

The Parallel Column, Turned Around: Comparative Analysis and What It Really Shows About Crockett

This article is one of a series examining the plagiarism campaign against S.R. Crockett in autumn 1894 and its literary consequences. Companion articles address the specific charges made in The Academy exchange of November 1894 and the analysis of 'The Goodman of Ballangiech' as a demonstration of Crockett's craft. This article focuses on method: specifically, on what happens when you apply the same comparative tools Wallace used to accuse Crockett — rigorously, and to the right texts.

A note on method: the comparative analysis in this article was produced by asking Claude (Anthropic's AI assistant) to perform exactly the operation Wallace performed in his Academy review of 3 November 1894 — systematic comparison of parallel texts — but directed by a different question. Wallace asked: did Crockett copy this? We asked: what did Crockett do with what he inherited? The tables and close readings below are the result of that AI-assisted analysis, subsequently checked, mediated, and edited by the human curator. The exercise is itself a demonstration of the article's argument: the same comparative tool produces entirely different conclusions depending on whether it is directed by the intent to accuse or the intent to understand.

The Parallel Column as a Weapon

When William Wallace reviewed Crockett's work in [The Academy on 3 November 1894](#), his most striking move was methodological. He did not simply assert that 'The Cuif before the Session' chapter in *The Lilac Sunbonnet* resembled Dugald Graham's chapbook *Jockey and Maggy's Courtship*. He printed them side by side, in parallel columns, and let the visual proximity do its work. The implication was clear: look at these two passages together, and you will see the theft.

It was a rhetorically effective technique. It looked like evidence. It had the appearance of scholarly rigour — the kind of rigorous, text-based argument that could not easily be dismissed as mere opinion. The problem, as Crockett demonstrated in his reply of 10 November, was that both passages drew independently on a common source — the *Scots Magazine* for February 1757 — and that the shared material was, in any case, 'a familiar ingle-nook tale told in every farm-kitchen in Galloway.' The parallel column had not demonstrated theft. It had demonstrated shared access to a communal tradition. But by then the damage was already done: the accusation had been made visible, in print, in the most prominent literary weekly of the period.

The parallel-column method, used by Wallace as a weapon, is in fact a legitimate and powerful tool of literary analysis — when applied honestly, to the right texts, with the right question in mind. The question Wallace was asking was: did Crockett steal this? A

more useful question is: what did Crockett do with what he inherited? Apply the same comparative discipline to that question, and the results are entirely different. They demonstrate not imitation but craft — the systematic transformation of inherited material into something bearing one writer's singular stamp.

That is what this article sets out to show. What follows is Claude performing Wallace's operation — the same tool, the same method, the same structural comparison of parallel texts — but with Wallace's question replaced by a better one. The human expert's role is to frame the question, verify the sources, and test the conclusions against the primary texts. The AI's role is to execute the comparison with the consistency and comprehensiveness that the method requires. Together, they produce an analysis Wallace could have made in 1894, had he been asking the right question and reading in good faith.

Stage One: Establishing the Tradition

Before the comparison can begin, one baseline must be established: the Ballangiech tradition predates Scott entirely and belongs to no individual writer. James V's disguise alias was in oral and manuscript circulation before Scott encountered it, collected by Robert Chambers among others; Scott drew on it, so did the composers of the *Gaberlunzie Man* ballad, so did Crockett. Any comparative analysis that treats Scott as Crockett's source — rather than the common tradition as the source for both — will misread everything that follows. For a full account of the tradition and Scott's handling of it, see 'A King in Galloway' in this series.

Stage Two: Scott's Own Variations — A Writer Handling Tradition Twice

Scott used the Ballangiech material twice in forms so different from each other that the comparison is instructive in its own right: it demonstrates that variation within a tradition is the natural behaviour of a writer working inside it, not a mark of inconsistency or failure.

Aspect	<i>Tales of a Grandfather</i> (1828)	<i>The Lady of the Lake</i> (1810)
Form	Historical prose anecdote	Romantic narrative poem
King's alias	'The Goodman of Ballengiech' — used explicitly	'James Fitz-James' — chivalric alias, name concealed
Setting	Near Stirling (Cramond Bridge); Stirlingshire	Loch Katrine; the Trossachs

Aspect	<i>Tales of a Grandfather</i> (1828)	<i>The Lady of the Lake</i> (1810)
Source register	Presented as historical fact and tradition	Presented as romantic fiction
Tone	Anecdotal, warm, popular history for young readers	Elevated, heroic, lyric throughout
Primary female figure	None — a male commoner's tale	Ellen Douglas, the Lady of the Lake
Primary danger	Generic ruffians on a road	Roderick Dhu and clan warfare
Resolution	Domestic reward: a farm, a feudal service	Political resolution: pardons, revealed identities

Nobody called Scott's variation inconsistency; nobody called it self-plagiarism. The variation was understood as what a writer does with living tradition. Scott's own footnote in *Tales of a Grandfather* cross-referenced *The Lady of the Lake* explicitly on this material — signalling to any attentive reader that the tradition was open to multiple creative registers simultaneously. Crockett inherited that openness.

If ballad traditions are open for reinterpretation — and Scott's practice confirms that they are — then the charge against Crockett was not a literary-critical judgement at all. It was a hierarchical one: good enough for Scott, but apparently not good enough for a working-class Free Kirk minister from Galloway.

Stage Three: Scott and Crockett — The Parallel Column Properly Applied

The structural model for 'The Goodman of Ballangiech' is Scott's Howieson episode in *Tales of a Grandfather* — the prose anecdote of the king attacked at Cramond Bridge, rescued by a farm labourer, sheltered as a guest, and revealed. This is the skeleton Crockett inherited. The table below applies the parallel-column method Wallace used — but reads for transformation, not copying.

Element	Scott (<i>Tales</i> , Howieson episode)	Crockett, 'The Goodman of Ballangiech'
King attacked by ruffians	Yes — a gang of desperate men, Cramond Bridge, Lothian	Yes — the Armstrong brothers and Martin Faa, Galloway uplands

Element	Scott (<i>Tales</i> , Howieson episode)	Crockett, 'The Goodman of Ballangiech'
Commoner rescues king with improvised weapon	Yes — John Howieson with a flail	Yes — Andro Kennedy with a hackbut and sheep-dog
King's alias	'The Goodman of Ballengiech, a poor man with a small appointment about the palace'	'James Jamieson, the King's poulterer '
Alias register	Vague, warm, quasi-domestic	Specific trade role — comic, pointed, subversive
King sheltered as domestic guest	Howieson's barn, briefly	Kennedy farmstead, Culsharg — overnight, full domestic integration
Revelation scene	Hat scene at Holyrood — John notices he and his companion are the only ones with hats on	Midnight military reveal — lanterns, soldiers, Lochaber axes
Villain	None — generic ruffians	Sir Allan St. Clair, the King's own favourite — the threat from within the court
Primary female character	None	Alison Kennedy (romantic interest) and Elspeth Kennedy (comic-domestic fulcrum)
Reward to the commoner	Farm of Braehead; perpetual feudal water service	Mercy for Harry Kennedy; implied royal protection
Geography	Lothian; Stirlingshire	Galloway — the Merrick, Glen Trool, the Silver Flow
Historical precision	Anecdotal; undated	1531 — the year after Johnnie Armstrong's hanging at Carlanrig
Narrative form	Two-page anecdote in a children's history	Five-chapter narrative fiction with romantic subplot

Element	Scott (<i>Tales, Howieson episode</i>)	Crockett, 'The Goodman of Ballangiech'
Tone	Warm, whimsical, anecdotal	Heroic and comic-domestic held simultaneously

Reading the table with Wallace's question — did Crockett steal from Scott? — the answer is that he took the structural skeleton: king attacked, rescued, sheltered, revealed. But that skeleton belongs to the tradition, not to Scott. The dispute, properly framed, is not about plagiarism at all; it is about whether working within a shared ballad tradition is legitimate. Scott's own practice answers that question.

Reading with the better question — what did Crockett do with what he inherited? — a different picture emerges at every row. The weapon changes from a domestic flail to a border hackbut. The alias moves from vague gentility to a specific, comic domestic trade. The revelation scene shifts from a warm hat-comedy at Holyrood to a military midnight confrontation. The geography relocates the whole tradition from Lothian to the Galloway uplands. And the villain — absent from both Scott versions — reappears in Crockett's story at the heart of the court itself.

The alias repays particular attention, because it reveals Crockett drawing on a wider range of the tradition than Scott's Howieson episode alone. The Goodman of Ballangiech stories are civic and heroic: the king moves among his subjects, encounters danger, reveals himself, dispenses justice. The *Gaberlunzie Man* ballad tradition is altogether different — James V as wandering beggar, seducing farmers' daughters, comic and subversive in register. They are distinct branches of the same tree. Crockett's 'James Jamieson, the King's poulterer' synthesises both: specific and civic in the Ballangiech manner, deflating and comic in the *Gaberlunzie* spirit. The comparative table shows structural similarities; what it cannot show is this depth of synthesis — a writer drawing on the full inheritance rather than any single strand of it. For the full literary analysis of these transformations, including the historical grounding of the St. Clair villain and the role of Elspeth Kennedy, see 'A King in Galloway.'

What the Comparison Shows

Applied honestly, comparative analysis of the kind Wallace deployed in the *Academy* demonstrates not what he intended but something more useful: the precise anatomy of literary inheritance.

The tradition of the disguised king is communal property — it preceded Scott, Scott used it in two quite different forms, and Crockett used it in a third that differs from both

in its geography, register, villain, female characters, historical grounding, and tonal signature. The structural skeleton passes through all three versions because it is the skeleton of the tradition itself, no more Crockett's debt to Scott than Scott's debt to Chambers.

There is one further dimension the tables do not capture: audience. When Crockett published 'The Goodman of Ballangiech' in *The Lady's Realm* in December 1898, he was bringing a story rooted in Scottish dynastic history to a predominantly female, middle-class readership — an audience that Scott's poem had not been written for and that *Tales of a Grandfather* addressed only indirectly. The choice to write this particular tradition for this particular readership — to place a Galloway king-story in a London illustrated monthly read by women across the empire — is itself a creative and cultural act, not an act of imitation. Scott wrote for the lending-library reader and the drawing-room; Crockett wrote for the magazine reader on the sofa with a cup of tea. The tradition travelled, and in travelling it changed.

Wallace used the parallel column to suggest that proximity proved guilt. Properly applied, the comparative method shows something quite different: that what Crockett did with the Ballangiech tradition was not to copy Scott but to inhabit a shared literary inheritance — and to make, from that inheritance, something that could only have come from one writer, in one place, with thirty years of Galloway knowledge behind him.

That is not plagiarism. It is the oldest and most honourable form of literary activity there is. And it is what the parallel column, turned around, reveals.

The full text of '[The Goodman of Ballangiech](#)' by S.R. Crockett is available in the S.R. Crockett Online Museum.

Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (Vol. II) is available via the Walter Scott Digital Archive at the University of Edinburgh:

<https://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/etexts/etexts/grandfather.html>