

1990

Henry Weber: Medieval Scholar, Poet, and Secretary to Walter Scott

Kurt Gamerschlag

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gamerschlag, Kurt (1990) "Henry Weber: Medieval Scholar, Poet, and Secretary to Walter Scott," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 25: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol25/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Kurt Gamerschlag

Henry Weber: Medieval Scholar, Poet,
and Secretary to Walter Scott



Henry Weber appears on several occasions in Lockhart's biography of Scott, most memorably in Chapter 27. There, in a highly dramatic scene, we find him challenging Scott to a duel with pistols in Scott's library in Castle Street, Edinburgh. His words: "you have long insulted me, and I can bear it no longer,"¹ seem an extraordinary statement to be used against as generous, warm, and understanding a person as Scott is usually portrayed to have been. One starts wondering about the story that may lie behind this scene. Both Lockhart and Scott offer the explanation that poor Weber had acted in a fit of madness. Anyway, he had to be put into a straight-jacket that night, and was later sent home to his family in the north of England, where he died in an asylum four years after the incident.

The story, such as it is, is tantalizingly bare of details and practically cries out for all sorts of wild conjectures. One is not helped much by what Lockhart elsewhere has to say about Weber—mostly negative and condescending. There is enough, though, to awaken our curiosity, especially after the discovery that Lockhart's dislike of the man and his work was in total opposition to Scott's own opinion—who after all had employed him, worked with him, and frequently had had him as a guest over the years.

¹J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (London, 1893), p. 251. Henceforth JGL.

One of the features of Scott biographies is that they inevitably assume some sort of *a priori* importance of everything he did, said, or wrote, excluding in this focusing much of the context he lived and worked in. The present study, coming from an outside angle, may help to remedy this as it will throw a different light, perhaps, on things that we thought we knew.

This, of course, leads directly to the question "what do we know about the phase in Scott's life and work which is connected with Weber—the years 1807 to 1814?"² We certainly seem to know much about the poet Scott in his heyday between *Marmion* and *The Lord of the Isles*; or the public and professional man moving from his first commission as a Clerk of Session and his new life at Ashestiel, to professional success, to the building of Abbotsford, and a busy social life connected with the best intellectual and influential circles that earned him recognition as one of the most famous Scotsmen of his day. What we know surprisingly little about is another very important side to Scott, namely Scott the scholar, the researcher and editor of historical and, especially, literary material. There is no full-length study of this side of Scott. The biographers, including Edgar Johnson, tend to slur over this with a few appreciative bows towards Scott's daunting knowledge; a few further remarks can be gleaned from about a handful of articles and general studies of historical, philological and literary scholarship of the period. Only recently has Jerome Mitchell's study of Scott's knowledge of medieval English literature been published.

Scott the scholar has thus been mostly taken for granted, an unsatisfactory state of affairs both with regard to the interpretation of works that integrate such a wealth of scholarly material, and, of course, his life and attitudes informing his work. Scott is, for instance, often accused of having had a certain cavalier attitude towards the texts of his novels, leaving it largely to the printshop to polish them and make them printable. This attitude, it should be noted, did not begin with *Waverley*, or *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* for that matter, but was in keeping with habits formed in accord with more general features of the scholarly life of his time. Henry Weber's life and connections with Scott touch strongly on this aspect. It may thus allow us to start reconstructing a part at least of the "normal" background against which the extraordinariness of Scott ultimately makes historical sense.

Heinrich Weber was born in St. Petersburg in 1783, the second of three children. His father, a Westphalian German, was a well-off mer-

²I do not agree with Lockhart that Weber worked as an amanuensis for Scott as early as 1804. The evidence of the letter JGL quotes (117f.) is far from clear. Scott's letter to G. Ellis of July 1, 1807 sounds as if he had met Weber for the first time. H. J. C. Grierson, et al., eds., *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1932-7), XII, 292. Henceforth, *Letters*.

chant and the commissioner for trade with Sarepta (on the Volga) for the Moravian Community which had settled in St. Petersburg about the middle of the century.³ Through his English mother Dorothy, née Foster, Henry was connected not only to Henry Lord Holland but also (through his great-uncle Joseph Foster-Barham) to the Earl of Thanet and the Earl of Verulam. One of his aunts, furthermore, was married to the Saxon Count Friedrich von Zetschwitz, of a famous dynasty of generals.

Henry's prospects thus looked quite promising at the outset of his life, even though he was only three when his father died, because the family was secure in the religious as well as social net of the community of Moravian Brethren. This community, survivors of the Bohemian Hussites of the 15th century with moderate and practical rather than intellectual and doctrinaire views (a prime example of enlightened Lutheranism), had founded a new base at Herrnhut (the Lord's Shelter) in Saxony at the beginning of the century. All of Weber's German relations belonged to the community while most of his English relatives, who had particularly strong ties to sister-communities, settled at Bedford and at Fulneck near Leeds, where Moravian communities are to be found to this day.

Although we have no detailed records of this, it is most probable that the widow Weber was sustained first by the St. Petersburg community, then perhaps by those of Bedford and Fulneck for quite a number of years—until the time, in fact, when her sons were due for their secondary education. The best education, the mother must have felt, could only be had back in Saxony at the Brethren's own boarding schools in Niesky, Barby, and Uhyst.⁴ Pragmatists that they were, the Moravians were convinced that their ideal of a sober, quiet, disciplined and fulfilling life in a Christian spirit was furthered by proper education. Their schools set high standards in curricula devised on the one hand for the education of their clergy (in Barby and Niesky), on the other for the preparation of the sons of high-ranking members for their positions in secular life (Uhyst).

The school archives show Henry's elder brother enrolled at Barby in 1795. Together with the sons of several Moravian nobles, Henry himself was enrolled at Uhyst in the fall of that year. It is not quite clear how long Henry Weber stayed at that school with its modern curriculum, offering—apart from the classics, history and geography—training in

³For the information about Weber's Moravian and family background I am deeply indebted to the communications of I. Baldauf, director of the Archiv der Brüder-Universität at Herrnhut, and H. Burkhardt of the Archiv der Brüdergemeine Königsfeld.

⁴For information regarding the schools in general I am indebted to Dr. M. Doerfel, of Dillendorf; the school records were searched by Mrs. Baldauf, esp. records in R4 BIV, a-c.

English and French as well as in public speaking and composition; in addition Henry was also made to take Greek and Hebrew in private lessons. His brother was taken out of the school after two years to leave for England. The payments for Henry had stopped even earlier, so it is likely that he had been transferred to some other as yet unknown school in Saxony or in Britain. There he must have finished his secondary education, as we next find him enrolled in medical studies in the 1803-4 session at Edinburgh University. He continued the following fall at Halle in Saxony, and can then be found at the neighboring university of Jena in 1806. When this university was temporarily closed by the Napoleonic authorities after the defeat of the Prussian Army in the battle of Jena and Auerstedt, Weber returned to Edinburgh to study.⁵ Here he met Scott in the early summer of 1807, having for years been an admirer of his poetry.

Behind Weber's movements between Saxony and Britain one may sense less some sort of romantic "Sehnsucht" and restlessness than divided loyalties between his German and his English relatives as well as some politically motivated changes of scenery. Again we do not get more than a hint as to the background from Lockhart who mentions in passing that Weber was a favorite with the Scott household, not least because of his gift for telling stories about his "early life chequered with many strange-enough adventures."⁶ Whatever these adventures may have been they were most probably occasioned by the Napoleonic wars. Scott later recalled how Weber had tried to hide the fact from him that he was a "violent Jacobin"—meaning to Scott both a pro-French and a pro-reform partisan.⁷ In a letter, probably of 1814, Weber had tried to explain to Scott his unhappy propensity "to take an opposite side in politics," maintaining that his opposition concerned only his Whiggish views on reform, but that as to Britain's position against Napoleonic France he was fully supportive.⁸ Scott does not seem to have accepted this distinction.

Unfortunately, back in 1806, after the battle of Jena and Auerstedt, the Saxon Elector (soon to be King) Friedrich August had joined the Napoleonic forces. As was customary, the military establishment had fol-

⁵From the matriculation records of the archives of Martin-Luther-Universität Halle, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, and Edinburgh University.

⁶JGL, p. 251.

⁷W. K. Anderson, ed., *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford, 1972), p. 110 (March 10, 1826).

⁸National Library of Scotland (NLS) MS 3883, f. 133; the NLS dating of the letter as 1810 is probably wrong.

lowed suit; among them several of the von Zetschwitzs in whose ears Weber's anti-Napoleonic opinions most likely rang somewhat shrill, so that one can imagine them putting pressure on their cousin for a speedy departure. This did not hinder them from changing sides again in 1814, when we find Henry's cousin Johann Adolph von Zetschwitz as a colonel in the army of Goethe's protector and friend, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar; a little later he even appears as the chief-of-staff of the Saxon contingent in the occupational forces in France under Wellington. Henry did not manage his life as successfully; his plan was to secure a safe place in the medical profession as a means to realize what he really wanted to be, a man of literature.⁹

To prepare himself for this latter career Weber must have gone through an extraordinary course of reading in several European literatures during the years that we find him sporadically enrolled in medicine. The knowledge of the young man of just twenty-four astounded Scott in 1807. During his student years we find Weber furthermore trying his hand at poetry in a truly romantic manner. The slim manuscript volume of poems which he later presented to Scott shows no indication, however, that a great poetic talent was lost when Henry decided on a scholarly rather than a poetical life.¹⁰ What we find are mostly unremarkable imitations, translations and adaptations of Goethe, Bürger, Spenser and Scott. Weber concentrated on the themes and manners of the early German Romantics—the Schlegels, Tieck, Brentano, von Arnim and others, with their bias towards a mythical recreation of the Middle Ages, balladry and romance literature. Quite a large number of Weber's poems employ the traditional theme of unrequited love. There are a few occasional poems on this theme, and on the pain of departure as well, that have a slightly unconventional ring to them. Perhaps a personal tragedy was hidden behind the move to Edinburgh?

Whatever made Weber give up his plan of becoming a professional man with literature as a hobby is not clear. He was obviously not the man to push hard for a career; in his own words: ". . . the education I had received, and a kind of backwardness in pushing my fortune, rendered me unfit for any great exertions."¹¹ His meeting with Scott may thus have

⁹Cf. Weber's letter to Scott of March 5, 1814. NLS MS 3885, f. 54^r.

¹⁰MS in the Abbotsford Library. I am indebted to the ladies Maxwell-Scott and the late Dr. J. C. Corson for permission to peruse and copy the MS.

¹¹Letter to Scott of March 5, 1814, cf. note 9.

provided him with the final reason for abandoning the idea of a double career and devoting himself solely to literary matters. Money, although he certainly must have been in need of it, was never something that greatly occupied his mind. Scott commented: ". . . he was altogether neglectful of any more interested motive and it was always necessary that a friend should take the trouble of procuring him the well-earned profit; otherwise I believe he might have altogether lost sight of it."¹²

We know from numerous other cases (Robert Southey's and Thomas DeQuincy's spring to mind as contemporary examples) how difficult the life of a literary man with no gentlemanly fortune or professional income must have been. Basic subsistence normally had to come from some sort of literary hackwork. With most it was the writing of articles, reviews and books to order. With Henry Weber it was copying, both of rare printed texts and of manuscripts.

Like other penniless young men before and after him—Nelson, young Leyden, Gordon—Weber worked for Scott and occasionally for Constable too, copying whatever he was asked to.¹³ Having shown himself to be of an extremely orderly mind, Weber was further employed in keeping Scott's papers in order, i.e. carefully filing the numerous extracts Scott wanted to use for later projects. When working on his *Life of Napoleon* more than a decade later, Scott found ample reason to deplore the lack of this essential assistance.¹⁴

One of the most important features of Scott's files was that a considerable part of them were copied by hand, and thus presented texts already at second hand. Scott was less nervous about the possibility of copyists' errors than today's scholars would be, not only because the copying was "odious and fatiguing work" in itself, but also because the "text" had not achieved that nearly sacrosanct status it enjoys today.¹⁵ There were, of course, people like Ritson who at least theoretically would go to any length to have an absolutely faithful copy of a text. This "antiquarian" school was, however, by far outnumbered by the "gentlemanly" or "polite" school in antiquarian literary studies, represented by such eminent persons

¹²MS "Recollections" of Weber, partly printed in *Letters*, XII, 292 note.

¹³That he needed protection from being exploited by Constable is made quite clear in Scott's letter to Ellis of Nov. 18, 1808 (*Letters*, II, 129) in which Scott states that "Constable . . . has offended me excessively by tyrannizing over this poor Teutscher, and being rather rude when I interfered."

¹⁴*Journal*, 295 (Jan. 14, 1827).

¹⁵Scott to R. Surtees, Apr. 4, 1808. *Letters*, II, 37.

as Thomas Percy and George Ellis. For these latter scholars, and Scott clearly belonged to this branch, the will to present historically faithful reproductions was, at it were, "transcended" by a combination of aesthetic and public-oriented values: what was important was to make as many readers as possible acquainted with and appreciative of the texts they had to offer. "Dry-as-dust" methods were for scholars only. To such a way of thinking holographs or first editions were of secondary importance, and transcripts of them were even less important.

Of course Scott would have to get an amanuensis he could trust, as reading the copy against the MS was not something that he did as a rule, or could have done in every case. To have people like John Leyden, Henry Weber or David Laing available was thus important, especially for the copying of the medieval texts. As Scott wrote to Laing, such people "are not of every days [*sic*] occurrence: the labour of the antiquarian transcriber must be a labour both of learning and of love both of the head and affections as well as of the fingers."¹⁶

As concerns Henry Weber this was an accurate description. Scott noted with delight that it had turned out that there was a strong "similarity of pursuits" between them regarding the medieval and early dramatic literature of Great Britain.¹⁷ Naturally, this "created a considerable degree of intimacy" between Weber and himself, furthered no doubt by Scott's appreciation of Weber's social connections, his openness, and his gentle manners. The cooperation thus hinted at had several meanings. On one level it could mean, in Scott's words to Ellis, that "little Weber" could be "very useful . . . in the way of collecting information and making remarks." Scott in fact used him often "as a pair of eyes in consulting books and collating, and as a pair of hands in making extracts."¹⁸ This sort of assistant-work, supplemented by the further use of Weber in collecting bibliographical data and hunting for books, quickly developed into independent research in fields that caught Weber's interest. And it finally led to Scott's entrusting Weber with publication projects that had originally been his own, but which could not be handled because of the work-load of the projects he was himself engaged in between 1807 and 1814—the writing of *Waverley* perhaps only counting as a pastime.

Scott was somewhat cross with Weber in 1808 when Henry had confided to Ellis (who, of course, immediately reported this back) that Scott

¹⁶Scott to D. Laing, Apr. 25, 1822. *Letters*, VII, 142.

¹⁷"Recollections," *Letters*, XIII, 290 note 2.

¹⁸Nov. 18, 1808. *Letters*, II, 129.

was at the moment "engaged in no less than five literary enterprises, some of them of immense extent."¹⁹ Although Scott played this down, a look at his letters of these crucial middle years that were finally to establish him as a poet, scholar, and novelist shows that Weber's count had been too low rather than too high. Admittedly, many projects, like the 100-volume edition of the British novelists or the Shakespeare edition, did not get much further than the planning stage. Granted, too, that work like the edition of Anna Seward's poetry and correspondence was forced upon Scott. The array of volumes produced is nevertheless breathtaking, with the poetical works from *The Lady of the Lake* to *The Vision of Don Roderick* as well as *Waverley* in the background; the edition of Swift's works in the foreground, simultaneously with the historical editions of *Somer's Tracts*, *Sir Ralph Sadler's State Papers*, and *The Secret History of the Court of James I*; a few smaller things like a *Life of Thompson* and reviews on the side—to say nothing of the launching of the *Annual Register* and, of course, the *Quarterly Review*.²⁰

In spite of his tremendous energy there was a physical limit to what Scott could do himself; this was where Henry Weber came in. As mentioned above, scholarly editing at this time did not necessarily mean the scrupulous presentation of a basic text with a complete apparatus of variants of the genetically/stematically relevant texts. This was a priority that scholars began acting upon in the 1820s. Earlier scholarship went rather into the presentation of the text, with historical introductions, notes, appendices, etc., and the endeavor to be as complete as possible. The *Variorum Shakespeare* may stand as a symbolic paradigm for this scholarly goal; Scott's editions of Dryden and Swift provide further examples.²¹

As early as 1807, in his first year with Scott, Weber had acquired his academic credentials through an edition of all the known texts relating to the battle of Flodden Field, the idea for this obviously a spin-off from *Marmion*. The edition had not been a financial success, however well Weber had come off as a scholar, even by today's standards.²² It encouraged Scott to turn over projects to Weber in the two fields where he

¹⁹Ellis to Scott, Sept. 23, 1808. NLS MS 3877, f. 135.

²⁰Cf. *The Scott Exhibition 1871: Catalogue of the Exhibition* (Edinburgh, 1872), 3rd Div., III: "Books edited by Sir Walter Scott."

²¹Cf. Scott's prospectus of his Swift edition in *Letters*, II, 80f.

²²Cf. the edition by I. F. Baird, *Scottish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems* (New York, 1982).

trusted him to be as well or even better informed than he was himself, in early dramatic history and in romance literature. In both fields he had been deeply impressed by Weber's competence which he himself lacked to some degree: the ability to read and speak a wide spectrum of European languages, modern and historical. It is not at all clear where Weber had picked up his language skills which included, apart from German and English, Russian, Esthonian, Danish, French, Italian and Spanish as well as the classical languages plus Hebrew and the ability to read Old French, Old and Middle High German, Old and Middle English. His schooling and his family background must have been responsible for the greater part of these abilities; travels and autodidactic training may account for the rest. Weber had, in any case, not learned the languages as a means of everyday communication but, much like Scott, as a key to their literature. That he was widely read in medieval romance literatures, of which Scott himself had only a slight notion, is evident in *Sir Tristrem* which incorporated a number of Weber's communications to Scott. Most probably their first meeting took place after a letter from Weber to Scott early in 1807 in which he had outlined Gottfried von Strassburg's Middle High German *Tristan* and its derivation from an even earlier French version.²³ This is not the place to go into the details of Scott's rather odd way of dealing with this far from welcome piece of information which disproved his pet theory of a Scottish origin of the Tristan tradition.²⁴ Henry's first letter and further talks convinced him that Weber was competent enough in this field. Regarding the history of drama Scott must have based his good opinion of Weber's competence mainly on their personal conversations. His letters inform us about his particular respect for Weber's reading knowledge in foreign literature which enabled him to connect British with continental traditions. Whatever scathing remarks the haughty Gifford showered on Weber's edition of John Ford (to be echoed later from the same critical chair by Lockhart with regard to the Beaumont & Fletcher edition),²⁵ Scott knew better and rightly defended these works.²⁶ In 1810

²³Cf. "Recollections," *Letters*, XII, 290 note 2, and Scott to Ellis, July 1, 1807. *Letters*, XII, 292.

²⁴For this see A. Johnston, *Enchanted Ground* (London, 1964), p. 186f., and C. E. Pickford, "Sir Tristrem, Sir Walter Scott, and Thomas," in W. Rothwell et al., eds., *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of F. Whitehead* (Manchester, 1973), pp. 219-24.

²⁵Gifford's review in the *QR* (1811) is quoted in A. Dyce, ed., *The Works of John Ford* (London, 1895), I, IV ff. with interesting remarks on Gifford's edition of 1827. Lockhart

he even proposed that Weber should bring out an edition of Shakespeare with "a selection of notes from former editions with some original commentaries, exclusive of all trash . . .;" Scott and Erskine would cooperate with Weber on this but "Weber would be worth us both."²⁷ While this plan came to nothing, largely due to a lack of funds, a further project of Scott's, an extensive collection of what in the critical terminology of the day were "modern romances," could at least be realized in part in the four volumes of Weber's *Popular Romances* and *Tales of the East* of 1812 and 1813, from which Scott loved to quote.

Looking at Weber's total output of twenty-four published volumes from 1810 to 1814 one begins to have doubts regarding their scholarly standard. Indeed, there were early critics who pointed out clear shortcomings and a certain shoddiness in the textual work of the editions of drama. The standard of correctness and documentation of even the exemplary editions of the time, however, e.g. Gifford's edition of Massinger, Steeven's of Shakespeare or Scott's own of Dryden and Swift—for the latter of which Weber did much of the collation—was not as high as one might expect from reading the prefaces of their editors. Even against those standards, though, Weber's volumes fall somewhat short because lack of time did not allow painstaking collation and proof-reading.²⁸ On the other hand, regarding the primary concern of editors, i.e. the completeness of the collected material and the learnedness of the notes and remarks, Weber did rather well. It is true that Scott had lent his help with occasional problems, and that he had given Weber his notes on Beaumont & Fletcher, but the essential achievement of the introductions on the textual and theatrical history of the plays, as well as on their literary sources, was Weber's own. Scott was impressed and even wondered if there was anybody "excepting Mr. Francis Douce" at that time as widely acquainted as Henry Weber with "the novellists of Spain and Italy . . . the fabliaux of the Normans, the tales of the Provençals and the still more obscure writers of early German. . ."²⁹

does not appear to have examined the Beaumont & Fletcher edition he condemned so thoroughly (JGL, p. 202).

²⁶"Recollections," *Letters*, XII, 291 note, and *Letters*, III, 32f. (Scott to Weber n.d.).

²⁷Scott to James Ballantyne, Oct. 23, 1810. *Letters*, I, 413.

²⁸Cf. Scott's remark that Weber was rushing the edition through the press because he wanted to leave Edinburgh. "Recollections," *Letters*, XII, 291 note.

²⁹*Ibid.*

If we turn our attention to the other area of Weber's work, his medieval researches, we have even more reason to be impressed. Again only the formidable Douce of the British Museum would be the scholar to be compared with Weber in his knowledge of medieval romance material. Of the fifty-six Middle-English romances that can safely be considered to have been known around 1800, Weber had personally studied more than three quarters, to say nothing of the many thousands of lines he had copied.³⁰ He was, moreover, quite well read in the material that was being published on the continent, especially in Germany, at this time of romantic enthusiasm and the beginnings of Germanic philology, and he corresponded with quite a number of eminent antiquarian scholars of his time.

Scott knew well the caliber of the man he employed as his "amanuensis." When, early in 1808, he had the idea that, the poor financial success of his *Sir Tristrem* and other editions of medieval material notwithstanding, a collection of medieval romances might be attempted, he immediately thought of Weber as the best editor for the texts and the European background. Scott himself would be contented to add some learned notes. Weber agreed to do the work and Scott solicited some scholarly and financial help from his antiquarian friends through a subscription plan.³¹ While Scott's plan met with little success, Weber twice went on longish forays to libraries in England. He became so excited by the material he saw that he began to envisage a comprehensive edition of "all the ancient English romances, or, at least, all those which merit preservation for any reason whatever, from their precarious existence in manuscript, and difficult accessibility in public libraries" as the basis for a "dictionary of the ancient English tongue after the conquest."³² The plan was doomed to failure—it is still wishful thinking today. Other scholars and librarians like the crotchety Douce appear to have grown jealous of the man who wanted too much information and "seemed to meditate the publication of all the romances in the world."³³ On the other hand there was Bishop Percy's offer of his transcriptions of romances, even if it came

³⁰Counted according to Appendix II of Johnston's *Enchanted Ground*.

³¹See, for example, Scott to R. Surtees, Apr. 4, 1808. *Letters*, II, 38f.

³²H. Weber, *Metrical Romances* (Edinburgh, 1810), p. xi.

³³F. Douce to G. Ellis, Feb. 2, 1810. British Library, Add. MS 28099, f. 55^v-56.

too late.³⁴ In the end the project failed because there was no financial backing. Weber tried some London publishers without success, as Scott did not want to see his name publicly associated with the project. He maintained that he had not found the time to produce anything for the edition that would justify this. Finally Constable was prevailed upon to print just three volumes for which Weber selected eight romances and the collection of fifteen "framed tales," *The Seven Wise Masters*, from his and George Ellis' twenty-five copied texts.³⁵

Considering that Middle-English scholarship was practically non-existent at the time, and that Weber must have been self-taught in this as in other medieval disciplines, his accomplishment was considerable.³⁶ Later philologically-trained editors of the Kölbing school have, of course, pointed out numerous errors of transcription in the texts (in almost 20 percent of the lines there are deviations from the MS), but they respected Weber as the first to attempt an undoctored and comprehensive collection.³⁷ Weber had certainly tried to the best of his knowledge, following the best models of his time which allowed the documented telescoping of several deficient MSS into one "complete" version, the filling of gaps, the addition of endings. After Weber's edition some other MS versions of the romances he printed have come to light. They provide interesting comparisons with his imaginative "gap-fillers," not always to his disadvantage.

The same can be said for Weber's part in the collaborative effort with Robert Jamieson and Scott, *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities*—to which Scott only contributed a small portion, an abstract of the Icelandic "Eyrbyggja Saga." Weber wrote his contribution (for which he had had earlier publication plans) in 1810.³⁸ His professional competence is once

³⁴Johnston, *Enchanted Ground*, p. 94.

³⁵Abbotsford Library, Press N, shelf III contains 2 vols. of Weber's and 4 vols. of Ellis' transcriptions. Cf. also Ellis to Scott, Sept. 23, 1808. NLS MS 3877, f. 134 for some of the bargaining.

³⁶Cf. R. Willard, "Layamon in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *TSE* 27 (1948), 273.

³⁷See among others, E. Kölbing's *Amis and Amiloun* (Heilbronn, 1884); G. Sarrazin's *Octavian* (Heilbronn, 1885); V. Kirschten's *Life of Ipomedon* (Marburg, 1885); and A. Treichel's *Sir Cleges* (Leipzig, 1896).

³⁸Ellis to Scott, Oct. 26, 1808. NLS MS 3877, f. 168 for Ellis' suggestion that Weber write the historical sketches in the form of letters addressed to Ellis, Scott, Heber, and Rose which the addressees would then edit.

again evident in the historical sketch of medieval romance literature in Germany, Denmark and Iceland. Scott was to use and acknowledge this material later in his "Essay on Romance" of 1824. One should also take notice of Weber's poetical translations, especially from the "Nibelungen Lied," of which he gives a summary. These translations were so good that Lockhart without hesitation ascribed them to Scott; but the evidence of the correspondence proves this to be a mistake.³⁹

Scott's and Weber's relationship on all levels seems to have been anything but problematic during those years of intense work. The scene in the library in Castle Street early in 1814 thus comes as a considerable surprise. Scott's explanation points to the Highland walking tour which Weber had undertaken from the beginning of August 1813 to the middle of November. This tour had not been entirely touristic like those of more famous persons such as Johanna Schopenhauer and George Borrow in the same year, stimulated by the wish to see the country of the *Lady of the Lake*.⁴⁰ It seems that Weber had been hired—together with a Gaelic-speaking piper who was to act as interpreter—to accompany a rich Jamaican gentleman named Johnstone with strong interests in mineralogy; one of his tasks had been to draw maps and make sketches. At the end of their tour Weber counted nearly four hundred sketches made by Johnstone and himself. Some of these he intended to serve as illustrations for a travel book he wanted to publish later, but which does not appear to have been written. The sketches as well as the journal Weber kept have disappeared.

Scott had helped Weber with about thirty letters of introduction to his friends, and the travelers—on their nearly 1500 miles criss-cross walk up the eastern parts of Scotland to John o'Groats and down the west including the Isles—had readily availed themselves of the opportunity to get some decent accommodation in between long stretches of camping out. The tour seems to have been quite a success apart from one incident at the Duke of Sutherland's Dunrobin Castle. Again we do not know exactly what happened as the report that reached Scott is not extant. From some remarks Weber made later it is likely, however, that the gentlemen man-

³⁹JGL, p. 252; but cf. Weber to Scott, Sept. 22, 1810. NLS MS 3879, f. 195.

⁴⁰W. M. Parker, "A Scott Amanuensis: Henry Weber and His Highland Tour," *The Scotsman* (Nov. 29, 1937), p. 15. Weber's letters describing the tour are of July 30, 1813 (NLS MS 3884, f. 209) and of Nov. 2, 1813 (NLS MS 3884, f. 282).

aged to get inordinately drunk and misbehaved themselves accordingly.⁴¹ With the Countess of Sutherland and her husband, the Marquis of Stafford, present as well as (probably) their son Earl Gower and Lord Cawdor, this made quite some splash and must have annoyed the socially sensitive Scott deeply.⁴²

When Weber returned, Scott obviously resolved to treat him to a course in moderate drinking habits, amongst other things, through openly controlling his consumption even when he had him as a guest at his Christmas dinner party.⁴³ Weber, for his part, must have been fairly exhausted after the tour and, aided by the severe winter of 1813-14, was affected by what he termed a "fever" from which he seems never to have fully recovered.⁴⁴ Most probably these two causes, irritation with Scott's condescending temperance course and a loss of mental control in his feverish condition, worked together to produce the unlikely clash.

The duel scene did not end Weber's and Scott's relationship, although they never saw each other again. The letters from Scott to Weber are nearly all lost but the other half of their correspondence and further items from the years 1814 to 1816 have survived in Scott's letter books.⁴⁵ From this evidence it seems that Weber very slowly recovered under the care of a Dr. Bent in York where he stayed in lodgings with his mother. In early March 1814 he moved with her back to Fulneck where his sister, married to a militia captain away on duty in Ireland, had settled with her children in the Moravian community. With the help of Scott and John Ballantyne, Weber's financial affairs were meanwhile being settled in Edinburgh, and we soon find him bubbling over with new book projects, such as an essay on German, Provencal, Spanish, and Portuguese minstrelsy. For the sake of his health, but especially in order to get back to work in libraries, Weber in April accepted his sister's offer to move with her and her family to London. He found, however, that he was much too weak to work at the

⁴¹Weber to Scott, Apr. 24, 1814. NLS MS 3885, f. 82^r.

⁴²I am indebted to Lord Strathnaver of Dunrobin and Prof. R. J. Adams of the University of St. Andrews for information on the above. Scott's construction of what happened is to be found in Scott's letter to J. B. S. Morritt, Jan. 07, 1814. *Letters*, III, 396f.

⁴³JGL, p. 251.

⁴⁴Weber to Scott, Feb. 7, 1814. NLS MS 3885, f. 35.

⁴⁵For the following I chiefly rely on NLS MS 3885, ff. 35-6, ff. 53-4, ff. 63-4, ff. 81-2, ff. 87-8, ff. 107-8; NLS MS 866, f. 73; NLS 3883, ff. 133-4. Scott's letters are in *Letters*, IV, pp. 187, 275, 325f.

pace he had been used to. Moreover, it was difficult for him to get access to the libraries without letters of introduction. But he had to earn a living. Plans were made to try his luck in Russia, but then he decided to stay in London and work as translator, secretary, or copyist. His influential relatives, especially J. Foster-Barham and Lord Holland, were appealed to and promised to help. The cousins in Saxony were asked to send interesting books for translation into English. One of these cousins, Colonel Johann Adolph von Zetschwitz, was in London in July accompanying the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. As Scott wanted to send the famous brothers Grimm in Cassel some books, Weber offered to arrange the transport through his cousins.

Suddenly there was the chance of returning to Germany as the travel companion of his cousin John Barham Livius. Weber disposed of the rest of his more valuable books by presenting them to Scott and Robert Jamieson at the same time offering to buy in Germany whatever Scott should want or the Advocates' Library could use. But John Barham, a Cornet in the 10th Hussar Regiment, did not pass muster with Weber's family; his "unsteadiness of character" gave rise to doubts as to his fitness as a companion. Perhaps the real reason was Henry's continuing poor health. A new start in Edinburgh was likewise vetoed by the family who finally decided to go back to the safe harbor of Fulneck where Weber, in his own words, unhappily "vegetated" unemployed for over a year before his mother moved with him again to York. The last letter to Scott, of Feb. 28, 1816, describing these happenings together with new plans for collections, translations and research in the Minster Library is in a tiny, very stylized handwriting quite unlike Weber's usual hand. Scott's prompt reply of March 5 is preserved. In this he cautions Weber about literary projects and a new attempt to move to Edinburgh, but offers assistance in facilitating Weber's access to the Minster Library, signing "always Dear Weber very much yours."⁴⁶

A few months later, Weber's sister Maria Fawsett wrote to Scott for help as her husband had been put on half pay and the support for the family and Henry was proving difficult. Scott tried without success to apply to the Literary Fund, then sent money through his agent Richardson in London. Weber by this time, however, had already gone into his final decline. On October 17, 1816, after two months of what the records starkly call "dementia" brought on by "intense study," Captain Fawsett signed the admission record for Henry at the York Lunatic Asylum. According to Lockhart, Scott paid the bill for Weber's hospitalization amounting to

⁴⁶Weber to Scott, Feb. 28, 1816. NLS MS 866, f. 73; Scott to Weber, Mar. 5, 1816. *Letters*, IV, 187.

eighteen shillings per week for more than fifteen months. In 1818 Henry Weber went into a state of atrophy, had an epileptic attack and died on March 25.⁴⁷

The Webers never forgot Scott's readiness to help. Scott on his part stood godfather to one of the children of Henry's sister as well as later, in 1824, to Walter Weber, son of Henry's elder brother in St. Petersburg⁴⁸—thus symbolically re-enacting the role he had played in Henry's life.⁴⁹

Bonn

⁴⁷For his search of the Bootham Park Hospital records I am greatly indebted to Dr. H. M. Klar.

⁴⁸Cf. Joseph Weber to Scott, May 1, 1824. NLS MS 3898, f. 157.

⁴⁹The above paper was read at the Scott Conference in Edmonton, Alberta, in August 1987.