

**The Origins of Grace Aguilar's Ideal Domesticity**

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<1> With the fracturing of the French nation as a result of the Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, and the upheaval of the European nations from the Napoleonic Wars in the early years of the nineteenth century, authors within Britain began to account for their origins in order to bolster the national cause. The 1820s and 1830s saw a substantial interest in national history by writers, and the volume of historical writings produced about England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland suggests that national identity was newly open to definition.<sup>(1)</sup> Writers celebrated their distinct ethnicities—Englishness, Scottishness, Welshness, Irishness—and attempted to portray theirs as an enlightened nation that had been so from the beginning of its existence. These writers, moreover, asserted that their nation was now unified against the chaos abroad. In this essay, I will position Grace Aguilar's romances about medieval England within the tradition of national writing during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in England.

**Current Scholarship**

<2> In current studies, Grace Aguilar (1816-1847) is almost inextricably linked with Walter Scott and *Ivanhoe* (1819), her popular novel *The Days of Bruce; A Tale From Scottish History*<sup>(2)</sup> often labeled by critics a lesser imitation of Scott's medievalism.<sup>(3)</sup> The critics who make this comparison, however, do so within the context of larger arguments about Aguilar's literary contributions to debates about Jewish Emancipation in the nineteenth century. Yet, Aguilar's efforts were praised by contemporary critics in their own right, able to compete with popular nineteenth-century literature. *Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, remarked in 1852 that they "look upon 'The Days of Bruce' as an elegantly-written and interesting romance, and place it by the side of Miss Porter's 'Scottish Chiefs.'"<sup>(4)</sup> The *Bucks Chronicle* claimed in the same year that *The Days of Bruce* was "a volume which may be considered as solid history, but is nevertheless entertaining as the most charming novel ever produced by genius."<sup>(5)</sup> Although *The Days of Bruce* appears frequently in research on Aguilar, little has been done to look critically at this text, or the others that preceded it. Michael Galchinsky's important works on Aguilar refer to *The Days of Bruce* in passing, emphasizing only that this novel exists in her "first period" of writing, that of historical romance (Galchinsky 140), and he suggests merely that *Bruce* was "written in imitation of Walter Scott's Waverly novels" (139). This statement, however, is deceptively simple.

<3> Aguilar's Scottish novel was written when she was just fifteen years old, and her notes accompanying her other early efforts indicate that she was extremely well read in the popular fiction of the early nineteenth century. The idea of juvenile aspiring writers imitating popular authors is a recent topic of critical interest. Christine Alexander believes that imitation, rather than copying, by young writers is instrumental in the development of a child's own voice and style.<sup>(6)</sup> Written in Aguilar's adolescence, the tales that immediately precede her composition of *The Days of Bruce* will be the focus of this essay. 'Legends of Time Past' (1831) and 'Tales of Time Past' (1833)—of which *The Days of Bruce* is the third part—comprise Aguilar's juvenilia and it is in this writing stage that Aguilar refines her writing style, working out the value system regarding nineteenth-century domesticity that she will develop in her later work. Influenced by Walter Scott, Maria Hack, and Jane Porter, Aguilar imitates the writing techniques she sees in order to establish values not just for Jews but also for English readers more broadly.<sup>(7)</sup> In this paper, I will not discuss the argument that Aguilar uses medieval Britain's struggle to define itself as a metaphor for her Jewish identity and Anglo-Jewish struggles in the nineteenth century for political and social independence, as this has been dealt with fully by other scholars.<sup>(8)</sup> Rather, I will show that her historical narratives about medieval England reflect, despite her faith, her cultivation of an English sensibility. I will argue that by assimilating and modifying the main tropes of the national tale and historical narrative Aguilar develops a distinctly English domestic ideology. I hope that a reading of Aguilar's broader canon will provide us with a greater understanding both of Aguilar's intentions for her fiction, as well as of her contributions to the development of conservative domestic values that have come to define the Victorian period.

### **Part I: Why National Tales about Medieval Britain?**

<4> National writing preoccupied authors within the nations of Britain in the nineteenth century, and in the early part of the century, 'national tales' became part of popular literary culture. Writers of this mode idealized landscape, traditions, and the family unit, building romances that demonstrated a nation's identity and domestic principles. Gary Kelly's definition of the 'national tale' will inform my use of the genre to locate Aguilar's English and Scottish historical romances in a larger literary context than has so far been done (Kelly, 1989 92-98). Kelly argues that the national tale evolved from 'village anecdotes' that appeared in the 1790s and which attempted to convey to readers an idealized view of society (Kelly, 1989 89 92). As the political climate of the late-eighteenth century changed with the American and French Revolutions, Kelly believes, England's fears about a revolution on its own soil cultivated a preference for literature that did not merely represent an ideal society, but that specifically articulated a unified British 'national social identity' (Kelly, 1989 92). Consequently, national tales are also 'historical romances' because they attempt to idealize the past for the benefit of the present (Kelly, 1989 92).

<5> This genre of writing was made popular by two female authors. The first was Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), whose *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) attempted to encourage English sympathy for Ireland's independence. The second was Jane Porter, whose *The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance* (1810) celebrates Scottish values, portraying these as consonant with English values. These novels were accompanied in the market by narrative histories like Maria Hack's *English Stories of the Olden Time* (1820-1825) and Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather; being Stories taken from Scottish History* (1828-1829), narratives which resembled

textbooks and were overtly didactic. Both genres articulated Britain's struggle with notions of a unified British identity. At the same time that this was discussed in the political arena, narrative histories and historical romances, building upon the foundation of the national tale, attempted to construct a national identity that could accommodate distinct national qualities at the same time that it promoted the idea of a unified civic body. The Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1829, the Chartist movement in the 1830s, the Great Reform Act of 1832, and the Emancipation Act of 1833 were all products of these nations' attempts to find a language for national definition. Fictional retellings of the exploits of the Scottish heroes William Wallace and Robert the Bruce appeared alongside those of the noble leadership of English monarchs Kings Edward I and II. These stories functioned allegorically, opening up a battlefield within these nations which was fought out in terms that constituted ethnicity and the nation.

## **Part Two: Recontextualizing Aguilar's English and Scottish Histories**

<6> The dominance of historical romances in the nineteenth century suggests that popular fiction used national politics to address the serious questions affecting the nation as a whole, and this is particularly the case with the national tale and narrative history. Aguilar's fiction has strong resonances with Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chief*, Maria Hack's *English Stories*, and Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*, and it is these texts that help to position Aguilar's British histories in the context of nineteenth-century popular literary culture.(9)

<7> Aguilar reiterates the main themes of Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* in her own historical novels about medieval Scotland: male and female patriotism and ideal womanhood. Set in thirteenth-century Scotland, *Scottish Chiefs* is a literary representation of Scotland's struggle for independence under William Wallace and in it Porter claims to illustrate Scottish social values. The narrative begins just prior to Wallace's wife's murder and its destruction of their domestic life, which inspires Wallace to take up the Scottish national cause. Writing of Scotland's struggles with King Edward I between 1296 and 1305, Porter focuses her text on Wallace, Joanna and Helen Mar, and all of the Scottish chiefs that labor under Wallace's guidance to challenge English rule, ending the story on Wallace's death. Fiona Price suggests that Porter '[reacted] to the unease produced by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars' by composing 'a public consciousness of history and its heroes', thinking that this 'could strengthen the contemporary sense of national community' (Price 9). This, Price argues, makes Porter's text 'quixotic'; it relies on sentiment and nostalgia to construct a romance about the Scottish nation rather than an unemotional relation of historical facts.(10) Aguilar's tales about medieval Scotland participate in the early nineteenth-century revival of medievalism and the notions of chivalry and order in Britain's past, and in this we can see Porter's influence on Aguilar's writing.

<8> Maria Hack's *English Stories of the Olden Time* is not a historical romance like Porter's, but a narrative history book.(11) She writes stories about the past told in "conversations" held by a nineteenth-century mother educating her children about English history as they play (Hack iv). Hack emphasizes English medieval history and includes stories of Scottish and English heroes, though her language is clearly biased towards the latter. The structure of this text, a narrative about a family unit sitting together to learn about the national past because of events in the

present, makes it didactic. Aguilar borrows this trope in most of her narrative histories when she sets the primary action of the text in a family home that is engaged in domestic activities, like sewing and storytelling. Hack's mother-character uses the past to educate her son and daughter about propriety, patriotism, and gender values, concerns Aguilar also addresses. Although she deflects praise of her work by enumerating its faults, Hack believes that *English Stories* will "strengthen the influence of moral and religious principle, and inspire a warm and enlightened attachment" of English citizens "to the English Constitution" (Hack vi). This, she hopes, will encourage "the Spirit of Patriotism" to "take root in the warm soil of domestic affection, and shed its ennobling, animating influence on future generations" (Hack vii). Hack locates the seed of patriotism in a mother's responsibility to the education of her children. Her historical narrative, therefore, is as much about the English nation as it is about the English home, and it is this element that Aguilar revises to suit her own literary purposes.

<9> Both Hack and Porter appear to have influenced Aguilar's creation of domestic histories. Aguilar constructs her histories in a way "that forms an alliance between historical account and domestic sentiment."<sup>(12)</sup> Aguilar expands the idea of "domesticity to include the 'national' identity" of the English and Scottish nations by spotlighting women's experiences in the past, giving them a more distinct role in the maintenance of the nation that is achieved in similar terms as is the ideal home.<sup>(13)</sup> Aguilar, however, does not only discuss the terms of domesticity and femininity in her portrayals of English history. Rather, as the fact that her earliest medieval histories were dedicated to her young brothers suggests,<sup>(14)</sup> she was also interested in portraying ideal masculinity, and her "Tales From British History" are as much about feminine propriety as they are about a masculine chivalric code of conduct.<sup>(15)</sup> Aguilar adapts her interest in manliness from Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*. Scott's narrative histories in this compilation of tales are distinct from Hack's because, as a unionist, Scott is interested in encouraging the idea of the coexistence of opposing nations. The language of Hack's work distinctly favours the English over the Scots, or she simply omits any discussion of them; similarly, Porter's support clearly lies with the Scots.<sup>(16)</sup> Aguilar does not use Scott in order to promote a unionist view of the nation, however. What she does borrow from him is the way in which he depicts a codified manliness and ideal masculinity, recycling these ideas in order to develop a type of male conduct that was to become important to nineteenth-century gender values.<sup>(17)</sup>

<10> Scott's *Tales*, structured like those of Hack's, are a series of narratives about the past accompanied by running commentaries. He claims his intention for these is to provide for "the young [...] a general view of Scottish History" and "a source of instruction for others" that was so well received by his grandson (Scott i). Like Hack, Scott expresses his hope that his text be received as a didactic history. Like Hack's fictional mother and daughter, Scott's longing for his family to be physically near to him motivates his writing, and his preface suggests he is anxious about families in the modern world. Scott writes that, had he and his grandson lived in close proximity, he "should have repeated [...] many of the stories contained in this book more than once," lamenting that "since that has ceased to be the case, I have nothing remaining save to put them in this shape, in which you may read them over as often as you have a mind" (Scott 4). Scott, perhaps, is here referring to the fact that his family has moved away from the place of its origin, a general comment on the effects of the new industrial age on families in Britain. Hence, Scott's interest in history is nostalgic and he looks towards the past not only for models of

propriety but also for a lost, ideal world in which families are able to stay in the homes and on the lands of their patriarchs. Porter's, Hack's, and Aguilar's historical narratives are also motivated by loss: the death of a national hero; the return of a son to school; the loss of mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, and daughters and sons. Each of these losses is measured in domestic terms, both as national loss and as family loss.

<11> In her early adolescence, Aguilar gleaned from national tales and narrative histories by Jane Porter, Maria Hack, and Walter Scott the components of English and Scottish nationhood that would help her to construct a British national identity that was dependent on specific gender roles. In doing so, she anticipated Victorian family values by presenting the nation as a domestic unit. Women's historical writing essentially expressed the same history and sense of national unity that men's did, but it did so by feminizing the nation with new views about domesticity and the English home. For Aguilar and others, national identity is expressed through a fictionalized version of people's moral values and this makes the didactic tone of the narratives a consistent feature of this type of writing. Aguilar participates in the dissemination of morality through narrative histories by feminizing nationalism, emphasizing propriety and decorum. This, according to Aguilar, enables women to take part in nation-building and is what sets her histories apart from those of these other writers. She shows, as well, the development of a female patriotic sensibility, enacting the trajectory of a woman's maturation and development of appropriate national domestic values.<sup>(18)</sup> It is in this way that Aguilar's heroines can become the "moral regenerators of the nation" that early nineteenth-century society envisioned women as (Hall, 1992 86).

### **Part Three: First Efforts in Aguilar's 'Legends of Time Past'**

<12> What sets Aguilar's versions of the national tale and narrative history apart from those by Jane Porter, Maria Hack, and Walter Scott is the way they use historical narrative to construct 'family romances' (May 13). Aguilar's national tales position their narratives in homes, and she uses this setting to explore the dynamics of domesticity with the tropes comprising the popular literature of her day. The private, domestic world becomes, for Aguilar, "an idealised space for the production of a virtuous and moral nation" (Hitchcock and Cohen 59). Aguilar's advocacy of patriotic morality would gain her access to and admiration from the English literary market of the 1840s.

<13> Existing in a hand-bound book is Aguilar's 'Legends of Time Past', which consists of 'Edmund de Clifford The Last of His Race a Legend of Poitiers' and 'Lionel Percy the Youthful Chief a Legend of Alnwick Forest'; neither of these texts have received critical attention.<sup>(19)</sup> These two tales are about fictional versions of the de Clifford and the Percy families respectively, set circa 1346-1356. The narratives explore domesticity—political and familial—and masculinity.

<14> Edmund de Clifford, of Aguilar's first narrative history, is an orphan raised by his uncle, the Earl of Northumberland, with his uncle's adopted daughter, Edith Camden. The two fall in love and are betrothed just before Edmund enlists as a soldier in Prince Edward I's war against

France. Edith accompanies Edmund into battle, unbeknownst to him, disguised as his page. She works for Edmund in loyal servitude and eventually fights alongside him as he establishes his reputation as a knight with honor and military prowess that gains the Prince's attention. Meanwhile an evil priest, Father Austin, who is the Prince's trusted advisor, becomes jealous of the Prince's admiration of Edmund and accuses Edmund of being a spy for the French when Edmund releases a young, French prisoner. This stains Edmund's reputation and causes him to lose his rank in the army. Prince Edward distrusts and demeans Edmund throughout the tale and Edmund determines to die in battle. Edmund's cousin eventually learns of Father Austin's evil plot and exposes him to the Prince, forcing Austin to confess that Edmund was never a spy. Prince Edward formally apologizes to Edmund, who dies just after Edith reveals that she has been disguised as his page. A few years later, Edith dies in a convent from pining over Edmund.

<15> In this tale, Aguilar writes an early version of the ideal domestic family as a unit that establishes romantic love and expresses sexual desire from within one family; patriotic activity is aimed at the maintenance and perpetuation of the family. This is achieved through heterosexual relationships that develop out of a quasi-incestuous desire between adopted siblings. The eponymous character falls in love with "the Lady Edith Camden the [adopted] daughter of one of' his uncle's 'dearest friends,'" who is "in every respect [...] treated as a daughter" (UCL Special Collections MS ADD 378, Box A, 1831).(20) Aguilar desires that the reader consider Edith a blood-daughter of the Earl's and chooses her language accordingly. Through this relationship Aguilar anticipates the mid-nineteenth-century pattern in which domestic novels "sexualize family relationships and encourage incestuous liaisons" (May 202). Aguilar here domesticates the English nation because, like the domestic units that comprise its core, she asserts that England is to be regarded as a family. When the Earl gives the couple his blessing to marry, therefore, it does not seem unnatural that he refers to them as "His beloved Children" (Aguilar MS). Aguilar begins her historical narrative in a home and her ideal family is dictated by a man's desire for a woman. In order to realize this desire, Edmund must "[behave] gallantly and nobly in France that he might then deserve to claim Edith as his bride" (Aguilar MS). His motivation for success in battle is his ambition to create and perpetuate a domestic world with his adopted sister, Edith. The family, for Aguilar, supports manly behavior and industry, helping to establish appropriate masculine roles. In this tale, therefore, Aguilar emphasizes male domesticity as an important component of manliness.

<16> However, the domestic man is problematic when his desire for home supercedes his obligations to participate in the public, male world. Edmund's attachment to his family distracts him from his military exercises and compromises his emotional stability. Just after Edmund and Edith say their farewells and Edmund prepares for war, he is overwhelmed by emotion. One of his young cousins who is not of age and, therefore, cannot participate in the battle demands, "How now Edmund in tears! a pretty warrior you'll make [...] come let us change places you shall remain here a lovesick Earl" (Aguilar MS). Edmund's emotions are outwardly observable and the jest made of him is much more critical than it is comical. Once in battle, Edmund's emotions continue to distract him from his preparation for masculine, political duty. During one of his first nights away from home he is unable to sleep because

his youthful mind [...] thought on his long cherished; his long loved home; on that venerable form so severe on him who was his Uncle and father in one on his fondly loved Aunt who had been the only mother he knew; on his Cousins on one so dear that all one fair form so loved so dearly so devotedly loved. (Aguilar MS)

Edmund's "youthful mind" is unprepared for the physical separation from his family that war requires. He is teased by his relatives and peers alike and spends much of the tale brooding over his distance from his family and lover. Later in the tale, when Edmund loses favor with Prince Edward, he desires only to find a way to die. Feeling that he "cannot suffer much more than I have already done by [Prince Edward's] coldness towards me whom [...] hast given occasion to consider [...] not only as his General, his prince, but as his friend," Edmund determines to "redeem my honor by laying me dead upon the plain" (Aguilar MS). For Aguilar, manhood is family-centered; men prepare to accept their role as fathers by learning about domestic duties in a fraternal military world. Edmund's masculinity is insufficient because he is unable to expand his domestic world to encompass both his private and public life. Aguilar conveys this through Edmund's unwillingness to survive battle and failure to establish a home with Edith.

<17> In Aguilar's first sustained writing venture about medieval England, she cultivates the main topic of concern that she will take further in her other writing: male domesticity. In 'Edmund de Clifford' manliness is defined not just by chivalric behavior but also by an inclination towards domestic activity; this too has qualifications. In their seminal book on middle-class families in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue that, "Coming from an affectionate home atmosphere, boys would often suffer greatly when sent away to school or, at a later age, to apprenticeships," but that "Severing close home ties was part of the hardening process of becoming a man" (Davidoff and Hall, 1987 345). Aguilar shows that a boy unable to assume his appropriate, manly role by "severing" himself from his family—and thereby enabling himself to establish one of his own as a mature adult—results in tragedy. Lionel Percy, however, in Aguilar's second tale in "Legends," illustrates the ways in which Aguilar's vision of masculinity is dependent upon a domestic ethos that extends beyond the paternal home.

<18> In "Lionel Percy the Youthful Chief a Legend of Alnwick Forest", Lionel Percy is the rightful son of one of the Earls of Northumberland. His mother dies two months after his birth and Lionel's father has him brought up by a nurse who also has a son born on the same day, Christened the same name, but who suffers from ill health. The nurse brings Lionel back to court for his seventh birthday, but he is forced to go back to live with her as his health fails. The nurse soon sends word to the Earl that his son has died and the Earl dies shortly thereafter from grief. The nurse then retires with her own son to an isolated area of Alnwick Forest. In his late teens, Lionel learns on his mother's deathbed that he is actually the son of Northumberland; when her own son died, she passed him off as the Earl's son. She, however, makes Lionel promise not to reveal himself until he turns twenty-one. Wandering Alnwick Forest hoping to die, Lionel meets a mixed English and Scottish clan—the "True Blue Archers"—and he joins their band, quickly impressing their Captain and followers with his moral integrity and military prowess. After the Captain retires, Lionel is promoted to the position of commanding officer, and it is at this point in the narrative that he returns, unexpectedly to Alnwick Castle.

<19> In the meantime, the Earl's brother has taken up residence in Alnwick Castle with his daughter Louisa, who was a playmate of Lionel's in his youth. Upon being presented at court, Louisa attracts the interest of the Earl of Kildare and he solicits her hand in marriage. She refuses him on the premise that she is not in love with him and that she disapproves of his unjust treatment of his vassals. This infuriates Kildare who kidnaps Louisa in order to force her to marry him. It is at her cries that Lionel enters the scene and saves Louisa, although he does not yet reveal his identity. Overjoyed at his daughter's safe return, the Earl hosts a tournament with the aim of inciting Louisa's romantic interest in one of the knights. Lionel participates in this game and defeats Kildare, forcing a confession from him about his role in Louisa's abduction. Kildare is forgiven and Lionel is revealed to be the rightful owner of Alnwick Castle. The Earl consents to Lionel's desire to marry Louisa and, after having the Archers' roguery formally pardoned, the family lives together happily at Alnwick Castle.

<20> In this tale, Aguilar suggests that the structure of the medieval Scottish clan is a model for the English family and the designation of domesticity as an essential component of English and Scottish national identity. Rescued by the "True Blue Archers" and brought into their den, Lionel experiences an ethnically mixed world. Taking "Robin Hood for their example", the Archers "consisted of 25 Scotsmen and the same number of Englishmen", and "no [...] trouble disturbed the band" (Aguilar MS). That the clan here consists of equal parts of Scotsmen and Englishmen is a revolutionary thought in the period depicted by Aguilar when England and Scotland were at war to conquer, in the former's case, and resist in the latter's. Even more provocative is the method of rule undertaken by the clan. They "know no laws but our own" and they "know no king" because they "are free men and no vassals are admitted amongst us" (Aguilar MS). Not only do the Archers ignore national boundaries, but they dissolve social borders as well; Aguilar here is creating a brotherhood founded upon equality and tolerance. Although the clan has a chief, he is a symbolic father-figure, considering all clan members "son[s] of my adoption" and relying upon his children to help in the establishment of regulations ratified by the clan as a whole (Aguilar MS). In this clan Aguilar unites Scotland and England by constructing a quasi-family unit that prepares adolescents for the adult family. Despite England and Scotland's union in 1707, the reality of a unified Britain was a subject of contention even in the 1830s when Aguilar was writing.<sup>(21)</sup> Her remedy to this anxiety was to advocate tolerance and domesticity: the formation of a family-like mixed clan set apart from English and Scottish rule creates a space to train future fathers how to transcend perceived national differences by uniting all through patriotism.

<21> From the beginning of "Lionel Percy," Aguilar defines masculinity as male domesticity that subsumes the traditional family unit into the public world of warfare. Because of his refusal to partake of an assassination plot against the patriarch of the Archers, Lionel is promoted to the position of Captain of the clan. The "Comrades" ratify the Chief's choice of Lionel as their leader, despite his youth; he becomes Chief at the age of twenty. Lionel bears "his new favor with a meekness that made him beloved by all his comrades" (Aguilar MS). He becomes "as much the idolized Chief of the archers" as the former Chief had been because of "his kindness, his lively humour" (Aguilar MS). More than anything it is "his reverence to his elders [that] procured him the affection of his men", and his voice is "inspiring," making "Victory [...] his" (Aguilar MS). In the character of Lionel, Aguilar enacts another fantasy of tolerance, that on behalf of children. Aguilar's literary imagination constructs an idea of masculinity that is

embodied not by older, more experienced men but by an adolescent whose innocence and genuine deference to his elders makes him an ideal governor of a new type of world that is unified through difference; she will develop this concept further in “William Wallace, the Dauntless Chiefs” in 1833. Aguilar reconstructs the domestic family unit, shifting the power dynamics and empowering young people’s inherent idealism as the model for a new England.

<22> “Lionel Percy” is not only about masculinity and the role of children in national identity, but about femininity as well. In the characters of Louisa Percy, Lionel’s cousin whom he eventually marries, and in Countess Charlotte de Clinton, Louisa’s mother-figure, Aguilar develops an early version of ideal femininity and the contradictions inherent in such. The women in “Lionel Percy” are separated by age and this enables Aguilar to consider femininity in childhood and adulthood. Louisa, Aguilar’s childish woman, is eighteen in the main action of the story. She possesses “health [...] very delicate” and “by her manners and appearance she might be thought full two years younger” than her age (Aguilar MS). Aguilar does not criticize Louisa’s feebleness and immaturity but, rather, uses it to show how women can be much more than their weaknesses. As she constructs an idealized family of English and Scots, Aguilar composes a fantasy of womanhood in which frailty and physical plainness are inconsequential because a woman’s mind is her most important feature. Although Louisa’s “countenance could scarcely be called beautiful and would not perhaps attract distant notice [...] to those [...] who knew the mild unassuming manners who saw her when using all of her soft persuasive eloquence to amuse her father and divert his fits of melancholy then was she admired and loved” (Aguilar MS). Louisa is not physically beautiful, but influential and because she enacts her appropriate role as a daughter to her father, she is celebrated as an ideal woman.

<23> Aguilar also makes Charlotte de Clinton an ideal woman because of her observation of specific social codes pertaining to gender. Although an orphan at the age of eighteen, and therefore early without a mother herself, Charlotte is enlisted by the Earl of Northumberland to mother Louisa. Charlotte nurses Louisa’s health and teaches her manners. She is capable of this role because she is a woman “in whom the charms of nature were combined with every virtue and she was the admiration of her country” (Aguilar MS). Unlike Louisa’s, Charlotte’s ‘features were regular and noble and at a distance would attract notice as being remarkably handsome’ (Aguilar MS). These physical attractions encourage further scrutiny, which reveals “The sweetness of temper and the virtues which adorned her whole mind” (Aguilar MS). Charlotte’s beauty is merely an element that serves to attract viewers and encourage them to observe her more important features: her mind; her manners; and, her morals. These reflect how, “tho’ so young[,] she possessed an absolute power over her followers whose admiration of the gentle mistress” made her vassals obey her “with readiness and pleasure” (Aguilar MS). Charlotte is not only physically attractive, but also morally so and, therefore, an ideal mentor for Louisa. Despite losing her parents at a young age, Charlotte has fully developed her version of morality and femininity and governs herself according to these values.

<24> It is perhaps this type of woman that Aguilar suggests is essential to cultivating in young women not only social propriety, but an understanding that women do not always benefit from sexual unions. Charlotte’s lessons are put into practice almost immediately when Louisa, once presented at court, attracts the attentions of Gerald Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, a wealthy

landowner of a prominent family in Ireland. Although Aguilar describes Louisa as simple and childish, she is not so about marriage. When her father urges Fitzgerald's suit, believing that she will learn to love him, Louisa adamantly protests, not because of a childish belief in romance, but because of her awareness of women's powerlessness in marriage. She tells her father that Fitzgerald

does not love me, he cannot he saw me but once thou knowest not the Earl my father or thou would not wish me to have him his character is far from good he spends his fortune in luxury and his shivering vassals pine for food and shelter. (Aguilar MS)

Louisa rejects her father's belief that she 'mayest convert him', forsaking the role of the redeeming wife, one a woman would be expected to uphold in a marriage based upon loyal servitude according to nineteenth-century expectations (Aguilar MS). Even when Louisa acknowledges her love for Lionel, her response to his suit is mixed. Her father encourages her to accept Lionel's proposal and 'with excess of bliss [she] sunk nearly insensible in the arms of her delighted lover who [with a] fervent kiss restored her to sense and blushing deeply she tried to withdraw herself from his embrace' (Aguilar MS). One reading of Louisa's reaction here might be that Aguilar is demonstrating her version of feminine modesty, portraying Louisa as childlike in her encounter with Lionel's sexual desire for her. But, despite the 'bliss' she feels in Lionel's love of her, Louisa's reaction could be read as ambivalence, a sentiment which suggests that Louisa's anxiety may be a fear of losing autonomy.

<25> Unlike Lionel Percy and his band of brothers, Aguilar's women do not exist in a fantasy of equality and tolerance. Whereas the men have the freedom to break down boundaries between class and nation, women must remain inside their domestic world, attending to domestic duties. Louisa marries Lionel, although she cries and faints at the thought; Charlotte is married off at the end of the tale, the details all but completely dismissed (Aguilar MS). Both women are absorbed into the world of their husbands. But, Aguilar seems uncomfortable with women's erasure from family histories. Her suggestion of the anxiety Louisa feels about marriage can be read as a critique of the patriarchal family. As Aguilar matures as a writer, she develops this critique to suggest that women need a more active role in interior domestic spaces—the private home—as well as political domestic spaces—the public nation.

### **Concluding Points**

<26> Two years following her composition of 'Legends of Time Past', Aguilar wrote four more narrative histories, grouping them together as part of 'Tales of Time Past.'<sup>(22)</sup> By the end of 'Tales', a distinctive pattern emerges in Aguilar's subject matter and, although she gradually becomes more focused on Judaism and womanhood in her later fiction, the subjects she explores in her juvenilia are clearly the beginning of what would eventually designate her as a proponent of nineteenth-century domestic ideology, the reputation she gained posthumously in the middle- and late-Victorian periods. These early historical narratives complicate her reputation as merely a spokeswoman for Anglo-Judaism and show that she was equally focused on English domestic identity. 'Tales', unstudied and only published in 1908 from the original manuscript as *Tales from British History*, includes 'Edmund, the Exiled Prince: A Tale of the Conquest', 'William

Wallace, the Dauntless Chief: A Tale of Olden Valour’, and ‘MacIntosh, the Highland Chief: A Tale of the Civil War.’<sup>(23)</sup> Because of the historical chronology that Aguilar follows in her collection, her novel *The Days of Bruce; A Story from Scottish History*, published as a separate novel in 1852, likely follows ‘Wallace’, being a chronological continuation of this shorter tale.

<27> A significant difference between ‘Legends’ and ‘Tales’ is the nationality of the characters portrayed; whereas ‘Legends’ is exclusively about English characters, ‘Tales’ is comprised of Saxon and Scottish histories. Michael Galchinsky believes that Aguilar could identify with medieval Scotland’s desire to obtain political independence because she saw the Scottish struggle for autonomy as analogous to the nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish movement that was petitioning for political and civil rights (Galchinsky Personal Correspondence). Galchinsky may be correct in suggesting that Aguilar’s sympathies with Scotland represent her understanding of her own social position as an outsider; however, I believe Aguilar’s engagement with British history—Scottish and English—makes a different statement. In ‘Tales’ is refined Aguilar’s definition of masculinity, femininity, and domesticity and her philosophies on these aspects of English and Scottish national identity are recycled in all of her subsequent fiction; moreover, Aguilar’s Scottish and English narrative histories shape distinct national identities that are also sometimes unstable. She anticipates Victorian England’s preoccupation with domestic ideals—both political and familial—and her ambivalence about these exposes the complicated nature of nineteenth-century English identity.

#### Endnotes

(1) See Cardiff University’s Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research (The English Novel, 1800–1829; British Fiction, 1800–1829; The English Novel, 1830–1836), online at <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/romtext/index.html>.<sup>(^)</sup>

(2) Grace Aguilar, *The Days of Bruce; A Tale From Scottish History*, Volumes I and II (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1871).<sup>(^)</sup>

(3) Miriam Burstein, “‘Not the Superiority of Belief, but Superiority of True Devotion’: Grace Aguilar’s Histories of the Spirit”, *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Woman Writers*, Brenda Ayres, ed. (Westport & London: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Michael Galchinsky, email, 30 March 2008; Elizabeth Fay, ‘Grace Aguilar: Rewriting Scott Rewriting History’, *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature*, Sheila Spector, ed. (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).<sup>(^)</sup>

(4) These reviews are cited in each of Aguilar’s published novels. I have taken them from: Grace Aguilar, *Home Scenes and Heart Studies*, Sarah Aguilar, ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1853).<sup>(^)</sup>

(5) See note 4.<sup>(^)</sup>

(6)In her essay about literary juvenilia, Christine Alexander writes: ‘Imitation is a major characteristic of youthful writing, and it is a feature that is often misunderstood’ (‘Defining and representing literary juvenilia’, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 77).<sup>(^)</sup>

(7)In her ‘Conclusion, *Which may be either considered as conclusive remarks, or as a Preface*’ to the published volume of *Tales from British History*, Aguilar writes that her sources include: ‘Sir Walter Scott’s first series of *Tales of a Grandfather*, and Maria Hack’s *English Stories* (vol. 2). These, with a little assistance from Hume[’s *History of England* (1778)] are the only works she has had it in her power to consult, but to them she strictly adheres’ (*Tales from British History* (London: Routledge & Sons Limited, 1908), 379. Throughout her ‘Poems Books’, as well, are notes of attribution to other sources, including Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (‘The Lament of Wallace’ (Poems Book 1, UCL Special Collections, Grace Aguilar Collection, MS ADD 378, Box A, n.d. (circa 1831), n.p. (19-22)).<sup>(^)</sup>

(8)See footnote 3.<sup>(^)</sup>

(9)See endnote 7.<sup>(^)</sup>

(10)Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs* (2007).<sup>(^)</sup>

(11)Maria Hack, *English Stories, illustrating some of the most interesting events and characters, between the Accession of Alfred and the Death of John*, vol. 1 (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, 1820).<sup>(^)</sup>

(12)Lisa Kasmer argues that this is precisely what Porter achieves in *The Scottish Chiefs* (‘Regendering History: Women and the Genres of History, 1760-1830’ (unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002) 115).<sup>(^)</sup>

(13)Kelly argues that women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries frequently wrote their historical fictions in this way (Kelly, 1993 184).<sup>(^)</sup>

(14)On her title page to ‘Legends of Time Past’, Aguilar writes: ‘To My Eldest Brother Whom the following Tales have often amused long before they were committed to writing this volume is affectionately inscribed by his Fondly attached Sister The Author’ (‘Legends of Time Past’, UCL Special Collections, Grace Aguilar Collection, MS ADD 378, Box A, 1831, n.p. (1)).<sup>(^)</sup>

(15)This is the title given to Aguilar’s ‘Tales of Time Past’ when Routledge published it in 1908.<sup>(^)</sup>

(16)For example, in her tale of Harold the Dauntless, Mrs. Bennett describes the Normans as ‘brilliant ingenious, quick to perceive’, whereas the Saxons are ‘solid, stubbornly and determinedly brave and enduring, but more easily outwitted’ (Hack 40). Mrs. Bennett ends this tale by offering a qualified praise of the Saxons: ‘the Anglo-Saxons, though defeated, showed at

least as much valour as those by whom they were vanquished, but less expertness in the discipline and art of war' (41). In her story of Edward II, Mrs. Bennet says that 'In his reign the English suffered perhaps the most disastrous defeat they have ever sustained [...]—the loss of the Battle of Bannockburn. But this is more properly a story of Scottish than of English history, and I need say nothing more respecting it here' (180). Clearly Hack, unlike Scott, does not consider Scottish history as part of English history.(^)

(17)Walter Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather; being Stories taken from Scottish History*, vol. 1 (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1828).(^)

(18)Anne Mellor, in *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) argues that women writers of the Romantic period took 'the family as the grounding figure of both social and political organization (87), and 'successfully called for a "revolution in manners," both in female manners and in the mores of the nation as a whole' (142). Aguilar may be responding to the preoccupation Romantic women writers had with establishing a woman's role in English society. Her fiction, however, is less about asserting a 'peace-loving female' (Mellor 142) as a model for her women readers, than it is about redefining the ideal woman as a patriot who actively inspires male patriotism.(^)

(19)Aguilar's text consists of a multitude of spelling and grammatical errors that would, undoubtedly, have been attended to had the work been published. I have left her spelling and grammar intact except where it would obscure my argument and, therefore, only note grammatical mistakes as necessary.(^)

(20)All further citations from this manuscript noted here in this essay will be designated as Aguilar MS. There are no page numbers in this document.(^)

(21)As part of the Reform Act of 1832, the British parliament negotiated 'parliamentary representation of Ireland and Scotland' and, scholars argue, the contention in this debate suggested there was still yet to exist a certain British identity (Gordon Pentland, 'The Debate on Scottish Parliamentary Reform, 1830-1832', *The Scottish Historical Review*, Volume LXXXV, 1.219 (April 2006), 100); see also Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, second edition (London: Yale University Press, 2005), especially pp. 101-146.(^)

(22)Grace Aguilar, *Tales From British History* (London: Routledge, 1908).(^)

(23)Grace Aguilar, 'Edmund, the Exiled Prince and William Wallace, the Dauntless Chief', *Tales from British History* (London: Routledge, 1908); Grace Aguilar, 'MacIntosh, the Highland Chief', *Tales from British History* (London: Routledge, 1908).(^)

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