



Theology, Imagination and Scottish Literature

Alison Jack

In Emma Cowing's fitness diary printed in *The Scotsman* newspaper recently, entitled "Tantrums and Trainers",¹ two lines from James Robertson's novel *The Testament of Gideon Mack*² are quoted. Cowing compares herself to Mack, who describes himself when he is running as 'a creature neither wholly real nor wholly imagined'. She muses on his comment that 'running, whether in the rain or sun, felt like life', decides that time spent with a friend and a bottle of wine has just as often felt like life to her, but concedes that she knows what Mack is talking about.

Creatures neither wholly real nor wholly imagined, running, litter the pages of Scottish literature, and here are some examples from the literature I happen to enjoy. Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr Hyde, real but not real, runs from the scenes of his crime, moves at speed under cover of darkness, but forces his alter ego Dr Jekyll closer and closer into the confines of his abyssal chamber, from where he looks down on his friends with aching sorrow, and where he finally dies.³ At the end of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,⁴ one of the intertexts of Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, Robert is forced to flee his home by an angry, accusing mob, and then spends weeks injured, hungry and terrified, hounded from place to place by hellish manifestations. Worn down and psychologically damaged, he finally utters Gil-Martin's prayer, and, as he says, 'What I now am, the Almighty knows!' (*Confessions*, p.165). And then there is Gideon Mack himself, never at peace, always at war with himself, finding meaning and reality in movement and drive. The devil figures, of course, in *Gideon Mack* and Hogg's *Confessions*, fit the description of 'neither wholly real nor wholly imagined'; but the objects of their attention too, Gideon and Robert, are also elusive, torn, unsure of themselves, presenting a slippery picture of themselves in their own narratives. Both, as I have said, go on the run, literally, experience something of life which we readers can only imagine, and finally disappear in mysterious circumstances.

That phrase, ‘running felt like life’, and the experience of being a creature ‘neither wholly real nor wholly imagined’, seem to me to be helpful ways into John McIntyre’s exposition of the subjects of faith, theology and imagination from the perspective of Scottish literature. But first we need to remind ourselves of his thinking on these issues, and this is best done through his tremendously accessible but deeply thoughtful volume, *Faith, Theology and Imagination*⁵ (*FTI*).

In the book, McIntyre sets out six aims: to explore the use of the concept of the imagination in the past; to define the notion of imagination, drawing out those elements which are essential to it; to look at its place in the literature and interpretation of the Bible; and in the content of theology, the way theology has attempted to understand the nature of God; to examine the relationship between imagination and imagery; and to view theology as it is presently understood from the perspective offered by the imagination so defined.

Before tackling this ambitious agenda, however, he takes some time to counter any objections to his endeavour, or to put it more positively, to justify his approach. Now this defence sounds strange to those of us not familiar with the theological debates of the extended period over which *Faith, Theology and Imagination* was written (some 20 years). Now I am no expert in this area, but it seems to me that the role of imagination, and the exploration of its meaning as McIntyre outlines it, holds a more secure place in the broad field that is theology today than it did when *Faith, Theology and Imagination* appeared.

And so I move on to an important basis for McIntyre’s decision to explore the imagination, and that is the opening essay of George MacDonald’s 1907 collection of essays, *A Dish of Orts*.⁶ What McIntyre calls ‘the key’ is MacDonald’s explanation of the human imagination as the way to understand the nature of the image of God: ‘The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God’ (quoted in *FTI*, p.14). Here MacDonald names imagination as an attribute of God, through its role in God’s creative work; and he asserts that the concept of the image of God is to be found in the human imagination, which is linked to that same divine creative impulse.

This imagination has a role to play in science in the discovery of God in nature; in the understanding and writing of history, including the interpretation of texts such as the Bible; and in aesthetics, in which the artist and imagination and God are co-workers in the terms of a striking phrase of MacDonald's:

God sits in the chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out into the darkness, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is his candle. (quoted in *FTI*, p.17)

There is an inter-relationship between divine inspiration and human imagination which produces 'endless forms of beauty informed in truth' (*ibid*). The candle of our consciousness is God's candle.

Finally, MacDonald identifies a relationship between imagination and faith. In times of uncertainty, he writes, 'a wise imagination, which is the presence of the Spirit of God, is the best guide that man or woman can have'. Learning, in the words of 2 Cor 5:7 to 'walk by faith and not by sight', the faith of imagination develops a new relationship with the God who also 'imagines greatly' (*ibid*).

By linking the image of God with human imagination, the 'light lit within us by God himself through his Spirit' (*FTI*, p.18), MacDonald offers McIntyre a justification for his study of the imagination, and his use of it to explore what both call 'the dark places'.

Now it seems to me that dark places are a particular feature of much of Scottish literature, and that at times the 'light lit within us by God himself' is strangely absent. I wonder if this points to some failure of imagination, or some fear of the imagination in the Scottish literary psyche, which sees us running from that which inhabits the boundary between that which is 'neither wholly real nor wholly imagined'. And so it is the relationship between the dark places, faith and imagination in Scottish fiction, explored through some at least of McIntyre's working out of his aims, that will form the rest of my paper today.

McIntyre mentions the Scottish context in a comment he makes about the role of imagination in the parables of Jesus. For McIntyre, the parables are not only an excellent example of the role imagination may have in theology, in Gary Badcock's words in his critical introduction to the edition of McIntyre's work, *Theology after the Storm*:

they actually constitute the sole content of Jesus' teaching on a range of questions; they are not illustrations of some theme found elsewhere, which he stated in nonparabolic fashion. Jesus' technique is to "heap image upon image, in rapid profusion," so that we "run from particular image to particular image and so to the conclusion that Jesus wants us to see," a conclusion which is specific to us and particular, both in the original setting of the parable and in its contemporary application in the reading of the Bible or in prayer.⁷

In a section which covers the, in his view, unnecessarily damaging effect of the Reformation on the role of imagination both in church life and in theological thinking in Scotland, McIntyre laments that this affirming and positive understanding of the imagination has been lost. He comments that in the parables

Jesus is saying something to us about how we should be talking and thinking about the fundamental facts of the faith; and that we have refused to listen, or listening, have been unable to hear because of the conditioning of centuries of other voices telling us of other, more complex, ways of carrying out these activities. (*FTI*, p.32)

The iconoclasm which has been experienced in certain of our Scottish churches allied with a concerted effort in theological discourse to 'de-iconise' religious expression has led to our 'impoverishment' and 'barrenness' (*FTI*, p.32). Instead of being creatively nourished by the relationship between human and divine imagination, as the parables have the potential to inspire, reformed churches in Scotland all too

often have suppressed the role of the imagination in favour of the intellect, the unadorned, that which does not distract. Again, here I sense we are entering a much larger debate about imagination and the Reformation, one I am not qualified to engage with. However, I do believe, and am willing to argue, that the effect of this suppression of the imagination may be read in many Scottish literary texts, pointing to at least a perception that the Kirk and imagination don't mix. If we take some of McIntyre's conclusions about the positive and potential role of the imagination, and compare them with the experiences of some of the most famous literary creations in Scottish literature, we will be offered plenty of warning examples of what happens when the imagination is stifled or repressed.

In his chapter on 'Methodology and Epistemology', McIntyre comments that 'Religious language has been a central problem of religious philosophy ever since Plato, at least' (*FTI*, p.149), and his response to this 'problem' is to 'instat[e] imagination at the heart of questions about the nature of our knowledge of God, and about how we speak of the God whom thus we know' (*FTI*, p.151). By applying Collingwood's concept of 're-enacting the past' (*FTI*, p.153) in order to understand the past, McIntyre argues that it is only the imagination which allows the reader to enter into the experiences and stories described in the Bible. This empathetic projection holds the past of the incarnation in the present, enabling us to know the past in the present and the present in the past. The imagination allows readers to assess critically what the Bible says about God. It opens up the possibility of our projection 'not only intellectually into deeper understanding of the situation, but also affectively and emotionally into it, so that we identify with its components and with the persons involved in it' (*FTI*, p.162). McIntyre has more to say about the epistemological role of the imagination, but I'll pause here and bring his thoughts into contact with the character and experience of Robert Wringhim, the anti-hero of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

By the account of the editor and from his own 'Confession', Robert's upbringing is marked by estrangement, coldness and rigidity. Robert's

mother's husband and presumably his brother George's father, the Laird, refuses to acknowledge him. The reader is led to believe, from the editor's descriptions of the 'fiery burning zeal' (*Confessions*, p.13) which his mother and her spiritual advisor, Robert Wringhim, share in their nights 'in the same apartment' (*Confessions*, p.13), that this Wringhim is his father. However, any reference to this by others is met with anger and denial. His upbringing is marked by 'all the sternness and severity of his pastor's arbitrary and unyielding creed. He was taught to pray twice a day, and seven times on Sabbath days; but he was only to pray for the elect, and, like David of old, doom all that were aliens from God to destruction' (*Confessions*, p.14). From his own account, Robert believes himself to have been rescued from being an outcast by Wringhim:

He took pity on me, admitting me ... into the bosom of his own household and ministry also, and to him I am indebted, under Heaven, for the high conceptions and glorious discernment between good and evil, right and wrong, which I attained even at an early age. It was he who directed my studies aright, both in the learning of the ancient fathers, and the doctrines of the reformed church ... I missed no opportunity of perfecting myself particularly in all the minute points of theology in which my reverend father and mother took great delight ...
(*Confessions*, pp.67-68)

There is little room for empathetic imagination, either in the reading of the Bible, or towards others. Rather, fear for the status of his soul dominates both his parents' and his own mental life. 'my dread is ... that he is still in the bond of iniquity' (*Confessions*, p.68) Wringhim warns his mother; 'for several years' Robert exists in a 'hopeless and deplorable state of mind', propelled into sinful acts by the terrible logic of predestination. As he says, 'If my name is not written in the book of life from all eternity, it is in vain for me to presume that either vows or prayers of mine, or those of all mankind combined, can ever procure its insertion now' (*Confessions*, p.69). Here is McIntyre's 'complex',

‘de-iconised’ religious expression writ large, leading not just to barrenness and impoverishment but to severe mental dislocation.

An exchange between Wringhim and the voice of honest, natural realism in the novel (one of the few), the servant John Barnet, beautifully exemplifies the dangers of failing to read the Bible with the imagination which projects the reader into an empathetic relationship with the story. Like Adam, Barnet is to be found ‘dressing [a] plot of ground’ when Wringhim approaches him to confront him with Robert’s claim that he has implied Wringhim to be his father. Wringhim, whom Robert describes as being able to identify the elect ‘as it were by instinct’, has pronounced Barnet morally good, but with ‘very little of the leaven of true righteousness, which is faith, within’, and so destined to be a ‘castaway’ (*Confessions*, p.70). In their exchange, Barnet likens Wringhim to a ‘Scripture character’, and invites him to guess which one. Wringhim suggests he is like Melchizedek, as both are ‘preachers of righteousness’, or Paul, ‘the Apostle of the Gentiles, of whom [he is] an unworthy representative’. Barnet brushes these self-serving guesses aside, and tells Wringhim he is ‘the just Pharisee ... that gaed up wi’ the poor publican to pray in the Temple’, like him saying in his heart ‘God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, an’ in nae way like this poor misbelieving unregenerate sinner, John Barnet’. To this, Wringhim retorts ‘I hope I may say so indeed’ (*Confessions*, p.72). The reader who knows his or her Bible shares the joke at Wringhim’s expense, able imaginatively to enter into the parable from Luke 18 and hear Jesus’ counter-intuitive judgment on those whose religion is impressive, public and self-assured, and Jesus’ acceptance of those whose faith is based on an acknowledgment of their need for God’s mercy. Throughout, Wringhim’s biblical hermeneutic is the application of proof texts to current situations, with no sense of their original context or original meaning, a common ploy of the preacher in Hogg’s day (and perhaps still our own). Barnet’s reading strategy is more attuned to the wider story, more sensitive to the context in which it is told. Significantly, it is because Robert has been schooled in Wringhim’s way rather than Barnet’s that the figure of Gil-Martin, with his own ‘Bible’ ‘all

intersected with red lines' (*Confessions*, p.85), is able to persuade Robert into the most deplorable acts of violence.

Speaking the biblically-based but often misapplied language of Robert's father, applying the strict logic of a narrow theology, never allowing Robert time to think things through, Gil-Martin apparently adheres to Wringhim's religious principles 'in their fullest latitude' (*Confessions*, p.84) as Robert perceives them. Ultimately Robert has no answer to Gil-Martin's arguments, and cannot project himself into the experience of others or of the wider message of the Bible. His imagination has never been allowed to flourish, and the consequences for him and for his victims are dire.

If we turn to James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, we are confronted with a very similar structure to that of Hogg's *Confessions* and, I suggest, a similar failure of imagination in the main character. In his Testament, Gideon describes the coldness of his childhood:

There was ice built around my heart, years of it ... The manse at Ochtermill saw to that. I have walked and run through this world pretending emotions rather than feeling them ... I learned early to keep myself well disguised ... And all the while this fire was burning deep inside me. I kept it battened down, the door of the furnace tightly shut, because that seemed necessary in order to get through life ... I was the reader who hurries through a 500-page novel not to see what will happen but simply to get to the end. (*Testament*, pp.27-28)

Here is a self-description of an imagination never allowed to blossom, empathise or be creative, never experiencing the 'light of that candle which is [God's] candle'. Extreme coldness and extreme heat battle within his psyche: there is no middle way or controlled release for the energy within him. Little wonder that running becomes his way of coping with the world, and in running he tastes something of authentic living, away from all other pressures.

Like Robert's 'father', Gideon's father has a key role to play in the under-development of his son's imagination. James Mack is described by his son as

grave, forbidding, slow to anger but fearsome when roused ... the lawmaker, the sayer of grace before and after meals, the inculcator of good manners, the overseer of cleanliness and industry; a man, to my childish eyes, so fashioned in what I presumed was the image of God that God, looking at him, might have momentarily thought himself in front of a mirror. (*Testament*, pp.43-44)

So powerful is this man in Gideon's life, he represents all that there is to know or can be known about God. He names his son after a miracle-working Old Testament prophet. In an aside, Gideon comments that the Old Testament was his father's preference over the New, as its 'theology was simpler and its stories better' (*Testament*, p.45), a hint perhaps that James's inner life was richer and more complex than Gideon knew, suggested too by his mother's comments after James' death that he was 'full of fear' (*Testament*, p.130), and that he had been damaged by the war. However, Gideon is a name that his son is never able to inhabit or live up to; James' use of biblical phrases about Gideon to praise his son for his achievements, such as learning to ride a bike (provoking the exclamation 'The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!' (*Testament*, p.46)) emphasises the distance between the biblical character and the wee boy. More positively, from his father Gideon tells the reader he learns 'the beauty of austerity' (*Testament*, p.47) (and how like McIntyre's phrase, that '[a] positive consequence of the admittedly iconophobic strain in the protestant tradition is a realisation, particularly in ecclesiastical architecture, that beauty need not be ornate, and there is beauty also in simplicity, especially when the physical simplicity is matched by a like simplicity in liturgy' (*FTI*, p.7). Gideon also tells the reader that from his father he learns 'how to think, how to argue, how to hold [his] own' (*Testament*, p.47). What he fails to learn is how to imagine, how to be freely creative, empathetically connected to others.

Most striking is the place of books in the house of Gideon's childhood. He comments that apart from the religious reference books in his father's study (which Gideon is 'discouraged from disturbing' (*Testament*, p.88)), the only books in the house are an old set of Scott's Waverley novels, unread until he starts to read them. Gideon is a voracious reader, but must visit the library to supplement the small number of children's books he is later given, 'deemed suitable because they were at least half a century old and their authors dead' (*Testament*, p.62). His discovery in his father's study of Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, inscribed 'To remind you of better days and other worlds. G.M.', validated by an explanatory footnote by the editor (*Testament*, p.89), again suggests his father has had more experience of the world of imagination than Gideon is aware. The 'foolish man' ('G.M.') who gave James the book on a jaunt to the Trossachs will reappear in the story of Gideon's life. His father's knowledge of and in interest in a time 'when superstition and religion still walked side by side' (*Testament*, p.90), a theme which of course Robertson is exploring in this very novel, surprises Gideon and the reader. His later scathing rejection of Scott's work, which has led Gideon into the world of literature, as 'harmless ... romance', leading people to 'succumb' to the danger of forgetting 'the one true Author' (*Testament*, p.93), is nevertheless cruel and destructive of Gideon's only imaginative experience. It also places the Bible in a very different category from fiction: 'In the end there is only the one [book] that matters' (*Testament*, p.93). It is perhaps in defiance of his father that Gideon insists on reinstating the Authorised Version of the Bible in his parish in Monimaskit, arguing that people who come to church 'don't want the Word of God to be as mundane as the word of the weather forecaster. They want a Scripture that has poetry in it, and mystery and beauty and splendour.' I suggest most readers of this text would agree with the elder, Macmurray, who comments to Gideon 'You want that' (*Testament*, p.69): the Authorised Version feeds Gideon's under-nourished imagination and is sufficiently 'antique' not to challenge his lack of belief.

We will come back to Gideon Mack and the failings of his imaginative powers, but I want to close this section of my paper with a quotation

from near the beginning of his Testament, in which he turns his own experience into a national, Scottish characteristic:

What is the history of Christianity in this dark wee country but a history of doubts and fears, graspings at metaphysics from hard stone and wet bog? True, some came up bloody and triumphant with their fists full of certainties, but it is a delusion to look into our past and see only grim ranks of Covenanters and John Knoxes scowling back. Even then there were plenty of holy wobblers and switherers making up the numbers. Had I lived in those fierce times, would I have been one of them or one of the zealots? I do not know. I only know that in this life I have lived behind a mask, adapting my disguise as circumstances required. (*Testament*, p.37)

Of course there is truth in his assessment of history, but as the novel goes on, the reader becomes less sure that everything Gideon writes is true. The mask and the disguise, adapting to circumstance, continue to hide and deceive. He says he does not know where he would have stood in ‘those fierce times’. The reader, from the vantage point of the end of the book, has a better idea, having entered some way into his spiritual, mental and physical journey which has involved plenty of ‘hard stone and wet bog’. From that vantage point, Gideon’s mask is very much a barrier preventing positive, empathetic relationships with anyone else, including God.

The role of imagination in bringing the Bible into relationship with a person’s experience, in giving language the power to speak about God and in enabling connections between people, as highlighted by McIntyre, may be thwarted or blocked when the growth of the imagination is stunted. Robert Wringhim and Gideon Mack are two figures from Scottish literature, from two very different centuries who nevertheless exemplify the dangers of a typically Scottish repression of all that the imagination stands for: creativity, constructivity, integration and sensitivity to others, including to a complex and ultimately unknowable God. I now want to consider another two

aspects of McIntyre's analytic of imagination, and those are its cognitive role in helping us to go beyond the material, to appreciate dimensions of reality which are hidden from the unimaginative; and its 'conspatialising' power to make the absent present. Both of these aspects are developed from the work of Dame Mary Warnock.⁸

Warnock argues that the imagination gives us the power to endow things that are absent with a kind of presence, and then makes possible the interpretation and communication of these experiences to others, particularly through the creative work of the artist. As McIntyre comments in his review of Warnock's work,

The religious epistemological value of the idea is that it provides a way of conceiving how we come to know God, who is not visibly present and is to that extent 'absent'; who cannot be reached through the processes of ratiocination; ... Imagination can conceive of that God as present-in-absence. (*FTI*, p.123)

Imagination and faith may not be so far apart according to this way of understanding both concepts. This same imagination has a role to play in our appreciation of all reality, which is 'multi-dimensional and richly complex' (*FTI*, p.162). Just as imagination enables us to create and enjoy works of art, it also operates to give us a wider view of the world, ourselves, others, history, the Bible and so on. What the imagination reveals is not illusion, either in the field of theology or epistemology, but a conception of those things that are absent, and facts about the world which would otherwise be beyond us.

I would now like to recall my two former witnesses, Robert Wringhim and Gideon Mack, and introduce a new witness in my defence, Dr Jekyll. McIntyre quotes verses 7-10 of Psalm 139, which speak about being in God's presence wherever we go, and suggests that the imagination treats friends and family who are far away in the same way: 'imagination treats the absent as present, in our midst, with claims upon us as immediate as if they had already knocked on our

door' (*FTI*, p.165). For Robert, Gideon and Jekyll, the claims of Psalm 139, 'Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me' (vv.4-5) are not comforting and inspiring, but deeply disturbing. These characters seem to have an extra sensitivity to the presence of the absent, but for them that presence is dark and threatening.

Robert meets Gil-Martin on the very day his 'father' has claimed a promise of his membership of the Elect from his God. Drawn by an 'invisible power ... like the force of enchantment' towards 'a young man of mysterious appearance', Robert realises the stranger is 'the same being as myself ... The form was the same; the apparent age, ... and, as far as recollection could serve me from viewing my own features in a glass, the features too were the very same. I conceived at first that I saw a vision, and that my guardian angel had appeared to me at this important era of my life; but this singular being read my thoughts in my looks, anticipating the very words I was going to utter' (*Confessions*, p.80). Gil-Martin claims to be Robert's 'brother, not according to the flesh, but in [his] belief of the same truths' (*Confessions*, pp.80-81), and the identification of his speech with the preaching of Rev Wringhim gives Robert a sense of assurance, despite his seeming to carry these principles 'to extremes' (*Confessions*, p.81). The role of the double in Scottish literature is well discussed,⁹ as is the view that Gil-Martin is a projection of Robert's mental state, a figment of his imagination which gradually takes control of his life as his mental instability increases.¹⁰ I suggest that explanation for the presence of Gil-Martin in Robert's life, while attractive and enlightening, does not do justice to the text. Too many other characters, such as George, Bell Calvert and the 'liberal' minister Blanchard, see Gil-Martin for him to be a psychological creation in the mind of Robert. His presence is too pervasive for any explanation which does not give him some credible reality in Hogg's fictional world. He is indeed 'a creature neither wholly real nor wholly imagined', and what is significant is Robert's sensitivity to his presence. Unable to find God's presence in absence, his poorly developed powers of imagination nevertheless

sense another, more sinister presence, and Robert, defenceless, is drawn further and further into another world, ‘a yawning chasm’ of torment and horror (*Confessions*, p.165).

Gideon Mack’s sense of another presence seems to follow him from his childhood, although it is only after his experience in the ‘yawning chasm’ that he gives it credence and identity. As a boy he is taught that he is ‘never alone’: ‘Always there was one who walked beside me. I could not see him, but he was there, constant at my side. I wanted to know him, to love and be loved by him, but he did not reveal himself. He frightened me. I had neither the courage to reject him nor the capacity to embrace him’ (*Testament*, p.27). These comments are not surprising when the reader knows that God and Gideon’s father are mirror images in Gideon’s imagination. On growing up, Gideon describes his move away from ‘childish things’, choosing not to believe ‘in anything [he] could not see’. He comments:

I mocked at shadows and sprites. That constant companion was not there at all: I did not believe in him, and he did not reveal himself to me. Yet, through circumstance and through choice, I was to become his servant, a minister of religion. (*Testament*, p.27)

After his accident in the waters of the Black Jaws, Gideon does indeed become the believing servant of the companion he meets there, and senses his presence, although fleetingly, ever after. Again, as in Hogg’s *Confessions*, the easy interpretation of his experience as subconscious projection as a result of mental illness is made problematic by the sightings, if not of the Devil figure, then of Gideon himself, by now presumed dead, on Ben Alder. And of course by his miraculous escape from the Black Jaws.

Just as Gil-Martin uses words and ideas familiar to Robert, Gideon’s Devil tempts him by confirming beliefs he already holds: ‘The fact is, I don’t know where [God] is. I haven’t seen him for a long time ... Maybe he’s had enough ... I reckon he’s gone. Taken early retirement ... Done a runner. And you know what? I don’t blame him. I don’t

blame him at all' (*Testament*, p.296). Into this emptiness the Devil offers Gideon 'an adventure'. 'Let's escape from the world, you and I, let's go on the run' (*Testament*, p.298) he suggests, and Gideon transfers his only experience of adventure, from books, onto this suggestion: they will meet on Ben Alder, the setting of *Kidnapped*. The Devil promises to find him there, to have the power to be by his side 'in an instant', and tells him to trust him (*Testament*, p.299). And then he apparently hits him over the head, steals his shoes, and sends him back into the water.

There is so much more to say about this novel, but what I take from it for our purposes here is that it offers in narrative form a disturbing and sad view of a life unable to experience a positive presence in absence, or to comprehend a world beyond the material. Where imagination fails, or is thwarted, something much darker and more destructive takes its place.

Finally, a few words about Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Jekyll and Hyde is a study of what Jekyll calls the 'profound duplicity of life' (*Jekyll*, p.55). Jekyll's scientific studies, 'which led wholly toward the mystic and transcendental, re-acted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among ... [his] members'. Jekyll perceives the 'immateriality, the mist-like transience of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired' and by combining a certain set of drugs, manages to 'shake and pluck back that fleshly vestment' (*Jekyll*, p.56), although in an incomplete and ultimately ruinous way. The character of interest to me, in this consideration of the role of imagination in the appreciation of the immaterial, the beyond reality, the absent as present, is Dr Lanyon, the mutual friend of Jekyll and Utterson the lawyer/narrator. Jekyll tells Utterson that Lanyon is a 'hide-bound pedant; ... an ignorant blatant pedant' (*Jekyll*, p.19); Lanyon describes Jekyll as 'too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong in the mind, [following] unscientific balderdash' (*Jekyll*, p.12). Jekyll as Hyde turns to Lanyon for help, and offers him the chance either to avoid the knowledge of what his, Jekyll's, experiments have created, or to choose 'a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power', the chance to be

‘blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan’ (*Jekyll*, p.53). By choosing to follow his curiosity, and not to be ‘bound to the most narrow and material views’, Lanyon is shown the transforming effect of the drug, and what he sees and is told is so shocking to him that he ‘cannot bring [his] mind to set [it down] on paper’ (*Jekyll*, p.53-54). He writes to Utterson:

My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. (*Jekyll*, p.54)

When Utterson, before reading the letter, meets Lanyon, he suspects the change in him is due to his fear of death. Lanyon comments instead, ‘I sometimes think if we knew all, we should be more glad to get away’ (*Jekyll*, p.32). Within weeks he is dead.

Lanyon and Jekyll offer two extreme ways to understand the world. One, Jekyll’s, strives only for that which is beyond reality, as the reality he experiences is too constricting and constricted. The other, Lanyon, will not lift his thoughts above the material or give credence to anything beyond that which he can measure. Both are killed by the darkness unleashed by the impure drug, the uncontrolled but not necessarily uncontrollable potential represented by the mysterious ingredient. McIntyre’s analytic of the imagination describes the role of the imagination as sensitive and perceptive to the world, selective, synoptic and integrative, creative and constructive, communicating ‘the out-pouring of [God’s] Spirit upon our spirit, so we share in his imaginativeness’ (*FTI*, p.160). The hidden reality it enables us to understand is not destructive of our integrity, but bringing within reach of our comprehension a presence which is positive and affirming. Both Lanyon and Jekyll fail to use what imagination they have to its fullest positive potential, and the effect upon both is catastrophic.

I’ve chosen to consider my topic, theology, imagination and Scottish literature from a negative starting point. I’ve suggested that what much Scottish literature offers us is a view of imagination gone

wrong, under-developed, repressed. It is more concerned with the dark places, with the running figures who are neither wholly real nor wholly imagined, who flee the light, inhabiting the boundaries between the knowable and the unknowable, leaving behind them plenty of unanswered questions.

I've certainly left myself open to the charge of selectivity, of choosing those texts which suit my purpose. But perhaps even in the texts I have discussed here we are not left alone in those dark places. In McIntyre's understanding of imagination as that capacity of art to move us, of imagination as 'the only means of effective communication' (*FTI*, p.163), we the reader are offered a way to view these texts which is positive and helpful. In the connection between these texts and our imaginations, and the creative imaginations of their authors, we are given a glimpse of another way to be. As Irvine Welsh states in his review of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* in *The Guardian*,¹¹ here we are given a way to engage, or to choose not to engage, with 'some of life's big themes: mental illness; death; (im)mortality and the way history and culture can potentially deceive as well as illuminate'. Welsh continues '[i]n an age of obsession with cheap Z-list "fame" and reality TV, this overwhelmingly compassionate and thought-provoking book [I would add all these books], destined to be open to several interpretations, poses stark questions about the anxious way we steadfastly avoid such grandiose topics'. John McIntyre's exploration of the role of imagination in the task of seeking to answer those stark questions adds a new dimension to the debate.

¹ *The Scotsman*, 12 March 2007, 22.

² James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

³ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886; ed. R. Mighall; London: Penguin, 2002).

⁴ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824; ed. P. D. Garside; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

- ⁵ John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1987).
- ⁶ George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination and on Shakespeare* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1907).
- ⁷ John McIntyre, *Theology After the Storm: Reflections on the Upheavals in Modern Theology and Culture*, edited, with a critical introduction by Gary D. Badcock (Grand Rapids, Mich. and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 21.
- ⁸ Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976).
- ⁹ See, for example, Karl Miller's *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- ¹⁰ For example, Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1976), 148ff.
- ¹¹ *The Guardian*, 24 June 2006, 8.