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Coleman O. Parsons

City College of the City University of New York

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Reviews

Francis R. Hart. *Scott's Novels: The Plotting of Historic Survival*. Charlottesville. The University Press of Virginia. 1966. xiv + 371 pp. \$6.75.

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In proposing a toast "To the Memory of Scott" at the 1966 dinner of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club, the Hon. Lord Cameron remarked: "Today Scott's novels tend, for the most part, to lie undisturbed on the library shelves." The Great Unknown of the nineteenth century, the unacknowledged Author of *Waverley*, seems on the way to becoming the Great Unread of our century.

In 1932 the centenary of Scott's death became the occasion for efforts in resuscitation. The Grierson team began the five-year process of publishing twelve volumes of *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*. But Scott was not a great letterwriter. Two harbinger volumes (1930 and 1932) of selections by Wilfred Partington from letters to Scott were more viable. The centenary year also saw a bibliographical work by W. C. Van Antwerp, a mellow biography by John Buchan, an edition by Davidson Cook of *New Love-Poems*, and various handbooks, selections, lectures, and essays rendering tribute to Scott. These books and articles were more distinguished in biography than in criticism. For a little over a decade a diminished output continued in Lord David Cecil's *Sir Walter Scott* (1933), James T. Hillhouse's *The Waverley Novels and their Critics* (1936), William Ruff's bibliography of the poetry (1937-8), Sir Herbert Grierson's *Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1938), J. G. Tait's accurate edition of the *Journal* (1939-46), and James C. Corson's *Bibliography of Sir Walter Scott* (1943). The centenary period was dominated—genially—by Sir Herbert Grierson.

But somehow the good ship *Scott*, though careened, refitted, and launched once more with due ceremony, sailed as if it needed more ballast. One bad omen—or sign of the times—was that the indispensable

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thirteenth, index volume of the *Letters* was never brought out. Lacking was money—another way of saying publisher's confidence. And now that a new revival seems under way, with the bicentenary (1971) of Scott's birth as the possible year of culmination, there is a certain ominousness in the collapse of the great Edinburgh project of an edition of the *Waverley Novels*, scrupulous in text as in annotation. But the voices of the detractors, of Carswell, Muir, Craig, Van Ghent, et al., have not drowned out the encomiasts. David Daiches and others can be clearly heard saying that Scott has substance, depth, and complexity, and significance for readers today.

As Grierson was the scholar-father of the earlier revivification, so Georg Lukács would seem to be the emergent power behind the present vitalization. The Hungarian critic's *Studies in European Realism* and *The Historical Novel*, translated in 1950 and 1962 respectively, present Scott, along with Goethe, Stendhal, Pushkin, and Gottfried Keller, as a realist. Followers of the leftist critic need not ideologically join him in what he calls a "contribution to both Marxist aesthetics and the materialistic treatment of literary history," but they will increasingly insist with him that Scott is basically a realist (or anti-romantic) and that his vision of history as process is moving and true. Lukács finds that Scott authentically recreates the social and economic "components of historical necessity," which "is of the most severe, implacable kind." This is an immense advance over the radical William Hazlitt's early attack on Sir Walter as a "degraded" genius who, in lauding a static past, "would fain put down the *Spirit of the Age*."

Both Hazlitt and Lukács, despite the difference of their conclusions, are thematic in critical approach. And of course thematic studies usually have the advantage of stimulating thesis and firm direction but the disadvantage of arbitrariness and repetition. This is true of *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (1963), in which Alexander Welsh pursues a materialistic interpretation by referring the amorous fortunes of heroes and heroines to property and its disposal through marriage contracts. Although this thesis is broadly and variously applied, it is still too rigid to conform to all the sinuosities of Scott's narratives.

Welsh's ideas have been both a challenge and an irritant to Francis R. Hart in his *Scott's Novels: The Plotting of Historic Survival* (1966), in which the comments are more often polite than petulant. Some exceptions are: "But Welsh slights important facts in the

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interests of his thesis"; "Welsh misrepresents"; "This seems to me sheer perversity," and so forth. The fervor of controversy leads Hart into references to Welsh on 41 pages (according to a somewhat inadequate index). Lukács, more central as critic to Hart's purpose, appears on 20 pages, and Daiches on 23. This running debate creates a disproportion in a book that is otherwise judicious.

Wary of thematic dogmatism, Hart asserts that his aim is to be flexible. And this he is to an admirable degree in a rangy and balanced discussion of Sir Walter as a conservative who believes in continuity of culture, maintained by the temperate and the humane against dehumanizing fanaticisms and incapacitating illusions, against "the terrors of history" and "the terrors of romance" as well. In different novels this struggle for civilized survival is related to Jacobites and Hanoverians, Cavaliers and Puritans, decadent chivalry and imperiled family lines. The chief human means of historic survival is made clear by an epigraph from Conrad's *A Personal Record*: "The temporal world . . . rests notably . . . on the idea of Fidelity." But to be a virtue this fidelity must be courageous, discriminating, and self-controlled; its object must be human rather than abstract. This aspect of the novelist's modernity did not strike E. M. Forster when he criticized Scott in *Aspects of the Novel*. Yet it was Forster who reduced Scott's humanity to its anarchic essence in the essay "What I Believe." In a violent, cruel, and chaotic world "personal relationships" offer some refuge; "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."

Thus interpreted, the *Waverley Novels* would seem at times to be a huge *Bildungsroman* in which those mediators between extremes, the much-scorned wavering heroes, grope toward "a new stability" based on human values rather than on ideologies. In this Scott is most timely, "most significant to our day."

If this were a single rather than a double review, there might be room for some adverse criticism of the overallegorizing of *The Talisman*, the neglect of Wandering Willie as a father figure in *Redgauntlet*, the failure at certain points to relate the discussion of fiction to Scott's experience in life and to his practice as a historian, and the sketchiness of an index which—as an instance—does not list Scott's *Essay on Chivalry*, although it is referred to in both text and notes of Section III, "The Historical Picturesque and the Survivals of Chivalry." Nor is there enough space to call attention to the many

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fringe benefits of the main argument, such as the fresh re-estimates in which *Ivanhoe*, *Woodstock*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, and other novels are upgraded and *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Redgauntlet*, among others, somewhat downgraded; the analysis of Effie Deans's sin; the reminder of Scott's failure to fuse the comic Dugald Dalgetty into "the moral interest" of *A Legend of Montrose*; the treatment of the theme of death in *Old Mortality*; the explanation of King Richard's centrality in *Ivanhoe*, Richard Varney's in *Kenilworth*, and Sir William Ashton's in "Scott's single Gothic triumph" *The Bride of Lammermoor*. There is no lack of critical ideas, so the reader is sometimes trusted to extend an aperçu on his own: "Much could be made of the recurrence in the novels of the archetypes of deserted maiden and virago—both fatal, one passively so, the other arrogantly, both destructively." The formulations are precise rather than arbitrary: "the saving of fidelity through a reconciliation of humanity and prudence" or "the tragicomic way historic or ideological commitments impinge on or destroy private humanity." Most heartening throughout is Professor Hart's sense that Scott needs no apologist, only an expounder; for Sir Walter, in his "moral and artistic maturity," achieved "significant form."

Sensitive and sound as Francis R. Hart's work for the most part is, and handsome as is the format given it by the University Press of Virginia, it is not more impressive in its way than Thomas Crawford's paperback *Scott*, published a year earlier by Oliver and Boyd in its "Writers and Critics" series. Like Hart, Crawford is original in his re-estimates, highly selective in his quotations, and succinct in formulation: "a tension between reality and romance . . . seems fundamental to Scott," eventually making him "at one and the same time a romantic and an anti-romantic novelist." The revaluation, however, is broader in scope, including the life, the editorial work, the poetry, and the fiction. About all of these Crawford has valuable things to say.

Crawford sees Scott as a man whose "innate passion" suffused with "stoicism, melancholy, and resignation" (best expressed in "his moving and noble *Journal*") and whose "tragedy was that, as a creative artist, he 'sold out' by putting 'the market' first. Never writing "better, in verse or in prose, than in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*" (1802-3), he became "a Lost Leader right from the time of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*" (1805). Ironically this "intensely visual and literal," "this most unmetaphysical of men," went on to achieve stature as a social historian in "the depiction of *manners*," presenting his characters for the most part in relation to economic and historic

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necessity. If one accepts Crawford's value judgments, only the creative editing (ballad making and remaking) comes before the 1805 watershed between the free and the economically hampered artist. Such masterwork as the handful of perfect lyrics, the fictional dialogue ("Scott's greatest writing is to be found in his dialogue"), *The Heart of Midlothian*, and the short story "The Two Drovers," comes after. The pot, kept continuously on the boil for a quarter century, was long full of nourishing collops.

Professor Crawford is well acquainted with Scott criticism and remarks keenly on many of its issues. He has something in common with Lukács and with Welsh, besides anticipating Hart in a rather general fashion. But instead of comparing and contrasting Crawford with other critics, I should like to suggest an exception to one of his most stimulating generalizations: Scott's "most vivid experiences took place in the world of the historic imagination, not in personal relations."

Although Crawford objects to the romanticizing of Williamina Belsches into the original of Margaret of Branksome (the *Lay*), Diana Vernon (*Rob Roy*), or Greenmantle (*Redgauntlet*), who are all "active, strong-willed, positive creatures," more akin to the author's wife than to his "shadowy" early love, her influence need not be entirely written off as "matter of speculation." Crawford's conception of Williamina as "a conventional and rather passive girl from a higher social [and economic] position than Scott's own" and of Walter as certainly believing "he had been jilted" by her engagement and marriage to a banker's son reveals her as a likely original of Lucy Ashton. In his life of Scott, Sir Herbert Grierson tentatively suggests that the "tragically passive Lucy" may be a sketch of Williamina. Earlier in the same biography occurs the comment "Scott felt . . . that she had surrendered her will to her mother" and that he had been "deceived and abandoned for a wealthier wooer." Williamina, her mother, Lady Jane Belsches, the rich laird William Forbes, and Walter Scott the rejected suitor—all as seen by young Scott—may well have been tamer versions of Lucy Ashton, Lady Ashton, the rich laird of Bucklaw, and the Master of Ravenswood, who later weltered in the strong emotions, amorous, ambitious, and vindictive, of *The Bride of Lammermoor*.

Lucy's truly shadowy original in legendry gave Scott just the amount of distance that could have released what Crawford calls "the deep passions that smouldered beneath his self-discipline." Surely the self-deceived "romantic" youth about whom a friend wrote at the time

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of Williamina's engagement, "I shudder at the violence of his irritable and most ungovernable mind" (quoted by Grierson), had the makings of a tragic Ravenswood. He did not commit suicide; nor did Williamina go mad, but she died young, in 1810, nine years before the *Bride* was written.

Scott is reported by Lockhart and by James Ballantyne as having dictated the *Bride* between groans of torment ("audible suffering") and as having forgotten all of it except its foundation, the Dalrymple legend. Although this story of painful, almost hypnotic creation and forgetfulness of all the invented portions has been shaken by Grierson, it is noteworthy that on emerging from the abandon of composition to what would seem to have been awareness of emotional indiscretion, Scott managed to black out on much "incident, character, or conversation" and that he practically disavowed the *Bride* as "monstrous gross and grotesque." What the involved writer thrust from him in this fashion was to his uninvolved son-in-law "the most pure and powerful of all the tragedies that Scott ever penned."

In resisting the twentieth-century shrinkage of Scott's literary domain by stressing his artistry in ballad and lyric, Crawford has performed a very real service, as has Hart in refusing to reject the non-Scottish novels as consistently trumpery stuff. Edgar Johnson's forthcoming study of Scott's life and work, as well as the Pottle-Cameron edition of Lockhart's *Life*, will contribute on the grand scale to rehabilitation efforts. But what can be saved from the attrition of time and changing taste is still most problematical. Publishers' figures, as reported by Walter Allen on January 1, 1967, show a steady decline in the relative sales of fiction. It is becoming a common lament that fiction—at least realistic fiction—is moribund. If this is true, Sir Walter may linger longer in memory as a man than as a literary master. Posterity owes no debt to writers who cease to interest. If Scott is to live as a man of letters, I suspect that the pieces which readers in the twenty-first century will be most reluctant to forget may be a few ballads, a few lyrics, the *Journal* perhaps, and such miniature Waverleys as "The Two Drovers" and possibly "The Highland Widow." All of these fall within Professor Crawford's scope of discussion and outside Professor Hart's "plotting of historic survival."

COLEMAN O. PARSONS

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