

## Interpretative Notes to “The Gallant Grahams”

There are several levels of information contained within language used in traditional ballads. Much is that of the narrative, but there may be other important points of information which can refer to cultural or historic practices, or may refer to the emotional condition of the characters.

Literal statements may actually indicate a different action, which cannot fully presented due to the constraints of ballad language and the invasive nature a full description would have on the actual narrative of the story within the ballad.

Developed euphemisms may be used to indicate but not state a more visceral event than that which seems to be referred to. In the *Minstrelsy*, Scott seems to have resorted to at least one of these, and may have invented it.

Sometimes, such information may be presented through the use of supra-narrative functions, which operate as an effective shorthand code, implying actions, emotions or the likelihood of a certain outcome, which would not be easily described concisely or within the bounds of a ballad’s verses.

Several forms of these language structures, formulas and formulaic language have been developed within the tradition, in order to contain a full emotive response from a listener, who would often share the knowledge with the singer. To help interpret the subtleties which exist within some ballads, we have provided a list of interpretative points to help pinpoint important moments of action or response within these ballads, or to better explain certain phrases within the narrative or the dialogue

And remember, if words ever seem confusing on the page - always try reading them aloud.

### Overview |

The language of this ballad is reasonably straightforward. Any complications encountered may be due to the rather convoluted narrative, and lack of knowledge regarding the Covenanting era, as there is an assumption within the text that the listener will be sympathetic to Montrose’s position and that of his contemporaries. It is both a lament for the loss of Montrose and other Royalist supporters and a celebration of the Graham family’s defence of the Stewart monarchy throughout the ages. As such, it is highly partizan in its presentation. The narrative thread leaps back and forward through history. The present tense and the past tense are used interchangeably, which adds to the confusing presentation.

### Verses 1 -3 |

The tone of these verses is similar to that found in exile songs. It might be useful to compare these verses with “Lord Maxwell’s Goodnight”.

Scott stated that Ennerdale was a corruption of Endrickdale, noting that the “principal and most ancient, possessions of the Montrose family lie along the water of Endrick, in Dumbartonshire” (*MSB* (1803) III 181).

The reference to the “silken snood” indicates that the narrator is female. A snood, as defined by the Dictionary of the Scots Language / Dictionar o the Scots Lied is: A fillet or ribbon bound round the brow and tied at the back under the hair, worn esp. by young unmarried women and hence looked on as a symbol of maidenhood. See [www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk) for further definitions.

The inclusion of blue may be a point of confusion. The Highland levies of Montrose were described as wearing blue bonnets. However, blue was also the colour favoured by the Covenanters, and many of their banner were blue. In this verse, the blue most probably refers to an association to Montrose’s troops. It should be noted that from signing the Covenant in 1639 to around 1641, Montrose was a Covenanter. He joined the King’s cause in 1643.

Verses 4 - 6 |

There are several points of history mentioned in this ballad, and these verses contain references to the Wars of Independence and William Wallace: Sir John the Graham was an ally and friend of Wallace. He died at the Battle of Falkirk. In including this reference, it aligns the Grahams with historic struggles and aligns the clan with the story of Scotland. It suggests the nobility and gallantry of the Grahams and their loyalty to their king. By including a reference to the Tay, the Scottish nationality of the clan is emphasised, along with their hereditary lands.

Verse 8 |

“Our false commander”

This line refers to Sir Alexander Leslie, who led a Covenanter army into England on behalf of Parliament in 1644. “traitor Cromwell” is Oliver Cromwell, the English military and political leader.

Verse 9 |

“our noble prince” refers to Charles II, who lived in exile until the Restoration. The ballad presents the Grahams as his loyal supporters.

Verses 10 - 11 |

These verses refer to battles which took place in 1644 and 1645. However, Montrose did not join battle with Argyll in Aberdeen. At Inverlochie, however, the Campbells who were present were slaughtered by Alasdair MacColla’s men, in retribution for long-standing clan feuds.

Verses 12 - 16 |

This verses refer to events at and after Philiphaugh in 1645. The declaration in support for the king - “God preserve his majestie!” suggests that Charles I is alive, but it may refer to Charles II, as the ballad also refers to the death of Montrose, who was executed in 1650.

The other men named in these verses all fought for the Royalist cause. They were captured and executed.

Montrose was exhorted to leave the field and went into exile. He transferred his loyalties to Charles II, after Charles I had been executed in 1649. While he was in exile in Europe, Montrose travelled into Germany, Poland and into Scandinavia, in an attempt to raise troops to fight for Charles' cause. James Gordon, Earl of Aboyne also went to France - he inherited the title when his elder brother, George, died at the battle of Alford. Aboyne died in France.

Verse 17 |

The narrative takes another leap here. Montrose returned to Scotland, via the Orkneys, in 1649.

Verses 18 - 19 |

“the water of Carron” referred to is Invercarron, or Carbisdale, which was the site of Montrose's last battle. The Danes mentioned were part of the mercenary force Montrose brought to Scotland.

Gilbert Menzies dies on the field of Carbisdale, defending the King's banner to his death.

Verse 20 |

The men mentioned here were all Covenanting officers. Strachan and Hacket led different divisions against Montrose's troops. General David Leslie was the commanding officer, but he had sent Strachan off with an advance force.

“Lesly, ill death may thou die!”

This is one of the few traditional ballad phrases within this piece. It is rare for direct commentary to appear in the traditional corpus, as the narrative is usually impersonal. However, “an ill death may he / she / thou die” is a standardised phrase which is used.

Verse 21 |

Montrose was betrayed and taken down to Edinburgh, where he was executed. As this verse notes, he was beheaded and his body quartered. However, he was hanged first.

Verse 22 |

“Huntly” refers to the George Gordon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquis of Huntly – father to Aboyne, or the young Huntly. The Marquis of Huntly was executed in Edinburgh 1649. Although he was a Royalist, he did not support Montrose, whom he considered a turncoat.

Verse 23 |

The final verse leaps in time once more. However, it may not leap as far as it might first appear.

The Restoration of 1660 paved the way for the crowning of Charles II, and he was crowned monarch of all three kingdoms on the 23rd April 1661.

However, he had already been declared King by the Scots in 1649, after the execution of his father. The title given to him in this verse - "King Charles the second in degree" may then be as valid in 1649 as it would be in 1660.