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Will and Mimosa Stephenson

Scott's Influence on Hawthorne

The Heart of Mid-Lothian, Sir Walter Scott's epic of social and political change in eighteenth-century Scotland, was an unprecedented bestseller upon its publication in 1818.¹ In one of the novel's vivid early scenes, a reluctant young minister named Reuben Butler is commandeered and pulled through the streets by a mob to provide final spiritual counsel to the man the rioters intend to hang. Nathaniel Hawthorne's initiation story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," contains a similar scene, in which young Robin Molineux, seeking the patronage of an influential second cousin, arrives in eighteenth-century Boston to find his kinsman freshly tarred and feathered, the victim of a rebellious mob. Hawthorne's letters show he had read Scott's novel before he wrote his short story, and an examination of the two scenes shows remarkable parallels.

Hawthorne's historical sources for the tale have been described,² and a

¹Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, ed. with Preface by W. M. Parker (London, 1956), p. v. All quotations from Scott's novel are taken from this edition and are cited in the text. For the convenience of readers who are using other editions of Scott, chapter numbers are included.

²Neal Frank Doubleday, *Hawthorne's Early Tales, A Critical Study* (Durham, 1972), pp. 227-30; Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston, 1979), pp. 217-9; Robert C. Grayson, "The New England Sources of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *American Literature*, 54 (1982), 545-59; Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 130-53.

number of literary influences have also been investigated.³ Hawthorne's interest in the works of Sir Walter Scott is generally known. G. Harrison Orians asserts that Hawthorne's "lifelong romantic tendencies received their strongest nurture from the Great Unknown [Scott]."⁴ In a similar vein, Douglas Grant states, "Scott's influence on all of Hawthorne's characterisation is pervasive,"⁵ and he specifically mentions the influence of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* on *The Scarlet Letter*, but he does not allude to "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Neal Frank Doubleday has treated Scott's influence in some detail, saying that at the time Hawthorne began to write, "the case for an American fiction rested upon Scott's example . . . Scott had shown American writers how to use their own history and experience." Doubleday also says that "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" suggests the "insight into social change and the conflict of traditions that distinguishes Scott's best novels" and that the scene of Major Molineux's humiliation shares the "pictorial quality" of Scott's writing,⁶ though he does not associate it specifically with *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Hazel M. Koskenlinna has studied Scott's influence on Hawthorne's imagery and symbolism. She finds *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* to have influenced a significant descriptive passage in the *The Blithedale Romance*,⁷ but she makes no other allusions to that Scott novel; nor does she mention "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." It seems, indeed, that no one has yet pointed out Hawthorne's indebtedness to *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, specifically to Scott's description of the second Porteous Riot for the climactic mob scene in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux."

³Austin Warren, "Hawthorne's Reading," *New England Quarterly*, 8 (1935), 480-97; Jane Lundblad, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and European Literary Tradition* (1947; rptd. New York, 1965); Arthur T. Broes, "Journey into Moral Darkness: 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' as Allegory," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 19 (1964), 171-84; Alexander W. Allison, "The Literary Contexts of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 23 (1968), 304-31; Mario L. D'Avanzo, "The Literary Sources of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux': Shakespeare, Coleridge, Milton," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 10 (1973), 121-36; Newman, pp. 219-23.

⁴G. Harrison Orians, "Scott and Hawthorne's *Fanshawe*," *The New England Quarterly*, 11 (1938), 389.

⁵Douglas Grant, "Sir Walter Scott and Nathaniel Hawthorne," *University of Leeds Review*, 8 (1962-63), 40.

⁶Doubleday, pp. 20, 41, 43.

⁷Hazel M. Koskenlinna, "Setting, Image, and Symbol in Scott and Hawthorne," *Emerson Society Quarterly*, 19 (1973), 54.

Hawthorne was a young man during the height of Scott's popularity in America. In their introduction to Hawthorne's *Letters*, Woodson, Smith, and Pearson note that a number of American intellectuals "saw Walter Scott's historical romances as a model for Americans, to cultivate the now legendary early history of colonization."⁸ The circle of Scott admirers included Thomas Cogswell Upham, a college teacher who may have encouraged the young Hawthorne to emulate the great novelist (*Letters*, p. 42). Hawthorne seems to have begun his reading of Scott the year after the publication of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. On September 28, 1819, he writes to his sister Louisa, "I have read Waverly" [sic] (*Letters*, p. 114). He would have read *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* within the following year, for he writes his sister Elizabeth on October 31, 1820, "I have read all Scott's Novels except [*The Abbot*]. I wish I had not, that I might have the pleasure of reading them again" (*Letters*, p. 132). F. O. Matthiessen claims, "the beginning of [Scott's] *Waverley* series had been one of the great events of Hawthorne's boyhood."⁹ His first novel, *Fanshawe* (1828), is generally acknowledged to imitate Scott,¹⁰ and Hawthorne was writing "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" about the same time, for he tells Samuel Griswold Goodrich on December 20, 1829, that it and several other tales "have been completed . . . a considerable time" (*Letters*, p. 199). Years afterwards Hawthorne comments in his English Notebooks that he "saw the steeple of the Tolbooth, all of which Scott has made interesting,"¹¹ presuming incorrectly that he has seen the same city prison celebrated in Scott's novel. Later he adds, "For Scotland—cold, cloudy, barren, insignificant little bit of earth that it is—owes all the interest that the world feels in it to [Scott]."¹²

Parallels between *Mid-Lothian* and "Major Molineux" prove extensive, beginning with the political situation. In both cases the populace rebels

⁸Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson, eds., *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Letters, 1813-1843* (Columbus, OH, 1984), p. 78. Hereafter cited in the text as *Letters*.

⁹F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London, 1941, rptd. 1968), p. 203.

¹⁰Orians, pp. 390-94; Mark Van Doren, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (np, 1949), p. 35; Doubleday, p. 42; James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston, 1980), p. 42.

¹¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, ed. by Randall Stewart (1941; rptd. New York, 1962), entry of May 10, 1856, p. 329.

¹²*Notebooks*, p. 344.

against a government that it perceives as particularly harsh. In both cases the authority has been imposed from distant London rather than from local representative bodies. In Scott's novel, Scotland has been united to England less than thirty years when the Porteous Riots take place in 1736. The Scots want a Stuart back on the throne and resent control from London. As David Daiches notes, "The Union was not popular in Scotland. The excise and other taxes imposed by the London Parliament were resisted almost as a patriotic duty."¹³ More particularly, the people of Edinburgh have resented Captain John Porteous's firing on the crowd at the hanging of the smuggler Andrew Wilson, and they want Porteous punished. When Queen Caroline, acting as Regent for King George II, delays the execution of Porteous, the populace feels, probably with justification, that he is being let off. A few vigilantes plan to hang Porteous themselves and are joined by thousands of citizens of Edinburgh.

Hawthorne's story, like Scott's, has a basis in history. In this case the Americans object to control by the monarchy across the Atlantic. Feeling that their rights have been violated, they rise in revolt. Several critical discussions focus on the time of the events, either the Boston Tea Party of 1765 or around 1730.¹⁴ Hawthorne himself, writing in the late 1820s, states that the story occurred "not far from a hundred years ago,"¹⁵ i.e., about the time of the Porteous Riots. Both tales are of popular uprisings against the perceived tyranny of the English crown, specifically the House of Hanover.

Both Hawthorne and Scott object to the violent abrogation of authority by the mob, and they are alike in having mixed feelings about the rebellious activities of their ancestors. Though Scott was the only political conservative of the great British Romantics, Roderick Watson notes that he had been brought up "to admire the Stuart cause, with the Cavaliers and Montrose and his Highlanders."¹⁶ Alluding to the Union of Scotland and England, Watson notes, "As a Lowland Tory and a Unionist, [Scott] was half in love with a warlike Stuart cause. As a man of aristocratic prejudices, and a lifelong op-

¹³David Daiches, Introduction to *The Heart of Midlothian* (New York, 1948), pp. v-vi.

¹⁴Doubleday, pp. 228-30; Newman, p. 218; Grayson, p. 547; Eugene England, "Hawthorne and the Virtue of Sin," *Literature and Belief*, 3 (1983), 115-6; Colacurcio, pp. 132-4.

¹⁵Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," *The Snow-Image and Uncollected Tales*, ed. William Charvat, et al. (Columbus, OH, 1974), p. 209. Subsequent quotations from this text are cited in parentheses in the paper.

¹⁶Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (New York, 1985), p. 247.

ponent of the Reform Bill, he delighted in the oral tradition and the sturdy independence of common Scots folk. These are the conflicting claims at the heart of his novels.¹⁷ In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* Scott's conflicting loyalties are especially evident in his descriptions of the Edinburgh City Guard, the troops who supported the English government in the Scottish capital. In his novel Scott quotes the poet Robert Fergusson (1750-74)¹⁸ in condemning them: "There's nae sic savages elsewhere / Allow'd to wear cockad" (p. 37, ch. 3), but then immediately follows these lines with a sympathetic portrayal of these veteran troops: "the tempers of the poor old fellows were soured by the indignities with which the mob distinguished them on many occasions" (pp. 37-8, ch. 3), adding, "a skirmish with these veterans was a favourite recreation with the rabble of Edinburgh" (p. 38, ch. 3). He notes that "the rabble . . . seldom failed to regale [Captain Porteous] and his soldiers with some marks of their displeasure" (p. 39, ch. 3).

Hawthorne too felt some "conflicting claims." A patriotic American, he wanted to see an independent American literature established. He dabbled in politics, enjoyed the fruits of political patronage, and cherished a life-long anti-English bias. At the same time, his sympathy for law and order left him with a distaste for the violence and disorder of the events leading to the Revolution. Colacurcio asks, "What if Hawthorne were perceiving that the American Revolution were *not*, or did not *necessarily* enfigure itself as, some inevitable rite of national passage? If so, then the tale of Robin Molineux is more ironic than we have yet supposed." Colacurcio suggests that Hawthorne wrote his tale in response to "the public oratory which marked the semi-centennial celebrations of 1826. . . . [I]n the face of a nearly overwhelming national consensus in favor of the holy-historical significance of 1776, Hawthorne is studying the majestic Revolution in terms of a minor outbreak of provincial unruliness, a mob scene." In his tale, "Hawthorne has come much closer to dignifying the 'Tory' cause with religious significance" than to justifying the rebel cause.¹⁹ As Scott speaks of the Edinburgh rabble regaling the City Guard "with some marks of their displeasure," so Hawthorne states that "the measures of the [colonial governors] seldom met with the ready and general approbation" of the Massachusetts colonists, who "usually rewarded the rulers with slender gratitude" (p. 208). More specifi-

¹⁷Watson, p. 255.

¹⁸Watson, p. 216. Watson observes of Fergusson, "No doubt the poet's rowdy pranks led him to fall foul of the City Guard, for he never misses an opportunity in his verses to satirise the 'black banditti' and their Highland accents," p. 218.

¹⁹Colacurcio, pp. 134-7.

cally, Hawthorne points out that two of the Royal governors "were imprisoned by a popular insurrection; a third . . . was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket ball," and the remainder "were favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway" (p. 208). These details clearly parallel Scott's comment that harassing the City Guard "was a favourite recreation with the rabble." Thus Hawthorne was much like Scott in his sympathies. Each strongly supported the status quo in his country; each had a constitutional distaste for rebellion and disorder; each felt sympathy and nostalgia for what had been lost in the revolutions of the previous century.

Hawthorne's description of the mob action which so corrupts the young Robin Molineux closely parallels Scott's description of the riot in which Reuben Butler is an unwilling participant.²⁰ One difference, however, is in the narrative point of view. In Scott's novel, Reuben is caught up by the mob before Porteous is taken from the prison; thus the narrative vantage point is from the midst of the din and confusion: "Having accomplished all the preliminary parts of their design, they raised a tremendous shout of 'Porteous! Porteous! To the Tolbooth! To the Tolbooth!'" (p. 67, ch. 6). Scott emphasizes Reuben's being engulfed by the mob: "Butler had been led up near to this the principal scene of action; so near, indeed, that he was almost deafened by the unceasing clang" (p. 69, ch. 6). In Hawthorne's tale, although the actions of the mob are similar, the narrative purpose is better served by Robin's gradually becoming aware of it at a great distance. Robin notices "a murmur, which swept continually along the street, yet was scarcely audible, . . . compounded of many noises, each of which was at too great a distance to be separately heard. . . . [I]ts continuity was broken, by now and then a distant shout, apparently loud where it originated" (p. 221). Realizing that some great tumult is taking place, Robin remarks, "there were at least a thousand voices went to make up that one shout" (p. 226). The growing momentum of the riot is shown more directly in Scott: "The mob, at first only about one hundred strong, now amounted to thousands, and were increasing every moment" (p. 65, ch. 6). In Hawthorne the progress of the mob is announced by a blaring band of wind instruments: "The sounds of a trumpet in some neighboring street now became . . . evident," and Robin "heard frequent bursts from many instruments of discord" (p. 226). In Scott the rioters gather behind a drummer: "He heard the sound of a drum, and to his great surprise, met a number of persons . . . moving with great speed . . . and having in front of them a drum beating to arms" (p. 63, ch. 6). Thus, in the two stories together we have a regular drum and bugle corps.

²⁰In connection with the name of Scott's character, it may be of interest that Hawthorne uses "Reuben" in "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "Butler" in *Fanshawe*, both written about the same time as "My Kinsman, Major Molineux."

In Hawthorne, Robin comes face to face with the mob only in the final scene: "A mighty stream of people now emptied into the street, and came rolling slowly towards the church" (p. 227). This passage parallels the Porteous rioters' approach to the place of execution: "The procession now moved forward with a slow and determined pace" (p. 76, ch. 7). In both stories the scene is rendered garish by the rioter's torches: "Then a redder light disturbed the moonbeams, and a dense multitude of torches shone along the street" ("Molineux," p. 227). The Scottish procession "was enlightened by many blazing links and torches" (p. 76, ch. 7). One of the best-known details in "Molineux" is the "parti-colored features" (p. 220) of the leader of the mob: "The single horseman . . . appeared like War personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire . . . the blackness of the other betokened . . . mourning" (p. 227). But even this striking aspect of Hawthorne's story has its antecedent in Scott, where Butler remembers the leader of the mob: "this person's features . . . were disguised apparently with red paint and soot, like an Indian going to battle" (p. 156, ch. 13). In Hawthorne some of the followers are disguised as Indians, and others are dressed in "many fantastic shapes" (p. 228); they are also described as "individuals in outlandish attire" (p. 219). In Scott the rioters wear a variety of costumes: "Several . . . in sailors' jackets, . . . others in large loose-bodied greatcoats, and . . . several who, judging from their dress, should have been called women" (pp. 64-5, ch. 6).

Hawthorne's symbolism is enhanced by the dreamlike atmosphere created by the flickering torches and the "outlandish attire" of the rioters, and Hawthorne explicitly calls our attention to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* motif several times. Before meeting the procession of rioters, Robin awakens from a dream of home and asks himself, "Am I here, or there?" (p. 223). The approaching procession seems "as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain" (p. 228). And in the final scene, the curious gentleman who has kept Robin company asks, "Well, Robin, are you dreaming?" (p. 230). Though Scott does not develop the dream motif as Hawthorne does, even this idea is present in the novel, as the rioters order Reuben to "consider all that is passing before you as a dream," and he says to himself: "I would it were a dream I could awaken from" (p. 64, ch. 6).

In both stories the riotous actions are shown to have the support of the populace. Scott writes, "Some of the spectators muttered accents of encouragement. . . . No one offered, by act or word, the slightest interruption" (p. 77, ch. 7). The passage is paralleled by Hawthorne: "A mass of people, inactive, except as applauding spectators, hemmed the procession in" (p. 228). Both writers mention crowds of spectators, not only lining the streets, but also watching from windows and balconies. In both narratives the victim of the people's ire is seen in an elevated position at the center of the procession.

Scott writes, "the prisoner, whose pallid yet stubborn features were seen distinctly by the torchlight, . . . was raised considerably above the concourse which thronged around him" (p. 77, ch. 7). In Hawthorne the parallel passage forms the climax of the story—it is the moment of recognition when Robin finds that the mob's victim is none other than the object of his search: "Right before Robin's eyes was an uncovered cart. There the torches blazed the brightest, . . . and there in tar-and-feathery dignity sate his kinsman, Major Molineux!" (p. 228). In both victims, pride struggles to overcome fear and pain. Porteous has "stubborn features" (p. 77, ch. 7), and Molineux has "strong, square features" (p. 228). "Porteous at first uttered some supplications for mercy, but . . . his military education, and the natural stubbornness of his disposition, combined to support his spirits" (p. 76, ch. 7). Similarly, Molineux's "whole frame was agitated by a quick, and continual tremor, which his pride strove to quell" (pp. 228-9). In both stories the climax of the action is greeted by shouts of triumph from the mob. When Porteous is hanged, "A loud shout proclaimed the stern delight with which the agents of this deed regarded its completion" (p. 78, ch. 7). In Hawthorne the climax is not the execution of mob justice but the protagonist's recognition of the victim. Nonetheless, the climax of the story is similarly punctuated by triumphant and jeering shouts: "The contagion was spreading among the multitude, . . . every man emptied his lungs" (p. 230).

Though both writers have considerable sympathy with the sentiments of their countrymen, neither can embrace chauvinistic nationalism, and both starkly depict the unmitigated evil of mob violence. Scott admires the organization and determination of the Scottish vigilantes, but at the end he distances Reuben from the horror and sadism of the scene: "By the red and dusky light of the torches, he could discern a figure wavering and struggling as it hung suspended above the heads of the multitude, and could even observe men striking at it with their Lochaber-axes and partisans."²¹ In similar fashion, Hawthorne leaves no doubt about his moral judgment upon the actions of the mob: "On they went, like fiends that throng in mockery round some dead potentate" (p. 230).

Both Hawthorne's indebtedness to Scott and his creative originality can be seen in a comparison of the two young men through whose eyes we see the tumultuous events. Both Reuben and Robin are poor young men from the country. Both have had a pious upbringing: Reuben is himself a clergyman; Robin, the younger of the two, is the son of a clergyman. Neither is particularly heroic; both are portrayed sympathetically, but somewhat condescendingly; both have journeyed on foot to the city, where they become in-

²¹*Mid-Lothian*, p. 78 (ch. 7); partisan: "a long-handled spear, the blade having one or more lateral cutting projections"—*OED*.

volved in the riots. It is in the climaxes of the stories that the two characters diverge in their development and that the originality of Hawthorne's vision becomes apparent.

Scott, the more genial and the more optimistic of the two writers, endows Reuben Butler with the moral backbone to resist the evil represented by the rioters, even at the risk of antagonizing them. Thus Reuben pleads with the rioters, "In the name of Him who is all mercy, show mercy to this unhappy man." One of the mob responds, "If we hear more of your clavers, . . . we are like to hang you up beside him" (p. 75, ch. 7). Just before the hanging takes place, Reuben makes a last remonstrance, "'But what, my friends,' insisted Butler, with a generous disregard to his own safety—'what hath constituted you his judges?'" (p. 78, ch. 7). Unable to prevent the hanging, Reuben makes his own escape from the mob: "Butler, separated from him by the press, escaped the last horrors of his struggles. . . . [H]e fled from the fatal spot, without much caring in what direction his course lay" (p. 78, ch. 7). Scott makes clear that Reuben flees with aversion from the evil he has been forced to witness: "The sight was of a nature to double his horror, and to add wings to his flight" (p. 78, ch. 7).

Hawthorne's vision is darker than Scott's. Robin is younger, more naive, and morally weaker than Reuben. Confronted by evil, he proves unable to resist the sympathetic response in his own heart: "A bewildering excitement began to seize upon his mind; the preceding adventures . . . the spectre of his kinsman reviled by that great multitude, all this, and more than all, a perception of tremendous ridicule in the whole scene, affected him with a sort of mental inebriety" (p. 229). Impelled by a newly awakened sense of kinship in the darkest recesses of his own soul, Robin is irresistibly drawn to identify himself, not with his suffering kinsman, but with the malevolent mob: "The contagion was spreading among the multitude, when, all at once, it seized upon Robin, and he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street; every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin's shout was the loudest there" (p. 230). Thus, Hawthorne's originality, here and in other tales, seems to lie in his darker vision of the human soul.

Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is a finely polished short story of compelling symbolism. It is one of our best initiation stories and has even been called the finest short story ever written.²² In general situation, in the nature of its protagonist, and in many of the details of the riot, it is strikingly similar to the opening chapters of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Given Hawthorne's knowledge and admiration of Scott, it seems clear that

²²England, p. 108.

Mid-Lothian was an important source that Hawthorne drew upon in writing "Major Molineux."

There is a sense in which Scott does not show to advantage in this comparison. His narration of the Porteous Riots seems to lack the evocative symbolism and the polish of Hawthorne's tale of colonial Boston. In Scott's case, however, we are not looking at a short story, but at the opening chapters of an epic novel. Reuben Butler, furthermore, is not the protagonist of the novel, though he eventually becomes the spouse of the protagonist. Scott's narrative and moral purposes are achieved in Jeanie Deans's courageous journey to save her sister's life and in her subsequently settling down to a humble but tranquil and happy life as the wife of Reuben, become a country parson. Scott's genius is more expansive than Hawthorne's, and in the larger format of the novel he shows convincingly the consequences of virtue and vice, as seen in the lives of Jeanie and her sister Effie. Scott has furthermore registered a unique achievement in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Just as Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* has given us the only example in a major novel of an impotent hero, so Scott has given us the only successful example of a romantic heroine who is neither beautiful nor even particularly young. No one else has dared to base the portrayal of a heroine entirely upon her moral and spiritual qualities. Seen in this light, Scott's mastery of his art remains unsurpassed. Perhaps, indeed, the time has come for a revival of interest in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* and others of Scott's too-long-neglected masterpieces.²³

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²³In a recent course in British Romanticism a student protested in dismay that there is no Cliffs Notes study guide available for *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.