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JAMES C. SIMMONS

Of Kettledrums and Trumpets: The Early Victorian Followers of Scott

In the early autumn of 1826 Sir Walter Scott perused two new historical romances that had made their appearance that year, William Harrison Ainsworth's *Sir John Chiverton* and Horace Smith's *Brambletye House*. He noted in his journal that they were "both clever books" and went on to exclaim: "I am something like Captain Bobadil who trained up a hundred gentlemen to fight very nearly, if not altogether, as well as myself."¹

Very few of Scott's contemporaries would have agreed with his paternalistic evaluation that his imitators handled their material "very nearly, if not altogether, as well as myself." But it is undeniable that the success of the Waverley novels prompted scores of lesser talents to take up the genre and produce hundreds of volumes closely modeled upon the formulas introduced or modified by Sir Walter Scott.² In their hands the historical romance underwent a sharp artistic depreciation, although it continued to remain a most profitable field for its innumerable practitioners. A critic for the *Edinburgh Review*, taking cognizance in 1837 of the numerous professional romancers who wrote to fill the circulating libraries, observed in an understatement that "the state of Romance, since the death of Sir Walter Scott, has not been of the most high and palmy kind."³ The *Athenaeum* lumped all of Scott's imitators together under the label of the "Wardrobe School of Novelists" and characterized them as writers "who give the costume of the time without the life and nerve."⁴

¹ *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1950), p. 247. Henceforth *Journal*.

² To select only one example, many of Ainsworth's later romances were patterned directly after specific novels by Scott. *Rookwood* (1834) is indebted to *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the chief character of that novel drawing heavily upon Scott's conception of Ravenswood. *Crichton* (1837), a tale of a Scottish adventurer in the court of medieval France, is an obvious reworking of *Quentin Durward*. Even as late a novel as *The Star Chamber* (1854), in which Ainsworth undertook to depict the court of James I, shows the influence of Scott, in this case his *The Fortunes of Nigel*.

³ "Recent English Romances," *Edinburgh Review*, LXV (April, 1837), 180.

⁴ *Athenaeum*, 21 April 1832, p. 251.

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Scott himself had evinced little regard for the novel as a truly significant branch of literary endeavor. From his many statements in his prefaces, journals, and letters we know that he placed it in a subordinate position to poetry and drama with very limited possibility for the serious moral or practical instruction of the reader. It was, however, wonderfully suited for amusement and this, he felt, should be taken as the chief value of fiction. This was qualified somewhat by Scott's belief that the reader could gain limited knowledge from the depiction of Scottish manners and character and the portrayal of important historical personages, such as Louis XI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I. Nevertheless, as Walter Houghton has said, Scott's fictions belonged to "the easy-going world of old Leisure before the crisis of the thirties,"⁵ and in a very real sense this was also true of many of his imitators writing in the 1830s and the 1840s. G. P. R. James, William H. Ainsworth, Emma Robinson, Horace Smith, and a host of others produced a multitude of historical romances that the more earnest Victorians would have considered as little more than self-indulgence in frivolous escapist literature. After reading through Ainsworth's historical romance *Rookwood* in 1839, Henry Crabb Robinson noted in his journal that while the book "interested me during the day I was reading it, . . . I felt ashamed of the lost time."⁶

Many of the historical romances of the early Victorian period in fact offered the reader a real escape from the didactic fiction then flooding the market. Frequently these romancers wrote with little more purpose than that of telling a rapidly paced adventure story and their works were, in the context of the critical temper of the age, an escape from responsibility for both the author and the reader. By deliberately catering to the desires of many readers for light amusement unspoiled by the Utilitarian and Evangelical insistence upon practical values, the historical romancers won for themselves a broad popular support. The Victorians in their drive for informal education sometimes forgot the *delectare* in their rush for the *prodesse*. As early as 1833 we find John F. W. Herschel forced into a lengthy public defense of the right of people, especially the working classes, to read for amusement rather than instruction and insisting upon the responsibility of public and private libraries to provide good books that would satisfy that basic need.⁷

⁵ *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 228.

⁶ *On Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1938), II, 575.

⁷ "Address to the Subscribers to the Windsor and Eton Public Library and Reading Room" (29 January 1833), reprinted in Herschel, *Essays from the*

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And yet, though there was severe pressure from many leading critics and periodicals and the Utilitarian and Evangelical interests to discourage those books felt to be irresponsible, frivolous, and escapist, such literature flourished. Scott's romances continued to enjoy phenomenal sales in spite of the carping from some quarters that they lacked intellectual substance and falsified history; 78,270 sets of the Waverley novels were sold between 1829 and 1849. Ainsworth's *Windsor Castle* (1843), roundly condemned by the critics, found favor with the reading public who purchased more than 30,000 copies in the cheap edition. The sales of James Grant's historical romance *The Romance of War* (1856) passed the 100,000 mark by 1882.⁸ And the public at large continued to buy up large quantities of G. P. R. James' novels. Between 1847 and 1860 the cheap reprints of the Parlour and Railway Libraries carried 47 titles by James, 28 ahead of his nearest rival, Bulwer Lytton.⁹ Many of the circulating libraries, especially those in the working class areas, provided abundant opportunity for those readers who wished to while away the time with an entertaining historical romance. The London Statistical Society conducted a survey in 1838 of the contents of ten circulating libraries in the working class districts of Westminster and found that the largest proportion of volumes were books by Scott and his imitators.¹⁰ In terms of sheer bulk there is little doubt that the historical romance dominated the fiction market throughout the early Victorian period.

When we compare the historical romances of Scott with those of his followers, we find, not unexpectedly, that they took over those features most easily imitated. The strengths of Scott's fictions lay in his realistic handling of the Scottish setting and the skillful delineation of characters drawn from the lower classes. It was this latter aspect, especially when coupled with the colloquial liveliness of much of the dialogue, that accounted for much of the dramatic vigor of his narratives and can still appeal to a responsive modern audience. Scott himself was perpetually caught up between realism and romance and his most successful novels are those in which the realistic element assumes

Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews (London, 1857). Cf. especially pp. 7-11, 14. For a good discussion of the relevance of Herschel's "Address" to the temper of the times, cf. Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957), p. 96. Henceforth Altick.

⁸ Altick, pp. 383, 384, 385.

⁹ Margaret Dalziel, *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago: An Unexplored Tract of Literary History* (London, 1957), p. 81.

¹⁰ Altick, p. 217.

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proportionately greater emphasis. And these novels, those dealing with eighteenth century Scotland, allowed him the fullest potential for the utilization of his own experiences and observations. When he shifted the setting from Scotland to England or a foreign country and moved back in time, the personal element disappeared from his fictions and the romance eclipsed the realism. It is significant that Thackeray in *Henry Esmond*, perhaps the finest historical novel produced in the Victorian period, emphasized the realism and reduced the romance and melodramatic elements to a minimum. But the host of minor novelists who took Scott as their mentor eschewed the realism and followed the romance, patterning their works after such novels as *Quentin Durward*, *Ivanhoe*, and *Kenilworth* rather than *Waverley*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, and *Old Mortality*. Thus, writers such as Ainsworth, G. P. R. James, Emma Robinson, and Horace Smith produced a flood of historical romances which lacked the strengths of Scott's best work but contained most, if not all, the faults, many of them grossly exaggerated.

One aspect of Scott's fictions open to ready exaggeration was inherent in the basic formula of the romance (fictive) characters and plot in the foreground and the historical personages and events behind, only occasionally coming into prominence. At its best, as in *The Heart of Midlothian*, both the historical event (e.g., the storming of the Tolbooth) and the historical characters (e.g., the Duke of Argyle) are integral parts of the story and have a definite organic relationship to the whole. They are not superfluous, and occupy a meaningful place in the story. But in other novels, primarily those dealing with non-Scottish subjects and set further back in time, this technique is abused. There we find historical characters, especially literary figures, are introduced to give the reader a sense of historical milieu and serve no real function in the story. Rather they are names to be dropped, like the details of costume and architecture, in a reconstruction of the age. Scott's *Kenilworth* is an excellent example of this abuse: Shakespeare, Raleigh, and Spenser are briefly introduced even though their appearance in no way furthers the plot or has any effect upon the careers of the chief personages. In *The Fortunes of Nigel* the young hero accompanies Lord Dalgarno to the Fortune Theater for a performance of Burbage in *Richard III*; afterwards the pair sups at the Mermaid Tavern among the famous wits and poets of the day. This can admittedly be justified in terms of plot since Nigel's initial good impression at court is destroyed in part because of his loose "running-about," but here again one feels uncomfortable about the patness of the scenes in question.

Essentially what Scott is doing is forcing the names and places

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familiar from literary association to do his work of evoking the appropriate historical setting and atmosphere. This was not what he had done in those novels dealing with later Scottish life where he relied upon details drawn from the cottage, castle, inn, and so forth. There considerable skill and effort were necessary to construct a plausible historical and cultural milieu and the success did not depend upon the author's jerking the strings to yank a familiar historical figure on to the stage. The minor characters in these novels are developed with life-like vigor; they are most certainly not the grotesque pasteboard contrivances forced into place and labeled Burbage, Shakespeare, or Raleigh.

Scott's readiness to fall back on names of literary and historical significance was exploited in an exaggerated fashion by his imitators. The number of historical characters jerked awkwardly into place proliferated at an alarming pace even before Scott's death. Horace Smith in his *Brambletye House* (1826), a historical romance set in the time of the English civil wars and the Restoration and patterned closely after Scott's *Peveril of the Peak*, is one of the first to exhibit this abuse. The novel is filled with numerous detached incidents, arising from Smith's desperate attempts to introduce as many well-known personages and events from the age as possible. Yet they only serve to break the unity and insult the reader's intelligence. At one point Jocelyn, the young hero, fleeing through London, seeks shelter in a small non-descript house and by sheerest "chance" finds himself rudely interrupting Milton dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughters. A few pages later on he encounters for a brief moment Isaac Walton quietly fishing on the Lea. Edward Bulwer Lytton in *Devereaux* (1829), an early historical romance set in the eighteenth century, paraded before the reader an endless procession of stiff figures lifted from the society of the day: Alexander Pope, John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Bolingbroke, Peter the Great, Louis XIV, etc., each coming forward briefly to be introduced, clay models on a fashion boardwalk. Thackeray's historical personages in *Henry Esmond* (1852) are among the weakest points in that novel. An extreme manifestation of the irresponsible use of this technique occurs in Emma Robinson's romance *Whitefriars* (1844). There she strings her historical events and persons together like so many beads on a necklace. The episodic nature of the story allows Miss Robinson to shuttle her young hero here and there, so that he is present on the eve of the murder of Lord Aumerle in the Tower, narrowly escapes the London fire, sits on the lap of Nell Gwyn, studies with Titus Oates, witnesses that man's trial where he makes his infamous anti-Catholic accusations,

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appears as an observer on the scaffold to record the executions of persons unjustly convicted from his testimony, accompanies the Duke of Monmouth at the battle of Bothwell Brigg, serves Charles II as a courtier and meets Eleanor Gwynne, and encounters a variety of other historical personages from the period too numerous to be mentioned here.

This then was a common abuse in the historical romances of the day. The critics were almost unanimous in their condemnation of the practice, both on artistic and historical grounds. A writer in the *Quarterly Review* called it all "horrible nonsense" and felt that this "episodic tampering with illustrious names" was a general disease of historical fiction that undercut the dignity of the historical men and women treated in this fashion.¹¹

The use of historical personages and events haphazardly drawn into the story was but one of the ways in which the romancers attempted to give a sense of historical verisimilitude to their fictions. A second means, equally open to abuse, was the use of details of costume, manners, architecture, weapons, and armor to pad out the picture. Many historical romancers in the 1830s and the 1840s felt that little more was necessary to a reconstruction of a past epoch than a sprinkling of historical characters and a flood of antiquarian detail. Again this exaggerated utilization of descriptive detail can be traced back to Scott, who had himself always been susceptible to this excess. It had been a danger potential in Scott's fictions from the first. In the preface to *Waverley* he stated that he had been desirous of repeating the success of Maria Edgeworth in her sympathetic introduction of the Irish peoples and ways to the English reading public. The plot in this novel was chiefly a vehicle for Scottish "habits, manners, and feelings." Scott was always willing, especially in his earlier novels, to deviate upon a tangent descriptive of some aspect of Scottish manners and life.

When Scott temporarily abandoned Scotland for England and France, the local color of the Scottish highlands gave way to the color and pageantry of a period piece reconstruction. In such novels as *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, and *The Monastery* there is a strong emphasis on a careful depiction of the external aspects of the age—the scenery, costumes, and architecture—while character and sometimes plot are slighted. Scott took considerably more care to insure the accuracy of his manners and costume than of his historical characters and events. A good example of this is his novel *Kenilworth*. The action of the novel occurs in 1575, yet the historical elements are notoriously inac-

¹¹ XLVIII (1832), 395. Horace Smith's *Brambletye House* and Bulwer's *Devereaux* are cited as the two chief offenders.

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curate. Amy Rosart and Leicester are far less historical personages than melodramatic props from sentimental romances. Elizabeth's love for the Earl, of such crucial importance in the novel, is based on the flimsiest historical evidence. The chronology throughout is hopelessly scrambled: Amy Rosart's death occurred in 1560, not 1575; and Shakespeare at that time was but a boy of eleven, not a fully matured playwright on the edge of retirement. Yet in subsequent years when Scott came to revise the novel, the inaccuracies in the historical aspects of the work (which were to trouble many later Victorian readers) were left unchallenged. But upon obtaining a copy of an inventory of furniture at Leicester's Kenilworth, Scott made several minor modifications of the text to ensure the accuracy of his descriptions of that building and its furnishings. In short, Scott's fidelity in *Kenilworth*, as elsewhere, was to the manners of the day, not to the history.

Scott's novels, especially those set in the earlier centuries of English and French history, contributed to the strong antiquarian interest of the Victorians in the details of dress, architecture, weapons, and so forth of earlier generations. The historical novelists who followed Scott exploited this interest, padding their fictions with excessive descriptions of the superficial aspects of earlier ages. Ainsworth, James, C. Herbert Rodwell, and others undertook extended researches into such areas and all too frequently their utilization of such material degenerated into pedantic floutings of specialized knowledge gleaned from their investigations. Scott had exhibited the good sense of reserving much of his antiquarian information for the notes affixed to the end of the text. His followers, however, chose to include such information in the narrative itself. In many instances the accumulation of masses of historical facts and details became an end in itself. Blocks of historical information were dropped ungracefully into the text, destroying whatever unity the narrative might have had. At times this over-zealous use of antiquarian information rendered the story itself incomprehensible. Scott in his journal once advised himself not to "let the background eclipse the principal figures—the frame over-power the picture."¹² This was something his followers never learned.

Both Bulwer Lytton and Ainsworth succumbed repeatedly to this temptation. In his immensely popular *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) Bulwer yielded to his enthusiasm for the place and time, allowing his antiquarian interests to override his good sense as a novelist, and consciously "worked up" the topography and buildings of the ancient city of Pompeii. Much archaeological information was included in the novel

¹² *Journal*, p. 249.

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which had little relevance to the story at hand and was there merely to give the reader a more complete picture of first century Roman life. He thus anticipated Ainsworth's method in such romances as *The Tower of London* (1840), *Old Saint Paul's* (1841), and *Windsor Castle* (1843), a series of historical romances centering around specific buildings and confined to very restricted areas in imitation of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Ainsworth's early fascination with the Gothic tale combined with his antiquarian interests to give to these romances a distinctive sort of local color. It is a local color of a building, embodying its history, legends, and topography, rather than of a region. For *The Tower of London* and *Windsor Castle* he "worked up" the area, spending considerable time at both the Tower and the Castle, prowling throughout the structures, making diagrams, taking sketches, filling notebooks with his observations, and later doing abundant reading on his subjects. This extensive and methodical research on the spot accounted for the accuracy of the details of both the text and the accompanying drawings by Cruikshank. Such a method, however, presented inherent dangers and Ainsworth failed to escape them. Obviously there is the possibility that once so much labor has been expended, the novelist will want to bring into his narrative as much of his researches as possible; descriptive material will assume a dominant, rather than subordinate, place and become an end in itself. Ainsworth had done this in regard to his researches into costumes and he did it to an even greater extent in his descriptions of his buildings. In *The Tower of London* his chief concern was with "exhibiting the Tower in its triple light of a palace, a prison, and a fortress," and all aspects of his story were so contrived to "introduce every relic of the old pile,—its towers, chapels, halls, chambers, gateways, arches, and drawbridge—so that no part of it should remain un-illustrated."¹³ In actual fact both *The Tower of London* and *Windsor Castle* and Bulwer's *The Last Days of Pompeii* are an unsuccessful merging of historical romance and guidebook; these twin features are in constant conflict and end in destroying the effectiveness potential in each aspect rather than complementing one another as was originally intended.

C. Herbert Rodwell, a disciple of Ainsworth, was also guilty of this same abuse. The following excerpt from his romance *Old London Bridge* (1848-1849) will illustrate this tendency of description to become history, as the author undertakes to parade pedantically the information

¹³ *The Tower of London*, George Routledge and Sons edition of *The Collected Works* (London, n.d.), p. iv.

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he has recently acquired. The passage describes a sixteenth century London dinner.

The silver tankards were all displayed on a side buffet. William had knocked up at least half a dozen of their neighbors to procure sundry dainties, such as sea-gulls, served up in cold jelly; reys and ruffs, and delicious venison pasty, too, were procured; and conger eels, in a rich sauce of cream. Then there were fruits, among which were plums that had been introduced from Italy by Cromwell himself in 1510. A great addition to our fruits had been lately made; for instance, the pale gooseberry, the apricot, and the musk-melon from the Netherlands, had not been in England twenty years before; and cherries were only just brought into notice. To the Netherlands we also owe our salads and our cabbages, which were first brought over about 1524. Pippins came about a year after; and artichokes were not cultivated until this reign. Currants, which afterwards came from Zante, were not yet known — not indeed until 1555.¹⁴

Setting has evolved into history. In actual fact this short essay on the history of English foodstuffs serves little purpose except to show off Rodwell's researches. It cannot be said to contribute substantially to a description of the scene and in effect breaks down the continuity of the narrative. Whereas Scott had consigned much of this pedological information to his notes, Rodwell, jealous of his researches, injected the material into the text. The extreme instance of this occurs in Ainsworth's *Windsor Castle* where the entire third book is given over to a lengthy account of the history of that castle from its earliest days to 1843. It is as if Scott in *Rob Roy* had interpolated the lengthy prefatory essay on the history of the famous Scotch outlaw into the novel itself.

Scott himself was aware of this abuse, both in his own novels and those of his imitators. In his journal for 1826 he stated of his followers that

They have to read old books and consult antiquarian collections to get their information. . . . This leads to a dragging-in historical details by head and shoulders, so that the interest of the main piece is lost in minute descriptions of events which do not affect its progress. Perhaps I have sinned [sic] in this way myself—indeed, I am but too conscious of having considered the plot as what Bayes calls the means of bringing in fine things. . . .¹⁵

History then is there in the romances of the 1830s and the 1840s and frequently it is accurate, indicating a partial response to the new critical demands on the part of many readers and reviewers for closer

¹⁴ *Old London Bridge* (London, n.d.), p. 176.

¹⁵ *Journal*, pp. 248-249.

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attention to factual detail. But all too often it takes the form of undigested lumps of pure information forced into the text and upon the reader. Furthermore, accuracy is to be found only in the minuter details of costume and weapons, while the customary liberty is taken with historical events and personages.

The general tendency of the post-Scott historical romancers to "write to the eye, rather than to the mind and the heart" was strongly criticized by the contemporary critics, who found their excessive descriptions tiresome, repetitious, and injurious to the unity of the story. A typical comment is that of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1842 wherein it was argued that "antiquarian study may injure historical taste" because the reader may accept the superficial detail as the substance.

In seeking with exclusive earnestness to realize past ages to our imagination, we run the risk of losing sight of those general characteristics common to men in all circumstances, in our attention to those which are distinctive. Substantial reality no longer suffices us—we must have outward verisimilitude also; and we become apt to mistake the show for the substance. We withdraw our eyes from the man himself, to fix them on his coat-of-mail, trunk hose, or periwig; and history becomes rather a gallery of pictures than a series of examples.¹⁶

The majority of Victorian romancers reduced history to little more than a "coat-of-mail, trunk hose, or periwig." Again the chief offender here was Ainsworth; character in his novels was completely submerged by costume. His greatest efforts were made on behalf of a depiction of the pageantry inherent within the life of past periods. The emphasis upon costume alone assumed a disproportionate place in his romances and Ainsworth's name became synonymous among his contemporaries for elaborate, over-blown descriptions of clothes. R. H. Horne complained that his romances consisted of little more than "catalogues of numberless suits of clothes."¹⁷

In contrast, Scott at his best was fully aware of the complex undercurrents in past periods and strove to embody them in his novels, us-

¹⁶ LXXIV (January, 1842), 433.

¹⁷ *A New Spirit of the Age* (London, 1844), II, 219. However, this element of exaggeration in the romances of Ainsworth may have accounted in part for his popularity. Louis James has suggested that it was precisely this aspect which appealed most strongly to the lower class readers, for Ainsworth's "love of elaborate, pseudo-poetic descriptions . . . fitted in exactly with a working-class taste looking backwards to chapbook stories and the costume plays of the Elizabethans." For such readers this love of extravagance was "a reaction against the squalor of [their] living conditions." *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850* (London, 1963), p. 91.

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ually in the form of his characters. But as he went further back in time and shifted his locale from Scotland to other countries the historical element was reduced to little more than a superficial pattern of costume and adventure. To utilize the terminology of the drama, we can say that Scott in most successful novels used a box set, in which the characters and the historical settings were functionally related. In his weakest novels he was content to employ a flat set, a two-dimensional painted backdrop against which an action unfolded itself to a predictable conclusion. The followers of Scott were never able to achieve more than the latter; their stories are always played out *against* a historical setting, never *in* one.

One further point should be made in regard to the Victorian historical romancers. The plots in almost all of their books are complicated intrigues. With James, Robinson, Ainsworth, and the others the plot is all. This had not been true of Scott. He generally kept to a fairly simple story. In *Waverley*, for example, the reader is half way through the novel before anything exciting happens. Indeed the complex plot was generally beyond Scott's talents. He usually began a story with a minimum of advance planning. He constantly improvised, never hesitating to embark upon tangents when the urge came upon him. His plots, as E. A. Baker has said, are frequently "of trifling interest, merely contrivances for keeping things moving."¹⁸ In novels, such as *The Talisman*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, and *Quentin Durward*, where action is more important, the plot is generally developed in a leisurely and casual fashion. The story lines of Ainsworth and James, in contrast, are all action and intrigue, rapidly developing and swiftly moving tales, depending upon the utilization of lost heirs, disguises, incredible escapes, mistaken identities, fantastic coincidences, and missing letters. All of these, it is true, can be found in Scott's works. But his imitators relied more exclusively upon such devices to give interest and forward momentum to their stories. And the Victorian habit of periodical serialization accentuated their tendency to see plot as a rapid, almost dizzy, change of incidents, their stories moving forward at a hectic pace with an abundance of small climaxes and sudden surprises.

Scott too generally restricted himself to a single plot line in any novel. His followers, succumbing to the Victorian tendency to proliferate plots, generally initiated two, sometimes three, stories in a single romance. G. P. R. James' *Philip Augustus* (1831) keeps a triple plot going: two dealing in loose terms with historical personages, the third with fictional characters. The three are poorly integrated, and the reader

¹⁸ *The History of the English Novel* (London, 1950), VI, 184.

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continually loses track of the development of one story, as James shifts to a second or third plot. This readiness of the post-Scott romancers to work up incredibly complex, interlocking intrigues was effectively satirized by Captain Frederick Marryat in his first historical romance, *Snarleyyou, or The Dog Fiend* (1837).

This then in general terms was the state of the early Victorian historical romance: intrigue, costume, and history mixed together with little imagination and less art. As George Henry Lewes said, "To write a good historical romance is no easy task; to write such as are published . . . is, we believe, one of the easiest of all literary tasks."¹⁹

In summary we can say that on the whole the post-Scott historical romancers followed Scott only at a distance. They took over from the Waverley novels those features most easily exploited: the costume, the picturesqueness, the sense of pageantry, and the antiquarianism. In these areas they evinced a careful concern with accuracy of detail backed by considerable research. Like Scott, they brought history to the aid of romance. The major characters and events in their novels are still fictional, as they had been in the Waverley novels. Generally, the historical elements in their novels are more accurate than Scott had been inclined to make them; but they still felt free to bend the fact for the sake of the story. There is also a schizophrenic division to their history and their use of it. Careful accuracy is balanced against flagrant violation of historical fact, sometimes (as in *Windsor Castle*) in the same paragraph. None of their historical romances really forced the reader to reflect upon the complex patterns and causes of events as they affected the lives of the individual characters in the story. Scott had done this in his better novels; in *Waverley*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *Old Mortality*, and a few others the chief characters were inextricably a part of the period in which they were set, and their vacillations and destinies were in a very real sense tied to and pre-conditioned by the events of the period.

For the most part the early Victorian romancers exhibited a paucity of imagination. With few exceptions they were the "industrials," men and women who put together a historical novel in the way a small boy might assemble the parts of a model plane kit: mechanically fitting the pre-cut parts together according to the diagram. Since there were few alterations in the basic pattern, their total productivity exhibits a most monotonous regularity, the sameness altered only superficially by the choice of background drapery. Rarely has literary composition been so

¹⁹ "Historical Romance," *Westminster Review*, XLV (March, 1846), 34.

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reduced to a mechanical assembly of parts. George Henry Lewes in a devastating review of current historical romances in 1846 was painfully correct when he asserted that the Victorian historical romancer needed

no style, no imagination, no fancy, no knowledge of the world, no wit, no pathos; he needs only to study Scott, and the historical novelists; to "cram" for the necessary information about costumes, antiquated forms of speech, and the leading political events of the epoch chosen; and to add thereto the art, so easily learned, of complicating a plot with adventures, imprisonments, and escapes. As for character, he need give himself no trouble about it: his predecessors have already furnished him with *types*; these he can christen anew. Probability he may utterly scorn. If he has any reflections to make, he need only give them a sententious turn; truth, novelty, or depth, are unimportant. Sprinkle largely with love and heroism; keep up the mystery overhanging the hero's birth, till the last chapter; and have a good stage villain, scheming and scowling through two volumes and a half, to be utterly exposed and defeated at last—and the historical novel is complete.²⁰

Other novelists, utilizing the general Scott formula of a fictive story played out against a historical backdrop, would find new ways of adapting their material to the tastes of the age. Later writers would employ the historical romance as a medium for the discussion of contemporary problems; the past for them would reflect the present. Dickens would go to the historical novel to deal with the current social problems of England; Kingsley, to preach muscular Christianity and patriotism; Edwin Abbot and Dean Frederic W. Farrar, to defend the Broad Church principles; and Cardinals Wiseman and Newman, to set forth Catholic doctrine. In their hands the historical romance would cease to be the vehicle of escapism it had been with many of the earlier romancers.

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²⁰ "Historical Romance," pp. 34-35.