

1979

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### Recommended Citation

Howard, William (1979) "The Symbolic Structure of Scott's Rob Roy," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol14/iss1/7>

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*William Howard*

## The Symbolic Structure of Scott's *Rob Roy*



The persistent critical attack which the reputation of *Rob Roy* has suffered is based on a fundamental misconception of what the novel offers. A. O. J. Cockshut asserts that "it cannot be called a major work of art in the sense in which *Waverley* and *Old Mortality* are,"<sup>1</sup> and he proceeds to complain about its perfunctory plot and its failure to live up to the "almost perfect" *Waverley*.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Welsh agrees with Cockshut's criticism of the plot on the grounds that "the action seems inchoate because there are too many sources of interest, no one of which commands the whole."<sup>3</sup> But Donald Davie's attack on the novel is more sustained, a more obvious example of the misconceptions which are brought to bear on it. He charges that *Rob Roy*, "written four years after the appearance of *Waverley*, challenges comparison with that masterpiece and comes badly out of the comparison."<sup>4</sup> One reason for the novel's failure, he suggests, is its lack of unity: "we should not be so dissatisfied with the early chapters if the title alone--let alone Scott's introductory matter on sources--had not prepared us for something quite different....We can regard it *either* as a romance *or* as a realistic novel spoiled by a second half which turns out to be romance. Take it either way and we are compelled--so far as I can see--to put it down a failure."<sup>5</sup> When he comes to discuss the hero of the novel, Davie discloses the

preconceptions that lead to his conclusions. Frank, he finds, is "quite inadequate as the hero of the sort of book Scott found himself writing, an analysis, in historically realistic terms, of the state of English society in the first half of the eighteenth century. Hence, we may argue, Scott *had* to turn his novel into a romance half way through, just because he had furnished himself with a hero who was fit for nothing else."<sup>6</sup> These views not only illustrate the unfair prejudices that influence the reading of the novel, but also help to indicate, by inversion, what I consider to be the main strengths of *Rob Roy*.

The comparison with *Waverley*, for example, is an easy one to make, but a misleading one to insist upon. In the earlier work the historical events of the Jacobite uprisings permeate the book, providing the central preoccupation of the hero and the main subject of Scott's discussion. In *Rob Roy*, however, the historical events are a mere adjunct to the action, a minor example of one aspect of the universal question Scott is examining. Scott is not attempting "an analysis, in historically realistic terms," of anything, much less of the state of English society. He is examining the universal condition of human beings who have been denied their identity and are threatened with displacement from their native habitation. The highlanders in this novel are not simply historical personages, as they are in Scott's first novel, they are representative figures whose history and personality contribute to a symbolic expression of the plight of all oppressed people. This also explains the lack of consistency that Davie and Welsh find in *Rob Roy*. Scott had provided a novel of action in *Waverley*, but in *Rob Roy* he turns to a symbolic structure to convey far more complex ramifications of a different theme. And for this reason *Rob Roy* is still a relevant novel, a discussion of problems still being faced by mankind in the twentieth century, while *Waverley* is a nineteenth-century analysis of eighteenth-century events.

Scott makes this universal aspect of *Rob Roy* clear in his lengthy introduction to the *magnum opus* edition of the novel. There he stresses the qualities of the MacGregors which he associates with their name. He speaks of the "indomitable spirit with which they maintained themselves as a clan," and of "their retaining, with such tenacity, their separate existence and union as a clan under circumstances of the utmost urgency."<sup>7</sup> He also emphasizes their contempt for laws from which they experienced "severity, but never protection" (VII,xii). He stresses these qualities--and points to Rob Roy as the epitome of the MacGregor spirit--because they were at the heart of his novel. He is intrigued by the clan's history and what it illus-

trates about their character, but most of all he is attracted to that character itself. Thus he distinguishes between their "wild and lawless adventures" and the "civilized and cultivated mode of life" in the Lowlands (VII,viii). He is not drawing a distinction between the old and the new as is so often alleged; but between those who have submitted to the legal system and benefit from it, and those who reject it because it has nothing to offer them. In this same introduction Scott justifies his digression on the MacGregor clan "as affording an interesting chapter, not on Highland manners alone, but on every stage of society in which the people of a primitive and half-civilized tribe are brought into close contact with a nation, in which civilization and polity have attained a complete superiority" (VII,lxxvi-vii). This justification applies specifically to his purpose in the introduction, but a similar expansion of significance is evident in the novel. His emphasis on "every stage of society" indicates the universal nature of the problem he envisaged.

But the emphasis on contact is equally important. It is a clear indication of Scott's method. He creates a symbol out of the peculiar properties of the region surrounding Glasgow and extending to the Highland line. This region is the core of the novel, not only because it was the location of Rob Roy's exploits, but because it embodied a conflict which Scott recognized as a universally crucial one. This conflict is implied in Scott's explanation of his hero's fame: "he owed his fame in great measure to his residing on the very verge of the Highlands, and playing such pranks in the beginning of the 18th century, as are usually ascribed to Robin Hood in the middle ages,--and that within forty miles of Glasgow, a great commercial city, the seat of a learned university" (VII,viii). The abstract elements of Scott's discussion are not embodied in specific characters or in individual objects, but in the nature of the region itself. The region is, of course, physical, and Scott stresses the relationship between topography and the mode of life it encourages, especially dwelling on the suitability of the Highland-Lowland proximity for the Highlander's illicit cattle trade. But he finds in its physical composition a suggestion of abstract relationships which apply beyond the local level. Some of these implications are outlined on the same page as the previous passage. With a single sentence he elevates the problem to the national level: "Addison, it is probable, or Pope, would have been considerably surprised if they had known that there existed in the same island with them a personage of Rob Roy's peculiar habits and profession" (VII,viii). Their ignorance is the initial thread in the web of meaning Scott is to weave around the region as a symbol. Ignorance, in

two of the paramount representatives of contemporary civilisation on the island, is symptomatic of much of the Highlanders' plight he is to explore.

To this core, then, are related all the diffuse elements of which Welsh complained. The logic in this novel does not parallel the development of the plot, it unfolds after the various images have been planted in the reader's mind, when the layers of the symbol become apparent. This method is endorsed by the form of the narrative. We are reading an old man's reminiscences of events which occurred to him in his early twenties and which led up to the marriage with his now departed wife. *Rob Roy* differs therefore from Scott's other major novels which are told in the third person or, in the case of *Redgauntlet*, in the first person but contemporaneously with the action. In the opening pages of *Rob Roy* the elderly narrator lays down some of the conditions which he attaches to the reader of his memoirs. He proposes a "faithful transcript of my thoughts and feelings," and assumes the right--seldom faithfully adhered to--to spare details of events which are well known to his correspondent (VII,4). He also begs permission for self-indulgence in relating matters which may disregard the "attention due to the time and patience of the audience" (VII,5). We are being given a highly personal glimpse into the narrator's private life rather than a romantic tale about the hero of the title. And we can see in the narrator's retelling of the story an attempt to grasp the elusive meaning which he instinctively feels to lie at the bottom of his extraordinary experience. Thus he draws us gradually towards the center of this story, exploring succeeding layers of related events, searching for the significance of what has happened to him. After the Highland adventures he realises he has exhausted the relevant fund of experiences and he quickly dispenses with the remaining events. This cursory conclusion is only a weakness if we forget the circumstances of the old narrator and his purpose in retelling his story.

The first layer of significance which he puzzles over is the complicated issue of his expulsion from home and the pressures of commercial society which seem to have precipitated his father's action. He mentions at least two possible reasons for his expulsion, but they are only conjectures; the narrator's understanding of other people's motives is finite, and reasons are less important to Scott than the atmosphere in which the decision is made. The significance of events in the London portion of his experience still somehow escapes the teller, as if all aspects of the question are clear but the answer is not. Thus we get a well-rounded portrait of his ostensibly one-dimensional father, whose approach to business is also applied to

his family affairs, but is complicated by a tendency to be "impetuous in his schemes, as well as skilful and daring" (VII,12). Parallels with Rob Roy's similar character are hinted at as the narrator, late in life, searches for a connection between these two poles of that epoch in his life.

But the overriding emphasis is on the conflict between the individual and the commercial system. The latter is held to provide the hope of civilisation and Frank has been indoctrinated to the extent that he can repeat its creed on demand: "It connects nation with nation, relieves the wants, and contributes to the wealth of all; and is to the general commonwealth of the civilized world what the daily intercourse of ordinary life is to private society, or rather, what air and food are to our bodies" (VII,21). That is the sentiment we are left with in this section of the novel. Frank believes this creed, but cannot find his own character compatible with service in its system.

And this would be a clear enough starting point for the novel if Frank's personal experience had not introduced a complicating factor. For this system which is supposed to bind nations together, is found to be so selfishly demanding that it threatens the division of families and the stifling of individual talents. It views, through the eyes of the senior Osbaldistone, the indifference to devoted service within the system as a form of madness: "'Owen?' said my father--'This boy is mad, actually insane'" (VII,26). Frank wins his battle in the end, but a sense of confusion persists even as he sets out on his way. He regrets leaving behind "comfort, opulence, the charms of society, and all the pleasures of cultivated life" (VII,37), but he is comforted by a feeling that the whole affair may have been staged for his ultimate benefit: "My father could not be serious in the sentence of foris-filiation, which he had so unhesitatingly pronounced. It must be but a trial of my disposition, which, endured with patience and steadiness on my part, would raise me in his estimation, and lead to an amicable accomodation of the point in dispute between us" (VII,37-8). He has confidence in the system and seems to believe that his rejection of it does not disqualify him from a future place in it. In any case his expulsion is of secondary importance to the picture of a formal, regular and safe institutionality in the civilised life of London.

On the road from London to his exile at Osbaldistone Hall in Northumberland, Frank experiences a gradual retreat from the safety and regularity of life in the capital. His encounters with travellers' tales of robbery and violence on the highway suggest that both the commercial and legal systems here are dependent on the strength of the individual to accumulate or pro-

tect his wealth. In addition we are introduced to a new factor, the anti-Scots prejudice of Frank's father and of the Englishmen Frank meets along the way. Frank is reminded of his old nurse's stories of Scotsmen who served "to fill up the parts which ogres and giants and seven-leagued boots occupy in the ordinary nursery tales" (VII,52). He admits to having looked "upon the Scottish people during [his] childhood, as a race hostile by nature to the more southern inhabitants of this realm" (VII,53). He is therefore ready to join in the prejudices voiced by the occupants of a public house in Darlington. It is no surprise by then, that he fosters an "impression of dislike" towards the "first Scotchman [he] chanced to meet" (VII,54). These are national prejudices in keeping with the novel's movement from the general context of the narrator's experience towards specific events which have a more profound effect on him. It is soon to be traded for regional prejudices when he actually reaches Scotland.

His arrival in Northumberland, meanwhile, brings us to the second layer of the novel's structure. Here the formality, regularity and safety of London are exchanged for informality and an almost total lack of institutions. The over-riding impression conveyed by the events in this locale is of the dominance of sporting attitudes to the conduct of life, not only at the degenerate Osbaldistone Hall, but in every facet of life in the area. Aside from the hunting at the hall, the major pre-occupation in this section is with Frank's mistaken prosecution for alleged highway robbery. Justice in the area is dispensed casually by a justice of the peace whose ignorance of the law is somewhat compensated for by his pervading sense of fair play and his crafty clerk, Jobson. The attitudes to justice in this frontier country are directly opposed to what Frank is used to in highly institutionalized society. Thus his first impulse is to defend himself immediately before the local justice of the peace. Those who know the local system, however, advise "a short retreat into Scotland--just till matters should be smoothed over in a quiet way" (VII,108-9). Justice Inglewood, too, insists on seeing the event in a sporting light:

Come, Master Morris, you're not the first man that's been robbed, I trow--grieving ne'er brought back loss, man. --And you, Mr. Frank Osbaldistone, are not the first bully-boy that has said stand to a true man. There was Jack Winterfield, in my young days, kept the best company in the land--at horseraces and cock-fights who but he--hand and glove was I with Jack.--Push the bottle, Mr. Morris, its dry talking--Many quart bumpers have I cracked, and thrown many a merry main with poor Jack--

good family--ready wit--quick eye--as honest a fellow, barring the deed he died for--and we'll drink to his memory, gentlemen--poor Jack Winterfield. (VII,123)

In the end justice is seen to be done, but it has been accomplished by a combination of influence and subtle blackmail which is no substitute for real justice. The culprit--we still do not know he is Rob Roy--has himself appeared as a witness on Frank's behalf and remains free to pursue his way when the examination is over.

But the major preoccupation of this section of the novel is the closer examination of Scottish national character. It begins with Rashleigh Osbaldistone's definition of Scottish traits:

Discretion, prudence, and foresight, are their leading qualities; these are only modified by a narrow-spirited, but yet ardent patriotism, which forms as it were the outmost of the concentric bulwarks with which a Scotsman fortifies himself against all the attacks of a generous philanthropical principle. Surmount this mound, you will find an inner and still dearer barrier--the love of his province, his village, or, most probably, his clan; storm this second obstacle, you have a third--his attachment to his own family--his father, mother....It is within these limits that a Scotchman's social affection expands itself, never reaching those which are outermost, till all means of discharging itself in the interior circles have been exhausted. It is within these circles that his heart throbs, each pulsation being fainter and fainter, till beyond the widest boundary it is almost unfelt. And what is worst of all, could you surmount all these concentric outworks, you have an inner citadel, deeper, higher, and more efficient than them all--a Scotchman's love for himself. (VII,157-8)

Diana, a much more sympathetic character in the novel, denies this assertion, but the image of concentric spheres of interest persists in the depiction of Scottish character in the scenes that follow. The Duke of Argyle in parliament, for example, makes a speech which, though "spirited and eloquent, contained chiefly a panegyric on his country, his family, and his clan, with a few compliments, equally sincere, perhaps, though less glowing, which he took so favourable an opportunity of paying to himself" (VII,226-7). Rob Roy also works on the concentric nature of Bailie Jarvie's defences when discovered in the Glasgow Tolbooth. When the Bailie asks why he should not report



Rob's presence to the authorities, Rob replies, "for three sufficient reasons, Bailie Jarvie.--First, for auld langsyne;--second, for the sake of the auld wife ayont the fire at Stuck-avrallachan, that made some mixture of our bluids, to my own proper shame be it spoken! that has a cousin wi' accounts and yarn winnles, and looms, and shuttles, like a mere mechanical person;--and lastly, Bailie, because if I saw a sign o' your betraying me, I would plaster that wa' with your horns ere the hand of man could rescue you!" (VIII,78-9). This motif of penetration to the inner preoccupations of the Scots is repeated in several instances, perhaps nowhere with as succinct and true an expression as Rob's incognito utterance on the Glasgow bridge: "He that is without name, without friends, without coin, without country, is still at least a man; and he that has all these is no more" (VIII,53). This image is useful not so much for what it might tell us about the Scots--except maybe that they are similar to all other men--but because of its close parallel with the technique of this novel. Each step north from London surmounts one of these concentric bulwarks of the Scotsman's identity. We move with Frank from the ignorant prejudice of his father and nurse in London, to the regional view of the Northumbrians, and finally to the personal perspective of individual Scots such as Bailie Jarvie, Rob Roy and Andrew Fairservice.

With Frank's departure from Osbaldistone Hall we enter into the regional core of the novel. Once inside this core the national distinctions that have been prominent up until now are exchanged for regional ones.<sup>8</sup> Jarvie, a Lowlander, is wary of his Highland relatives: "ye suldna keep ower muckle company wi' Hielandmen and thae wild cattle. Can a man touch pitch and no be defiled?" (VIII,91). The suspicion is mutual; Rob tells Frank that Jarvie "has some gentlemen's bluid in his veins, although he has been unhappily bred up to a peaceful and mechanical craft, which could not but blunt any pretty man's spirit" (VIII,276). Both attitudes are held in the region around Glasgow and there is a considerable interchange of people and ideas between the northern half of the region and the southern, metropolitan section.

The most striking feature of the Glasgow scenes is not the action that takes place there, but the setting in which it occurs. Indeed the major episode in Glasgow--Jarvie's discovery of the outlawed Rob Roy in the Tolbooth--turns out to be a distinct non-event, dissipating the tension rather than resolving the action which has led up to it. In contrast, the three major locations of the action, the church, the tolbooth, and the college, assume a presence beyond their function in the plot. All three are the center of lengthy scenes in which their

own presence is emphasized and in which only a single event takes place.

The church is particularly intriguing because almost nothing occurs at the service except the delivery of a brief cautionary message which Frank could as easily have received elsewhere. Yet the church and the depiction of a Glasgow sabbath for which it provides the focus are lingered over at great length and leave a lasting impression. The building has a profound effect on the narrator: "the impression of the first view was awful and solemn in the extreme" (VIII,27). Later, with the congregation inside, he responds to the natural unity between their song and its setting: "the sound of so many voices, united by the distance into one harmony, and freed from those harsh discordances which jar the ear when heard more near, combining with the murmuring brook, and the wind which sung among the old firs, affected me with a sense of sublimity" (VIII,31). The atmosphere of the day itself--calm, peaceful and orderly, with groups of citizens strolling through the silent streets--evokes the tranquility of religious life in Glasgow which is soon to be contrasted by that of the Highlands.

In the service we get the first sense of the duality of the region. Among the congregation, "amid the Lowland costume of coat and cloak, I could here and there discern a Highland plaid, the wearer of which, resting on his basket-hilt, sent his eyes among the audience with the unrestrained curiosity of savage wonder...inattentive to the sermon...because he did not understand the language in which it was delivered" (VIII,37). Later we learn that the sanctity of the sabbath is disrupted by the whistling of the Highlanders, who, Bailie Jarvie points out, "think themselves on the skirts of Benlomond already, where they may gang whewing and whistling about without minding Sunday or Saturday" (VIII,90). We also learn that the solemnity of Glaswegian religious observance is replaced in the Highlands by reverence for ancestors and a superstitious deference to a "race of airy beings, who formed an intermediate class between men and demons" (VIII,160). But the principle effect of Frank's visit to the church and his wanderings on the sabbath is to implant an image of these aspects of Glasgow in preparation for our introduction to life in the neighbouring country nearer the Highland line.

A similar purpose governs the visit to another bastion of civilised life in the area, the Glasgow Tolbooth. Admittedly the action related to the gaol is more crucial to the development of the plot, but the image of this building is firmly insisted upon. Perhaps we are invited to link this institution in our minds with the church, since several similarities exist in their descriptions. Both are massive structures with mys-

terious passageways that forbode sinister happenings to the narrator. Both are locked, yet are accessible to the outlawed Rob Roy. In addition, the sermon in the church is paralleled by the Bailie's deeply religious speech in the gaol. And the lighting in both buildings is dim, enforcing Frank's growing suspicion of the predicament he is in. In the church, furthermore, the darkness takes on metaphoric proportions when Frank looks into the network of vaults which surround the congregation: "when my eyes took that direction, I found it difficult to withdraw them; such is the pleasure our imagination receives from the attempt to penetrate as far as possible into an intricate labyrinth, imperfectly lighted, and exhibiting objects which irritate our curiosity, only because they acquire a mysterious interest from being undefined and dubious" (VIII, 39). Similarly in the tolbooth, "at my first entrance I turned an eager glance towards my conductor; but the lamp in the vestibule was too low in flame to give my curiosity any satisfaction by affording a distinct perusal of his features" (VIII, 59). This same mixture of curiosity and mystery, hampered by inadequate vision, greets Frank's first entrance into the Highlands:

The only exercise which my imagination received was, when some particular turn of the road gave us a partial view, to the left, of a large assemblage of dark-blue mountains stretching to the north and north-west, which promised to include within their recesses, a country as wild perhaps, but certainly differing greatly in point of interest, from that which we now travelled....And while I gazed on this Alpine region, I felt a longing to explore its recesses. (VIII,151)

Penetration is the catch-word of these images, as it was of the concentric bulwarks image; the symbolic implications accumulate as we near the heart of the novel.

But the chief purpose for emphasizing the tolbooth in the Glasgow pages is to point out through variations in legal systems the difference between life in the various regions the book deals with. It is the "legal fortress of Scotland," and as such represents in concrete form the system about which Andrew Fairservice initiates a discussion as he and Frank cross the border into Scotland: "we're in Scotland now....The laws are indifferently administered here to a' men alike; its no like on yon side, when a chield may be whuppit awa' wi' ane o' Clerk Jobson's warrants, afore he kens where he is. But they will hae little enough law among them by and by, and that is ae grand reason that I hae gi'en them gude day" (VIII,18). We are

not to accept this opinion as reliable, but it does draw our attention to one measurement of the change in life which accompanies their crossing of the border. Once in Scotland we see the law abused by MacVittie and Co. when they lock up Mr. Osbaldistone's chief clerk to prevent him from discovering the tricks they are using to bankrupt Osbaldistone's firm. But we also see the merciful way in which it is administered by Bailie Jarvie when he frees the clerk and, though not without a portion of self-interest, turns a blind eye to Rob's presence in the tolbooth. Like the church, too, the tolbooth illustrates the dichotomy that exists in the region: "the air o' Glasgow tolbooth is no that ower salutary to a Highlander's constitution" (VIII,87). No doubt it does little to improve the health of a Lowlander either, but the natural environment of the Highlander is even more contrasted by his confinement in a metropolitan gaol. This distinction is supported by the argument, later in the novel, of the Highlander's right to his own form of civilisation. For the time being we are left with the Bailie's succinct verdict on Rob Roy when the outlaw scorns "weavers and spinners, and sic-like mechanical persons and their pursuits" (VIII,82). Jarvie says, "Ye're mad, Rob--mad as a March hare" (VIII,82).

The legal preoccupations of the tolbooth events are carried over to those which occur in the precincts of the third architectural symbol of civilised society, the college. Here the setting is equally unnecessary for any reason other than its symbolic value. Functionally it serves only to provide a secluded spot for a duel between Frank and his cousin Rashleigh, a function which could have been supplied by any of a number of locations. But it is a memorable setting because of its reputation for an intellectual, rational approach to problems. In contrast, the rash, primitive response of the two young men when they meet is another indication of the duality of human nature which is reflected in the composition of the region. The fight itself is unremarkable, but its termination by the so-called savage Highlander adds its own dimension of irony. He is indignant that their much vaunted civilised values are insufficient to keep the peace between members of the same family. In the grounds of the college he calls on them to replace institutionalised relationships--"warrants and poidings and apprizings"--with common respect for their family ties (VIII,114). He supports his argument with an appeal to conscience as the supreme guide in human relationships. When his own conscience is called into question he replies with one of a series of justifications for his own and his people's conduct:

"Yes, my conscience," reiterated Campbell, or MacGregor, or whatever was his name; "I hae such a thing about me, Maister Osbaldistone; and therein it may weel chance that I hae the better o' you. As to our knowledge of each other.--if ye ken what I am, ye ken what usage it was made me what I am; and, whatever you may think, I would not change states with the proudest of the oppressors that hae driven me to tak the heather-bush for a bield."  
(VIII,114)

The reason, the knowledge, and the institutional framework which characterises the college setting are an ironical backdrop to this appeal against civilisation's oppression of a different culture.

Once the church, the gaol and the college have been implanted in our minds, we are prepared to move into the heart of Frank's experience. He has not yet taken sides in the arguments that have been going on--he is still ruminating over these incidents--but the images of the three settings have had such an impact on his memory, now that he is retelling the story, that he has dwelt on them at greater length than their physical contribution to the action warrants. Once he starts recounting his Highland experiences, however, some of the pre-occupations of his earlier adventures begin to coalesce into a clearer picture of what these events have meant to him.

He begins to see, for example, the interdependence of this remote section of the island with the capital. That he sees this connection in commercial terms is all the more convincing since he had earlier made brave statements about commerce binding nations together. In this instance he fails to see the legitimacy of the connection until it is pointed out to him by the Bailie:

"It is very singular," I replied, "that the mercantile transactions of London citizens should become involved with revolutions and rebellions."

"Not at a', man--not at a'," returned Mr. Jarvie, "that's a' your silly prejudications....They wad do weel, and deserve weel baith o' the state and o' humanity, that wad save three or four honest Hieland gentlemen fra louping heads ower heels into destruction, wi' a' their puir sackless followers, just because they canna pay back the siller they had reason to count upon as their ain--and save your father's credit--and my ain gude siller that Osbaldistone and Tresham awes me into the bargain."  
(VIII,140)

In some respects this aspect of the novel is similar to one of the points John Galt makes in *Annals of the Parish*. Frank begins to see here the same interdependence of all regions of the United Kingdom, that Balwhidder became aware of in the "great web of commercial reciprocities" which bound his parish to the outside world.<sup>9</sup>

But *Rob Roy* goes farther. Whereas Balwhidder considered his parish a microcosm of the nation through which he could "foresee what kings and nations would do, by the symptoms manifested within the bounds of the society around me,"<sup>10</sup> Scott's narrator learns only superficially about national affairs in comparison with his lessons about the general lot of mankind. The difference is between the region used as an example, and the region as symbol. Galt was attempting "to exhibit a kind of local theoretical history, by examples, the truth of which would at once be acknowledged." With these examples he sought to "bring impressions on the memory harmoniously together."<sup>11</sup> Both statements could apply to *Rob Roy* also--Frank's memory of the impressions his experiences have left is, after all, the basis of his narrative method--but they restrict it to a local and national level. The dichotomy within the region in Scott's novel reflects the condition of certain groups of men throughout history.

The meaning Frank searches for gradually unfolds, not from his statements in the novel, but from the relative impact that his experiences have on his telling of the story. Thus he may not entirely agree with some of Rob's arguments, but they have an impact on his memory which demands a prominent place in his story. The force of these statements accumulates until it cannot be ignored. Rob's words on the bridge of Glasgow were the initial expression of his justification for his people's actions. He repeats that defence with additional aggression in his remarks to Rashleigh in the college grounds. His argument gains momentum in the Highland scenes where Bailie Jarvie joins the chorus. He tells Frank of MacGregor's commercial enterprises as a cattle drover--"Robin was anes a weel-doing, pains-taking drover, as ye wad see amang ten thousand"--and of his generosity, which extended credit where it could not be repaid (VIII,130-1). In turn his own creditors took vengeance rather than wait for repayment. The result? "Weel, Rob cam hame, and fand desolation, God pity us! where he left plenty; he looked east, west, south, north, and saw neither hauld nor hope--neither bield nor shelter; sae he e'en pu'd the bonnet ower his brow, belted the broadsword to his side, took to the brae-side, and became a broken-man" (VIII,131-2). The emotional language is indicative of the nature of the argument. It is exaggerated, even romanticised, but its impact is more pronounced than

any rational rebuttal of it. And that is the novel's strategy. It seeks not to condemn, but to convey the complex feelings of oppressed and displaced people, the impassioned rhetoric they use to justify their actions, and the equally perverse attitudes of outsiders who refuse to understand their point of view.

The climax of these arguments and of the novel's symbolic structure, is the murder of Morris by Helen MacGregor. It is a repulsive act which cannot be condoned by any of the rational arguments the Highlanders use. Yet its brutality and the discordant effect it has on the flow of the novel is precisely its strength. Contrasted with the safety of institutionalised London and the atmosphere of sport which permeates all aspects of society in the Northumberland pages, this act brings home the deadly serious nature of the Highlander's plight. Even Rob notices the difference when he is called upon by Frank to explain the mystery of recent events: "you were going to say Morris,...I used to laugh heartily at that reik [at Justice Inglewood's], but I'll hardly hae the heart to do't again, since the ill-far'd accident at the Loch" (VIII,283). And the effect of that incident on Frank's actions is equally clear. In Northumberland, when confronted by suspicions about his role in the robbery of Morris, he goes straight to the magistrate to clear his name, and when the honour of his family is threatened by bankruptcy he proposes an immediate return to London to help clear that name. In similar circumstances in the Highlands, however, he concludes "there was no point of honour which could require, in such circumstances, an unnecessary exposure of my life" (VIII,265). It is not so much that the rules of the game have been changed; life in the Highlands is no game.

With the death of Morris the progressive penetration of the symbol is complete. The remainder of the novel concerns itself with the ramifications of this act and with the expansion of its symbolic meaning. For the test of a symbol is its ability to communicate suggestions which extend far beyond the relevance of the specific incident or object--or in this case, region--that make up its immediate frame of reference. A truly effective symbol, like Blake's sick rose or Eliot's wasteland, requires a minimum of overt guidance for the perception of its truth. So it is with the regional symbol in this novel. Within the physical reality of the region, and the culture and events associated with it, we get a glimpse into the heart of man under extreme pressure. To point out the following parallels is only to illustrate the viability of the symbol, not to suggest the exact truth Scott had in mind.

Indeed, one aspect of the symbol is so applicable to the

twentieth century that it illustrates with uncanny accuracy the picture of oppressed people that Scott painted. The age of guerrilla warfare, practised by displaced peoples like the Palestinians and North American Indians, or the dependent culture of French Canadians, is clearly the descendant of the situation depicted in *Rob Roy*. The conventional forces of Captain Thornton, for example, are outclassed by the guerrilla tactics of a ragged band of Highlanders, and the issues raised by the capture of hostages are problems we have become accustomed to regard as symptomatic of our modern sky-jackings and political kidnappings. With Bailie Jarvie and Captain Thornton as hostages, Helen MacGregor utters a threat of guerrilla action: "If they injure a hair of MacGregor's head, and if they do not set him at liberty within the space of twelve hours, there is not a lady in the Lennox but shall before Christmas cry the coronach for them she will be loath to lose,--there is not a farmer but shall sing well-a-wa over a burnt barnyard and an empty byre,--there is not a laird nor a heritor shall lay his head on the pillow at night with the assurance of being a live man in the morning" (VIII,242). The dilemma faced by modern governments in the face of similar threats is akin to the conflicting advice of the two hostages here. The Bailie considers giving in to her demands to save the lives of the hostages: "the best thing he can do for the common good, will be just to let Rob come his wa's up the glen, and nae mair about it" (VIII,243). Thornton, on the other hand, would sacrifice the hostages. So would the captor of Rob Roy, the Duke of Montrose: "it was folly to suppose that he would deliver up the very author of all these disorders and offences, and so encourage his followers in their license" (VIII,246-7).

Behind the actions of Helen MacGregor is an equally universal desperation. She feels the humiliation of a once independent and self-sufficient people threatened with ignominious servitude. She is more extreme than her husband because she sees servitude even in his acts of defiance. Rob, she says, is "wise only when the bonnet is on his head, and the sword is in his hand, he never exchanges the tartan for the broad-cloth, but he runs himself into the miserable intrigues of the Lowlanders, and becomes again, after all he has suffered, their agent--their tool--their slave" (VIII,241). Scott draws no conclusions from these arguments, but he does offer both sides of the coin. Therefore, we also see the weakness of Helen's own position when she declares "all may be forgotten, . . .--all--but the sense of dishonour, and the desire of vengeance" (VIII, 315). Touching as her arguments are, she remains a slave to the single-minded concept of revenge, a passion which prevents any adaptation of her outlook to the changing nature of her world.



Our response to her situation is heightened by our familiarity with the current Middle East situation, understanding perhaps the frustration and desperation that causes the Palestinians to resort to the means they do, but repulsed by the actions they indulge in to secure an audience for their pleas. Theirs is the same attitude as MacGregor's when he is faced with the possibility of civil war: "Let it come, man--let it come,...ye never saw dull weather clear without a shower; and if the world is turned upside down, why, honest men have the better chance to cut bread out of it" (VIII,309).

And this is where the comparison between *Rob Roy* and *Waverley* breaks down. History ensured that a novel about the '45 would have a conclusion in which one side of the struggle was triumphant. Not being an historical novel in the same sense, *Rob Roy* can offer no solution to the universal problem it explores. That is why the only solution offered by any character in the book is so obviously inadequate. Jarvie's offer to make weavers out of Rob's sons is destined to fail because it is based on his basic misunderstanding of the problem. To accept employment with those who have persecuted them is only another form of what they see as attempts to irradicate their way of life and impose a foreign control on their region. It is no accident that Jarvie's offer is treated humorously in the novel; it is not a solution that will work. The practical man of business (and there are several in this novel) fails to understand Rob's dilemma. Material improvement may indeed lie in the direction of Lowland manufacturing industries, but that involves a fatal change of location. As Rob says, "my arm would shrink and wither like fern in the frost, were I to lose sight of my native hills; nor has the world a scene that would console me for the loss of the rocks and cairns, wild as they are, that you see around us" (VIII,305-6). In the context of the two previous references to madness in this paper, Jarvie's comment on Dougal's refusal to turn to mechanical trades indicates the extent of the misunderstanding with which we are left. "The creature," observed the Bailie, "was a natural-born idiot" (VIII,321).

So we are left with a dilemma embodied in the life style of a particular region. In the end Frank is sympathetic to the Highlanders, but has submitted to his father's wishes. His compromise of marrying the Jacobite Die Vernon and taking up residence in Northumberland is a comforting one, but we are not allowed to accept that as the conclusion of Scott's logic in the novel. We are to respond to images, and he leaves us with another one which offsets the domestic harmony at Osbaldistone Hall. It is a picture of the execution of convicted Jacobites, to one of whom Frank offers some last minute comforts before his execution. The Jacobite's reply is indicative of Scott's

method in *Rob Roy*, seeing through the pleasantries to the basic human misery behind them: "I must suppose you mean me kindly, and therefore I thank you. But, by G--, men cannot be fattened like poultry, when they see their neighbours carried off day by day to the place of execution, and know that their own necks are to be twisted round in their turn" (VIII,340). This example of civilised, clinical execution of justice is presented as being just as ruthless as that of the Highlanders. Rob wished his wife had "rather putten a ball through [Morris], or a dirk" (VIII,340), but it would have made little difference to the victim. Likewise the horror of the Jacobite's death gains no alleviation from the efficiency of its method.

For all the romance associated with the Jacobite cause it is not an important feature of this novel, but its treatment is in keeping with the novel's treatment of other issues. The rational logic of *Waverley*, tempered though it is with romance, is here replaced by a symbolic statement which expands out of the central situation, yielding a series of insights into several basic human predicaments. The novel works much the way Frank's dream does:

Though my sense slumbered, my soul was awake to the painful feelings of my situation, and my dreams were of anguish and external objects of terror.

I remember a strange agony, under which I conceived myself and Diana in the power of MacGregor's wife, and about to be precipitated from a rock into the lake; the signal was to be the discharge of a cannon, fired by Sir Frederick Vernon, who, in the dress of a cardinal, officiated at the ceremony. Nothing could be more lively than the impression which I received of this imaginary scene. (VIII,365-6)

The dream omits not only numerous incidental images associated with his recent experiences, but also the causal links between them. Similarly Frank's organisation of his tale, his extraction of images from the mass of detail in the original experience, highlights certain scenes, events, and characters which seem most relevant to the significance for which he searches. That he finds no answers at the end does not detract from his presentation of the problem.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A. O. J. Cockshut, *The Achievement of Walter Scott* (London, 1969), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Cockshut, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New Haven, 1963), p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Davie, *The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1961), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> David, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Davie, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, 48 vols. (Edinburgh, 1848), VII, ix. Subsequent references to *Rob Roy* will be to volumes VII and VIII of this edition and will be contained in parentheses in the text.

<sup>8</sup> I use the terms "national" and "regional" with some diffidence, but they do have a purpose in helping us understand the structure of *Rob Roy*. In Frank's experience the national distinctions are nebulous, distant, and founded on prejudice and ignorance. His insights into regional character are more intimate, therefore more valid, not only because he travels personally into the regions under investigation, but also because the contrast between Scottish regions is even more pronounced than that between Lowland Scotland and England.

<sup>9</sup> John Galt, *Annals of the Parish* (London, 1972), p. 197.

<sup>10</sup> Galt, *Annals*, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Galt, *Annals*, p. vii, quoted from his *Literary Life and Miscellanies*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1834), I, 155-6.