¹²²⁴ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 18.

¹²²⁵ Lauder, *Historical Notices*, 143.

¹²²⁶ The Covenanters were an early modern Scottish Presbyterian movement that was intent on maintaining Presbyterian doctrine as the sole form of religious expression in their country. The fact that two devout Covenanters consulted Janet is further evidence that some Christians believed she was a divinely inspired visionary.

¹²²⁷ Hickee, *The Spirit of Popery*, 35.

origin of her abilities: “if hir knowledge be so strange as it’s reported to be, it’s just shee tell whence shee hes it; but if it be an unvoluntar possession, or by a spirit’s frequenting of hir, or by the second sight without paction, it can never be made criminall.”¹²²⁸ Her interrogators also accused Janet of being “ane imposter and cheat, at least possest, or having the 2nd sight, or revealed to hir in the air.”¹²²⁹ After visiting her in prison, George Hickee cited divided opinions about Janet, but argued that he was convinced she was a genuine seer: “People were divided in their opinion of her, some suspected her for an impostrix, but others, of whom I myself was one, thought that she was really what she pretended, being induced to that opinion from the notoriety of the facts which the most incredulous, and suspicious could not deny.”¹²³⁰

Janet’s status as a person with a disability was initially vital to how others saw and interpreted her abilities. If her muteness was feigned, it is likely that she did so in order to cultivate a sense of credibility about her claims to second sight. Her disability was referenced by numerous of her contemporaries, often directly in connection to her supposed supernatural abilities. A letter written by Robert Knox claimed “I judge Dumby (i.e. Janet Douglas,) the greatest prodigy in the whole business, and would gladly be satisfied of her birth and education... I observe, from your information, her age, her deafness and dumbness, which make it improbable she had that charme from observation and experience. I am convinced this came the same way to her that the rest of her extraordinary sagacity came, which, for all this, I dare not

¹²²⁸ Lauder, *Historical Notices*, 144.

¹²²⁹ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 348.

¹²³⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 178.

impute positively to an evil cause.”¹²³¹ John Fraser referred to her as “Janet Dowglas, that was first a Dumbie, yet spoke thereafter... had given many Responses by Signs and Words, and foretold many future events.”¹²³² For some, the fact that Janet suddenly recovered her ability to speak raised doubts as to whether her disability had been genuine, and therefore whether her claims to second sight were also fabricated. Robert Chambers referred to her as a “vagrant girl... who appeared deaf and dumb, and who may reasonably set down as one of those singular young persons who, acting under a morbid love of mischief, have at the same time marvellous powers of deception.”¹²³³ John Maxwell wrote that “she was dumb, whether really or counterfeited, its hard to determine,”¹²³⁴ while John Dalryell noted that the recovery of her speech “would have undoubtedly impaired the public confidence in her discernment.”¹²³⁵

The fact that Janet’s claim to being both second sighted and a Christian seer was dependent on the authenticity of her muteness was based on ideas already articulated by learned authors. Robert Law theorized at length about the distinction between those who had true disabilities accompanied by supernatural talents, and those who only pretended to have both. He was also a strong defender of the idea that the truly mute may well have supernatural powers endowed by God. Law cautioned “we wold be sober in passing judgement on them that are truely dumb, lest we father the works of the sovereign God on Satan, which is hy impiety.”¹²³⁶

¹²³¹ Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft*, 140.

¹²³² Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196-197.

¹²³³ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 376.

¹²³⁴ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 2.

¹²³⁵ Dalryell, *Darker Superstitions*, 347.

¹²³⁶ Law, *Memorialls*, 115.

However, Law argued that it was sinful to feign disability or be desirous of supernatural talents that were not granted to us: “If God give extraordinary and excellent gifts of knowledge to some of those that are naturally dumb and deaf, we would not envy it; he is the sovereign Lord and may bestow the common operations of his spirit on whom he will.”¹²³⁷ By this logic, Janet’s innocence and reputation as a Christian seer were dependent on the authenticity of her disability. If she had only pretended to be mute, then she would be guilty of actions contrary to the will of God.

Despite the prevalent opinion that people with disabilities had access to genuine supernatural talents, many writers seem to have been persuaded that Janet’s second sight had an evil origin. John Lauder clearly believed that Janet had a bad character and reputation, indicating that her powers were not legitimate or granted by God: “What made hir very suspect to be hanted only be a familiar, was hir dissolute idle life, having nothing of austerity, and not so much as a shew or semblance of piety in it, but much lightnes and vanity, so many concluded hir to be a very cheat.”¹²³⁸ George Hickee initially claimed that Janet “pretends to have the Second Sight; but is believed to have a Familiar Spirit.”¹²³⁹ Robert Law argued that though Janet denied being inspired by the Devil, he was still the most likely origin of her abilities: “being asked, how she had that knowledge of detecting witches, and of other secrets? she declared that she knew not from what spirit; only things were suggested to her, but deny’d that she had any correspondence with Sathan. The best construction that can be put on her, as some think, is that she has the

¹²³⁷ Law, *Memorialls*, 119.

¹²³⁸ Lauder, *Historical Notices*, 144.

¹²³⁹ Hickee, *The Spirit of Popery*, 35.

second-sight, by a compact of her parents with the devill, and that she may be passive in it.”¹²⁴⁰

These numerous divided opinions about Janet, her disability, her second sight, and her status as a Christian seer illustrate the contested nature of visionaries and their experiences during this era.

Despite the opinions of others, the recorded accounts of Janet’s interrogations by authorities demonstrate that she clearly styled herself as both a righteous visionary and a second sighted individual. Janet rejected any malign imputations made against her, reasoning that she had the knowledge to reveal witches, and therefore she was not among them.¹²⁴¹ During these sessions, Janet was sternly warned by the archbishop that she could be sent away to the king’s plantation in the West Indies for her crimes. According to Wodrow, Janet turned to the archbishop and asked him who was with him in his rooms late last night. Her interrogator was shocked, and was later forced to reveal that it was the Devil who was present with him the night before.¹²⁴² The records of Janet’s interrogations reveal her to be a rather sagacious and manipulative individual, though she largely seems to have employed these talents in order to enhance her reputation as both a second sighted person and a righteous visionary. When confronted with the idea that her ability could be demonically inspired, Janet cleverly responded

¹²⁴⁰ Law, *Memorialls*, 129-130. John Fraser noted that Janet specifically “denied any explicit or implicit Paction.” See Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196-197.

¹²⁴¹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 105. A similar argument was made by the defenders of the seer Duncan Campbell, who was often called upon to diagnose or provide remedies for people who were believed to be bewitched. See Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 219.

¹²⁴² Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 105. This seems to have been a technique that Janet used against individuals who questioned her. A letter from a friend to George Sinclair described a similar story in which a woman who questioned Janet was asked “Where were you yesternight, and what were you doing?” When the woman did not reply, Janet seized the woman’s arm and claimed she could see a witches’ mark on it. The woman was ashamed and ran home, and she was later found drowned in the Clyde. See Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 205-206.

that “it could not be from any delusion of Satan, for else his kingdome should be devided against it’s selfe, and our Saviour’s argument should not be concluding.”¹²⁴³ In saying this, Janet recalled the words of Christ when he was confronted by the Pharisees and accused of using the power of Satan to exorcise demons.¹²⁴⁴ By placing his words in her own mouth, and thereby casting herself as Christ in this story, Janet was unequivocally positioning herself and her abilities within Christian beliefs about the earthly battle against evil.

Janet clearly expected that her abilities would be interpreted as divinely inspired. Judging by her reasoning that Satan’s house could not be divided against itself, she was likely versed in Christian scripture. Janet’s knowledge of proper doctrine and desire to be understood as a Christian seer are also displayed in George Hickes’ notes on his interview with Janet during her imprisonment in Edinburgh in 1678. Hickes was initially quite suspicious of her ability, since “I told her plainly I fear’d it was from an evill cause.”¹²⁴⁵ However, Hickes departed from the interview convinced “that she was really what she pretended.”¹²⁴⁶ Hickes became convinced of this opinion not only because of the supernatural knowledge that Janet appeared to possess, but because of her intelligence, bravery, virtuous character, and familiarity with Christianity.

During this interview, Hickes plied Janet with a number of tests and questions, both

¹²⁴³ Lauder, *Historical Notices*, 143-144. In 1677, Janet accused a confrontational woman of being a witch. This caused the woman to accuse Janet of being a Devil, at which point Janet replied “the Devil doth not reveal witches.” Janet’s ability to engage in theological arguments seems to have developed and improved after this first exchange. See Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 205.

¹²⁴⁴ See Matthew 12:25-29, Mark 3:23-27, and Luke 11:17-22 in the Bible.

¹²⁴⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

¹²⁴⁶ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 178.

moral and spiritual, and she appears to have passed muster. He was particularly eager to “ask her some questions about the Second Sight, by which she pretended to make all her discoveries.”¹²⁴⁷ Hickes also brought a reverend with him to the prison, as a supplemental witness and judge of Janet’s character. Hickes claimed that they both “found her as I had heard her described, to be a girle of very great assurance, undaunted,”¹²⁴⁸ as well as in possession of both “wit” and “cunning.”¹²⁴⁹ Hickes began by swearing Janet to truth and reminding her that all pretenders to prophecy and revelations were “odious to God and man.” During the conversation that followed, Janet affirmed that she had the second sight, described how she experienced her visions, and declared that she hoped this ability came from a good source, since she never received it through any actions, formulas, charms, or incantations. Hickes asked her if she remembered her baptismal vow, and “with great quickness replied, she remembred it, and called to mind that she had renounced the devill, and all his works.”¹²⁵⁰ Janet even consented to “renounce them in a form of words, that I had provided... which she did in the most serious and Emphaticall expressons that I was able to devise.”¹²⁵¹ She also recited the Lord’s Prayer with Hickes, and repeated another prayer which Hickes had composed “to deliver her from the power of the Devill, and all evill spirits.”¹²⁵² When he asked if she desired to have the second sight taken from

¹²⁴⁷ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

¹²⁴⁸ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

¹²⁴⁹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 177.

¹²⁵⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

¹²⁵¹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

¹²⁵² When interviewed by a friend of George Sinclair in 1677, Janet was found to be “ignorant of the Principles of the Christian Religion, but had some smattering knowledge of the Lords Prayer.” See Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 204.

her, “she replied what God pleased.”¹²⁵³ In these ways, though Janet was only a teenage girl, she managed to convince an educated, adult, male skeptic of her validity and virtue by emphasizing her identity as a Christian seer, and arguing that her abilities existed by the permission of God. While Hickes had entered the interview believing that her second sight likely had a diabolical origin, Janet’s ability to integrate aspects of their shared religion into her presentation of herself as a second sighted individual proved very persuasive.

Ultimately, it is unclear what happened to Janet following her imprisonment and interrogation, though some sources say she was banished.¹²⁵⁴ She may have been sent to the West Indies,¹²⁵⁵ or perhaps she managed to depart to England, a desire and intention she expressed to George Hickes.¹²⁵⁶ Regardless, her disappearance from the historical record likely indicates that she was unable to recover her public status and reputation following her imprisonment and punishment. While she managed to convince Hickes of her piety, Janet’s argument that she was both a second sighted witch-finder and a good, honest Christian seems to have been largely rejected by authorities.

Janet and the other Christian visionaries discussed in this chapter laid claim to a wide variety of abilities that were associated with second sight. While some of these visionaries explicitly applied the term “second sighted” to themselves, others were simply Christians who

¹²⁵³ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 177.

¹²⁵⁴ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 381.

¹²⁵⁵ An informant wrote to George Sinclair about Janet Douglas, and claimed she was “sent away to some forrainge Plantation” following her imprisonment and interrogation. See Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 206.

¹²⁵⁶ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176.

believed in the existence of divinely endowed gifts or talents. Despite the fact that many styled themselves as seers within the biblical and prophetic tradition, their accounts also contained descriptions of trance states, familiar spirits, death prognostication, and revelations of hidden knowledge. This demonstrates that second sight and early modern Christianity were compatible belief systems, and that the Scottish Reformation was ultimately a process of cultural synthesis between pre-existing and reformed spiritual traditions. Far from being disenchanting, Scottish Protestantism may have been more adaptable than has generally been recognized, permitting Christian seers and visionaries to orient their experiences within existing frameworks of popular belief. Remnants of Catholic devotion in accounts of Scottish seers also indicate that Protestantism had not been entirely successful at eradicating pre-Reformation belief systems, which remained influential towards visionaries' encounters with the holy. Though some seers came under suspicion for their Catholic sympathies, visionaries and their experiences were generally judged through processes of discernment that seemed arbitrary and subjective. Beliefs about prophets, practitioners of magic, and witches were also somewhat fluid, further complicating early modern attempts to distinguish second sight from divine inspiration. While some seers failed to convince everyone that their talents were granted by God, surviving accounts of these many visionaries illustrate that some early modern people were able to reconcile Christianity and second sight.

Chapter 5: Second Sight During the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution

Therefor Every Age hath som secret left for it's discoverie, and who knows, but this intercourse betwixt the two kinds of Rational Inhabitants of the sam Earth may not be only beleived shortly, but as freely intertain'd, and as well known, as now the Art of Navigation, Printing, Gunning, Riding on Sadles with Stirrops, and the discoveries of Microscopes, which were sometimes as great a wonder, and as hard to be beleiv'd.

— Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth* (1691)¹²⁵⁷

Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* was an early modern scientific treatise written on an unusual topic: fairies and the second sighted people who saw them. Kirk was an early modern Scottish minister who presided over a congregation in Aberfoyle, tending to their spiritual needs and collecting their stories about fairies and second sight. Kirk was obviously a devout man, and well-educated. He studied theology at the University of St. Andrews, and received a master's degree from the University of Edinburgh. Kirk was responsible for translating the Bible into Gaelic, a project that was funded by Robert Boyle, a British member of the Royal Society.¹²⁵⁸ *The Secret Commonwealth* was based on material that Kirk gathered from his parishioners between 1691 and 1692, though it wasn't published until 1815, long after his death.¹²⁵⁹

Kirk's life and work illustrate the profound intersections between religion, science, and folk belief during the years associated with the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. Kirk firmly believed that fairies existed alongside human beings who were generally unaware of their

¹²⁵⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 73.

¹²⁵⁸ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 173-174.

¹²⁵⁹ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 175. Kirk's original manuscript is EUL, La.III.551, while some published versions are EUL, Gen.308.D and NLS, MS 5022.

presence, all except those second sighted people who frequently saw and encountered them. To Kirk, the existence of such beings was no less mysterious or undeniable than the discovery of strange animals living in the ocean, or microscopic organisms that were invisible to the human eye but nevertheless observable through powerful lenses. He anticipated that humans' coexistence with the fairy folk was the great new discovery of his age, not unlike the relatively recent discovery of the American continent and its inhabitants. Kirk also believed that fairies existed by the permission and will of God, and as such they were part of the grand system of creation along with humans and all other living beings. Kirk asserted that soon learned society would accept the reality of fairies and second sight, and that such undeniable truths were bound to be apparent to all rational people. He collected testimony from reliable second sighted witnesses and used these accounts to construct a treatise that met early modern standards for scientific research and argumentation.

Kirk's purposes were threefold: to verify the reality of second sight, to make his readers aware of the "entercourse betwixt the two kinds of Rational Inhabitants of the sam Earth" (humans and fairies), and to thereby affirm the existence of a world of spirits created and controlled by the Christian God. Kirk's methods and arguments could be considered cutting edge.¹²⁶⁰ He was intent on offering evidence that was obtained from verifiable sources, that is, eyewitnesses who were credible people. His arguments incorporated recent findings in scientific fields such as exploration, biology, and optics. Kirk also oriented his conclusions within a growing body of work that emphasized the existence of a spiritual realm, contrary to a perceived

¹²⁶⁰ For more on this, see Lizanne Henderson, "The (super)natural worlds of Robert Kirk: fairies, beasts, landscapes and lychnobious liminalities," *The Bottle Imp* 20 (2016): 1-4.

threat of atheism or deism among his peers. In these many senses, Robert Kirk was a model early modern scientist: scrupulous in his methods and reasoning, and continually aware of the impact his findings would have on our understanding of God and creation.

Kirk's scientific interest in second sight was not singular, as educated interest in Scottish second sight expanded during the years associated with the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. During these years, particularly at the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, second sight began to receive attention from individuals and organizations outside of Scotland. Notably, a group of scientists who were members of the Royal Society became intrigued by the notion that the Scottish Highlands contained numerous people who were capable of predicting the future and seeing spirits. Aided by some friends in the Oxford Philosophical Society, these scientists launched an investigation into the nature and reality of second sight. They sent letters and questionnaires to Scottish acquaintances asking for reliable information about second sight. They circulated treatises and pamphlets that they managed to obtain on the topic, and interviewed reputable sources whenever the opportunity allowed. Educated curiosity about second sight outside of Scotland also sparked a trend of tourism to this supposedly "exotic" location, with many travelers intent on enquiring about Scottish beliefs in the supernatural and second sight. For many writers, including Enlightenment thinkers, scientists, and travelers, second sight represented something uniquely Scottish that demanded investigation. These second sight theorists of various backgrounds were all particularly concerned with obtaining evidence from reliable witnesses in order to establish "matters of fact," using contemporary standards for the demonstration of scientific knowledge. Their approach attempted to tread a line between credulity and disbelief, with repeated emphasis

on the need for credible second sighted informants.

This chapter is largely concerned with the questions and theories generated by early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers about second sight, its nature, origins, and functions. Second sight theorists approached numerous questions about second sight from scientific perspectives, such as how the second sighted “saw,” whether second sight was attached to any objective qualities of individuals, or whether the ability could be attributed to environmental influences on Scottish people’s physical or mental health. Early modern scientific inquiry into second sight yielded many theories about the origins of the ability, particularly as having potentially natural or medical causes. These theories still largely accounted for the existence of spirits, and the possibility that second sight was due to their operations in the physical world. In this way, scientific interest in second sight was profoundly rational, yet in no way secular. Rather, the fact that second sighted people could have their ability through natural means yet still attest to the existence of spirits illustrates the entanglement of religious and scientific pursuits during this era. For many theorists, Scottish second sight became a test case for various early modern assumptions and questions about the boundary between the natural and the supernatural.

Early modern scientists were continually aware of the religious implications of their work; therefore, their theories about second sight incorporated prevailing beliefs about the existence of spirits and their ability to interact with human beings. Conversations about the exact mechanisms of second sight involved early modern theories about optics, the human senses, and the imagination. These conversations increasingly featured the assertion that visions occurred in seers’ imaginations, though this did not mean that the visions were not genuine. Though the

perspective that visions are “imaginary” may seem like a secularization of second sight, this theory still incorporated the belief that spirits influenced the human mind and senses. While some sources were prepared to argue that second sight was a delusion, and therefore seers’ visions were not “real,” a large number of theorists continued to assert that these delusions were the work of deceiving spirits influencing people’s faculties of perception. Though some did argue that second sight was the result of illness, none were prepared to assert that this was evidence that true visions or spirits did not exist. Therefore, scientific theories of second sight were not inherently skeptical or atheistic, but rather leaned on the accepted belief that spirits could interact with humans. Medical theories that attributed second sight to illness or delusion still accounted for the existence of visionary abilities, and do not demonstrate a growing secularization of early modern scientific theory.

Most scientists and Enlightenment thinkers who wrote about second sight were actually attempting to verify the reality of a world of spirits in the face of the supposed menace of deism and atheism. While the number of individuals willing to openly discuss skepticism of traditional religion did seem to increase during these years, the quantity of treatises and pamphlets displaying “proof” of the reality of spirits was a reaction entirely disproportionate to this perceived threat. As such, spirits and people who claimed they saw them were a popular topic of conversation for early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers. Second sighted people were implicated in the quest for proving the existence of spirits as their accounts were collected, recorded, and circulated within educated circles. In this way, scientific theories of second sight were tailored to the religious and spiritual goals of this era, and far from discouraging belief in the supernatural, many who investigated visionary abilities were intent on proving their validity.

I: Historiography: Second Sight, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution

The early modern period in Europe is often thought of as the era that witnessed the birth of the modern scientific process. This perspective is largely correct, though it is not without qualification. Enlightenment thinkers and early modern scientists were certainly asking questions and developing methods that have come to be associated with modern science. However, the objects of these questions and the development of these methods sometimes revolved around surprising topics, such as second sight. An excellent example is George Sinclair, the Scottish engineer, mathematician, and demonologist. He was the first Professor of Mathematics at the University of Glasgow, and made notable contributions in the fields of hydrostatics and pneumatics.¹²⁶¹ He also wrote the widely-read book *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, and Sinclair personally investigated various supernatural phenomena (including second sight) for the purpose of proving the existence of a spiritual world. Robert Boyle was also very interested in second sight, and expended a considerable amount of effort trying to determine whether there were indeed certain people in Scotland who could see spirits and interpret signs of the future. Aside from his interest in second sight, Boyle is credited with being one of the founders of modern chemistry and a pioneer of the experimental scientific method. He was the discoverer of Boyle's Law, which is named for him, and he was one of the founding members of the Royal

¹²⁶¹ Alex D.D. Craik, "The hydrostatical works of George Sinclair (c.1630-1696): their neglect and criticism," *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 72 (2018), 241-250.

Society.¹²⁶² In the past, biographers of Boyle's life have attempted to scrub his manuscripts of interests that they considered evidence of superstition or credulity.¹²⁶³ However, recent historiography has been more willing to examine the supposedly "superstitious" interests of early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers.

Prevailing wisdom once held that religion and magic were antithetical to scientific pursuits. In his *Introduction to the History of Science*, George Sarton boldly declared, "The historian of science can not devote much attention to the study of superstition and magic, that is, of unreason, because this does not help him very much to understand human progress. Magic is essentially unprogressive and conservative; science is essentially progressive; the former goes backward; the latter forward."¹²⁶⁴ A similar viewpoint was popularized by Peter Gay in his book *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, which hailed the Enlightenment as an era of progress towards an increasingly secular, rational, and therefore less mystical worldview.¹²⁶⁵ These arguments were part of the overall thesis of disenchantment, which held that the early modern period witnessed the emergence of a more modern and inherently rational society. Utilizing the tools of Protestantism, Enlightenment philosophy, and experimental science, the early modern period was portrayed as carving away at the superstitious excesses of the medieval era and

¹²⁶² Michael Hunter, "Boyle, Robert (1627-1691), natural philosopher," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3137>.

¹²⁶³ Walsham, "The Reformation and 'The Disenchantment of the World,'" 521.

¹²⁶⁴ George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Williams, and Wilkins, 1927), 19.

¹²⁶⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969).

moving forward unburdened into the world we have inherited today.

Just as with the thesis of Protestant disenchantment, these arguments about the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution have come under scrutiny in recent years. While the older historiography still holds sway in modern popular culture, among scholars of early modern Europe there is a growing awareness that scientists' interest in supposedly magical subjects was influential in the development of modern science. Even more than this, it is now reasonable to claim that both the Enlightenment movement and the Scientific Revolution actually encouraged a resurgence of interest in the supernatural. Steven Shapin's *The Scientific Revolution* went so far as to assert that there may not have been a "revolution" at all, since the author claimed that the early modern era did not witness any significant shifts in how scientists went about discovering truths or producing knowledge. Rather, most scientists continued to pursue natural philosophy as a means of achieving greater understanding of the divine, through studying creation.¹²⁶⁶ Simon Schaffer has influentially argued that the achievements of the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century cannot be accurately described as a "mechanization of the world picture,"¹²⁶⁷ as his examination of early modern scientific methods and discoveries revealed that most influential approaches took into account the existence of spirits and souls. Schaffer asserted that "Historians have too often assumed that the "mechanical philosophy" was obviously progressive and so self-evidently defined." Rather, "a divorce between mechanical and occult philosophy does not, then, assist us in reaching a historical understanding of experimental

¹²⁶⁶ Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹²⁶⁷ Simon Schaffer, "Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers: Souls and Spirits in Restoration Natural Philosophy," *Science in Context* 1, no. 1 (1987), 55.

work.”¹²⁶⁸ Similarly, Allison Coudert’s *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America* succinctly argued that “well into the eighteenth century, religion, magic, and science were all of a piece.”¹²⁶⁹ Alexandra Walsham has also pointed to a “growing awareness that magical philosophies and practices exerted a considerable and creative influence on the development of modern science.”¹²⁷⁰

The historiography of the European Enlightenment has taken a similar course. Roy Porter has argued “only the most unquestioning historian today would pronounce that what we now know as the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century... unambiguously amounted to a decisive stage in human improvement... It would be folly to hope to find in the Enlightenment a perfect programme for human progress.”¹²⁷¹ Within this general historiographical shift, historians have emphasized the ways in which the writings of Enlightenment thinkers and early modern scientists revealed a preoccupation with the perceived rising threat of atheism, or denial of the spiritual world. Colin Kidd has argued that the mainstream voices of the Scottish Enlightenment were religiously orthodox and fully convinced that “science and philosophy provided the only means of convincing sceptics and deists of their errors.”¹²⁷² Moody Prior has illuminated the ways in which most notable early modern scientists displayed an awareness of the religious implications of their work, and were profoundly insistent that their new discoveries did not

¹²⁶⁸ Schaffer, “Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers,” 65.

¹²⁶⁹ Allison P. Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America* (Santa Barbara: Preager, 2011), ix.

¹²⁷⁰ Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 523.

¹²⁷¹ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 1.

¹²⁷² Kidd, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 93.

support atheism. For these scientists, the world of spirits was recognized as a legitimate field of study, whose findings could be used to combat a dangerous new wave of skepticism.¹²⁷³ Because of this, Lizanne Henderson has argued that “in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the level of debate and interest in the supernatural was actually on the increase,”¹²⁷⁴ while Alexandra Walsham has claimed “it is becoming increasingly plausible to argue that Enlightenment actually served to foster a resurgence of interest in, and discussion of, the supernatural.”¹²⁷⁵

A variety of supernatural topics were implicated in the mission to prove the existence of a world of spirits. Stories of ghosts saw increasing circulation,¹²⁷⁶ and scientific interest in fairies as an ambiguous form of “intermediate spirit” witnessed an unprecedented level of inquiry.¹²⁷⁷ Prophecy (popular, religious, and political) and the related topics of omens and prodigies were discussed more animatedly than ever.¹²⁷⁸ The debates over miracles and divine providence can

¹²⁷³ Moody E. Prior, “Joseph Glanvill, Witchcraft, and Seventeenth-Century Science,” *Modern Philology* 30, no. 2 (1932): 167-193.

¹²⁷⁴ Lizanne Henderson, *Witchcraft and Folk Belief in the Age of Enlightenment: Scotland, 1670-1740* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2. See also Lizanne Henderson, “The Survival of Witchcraft Prosecutions and Witch Belief in South West Scotland,” *Scottish Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (2006): 52-74.

¹²⁷⁵ Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 526.

¹²⁷⁶ Jo Bath and John Newton, ““Sensible Proof of Spirits”: Ghost Belief during the Later Seventeenth Century,” *Folklore* 117, no. 1 (2006): 1-14.

¹²⁷⁷ Goodare, “Between Humans and Angels,” 169-190.

¹²⁷⁸ Cowan, “The Discovery of the Future,” 1-28; Gow, “Prophetic Belief.”; Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton: Magic and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 15-47.

also be seen as peaking during this era.¹²⁷⁹ In light of this, Alexandra Walsham has asserted that the Enlightenment was no less ambiguous than the Reformation as a period in which “the boundaries of religion and magic were readjusted.”¹²⁸⁰ She posited that this blossoming of literature on the supernatural should prompt us to view the Enlightenment as experiencing a wave of partial re-enchantment, as part of a continuing cycle of early modern sacralization and desacralization.¹²⁸¹

Second sight fits neatly into this picture. While second sight was demonized during the Reformation years, early modern scientists’ and Enlightenment thinkers’ interest in second sight represented a partial re-enchantment or sacralization of a desacralized belief. From their perspective, second sighted people could offer eyewitness evidence of the existence of a spiritual world.¹²⁸² Furthermore, second sight provided an opportunity for scientists to learn more about human senses and perception, particularly how visions were experienced and by what criteria they could be considered legitimate. In pursuit of these questions, early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers wrote letters, sent out questionnaires, interviewed informants, and sought out treatises and pamphlets that could provide information on second sight. While it would seem that many wanted to believe in the reality of second sight, they also attempted to maintain a scholarly distance that would not invite accusations of credulity. Partakers in early modern “wit

¹²⁷⁹ R.M. Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles: From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981); Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹²⁸⁰ Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 526.

¹²⁸¹ Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World,’” 526.

¹²⁸² Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 1-2; Hunter, “The Discovery of Second Sight,” 48-52.

culture,” which flourished in urban centers, clubs, and coffee houses, took pleasure in advertising their skeptical religious outlooks and scoffing at the overly credulous.¹²⁸³ Never forgetting their contemporaries’ condescending view of “enthusiasts,”¹²⁸⁴ early modern writers who discussed second sight were careful to make use of contemporary methods for establishing matters of fact.

The concept of a “matter of fact” was a crucial aspect of early modern scientific study, particularly during the years associated with the Scientific Revolution. The question of what was indeed a “fact” necessitated the establishment of what constituted “truth,” and how something could be determined to be true. Steven Shapin has argued that early modern scientists, and Robert Boyle in particular, created a system that Shapin called “virtual witnessing.” Virtual witnessing involved the publication of experimental reports that were extraordinarily detailed, and were specifically created in order to enable readers to generate a vivid mental image of the experimental process that was being described.¹²⁸⁵ When these reports were read by other learned men, the number of virtual witnesses to the experiment was expanded. This was significant because public witnessing and acceptance of the processes and outcomes of scientific experimentation helped validate the discovery of truth, or “a matter of fact.”¹²⁸⁶ These could not just be any witnesses though; they had to be people who were considered credible.¹²⁸⁷ Simon

¹²⁸³ J.A.I. Champion, “Enlightened Erudition and the Politics of Reading in John Toland’s Circle,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 111-141; Heyd, “The Reaction to Enthusiasm,” 258-280; Hunter, “The Discovery of Second Sight,” 50.

¹²⁸⁴ See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for more on early modern perceptions of “enthusiasm.”

¹²⁸⁵ Steven Shapin, “Pump and Circumstance: Robert Boyle’s Literary Technology,” *Social Studies of Science* 14, no. 4 (1984), 481.

¹²⁸⁶ Simon Schaffer, “Making Certain,” *Social Studies of Science* 14, no. 1 (1984), 137-138; Shapin, “Pump and Circumstance,” 484.

¹²⁸⁷ Shapin, “Pump and Circumstance,” 489.

Schaffer has further emphasized that educated men, ideally of noble birth, were vastly preferred as witnesses.¹²⁸⁸ Virtual witnessing also relied on a system of trust between the experimenter and the reader, and Boyle attempted to establish himself as a “reliable purveyor of experimental testimony and to offer conventions by means of which others could do likewise.”¹²⁸⁹ In this way, Boyle hoped to create a sustainable system by which facts could be validated and discovered, not invented.¹²⁹⁰ Simon Schaffer has argued that these methods allowed early modern scientists to avoid accusations of credulity: “Proper reporting allowed the dissemination of these matters of fact through a society of otherwise vulnerable subjects. Collective witnessing and organized labor controlled the reproduction of phenomena lest they lead to dogmatism and illusion... the experimental philosophers sought to escape the taint of atheist mechanism by showing the vitalism of their ontology... and the charge of enthusiasm by showing the discipline of their technology.”¹²⁹¹ These methods would be applied to early modern investigations of second sight, which were in their own way seeking to virtually witness the conventionally unseen. By obtaining reliable testimony of spirits or supernatural abilities from the second sighted, scientists endeavored to establish matters of fact about the invisible world.

¹²⁸⁸ Schaffer, “Making Certain,” 143, 146.

¹²⁸⁹ Shapin, “Pump and Circumstance,” 493.

¹²⁹⁰ Shapin, “Pump and Circumstance,” 496.

¹²⁹¹ Schaffer, “Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers,” 72-73.

Tourists and Scientists

Early modern scientific interest in second sight came from sources that were largely outside of Scotland. This was relatively new; according to Michael Hunter, “no one prior to Boyle had considered the phenomenon worthy of investigation.”¹²⁹² However, once educated inquiry into second sight had spilled outside of Scottish borders, popular interest in the topic began to increase at a rapid rate. Soon, Scotland became a fashionable destination for tourists, many of whom were eager to investigate the supernatural phenomena for which Scotland was becoming known.¹²⁹³ In 1759, the Scottish Lord Breadalbane commented “it has been the fashion this year to travel into the highlands, many have been here from England, I suppose because they can’t go abroad.”¹²⁹⁴ By the 1770s and 1780s, tourism to Scotland was on the rise. This notable increase caused traveller Elizabeth Diggle to proclaim “All the world is travelling to Scotland!” as she made her own voyage in 1788.¹²⁹⁵

Scientists and tourists had a few commonalities: they were generally cultural “outsiders,” and as such were prone to perpetuating stereotypes about Scottish people, particularly Highlanders); they were interested in supernatural phenomena that were native to Scotland; and

¹²⁹² Hunter, “The Discovery of Second Sight,” 49.

¹²⁹³ Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson, “The last of the witches? The survival of Scottish witch belief,” in *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 199-200; Martin Rackwitz, *Travels to Terra Incognita: the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides in Early Modern Travellers’ Accounts c. 1600 to 1800* (New York: Waxmann Munster, 2007), 528.

¹²⁹⁴ Alastair J. Durie, ed. *Travels in Scotland 1788-1881: A Selection from Contemporary Travel Journals* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), 3.

¹²⁹⁵ Durie, *Travels in Scotland*, 3.

they avidly sought testimony of these phenomena from reliable witnesses for the purpose of sharing this information with others. By and large, travelers and scientists also seemed to have asked similar questions about second sight, the nature of seers, and the credibility of the phenomenon among Scottish people. A number of travelers who went to Scotland made deliberate enquiry into second sight and recorded accounts of second sighted people in travel journals, personal diaries, and correspondence. Stimulated by the same curiosity about Scotland, early ethnographic works that described Scottish people and culture witnessed rising popularity, and a number of these also featured accounts of second sight.

Early modern scientists and tourists were both profoundly intrigued by “the new.” Historian Peter Dear has argued that the Scientific Revolution was characterized by a shift in worldview that prioritized new discoveries over explaining known phenomena. Dear claimed that the medieval study of science did not view the natural world as massive or unknown, with discoveries still to be made.¹²⁹⁶ Rather, the focus was on understanding known phenomena instead of innovating. Dear’s thesis is that the scientists of the early modern period placed value on the discovery of the new, and that this shift in goals represents the development of a new approach towards the study of science.¹²⁹⁷ This obsession with new discoveries was shared by travelers, who were intent on witnessing and hearing about the supernatural first-hand. Both scientists and travelers saw Scotland, and the host of spirits that haunted it, as a new world to discover and explore. For many scientists, this exploration was mediated through pen and paper. However, the early modern traveler who went to Scotland and reported his or her findings can be

¹²⁹⁶ Peter Dear, *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and Its Ambitions, 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 13.

¹²⁹⁷ Dear, *Revolutionizing the Sciences*, 6.

viewed as a form of field researcher who engaged in this scientific pursuit of the new. As with other supernatural phenomena, scientists, travelers, and ethnographers were generally divided in their opinions of second sight. Some came away convinced that it was “imposture,” while others were willing to believe that it could be verified through the testimony of credible witnesses.

II: Establishing Matters of Fact

In keeping with standards for scientific investigations, early modern scientists and theorists were only interested in accounts from sources that they deemed credible. Ideally, these accounts would come from learned, noble-born men who could personally attest that second sight was a valid and observable phenomenon. Understanding their peers’ standards for witnesses, second sight theorists attempted to emphasize the truthful character of their second sighted sources, as well as reference any educated noblemen who were also believers. When uneducated sources were cited, theorists found ways of justifying their inclusion. Overall, early modern scientists who argued for the reality of second sight avoided appearing either credulous or atheistic by referring their readers to the reliability of their informants.

Scientists were adamant that their chosen sources were men well-known for their truthfulness and trustworthiness. Belief in the credibility of these witnesses was crucial, and the issue was raised numerous times in letters to correspondents. George Hickes argued that the matter of the veracity of second sight could only be investigated through the acquisition of “a good number of well attested stories out of good historians, and records, as well as living

witnesses.”¹²⁹⁸ John Aubrey specifically wanted to know whether credible instances of second sight could be located, to which James Garden wrote back that many such stories could be provided by the second sighted.¹²⁹⁹ These types of inquiries produced numerous attestations of second sighted informants as people who could be trusted to provide reliable information, uninfluenced by superstitious credulity. Theophilus Insulanus described his informant seers as “persons of all ranks and professions, who have no interest or temptation to invent and propagate ridiculous lies and falsehoods, to impose on the credulity of mankind.”¹³⁰⁰ John Ferriar referred to one of his informants as “a gentleman connected with my family, an officer in the army, and certainly addicted to no superstition.”¹³⁰¹ A letter from Malcom MacCaskil to Theophilus Insulanus affirmed that his sources were “persons of undoubted veracity and established character,”¹³⁰² while Martin Martin claimed his accounts were “had from Persons of as great Integrity as any are in the World.”¹³⁰³ George Sinclair’s stories of second sight were framed as “attested by Authentick Records, or by famous witnesses.”¹³⁰⁴ Likewise, Samuel Pepys became convinced by Lord Reay’s testimony, since “these Considerations, joyn’d to that of its being so abundantly attested by Eye-witnesses of unquestionable Faith, Authority, & Capacity to judge,

¹²⁹⁸ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 174.

¹²⁹⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

¹³⁰⁰ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 78-79.

¹³⁰¹ Ferriar, *An Essay towards a Theory*, 64.

¹³⁰² Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 168.

¹³⁰³ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 335.

¹³⁰⁴ Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, unnumbered page.

will not permit me to distrust the truth of it.”¹³⁰⁵

Tourists on their way through Scotland were also interested in the topic of second sight, and sought out credible informants who they hoped could enlighten them. On their tour of Scotland, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell “endeavoured with particular attention to examine the question of the Second Sight. Of an opinion received for centuries by a whole nation, and supposed to be confirmed through its whole descent, by a series of successive facts, it is desirable that the truth should be established, or the fallacy detected.”¹³⁰⁶ Johnson’s travel account described his and Boswell’s curiosity: “Our desire for information was keen, and our inquiry frequent... we heard many tales of these airy shows, with more or less evidence and distinctness.”¹³⁰⁷ These tales led Samuel Johnson to conclude that “particular instances [of second sight] have been given, with such evidence, as neither Bacon nor Boyle has been able to resist.”¹³⁰⁸ Daniel Defoe’s tour through the British Isles also led him to assert that “The Instances of the Truth of this Second Sight, as ’tis called, are so many, and so frequent, that it can scarcely be disputed.”¹³⁰⁹

Scientists further affirmed the credibility of their arguments by advertising that they had been initially skeptical about the reality of second sight. In a letter to Robert Boyle, Lord Tarbat reported “I heard verie much but believed verie litle of the second sight, yet it’s being affirmed

¹³⁰⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹³⁰⁶ Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, 89.

¹³⁰⁷ Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, 90.

¹³⁰⁸ Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, 91.

¹³⁰⁹ Defoe, *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island*, 277.

by severals of great veracity.”¹³¹⁰ Similarly, John Fraser’s publisher noted that though he was still skeptical, he heard many “Relations that I have received from persons of known integrity, & such as I suppose are wiser than to be impos’d upon, and honeste than to impose fables instead of Truths, upon others.”¹³¹¹ In his *An Account of the Highlanders and Highlands of Scotland*, Lord Grange wrote to Viscount Towshend that he was generally convinced that the Highlanders were barbarous and superstitious. However, Grange also commented that “their second sight is famous, & so well attested by men of understanding and probity under no temptation to impose on us, that there is no good reason to doubt the truth of it.”¹³¹² Lord Reay mused, “for my owne part I Doe not Questione it Tho But a small Ground to perswade others to the beleife of it But I Dare affirm hade You the same Reasons I have You would be of my opinione... had you heard all the stories I have, attested by men of honour not to be doubted and been eye witness to some of them yourself.”¹³¹³ By citing their own initial skepticism, scientists could avoid appearing credulous. Simultaneously, they could reinforce the reliability of their sources by making these informants appear so convincing that they had eradicated doubt from the doubtful.

Scientific investigators also inquired about whether second sight was widely attested, or only the purview of a credulous few. Logic held that if second sight was widely believed by many people, it was more likely to be a genuine phenomenon. In answer to this, sources and informants reported that second sight was attested by numerous credible Scottish people. Lord

¹³¹⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 41.

¹³¹¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 191.

¹³¹² NRS, GD124/15/1263/2, fol. 1B.

¹³¹³ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163.

Reay argued that, “The people are so much perswaded of the trueth of it in the highlands and Isles That one would be More Laught at, for not beleiving it there Than affirmeing it elsewhere.”¹³¹⁴ Samuel Pepys was still skeptical about second sight, though he did acknowledge “the Credit only which I find it to have obtain’d among your Neighbours the High-landers.”¹³¹⁵ John Fraser’s publisher observed that “The Reverend Author of the ensuing Discourse... reported [second sight] to be so common in these parts; he told me, that as to the thing itself, it was most certain and undeniable.”¹³¹⁶ Samuel Johnson claimed that, at the time of his journey, “The Islanders of all degrees, whether of rank or understanding, universally admit it.”¹³¹⁷

Some scientists were also interested in the level of education or learning that their sources had obtained, especially since scientists tended to believe that credulity and ignorance went hand-in-hand. George Hickes supported his belief in second sight by claiming, “I never met with any learned man [in Scotland] either among their divines, or lawyers, who doubted of the thing.”¹³¹⁸ When they met previously, Robert Boyle had been exceedingly eager to interview Lord Tarbat on the topic of second sight, describing his guest as “a very ingenious gentlman,” and that “no man was better able than he, to gratify the curiosity I had, to receive some credible information about those, who are said in Scotland to have, what they call The Second Sight, which information invited me to beg his Lordship to let me know what I might beleive and

¹³¹⁴ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163.

¹³¹⁵ Pepus, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹³¹⁶ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 188.

¹³¹⁷ Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands*, 90.

¹³¹⁸ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 173.

especially what he had observed about a thinge.”¹³¹⁹ Lord Reay’s accounts were widely shared as a reliable, educated source who attested to belief in second sight.¹³²⁰ Samuel Pepys was convinced by the credible stories he received from educated sources, writing to Lord Reay that “I little expected to have been ever brought so near to a Conviction of the reality of [second sight], as by your Lordship’s & the Lord Tarbutt’s Authoritys.”¹³²¹ Pepys expressed a similar eagerness to hear testimony of second sight from the Earl of Clarendon, whose personal recounting would render second sight as “an instance of Fact... uncontestable.”¹³²² Lord Reay commended the first-hand accounts recorded by Lord Tarbat, calling them “the most sufficient to prove the second sight of any ever I heard.”¹³²³

This idea that “the learned” were the best judges of the reality of second sight corresponded with contemporary standards for establishing matters of fact through observed and well-attested accounts, ideally given by educated sources. Concern over witnesses’ level of education was apparent in treatises on the topic. Martin Martin asserted that in Scotland “there are several Persons among them, whose Birth and Education raise them above the suspicion of concurring with an Imposture.”¹³²⁴ In his treatise on second sight, John Fraser claimed that the topic “deserves the consideration of the learned,” and that his purpose for writing was grounded in “the perswasion of some serious Friends, [who] prevailed with to commit my self to the

¹³¹⁹ Boyle, “Robert Boyle’s notes,” 51.

¹³²⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 171.

¹³²¹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹³²² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 185.

¹³²³ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163.

¹³²⁴ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 309.

favourable Judgement of the Learned (who might sooner commend my Endeavours than censure my failings).”¹³²⁵ Yet most first-hand accounts of second sight came from uneducated sources, which was admittedly a problem for establishing matters of fact from learned, ideally noble-born witnesses. Both scientists and travelers attempted to reason their way out of this imperfect situation. Fraser’s theory of second sight also allowed that “men of little Learning and Education may be recompensed by notable presentations, not so obvious to others of greater parts.”¹³²⁶ Other investigators also attempted to persuade their readers that the learned were not the only sources of reliable information. Samuel Johnson’s reasoning was based in statistics: “The proportion in these countries of the poor to the rich is such, that if we suppose the quality [of second sight] to be accidental, it can very rarely happen to a man of education; and yet on such men it has sometimes fallen.”¹³²⁷ Theophilus Insulanus also objected to the idea that the only worthy informants were the educated, but provided a more spiritual justification for this perspective: “You’ll forgive me to believe, That neither birth, liberal education, uncommon genius, or strength or understanding, are qualifications not absolutely necessary to give credit to the Second Sight; since... the Author of our Being is not a respecter of persons, but has an equal regard to the welfare of all, from the spade to the scepter.”¹³²⁸

Second sight theorists were also quick to point out that science and logic were unable to

¹³²⁵ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 192.

¹³²⁶ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

¹³²⁷ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 91. *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* does note the existence of a man named Michell, who was both a monk and “a man studious and curious of antiquities, known in history and endued with a faculty of predicting events.” Perhaps this was one example of an educated seer. See BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 40v.

¹³²⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 129.

answer all questions about observable phenomena, and therefore the powers of the educated to explain everything must be limited. Such a position fit neatly with scientists' attempts to appear neither credulous nor overly skeptical, by appealing to the early modern idea that there were still new discoveries to be made. If scientists were to hope for discoveries of the unknown, then they should also allow for the possibility of the existence of second sight. Martin Martin specifically argued that experience and logic had thus far been unable to account for certain observable facts, and therefore "the learned" were far from the only source of truth in the world: "If every thing for which the Learned are not able to give a satisfying account be condemn'd as impossible, we may find many other things generally believed, that must be rejected as false by this Rule. For instance, Yawning, and its influence, and that the Loadstone attracts Iron; and yet these are true as well as harmless, tho we can give no satisfying account of their Causes. And if we know so little of natural Causes, how much less can we pretend to things that are supernatural?"¹³²⁹

Johnson and Boswell adopted similar arguments as Martin. When they encountered a skeptical minister who disbelieved all instances of second sight, Johnson fired back that "There are many things then, which we are sure are true, that you will not believe. What principle is there, why a loadstone attracts iron? why an egg produces a chicken by heat? why a tree grows upwards, when the natural tendency of all things is downwards?"¹³³⁰ Reflecting on the topic after their return, Boswell noted that second sight may simply operate by invisible forces, whose mechanisms were still being explained during his own era: "To entertain a visionary notion that one sees a distant or future event, may be called superstition; but the correspondence of the fact

¹³²⁹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 308-309.

¹³³⁰ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 100.

or event with such an impression on the fancy, though certainly very wonderful, if proved, has no more connection with superstition, than magnetism or electricity.”¹³³¹

Robert Kirk marshaled similar arguments in his personal conversations and treatise on second sight. During a discussion of second sight with Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester, this acquaintance claimed that “it being a voluntary art, & having no natural dependence of cause & effect, it was sinful.” To this Kirk retorted that yawning was not voluntary, yet it “affected others by imitation, & that innocently & there was no dependence of the effect from the cause naturally, & understood by us, then of the loadstones drawing steel.”¹³³² Kirk asserted that God’s laws were at work behind all of nature, including second sight, and even seemingly miraculous objects like magnets and weapons’ salve “that cures at a distance invisibly by touch.”¹³³³ He also cited the fact that there were already many phenomena that existed, yet were inscrutable to mankind such as “with what oyl the Lamp of the sun is mainteand so long & regularly; or why the moon is called a great Luminary in scripture while it only appears so.”¹³³⁴ Similarly, there were numerous new discoveries that seemed wondrous, yet were certainly valid such as “The beleef of the natural circulation of the blood [and] the discoveries of telescopes among the luminaries.”¹³³⁵ For Kirk, second sight was something that plainly existed, yet was still unexplained by prevailing scientific knowledge. He believed that explanations could be

¹³³¹ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 273.

¹³³² EUL, La.III.545, fol. 131v.

¹³³³ EUL, La.III.529, fol. 59. Kirk also discussed lodestones in his treatise on second sight. See EUL, La.III.551, fol. 89.

¹³³⁴ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 24.

¹³³⁵ EUL, La.III.545, fols. 24-24v.

found, but first it would have to gain the acceptance and recognition of the learned.

All of these concerns about credibility, witnesses, and educated belief in second sight came down to early modern standards for establishing “matters of fact.” This specific turn of phrase gained popularity during the early modern period, and was deliberately inserted into accounts of second sight to illustrate that their authors were on the cutting edge of early modern scientific investigation. Writing to Robert Boyle and including numerous accounts of second sight, Lord Tarbat concluded by asserting, “These are matters of fact, which I assure you are truly related.”¹³³⁶ Martin Martin followed one of his accounts of second sight by affirming “This is Matter of Fact, which [a minister] and a considerable Number of Parishioners, are able to vouch for, and ready to attest, if occasion requires.”¹³³⁷ In his treatise on second sight, Robert Kirk claimed that a letter from Tarbat to Boyle could be used as as evidence “that the matter of fact might be undenyably made out.”¹³³⁸ Similar phrasing appeared in John Fraser’s *Deuteroscopia*,¹³³⁹ Theophilus Insulanus’ *A Treatise on the Second Sight*,¹³⁴⁰ George Sinclair’s *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered*,¹³⁴¹ Samuel Pepys’ collection of letters on second sight,¹³⁴² and Lord Grange’s account of the Highlanders.¹³⁴³ In asserting that second sight was a “matter of

¹³³⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 53.

¹³³⁷ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 328.

¹³³⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 41.

¹³³⁹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 193.

¹³⁴⁰ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, xi.

¹³⁴¹ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, unnumbered page.

¹³⁴² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 185.

¹³⁴³ NRS, GD124/15/1253/1.

fact,” these authors were arguing that its validity had been established using proper means: namely, through obtaining the testimony of credible, educated sources who had personally observed the operations of second sight. These sources were considered eyewitnesses to the conventionally unseen, and as such could provide trustworthy information about the existence of an invisible world.

Imposters and Credulity

Despite some scientists’ reassurances that their informants were credible and discerning, expressions of concern over credulity and ignorance were frequent in early modern sources. In particular, it was hypothesized that some second sighted people were “imposters” or “pretenders” who had successfully duped their naive peers into believing in the ability. This early modern concern over imposters who preyed on the ignorant further necessitated the citation of reliable witnesses, if such a fear was to be laid to rest. Lord Reay enquired about second sight on behalf of Pepys, but was initially doubtful of its reality since “I have spoke to severall that pretended they saw them but were so ignorant that I could make nothing of them.”¹³⁴⁴ Dr. Beattie rejected the idea that sufficient evidence for second sight existed, as none but the ignorant pretended to have the ability.¹³⁴⁵ While he had read a treatise on the topic, Beattie was of the opinion that “most of the tales were trifling and ridiculous, and the whole work betrayed credulity.”¹³⁴⁶ In the

¹³⁴⁴ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 160.

¹³⁴⁵ Beattie, “Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

¹³⁴⁶ Beattie, “Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

account of his voyage through the British Isles, Pierre Chantreau complained that the local people were too credulous in their willingness to believe accounts of seers' predictions.¹³⁴⁷ As is discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the second sighted witch-finder Janet Douglas was accused of being “ane imposter and cheat,”¹³⁴⁸ and George Hickee recorded that “some suspected her for an impostrix.”¹³⁴⁹

The belief that second sighted people were generally imposters and charlatans was frequently expressed in early modern conversations about the celebrity seer Duncan Campbell. Campbell rose to fame in London social circles just after 1700, and according to his biography and following publications, he attracted the attention of quite a few high-profile writers and historical figures such as the Duke of Argyll, Queen Anne, and other members of the nobility.¹³⁵⁰ An issue of the *Daily Post* in May 1720 reported that Campbell had even met King George I: “Last Monday Mr. Campbell, the deaf and dumb gentleman (introduced by Colonel Carr) Kiss'd the King's Hand, and presented to his Majesty *The History of his Life and Adventures*, which was by his Majesty most graciously receiv'd.”¹³⁵¹ As cited by the press, Campbell was supposedly both deaf and mute, though numerous theorists questioned whether these disabilities were simply a pretense in order to lend credibility to his claim to second sight. During the height of his career

¹³⁴⁷ Pierre N. Chantreau, *Voyage Dans Les Trois Royaumes D'Angleterre, D'Ecosse Et D'Irlande, Fair En 1788 et 1789*, vol. 3 (Paris: Chez Briand, 1792), 93-95.

¹³⁴⁸ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 348.

¹³⁴⁹ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters,” 178.

¹³⁵⁰ T.F. Henderson and David Turner, “Campbell, Duncan,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4494>; Alex Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer: The Making of a Legend* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 105.

¹³⁵¹ R.M. Baine, *Daniel Defoe and the Supernatural* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1968), 144.

in London, Campbell established himself as a soothsayer, and attracted widespread interest as an educated deaf-mute individual who could converse through writing, gestures, and hand signs.¹³⁵² *The Tatler* claimed that “all his visitants come to him full of expectations, and pay his own rate for the interpretations they put upon his shrugs and nods.”¹³⁵³ During the 1720s, Campbell’s success began to dwindle and he orchestrated the publication of six books and pamphlets on his supernatural abilities, in hope of attracting more customers.¹³⁵⁴ Among these was a book by Eliza Haywood, a member of Campbell’s social circle, which contained some rather voyeuristic accounts of his relationships with his clients, including titillating intimations about the secret knowledge that was believed to pass between them.¹³⁵⁵ In actuality, this publication was intended as “a kind of infomercial... intended to plug Duncan Campbell.”¹³⁵⁶ By 1726, Campbell had turned to selling various supposedly magical and curative medicines, powders, talismans, and lodestones, a practice continued by his wife after his death in 1730.¹³⁵⁷

While Campbell does initially seem to have had a large number of clients who consulted him for a wide variety of purposes, he was continually dogged by the accusation that he was an

¹³⁵² Henderson and Turner, “Campbell, Duncan.”

¹³⁵³ D.F. Bond, ed. *The Tatler*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 121.

¹³⁵⁴ Kathryn R. King, “Spying on the Conjuror: Haywood, Curiosity, and “the novel,” *Studies in the Novel* 30, no. 2 (1998), 183.

¹³⁵⁵ Eliza Haywood, *A Spy on the Conjuror. or, a Collection of Surprising and Diverting Stories, with Merry and Ingenious Letters. By way of Memoirs of the Famous Mr. Duncan Campbell, demonstrating the astonishing Foresight of that Wonderful Deaf and Dumb Man* (London: W. Ellis, J. Brotherton, J. Batly, T. Woodward, and J. Fox, 1725).

¹³⁵⁶ Kathryn R. King, “Spying on the Conjuror: Haywood, Curiosity, and “the novel,” *Studies in the Novel* 30, no. 2 (1998), 183.

¹³⁵⁷ Henderson and Turner, “Campbell, Duncan.”

imposter. Both his fame and the widely-expressed opinion that his disabilities were faked were reported by *The Spectator*: “every one has heard of the famous conjuror who, according to the opinion of the vulgar, has studied himself dumb.”¹³⁵⁸ The allegation that Campbell was an imposter and charlatan was prevalent during his lifetime, and several of his publications plainly attempted to refute it. The introduction to *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* specifically set Campbell’s abilities against those of “cheats, gipsies, and common fortune-tellers,” as well as “conjurers or enchanters that deal in black arts.”¹³⁵⁹ In contrast, the predictions and hidden knowledge offered by Campbell were described as coming to him “naturally” and “purely by possessing the gift of the second-sight.”¹³⁶⁰ The author urged his readers to forebear consulting others or attempting to engage in divination themselves, and instead “have recourse innocently to such a man [Campbell] than use unlawful means to acquire [knowledge].”¹³⁶¹ An appendix to Campbell’s memoirs, published posthumously, was specifically aimed “by Way of Vindication of Mr. Duncan Campbell, against that groundless Aspersion, cast upon him, that he but pretended to be Deaf and Dumb.”¹³⁶²

Despite these defenses, Campbell’s legacy was one of fraud. *A New General Dictionary*, which was first published a few years after Campbell’s death, contained an entry on second sight.

¹³⁵⁸ Addison and Steele, *Spectator*, 512.

¹³⁵⁹ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, xx. From 1790 to 1968, this book (and some other publications on Campbell) were mistakenly attributed to Daniel Defoe. The author was anonymous, but it was likely William Bond. See Baine, *Daniel Defoe and the Supernatural*, 147; Henderson and Turner, “Campbell, Duncan.”

¹³⁶⁰ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, xx-xxi.

¹³⁶¹ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, xxi.

¹³⁶² Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 227.

The *Dictionary* specifically defined it as a fraudulent ability, and described it as “a pretended inspiration... a privilege that many inhabitants of the western islands... are said to be endowed with.”¹³⁶³ In following editions, the definition was edited to include mention of Campbell: “Mr Campbell, the famous imposter of that nation lately resident in London, hath destroyed the whole credit of that pretension.”¹³⁶⁴ Campbell’s legacy as an imposter seems to have cast doubt on the entire faculty of second sight in the realm of public opinion. Because Campbell was one of the only second sighted individuals who was widely known, any perceived deficiencies in his character or doubts about his abilities may have reflected on second sight as a whole.¹³⁶⁵ When annotating a copy of Martin Martin’s *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, Lord Molesworth’s marginal comments expressed his strong opinion of Campbell and all second sighted people: “I wonder these imposters, with Duncan Campbell at the head of them, are not shipped, publickly, out of all communityes, or more severely punished.”¹³⁶⁶

The question of whether the second sighted were pretenders or imposters was tied to inquiries about whether any of them profited or gained from having the ability. Campbell had openly advertised his second sight, and made a living off of cultivating fame and providing answers to questions from paying clients. Campbell’s widespread notoriety and clear attempt to profit off of his abilities doubtless contributed to the belief that he was a pretender. Accounts of second sight also sometimes claimed that seers offered to convey the ability or teach others how

¹³⁶³ Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer*, 105.

¹³⁶⁴ Henderson and Turner, “Campbell, Duncan.”; Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer*, 106.

¹³⁶⁵ Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer*, 105.

¹³⁶⁶ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 300.

to have it in order to earn money or enhance their reputations. Such practices were naturally viewed with suspicion. One account by Dr. Beattie asserted that “a gentleman of character assured me, that one of them offered to sell him this unaccountable talent for half a crown.”¹³⁶⁷ Similarly, in a letter to John Aubrey, James Garden claimed “I have heard that those who have that faculty of the 2nd sight, have offered to teach it to such as were curious to know it: upon such and such conditions they would teach them: but their proffers were rejected.”¹³⁶⁸ A divinity student wrote to James Garden that his father had been told by a second sighted man “that indeed he could in 3 dayes time teach him if he pleased,”¹³⁶⁹ and Samuel Pepys wrote that seers were always “ready to communicate it to any other that will adventure on’t.”¹³⁷⁰

Those who were convinced of the reality of second sight were prepared to defend the phenomenon, often in a manner that acknowledged the prevalence of such imputations against the second sighted. Martin Martin claimed that Scottish seers were “altogether void of design, nor could I ever learn that any of them made the least gain by it, neither is it reputable among ‘em to have that Faculty.”¹³⁷¹ Martin also denied that second sight “was communicable any way whatsoever.”¹³⁷² Similarly, Samuel Johnson asserted that no one would ever pretend to have second sight, since “no profit was ever sought our gained... Those who profess to feel it, do not boast of it as a privilege, nor are considered by others as advantageously distinguished. They

¹³⁶⁷ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

¹³⁶⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129v.

¹³⁶⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

¹³⁷⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹³⁷¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 309.

¹³⁷² Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 301.

have no temptation to feign; and their hearers have no motive to encourage the imposture.”¹³⁷³

The author of *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded* claimed that the second sighted “never make Money of it; which should in some Measure free them from the Imputation of designing to carry on a Cheat, or propagate a Falsehood.”¹³⁷⁴ Robert Kirk also believed that “they for most part neither seek to the art, nor expect any advantage or pleasure by it, either in way of enriching themselves, or revengment on others.”¹³⁷⁵ Despite the fact that he was primarily remembered as a seeker of profit, Duncan Campbell also denied that second sight could be learned or acquired even “by the most strenuous Application,”¹³⁷⁶ thereby asserting that he had never offered to communicate the ability to others. Furthermore, a chapter of his memoirs was dedicated to “Some convincing Proofs that I always preferred the Interest of my Consulters to my Own,”¹³⁷⁷ a clear attempt to distance himself from the accusation that he had taken advantage of gullible clients for personal gain.

Second sight theorists also denied that they and their fellow believers were overly credulous. These denials were often paired with acknowledgments that credulity and superstition were rampant, yet such accusations were misplaced when it came to second sight. Martin Martin responded to the potential objection that “The Seers are Impostors, and the People who believe them are credulous, and easily imposed upon,” by arguing that “the People of the Isles are not so

¹³⁷³ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 91.

¹³⁷⁴ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 16.

¹³⁷⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 89-90.

¹³⁷⁶ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 130.

¹³⁷⁷ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 20.

credulous as to believe implicitly, before the thing foretold is accomplished.”¹³⁷⁸ John Cockburn began his defense by claiming that only the “vulgar” were followers of astrologers and fortune-tellers, yet he also declared that Scottish second sight was “certain by undoubted testimonies from both credible histories and living witnesses.”¹³⁷⁹ Similarly, the author of the pamphlet *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded* acknowledged that many people mocked belief in second sight as “taking its Rise from the Superstition and Credulity of the Vulgar, who have always been Dupes to all Pretenders to Divination.”¹³⁸⁰ While he admitted that some stories of second sight were unfounded, “there are some related with such strong Circumstances, and attested by People of undoubted Veracity, that I am strongly inclined to believe that some of them are true.”¹³⁸¹ In response to possible objections, the author asserted “I confine my Belief to Matters well attested... I hope you’ll not rank me amongst Visionaries, or believe me weakly credulous.”¹³⁸²

This concern over appearing “credulous,” and the social consequences of a reputation for credulity, were well-founded. Some scientists and travelers who became convinced of the reality of second sight faced criticism and derision from their peers. In his account of his travels through Scotland, Samuel Johnson had declared “I never could advance my curiosity to conviction; but came away at last only willing to believe.”¹³⁸³ The publication of this account in 1775 led to Johnson’s subsequent reputation as a credulous individual, and some of his peers at the literary

¹³⁷⁸ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 309.

¹³⁷⁹ Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected*, 62.

¹³⁸⁰ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 15.

¹³⁸¹ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 15.

¹³⁸² *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 9.

¹³⁸³ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 91.

club openly ridiculed his belief.¹³⁸⁴ Johnson's travel companion James Boswell fared slightly better, perhaps owing to his more skeptical perspective of their shared tour: "I returned from the Hebrides with a considerable degree of faith in the many stories of that kind which I heard with a too easy acquiescence, without any close examination of the evidence: but, since that time, my belief in those stories has been much weakened, by reflecting on the careless inaccuracy of narrative in common matters."¹³⁸⁵ Boswell's willingness to advertise his desire for better evidence of second sight likely shielded him from the intense ridicule to which Johnson was subjected.

Martin Martin faced a similar fate as Samuel Johnson following the publication of his *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*. John MacCulloch's *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* referred to Martin as an "incredulous philosopher" who believed in a number of ridiculous things, among them second sight.¹³⁸⁶ A copy of Martin's book, shared and annotated by John Toland and Lord Molesworth, resides in the British Library and the notes and marginalia reveal some readers' hostile reactions to Martin's convictions. In a passage that argued against the credulity of the Scottish, Lord Molesworth scribbled, "credulous, ignoramuses who are drawn in by the multitude and help to deceive themselves, not daring to be singular in disbelieving a thing so taken for granted... Designing and weak people love to tell strange lyes,

¹³⁸⁴ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 461.

¹³⁸⁵ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 272. Thomas Jemielity has claimed that Boswell's writings demonstrate a clear pattern of attempting to distance himself from accusations of gullibility on the subject of second sight. See Thomas Jemielity, "A keener eye on vacancy": Boswell's Second thoughts about second sight," *Prose Studies* 11, no. 1 (1988): 24-40.

¹³⁸⁶ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 3, 25.

& at last believe them themselves.”¹³⁸⁷ Molesworth also doubted the credibility of Martin Martin’s sources, claiming that his informants of “great integrity” were “all impostures.”¹³⁸⁸ Likewise, one margin contained John Toland’s commentary that “there are many pretenders to the second sight.”¹³⁸⁹ Toland’s notes referred to Lord Tarbat as “an insidious man of a very bounded genius,”¹³⁹⁰ James Garden as “altogether as credulous as Dr. Martin,” and John Beaumont as “the greatest visionary of the three.”¹³⁹¹ Martin Martin himself was scorned by Molesworth as a “poor” and “ignorant” man, who “one day exposed him so much to the ridicule of very good company (whither he was brought to dine) upon the account of the second sight which he pretended to maintain, that he never afterwards durst appear again in that company: the Royal Society were much to blame to admit such a person among them as a Philosopher, who was the farthest from that Character that could possibly be.”¹³⁹² Martin Martin was seemingly aware of the harsh gossip about his book. In 1703, the same year that the first edition of his book was published, Martin wrote a letter to Edward Lhuyd that defensively claimed, “there are several who approve of the Book that do not give credit to the instances related of the second sight, tho at the same time they can bring no reasonable objection against it.”¹³⁹³

Though the members of some academic organizations seemed to openly ridicule belief in

¹³⁸⁷ BL, C.45.c.1, pgs. 309-310.

¹³⁸⁸ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 335.

¹³⁸⁹ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 302.

¹³⁹⁰ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 326.

¹³⁹¹ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 300.

¹³⁹² BL, C.45.c.1, pgs. 303-304.

¹³⁹³ BOD, MS Ashmole 1816, fol. 338.

second sight, the ability was still witnessing rising popularity in educated circles. Aside from the interest exhibited by members of the Royal Society, discussions of second sight were also occurring among members of the Oxford Philosophical Society. A brief note in a manuscript of the minutes of the Philosophical Society from 1686 notes that a Mr. Walker gave a presentation on a paper entitled “Of Second Sighted men in Scotland.”¹³⁹⁴ The reception of this paper is not described, though one can only hope that Mr. Walker fared better than Martin or Johnson. This note illustrates that while concerns over credulity and imposture were prevalent in scientific sources on second sight, curiosity about the phenomenon was also widespread, as evidenced by the numerous inquiries, presentations, and treatises that engaged with the topic.

The “Troublesome” Gift

One method of convincing skeptics that second sight was genuine, and not the result of imposture, was to argue that it was actually a somewhat oppressive ability to possess and therefore no one would willingly acquire or have it. In this way, second sight was frequently framed as something “troublesome” and undesirable, and consequentially the second sighted were noble individuals who were burdened with it. Robert Kirk claimed that “even persons having this second sight... find such horror and trouble by the intercourse, that they would often full gladly be as free from them, as other men.”¹³⁹⁵ Lord Tarbat wrote to Robert Boyle that “It is a trouble to most of them, who are subject to it, and they would be rid of it at any rate, if

¹³⁹⁴ BOD, MS Ashmole 1811, fol. 25.

¹³⁹⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 93.

they could.”¹³⁹⁶ One of James Garden’s letters to John Aubrey claimed “It is comonly talked by all I spoke with that it is troublsome: and they would gladly be freed from it; but cannot.”¹³⁹⁷ This opinion was repeated in a letter from a divinity student to James Garden, that read, “it seems its a thing troublesom & uneasie to them that have, & such as they would fain be rid off.”¹³⁹⁸ Similar beliefs appeared to be widespread, and were recorded in *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*,¹³⁹⁹ Defoe’s *A tour thro’ the whole Island of Great Britain*,¹⁴⁰⁰ and a popular pamphlet on second sight.¹⁴⁰¹

Often, the belief that second sight was a troublesome faculty was justified by descriptions of visionary experiences as distressing, painful, or relentless. Dr. Beattie argued that second sight was generally viewed as unfortunate, since those with the gift were prone to seeing many dreadful and intrusive visions at any time.¹⁴⁰² The second sighted Duncan Campbell claimed that his ability was not desirable, since “it has frequently presented me with Objects so very astonishing and terrible, as have made me wish, within myself, it would depart from me for ever.”¹⁴⁰³ John Dalryell asserted, “it was considered no enviable property... it was accompanied by a troublesome and painful sensation. It subjected those gifted, to some kind of invisible

¹³⁹⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 42.

¹³⁹⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 129.

¹³⁹⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

¹³⁹⁹ BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 9.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Defoe, *A tour thro’ the whole island*, 277.

¹⁴⁰¹ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 16.

¹⁴⁰² Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

¹⁴⁰³ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 131.

violence: they shrieked, trembled, and perspired under its impressions... therefore many would have renounced it willingly, glad to be relieved of a prerogative so distressing.”¹⁴⁰⁴ James Garden quoted a letter from a minister near Inverness to a friend, stating “if the object [of the vision] be a thing that is terrible, they ar seen to sweat & tremble, & shreek at the apparition.”¹⁴⁰⁵ Robert Kirk also argued that second sight could be disturbing for its possessor, and “glad he would be quit of such, for the hideous spectacles seen among them.”¹⁴⁰⁶ A divinity student who wrote to James Garden claimed that a second sighted man cautioned his father against attempting to obtain the ability, since he would never again be free of seeing numerous specters around him always.¹⁴⁰⁷ Similarly, Lord Reay told Pepys that a seer had warned him that once the second sight had been conferred, it could not be taken away again even if he so desired.¹⁴⁰⁸

Added to this were numerous accounts of methods for “curing” second sight, since some viewed it as an affliction rather than a gift. Some sources claimed that various Christian rites or prayers could effectively exorcise the ability from its unhappy host.¹⁴⁰⁹ In another story of a seer, the afflicted man took the advice of a neighbor and cast a live coal into the face of a specter that troubled him, in hopes of dispersing it.¹⁴¹⁰ Martin Martin also gave an account of a man who

¹⁴⁰⁴ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 471.

¹⁴⁰⁵ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

¹⁴⁰⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 14.

¹⁴⁰⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 164.

¹⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for more on methods of curing second sight that involved Christian rites, prayers, or ritual objects.

¹⁴¹⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 317.

claimed he wore a plant called “*Fuga Daemonum* sew’d in the Neck of his Coat, to prevent his seeing of Visions, and says he never saw any since he first carried that Plant about him. He suffer’d me to feel the Plant in the Neck of his Coat, but would by no means let me open the Seam, tho I offer’d him a Reward to let me do it.”¹⁴¹¹ The implication of this story was that experiencing second sight was oppressive, and this particular seer had taken steps to rid himself of the ability. Furthermore, the seer’s remedy could be interpreted as functioning by natural or medicinal means, as opposed to spiritual (as in the cases of exorcised seers). This seer also wouldn’t let Martin open the seam of his coat, even in exchange for money, for fear that the herb would lose its efficacy and he be returned to his prior unfortunate state. Behind these various arguments lay the assumption that second sight was not a thing to be sought or desired, since it was recognized as both troublesome and painful. Therefore, those who claimed they had it were likely truthful and perhaps even burdened by their weighty ability.

III: How did the Second Sighted “See”?

The question of the how the second-sighted experienced their visions was at the forefront of many inquiries into second sight, and an examination of this primary question reveals the profound intersections between early modern religious and scientific concerns. Emerging theories of sight, optics, imagination, and perception were all invoked in discussions of second sight, and this was a broad field of inquiry that was experiencing rising popularity. Stuart Clark

¹⁴¹¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 334. In this section of Martin’s book, Molesworth annotated a simple “Here’s popery again” in the margin. See BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 334.

has argued that early modern judgements about visual phenomena became “vastly more complex and contentious than ever before.”¹⁴¹² In this period, discussions of visions, apparitions, and specters now also engaged with questions of optical tricks, demonic influences, hallucinations, sensory knowledge, and the notion of the imagination.¹⁴¹³ During the years associated with the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, it became increasingly common for scientists and theorists to argue that a vision took place in the seer’s “imagination,” that is, perceived as “images” in his or her mind.¹⁴¹⁴ However, such theories still involved distinctly religious concerns, as they did not discount the idea that visions and apparitions could be caused by good or evil spirits influencing the human senses or mind. Therefore, early modern descriptions of visions as “imaginary” should not be interpreted as claims that these visions were not “real.” For these reasons, the move towards discussions of the imaginary did not amount to a secularization of visionary experiences, as imaginary visions were often believed to involve interactions between people and spirits.

Naturally, scientists and theorists were interested in the actual means by which the second sighted “saw” their visions, and whether this sight was similar to sensory sight or more comparable to mental visualization. Samuel Pepys wrote to George Hickes about his interest in “whether this second-seeing be indeed the Act of a Wakeing Agent, and as from without, and at

¹⁴¹² Stuart Clark, “The Reformation of the Eyes: Apparitions and Optics in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe,” *The Journal of Religious History* 27, no. 2 (2003), 143.

¹⁴¹³ Clark, “The Reformation of the Eyes,” 143-160. See also Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*.

¹⁴¹⁴ Clark, “The Reformation of the Eyes,” 143-160; Sven Dupre, “Images in the Air: Optical Games, Magic and Imagination,” in *Spirits Unseen: The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern European Culture*, eds. Christine Göttler and Wolfgang Neuber (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 71-92.

what distance, or of a Dreaming Visionaire, as from within.” For Pepys, these questions could only be answered through a “variety of Facts well reported, well attested, and well compared.”¹⁴¹⁵ On this topic, Pepys was particularly grateful for Hickes’ detailed account of Janet Douglas, which he had sent to Pepys. When Hickes interviewed Janet in prison, he made specific inquiry into the question of whether Janet’s second sight “came upon her sleeping or waking,” as well as whether it “was by outward representation; which I call apparition, or by inward representation on the theater of the imagination caused by some spirit... whether these second-sight-folks were seers or visionists. or sometimes one and sometimes the other.”¹⁴¹⁶

Scientists’ own observations and theories about the mechanisms of second sight largely leaned in one of two directions, either locating second sight primarily in the eyes of the seers, or alternately in the mind (also referred to as the “imagination” or “fancy”). Some theorists posited that both sites of the body were involved, and therefore communicated jointly in order to present the vision to the perception of the second sighted. Often, all these theories were supported by testimony from second sighted people, like Janet Douglas, who provided descriptions of their lived experiences. When discussing these various theories, most theorists were still primarily interested in the mechanism of second sight as a means understanding how humans could perceive the world of spirits or predict future events.

As it was referred to as “second sight,” it should be unsurprising that scientists and theorists recorded descriptions that emphasized the role of seers’ eyes in their visionary experiences. Several theorists discussed the belief that the visionary ability was either located in

¹⁴¹⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 178.

¹⁴¹⁶ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 176-177.

or perceived by the physical organ of the eyes. A second sighted woman mentioned in John Fraser's *Deuteroscopia* was consulted by others for her ability to "give Responses" to questions, and Fraser attested that very often the responses she gave were true "even in future contingent events."¹⁴¹⁷ This seer would recite a charm that she learned from her father, and a few hours after a question had been asked of her, she claimed that the answer would appear "in live Images before her eyes, or upon the Wall."¹⁴¹⁸ Similarly, James Garden recorded the account of a minister near Inverness who attested that "They see all this visibly acted before their eyes, sometimes within & sometimes without doors, as in a glass."¹⁴¹⁹ George Hickes also cited Janet's testimony that her visions appeared "at the same distance they were really from her,"¹⁴²⁰ while John Fraser's description of Janet's abilities emphasized "that the answers of the questions proponed to her were represented by a Vision in lively Images, representing the persons concerned and acting the thing, before her Eyes."¹⁴²¹ A friend of George Sinclair also claimed that Janet's knowledge was attained "only by vision, and knew all things as well this way, as if she had been personally present with them."¹⁴²² These details were corroborated by the second sighted Duncan Campbell, who asserted that his ability was mediated through his "bodily Eyes."¹⁴²³ These various accounts from seers were likely the basis of Fraser's claim that the

¹⁴¹⁷ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

¹⁴¹⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

¹⁴¹⁹ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

¹⁴²⁰ Pepys, "Samuel Pepys' collection of Letters," 176-177.

¹⁴²¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196-197.

¹⁴²² Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World*, 204.

¹⁴²³ Campbell, *Secret Memoirs*, 130.

second sighted's visions were perceived as "representations... made to the eyes."¹⁴²⁴ Robert Kirk reasoned that if fairies were able to physically blind people and also deprive them of their ability to see spirits, then logically "both these sights where once they come, being in the sam organ and inseperable."¹⁴²⁵ For most, the fact that seers claimed that they saw visions with their physical eyes was compatible with the theory that their experiences were attributable to the operations of spirits.

Robert Kirk plainly believed that the second sighted were able to perceive spirits that were invisible to others. However, Kirk's theory that second sight was located in the eyes also borrowed heavily from early modern discourses about optics in order to scientifically frame the ability as a form of "exalted sight."¹⁴²⁶ Kirk found ready examples to support this argument, both from nature and the recent invention of magnifying lenses. For Kirk, the empirically verifiable existence of forms of advanced sight proved that second sight did exist, and that the second sighted were perceiving an otherwise unseen reality. He noted that cats had a "species of vision" that was distinct from humans,¹⁴²⁷ as did other animals: "the sight of Bats & owles transcend that of Shrews and Moles, so the visive faculties of Men are clearer then those of Owles, as Eagles, Lynxes, and Cats, are brighter then Mens: And againe that Men of the second sight... surpass the ordinary vision of other men... acquired as an artificiall improvement of their naturall sight."¹⁴²⁸ He also compared second sight to gazing through a beam of light, which "when it shynes clear

¹⁴²⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 193.

¹⁴²⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 10.

¹⁴²⁶ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 5.

¹⁴²⁷ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 104v.

¹⁴²⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 29-30.

only, lets common eyes see the atomes in the air, that without these rayes, they could not discern.” By this metaphor, Kirk claimed that the second sighted have “such a Beam continually about them, as that of the Sun.”¹⁴²⁹ Kirk also made relevant comparisons between second sight and magnifying lenses (“Optic Glasses... Telescopes, and Microscopes”), both of which he identified as newly discovered means of apprehending things “that for their smalness, or subtilty, and secrecy, are invisible to others, tho daylie conversant with them.”¹⁴³⁰ In these ways, Kirk was particularly deft at orienting second sight within the field of scientific discovery, framing it as a form of superior sight that while new and emerging, was not totally unknown. Kirk’s argument was supported by these references to other forms of superior sight that were verifiable means of perceiving that which was generally invisible.

A divergent group of theorists rejected the theory that second sight visions were experienced by seers’ physical eyes, and actually argued that such perception would be impossible. This position had some logical merits, as some claimed that physical eyes could not perceive inherently non-physical entities, such as spirits. These theorists also relied on testimony from second sighted witnesses, and frequently supported their assertion with evidence from seers who were blind yet had second sight. Theophilus Insulanus was of the opinion that “the Second Sight is not seen by the organ of the eye; as an immaterial phantom cannot be the object of sight.”¹⁴³¹ Insulanus followed this claim with accounts of some seers who became blind, yet continued to experience second sight. Lord Reay also affirmed that he knew of a blind woman

¹⁴²⁹ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 30.

¹⁴³⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 29-30.

¹⁴³¹ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 35-36.

who had second sight, and though she was not born blind, her ability to see visions remained the same before and after she was blinded.¹⁴³² A popular pamphlet on a blind seer in Kintyre described his visionary experiences of foresight and perception of spirits, despite the fact that he “hath been blind Six Years.”¹⁴³³ John Fraser also cited testimony from a man of his acquaintance who “though his sight was much decayed, the Seat of his Judgement was nothing touch’d.” Fraser concluded that this man’s visions were “only the trouble of his fancy,” a theory which the seer confirmed: “it is the work of the Fancy, for since I cannot see yourself (for only by your Voice I know you) how could I see them?”¹⁴³⁴

If second sight was not to be located in the eyes, the alternative was to claim that the ability to perceive visions was largely concentrated in the mind. Early modern theorists developed the concept of the imagination that perceived “images” in the mind, as opposed to seeing them externally, and the theory that apparitions were “imaginary” found application in discussions of second sight. While some theorists specifically used the term “imagination,” others (such as in the account of Fraser’s blind visionary) preferred the more colloquial term “fancy” to refer to perception that was not sight-based. George Hickes postulated that Scottish seers had their visions “by representation... as all apparitions are, or within upon the stage of the imagination, as all sorts of visions are made.”¹⁴³⁵ Samuel Pepys also weighed in that “[the visions] must be the Creatures of the Mind only (however directed to them) & not of the

¹⁴³² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163.

¹⁴³³ *An Account of Some Strange Apparitions Had by a Godly Man in Kintyre*.

¹⁴³⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 198.

¹⁴³⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 172.

Eye.”¹⁴³⁶ Likewise, Fraser described the account of a seer deluded by visions that were “presented to her fancy by the Devil.”¹⁴³⁷ Some theorists ended up concluding that second sight involved a relationship between the eyes and the mind, and that visions consisted of an interplay between the two. Samuel Johnson claimed that second sight was caused by “an impression made either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind.”¹⁴³⁸ Similarly, John Fraser was interested in “what influence an External Agent... may have upon the Organ of the Eye, and the fancy.”¹⁴³⁹ These various theories located visions primarily in the minds of the second sighted. However, the argument that second sight involved inward perception did not discount the belief that these visions could be attributed to objectively real agents.

The question of whether second sight occurred in the eyes, mind, or both naturally involved early modern questions about the causes of visionary experiences. While modern people often use the term “imaginary” to refer to something that is not real, early modern people did not necessarily apply the term this way. Rather, as in Fraser’s example of a seer deceived by the Devil, for something to be “imaginary” simply meant that it occurred in the theater of the mind as opposed to being perceived outwardly, by the eyes. Fraser still argued that this particular vision was caused by an objectively real agent: the Devil. Theorists such as Fraser and Insulanus believed that second sight was due to the operations of both good and evil spirits who acted upon the human mind, sometimes delivering visions that were true, and at other times deceptive.¹⁴⁴⁰

¹⁴³⁶ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹⁴³⁷ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 196.

¹⁴³⁸ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 89.

¹⁴³⁹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 197.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 195-197, 202; Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 35.

Therefore, “imaginary” visions of spirits were not automatically unreal; instead, belief in the imaginary was simply the emerging idea that perception of these spirits took place inwardly.

While conversations about whether visions occurred in the mind or eye were important, they were only relevant to early modern scientists insofar as they helped them understand how visions functioned to provide evidence of spirits or accurately predict future events. Fraser argued that the key question in the study of second sight was “what Connection may be found betwixt the Representations made to the Eye or Fancy, and the future contingent Events, that experience teaches do follow thereupon.”¹⁴⁴¹ Arguments of second sight may have invoked innovative and lofty theories from emerging fields of scientific inquiry, but the primary goal of these conversations was to determine how spirits were able to interact with and influence the human organs of perception. In this way, theorists such as Fraser and Insulanus referenced contemporary theories about optics and the imagination in order to affirm their rational belief in a spiritual world that was verifiable through the study of second sight. While the move towards discussing visions as “imaginary” may seem inherently secularizing to a modern person, early modern scientists and second sight theorists would not have intended for their assertions that visions happened in the imagination to be interpreted as disbelief in spirits.

IV: Who Saw Spirits?

As scientific inquiries into second sight were founded on the testimony of second sighted individuals, many theorists attempted to understand what qualities made a person most likely to

¹⁴⁴¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 197.

be second sighted. Second sighted people were considered to be exceptionally sensitive to the operations of the spiritual world, and therefore were by definition different from normal people. The letters and questionnaires sent out by early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers were particularly interested in whether second sight was attached to any objective qualities of individuals, such as their birth order, age, gender, or even species. These questions also appeared in accounts of travelers who voyaged to Scotland in hope of discovering more about the mysterious abilities that seemed to exist only in that remote region. Questions about the characteristics of the second sighted were also related to theories of how second sight was acquired, and especially whether it was a hereditary condition. In attempting to identify these measurable qualities of second sighted people, early modern theorists were formulating theories about whether second sight had objectively natural causes or origins. However, most explanations for why some individuals had more frequent contact with the spiritual realm were based on the assumption that supernatural abilities and invisible beings did exist. Therefore, early modern scientists and theorists frequently used second sight confirm their belief that evidence of spirits could be perceived by humans. This intersection between natural, scientific theories of second sight and the spiritual goals of scientists illustrates that religious concerns were considered inextricable from scientific pursuits.

Seventh Sons

The belief that seventh sons (particularly the seventh son of a seventh son) possessed supernatural abilities such as second sight was frequently entertained by early modern scientists

and theorists. If theorists could definitively establish that seventh sons had supernatural abilities, it would be proof that second sight had an entirely natural origin. Robert Kirk, who was himself a seventh son, expressed the detailed theory that seventh sons acquired their talents through “the reliques of miraculous operations or some secret virtue in the womb of the parent, which encreaseth untill 7 Sons be born, & decreaseth, by the sam degrees afterward.”¹⁴⁴² John Dalzell cited the belief that “the seventh child of the same sex born in succession, without the intervention of male or female, respectively enjoyed that celebrated prerogative— the second sight... no virtue was admitted in the person: it was inherent in the number.”¹⁴⁴³ This belief in the power of seventh sons also appeared in a letter to James Boswell from William Kenrick, in which Kenrick discussed a Coriscan general named Pascal Paoli who had the “gift, talent, or whatever you please to call it” of second sight. Kenrick described Paoli as a “prophet” who was capable of foreseeing the future, but added “whether he is the son of a seventh son, we are not informed.”¹⁴⁴⁴ The comedic writer George Colman mentioned this belief about seventh sons in a humorous piece about the Cock-Lane ghost: “Glasgow: The seventh son of a seventh son is just set out on a walk to London, in order to visit the Spirit in Cock-Lane; and as this gentleman is

¹⁴⁴² EUL, Laing.III.551, fol. 31; see also fols. 72 and 89. Kirk’s belief that seventh sons had “miraculous” powers that were endowed by God and supported by scripture can be found in his “Ane account of some occasional meditationes, resolutiones, and practices etc. 1681-1683,” EUL, La.III.529, fols. 59, 61, 65, 99-100, as well as his commonplace book from 1689, EUL, La.III.545, fols. 9, 25. Interestingly, Robert Boyle was also a seventh son and it is possible that his interest in second sight and supernatural abilities was related to this biographical detail. See Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 173-174.

¹⁴⁴³ Dalzell, *Darker Superstitions*, 395-396.

¹⁴⁴⁴ William Kenrick, *An epistle to James Boswell, Esq. occasioned by his having transmitted the moral writings of Dr. Samuel Johnson, to Pascal Paoli... With a postscript, containing thoughts on liberty; ... By W.K. Esq.* (London: Fletcher and Anderson, 1768), 53-54.

blest with the faculty of second sight, it is thought that he will be able to see her.”¹⁴⁴⁵

Early modern writers also commented on the more widespread belief that seventh sons had other special powers, such as the ability to heal diseases.¹⁴⁴⁶ Dalyell observed that “the seventh son of a family, born without the intervention of daughters, enjoyed the power of curing scrofula.”¹⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, a seventh son who lived in Haddington had a reputation as a healer, and was consulted specifically for this purpose.¹⁴⁴⁸ In England, a healer named John Wrightson had trade cards made for distribution, and they began with the words, “J. Wrightson, Cow doctor, a seventh son, Stokesley.”¹⁴⁴⁹ Robert Kirk’s notebook also contained musings on the ability of seventh sons to cure the “king’s evil” by touch.¹⁴⁵⁰ Edward Poeton’s treatise *The Winnowing of White Witchcraft* discussed a famous seventh son, known as “the boy of Godlyman.” This boy had a reputation as a prophet and healer, and could supposedly heal people of ailments by

¹⁴⁴⁵ George Colman, *Prose on several occasions: accompanied with some pieces in verse*, vol. 2 (London: T. Cadel, 1787), 2.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Joyce Miller, “Devices and Directions: Folk Healing Aspects of Witchcraft Practice in Seventeenth Century Scotland,” in *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 95. See also Owen Davies, *Cunning Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003), 70, 74, 115. Davies noted that this ability also extended to seventh daughters. On this point, Robert Kirk would have disagreed. See EUL, La.III.545, fol. 25.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 395.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Robertson, *Goodnight My Servants All*, 158.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Davies, *Cunning Folk*, 115. Keith Thomas also cited an advertisement by a “gentlewoman, the daughter of a seventh daughter” in BL, Harley 5946, fol. 6. See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 240 n.2.

¹⁴⁵⁰ EUL, La.III.529, fols. 59, 65, 99-100.

stroking the afflicted place.¹⁴⁵¹ Francis Grose's *A Provincial Glossary* also included the story of a seventh son of a seventh son, who was "born a physician" and had intuitive knowledge of how to cure diseases, sometimes only by touch.¹⁴⁵²

While the vast majority of second sight accounts do not mention that the second sighted had to be seventh sons, the appearance of a seventh son in connection to supernatural abilities was often regarded as noteworthy. Arguments about a connection between second sight and birth order were one of many attempts at identifying a supposedly natural or scientific cause for this ability. However, the theory of birth order was founded on the belief that some individuals did indeed possess talents for healing or second sight, illustrating the intersection of scientists' theories about the nature of innate human qualities with their belief in the supernatural.

Heredity

Another natural explanation for second sight was the theory that seers inherited the gift from their parents. As with birth order, the theory of heredity would allow for second sight to be construed as a natural ability that had observable origins. In particular, this theory lent itself to the argument that second sight was a morally neutral ability, and therefore seers were not

¹⁴⁵¹ BL, Sloane 1954, fols. 53-56. Other popular healers also used this method of treatment. Anne Jeffries was supposedly able to heal various diseases and injuries "only with the touch of her hand." See BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2443, fol. 102, and BOD, MS Clarendon 29, 2478, fol. 165. Valentine Greatrakes, known as "the Irish Stroker," also gained a certain degree of fame in early modern Europe for his ability to cure diseases by touch. Greatrakes arrived in London in 1666 and proceeded to perform healings in front of crowds. Greatrakes' talents attracted the attention of Robert Boyle and the Royal Society. See BL, Add.MS.4293, fols. 50-53; Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science*, 49-53; Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England*, 74-97.

¹⁴⁵² Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 55.

responsible for having it. Robert Kirk ascribed to this theory of inheritance, and his treatise argued that “some have this second sight transmitted from Father to Son, thorow the whole family, without their own consent, or others teaching.”¹⁴⁵³ The second sighted Duncan Campbell claimed that his ability was inherited from his mother, a woman from Lapland who had the gift of foresight.¹⁴⁵⁴ The pamphlet *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs* also affirmed that “The Second Sight descends from Father to Son for some Generations.”¹⁴⁵⁵ A divinity student wrote to James Garden on the topic, assuring him that several families in the Isle of Skye “had it by succession, descending from parents to children, and as yet ther be manie there who have it that way.”¹⁴⁵⁶ Belief in this means of acquiring second sight was repeated by John Beaumont in more than one publication.¹⁴⁵⁷ The argument that the hereditary acquisition of second sight freed the holder from imputations of impiety appeared in a story related by James Garden, about a young man in the parish of Wardlaw who was suspected of witchcraft. This seer defended himself by claiming that second sight ran in his family: “he knew not what manner of way he gott it, being young when his father died, who was thought to have that faculty.”¹⁴⁵⁸

¹⁴⁵³ EUL, Laing.III.551, fols. 30-31.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 6, 14, 35, 38. It is possible that Campbell’s claim to having a mother from Lapland was fabricated in order to take advantage of the belief that genuine second sight was more prevalent in this remote and exotic part of northern Europe. See Linda Andersson Burnett, “Abode of Satan: the appeal of the magical and superstitious North in eighteenth-century Britain,” *Northern Studies* 41 (2010), 72; Henderson and Turner, “Campbell, Duncan.”

¹⁴⁵⁵ BOD, MS Carte 269, fol. 9.

¹⁴⁵⁶ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 133.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Beaumont, *A historical, physiological and theological treatise*, 86; Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 193.

¹⁴⁵⁸ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fol. 132.

Though it was often intended to, the assertion that second sight was hereditary did not actually lay to rest questions of whether the second sighted were guiltless. In a conversation between Edward Stillingfleet and Robert Kirk, both parties' arguments drew on scientific and religious theories of inheritance. When discussing second sight with Stillingfleet in London, Kirk asserted that "some had it innocently of their predecessors," to which Stillingfleet replied that "original sin cam from ancestors, yet not innocently, & so sins of ignorance."¹⁴⁵⁹ This counterargument clearly concerned Kirk, since he felt the need to respond to it in his treatise on second sight. Kirk posed the bishop's objection and offered the response, "Albeit Original Sin, and it's fatal consequents be not innocently derivd to us from our progenitors,... yet this doth not make hereditary diseases, and all other things of our immediat parents, sinfully to affect us."¹⁴⁶⁰ In saying this, Kirk was addressing what he perceived to be an educated objection to the supposition that second sight was both hereditary and guiltless. Kirk's answer was well-reasoned, and illustrated his dual role as minister and scientific theorist. His response provided a medical solution to a supposedly religious problem, by arguing that second sight was more comparable to a hereditary disease than it was original sin. As with other arguments that attributed second sight to natural causes, scientific theories of second sight were still embedded in religious concerns about the nature and origins of supernatural abilities.

Despite the number of sources claiming that second sight was inherited from parent to child, there was no consensus on this issue. The variety of responses received to questions about second sight and heredity illustrate the fact that second sight belief was far from uniform. Among

¹⁴⁵⁹ EUL, La.III.545, 131v.

¹⁴⁶⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 90-91.

the questions on second sight sent by Robert Wodrow to John Fraser and John MacLean was the request, “if you can certainly Informe me, of its going from father to son, in a line, or from Nurse to Child.”¹⁴⁶¹ The answers received were hardly satisfying, as MacLean replied that his informant “affirms that it readilie went from father to son,”¹⁴⁶² while Fraser insisted “neither is it propagated from father to son.”¹⁴⁶³ Martin Martin had evidently heard of the theory of inheritance, as he goes out of his way to refute it: “This Faculty of the Second-Sight does not lineally descend in a Family, as some imagine, for I know several Parents who are endowed with it, but their Children not, & vice versa.”¹⁴⁶⁴ In a letter to Robert Boyle, Lord Tarbat also noted that second sight was not always hereditary,¹⁴⁶⁵ and John Fraser added his voice to this disagreement stating “it is not propagable from Father to Son neither Peculiar to any particular Family.”¹⁴⁶⁶ Francis Grose succinctly noted this problem when comparing sources: “Accounts differ much respecting this faculty: some make it hereditary; which is denied by others.”¹⁴⁶⁷ As with many other aspects of second sight belief, assertions about the cause or nature of the ability were diverse and perhaps even regional. This plurality of beliefs about second sight made early modern scientists and their sources incapable of agreeing on whether it was passed down from parent to offspring. Therefore, this data about heredity and second sight failed to establish an

¹⁴⁶¹ EUL, La.III.355, fol. 117v.

¹⁴⁶² NLS, Wod.Qu.Lett.ii, fol. 12.

¹⁴⁶³ NLS, Wod.Qu.Lett.ii, fol. 5.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 301.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 165-166.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 31.

objective cause for the ability.

Gender and Age

There also appears to have been some disagreement about whether second sight was largely the purview of men or women. If second sight could be identified as related to a particular gender or age group, then that data could be used to point towards the origins or functions of the ability. However, because there was no consensus on these questions, inquiries into this topic were as unfruitful as the queries about heredity. Robert Kirk claimed that women did not often have second sight, yet somewhat confusingly, his treatise on the topic contained numerous accounts of both male and female seers.¹⁴⁶⁸ John MacCulloch also thought that “although this art was not limited to men, the number of male professors seems to have exceeded that of the female,” and added “even children were not excluded.”¹⁴⁶⁹ The belief that second sight was not possessed by women appears to have been a minority opinion. Janet Douglas certainly claimed she had second sight with enough confidence, even at her tender age,¹⁴⁷⁰ as did accused witches Isobel Sinclair and Elspeth Reoch.¹⁴⁷¹ In a letter to Robert Boyle, Lord Tarbat asserted that Scottish “men women and children Indistinctly were subject it,”¹⁴⁷² though he also

¹⁴⁶⁸ EUL, Laing.III.551, fol. 4.

¹⁴⁶⁹ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 69.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Hickee, *The Spirit of Popery*, 35.

¹⁴⁷¹ “Acts and Statutes of the Lawting, Sheriff, and Justice Courts,” 189; Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 470.

¹⁴⁷² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 165.

argued that some children “unsullied by manie objects” could see apparitions that their elders could not.¹⁴⁷³ John Fraser’s *Deuteroscopia* claimed that seers were of both genders and all ages,¹⁴⁷⁴ as did Theophilus Insulanus’ treatise on second sight.¹⁴⁷⁵ Martin Martin and Francis Grose both corroborated this view that anyone could have second sight.¹⁴⁷⁶ Tales of seers of both genders, as well as children, also featured in James Gardens’ letters to John Aubrey,¹⁴⁷⁷ Samuel Pepys’ collection of letters on second sight,¹⁴⁷⁸ Robert Wodrow’s *Analecta*,¹⁴⁷⁹ James Boswell’s journal of his tour through the Hebrides,¹⁴⁸⁰ and Robert Law’s *Memorialls*.¹⁴⁸¹ A travel account by a German tourist in Scotland actually claimed that while many people there had second sight, most were women, and that the predictions of female seers were usually held to be more precise than those of male seers.¹⁴⁸² Therefore, while a couple of authors asserted that men were more likely to possess second sight, early modern accounts of this ability generally included people of all genders and ages, making no demographic exempt. In this way, data about seers’ genders or

¹⁴⁷³ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 54.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 193.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 21, 158.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 32; Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 306.

¹⁴⁷⁷ BOD, MS Aubrey 12, fols. 129-130.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 161-163.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 1, 51-52, 98-101, 105; vol. 3, 263-264, 312, 339.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, 100-101.

¹⁴⁸¹ Law, *Memorialls*, 110-119.

¹⁴⁸² John MacDonald, *Reise durch Schottland, seine Inseln, Dänemark, und einen Theil von Deutschland*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Georg Joachin Göschen, 1808), 180. This is in direct contradiction to Robert Kirk’s assertion that “a few women are endued with this sight in respect of men, and their predictions not so certane.” See EUL, La.III.551, fol. 55.

ages ended up being rather inconsequential and inconclusive, as second sight did not appear to be attached to either of these qualities.

Animals Too?

One of the more surprising assertions made by some early modern theorists was that second sight was not solely the purview of human beings, but that animals were also capable of having second sight. If this proved true, it would be evidence that second sight was a completely natural ability, similar to any other form of heightened perception possessed by animals. Furthermore, if animals were aware of the operations of spirits, this would be compelling evidence of their existence, since animals had no ulterior motives (as people were often accused of having). On the topic of second sighted Highlanders, Dalyell mused, “Marvellous to be told, they have said that their cattle are gifted with it as well as themselves.”¹⁴⁸³ In his treatise *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered*, George Sinclair shared his belief that apparitions could be seen by both men and dogs.¹⁴⁸⁴ Francis Grose also believed that second sight was had by not only men, women, and children, but also “horses and cows.”¹⁴⁸⁵ Some of Grose’s material was taken from Martin Martin, who made the particular argument that both horses and cows were capable of having second sight.¹⁴⁸⁶

¹⁴⁸³ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 468.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, 187.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 32.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 307.

Some of these accounts emphasized that the reactions of animals to seemingly invisible phenomena were evidence of the reality of spirits, as well as the fact that animals could see them. In this way, the argument that animals had second sight combined the scientific theory that second sight had a natural cause with scientists' interest in proving the existence of a world of spirits. William Cheyn claimed that dogs and horses were receptive to "Revelations of future Events," as evidenced by their protection and defense of their human masters.¹⁴⁸⁷ Francis Grose proposed that horses clearly possessed the ability, since they sometimes started at the same time that a seer received a vision, and that it was well known that horses would not approach apparitions.¹⁴⁸⁸ Grose went even further to argue that Balaam's ass must have been in possession of this faculty.¹⁴⁸⁹ Martin Martin related the account of a horse that broke free from its rope and ran around for no apparent reason. However, two second sighted people attributed the horse's behavior to a spectral funeral procession that they witnessed at the same time. Martin also argued that cows experienced second sight, which was evident from the fact that they sometimes started away from the visions perceived by the second sighted women who were milking them.¹⁴⁹⁰ The theory that some animals had second sight also implied that evidence gained from accounts of animals must amount to genuine proof of spirits, as animals were incapable of lying for personal gain. As may be expected, members of early modern wit culture found this theory of second sight to be quite unacceptable. John Toland's and Lord Molesworth's annotations of this portion of

¹⁴⁸⁷ Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism*, 233.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 32.

¹⁴⁸⁹ See Numbers 22:21-38 in the Bible for the story of Balaam and his perceptive donkey.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 307.

Martin's book were particularly scornful. In the margin next to Martin's section on animals having the second sight, Moleworth penned the wry phrases, "Here's brave work. A starting Horse turned to a Witch or a Prophet."¹⁴⁹¹ A minority of early modern sources discussed animals with second sight, and this aspect of second sight belief seemed to gain the least amount of traction in scientific circles. However, the instances where it does appear are frequently coupled with assertions that this seemingly natural explanation for second sight amounted to proof of the existence of spirits.

V: Second Sight as Exclusive to Scotland

As accounts of second sight spread outside of Scotland, stories of seers often featured the belief that the ability was specific to the country or region, and was to be found only there. Though this argument was made by both Scottish and non-Scottish individuals, this section reveals that these two groups often had different perspectives on this widely-held belief. While Scottish people appeared to have made use of these arguments to emphasize the exceptional nature of Scotland and its people, writers who were not Scottish seemed to have generally believed that this was evidence of Scotland's barbarity or proximity to the supernatural.¹⁴⁹² This perception of Scotland, and particularly the Highlands, encouraged the development of

¹⁴⁹¹ BL, C.45.c.1, pgs. 306-307.

¹⁴⁹² Historian of science Michael Hunter has claimed that scientists outside of Scotland viewed the Highlands as an "occult laboratory" full of strange phenomena that were ripe for experimentation. See Hunter, *Occult Laboratory*, 1-31. While this interpretation holds true for some scientists' perspective of Scotland, this argument does not account for the fact that many Scottish people apparently also believed that second sight was unique to their homeland. Furthermore, it is unclear whether this belief originated inside or outside of Scotland.

Scotland's international reputation as a remote, haunted nation where wild spirits and traditional beliefs still thrived. The common belief that second sight was exclusive to Scotland caused a spike in tourism to Scotland during the later part of the early modern period, fueled by travelers' desire to learn about foreign superstitions and Scottish seers. It also led to the development of numerous theories that hinged on the exceptional nature of Scotland or the Highlands. Some theorists hypothesized that the prevalence of second sight in Scotland could be due to innate qualities in the Highland air or the eyes of Scottish seers. Alternately, some posited that second sight could be attributed to the lifestyle of the Highlanders. This theory drew on various stereotypes of Highlanders as exceptionally solitary, idle, drunk, starving, melancholic, and superstitious.¹⁴⁹³ In these ways, some theories of second sight characterized Scotland as a fundamentally "different" place, populated by people who believed that they frequently encountered spirits.

The theory that second sight was exclusive to Scotland or the Highlands often relied on natural, environmental, and medical explanations for the causes of second sight. However, these theories did not generally disqualify second sight from being perceived as a legitimate faculty that allowed its possessor to observe the operations of spirits. While some did argue that second sight was the result of delusion, many maintained that these delusions were due to the influence of deceptive spirits. Even those who attributed second sight to mental illness were not prepared to argue that the fact that second sight visions were not "real" was evidence that all visions or

¹⁴⁹³ In her discussion of second sight in the nineteenth century, historian Elsa Richardson has referred to this cluster of theories as a form of appropriation and colonization of second sight, as supposedly part of an ancient Gaelic tradition. See Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century*, 6.

sight of spirits were false. In this way, theories of second sight that claimed it was a uniquely Scottish ability still accounted for influential religious and scientific beliefs about the existence of a world of spirits and individuals who were capable of perceiving it. Early modern theorists, even those who were skeptical of the ability, were not interested in generating atheistic or materialistic theories of second sight. Therefore, theories that pointed to natural or medical causes for the ability do not demonstrate the secularization of early modern scientific inquiry. Rather, theories about second sight as unique to Scotland allowed scientists to test various hypotheses about the influence of environment or lifestyle on the mind and body.

Numerous early modern sources affirmed that second sight was a distinctly Scottish phenomenon, with some arguing that it was specific to the Highlands and was not to be found anywhere else. John Evelyn noted that the topic of second sight came up at a dinner party he attended, where it was referred to as “something... happening to some persons, especially Scotch.”¹⁴⁹⁴ This belief was also conveyed by Lord Tarbat to Robert Boyle, writing “The more Generall accompts of it were That many highlanders Yet farr more Islanders were quallified with this sight.”¹⁴⁹⁵ Some Scottish people capitalized on this belief about the exceptional nature of their country, and openly publicized it as a matter of national pride. The seer Duncan Campbell attested that in his homeland of Scotland, second sight “abounded the most of any,” and it had “grown almost a national faculty among a people.”¹⁴⁹⁶ Likewise, Robert Kirk’s treatise on second sight advertised itself as “a treatise displaying the chief curiosities among the people of

¹⁴⁹⁴ Evelyn, *Memoirs of John Evelyn*, 485.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 165.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Bond, *History of the Life and Adventures*, 157, xx.

Scotland as they are in use to this day being the most part Singular to that Nation.”¹⁴⁹⁷ The belief that second sight was peculiar to Scotland or the Highlands appeared to be quite widespread, as it was also recorded by John Brand,¹⁴⁹⁸ John Cockburn,¹⁴⁹⁹ Lord Reay,¹⁵⁰⁰ Francis Grose,¹⁵⁰¹ Samuel Pepys,¹⁵⁰² and the author of *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*.¹⁵⁰³ Based on the widely-held assumption that they would have privileged knowledge of this ability, some Scottish travelers abroad reported that people who were not Scottish had asked them about second sight. While Robert Kirk was staying in London, Edward Stillingfleet specifically approached Kirk on the topic of second sight with this opinion in mind. A note in Kirk’s diary read that, “he came to enquire of the 2d sight, only heard to be in the highlands of Scotland.”¹⁵⁰⁴

Numerous travel accounts of voyages to Scotland also noted the presence of the gift there, and curiosity about second sight was likely a motivating factor for the rush of tourists to Scotland in the later part of the early modern period. Matthias d’Amour claimed that the

¹⁴⁹⁷ EUL, La.III.551, title page.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1777), 94.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Cockburn, *Bourignianism detected*, 62.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 163.

¹⁵⁰¹ Grose, *A Provincial Glossary*, 31.

¹⁵⁰² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 181.

¹⁵⁰³ *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 16.

¹⁵⁰⁴ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 131v.

Islanders specifically were renowned for having this ability,¹⁵⁰⁵ as did Sarah Murray.¹⁵⁰⁶ John Ferriar similarly noted that second sight was a “species of ecstasy” known particularly in the north of Scotland.¹⁵⁰⁷ As Edmund Calamy reflected on his trip to Edinburgh, he claimed that “Many told me that it was only in the Highlands, persons that had this gift were to be met with.”¹⁵⁰⁸ Similarly, before Emilie Harmes travelled to the Highlands in 1800, she was informed that one out of six Highlanders were in possession of this gift.¹⁵⁰⁹

While prevailing opinions held that second sight was a uniquely Scottish or Highland ability, some theorists attempted to argue that it was not isolated to the country. Others noted the existence of similar beliefs elsewhere, or argued that it was perhaps even a universal phenomenon. James Boswell plainly stated “the belief in second sight is not peculiar to the Highlands and Isles.”¹⁵¹⁰ John Fraser argued that it was only lack of observation that made second sight appear more common in the Highlands than elsewhere in Scotland,¹⁵¹¹ a perspective

¹⁵⁰⁵ d’Amour, *Memoirs of Mr Matthias d’Amour*, 135.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Sarah Murray, *A Companion, and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland, to the Lakes of Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire... Also a Description of part of Scotland, particularly of the Highlands, and the isles of Mulla, Ulva, Staffa, I-columbkill, Tirii, Coll, Eigg, Skye, Raza, and Scalpa. To which is now added an account of the new roads in Scotland*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1810), 295.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Ferriar, *An Essay towards a Theory*, 63.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life, with some reflections on the times I have lived in*, vol. 2, ed. J.T. Rutt (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1829), 189.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Emilie Harmes, *Caledonia: Von der Verfasserin der Sommerstunden*, vol. 3 (Hamburg: B.G. Hofmann, 1803), 82.

¹⁵¹⁰ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 272.

¹⁵¹¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

also shared by John Macculloch.¹⁵¹² Robert Wodrow noted, “My informer tells me that the second-sight is as common in North Holland, if not more, than in our Highlands of Scotland.”¹⁵¹³ Theophilus Insulanus made a rather universal claim when he argued that “this kind of intelligence, is not confined to the western islands of Scotland, or continent adjacent, but prevails in every kingdom, and indeed... throughout every part of the known world, in all ages.”¹⁵¹⁴ Johnson also claimed that the ability appeared to exist in “all ages and all nations” and that “the Second Sight of the Hebrides implies only the local frequency of a power, which is nowhere totally unknown.”¹⁵¹⁵

This disagreement about whether second sight was exclusive to Scotland reflected the diversity of perspectives that early modern people had about this phenomenon. Yet the belief that second sight was singularly Scottish actually shared an important similarity with the argument that it was a universal ability. Both assertions relied on the idea that second sight was inherent to some individuals, who were uniquely capable of perceiving the world of spirits. Therefore, theories that emphasized specificity of location or universality both presented natural explanations for the apparent existence of supernatural abilities.

¹⁵¹² MacCulloch, *Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 65.

¹⁵¹³ Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 3, 262-263.

¹⁵¹⁴ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 69.

¹⁵¹⁵ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 91.

Environmental Influences

The belief that second sight was peculiar to Scotland or the Highlands gave rise to theories that there were innate qualities in the air, environment, or even the eyes of Scottish seers. Some scientists, including Robert Boyle, were interested in the qualities of the Scottish air, and the degree to which it could take on forms that were visible to the human eye. Popular belief held that the northernmost countries, such as Scotland and Lapland, actually had particularly rigid air that was conducive to taking on apparitional forms.¹⁵¹⁶ While they attributed second sight to a natural source, theories such as these that proposed environmental influences as the cause of second sight did not dismiss the possibility that the second sighted were genuinely witnessing the activity of spirits. Writing to Robert Boyle, Lord Tarbat described being unsure of the origins of second sight, but proposing inquiry into “Whither it be a quality in the eyes of some people in those parts, concurring with a quality in the air also” or “Whither such species be every where, tho not seen by the want of eyes so qualified.”¹⁵¹⁷ John MacCulloch applied this theory to the legend of St. Columba, and claimed that his gift of second sight must have been due to the Highland air and the environmental influence of the island of Iona.¹⁵¹⁸ John Evelyn recalled a conversation about Scottish second sight at a dinner party in England, which prompted another guest to tell the story of a “French nobleman, lately here in England, seeing the late Duke of Monmouth come into the play-house at London, suddenly cried out to somebody sitting

¹⁵¹⁶ Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, “Spectral Currencies in the Air of Reality: A Journal of the Plague Year and the History of Apparitions,” *Representations* 87, no. 1 (2004), 87.

¹⁵¹⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 54.

¹⁵¹⁸ MacCulloch, *Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 68.

in the same box, *Voilà Monsieur comme il entre sans tête.*¹⁵¹⁹ Evelyn's story appeared to illustrate the belief that this traveler acquired temporary second sight during his trip to the British Isles, presumably due to environmental influence, and was therefore shocked to witness the wraith of the Duke without his head.

This environmental theory of second sight was also cited in accounts that claimed that seers who travelled to other countries did not experience their second sight visions there. Lord Tarbat reported hearing "that severals did see the second sight, when in the highlands or Isles, yet when transported to live in other Countreys, especially in America, they quite lost their qualitie as was told me by a Gentlman who knew som of them in Barbadoes who did see no vision there, altho he knew them to be Seers, when they lived in the Isles of Scotland."¹⁵²⁰ Martin Martin shared a similar story of some seers from the Scottish islands who journeyed to Barbados and stayed for fourteen years and "tho they were wont to see the Second-sight in their Native Country, they never saw it in Barbadoes: but upon their return to England, the first Night after their landing they saw the Second-sight."¹⁵²¹ If the second sighted did not see specters when they travelled elsewhere, this evidence would support the theory that second sight was a product of the Scottish air or environment. Despite their citation of evidence that supported environmental theories, both Tarbat and Martin believed in the reality of second sight, and were of the opinion that it represented a genuine ability to see into the world of spirits.

These persuading anecdotes aside, some theorists rejected the idea that second sight

¹⁵¹⁹ Evelyn, *Memoirs of John Evelyn*, 485.

¹⁵²⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 54-55.

¹⁵²¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 334.

could be due to an innate quality of the environment or Scottish eyes. Though Lord Reay initially wrote to Pepys that “Som things (tho nothing Demonstrative) perswade me still to suspect that the Qualities of the eyes and air in these places, May contribute much to this sight,”¹⁵²² he later decided he could not be convinced that “it depends on the quality of either air or eyes.”¹⁵²³ Pepys shared his correspondent’s skepticism.¹⁵²⁴ Theophilus Insulanus also denied that second sight could be due to an “innate quality; else it would be common to the whole species,”¹⁵²⁵ and that there could not be “any intrinsic quality in matter, which undoubtedly is void of all intelligence.”¹⁵²⁶ Robert Kirk had a very similar perspective, reasoning “this sight can be no qualitie of the air, nor of the eyes, Because...Such as live in the sam air, and see all other things as farr of and as clearly, yet have not the second sight.”¹⁵²⁷ Kirk was also skeptical of interpretations of stories of traveling seers that supported environmental theories. Instead, he argued that accounts of Scottish seers lacking second sight in other countries affirmed his own theory that the ability to see fairies was the core nature of second sight.¹⁵²⁸ By Kirk’s logic, traveling seers were strangers in distant lands, and therefore should have no expectation of familiar communication with foreign spirits. In this way, Kirk managed to reconcile his belief that second sight was evidence of spirits with his assertion that second sight was not isolated to

¹⁵²² Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 161-162.

¹⁵²³ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 171-172.

¹⁵²⁴ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 170.

¹⁵²⁵ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 35.

¹⁵²⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 44.

¹⁵²⁷ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 58.

¹⁵²⁸ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 61-62.

any particular environment. Rather, Kirk believed that spirits were everywhere, and apprehension of them was merely connected to local familiarity.

Medicine, Melancholy, and Illness

A popular theory, mostly promoted by those outside of Scotland, was that second sight was caused by mental or physical illness. Often, this theory relied on the idea that second sight was to be found only in Scotland, and therefore leaned on assertions that the ability was the result of environmental influences or the lifestyle of the Highlanders. The remoteness and isolation of the Highland region, coupled with the rugged landscape and more rural culture, led to a vision of the Highlands as a mystical and haunted location, populated by individuals who frequently encountered the supernatural.¹⁵²⁹ These theories emphasized certain stereotypes of Highlanders as solitary, idle, underfed or over-imbibed, and deeply affected by the melancholic nature of their wild, rural landscape. Medical theories of second sight were part of a wider belief that one's environment could have a profound affect on the body, mind, and health, as well as one's sensory perception. As these theories were generally articulated by non-Scottish individuals, they tended to rely on the belief that the environment of the Highlanders was profoundly different from that of other people. Therefore, the frequency of second sight could be attributed to the impact of their surroundings and lifestyle on their mental and physical health.

While some argued that this natural or medical explanation for second sight meant that

¹⁵²⁹ This perspective on the Scottish people and landscape, as viewed from outside Scotland, is perhaps best exemplified in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, complete with its cast of feuding Scottish nobles, dread-inducing ghosts, and duplicitous witches who utter prophecies.

the visions of the second sighted were merely delusions, others plainly rejected this idea, demonstrating that there was no scientific consensus about the pathology of second sight. Furthermore, many theorists who promoted medical explanations of second sight also expressed personal belief in visions and spirits, and so their interventions in the early modern conversation about second sight should not be taken as evidence of scientists' disbelief in an invisible world or people who could perceive it. Some hypothesized that second sight was caused by a confusion of the waking and dreaming states, while others proposed that the ability was due to excitation of the imagination or the "fancy," as early modern people referred to it. Comparisons were drawn to altered states of consciousness that were well-known to early modern people, such as those caused by the ingestion of drugs or alcohol. Overall, these theories illustrate the rising popularity of medical interpretations of second sight and other visionary abilities.¹⁵³⁰ While some did use medical theories of second sight to discount the belief that seers' visions were "real," others reasoned that melancholy or illness did not exclude the second sighted from being witness to the operations of spirits. In these ways, the religious implications of their work were still at the forefront of scientists' discussions of second sight, and belief in delusional visions did not amount to disbelief in all visions or sight of spirits.

As second sight appeared to be native to Scotland or the Highlands, a prominent strain of thought attributed associated illnesses with the remote or wild environment. J. Mitchell and John Dickie claimed that "the second sight originates in a highly excited or diseased state of the organ

¹⁵³⁰ Robert Burton's influential medical textbook *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621) discussed many potential causes for melancholy and related illnesses, including humors, spirits both good and evil, witchcraft, celestial bodies, age, heredity, bad diet, bad air, solitude, idleness, sleep disorders, imagination, emotional irregularities, and addictions. Many of these same causes were mentioned by theorists who discussed second sight. See BL, C.123.k.281.

of wonder... The individuals most prone to this organic derangement, are those who inhabit mountainous districts— whose lives are spent amidst scenes of the wildest beauty and sternest grandeur.”¹⁵³¹ Walter Scott agreed that “private life” could create a “tenor of thought which has been depressed into melancholy by gloomy anticipations respecting the future.”¹⁵³² This was in accord with Dr. Beattie’s assertion that “nobody ever laid claim to this faculty, who was much employed in the intercourse of social life.”¹⁵³³ Following his trip through Scotland, John MacDonald became convinced that seers’ visions were caused by the mental influence of the Highlands, hills, and ocean.¹⁵³⁴ John Trusler claimed that the Highlanders of Scotland were “very much addicted to the idle fancies of a second sight,” caused chiefly by the solitary nature of their lifestyle among the wild Highlands and “chimerical operations of a distempered imagination.”¹⁵³⁵ Dr. Beattie also described Scotland as a “melancholy country,” whose ocean and land “diffuse a gloom over the fancy, which... cannot fail to tincture the thoughts of a native in the hour of silence and solitude.”¹⁵³⁶

Others emphasized the perceived lifestyle of the Highlanders, particularly as they were believed to be idle, pastoral, and starved. John MacCulloch argued that the “condition of the Highlanders” was to be “unoccupied, subject to hypochondriacal disorders, dozing away their

¹⁵³¹ J. Mitchell and Jn. Dickie, *The Philosophy of Witchcraft* (Paisley: Murray and Stewart, 1839), 316.

¹⁵³² Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 16.

¹⁵³³ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

¹⁵³⁴ MacDonald, *Reise durch Schottland*, 170-174, 180-182.

¹⁵³⁵ John Trusler, *The Habitable World Described* (London: John Trusler, 1788), 251.

¹⁵³⁶ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

time in tending their cattle, nationally and habitually superstitious.”¹⁵³⁷ Fraser noted that “Many such illusions are... caused merely by the confusion of the Brains, bred by their fasting, and unwholsome Food.”¹⁵³⁸ MacCulloch agreed that “they were generally ill fed; often on the verge of starving... this condition leads to generate visions.”¹⁵³⁹ Annotating Martin Martin’s *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, Lord Molesworth commented “visionaries are generally very sober melancholy folks, & more peoples brains are disturbed by abstinence then by excess.”¹⁵⁴⁰ Arguments that emphasized the remote environment or the unusual lifestyle of the Highlanders often implicitly attributed second sight visions to disorder, thereby relegating them to the realm of un-reality.

While this stereotype of the malnourished and mentally disordered second sighted Highlander may have appealed to those outside Scotland or in the Lowlands, some Scottish theorists rejected the idea that second sight was caused by melancholy, illness, loneliness, or diet. Their arguments demonstrate that Scottish theorists viewed second sight as evidence that their countrymen were exceptional, as opposed to delusional. Native Gael Martin Martin was intent on dispelling damaging stereotypes, and asserted that “The People of these Isles, and particularly the Seers, are very temperate, and their Diet is simple, and moderate, in quantity and quality; so that their Brains are not in all probability disordered by undigested Fumes of Meat and Drink. Both Sexes are free from Hysterick Fits, Convulsions, and several other Distempers of that sort;

¹⁵³⁷ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 80.

¹⁵³⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 198.

¹⁵³⁹ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 80.

¹⁵⁴⁰ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 308.

there is no Madmen among them, nor any instance of Self-murder. It is observ'd among 'em, that a Man drunk never sees the Second Sight."¹⁵⁴¹ Robert Kirk, who was also Scottish, mounted his own defense. Kirk denied that second sight was caused by isolation, writing that "The persons endowed with this Rarity are for the most part candid, honest, and sociable people."¹⁵⁴² Kirk also argued that a specter seen through second sight "Is no fantastic shadow of a sick apprehension, but a Realitie."¹⁵⁴³ For these writers, the rejection of the idea that second sight was caused by illness was also a rejection of arguments that framed the visions of the second sighted as delusions. Therefore, these conflicting groups of theories illustrate that there was no scientific consensus about the pathology of second sight, and many theorists continued to assert that it was a genuine ability found in healthy individuals.

Some early modern scientists and thinkers were also keen on exploring theories about altered states of consciousness, including but not limited to sleeping and dream states. Particularly, some argued that second sight was due to a confusion or overlap between the sleeping and waking mind. By these theories, the visions of the second sighted could be interpreted as dreams that had intruded into waking life, and therefore did not represent an external reality. Walter Scott hypothesized that seeing apparitions could be due to "the excited imagination acting upon the half-waking senses,"¹⁵⁴⁴ while Daniel Defoe argued that some apparitions could be the result of "fancy, vapours, waking dreams, [or] delirious heads."¹⁵⁴⁵ Both

¹⁵⁴¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 308.

¹⁵⁴² EUL, La.III.551, fol. 85.

¹⁵⁴³ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 56.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 16.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Defoe, *An essay on the History and Reality*, 364.

Sir Hans Sloane and John Beaumont were of the opinion that Beaumont's predilection for seeing spirits was a disorder of the mind that resulted from dreaming while awake.¹⁵⁴⁶ Dr. Beattie claimed that the Highlanders were prone to "short fits of sudden sleep or drowsiness, attended with lively dreams, and arising from some bodily disorder, the effect of idleness, low spirits, or a gloomy imagination."¹⁵⁴⁷ Therefore, second sight was the result of the fact that "persons of lively imaginations, immured in deep solitude... should dream, even when they think themselves awake."¹⁵⁴⁸ Beattie asserted that the attribution of second sight to such waking dreams "makes him [the Highlander] more recluse and more melancholy than ever; and so feeds his disease, and multiplies his visions."¹⁵⁴⁹ As to predictions which came true, Beattie claimed that this was only due to these visions of "distempered fancy" combined with "the laws of chance," which was no more miraculous than a chattering parrot that "should sometimes happen to salute the passenger by his right appellation."¹⁵⁵⁰

Early modern discussions of altered states of consciousness sometimes referenced the effects of substance use, particularly alcohol and drugs. Just as starvation or solitude were believed to make one susceptible to seeing visions, scientists and theorists also acknowledged that the use of mind-altering substances sometimes led to visionary states. Walter Scott claimed that some spectral hallucinations could arise from "the debility of stomach brought on by excess

¹⁵⁴⁶ Sir Hans Sloane, *Magic and Mental Disorder: Sir Hans Sloane's Memoir of John Beaumont*, ed. Michael Hunter (London: Robert Boyle Project, 2011), xiv, xi, 8.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland," 457.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland," 457.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland," 458.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland," 458.

in wine or spirits, which derangement often sensibly affects the eyes and sense of sight, but also because the mind becomes habitually predominated over by a train of fantastic visions, the consequence of frequent intoxication.”¹⁵⁵¹ Scott further noted that some drugs such as opium or nitrous oxide also caused an “embodying before the eyes of a patient imaginary illusions which are visible to no one else” through the effects of “a deranged state of the blood or nervous system.”¹⁵⁵² John MacCulloch also admitted that “It is often very difficult to distinguish between the dreams of sleeping and waking... Opium, no one need be told, produces a similar state... It is also caused by disease... and it may be the Second Sight.”¹⁵⁵³ While these authors believed that some specters were caused by ingestion of drink or drugs, not all accounts that described substance use were convinced that the testimony of the imbibed was illegitimate. Richard Baxter’s *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* described the visions of Major Wilkie, a Scottish soldier who was prone to “drink too much, and had the signs of a heated brain.” Despite this, Baxter recorded evidence of Wilkie’s testimony as “a scholar of considerable learning” who “confidently affirmed, that he continually saw good and evil spirits about him, and that he had a good genius and an enemy.”¹⁵⁵⁴

Medical theories of second sight often involved the widely-discussed concepts of disordered “fancy” or melancholy, two early modern terms for mental illness of various forms. While medical explanations of visionary experiences could be seen as evidence of growing

¹⁵⁵¹ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 24.

¹⁵⁵² Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 24-25.

¹⁵⁵³ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 79-80.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Wilby, *Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 261.

atheism or disbelief in spirits, closer examination proves this is plainly untrue. While they argued that some visionary experiences were the result of illness, most theorists still expressed personal belief in real interactions between humans and spirits. Some early modern sources characterized religious enthusiasm as a form of mental illness, an interpretation that became increasingly common in the early eighteenth century. These opinions can be found in Sir Hans Sloane's memoir of John Beaumont,¹⁵⁵⁵ as well as Meric Casaubon's *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm*.¹⁵⁵⁶ However, both Beaumont's and Casaubon's writings defended the existence of spirits, and neither author could be considered a deist or atheist. A letter from David Barclay to Lord Grange related a woman's encounter with the angry ghost of her dead brother, and Barclay recorded that the spirit "scratched all her face and her face was all bloody... how it was done God knows but that it was done was matter of fact." Despite this citation of physical evidence for the woman's encounter, Barclay was plainly torn as to whether he should interpret her experience as "Apparition, or Delirium."¹⁵⁵⁷ Bishop Edward Stillingfleet was clearly not skeptical of traditional religion; nevertheless, he told Robert Kirk that he believed second sight "was no reality but apprehension."¹⁵⁵⁸ The notebooks of Dr. Richard Napier document that he had a number of patients who suffered from seeing apparitions and were subsequently diagnosed with illnesses related to this symptom. Napier's descriptions of his patients' symptoms bear a

¹⁵⁵⁵ Sloane, *Magic and Mental Disorder*, xv.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise concerning enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature, but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession* (London: Tho. Johnson, 1655), 31.

¹⁵⁵⁷ NRS, GD124/15/1181.

¹⁵⁵⁸ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 19v.

similarity to descriptions of second sight.¹⁵⁵⁹ However, Napier himself reportedly believed that he saw angels who counseled him about whether patients were incurable.¹⁵⁶⁰ Therefore Napier, like most second sight theorists, must not have rejected the idea that spirits existed and could interact with the human world. While many theorists accepted that mental illness was a diagnosable disease, none were prepared to argue that the existence of delusional visions was evidence that spirits did not exist, or that humans were incapable of seeing them.

Some theorists who attested the reality of second sight still believed that other forms of visions could be caused by mental disorder. In this way, belief in both second sight and visions caused by mental illness were not mutually exclusive. John Fraser was a strong defender of the existence of second sight, but he also diagnosed a visionary who was visited by the specters of dead friends as experiencing “the trouble of his fancy.”¹⁵⁶¹ Likewise, the author of *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded* assured his reader of the reality of Scottish second sight, yet also argued that some other forms of visions could be the result of “a warm Imagination, overheated.”¹⁵⁶² From these various examples, it is clear that just because a theorist argued that some visionary experiences were caused by illness, it did not follow that this individual believed that all visions or sight of spirits were the result of delusion. Rather, medical theories of second sight were evidence of emerging concerns about the nature of human perception, and the degree to which illness affected the mind and body. While some medical theories of second sight

¹⁵⁵⁹ BOD, MS Ashmole 1790, fols. 106v, 108-108v, 109.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 529.

¹⁵⁶¹ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 198.

¹⁵⁶² *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded*, 15.

attributed visionary experiences to illness, none were prepared to argue that this was evidence of the validity of atheism or materialism. Therefore, medical explanations of second sight or visionary experiences do not demonstrate a growing secularization of early modern scientific theory, and most theorists continued to believe that genuine visions and encounters with spirits did occur.

Medical explanations of second sight were inherently tied to the question of whether its causes could be objectively diagnosed. For some, diagnosis of illness in a second sighted individual would be evidence that his or her visions were not caused by spirits, but by internal disorder. Walter Scott attested that “there certainly exists more than one disorder known to professional men of which one important symptom is a disposition to see apparitions.”¹⁵⁶³ However, arguments such as these did not necessarily appeal to all second sight theorists. While some viewed illness and inspiration as mutually exclusive, other theorists were willing to believe that they could exist in the same individual. John Fraser believed in the reality of second sight, yet he also thought that medical explanations of second sight deserved further examination, specifically as to whether second sight came from “a natural constitution and temperament, when confounded with a flatuous or Melancholick Distemper.”¹⁵⁶⁴ William Cheyn also made an interesting intervention, and argued that “it is diverse times found true by iterated Experience... that severall Persons affected with Melancholy have been Capable... to speak with unknown Tongues, although never formerly instructed therein, and others to Prophecy, and Reveal future

¹⁵⁶³ Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 21.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 197.

Events, &c.”¹⁵⁶⁵ In these ways, both Fraser and Cheyn argued that melancholic individuals could be predisposed to having supernatural abilities. While this theory referenced concepts that were drawn from early modern theories of mental illness, it also relied on existing aspects of second sight belief. Some argued that people with disabilities were uniquely receptive to supernatural knowledge or talents, and it would seem that some theorists extended this belief to include mental, and not just physical, disability.

For many theorists, the fact that some visions were caused by illness did not necessarily conclude that all visions or sight of spirits were the result of medical disorder. Furthermore, some theorists contended that medical disorder was not mutually exclusive with true second sight. Though medical theories of second sight were becoming more widely discussed in early modern sources, a number of theorists still insisted that spirits were real and some people could perceive them. In this way, theorists who provided medical explanations for second sight did not deny belief in genuine accounts of spirits, prophecies, or seers. Some did argue that the second sighted were deluded, yet none saw this as evidence that spirits did not exist. Therefore, skepticism about second sight did not amount to atheism, and some theorists managed to reconcile their assertions that second sight was not a genuine ability with their belief that accounts of second sight represented evidence for the existence of spirits.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism*, 238. These were the precise abilities to which the second sighted witch-finder Janet Douglas laid claim. See the section in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, “The Witch-Finder Janet Douglas.”

Barbarity, Ignorance, and Superstition

The prevalent belief that second sight was common in the Highlands was associated with the popular assumption that Highlanders were barbarous and ignorant. Ignorance and credulity were believed to go hand-in-hand, and the remoteness of the Highland region prompted the belief that its inhabitants were uncivilized and uneducated. Detractors of second sight often cited this widely-held opinion as a means of discrediting the accounts of Scottish seers and witnesses. Belief in this stereotype had deep roots in elite culture inside and outside Scotland, and both detractors and promoters of second sight acknowledged that Highlanders were generally believed to be superstitious. However, theories of second sight that featured Highlanders' perceived tendency towards ignorance or barbarity still refused to acknowledge that second sight was not the result of the influence of spirits. While some reasoned that the second sighted were not what they claimed to be, these theorists still constructed arguments about second sight that framed it as both the result of identifiable causes, as well as evidence for the operations of spirits. In this way, scientific theories that denied that second sight was a supernatural ability continued to attribute its causes to the influence of spirits on the human senses. While modern conversations about second sight and ignorance would likely emphasize that the superstitious are more likely to believe in things that aren't "real," early modern discussions of barbarity featured the argument that belief in second sight was simply a misinterpretation of deceptive, yet genuine, spiritual phenomena. Regardless of Highlanders' misattribution of the actions of deceptive spirits to second sight, these theorists still argued that accounts of second sight proved the existence of an invisible world.

Numerous early modern sources cultivated a stereotype of Highlanders as ignorant, barbaric, and superstitious. Dr. Beattie asserted that the Highlanders of Scotland “do still retain many of their old superstitions,” “notwithstanding their reformation in religion, and more frequent intercourse with strangers.”¹⁵⁶⁶ Likewise, Thomas Pennant claimed of the Highlands that, “in spite of the intercourse this and the neighbouring parts have of late years had with the rest of the world, it still retains some its ancient customs and superstitions.”¹⁵⁶⁷ Lord Grange’s *An Account of the Highlanders and Highlands of Scotland*, sent to Viscount Towshend, was chiefly concerned with the question of “How the Highlanders may be civilized.”¹⁵⁶⁸ In discussing this, Grange claimed that “gross Ignorance & Superstitiousness is much occasion’d by their Barbarity.”¹⁵⁶⁹ When George Hicke interviewed Janet Douglas in prison, he revealed his bias when he “observ’d how her words, and expressions were of the better sort, and asked her how she being an highlander, and in appearance a poor girl came to speak so well. To this she artfully replied by asking me why I shud suppose it so difficult for her to learn to express herself well.”¹⁵⁷⁰

This supposed barbarity, ignorance, and tendency towards superstition was directly associated with second sight belief by some early modern writers. Dr. Beattie specifically argued that only ignorant people claimed to be second sighted,¹⁵⁷¹ while Theophilus Insulanus noted his

¹⁵⁶⁶ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands,” 457.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 67.

¹⁵⁶⁸ NRS, GD124/15/1263/1, fol. 1.

¹⁵⁶⁹ NRS, GD124/15/1263/2, fol. 1B.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Pepys, “Samuel Pepys’ collection of Letters,” 177.

¹⁵⁷¹ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

detractors' belief that "it is only seen by mean, silly, illiterate people."¹⁵⁷² Johnson recorded that often the faculty "is ascribed only to people very little enlightened; and among them, for the most part, to the mean and the ignorant."¹⁵⁷³ John MacCulloch claimed of second sight that "this gift was nearly limited to the ignorant among the people, and to an ignorant people among the nations."¹⁵⁷⁴ In a letter to James Boswell, George Dempster asserted "The notion of the second sight I consider as a remnant of superstitious ignorance and credulity."¹⁵⁷⁵ Traveler Jacob Pattison claimed that second sight belief in Scotland could be "credited in proportion to the distance, or obscurity of the place, & the consequent ignorance of the people."¹⁵⁷⁶ John Dalryell also perceived it to be believed by "the highlanders chiefly, together with the inhabitants of the insular districts, or that portion of the kingdom less advanced."¹⁵⁷⁷

However, somewhat counterintuitively, the supposed "ignorance" of the Highlanders did not necessarily preclude that their belief in second sight was due to pure delusion. Rather, many argued that second sight was more prevalent among the barbarous because spiritual activity was more common in these remote parts of the world. While some theorists argued that this spiritual activity was malicious and deceptive, they still maintained that accounts of second sight represented evidence of the existence of spirits and their interaction with humans. Part of John Fraser's explanation for why second sight appeared to be more prevalent in the Highlands than

¹⁵⁷² Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 84.

¹⁵⁷³ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 90.

¹⁵⁷⁴ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 85.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Boswell, *Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides*, 284.

¹⁵⁷⁶ NLS, MS 6322, fols. 24, 38.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Dalryell, *Darker Superstitions*, 468.

elsewhere was “that Credulity and Ignorance give occasion to evil Spirits to juggle more frequently, than otherways they would have don.”¹⁵⁷⁸ Robert Kirk had a similar theory about the fairies seen by second sighted men: “They haunt most where is most barbarity & least of Gods truth to divert.”¹⁵⁷⁹ Lord Grange argued that among the Highlanders, “barbarity... still prevails,”¹⁵⁸⁰ and “it is commonly said that (in the remotest Places especially) there are still several among them who deall with Familiar Spirits.”¹⁵⁸¹ These claims were part of a broader early modern belief that the Devil was most active in the northern parts of the world, where he found more ignorant individuals to deceive. In *A System of Magick*, Daniel Defoe articulated the belief that “the Devil has some little Out-lyers and sculking Operators in the World, and which he makes great use of... as particularly our Second-sight Men in Scotland... and other Northern Parts of the World.”¹⁵⁸²

The remoteness of the Highlands and the consequential barbarity of its inhabitants was also compared to other “exotic” locations and peoples around the world, where deceptive spiritual activity was witnessed by credulous individuals. In his dialogue *Daemonologie*, King James posed the question “what is the cause that this kind of abuse [by spirits] is thought to be most common in such wild parts of the world, as Lapland and Finland or in our north isles of

¹⁵⁷⁸ Fraser, *Deuteroscopia*, 204.

¹⁵⁷⁹ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 32. There is a similar passage in Kirk's treatise on second sight. See EUL, La.III.551, fols. 79-80.

¹⁵⁸⁰ NRS, GD124/15/1263/1, fol. 2.

¹⁵⁸¹ NRS, GD124/15/1263/2, fol. 1B.

¹⁵⁸² Daniel Defoe, *A system of magick; or, a history of the black art. Being an historical account of mankind's most early dealing with the Devil; and how the acquaintance on both sides first begun* (London: J. Roberts, 1727), 227.

Orkney and Shetland? [Answer:] Because where the devil finds greatest ignorance and barbarity there assails he grossliest.”¹⁵⁸³ Like James, the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* asserted that apparitions of fairies were actually deceptive demons. In addition, they noted that such beings were “plentiful in the Kingdom of Norway.”¹⁵⁸⁴ A similar belief was shared by Increase Mather, and when discussing Scottish second sight he asserted that it was also common among the Laplanders, who were famously “addicted” to superstition.¹⁵⁸⁵ Dr. Beattie supposed that second sight was also to be found in the inhabitants of “some of the Alpine regions,”¹⁵⁸⁶ and a letter from Donald MacQueen to Theophilus Insulanus expressed the belief that “these sights have been common only among the more ignorant people, the Highlanders, the Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinambo.”¹⁵⁸⁷ Among the northernmost countries that Daniel Defoe cited as most likely to play host to the Devil’s machinations, he listed Scotland, Norway, Lapland, Muscovy, and Siberia.¹⁵⁸⁸

While these arguments about the ignorance and barbarity of the northerners and Highlanders were often propagated by detractors of second sight, few actually claimed that accounts of second sight did not constitute evidence of encounters between humans and spirits. Rather, the supposedly superstitious nature of people in northern countries led them to misattribute the tricks of deceptive spirits to second sight. Though these theorists often claimed

¹⁵⁸³ James VI, *Demonology*, 414.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Sprenger and Institoris, *The Hammer of the Witches*, 296.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Mather, *A further account of the tryals of the New-England witches*, 14.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Beattie, “A Description of the Highlands of Scotland,” 457.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 94.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Defoe, *A system of magick*, 227.

that second sight was not a true supernatural ability, their arguments still constructed second sight as having observable causes. Furthermore, like those who did believe in second sight, theorists who rejected its validity were still deeply concerned with the spiritual implications of their conclusions. While these theorists denied being superstitious, they would never had denied that they were religious. Just like conversations about visions and the imaginary, early modern theories of second sight that seem skeptical at first glance were still entrenched in scientists' belief in a world of spirits, and their ability to influence the human senses.

VI: Science, Spirits, and Skepticism

The intense interest in second sight expressed by early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers was often a reflection of their desire to verify the existence of the world of spirits. The drive to collect the second sighted's experiences with spirits intensified in the face of a perceived growing threat of atheism, a crisis frequently discussed in early modern scientific sources. In response, second sight theorists marshaled their skills of scientific inquiry and analysis, and applied them to the task of recording and publishing verifiable accounts of the spirit world. They also made every effort to orient second sight belief within the scientific discourses of their day, emphasizing the fact that the existence of spirits was empirically undeniable and in accordance with current knowledge.

While very few early modern writers or thinkers expressed genuine atheism in the way that the term is used today, some did espouse religious or philosophical ideas that were outside the mainstream and therefore represented a challenge to orthodox beliefs about the supernatural

and God's intervention in the human world. In particular, the writings of René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and Baruch Spinoza all advocated for unorthodox views of God and the nature of spirits, and as a result the ideas of these three philosophers faced significant criticism from anti-skeptical writers.¹⁵⁸⁹ Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza were accused of being materialists who denied that spirits could affect the physical world. This denial not only included a rejection of the idea that spirits could take material form, but also the belief that spirits could manipulate the human imagination and deceive humans into perceiving them. Rather than visions being the result of spirits actually appearing to people, or deceiving their minds to make them think that spirits appeared, all visionary experiences were now considered delusions, fantasies, or irrational experiences.

Ideas such as these often came under attack as endorsed by “deists,” “atheists,” “Sadducees,”¹⁵⁹⁰ or “free-thinkers.” A letter from Lord Grange to minister Isaac Watts in 1724 complained about “some Books of Logic [that] seem to teach what we call our Reason to rebel against Revelation. . . . I lament the wickedness of the age that has produced so many advocats for infidelity.”¹⁵⁹¹ Opponents of this “infidelity” gathered stories of ghosts, fairies, witchcraft,

¹⁵⁸⁹ See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy In Which The Existence of God And the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, 3rd. ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme & Power of A Comonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, ed. A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904). In the British Library, Hobbes' *Leviathan* is shelf-marked BL, Egerton MS 1910; Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1995).

¹⁵⁹⁰ The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that did not believe that humans had immortal souls, and therefore they didn't believe in an afterlife. The Bible says they believed that “there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.” See Acts 23:8.

¹⁵⁹¹ NRS, GD124/15/1253/2.

apparitions, prophecies, portents, and second sight in an attempt to prove that spiritual forces moved in the world around them. King James was compelled to write *Daemonologie* in response to skeptical authors who denied that witchcraft was a crime that was possible to commit.¹⁵⁹² According to James, “who denieth the power of the devil would likewise deny the power of God, if they could for shame... But I fear indeed there be over-many Sadducees in this world that deny all kinds of spirits; for convicting of whose error there is cause enough, if there were no more, that God would permit at some times spirits visibly to kith.”¹⁵⁹³ Numerous other early modern writers contributed to this growing body of literature that affirmed the reality of the supernatural. Among these were Thomas Bromhall’s *A History of Apparitions*,¹⁵⁹⁴ Richard Baxter’s *The Certainty of the World of Spirits*,¹⁵⁹⁵ Henry More’s *An Antidote against Atheisme*,¹⁵⁹⁶ and Meric Casaubon’s *A Treatise Proving Spirits, witches, and supernatural operations*.¹⁵⁹⁷ Robert

¹⁵⁹² Specifically, James named Reginald Scot “an Englishman, [who] is not ashamed in public print to deny that there can be such a thing as witchcraft; and so maintains the old error of the Sadducees in denying of spirits. The other called Wierus, A german physician, sets out a public apology for all these craftsfolk, whereby, procuring for their impunity, he plainly betrays himself to have been one of that profession.” Here, James is referring to Johann Weyer, who was actually Dutch but lived in Germany. For their writings see Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), BL, G.19129; Johann Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum* (Basil: Joannes Oporinus, 1563).

¹⁵⁹³ James VI, *Demonology*, 401-402. It should be noted that James was of the opinion that all apparitions were plainly demons since “all miracles, visions, prophecies, and appearances of angels or good spirits are ceased, which served only for the first sowing of faith, and planting of the church.” See James VI, *Demonology*, 412.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Thomas Bromhall, *A History of Apparitions* (London: John Streater, 1658).

¹⁵⁹⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (London: T. Parkhurst and J. Salisbury, 1691).

¹⁵⁹⁶ Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheisme* (London: Roger Daniel, 1653).

¹⁵⁹⁷ Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise Proving Spirits, witches, and supernatural operations* (London: Brabazon Aylmer, 1672). This source was alternately titled *Of credulity and incredulity in things natural, civil, and divine*.

Wodrow's *Analecta* also contained many stories of the supernatural, and at times featured accounts of skeptical individuals who had been converted away from their dangerous beliefs.¹⁵⁹⁸

Accounts of second sighted people were implicated in this quest to prove the existence of the world of spirits. As people who claimed that they could see spirits or predict future events, second sighted people were considered eyewitnesses to the supernatural. James Boswell wrote that his travel companion Samuel Johnson's interest in second sight was an "elevated wish for more and more evidence of spirit."¹⁵⁹⁹ Boswell agreed with Johnson that confirmation of the supernatural could be obtained through the existence of individuals who had access to knowledge that was above the ordinary.¹⁶⁰⁰ Various pamphlets and treatises on second sight appeared to also take this perspective. *The History of Witches, Ghosts and Highland Seers* contained many accounts of second sight, and was specifically "Designed For the Conviction of the Unbeliever."¹⁶⁰¹ William Cheyn's *The Great Danger or Folly of Atheism* was written for the same purpose, and cited evidence of prophets and revelations of the future as infallible proof of the existence of God.¹⁶⁰² Joseph Glanvill and Henry More's *Saducimus Triumphatus* defended the reality of apparitions, claiming that "there are Innumerable Stories of people that have their

¹⁵⁹⁸ Wodrow recorded the account of a man named Dr. Pitcairne who was ordinarily haunted by an apparition, despite once being an atheist and a "very learned man." See Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 2, 48, 255, 379. Similarly, Wodrow claimed that Patrick Erskine was "a skeptic and almost a deist," yet he saw the apparition of a dead man, who gave him advice and directions. See Wodrow, *Analecta*, vol. 3, 519.

¹⁵⁹⁹ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D: comprehending an account of his studies and numerous works*, vol. 1 (London: Charles Dilly, 1791), 355.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 355.

¹⁶⁰¹ *The History of Witches, Ghosts, and Highland Seers*, title page.

¹⁶⁰² Cheyn, *The Great Danger and Vanity or Folly of Atheism*, 232-238.

second sight as they call it, to wit, a faculty of seeing Spectres when others cannot discern them.”¹⁶⁰³ George Sinclair’s *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered* investigated various supernatural phenomena, including second sight, for the purpose of proving the existence of a spiritual realm. Sinclair advertised the book as “A choice Collection of Modern Relations, proving evidently against the Saducees and Atheists of this present Age, that there are Devils, Spirits, Witches, and Apparitions, from Authentick Records, Attestations of Famous Witnesses, and undoubted Verity.”¹⁶⁰⁴

The entire self-declared purpose of Theophilus Insulanus’ *A Treatise on the Second Sight* was to prove the reality of spirits in opposition to atheism. Published in 1763, the dedicatory epistle at the beginning of the treatise exhorted the reader to “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe his Prophets, so shall you prosper.” According to the author, this call came at a time of crisis, “against the infidelity of the age, when vice reigns triumphant, and atheism, or at least deistical principles are openly avowed, and by too many countenanced.”¹⁶⁰⁵ Insulanus found it ultimately unsurprising that “Deists and Free-thinkers” doubted revelation, spirits, and visions, yet was altogether shocked that “Christians, who profess to believe the Sacred Oracles as they are handed down to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, should discover any scruple to admit the truth of apparitions; which so powerfully prompt and enforce the important belief of revelation.”¹⁶⁰⁶ The author claimed that second sight “most

¹⁶⁰³ Glanvill and More, *Saducimus Triumphatus*, 53.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World*, unnumbered page.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, iii.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 50.

powerfully confirms the existence and agency of spirits; and seeing we receive, in this life, any informations from visions, dreams, sounds and apparitions, that are certain and unquestionable, we have no room to doubt.”¹⁶⁰⁷ Insulanus openly condemned early modern wit culture and those educated men who scoffed at accounts of second sight. His treatise was intended to refute “the creed of our modern Free-thinkers, who treat that awful truth, in the hours of their mirth and vanity, as the subject of profane mirth and raillery, as phantoms, or the idle dreams of superstitious brains.”¹⁶⁰⁸

Providing evidence of the reality of spirits, and therefore God, was also the objective of Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Commonwealth*. The development of Kirk’s ideas that would become his treatise on second sight is documented in his diaries and commonplace books in the years leading up to the treatise’s composition in 1691. Kirk was also consuming and thinking about other anti-atheist texts during these years, and his later writings referred to various publications by Meric Casaubon,¹⁶⁰⁹ Richard Baxter,¹⁶¹⁰ Joseph Glanvill, and Henry More.¹⁶¹¹ Kirk’s work, like that of his fellow scientists and theorists, combined his faith in God with his reason and knowledge about early modern science. Kirk expressed the fervent belief that “a humane or divine faith is required of all the discipuls of humane arts & sciences, & of religion.”¹⁶¹² His

¹⁶⁰⁷ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 82.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 84.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Kirk was clearly aware of and had read Casaubon’s *Of Credulity and Incredulity* as mention of it appears in his student notebook in 1672. See EUL, Dc.8.114, fol. 193.

¹⁶¹⁰ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 63.

¹⁶¹¹ Robert Kirk, “Kirk’s Secret Commonwealth,” in *The Occult Laboratory*, ed. Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 97-98.

¹⁶¹² EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

treatise *The Secret Commonwealth* was the result of Kirk's convictions about second sight and its ability to prove the validity of the Christian worldview. As such, it is a highly valuable source that records numerous popular beliefs about second sight and orients them within a framework of early modern science and religion.

Kirk was intent on demonstrating the existence of fairies and second sight through references to contemporary scientific knowledge and discoveries. The presence of spirits in the world around us seemed entirely logical to Kirk, who compared the polity of fairies to the orders of biological life in creation. He described how birds, flies, insects, men, beasts, worms, moles, otters, badgers, and fish all inhabit the air, earth, and water, as well as hell which is inhabited at the center of the world and heaven at the circumference.¹⁶¹³ Kirk invoked the neo-Platonic idea that the entire world was teeming with life and there was “no such thing as a pure wilderness in the whol Universe.”¹⁶¹⁴ Therefore, “can we think of the midl cavities of the earth empty?... all under the earth must bow to Jesus also.”¹⁶¹⁵ These ideas appear to be illustrated in Kirk's student notebook, which contains some drawings that accompanied his early writings, including depictions of cross-sections of creation with birds, snakes, fish, owls, and people.¹⁶¹⁶ Kirk's view of a populated world led him to conclude that “all ages have given some obscure testimonies of it, & hints of it [the existence of spirits],” and “every place & thing had special invisibl regular

¹⁶¹³ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v. This passage overlaps with a portion of Kirk's treatise. See EUL, La.III.551, fols. 68-69.

¹⁶¹⁴ EUL, La.III.551, fol. 3.

¹⁶¹⁵ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

¹⁶¹⁶ EUL, Dc.8.114.

Governours.”¹⁶¹⁷

For Kirk, contact between humans and spirits, as attested by second sighted people, was for the purpose of convincing the doubtful of the existence of a spiritual world. These ideas appeared in his earliest writings, and Kirk’s notebook from 1678-80 claimed that some people had “noble correspondence with the invisible world of spirits,”¹⁶¹⁸ as evidenced by the spirit haunting in Glenluce and other spirits that “wander sporting and troubling houses.”¹⁶¹⁹ His notebook from 1678 contained some of his thoughts on fairies that kidnapped children or women to be their nursemaids, and concluded that these accounts were evidence that there are “diverse clans and kynds of spirits who make their vehicles seen to us when they please.”¹⁶²⁰ Both his notebook from 1678 and his commonplace book of 1689 contained early musings on evidence of the “invisible polity,” and his belief that it had its own laws, economy, and commonwealth.¹⁶²¹ A scribbled note recorded the assertion that “Highlanders mostly say their souls go to the sith... This against Sadducees & atheists is worth enquiry.”¹⁶²²

Eventually, these thoughts came together into his grand theory of second sight as a means of proving the existence of spirits against the arguments of atheists. In his treatise, Kirk argued that second sight was due to the “courteous endeavours of our fellow creaturs in the invisible world to convince us (in opposition to Sadducees, Socinians and Atheists) of a Dietie, of

¹⁶¹⁷ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

¹⁶¹⁸ EUL, Dc.8.116, fol. 112v.

¹⁶¹⁹ EUL, Dc.8.116, fol. 113.

¹⁶²⁰ NLS, MS 3932, fol. 13.

¹⁶²¹ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 24; NLS, MS 3932, fol. 37v.

¹⁶²² EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

Spirits... A knowledge (belike) reservd for these last Atheistic Ages, Wherein the profanity of mens lives, hath debauchd and Blinded their understandings.”¹⁶²³ This conviction was supported by numerous stories about fairies and spirits as related by second sighted people. Kirk especially believed of the “subterranean apparitions” that “Men prepossessed with a prejudice and misbelief of them, will get a sight of them, & have gotten.”¹⁶²⁴ In support of this claim, Kirk’s treatise contained accounts of disbelievers who were convinced of the existence of spirits through their encounters with second sighted people.¹⁶²⁵

Kirk knew that his propositions would be scoffed at by many, particularly those members of wit culture that he had encountered in London coffee houses during his trip in 1689.¹⁶²⁶ In defense of his theory, Kirk made reference to the public’s initial reactions to the discovery of America: “the antipodes & inhabitants of America, the bone of our bone, yet their first discovery was lookt on as a fayrie tale and the Reporters hooted at as inventors of ridiculous Utopia’s, and the first probable asserters were punished, as if they divulg’d a Doctrine of new worlds & gods, & involvd themselves there by into dangers... Who knows but as every age hath its truths reservd for their being most patly discovered at that time.”¹⁶²⁷ This justification closely resembled one given by Joseph Glanvill, who argued that scientists had a responsibility to study the heretofore undiscovered world of spirits: “Indeed, as things are for the present, the Land of Spirits is a kinde of America, and not well discover’d Region... were there a Cautious, and Faithful History made

¹⁶²³ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 60-61.

¹⁶²⁴ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 23v.

¹⁶²⁵ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 37-39.

¹⁶²⁶ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 127v.

¹⁶²⁷ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 24.

of those certain and uncommon appearances. At least it would be a standing evidence against Sadducism, to which the present Age is so unhappily disposed.”¹⁶²⁸ Kirk also used this metaphor of the world of spirits as an unexplored realm to make comparisons to new discoveries of marine life: “diverse of that Secret Common-Wealth may by permission discover themselves as innocently to us who are in another State, as some of us men do to Fishes which are in another Element, when we plunge, and dyve into the bottom of the Seas... in process of time, we may come to converse as familiarly with those Nible and Agil Clans (but with greater pleasure and profit) as we do now with the Chinois and Antipodes.”¹⁶²⁹ For Kirk, the existence of a world of spirits was as certain as the existence of the fish in the sea or the inhabitants of other continents. Just as we could be assured of the realities of previously unknown wildlife and people-groups by explorers, we could be convinced of the existence of spirits by the verifiable testimony of second sighted people.

Kirk’s numerous references and appeals to a scientific interpretation of second sight certainly placed him among those early modern scientists and theorists who attempted to orient visionary experiences within their expanding worldview. From Kirk’s perspective, his accounts of second sight absolutely proved the reality of a world of spirits and people who could perceive them. Kirk envisioned a scientific order to the universe that decreed that the world was densely populated with beings in all realms and continents, with spirits simply being one kind of creature among many. Furthermore, he argued that his belief that some people had higher powers of

¹⁶²⁸ Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism in some philosophical considerations about witchcraft* (London: James Collins, 1668), 93-95.

¹⁶²⁹ EUL, La.III.551, fols. 78-79. See also EUL, La.III.545, fol. 104v. For this reason, Kirk referred to the second sighted as “Amphibious Seers.” See EUL, La.III.551, fol. 92.

perception was not unreasonable, given current scientific knowledge about optics. For Kirk, this was the great new discovery of his age, reserved for an era of doubt and crisis, in need of the proof that the second sighted could offer.

Though Kirk intended for his treatise to reflect his dual role as an early modern minister and scientific researcher, this was not necessarily the legacy he left behind. Shortly after the composition of *The Secret Commonwealth*, Robert Kirk was found dead outside, lying on a hill, presumably during an evening walk. He was only forty-eight years old, and his sudden demise appeared suspicious to those who found him. His body was buried in the Kirkton graveyard, but legend held that he had been taken to fairyland for treading on a known fairy hill and revealing the secrets of the invisible polity in his writings.¹⁶³⁰ A folklore developed around Robert Kirk, who was now believed to be a captive in fairyland, and his tale persisted into the modern era.¹⁶³¹ More than two centuries after Kirk's death, W.Y. Evans-Wentz was in Aberfoyle asking locals about fairy belief when he encountered the story of the "fairy minister." Fairylore scholar Katharine Briggs also heard a version of the tale of Kirk's kidnapping in 1943.¹⁶³² Engaged in fieldwork in 1990 on fairy belief in Balquhidder, the first parish where Kirk worked, Margaret Bennet was also told a rendition of this story.¹⁶³³ While his research and treatise were the clear product of early modern scientific knowledge and reasoning, Kirk's memory has developed into

¹⁶³⁰ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 363; Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 138.

¹⁶³¹ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, vol. 2, 363; Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 138.

¹⁶³² Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 173.

¹⁶³³ Margaret Bennet, "Balquhidder Revisited: Fairylore in the Scottish Highlands, 1690-1990," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narvaez (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 98-102.

the stuff of folklore and legend. In this way, his life and work represent the early modern entanglement of folklore, religion, and science that is ultimately impossible to extricate. Perhaps Kirk would have preferred to be remembered not as the fairies' captive, but as a scientist and explorer of the invisible world, whose existence he had so fervently defended.

Like Kirk, most scientists and Enlightenment thinkers who were interested in second sight hoped it would provide a means of understanding how the world of spirits interacted with our own physical realm. Scientists' theories about second sight were numerous and diverse, and generally attempted to provide natural or medical explanations for the origin of this ability, thereby demarcating the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. All the while, their conviction that genuine visionary experiences did exist and contact with spirits was possible provided a rational foundation and interpretive framework for scientific theories of second sight. Far from being subject to disenchantment, investigations into second sight by early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers illustrate that their field of study did not undergo progressive secularization. Many theorists were actually intent on utilizing the second sighted as eyewitnesses to the invisible, and thereby countering the rising tide of atheism and disbelief that they believed menaced their present age. In these ways, religious concerns and scientific concerns overlapped, and were often identical. For most theorists, the early modern world contained individuals for whom the invisible *was* visible, and this undeniable truth demanded investigation.

Conclusion

There is more managed by Gods spirit & other spirits in this world than we are aware of.

— Robert Kirk, in his commonplace book (1689)¹⁶³⁴

This sweeping statement was recorded among Kirk's thoughts on second sight, as he jotted down various observations and assertions about the ability while visiting London in 1689. Though Kirk's treatise on fairies and second sight was still in the early stages of composition, the contents of his commonplace book attest that he was assembling and organizing the arguments and evidence that would soon come together to make this larger source. While Kirk's theory of second sight rested on specific beliefs about the origins and scope of this ability, his broader conviction that the world of spirits operated in powerful and unseen ways underpinned his entire philosophical and religious outlook. Kirk was an exceptional individual in many ways, but in this particular way he was like most of his contemporaries. His belief in the reality and influence of an invisible world informed his everyday existence.

Like Kirk, the vast majority of early modern people would have agreed that spirits engaged in actions more dynamic and far-reaching "than we are aware." However, as this dissertation has demonstrated, there were notable variations among early modern people's theories about spirits and our awareness of them. Despite these variations, many did believe in the existence of something called "second sight." Even those who were skeptical about its validity did not conclude that spirits, and therefore God, did not exist. Rather, early modern people widely acknowledged that our world overlapped with an invisible reality, which some

¹⁶³⁴ EUL, La.III.545, fol. 129.

individuals under some circumstances were able to perceive. In this way, this dissertation's historical inquiry into second sight has afforded us a wide vantage on the many early modern inhabitants of the British Isles, and aspects of their shared culture. The body of early modern knowledge that informed interpretations of second sight was vast, and therefore this dissertation has attempted to both bring together and parse out the many perspectives that individuals had about this ability.

This dissertation has approached second sight as a topic that was taken seriously by early modern people, and has sought to contextualize it within prevailing systems of belief, logic, and knowledge. Early modern theories and interpretations of second sight were numerous and diverse, but all were informed by culturally specific beliefs about the supernatural. Theories of second sight drew on various influential belief systems such as popular magic, Christianity, demonology, early modern science, and the folk tradition. Among these many belief systems, the study of second sight illuminates the fractures and overlaps between elite and popular culture, as it moved readily between the realms of folk belief and intellectual discourse. This dissertation's analysis of the intersections of these many belief systems compels us to revise any perspective of this period that views magic, religion, science, folk culture, or intellectual theory as subjects that were in binary opposition.

Approaching second sight with scholarly sincerity also means trying to understand how it was experienced by those who laid claim to the ability. To that end, this dissertation has examined not only observers' theories of second sight, but also the personal testimony of individuals who claimed to be second sighted. Theories of second sight were often founded on the first-hand accounts of individuals who attested that they possessed perception above the

ordinary. Therefore, seers' beliefs about the limits and nature of their own abilities were in dialogue with early modern theories of the supernatural. Interpretations of supernatural abilities or encounters with the invisible world were predicated on early modern beliefs about the spiritual landscape, which was populated by many types of spirits whose attributes and behaviors often overlapped. Therefore, processes of discernment engaged in by both visionaries and their communities were inherently arbitrary and subjective, further contributing to the plurality of early modern beliefs about second sight. By analyzing early modern records of seers, their observers, and second sight theorists, this dissertation has facilitated an exploration of the range of sources to which Scottish people attributed supernatural powers, as well as the uses of those powers within seers' communities.

A greater understanding of the experiential dimension of second sight has also permitted us to span the gap between the distant, strange-seeming past and our own present day by recognizing that visionary experiences often have a basis in reality. Modern studies of altered states of consciousness indicate that cultural factors have a profound effect on the content of visionary experiences, as well as their interpretations. This dissertation's exploration of the potential physiological basis of second sight experiences has encouraged modern scholars to view second sight belief as a means through which early modern people explained and interpreted seers' lived experiences. In this way, second sight is revealed to be part of a broader belief system about people who had exceptional abilities or could make contact with spirits, such as practitioners of magic, accused witches, and shamans. Therefore, this dissertation has emphasized that second sight belief was oriented within a coherent cultural framework that widely accepted the existence of an invisible world, and people who could perceive it.

As the first lengthy scholarly exploration of early modern second sight, this dissertation has been in a position to make several significant historiographical interventions. Despite the fact that scholars of folk belief and culture have tended to approach the study of early modern second sight with narrow definitions in mind, this dissertation has emphasized the utility of a broad and inclusive definition to a more realistic understanding of Scottish second sight. The term “second sight” was used in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways, and no single or narrow definition does justice to the concept from an early modern perspective. People who identified as “second sighted” laid claim to a wide variety of supernatural and visionary abilities, including seeing the future, prognosticating death, accessing hidden knowledge, and perceiving the world of spirits. However, these talents were broadly defined and often far-reaching, and could be expressed in numerous ways such as speaking other languages, transferring illness from one being to another, detecting sources of witchcraft, or having working relationships with spirit beings. Early modern people also lacked a cultural consensus about how second sight was acquired, with many people arguing that it could be obtained and exercised voluntarily, while others believed that it was an uninvited and troublesome faculty. There were also varying beliefs about whether second sight could be cured, and by what means. Theories differed as to whether the second sighted “saw” with their eyes or minds, or even whether their descriptions of their visions were reliable. While some argued that second sight was evidence of genuine contact between humans and spirits, others claimed it was the result of illness and delusion. Beliefs about second sight were far from uniform, and there was no single early modern theory of second sight.

These debates about how to define second sight have been replicated in modern historiography on the topic. While some scholars have defined second sight as the ability to

prognosticate death or acquire knowledge at a distance, others have argued that it was the ability to see spirits. Scholars' opinions have also been divided as to whether second sight was an ability that was subject to the seer's own invitation and control. On the whole, scholars have tended to emphasize single or narrow aspects of second sight as they were represented in individual early modern sources, or clusters of sources. In doing so, scholars have often failed to recognize that second sight was a multivalent concept that encompassed many supernatural abilities and beliefs about people who could perceive the invisible world. This dissertation has approached the phenomenon with an inclusive definition in mind, and as such has attempted to understand the complex ways in which second sight was conceptualized by early modern people. While this dissertation does not reject any of the narrower definitions put forward by historians and scholars of early modern folk belief, it does seek to integrate these many definitions into a broader understanding of second sight as a messy, yet useful, concept.

The continued relevance of second sight belief across the early modern period can largely be attributed to its malleability, since it was readily adapted to many conversations about relevant topics that were integral to early modern people's worldviews. Second sight remained a significant aspect of the early modern matrix of beliefs and practices related to supernatural visionary powers and the overlap of the human and spiritual realms. Because of its fluid nature, second sight belief was incorporated into various theories about morality, theology, science, and nature. It was considered relevant to other contentious topics such as prophecy, magic, spirits, and the limits of human perception, making it an ideal concept for testing various early modern theories about the existence of the conventionally unseen. Without a flexible and inclusive definition of second sight, we cannot understand its utility to these many conversations, and

therefore we cannot understand early modern people's varied opinions about second sight.

This dissertation has also intervened in the scholarly debate about second sight's relationship to witchcraft, witch trials, and fairy belief. Siding with the majority of scholars of Scottish folk belief, this dissertation has asserted that second sight was associated with witchcraft in early modern legislation and demonological sources. Consequentially, some second sighted people were prosecuted during the Scottish witch trials. Witch trial documents are our richest sources for identifying the connections between second sight, fairy belief, and witchcraft, as numerous folk beliefs and practices were demonized by Scottish reformers in their mission to create a godly society. These documents illustrate that second sight was inherently related to fairy belief in the popular imagination, as some second sighted people claimed that they had association with the fairies, or even attested that their supernatural abilities had been acquired through a relationship with the fairy folk. These claims were not unusual for practitioners of popular magic, further emphasizing the relevance of second sight to the broader body of early modern beliefs about witchcraft and the supernatural. Through a close examination of early modern legislation, judicial records, and treatises on witchcraft, it is evident that second sight belief was not unidirectionally influenced by demonological theories, but rather popular beliefs about second sight and fairies actively shaped demonological understandings of witchcraft.

Though second sight was demonized during the Scottish witch trials, it also appears to have played a different role in the conversations and theories of some reformers, scientists, and Enlightenment thinkers. By noting the prominence of second sight belief in sources produced during these various social movements, the conclusions of this dissertation contradict the once-influential thesis of early modern disenchantment. Notably, some Christian visionaries managed

to reconcile second sight belief with their own prophetic traditions. Through this means, some visionaries oriented their experiences within the existing cultural framework of second sight belief, incorporating and adapting aspects of second sight into their understanding of spiritual gifts. As was also the case for witch trial documents, tracing aspects of second sight belief in accounts of Christian visionaries allows us to observe ongoing confessional conflict in reforming Scotland, and recognize the various ways in which Scottish Christianity was flexible or inflexible to pre-existing spiritual traditions. The conversion of Scotland to Protestantism was ultimately a process of cultural synthesis, during which second sight belief and early modern Christianity engaged in reciprocal influence and exchange.

Inquiry into second sight also proved useful for early modern scientists and Enlightenment thinkers, many of whom were intrigued by the idea that some people in Scotland could receive genuine visions of the future or communicate with spirits. Through their investigations into phenomena such as second sight, scientists and Enlightenment thinkers were able to develop and test theories about the boundary between the natural and supernatural. Inquiries into the mechanisms or operations of second sight yielded various theories about spirits' abilities to influence human perception, whether for good or evil purposes. Therefore, regardless of their personal belief or disbelief in the validity of second sight, scientific theories about the phenomenon were informed by scientists' conviction that spirits did exist and some people could communicate with them. Many scientists were specifically interested in the second sighted as eyewitnesses to the invisible world, who could provide trustworthy evidence to support belief in its reality. In this way, early modern inquiry into second sight was profoundly rational yet not secular, and scientific pursuits were often tailored to scientists' religious goals.

These instances of persistent belief and interest in second sight challenge historiographical attempts to cast the early modern period as the midwife to some elusive concept of “modernity.” Some historians and social scientists were generally too eager to accept early modern writers’ claims that superstitious beliefs were declining, and so they declared that the era that preceded their own had been subject to a gradual process of disenchantment. As a result, scholars have argued that the early modern period was characterized by this process of secularization and rationalization that progressively banished “superstitious” belief systems, such as second sight. However, this dissertation has demonstrated that second sight played a role in several significant early modern social movements, such as the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution. In this way, second sight belief continued to be relevant to early modern people who were interested in demonizing, sanctifying, verifying, and studying the experiences of the second sighted.

By reconstructing the various ways in which second sight remained relevant throughout the early modern period, we are forced to discard the thesis of linear disenchantment. Rather, mapping the path of early modern second sight reveals that belief systems during this period conform more closely to Alexandra Walsham’s model of cycles of sacralization and desacralization. This cyclic model permits us to observe superstitious or religious beliefs being shaped and re-shaped within the conversations of reformers, scientists, and Enlightenment thinkers. This perception of the early modern period prompts us to have a more nuanced view of this era, and leads us to revise our assumptions about its actors, culture, and social movements.

The early modern period can be characterized as a time when categories of knowledge were being reorganized and redefined. Science and theology, the natural and the supernatural, the

significant and the mundane— these were all categories that were actively in flux. Second sight was a phenomenon that sat at the intersection of these various topics, and moved fluidly among them. This period ushered in both an intense interest and skepticism about the spiritual world and people who claimed they had contact with it. This took the form of an explosion of writing on subjects such as visionary abilities, the boundaries of human knowledge, and the existence of spirits. Second sight had a significant presence in these conversations, influencing and being influenced by both Christianity and the folk tradition. Second sight appeared in numerous sources, composed by individuals with many different perspectives and purposes for writing. Interest and belief in second sight defied social stratification, and contributions to these debates came from both inside and outside of Scotland.

Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that second sight was an exceptionally malleable concept that was easily molded to a variety of shifting conversations. Early modern people applied the term in diverse ways, and as such it came to be understood as applicable to a number of supernatural abilities of contested origin. Despite any historiographical claims about the emergence of a more rational, disenchanted world borne out of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Scientific Revolution, belief and interest in second sight survived the early modern period and continued to receive attention in the writings of folklorists, visionaries, and scientific researchers. The persistent relevance of second sight is directly related to its ability to take on numerous definitions and interpretations by early modern people, who were able to adapt it to test or explain various theories they had about their changing world. For many, this world included invisible beings and unknowable forces, both of which had the potential to be seen through the eyes of the second sighted.

Epilogue: The Persistence of Second Sight Belief

The ability of second sight, and those who believe in it, are fading away. At least, that's what most early modern theorists thought. Numerous sources that discussed the phenomenon insisted that it was becoming a rarity and soon it would disappear completely. This belief was the basis for an annotation by Lord Molesworth in a copy of Martin Martin's book, where Molesworth asserted that, "As ignorance vanishes, so does all spectres, second sights, hobgolins, fayries, Haunted houses, & 100 such fooleryes & apparitions. The pretenders to such storyes ought immediately to be taken up & whipped at a Cart's tayl for cheates & imposters in a well policed governance."¹⁶³⁵ Though Molesworth's argument about what should happen to "pretenders" was more extreme than most, others appeared to more or less agree with his opinion about second sight and all "such fooleryes and apparitions."

As in Molesworth's comments, second sight was often associated with the waning influence of ignorance and superstition over which rational belief systems would inevitably triumph. Dr. Beattie claimed that since some remnants of belief in second sight still existed, "we need not doubt but in former times they must have been much more enslaved to the horrors of imagination, when beset with the bugbears of Popery and the darkness of Paganism... For it is admitted by even the most credulous Highlanders, that as knowledge and industry are propagated in their country, the second sight disappears in proportion."¹⁶³⁶ A letter from the Reverend Donald McQueen to Theophilus Insulanus also contained the sentiment that second sight was

¹⁶³⁵ BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 313.

¹⁶³⁶ Beattie, "A Description of the Highlands of Scotland," 457.

soon to “disappear... as we improve in knowledge,”¹⁶³⁷ while Daniel Defoe agreed “that this Faculty decays in proportion as Christianity increases among them, and as they improve in Knowledge.”¹⁶³⁸ John Dalyell believed that the second sight “must be ascribed to past rather than to present times, because although not entirely extinct, the same credulity which fostered its subsistence has been long on the wane.”¹⁶³⁹ Similarly, John MacCulloch wagered, “If I mistake not, it is now, not only disbelieved, but held a matter to be ashamed of. Even those who believed that such things did happen in former times, will not admit that they can occur at present.”¹⁶⁴⁰ At the time of Martin Martin’s writing, he confidently asserted, “It is observable, that it was much more common twenty Years ago than at present; for one in ten do not see it now, that saw it then.”¹⁶⁴¹ John Toland’s rationale for this decline was “Because people become less credulous.”¹⁶⁴²

Travelers to Scotland also discussed the dwindling of second sight belief. During his tour of the Highlands, James MacDonald claimed he was told by a seer that there had been more seers when he was young, and that now most people were afraid to speak openly about their visions.¹⁶⁴³ Traveler Sarah Murray also recorded that belief in second sight was disappearing

¹⁶³⁷ Insulanus, *Treatise on the Second Sight*, 94.

¹⁶³⁸ Defoe, *A Tour thro' the Whole Island*, 277.

¹⁶³⁹ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*, 468.

¹⁶⁴⁰ MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles*, vol. 4, 86.

¹⁶⁴¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 312.

¹⁶⁴² BL, C.45.c.1, pg. 312.

¹⁶⁴³ MacDonald, *Reise durch Schottland*, 175.

from the Highlands.¹⁶⁴⁴ Recalling his tour of Scotland, Samuel Johnson noted, “It is the common talk of the Lowland Scots, that the notion of the Second Sight is wearing away with other superstitions; and that its reality is no longer supposed, but by the grossest people.”¹⁶⁴⁵ On his trip to Edinburgh, Edmund Calamy observed, “I perceived it to be a prevailing opinion, that the thing was now much abated.”¹⁶⁴⁶ John Brand also cited one of his references for second sight accounts as “having so lately visited the Scene of its declining Influence.”¹⁶⁴⁷ Thomas Pennant claimed that while the Highlands retained some of their superstitions, “they decline daily.”¹⁶⁴⁸ During his visit there, Pennant recorded that he “Passed near the seat of a gentleman not long deceased; the last who was believed to be possessed of the second sight,” one William Sinclair of Freswick in Caithness.¹⁶⁴⁹ Walter Scott also claimed to have known “the last person eminently gifted with the second sight,” though this was a different man named Macoan in Appin who attributed his gift to the fairies.¹⁶⁵⁰

Some of these statements about the disappearance of second sight or “the last” person who had the gift were optimistic that superstition was giving way to rationality, while others were wistful or nostalgic about a dwindling past that would soon be lost to us forever. This belief that “superstitions” were in decline was not isolated to second sight, but was also frequently

¹⁶⁴⁴ Murray, *A Companion, and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland*, 295.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, 90.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life*, 189.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Brand, *Observations on popular antiquities* (1777), 381.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 67.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland 1769*, 117.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Scott, *Minstrelsy*, vol. 2, 305.

mentioned in reference to belief in witches and fairies. Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson have discussed the prevalent opinions that early modern people were witness to both “the last of the witches”¹⁶⁵¹ as well as “the departure of the fairies.”¹⁶⁵² If we were to believe what early modern theorists wrote, we would be inclined to think that many of their belief systems were as wraiths in their winding shrouds: shadows of their healthy selves, presaging their imminent departure from the realm of relevance.

Despite the widespread opinion that second sight belief was a relic of the past, those who predicted its extinction were ultimately unable to witness its demise. Belief in second sight persisted in a number of ways after the early modern period, both inside and outside of Scotland. The widely-held sentiment that the beliefs of the past were fading away encouraged a new generation of nineteenth and twentieth century folklorists to preserve these quaint superstitions that were supposedly being eradicated by the unstoppable force of progress. Industrious folklorists such as J.G. Campbell, J.F. Campbell, Andrew Lang, and Lewis Spence meticulously recorded and studied the purportedly waning belief systems of Scotland, including second sight. The nineteenth century also experienced the rise of Romanticism, which further enshrined the Highlands among those wild and untouched areas of the world where traces of second sight were most likely to survive.

Despite the “declining influence” of second sight, the field of folklore studies is likely responsible for creating the most iconic seer of Scottish popular culture: Coinneach Odhar, also known as Kenneth Mackenzie or the Brahan Seer. Odhar’s legend incorporated many aspects of

¹⁶⁵¹ Cowan and Henderson, “The last of the witches?,” 198-217.

¹⁶⁵² Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 24-30, 193-216.

early modern second sight belief, and despite the lack of historical evidence to support oral accounts of his life, he is widely believed to be among the most famous seers in Gaeldom. The creation of Odhar's legend in oral culture, and its embellishment at the hands of nineteenth century folklorists, illustrates ongoing interest in popular prophecy and the preservation of early modern second sight belief. According to legend, Coinneach was a seer who lived in the seventeenth century and was a member of Clan Mackenzie who dwelt on lands owned by the Seaforths. Accounts of his life also connected him to Brahan Castle, near Dingwall, and the Black Isle in Easter Ross. Numerous predictions were recorded and attributed to the seer, whose visions came to him when he gazed through a holed stone. Some versions of the legend claimed that he acquired the stone from sleeping on a fairy hill,¹⁶⁵³ others said he found it in a raven's nest,¹⁶⁵⁴ while yet another version held that the stone was given to his mother by the ghost of a Norse princess.¹⁶⁵⁵ In some variations of the story, gazing through the stone deprived Coinneach of sight in one eye but simultaneously granted him the gift of second sight.¹⁶⁵⁶ The seer met his downfall after revealing to Lady Seaforth the hidden knowledge that her husband was being unfaithful to her while he was traveling in Paris. This humiliation led to the order that Coinneach was to be burned alive in a spiked barrel, but not before he uttered a detailed prediction about the end of the Seaforth line.¹⁶⁵⁷

This tale holds a special place in Scottish popular culture and folk memory, particularly

¹⁶⁵³ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 93.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Black, *Gaelic Otherworld*, 149.

¹⁶⁵⁵ MacInnes, "The Seer in Gaelic Tradition," 22.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Spence, *Second Sight*, 148; Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 202.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 204-206.

as it pertains to second sight. There is a notable problem, though: the Brahan Seer likely never existed, or if he did, his legend is highly fictionalized. There is no historical evidence for Coinneach Odhar as the Brahan Seer, and it is now supposed that his legend was largely the creation of a nineteenth century folklorist named Alexander Mackenzie, whose accounts of the seer's life and prophecies were recorded almost two centuries after the seer was supposed to have lived.¹⁶⁵⁸ There are no recorded mentions of the Seaforth prophecy until 1815, and Mackenzie's book included numerous details that do not seem to be found anywhere else.¹⁶⁵⁹ Edward J. Cowan has argued that the fulfillment of the Brahan Seer's detailed predictions about the end of the Seaforth line are clearly an example of "prophesying backwards, or after the fact." This is evident, since "Prophecy provides confirmation of unusual events or developments. When it ought to exist but does not, it is manufactured."¹⁶⁶⁰ In this way, the legend of the Brahan Seer reveals the persistence of interest in second sight after the early modern period, in that second sight and prophecy continued to be part of a culturally accepted system of belief and explanation.

The only historical records that demonstrate the existence of anyone who may have resembled the Brahan Seer are two records for the respective arrest and execution of a man named Kenneth Owar, "principle or leader in the art of magic," who was accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth century in the trials at Easter Ross.¹⁶⁶¹ This man may or may not have been

¹⁶⁵⁸ Alexander Mackenzie, *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer; Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1977).

¹⁶⁵⁹ Cowan, "The Discovery of the Future," 26.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Cowan, "The Discovery of the Future," 26.

¹⁶⁶¹ William Matheson, "The historical Coinneach Odhar and some prophecies attributed to him," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 46 (1969-70): 66-88. See also Henderson, "Witch Hunting and Witch Belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*," 95.

connected to the legendary seer, and it is possible that this executed individual was just someone with a similar name who was found guilty of a magic-related crime. From there, accounts of the seer appear to exist mostly in oral legend and folklore. Thomas Pennant provided the earliest recognizable mention of the seer in 1769 when he wrote “Every country has its prophets... and the Highlands their Kenneth Oaur.”¹⁶⁶² Odhar also appears in the famous *Bannatyne Manuscript*, dated 1832, which identified him as being born in the sixteenth century in Ness on the Isle of Lewis. *The Bannatyne Manuscript* also referenced numerous popular prophecies attributed to him, particularly in Lewis and Skye.¹⁶⁶³ Hugh Miller’s 1835 collection of tales from the north of Scotland made mention of the seer as a seventeenth century field worker near Brahan Castle who by virtue of his second sight evaded poisoning by the clansman’s wife.¹⁶⁶⁴ These fragmentary references provide the only bridge between the potentially historical Coinneach Odhar and the legendary Brahan Seer of folklore.

These fragments also illustrate that stories about Coinneach Odhar did exist in Gaelic oral culture before Alexander Mackenzie set about to record and publish them in 1877. Mackenzie’s impulse to immortalize these legends was the same as many other folklorists; he was concerned that they would be forgotten as the world moved away from traditional belief systems and towards modernity. In response, Mackenzie collected stories and prophecies relevant to Odhar’s legend and titled them under a name of his own invention: “the Brahan Seer.” However, it has been pointed out that Mackenzie was guilty of inventing some of his stories about the seer and

¹⁶⁶² Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 208.

¹⁶⁶³ NLS, Adv.MS.1.1.6, fols. 113-120.

¹⁶⁶⁴ Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1835), 205-206.

embellishing others.¹⁶⁶⁵ Elizabeth Sutherland has argued that Coinneach Odhar must be a collective name for a number of legendary seers whose stories are part of a wider tradition of Highland prophetic history.¹⁶⁶⁶ Similarly, Lewis Spence claimed that Odhar's legend became attached to the sayings of numerous popular prophets such as Thomas Rymer and Michael Scot.¹⁶⁶⁷ The lack of historical basis for the seer's existence has not stopped people from speculating about his prophecies and identifying some that have supposedly come true, including predictions that purportedly presaged World War II,¹⁶⁶⁸ the 1988 Piper Alpha explosion in the North Sea,¹⁶⁶⁹ and the election of Margaret Thatcher.¹⁶⁷⁰

Despite the dearth of material that proves the existence of a historical Brahan Seer, the popularity and persistence of stories told about the seer illustrate the survival of belief in second sight beyond the early modern period. While the basis of the legend that Mackenzie recorded was likely manufactured during earlier centuries, his belief in the importance of these stories and the culture that created them supports the idea that second sight belief was not necessarily on the decline. Rather, the legend of one of the most famous Scottish seers was actually manufactured and immortalized in print in the years following the end of the early modern period.

Furthermore, ongoing interest in the seer's predictions, and their potential fulfillment, is surely a reflection of enduring belief in second sight and visionary abilities.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 121. See also Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer*.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 233.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Spence, *Second Sight*, 151.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 324; Thompson, *The Supernatural Highlands*, 79.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 319.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Sutherland, *Ravens & Black Rain*, 316.

Second sight belief also lived on among the Scottish clergy and laypeople, some of whom continued to be revered as gifted with prophetic abilities. Dr. John Kennedy was the minister of the Free Church at Dingwall from 1844 until his death in 1884. During this time, he recorded and published the sayings of his father the clergyman-seer and “the Men,” a group of lay prophets who were under his father’s spiritual care. The resulting book revealed the persistence of belief in second sight and subtle bodies among the members of his community.¹⁶⁷¹ Kennedy’s father’s spiritual gifts embodied many aspects of second sight belief, such as his knowledge of the secret sins of others¹⁶⁷² and his ability to predict forthcoming deaths, including his own.¹⁶⁷³ Kennedy provided evidence that the local lay prophets had similar talents, and apparently also believed that their spirits could travel outside of their bodies and engage in worship of God or attend services where they otherwise could not be present.¹⁶⁷⁴ Just as during the early modern period, second sight and subtle body belief proved compatible with Christianity, and a number of righteous individuals were able to reconcile aspects of popular belief with orthodoxy.

Interest in second sight also endured within scientific circles, where it continued to be subjected to various forms of inquiry and analysis. Outside of Scotland, second sight was associated with other types of continental clairvoyance by nineteenth century theorists who were eager to universalize the existence of supernatural abilities. This comparative analysis of beliefs to do with extraordinary human abilities both elevated second sight to the level of contemporary

¹⁶⁷¹ John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, 4th ed. (Toronto and Montreal: James Campbell & Son, 1867).

¹⁶⁷² Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 116-117.

¹⁶⁷³ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 123-124, 126-128.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Macrae, *Highland Second Sight*, 110.

scientific discourse, and divorced it from the belief that second sight was a uniquely Scottish phenomenon. Second sight was also implicated in conversations about mesmerism and animal magnetism, two interrelated concepts that were gaining traction within educated society.¹⁶⁷⁵ In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was founded and some of its members, such as Andrew Lang, quickly became interested in investigating the reality of Scottish second sight. In 1893, this organization began to issue questionnaires and conduct field research into second sight in the Highlands, not unlike the Royal Society had done in the seventeenth century. “The Enquiry into Second Sight” was led by Ada Goodrich Freer, a self-proclaimed psychic and medium, and it continued until 1896 when the project was disbanded.¹⁶⁷⁶

Nearly a century later, scientific interest in second sight continued to persist in the modern world. Like the Royal Society and the Society for Psychical Research, psychologist Shari Cohn’s doctoral research at the University of Edinburgh during the 1990’s also investigated second sight through the medium of questionnaires and interviews. Cohn’s research concluded that second sight may be a “creative mental ability” facilitated by hereditary “sensitivity.”¹⁶⁷⁷ Couched in the language of modern psychologists and geneticists, Cohn’s study migrated belief in second sight from the realm of the mystical to the empirical. In the same decade, famed American psychic and “consciousness researcher” Ingo Swann laid claim to powers equivalent to “the “second sight” of the Scots” in one of his many books about cultivating supernatural

¹⁶⁷⁵ Busst, “Scottish second sight,” 149-177; Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century*, 57-102.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century*, 195-199. See also John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall, *Strange Things: Father Allan, Ada Goodrich Freer and the Second Sight* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006).

¹⁶⁷⁷ Cohn, “Second Sight and Family History,” 351.

abilities.¹⁶⁷⁸ At the height of his popularity, Swann's own research into psychic phenomena at the Stanford Research Institute caught the attention of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, who funded further inquiry into supernatural abilities via the Stargate Project. Though information about the Project was formally declassified in the mid-nineties, the records of the US government's research into second sight were not made widely available until 2017.¹⁶⁷⁹

It would appear that belief in second sight among the Scottish also survived into the modern age, and perhaps until the present day. Shari Cohn's research in the 1990's gathered more than five hundred separate accounts of second sight experiences from her Scottish informants, as well as concluded that second sight was reported by people of "diverse ages, occupations, and religious and cultural traditions."¹⁶⁸⁰ Similarly, Margaret Bennett's 1990 field research into fairy belief in Balquhiddy revealed that second sight belief was alive and well there.¹⁶⁸¹ As recently as the mid-twentieth century, a local glen had been re-named "the Fairy Glen" since a second sighted man reported that he frequently saw fairies there.¹⁶⁸² So much for the "last seers" of the early modern age, it was common knowledge that the second sighted man in Balquiddy was in possession of the ability to see spirits and receive visions, and it was even reported that he had foreknowledge of his own death.¹⁶⁸³ Eilidh Watt, a Gaelic contributor to

¹⁶⁷⁸ Ingo Swann, *Psychic Sexuality: The Bio-Psychic "Anatomy" of Sexual Energies* (Swann-Ryder Productions, LLC., 2017), 111-112, 146.

¹⁶⁷⁹ "CIA releases 13m pages of declassified documents online," *BBC News*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38663522>.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Cohn, "Second Sight and Family History," 353.

¹⁶⁸¹ Bennet, "Balquhiddy Revisited," 96, 102.

¹⁶⁸² Bennet, "Balquhiddy Revisited," 96.

¹⁶⁸³ Bennet, "Balquhiddy Revisited," 96.

Hilda Ellis Davidson's edited volume *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions* (1989), also freely shared her experiences with second sight which had "for generations been a characteristic of my father's family."¹⁶⁸⁴ Furthermore, the aspects of second sight that Watt laid claim to corresponded with early modern accounts, including her attestations of seeing phantom funeral processions, being visited by spirits or ghosts, predicting death by seeing a wraith in a shroud, foreseeing disasters, and seeing co-walkers or "doubles." Watt also recognized that Highlanders were more likely to be in possession of this ability, and seemed to have no difficulty reconciling the belief that she had second sight with her devotion to the Christian God.¹⁶⁸⁵ Reports of second sight visions have also appeared in the modern Scottish popular press, leading one source to publish the headline, "The belief that some people have the power of a 'second sight' is not extinct today" in 2016.¹⁶⁸⁶ "Second Sight" even currently serves as the name of a "Psychic Reading Service" in Paisley, whose employment can be booked using an online form.¹⁶⁸⁷

So how did early modern theorists get it so wrong? How did belief in second sight survive the transition into the modern world, complete with our predicted "increase in knowledge," and what permits its continued existence today? Despite being rooted in genuine physiological experiences, early modern belief in second sight was dependent on culturally

¹⁶⁸⁴ Eilidh Watt, "Some Personal Experiences of the Second Sight," in *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), 25.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Watt, "Some Personal Experiences," 26, 36.

¹⁶⁸⁶ "Scots belief in the Second Sight- the gift of premonition," *The Scotsman*, February 1, 2016, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scots-belief-second-sight-gift-premonition-1482608>. See also "A Second Sight for Sore Eyes," *The Scotsman*, February 23, 2006, <https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/a-second-sight-for-sore-eyes-1-466288>; "Focusing on second sight," *The Herald*, May 17, 1998, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12365657.focusing-on-second-sight/>.

¹⁶⁸⁷ *Second Sight Psychic Reading Service in Scotland*, <https://www.secondsightscotland.co.uk/>.

specific interpretations of these experiences. Therefore, the survival of second sight belief cannot solely be attributed to the fact that modern humans still attest to experiencing trances, autoscopy, or visions of spirit beings. Rather, the persistence of interest and belief in second sight in the modern age may be attributed to the malleability of the concept's definition. For early modern people, second sight was a flexible and broadly defined ability that could encompass many supernatural gifts. Just as there was no cultural consensus about how to define second sight, there was no single understanding of the cause of second sight or how it functioned from the seer's perspective. This flexibility has permitted second sight belief to be involved in and shape a wide variety of conversations about religion, science, and the boundaries of human knowledge and perception. In these ways, second sight was, and continues to be, a useful concept with which to develop theories, and a ready test case to confirm or reject various notions about existence of the supernatural. Ultimately, those who foretold the demise of second sight belief proved less prescient than the seers whose passing they predicted. It would seem that not all prophecies can come true.

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