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**AUTHORIAL DISGUISE AND
INTERTEXTUALITY: SCOTT'S *THE LAY OF THE
LAST MINSTREL*, COLERIDGE, AND KEATS**

Beth Lau

Walter Scott notoriously published his best-selling novels anonymously, identifying himself only as "The Author of Waverley" on the title pages of his books and also employing numerous frame narrators and pseudo authors such as Jedidiah Cleishbotham, Peter Pattieson, Captain Clutterbuck, and Chrystal Croftangry. Scott went to elaborate lengths to maintain his anonymity, even having his manuscripts as well as his corrected page proofs copied so that no one at the printing office could see and recognize his handwriting. Although numerous scholars have explored the strategies Scott used to disguise his authorship and his reasons for doing so in the novels, few have addressed these issues in his poems. As Frank Jordan notes, however, Scott's impulse toward authorial anonymity and the wearing of masks can be detected "from the outset of his career," even before he published *Waverley* in 1814.¹ In this essay, I offer support for Jordan's claim by analyzing techniques and themes of authorial disguise in Scott's first published poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). Moreover, as I shall demonstrate, the tactics used and possible motives for Scott's desire to withhold his identity can be elucidated by comparing his practice in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and his prose remarks on the subject to works of other Romantic writers, especially Coleridge and Keats.²

¹ Frank Jordan, "Scott, Chatterton, Byron, and the Wearing of Masks," in *Scott and his Influence: The Papers of the Aberdeen Scott Conference, 1982*, ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983), 282.

² Others who have explored the motives for and implications of Scott's anonymity in the novels include Seamus Cooney, "Scott's Anonymity—Its Motives and Consequences," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 10 (1973): 207-19; Claire Lamont,

Scott made a number of comments on the importance of masks and disguises in artistic performance. In a review of *The Works of Thomas Chatterton*, published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1804, the year before *Lay of the Last Minstrel* appeared, Scott considers why the poems Chatterton wrote in the persona of Thomas Rowley were more successful than those he wrote under his own name. "There exist persons to whom nature has granted the talent of mimicking, not merely the voice and gesture, but the expression, ideas, and manner of thinking of others, and who, speaking in an assumed character, display a fire and genius which evaporates when they resume their own." When writing as Rowley, Scott says, Chatterton was "superior to what he was able to maintain in his own person when his disguise was laid aside."³ In another essay, on "The Present State of Periodical Criticism," published in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* in 1811, Scott defends the practice of anonymous reviewing and provides the following anecdote to illustrate his points: "Every one has heard of the celebrated harlequin, who could not go through his part with spirit unless when he wore the usual mask, although conscious that his identity was equally recognized whether he used it or not; and we cannot help thinking that those critics whose opinions are best worth hearing will be most ready to deliver them under the modest disguise of an anonymous publication."⁴ The Harlequin anecdote is repeated in expanded form in the Introduction to *Chronicles of the Canongate*

"Walter Scott: Anonymity and the Unmasking of Harlequin," in *Authorship, Commerce and the Public*, ed. E. J. Clery, Caroline Franklin, and Peter Garside (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 54-66; Jerome McGann, "Walter Scott's Romantic Postmodernity," in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 113-29; Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 163-64. Jane Millgate provides one of the most extensive treatments of disguise and anonymity in Scott's novels (*Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984], e.g., 59-62, 66-67, 85-87, 104-5, 107-10, 132-33, 189-90). Millgate stresses the continuity of Scott's career and the patterns one can trace in all of his work, from his editions of ballads, to his poetry, to his novels. Although she does analyze several of Scott's poems, including *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, her emphasis differs from my own (see n. 9 below).

³ In *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 17 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1849), 227.

⁴ In Kenneth Curry, *Sir Walter Scott's Edinburgh Annual Register* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 169.

(1827), where Scott for the first time acknowledged in print his authorship of the Waverley novels. Scott explains how an Italian actor playing the role of Arlechino or Harlequin was persuaded by others to go on stage without his customary cat mask, on the grounds that he would be even more entertaining if he could add facial expressions to his comedic performance. The result, however, was disastrous; the clown “lost the audacity which a sense of incognito bestowed, and with it all the reckless play of raillery which gave vivacity to his original acting.” He resumed his mask in subsequent performances, “but, it is said, without ever being able to regain the careless and successful levity which the consciousness of the disguise had formerly bestowed.” Scott then draws a connection to his own situation. “Perhaps the Author of Waverley is now about to incur a risk of the same kind, and endanger his popularity by having laid aside his incognito.”⁵ As Seamus Cooney notes, Scott’s remarks “imply that he felt anonymity was deeply connected with his creative power” (211).

This impulse to disguise the authorial self would seem to be an anti-Romantic characteristic, since it runs counter to a central principle of Romantic aesthetics as traditionally defined: the shift M. H. Abrams documented from earlier mimetic and pragmatic theories to an expressive theory of art that locates the source of poetry in the poet’s own perceptions, thoughts, and especially feelings. If poetry is regarded as the direct expression of a writer’s inner self, impeding access to that self would seem to negate the primary function and appeal of poetry.⁶ As Jordan points out, however, the statements by Scott cited above are actually similar to many by other Romantic writers who describe the ideal poet, usually represented by Shakespeare, as a selfless chameleon or ventriloquist who disappears into his characters (280, 284-85). Coleridge compares Shakespeare to Proteus and contrasts his poetry, which “is characterless; that is, it does not reflect the individual Shakespeare,” to Milton’s, which expresses the author’s own personality. Hazlitt similarly extolls the impersonality of Shakespeare’s art, declaring that “he was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be.” “By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is

⁵ Walter Scott, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, ed. Claire Lamont (London: Penguin, 2003), 3.

⁶ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; rpt. New York: Norton, 1958), 21-26, 97-103, and *passim*.

given.” Hazlitt’s writings helped shape Keats’s concept of the identityless poet of Negative Capability, again most effectively represented by Shakespeare. Keats defines the poet as a “camelion,” having “no self . . . no character” who takes on the identities of his creations. “A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence,” Keats writes, “because he has no Identity—he is continually in for[ming]—and filling some other Body.”⁷ It is perhaps a central paradox in Romantic concepts of the poet that they celebrate an ideal of self-loss in the creation of other beings at the same time as they describe poetry as the expression of the poet’s own perceptions and feelings. Indeed, Andrew Bennett argues that the Romantic idea of the poet is a site of conflict, in that “Writing is seen to both construct and evacuate the subjectivity of the author. . . . The author in the text is both present and absent, self-identical and anonymous,” and Scott’s claim that for many writers disguise fosters creativity can be regarded as further evidence of this inconsistency.⁸

Although *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* featured Scott’s name on the title page, the poem reflects an impulse toward authorial anonymity by employing the old Minstrel from an earlier time period as narrator.⁹ Moreover, disguise features prominently in the plot of the poem. The magician Michael Scott, whose miraculously preserved corpse clutches his “Mighty Book” (2.243), is surely in part a figure for the inspired,

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 1: 125. For Coleridge’s comparison of Shakespeare to Proteus see *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 1: 69-70, 225, and *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2: 27-28 and 27n.2. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930-1934), 5: 47, 50. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 1: 193-94, 223-25, 387.

⁸ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2. See also 19, where Bennett states that for Romantic writers, “literature becomes a paradoxical strategy of self-preservation and, at the same time, self-dissolution.”

⁹ Jordan (282) notes that the poems as well as the novels employ fictional narrators. Millgate also treats the importance of framing devices in *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and other poems, though she stresses the way they provide a link between the world of historical and geographical reality and the fictional world of imagination (19-34; she treats *Lay of the Last Minstrel* on 14-18).

immortal poet.¹⁰ The mischievous goblin dwarf Gilpin Horner steals this book, and the one spell he is able to learn before it snaps shut is the ability to disguise himself as other people. Later in the poem the Baron he serves, Lord Cranstoun, draws on the dwarf's skill to disguise himself as William of Deloraine, fight against and defeat the English knight Richard Musgrave, and thereby ensure peace between the warring nations and win the Ladye of Branksome Hall's permission to marry her daughter Margaret. The ability to disguise oneself as another person would seem to be the central, virtually magical talent of the poet. A tension exists in the fact that Michael Scott is revered as a mighty, mythic figure for the power of disguise he commands; he is famous for his ability to hide his identity. This is the same tension, however, as we find in Keats's declaration that Negative Capability is the "quality [that] went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed [sic] so enormously" (*Letters* 1: 193). For Keats as for Scott, a man can gain fame as a great poet by disappearing into his creations. Indeed when Keats writes that "We have seen three literary kings in our Time—Scott—Byron—and then the scotch nove{els}," he acknowledges the anonymous author of "the scotch novels" as one of the most acclaimed writers of the day (*Letters* 2: 16).

Tensions also exist in Scott's account of the poem's composition in his 1830 Introduction to *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. As Scott explains, he was stalled in his effort to write his first major narrative poem from a dislike of all the known verse forms available to him. A breakthrough occurred when he heard John Stoddart recite Coleridge's *Christabel* (then unpublished). "The singularly irregular structure of the stanzas, and the liberty which it allowed the author to adapt the sound to the sense," Scott writes, "seemed to be exactly suited to such an extravaganza as I meditated" (*CPW* 44). The fact that his creative breakthrough came from hearing *Christabel* recited, whose verse form (as well as other aspects of the poem) he could imitate, takes away from Scott's originality and certainly from any image of a solitary genius whose works overflow from his unique inner psyche. Dorothy Wordsworth reported a visit she and her brother made to Scott, in which the latter explained he had been "very much struck with" *Christabel* when he heard John Stoddart recite it and "desired him to repeat it again" until "he himself after this could repeat a

¹⁰ Scott's poetry and 1830 introductions to his poems are cited from *The Complete Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), hereafter abbreviated *CPW*.

good deal of it.” Dorothy speculated that Scott’s unacknowledged borrowings from the poem in *Lay of the Last Minstrel* might have been “an unconscious imitation” rather than deliberate plagiarism.¹¹ As Margaret Russett notes, this account of his creative process “cast[s] Scott in the role of ‘Christabel’’s heroine, who, ‘o’er-mastered by [a] mighty spell,’ is moved by ‘unconscious sympathy’ ‘passively [to] imitate’ her enchantress” and “invests . . . Coleridge’s verse with the power of folk spells.”¹² According to this reading, one could understand *The Lay*’s references to overpowering spells derived from a mighty magician as attesting to the inescapability of literary influence. Indeed, Scott, who found it easy to memorize extensive passages of poetry, seems to have significantly relied on other texts for his creative process. Alison Lumsden refers to the “essentially intertextual nature of Scott’s work” and claims that the notes documenting allusions to other writers in the new Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels make clear that “Scott’s fiction is constructed via a mesh of allusion.”¹³ If this statement is true of the novels it also aptly characterizes the poems. In *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Michael Scott may particularly be read as a figure for Coleridge, whom Scott in his Introduction to the poem calls “a man of . . . extraordinary talents” (CPW 44), and whose work both inspires and constrains other poets—helps bring their work into existence but without allowing them to break free from his example.

If Coleridge had this effect on Scott, however, it is one with which Coleridge himself was familiar. Morton Paley cites a document

¹¹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 1: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 633. Scott did not publicly acknowledge his debt to Coleridge until 1830. After *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was published in 1805, Coleridge and many of his friends feared that Scott might have damaged *Christabel*’s claim to originality by imitating many distinctive features of the poem, which was not published until 1816.

¹² Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760-1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 85-86, quoting 2.605-20 of *Christabel*.

¹³ Alison Lumsden, “Burns, Scott and Intertextuality,” in Gerard Carruthers, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 126. Scott refers to his “uncommonly retentive memory” in his 1808 Memoir (David Hewitt, ed., *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott* [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981], 41). This work is hereafter cited as Hewitt.

Coleridge labeled “Rough Draft of a Letter written to a Man . . . who offered to review W. Scott’s poems to his injury,” in which he exculpates Scott from the charge of plagiarizing *Christabel* in *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In this document, Coleridge also describes an incident (probably invented) in which a German man who attends one of his lectures on Shakespeare tells him it was remarkably similar to A. W. Schlegel’s remarks on the same play, though Coleridge claims he had not read Schlegel at that time and attributes the similarities to two like-minded men, steeped in the same books, naturally coming to “the same conclusions by the same trains [of reasoning] from the same principles.” Most scholars believe Coleridge in fact did borrow from Schlegel in this lecture and other works, and Paley believes he is lenient on Scott’s unacknowledged appropriation of *Christabel* in hopes of securing a similar pardon for his own acts of plagiarism.¹⁴

Indeed, Coleridge’s tendency to inject passages from other people’s works into his own is notorious. Jerome Christensen offers one explanation for this practice that links it to another compulsive habit of Coleridge’s, his writing of voluminous notes in the margins of his own and other people’s books. According to Christensen, Coleridge needed another text to provoke his own writing, and his works therefore incorporate passages from other writers, whether acknowledged or not, which he can then respond to with commentary.¹⁵ In this sense, Coleridge like Scott needed an external source—another text, tale, or historical anecdote—to initiate and enable his own, supposedly original works. Even *Kubla Khan*, which celebrates the inspired creative genius and, according to its Preface, resulted from a process of unconscious composition, begins by citing a passage from a book, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, Coleridge says he was reading when he fell asleep. Thus even a poem that would seem to be the most spontaneous and subjective, a direct effluence from the poet’s inner psyche, is said to owe its origin and some of its most memorable language to another work. Moreover, *Purchas* is hardly the only source that has been detected in the poem. Scholars have identified allusions to *Paradise Lost* and many other works in *Kubla Khan*; John Livingston Lowes wrote an entire book on literary

¹⁴ *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (1956-1971), 3: 360; Morton Paley, “Coleridge, Scott, and ‘This Mescolanza of Measures,’” *The Wordsworth Circle* 38.3 (2007): 106-7.

¹⁵ Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge’s Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), chap. 3, esp. 98-100, 104-5.

sources for this poem and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the latter of which is meant to resemble an oral folk ballad and which Coleridge characterized as “a work of . . . pure Imagination.”¹⁶ In addition, *Ancient Mariner* employs multiple frame narrators—the Mariner, the poet who introduces his story, and in 1817 the gloss writer—so that Coleridge speaks not directly but through layers of various personae. Like Scott, Coleridge often seems to have felt freest to compose with the aid of some distancing device or disguise. Speaking through the voices of others, whether invented narrators, characters, or other writers whose passages one appropriates, paradoxically allows for the most uninhibited self-expression.

A similar pattern can also be identified in Keats's work. Keats's poetry is notoriously literary, dense with allusions to other poems. *Ode to a Nightingale*, a locus classicus of the Romantic expressive theory of poetry, is one such work. Jonathan Bate states that the number of “Shakespearean analogues” in *Ode to a Nightingale* is “remarkable”; he counts about fifty examples. Cynthia Chase considers Milton to be the central literary predecessor with whom the ode engages. My own study of Keats and Wordsworth found more allusions to Wordsworth in *Ode to a Nightingale* than in any other of Keats's poems.¹⁷ In addition, traces of many other writers have been detected in the ode, including Coleridge, Hazlitt, Charlotte Smith, Horace, and Drayton.¹⁸ *Lay of the Last Minstrel* may also be echoed in the poem. Keats's account of how the nightingale's

plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades (75-78)¹⁹

¹⁶ John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927); Coleridge, *Table Talk* 1: 149.

¹⁷ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 192; Cynthia Chase, “‘Viewless Wings’: Intertextual Interpretation of Keats's ‘Ode to a Nightingale,’” in Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker, eds., *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 212-13; Beth Lau, *Keats's Reading of the Romantic Poets* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 28.

¹⁸ See the notes in Miriam Allott, ed., *Keats: The Complete Poems*, 3rd impression with corrections (London: Longman, 1975), 523-32.

¹⁹ Keats's poetry is quoted from *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

is reminiscent of the effect in *Lay of the Minstrel*'s harp on his audience after he has finished his song:

Now seems it far, and now a-near,
Now meets, and now eludes the ear;
Now seems some mountain side to sweep,
Now faintly dies in valley deep (5.516-19).

As with *Kubla Khan*, a fundamental irony pervades Keats's ode: it proposes the nightingale's spontaneous, natural song as its model of creativity, but it is composed almost solely from other texts. Keats could be said to conform to Hazlitt's description of Shakespeare as an artist whose originality derives from his uncanny ability to assume the voices of others, "with an art like that of a ventriloquist" (*Works* 5: 50)—or to Keats's own formulation that one becomes a "Man of Achievement" like Shakespeare through the Negative Capability of losing his identity as he takes on the voices of others (*Letters* 1: 193).²⁰

Another work that illustrates Keats's tendency to construct his poetic voice from the voices of others is *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Many parallels between this poem and Coleridge's *Christabel* have been noted, including the setting in a Medieval castle, the plot device of hostile families, young women who dream of their future husbands and participate in some way in their own fall from innocence, and numerous verbal echoes, such as *Christabel*'s "The lamp with twofold silver chain" (1.176) and *St. Agnes*'s "A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door" (357).²¹ Significant parallels have also been identified between *St. Agnes* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, particularly Scott's description of the moon shining through "the east oriel" in Melrose Abbey—

The silver light, so pale and faint,
Showed many a prophet and many a saint,
Whose image on the glass was dyed;
Full in the midst, his cross of red
Triumphant Michael brandished,
.....

²⁰ On Keats's ventriloquism of other writers, see my "Protest, 'Nativism,' and Impersonation in the Work of Chatterton and Keats," *Studies in Romanticism* 42, no. 4 (2003): 532-39.

²¹ See Lau, *Keats's Reading of the Romantic Poets* for these and other parallels that scholars have detected between the two poems (95-101). Coleridge's poetry is quoted from *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004).

The moonbeam kissed the holy pane,
 And threw on the pavement a bloody stain (2.121-28)
 —and Keats's description of the moon shining through the "casement
 high and triple-arch'd" in Madeline's bedroom, with its
 panes of quaint device,
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes

 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
 A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,

 And on her silver cross soft amethyst. (208-21)

Deloraine follows the porter through "The arched cloister" of Melrose "Till, stooping low his lofty crest, / He entered the cell of the ancient priest" (2.35, 37-38), much as Porphyro "follow'd [Angela] through a lowly arched way. / Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume" (109-10). Margaret "early awake[s]" and "glides down the secret stair" (2.298, 303) to meet her clandestine lover, as Madeline and Porphyro just before dawn escape the castle "Down the wide stairs" and "glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall" (355, 362). To amuse herself Margaret "waked at times the lute's soft tone" as she thinks of Lord Cranstoun (3.314), while Porphyro at Madeline's bedside "Awakening up . . . took her hollow lute" and "play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute" (289, 291). When the Scottish and English troops banquet together the night before Musgrave and Deloraine are to fight in single combat, many warriors "strove / To win [Margaret's] love" (5.159-60), but she "from hall did soon retreat" to "her lonely bower apart" (5.155, 163), much as Madeline disregards the "amorous cavalier[s]" (60) who try to win her favor and withdraws to her bedroom to dream of her future husband. These and numerous other passages indicate that *Eve of St. Agnes* is indebted to *Lay of the Last Minstrel* as well as to *Christabel*, the poem that itself helped inspire Scott's work.²²

²² For Scott's influence on *St. Agnes* see E. C. Pettet, "Echoes of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in *The Eve of St. Agnes*," *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 3, no. 9 (1952): 39-48. I have supplied some parallels not noted by Pettet, specifically the last two examples from Cantos 3 and 5 of *Lay*.

In fact, in a number of cases all three poems are similar, so that it may be difficult to distinguish whether Keats borrowed from Coleridge, from Scott, from Scott echoing Coleridge, or from all of the above. All three works feature medieval settings, young women with surreptitious visitors from families that are feuding with their own families, spells and supernatural elements, and old men (two of whom are bards—the Minstrel and Bard Bracey—and the elderly beadsman in *St. Agnes*). In all three works, the young woman sneaking out of or into her castle encounters the family watchdog (“The mastiff old” in *Christabel* [1.140], “the shaggy bloodhound” in *Lay* [2.304], and “The wakeful bloodhound” in *St. Agnes* [365]). All three young women are compared to doves: Bard Bracey dreams of a dove strangled by a snake that he interprets as Christabel; Margaret “Flew like the startled cushat-dove” through “the hazel grove” after her meeting with Lord Cranstoun (2.410-11); and Madeline enters her chamber “like ring-dove fray’d and fled,” and later when she fears she has been betrayed by Porphyro she compares herself to “A dove forlorn” (198, 333). In all three works, the narrator (in *Christabel* 252; *Lay* 1.9) or a character (Angela in *St. Agnes* 111) exclaims “well-a-day!” Leigh Hunt said *The Eve of St. Agnes* contains “nothing of the conventional craft of artificial writers . . . no substitution of reading or of ingenious thoughts for feeling or spontaneity. . . . All flows out of sincerity and passion.”²³ On the contrary, this poem like all of Keats’s is heavily indebted to other writers through whom Keats speaks like a ventriloquist. This is not to deny that the poem *is* original, however, or that it expresses Keats’s perceptions and feelings. E. C. Pettet attributes the ease with which Keats composed the opening stanzas of *St. Agnes* (based on evidence from the manuscript showing less revision in these passages than in later ones) to the fact that he was able to draw upon “a teeming abundance of associations” from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (43). Pettet cites as confirmation of this process the sonnet “How many bards gild the lapses of time,” in which Keats says that other poets constitute “the food” of his imagination, and “often, when I sit me down to rhyme, / These will in throngs before my mind intrude” and inspire his composition. Like Scott himself and like Coleridge, Keats could compose most fluently and effortlessly, could even be said to express himself most effectively, when he could don the mask of someone else, in his case other writers.

²³ From *Imagination and Fancy* (1844), in *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Charles Mahoney, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), 110.

Despite these similarities between the theories and practices of Scott, Coleridge, and Keats, some differences can be identified that may distinguish Scott's version of authorial disguise from those of other Romantic contemporaries. Although Scott in his review of *The Works of Thomas Chatterton* identifies to some extent with Chatterton's preference for composing under "an assumed character" (*Miscellaneous Prose Works* 227), he finds fault with the earlier poet's insistence on maintaining the fiction of Thomas Rowley as the author of his works. "The ardent mind of Chatterton," Scott writes, "urged him to maintain [the Rowley persona] at the sacrifice of the poetical reputation he might have acquired by renouncing a phantom of his imagination, and at the yet more important dereliction of personal truth and moral rectitude" (223). In this account, Chatterton's authorial disguise is not only morally reprehensible but reflects too much or too "ardent" an imagination, rather than serving as a manifestation of the creative imagination in its highest form as in remarks by Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Keats.

Keats is especially relevant on this point, as he has been compared to Chatterton for the way in which both sought legitimacy through a kind of self-loss: Chatterton by masquerading as the fifteenth-century monk Thomas Rowley and Keats by his extensive allusions to other poets, or what Marjorie Levinson calls the "fetishized exhibition of other men's words" in his poetry. According to Levinson, Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence model does not apply to Keats but only to those poets who regard themselves as legitimate heirs of their national literary tradition. The middle-class Keats, who felt "disinherited by the Tradition," paradoxically had to establish his legitimacy by proving his derivativeness, just as Chatterton felt he could more easily gain acceptance into elite literary circles as the editor of ancient texts than as an original author.²⁴ A similar argument has been made about Jane Austen's uncanny, Shakespearean ability to create a range of lifelike characters that bear no trace of her own identity. According to D. A. Miller, Austen disappeared into her characters in order to escape her own marginalized status as an unmarried female. "Behind the glory of her style's willed evacuation of substance," Miller writes, "lies the ignominy of a subject's *hopelessly insufficient social realization*, just as behind style's ahistorical impersonality lies the historical impasse of someone

²⁴ Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 57, 10. See also Lau, "Protest, 'Nativism,' and Impersonation in the Works of Chatterton and Keats," 532-35.

whose social representation doubles for social humiliation” (Miller’s emphasis).²⁵

In his Memoir of his early life, Scott directly states that he did not share the social disadvantages and concomitant literary ambition of writers like Chatterton and Burns (or, we could add, Keats and Austen). “As I have not been blessed with the talents of Burns or Chatterton,” Scott writes, “I have been happily exempted from the influence of their violent passions, exasperated by the struggle of feelings which rose up against the unjust decrees of fortune. . . . Yet, although I cannot tell of difficulties vanquished and distance of rank annihilated by the strength of genius, those who shall hereafter read this little memoir may find in it some hints to be improved for the regulation of their own minds or the training those of others” (Hewitt 1-2). As Scott himself realized, whatever he had in common with Chatterton, he did not share the earlier poet’s motives for disguising his authorial identity.

Scott and Chatterton also differed in that, whereas the literary world long and contentiously debated whether or not Chatterton’s Rowley poems were written by a fifteenth-century monk, Scott’s authorship of the Waverley novels was never truly disguised. As Claire Lamont points out, although Scott practiced various forms of anonymity, including having no name, another name, or the sobriquet “The Author of Waverley” on the title pages of his novels, these tactics were “in a simple sense unsuccessful” because his identity was widely known (54-55). The fact that even after he publicly acknowledged his authorship of the novels in 1827 Scott continued to publish works that feature various frame narrators and fictional authors makes clear that the chief purpose of these tactics was not to hide his identity.²⁶ This point is further supported by the Harlequin anecdote Scott twice uses to illustrate his claim that writers, whether reviewers or novelists, compose more freely when they are wearing masks. As Lamont explains, dramatic masks such as those worn by Harlequin and certain other characters in the *commedia del’arte* tradition differ from those worn during masquerades. Whereas the latter are meant to “give an incognito” to the wearer, this was not the case with the actor’s mask, for the audience would know the actor’s name from the play bill. “The dramatic mask is not concerned with anonymity,” Lamont

²⁵ D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 28.

²⁶ Jordan notes the various “masks” Scott assumed in works published after he admitted his authorship of the Waverley novels (285).

states, "and clearly serves a different purpose" (60-1). According to Lamont, just as Harlequin's mask had the effect of making audiences "pay attention to the whole figure of the actor" instead of focusing on his facial expressions, so Scott may have adopted authorial masks so that readers would pay attention to "the whole story" instead of fixating on "the personality of the artist" (59, 61).

Another way to understand Scott's motives may be suggested by the Venetian custom of masking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the very Italian culture and time period from which Scott's Harlequin anecdote derives. As James Johnson argues, by the eighteenth century masking had become a widespread custom in Venice, not just during carnival but throughout most of the year. Johnson challenges the common view that masks in Venetian culture allowed for a liberating, subversive freedom from social roles. Instead, he claims that the custom of masking preserved social hierarchies "and the collective effect was on balance conservative."²⁷ Johnson gives various examples of persons for whom masks, while they did not disguise identity, maintained distance and dignity in public spaces. Men who had once been wealthy but had fallen into ruin and become beggars wore masks to preserve their pride and "hid[e] their humiliation," even though most people "knew the rank and even the names of those behind the mask" (114). At gambling halls such as the Ridotto where people from various ranks assembled, masks "allowed nobles to play 'anonymously' and off the record" and to "save face" if they lost "large sums to commoners" (123-24). Likewise in the theatres, masks allowed diverse social classes to mingle in close quarters without having to follow the usual formalities between inferiors and superiors, and they thereby "uph[eld] the hierarchy by temporarily effacing it" (120). The authority of the elite classes was preserved by the polite fiction of the mask, for "How can your authority be defied if it isn't publicly acknowledged?" (124).

The use of the mask in Venetian culture as Johnson describes it has much in common with Scott's impulse to disguise his authorship. At least one major purpose of Scott's various strategies for creating anonymity may have been to maintain a gentlemanly distance from participation in the commercial publishing market, especially the writing of novels. One of the reasons Scott initially gave for publishing *Waverley* anonymously was that "I am not sure it would be considered quite

²⁷ James H. Johnson, *Venice Incognito: Masks in the Serene Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 112.

decorous for me as a Clerk of Sessions to write novels" (28 July 1814 letter to John Morritt), and he repeats this point in the Preface to the Third Edition of *Waverley* when he says the author may not wish his identity to be known because "He may be a man of grave profession, to whom the reputation of being a novel-writer may be prejudicial."²⁸ Even Scott's metrical romances, however, though they carried more cachet as poetry, were consumed by a mass public that, as Marlon Ross notes, found them as easy to read as Gothic novels. According to Ross, by writing popular narrative romances about feudal society, Scott was able to maintain the persona of an upper-class gentleman endorsing an older economic and cultural order all the while that his best-selling books participated in the new.²⁹

In his defense of the practice of anonymous reviewing, Scott uses a telling analogy when he says that "the writers of the leading articles in the reviews of any eminence, are in general pretty well known," for each man's "manner and style" identifies him, "like the champions of old, who, though sheathed in armour, were known by their bearings and cognizances, [and] are distinguished farther in the battle than the groom and yeoman who entered into it barefaced" (Curry 168). Like the masked nobles in Venetian society, the purpose of writing anonymously for Scott is less to remain concealed than to preserve a distinction between upper and lower ranks, knights as opposed to "groom[s] and yeom[e]n," the latter of whom enter battle "barefaced." As mentioned above, in his second reference to the Harlequin anecdote (in the Introduction to *Chronicles of the Canongate*), Scott states that without his mask the actor "lost the audacity which a sense of incognito bestowed, and with it all the reckless play of raillery which gave vivacity to his original" performance (3). One of the possible sources of this anecdote is a passage in the autobiography of Colley Cibber about the comic actor William Penkethman. Cibber describes an occasion when Penkethman was persuaded to perform the role of Harlequin without his usual mask, with disastrous results, for he "could not take to himself the Shame of the

²⁸ H. J. C. Grierson, ed., *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-1937), 3: 479; Walter Scott, *Waverley ; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 344. Both passages are cited and discussed by Cooney 208, 210.

²⁹ Marlon B. Ross, "Scott's Chivalric Pose: The Function of Metrical Romance in the Romantic Period," *Genre* 19, no. 3 (1986): 277-79.

Character without being conceal'd." Cibber concludes that the main reason for playing Harlequin in a mask "is that the low senseless, and monstrous things he says, and does in it, no theatrical Assurance could get through, with a bare Face."³⁰ Scott may have shared Cibber's view that there was something shameful or in his own words "audacious" and "reckless" about the literary performances in which he engaged, the writing of popular romances and novels for a mass readership and commercial gain, from which he needed to distance himself with the decorous fiction of an authorial mask.

Similar class anxieties have been noted in other figures and institutions from the early nineteenth-century Edinburgh publishing industry. Ian Duncan explains how the *Edinburgh Review*, to which Scott contributed early on in his career, sought to create a professional class of literary men who would be "neither aristocratic dilettanti nor Grub Street hacks but professional gentlemen." One of the chief means Archibald Constable, the publisher of the *Edinburgh Review* (as well as most of Scott's novels), used to achieve this goal was to pay contributors generous sums, considerably more than other magazines were accustomed to offer. The other main strategy which assured that Edinburgh Reviewers "retained [their] caste" was the cloak of anonymity, the practice Scott defends in his essay "On the Present State of Periodical Criticism." "All the same," Duncan writes, "the resort to such a cloak suggested uncertainty or vulnerability, and [Francis] Jeffrey (in particular) worried constantly whether his role as editor (with a salary of £300 a year) exposed him to the contamination of trade" (53). Walter Scott's future son-in-law John Gibson Lockhart, writing in the rival Tory *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (under the pseudonym Baron von Lauerwinkel), asserted that Jeffrey's fear, in effect, was justified, for he challenged the professional disinterestedness of the Edinburgh Reviewers and characterized them as "only advocates for hire after all."³¹

Lockhart, in *Blackwood's* articles signed "Z," is well known for his notorious class-based attacks on Leigh Hunt, Keats, and Hazlitt as vulgar "Cockney" writers who lack the credentials of birth, education, and places of residence to gain admittance into elite literary circles, though

³⁰ Quoted in Lamont 61-62. Both Lamont and Jordan (283-84) cite Cibber as a possible source for Scott's Harlequin anecdote.

³¹ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 53, 54; see also 25.

scholars have argued that these attacks reflect Lockhart's fears of a rising meritocracy that threatens the security of his own privileged status.³² Kim Wheatley, after identifying various ways in which Lockhart's social credentials were superior to Leigh Hunt's (Lockhart had gone to Oxford, for example, whereas Hunt had not attended a university), points out that nonetheless Lockhart like Hunt was making his living as a journalist, so that his "social snobbery toward Hunt may reflect the tenuousness of his own claim to the status of a member of the landed gentry."³³ It would appear that tensions involving the class status of professional writers permeated the literary circles in which Scott participated, and these tensions informed the practice of authorial anonymity. Of course, Scott also kept secret his direct involvement in trade--his partnerships with the Ballantyne brothers' publishing and printing businesses --an aspect of Scott's life that is surely related to his refusal to acknowledge the authorship of his novels.³⁴

In *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the treatment of disguise may also have class implications. As mentioned previously, the aristocratic Michael Scott had been a powerful magician whose "Mighty Book" contains the spell that allows people to take on the identities of others. When Lord Cranstoun employs this spell the outcome is beneficial, as his defeat of the English knight Richard Musgrave while disguised as Deloraine and his subsequent marriage to Margaret bring peace and harmony to the border clans. When the goblin page Gilpin Horner draws on Michael Scott's book to disguise himself as the Ladye of Branksome Hall's son, however, he causes much mischief and discord until he is finally exposed and spirited away by the ghost of Michael Scott. As Dino Felluga argues, the short, crude goblin suggests the lower classes, and the fact that Michael Scott and Lord Cranstoun are able to use disguise expertly, to the benefit of society, whereas the dwarf in disguise wreaks havoc, implies that literature is best left to the ruling elite and will only be mismanaged by writers of lower rank.³⁵

³² See for example Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 10-23.

³³ Kim Wheatley, "The *Blackwood's* Attacks on Leigh Hunt," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47 (1992): 6n.11.

³⁴ On this point see Cooney 216-17; Millgate 85-86.

³⁵ Dino Franco Felluga, *The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

In conclusion, although Scott in many respects can be said to participate in a pervasive Romantic celebration of authorial disguise, which manifested itself in various forms including fictional authors, frame narrators, extensive intertextuality, and the practice of disappearing into one's characters, the motives behind this impulse for Scott were perhaps opposite to those of many other Romantic writers. Whereas Chatterton, Keats, and Austen sought to lose their identities in their art so as to escape their inferior social status through achievement in a literary tradition they honored, Scott may have done so to protect and preserve his gentlemanly reputation from what he perceived as the taint of participation in a bourgeois literary enterprise. Coleridge did not suffer from the same class (or gender) stigma as Chatterton, Keats, and Austen, but he was notoriously insecure about his ability to fulfill his lofty if not grandiose literary ambitions, so that the psychological impulse behind his strategies for speaking through others may also have been compensation for a feared inadequacy rather than preservation of a privileged status. Then again, perhaps the example of Scott illustrates the curious variety of motives and tactics employed to obscure or diffuse authorial identity during an age that exalted the individual and defined poetry as the direct expression of the author's private feelings.³⁶

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2005), 66. Felluga claims the goblin dwarf may represent lower-class (and women) readers, rather than writers as I do.

³⁶ The reasons for and effects of disguise and anonymity in Scott's work are admittedly complex and involve other implications besides those traced here. Cooney and Millgate provide the best accounts of the multiple and at times contradictory impulses that led Scott to keep his authorship of the novels a secret. Both Cooney (209, 212-13) and Millgate (61-62) claim that Scott himself did not appear to understand or want to explore too deeply the motives for his authorial masks.