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“Faith in the Hand of Nature”:  
Physiognomy in Sir Walter Scott’s Fiction

One aspect of Sir Walter Scott’s fiction that has received critical attention down the years is his treatment of physical character description, whereby comments made on that subject in the twentieth century would appear to have been generally more objective, not to say more sober, than some made in the nineteenth century, the early part of which is conspicuous for outright condemnations of Scott’s uses of this device.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there were at that time literary critics such as John Adolphus and Edward Channing who not only wrote favorably about Scott’s descriptive techniques, but seemed alive to their physiognomic implications, even though neither of them, nor, indeed, any other literary critic of that period, is known to have mentioned or alluded to physiognomic theory.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that scholars first remarked on references to physiognomy in Scott’s fiction, doing so, however, without touching on the historical background against

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<sup>1</sup>For examples of nineteenth-century condemnation of Scott’s character description, see especially John O. Hayden, ed., *Scott: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1970), pp. 86, 302, 303, 312, 313, 318, 319. Henceforth Hayden.

<sup>2</sup>See John Adolphus, *Letters to Richard Heber* (London, 1821), pp. 113-4, 122-4, 214-5. For Edward Channing, see Hayden, pp. 149, 157, 158. For other favorable nineteenth-century reactions to Scott’s character descriptions, see pp. 332, 386, 387, 405, 424.

which they must needs be seen to be fully understood.<sup>3</sup> Our aim here will be to show how far such references, together with the physical character descriptions they sometimes pertain to, may be deemed an expression of the influence which the physiognomic writings of the Swiss pastor Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) exerted on British literature and culture from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>4</sup>

The appropriateness of our topic may in some sense be said to have been already suggested in the nineteenth century when some practitioners of phrenology, the science most closely associated with physiognomy throughout that period, found certain phrenological (or craniological) ideas embodied in the presentation of some of Scott's fictional characters.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as those same phrenologists knew only too well, Scott was anything but sympathetic toward their science, repudiating it in his letters and journal and, to some extent, even in his fiction.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, he appears to have made no appraisal of physiognomy anywhere in his secondary writings, even though it is hard to imagine that, as someone whose library included books on that science, he should have been

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<sup>3</sup>See especially Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New Haven & London, 1963), pp. 74, 82, henceforth Welsh; Angus and Jenni Calder, *Scott* (London, 1969), pp. 117, 119; Thomas Crawford, *Scott* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 71, 84.

<sup>4</sup>For studies on Lavater's influence on British fiction see John Graham, "Character Description and Meaning in the Romantic Novel," *Studies in Romanticism*, 5 (1966), 208-218; John Graham, *Lavater's Essays on Physiognomy: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Bern, 1979), pp. 75-83; Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton, 1982). Henceforth Tytler. Graeme Tytler, "Lavater and the Nineteenth-Century English Novel," in Ellis Shookman, ed., *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johann Caspar Lavater* (Columbia, SC, 1993), pp. 161-81. Henceforth Shookman.

<sup>5</sup>See W. U. McDonald, Jr., "Scottish Phrenologists and Scott's Novels," *Notes and Queries*, New Series, 9 (1962), 415-7. For the association (and confusion) between physiognomy and phrenology, see Tytler, pp. 33-4, 87-90, 97, 119, 34, 350-52, 356-7, 385-8.

<sup>6</sup>See *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London, 1932-7), V, 3n; X, 159-60; 401; and *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford, 1972), pp. 257, 526. For references or allusions to phrenology in Scott's fiction, see *QD*, XVIII, 267; *SRW*, XII, 152. See also the 1829 Preface to *Waverley*, in which Scott ironically asserts that "the mental organization of the Novelist must be characterized, to speak craniologically, by an extraordinary development of the passion for delitescency!" (*WA*, 13). It is curious to note that Scott's physical descriptions of people in his letters and journals are few and, with rare exceptions, brief. For a list of abbreviations used to identify Scott's novels, see the end of this article.

unaware of Lavater or of his cultural impact.<sup>7</sup> In any case, quite apart from the fact that he was taking an intense interest in German literature in the 1790s, especially as a translator thereof, he might have noticed Lavater's name in Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature* (1817) and Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington and Ormond* (1817), copies of which he possessed and, more importantly, in descriptive passages of some contemporary novels he was reviewing, notably those of Charlotte Smith and Anna Maria Bennett. Moreover, such passages could well have alerted Scott to the benefits that he as a novelist might derive from Lavater's famous text, the first French edition of which, entitled *Essai sur la physiognomie* (1781-1803), he would have had access to at the Scottish Advocates Library while he was a curator there on and off from 1795 to 1809. Scott would doubtless have also known about the various English translations of the *Essai* as well as of the *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-78) that were warmly received in Britain by the literary world as well as the general public.<sup>8</sup>

Physiognomy was by no means a new branch of learning in the late eighteenth century, but there was something quite unwonted about the way in which Lavater enthusiastically championed its cause in his writings. Certainly, through his physiognomic and aesthetic analyses of the engravings that filled each of the four volumes, his interpretations of sundry facial and bodily features, with particular emphasis on the bone structure, his categorical equating of beauty and ugliness with virtue and vice respectively, his comments on first impressions, attraction and revulsion, moral and psychological influences on the appearance, the four temperaments, family, national and animal physiognomies, the nature and function of the physiognomist, along with his shrewd exposure of wrong-headed physiognomic ideas and his astute rebuttals of objections to physiognomy, Lavater offered a strong challenge to the prevailing skepticism toward a science which, in his view, had been unjustly discredited by its long association with astrology. Such richness of content may explain why, despite their theological premises and deterministic argumentation, for which they had often been censured or satirized, Lavater's physiognomic essays helped to bring about an extraordinary interest in physiognomy throughout Britain as they had already done on the Continent of Europe, and why Lavater himself was soon to supersede Aristotle as the chief authority on the subject, to the extent that "physiognomy" and "Lavater" became practically

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<sup>7</sup>For details about the physiognomic treatises of Michael Scott, Barthelmy Cocles and Jean Indagine, see John G. Cochrane, ed. *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh, 1838), pp. 47, 100, 134, 137, 145, 148.

<sup>8</sup>Lavater's two main physiognomic texts are *Physiognomische Fragmente*, 4 vols. (Zurich & Winterthur, 1775-78) and *Essai sur la physiognomie*, 4 Vols. (Paris & The Hague, 1781-1803). Henceforth *Essai*.

synonymous, particularly in the realm of *belles-lettres*. And though Lavater's was not the only text on physiognomy at the turn of the century, it proves to have been the one most often borrowed or quoted from by the literary world.

Any consideration of physiognomy in Scott's fiction means acknowledging at the outset that his treatment of the outward person represents in part a tradition stretching back to the seventeenth-century French romance, to English character, and even to medieval forms of literary portraiture. This tradition is especially manifest in the more or less elaborate composite portrait by which a good many of Scott's fictional characters are introduced to the reader. At the same time, unlike his predecessors, Scott is inclined to go beyond the confines of this ancient format by singling out certain physical characteristics, sometimes as labels or leitmotifs, in order to underline their special physiognomic significance. Prominent in this respect are his numerous descriptions of clothes, which may indicate fashionableness or social position, a religious sect or a foreign culture, affectation or eccentricity, or even moral development, each description usually serving the physiognomic function that Lavater himself ascribes to attire and other such appurtenances.<sup>9</sup> There are parallels of a sort, too, between Scott's descriptions of the eyes and the hair and Lavater's interpretations of the same inasmuch as both seem to agree that, whether in men or women, dark eyes and hair are generally signs of strength and sturdiness, whereas blue eyes and fair hair bespeak gentleness or weakness. This dichotomy seems to be acknowledged by Scott when, for example, in a description of the blonde Rowena, he remarks that "her disposition was naturally that which physiognomists consider as proper to fair complexions, mild, timid, and gentle (*IV*, XXIII, 254).<sup>10</sup> As for red hair, which Lavater considers an attribute of either very good or very bad people, Scott follows literary tradition by often assigning this feature to unsympathetic characters.<sup>11</sup> Especially interesting is Scott's attention to the hands and the voice, the more so as Lavater attaches great importance to them and, in the case of the hands, supplements

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<sup>9</sup>As concerns clothes, Lavater writes that "il est très nécessaire d'y avoir égard, si l'on veut pénétrer dans la connoissance de l'homme" (*Essai*, III, 229). There are some 120 descriptions of clothes in Scott's entire fiction.

<sup>10</sup>For Lavater's comments on eye and hair color, see *Essai*, III, 280f, 340f. If, like most novelists, Scott does not share Lavater's concern with the contours or shape of the eyes or their position in relation to other facial features, he is none the less Lavaterian in suggesting that the eyes are the center of physiognomic expression.

<sup>11</sup>See *Essai*, III, 340. See also *BL*, VI, 75; *GM*, XVIII, 167; *LM*, V, 238; *OM*, IV, 49; *RR*, XXII, 298. That red hair also bespeaks Celtic blood is suggested in descriptions of Rob Roy and other Highlanders. See *FMP*, XIV, 201, XXXIV, 474; *RR*, XXXII, 433.

his general comments with sensitive analyses of engravings of these features.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, there is something poetically appropriate about the fine hands of heroines such as Eveline Berenger, Diana Vernon and Edith Plantagenet, the "little and well-proportioned hand" of which last gives her prospective lover Sir Kenneth "the highest idea of the perfect proportions of the form to which it belonged" (*TT*, IV, 68). Of similar function are references to the voices of Alice Lee, Isabella de la Croye and Jeanie Deans, enhancing the nobility or charm of these heroines.<sup>13</sup> Again, Lavater's advice to pay heed to the smile and the laugh is reflected in Scott's presentation of unsympathetic figures such as Prince John, the Duke of Burgundy, Richard Varney, and Renault Vidal.<sup>14</sup> Interesting, too, is the way in which, during a tense moment at court, Scott points up James I's eccentricity by referring to his "shambling circular mode of managing his legs" (*FN*, IX, 153), or hints at the moral imitations of Cromwell's parliamentary commissioner Colonel Desborough by remarking that, while his "figure was well enough," his limbs "seemed to act upon different and contradictory principles," whereby "the right hand moved as if it were upon bad terms with the left, and the legs showed an inclination to foot it in different and opposite directions" (*WO*, XI, 168).<sup>15</sup> And there are, of course, physiognomic analyses of some other characteristics commonly included in Scott's physical portraits—noses, mouths, lips, chins, teeth, ears, eyebrows, profiles, complexions, heads, foreheads, figures, handwriting—which, whether referred to separately or in conjunction with other facial or bodily features, are usually meant to substantiate the moral role and function of those to whom they belong.

Another traditional device used by Scott in innumerable contexts and for all manner of psychological purposes is that which for Lavater would be subsumed under "pathognomy," namely, the interpretation of facial expressions,

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<sup>12</sup>See *Essai*, II, 375; III, 212, 342-9; IV, 303.

<sup>13</sup>See *WO*, XV, 224; *QD*, XIV, 217, XXIV, 345; *HM*, XXXVII, 444.

<sup>14</sup>See *IV*, XVI, 190; *QD*, II, 48, XXVI, 367, 368f; *K*, XX, 274; *TB*, XXIX, 313. Other references to the smile or laugh may be found in *R*, Let. VII, 87 and *TA*, XIX, 229. See also *Essai*, I, 160-62; III, 43, 213, 317.

<sup>15</sup>For similar references to gait or movements, see *AG*, XXX, 423; *FMP*, XXXIV, 476; *FN*, IX, 185, XXVI, 377; *GM*, XXII, 188; *HM*, XI, 136, XXXVII, 439; *IV*, XXXV, 401, XXL, 462; *QD*, VIII, 129, XXII, 318; *R*, Let. IV, 47, XVI, 378; *RR*, VI, 126f; *SRW*, XIII, 160; *TP*, III, 33, XVI, 199, XXXIV, 415; *TT*, XI, 140; *TTD*, I, 365; *WA*, X, 119. See also *Essai*, III, 180, 182, 227.

blushes, pallor, gestures, and the like.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, one senses something of the new physiognomic climate in a number of remarkable pathognomic descriptions, notably those of strong personalities such as John Balfour, Charles Duke of Burgundy and Archibald de Hagenbach as observed in moments of tension or conflict. Closely akin to all this is Scott's treatment of an idea, also acknowledged in the *Essai*, that is to say, the ways in which the human appearance may be more or less affected by physical, moral or spiritual influences, by general mode of life, or even by the presence of other people—an idea aptly illustrated, for example, in the presentation of heroic figures such as Jeanie Deans and Halbert Glendinning, as it is in that of villains such as Julian Avenel and Sir John Ramorny.<sup>17</sup> Significant, too, for their unprecedented abundance are Scott's animal images, the more so when we consider them in the light of Lavater's inclusion in the *Essai* of several engravings of animals, together with detailed anthropomorphic analyses of them (*Essai*, II, 36-8, 88-128). Scott's fiction contains a wide range of animals—wild beasts, birds, reptiles and domestic creatures, the most ferocious serving, pertinently enough, to make more palpable for the reader both the behavior and the appearance of some of his rough or vicious characters. Finally, mention might be made here of Scott's much-discussed use of a long familiar literary topos, namely, the pictorial interest of an individual or a group of people—a topos which he, nevertheless, took to hitherto unwonted extremes with his connoisseur-like references to painters, paintings and statuary. The fact that Scott's narrators are also given to detailed physiognomic analyses of some paintings, nowhere more memorably than in the description of Mary Queen of Scots in *The Abbot*, is a reminder that in his *Essai* Lavater not only makes physiognomic and aesthetic evaluations of well-known paintings, but imputes a sound knowledge of physiognomy to his ideal portrait painter.<sup>18</sup>

Thus we gain some idea of the extent of the physiognomic skills possessed by Scott's third-person narrators, seldom equaled by their eighteenth-century counterparts. That Scott's physiognomic narrators were, however, not altogether a new thing in English fiction is evident from a perusal of the works of Ann Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis, Godwin, Elizabeth Inchbald, Amelia Opie, Robert Bage, and other minor figures, some of whom cite Lavater in their

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<sup>16</sup>For Lavater's distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy and his illustrated discussions on the latter, see *Essai*, I, 21, 25, 26, 130, 212, 239, 287; II, 58-87. For physiognomic influences, see *Essai*, I, 130-50, 152-4, 158f, 161, 164, 166, 180, 290; III, 16, 70, 72, 75, 76-8, 127, 161-68, 171-76.

<sup>17</sup>See *HM*, I, 575; *TN*, XIV, 195, XXIV, 301; *FMP*, XI, 144f.

<sup>18</sup>For Lavater's comments on the close relationship between physiognomy and painting and drawing, see *Essai*, I, 65, 114f, 122, 223; II, 214-31, 381; III, 222; IV, 40-45.

character descriptions from the 1790s onward.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, like some of the narrators of these novels, Scott's narrators will now and again mention the science of physiognomy, defer to the authority of real-life physiognomists, and even honor a notion put forward by Lavater himself, namely, that Nature creates human beings in such ways as to make them physiognomically comprehensible to one another. This notion is unmistakably reflected in statements correlating physical appearance with moral character, as we see when told, for example, that Jenkin Vincent's "physiognomy...corresponded with the sketch we have given of his character" (*FN*, I, 31); or when, reminded of Lavater's practice of reading sundry mental or moral qualities in faces depicted in the *Essai*, we find a description of Philip des Comines ending with the words "the whole physiognomy marking a man who saw and judged rapidly, but was sage and slow in forming resolutions or expressing opinions" (*QD*, XXV, 359). We note this again when we are told that Lucy Ashton's facial features are "formed to express peace of mind, serenity, and indifference to the tinsel of worldly pleasure" (*BL*, III, 46); or, again, that Brian de Bois-Guilbert's eyes tell in every glance "a history of difficulties subdued or dangers dared" (*IV*, II, 37).<sup>20</sup> Such descriptions are elsewhere matched by those in which, not unlike Lavater in his engraving analyses, Scott's narrators tell us that a character's facial or bodily features "announce," "express," "exhibit," "evinced" or "betoken" a particular disposition or temperament, or a proclivity to certain passions or emotions.<sup>21</sup> No less significant in this context is Scott's frequent use of the word "physiognomy" in the sense of face or general appearance, this being one aspect of his fiction which, perhaps more obviously than any other considered so far, bespeaks the influence exerted by physiognomy on British writers in the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of the foregoing, then, it is not surprising that Scott's third-person narrators should so often come across as tireless observers of the human appearance. Indeed, nothing more clearly attests the new physiognomic era than that tendency of theirs to comment knowledgeably and sensitively on the outward person for its own sake. Thus, aside from speaking of a face, a facial expression or a general appearance that "fixed" the attention, or as "not easily escaping the attention" (*QD*, II, 45), they are quick to note the universality of particular physical characteristics. For example, Major Bridgenorth's face is

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<sup>19</sup>See Tytler, "Lavater and Physiognomy in English Fiction 1790-1832," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 7 (1995), 298-305

<sup>20</sup>See *Essai*, I, 112f, 189, 193, 194; II, 23, 27, 30, 225, 231; III, 147, 215, 216, 260, 353.

<sup>21</sup>See *Essai*, I, 252, 351, 352; II, 58, 175, 198; III, 140, 219, 311, 352; IV, 131f.

<sup>22</sup>For the development of the use of the term "physiognomy," see Tytler, pp. 117f and 364f.



described as “one of those physiognomies to which, though not otherwise pleasing, we naturally attach the idea of melancholy and of misfortune” (*PP*, XI, 184). This fondness for classifying faces is sometimes expressed in a lyrical commentary, as, for example, in this part of a description of Fenella who had, we are told:

One of those faces which are never seen without making an impression; which, when removed, are long after remembered; and for which, in our idleness, we are tempted to invent a hundred histories, that we may please our fancy by supposing the features under the influence of different kinds of emotion. Every one must have in recollection countenances of this kind, which, from a captivating and stimulating originality of expression, abide longer in the memory, and are more seductive to the imagination, than even regular beauty (*PP*, XXXIX, 563).

There are like comments of varying length whereby certain physical features—the eyes, the hair, the figure, a brow, a gesture—remind the narrator of imaginary figures in imaginary circumstances. The same method is also applied in pathognomic descriptions. Thus of Archibald de Hagenbach we read that his countenance “expressed that settled peevishness and ill temper which characterize the morning hours of a valetudinary debauchee” (*AG*, XII, 181); of Christie of the Clint Hill’s features that they were “drawn into that air of sulky and turbid resolution with which those hardened in guilt are accustomed to view the approach of punishment” (*TM*, X, 142); and of a herald’s look of “boldness and apprehension” making him seem “like one who has undertaken a dangerous commission, and is sensible that audacity can carry him through it with safety” (*QD*, XXXIII, 474). References to blushing or pallor or changes in complexion, too, are noted for their applicability to people other than those being described.

What we have seen so far are physiognomic descriptions given from that omniscient viewpoint which Scott’s third-person narrators assume when they describe landscapes, castles, houses, domestic interiors, banquets, and so on. Such a viewpoint usually underlies descriptions of heroes and heroines, where Scott not only honors Lavater’s equation of beauty and virtue, but seems to share the latter’s essentially Eurocentric thinking about human physicality.<sup>23</sup> But Scott is not so inclined as his eighteenth-century predecessors to place personal appearances in neat categories of opposites, recognizing as he does, somewhat in the spirit of Lavater’s engraving analyses, that the outward person, like the inner being, is usually a mixture of good and bad.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it is with descriptions of physiognomic heterogeneity, as with those of less than

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<sup>23</sup>For Lavater’s comments on the correlation between physical and moral beauty, see especially *Essai*, I, 128-66.

<sup>24</sup>For some examples, see *Essai*, II, 59, 63, 65, 72, 73, 76, 77, 79, 244; III, 332.

perfect beauty, that Scott manages subtly to underline the flaws in character or temperament of some of his heroic figures, most notably the Earl of Leicester and Henry Gow.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to see this method also applied *mutatis mutandis* to unsympathetic characters, illustrated, for example, in the detailed description of William De la Marck (*QD*, XXII, 313). Such descriptions may be said, moreover, to have a certain link with those given from a non-omniscient standpoint. Though Scott's personal descriptions sometimes suggest that the person described has been observed many times already, it is nonetheless remarkable how often his characters are introduced as though they were being given a first physiognomic reading. The subjectivity of such readings is indicated, for example, when a narrator describes someone from shifting perspective, as in this detail about Touchwood: "his face, which, at the distance of a yard or two, seemed hale and smooth, appeared, when closely examined, to be seamed with millions of wrinkles, crossing each other in every direction possible, but as fine as if drawn by the point of a very small needle" (*SRW*, XV, 181).

This subjective approach is again noticeable when a narrator writes: "It might be read in his countenance, that he was one of those resolute enthusiasts to whom Oliver [Cromwell] owed his conquests" (*WO*, VIII, 126); in the hesitancy over interpreting a particular face or look as in this detail: "An air of sadness, or severity, or both seemed to indicate a melancholy, and, at the same time, a haughty temper" (*R*, Let., IV, 50); or in a comparison between actual and latent character traits, as in this description of James Ratcliffe: "The man's face expressed rather knavery than vice, and a disposition to sharpness, cunning, and roguery, more than the traces of stormy and indulged passions" (*HM*, XIII, 167). Of similar interest are those descriptions in which a narrator eschews omniscience by using the verb "seem," as in the following passage: "The envoy of the Covenanters, to judge by his mien and manner, seemed fully imbued with that spiritual pride which distinguished his sect" (*OM*, XXV, 275-6). The idea of character description as an act of observation is further manifest in Scott's tendency to present his characters partly from the viewpoint of a number of imaginary figures of varying physiognomic ability, be they "a skilful physiognomist," "a strict observer," "the experienced traveller," "a spectator," "the beholder," "the female eye," "an ordinary mind," or merely the "you" he clearly identifies with the reader.<sup>26</sup> Aside from underlining the lyrical or dramatic interest of someone's looks, these hypothetical figures help to confirm the idea of physiognomic observation as an inherently subjective process. One example of this may be noted in the following excerpt:

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<sup>25</sup>See *FMP*, II, 30; K, XXX, 377.

<sup>26</sup>Lavater defers to imaginary observers in some of his engraving analyses. See, for example, *Essai*, I, 182, 193, 222, 248, 259, 264, 271; II, 43, 228, 230, 255; III, 22.

To those who looked at Arnold Biedermann in this point of view, he displayed the size and form, the broad shoulders and prominent muscles of a Hercules. But such as looked rather at his countenance, the steady sagacious features, open front, large blue eyes and deliberate resolution which it expressed, he more resembled the fabled King of Gods and Men (*AG*, II, 53).

With all these imaginary observers, Scott evokes the Lavaterian climate for us quite as effectively as he does with those many fictional characters of his endowed with sundry physiognomic skills. It is interesting to note Scott reflecting Lavater's attribution of such skills to those in highest authority by portraying his kings and queens and other heads of state as physiognomists—Richard Lionheart, Prince John, Louis IX, René of Provence, Oliver Cromwell, Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I, the last mentioned being perhaps the most interesting in that her perceptive comments on the faces of her subjects, while enhancing her presentation as a woman of formidable personality, enable the author to add to the tensions of court life and to keep the reader in suspense with respect to the Earl of Leicester's sedulous efforts to keep his marriage hidden from such a sharp-eyed monarch.<sup>27</sup> Again, as if to echo Lavater's assertion of the universality of the physiognomic instinct, Scott was almost certainly the first modern novelist to comment on that instinct both in children, whom he describes as "generally acute physiognomists" (*TA*, II, 23), and in dogs, referring as he does to the "sagacious knowledge of physiognomy peculiar to their race" (*IV*, III, 52).<sup>28</sup> And while it is true that minor characters possessed of "skills in physiognomy are not unusual in eighteenth-century English fiction, there is little doubt that Scott's are generally more memorable than those figures. One thinks, for example, of that tense moment in *Redgauntlet* when, having noted Alan Fairford's discomfiture at the awesome appearance of the smuggler Tom Trumbull, the narrator adds: "The old man, accustomed to judge with ready sharpness of the physiognomy of those with whom he had business, did not fail to remark something like agitation in Fairford's demeanour" (*R*, XIII, 336). That Scott is mindful of the traditionally humorous, not to say satirical, attitude of the literary world toward physiognomists, may be felt in his depiction of certain eccentric or comical figures such as Edie Ochiltree, presented at his first encounter with the young hero of *The Antiquary* as "a physiognomist by profession" (*A*, IV, 47), and Mrs. Dods, who is described as being "accustomed to judge of persons on their first appearance" and, therefore, able to tell from the newly-arrived Peregrine Touchwood's walk that it is,

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<sup>27</sup>In this connection, Lavater writes: "Quel souverain choisira un Ministre, sans faire aussi quelque attention à son extérieur, sans le juger, secrettement et jusqu'à un certain point, sur sa figure?" (*Essai*, I, 36).

<sup>28</sup>Concerning children as physiognomists, Lavater writes: "...chaque enfant aime ou craint, sans savoir pourquoi, & uniquement par un tact Physiognomique" (*Essai*, I, 35).

"without the possibility of mistake, the gait of a person who was well to pass in the world," adding as she does with a wink, "and that...is what we victuallers are seldom deceived in" (*SRW*, IV, 181).

Inasmuch as Mrs. Dods' words foreshadow Touchwood's constructive role in *St. Ronan's Well*, they typify the way in which Scott harnesses the physiognomic skills of his characters for purposes of plot and structure. Even a seemingly casual dialogue such as that in which Wayland Smith affirms "the honesty of [his] looks" (*K*, XX, 274) against Janet Foster's suspicions about his "countenance" may be seen in retrospect as an ironic foreshadowing of the only happy fulfillment of a love relationship in *Kenilworth*. A similar outcome, too, is adumbrated in *The Fair Maid of Perth* when, to his physiognomically skeptical future father-in-law Henry Gow expresses confidence that from "what is written on her brow" (*FMP*, V, 73), Catherine Glover is in love with him. That differing physiognomic viewpoints have obvious dramatic advantages is just as humorously illustrated in *Ivanhoe* when the favorable physiognomic reading of Robin Hood (disguised as Locksley) by Richard Lionheart (disguised as the Black Knight) is presently offset by the court-jester Wamba's interpretation of the former as "a born deer-stealer" (*IV*, XX, 223). Much more ambivalent, on the other hand, is the way in which Edgar Ravenswood's fate is estimated by particular physiognomic reactions. Thus the destruction which Alice Gray fears Ravenswood's love for Lucy Ashton will bring about, is later physiognomically confirmed when Ailsie Gourlay says this to Annie Winnie: "It is written on his brow...that hand of woman, or of man either, will never straight him" (*BL*, XXIII, 267). This prophecy is virtually replicated by a gravedigger shortly afterwards when, in answer to Ravenswood's denial of the latter's claim that he is "a wedding customer," he looks again into the hero's face saying: "troth as it may be; since, for brent as your brow is, there is something sitting upon it this day, that is as near akin to death as to wedlock" (*BL*, XXIV, 270-1). An analogous use of physiognomy concerns the presentation of the Varangian guard Hereward as a man who looks personable enough for both the eponymous hero of *Count Robert of Paris* and the Emperor Commenus to entrust him with certain dangerous missions, and yet perhaps too personable for them not to wonder whether they are in the circumstances not placing undue reliance on his physiognomy. Thus Count Robert, afraid that Hereward may report his escape from prison, says this to himself: "The Varangian's look is open, his coolness in danger is striking, his speech is more frank and ready than ever was that of a traitor. If he is false, there is no faith in the hand of nature, for truth, sincerity, and courage are written upon his forehead" (*CRP*, XIX, 287-8). And though the Emperor, too, is beset by doubts about Hereward's seeming "disinterestedness" after sending him off on a mission that might prove disastrous to himself, his realization that "there is in that man's looks and words a good faith which overwhelms me" (*CRP*, XXI, 322) turns out after all to have been as well founded as Count Robert's trust in the laws of physiognomy.

The fact that two essentially virtuous men are ultimately vindicated in their respective readings of Hereward's face exemplifies Scott's tendency to equate observational capacity with moral nature. It is true that many a valid physiognomic judgment is made by fictional characters scarcely conspicuous for goodness. This is especially true of the commonalty, who, like Wamba, as we saw earlier, are more or less streetwise and hence inclined to be on their guard against the human face. Such a cautious attitude is doubtless fostered to some extent by the prevalence of certain time-honored proverbial notions, as Scott amply suggests through the comments his characters make about someone's fate being written on their brow or forehead, or through references or allusions to the so-called negative physiognomic judgments made by intelligent characters such as Amy Robsart's of Anthony Foster, Alice Lee's of Joseph Tompkins, Liliast Redgauntlet's of Cristal Nixon, and Mordaunt's of Cleveland are eventually validated, just as those made by bad or stupid people, such as Craigenelt's of Ravenswood, Lady Penfeather's of Francis Tyrrell, or those made of Julian Peveril by the Duke of Buckingham's two retainers and a local magistrate, prove to be grossly mistaken or comically misplaced.<sup>29</sup> Of similar interest here is the episode in which King Louis orders his astrologer Galeotti to examine Quentin Durward's physiognomy, the more so as, despite his favorable interpretations of the latter's hand and face, Galeotti's advice to the King not to allow such an inexperienced young man to accompany the Countess de la Croye and Lady Hameline to Liège proves ill-founded by virtue of the hero's timely discovery on that journey of a plot to abduct the two women. Through the fact that Galeotti later just escapes execution for having failed to predict the King's subsequent imprisonment at the hands of the Duke of Burgundy, and that Quentin himself, chastened perhaps by his futile interview with Galeotti, should be defiantly skeptical of the claim made by the villainous Hayruddin Maügrubin, later unmasked as an "imposter" (*QD*, XXXIV, 486), that he and his fellow astrologers can read anyone's future "from the lines on the face and on the hand" (*QD*, XVI, 240), Scott seems to be denouncing astrological physiognomy as roundly as Lavater does in the *Essai*.<sup>30</sup>

Still, an astrologer's complimentary reading of Quentin Durward's person remains a perfect example of Scott's recourse to the physiognomic skills of his minor characters in order to affirm the heroic status of the protagonists. It is interesting to find among several minor characters serving that function in

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<sup>29</sup>See *K*, VI, 74; *WO*, XXXI, 446; *R*, XVIII, 423; *BL*, VI, 78, XXXII, 335; *SRW*, VII, 82; *PP*, XXXII, 481, 489.

<sup>30</sup>The fact that Scott eventually repudiated astrology altogether is perhaps not without relevance to his treatment of physiognomy. See Robert C. Gordon, *Under Which King? A Study of the Scottish Waverley Novels* (Edinburgh & London, 1969), p. 27. For Lavater's condemnation of the occult sciences, see *Essai*, I, 40, 465, 83; III, 237, 244.

Scott's fiction two blind women, namely Elizabeth Maclure and Alice Gray, whose sensitive reactions to Henry Morton's voice and Ravenswood's step respectively are fine illustrations of Lavater's remark on the exceptional physiognomic capacities of the sightless.<sup>31</sup> Noteworthy, too, is Scott's treatment of what was largely his own contribution to literary portraiture: the collective physiognomic response or judgment. This device is an effective means of characterizing sympathetic or unsympathetic figures such as Richard Lionheart, Prince John, the Earl of Montrose, Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert, and Hereward, and of underlining the exceptional beauty of, say, Rebecca and Effie Deans when observed at a tournament or in a court of law. The group physiognomic response is used to considerable poetic effect in *Kenilworth*, especially where it has some bearing on the Earl of Leicester's secret marriage. The latter's deception of his sovereign never seems more ironic than when, just after she has declined his proposal of marriage in the grounds of Kenilworth Castle, the Queen, hitherto presented as a woman of great beauty and personality, is described from the following perspective:

But those who watched at some distance (and the eyes of courtiers and court ladies are right sharp) were of opinion that on no occasion did the dignity of Elizabeth, in gesture and motion, seem so decidedly to soften away into a mien expressive of indecision and tenderness. Her step was not only slow, but even unequal, a thing most unwonted in her carriage: her looks seemed bent on the ground, and there was a timid disposition to withdraw from her companion, which external gesture in females often indicates exactly the opposite tendency in the secret mind (*K*, XXIV, 419).

Physiognomy in Scott's fiction, then, has to do not merely with descriptive techniques but also with observation and point of view. Thus, whereas the heroism of Scott's main characters may be hinted at by sundry affirmative responses to their physicality, it is clinched for us through their capacity as physiognomists.<sup>32</sup> In eighteenth-century (non-epistolary) fiction, physiognomically gifted heroes and heroines tend to be first-person narrators in the novels of Marivaux and Diderot, where the description and observation of personal appearance are chiefly in the hands of third-person narrators.<sup>33</sup> From the 1790s onward, however, there is a tendency, especially in the British novel,

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<sup>31</sup>Concerning the blind as physiognomists, Lavater writes: "On sait combien de sagacité plusieurs aveugles parviennent à suppléer jusqu'à un certain point, par les autres sens, à celui qui leur manque" (*Essai*, III, 212). See also *Essai*, I, 120.

<sup>32</sup>For discussions on observant protagonists in Scott's fiction, see Horst Tippkötter, *Walter Scott* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971), pp. 185, 190-92; and Welsh, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup>See Tytler, pp. 133-65.

for character description to be done from the viewpoint of non-narratorial protagonists. In Scott's fiction we may find a brief or extended description of an individual or a group of people prefaced or accompanied by statements to the effect that a character has a perfect survey of, has their eye fixed on, or has their attention caught by a particular appearance; has an opportunity or leisure or time to study or examine someone's facial or bodily features; looks hard at someone to discover their attitude or state of mind.

The physiognomic disposition of Scott's heroes and heroines also plays a prominent part in his treatment of love. Indeed, awareness of the physical characteristics of the beloved person, and alertness to changes in their facial expressions, are essential to the delineation of amatory relationships between, say, Quentin Durward and Isabelle de la Croye, Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton, Roland Graeme and Catherine Seyton, Arthur Philipson and Anne of Geierstein. It is partly through such acts of mutual observation, which are practically unprecedented in the modern European novel, that we are apprised of the intelligence, perspicacity and integrity of Scott's principal characters.

Yet while there may be little to distinguish these heroes and heroines from one another *qua* physiognomists with respect to love, Scott nevertheless suggests that physiognomic capacity is determined and shaped by gender and mode of life. For competent as all such figures may be as physiognomists in general, it is Scott's heroines rather than his heroes that are given to physiognomic utterances of poetic or philosophical content—utterances through which they manifest their sensibility and intellect. This is true not only of Di Vernon, Alice Lee, Amy Robsart and Rebecca, but also of minor figures such as Mary Avenel and Magdalen Graeme.<sup>34</sup> Conspicuous among general comments about Scott's heroes, on the other hand, are those relating to first impressions. That Scott recognized such reactions as a sort of physiognomic law is suggested in *Ivanhoe* when Prince John, sensing the eponymous hero's unexpected presence at a tournament, asks Prior Aymer what he thinks of "the doctrine the learned tell [them] concerning innate attractions and antipathies" (*IV*, *XII*, 156). The "learned" probably included, albeit anachronistically, Lavater himself for his comments on that subject.<sup>35</sup> This doctrine is illustrated when the narrator of *Waverley* speaks of the hero's "dislike at applying to a stranger for information without previously glancing at his physiognomy and appearance" (*WA*, *XXX*, 279) and, even more vividly, in Frank Osbaldistone's reluctance to address a business associate of his father's called Ephraim MacVittie. Though unable to find "any rational ground of dislike or suspicion," (*RR*, *XX*, 286) Frank nevertheless falls back on physiognomy to justify that reluctance:

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<sup>34</sup>See *RR*, VI, 128; *WO*, XXII, 327; *K*, VI, 80; *IV*, XLIV, 525; *TM*, XXI, 271; *TA*, X, 107, II, 119f.

<sup>35</sup>See *Essai*, I, 186; III, 173f.

"There was something so singularly repulsive in the hard features of the Scotch trader, that I could not resolve to put myself into his hands without transgressing every caution which could be derived from the rules of physiognomy" (*RR*, XX, 287). Such fastidiousness is of a piece with Scott's presentation of his heroes as men more or less gifted with what is ascribed to Halbert Glendinning as "a natural acuteness of observation" (*TM*, XX, 262). As well as being a useful means of coping with the unfamiliar and sometimes hostile worlds in which these figures find themselves plumped, this acuteness is usually specific to the plot, as we discover from Frank Osbaldistone's persistent and scrupulous observations of Rob Roy and Rashleigh, Darsie Latimer's and Alan Fairford's of Herries, Henry Morton's of John Balfour, and Edward Waverley's of Fergus MacIvor.

Of the many interesting ways in which Scott utilizes the physiognomic skills of his major and minor characters, few are more ingenious than his handling of what Lavater designates as the family physiognomy.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Lavater claimed to be practically the first physiognomist to draw special attention to this aspect of physiognomy is more significant when we consider that, aside from seldom obtaining in British fiction before the 1790s, it is used frequently, and sometimes elaborately, in Scott's fiction. Although some references to family resemblances are little more than perfunctory, others, notably those given from the viewpoint of observing characters, have a certain pathos, as when someone is painfully reminded of their late spouse by the child's likeness to the latter; or a certain lyricism, especially where the reference underlines someone's pride in their family, or the heroic status of a main character, not least when that character bears a startling resemblance to an ancestor in a portrait. But whereas the recognition of such a resemblance may serve an essentially poetic function in one context, in another it helps to thicken a plot. Thus Edgar Ravenswood's uncanny likeness to a painting of Sir Malise Ravenswood, which still hangs in the house that the hero's late father was wrongfully dispossessed of, becomes the reason for young Henry Ashton's superstitious and, ultimately, baseless fear that he (Ravenswood) will kill his father and drive the rest of the family out of Ravenswood Castle.<sup>37</sup> A family resemblance also plays a crucial part in an incident that has occurred before the main narrative of *St. Ronan's Well*, and one not without some symbolic bearing on Lord Etherington's bid to deprive his half-brother Francis Tyrrell of his legitimate claim on the earldom recently fallen vacant through the death of their father. Having just arrived at the Spa, despite an earlier agreement with his brother never to return to Scotland, Lord Etherington vehemently denies that

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<sup>36</sup>For Lavater's comments on the family physiognomy, see *Essai*, I, 145-7; III, 159; IV, 123-8.

<sup>37</sup>See *BL*, XVIII, 207-8, XIX, 210, XXXII, 336, XXXV, 360.



he is the Valentine Bulmer he has been correctly taken for by the local minister Joseph Cargill. This act of deception becomes a kind of foreshadowing of, and, to some extent, an explanation for, Etherington's account of his marriage to Clara Mowbray in a ceremony conducted, ironically enough, by Cargill. His success in posing as his brother Francis, as he explains in a letter to a friend, was due partly to "the darkness of the church" and partly to "the resemblance between Francis and [him] in stature and in proportion" (*SRW*, XXVI, 321). Scott's use of the family physiognomy for purposes of plot is perhaps nowhere more conspicuous than when, possibly in emulation of Ann Radcliffe's treatment of it in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, he lets it function as a means of foreshadowing the true identity of a main character. Examples of this may be found in *A Legend of Montrose*, *The Pirate*, *The Abbot* and *The Antiquary*, and, above all, in two novels where this physiognomic idea is seen at its most elaborate: *Guy Mannering* and *Redgauntlet*.

In *Guy Mannering*, one particular family physiognomy constitutes a principle motif in the plot concerning the restoration of the late Laird of Ellangowan's property to his son Henry Bertram, who was kidnapped as a child at the behest of Gilbert Glossin, currently the owner of that property. The motif begins when, on his return to Scotland after several years abroad, Bertram, now living under the name of Brown, encounters the gypsy Meg Merrilies, who, having known him in his childhood, but as yet unaware who he is, nevertheless expresses disbelief that he has just come from India, saying "ye hae a face and a tongue that puts me in mind of auld times" (*GM*, XXIII, 198). Once informed of his true identity, Meg is determined to help him recover his family estate. On a visit to Ellangowan under his real name, Bertram makes an ironic suggestion to Glossin about burning down the castle that is described as having the following effect on the latter: "His face, person, and voice, were so exactly those of his father in his best days, that Glossin, hearing his exclamation, and seeing such a sudden apparition in the shape of his patron, and on nearly the very spot where he had expired, almost thought the grave had given up its dead!" (*GM*, XL, 259f). Partly out of dread lest others should also recognize Bertram, Glossin succeeds in having him arrested and imprisoned for shooting Charles Hazlewood, though Bertram manages to escape from his prison with the help of some gypsies. On arriving at Guy Mannering's residence at Woodbourne, Bertram is almost instantly recognized for his resemblance to his father, not only by his former tutor Dominie Sampson and his own sister Lucy Bertram, but also by the lawyer Paulus Pleydell, who, having acknowledged Bertram to be "the very image of old Ellangowan" and to have "the same manly form and handsome features," goes on to enhance the young man's heroic stature by adding: "but with a world of more intelligence in the face" (*GM*, L, 440). Meanwhile, Meg Merrilies, who has frustrated Glossin's plot to have Bertram kidnapped a second time, but at the cost of her life, sends for the latter and, as she lies dying, addresses the people in her midst thus: "Look at him...all that ever saw his father or his grandfather; and bear witness if he is

not their living image?" (*GM*, LV, 486). With the acknowledgment of the bystanders that "the resemblance was too striking to be denied" (*GM*, LV, 486), the motif gathers momentum as, one by one—a postillion, a group of tenants, the women of the neighborhood—all exclaim at Bertram's resemblance to his father, thereby playing no small part in the former's being acknowledged as the Laird of Ellengowan. If Scott may be taxed with having used rather too many physiognomists in the narrative leading up to the dénouement, his treatment of Bertram's family physiognomy is, nevertheless, not without subtlety, especially when Meg Merrilies' nephew is described as being reluctant to look the hero in the face, or when the landlady Mrs. MacCandlish and Sir Robert Hazlewood, without knowing Bertram's real identity, remark, in separate contexts, on his gentlemanly manner and appearance.<sup>38</sup>

Just as central to an ingenious plot leading up to the revelation of a male protagonist's real identity is the physiognomic leitmotif which in *Redgauntlet* begins chronologically when a group of "iron-hearted" soldiers observe that the brow of the recently-orphaned infant grandson of the hero's ancestor, Sir Alberick Redgauntlet, is "distinctly marked by the miniature resemblance of a horseshoe" (*R*, VIII, 269). Although the protagonist in question, Darsie Latimer, is given that detail as part of the long story of the ill-fated Redgauntlet family told by his guardian Herries while in the latter's forced custody, he is nevertheless kept in the dark as to whether he is himself "descended from this unhappy race" (*R*, VIII, 270), even though he has already had good reasons for so speculating. First, there has been a moment when, while being examined in a magistrate's office, Darsie has already noticed Herries' grim horseshoe frown as something which "awaked a dreadful vision of infancy" (*R*, VI, 246) and, therefore, as he presently tells Herries, something which he is now certain he has seen before. Then there has been another moment in which, having had his present identity questioned and his Jacobitism suspected, Herries looks hard at Darsie, but in such a way as to prompt the latter to answer him "by a look of the same kind," at the same time as Darsie discovers, from his own reflection in a mirror, that his face resembles that of Herries. On his return to his apartment, Darsie wonders whether Herries' strange power over him has to do with their being related, indeed, to his sharing "the blood, perhaps the features of this singular being" (*R*, VIII, 265). Reminded of the resemblance between them, Darsie tries to contort his face into "the peculiar form which so much resembled the terrific look of Herries," but in vain, though perhaps not altogether unsuccessfully insofar as his efforts are interrupted by the servant girl Dorcas begging him to desist because they make his face look unpleasantly "as like the ould Squoire as—" (*R*, VIII, 265). Dorcas is, however, unable to complete her comparison because she has sensed the unexpected presence of her master, who, evidently aware of what Darsie has just been doing, addresses the

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<sup>38</sup>See *GM*, XI, 114, XXXII, 270, XLIII, 379.

latter as follows: "Doubt not that it is stamped on your forehead—the fatal mark of our race; though it is not now so apparent as it will become when age and sorrow, and the traces of stormy passions, and of bitter penitence, shall have drawn their furrows on your brow" (*R*, VIII, 265-6).

Although, notwithstanding this portentous prophecy, Darsie still remains unenlightened by Herries as to his origins, which he has long been anxiously concerned to discover, he comes to learn the truth from Herries' ward Lilius (alias Green Mantle), who turns out to be his sister. Lilius relates that their mother, resentful of the fact that the untimely death of her husband Sir Henry Darsie had been partly caused by his brother Sir Edward Redgauntlet (alias Herries,) had fled from the north of England, determined to bring up her offspring as "adherents of the present [Hanoverian] dynasty" (*R*, XVII, 408). The effect of her sufferings at that time was a curious birthmark on Lilius' arm, concerning which detail Scott could have found a relevant comment in Lavater's *Essai*.<sup>39</sup> Lilius also recounts that Herries managed to kidnap her, but was reluctant to snatch Darsie from the arms of his screaming mother, and so withdrew from the latter, but, as Lilius adds, "after darting upon you and her one of those fearful looks, which, it is said, remain with our family, as a fatal bequest of Sir Alberick, our ancestor" (*R*, XVII, 409). This description is evidently linked with others in which particular reference to Herries' horseshoe frown seems intended as a symbol of the inveterate fanaticism with which he has continued to pursue his Jacobite activities, to the point of even imprisoning his nephew. As Darsie watches Herries reading a letter (presumably from Prince Charles Edward) in which, to his dismay, he is instructed to turn northwards instead of advancing with his men on London as he had expected to do, the narrator notes that the hero had "never before observed his frown bear such a close resemblance to the shape which tradition assigned it" (*R*, XVII, 400). Lilius, too, seems to have had much the same physiognomic experience at the coronation of George III when, just after Herries has angrily muttered to her about the new monarch being a usurper, and shortly before she will, at Herries' request, replace the gage of the King's Champion with his own, she observes that "the dark hereditary frown of [their] unhappy ancestor was black upon his brow" (*R*, XVIII, 417). It is significant that no further reference is made to this hereditary characteristic once Herries has become resigned to Darsie's refusal to join him in a fresh conspiracy against the Hanoverian dynasty. Indeed, Darsie's inability to recover the horseshoe frown (not to mention its apparent absence in Lilius) may be said to have been a kind of foreshadowing of that refusal, and perhaps even of the suggestion that the hereditary curse will end with the death of Herries.

Lavater's contention that "the family physiognomy is as incontrovertible as the national" seems to have been a self-evident truth for Scott. Lavater was

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<sup>39</sup>See *Essai*, III, 162, 165, 169.

by no means the first physiognomist to put forward the idea of national physiognomies, but he was unquestionably instrumental in the re-emergence of that idea, in fiction as well as in travel books, from the 1770s onwards. Scott's own acknowledgment of national physiognomies is perhaps most memorably exemplified in the long description of the Christian and the Saracen at the beginning of *The Talisman*, which is prefaced as follows: "The champions formed a striking contrast to each other in person and features, and might have formed no inaccurate representation of their different nations" (*TT*, I, 23f). The notion that certain physical characteristics are peculiar to certain nationalities generally underlies Scott's references to various European, Afro-Asian and Levantine physiognomies. That notion is especially discernible in descriptions of the Scots. Thus of Fergus MacIvor in *Waverley* we read: "His countenance was decidedly Scottish, with all the peculiarities of the northern physiognomy" (*WA*, XVIII, 191). In *Rob Roy* a mountaineer is described as being "a sort of caricature of the national features of Scotland" (*RR*, XXVIII, 374). Such details form part of a number of descriptions of the faces, physiques and attire of the Scots, some of which seem, in their patent lyricism, to pay homage to the principle of the individuality of nations and races so dear to the Romantics.

Yet at the same time as Scott evokes the Lavaterian climate of his day, as he does through the various responses of his characters to foreign appearances or to the exoticism of someone's looks, he suggests, more especially in fiction set in the Middle Ages, that astonishment at, or distaste for, foreign faces is mainly the effect of a lack of contact between peoples. This we see ironically illustrated in descriptions of negative reactions to, or of stereotypical ideas about, the physicality of Jews and Negroes in particular, concerning which some third-person narrators give the impression of being just as racially biased as the characters therein. One notable example is this reference in *Count Robert of Paris*: "The black walked on with a species of leer peculiar to his physiognomy" (*CRP*, I, 144). Something of this racial bias is perceptible (no doubt, partly to the mild amusement of the present-day reader) in English reactions to the Scottish physiognomy even as late as the mid-eighteenth century, as we can see when the narrator of *Waverley* accounts for the surprise and terror created in the Lowlands by the Scottish Highlanders thus:

So little was the condition of the Highlands known at that late period, that the character and appearance of their population, while thus sallying forth as military adventurers, conveyed to the south-country Lowlanders as much surprise as if an invasion of African Negroes or Esquimaux Indians had issued forth from the northern mountains of their own native country (*WA*, XIV, 374).

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the extent to which *Waverley*'s moral development seems to rest on his growing sensitivity to the physical appearance of the Scots, whether seen individually or in groups. The same may be

said perhaps more emphatically of the very observant Frank Osbaldistone, who, having started out in *Rob Roy* with “an impression of dislike” for “the first Scotchman [he] chanced to meet in society” because the latter physically “coincided with [his] previous conceptions” (*RR*, IV, 110), gradually comes not only to understand the Scottish physiognomy, in some measure by carefully observing a congregation in a kirk while acknowledging the physiognomic benefits of so doing, but also to love it, even when it is also manifest in the very sound of the eponymous hero’s voice. But if Scott seems to be now and again ironically conscious of the implications of prejudice toward foreign physiognomies, as in Quentin Durward’s early reactions to the faces of some Continental Europeans, in Hereward’s dialogue with a Negro slave about skin color, or even in the admiration felt by a crowd of Gentile spectators for the beauty of the Jewess Rebecca, his treatment of national physiognomies shows him to be hardly less Eurocentric in his thinking about the human appearance than Lavater himself.<sup>40</sup>

Lavaterian, too, is Scott’s hierarchical notion of social physiognomies. In his analyses of engravings Lavater will confidently designate someone’s facial features individually or collectively as those of “the accomplished gentleman” (*Essai*, I, 60) or of “the Frenchman of a superior class” (*Essai*, III, 261) or of “an unpolished person” (*Essai*, II, 87). Scott tends to associate a particular physiognomy or look with a particular social class also, his references in this respect having to do mainly with the aristocracy, as may be seen in descriptions of the Earl of Leicester, the Marquis of Argyll, Anna Comnena, Sir William Ashton, Richard Vere, Roland Graeme and Catherine Seyton. Even the ugliness of the Count de Dunois does not lessen the fact that there is about him “an air of conscious worth and nobility...which stamped, at the first glance, the character of the high-born nobleman, and the undaunted soldier” (*QD*, VIII, 129). In other contexts Scott shows that even a certain rusticity of appearance or plainness of attire can scarcely disguise good breeding. Again, like Lavater, who does not hesitate to ascribe a royal countenance or a royal air to Frederick the Great, Charles XII of Sweden, or Henry IV of France, Scott seems to acknowledge the existence of a specifically royal physiognomy when in his very detailed portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, he refers to “that remarkable countenance, which seems at once to combine our ideas of the majestic...the pleasing, and the brilliant” (*TA*, XXII, 258); or when he describes Queen Elizabeth I as someone who “would in the lowest rank of life have been truly adjudged a noble figure, joined to a striking and commanding physiognomy” (*K*, XV,

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<sup>40</sup>For Lavater’s racist references, see *Essai*, I, 31f, 131, 244, 275; II, 145, 146; III, 57. For discussions on Lavater’s racism and Eurocentricity see Sander L. Gilman, “Lavater, Lichtenberg and the Physiognomy of the Black,” *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 215 (1978), 356-61, and Judith Wechsler, “Lavater, Stereotypes and Prejudice,” in Shookman, pp. 104-25.

190f); or when he styles the Soldan someone "on whose brow Nature had written, 'This is a King!'" (*TT*, XXVII, 325)<sup>41</sup> As with some other aspects of physiognomy discussed above, Scott reinforces the concept of social physiognomies through the responses of his fictional characters to genteel appearances, using such responses partly as a means of foreshadowing someone's aristocratic identity, as in the case of Lovel, Francis Tyrrell, Lilius Redgauntlet, Herries, Roland Graeme and Arthur Philipson.

The importance of possessing a genteel physiognomy is evidently such as to prompt the narrator of *The Antiquary* to declare it a mistake for "a man of perfect breeding" (*A*, XIX, 198) to allow his appearance to betray his profession—a detail that relates ironically to those contexts of character description in which Scott affirms the notion of professional physiognomies. Although Lavater makes no general comment on this aspect of physiognomy in his *Essai*, he acknowledges this concept in some of his analyses of engravings inasmuch as he tends to see someone's face as being appropriate to, if not shaped by, a particular profession.<sup>42</sup> Scott, on the other hand, takes it for granted that each profession leaves its mark on the appearance, referring as he does most often to the military profession, but perhaps most memorably to the religious orders, especially through descriptions of the austere facial features of the various sectarians. And yet he was astute enough an observer of the outward person to know that nothing can be more deceptive on occasion than an austere religious physiognomy, at least to judge by that moment in *Redgauntlet* when Alan Fairford sees emerging from his morning prayers "with his psalm-book in his hand," the very man who, experienced in sundry illegal activities, including contraband, will prove to be the right man for him to have turned to in order to gain access to Herries:

Nothing could be more different than his whole appearance seemed to be from the confidant of a desperate man, and the associate of outlaws in their unlawful enterprises. He was a tall, thin, bony figure, with white hair combed straight down on each side of his face, and an iron-grey hue of complexion; where the lines, or rather, as Quin said of Macklin, the cordage, of his countenance were so sternly adapted to a devotional and even ascetic expression, that they left no room for an indication of reckless daring, or sly dissimulation. In short, Trumbull appeared a perfect specimen of the rigid old Covenanter, who said only what he thought right, acted on no other principle but that of duty, and, if he committed errors, did so under the full impression that he was serving God rather than man (*R*, XII, 326f).

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<sup>41</sup>For Lavater's references to some royal countenances, see *Essai*, I, 235; II, 82, 195; III, 315, 322. An interesting parallel may be drawn between Scott's description of the Soldan and Lavater's imagining a physiognomist saying this of a portrait of Frederick the Great: "Cet homme fut destiné au Trône! Il est né pour étonner l'Univers!" (*Essai*, II, 195).

<sup>42</sup>See, for example, *Essai*, III, 195, 286, 310.

This passage might well be cited as a good illustration of that *fronti nulla fides* view of physiognomy which had so often been held in imaginative literature up to the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> It is, of course, only to be expected that, as the creator of several fictional characters who wear disguises or live under false names, Scott should have been mindful of the unreliability of the human face. This awareness is further illustrated not only through the comments of his narrators and characters on the discrepancy or contradiction between someone's external appearance and their inner self, but through contexts concerned with the portrayal of courtly manners, most notably in *Kenilworth*, in which importance is perforce attached to the business of keeping up appearances and practicing dissimulation. Such references lend a certain realism to Scott's treatment of physiognomy, the more so as we recall those sections of the *Essai* where Lavater speaks candidly of the difficulty of reading faces or confesses to his shortcomings as a physiognomist.<sup>44</sup> But if Scott seems to be here and there impugning off-hand physiognomic judgments, or, rather, suggesting that a true gift for physiognomic observation is inseparable from moral integrity, he can scarcely be said to make overtly thematic or structural use of a negative or ambivalent stance toward physiognomy and physiognomists as Fielding had done in his fiction, or as George Eliot was to do in hers.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, studded as they are with able physiognomists of all kinds and with characters that are almost always as good or bad as they look, Scott's novels are striking for a generally affirmative attitude to physiognomy—an attitude which, as regards its function in the construction of his plots, may be deemed perhaps all too affirmative, even conservative. It is, moreover, probable that Scott felt encouraged by the physiognomic atmosphere of his day to describe the outward person perhaps more often than seems justifiable from a strictly aesthetic standpoint. One is tempted to suppose that, in his apparent fondness for describing in great detail some very minor characters that appear only once, he was deliberately pandering to the Lavaterian enthusiasts among his contemporary readers, if not making up for a certain poverty of invention, especially in some of the fiction he wrote during the last years of his life. Nevertheless, at its finest, whether as a means of enhancing the drama of various human relationships and situations depicted, or of lyrically, even lovingly, conveying in remarkably graphic detail the physical pres-

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<sup>43</sup>See Tytler, pp. 138-52.

<sup>44</sup>See *Essai*, I, 90; II, 9-18.

<sup>45</sup>See Tytler, "Letters of Recommendation and False Vizors: Physiognomy in the Novels of Henry Fielding," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 2 (1990), 93-111; and Tytler, "'The Lines and Lights of the Human Countenance': Physiognomy in George Eliot's Fiction," *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies*, 36-7 (1999), 29-58.

ence of certain popular historical figures, Scott's treatment of physiognomy and pathognomy was utterly original and should be adjudged one of his abiding strengths as a novelist.

Although there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Scott was in any way directly influenced by Lavater, it is clear that his fiction represents an important manifestation of the new physiognomic climate by which European literary culture had been more or less dominated since the publication of the *Physiognomische Fragmente* in the 1770s. That Scott's treatment of the outward person may have in fact owed a good deal to Lavater's physiognomic writings is an argument that could be proposed and substantiated through the parallels noted above. What seems certain is that Scott's notion of physiognomic awareness as a product not so much of the head as of the heart is practically unthinkable except as an expression of Lavater's influence. Certainly in those novels where, in the face of seemingly irresolvable political, religious or ethnic differences and conflicts, and of rigidly hierarchical systems of governance, Scott points up the need for compassion, mercy, clemency and forgiveness, he seems for all his humanism and liberalism, to be close in spirit to the Christocentric ethos of the *Essai*, as manifest more especially in Lavater's concept of physiognomy as a means of learning to know and to love one's fellow beings.<sup>46</sup> This we sense in no small measure in the presentation of such figures as Edward Waverley, Quentin Durward, Roland Graeme, Julian Peveril and, above all, Henry Morton, in each of whom the capacity for sensitive physiognomic observation seems not unrelated to their tendency to repudiate fanaticism and violence and to behave selflessly toward others. And though Scott was by no means the first British novelist to reflect the Lavaterian climate, it is clear that with his remarkably comprehensive incorporation of physiognomy in fiction he set a pattern that can be seen to have been more or less faithfully adhered to by his European and American successors through the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. It is this aspect of Scott's literary achievement which, so often condemned in his day and somewhat overlooked in our own time, ought to be taken into account in studies concerned with his unrivalled place in the history of the novel.

#### ABBREVIATIONS USED

The copy-text used is Sir Walter Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, 25 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1852-53). Abbreviations are listed below in alphabetical order. For readers who are using another edition of Scott, the chapter number of quotations is included in Roman. When referring to

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<sup>46</sup>See *Essai*, II, 43-54. The subtitle of *Essai sur la physiognomonie* is "destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer."



*Redgauntlet* the abbreviation “Let” stands for Letter. When several characters are referred to, the footnote will identify the novel in which they appear in the order in which they are mentioned in the text.

|            |                               |            |                                |
|------------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>A</i>   | <i>The Antiquary</i>          | <i>AG</i>  | <i>Anne of Geierstein</i>      |
| <i>BD</i>  | <i>The Black Dwarf</i>        | <i>BL</i>  | <i>The Bride of Lammermoor</i> |
| <i>CD</i>  | <i>Castle Dangerous</i>       | <i>CRP</i> | <i>Count Robert of Paris</i>   |
| <i>FMP</i> | <i>The Fair Maid of Perth</i> | <i>FN</i>  | <i>The Fortunes of Nigel</i>   |
| <i>GM</i>  | <i>Guy Mannering</i>          | <i>HM</i>  | <i>The Heart of Midlothian</i> |
| <i>IV</i>  | <i>Ivanhoe</i>                | <i>K</i>   | <i>Kenilworth</i>              |
| <i>LM</i>  | <i>A Legend of Montrose</i>   | <i>OM</i>  | <i>Old Mortality</i>           |
| <i>PP</i>  | <i>Peveril of the Peak</i>    | <i>QD</i>  | <i>Quentin Durward</i>         |
| <i>R</i>   | <i>Redgauntlet</i>            | <i>RR</i>  | <i>Rob Roy</i>                 |
| <i>SD</i>  | <i>The Surgeon's Daughter</i> | <i>SRW</i> | <i>St. Ronan's Well</i>        |
| <i>TA</i>  | <i>The Abbot</i>              | <i>TB</i>  | <i>The Betrothed</i>           |
| <i>TM</i>  | <i>The Monastery</i>          | <i>TP</i>  | <i>The Pirate</i>              |
| <i>TT</i>  | <i>The Talisman</i>           | <i>TTD</i> | <i>The Two Drovers</i>         |
| <i>WA</i>  | <i>Waverley</i>               | <i>WO</i>  | <i>Woodstock</i>               |

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