The hero and the villain are firmly established in western culture. From Moses and Pharaoh, through Beowulf and Grendel, and more recently to Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty or to Superman and Lex Luthor, the stories that people have told since time immemorial have reiterated and reinforced the concept, inviting the audience to identify with the hero and disdain the villain. It is a powerful dichotomy and one to which people are drawn when they tell their own stories, whether they are deliberately fictional or an attempt to present a true account of the past. The history of the Reformation period perhaps lends itself better than any to the representation of epoch-making events through narratives of the lives of heroic individuals and their adversaries and this is no less the case in Scotland than elsewhere. George Wishart and Cardinal David Beaton figure prominently in the period before the Reformation while John Knox has long held the role of the Protestant hero of the Reformation itself, his not entirely convincing villainous counterparts being found in Mary of Guise and her daughter. The hero of the second generation of the Scottish Reformation is Andrew Melville, the so-called ‘father of Scottish presbyterianism’, and Patrick Adamson, archbishop of St Andrews, is undoubtedly his villainous counterpart.¹

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Melville and Adamson are seen to embody, on the one hand, principled adherence to presbyterian purity and ecclesiastical independence as the unshakable champion of a cause and, on the other, deceit, self-seeking

ambition and treachery against the Church. They were sworn enemies who had nothing but contempt for each other, or so the caricature would have it. To J. H. S. Burleigh, Adamson was clearly the arch-villain and Andrew Melville, along with his nephew James, were his principal rivals: 'On Adamson fell the brunt of the battle with the Melvilles.' This epitomises the portrayal of these adversaries, which obtained its historiographical prominence in the presbyterian hagiographer Thomas McCrie’s *Life of Andrew Melville*, first published in 1819. McCrie, looking for a successor to Knox as leader of the Reformed Church in Scotland, believed that he had found one in Melville. His account drew heavily on the writings of Adamson and Melville’s own era, particularly the works of Andrew’s nephew James. In spite of the fact that McCrie’s gravestone in Greyfriars kirkyard in Edinburgh praises his ‘objectivity’, his biography of Melville shows little sign of an attempt to read James Melville’s work with a critical eye. Indeed, significant passages of it are little more than paraphrases of James Melville.

This essay does not seek to alter fundamentally the way in which Patrick Adamson is understood, for it would be hard to mount a case for the defence against charges of untrustworthiness, financial mismanagement, hypocrisy and betrayal. As David Mullan has put it, his life was characterised by ‘vacillation and opportunism’ and he ‘committed just about every sin in the Presbyterian book’. Nor does it seek to topple Andrew Melville from his traditional position as the leader of an aggressive presbyterian faction within the Church of Scotland, for that job has already been done. However, a closer examination of a number of incidents from the lives of Adamson and Melville suggests that something significant has been missed about Andrew Melville in particular.

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