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DEFICIENCIES: MENTAL DISABILITY AND THE IMAGINATION IN SCOTT'S WAVERLEY NOVELS

Colin Carman

Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* and *The Heart of Midlothian* register a shift in nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish attitudes toward the mentally ill, and both novels are central to the following analysis of mental disability as it operates under the guises of idiocy and insanity in Scott's historical novels. Social historians of madness are clear that the early 1800s in Britain saw a full-scale reform of the ways in which the mentally ill were controlled and ostensibly "cured."¹ Between 1816 and 1819, no fewer than three reform bills were presented by members of a special committee that painstakingly detailed the abuse of inmates at charity hospitals in Bethlem, York Asylum, and St. Luke's. Within two of the largest of the private madhouses at Bethnal Green in London, one patient saw his feet amputated after developing gangrene and tuberculosis inside a damp and rat-infested jail-cell while at least one hundred more inmates died from typhus during the winter of 1810-11.² Public debate inevitably arose over the welfare of the insane and the idiotic, and already alarmed by rumors of the King's derangement of mind, Anglo-Scottish society saw an explosion in mad-doctors and other "authorities" touting new therapeutics outside the asylum walls.

¹ On the domestication of madness, see Andrew Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder: Anglo-American Psychiatry in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: Univ. of California P, 1989), 76. For further discussion of "new forms of treating the mad," see Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 32 and 92.

² See Scull's "The 1815-16 Parliamentary Inquiry" in *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 115-175 (p.120).

One such authority was Andrew Duncan, the president of the Royal College of Physicians at Edinburgh, who decried what he called the “deplorable situation of pauper lunatics, even in this opulent, flourishing, and charitable metropolis of Scotland.”³ In his *Letter to his Majesty’s Sheriffs-Depute in Scotland* (1818), Duncan called for the speedy construction of four new lunatic asylums: one at Edinburgh for the east quarter, another in Glasgow for the west, a third at Dumfries for the south, and a fourth at Aberdeen for the north. Duncan’s motivations were in part nationalistic. Edinburgh, he argued, must remain on equal footing with London, for “we are much behind our fellow subjects in England” whose Acts of Parliament in 1808 and 1811 to better care for the idiots and lunatics represented a serious challenge to Scotland’s own “humane Legislature” (7-9). Duncan’s dreams of reform would be eventually realized: by 1820, when the public asylum at Dundee opened its doors, additional asylums in Montrose, Glasgow, and Aberdeen were already in operation.

In what follows, I read Scott’s depictions of the idiotic and insane as crucial contributions to this trend towards the humane treatment of the mentally ill during the nineteenth century in Scotland.⁴ In *Waverley*, the fiercely protective mother of a minor but meaningful character named Davie Gellatley comments on her son’s inferior social status by insisting that her Davie is by no means as “silly as folk tak him for.”⁵ After likening Davie to the idiot boy of Wordsworth’s 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, Scott follows his poetic allusion with Janet Gellatley’s defense of her mentally disabled son, in dialect: “Davie’s no just like other folk, puir fallow,” for “I can tell you a story o’ Davie” (W 321, 320). She imparts the tale to prove Davie’s loyalty to his master Baron of Bradwardine but

³ Andrew Duncan [senior], *A letter to his majesty’s sheriffs-depute in Scotland, recommending the establishment of four national asylums for the reception of criminals and pauper lunatics* (Edinburgh, 1818), 5.

⁴ I can safely couple idiocy and insanity as forms of mental debility because, according to British legal history, both conditions often resulted in a person (known as a “petitioner”) appearing before a Commission of Lunacy, which since the fourteenth century protected the estates of lunatics and idiots through a procedure known as the commission *de lunatic inquirendo*. For its history, see Suzuki Akihito, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient, and the Family in England, 1820-1860* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2006), 19.

⁵ Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 320. Hereafter cited as W. All subsequent references are to this edition except where otherwise noted.

also to elicit sympathy through storytelling. In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Scott offers another representation of mental disability—in this more violent and unsettling instance, insanity—in the form of Madge Wildfire whose “total derangement of mind” is attributable to her mother’s murder of her illegitimate child.⁶ The novel’s heroine Jeanie Deans is provided with what Scott calls a “dark insight into Madge’s history” when the poor lunatic raves about when her mother seized and slaughtered her newborn child: “I think she buried my best wits with it, for I have never been just mysell since” (*HM* 276). Here, too, Scott’s own characterization of cognitive impairment is explicitly related to Wordsworth’s—an allusion to “the poet of Grasmere” and “his verses on the Thorn”⁷ anticipate the role that infanticide plays in Madge’s mental breakdown—and the reasons behind one’s deficient state of mind have to be explained and indeed defended through narrative in order for the able-minded Jeanie to look kindly on this “raging lunatic” (*HM* 273, 271).

Still, Walter Scott was very much a man of his time and his fictions reflect many of the prejudices against the mentally disabled. Davie and Madge are to be feared. They are figures of mystery, disorder, even the occult though these negative traits fail to impinge upon their worthiness of sympathy, for Scott’s idiots and lunatics *also* possess intense, albeit limited, powers of imagination. Scott’s romances suggest that the mentally unfit do in fact have access to that exalted state of mind most cherished by the high Romantics, that is, the imaginative mind—that “living power,” according to Coleridge, that “prime agent of all human perception.”⁸ The mentally disabled figure, whether it be the “poor simpleton” Davie Gellatley or the “poor maniac” Madge Wildfire, occupies the borderland between disability and ability, the dark riddle of mental deficiency and the light of reason, the freedoms of insanity and the repressions of reason (*W* 317, *HM* 363).

⁶ Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, ed. David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993), 277. Hereafter cited as *HM*. All subsequent references are to this edition except where otherwise noted.

⁷ This phrase did not appear in the first edition of 1818 but is present in the “Magnum” edition of the novel published in 1830: Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels*, Vol. XII, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, (Edinburgh: Cadell & Co.; London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1830), 269.

⁸ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. G. M. Watson Jr. (London: Everyman, 1993), 167.

Two things seem particularly useful about Scott's effort to humanize the mentally disabled in relation to Scottish psychiatry history. One is the attempt to make the period's changing relationship with the mentally impaired visible and to thus include disability in a larger, and still emerging, history of the underrepresented, or what R.A. Houston calls in his *Madness and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* a "history from below."⁹ Terminologically speaking, "disability" is a contemporary term but far from being anachronistic, it's an apt way to understand incurable conditions like idiocy and insanity in Scott because these inferior cognitive states are repeatedly defined in relation to the more able-minded and imaginative.¹⁰ In short, idiocy and insanity are rendered "disabled" by the Scottian narrator who flexes this living power as the sign of his sovereignty.

A subsidiary objective of this argument is to locate (dis)ability in Scott's historical fiction as a particular epistemological obstacle to interpretive transparency, as a subjectivity frustratingly closed to the monolithic power of the author-historian. In Scott, the unruliness of the idiotic and insane mind has to be brought under control by the speaker since disability frequently occasions, as Mitchell and Snyder note in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, the "act of meaning-making" whereby disability and its uncertain etiology can be "pierced by storytelling."¹¹ This article argues that disability enables narration inasmuch as it appears to catalyze the act of storytelling, so much so that despite the ability of back-stories and histories to explain the origins of one's disability, idiocy and insanity incite authorial attempts to diagnose and manage these conditions. Scott's surrogate in *Waverley* is the imaginative Edward Waverley himself who, upon meeting Davie, listens patiently as the idiot boy recites a ballad.

⁹ R.A. Houston, *Madness and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 1.

¹⁰ On the terminological question of whether or not "mental illnesses" should be differentiated from "cognitive disabilities," see Margaret Price, "Mental Disability and Other Terms of Art," *Professions* (New York: MLA, 2010), 117-123, p. 118.

¹¹ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: Univ of Michigan P, 2000), 6. In terms of authorial control, Christopher Nagle, in *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era*, refers to Wordsworth and his "trinity of Romantic control mechanisms: retrospection, tranquility, and contemplation" (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2007), 81. The idiot figure lacks such mechanisms.

This is in response to a series of questions posed by Waverley, but the boy, who reminds Scott's hero of the witch in Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*, "conveyed no information" (W 41). That lack of intelligibility is what at once frustrates and facilitates the mind of Waverley and the act of interpretation itself. For some time, historians of madness, from Foucault to Porter, have argued that madness cannot be understood apart from Western intellectual history since it emerges as a byproduct of the Enlightenment's faith in *homo rationalis* and his natural right to *logos* and order. The absence of reason constitutes what Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, calls an "excess of meaning," while Porter, taking up and expanding this claim, claims that "madness was Protean, in that the idea itself encompassed no end of meanings."¹² Scott's mad-folk plunge the reader into a maze of meanings and reveal overall a spectrum of cognitive disabilities never entirely out of touch with the romantic imagination.

To start, I wish to trace Scott's sympathy for the disabled to two initial contexts, the biographical and the socio-historical, which I will address first before returning to *Waverley* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* for more sustained explications. First, John Gibson Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott* reminds us of a fact too often overlooked: Scott wrote the first recorded case of poliomyelitis in the British Isles. A nerve disorder in his leg not only prevented him from early exercise at the High School of Edinburgh but destroyed his later hopes of becoming a soldier. As a consequence, it shaped the fictions Scott came to write involving himself and others. By the time of his birth, in 1771, as the ninth child and seventh son to a barrister father and Episcopalian mother, Walter Scott senior and Anne Rutherford had already buried five of their children. Though lawyers occupied the upper echelon of Scottish society, the Scotts occupied the third floor of a town house in College Wynd, near the College of Edinburgh and only a few hundred yards from some of the

¹² Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988), 19. Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, 17. For more on Foucault in relation to Romantic representation of madness, see Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996), 163.

worst slums in Europe.¹³ Edinburgh's population grew exponentially between 1750 and 1780, and Scott spent his first eighteen months in one of its most overcrowded, and unsanitary, sections.

It was at this time, in early 1773, that Scott was stricken with a three-day teething fever and suddenly lost all feeling in his right leg. A wet nurse brought the matter to the Scotts' attention and the baby was promptly sent to live with his grandfather, a physician in possession of a farm thirty miles outside the city in Sandy Knowe. All sorts of therapeutics were administered. In a "Memoir of the early Life of Sir Walter Scott, written by himself,"¹⁴ Scott recalls being swaddled in sheep carcasses. The most striking aspect of Scott's disability, which he terms "my lameness," involves a potentially violent woman whom his mother had sent with him to Dr. Rutherford's farm in Sandy Knowe.¹⁵ The following anecdote uses the violence associated with female insanity not only to heighten the feelings of vulnerability which Scott wishes to convey, but to darken the history of his own disability with a dash of Scottish folklore:

[T]he damsel sent on that important mission had left her heart behind her, in the keeping of some wild fellow, it is likely, who had done and said more to her than he was like to make good. She became extremely desirous to return to Edinburgh, and as my mother made a point of her remaining where she was, she contracted a sort of hatred at poor me, as the cause of her being detained at Sandy-Knowe. This rose, I suppose, to a sort of delirious affection, for she confessed to old Alison Wilson, the housekeeper, that she had carried me up to the Craigs, meaning, under a strong temptation of the Devil, to cut my throat with her scissors, and bury me in the moss. [...] She was dismissed, of course, and I have heard became afterwards a lunatic.¹⁶

The anecdote, replete with hearsay and yet another allusion to Wordsworthian lunacy, bears all the traces of textual constructedness. By 1826, *Lyrical Ballads* had been in print for more than two decades and Scott's recollection bears an unmistakable resemblance to Wordsworth's

¹³ John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 11.

¹⁴ John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell; London: John Murray and Whitaker and Co., 1837), I:16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-6.

"The Thorn," the same ballad that Scott correlates with his character Madge Wildfire and that also features a "little babe" buried beneath a "hill of moss so fair."¹⁷ But regardless of whether the tale is fact or fiction, it serves only to intensify the degree to which disability begets danger and dislocation in what might be considered Scott's (personal) "history from below," that is, an incident told from the remembered perspective of a child with special needs.

In this retrospective mode, Scott relies on his strengths as a storyteller to triumph over past adversity. He puts the damsel figure in her place, providing both a cause for her lunacy (unreciprocated love) and an outcome (incarceration). During Scott's lifetime, there appears to have been no limit to the factors believed to "cause" lunacy: Phillipe Pinel cited an excess of bodily fluids as the cause and "spontaneous diarrhea" as the cure while Percy Shelley saw a carnivorous diet as igniting the "irrationalities of ill temper."¹⁸ Irrationality had been long attributed to demonic possession, witchcraft, and, even within the elite educational circles in Tudor England, the disorder of one's astrological signs.¹⁹ In the devil-made-me-do-it defense, which Scott applies to the damsel who threatened his life, we see the first of many representations of mental illness, specifically lunacy, that intertwine mental disorder with demonism.

If Scott's personal motives for humanizing the mentally ill are not altogether persuasive, consider what Scott calls, in the context of *Waverley*, the "Scotch ideas of the period" (W 47). Something remarkable and altogether new occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century in Scotland: the mentally infirmed began to speak for themselves. A whole host of studies attest to this historical and legal fact. Houston relies on civil court inquests, or "brieves" brought against a person believed to be mentally incapable, to show how idiots and lunatics were lumped together and found *incompos mentis*.²⁰ This meant that the mentally unfit were forced to take the stand and defend themselves in open court.

¹⁷ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, eds. M. Gamer and D. Porter (Ontario: Broadview, 2008), 1.242. Cited hereafter as *LB*.

¹⁸ Phillipe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. D. D. Davis, M. D. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1806), Google E-Book accessed March 1, 2013, 255. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Lee Clark (NY: New Amsterdam Books, 1988), 85-6.

¹⁹ See Scull in *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, 175-6.

²⁰ Houston, *Madness and Society*, 35.

Brieves of “idiotry” and “furiosity” were usually initiated by family members, especially where property was involved, and heard by a judge in places such as the kirk sessions and the Consistory Court of Edinburgh. On a local level, these cases not only generated an inestimable amount of manuscript pages, but demanded new procedures for admission and institutionalization. Houston concedes that the population of Scotland was barely a fifth of England’s in 1819, but that it had less than a third of the ninety privately licensed madhouses in England.²¹ Debates erupted over matters such as false confinement and who exactly should pay for the proliferation of asylums.

Historian Jonathan Andrews adds an even more specific point that attests to the increasing supervision over the organization of asylums in Scotland. He turns to the Glasgow Royal Asylum’s case notes to analyze the increasing emphasis placed on patient testimony. Such notes were not even required until the year 1800 and only with the Scottish Madhouses Act of 1815 were public asylums required to formalize their records and submit to state oversight. Of all the Scottish psychiatric institutions, Andrews claims, Glasgow Royal was “ahead of its time in its record keeping.”²² Such changes in patient records entailed a virtual explosion of dated reports, first-person confessionals, and upon a patient’s death, autopsy reports. This is important in terms of Scottish psychiatry and Scottish literature because before the rise of first-person testimonials, there was a long silence in the histories of disabled people, a silence that Scott may have wished to fill.

Scott’s fictions incorporate this new understanding of the mentally ill; at the same time, they are deeply dependent on texts already circulating at the close of the eighteenth century. Scott scholars consistently point out that the integration of individual and collective narratives, which is a certain trademark of the Waverley novels, depends upon the author’s careful mediation between texts.²³ Two texts in particular are especially crucial to Scott’s sympathetic renderings of idiots and lunatics, derived as they are from the cult of sensibility. First, there is *The Man of Feeling*

²¹ Ibid., 391.

²² Jonathan Andrews, “Case Notes, Case Histories, and the Patient’s Experience of Insanity at Gartnavel Royal Asylum, Glasgow, in the Nineteenth Century,” *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 11.2 (1998): 255-281 (p. 258).

²³ On Scott’s combination of first-hand experiences and more collective, cultural accounts, see Ann Rigney’s *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 21-34.

published in 1771 by Henry Mackenzie. As his review, published in an 1805 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, makes plain, Scott saw Mackenzie's man of feeling as the very paragon of the "amiable virtues": sympathy, patience, and introspection.²⁴ Inspired by Hogarth's 1735 engraving of Bedlam, the vignette in which Harley, the titular man of sympathy, is shocked to see the inmates of Bedlam—"the clanking of chains, the wildness of their cries"—stresses the limits of masculine self-restraint.²⁵ Scott similarly imbues his representations of the mentally ill with the threat of wildness or, to use Mackenzie's locution, the "fierce and unmanageable."²⁶ Madness, like male effeminacy, symptomatizes a surplus of feeling.²⁷

The second text that shaped Scott's view of mental disability is *Lyrical Ballads*, arguably the inaugural publication of the English Romantic movement. The fictionalized portraits therein of mentally ill rustics like Johnny in "The Idiot Boy" and Martha Ray in "The Thorn" (both from 1798) are of particular importance here because Scott's Davie and Madge are based on those Wordsworthian prototypes. When Madge cries herself to sleep in a straw-strewn hovel, it's Wordsworth's words that not only solidify her mania but clarify the parallel between Martha Ray and herself. "[S]he burst into a fit of crying and ejaculation," writes Scott, "'Waes me! waes me! waes me!' till at length she moaned and sobbed herself into a deep sleep" (*HM* 266). While "the poet of Grasmere" was vital to Scott's own characterizations, it is principally Wordsworth's definition of the Poet from his 1800 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that helps to illuminate where the disordered brain stood in

²⁴ See Scott's review of Godwin's 1805 novel in *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling*, eds. Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley (Ontario: Broadview, 2001), 518-522.

²⁵ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷ Mackenzie's Harley is the quintessence of manly sensibility. Comparing that character with the titular character of Godwin's *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling* in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* of August 1805, the reviewer notes that Mackenzie's man of feeling possesses a heart "exquisitely sensible to the distresses of every being around him, and whose hand is ever ready, as far as his influence extends, to alleviate or relieve them." Quoted in *Fleetwood*, eds. Handwerk and Markley, 525. On the effeminate man of *too much* feeling see Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 9.

relation to that “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” not just felt but processed by the poetic master-mind (*LB* 175). This wellspring of affect experienced by a man “possessed of more than usual organic sensibility” must be redirected, or according to the hydraulics of Wordsworth’s analogy, rechanneled (*LB* 175). By contrast, Scott tells us twice in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* that “poor” Madge Wildfire has what’s called an “unretentive memory” (*HM* 151), or as her seducer George Staunton (alias Robertson) later puts it, only “imperfect recollections” with “allusions to things which she had forgotten” (*HM* 301). Later, at Madge’s bedside, Jeanie addresses her by name but “it produced no symptoms of recollection” (*HM* 365). This inability to recollect is what sets the disabled mind apart from the self-conscious forms of forgetting and remembering identified by Alan Liu as the “post-self-conscious and post-imaginative” manifestations of Wordsworthian memory.²⁸

Just as the mentally disabled in Scott lack the cognitive power of recollection, they’re also missing that refined kind of “organic sensibility,” possessing instead *insensibility*, as in the “state of insensibility, owing to the cruel treatment” or mob violence which engulfs Madge after her mother Meg Murdockson’s public lynching on Harabee-hill (*HM* 364). Davie is similarly susceptible to insensibility (“long asleep and snoring between Ban and Buscar”) since expressions of an unimaginative mind in Scott vacillate between wild fits and stuporous sleep, a dreamless sleep and a forgetting from which the mentally unfit never awaken (*W* 322). The maniac Blanche of Devan speaks, or more aptly, *sings* to this point in *The Lady of the Lake* (1810):

They bid me sleep, they bid me pray,
They say my brain is warp’d and wrung;
I cannot sleep on Highland brae,
I cannot pray in Highland tongue.

[...]

And woe beside the fairy dream!

²⁸ Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 490. For further discussion of Wordsworthian poetics in terms of those familiar tropes, recollection and feeling, see William Galperin, “Wordsworth’s Double-Take,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 41.3 (Summer 2010), 123-127, and Miranda Burgess, “Transport: Mobility, Anxiety, and the Romantic Poets of Feeling,” *Studies in Romanticism* 49 (Summer 2010), 229-260.

I only waked to sob and scream (IV.xxii).²⁹

The repetition of "they bid" and "they say" reinforces the degree to which diagnoses always come from outside the patient with some kind of authority figure (i.e., neighbor, doctor, judge) determined to think for those who cannot think for themselves. And if idiocy is marked by a failure to feel, insanity is precisely the polar opposite of this imbalance: the lunatic suffers from unregulated feeling and passions that, Juliet Shields contends, took on a political valence since "aberrant and rebellious passions" were commonly associated with Jacobinism.³⁰

Failures in memory and self-control are frequently balanced by lyrical artistry. Scott's idiot boy and madwoman are such adept transmitters of Scottish folklore that they belong to the tradition of the "mad rhapsodist," or the *furor poeticus*, identified by Frederick Burwick in *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination*.³¹ The mad-poet is freed from the rational dictates of society but not from the inspiration and imagination accorded by nature. For example, Madge's swan song, delivered from her deathbed inside the hospital ward, is the oft-anthologized "Proud Maisie."³² It is Madge's tragic life-story in miniature: a "proud Lady" lost in the woods longs for a life of marital respectability but dies an early death (*HM* 366). Still, Madge's auditors Jeanie and Archibald hear "only a fragment or two" of her ballad, and such fragmentation is manifestly part of the incompleteness signified by cognitive disability in Scott (*HM* 366).

Two analogies for Wildfire's mind provided by Scott in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* are imbued with an identical sense of irresolution. First, there's "the mind of this deranged being" likened to a "quantity of dry leaves, which may for a few minutes remain still, but are instantly discomposed and put in motion by the first casual breath of air" (*HM* 274)—(akin to the "cruel fire" in "The Thorn," which "dried [Martha's] body like a cinder, / And almost turn'd her brain to tinder" [*LB* 1.129-132]). Then there's Wildfire's "mind" which is "like a raft upon a lake [...] agitated and driven about at random by each fresh impulse" (*HM*

²⁹ Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford UP, 1960), 246.

³⁰ Shields, *Sentimental Literature*, 9.

³¹ Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996), 164.

³² James Reed, in *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality* (London: Athlone, 1980), describes "Proud Maisie" as "the finest of Scott's lyrics, a piece of unsurpassed literary balladry" (118).

280). Madge's mind is hardly composed and capable enough for brainstorming; rather, her "infirm" brain discomposes without direction. Derivative as they are of Wordsworth, Scott's comparisons construe the desiccated mind of Madge Wildfire as resistant to unified composure. Scott's plotting reflects this breeziness, for James Reed describes Madge as a "deranged, beautiful whore" caught in a "conventionally mechanical" subplot whereby she and mother Meg "appear and vanish with a predictable coincidental conveniency."³³ Unquestionably an ancillary character, Madge's violent and inevitable fate is not without sociological significance; Scott scholars generally read *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* as an expression of Scott's disapproval of mob-law given the drowning-lynching of Madge Wildfire by an English mob, but remain blind to the other ways in which Scott is challenging popular (mis)perceptions of lunatic and idiots as submental, even subhuman.³⁴

Waverley transplants the titular wild child or "poor idiot boy" of Wordsworth's poem to Scottish soil (*LB* 241). It is even consistent with what Ian Duncan has called the "displacement of poetry by the novel" and "even a masculine takeover of what had been understood to be a feminine kind of writing."³⁵ That usurpation is made especially explicit in the aptly titled sixty-fourth chapter, "Comparing of Notes," when Scott alludes to Davie's loving mother and, quoting the poem, "Him whom she loved, her idiot boy" (*W* 320). Such oedipality between rustic mother and son, also evident in Scott's version, likely stemmed from the fact that idiocy was regarded as a parental problem in the early nineteenth century though some asylums would admit those diagnosed as chronically fatuous.³⁶ Custodial care for a lunatic increasingly fell on the family as part of a broader domestication of mental illness whereby the family became a medical outfit, a mini-hospital as it were. Idiocy, meanwhile, was understood as the most severe degree of mental and social incompetence, distinct from and deeper than "imbecility" and "feeble-

³³ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁴ See Sutherland, 215.

³⁵ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 22.

³⁶ Southey, in "The Idiot" (published in *The Morning Post* in June of 1798) also stresses the intense oedipal bond between "Old Sarah" and her idiot boy Ned who preserves his mother's corpse before a cottage fire.

mindfulness."³⁷ A clear proof of this can be found in Jonathan Oldbuck's remark, from *The Antiquary*, when "fools" and "ideots" are equated in the following remark to Lovel: "[Y]ou must suppose that fools, boors, and ideots will plough up the land, [. . .] like beasts and ignorant savages."³⁸

Definitionally speaking, being an idiot or a madwoman in Scott is distinct from experiencing a fit or some other lapse in reason. *The Bride of Lammermoor* is instructive in this context because while the tragic Lucy Ashton suffers a mental breakdown on her wedding day, her madness is situational. As Alexander Welsh notes in *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, "actual mad people" are relegated to minor roles and "of principal characters only Lucy Ashton is actually driven mad."³⁹ Her mother's machinations, coupled with what Lucy perceives as Edgar Ravenswood's abandonment of her, results in what Scott describes as "fits of deep silence and melancholy, and of capricious pettishness."⁴⁰ Family physicians, Scott proceeds, "could only say that the disease was on the spirits," perfectly curable with "gentle exercise and amusement."⁴¹ In short, Lucy is depressed as opposed to chronically insensible. After she stabs the Laird of Bucklaw in their bridal-chamber, the provincial judge determines that the bride suffered a "sudden fit of insanity" completely out of character (261). More incurable forms of mental illness such as idiocy and insanity, meanwhile, are diseases of the mind in Scott's fiction, and such conditions are dangerously proximate to witchcraft and the occult in *Waverley* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.

Consider Davie. In his scarlet stockings and bonnet, "proudly surmounted with a turkey's feather," writes Scott, the "poor fellow" known as "daft Davie" possesses a mysterious mind that cannot be read by the other inhabitants of Tully-Veolan (W 41, 42, 60). Scott's figure of idiocy, dismissed by John Lauber as merely that "Shakespearean fool, the half-crazed Davie Gellatley" who "communicates more by music than by words," plays an important role in how the interrelatedness of the

³⁷ Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 2.

³⁸ Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995), 28.

³⁹ Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 110.

⁴⁰ Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, ed. J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993), 254.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

imaginative and the idiotic are constituted in *Waverley*.⁴² In Scott, there appears to be a spectrum of disability, from the half-crazed Davie to the “crazed hellicat” Madge Wildfire (*HM* 170). But that spectrum only takes shape in a dialectical relation to the sovereign mind that must manage all the various disabled states of mind. The ideological aims underlying that latter position align themselves with what Lennard Davis, author of *Enforcing Normalcy*, calls “dominant, ableist culture.”⁴³ Disabled states of mind presented a particular problem for Scott because while the cognitively disabled were believed to be closer to a state of nature and powerful feelings, they were persons to be pitied for their failure to develop. The paradoxical function of Davie’s disability is that it enables the mastermind that is Waverley, Scott’s peripatetic dreamer described as a “youth of romantic imagination” (*W* 122).

In light of the imagination’s iconic status within British Romantic culture—the “glorious faculty” of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and the “great instrument of moral good” in Shelley’s *A Defense of Poetry*—idiocy is frequently marginalized as a state of affective excess.⁴⁴ For example, Rose Bradwardine (Waverley’s eventual wife) explains to him that when asked about his dead brother Jamie, Davie “either answers with wild and long fits of laughter, or else breaks into tears of lamentation” (*W* 59). This representation of mental disability is paradigmatic because “poor Davie” appears lost in his own thoughts. What Scott calls the “romantic spirit” of Edward Waverley is comprised of “intense curiosity and exalted imagination” (*W* 193). Conversely, the “half-wise” figures in Scott and Wordsworth are defined by cognitive lack or half-ness. Davie, in particular, is Scott’s “half-crazed simpleton [...] incapable of any

⁴² John Lauber, *Sir Walter Scott* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 24.

⁴³ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 5. Another foundational volume in the area of disability studies vis-à-vis early modern and Enlightenment periods is “*Defects*”: *Engendering the Modern Body*, eds. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (Ann Arbor: Univ of Michigan P, 2000). See also Ato Quayson’s response to this last volume in his *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007).

⁴⁴ Wordsworth, Book XIV, *The Prelude* (1850), 1.89-90. P. B. Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, eds. D.H. Reiman and N. Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 517. In the vaguely hagiographic *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (Folcroft: Folcroft, 1936), Edwin Muir extols Scott as the “greatest creative force in Scottish literature” but identifies the “riddle” of his imagination as the reason for his disquisition (11).

constant and steady exertion" (W 58). If, as Julie A. Carlson notes, the Romantic "imagination is associated with creativity, organicism, unity, life," mental incapacity in Scott has only limited access to these privileged states.⁴⁵ More inward-looking than inquisitive or curious, Davie and Madge are only *halfway* there. Nevertheless, in his attempt to dichotomize the imaginative and deficient mind, Scott crisscrosses the two at times, proof that mental illness haunts the imagination. His representations of mental debility should be better read in terms of the recent reevaluation of the Romantic imagination by scholars like Sha and Woodman who now see this faculty as a form of materiality, physiology, even pathology.⁴⁶

What is unique to Scott's version of the idiot boy is that it calls the very authenticity of Davie's idiocy into question in its attempt to solve that riddle, a riddle, as one Scott scholar notes, Waverley never succeeds in deciphering.⁴⁷ Davie's mental capacities are always in a state of redefinition in *Waverley* just as Wordsworth's Betty Foy, like Davie's mother Janet, insists that her "Johnny's but half-wise" and not altogether idiotic (LB 1.198). Scott further expands upon the indeterminacy of Johnny's idiocy when Edward asks the butler at Tully-Veolan if "this poor fellow" can be trusted with delivering a letter to which he replies: "I would hardly trust him with a long message by word of mouth—though he is more knave than fool" (W 42). The butler is merely echoing the view of his employer, the Baron, who assures Edward that Davie was "neither fatuous *nec naturaliter idiota* [not an idiot from birth], as is expressed in the brieve of furiosity, but simply a crackbrained knave" (W 58).

In *Waverley*, Scott leaves the unanswered question of "Davie's deficiencies" for the reader to decode (W 59). As a *bildungsroman*, Scott's novel traces the development of its hero from his early reading habits within Waverley-Honour to his later alliance with Scottish Highlanders. After joining an English regiment, Edward requests a leave

⁴⁵ Julie A Carlson, "Fancy's History," *European Romantic Review* 14.2 (2003), 163-176, p. 163.

⁴⁶ On the materiality of the Romantic imagination, see Ross Woodman's *Sanity, Madness, Transformation: The Psyche in Romanticism* (Toronto: Univ of Toronto P, 2005) and Richard C. Sha's "Toward a Physiology of the Romantic Imagination," *Configurations* 17 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 2010), 197-226.

⁴⁷ See Jane Millgate, "Waverley: Romance as Education," *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Toronto: Univ of Toronto P, 1984), 45.

of absence in order to visit his uncle Sir Everard's friend Bradwardine at his estate in the Highlands of Perthshire. All the while, Captain Waverley is driven, writes Scott, by a "curiosity to know something more of Scotland" despite his Aunt Rachel's warning that the northern part contains "all whigs and presbyterians" (*W* 34, 32). When Edward first encounters Davie at the entrance to the Baron's mansion, he finds the stranger nearly impossible to read; his puzzlement is paralleled by the reader's as he is "struck," writes Scott, "with the oddity of his appearance and gestures" and the antiquated extravagance of his colorful clothing (*W* 40). Also prone to "dancing, leaping, and bounding," Madge Wildfire is described as "dressed fantastically" in a Highland bonnet and broken feathers (*HM* 362, 148), and later, as "fantastically dressed," as if the disabled wear their difference on their sleeve (*HM* 362). These two characters are cut from the same cloth as Wamba, Cedric's jester who, in *Ivanhoe*, dons a belled cap, silver bracelets, purple jacket and "grotesque" ornamentation. There, too, being "half-crazed" is cut through with "half-cunning" since the look of a lunatic can be deceiving.⁴⁸ Look closer, Scott seems to say.

The one descriptor which recurs in representations of Davie is "grotesque," as in his "grotesque signals of surprise, respect, and salutation" (*W* 41) and his resembling the "grotesque face on the bowl of a German tobacco-pipe" (*W* 42). In this sense, Davie is a grotesque boy of the same breed as Dickie Sludge, the "hobgoblin" in Scott's *Kenilworth*—another "inferior person" marked by physical deformity—but Dickie's inferiority is more externalized than Davie's; plus, he possesses, we're told twice, a "sharp wit."⁴⁹ In the following passage from *Waverley*, Scott positions Davie's irregularity on the borderland of idiocy and lunacy:

Edward, whom he did not seem to observe, now perceived confirmation in his features of what the mien and gestures had already announced. It was apparently neither idiocy nor insanity which gave that wild, unsettled, irregular expression to a face which naturally was rather handsome, but something that resembled a compound of both, where the simplicity of the fool was mixed with the extravagance of a crazed imagination. He

⁴⁸ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998), 19.

⁴⁹ Scott, *Kenilworth*, ed. J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993), 95 and 247.

sung with great earnestness, and not without some taste, a fragment of an old Scottish ditty (W 41).

In these lines, the idiot and the lunatic merge to form another half-man, equal parts foolish and frenzied, and a mad rhapsodist of sorts. Scott puts it another way: Davie possesses "just so much solidity as kept on the windy side of insanity; so much wild wit as saved from the imputation of idiocy" (W 58). By linking idiocy to the imagination, albeit a "crazed" one, Scott accords minimal imaginative agency to the novel's only mentally challenged character though in a novel of education, Davie (nicknamed "Davie Do-little" and "Davie Do-naething" [W 43]) is evidence of the mental lack that consolidates male genius in *Waverley*.

To be fair, Madge Wildfire is also accorded some traces of the imagination. Yet the two instances in which Madge uses something like an imagination are followed by either sleep or death. Inside the hovel, she imparts to Jeanie—"[s]trengthened," writes Scott, "in a mind naturally calm, sedate, and firm"—her morbid fantasy that her lost bairn is still alive and bouncing on her knee (HM 267). Remorseful, she cuts herself short as "some conviction half-overcoming the reveries of her imagination" induces a fit of tears and then "deep sleep" (HM 266). Madge's capacity for imaginative thought is even less sustainable on her deathbed as her catastrophic life comes to a close. "She was still insane, but was no longer able to express her wandering ideas in the wild notes of her former state of exalted imagination," for "there was death in the plaintive tones of her voice" (HM 365). Her sympathetic auditors are given a glimpse of Madge's humanity though she's remembered, in a broadside-sheet, as a baby-snatcher and "sorceress" (HM 433). Scott is not so dismissive of her humanity though he is unsure of how to categorize her mental state. Not only is Wildfire conversant in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but she possesses what Scott calls a "doubtful, uncertain, and twilight sort of rationality" (HM 271). As we might say in today's parlance, she's "not all there," and that absentmindedness stands in contrast to Jeanie's "firmness" of character, writes Scott, "that insensibility to fatigue and danger" (HM 73).

In *Waverley* as well, the sleepy sort of idiocy embodied by Davie is subject to interpretive doubt. There are two major features of Davie's mental character that make his disability so hard to discern. First, Davie possesses what's termed a "simpleton's memory," which means he can retain and recite scores of old Scottish songs with poetic precision (W 318). Something of a savant, he impeccably delivers no fewer than six over the course of the novel though his mind is said to hold a "thousand-

and-one-songs" (W 356). Davie is such a skilled balladeer, in fact, that Waverley suspects he lays what's called "satirical emphasis" on chosen lines (W 67). After virtually disappearing from the narrative while Waverley joins the Highland insurgents, Davie reemerges once the Jacobite cause has collapsed. Upon returning to the Baron's ancestral home, now sacked by English troops, Waverley finds Davie dressed in tatters and looking quite "nervous to a pitiable degree" (W 317). Standing among the ruins in the chapter called "Desolation," Davie may symbolize the irrepressible traditions of Jacobitism, but he fails to connect those scraps of songs in any coherent way. Asking if the Baron and Lady Rose have been injured, Waverley forgets the "incapacity of Davie," writes Scott, "to hold any connected discourse" (W 318). He's like Madge Wildfire who, singing to Jeanie, pursues "the unconnected and fluent wanderings of the mind" (HM 265).

The disabled mind wanders whereas the imagination re-collects. Thus there's Davie, that "poor simpleton," that "poor fool," whose songs are "well-remembered" by Waverley as auditor (W 317). In addition, there's the battlefield scene in which Colonel Gardiner's death doesn't affect Waverley in the present moment but as it "recurred to his imagination at the distance of some time" (W 242). Of course, the philosophical sponsor of the idea that the idiot is analogous to a blank page is Locke, whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* grants a basic interiority to "children and idiots" but uses their ignorance to disprove the existence of innate or non-learned notions.⁵⁰

Davie's working memory makes his status as the village idiot suspect within Tully-Veolan. While they pity the "poor innocent" who wanders about in rags, they resent his privileged place in the Bradwardine household and wonder whether his flashes of "ingenuity and sharpness" belie his foolishness (W 58). Scott tells us twice that Davie has a

⁵⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. J. W. Yolton (London: Everyman, 2001), 18-19. For an illuminating consideration of Locke vis-à-vis Wordsworthian idiocy, see Alan Bewell's *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 57-58. Also see Molly Desjardins, "Idiotic Associations: Wordsworth and Nineteenth-Century Discourses on Idiocy," in *Liberating Medicine 1720-1835*, eds. Tristanne Connelly and Steve Clark (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 141-151.

"prodigious memory," so prodigious, in fact, that he may be essentially faking it to escape hard labor (*W* 58). Here the racial dimensions of Davie's idiocy enter the portrait, for Davie's proximity to racial otherness, specifically blackness, makes his disability that much more shadowy. Is it a simpleton's memory or an archivist's collection? Scott seems to confirm the villagers' suspiciousness of Davie when he writes:

This opinion was not better founded than that of the Negroes, who, from the acute and mischievous pranks of the monkeys, suppose that they have the gift of speech, and only suppress their powers of elocution to escape being set to work (*W* 58).

This passage makes central the collision between racist and ableist ideology. The narrator concedes this is only a "hypothesis," as if Scott's primate pantomime qualifies as empirical anthropology, and in the subsequent chapter, "A More Rational Day Than the Last," the irrationality constituent of idiocy is again linked to animality as well as to the occult (*W* 58). The maniac meanwhile bears the same mark of non-white savagery: partaking in the Porteous riot, Madge is "disguised apparently with red paint and soot, like an Indian going to battle" (*HM* 125). That otherness appears to run in the family: mother Meg later stabs at the robber Frank Levitt with "vengeful dexterity of a wild Indian" (*HM* 261). The mentally ill may be closer to nature, but that indigenous form of nature threatens to rise up and overpower the rationally able.

Entertaining Waverley on his second evening in Tully-Veolan, Rose Bradwardine confirms that her father has always protected the Gellatley family and especially so when Janet was called before a witch trial. (Reading between the lines, one can intuit that Davie and his poet brother may be the Baron's illegitimate children.) Scotland was certainly no stranger to witch-hunting, which reached especially febrile heights between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Between 1590 and 1663, the campaign against Scots suspected of satanism claimed close to 4,000 lives nationwide and in Edinburgh, witches were routinely burned on Castle Hill.⁵¹ In *Waverley*, Scott comments that trials for witchcraft form what he calls the "one of the most deplorable chapters in Scottish

⁵¹ See Francis J. Rice's doctoral dissertation *Madness and Industrial Society: A Study of the Origins and Early Growth of the Organisation of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Scotland, c. 1830-1870* (Department of History, University of Strathclyde, 1981), 67-68.

story.”⁵² Rose thus speaks to the unfair and usually lethal verdicts handed down by these witch trials: “My father went to see fair play between the witch and the clergy for the witch had been born on his estate” (W 65). She proceeds to explain that the devil himself (that “foul fiend,” that “Evil One”) had appeared to Janet in the form of a “handsome black man” (W 65-6). Is this supernaturally black man Davie’s father? Rose’s anecdote does not resolve the matter; instead, it narrows the gap between the disabled and the demonic.

Janet may escape scot-free but her reputation for satanism only darkens the question of Davie’s paternity. Whereas Wordsworth’s Betty is a sympathetic character, Janet is the occult other whose involvement with the “sin of witchcraft” is believed to be the cause behind her son’s “vacant and careless air” (W 317). Valerie Rohy has recently observed, in *Anachronism and Its Others*, that racist discourse has historically been structured by what she calls “tropes of backwardness, immaturity, regression, and arrested development,” all of which rear their backward-facing head in Scott’s infantilization of idiocy.⁵³ The manchild, after all, plays an indeterminate gender role with one foot in adulthood and another in latency. It should come as no surprise to know, then, that when *Waverley* was first performed on the London stage at the Adelphi Theatre in 1824, the devirilized Davie was played by a woman.⁵⁴

This is not to say that Scott’s idiot figure is completely divested of heroic agency. In wartime, Davie acts as Lady Rose’s personal messenger and by helping to warn Fergus Mac-Ivor that Tully-Veolan has been overrun by English troops, Davie participates in the rebellion by

⁵² The statement appears in one of Scott’s notes, first added to the “Magnum Opus” edition of the novel published in 1829. Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels, Vol. I, Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, (Edinburgh: Cadell & Co.; London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1829), 138.

⁵³ Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: SUNY, 2009), xii. In terms of Scott and issues of race and sexuality, you can find two very forward-thinking analyses in *Approaches to Teaching Scott’s Waverley Novels*, eds. Evan Gottlieb and Ian Duncan (New York: MLA, 2009), including McNeil’s “The Limits of Diversity: Using Scott’s ‘The Two Drovers’ to Teach Multiculturalism in a Survey or Nonmajors Course” 123-129, and Buckton’s “‘The Monstrous Passion:’ Teaching *The Bride of Lammermoor* and Queer Theory,” 157-163.

⁵⁴ For the theatrical history of *Waverley*, adapted by Edward Fitzball, see William B. Todd and Ann Bowden’s *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History, 1796-1832* (New Castle: Oak Knoll, 1998), 324.

protecting the Baron and his daughter. He essentially follows his mother's lead since it is Janet who nurses Captain Waverley back to health. "[I]t was singular what instances of address seemed dictated by the instinctive attachment of the poor simpleton," writes Scott, "when his patron's safety was concerned" (W 324). In this sense, *Waverley* circles back on itself insofar as Scott introduces Davie at the novel's start as he who was "much attached to the few who showed him kindness," which suggests an animal-like affinity for whoever provides food and shelter (W 58). Of course the flatness of Davie's character contrasts the dynamic roundness of Edward's shifting emotional and political sympathies.

Where there is insanity in Scott, there is violence. Just before the mob envelops Madge to duck her in a muddy pool—"according to their favorite mode of punishment"—Jeanie overhears a Cumbrian peasant denounce mother and daughter in the following: "Shame the country should be harried wi' Scotch witches and Scotch bitches this gate—but I say hang and drown" (HM 364, 361). The violence in store for Wildfire bears out the similarities between her and other maligned madwomen in Scott. There's the aforementioned Blanche of Devan, the "crazed and captive Lowland maid" and "brain-sick fool" of *The Lady of the Lake*, fatally wounded by an arrow aimed at Fitz-James's crest (IV.xxiii). There's also Feckless Fannie, the Ayrshire sheep-herder who provided what Scott calls in his note to *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* the "first conception of [Wildfire's] character," that "poor maniac."⁵⁵ Like Blanche, Fannie sees her intended killed when her father, fearing for his family's reputation, shoots the shepherd whom Fannie loved, leaving her to roam from Galloway to Edinburgh in the year 1769. Along the way, she's tormented by a "crowd of idle boys" (just as Madge is outside the rectory at Willingham) and finally stoned to death between Glasgow and Anderston.⁵⁶

Scott's note on Wildfire's characterological antecedents is telling because it serves only to ennoble and indeed *enable* the author's memory. Scott informs his reader that his own history of Fannie is potentially "all that can be known of her history" though many, "among whom is the author, may remember having heard of Feckless Fannie, in the days of their youth."⁵⁷ Just as Davie's deficiencies serve to reify the more exalted

⁵⁵ Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels*, Vol. XIII, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, (Edinburgh: Cadell & Co.; London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1830), 36-9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 36.

dimensions of Edward Waverley's romantic imagination, the composite character known as Madge Wildfire exists only to empower authorial authority and its power to not just remember but recraft the various histories of mad people otherwise relegated to folklore.

In this way, Scott's view of disability has deeply conservative consequences. The danger, of course, is that when we use the disabled as a symbol for the deficient imagination, we trivialize the flesh-and-blood experience of those reduced to the realm of halfness and imperfection. That *Waverley* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* present us with disabled minds, closed to the mindreading of others, is proven by these last lines of Scott in which Waverley struggles to comprehend what lies at the limits of his understanding: "He therefore approached, and endeavoured, by sundry queries, to elicit from him what the innuendo might mean; but Davie had no mind to explain, and had wit enough to make his folly cloak his knavery. Edward could collect nothing from him" (W 67). Earlier, Edward cannot collect because the idiot boy "conveyed no information" (W 41). He stands for the failure of interpretation and stymies the teleological progressions integral to such Romantic ideologies as imagination and reform.

Scott ascribes, here and elsewhere, a nothingness to the idiot boy of *Waverley* because he is *all* other, or the "prodigious Other" (in Foucault's apt description of madness as "present in every reasonable man").⁵⁸ Scott appears to have absorbed this popular prejudice though he restores Gellatley and Wildfire to the realm of humanity by bestowing on them an alternative set of abilities. The divergence of medicine and moral psychology later in the nineteenth century grew on the foundation of Scott's representations of those, like Davie and Madge, whose "brain is infirm" (HM 157).⁵⁹ In order for Dr. J. B. Thomson, the resident surgeon at Perth prison in Scotland, to claim that criminals occupy the "borderland of Lunacy," Scott's earlier representations had to contribute to this sense that mental illness was unreadable, unknowable, and deeply dangerous.⁶⁰ At the same time, Scott's frustration in the face of disability,

⁵⁸ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 213.

⁵⁹ See Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: Ecco, 2007), 245.

⁶⁰ See Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 13.

which may have stemmed from the author's nerve disorder and paralysis, makes the infirmed mind *and* body into a subject worthy of inquiry and moral concern.

Mental disability, as I hope to have shown, was integral to Scott's articulations of the romantic imagination in two of his Scottish novels from the 1810s. The Johnnys, Davies and Madges of this period had to have been more than the solipsistic props they become in other men's attempts to know their own minds, but recovering the subjective experiences of disabled people in Scotland remains, at least for now, a formidable challenge.

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