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Alan Riach

The Whistler's Story
Tragedy and the Enlightenment Imagination
in *The Heart of Midlothian*

The Heart of Midlothian is generally considered Scott's most approachable novel. David Daiches tells us that "most critics consider [it to be] the best of Scott's works."¹ In his short but influential 1965 study, it is the only novel to which Thomas Crawford devotes an entire chapter, and in his 1982 revision of the same book, Crawford preserves the emphasis, citing the "extended critical debate" to which the novel has been subjected by Robin Mayhead, Dorothy van Ghent, Joan Pittock and David Craig.² In *Scottish Literature since 1707*, Marshall Walker tellingly chooses *The Heart of Midlothian* above any other of Scott's works for extended consideration before addressing the question of Scott's fluctuating appeal as a novelist, "then and now."³ When Ludovic Kennedy inquired in 1969, he found that the Edinburgh City Library's nine copies of the work were all out. The librarian estimated that there were between 180 and 200 borrowings of the book each year.⁴ So in terms of critical acclaim and

¹David Daiches, "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist," in A. Norman Jeffares, ed., *Scott's Mind and Art* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 45. Henceforth Daiches.

²Thomas Crawford, *Scott* (Edinburgh and London, 1965); *Scott* (Edinburgh, 1982). Henceforth Crawford 1965, and Crawford 1982.

³Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707* (Harlow, 1996). Henceforth Walker.

⁴Ludovic Kennedy, "12," in Allan Frazer, ed., *Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832: An Edinburgh Keepsake* (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 167. Henceforth Frazer.

popular appeal, *The Heart of Midlothian* is central. One reason for this is its crucial position in Scott's career, not simply chronologically nor because of its principle character, the "common cow-feeder's daughter" Jeanie Deans, but rather because of its balance of thematic, personal and social concerns and compulsions.

Two of the most influential accounts of Scott's career are those of Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel*⁵ and the essay by Daiches, "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist" (Daiches). For Lukács, the "tapestry" or "tushery" novels of a past of knighthood, feudalism, courtliness, chivalry and majestic nature are no less significant than those set in Scotland. They are all engaged in the initiation of a new genre and a newly invented vision of the past. For Daiches, it is the first nine novels of the *Waverley* series plus one, *Redgauntlet*, written a little later (and all set in Scotland), which are the important novels in the tradition of the genre of the novel.

Since these accounts were published, however, another overview of Scott's work has been elaborated by Graham McMaster, who contrasts the first of the series and the later Scottish novel, like this: "*Waverley*... bids a regretful farewell to the past and looks forwards with a jaunty optimism to the future.... *Redgauntlet* imagines a world in which the past is even more unavailable, but the future questionable." Scott's focus in the later novel is much more "the societal basis of personal identity, and the limits imposed by society upon autonomous action and feeling."⁶

The Heart of Midlothian is exactly mid-way in this structure. It keeps the optimism, strengths and hope of the earlier novels, but it also involves darker, more unanswerable questions and stories that refuse progressive resolutions. The most poignant, brilliantly etched and suggestive of these is the Whistler's story. In the overall context of the novel, it has often been forgotten, or else it has attracted hostile criticism. Before we begin to discuss it, though, we should have some sense of the grand design and intensely related personal and social dilemmas which the novel embodies.

The Heart of Midlothian was written in 1818, but it is set in 1737. Scotland, having united her kingdom with England in 1603, has removed her parliament to Westminster in 1707. There has been civil unrest: riots and protests were widespread. The country now has national identity but no political authority. When grave injustice happens, the court of highest earthly appeals is in London. It is a dangerous time. The events of the novel are carefully located in this period of civil unrest, after the Jacobite rising of 1715 and not long before that of 1745. The Porteous Riots, with which the novel begins,

⁵Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, transl. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth, 1969).

⁶Graham McMaster, *Scott and Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 49.

were in effect the Edinburgh mob's protest against the Union of 1707, and both as novelist and as historian, Scott catches the mood in Chapter 4: "the hitherto silent expectation of the people became changed into that deep and agitating murmur, which is sent forth by the ocean before the tempest begins to howl."⁷

The outlaws (robbers, gypsies, highwaymen, smugglers) who populate the novel are part of this great ocean, but it is the respectable individual Jeanie Deans who is at its center. The central event of the novel's plot depends entirely upon her heroic walk from Edinburgh to London to plead for an intercession to save her sister Effie from execution as punishment for the crime of child-murder. At this time, the inability to produce a child was considered proof that it had been murdered, and Effie does not know what has become of her son. Queen Caroline's merciful sympathy is given and the pardon arrives. Jeanie's heroism is celebrated and the letter of the law is upheld.

But the questions the narrative proposes remain questions, resolved by the plot but unresolved in society. In the novel's happy resolution, luck is in the service of justice, but the sense that that might somehow misfire is never entirely absent, and sustains a tension in the narrative. In this it resembles *Twelfth Night*: ultimately festive, a comic release of celebrative energy in which the malevolent aspects are banished, it is nevertheless a world in which tragedy, mistakes, bad timing, missing correspondences, are always, and always felt to be, imminent. The conventions of realism Scott is obliged to observe as a novelist may seem ponderous, but they should not obscure the artifice with which his story is contrived—an artifice at least as dramatically tense as that of *Twelfth Night*.

This structure of personal and social themes is evident in the careful balance of extreme emotions and steadfast convictions which are held and revealed in an unfolding pattern by the main characters: the sisters, Effie and Jeanie, both daughters of the staunch Presbyterian Kirk elder David Deans, a man whose paternal authority and religious humility combine in a stern yet sympathetic portrait.

His character is beautifully brought out in the opera *Jeanie Deans* by Hamish MacCunn, in which his aria on discovering Effie's alleged crime is a masterly expression of grief, compassion, rage, defeat and sustained dignity.⁸

Effie, whose rebellious nature has led her to consummate her affair with the outlaw Robertson and give birth to the child whose disappearance prompts the charge against her of child-murder, is a free spirit whose trust in justice and the law is held despite temptation. When the prison is stormed by the Edin-

⁷Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford & New York, 1982), p. 42, Chapt. 4. Henceforth Scott.

⁸Hamish MacCunn, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood and Other Music*, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion CDA66818).

burgh mob, her lover urges her to take the opportunity to escape. She refuses. Jeanie, however, is the pivotal figure who will not compromise herself by lying to save her sister at the trial, and instead sets out to London to seek intercession. (For the sake of quickly clarifying the plot, the outlaw Robertson is later revealed as the nobleman Sir George Staunton, and marries Effie, who becomes Lady Staunton, and we'll come back to them later.)

Around these characters whose story forms the central plot, a number of other more colorful, melodramatic and highly spiced figures come and go, from the grand old Laird of Dumbiedykes (whose deathbed scene in Chapter 8 is richly comic) to the fresh Tabasco ferocity of Madge Wildfire, whose cruelty and heavy hints of prophecy interleave the world of reason and law with that of chaos, nature, and demonic energy. It's Madge who has carried Effie's baby away and precipitated the action which moves the plot of the novel along. Yet it is in the structure of the book as a whole that Scott's artifice, and the extent to which his characters and their social world are interdependent, can best be understood.

The novel was published in four volumes, conventionally enough for the period, of course, and much has been made of Scott's writing to fill out the obligation of the fourth volume. (He was paid by the word.) But the book is much more clearly divided not into four, but into three parts:

Part 1, Chaps. 1-7, is introductory, a panorama of Edinburgh describing the events surrounding the Porteous riots.

Part 2, Chaps. 8-46, is Jeanie Deans's story: she is the main focus of our attention as she comes to terms with the family predicament, makes her picaresque journey, returns with the pardon and saves her sister.

Part 3, Chaps. 47-52, is a balance to the introductory chapters, and counterpoints the civic unrest depicted there against the domestic happiness achieved by Jeanie and the man she marries, Reuben Butler, whose character is that of the passive hero formerly center-stage in Scott's fiction. But this final section also contains the story of the Whistler.

This last section has often been criticized. Crawford says it works on a "lower level" because Scott is less interested in the peasantry than in the paternalist landlord class (Crawford 1965, p. 91). Frequently the Whistler's story itself has been dismissed. Daiches approves the pastoral ending and following him, Walker endorses John Buchan's view that the domestic chapters are justified: "he wanted to show Scottish life passing into a mellower phase in which old unhappy things were forgotten. The figures, who have danced so wildly at the bidding of fate, should find reward in a gentle, bright, leisurely old age. Even so Tolstoy rounded off his *War and Peace*." But this evaluation is at the expense of the Whistler's story: Buchan's judgment is right, Walker says, despite "Scott's undesirable interest in money" and "the perfunctory melodrama of George Staunton's death at the hand of his and Effie Deans's son" (Walker, p. 125).

The episode has been problematic from the book's first publication. The 1818 notice in the *British Review* describes it in detail before dismissing it as "trash":

As an instrument of vengeance upon the heads of his guilty parents, the youth, for whose supposed death when an infant, Euphemia Deans had been sentenced as a murderer, is brought upon the stage in the character of a smuggler on the Highland border, and has the part assigned to him of shooting his father, in a random fire of musketry. This event, so unnatural and unexpected, is another atonement made to the stunted morality of the tale...

[I]f he [Scott] had not been compelled by his mercantile engagement to spin out the thread of his story, with or without materials, so as...to secure the fourth thousand pounds, he would have scorned to introduce any part of the trash...⁹

In the *Quarterly Review* in 1821, there is a greater interest in Scott's assiduous attention to the sheer number of stories involved in the novel, and an amused caution at the resulting work foisted upon the reader: "instead of floating down the united stream of events, we are forced separately to ascend each of its tributary branches, like Humboldt examining the bifurcation of the Oroonoko." Nevertheless, "we are not sure...that it might not have been politic in the author to suppress almost all his fourth volume" (Hayden, p. 224).

For Crawford, in both 1965 and 1982, the Whistler episode is also merely "perfunctory melodrama." But Crawford also notes that the Whistler "seems to belong to a work with a different subject and a different tone" and Scott's attitude to him is first, sympathy, then, disapproval (Crawford 1965, pp. 89, 96-7; Crawford 1982, pp. 93, 103). Crawford's observation of that conflict of feeling is acute. It is too schematic to say, as James Kerr does, that, "The motive behind Staunton's career is to debunk an ideology that poses a threat to the form of social order in which Scott believes." The novel delivers a punishment the British government could not, killing off the leader of the Porteous riot. "While Effie and Staunton succeed in evading the force of the law, they cannot escape the pattern of fatality that seems to determine the form of Scott's historical romances."¹⁰ But this misses a crucial component of Scott's novel: his sympathy. It's certainly there for Effie through the whole course of her life; it's there for Staunton, otherwise Robertson, the charming (but always slightly anxious) rogue who has ruined Madge Wildfire but whose devotion to Effie is constant, and whose criminality is always on the point of being redeemed by both his aristocratic birthright and his incipient nobility of purpose. And it's there most importantly for the Whistler himself.

⁹John O. Hayden, ed., *Scott: The Critical Heritage* (London, 10), p. 169. Henceforth Hayden.

¹⁰James Kerr, *Fiction Against History: Scott as Storyteller* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 84.

His appearance, in chapt. 50, to Lady Staunton (Effie) and her guide, David, occurs as they are on an excursion to visit a waterfall in the hills. The grand scene reveals itself after a five-mile walk, and to get the best view they have to climb around a precipice, "clinging like sea-birds to the face of the rock." (Scott, p. 479, Chapt. 50) David Richards has noted the importance of this setting: "The landscape, and the precipice in particular, is an apt historical symbol for Scott's dynamic historical presentation of Highland culture since the Highlanders fell, were pushed or jumped to destruction. Precipices abound in Scott's novels."¹¹ Effie is about to slip and cries out; she is held by the 14-year-old guide—she screams with terror, and,

To her amazement, the scream was answered by a whistle from above, of a tone so clear and shrill, that it was heard even amid the noise of the waterfall.

In this moment of terror and perplexity, a human face, black, and having grizzled hair hanging down over the forehead and cheeks, and mixing with mustaches and a beard of the same colour, and as much matted and tangled, looked down on them from a broken part of the rock above.

'It is the Enemy!' said the boy...

"No, no," exclaims Lady Staunton, "it is a man—For God's sake, my friend, help us!"

The face glared at them, but made no answer; in a second or two afterwards, another, that of a young lad, appeared beside the first, equally swart and begrimed, but having tangled black hair, descending in elf locks, which gave an air of wildness and ferocity to the whole expression of the countenance....[Effie] though she observed the lips of the younger being whom she supplicated more as he spoke in reply, not a word reached her ear (Scott, pp. 479-80 [Chapt. 50]).

The poignancy of this encounter in the melodramatic context is carefully layered. The first dark figure, the adult, is silent, stares on the unfortunates without moving to help or even appearing to recognize their predicament. He is unresponsive, and his seeming indifference to their fate (neither sympathy nor cruelty is registered in his posture, looking down on them), as well as his wild appearance, prompts the guide to identify him as the Devil—"The Enemy!"

But then the Whistler appears, a young lad who resembles the first wild man in dress and physique, but is immediately responsive to the cry for help from the woman neither of them can yet know is his mother. His words come forth inaudible to her. For her, at this moment, he is mute.¹²

¹¹David Richards, *Masks of Difference* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 135. Henceforth Richards.

¹²Cf. Ernest Renan, "In most ancient languages, the words used to designate foreign peoples are drawn from two sources: either words that signify 'to stammer' 'to mumble' or words that signify 'mute'." (Richards, p. 1).

A moment afterwards it appeared he had not mistaken the nature of her supplication.... The younger apparition disappeared, and immediately after lowered a ladder of twisted osiers (Scott, p. 480).

She ascends the ladder; her guide (her nephew, in fact, therefore, the Whistler's cousin) follows, and they find themselves "surrounded on every side by precipices"—in an unknown recess confronted by their rescuers. The tall old man, now lying down, looks on them with "lazy and listless apathy," but the Whistler is described as

a tall, lathy, young savage; his dress a tattered plaid and philabeg, no shoes, no stockings, no hat or bonnet, the place of the last being supplied by his hair, twisted and matted like the *glibbe* of the ancient wild Irish, and, like theirs, forming a natural thickset, stout enough to bear off the cut of a sword. Yet the eyes of the lad were keen and sparkling; his gesture free and noble, like that of all savages. He took little notice of David Butler, but gazed with wonder on Lady Staunton, as a being different probably in dress, and superior in beauty, to any thing he had ever beheld (Scott, p. 480).

He helps them up a further ladder and out to the way back to the safety of the Manse.

How far the Whistler stands from Lady Staunton is poignantly emphasized, but that distance works both ways: it is also a register of how far she is from him, or, to elaborate, it is a signal of the distance between the world of landed society and order to which Effie has been promoted and to which Scott himself belonged (and struggled to stay with), and the world of all savages to which the Whistler is consigned. The Whistler's tragedy cannot be accommodated by that world. His life must be passed elsewhere.

Chapt. 52 begins with the encounter which leaves Sir George Staunton a "bloody corpse" (p. 501) and the Whistler in captivity in a hay-filled barn. When Jeanie Deans visits this "born imp of Satan," (p. 502) she tries "in vain to trace the likeness of either of his very handsome parents. Yet how could she refuse compassion to a creature so young and so wretched,—so much more wretched than even he himself could be aware of, since the murder he had too probably committed with his own hand, but in which he at any rate participated, was in fact a parricide" (Scott, p. 504, Chapt. 52).

She gives him food and asks him what his intention would be if he were to escape the sentence of death "'Join wi' Rob Roy'" he replies. Overcome with compassion, Jeanie frees him. He instantly sets the place on fire and makes his bid for liberty. Later inquiries reveal he escaped to a ship whose captain transported him to America where he was sold

as a slave, or indented servant, to a Virginian planter, far up the country. When these tidings reached Butler [Jeanie's husband], he sent over to America a sufficient sum to redeem the lad from slavery, with instructions that measures should be taken

for improving his mind, restraining his evil propensities, and encouraging whatever good might appear in his character. But this aid came too late (Scott, p. 506, Chapt. 52).

What follows, Scott's biographer John Sutherland describes as "volumes of romance compressed into two sentences."¹³

The young man had headed a conspiracy in which his inhuman master was put to death, and had then fled to the next tribe of wild Indians. He was never more heard of; and it may therefore be presumed that he lived and died after the manner of that savage people, with whom his previous habits had well fitted him to associate (Scott, p. 506, Chapt. 52).

Placed only a page or so from the end of the novel, the resonance of these lines is emphatic and enduring.

Scott was of course an enormously productive writer, but there is surprisingly little reference to America in his work. Other than Major Bridgenorth's memories of New England life in *Peveril of the Peak*, America figures largely by analogy. The generalized analogy between Scottish Highlanders and Native American Indians, symbolizing romantic barbarism (as opposed to the civilized Hanoverian world) has been widely noted and received ample comment. In Alexander Welsh's *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, for example, the dedicatory epistle to *Ivanhoe* is quoted, in which the recent government of the north of Scotland (that is, the Highlands) is likened to a state "nearly as simple and patriarchal as those of our good allies the Mohawks and the Iroquois."¹⁴ Also, Welsh says, "Rob Roy [with whom the Whistler had hoped to find refuge], shares his symbolic stature with that of the Indian" (Welsh, p. 90). The 1829 Introduction to *Rob Roy* notes that the hero's character, which blends "the wild virtues, the subtle policy, and unrestrained licence of an American Indian, was flourishing in Scotland during the Augustan age of Queen Anne and George I."¹⁵ The proximity of Rob Roy's savage world to that of the court in London is more than geographical, however. As the Whistler's story makes painfully clear, there are ties of family that cross the boundaries of cultural, political and economic identity. In *Rob Roy* this is made emphatically important as the Highland rogue, and the Lowland merchant Bailie Nicol Jarvie (his

¹³John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott* (Oxford, 1995), p. 217. The point is, of course, that Scott couldn't have written "volumes of romance" about this story: two sentences are all he can give it. Henceforth Sutherland.

¹⁴Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New York, 1968), p. 90. Henceforth Welsh.

¹⁵Quoted in Welsh, p. 90.

companion, counterpoint and clever foil, comic, but never ridiculous) are in fact full cousins.

In a general sense Scott is simply drawing upon the conventional imagery of Rousseau's noble savage to endorse ideas of romantic heroism, foreshadowing the outsider as Byronic devil and building on the idea of epic atavism, as described by James Macpherson in *Ossian* in the 1760s, with specific reference to the Scottish Highlands (though we should note that Scott despised *Ossian* as a thin and poor example of proto-romanticism). Of course, Scott is also drawing on an aspect of Milton's Satan, the first of the great "Romantic Sinners." But the specific identification of the other as a being excluded from civilized European society is pre-eminent in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* of 1690, where Locke says that "in the beginning all the world was America" and "America...is still a Pattern of the First Ages in Asia and Europe" (cited in Richards, p. 74).

This sense of the "First Ages" represented in America could, perhaps, be as easily represented by an iconography of savagery from various other parts of the world. To Dr. Johnson, visiting the Highlands of Scotland in 1773, the inhabitants and their country seemed as remote to Lowlanders as those of Borneo or Sumatra and Scott also likens the Highlander to oriental mountaineers or reconstructed Afghani tribesmen. In "The Culloden Papers" Scott says that Highlanders were considered as "complete barbarians; and the mass of the people cared no more about them than the merchants of New York about the Indians who dwell beyond the Allegheny mountains."¹⁶ This identification of a remote and alien being is, as David Richards puts it, intended "not simply to satisfy a desire to understand other cultures, but to articulate an alternative social world for a European readership to occupy imaginatively" (Richards, pp. 126-7).

The problem is that while this may be true of the world described by Johnson and Boswell, or the world invented by James Macpherson, or the world of *Rob Roy* in Scott's great fiction, it is not true of the Whistler's story. The tradition of "Romantic Sinners" is a form of accommodation; the Whistler's story is one of exclusion. It is too short, brutish and nasty for an enlightened imagination to occupy fully or for any length of time, and the savage people the Whistler joins are beyond the scope of even Scott's most generous sympathy. The Whistler has crossed over from a world of savagery and tragedy the Enlightenment mind could not accommodate. Unlike Highland society in *Waverley*, for example, which Scott clearly shows giving way to the developing mercantile economy of the recently united kingdom, the society in which the Whistler survives does not pass away into the new. It is pushed west, relocated, exists elsewhere, independent of British law altogether.

In *The Ignoble Savage*, her study of "American Literary Racism" between

¹⁶Quoted in Richards, p. 122.

1790 and 1890, Louise K. Barnett draws attention to the fact that although Scott was immensely popular in the United States and demonstrably inspired American writers, "Neither Scott's chivalric spectacle nor his stratified society could be reproduced" in America. "The political conflicts of English [sic] history—Jacobite and Hanoverian, Cavalier and Puritan—had to be replaced by the struggle of opposing colonial groups: English versus other nationalities of settlers each with supporting Indians, or by the stark racial and cultural confrontation of Whites and Indians."¹⁷ The frontier romance, in Barnett's view, by concluding with the union of the white American couple and the death or defeat of Indians, conveyed the insistence upon a new national identity. In such general terms, one might argue that Scott's work is analogous. As Edgar Johnson says, "Scott's great theme was always the struggle between the dying and the emerging,"¹⁸ and in David Richards's words, "Taken as a body of material, the Highland novels portray a process of repression of dissident ethnicities which borders on genocide" (Richards, p. 133).

It borders on genocide because Scott is always making as well as unmaking the reality and dream of Highland life. As Richards correctly stresses, Scott is both a novelist and an antiquarian: his work is a delivery into the realm of explicit articulation of "the 'unconscious' schemes of folklore" (Richards, p. 127). Paradoxically, this allows and encourages a kind of survival even as it codifies, regulates and suppresses. As the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri said when he visited Scotland for the first time in 1986, "while culture, during a time of political impotence, can become kitsch, it can also function as continual declaration and resistance."¹⁹

I began by referring to the shift in Scott's work, from an optimistic, rational, classical temper in which the concerns of judgment, balance and order are predominant and which the attractions of glamour effectively endorse, to a temper more given to darkness, dream and symbol. If the modern always arrives at the expense of the savage, this expense seems to be higher in Scott's later work. The Whistler's story points forward to *Redgauntlet* but it is more disturbing than anything in the later novel, and this, perhaps, is the deepest reason it has been found unsatisfactory in the context of *The Heart of Midlothian* as a whole.

Scott is frequently seen as "a man of the Scottish Enlightenment, who believed in progress, rationality, moderation, reconciliation."²⁰ "Here, then, is

¹⁷Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage* (Westport and London, 1975), p. 65.

¹⁸Edgar Johnson, "Scott and the Corners of Time," in Alan Bell, ed., *Scott: Bicentenary Essays* (Edinburgh and London, 1973), p. 37. Henceforth Bell.

¹⁹Ben Okri, "Diary," *New Statesman*, 112 (8 August 1986), 16.

²⁰David Daiches, "Scott and Scotland," in Bell, p. 40.

the basic Scott: the realist, the sceptic, the Augustan man of letters, the British British patriot of the Age of Reason."²¹ Scott's was the first country house in Scotland to be illuminated by gas. As a true progressive, he installed gas at Abbotsford and became the first chairman of the Oil Gas Company. He welcomed the advent of steam transport and was interested in the development of a railway for moving coal and lime.

But the other side of this is not simply the lover of the past, the assiduous collector of innumerable mementoes and trinkets from Scotland's history, the High Tory patriot whose national sympathies were always to be contained by Unionism. These are both aspects of a man of reason. There is another Scott, to be found in the nightmares of *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Redgauntlet*, and in the Whistler's story.

The title of the novel, *The Heart of Midlothian*, was the name given to the Old Tolbooth, the prison where Effie was incarcerated, Edinburgh's version of the Bastille, which was torn down the year before the novel was written. Its massive door was presented to Scott, who had it set into a wall at Abbotsford. That Scott considered the prison door worth preserving like this says something about the symbolic importance Scott attached to it. To recall the title of Goya's famous etching, "The sleep of reason produces monsters": nightmares live behind that door.

The world of the Enlightenment from which Scott emerged, no matter how much equanimity and accommodation it possessed, was also exclusive. As Archie Turnbull has shown, the role played by the ideas and ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment in the birth and development of the United States is enormously significant: in literal terms (the mentors and teachers of three—possibly four—of the first five Presidents of the United States were all Scots from an Enlightenment background, and acknowledged by their pupils as mentors) and in broader philosophical terms (the elective monarchy described in the Declaration of Arbroath clearly foreshadows the recognition of the value of life, liberty and the rights of people enshrined in the Declaration of Independence 450 years later.²² But to Scotland and America alike, there were people to whom the words could not apply.

In March 1818, a few months before *The Heart of Midlothian* was completed and published (in late July or early August), Scott wrote a review for Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*.²³ The review was of a novel Scott later

²¹Hugh Trevor-Roper, "13," in Frazer, p. 181.

²²Archie Turnbull, "Scotland and America," in David Daiches, Peter Jones and Jean Jones, eds., *The Scottish Enlightenment 1730-1790: A Hotbed of Genius* (Edinburgh, 1996), pp. 138, 143.

²³Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York and London, 1996), pp. 191-6. Henceforth Shelley.

declared to be his favorite work of fiction, and, given the paucity of references to America in Scott's work it is worth noting for a curious slip of detail, and, finally, for a curious association of identity. The review begins by emphasizing the shifting scenes and "stupendous drama" of the "real events of the world" in recent years—the Napoleonic era—"so rapid and so various"—that have seen the career of "a private adventurer" rise "to the greatest of European thrones" and end "an exile, in a remote speck of an island, some thousands of miles from the scene of his triumphs." This reflects upon Scott's judgment of the novel: "The very extravagance of the present production will now, therefore, be, perhaps, in its favour, since the events which have actually passed before our eyes have made the atmosphere of miracles that in which we most readily breathe."

Scott describes the story of a monster who, like the Whistler, is literally "surplus population" (Sutherland, p. 218). Gradually, he learns how to speak and to hear music from a blind man who plays beautifully on a guitar, airs "sweet and mournful," before being discovered, forced to flee and confront his maker with the question he must ask himself: "I had never yet seen a being resembling me... What was I?" (Shelley, p. 81).

The novel, of course, was *Frankenstein* and the curious association of identity between the monster and the Whistler is signaled by a tiny slip in Scott's review. In Volume 2, Chapt. 9 of Mary Shelley's novel, the monster promises that if Frankenstein creates a mate for him, then "neither you nor any other human being shall ever see us again: I will go to the vast wilds of South America..." (Shelley, p. 99). Scott paraphrases the passage: the monster "concludes with devouring vengeance against Frankenstein and all his race, if he does not agree to one request, to create a female companion for him like himself, with whom he proposed to retire to the wilds of North America, and never again to come into contact with man" (Shelley, p. 195).

The *Frankenstein* review was written at almost exactly the same time that Scott was about to write the Whistler away, into the wilderness of North America, not to be seen again. The change from Shelley's "South America" to Scott's "North America" might be a slip suggesting Scott's unconscious recognition of affinity between the two unaccommodated figures. Both of these outsiders, it seems, were, in the words with which Mary Shelley famously brought her novel to an end, to be "borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley, p. 156).