

# **Macpherson's Farewell**

**An historical drama**

**by Dave Buchanan**

**Spotlight Publications**

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## **Macpherson's Farewell**

**CAST** (in order of appearance):

**McHennesy**, narrator

**James (Jamie) Macpherson**, freebooter

**Braco Macduff**, jailer

**Peter Macpherson**, Jamie's brother

**Margareta**, Jamie's girlfriend

**Rosa**, a young gypsy friend of Jamie's

**Lord Grant**, the Laird & magistrate

**Two extras** (who double up as Jamie's companions and soldiers, non-speaking)

**The Hangman** (non-speaking)

**Time** - c. 1705

**Place** - Banff, in and around the Tolbooth or jailhouse

It is a split-level set with one area L representing the prison cell, in it a mattress and a small wooden table. On the table a basin and jug of water. R is a low platform to represent the courtroom, a room in an inn, and the place of execution. The latter may be real, depending on resources, or a two-dimensional projection.

The music may be provided by a small group consisting of fiddle, flute and bodhran. The main theme "Macpherson's Lament" is played throughout, at various speeds and in various styles. The singing is done by Jamie, who also plays or appears to play, the fiddle music.

## Scene 1

*The music of “Macpherson’s Lament” is playing softly as the curtain rises*

*Jamie is spotlit DL as he sings:*

“Fareweel, ye dungeons dark and strong,  
Fareweel, fareweel to thee.  
Macpherson’s life will no be long  
On yonder gallows tree.”

*Simultaneously, the spotlight DL goes out and another comes on DR. In it is McHennesy, who wears an open shirt and kilt, with boots in modern style. He holds a broken fiddle in his hands*

**McHennesy** A broken fiddle, gathering dust in a Highland museum. And thereby hangs a tale. Or many tales, depending on which brochure you read. The owner of this was a certain James Macpherson. Either a loveable highland rogue, unjustly condemned, or a convicted felon, who got his just reward. And the truth? Probably somewhere in between. What is it they say? One man’s truth is another man’s lies. And one man’s hero’s another man’s villain. Very philosophical, eh? Do you no think? It all depends on your agenda. Your angle, as our American cousins have it. *(He holds up the fiddle)* Look at it. The legend goes that he composed the tune and words of the Lament, and danced around the gallows tree, playing his fiddle. Then he took it and broke it over a stone ...

“Saying ‘No other hand shall play on thee,  
When I am dead and gone.’”

His origins are shrouded in myth. They say he was the son of a gentleman, a Macpherson from over at Invershie, and a beautiful gypsy woman. That he grew up to be leader of a band of gypsies who wandered the northern counties from Badenoch in the west to Buchan and beyond. His profession? Lifting cattle from his neighbours, or in modern parlance, cattle-rustling, as Rob Roy McGregor did further south. But enough of history lessons. At this juncture in our story, Jamie is a guest in the Tolbooth of Banff ...

*The spotlight is flicked off. The area of the cell is now floodlit, where Jamie is pacing*

*The cell door opens (it may be a working door or offstage) and the jailer, Braco Macduff enters with a plate of food, which he throws down roughly*

**Macduff** Here’s yer grub, Macpherson. Little good may it do ye.

**Jamie** What do you mean, Macduff?

**Macduff** I mean that if I had my way, I’d have yer neck stretched on the gallows. And hopefully that still may come to pass. When you are tried the morn before Lord Grant. They call him the Hangin’ Judge, as weel ye ken.

*He spits on the floor*

**Jamie** You dinna like me, Macduff. It’s as plain as yer neb. And it’s no because I’m a prisoner and you’re a jailer. Or because you’re a Macduff and I’m a Macpherson. Though God knows that’s reason enough. Our clans hae been at each other’s throats for mony a year now. But I dinna hate ye for it. I dinna like ye - ye’re a mean auld curmudgeon. But I dinna hate ye. Maybe that’s it. Is it?

*Macduff says nothing*

Come on, man. What hae I done tae displeasure you?

**Macduff** What hae ye no done? You smiling, damned rogue. That flaunt the law wi’ yer gyppo companions and live the life o’ a lord, while honest folk struggle to mak’ a livin’.

**Jamie** And you would include yerself amongst ‘honest folk’? Dinna make me laugh! You’ve never had an honest thought in yer life, Macduff, you mean grasping old devil. Tis weel kent ye sell your favours, aye

even tae the gallowsbait on the day o' their execution.

*Macduff lifts his clenched fist*

**Macduff** You watch yer tongue ...

**Jamie** Dinna worry - I'll be wantin' nae favours from the likes of you, Macduff! *(Smiles)* But if there's anything *I* can do for *you* -

**Macduff** In the name o' Christ I'll wipe that smirk from off yer face. Ye'll see. Ye'll see! *(Exits)*

*Jamie picks up the fiddle and begins to play ...*

*As he does so, three characters appear UC and creep towards the cell's imaginary wall C. They are **Peter**, **Margareta** and **Rosa***

*Peter stands on tiptoe reaching for an (imaginary) window*

**Peter** Jamie! Jamie! Can ye hear me, Jamie?

*Jamie puts down the fiddle and goes over to the (imaginary) wall*

**Margareta** Jamie! It's me, Margareta.

**Jamie** Margareta! Whit are ye doin' here?

**Peter** We've come tae rescue you, you idiot!

**Rosa** Just let me near that Braco Macduff. I'll slit his throat from ear to ear!

**Peter** Wheesht, Rosa! That's not the plan.

*Rosa is small and does little jumps to reach towards the (imaginary) window*

**Rosa** I'll do whatever's needed, Jamie. I'll do anything for ye, Jamie -

**Peter** Wheesht! Jamie, can ye hear me?

**Jamie** Aye, I can hear ye.

**Peter** We've a plan tae get ye oot. We've got a drink for Macduff that's been doctored. Margareta ...

**Margareta** I've got it here, Jamie.

**Jamie** No!

**Margareta** What?

**Jamie** I dinna want tae be rescued.

**Margareta & Peter** What?

**Jamie** The evidence against me is sketchy. I want this trial to go ahead and take my chances. Clear my name.

**Peter** Are ye sure, Jamie?

**Jamie** Aye, I'm sure. Now away ye go and leave me. I'll be alright. Go!

*They exit slowly*

*Margareta comes back*

**Margareta** Jamie?

**Jamie** Margareta?

**Margareta** I love ye, Jamie.

**Jamie** And I love you too.

*They stretch up their hands and just touch each other through the 'window'*

**Margareta** Jamie?

**Jamie** Whit is it?

**Margareta** Are ye sure aboot this?

**Jamie** I'm sure. I've thought about it and thought about it. I've had enough o' this life. I want tae start afresh. Can ye believe it? The notorious freebooter James Macpherson, wanted in three counties, wants tae be a farmer. Settle down, raise a family.

**Margareta** So, you propose tae get married?

**Jamie** I do.

**Margareta** And who do ye propose tae get married to?

**Jamie** Tae you, of course.

**Margareta** So this is a proposal of marriage, James Macpherson.

**Jamie** Aye. What is your answer?

**Margareta** It is a most strange proposal, made through the window of a prison cell.

**Jamie** I ken that, but whit dae ye say?

**Margareta** I say aye. Did ye think I'd refuse ye?

**Jamie** Not for a moment. Would next week suit ye?

**Margareta** But what about yer trial?

**Jamie** It'll be over tomorrow, mark my words.

**Margareta** But what makes ye think ye'll be released?

**Jamie** There is a rumour - a strong rumour - that there'll be a new government of both England and Scotland. And that to cement the Union, an amnesty will be proclaimed. I hope to be on the list, as I am charged wi' a minor offence.

**Margareta** If only it were so ...

**Jamie** Now off ye go. Ye can see me again tomorrow, in court.

**Margareta** Fare ye weel, my love and husband-to-be.

**Jamie** Fare ye weel too, my darlin'.

*They touch hands again through the 'window'*

*Eventually **Margareta** slips away*

***Rosa** comes in. She has apparently heard everything. She slumps down at the side of the 'wall' and weeps silently*

*The lights slowly fade to blackout*

## **Macpherson's Farewell**

An historical drama by Dave Buchanan based on the life of James Macpherson, freebooter, who famously danced and played on his fiddle round the gallows tree on which he was due to be hanged.

### **Plot Summary**

James Macpherson is falsely accused of murder and condemned to die on the gallows by the Hanging Judge, Lord Grant. His brother Peter and wife Margareta come across crucial new evidence and frantically try to locate Lord Grant. With time slowly ticking, will they be able to obtain a stay of execution in time and save Jamie's life?

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