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Sir Walter Scott as Historical Novelist

Part V

The Fortunes of Nigel (1822) may be described as a semi-Scotch novel, since the best part of it is supplied by the Scotch humourists King James, Sir Mungo Malagrowth, and Richie Moniplies, the rest being English Jacobean. (Sir Mungo Murray was, Scott tells us, whipping-boy to King Charles I, as the fictitious Sir Mungo was to King James).¹ Many of the details in Scott's picture of King James are to be found in the sources; for example, the King's lecture to his courtiers at Whitehall² on the superiority of the Scottish pronunciation of Latin is based on a speech he made at Stirling in 1617, reported in Thomas Crawford's *History of the University of Edinburgh*.³ Scott himself gives most of the rest in the notes. Readers of the *Secret History*, *Somers Tracts*, and other contemporary matter, will be struck by the fact that, in spite of the verisimilitude of detail, the essential King James of Scott is but faintly shadowed by the historians.

Three of the Waverley novels deal with Scotland before the 17th Century⁴—*The Monastery* (1820), *The Abbot* (1820), and *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828). The chief point of interest about these is that the dialogue, apart from a slight sprinkling of Scots in certain minor characters, nearly all women, is couched in that standard English, sprinkled more or less freely with archaic usages, words, and phrases, redolent of Shakespeare, which invariably does duty in Scott's novels, whether their scene be laid in Scotland, England, or Europe, whenever the period takes us back beyond 1600. He obviously felt that the Scots tongue of his own day had associations for his readers, as well

¹ See "Account of the Earl of Glencairn's Expedition" in John Gwynne, *Military Memoirs of the Great Civil War*, ed. Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1822), p. 162. But in fact it was not Sir Mungo but William Murray, Lord Dysart, who was Charles I's whipping-boy. (See *DNB*)

² *Nigel*, I, 222.

³ Thomas Crawford, *History of the University of Edinburgh from 1580 to 1646* (Edinburgh, 1808), p. 86.

⁴ Four if you count *Castle Dangerous* (1831).

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as for himself, which made it unsuitable as the vehicle for 16th Century dialogue; associations of the kind which made a golf-club an incongruous appendage to a Border riever, however authentic. By 1800, Scots was the language of peasants, old ladies, humourists, and eccentrics; appropriate to King James, but not his mother. The abandonment of Scots in these novels is therefore in keeping with Scott's views on the problem of reconciling historical authenticity with the requirements of fiction; it is also a tribute to the Elizabethan literature, whose language could be accepted as imparting a suitable atmosphere even to a novel about 15th Century Scotland. (This question is touched upon by the author in the Introduction to the *Fair Maid*;⁵ but, having explained that mediaeval Scots is out of the question as a medium, he makes no attempt to justify what he has put in its place.)

Apart from this very important general point, there is little to hand for the present purpose in these, as one might say, sub-Scottish novels. *The Abbot*, however, offers an exquisite specimen of Scott's work. Laing⁶ prints documents describing how Queen Mary, imprisoned in Edinburgh after Carbery Hill, looked out of the window and saw the celebrated banner showing her murdered husband, and her son praying for the punishment of the guilty; she fell into delirious agony, tore her clothes, and regardless of her half-naked condition, made an attempt to address the people. The delirious agony sets in at Lochleven in the novel,⁷ brought on by an incautious reference of Lady Fleming to the marriage of Sebastian at Holyrood, on the night Darnley was murdered; but it runs its course in the decorous seclusion of the Queen's apartment. Later on, after the escape from Lochleven, Mary looks out of the window at Niddrie Castle, sees the army of her followers in the park below, and, forgetting the lightness of her attire—she has just risen from bed—opens the window to acknowledge the loyal shouts of the troops. Recollection drives her from the window with a blush, not, however, before the troops have been inspired, not merely by the Queen's condescension, but by "the unadorned beauties of the lovely woman."⁸ This is Scott's most perfectly delightful adaptation from history.

The Abbot also shows what can be done by the pleasant chime of an

⁵ *Fair Maid*, I, 26.

⁶ Malcolm Laing, *History of Scotland*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London, 1804), II, App. p. 106.

⁷ *The Abbot*, II, 206 ff.

⁸ *The Abbot*, II, 304-305.

old-fashioned phrase. Dryfesdale, the Steward of Lochleven, laced the Queen's jar of succory-water with what he thought was poison.⁹ Burnet, echoed by Sharpe in his *Kirkton*,¹⁰ states that the Duchess of Orleans was poisoned in 1671 by means of a glass of succory-water. This hint, together with the assertion of Mary in one of her letters that there was a plot to stab her to death in Lochleven,¹¹ is developed into a whole episode in the fiction.

Two novels in the series might be described as "crypto-Scottish"; *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), because it is really a variation on the Scottish and Jacobite themes, with Switzerland representing Scotland and Margaret of Anjou the Stewarts; and *Quentin Durward* (1823), not merely on account of the Scottish hero and the French King's Scots Guard, but because the story has an interesting basis in Scottish family history. While writing this novel, Scott wrote to Constable: "Books of history help me little except Commines;"¹² the observer is therefore prepared to find the detail of *Quentin Durward* in unexpected places. In the *Memorie of the Somervilles*, edited by Scott in 1815, it is related how a James Somerville of Drum went to France early in the 17th Century, with a letter to his uncle, Sir John Seaton, a captain in the French King's regiment of Guards. Sir John promised to enlist him in his own company.¹³ This is exactly what happened to Quentin in the novel. The name of his uncle, Ludovic Leslie (*Le Balafre*) occurs in the *Memorie*¹⁴ as that of a friend with whom Somerville visited Italy. ("Old Sir Ludovick Leslie" is also named by Dugald Dalgety¹⁵).—Quentin came from Glenhoulakin, the Glen of the Midge; and one may wonder where Scott learned this bit of Gaelic. The answer seems to be that he read it in Burt's *Letters* (II, 230, edr. 1818), where the author expatiates on the midge nuisance in the Highlands. Burt's spelling of the Gaelic word is the same as Scott's, and one feels more and more that Scott must have been quite deeply indebted to this obscure English official for knowledge of the Highlands. Quentin's designation on the Continent, however, was "the varlet with the Velvet Pouch";¹⁶

⁹ *The Abbot*, II, 215.

¹⁰ p. 310n.

¹¹ See *The Abbot*, II, 362.

¹² *Letters*, VII, 283.

¹³ Somerville, II, 148.

¹⁴ Somerville, II, 170.

¹⁵ *Legend*, p. 51.

¹⁶ *Quentin Durward*, I, 77.

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"Sir John with the red bag" is mentioned in Somerville,¹⁷ and in both cases the bag or pouch was for hawk's meat.

In *The Pirate* (1821), we have the unique case of what might be called an "anti-Scotch" novel; one in which the Scots play the role of the intrusive Southron, while the Shetlander assumes the customary Scottish role of underdog. As the author admits that his account of Shetland society about 1720 is largely imaginary,¹⁸ one may expect again to find the detail of the fiction in odd sources; but nothing is yet available, apart from one point which vindicates Scott. Triptolemus Yellowley, the agricultural reformer from the Mearns, has been censured an anachronism by Andrew Lang;¹⁹ but Lang is wrong here. Yellowley is nowhere represented as a spear-head of the Agricultural Revolution; all he wants to do is to substitute mainland methods, such as they are, for the even more primitive techniques of the islands.²⁰ Yellowley relates how he tried to introduce apiculture into Orkney, but failed because the Orcadian in charge of the bees stopped up the hives to prevent the insects from escaping. Macfarlane's *Geographical Collections*²¹ report that a lady from Angus (close enough to the Mearns), took a skep of bees to Orkney as a novelty in the late 17th Century, and lost them exactly in the manner described by Yellowley. Clearly Scott had read this.

Scott wrote four English novels: *Kenilworth* (1821), *Fortunes of Nigel* (1822: semi-English for the present purpose), *Woodstock* (1826), and *Peveril of the Peak* (1823). The outstanding feature of these novels is the relatively consistent and narrow "period" authenticity which puts them (in this respect only) on a par with *Old Mortality*. However freely factual detail may be handled, borrowing from other periods seems to be at a minimum. The reason seems to be literary. Just as *Old Mortality* has Covenanting writings of literary merit to draw upon, so these "English" books have a rich background, not only of historical works, full of biographical detail, but also of the imaginative literature of the Elizabethan, Restoration, and Augustan

¹⁷ Somerville, I, 305.

¹⁸ *The Pirate*, I, 6.

¹⁹ *The Pirate*, *Waverley Novels*, Border Edition, ed. Andrew Lang, 48 vols. (London, 1892-1894), Editor's Introduction, p. xiii.

²⁰ *The Pirate*, I, 78-79; I, 207-209.

²¹ Walter Macfarlane, *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland*, ed. A. Mitchell, Scottish History Society, 51-53 (Edinburgh, 1906-08), III, 6. Henceforth cited as Macfarlane's *Geog. Collections*. Also *The Pirate*, II, 253.

periods. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the depth of Scott's familiarity with this literature, which may be estimated by the frequency of his unconscious quotations from it, and especially from Shakespeare.

In *Kenilworth* we have a certain amount of material from the foothills of history.—There is the pageantry at Kenilworth. There is the affair of Leicester's marriage, which Scott knew about through his work on the *Somers Tracts*. But even here there is a strong literary background, because Scott's original acquaintance with the story of Amy Robsart was made through a ballad, "Cumnor Hall." There is an intolerable deal of Gloriana folk-lore, including some quite minute detail from historical writers—Leicester's public rebuke from Elizabeth for pushing past the usher into her presence is in Naunton;²² and even a passing remark like Sussex's "Were war at the gates I should be one of her white boys," proves to be a quotation from Naunton's account of Sir John Perrot.²³ Yet even in these court scenes, Scott's debt for atmosphere to the literary sources is again quite obvious: Shakespeare's miraculous passage about the "fair vestal throned by the west" is actually embodied in the novel as one of Raleigh's flatteries, additional to the well-known matter in Fuller's *Worthies*. This Shakespearean element is at its best in the more unobtrusive passages; those who do not care for Varney as another Iago will hardly fail to appreciate Giles Gosling's tapster-boy²⁴—another Falstaff's Page; or the citizens of Woodstock—Shakespearean artificers every man.²⁵ Purely literary sources are found contributing to other novels of Scott, but in *Kenilworth* they seem almost to push history aside. We know, of course, that Scott valued the fiction of a past age as evidence for its ways of life and thought; when a body of literature like the Elizabethan was available—exceptional both in quality and quantity—he hardly needed to look any further.

The same may be said with even more truth of the English part of *Nigel*. There are contacts with history, certainly—Buckingham's declaration to Glenvarloch, "You know me, my lord, for your enemy," was actually made by him to Olivarez in Madrid²⁶—yet admirers of

²² Sir Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia*, ed. (with Cary's *Memoirs*) Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1808), p. 179; *Kenilworth*, I, 312.

²³ *Fragmenta Regalia*, p. 246; *Kenilworth*, I, 307.

²⁴ *Kenilworth*, II, 9-10.

²⁵ *Kenilworth*, I, 157.

²⁶ According to Hume, VI, 136, quoting Rushworth.

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this book have always seen in it a glorious re-creation of the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, with the necessary difference entailed by Scott's position in time. Although it has several historical characters, the plot of *Nigel* contains less historical incident than *Kenilworth*—in fact, it has none at all, so that the dramatists have things all their own way.

Political history returns to the throne in *Woodstock* and *Peveiril*; no-one has ever regarded *Peveiril* as a re-creation of the Restoration Drama; but the historical record remains so full and, in especial, so well supplemented by the literature of political satire, that there is little need to pillage other periods. In *Woodstock*, Charles II is supposed to be pursued after Worcester by Cromwell in person; these two therefore are the chief historical characters, and it is curious to observe how differently they are handled. Charles II resembles some other great characters in Scott in that his outline is visibly taken from the historical accounts, but he develops so much in the novelist's hands that he seems to become independent. Rather different is the case of Cromwell. Ask any reader of *Woodstock* which feature of Cromwell struck him most in the book, and he will probably mention Oliver's habit of deliberately concealing his meaning under mountains of verbiage. This trait, which Scott develops at length and with much skill, appears to be taken from the account of Cromwell in Hume,²⁷ who quotes from one of his speeches. In fact, Scott introduces Cromwell with the words "It has been long since said by the historian, that a collection of the Protector's speeches would make, with a few exceptions, the most nonsensical book in the world."²⁸ This historian is Hume — a hostile source. One can therefore understand why Cromwell, in spite of Scott's sympathetic treatment, remains essentially an outsider, or what small boys at play in Scotland call a "baddy", whereas Charles and his supporters constitute the interior circle of "goodies." — But further discussion of this point really belongs to a later section.

Peveiril is Scott's second-greatest disappointment after *Napoleon*. The man who had edited *Somers*, Dryden, and Swift, was qualified above all others to write a great novel about the Popish Plot period. The scene of such a book must be London; yet with sad and perverse provinciality Scott lingers in Derbyshire and the Isle of Man till more than half-way through. In *Waverley*, the hero's departure to Scotland is delayed for only seven chapters, and these chapters have

²⁷ Hume, VII, 273.

²⁸ *Woodstock*, I, 203.

a high biographical interest for Scott students; but in *Peveiril*, the real beginning of the novel is delayed for twenty-seven chapters, and these do not offer much of biographical or any other kind of interest. Apart from the picaresque episode of the hero's journey from Liverpool to London, these chapters recall the judgement of the critic who condemned most of *Nicholas Nickleby* as "totally unobserved." The theory that Scott in his dull passages was out of touch with his life-giving sources — historical or other — is, to say the least, an attractive one.

The London scenes, however — in spite of the conventional Fenella (she loved the hero in secret and in vain), and the dwarf Sir Geoffrey Hudson, whose treatment jars upon the reader like nothing else in Scott — the London scenes make the unconscionably diffuse prolegomena worth skimming through. Historical interest revives among other things, and we find the atmosphere of the *Dryden* and the *Somers* at last beginning to pervade the action. The value of Roger North's *Examen* is freely admitted by Scott himself in his notes to *Peveiril*, and in addition we find him quoting from the *Examen* in his *Dryden*,²⁹ specimens of Titus Oates' peculiar English pronunciation. When Buckingham tells Christian he is the most barefaced villain who ever breathed, and Christian replies "Of a commoner, I may [be],"³⁰ he echoes Shaftesbury's famous answer to Charles II's charge that he was the most unprincipled man in England: "Of a subject I may be." When Charles II requests Buckingham to respect the decencies of his private life, and Buckingham asks what decencies are these, Scott reproduces a passage in Burnet, with Swift's clever marginal query. (Swift's marginalia on Burnet are in Scott's *Swift*).³¹

The most interesting point to emerge from *Peveiril* concerns a long passage near the end.³² Charles II got wind of Buckingham's plan for a *coup d'état*, which included the introduction of armed desperadoes into the palace disguised as musicians, under the leadership of the notorious Thomas Blood. The King's investigation was protracted and full of incident, but in the end he publicly accepted Buckingham's innocence as proved. Then, detaining him out of earshot of the other courtiers, the King said "When was it, George,

²⁹ *Dryden*, IX, 284; *Peveiril*, III, 199.

³⁰ *Peveiril*, III, 337.

³¹ Swift, X, 266; *Peveiril*, III, 10.

³² *Peveiril*, Chapt. 48, 49.

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that your useful friend Colonel Blood became a musician?" Buckingham, realising that the King had recognised Blood and knew all, confessed and was forgiven, his guilt being kept secret. According to Dalrymple's *Memoirs* (for 1692), William III suspected his minister Lord Shrewsbury of tampering with the Jacobite party; an interview between the two is described.

William asked Lord Shrewsbury . . . why he had quitted his service? Shrewsbury answered . . . The King, looking steadfastly upon him, said, "My Lord, have you no other reason?" The other answered "he had not." William then asked "when he had last seen Sir James Montgomery?" Shrewsbury faltered, but recovering himself said "he could not help seeing people who called at his door, but that his principles were loyal." "I know you to be a man of honour," replied the King, "and will believe what you say. But remember what you have said and that I trust to it." And without waiting for an answer quitted the room.³³

This adaptation of material from the life of William of Orange to supply details for the story of a Stewart King, may tend to show how insignificant in the eyes of a great artist are the objects of party strife among lesser men.

Although several of the foregoing points involve Buckingham, one can hardly doubt that he is essentially a development of Dryden's Zimri, and therefore a literary inspiration, like so much else in this group of novels.

The tale is completed by the Crusading Novels — *Ivanhoe* (1819), *The Betrothed*, and *The Talisman* (1825).³⁴ The disarming frankness of Scott in the matter of his difficulties with the Crusading period saves us the trouble of detecting him in the pillage of Froissart and other historians who flourished in the 14th and 15th Centuries. Here is one minute example. Lord Hailes quotes from Fordun the preliminary defiance of a 14th Century Scots warrior about to enter the lists against an English knight: "Prepare for death and confess yourself, and then you shall sup in Paradise."³⁵ So Bois-Guilbert to the Disinherited Knight in *Ivanhoe*: "This night thou shalt sleep in

³³ Dalrymple, under the year 1692.

³⁴ Also, no doubt, *Count Robert of Paris* (1831). *The Betrothed* and *The Talisman* were published together in 1825.

³⁵ Hailes, II, 272-273; also in *Grandfather*, I, 219. See also St. Luke's Gospel, XXIII, 43.

Paradise.”³⁶ Again, the folk-lore characters of Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and King Richard must, for the most part, reflect the ideas of a later age. And again, the quasi-Elizabethan language of the dialogue is of course quite as unauthentic here as in the “sub-Scottish” novels. If, then, historical authenticity is virtually thrown to the winds, we may expect to find details of these Crusading novels in strange places; and we are not altogether disappointed.

No-one reads *The Betrothed*, apparently, and one cannot be altogether surprised. Even Andrew Lang read it for the first time when he had to provide an introduction for it in the Border Edition. It is interesting technically, however, as a case where Scott attempted a task which was simply too much for him; not only is the novel set in the period of the Third Crusade, but it is located on the Welsh March, thus introducing a country and people of whom Scott knew practically nothing. In these circumstances we cannot be surprised to find him falling back on Scottish history. Wilkin Flammock is the leader of a group of Flemish colonists on the March, who find themselves entrusted with the defence of the Garde Douleureuse, a great March fortress, against the mountaineers. Much is made of Flammock’s skill in erecting and operating a mangonel, or machine for casting stones on the besiegers.³⁷ Now, in 1319 the English besieged Berwick, and “John Crab, a Fleming . . . constructed a moveable crane whereby stones . . . might be . . . let fall upon the enemy.” This passage is in Hailes,³⁸ and is recalled by Scott in his “Lardner” History,³⁹ and he had already quoted the original passage from Barbour in the *Minstrelsy* (I, 332).

Sir Ralph Sadler relates⁴⁰ how Queen Mary, a prisoner at Tutbury, begged to be allowed to accompany him when he went out hawking; to the annoyance of Elizabeth, he permitted Mary to go with him several times under guard to see his hawks fly upon the rivers in

³⁶ *Ivanhoe*, I, 164. Concerning the passage in *The Talisman* (pp. 386-8) where King Richard sucks poison from Sir Kenneth’s wound, see an interesting comment by Alan M. Cohn in *N & Q*, CCXI (Nov. 1966), 419-420.

³⁷ *Betrothed*, pp. 137, 142.

³⁸ Hailes, II, 89-90.

³⁹ Sir Walter Scott, “History of Scotland,” *Lardner’s Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, 2 vols. (London, 1830), I, 135.

⁴⁰ See Scott’s “Memoir of Sir Ralph Sadler” in *Misc. Prose Works*, IV, 126. This Memoir was originally prefixed to *State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler*, ed. A. Clifford, with notes by Walter Scott, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1809).

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the neighbourhood of the castle. Similarly, Eveline Beranger, a virtual prisoner in her castle on account of danger from the Welsh mountaineers, accepts with incautious eagerness a proposal to go out hawking along the river, and in consequence falls into great peril.⁴¹

Matter from Queen Mary's time can be detected in *Ivanhoe*. The roasting of Isaac the Jew is acknowledged by Scott himself as a borrowing from this period;⁴² and Rebecca the Jewess, repelling the guards at her trial with the words "It suits not a maiden to be disrobed by such rude grooms,"⁴³ echoes the well-known speech attributed to Queen Mary in the accounts of her execution.

All these points illustrate Scott's commonsense principle that there is much in the life of any age which is perfectly appropriate to the life of other periods.

Scott's very free handling of his historical material, which we have now illustrated at considerable length, is paralleled by a similar freedom with geography. Just as the past is but vaguely known to most readers, he might argue, so the geography of any given area is but vaguely known to most people, even to those who live in or near it. The scene of *The Antiquary* is supposed to be the neighbourhood of a town on the North-East Coast of Scotland, generally identified as Dundee; but the fisher-folk in the novel are almost certainly drawn from Newhaven-on-Forth. When Maggie Mucklebackit speaks of the coble "jowin' awa' in the Firth,"⁴⁴ she can hardly mean the narrow Tay Firth (but the Moray Firth is a possibility). In the famous storm scene,⁴⁵ the sea-fowl are said to have been alarmed by the "sound of human voices, where they had seldom been heard"⁴⁶ — a strange statement to make about the shore within a mile or two of a town like Dundee; but discrepancies disappear when it is realised that Scott was thinking about his tour in the lighthouse yacht round the shores of Scotland in 1814, his journal of which mentions several things in common with the *Antiquary* storm scene: [Francie o'] Fowlsheugh (*Antiquary*, I, 122, Lockhart, II, 340-1); the Dunbuy of Slaines (*ibid.*); a flimsy device for transporting persons or animals

⁴¹ *Betrothed*, pp. 384 ff.

⁴² *Ivanhoe*, I, 384.

⁴³ *Ivanhoe*, II, 252; *Grandfather*, II, 185.

⁴⁴ *Antiquary*, II, 69.

⁴⁵ *Antiquary*, Chapt. 7.

⁴⁶ *Antiquary*, I, 125.

among the Shetland cliffs (*Antiquary*, I, 126 ff: Lockhart, II, 351) — all these show quite clearly that in composing his storm scene Scott was ranging over his experiences at sea. When at Cape Wrath, he noted that the birds seemed to be little disturbed, as they showed no great alarm⁴⁷ at the sight of men. All this suggests an explanation for Scott's celebrated blunder in *The Antiquary*, in making the sun set in the North Sea. He could see ocean sunsets on his lighthouse voyage.

Similarly, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, Scott took the liberty of moving St. Leonard's Crag some considerable distance further from the High Street than they really are; in fact, the Deanses might well have been left at Woodend, near Dalkeith. As things are, Effie Deans could have gone home for dinner every day from Mrs. Saddletree's shop, and the concealment of her "situation" from her sister would have been impossible. The traditional site of the murderer Nichol Muschat's Cairn, where Jeanie Deans was to meet Robertson, is at the far end of the Duke's Walk behind Holyrood; but Scott moves it to the foot of the spur on which St. Anthony's Chapel stands, ignoring St. Anthony's Well, which actually is thereby, but whose associations were presumably not gruesome enough for a tale of nocturnal terror. Further, the spot has, like St. Leonard's, been removed to some distance from the town; for, as things are, no policeman of Edinburgh, however superstitious, could ever need any guide from the High Street to St. Anthony's Well, far less a guide like the loquacious madwoman Madge Wildfire.

A pleasantly characteristic case occurs in *Rob Roy*. The little force which captured Rob lay, we are told, at Aberfoyle, on the north side of the Forth,⁴⁸ and was ordered to cross the river, some to Gartartan, some to Duchray.⁴⁹ Ignoring the stone bridge which — according to Frank Osbaldistone, at least — crossed the Forth half a mile from the clachan, and ignoring the ford at Gartartan, which certainly was in use at the time,⁵⁰ the troops of "the Duke" rode down the valley about ten miles, to cross the Forth at the Fords of Frew,⁵¹ near Kippen. Scott obviously gave them this long detour

⁴⁷ Lockhart, II, 410-411.

⁴⁸ *Rob Roy*, II, 252, 266.

⁴⁹ *Rob Roy*, II, 263.

⁵⁰ Macfarlane's *Geog. Collections*, I, 341.

⁵¹ *Rob Roy*, II, 274.

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for nothing on account of the historical associations of the Fords of Frew; the Jacobite army crossed the river here in 1745,⁵² both advancing and retiring; and in 1715, according to Sinclair,⁵³ the Fords of Forth were turned into a death-trap by Argyle, who floored the river-bed with beams carrying pikes. In any case, says Sinclair, the Fords were known only to Rob Roy, whom the Jacobite leaders did not trust. The name Fords of Frew thus becomes a means of creating a hazy atmosphere of authenticity in the novel.

These things may, on the other hand, explain why Scott never liked to be tied down by the acceptance of geographical identifications in his novels.⁵⁴ If the novelist uses fictitious place-names, firmly dissociated from all real localities, he is safe from the critiques of persons who read his novel map in hand.

When all is said and done, every historical novel by Scott is bound to contain a great deal drawn from his personal life and observation — the entire stock-in-trade of most novelists, and the foundation for the work of all novelists whatever. It would not be appropriate to illustrate this proposition at length in a historical study, but the point needs to be established in order to complete the picture of the *Waverley* novels as a historical *pot-pourri*. For this purpose, some illustrations of exceptional interest now follow.

Although Scott's debt to outsiders like Burt for knowledge of the Highlands is probably much greater than the naïve reader would ever think possible, we are not to suppose that he had none of his own. Rose Bradwardine⁵⁵ tells how three Highlanders, killed at Tully-veolan in a skirmish, were laid out on the floor of the hall until their wives came, cried the coronach, and took away the corpses. For weeks after, she heard the cries, and saw the bodies lying stiff and swathed up in their bloody tartans. This is a personal reminiscence; Scott told Maria Edgeworth⁵⁶ how, as a High School boy, he had been admitted for a penny to view the corpses of some Highlanders killed in a mutiny at Leith Pier, and for ten days saw nothing but these bodies lying stiff and stark, wrapped in their plaids.

⁵² Home, p. 74.

⁵³ Sinclair, p. 201.

⁵⁴ *Letters*, XI, 223, 331; *Bride*, I, 15; *The Monastery*, I, 5; *Canongate*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ *Waverley*, I, 239.

⁵⁶ *Letters*, XI, 378-379.

Two incidents in *Ivanhoe* have been censured as improbable — the resurrection of Athelstane, and the death of Bois-Guilbert, who, after easily unhorsing the sick Wilfred of Ivanhoe, falls to the ground himself and is found to have died "a victim to the violence of his own contending passions."⁵⁷ Scott himself came to regard the Athelstane incident as a "botch,"⁵⁸ but it would not occur to him to repent in the case of Bois-Guilbert, since the mishap in question befell a neighbour of his own, one Lauchie Lochbreist. This man's brother and sister went to his house and told him, in the course of an unpleasant family wrangle, that his wife was no better than she should be. The husband, after answering with deep emotion that if she were the greatest whore in Edinburgh it was none of their business, fell down dead on the spot: "the contending passions of shame and anger and sorrow fairly burst the flood gates of life."⁵⁹ The incident was spoken of by Scott in letters of September 1819, and *Ivanhoe* was finished by November.⁶⁰ Thus Scott could transfer what happened to the man next-door, as it were, to a 12th Century knight, altering the contending passions to love for Rebecca, hatred of Ivanhoe, and ambition.

There seems to be only one character in the novels who clearly represents Scott himself, and that is the Edward Waverley of the early chapters of the novel, whose education and reading are Scott's own. These chapters might be explained as a false start. Perhaps it is no accident that Scott abandoned this novel for some years after writing them. The man who gave up poetry, wrote novels anonymously, shrank from intimate love-scenes, and criticised Byron for wearing his heart too openly on his sleeve⁶¹ — such a man could never be expected to bare his soul in fiction, and *Waverley* may well have been suspended because the author could go no further, irrespective of the approval or disapproval of friends. It is true that Scott never cancelled the chapters; but cancellation was a thing that wrung his withers very painfully at all times. After Waverley has shown his mediocrity in the dry, mathematical work of an army officer⁶² — Scott confessed his own inaptitude for this in a private letter of 1813⁶³ — he goes off on leave to Tully-

⁵⁷ *Ivanhoe*, II, 377.

⁵⁸ *Letters*, XII, 458.

⁵⁹ *Letters*, V, 498, 501.

⁶⁰ *Letters*, VI, 6, 11.

⁶¹ *Letters*, VI, 506.

⁶² *Waverley*, I, 154.

⁶³ *Letters*, III, 351.

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Veolan and we hear little more about the original theme: the Evils of a Defective Education.

But the most reticent artist cannot altogether conceal his soul, although he may lay false trails. James Hogg thought that Guy Mannerling was Walter Scott; but then *Guy* is not really a historical novel. A more interesting, if more speculative, case occurs in *The Highland Widow* (1826). Elspat MacTavish was a dreamer, out of touch with reality, and living in the past; she regarded her son's enlistment in one of the new Highland regiments as a disgrace to a free-born bandit, and her attempt to make him desert resulted in his death in front of a firing-squad. Scott himself, was, in one aspect of his personality, a dreamer, living in an ideal world,⁶⁴ as a result of which defect, perhaps, he brought about, not the death, but the threatened ruin of his children through the financial disaster of January 1826. (*The Highland Widow* was written in the summer of 1826.) Scott was always very anxious about the future of his family, and states several times that he worked to pay off his debt in full, mainly for their sake.⁶⁵ In the case of his unmarried daughter Anne, the loss was more than financial, since her matrimonial prospects were obviously injured—Lockhart hints at this, perhaps, when he speaks of her "reverse of fortune and disappointments of various sorts connected with that."⁶⁶ A psychologist of the more startling school might maintain that, seeing Elspat as the murderess of her son, Scott was seeing himself as the murderer of grandsons. It is certain that the pseudo-Gaelic speech of Elspat is much more tortured and unnatural than similar matter in any other novel, and it might possibly reflect an exceptional irritation in Scott's mind.

A good occupation for a rainy day is to count the number of cases in the novels where the gentleman assists his beloved in her studies; this is a recurring feature in the heroes and heroines, whether they belong to Scott's own generation or to the Middle Ages, and it must originate in his own love-affair with Miss Belsches, who, according to Lockhart, had literary interests.⁶⁷ Possibly the most interesting case is that of Amy Robsart, who rebelled against Tressilian's educational courtship,⁶⁸ and married someone else—like Miss Belsches. Incidentally,

⁶⁴ *Journal*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ *Journal*, pp. 176, 623; *Letters*, XI, 30, 450; see also *Letters*, VIII, 488.

⁶⁶ Lockhart, V, 451.

⁶⁷ Lockhart, I, 205.

⁶⁸ *Kenilworth*, II, 43, 46, 142.

Amy came to a tragic end, like Eveline Neville, who rejected Oldbuck to marry the heir of an earldom, and was in consequence driven to despair and suicide. If there is a sub-conscious serves-you-right element in this, it has probably no foundation in reality, since Miss Belsches married a man who was a good friend of Scott's, Sir William Forbes the banker.⁶⁹—Towards the end of 1827, when Miss Belsches had been long dead, Scott renewed his acquaintance with her mother, Lady Jane Stuart, and was deeply affected by this resurrection of his youthful trial:⁷⁰ at precisely the same time, he began *The Fair Maid of Perth*, whose hero, Henry Gow, living about 1400, displays an absurd lack of *savoir faire* when making a Valentine visit to his fair one. His gaucherie resembles that of Oldbuck in his shy youth,⁷¹ and one can have little doubt that there is an autobiographical foundation for these features in the novels.

It has already been suggested above that *Rob Roy*, whose plot turns on bills of exchange, was an epilogue to four years of financial stress and strain in Scott's own affairs. It has also been remarked above, more than once, that the historical record contains no more than hints or outlines for his great characters; a person like Scott's King James almost certainly owes more to living humourists of Scott's acquaintance than to history.—Finally, the feelings and opinions of the characters must often owe more to the author than to any historical prototype—see, for example, the meditations of Henry Morton on the political and religious situation in his day.⁷² Every novel of Scott's obviously has a strong infusion of Regency life and thought which renders period authenticity quite impossible.—Further remarks on Scott's own attitudes as displayed in the novels will be offered later.

(To be continued)

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⁶⁹ See *Journal*, pp. 81-82.

⁷⁰ *Journal*, p. 427.

⁷¹ *Antiquary*, II, 178; *Fair Maid*, I, 118.

⁷² E.g., *Old Mortality*, I, 108.