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H. Michael Buck

**A Message in her Madness:
Socio-Political Bias in Scott's Portrayal of
Mad Clara Mowbray of *St. Ronan's Well***



In order to defeat Napoleon, Britain formed a Quadruple Alliance (the Holy Alliance) with Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and then maintained the Alliance to preserve the peace settlement of 1815. British Foreign Secretary Castlereagh hoped for close cooperation among the great powers and suggested that they hold periodic conferences to discuss the problems of Europe.¹ A sharp difference arose, however, when Castlereagh refused to commit England to a general policy of suppressing revolts and guaranteeing borders—the express desire of Alexander of Russia.

The test came in 1820: a "liberal explosion" in Europe, with revolts in Spain, Naples, and Portugal against the governments set up in 1815.² In Spain, the army and then the nation revolted against Ferdinand VII, forcing him to adopt the "liberal" and "impractical" constitution that had been drawn up in 1812.

At the Congress of Verona in 1822, the Allies were ready to support a plan for French intervention in Spain—a safer alternative than allowing the Tsar to march across Europe to restore Ferdinand. When the French

¹David H. Willson and Stuart E. Prall, *A History of England* (New York, 1984), p. 477.

²R. K. Webb, *Modern England* (New York, 1969), p. 169.

invasion finally came in 1823, it was a sort of "military promenade." The Spanish Liberals were dispersed with surprisingly little fighting. The peasantry, to whom "The Rights of Man" had been such important jargon, shouted to the French troops, "Death to the constitution; long live the absolute king!" Soon, Ferdinand VII was back on his throne, taking action to abolish the constitution.³

Just as he was finishing *St. Ronan's Well*, Sir Walter Scott heard that the Spanish Liberals had been crushed in October of 1823; he was ecstatic, and used the opportunity to lecture publisher James Ballantyne on the evils of popular government:

You see the humbug of the Spanish war is over. The military who were radicals because they got no pay have commenced anti-radicals because the radicals in their turn have emptied their purse and can pay no longer. The **people** that much abused name care as little for the Spanish Constitution of 1812 as they care for baby-house—You who are one of the great **Hum-fums** will be much shocked at what every man who knows anything of the European politics could have asured you of twenty weeks ago—But much good may it do you & pray let Naples & Spain excite a doubt when you read of nations rising in mass to defend what nations dont care a damn for—Nations as Spain proved in 1808 will rise in mass for their own laws and independence as a country but not for the visionary theories of constitution mongers.

I trust we will interfare to get them real liberty which in my opinion consists not in voting for members of parliament so much as for personal security for life limb and property often enjoyed much more perfectly under the most apparently despotic government than under the despotism of a popular government—of all others so far as my knowledge of history goes the most severe and intolerable because it is despotism exercised in the name of freedom.⁴

Clearly, Scott's rancor over liberalism and the reform movement was as strong as ever. He had strong antipathy for the "**people** that much abused name," and seemed to fear that "the despotism of a popular government" might eventually come to Britain (latent fear that Britain might suffer its own "reign of terror" against wealthy land owners?).

Knowing Scott's animosity toward reform at this time, one can understand how he would write *St. Ronan's Well*, a novel which vilifies a peculiar band of displaced, shallow-minded bourgeois—a group that he would probably see as potential "visionary contitutional mongers." He sets the

³William Sterns Davis and Walter P. Hall, *The Course of Europe Since Waterloo* (New York, 1957), p. 35.

⁴H.J.C. Grierson, ed., *Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 12 vols. (London, 1932-1937), VIII, 96-7, cited hereafter in text.

novel in 1812, as well, the very year that liberal revolts around Europe were getting started.

To say the least, Scott does not present a very flattering picture of the society at St. Ronan's. In fact, Joan Pittock says that the group "is caricatured rather than described."⁵ Lady Penelope Penfeather, though of noble birth, is presented as an aging beauty who has never landed a husband. Very skillful at social gatherings, she knows just when to "profess ignorance so that she is not generally discovered to be a fool, unless she...[sets] up for being remarkably clever" (ch. 6).⁶ Lady Binks is a beautiful though brazen young woman, whose boldness has caused the company to smile at her "dancing the highest highland fling" but stare in shock at her loud laugh and her "briefest petticoat of any nymph at St. Ronan's" (ch. 6). She has her eyes on Sir Bingo Binks, a shallow-minded gamester whom Scott describes as a "brute and a fool" but "on the whole rather an innocent monster" (ch. 6). The man of medicine in the group is Dr. Quentin Quackleben, whose name is self-explanatory. He was the first "to proclaim and vindicate the merits of these healing waters" (ch. 3). Mr. Winterblossom is a gallant who once owned a small estate, "which he had spent like a gentleman, by mixing with the gay world" (ch. 3). Now, with "impaired health and impoverished fortune," he lives upon a moderate annuity but still enjoys dressing ostentatiously: "...his hair cued and dressed with powder...knee buckles set with Bristol stones, and a seal-ring as large as Sir John Falstaff's" (ch. 3). Finally, a late-comer to St. Ronan's is Lord Etherington, actually Valentine Bulmer in disguise, a schemer whose villainy against his half-brother provides the central conflict of the novel.

Scott's purpose in drawing such an unsightly picture of the society at St. Ronan's can be discerned by remembering his frame of mind as he wrote the novel. He had strong animosity toward and fear of any popular movement which might upset the existing order in Britain or elsewhere in Europe. This group of rogues at St. Ronan's epitomizes the stratum of society most likely to effect just such a change: they have enough talent and will to organize; they are highly ambitious and expedient middle-class fortune-hunters. As such, they incur Scott's full animosity while he draws them as a disgusting band of social climbers. David Brown corroborates this view of the spa society: "...the satiric comedy [of *St. Ronan's Well*] is intended primarily to show how lamentable the products of modern soci-

⁵Joan Pittock, "Scott and the Novel of Manners: the Case of *St. Ronan's Well*," *Durham Univ. Journal*, 35 (1973), 4.

⁶All quotations from *St. Ronan's Well* and from *The Bride of Lammermoor* are the New York: Harper and Bros. (n.d.) edition and will be cited by chapter.

ety show up against the remnants of the old, and how peasant virtues are more attractive than bourgeois mores."⁷

That Scott's portrayal of the spa society denigrates "bourgeois mores" is made clear by the way he uses the spa as a backdrop for the central thrust of the plot: the tragedy of Clara Mowbray. Clara's madness and eventual death are a result of the shallow, "rootless" society to which she is forced to respond.⁸ Through her brother John, Clara is compelled to associate with and eventually, she fears, marry into this pack of scheming fortune-hunters and charlatans. Already guilt-ridden because of hidden sins, Clara responds by going insane. Given the background of Scott's animosity toward middle-class ambitions, the reader discovers Scott using Clara's insanity to reflect the madness of the bourgeois values that victimize her. This is why Graham McMaster sees Clara's tragedy as "the expression of Scott's feelings about...some trends in society."⁹ One can understand Clara's tragedy in this way by seeing how Scott presents her as insane and how she is a victim both of her own reckless values and of the "rootless" society with which she is forced to deal.

Scott leaves no doubt that Clara Mowbray is a bizarre young woman in both appearance and behavior. When we first hear about Clara, Lady Penelope says that everyone calls her the "Dark Ladye." "She is a singular young person," says Lady Penelope, "an odd creature...very whimsical...like something from another world" (ch. 6). As Lady Penelope describes Clara's countenance, it seems like that of someone only half alive: her eyes are "hollowed," "caves of the most beautiful marble" dug out by "care"; dug out by "care" tips the reader that some deep anxiety has taken its toll on Clara's countenance.

Clara's behavior is bizarre as well. When the reader first meets her, she has arrived at a formal dinner party very late and very inappropriately dressed. While everyone else dons his or her best evening attire, Clara shows up in her riding habit. "My dearest Clara, why so late, and why thus?" questions Lady Penelope (ch. 7). Clara stays at the party for only a few minutes, but before she leaves, she greets everyone in a manner which leaves no doubt that she is disturbed: Clara "looked round the company and addressed each of them with an affectation of interest and politeness, which thinly concealed scorn and contempt" (ch. 7). Clara trips out of the room while shouting impertinent, nonsensical farewells, "leaving the ladies

⁷David Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London, 1979), p. 207.

⁸See Francis Hart, *Scott's Novels* (Charlottesville, 1966), p. 282.

⁹Graham McMaster, *Scott and Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 216.

looking at each other significantly, and shaking their heads with an expression of much import" (ch. 7). They all suspect that Clara may be insane, but she mixes enough coherent speech with her bizarre behavior to keep everyone guessing about her mental condition.

That guessing comes to an end when the reader learns that two young men have forced themselves back into Clara's life, shocking her emotionally. A few years before, Clara had fallen in love and experienced a sexual relationship with a young man named Francis Tyrrel. Since her father would never agree to the match, Clara, on a youthful impulse, acquiesced to what she thought was a secret marriage—only to discover, to her horror, that Tyrrel's half-brother, Valentine Bulmer, had arranged a travesty and substituted himself as the groom. Bulmer attempted such a reckless scheme in order to secure an inheritance that marriage to Clara made possible. Deeply ashamed of the whole sordid affair, Clara fled to live with her brother John, but told no one about the fraudulent ceremony.

After learning that Tyrrel is now in the village, she meets with him in a nearby forest and learns that Bulmer may be coming soon to attempt to claim her as his wife. Almost beside herself, Clara develops a more obvious mental malady, indicated by erratic efforts at handwork:

A number of little articles lay on the work-table, indicating the elegant, and at the same time the unsettled, turn of the inhabitant's mind. There were unfinished drawings, blotted music, needlework of various kinds, and many other little female tasks; all under-taken with zeal, and so far prosecuted with art and elegance, but all flung aside before any one of them was completed (ch. 11).

Some time later, John hosts an entertainment for the company from the Well, and Clara's behavior is increasingly incongruous. The entire company waits for Clara's appearance so that dinner can be served. Angry and frustrated, John goes to fetch her, impatiently knocking at her dressing-room door. Clara answers in fragmented, incoherent Shakespearean phrases—"Padlock calls, anon-anon!"—and finally emerges dressed in her old riding habit, "her finery entirely thrown aside" (ch. 22). John pleads with her to wear at least her exquisite shawl (which has been the envy of all the ladies), only to discover that Clara has *given* it to Lady Penelope. "'Do not let us quarrel about a trumpery shawl,'" Clara brazenly pleads with John. "'Trumpery!' said Mowbray, 'It cost me fifty guineas, by G—, which I can but ill spare—Trumpery!'" Although Clara is justified in protesting against this materialistic group, her refusal even to recognize the worth of the shawl reveals her increasing inability to function in congruity with common values of society.

Toward the end of the narrative, Valentine Bulmer sets in motion a series of events which precipitates Clara's plunge into the abyss of mad-

ness. Bulmer, knowing that John Mowbray is near financial ruin, asks to marry Clara, adding a substantial financial settlement as well. So John attempts to compel his sister to marry Bulmer—whom she loathes—and their altercation climaxes in John's striking Clara. Confused and terror-stricken, Clara wanders off into a stormy night and ends up at the manse of the Reverend Cargill, the clergyman who had been tricked into performing the fraudulent ceremony. There, she inadvertently overhears the dying confession of Hannah Irwin, her cousin who had aided Bulmer in his scheme. Hannah dies, but her confession was "a tale sufficient to have greatly aggravated [Clara's] mental malady" (ch. 38).

In the same house, Clara wanders into the room of Francis Tyrrel, but by this time her reason is shrouded by a veil of insanity. Tyrrel attempts to talk to her, but the night's events have been too much for her disturbed mind to bear. In a mad frenzy, Clara imagines that she hears Hannah Irwin calling to her from the grave:

"I must go," she replied—"I must go—I am called. Hannah Irwin is gone before to tell all, and I must follow. Will you not let me go? Nay, if you will hold me by force, I know I must sit down; but you will not be able to keep me for all that."

A convulsion fit followed, and seemed by its violence to explain that she was indeed bound for that last and darksome journey. The maid, who at length answered Tyrrel's earnest and repeated summons, fled terrified at the scene she witnessed, and carried to the manse the alarm... (ch. 38).

Scott does not include the details of the "convulsion fit," but judging from the reaction of the maid, one can assume that it was an ugly sight—leaving little doubt that Clara dies in a mad frenzy.

In addition to bizarre behavior, Scott includes a plethora of vivid imagery pointing to Clara's madness. When we first hear about Clara, the spa company is dining, and Lady Penelope notices that Tyrrel's eyes have been "fixed upon that empty chair" (ch. 6). The empty chair is Clara's and it suggests her mental condition. Her conspicuous absence parallels her lack of conventional behavior and contributes to the impression that she is not at home in this world at the spa. Reinforcing this impression is Clara's repeated refusal to wear appropriate evening attire—symbols of conformity. She will not be confined in attire symbolizing social convention. In the same way that the clothes would confine her body, Clara seems to believe that they would direct her behavior into the pretense and affectation she so hates.

Clara's horsemanship parallels her behavior at a dinner party—reckless and unconventional. Throughout the narrative Clara is known for her unusual skill in riding. This is made clear when Tyrrel

questions a groom about the surprisingly rough road that Clara takes back to Shaws Castle:

"She returns to Shaws Castle by the Buckstane road?"

"I suppose so, sir" said the groom. "It is the nighest, and Miss Clara cares little for rough roads. Zounds! she can spank it over wet and dry" (ch 8).

Seen in this way, Clara's careless horsemanship reflects her mental malady. Just as she fails to regulate the speed of her horse, she fails to hold the reins of her mind in check. As she rides over "rough roads" nearly out of control, she pictures her difficulty negotiating the curves and hills of her journey through life.

Scott also mirrors Clara's insanity by alluding to two Shakespearean characters: Helena and Ophelia. First, in a play given by the company at the spa, Clara is given the part of Helena. This casting seems appropriate. Helena's confusion because of the vacillating affections of Lysander and Demetrius mirrors the confusion in Clara's mind. She still loves Tyrrel, but because of the fraudulent wedding, she cannot figure out what she can or should do to remedy the situation. That she is an appropriate choice for this "confusing" role is further confirmed by her performance, which itself reflects confusion:

The expression of her countenance seemed to be that of deep sorrow and perplexity, belonging to her part, over which wandered at times an air of irony or ridicule, as if she were secretly scorning the whole exhibition, and even herself for condescending to become part of it (ch. 20).

The second allusion to a Shakespearean character is much more harsh; within a couple of pages, Clara is twice compared to Ophelia—once by the narrator Pattieson, once by Clara herself (ch. 7). The parallels between the two women make this allusion seem carefully chosen. Both are driven to distraction because of problems in love. Ophelia has trouble processing the treatment that she receives from Hamlet: affectionate then reproachful, reverent then vulgar. In a similar way, Clara can make no sense out of her situation. Tyrrel returns to Clara and meets with her in the forest. He talks of their love and tantalizes her with his presence but offers no solution for their predicament. In part because of their sexual liaison, Clara is tormented by her love for Tyrrel, but terrified at the same time that Bulmer may compel her to join him as his wife. Deeply ashamed, she tells no one, choosing rather to suffer quietly in utter confusion.

Clara and Ophelia have similar tragic deaths as well. Finally driven to distraction by Hamlet, Ophelia wanders about making garlands for her

hair and then falls into a brook and drowns. Clara, likewise, loses her rationality and flees into a stormy night rather than explain her shameful affair to her brother and ask for his protection from Bulmer. So by comparing her to Ophelia, Scott foreshadows both Clara's madness and her tragic death.

When Clara does meet death, it seems quite similar to Lucy Ashton's anxiety attack in the *Bride of Lammermoor*. For Lucy, "convulsion followed convulsion, till they closed in death" (ch. 34). For Clara, "a convulsion fit followed, and seemed by its violence to explain" that she would soon die (ch. 38). The crisis for both of them is caused by the seeming inevitability of sexual intercourse with men whom they loathe—Ashton with Bucklaw, Mowbray with Bulmer. In response, they go mad. What is curious about Clara's mad convulsion is that it seems more self-induced than Lucy's. Given Clara's pledge never to allow Bulmer to claim her, one wonders if she ended her life by the power of her mad will. Like old Elspeth Mucklebacket in *The Antiquary*, Clara hears voices calling her from the regions of the dead and seems to speak herself into a fit of mad convulsions.

One cannot understand the full impact of Clara's characterization, though, without knowing the determinants of her madness. Carefully assessing the development of Clara's insanity, one can see Scott using three contributing forces: she is victimized by her own undisciplined appetites, by the rampant ambition of Bulmer and Hannah Irwin, and by the shallow values of the "rootless" society with which she must deal.

Francis Hart contends that in *The Bride of Lammermoor* Lucy Ashton's "character is her fate."¹⁰ The same is true of Clara Mowbray, except that this time Scott draws a much more culpable heroine. He makes it clear in one of his letters that his goal in *St. Ronan's Well* was "tragedy" (8: 29). Knowing this, one can see Clara's "tragic flaw" as her undisciplined lust for life. One of the first comments made about Clara is her brother's announcing to the party that "Clara...is a little wilful" (ch. 4). This trait is evidenced by her never letting the company know whether or not she will attend a particular dinner. "She cares about no rules we [the spa company] can make," complains Dr. Quackleben (ch. 7).

Early in the narrative, Dr. Quackleben reveals just how ill-regulated Clara's life has been. Her mother died when she was very young, and her father "thought of nothing but his sports" (ch. 7). So Clara was left to educate herself: "What reading she did was in a library full of old romances; what friends or company she had was what chance sent her." John Mowbray, Clara's brother, confirms the frivolity of her style of life much later

¹⁰Hart, p. 324.

when he attempts to justify putting her under restraint: "You roamed the woods a little too much in my father's time, if all stories be true" (ch. 23). Bulmer affirms this image when he says that when Clara was "scarce sixteen years old" she was "as wild and beautiful as a woodland nymph..." (ch. 25). Pattieson summarizes the effect of Clara's undisciplined youth:

...for she had never been under the restraint of society which was really good, and entertained an undue contempt for that which she sometimes mingled with, having unhappily none to teach her the important truth, that some forms and restraints are to be observed, less in respect to others than to ourselves (ch. 7).

Although the general tone of the narrative leads the reader to empathize with Clara, Pattieson makes it clear that because she did not observe "some forms and restraints," her character is flawed by a lack of discipline.

The result of that flaw is something unprecedented in a Scott heroine—sexual sin.¹¹ Edgar Johnson explains how Scott censored *St. Ronan's Well* to make it less explicit about Clara's sin. James Ballantyne, concerned about public reaction, strenuously protested the idea of a gentlewoman misbehaving before marriage; so Scott acquiesced and cut out a major passage that makes the indiscretion explicitly clear. Joan Pittock cites that original passage, which was eventually published in the *Athenaeum* in February of 1893. In it Hannah Irwin confesses to the Reverend Cargill how she had helped to orchestrate the moral downfall of Clara and Tyrrel:

"Bulmer had gained the advantage over me which he pretended to have had over Clara. From that moment my companion's virtue became at once the object of my envy and hatred; yet, so innocent were the lovers, that, despite of the various arts which I used to entrap them, they remained guiltless until the fatal evening when Clara met Tyrrel for the last time ere he removed from the neighbourhood—and then the devil and Hannah Irwin triumphed. Much there was of remorse—much of resolutions of separation, until the church should unite them—but these only forwarded my machinations, for I was determined she should wed Bulmer, not Tyrrel."

"Wretch!" exclaimed the clergyman; "and had you not then done enough? Why did you expose the paramour of one brother to become the wife of another?"¹²

Scott excised all references to Hannah's attempting to entrap the young couple and changed the term "paramour" to "betrothed" (ch. 38). As a re-

¹¹Edgar Johnson, *Walter Scott: The Great Unknown* (New York, 1979), I, 918.

¹²Pittock, p. 4.

sult, some critics have chided Scott for succumbing to Ballantyne's pressure. R.C. Gordon calls the excision "a crime against the laws of fiction."¹³

Despite Scott's half-hearted self-censorship, he retains enough hints to make it clear that the seduction took place. When Tyrrel meets Clara in the forest, he complains how sorrowful it is that they can never be together. Clara responds, "And wherefore should not sorrow be the end of sin and of folly? And when did happiness come of disobedience?" (ch. 9). The strong terms of "sin," "folly," and "disobedience" connote sexual intercourse before marriage—something in one of Scott's heroines that he must punish, thus Clara's insanity.

James Lockhart takes Clara's sexual sin a step further.¹⁴ He conjectures that the mock marriage did not end with the fraudulent ceremony, but that under the cover of darkness and disguise, Bulmer consummated the "marriage"—an act which would give Clara the added guilt that sexual relations with the two brothers have unwittingly involved her in incest.

Whether through intercourse before marriage or through an incestuous involvement with two brothers, Clara is guilty of sexual sin, and this guilt ultimately victimizes her. Her sexual encounter with Tyrrel precipitates the chain of events which eventually strangles her mind. This liaison was the impetus for the hasty secret marriage and the necessity of contracting the services of an agent who turned out to be diabolical. When Bulmer finally gains an interview with Clara, he declares, "Defy me not...I am your Fate, and it rests with you to make me a kind or a severe one" (ch. 24). Scott constructs this moment to make it clear that Bulmer's power over Clara originates in the one impulsive moment when she and Tyrrel succumbed to their passions. Had she not done that, Bulmer would not now have the power to expose some twisted version of the whole sordid affair to her brother and the community, and claim her as his wife in the process. Fearing this, Clara flees into a stormy night and eventually into mad convulsion.

Knowing how Clara is victimized by her sexual sin gives insight into her final words. Just before she goes into a "convulsion fit," Clara says that she "must follow" Hannah Irwin, who "calls" her from the region of the dead (ch. 38). Scott hints, by this telling remark, that Hannah and Clara experience similar tragic ends. Hannah has just explained how she acted as an aid to Bulmer in exchange for the promise of marriage to a supposed

¹³R.C. Gordon, *Under Which King?* (New York, 1969), p. 140.

¹⁴James Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Susan M. Francis (Boston, 1901), IV, 151-2.

"man of fortune" (who ended up abusing her and selling her). But it seems that Bulmer took sexual satisfaction from Hannah before releasing her: she describes Bulmer as one who "'having first robbed me of my virtue made me a sport and a plunder to the basest of the species'" (ch. 38). Hannah and Clara both lose their "virtue," and Scott shows them to be mirror images by having Clara hear Hannah calling her from the other side of death.

Besides being victimized by her own undisciplined nature, Clara is victimized by the greedy ambition of Valentine Bulmer and Hannah Irwin. Bulmer's effecting the fraudulent marriage is motivated by ambition alone. In the beginning, Bulmer acts as an agent to arrange the secret marriage, since it will probably mean that Tyrrel will be disinherited. But he suddenly discovers the will of a bizarre great-uncle: "a large and fair estate was bequeathed to the eldest son and heir of the Earl of Etherington, on condition of his forming a matrimonial alliance with a lady of the house of Mowbray of St. Ronan's" (ch. 26). Edgar Johnson contends that Bulmer's "complex villainies and slippery ingenuity" prove that "his only concern is to obtain the inheritance."¹⁵ His ambition to procure this inheritance is what motivates Bulmer to execute the diabolical ceremony. In doing so, he helps to poison Clara's young life.

Bulmer is aided by Hannah Irwin, and she, too, is motivated by greedy ambition, to get her "man of fortune." After fleeing into the stormy night, Clara ends up at the Reverend Cargill's, where she overhears Hannah's death-bed confession. Knowing that Hannah is her cousin, Clara feels doubly betrayed. This is why Pattieson calls Hannah's confession "a tale sufficient to have greatly aggravated her [Clara's] mental malady" (ch. 38). Hannah's cruel betrayal seems to be the last shove, plunging Clara into a maelstrom of total distraction.

Victimized both by her own undisciplined appetites and by the ambitions of Bulmer and Irwin, Clara can be seen as the embodiment of Scott's worst fears for Britain if it falls prey to "the despotism of a popular government." Although Clara is of noble birth and is drawn somewhat sympathetically, she is fully culpable for her tragic end. Clara admits her guilt: "[society] can scarce say worse of me than I deserve" (ch. 35). She is so devoid of vigilance that she marries the wrong groom and, perhaps, even has "carnal intercourse" with him. Seen in this way, Clara's character parallels that of an apathetic upperclass so intent on its own pleasure that it drops its guard against liberalism and the reform movement—something that obviously worried Scott as he was finishing *St. Ronan's Well*.

¹⁵Johnson, II, 918.

Of the rogues vilified by the unsightly society at the well, Bulmer and Irwin are the worst type. Characterized by pretense, ambition, scheming, and treachery, they epitomize the "rootless" society to which Clara falls prey. They victimize Clara by their individual treachery, but they act in proxy for a band of rogues whose bourgeois values Scott sees as madness.

Seen from this perspective, Clara is also victimized by the "rootless society" with which she must interact. It is clear that Clara has no choice but to socialize with the schemers and fortune-hunters at the spa. Early in the narrative Tyrrel asks Meg Dodds—the innkeeper at "Auld Town"—if Clara keeps company with "such women" as those at the well. Meg replies, "What can she do, puir thing? She maun keep the company that her brother keeps, for she is clearly dependent" (ch. 2). Clara's brother keeps this company because, he, too, is financially strapped and, therefore, uses Clara in his efforts to establish himself: "Yes, brother, I have often foreseen that you would make your sister the subject of your plots and schemes, so soon as other stakes failed you" (ch. 23).

This exploitation is the last thing that Clara needs. Burdened by guilt from the affair with Tyrrel and Bulmer, Clara has a loose grip on reality when she comes to live with her brother. She certainly does not need to be thrust into a group which thrives on pretense and affectation, which suffers from a sort of group insanity. Touchwood, a do-gooder who enters late in the narrative, explains this group madness. He contends that "everybody who has meddled in this St. Ronan's business is a little off the hooks...in plain words a little crazy..." (ch. 30). He then specifically explains how several characters are insane. This is why Francis Hart says, "The whole world of St. Ronan's Well is unstable; madness runs throughout its rootless society."¹⁶

Reminiscent of what T.S. Eliot does in *The Waste Land*, Scott, too, draws a post-war society which is highly unstable, where everyone is pretending to be or trying to become something he or she is not. That Clara is forced to associate with such a group exacerbates her mental malady, precipitating a severe identity crisis. Graham McMaster recognizes this cause-and-effect when he says "that it is a lack of society, or inadequate society, that makes Clara unable to support her identity..."¹⁷

Drawing all of this together, one can see political attitude in Scott's portrayal of mad Clara Mowbray. Scott's letter in October of 1823 makes it clear that he was strenuously opposed to any reform originating with "the *people* that much abused name"; at the same time, he feared the

¹⁶Hart, p. 282.

¹⁷McMaster, p. 220.

"despotism of a popular government." A month later he published a novel in which a young aristocratic woman's mental health is victimized both by her own undisciplined behavior and by the rampant ambition of a band of scheming, shallow-minded bourgeois. Keeping Scott's Tory anxieties about reform in mind, one discovers him drawing Clara's madness to reflect the insanity of the reckless bourgeois values that victimize her.

In addition to delineating Scott's implicit concern about current socio-political movement, Clara's characterization also presents an explicit picture of Scott's concept of insanity. If the latter grows out of the former—the concept of insanity out of concern about socio-political trend—then Scott may be open to the charge that Michel Foucault makes in *Madness and Civilization*. Reviewing this book, George Steiner lucidly capsulizes Foucault's indictment: "He [Foucault]...argues that [down through the centuries] the very definition of psychotic behavior and of madness is arrived at by essentially arbitrary political and symbolic manipulations."¹⁸ Knowing that Scott draws Clara Mowbray out of socio-political concerns, the reader sees an essentially subjective picture of madness—one aspect of Scott's Tory posture that has, to this point, gone unidentified.

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¹⁸George Steiner, review of *Madness and Civilization*, by Michel Foucault, *New Yorker* (March, 1986), p. 106.