

1986

Scott, the Short Story and History: "The Two Drovers"

W. J. Overton

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



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

Recommended Citation

Overton, W. J. (1986) "Scott, the Short Story and History: "The Two Drovers", *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol21/iss1/17>

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.

W.J. Overton

Scott, the Short Story and History: "The Two Drovers"



Sir Walter Scott's distinction as a short story writer has long been appreciated, and it has been marked recently both by reprintings of the stories, including "Wandering Willie's Tale,"¹ and by Walter Allen's placing of Scott as the founder of the modern short story in English.² Yet several questions remain incompletely answered—questions which are important not just for their bearing on Scott but on the development of this new, and essentially modern, form. Most obviously, there is the problem why Scott attempted the shorter form, then abandoned it—and why so few British writers took it up again till near the end of the nineteenth century. But a second set of questions concerns the nature and quality of the story: both particular and general. How good are Scott's essays in the form, and what were the conditions of their success? Then, because both "The Highland Widow" and "The Two Drovers" are historical short stories, the implications of what may seem a contradiction in form need exploring. These questions I will try to follow out by considering in detail Scott's finest short story, "The Two Drovers."³

"The Two Drovers" is set at a period within Scott's lifetime, towards the end of the eighteenth century. What is historical in the story is the representation of cultural conflict at a specific period in the past. Scott dramatizes history in the story much as he does in his novels: by placing in conflict a group of representative figures at a moment of historical change. The history which stands behind the action presented is the long, often violent, process by which, from one point of view, a feudal society was civilized; but by which, from another viewpoint, Scotland was brought under English hegemony. Scott's novels often fix on turning-points within that process: on, for instance, agitation following the 1707 Act of Union in *Heart of Midlothian*, or on the final crushing of the Jacobite cause in *Waverley*.

The chief difference between Scott's practice in novel and short story respectively lies in the kind of figures he chose for his main characters. As Georg Lukács indicated in his classic work on the historical novel, Scott's crucial innovation, as historical novelist, was to focus not on historical personages but on fictional characters swept up by the conflicts of change.⁴ In *Waverley*, for instance, Scott not only elaborated a plot by which his hero could wear both Hanoverian and Jacobite colors; he also gave him a heritage which represented the divisions within the Union. Yet, as Lukács also suggested, the burden of historical action is not carried by such figures. Instead, if Scott's novels sideline historical personages, and dispose their central characters as spectators, they show the game of history being played out among ordinary people. One reason why his attempt with the short story has such importance is that in "The Two Drovers" and "The Highland Widow" this development is taken to its limit: the characters of both stories are almost all taken from the people. Whether intentionally or not, the effect is to challenge conventional views of what is "history." The action of "The Highland Widow" and "The Two Drovers" involves neither "great" historical events nor the kind of people often supposed to "make history." What it suggests instead is that the representative event, even in its way the determining event, can happen in farmer's field as well as battlefield, inn as well as council chamber. Consequently these stories enable a more radical view of history than do Scott's novels. By showing the impact of change on the lives of ordinary people, they render themselves less available

than his novels to a progressive, Whig, interpretation of history. Instead, they present history as the product of basic economic and cultural tensions.

The most obvious tension in "The Two Drovers" is between Highlander and English. That tension is inscribed in the generic names which both narrator and character use repeatedly. It is not only for elegant variation that the narrator calls Highlanders "Donald," or that, introducing the main Scottish figure, he calls him "a *glunamie*" and "a John Highlandman" in quick succession.⁵ The character's proper name also has its significance. The narrator suggests that Robin Oig gets his first name from his grandfather's friendship with Rob Roy (206); even more to the point, the reason why Oig may not use his surname, M'Gregor, is that the clan was still proscribed. Furthermore, as Coleman Parsons suggests, it is probably not a coincidence that Oig's second name, M'Combich, recalls that of Evan Dhu Maccombich in *Waverley*, the clansman who offered his own life in exchange for his chief's and refused a pledge of mercy in order to die with him.⁶ Scott calls Harry Wakefield, the other main character, "the model of Old England's merry yeomen" (211); the name is unmistakably English and the surname—Wakefield being a town in Yorkshire—especially suits a Yorkshireman. Phrases such as "the placability of his country," for Wakefield (226), or "the light foot of his country" (228), for Oig, underline that each is representative of his culture, and that those cultures are very different. The characters are keenly aware of such differences. Not only the narrator uses the term "John Highlandman," but also the Lowlander to whom Robin Oig entrusts his dirk (210). In the same way the farmer who hires out his field to Oig calls him, familiarly, "Sawney" (216); and the landlady at the inn speaks in ethnic stereotypes such as "the dour temper of the Scots" (227). But the crucial example comes at the story's climax as Oig moves to stab his dishonorer: "You, Harry Waakfelt, showed me to-day how the Saxon churls fight—I show you now how the Highland dunnìe-wassel fights" (232).

Such names, titles, and cultural stereotypes are signatures of the social conflict which Scott dramatized in his story. He dramatized it with great economy. Not only are there the main racial types of Highland Scots and Englishmen—the latter predominant because the action takes place in England—but also the Lowlander Hugh Morrison who keeps Robin Oig's dirk for

him. Secondly the characters are ranged according to their part in the industry of producing meat, and ranged so carefully as to show that Scott's knowledge of that industry was both close and perceptive.⁷ The drover's task is to convey from grazing in the Highlands cattle which will command a higher price in the richer and more populous markets of England. At the start of the story the narrator emphasizes how and why Highlanders are especially suited to droving, since it meets their needs for activity, outdoor employment and independence. In this respect, Robin Oig's connexion with his famous namesake Rob Roy M'Gregor has extra point, for, as Scott had indicated in his Introduction to *Rob Roy*, before turning outlaw McGregor's trade had been droving.⁸ At that period, early in the eighteenth century, Highlanders alone possessed the knowledge and power to drive cattle to Lowland markets. Indeed, according to the historians of droving, the trade in Scotland was only emerging in those days from cattle-raiding,⁹ so that Rob Roy, in turning outlaw, was reverting to origin. By the time in which Scott's story is set droving had become a safer and more regular occupation. Not only may Highlanders travel south and Englishmen north, but they co-operate on the journey. With one man as guide and interpreter in the Highlands, and the other in England, Robin Oig and Harry Wakefield form a partnership of mutual advantage.

The partnership is undermined by a difference between two other participants in the industry, a farmer and a bailiff. As the drovers approach Carlisle, where a major cattle fair is to take place,¹⁰ scarcity of pasture obliges them to separate. Robin Oig happens to meet the farmer on his way and they reach a bargain, but arriving at the pasture they find it already occupied. Wakefield has applied directly to the bailiff, who as a fellow countryman is known to him and who has done a deal in his master's absence. The Englishman's resulting dispossession, in favor of his friend, is the immediate cause of their falling out. But the bailiff, seconded by the landlord and some customers of the inn where Wakefield stays, aggravates the dispute by blaming the Highlander. That such hostility is based in cultural antagonism rather than any legitimate sense of injustice is clear from the ironic fact that Wakefield, in his need for grazing, is forced to pay the landlord high rent for poor land. The bailiff's resentment at his master adds further inflammation, so that when Robin Oig goes to make peace at the inn with Harry Wakefield

he finds himself in a minority of one.

The fatal encounter which follows has been explained in two main ways by the critics who have commented on Scott's story. Edgar Johnson's analysis spans both: on the one hand, he says, "two racial temperaments" are contrasted, "Highland pride" versus "English pride"; on the other, the tragedy springs from "a conflict of codes."¹¹ Such a reading partly accounts for the Englishman's resort to his fists, the Highlander's to his dirk. It encompasses what the story suggests is Wakefield's sense of fair play, placability succeeding anger, as against the "gloomy sullenness" (226) to which a beating reduces Oig's initial good sense and composure. Further, it helps explain why neither man can properly avoid fighting. Wakefield, though half admitting to himself the rights of Oig's position, is unable to resist the charge that he is showing white feather. When he at last insists on fighting, it is for the form of the thing: "We must have a turn-up, or we shall be the talk of the country side" (223). But much stronger is the bond that compels Oig to action once the practiced boxer has inevitably downed him. For the Highlander, a fist-fight stains the dignity of his rank, and a drubbing unavenged is an irreparable slight. Gentlemen, he states in an unguarded moment to an alien crowd which can only ridicule him, fight with broadswords (224). Equally, only the dirk he inherited from his father can avenge him.

But it should be clear that "The Two Drovers" turns on more than what Walter Allen, in terms similar to Johnson's, has described as a "clash of tradition and temperament."¹² Economic self-interest is at stake: not only that of the drovers, but of the farmer and landlord versus both, and of the bailiff versus the farmer. This self-interest is cut across by cultural prejudice and solidarity, so that Wakefield still sees Oig as his enemy although in fact it is the bailiff and landlord who are at fault. One of Scott's achievements in the story—an achievement essentially of historical insight—is into how these ties intersect: each character acts in relations which are simultaneously racial, cultural, and economic.¹³ Thirdly, and at its deepest level, what is at issue in "The Two Drovers" is a question of law and justice. Although Scott emphasized that theme by ending his story with the whole of the judge's summing-up after Robin Oig's trial for murder, its importance seems not to have been grasped.

The crux is whether it is right that Oig die for killing his

friend. Oig's own view is clear-cut. After striking the fatal blow, and thrusting the bailiff contemptuously to the floor, he gives himself up to arrest and trial. He accepts that his sentence is just, and the story ends with his words: "I give a life for the life I took,' he said, 'and what can I do more?'" (241). Such is the Highlander's unblinking bravery—like Evan Dhu Maccombich in *Waverley*, Robin Oig dies in a loyalty more important to him than his life. Yet the clansman's perspective is not that of the story, and for this reason the judge's opinion takes on special importance. In summing up, the judge advances two fundamental reasons why Oig has to die. The one on which he spends most time depends on the legal distinction between murder and manslaughter. Oig, he argues, is guilty of murder because he did not kill in the heat of the moment; the time he took to recover his dagger has to mean that the act was premeditated, committed in cold blood. Secondly, the judge presents a brief view of Scottish history, in which the Highland clans resemble tribes of North American Indians, only recently subjected to what he calls "the general principles of justice and equity which pervade every civilised country" (239). Quoting Bacon on revenge as "a kind of wild untutored justice," he suggests that with the coming of civilization this must give way to the rule of law. So his address to the jury ends impressively: "should this man's action remain unpunished, you may unsheath, under various pretences, a thousand daggers betwixt the Land's-end and the Orkneys" (240).

Given in full and placed prominently at the end of the story, the judge's charge may look conclusive. More, because it has every appearance of authority, it is natural to assume that it reflects Scott's own view. This would be in keeping with the fact that the cultural analogy between Highlanders and North American Indians is one Scott often draws elsewhere,¹⁴ and also with the general cultural outlook that his narrative implies. The staple style is that educated English of the period in which concise reporting and description are apt to give way to leisurely whimsy. In this way Wakefield's cattle can be termed "his unwilling associates," human propensity to mischief can be cited "to the honour of Adam's children," and beer is inevitably, by elegant variation, "Good John Barleycorn" (218-19). Very much the same tone is sounded in the story's introduction, which ends: "An oyster may be crossed in love, says the gentle Tilburina—and a drover may be touched on a point of honour, says the

Chronicler of the Canongate" (202). It would be difficult to find a cultural reference more absurdly inapt than this one to Sheridan's *Critic*, yet it is consistent with the Establishment view of Robin Oig's trial expressed by Scott's narrator: "the generosity of the English audience was inclined to regard his crime as the wayward aberration of a false idea of honour rather than as flowing from a heart naturally savage, or perverted by habitual vice" (234). Again, when the judge claims that the crime "arose less out of the malevolence of the heart than the error of the understanding" (235), he repeats almost the same words applied in Scott's earlier story, "The Highland Widow," by the English captain to Hamish Bean before his execution: "less offences of the heart than errors of the understanding" (181). The evidence would seem to indicate that the judge's opinion is also Scott's; and so, almost certainly, Scott's contemporary readers would have felt.

Nevertheless, another point of view may be recovered from the story. Early in his summing-up the judge concedes that until Wakefield's stabbing the rights of the dispute were with Oig. He declares that no spirit of fair play ruled the English when they taunted the lone Highlander, and that Oig could be held to none of the laws of the ring which they and the prosecution supposed binding. Yet this opinion still oversimplifies. What denies it full authority is an incident early in the story. The reason Robin Oig did not kill his man in hot blood is that he did not have his dirk. At the start of his journey he had entrusted it to a friend because of the prophecy that he would stain it with English blood. This is not gratuitous supernaturalism, for the incident is crucial to the story. Oig's delay, in recovering his dirk, makes possible the judge's definition of the crime as murder rather than manslaughter. Yet the story shows that distinction to be meaningless in the Highlander's terms. First, Robin Oig is the equivalent of a gentleman, and, the story three times reminds us, proud of his birth. It is no empty flourish when, attacking Wakefield, he calls himself a "Highland dunniè-wassel" in opposition to "Saxon churls" (232). Second, the dirk inherited from his father is the badge of his status. This is why he cannot just give it away to Hugh Morrison after the prophecy—and why, in turn, he is able, indeed obliged, to reclaim it when he is dishonored. Third, and most important, what that dishonoring means in the terms of the clan that bind him is that Robin Oig

loses both status and identity until he can right himself. The point is underlined by his reply to Hugh Morrison's question whether he is Robin M'Combich or a wraith: "It is Robin Oig M'Combich," answered the Highlander, 'and it is not'" (229). In other words, he is not entitled to his own name until he redeems the slight upon it. What motivates the killing is far more than the "punctilio" to which the judge tries to reduce it (235), and it renders irrelevant his distinction between murder and manslaughter. Robin Oig has warned Harry Wakefield by word and gesture (226). He rights himself as clan law requires, and he submits to punishment from English law which he fully expects. In this light, the cultural analogy with North American Indians is misleading. What it does is to arrogate legitimacy to English law as the representative of an inevitable progress and civilization the worth of which can be taken for granted. Though the judge presents his "principles of justice and equity" as universal, there is a viewpoint from which, in this context, they may be seen as underpinning English rule. And, as the narrator prefaces the summing-up with the remark that assassination for revenge is "un-English" (234), the judge's final words should be considered as aimed at a populace stretching to the Orkneys not from Land's End but Carlisle.

There is still another complexity inherent in Scott's story. A key difference emerges between Highlander and Englishman when, after the fist-fight, Harry Wakefield's success in concluding a deal for part of his drove "at a very considerable profit" wipes out his sense of grievance entirely (227). Scott does not include this detail only for the irony with which it mocks Wakefield's previous anger. Nor does he intend a simple contrast between English "placability" and Highland "sullenness" (226). The difference is only in part rooted in temperament, for what feeds it are two separate kinds of culture. The Englishman, though vulnerable to the charge of cowardice, puts his economic interests first; but for the Highlander, once humiliated, neither profit matters nor life itself. Robin Oig is sufficiently used to the trade he follows, and the country to which it takes him, to subordinate in part his pride and traditions to economic necessity. He is described as "half embarrassed, half laughing" when his aunt insists on walking the *deasil* round him before he sets off (208), and he treats her prophecy sceptically. There is no question of his being deterred from his journey by her vision,

and he accepts Hugh Morrison's compromise out of deference to her importunity rather than to superstition. Proudly aware of his birth, he is careful to keep it to himself, as he must if he is to trade successfully. And at the inn he shows great coolness and restraint in not taking offence at repeated taunts until that birth is called in question. Then, however, it is striking that his aunt's warning, once recalled, gives him no pause but rather the reverse: "The recollection of the fatal prophecy confirmed the deadly intention which instantly sprang up in his mind" (228). He must avenge at whatever cost the affront to his clan-identity. His values are influenced neither by the economic motives which weigh with the Englishman nor by the legal constraints invoked by the judge. For these and other reasons, the emotional pull of the story is with the Highlander.

If there is a contradiction in Scott's story between, very broadly, an English and a Highland perspective, it might perhaps be resolved by differentiating Scott's view as author from that of his narrator. Here the narrative frame for "The Two Drovers" becomes relevant. Scott originally published the story in 1827, in the first volume of the first series of his *Chronicles of the Canongate*. The *Chronicles* made up part of his effort to escape from the bankruptcy which had overtaken him in 1826, and to introduce and relate them he invented the figure of Chrystal Croftangry. The narrator was a convenient device, such as he often used, for distancing himself from his narrative and giving it a sense of authenticity. But it is a question whether Croftangry is anything more than a mouthpiece. In the first story of the *Chronicles*, "The Highland Widow," Scott does not maintain narratorial consistency. Croftangry introduces the tale as a memorandum written by his friend Mrs Bethune Balliol, but by the end he has without notice taken over its telling. In "The Two Drovers" Scott was more careful, in that Croftangry is the narrator throughout. One sign of this is an individual note at the end when he says he was present at Robin Oig's trial and heard the judge sum up. The memory cannot be Scott's, as Coleman Parsons has assumed,¹⁵ for in the 1831 Introduction to *Chronicles of the Canongate* he acknowledges that his informant for the story was George Constable, the original of his Antiquary (xxxiv). Croftangry's reminiscence helps the sense of authenticity in another way. It strikes an effective personal chord by referring to his then career less as lawyer than as gentleman of

pleasure: "I shall never forget the charge of the venerable judge to the jury, although not at that time liable to be much affected either by that which was eloquent or pathetic" (234).

Yet, despite this brief and effective glimpse back into Croftangry's past, neither the story's language nor the judgements it either implies or expresses offers grounds for distinguishing his perspective from Scott's. Instead the style and outlook seem at odds with the tragic sacrifice related. I have already quoted the whimsical, condescending remark with which the story is introduced ("An oyster may be crossed in love . . . and a drover may be touched on a point of honour"). Equally inapposite is a simile twice applied to Robin Oig's pride in his birth and lineage: "like the miser's treasure, the secret subject of his contemplation, but never exhibited to strangers as a subject of boasting" (206); "more precious to him (like the hoard to the miser), because he could only enjoy them in secret" (228). These are highly unsuitable terms for a man to whom profit counts for nothing beside clan-honor; especially as the reason for his secrecy is not greed but oppression. But they are consistent with a third example of cultural bias, the narrator's statement: "every Englishman has a tolerably accurate sense of law and justice" (217). What occasions the generalization is Wakefield's acceptance that Oig's agreement with the farmer takes priority over his own deal with the bailiff; but it hardly seems borne out by English behavior at the inn. The question is: whose justice? The rules Wakefield adheres to are those of commerce in the market and those of the ring at the inn. Oig follows the former equally closely, and even goes beyond them in offering to share the pasture with his friend. And, though the laws of the ring are alien to him, he follows the sterner code of the clan to his death. Scott's remark about the English sense of law and justice must therefore reflect, in the light of the story, not only the bias of an English perspective but one based on commerce and prosperity.

What is more likely than a difference between Scott's perspective and his narrator's is that the latter's character and experiences in part project Scott's own. Croftangry has also suffered bankruptcy, and he has been obliged to part with his family estate as Scott first feared he would have to part with Abbotsford. But there is a further connexion between the story of "The Two Drovers" and that of its narrator. Croftangry contracted his debts in gentlemanly pleasures, and takes the

responsibility; yet he also lays some of the blame for his bankruptcy on an agent who cheated him. As in the story, the villain of the piece is the middleman. For an odd fact about "The Two Drovers," and one which has escaped critical interest, is that Scott has the story turn on a bailiff's malpractice. The two drovers quarrel because the bailiff hired out pasture without authority. Indeed this figure plays the meanest role in the story, and he is the only character to be given a comic, even derisory, name ("Fleecebumpkin"). This correspondence helps locate the ideological position from which Scott wrote. He had defined himself in his Introductory Epistle to *The Fortunes of Nigel* as "a productive labourer" whose works "constitute as effectual a part of the public wealth, as that which is created by any other manufacture."¹⁶ And, though Chrystal Croftangry does not write to live, his introduction to "The Two Drovers" sharply reflects Scott's predicament when a printer's boy arrives at his door to collect copy not yet written. Yet the other motive to writing, for Croftangry as for Scott, is love of national, especially Highland, tradition. Both the real-life author and his imaginary narrator are part of the change from a feudal to a commercial economy which had convulsed their country. It is not just snobbery which makes them despise the middleman. Neither clansman nor "productive labourer," he can be cast as the agent of conflict, defined as scapegoat, all too easily.

There is, then, an insoluble contradiction at the heart of "The Two Drovers." On the one hand Scott the conservative, trained as a lawyer, meant the judge's charge as authoritative. On the other hand, the full action of the story suggests that the judge's charge is part of the historical problem, not its privileged solution. For all his conservative allegiances, Scott was able to understand and to convey imaginatively the full nature of the Highlander's tragedy. A possible solution to the contradiction is the famous paradox offered by Lukács, developing remarks by Engels and Lenin: that the great nineteenth-century novelists, though fundamentally conservative, negate their ideological convictions by the force of human and artistic honesty.¹⁷ But this is an odd argument for a Marxist, as it draws its explanation from a moral and aesthetic abstraction rather than from social and economic reality. Instead, one source of Scott's historical insight was probably his own situation at the time of writing the story. What enabled Scott, from his very different social position,

to enter into the Highland drover's situation so fully was his own hostility to a class of middlemen which he saw as parasitic. This further impelled him to identify with the cultural values of the clan rather than with those of the market. So Fleecebumpkin is made to cut a sorry figure in the story, and Harry Wakefield emerges as a lesser man than his killer.

Something like this contradiction is also embedded in the story's language. Although its stylistic basis is that of the English Establishment, Scott goes beyond this not only to represent dialogue, and dialect, but also to incorporate their idioms into the narrative. The result is that the reader cannot easily consume the tale as comfortable entertainment. What is offered humorously turns to tragedy; and the wrapping of conventional literariness gives way to the perplexities of Yorkshire, Cumbrian, and Gaelic speech. Above all, what stay in the mind are the vigorous, eloquent rhythms of the Highland drover. Though the judge's charge is solemn, carefully weighed, and elaborate, it is Robin Oig who has the last words, and in the fullest sense.

"The Two Drovers" is a considerable achievement, both as story and history. If I have been able to indicate why it succeeds, there remain those questions I outlined at the start of this article: especially, why did Scott not continue his experiment with the short story? The simplest answer lies in the prejudice of his readers. Anticipating the response of his friend and colleague James Ballantyne, he confided in his *Journal*: "J.B. will, I fear, think it low; and if he thinks so, others will."¹⁸ Though he stood his ground in publishing the story, his fear was confirmed. The result was that he reverted to more conventional literary material in his bid to earn the high rates he needed to wipe out his bankruptcy.

A second possible explanation lies in the publishing conditions of the period. Even before the circulating library came to dominate, fiction in two or three volumes suited the publishers best. These were more easily made up from complete novels than from collections of stories, which could be disposed of separately as ephemera, and which usually paid the author less. Scott was not above writing ephemera. Three other stories he had first intended for the *Chronicles* are just that. They are "My Aunt Margaret's Mirror" (a tale of the supernatural), "The Tapestry Chamber" (a ghost story), and "The Death of the

Laird's Jock" (an anecdotal sketch). When he gave up the *Chronicles*, the three stories found their way into the *Keepsake*, a fashionable Christmas album. But readers and publishers brought up on what was literally heavy reading did not easily recognize that the two stories published in the *Chronicles*, with their "low" subject matter, were not necessarily lightweight.

The device of a linking narrator was Scott's attempt to square the circle: to get his stories into a format which could be published profitably. It was an expedient of limited success. Although, as I have tried to show, he sustained the device more consistently in "The Two Drovers" than in "The Highland Widow," he did not much develop it. Indeed *The Chronicles of the Canongate* is a pretty mixed bag. There is a novel struggling to get out of the experiences of Chrystal Croftangry, and it jostles with the stories Scott has him tell. Although "The Highland Widow" and "The Two Drovers" match each other effectively, they and Croftangry's account of himself are let down by "The Surgeon's Daughter," the melodramatic novelette which completed the first series. In the second series Scott abandoned his original idea by filling both volumes with an entire novel, *The Fair Maid of Perth*. Then came the stories which ended up in the *Keepsake*. Though Scott's supernatural short stories have had distinguished admirers,¹⁹ none of the three would have enhanced the *Chronicles of the Canongate*. Perhaps the best that can be said is that, because the links in the *Chronicles* are so weak, "The Two Drovers" loses nothing by being read independently.

Yet there is still the question of exactly what kind of story Scott achieved in "The Two Drovers." If the historical short story is a formal contradiction, the reason is that history is usually taken to demand length. What Scott's success in "The Two Drovers" suggests is that the short story may represent experience in history all the more powerfully because its brief illumination throws the essential crisis, the intractable conflict, into sharpest relief. The shorter form gave Scott both a freedom and a discipline which his novels tended to discourage. The freedom was that he could take his main characters from the people and present them in all their human dignity. The discipline came from formal constraint. As a representation of history, "The Two Drovers" gains from being epiphanic, not exhaustive. In it the tragedy of change is not compensated by a tailpiece in which, as

so often in Scott's historical novels, it is suggested that all turned out for the best. Though the story's style and narrative framework seem designed to promote such an assurance, they cannot contain the profound and complex social tensions which the story represents.

Yet "The Two Drovers" also disables an approach, often found in criticism of short stories, based on standards of narrow artistic or technical success. If this narrative stands as proof that the historical short story can exist, it also demonstrates that it is itself the product of history. "The Two Drovers" might have been better technically if Scott had resolved the contradiction in it between English and Highland perspectives by developing his dramatized narrator. Yet, if he had possessed the conscious awareness necessary for so radical an advance, it may be questioned whether the very tensions out of which the story is written would have been so potent. Instead the power of "The Two Drovers" probably derives in part from contradictions in Scott's position as author—social, economic, and in his own relationship to the past. It is those contradictions, embedded in language and action, which make the story so rich. Scott wrote as a subject in history, and his place in Scottish culture, in British society, and in the industry of literature helped him to dramatize with great force and complexity the gains and losses of change.

Loughborough University

NOTES

¹ Michael Hayes has edited *The Supernatural Short Stories of Sir Walter Scott* in the Scottish Library series (London, 1977); and Peter Bayley has included "The Highland Widow" and "The Two Drovers" in *Loves and Deaths: Novelists' Tales of the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 1972).

² *The Short Story in English* (Oxford and New York, 1981), pp. 9-10.

³ I am indebted to my late colleague, Kathleen Banks, for calling the importance of this story to my attention.

⁴ *The Historical Novel*, trans. H. and S. Mitchell (London, 1962), pp. 33-9 and 30-63, *passim*.

⁵ *The Waverley Novels*, Border Edition, ed. Andrew Lang, 48 vols. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1892-94), XLVIII, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, p. 205. All references to "The Two Drovers" and to the *Chronicles* are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text. A *glunamie* is a Lowland term for a Highlander.

⁶ *The Two Drovers* (Westwood, N. J.: Kindle Press, 1971), Foreword, p. ii.

⁷ Coleman Parsons notes that Scott's grandfather was active in the cattle trade. See *The Two Drovers*, p. v.

⁸ Border Edition, VII, *Rob Roy*, I, pp. xliii-xlv.

⁹ See A.R.B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (Newton Abbott, 1973; first published 1952), pp. 7-11; and K.J. Bonser, *The Drovers* (London, 1970), pp. 21-4.

¹⁰ See Bonser, *The Drovers*, pp. 133-4 and 149-52.

¹¹ *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols. (New York, 1970), II, pp. 1071-2.

¹² *The Short Story in English*, p. 10.

¹³ Alan Radley provides a social-psychological account of how "a person *exists simultaneously in multiple relations* even as he may *appear* to act, at that time, in one relationship only." See "Construing as Praxis" in *Constructs of Sociality and Individuality*, ed. P. Stringer and D. Bannister (London, 1979), p. 86.

¹⁴ See Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel* (Baltimore and London, 1971), pp. 41-6.

¹⁵ *The Two Drovers*, p. vi.

¹⁶ Border Edition, XXVI, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, I, p. xlix.

¹⁷ *The Historical Novel*, pp. 54ff., and *Studies in European Realism*, trans. E. Bone (London, 1950), pp. 10-13.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, II, 1022. See also p. 1033.

¹⁹ See Michael Hayes, *The Supernatural Stories of Sir Walter Scott*, pp. 9-10.

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
SCOTTISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
MEDIAEVAL AND RENAISSANCE

The Conference will take place from 3-8 August 1987 at King's College, University of Aberdeen. It will revolve round three themes: Mediaeval and Renaissance Scots studies, Folklore and its importance for Scottish Literature, Gaelic Language and Literature.

These themes will be introduced in plenary sessions by: Mrs. Priscilla Bawcutt (Liverpool), Professor David Buchan (University of Newfoundland), Dr. Donald Meek (University of Edinburgh).

For further information contact:

Dr. Derrick McClure
Department of English
King's College
University of Aberdeen
Scotland AB9 2UB