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## Victorian criticism of the Waverley Novels of Sir Walter Scott, 1832 to 1900

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VICTORIAN CRITICISM  
OF THE WAVERLEY NOVELS  
OF SIR WALTER SCOTT,  
1832 TO 1900

For submission, 1992

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to The Open University

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the phenomenon of Sir Walter Scott's extraordinary Victorian popularity. Focussing on criticism of his Waverley Novels between 1832 - the year of his death - and the end of the century, the thesis plots the development and terms of Scott's eminence. An introductory chapter sets out principal areas of study, being followed by a section leading up to 1832. Then follow analyses of critical work on Scott by, respectively, Harriet Martineau, Thomas Carlyle, Walter Bagehot, John Ruskin, Leslie Stephen, Richard Hutton and Julia Wedgwood. The thesis concludes with an epilogic section covering critics of the late nineteenth century, including Frederic Harrison and Andrew Lang. In each instance the context of each critic's wider work figures prominently.

The thesis contends that large elements of Scott's achievement received relatively little attention in Victorian criticism. These are Scott's Enlightenment interests in speculative history and detailed, almost sociological, methods of composition, as well as the 'experimental' character of his work. By contrast, much was made in criticism of what may be summarised as his 'health' and 'beneficial effects'.

It is claimed that the construction of such consensual critical notions about the merits of Scott's very popular work had a great deal to do with the buttressing and underpinning of some Victorian attitudes. While these varied with critics' own preoccupations - and Scott's 'malleability' is remarkable - Scott's role was so significant in Victorian culture that his employment, within what was still a relatively eclectic and formally undisciplined critical practice, constituted significant ideological manoeuvring.

Specifically, Scott's remit in Victorian criticism was most usually to represent and validate some kind of opposition to the present. This both excluded much of his achievement, and also narrowed the terms of his appraisal so as to permit a revealing coalescence of literary with social, political and even racial arguments. This thesis traces the increasing definition of such a pattern within Victorian criticism of the Waverley Novels.

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CHAPTER I :SCOTT AND THE VICTORIANS*PURPOSE AND APPROACH*

This thesis examines the centrality of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley Novels* in nineteenth century thought and culture. The main body of the study runs from the year of his death, 1832, to 1890, with prologue and epilogue sections. There is thus a close focus on the period in which Scott was, in terms both of sales and public adulation, among the foremost literary figures in Britain.

To some extent this ground has been covered before, but very differently. The most substantial publications have been James T. Hillhouse's *The Waverley Novels and their Critics* (1936), J.C. Corson's *A Bibliography of Sir Walter Scott 1797-1940* (1943), and John O. Hayden's anthology *Scott - The Critical Heritage* (1970).<sup>1</sup> While these works are invaluable to the student in this field, my purpose is not to update or supplement them.

My focus is on a selection of writers whom I have felt to be the most significant in the course of nineteenth century writing on Scott. This includes figures as eminent as John Ruskin and as obscure as Julia Wedgwood. This is not an exhaustive trawl through the period, since I neglect much of the veritable plethora of

criticism which was published in Britain, not to mention that from other countries which bore witness to Scott's phenomenal popularity around the world. Nevertheless, the selection is wide and representative.

The study is different from earlier work in this field in three principal ways. Firstly, I have concentrated on writers whom I consider to offer an important new development in the course of Victorian Scott criticism. In most cases, a complete Chapter has been devoted to each critic, in order to examine both what is idiosyncratic, and what is consistent with other views. By defining the place of Scott in each critic's opus, and in the context of their contribution to currents of thought, I have sought to find what is characteristic of wider developments and deeper preoccupations. I believe this relatively detailed attention given to particular writers enables Scott criticism to be seen to some extent as an expression of wider cultural, ethical or political views.

Secondly, the most considerable writer on this theme, Hillhouse - whose work was very much an evaluative survey - wrote at a time when Scott's position was considerably more assured than would subsequently be the case. In consequence, such work shows a confidence in this respect unavailable to the Scott enthusiast of today. The claims and power of the Waverley Novels are not self-evident to the modern reader, and may, therefore, be viewed with perhaps more objectivity.



A third distinction is that critical developments in recent years have yielded the possibility of new readings of Scott. These allow fresh perspectives on the great Victorian critics for whom Scott meant so much, and who did so much to fix his image and character in British culture. This perspective is worthy of some elaboration.

It has been a feature of Scott criticism in recent decades, that considerably more attention has been paid to Scott the folklorist, the oral historian and chronicler of the rural Scotland he knew in his earliest years. This focus in his work, which sees Scott as very much a child and purveyor of Scottish Enlightenment values, has received increasing critical attention in recent years, from essays by Duncan Forbes on 'The Rationalism of Sir Walter Scott' (1953) and Joseph E. Duncan on Ivanhoe (1954), to the work of such writers as Joseph Kestner (1977), W.F.H. Nicolaisen (1982) and Mary Ellen Brown (1989).<sup>2</sup>

The underlying bond between these writers, and others who have emphasised Scott's methodology and use of a range of sources, is a clear revolt against the conception of Scott as a straightforwardly 'Romantic' writer. This new interpretation has been a prominent feature in extensive treatments of him and his work over the last four decades, and David Daiches, F.R. Hart, and Thomas Crawford are notable, though by no means alone, in this respect.<sup>3</sup> There has been, in short, increasing critical interest in what David Hewitt (1989) describes as Scott's experimental, speculative employment of "varied evidence, presented in...a complex way".<sup>4</sup>

The Scottish Enlightenment roots of this approach link Scott with the Scottish 'philosophical' historians of the later eighteenth century. This influence was a strong one, and has been summarised by Peter Garside (1975) as imbuing Scott with several of his most important intellectual and cultural characteristics :

...the deep sense of the essentially social nature of history, the sophisticated determinism, the sharp awareness of the effects of historical environment on behavior (sic).<sup>5</sup>

This insight has important implications for our understanding of Scott and his work. In this study I have paid some attention to critics' interest - or lack of it - in one dimension in particular arising from this Enlightenment influence: Scott's employment, and imaginative treatment, of different sources, this reflecting both his commitment to research and social investigation and his wish to show, in his work, different kinds of knowledge and truth. This dimension is significant, and deserves its increased status.

Scott's use of traditional, antiquarian and folk-memory sources was substantial, and affected both language and structure in his work. He was himself aware of the power of his unconventional approach, stating, in Woodstock (1826) that "...minute antiquarian research can shake our faith in the facts most pointedly averred by general history."<sup>6</sup>

The translated research which we encounter in the Waverley Novels is genuinely empowered, through its direct origin in cultures and communities which were suddenly rendered obsolete and remote. To the Victorians, Scott's novels spoke, most appealingly, for vanished ways of life, their qualities seeming on occasion almost a matter of the self-evident or instinctive. From the perspective of the present day, it is possible for us to see Scott's works anew, in a sense as fictional experiments, much of their vitality originating in Scott's distinctive methodology, which lent his versions of the past a strong authenticity.

Scott used a variety of forms of evidence in his work, and his legal training in the construction of a case from various testimonies - each with its own version of the Truth - was relevant in his literary practice. However, no source is more significant in respect of its stark and unorthodox power, than the directly-transmitted oral history to which he had access in the many conversations he had in the first thirty years of his life with former Jacobites, old Borderers, singers and other reminiscers. This infuses his fiction with the dynamic combination of both his narrative gifts, and his faithful transmission of the human truth of the times through which he lived, times of a profound cultural and historical interface.

Born in 1771, Scott formed, early in his life, what were indeed fortunate connections, with many individuals of long memories and a variety of political and religious persuasions. These connections

gave him knowledge about, indeed almost direct experience of, many of the rapid changes in life in Scotland between the late seventeenth, and the end of the eighteenth century, in particular in the period 1715-1765.

His reception of oral tradition could prove as important in the novels as that of written histories. For example, Scott's speaking to speak to people who had themselves known Rob Roy MacGregor<sup>7</sup> proved to be useful preparation for the writing of his work of the 1715, Rob Roy (1818). Similarly, in Old Mortality (1816), he brought together not only very different written versions of the religious and constitutional conflicts of the seventeenth century, but also the oral tradition, reaching from the actual events to himself. This remarkable link came via his long-standing correspondent Joseph Train, who himself spoke directly to the 'Old Mortality' figure, the old Cameronian who had in turn spoken to survivors of the battle of Bothwell Bridge.<sup>8</sup> This new element in the discourse could be radical in content as well as technique, and certainly the resulting text of Old Mortality proved controversial at a time when there remained active supporters of the Covenanters.<sup>9</sup> Thus Scott, while forging gripping and popular tales, created novels which constituted a new fiction rooted securely in attested - if sometimes unrecognised or unwelcome - history.

This innovative methodology of *assembling* 'evidence' bore witness to the plurality of perspectives within history itself and in historiography. Scott's reconciliatory and generous disposition is

notable in this process, and was identified as a deep strength by Victorian critics. His approach also contributed to the creation of rich *contexts* for characterisation and storytelling. The result is a series of powerful works, typified by both intense political and personal drama, and what Thomas Crawford has described as an "overwhelming impression of factual truth",<sup>10</sup> a quality crucial to their Victorian success, which may be seen to emerge because of the energy and weight of that material and environmental detail collated by the author. This feature - to whatever extent it was perceived - lent the novels an almost non-fictional identity which was crucial to their nineteenth century popularity.

In my view Victorian critics' treatment of this aspect of Scott's work is most revealing of their own positions in regard to the new genre. The development of the Novel as a literary form in the course of the nineteenth century involved very definite, if largely implicit, decisions concerning its 'remit.' This development profoundly affected Scott's status, in particular by the roles assigned to the Enlightenment concerns noted above. As a result, the distinctive nature and purposes of Scott's work were not emphasised within the evolving discipline of literary criticism.

The purpose of this study is to identify the terms in which Scott was treated by critics, and thereby to trace significant continuities over the course of the Victorian period. By the distinctiveness of my approach I have aimed to reach more definite conclusions than previous students in the field, as to the

ideological importance of Scott to the nineteenth century. In particular I have taken considerable interest in the significance of Scott to critics' own work as a whole, and in their understanding of his importance for the age. I believe that Scott's power in the Victorian age, and the functions he and his work performed for it, were not only wide-ranging, encompassing much extra-literary life, but are also of importance in the wider history of thought and ideas.

#### *THE BREADTH AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY*

In entering the world of nineteenth century criticism, the reader is instantly struck by the sheer extent of Scott's popularity. This only began to tail off at the end of the period. In the twentieth century, along with falling sales, we have also seen a decline in Scott's perceived 'seriousness' or 'quality'. Thus we receive him in the light of a change which J.H. Raleigh has described (1963) :

In the nineteenth century Scott was ubiquitous; in the twentieth he virtually disappears. Never before or since in Western culture has a writer been such a power in his own day and so negligible to posterity.'

The underlying perspective of this study is that Scott was a kind of set text for the nineteenth century. I do not claim that the

years 1832-1890 were a 'golden age' of reviewing, or that Victorian critics 'understood' Scott, while later ones didn't. But I do see writing on Scott constituting one of the core cultural activities of the age.

For all the variety of critical methodologies, and whatever critics' moral, cultural or political motivations, this Scott criticism bears witness to representative ideological patterns. People wrote about Scott for a wide variety of reasons : but whether this was at the time of his death in 1832 to evaluate the oeuvre, to review Lockhart's biography (1837-8), to review a new edition of the Waverley series (see Appendix 2), to commemorate the centenary of his birth in 1871, to consider him anew in the light of the publication of his Journal (1890), or as part of an Encyclopaedia or 'Great Writers' series, all came to Scott as to a familiar and grand hero of their age.

Although he died five years before Queen Victoria ascended to the throne, Scott's 'Victorian-ness' is very much under consideration here. Scott was undoubtedly, to the early years of this century, part of the unwieldy Victorian past, increasingly as unfashionable as the hansom cab or the wearing of bombazine. Scott became so identified with the dreams and values of the Victorian period as to become indissociable from them, and his works, filling up entire book-shelves as they do, became a quite visible symbol of Victorian taste. Such revaluation early in this century has had significant implications for his subsequent status, mediated by literally

monumental awe at his past reputation, and by the condescension easily found for the *démodé*. Scott's critical reputation in our own century is a subject worthy of separate investigation. However, undoubtedly nineteenth century views of Scott were very influential in determining the kind of Scott found by the twentieth century, i.e. the kind of Scott which later readers and critics have largely rejected.

Despite the sheer extent of writing in the period studied, there are areas of consistent agreement. There is consensus over the importance of Scott the man, as a moral hero in the study of whose life was as much to be learnt as in attention to his books. There is also acceptance of Scott's 'innocent amusement' as a genial storyteller, and of his validation of society's progress from past to present, through the fathering of a historical consciousness which could not be renounced. These broad judgements are as true in the earliest reviews of Waverley (1814), as they are in the latest writers of the 1890s.

In these pages there is no substantial or separate treatment of Lockhart's Life of Walter Scott, Baronet (1837-8). Lockhart's long biography undoubtedly casts a shadow over all that follows, but I have referred to it more in its role as a kind of required reading for all subsequent, and perhaps more interesting critics, rather than pretend that it stands for us today as any kind of objective critical voice on Scott. Although some contemporary tastes found the Life to be unnervingly frank about Scott's business life, and



Carlyle found the enterprise painfully materialist and mundane, modern scholarship has shown the extent of Lockhart's concealment and misrepresentation.<sup>12</sup> As Scott's son-in-law, a large part of Lockhart's perceived remit was to affirm and establish an incontrovertible and lucrative reputation for Scott as a great man. In this way he may be seen to have had quite other purposes in his work than did any other critics in this study. However, he set the tone, and features throughout these pages.

The emphasis on Scott's novels as objects of criticism is also exclusive of the poetry. Scott's high status dated from the period before 1814, when he had been fêted for The Lady of the Lake, Marmion, and his other long narrative poems. Consequently, Victorian criticism of Scott the novelist was influenced by the continuing awareness of Scott the romantic poet. However, I have not sought to explore judgements on Scott the poet, although there is no doubting the power of the poetry for many Victorian readers. In many cases, criticism of the poetry was either subsumed within generalised judgements of 'Scott', or else definitely seen by critics as a minority task beside assessment of the novels, which quickly became even more massively popular than the poems.

I also largely exclude the plentiful criticism made during Scott's own lifetime, including his own, in what is limited introductory coverage of the period to 1832. Undoubtedly a separate study of this earlier period would constitute a rewarding and significant exercise, but I have decided to confine my remit to a more closely-

defined era - the 'Victorian', or very nearly so. The result is that the study really begins with Harriet Martineau and Thomas Carlyle, and concludes with a section briefly covering critics of the late Victorian years, including Andrew Lang, W.H. Hudson and Arthur Conan Doyle.

In many ways, however, the dates will still seem to be arbitrary judgements, and the case for stepping over these boundaries is undoubtedly a strong one. It would involve looking in detail at the reactions to Scott of, at the one end, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (writing on Scott 1816-20), Susan Ferrier (1816-23), Thomas Love Peacock (1817-31), Nassau Senior (1821) and William Hazlitt (1825), and at the other, of twentieth-century critics such as G.K. Chesterton (1903), Virginia Woolf (1921-28), Edwin Muir (1928-45) and John Buchan (1928-50). And then there are, among many, F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (1932-48), David Daiches (1951-71), Alexander Welsh (1963), Thomas Crawford (1965-82) and Frances Russell Hart (1966). There has also been a relative flood of critical attention over the last two or three decades. In fact, it may soon be realised, any limiting judgement would come to seem arbitrary. After all, a study looking at *all* Scott criticism, 1814 to the present day, would not be so very different, would it ?

Well, yes, it would, because the study is based on concerns and perceptions which characterise 'the Victorian age'. Scott's ubiquity in this era, or group of eras, cannot be over-emphasised,

as a brief look at Victorian journals, letters and autobiographies reveals.<sup>13</sup>

The *Waverley Novels* brought "calm and comfort" to Thomas Carlyle before his wedding. His affection for Scott, and that of such eminent Victorians as Martineau, Ruskin, Bagehot, Stephen and Harrison, are present in these pages, and are the subjects of analysis. Many others besides these few numbered themselves among lovers of Scott. Readings from Scott's works cheered George Eliot and George Henry Lewes at times of sickness. Disraeli adored Scott, and referred to him with affection as "the Chevalier." Gladstone repeatedly read and re-read all the novels, and Lord John Russell saw Scott as an "extraordinary man," likely to "furnish entertainment to many generations." Arthur Balfour placed Scott in a special light of "affectionate admiration", and John Morley thought him to be an "admirable genius."<sup>14</sup>

Amongst men and women of letters, Thackeray was a fan from before his University days, and as a student rushed to purchase the new edition of 1829 to read on the coach journey home to Devon. Dickens, a perennial admirer who quoted from *Rob Roy* (1818) in his speeches, believed the *Waverley Novels* had provided "gladness, instruction and delight for millions." Trollope, an admirer of *Ivanhoe* in particular, considered Scott to be a "genius". Matthew Arnold described him as "a man of the highest powers...a man of the greatest vigour of spirit and of true genius." John Stuart Mill, not given to wild eulogy, expressed great "admiration" for Scott's

impartiality. Mrs. Humphry Ward was so much of an enthusiast that, in the 1890s, she would visit schools to give readings from Scott. William Morris repeatedly urged the merits of The Heart of Midlothian (1818). There was scarcely an eminent Victorian who was not touched and in some measure delighted by Scott. Indeed, the Queen herself must be included among his fans, as one who took volumes of Scott with her on journeys to the Highlands.<sup>15</sup> The plain fact was, in J.H. Raleigh's words, that

To have been alive and literate in the nineteenth century was to have been affected in some way by the Waverley Novels.<sup>16</sup>

In this study I attempt to come to terms with Scott's Victorian popularity. In particular I have sought to identify some of the ways in which his appeal became so wide as to persuade very different individuals, of a variety of cultural and political positions, to enjoy Scott intensely. This approach does not cover in any adequate way the responses to Scott of the non-eminent, including the self-educated and those for whom reading played an important role in 'self-improvement.' This is a large field of research, being developed by, for instance, John Burnett and David Vincent,<sup>17</sup> and I cannot claim to have treated it substantially here.

But to comprehend Scott's appeal to very different Victorians, even to the extent achieved here, demands more detailed engagement with

critics and their differing approaches than perhaps has been achieved in the work of Hillhouse, or more recent critics such as Waswo (1982) and Wilt (1985).<sup>18</sup> This study is distinctive in the extent of such engagement, and consequently perhaps offers a more valuable insight into the phenomenon of Victorian Scottolatry.

#### *SCOTT FOR ESCAPE AND IMPROVEMENT*

The Waverley Novels, while 'vivid' and 'realistic', and undeniably 'Scotch' in character if not always setting, were often seen as referring to a nebulous, eternal time and place. 'Scott's world' - a phrase which Bagehot averred was well understood by the "habitual reader"<sup>19</sup> - was seen as a curious and intriguing one, but considerably in the past. That this would be a fundamental point in criticism was evident even in the first years of success of the novels, when Scott was still their anonymous author. Even given Scott's anonymity, the novels entered a cultural climate which had, in a way, been primed for them, as their instant success may be seen as building on some of the existing attractions held by Scott's poems, in terms of the magical appeal of the historic past.

We can see, even while authorship of the first novel Waverley (1814) was unknown, that the work was received in the critical realm as romance and fantasy, a new kind of novel. In his November 1814 notice on the work, Scott's friend Francis Jeffrey, who was later to write the inscription beneath the cornerstone of the Scott

monument, made a significant judgement. Writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, he saw the work as about a long-gone and well-rid aspect of a past and barbaric Scotland :

(The last Jacobite rebellion) brought conspicuously to light, and for the last time, the fading image of feudal chivalry in the mountains, and vulgar fanaticism in the plains; and startled the more polished parts of the land with the wild but brilliant picture of the devoted valour, incorruptible fidelity, patriarchal brotherhood, and savage habits, of the Celtic clans on the one hand, - and the dark, untractable, and domineering bigotry of the Covenanters on the other. Both forms of society had indeed been prevalent in the other parts of the country, - but had there been so long superseded by more peaceable habits, and milder manners, that their vestiges were almost effaced, and their very memory nearly forgotten.<sup>20</sup>

It was important to Jeffrey that the people of Scotland had progressed from the state described in the novel. The novel was entertainment, and nothing much to do with contemporary Edinburgh. For all the signs of a marvellous "fidelity and felicity" in pictures of the "lower orders", and "nice observation and graphical talents", making for an effect of "perfect accuracy", undoubtedly the best of the writer emerged in the "dramatic or picturesque

representations", in which the real value of the book itself lay.<sup>21</sup> There could be no going back to Scott's world. We can now see Jeffrey's conception, of a Waverley Novels series which offered wondrous vistas of a vanished land, to have been one of the characteristic features of nineteenth century Scott criticism.

There was also a consensus that Scott affirmed correct conduct. Although he might not have bequeathed many pithy maxims and epigrams, he was *sound*. Scott and his publishers benefitted in this respect from the fervid concern for improvement, which accompanied the expansion of the reading public. The books' weight of historical, constitutional and religious data, even more attested as these were after the *Magnum Opus* annotations, was an assurance of worth. In conjunction with what became a powerful biographical case for their author's own excellence, the books' authoritative composition meant that they were never merely fictions for the Victorian mind.

Thus, Harriet Martineau wrote (1833) of Scott's greatness' being in his teaching "the power of fiction as an agent of morals and philosophy." Her insistence, that Scott provided "amelioration, incitement and guidance" was especially important at a time when what she described as "a new state of things" imposed new demands on writers.<sup>22</sup> Her approval was echoed by later critics.

Robert Chambers, who knew Scott, wrote in 1843 of Scott's "fine healthy moral feeling" as one of his great literary strengths.

Francis Turner Palgrave (1866) described the clear evidence in Scott's writings of his "great-heartedness," his "warmth of heart and frankness of love," and "inexhaustible affectionateness and thought for others." Anthony Trollope (1883) wrote of Scott's "high poetic genius and correct morality."<sup>23</sup> By 1898, Edmund Gosse expressed the received verdict, that Scott was *established* and acceptable :

English readers confess the perennial attractiveness of a writer whose 'tone' is the most perfect in our national literature, who has left not a phrase which is morbid or petulant or base, who is the very type of that generous freedom of spirit which we are pleased to identify with the character of an English gentleman.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Gosse interestingly went on to assert Scott's 'Englishness' as so great as to make the enjoyment of his work an essential expression of the late century mood of the nation :

Into the persistent admiration of Sir Walter Scott there enters something of the militant imperialism of our race.<sup>25</sup>

To probe a little more deeply this developing phenomenon of Scott's standing for an acceptable kind of moral teaching, the comments of Hippolyte Taine (1863) are relevant. Taine was one of the most



perceptive observers of British culture, and confirmed Martineau's earlier thesis by concluding that, in literary endeavour, the Victorians set great store on "the amelioration of man and society". In this light, he wrote admiringly of Scott's moral power:

Scott is never bitter; he loves men from the bottom of his heart, excuses or tolerates them; does not chastise vices, but unmasks them, and that not rudely...<sup>26</sup>

Scott's status as a scion of eternally 'true' values was never seen as an annoying hangover from the past. While his world was thought of as a bygone thing, he himself transmuted into "a living friend", as Andrew Lang put it (1885). Scott seemed fraternally close to the Victorian reader, and his strictures were always seen as well-meant.<sup>27</sup>

This dimension of criticism, implying high standards and a sense of ultimate probity in Scott, ran interestingly parallel to the understanding of him as a writer of escapist fiction. These two identities did not clash. Jeffrey's assertion of a progressive present, from which the Waverley Novels offered a pleasurable excursion, mutated into the assertion of a troubled present. The same excursion was available, and its moral benefits became increasingly important. In the face of this emphasis, Scott's meticulous reconstruction of the Scottish past, far from being seen

as powerful documentary or social study, soon became impossible to discern through the dominant perception of his world, as an ideal and most valuable portrait. The re-creation to be found in Scott, the fantasy world, lay at the heart of his popularity throughout the period under consideration.

From the very earliest years, Scott's world proved immensely appealing, apparently a static repository of values felt to be under threat, vanished or sadly impossible. In times of social upheaval, where old assumptions about one's place in the order of society, and one's obligations and duties to others and to God, were far from clear, Scott offered some certainties. Mark Girouard (1981) has summarised well the set of codes perhaps found in Scott by the anxious reader of the 1830s and 40s, codes which held fast for subsequent decades :

...virtues especially associated with feudal, chivalric or old-fashioned societies...examples of bravery, loyalty, hospitality, consideration towards women and inferiors, truth to a given word, respect for rank combined with a warm relationship between different ranks, and refusal to take advantage of an enemy except in fair fight.<sup>28</sup>

This set of values, whatever the extent of their actual promotion within texts, were understood to be essential features of Scott's work. They were associated with Scott and his work from an early

date, embodied in characteristic Victorian terms like "simplicity", "healthiness" and "manliness."

These values, in turn - while by no means without political connotations in the early Victorian decades of enthusiastic mediaevalising - came themselves to acquire nationalistic significance over the course of the Victorian era. Thus, in May 1897, when the American Ambassador, John Hay, spoke at the unveiling of a bust of Scott in Westminster Abbey, the language of eulogy for Scott, apparently merely nostalgic, may be seen as distinctly conservative, in keeping with both British and American Governments of the time :

His ideals were lofty and pure; his heroes brave and strong; his heroines, whom he frankly asked us to admire, moved with womanly tact through the pages, pure of heart and delicate of feeling. Purity and loyalty were the undying elements of the charm with which this great magician has won the hearts of three generations.<sup>29</sup>

The work had come to represent certain extra-literary values. Certainly Mr. Hay's words - with all the allowance possible for the occasion - have an idealistic and atavistic sound in the age of suffragettes, the labour movement, international refugee crises, and mounting political tensions between the world's great powers. Given the controversial Secretary of State for Ireland Arthur

Balfour's presence at that ceremony, the occasion may be seen to epitomise a degree of annexation of Scott as a figure rich in cultural resonance for Conservative politicians keen to legitimise their own pursuit of imperialist or other nationalist goals. Edmund Gosse's remark, to the effect that Scott's were archetypal English imperial values, reflects both the wider fact of an increasing association between Empire and many forms of culture, and the central place of Scott and his work as embodiments of a public school ethos encouraging 'manliness,' loyalty, social hierarchy and other national goals.

The change in the terms in which Scott was discussed, and to some extent the authority and wider legitimacy of Scott criticism, became clearest in the 1890s, although its basis lay in the ways Scott had always been read. The course of much nineteenth-century historiography was unavoidably altered by the fact of British imperial expansion, but Scott's popularity rendered him a key figure for the validation of contemporary practice by historical and cultural reference. In the process, some perceptions about Scott's work were attenuated. The shrinking of the terms for criticism, and the freezing of his perceived values had been brought about over several decades, and had continuities with perceptions of Scott the man. One of the key facts about nineteenth-century Scott criticism was that an important underpinning of Scott's perceived literary power always came from a close identification between Scott the man and Scott the writer.

*SCOTT'S VIRTUOUS IDENTITY*

Scott's identity in the national consciousness became increasingly clearly that of a moral nonpareil of high standards. A special language of excellence was woven around him. Even when the very scrupulous Matthew Arnold made his only published comments on Scott in the 1860s, calling him "a very truthful antiquarian", he described Scott as not merely "a great novelist", but also as "a man of the highest powers...a man of the greatest vigour of spirit and of true genius".<sup>30</sup> It is unfortunate that Arnold, who did perhaps more than anyone else in the nineteenth century to link literary and moral judgements, did not elaborate on his reading of Scott.

Scott's virtue became a critical commonplace, the staple of encomiastic excess. Samuel Smiles, in his works aimed at the self-improving classes, Self-Help (1859) and Character (1871) adduced innumerable examples from Scott's life to illustrate model behaviour. He drew special attention to Scott's "indefatigable energy, in union with serene self-possession of mind and manner," along with his "cheerfulness," "industry", and ability to combine practicality with his literary pursuits.<sup>31</sup> Robert Chambers' biography (1871) was exaggerated in Scott's praise, but hints at the representative feeling of widespread admiration :

It is by far the greatest glory of Sir Walter Scott, that he shone equally as a good and virtuous

man, as he did in his capacity of the first fictitious writer of the age. His behaviour through life was marked by undeviating integrity and purity, insomuch that no scandalous whisper was ever yet circulated against him. Of all men living, the most modest, as likewise the greatest and most virtuous, was Sir Walter Scott.<sup>32</sup>

This perspective emerged strongly in the light of Lockhart's Life, but that publication, though bringing about a new level of celebrity and popular love, was not the sole cause of Scott's high personal reputation. He was pre-eminent as a writer, and was compared with Shakespeare, from the time of his own anonymous Quarterly Review essay of 1817, on the subject of the similarly anonymous Waverley series to date. But he was also known and beloved as the laird of Abbotsford, as a great literary and social host, and as a public figure involved in royal visits, currency debates and historical societies with equal enthusiasm and esteem. His eminence as the perceived father of a new and enthralling Scottish culture brought him esteem across the world, although the nature of that revivification of Scotland was ultimately rejected by many Scots.<sup>33</sup>

Such doubts, however, were not apparent in the nineteenth century, and in this respect Scott's place as 'a great Scot' was secure. The drama and pain of his last years, after the collapse of his publishers, Ballantyne, the death of his wife, Charlotte, and his

own worsening health, were part of the national life. His honourable wish to work off debts rather than be supported by the generosity of creditors, or by the subscription which friends would willingly have raised, was wholly in keeping with his popular image, and for many confirmed his personal integrity. All of these perceived strengths in Scott were already familiar to many before Lockhart wrote his Life, but they were very substantially enhanced in the mid-Victorian consciousness by Lockhart's version.

After his internationally-mourned death in 1832, full-length biographies appeared by W. Weir (1832) and George Allan (1834). There was also James Hogg's Domestic Life and Manners of Sir Walter Scott (1834). None of these, however, achieved the deification of their subject that followed Lockhart's seven-volume work. But this work only developed earlier admiration of Scott. There had always been praise of Scott's character. Byron's comment, for instance, although not published until 1834, had been that Scott was

...the only very successful genius...as generally beloved as a man as he is admired as an author...and he deserves it; for he is so thoroughly good-natured, sincere, and honest, that he disarms the envy and jealousy his extraordinary genius must excite.<sup>34</sup>

Such praise, however remarkable from a poetic rival, albeit a yet more popular rival, only hinted at the eulogy to come for Scott.

Lockhart's publication of Scott's own fragment of Autobiography, which recounted the enthusiastic innocence of his early years, lent an appealing period charm to Scott's life. But more importantly, Lockhart's description of the last years of heroic battling consolidated Scott's noble reputation.

Scott, through the Life more than any other single work, achieved a new stature. He now became more than a genial public figure. He became a very real man, of immense but palpable integrity and honour. His only crime was to have been too much of a dreamer for the tawdriness and pettiness of the modern world, with its accounting and its undue disrespect for genius. This passage from Lockhart, part of his concluding chapter, encapsulates the terms of his project in the Biography:

During the most energetic years of manhood he laboured with one prize in view; and he had just grasped it, as he fancied, securely, when all at once the vision was dissipated: he found himself naked and desolate as Job. How he nerved himself against the storm - how he felt and how he resisted it - how soberly, steadily and resolvedly he contemplated the possibility of yet, by redoubled exertions, in so far retrieving his fortunes, as that no man should lose by having trusted those for whom he had been pledged - how well he kept his vow, and what price it cost him to do so - all this



the reader, I doubt not, appreciates fully. It seems to me that strength of character was never put to a severer test than when, for labours of love, such as his had hitherto almost always been - the pleasant exertion of genius for the attainment of ends that owed all their dignity and beauty to a poetical fancy - there came to be substituted the iron pertinacity of daily and nightly toil in the discharge of a duty, which there was nothing but the sense of chivalrous honour to make stringent.

It is the fond indulgence of gay fancy in all the previous story that gives its true value and dignity to the voluntary agony of the sequel...<sup>35</sup>

These years of courage formed the basis of much Victorian admiration of Scott the man, whose perceived strengths permeated the reading of the literature of Scott the writer. Lockhart's picture of a hero enduring with an iron stoicism and resolution a crisis brought on by the incompetence of others set the mould for later critics.

Lockhart's Life was a massive success. It came out in a second and much-expanded ten-volume edition in 1839, and in single-volume form two years later. Some 26,000 copies of the entire work were sold in its first years, and it was, from 1844, a popular component of Cadell's hugely successful *People's Edition* of Scott's Works.<sup>36</sup> The effect of the Life was almost that of an instruction to readers to

acknowledge their immense debt to Scott, who had been thwarted in his (reasonable) ambitions by the ill fortune which the reader would recognise as all too often man's lot.

Scott's conduct after the crash, it was insisted, issued from a code of "chivalrous honour" which had characterised him throughout his life. In this term of Lockhart's, the connection with Scott's own language, his own books, was clear. It is as if Lockhart had converted the events of Scott's own life after 1826 into an episode of one of the Waverley Novels. The strength of character found by Scott in the time of his greatest crisis, came, through the pages of Lockhart, to ennoble the man immeasurably more than would have the simple attainment of his own anticipated goals. Thus was created Scott the Victorian hero, elevated by hard work and the endurance of worldly vicissitude.

This tradition, once established, became a feature of criticism in the Victorian years. Lockhart presaged it, and its culmination came at the end of the century, after the complete publication of Scott's agonised Journal (1890). Such descriptions of Scott as those of Henry Cockburn, in Memorials of his Time (1840), recalling Scott's demeanour after his bankruptcy, typified the vein of eulogy:

...the manly and modest air of a gentleman  
conscious of some folly, but of perfect rectitude,  
and of most heroic and honourable resolution.<sup>37</sup>

*BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SCOTT'S IMAGE*

What is most important about the biographical buttressing for Scott's status is that, in a century when biography counted for a very great deal in criticism, it served to direct critical attention in certain ways. Edwin Hood made the point in 1852 that the form of literary biography had, as one of its central functions, the provision for the reader of "the assurance of the certainty of something better than we are."<sup>38</sup> While this was by no means the universal pattern throughout the century, the form of the periodical review-essay in an age when both the publishing industry and the reading public were expanding, encouraged the amalgamation of the 'complete picture' in an essay for a reader who might well be unfamiliar with the subject or author. Thus a typical review-essay might well serve as simultaneously introduction, background, overview and recommendation of both author and work. In regard to Scott, the parallels between life and work were never seriously questioned, and his status as a writer was to some extent supported by that as a man. When there was doubt about the work, it was always within the acceptance that Scott was, even if flawed, a *real man*. As Julia Wedgwood expressed it in 1878, Scott was "emphatically...manly."<sup>39</sup>

Wedgwood, in this phrase, was distinguishing Scott from Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley, indeed from all other "men of genius", who, she considered, lacked Sir Walter's "robust and spirited nature...simplicity...frank honesty."<sup>40</sup> Often contrasted

with the wan and precious type of the literary figure, Scott's 'manliness' was little in dispute in the nineteenth century.

Also important, though, and a substantial feature of Ruskin's, Stephen's and Hutton's work, was Scott's family antecedence of Border stravaiging ('Auld Wat' of Harden) and romantic fidelity to Jacobitism (Walter 'Beardie' Scott, Tutor of Raeburn). While Carlyle could not forgive Scott's estimating literature below soldiering, for others this was a refreshing dimension. R.H. Hutton, for instance, dwelt at great length on Scott's family history of "a great riding, sporting and fighting clan", thus bringing into the foreground a "sunny and healthy-minded Scott", eager to vivify in his work an "old, simple, violent world."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Ruskin traced Scott's "absolute virginal purity of thought" directly from his male Scott ancestors.<sup>42</sup> The prevailing image was that Scott was not by nature a writer: he was a soldier. As Julia Wedgwood put it :

If he could have *lived* his ideal he would not have  
*written* it.<sup>43</sup>

However, the predominant picture of Scott which Lockhart's Life confirmed, as a down-to-earth and *ordinary* man, whose great achievements constituted real work, due to early rising and sheer dedication, obscured another perspective. The possibility that the warmly-loved Sir Walter was an intellectual writer, of an Enlightenment tradition, who was interested to study the

development of human societies and to reach conclusions about them, figured hardly at all.

Harriet Martineau found in Scott "a philosophical observer, and disinterested peace-maker"<sup>44</sup>, but this subsidiary point in her argument was not taken up by subsequent critics. Thus, by the near-total omission of an intellectual Scott from criticism - despite coverage of his education and early influences - Scott's methods, his research and social anthropology, almost disappeared from view.

When there was less favourable criticism, it was not at the level of Scott's social theories or literary methods. It took as its basis qualities which had been to a substantial extent 'manufactured', first by Scott himself, and then by Lockhart and others. Scott's *lack* of theory and *excess* of worldliness became indisputably part of his popular image.

The framework for Victorian views of Scott, both positive and negative, was very largely constructed by Thomas Carlyle. His critical essay (1838) was published shortly before the climactic final volume of Lockhart. Carlyle's typically iconoclastic approach indicted Scott the man as much as it did Scott the writer. The greatest fault was Scott's lack of concern for

...the spiritual purport of his work, whether it tended hitherward or thitherward, or had any tendency whatever...<sup>45</sup>

Criticism of later years would never be as savage as Carlyle's, but the terms of his essay stuck fast, so true were they to Victorian Scott mythology. Carlyle's charge of worldliness was effectively one of amorality, and was particularly associated with Scott's practice of literature as a form of trade, as a professional activity. But this was far from being an accusation to later Victorians, for whom such 'ordinariness' was a recommendation.

Indeed, for all its power as a critique of one literary lion of the day by another, Carlyle's essay was not very far removed from the generalised, and very positive, assertion of valuable 'naturalness', 'simplicity', and 'commonness', which critics such as Bagehot, Ruskin, Wedgwood and Stephen later employed to urge Scott's value as a humane and beneficial power in British culture. Their essays were each very different, but they shared an acceptance of Scott's considerable moral stature. Despite Carlyle's insistence to the contrary, these critics, given the terms in which they themselves had received Scott and the Waverley Novels, could not but accept Scott's reputation as an admirable man.

The terms of Victorian critical methodology were important. Biography was part and parcel of literary evaluation, and was perceived as a foundation stone for literary worth. The critical search for moral benefit therefore proceeded by unreserved reference to Scott's life and work. Ruskin went furthest in this respect. When, in his Fors Clavigera letters on Scott of 1873, his narrative, after meandering through Scott's male ancestors, finally

reached Scott himself, he drew on Scott's life and work in equal measure. "Scott," Ruskin told his readers, blurring with facility life and work, "is the Old Mortality, not of tables of stone, but of the fleshly tables of the heart." Ruskin considered that the Fragment of Scott's Autobiography published with the Lockhart Life yielded clear "first lessons" from the great man's childhood :

...The love, and care, of simplest living creatures; and the remembrance and honour of the dead, with the workmanship for them of fair tombs of song.<sup>46</sup>

Ruskin found in Scott an elevating influence for the nineteenth century. Where Ruskin's criticism represented an important stage was in its bridging the gap between the 'escapist' Scott - of nature, the past and romantic Scotland - and the 'moral' Scott who stood for key elements of Ruskin's own anti-modernism.

There were underlying themes to criticism, and the examination of writing on Scott permits us to see some of the most engrossing Victorian concerns. More characteristic of the period as a whole than Ruskin's were concerns with nationality and the sense of a cultural heritage. This theme preoccupied Walter Bagehot and Frederic Harrison, but it was Leslie Stephen who urged the pursuit of reading in these terms in 1887 :

(Reading the right thing) will please our intellects, give keenness to our perceptions and strength to our sympathies...will make us better specimens of the human race, and more fitted to discharge any of the duties which lie before us.<sup>47</sup>

Stephen saw the "chivalrous" Scott as invaluable in this light.<sup>48</sup> While he had himself written exhaustively on Scott, with considerable discrimination and even-handedness, unbridled enthusiasm for his subject inevitably emerged. But so fixed was Scott's place by the last years of the century, and so strong the consensus as to what constituted his chief merits, that the solid image of his moral health could be used to buttress quite other arguments than Stephen's.

A less liberal version of his search for a heritage came from the Conservative politician Arthur Balfour, at the aforementioned Westminster Abbey unveiling ceremony of 1897. Balfour saw Scott as not merely "a Scotchman," but

...a man of letters whose works are the heritage of the whole English-speaking race throughout the world...<sup>49</sup>



Such assertion of 'essential' national qualities depended on the blurring of biographical and literary-critical judgements. Scott became, in such readings, simultaneously part of the dynamic national imperial mission, and also oppositional, by which he was called into the service of ideas at odds with the present and some of its tenets. The assertion of a national character through history and literature saw Scott becoming identified as a racially-validated writer, firmly *British*, and part of the English literary heritage.

Critically, the greatest project in regard to the process of canonisation in literature was the Dictionary of National Biography, the ultimate Victorian positivist attempt to reach summative judgements through the virtual creation of a national cultural heritage. Leslie Stephen was editor of the massive operation from 1882 to 1891, and wrote his entry on Scott in 1897, a detailed essay, whose 25-page length testifies to Scott's high status in the context of national culture.

In his article we can see - overriding cursory comments about methods of composition - archetypal late Victorian language of manly virtue summing up Scott as very unintellectual and spontaneous in creative approach. Scott's centrality as a figure considered fit for such eulogy in the national pantheon was seen to arise from his human qualities, his noble and honourable character.

This was the definitive Victorian Scott, to whom biographical criticism lent a kind of innocent greatness :

Scott's personal charm, his combination of masculine sense with wide and generous sympathy, enabled him to attract an unprecedentedly numerous circle of readers to these almost impromptu utterances of a teeming imagination.<sup>50</sup>

Biographical critical methodology of the nineteenth century gives us in many cases an idealised conception of Scott. Because he was perceived as eminently human, he was almost beyond the mundane terms of literary criticism. His qualities assisted in making the literature an icon of wondrous power and good. Even more characteristic than Stephen in its gushing praise was such a biography as that of 1888 by Charles Duke Yonge :

...the whole series of the novels...is invested with a peculiar and all-pervading grace, with a genial cheerfulness of spirit, and an uniformly high manly tone of feeling, whether chivalrous, patriotic or sentimental, which make them all the healthiest study for the young, as they are likewise the most welcome and attractive of relaxations to those of riper age and more mature judgement.<sup>51</sup>

The 'healthiness' and 'geniality' provided by Scott's works were felt to emanate from his own possession of these qualities. Other characteristic critical terms were accreted onto Scott as time went by. Established from the time of Lockhart as 'chivalrous' and 'honourable', Scott, by also being presented as 'manly' in the second half of the century, was able to represent eternal values of great resonance to Victorians. These values were very much in tune with those institutionalised from the mid-century in the public schools. The concept of the making of a Victorian gentleman, and Scott's perceived literary and biographical merits had much in common. As a non-intellectual, 'manly' figure, he stood in direct opposition to contemporary theories and agonisings over intellectual, social or theological matters. This position he gained by his moral stature's outweighing all other considerations. Scott and his works were, in fact, not really part of Victorian intellectual life. They were rather part of the moral world.

#### *SCOTT IN THE MORAL WORLD*

Scott's transition to moral hero took place, as I have indicated, in large measure as a result of Lockhart's presentation of him as an unbowed stoic in his later years. Important, too, was the perspective available in Harriet Martineau's reading (1833). This saw Scott as an invaluable teacher of moral truths at a time when these were most needed. Martineau's work, very influential in the early Victorian years, went a long way to rendering fiction as a

whole acceptable as an instrument of the betterment of the people. Scott's early 'acceptability' on these grounds was crucially important to his enduring popularity.

However, there were difficulties within his acquisition of the fullest stature. There was occasional dissatisfied reference to the affair of George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822 - as by Hutton and Wedgwood.<sup>52</sup> There were also grumblings on the score of Scott's Conservatism, whether over his incorrigible opposition to Reform or Catholic emancipation, weakness before military or other greatness, or his stubborn and sometimes hurtful adoption of postures of chivalric purity, as towards his brother Daniel after the latter had been dishonoured through cowardice in the 1820s.<sup>53</sup> These, along with mixed critical reactions to Scott's unfailing respect for Jacobite and other royal relics, constituted a substantial and regular source of discontent, which was, nevertheless, not decisive in the question of his overall moral status.<sup>54</sup>

More significant were reactions to the events surrounding the bankruptcy. This was, for some admirers of Scott, a disappointing and enigmatic episode. While eminent admirers such as Charles Dickens had contributed in his defence to a debate on the issue following the publication of Lockhart's Life<sup>55</sup>, Scott's unquestionable involvement in regrettable financial matters clearly coloured Carlyle's perception for the worse in his essay of 1838. For him, the "inane racket" which had been the 'manufacture' of the

Waverley Novels was little better than an instrument of Scott's *Ambition*, and as such destined to come tumbling down:

Bookseller Constable's bankruptcy was not the ruin of Scott; his ruin was, that ambition, and even false ambition, had laid hold of him...<sup>56</sup>

The worldly Scott of Carlyle's essay influenced in turn Walter Bagehot's understanding (1858), but a sense of delicacy or propriety precluded Bagehot's alluding to Scott's crash. His was an essay in which a constant emphasis on Scott's "manly mind", "common sense" and "well-grounded sagacity" was stated rather than explained.<sup>57</sup> This approach is largely shared in these pages by such other critics as Julia Wedgwood (1878) and Leslie Stephen (1871, 1874, 1897), and may be seen to voice a consensus on Scott, that he was, at the end of the day, too down-to-earth for the tricks and crafts of accounting matters.

We gain the impression, not only that casual biographical allusion and generalisation were sufficient to support the arguments of a nineteenth century literary-critical essay, but also that Scott was felt to be above the kind of reproach in which Carlyle had unstintingly indulged. Of later critics, only Ruskin (1875) referred powerfully in negative terms to the events of the bankruptcy. These he described as having made for a "complex and bitter feeling" in his own father, who had felt scornful of Scott's dishonesty in concealing the Ballantyne partnership.<sup>58</sup>

Scott's assumption of the epithet 'manly', particularly through Leslie Stephen, symbolised his eventual transition to an extra-literary dimension. By the end of the century, while certain literary judgements may have found against Sir Walter, his moral and biographical stature had become so important as to count for at least as much as 'purely literary' merits, in the eyes of his admirers. Judgements in Scott's favour were comprehensive ones. Arthur Conan Doyle (1894) could write that "Scott drew manly men because he was a manly man," and Andrew Lang (1892) could state with authority that Scott was "the greatest of Scottish men of letters, and probably the best beloved author who ever lived." Thus also, for George Saintsbury (1897), Scott's character was "not inhumanly flawless, yet almost superhumanly noble." As T.B. Johnstone (1897) wrote, "the man himself, in his vast intellect and large-heartedness, was greater than all his works."<sup>59</sup>

The process by which Scott's critical status was able to override any doubts about moral value in fiction is a centrally important one. Throughout the century, salacious and sensationalist writing elicited a degree of alarm about the mental and social effects of fiction. From the days of the *Minerva Press* to those of *Tit-Bits* and the *Daily Mail*, massive literary popularity, such as Scott's, had to carry with it, as George Henry Lewes emphasised, "a serious responsibility."<sup>60</sup> The certainty of Scott's 'innocent pleasure' was important.

In this context, from Harriet Martineau to Frederic Harrison, the assertion of Scott's moral healthiness was at the core of much criticism. By way of illustration of this important strand of Scott's status, we can see in a respected mid-century editor and critic, the Reverend George Gilfillan (1857), an insistence on Scott's novels' "beneficent power" :

(They are) a series of the finest creations of the human mind, combining life-like reality with ideal beauty, full of simplicity, pathos, and humanity, as well as of the highest eloquence, interest, and imagination; a series which has bettered and blessed, as well as cheered and electrified, myriads and myriads more of mankind; and which, so far from having exhausted its artistic or its beneficent power, is likely to increase in wide-spread influence as man advances, and as ages roll on...<sup>61</sup>

Gilfillan's point that Scott offered an appealing mixture of pleasure and 'beneficence' is well made. The novels were, for him, as for many others, a single entity, attractive in so many respects for the critic that he could only muster a list of unsubstantiated qualities as his conclusion. It was important, too, that Scott was praised in a language felt to be intellectually and socially neutral - of 'simplicity', 'humanity', 'interest'.

This observation is not a dismissal of Gilfillan's criticism, but, in an example of the kind of 'generalist' Scott criticism found introducing editions and giving critical overviews, the socially- and politically- abstracted language is important to our understanding of Scott's appeal. This was importantly nonspecific, neither partisan nor ideological, but rather diffuse and *good*. The importance of Scott's 'neutral' appeal in times of deep social and political division has been well put by James T. Hillhouse, in his The Waverley Novels and their Critics (1936) :

Here were no subversive ideas. Here was nothing to put notions into the heads of youths and maidens, and not a word that could not be read aloud in the family circle. His moral tone was always unimpeachable, and he always seemed healthy and natural and free, after so many scenes in London clubs and drawing-rooms, to say nothing of East End sweatshops and thieves' resorts, and even Manchester and Sheffield factories.<sup>62</sup>

Scott's themes and attitudes, while certainly refreshing in the contemporary world, were increasingly seen as 'out of date.' The major questions of the day, whether these were religious heterodoxy, social reform, the extension of the franchise, the functions of an educational system, women's rights, evolutionary theory, imperial expansion or any other, all preoccupied the nineteenth century mind emphatically without Scott. He was in a



sense somewhere else. The wholesomeness, and refreshing nature of Scott were undoubted, but they were unquestionably felt to be 'universal'. In relation to the stuff of everyday life Scott was seen as generally uplifting rather than directly applicable.

There were more pressing diurnal questions to which Scott's readers paid attention, than those apparently addressed in the Waverley Novels. In terms of the Waverley Novels' concern with the complex web of relationships within a given community, Victorians saw such issues very differently from Scott himself. The pace of industrial development and the accompanying social and political change engendered new understandings of the structure of society.

This change had a considerable impact not only on the rising generations, but also on the views of many of the older middle classes. As G.M. Young (1936) has written, the speed of change created pressures to ensure social stability :

...men old enough to remember the French Revolution, or the Committees of Secrecy and the Six Acts of 1819, had their fears too, when they reflected that as the country became more and more dependent on machines, its stability turned more and more on the subordination and goodwill of the savage masses which tended them.<sup>63</sup>

Young's comment may be applied directly to Scott's actual conflict with the Galashiels weavers in the debate over Reform. His hysterical opposition to the extension of democracy - whatever its roots in his memories of the French Revolution - was already making him irrelevant and atavistic. Industrialisation, even in his own lifetime, had made Scott's couthy country folk into a proletariat, almost without his noticing. Indeed, it could be argued that his adamant Tory resistance to change in his own last years was at variance with his own works' advocacy of adaptation and tolerance, and that this attitude prematurely fixed his public image to some extent as part of a bygone world. Certainly, Scott's complex and even-handed studies of rural Scotland of the eighteenth century were felt to be worlds away from the industrial and political crises of the 1830s and 40s.

It is important too, in this context, that Scott's own paternalist approach to employing and managing labour was a dying model. Far from the dominant pattern in his Abbotsford days, it became less and less typical of industrial relations. For all the sociological and detailed research which he had undertaken, class and political relations were so altered by the time of Scott's death that he would not, for the Victorian critics, be seen as a writer about social realities of the very recent past.

So Scott's place was never felt to be among the 'social' novelists of the nineteenth century. He always occupied the moral realm, and was seen in the light of a healing influence. As Harriet Martineau

pointed out, he contributed much to a more humane understanding in "certain influential classes that human nature works alike in all," even, as she claimed, contributing to the furtherance of female emancipation by the power of his moralist illustrations of life.<sup>64</sup> Julia Wedgwood later (1878) made the distinction between Scott's greatest strength, "width of sympathy", which was a quality belonging to "the moral world", and what she felt to be the subordinate powers belonging to "the intellectual" part of man's existence.<sup>65</sup>

This identity may be seen as having some relation to the very *human* focus of Scott's work. As I have indicated, close attention to local history and oral tradition was characteristic not only of his novels of the very recent past, but virtually all of what were seen by Victorian readers as his greatest works. The methodology lent his work a quality of 'human reality' which was of great benefit in his growing status.

Notwithstanding this inevitable problem in tackling issues of recent history in a radical way, Scott's fresh approach appears to have allowed him to handle his history-based fiction with a real freedom, and to focus on events on a human scale in a way which would prove astonishing popular. Raphael Samuel has written of this effect of oral history :

The bias it introduces into history is wholly welcome because it will necessarily direct the

historian's attention to the fundamental common things of life: the elements of individual and social experience rather than upon (sic) administrative and political chronologies.<sup>66</sup>

The "fundamental common things of life" were the element to which oral tradition gave Scott access as no written record could. Scott's histories, as many Victorian readers testified, were exciting because of the very *personal* stories woven against the tapestry of often-familiar historical data. Oral tradition not only permitted into literature such realms as superstition and the folk-memory, it provided Scott with the 'stuff', the flesh and blood experiences, which, in his Scottish Enlightenment understanding, were the real test of great historical changes.

The primarily moral judgement on Scott's value on the one hand supported his sales throughout the century, but, on the other, also narrowed the terms of his appeal. For as the reading public expanded, Scott's status began to be fixed as a writer of morally 'good' and harmlessly enjoyable tales. This sense of superficiality meant that in the longer term, in the face of the great novels of the nineteenth century, Scott did not sustain a high status as a writer for adults. The direction in which his work was heading by the end of the nineteenth century was towards the classroom and the children's edition. As Altick points out in The English Common Reader (1957), although there were several impressive new editions of the Waverley Novels towards the end of the century, the biggest

growth area in publishing at this time was the school edition. In 1887, school editions of Scott were behind only Shakespeare and Milton in popularity. Altick goes on to note that, although novels were subordinate to poetry for official school use, Scott had long been popular with boys in such places as Eton and Rugby. Analogously, Stephen in 1897 reported that one of the cheaper editions of the Novels - with volumes costing 1s. or even 6d. - had sold some 3 million volumes over the period 1851-1890.<sup>67</sup> These figures tell the story of a Scott perceived as popular, enjoyable and accessible, but, by the same token, strangely 'unliterary.'

#### *THE 'UNLITERARY' SCOTT*

In these pages, I have not fully explored the range of critics' own literary tastes, but I believe a sense of the changing nature of Scott's audience may be gained from the terms in which critics wrote about him and his work. A key component of this changing readership was the increasing critical admission that Scott was *not literary*, that he was somehow different from 'writers', with all their affectations and impracticalities.

There was a movement towards a language of exclusivity or nostalgia, and a sense of Scott becoming a symbol of extraliterary values. These were unmistakable developments in later critics. But their seeds fell from the diminution of Scott's 'purely' literary

merit, which took place over many decades, and was occurring from the time of Bagehot's (1858), even Carlyle's (1838) essay.

Indeed, as soon as it became possible to take a detached view of Scott and his reputation, his weaknesses in the realms of detailed character delineation and sensitivity to human relations were acknowledged openly. Bagehot felt that Scott's novels lacked a clear account of areas such as "the soul...religion...consecrating power," and were too evidently the products of Scott "the man of the world."<sup>68</sup> This, confirming Carlyle, was widely recognised by later critics, along with acknowledgement of flaws in his creation of young male heroes.

Walter Bagehot's most important contribution to the change in Scott's status lay in his use of new criteria for evaluation. This constituted a new critical act. Bagehot was perhaps the first to undertake anything like a detached appraisal of Scott, and some of the terms of his essay were influential. From Carlyle's search for a prophetic voice in the novels, which he had seen ultimately as no different from any other form of writing in its social and moral responsibilities, Bagehot wrote in different times. His critical essay - actually a review - appeared in an age when even so unliterary a man as himself perforce looked for "delicate exactitude" in characterisation.

The felt need for a national literary canon meant that characters must now *in themselves* offer admirable qualities, and Scott's

heroes were, sadly, found to embody no more than "the vague commonplace way of this world". Overall, Bagehot's charge was that Scott had a "want of depth"<sup>69</sup> when dealing with the spiritual and religious side of human nature.

This charge was widely shared, and, although Scott's achievements in women characters provoked mixed reactions, the perceived overall lack of depth in characterisation percolated through to a consensus that much of the work was, in Leslie Stephen's words, "stucco," "mediaeval upholstery", "blank impossibilities."<sup>70</sup>

We can see in this insistent note in criticism an initially ill-defined wish for the kind of probing and close attention to human sensibility which would be a hallmark of the greatest achievements of the nineteenth century novel. However, Scott's identity was never as part of that tradition, indeed he was perhaps seen as *too* unique, *too* different from other writers for the good of his own lasting literary reputation. It was far more likely to find Scott mentioned in the same breath as Cervantes and Dante, as writers for "the human family", as George Gilfillan put it,<sup>71</sup> than along with writers of social and political satire based on close observation of men and manners. As a writer whose critical, sceptical and probing side was unduly neglected in criticism, Scott was not seen as part of the national literary heritage, with Fielding, Smollett, Austen and others. While most wrote for a particular 'cast of mind', expressed a certain view, Scott, it was felt, wrote for "the

millions", as Dickens said in 1842, for "the world", as Margaret Oliphant wrote in 1882.<sup>72</sup>

Thus Scott was not even seen as a nineteenth century writer. He was certainly not one of the earnest, 'modern' type, with its restless "zeal for creeds and anxiety about positive opinions," which Froude saw as among the new age's characteristics.<sup>73</sup> Thus, as the currents of literary development flowed on, Scott was, for some time, safely ashore. But there came a time when, inevitably, his merits were increasingly under evaluation by new generations of critics with new goals and perhaps fewer attachments to him on the grounds of sentiment and nostalgia. At this time, some of his more distinctive methods and achievements, in terms of social research and speculation, while seldom recognised as the nub of his work, were nevertheless so substantial in the texts as to weigh heavily against their author's being unequivocally championed on solely literary criteria.

The wider picture now shows us that, as literary criticism moved towards professionalism in the last decades of the century, and towards a separate identity from social science, political economy and the other disciplines with which it had been inextricably linked, Scott's fictional amalgamations of form were not the custom. The historical novel no longer had the charm of novelty, in fact was becoming marginalised; and Scott's intellectual and cultural origins in the Scottish Enlightenment were not acknowledged, in a general shrinking of his perceived achievement.



All in all, there came to be little awareness of the Waverley Novels as an exercise in social and cultural history, as fictionalised speculative investigations. Scott now became a figure to be evaluated in the terms of the developing nineteenth century novel genre (to which he had undoubtedly contributed) rather than as the unique author of hybrid and multi-layered texts which partook of history, literature, sociology and folklore. Although Ruskin understood well the deep importance of the natural and social environment to Scott's work, and others focussed on his unliterary qualities in sometimes incisive ways, only an isolated, and apparently throwaway, comment by Leslie Stephen, in an essay on Fielding of 1879, clearly defined the technical difference between Scott and other novelists:

It is a kind of misnomer which classifies all Scott's books as novels. They are embodied legends and traditions, descriptions of men, and races, and epochs of history, but many of them are novels, as it were, by accident...<sup>74</sup>

Although this, and some other comments by Stephen, point us towards Scott's genuine 'unliterariness' in practice, this methodological feature was largely neglected by critics, who, in a well-meaning emphasis on other qualities, sought to distance the great Sir Walter from the *narrowly* literary. Ultimately, this led, as I have stated, to relegation; but Victorian critics saw no problem for Scott's status in their pointing to his literary failings. Moral

'healthiness' would always compensate, especially if allied to smashing storytelling.

The conflation of biographical and literary judgements increasingly urged that Scott's novelistic skills were above all expressed in the generation of 'rattling good yarns'. As the prolific late century Scott apologist John Dennis wrote in his 'Talk about Sir Walter Scott for young readers' (1890), the novels' "high moral purity" and "intellectual gain" stemmed from not only Christianity and patriotism, but also "vigour...excitement...startling scenes".<sup>75</sup> Dennis encapsulated the ultimate conclusion of Bagehot, Stephen and others, that Scott's best audience was the young men of England. By that date, as indicated above, Scott's works were among the most popular school texts, and the simplification of the work and its ideas proceeded to meet new market opportunities.

#### *SCOTT THE STORYTELLER*

There were changes in readers' taste among the Waverley Novels over the course of the nineteenth century. There was a shift in popular and critical taste from such works as Guy Mannering and Old Mortality in the 1820s to Ivanhoe, Kenilworth, Woodstock and The Fortunes of Nigel by the 1870s.<sup>76</sup> Critics' interests are shown in Appendix 1. The movement from Scottish men and manners of the recent past towards a derring-do image rang no alarm bells for

Victorian critics. They had the Magnum Opus, and all the novels were part of 'Scott'. The differences - considerable ones - between the novels set in the remembered past, from the late seventeenth century onwards, and older tales, set in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, tended to be neglected in the newly dominant conception of his aims and achievements.

For critics, it was an increasing consensus that both an escapist and a 'moralist' dimension applied across the board of the Waverley Novels. The single work of fiction entitled 'The Waverley Novels' possessed a raft of agreeable and admirable qualities which the different groups of individual texts within the oeuvre may have individually lacked. These groups - such as of mediaeval novels, novels of the turbulent fifteenth century, or the more modern and memory-based novels of eighteenth century Scotland - partook of the total identity, and thus overrode reservations about their own limitations.

Thus, even a feeling that Scott had written too quickly after 1820 was undermined by the individual preferences of critics for whom virtually *all* of the Waverley Novels were marvellous, and some better still. What Stephen called "the melancholy drudgery of his later years" had made Scott "beat out his gold uncommonly thin,"<sup>77</sup> especially in those novels which were not in the group known as the 'Scotch novels': Waverley (1814), Guy Mannering (1815), The Antiquary, Old Mortality (both 1816), Rob Roy, The Heart of Midlothian (both 1818), and The Bride of Lammermoor (1819).

Redgauntlet (1824) was a belated addition to this group. However, even though it is the characters from these novels to whom most allusion is made, and to this group that critics always refer when considering the 'happiest' or 'most spontaneous' Scott, other work was often admitted to have appeal on more subjective or undefined grounds.

Thus, Richard Holt Hutton and Matthew Arnold shared pleasure in Kenilworth (1821), Hutton considering it, along with The Fortunes of Nigel (1822), among Scott's best work. Leslie Stephen loved Woodstock (1826) and Quentin Durward (1823), and believed St. Ronan's Well (1824) to be surprisingly popular with Scott cognoscenti. Ruskin rejoiced in The Monastery (1820), George Saintsbury reckoned highly Anne of Geierstein (1829), and Conan Doyle thought Count Robert of Paris (1832) seriously underrated. And they *all* loved Ivanhoe.<sup>78</sup>

The development of Scott criticism, involving this drift to often unsubstantiated and individualistic preferences, and particularly the exceptional status of Ivanhoe above novels alleged to be its superior, had important implications for the ultimate status and popularity of the Waverley Novels. The late-century flood of inferior criticism, containing, with too great frequency, increasingly vague and subjective assertions of Scott's merit, could not wash away the gathering consensus that he was not, at the end of the day, a great writer for adults. But this process had begun some decades earlier.

It was portrayal as the creator of adventure yarns which began to exclude Scott from the ranks of 'serious', adult writers. The young Henry James, for instance, in 1864, damned Scott with faint praise, emphasising the lightweight and trivial nature of the novels :

...we can liken him to nothing better than to a strong and kindly elder brother, who gathers his juvenile public about him at eventide, and pours out a stream of wondrous improvisation. Who cannot remember an experience like this ? On no occasion are the delights of fiction so intense. Fiction ? These are the triumphs of fact. In the richness of his invention and memory, in the infinitude of his knowledge, in his improvidence for the future, in the skill with which he answers, or rather parries, sudden questions, in his low-voiced pathos and his resounding merriment, he is identical with the ideal fireside chronicler. And thoroughly to enjoy him, we must again become as credulous as children at twilight.<sup>79</sup>

In this light, and remembering that James represented very much the future direction of serious critical and novelistic practice, Scott's increasing association was with the adventure novel, even with the simplified historical tales which sought the new boys' readership at the end of the century. Although James had identified the 'fact'-element of Scott's work, this was not a quality

befitting great adult novelists. Ivanhoe was, finally, more likely to be found alongside Henty and Westerman than beside Eliot or Hardy.

Similarly, a perceived propensity for what Mark Twain called "mediaeval chivalry-silliness" was damaging to Scott's literary status. Twain's writing on Scott, in a chapter of a book of 1883, famously related Scott's immense popularity to the incorrigible cultural myths of chivalry and knighthood which had so infected the Southern States before the American Civil War. Twain evaluated the Waverley Novels in terms of their "moral proposals", but drew very different conclusions from most critics. He dismissed absolutely any notion of the novels' fidelity to an admirable social state :

...dreams and phantoms...decayed and swinish forms  
of religion...decayed and degraded systems of  
government...the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham  
grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a  
brainless and worthless long-vanished society.<sup>20</sup>

For all the eulogy elsewhere, such comments as these were not inconsistent with the mainstream of criticism. Scott's perceived superficiality was accepted, his perceived lack of a grounding in social actuality acknowledged. Indeed, these components of a *non-realist* fictional practice were seen as positives, conducing, as they did, to generalised 'healthiness' and 'morality.'

Scott's being seen as a scribbler of yarns merely followed his being described, as by an anonymous critic of 1872, as "a popular and at the same time healthful beguiler of the leisure hours".<sup>81</sup> His perceived "total absence of self-consciousness", and the resultant "healthiness and purity of tone", according to an *Athenaeum* writer (1871), stemmed from his felt 'straightforwardness.'<sup>82</sup>

This view of Scott as a glib and profuse spinner of yarns was as one with his image as an untheoretical innocent, unconnected with any 'schools' or literary 'movements'. Margaret Oliphant, in 1871, was archetypal :

Scott is able for all. He looks on the world with eyes of sunshiny daylight, not with spectacles coloured by his own theories or other people's...<sup>83</sup>

Important in this wide appeal was the extent to which he was seen as an invigorating and exciting *change* from what had gone before, and from other ways of conveying educative messages. Scott's potential moral service to the century was the theme of Harriet Martineau's early essay, and as William Michael Rossetti (1870) wrote :

Readers were delighted to find some new source of interest opened up to them...; jaded with the old subjects and the old methods - with whatsoever was

recognised and right, respectable and conventional, the old clothes now threadbare, and the old viands now destructive of appetite - they got at last something fresh, full of stimulation in itself, and in the evidence which it everywhere presented of a lively, hearty, buoyant, and rejoicing nature, open to all impressions of the strength and sentiment of the past, and reproducing them in forms evidently quick-blooded.<sup>84</sup>

Rossetti's words encapsulate one of the dominant Victorian views of Scott. This tendency to make of Scott a comforting old friend, harmless fun and *good* removed him utterly from the realm of social actuality. His status as a historian, as much as that as a novelist, was ultimately undermined by this critical approach. Scott's history - a speculative history, based on oral and antiquarian evidence - was irrelevant. Just as the novels' historical content eroded his perceived literary merit, especially by dint of the high proportion of externalities and historical minutiae which he employed, so the emotional and psychological power of his novels weakened his 'purely' historiographical case.

Although he himself would have set great store by his skills as an accurate conveyor of history, he was seen to have been lacking in this criterion. His merits were seen as no more than the provision of a pleasurable narrative, a vivid imagination, and a broad understanding of some of the commonplaces of history.



Although critics from Jeffrey onwards, and even the otherwise disapproving Carlyle, bestowed praise on Scott for the vivification of the past in his work, yet the very success of the dramatic and 'story' elements of his novels disarmed his pretensions to being a 'serious' historian. Thus, beginning with Macaulay in 1828, there was a dismissal of Scott's importance in this regard, his category clearly that of the novelist, and not the historian. Macaulay's point, in the *Edinburgh Review*, was that there was a considerable difference between the enjoyment of the Waverley Novels, based as they were on "gleanings", and the work of the "truly great historian."<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, in what was at the time a common assertion of History's status as a *science*, this was how an anonymous reviewer in a *Fraser's Magazine* of 1847 described Scott's contribution to History:

That a great and romantic effect was...produced, is evident. There is all the semblance of a genuine historical *tableau*; the elementary characters are living, breathing men, and they offend us by no discrepancies of manner or costume. But is historical truth preserved? We confidently answer that it is not, and that there is no surer way of contravening the realities of History.<sup>86</sup>

What was certain in such writing was that History was *important*. History had important functions to perform in the task of ensuring the social cohesion of society, and the perceived frivolities of historical fiction had little part to play in this. In part, therefore, we may see the exclusion of Scott's history from serious consideration by many historians as the result of the tide of inferior historical novels which followed his own. The outpourings of G.P.R. James, Bulwer-Lytton, and Harrison Ainsworth in particular may now be seen to have permanently undermined the status of the historical novel as a form in English.

There were other dimensions to the disappearance of Scott the historian. The shift, which J.W. Burrow has incisively delineated, in perceptions of the past, is very relevant to Scott's place and role. Although it could not be denied that Scott contributed greatly to the creation of what we think of as historical consciousness, there was, ironically, an increasing reluctance in the nineteenth century to base modern political and cultural claims on overtly historical grounds. The past was too distant and too different, and, especially in the gathering Whiggish conception of history, too primitive. As Burrow puts it in his A Liberal Descent (1981) :

The habit of conducting political argument by claims to indefeasible historic rights modulates into the respectful and pragmatic political style enjoined by a civil prudence learnt from history.<sup>87</sup>

The specifics of Scott's achievement became increasingly difficult to relate, either to social and cultural realities, or to the developing professional disciplines of Literature and History. Claims for the Waverley Novels as panacea, as conceptions of 'comprehensiveness' and 'good' began to preponderate over criticism searching in more detail for their essence and achievements. That way led to a kind of ossification.

#### *SCOTT AS VICTORIAN INSTITUTION*

The subject which most preoccupied G.K. Chesterton in his essay on Scott of 1903 was one which had been in the minds of many Scott critics over the recent decades. It was that literary and cultural tastes were beginning to change, to Scott's disadvantage. Literary realism and the contemporary worship of 'facts' were felt to have together rendered Scott unfashionable, above all because of the evident quantity of his words and the perceived richness of his language. Given Chesterton's conservatism, the terms of his praise of Scott show the shrinking of the fiction into a kind of metaphor for bygone standards and lost splendours :

Take any contemporary work of fiction and turn to the scene where the young socialist denounces the millionaire, and then compare the stilted sociological lecture given by that self-sacrificing bore with the surging joy of words in Rob Roy's

declaration of himself, or Athelstane's defiance of De Bracy. That ancient sea of passion upon which high words and great phrases are the resplendent foam is just now at a low ebb. We have even gone the length of congratulating ourselves because we can see the mud and the monsters at the bottom.<sup>88</sup>

In keeping with this interpretation of his work as possessing 'eternal verities', Scott was increasingly seen as a curiously ahistorical figure. His place, by the turn of the century, was becoming that of a writer of simple adventure stories, or one with the subjective attractions of nostalgia. This was far from being apolitical, despite the constant presentation of the Waverley Novels as neutral, simply pleasurable.

Whereas Ruskin and Stephen had alluded to their childhood reading of Scott with evident fondness, for them this at least purported to be an adjunct to other reasons for valuing the Novels. For some later critics, that memory appears almost the entire substance of their predilection. The Novels were a recollection of youth for Arthur Conan Doyle in his 1894 essays entitled 'Before my Bookcase'. The young Conan Doyle was "thrown again and again" on the Waverley Novels by dint of "wet weather and country houses".<sup>89</sup> For W.H. Hudson, writing his full-length biographical criticism Sir Walter Scott in 1899, Scott was above and beyond all critical evaluation : the memory of his childhood half-holidays had

...a power not to be destroyed by any enlargement of intellectual horizon, changes of taste, or revision of critical judgements.<sup>90</sup>

Cultural changes within the wider realm of literature also affected readings of Scott from the last Victorian years. The rise of English Literature as a University subject changed the nature of literary criticism itself. The development of institutionalised practice arose from tentative 'English Studies' courses in late nineteenth-century University syllabuses. This led to the inevitable creation of demarcation and hierarchy within literature. Neither the novel as a genre, nor the (outmoded) tastes of the Victorians, nor Scottish writing were at the top of the pile, 'modern' writing as a whole being seen as unsuitable.

The course of Scott criticism could be seen as a case-study for evaluating the overall course of Criticism as a whole, in terms of the kinds of ideological territory identified by Chris Baldick in The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932 (1983). In this vein, the increasing definition and assertion of what Baldick calls "the implicit and intuitive properties of literary 'sensibility'", over the period from Matthew Arnold to F.R. Leavis, signified the shutting of doors against some of the terms in which Scott's Victorian eulogists wrote.<sup>91</sup>

Scott's depreciation as a writer was to some extent as one with the techniques employed in writing about him. This was far more than a

result of the end of the Review era, although the kinds of discourse available to the critic were undergoing attenuation because of this. At the very least, the possibility, that critics would emphasise 'folklore' or 'speculative history' in readings of Scott, was diminished. Scott's somewhat untidy and hybrid notion of the novel as a form was far from being convenient.

Twentieth-century critics have been eager to overcome Scott's almost institutional status, and to reduce his achievement. This was rooted in Victorian developments. In particular, Scott's becoming associated with a comforting blend of easy enjoyment and moral betterment weakened his case in the new century. But another dimension also matters: the series-identity of the Waverley Novels.

It was through the range and variety of humankind portrayed, and the breadth of emotions set before the reader, that Scott became central to Victorian culture. His nineteenth century readership set great store by the comprehensiveness of vision over the complete opus of the Waverley Novels. Bagehot made the point, that in each novel Scott gave "vivid" but "fragmentary" histories, i.e. did not reveal a "world-view" in any single novel.<sup>92</sup>

There was a sense of Scott and the Waverley Novels as unitary. A large measure of Victorian writing on Scott, indeed, only refers to a generalised amalgamation of man and novels, or even man, novels and poetry. The Collected Works were an indispensable asset to the

middle-class Victorian home, and as such part of the essence of Victorian culture.

The blurring of the identity of texts was taking place in Scott's own lifetime. As the texts themselves began to accumulate and multiply, the identity of Scott's work soon became a corporate one. When Scott finally admitted authorship of the Waverley Novels in 1827, the great extent of his achievement was evident. In one development in particular Scott's status changed dramatically, and with this change reading of the novels assumed a new sense of awe at Scott and the Waverley Novels as cultural institution.

The Magnum Opus - the full, 48-Volume edition of the Novels, published between 1829 and 1833 - contained considerable amounts of new work by Scott, including introductions, annotations and textual revisions. As Jane Millgate argues in Scott's Last Edition (1987), the Novels took on a "standard form" which conferred on the unified edition "classic status for the decades that were to follow". This was a radical and innovatory step which enhanced Scott's literary and biographical reputation:

...in collecting and annotating his writings in this way Scott was implicitly assigning to fiction a status previously reserved for poetry and drama, and to the productions of a living author a treatment normally accorded only to the achievements of the great masters of the past. For

although Scott's introductions and notes were engagingly modest and even self-deprecating - thus diminishing the impression of egotism - they in no way compromised the statement made by the very fact of bringing his novels together as an oeuvre.<sup>93</sup>

Millgate identifies the basis of nineteenth century writers' repeated blurring of Scott and the Waverleys as a "corporate entity" as the advent of the Magnum Opus, now the predominant form in which readers encountered the novels. This irrevocably changed the identity of individual texts :

The magnum apparatus has, in fact, a transforming as well as a supplementary function. Its presence signals a generic transposition of the individual works it contains; in the edition the various novels of the Author of Waverley become component parts of a new text, one which belongs to the genre Collected Works...The magnum clearly constitutes a separate version of Scott's entire fictional canon, one in which the novels cohere together as part of a corporate entity, and in which individual novels are encompassed by the new editorial framework...<sup>94</sup>

Thus we can see the importance to later criticism of the existence of the Magnum Opus. Victorian critics were able - indeed were almost bound - to view the Waverley Novels as a piece, to announce



the purpose of a review essay as a "contemplation of the works of Scott," as did Harriet Martineau, paying little regard to the differentiation within the opus.<sup>95</sup> Given the status of the complete series of the Novels as a central cultural artefact of Victorian life, in a sense offering the grand overview of Scott became a necessary component of being a literary critic.

It was a Scott of massive proportions whom most Victorians met. The perception of his offering 'essential' truths about life, and about man's place in the scheme of things, was assisted by the evident scale of his achievement.

The Waverley Novels furnished Victorian readers over six or seven decades with affirmative documents for their fondest myths. Critics, finding in Scott a sympathetic soul, drew readily on their own central concerns, such as class, morality and art. In these Scott writings, though, there was remarkable continuity in certain areas. These include: Scott's assertion of the mundane but necessary transition from past to present; his generation of wonderful tales from romantic times; the vital continuity between biography and work; and the sheer distance between the 'now' of the diseased, dirty and decadent nineteenth century, and the 'then' of Scott's glorious world.

Scott's past was perceived as being unified - religiously, socially and economically - in a way achingly unknown to the

Victorian present. Ruskin (1880) wrote of Scott's historic past, as in nothing more different from the nineteenth century than that

...from highest to lowest...a habit of serene and stainless thought was as natural to the people as their mountain air.<sup>96</sup>

Ruskin's first phrase is important. Scott's ability apparently to enter the souls of vanished generations of people from all ranks, and show their lives to be bound by far deeper and richer ties than the cash-nexus: that was a central part of this untrammelled joy in Scott which we find in Victorians. The novels were perceived by major and minor critics alike as being fundamentally committed to such values as what Julia Wedgwood (1878) called "sympathy" and "absolute simplicity", Richard Holt Hutton (1878) "natural goodness", and Frederick Harrison (1886) "humour, truth, human nature in all its sides".<sup>97</sup>

Scott was remarkably double-edged for Victorian readers, able to appeal from different sides. He was identified as being committed to a 'collective' conception of society. At the same time he was acknowledged to be promulgating a code of individual allegiance and loyalty unmistakably conservative in political complexion. This fine and socially-cohesive balance was well expressed by an anonymous *London Quarterly* reviewer of 1872 :

Although the author's conception of an ideal social state was evidently and unquestionably Feudalism, he maintains in the most pointed manner the respect of the higher classes to the lower classes as well as the converse bearing of the lower to the higher.<sup>98</sup>

Scott's pre-eminence in Victorian thought and culture was aided by the capacity of his work for being interpreted and accepted from very differing points of view. He was never merely a name from the past. While being commemorated as a Colossus to set alongside literary and cultural giants of all ages - Cervantes, Milton, Shakespeare, and Dante were favourite peers - he was clearly felt to be very much alive for the Victorians as a public and morally self-confident figure speaking to them and to their lives. You have the sense that they felt he *understood* them and their world.

Scott's acceptability to Victorian taste tells us a great deal, not only about their needs - both for moral leadership and escape into his distant land - but also about his own ability to write so as to gratify what was already a large and varied readership in his own time. His breadth of understanding stood him in great stead. For he was read *as if he had a coherent view of the past*, as if his work amounted to a confident and eternally true exposition of the past in all its salutary strengths and exemplary failings. Scott thus offered not just pleasure, but, we can discern, support and reassurance to a great variety of readers.

However, this breadth had its drawbacks. His function for nineteenth-century readers was increasingly separated from the material and mundane in life. Thus, as it was increasingly accepted that Scott's novels were perhaps not great art, indeed could be superficial, ponderous, lacking any firm convictions and long-winded; so the simplicity, the healthy, genial, unreflective pleasures of the Waverley Novels were urged the more.

These more general features of the work - Scott's less demanding aspects - appealed because of factors within his nineteenth century audience. In this context, surely, is the disturbing effect on moral and cultural self-confidence, of the series of deep spiritual crises which beset the Victorian mind. Very visible social ills and political discontent, the rise of Nonconformity, and a growing sense of estrangement from nature, as well as Evolutionary theory and the new Biblical scholarship, presented serious challenges to the ways Victorians thought about and lived their lives. Scott, in the Waverley Novels, was clearly able to offer a convincing dramatisation of the Via Media which G.M. Young has identified as the great fusion sought by the yearning Victorian soul - "the balanced emphasis on individual conduct and social coherence."<sup>99</sup> In this Victorian world, Scott was an escape hatch, a pressure valve.

The acceptability of Scott in all contexts cannot be overestimated. Felt to be wholesome and harmless, the Waverley Novels were icons for the nineteenth century, oases of innocence. The basis and formation of this status are the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER II :SCOTT IN A MORAL CLIMATE*SCOTT AND THE ETHIC OF 'IMPROVEMENT'*

We have to look at some generalities of the pre-Victorian cultural climate, in order to see more precisely the context in which Scott critics of the 1830s, such as Harriet Martineau and Thomas Carlyle, operated. The notion of a moral role for the arts, and particularly for fiction, emerged more clearly and more precisely than before in the 1820s, as the economic and political crisis of the immediate post-Waterloo years temporarily abated. At this time, periodical and other publishing served as a crucial forum for public debate.

Scott's status was great from the days of his poetic heyday, but when Waverley took a mere five weeks to sell out its first edition of 1000, and, after mounting success, Rob Roy later sold 10,000 copies in a fortnight, the popularity of the novels began to rival, and then outstrip even the poetry. When Scott finally announced his being 'The Author of Waverley', in 1827, it was a significant admission indeed. Over and above astonishing sales figures, the novels were a premium product, Ivanhoe costing 30s. and Kenilworth 31s.6d, unprecedentedly high prices. The impact of the Waverley

Novels on publishing history was so considerable, and the sheer scale and status of the early marketing of Scott and his work so dramatic in the context of their times, that this impact was perhaps never entirely forgotten in the cultural memory.' But into what kind of critical climate did they enter ?

Predominant in the kinds of literary criticism we find in the pre-Victorian years, and in which Review climate major writers like Carlyle developed their own distinctive style, was a strongly value-based, and what we would call an 'interdisciplinary' mode of discourse, reflecting the interwoven strands of thought of the new form of the Review Journals. The most prominent, among a multitude, were the *Edinburgh Review* (established 1802), the *Quarterly Review* (1808), *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817), the *London Magazine* (1820), the *Westminster Review* (1824), and *Fraser's Magazine* (1830). These publications sought to bring within comprehensible orbit the increasing variety of contemporary life.

The aim, if a common aim can be claimed of such diverse animals, was to encourage a heterogeneous literature characterised by articles which the publisher John Scott described in 1820 as typically "a miscellany, enquiring, independent, irreverent." His establishment of the *London Magazine* in that year, quickened the ferment of intellectual debate for the 1820s. His manifesto was a challenging one :

Opinion now busies itself with more adventurous themes than of yore; discussion must start fleeter and subtler game; excitements must be stronger; the stakes of all sorts higher; the game more complicated and hazardous. The spirit of things generally, and, above all, of the present time, it will be our business, or at least our endeavour, to catch, condense and delineate.<sup>2</sup>

There is a terrific sense here, that the pulse of the moment and the real centre of cultural change, were to be found in the Reviews. Throughout the 1810s and 20s, the Reviews vied for a growing market. The *Edinburgh Review*, for instance, reached sales of some 13,000 in the 1820s, a figure well below what would be reached by other periodicals later in the century, but, in the context of a restricted reading public, an indication of its real centrality in the critical world of its time.<sup>3</sup>

One of the principal cultural and intellectual concerns of these years was with the role and status of the creative in society. The terms and outcome of the debate on this issue would be very influential in the subsequent formation of a degree of consensus as to Sir Walter Scott's place and cultural role. The debate focussed on areas such as the degree to which art should imitate life, and the acceptability, in the new climate, of Romantic preoccupations with the artist in society. Associated with these were concerns about the depiction of the 'common' in art, and the relationship of

mankind to divinity. The fervent contesting at this time of these issues put Scott's work in the dock, and in a sense imposed certain conditions on their interpretation.

But of course the Waverley Novels were published anonymously for many years before Scott's unequivocal avowal of them in 1827. Much criticism of them prior to that date was a musing on the novelty of their subject-matter alone. Typical of this, although full of insight into the 'documentary' aspects of the work, was the critique of E.T. Channing on Rob Roy (1818).

Edward Tyrrell Channing was editor of the *North American Review*, and later, as a professor, played an important part in the development of Harvard University. His criticism shows a real concern with the society depicted in Scott's work, and an interest in the 'sociological' aspects of the Waverley Series.

In urging this viewpoint, one which respected Scott's speculative objectives, Channing was proposing that readers should see useful social exploration in the diversity of characterisation :

We may call these works novels, or what we please, - they are after all nothing but views of the real world, given by a man who observes it widely, justly and feelingly, and passes by nothing however low, and shrinks from nothing however terrible, which God has placed here as a part of his system.



The earth is large enough for the safe expansion and action of all minds however opposite, and he delights to contemplate the workings, and see the same principles struggling or playing freely in the various conditions of life, differently combining indeed and receiving different shades and modifications, according to the diversity of influences which help to make the character, and yet all betraying the universal alliance of man. With all the strangeness of his personages, the violence of the life he describes, and the local air of his sketches, his genius is still spread out over the earth...<sup>4</sup>

These words are strong in their admiration of several important elements in the work: Scott's sense of locality, the notion of the inseparability of humankind and society, and the generous 'democracy' of Scott's portraiture of common life, as well as the sense of the irrevocable lapse of years since the world of the novel, and the overarching humanity with which Scott synthesised all.

This kind of reading, however - one which placed greater emphasis on the 'experimental' or investigative side of Scott's enterprise - would come to be usurped by one concerned to establish literary value through moral unimpeachability. Altick, for instance, quotes a columnist, 'Excubitor,' in the *Christian Observer* of 1817, whose

complaint was that Scott was "an indulgence...at this day allowed in many religious families."<sup>5</sup> Such a dubious status testifies to the contemporary concerns, which, as the *Christian Observer* itself put it, were "dissipation" and "the low tone of public morals."<sup>6</sup>

Channing's stress on Scott's strengths as social observer would remain in part a commonplace of writings on Scott. 'Variety', 'breadth' and sympathy with the character of a given rural society were repeated concepts, which - stripped of Enlightenment clothing - would become, and remain, unproblematically positive features.

The way in which Scott's pictures of bygone societies would be expropriated from the context of his own speculative interests is typified by treatment of the folk element in the novels. This aspect would be popular and of lasting fascination to critics throughout the nineteenth century. Its greatest feature, for the earliest generations of readers of the *Waverley Novels*, was novelty. An anonymous reviewer in the *British Critic* in 1814, on the impact of the recent Waverley, described his reactions thus :

We are unwilling to consider this publication in the light of a common novel...but as a vehicle of curious accurate information upon a subject which must at all times demand our attention - the history and manners of a very, very large and renowned portion of the inhabitants of these islands; of a race who, within these few years,

have vanished from the face of their native land, but have left their names and their actions behind them as monuments of spirited independence...We would recommend this tale, as faithfully embodying the lives, the manners, and the opinions of this departed race, and as affording those features of ancient days, which no man probably, besides its author, has had the means to collect, the desire to preserve, or the power to portray. This tale should be ranked in the same class with the Arabian Nights' entertainments, in which the story, however it may for a moment engage the attention, is but of little consequence, in proportion to the faithful picture which they present of the manners and customs of the east.<sup>7</sup>

The striking originality in this respect of the Novels was clearly immensely appealing to Scott's first readers. But Scott's serious study of the development of society would be subordinated in criticism to the reading of his rural characters for pleasure or curiosity. That Meg Merrilies and Edie Ochiltree delighted readers more than the blander heroes and heroines was a commonplace of criticism, but the early realisation that they constituted a "faithful picture" diminished.

It was the enjoyment of such characterisations, rather than their perceived relation to social reality, which came to dominate

critical response, the more so as each decade rendered them less real to Scott's readership. As 'delight' in Scott's folk element became more consensual, however, so much the less was the tendency to value this highly. These initially-prominent folk characters were increasingly seen as akin to Dickensian light relief, rather than sociological and antiquarian endeavour. At this early stage, the crucial concept of *worth* was in large measure tied to such accuracy as Scott showed in his pictures of society.

*Worth*, though, was only of such crucial importance to critics because of the immense popularity of the works. The change, from the possibility that Scott would be viewed as an Enlightenment novelist - which Channing's criticism had at least allowed - was shaped by an escapist reading. Coleridge's praise for Scott as offering "innocent, refined heart-bettering amusement"<sup>9</sup> expressed that reading of his work which permitted Scott to be safely placed outside the maelstrom of contemporary social and political debates. This reading arose from a sense that Scott's world was a useful antidote both to sensational publications, and to the chronic unhappiness and doubt of the present. This perspective, importantly for the remainder of the century, omitted Coleridge's deeper point, that, among many laudable and powerful recommendations, Scott's greatest was to have shown

...the contest between the two great moving principles of social humanity; religious adherence to the past and the ancient, the desire and

admiration of permanence, on the one hand; and the passion for increase of knowledge, for truth, as the offspring of reason - in short, the mighty instincts of *progression* and *free agency*, on the other.<sup>9</sup>

In this emphasis on eternal social humanity as the real focus of the Waverley Novels, Coleridge was delineating a Scott committed to determining the essential and perennial characteristics of society's progress. But these points, quite apart from their being made in private letters, were wholly too abstract to have been the principal territory of debate in the wider critical climate.

Criticism largely neglected this deeper context of the Novels, for the urgent task facing all intellectual society was not so much reasoned study of the recent past, as *improvement*. This was an age of mission, when Scott himself did much work in the promotion of education, from help for elementary education in the Borders to assisting in the creation of Edinburgh Academy.

There was at this time a clamour for radical social and political change, which dated back to not only the post-war slump, but also a deep memory of the possibilities for the rights of man of social upheaval. The atmosphere in the Britain of the 1810s and 20s was charged with the energy and radicalism of such people as Robert Owen and Richard Carlile, and of the new trades unions. Such publications as Cobbett's *2d. Register*, *The Black Dwarf*, Henry

Hetherington's *The Poor Man's Guardian* and *The Voice of the People* sold in tens of thousands, and were read by thousands more in reading rooms, radical booksellers and at meetings.<sup>10</sup>

This complex of activity represented a response to the changing social and industrial scene, and was felt by the middle and upper classes to be a challenge best met by the expansion of education and literacy. Although popular demands would translate into those for Reform and, later, the Charter, the strategy to increase reading and overall levels of education was felt to be one which would at once obviate any political destabilisation, and meet the growing demand for an improvement in the moral health of the nation. As Altick has put it, there was

...a long campaign to insure (sic) that through the press the masses of people would be induced to help preserve the status quo and bulwark the security and prosperity of the particular sort of national life that they, its upper- and middle-class rulers, cherished.<sup>11</sup>

Scott, as a Conservative considerably affected by the psychological impact of the French Revolution - particularly by the 'Terror' - and as an individual who had joined civil militias when the threat of either foreign invasion or the insurrection of the underclasses arose, was felt to promote values of social stability and continuity in his work. His perceived moral 'health', which was so

important to his acceptability, may be seen as in part the result of his status as a profoundly anti-revolutionary figure.

There was nothing new in the nineteenth century about morality as a central dimension in the evaluation of literature and its practitioners. But the growth of the Evangelical movement, itself present in British society since the late eighteenth century, into the most effective transforming force in British society, is relevant here.

Evangelicalism both within and outside the Established Church, permeated every corner of British life. The renewal of energy within the religious life of the country, in response to social change, was expressed in many ways, including the numerous millennialist and adventist groups, the breakaway Dissenting and Secessionist movements, Church Constitutional changes and the rise of the High Church movements. But the most openly educational and social in their goals were those of an 'Evangelical' cast. From the years of the Clapham Sect and Charles Simeon to the establishment of educational societies such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the Religious Tract Society, the British and Foreign School Society and the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, there was an urge to control literacy and direct it appropriately for social stability. Fear about the consequences of the uncontrolled spread of literacy were inevitable, and Sydney Smith warned the Conservatives in 1831 :

...you have a different sort of man to deal with -  
you must change because the beings whom you govern  
are changed.<sup>12</sup>

In a cultural context in which it was widely felt that, as G.M. Young has written of this period, "The world is very evil,"<sup>13</sup> Scott's very *unworldliness*, his perceived lack of 'realistic' coverage of society was emphasised the more. His works increasingly found favour because of the social cohesion he was felt to offer, both in the fictional fantasy of the work and in their actual effect upon the reader. As a sense of common culture and reassurance about contemporary morality were sought by both the existing readership and the new groups acquiring literacy, the shopkeepers, clerks, skilled workers and self-improving domestic servants,<sup>14</sup> so the importance of such 'safe' work as Scott's grew within what J.F.C.Harrison has described as the "imperative" of "the creation of a fully literate society."<sup>15</sup>

The new factory age demanded the concomitant mental and moral 'improvement' of the populace. The quest for a 'common culture' depended on the ethic of Respectability via self-improvement.<sup>16</sup> Just as religious groups were taking a leading part in encouraging literacy for adults, and the spread of libraries grew as book prices increased, so, through the expanding education system, they played a key role in disseminating the benefits of the 1833 Government award of an annual grant of £20,000 to voluntary school societies. As increasing numbers depended on the expansion of the



industries purveying the written word, so the means to ensure the beneficial uses of the written word were correspondingly strengthened.

Scott, and other 'acceptable' works of literature, faced massive competition. A large percentage of the publishing industry's increasing output was in the area of 'popular fiction.' This remained deeply disturbing to many. New cheap literature, such as that emanating from the Minerva Press and the pulp writer Edward Lloyd, became immensely popular in the 1830s and 40s. This trend exerted a profound influence on all perceptions of the very term 'fiction'. Scott's increasing availability in editions cheaper than even Cadell's 5s. edition of the 1820s, is significant. Editions appeared throughout the century at 1s., 6d., 3d., and 1d. - leading to the important Everyman's Library edition of 1906, at 1s. - and this availability played a large part in Scott's effective competition with more sensationalist matter.<sup>17</sup>

Literature was subjected to intense scrutiny in the climate of reinforced moral vigour brought about by religious revival and earnestness. Scott, whose origins were in the eighteenth century - widely felt to have been a vulgar, complacent and immoderate age - had to be turned into an acceptable nineteenth century figure, and finally a Victorian, by dint of his moral usefulness. Characteristic of this conversion was a strand of earnest critical evaluation treating culture as a matter to be examined as keenly as

the remainder of one's life. G.M. Young describes the power of Evangelicalism as

...less in the hopes and terrors it inspired, than in its rigorous logic, 'the eternal microscope', with which it pursued its argument into the recesses of the heart, and the details of daily life, giving to every action its individual value in this life, and its infinite consequence in the next.<sup>18</sup>

Scott underwent scrutiny for the 'moral economy' of his work. The notion, with which he himself had felt quite comfortable, and which would again be acceptable late in the nineteenth century, that 'innocent enjoyment' was an acceptable criterion for literary worth, cut little ice in these years. The novel should be a form of *moral* production. A study in 1838 by the London Statistical Society showed Scott's novels, and imitations of them, to be among the largest categories of books held in the ten largest circulating libraries. They were acceptable, but were hugely outnumbered by 'Fashionable novels' and - the largest group - 'Novels of the lowest character.'<sup>19</sup> Criticism of Scott's work throughout the nineteenth century was never entirely free of this pre- and early Victorian criterion.

*THE DEBATE ABOUT FICTION AND THE MARKET*

Related to the formation of this moralist criterion, was an important debate over the nature and purposes of cultural production, and the authority of its critical guardians. The social functions of the myriad forms of literature were very much at issue in the Percy Bysshe Shelley/Thomas Love Peacock contention of 1820-21. The proposition which Peacock put in The Four Ages was that poetry

...like all other trades, takes its rise in the demand for the commodity, and flourishes in proportion to the extent of the market...<sup>20</sup>

Here he was resisting Shelley's assertion of an apparent monopoly on wisdom on the part of the 'poet-seer'. The 'Defence of Poetry' (1821) advocated an enhanced role in society for the Imaginative faculty :

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Shelley proposed greater social obligations for the artist, a clear break, as Marilyn Butler has put it, with the pre-war generation's interpretation of the artist as "a learned man, priest, preserver of a society's past and keeper of its conscience."<sup>22</sup>

Against this earlier conception, Shelley, in the radical atmosphere of the immediate post-war years, was campaigning for a yet more responsive artistic voice, removed from vatic élitism, but with distinct contributions to make to the new world. Raymond Williams has encapsulated these as

...certain human values, capacities, energies, which the development of society towards an industrial civilisation was felt to be threatening or even destroying.<sup>23</sup>

Both Butler and Williams see Shelley's position as something of a crusade against the muddying forces of conservatism. Understanding the limitations of this crusade is important to placing in context Scott's capturing 'the spirit of the age' in his novels. The success of the Waverley Novels, given their weight of speculative and investigative material, in particular in their earliest decades, may be seen to confirm Peacock's point in The Four Ages, that the arts played a different role in an era when political economy and the rational and empirical sciences were changing all around. The Waverley Novels represented a way of understanding

social humanity, and continued to perform this function for many decades, notwithstanding the rhetoric of easy, harmless enjoyment.

There are also formal reasons for the astonishing success of Scott's novels, which this 1820s debate illuminates. Peacock's Enlightenment deduction was that poetry had, as Butler puts it, "a less significant role in advanced society than in primitive society."<sup>24</sup> The new age was to be that of the tract, the essay, and the novel. The evidence of Scott's career, over and above the hybrid nature of his novels, seems to bear out this change, and to confirm Peacock's point. For all the success of his Poems, Scott's greatest sales came with the Waverley Novels, Waverley itself - to take just one text - selling 6,000 copies in its first 6 months' publication, 11,000 in collected editions up to 1829, and 40,000 in the new Magnum Opus edition between 1829 and 1836. Altogether, 78,270 sets of the Magnum Opus were sold between 1829 and 1849.<sup>25</sup>

These statistics show the power of the novel as a form, as practised by Scott, and, in confirmation of another of Peacock's points, they suggest the appeal of the past as subject-matter for artistic production in the nineteenth century. It was central to Peacock's beliefs that a sense of the value of the past was vital to art. He considered that the clearest evidence of the health of society was discernible in the uses which the present made of the past.

Peacock also asserted the eternal importance of the role of the market in art, and the need for forms of artistic production to adapt to a new age. This issue is crucial to understanding the issue of Scott's 'professionalism,' a status on which Carlyle would dwell at length, and the sense of which influenced many later critics. Concern over the role which the market should play, as both concept and reality within the realm of letters, stemmed from the dangers of the encroaching "spirit of trade" adverted to by Coleridge in his Lay Sermons (1817):

The habits attached to the character (of being a commercial nation) must...inevitably lead us, under the specious names of utility, practical knowledge, and so forth, to look at all things through the medium of the *market*, and to estimate the worth of all pursuits and attainments by their marketable value.<sup>26</sup>

This perceived erosion of the national cultural wealth could have seriously undermined the authority and status of Scott, as one deriving considerably more income from his writing than from his legal work. That Coleridge's view of an uncomplex threat from the growth of the market did not command universal support is an important point in this context. Peacock saw Scott as side-stepping this possible problem, in his possessing a dual identity, which he dramatised in his own satirical writing.

In Nightmare Abbey (1818), he freely derided modern literary taste (and by strong implication the in-vogue Scott) as "hag-ridden" with its "masquerade dress of heroism."<sup>27</sup> In so much he supported the thesis that such writing could be a sham. This was in large measure the line taken twenty years later by Carlyle.

But in a later dramatisation of his reflections, Peacock saw more merit in the detailed material of the Waverley Novels. His depiction of Scott in Crotchet Castle (1831) made explicit the division of Scott into romance-teller and historian, respectively 'Mr. Chainmail' and 'The Enchanter.' As the Reverend Dr. Folliott pointed out, the two were "both one, with a slight difference" :

The one is the literature of pantomime, the other is the pantomime of literature. There is the same variety of character, the same diversity of story, the same copiousness of incident, the same research into costume, the same display of heraldry, falconry, minstrelsy, scenery, monkery, witchery, devilry, robbery, poachery, piracy, fishery, gipsy-astrology, demonology, architecture, fortification, castrametation, navigation; the same running base of love and battle. The main difference is, that the one set of amusing fictions is told in music and action; the other in all the worst dialects in the English language...<sup>28</sup>

Peacock here saw the corrupting influence of the market's demands for quick satiation. The need to be "amusing," and to include an adequate quantity of "romance," did lead to questionable effects. Mr. Chainmail, for instance, serves as a caricature, with his patently absurd attachment to the twelfth century, rejecting any idea that the period was one of "brutality, ignorance, fanaticism, and tyranny," and considering instead that it had been "a much better state of society than this which we live in."

However, Peacock also acknowledged the difficulties of bringing arcane research and substantial historical material into the marketplace. The achievement of 'The Enchanter', in Crotchet Castle, is to have used dramatic tales to make the reluctant scholar Lady Clarinda "learn many things which I should never have dreamed of studying."

The truth of the matter was, as Dr. Folliott asserts regretfully, that "Sober truth is but dull matter to the reading rabble." Although there was a need for "moral or political truth", or a tendency "to make men wiser or better," these qualities were best wrapped in appealing fare. As Dr. Folliott puts it :

The angler, who puts not on his hook the bait that best pleases the fish, may sit all day on the bank without catching a gudgeon.<sup>29</sup>



In this way, Peacock reached a compromise with the idea of the market, which showed Scott in a relatively positive light. Market-related writing need not be baldly exploitative of the past, thus undermining the necessary understanding of that past.

In Peacock's satires of the past and card reworkings of the past often served up by the Gothic and Romantic fictional vogues, we may discern a wish for authenticity, for accuracy in depictions of the past. His awareness of Scott's sedulous research is important here. An early, though unpublished, Peacock essay of 1818 saw Scott's Waverley Series as a source of "fresh and valuable information", in its depicting

...with the truth of life the features of human nature in a peculiar state of society before comparatively little known.<sup>30</sup>

This sense of Scott's "truth", although sometimes acknowledged as more substantial, would widely and rapidly metamorphose into a conception essentially nostalgic in character. The balance was tilting, as the felt imperatives of the present increasingly bore upon critical practice.

*WILLIAM HAZLITT*

An important 1820s perspective on the growing importance of the market was that of William Hazlitt. He was very concerned about the advent of professionalism, a process to which Scott's own contribution had been considerable. This, as Hazlitt observed, was a real and perceived threat to the society of the lettered, of the *scholarly*. In an Essay 'On the Aristocracy of Letters,' collected in his Table-Talk (1825), he remarked that the

...preposterous and unfounded claims of mere scholars to precedence in the commonwealth of letters...are partly owing to traditional prejudice: there was a time when learning was the only distinction from ignorance, and when there was no such thing as popular English literature...<sup>31</sup>

At such a time, with the advance of "popular English literature", Hazlitt urged the power of the human mind. He denied the validity of an 'Aristocracy of Letters', and insisted that the only true basis for 'improvement' was "the free communication and comparing of ideas".<sup>32</sup> We do not need to see in these exhortations the still-conscious radical in Hazlitt. For this became very much an area of consensus in the 1820s. In the *growth* of the reading public, the diffusion of thought, went the increasing wisdom, would the much-needed change in popular taste be effected.

Hazlitt, confident enough to infer Scott's authorship of the entire Series, summarised the popular opinion of the 1820s that the 'Scotch' novels were the major achievement, in terms of the necessary verisimilitude of the works. Hazlitt insisted that Scott's greatest contribution was his introduction of a genuine romance - that of the everyday truth of the past - into a humdrum and petty present :

He has conversed with the living and the dead, and let them tell their story in their own way...He is only the amanuensis of truth and history. It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is.<sup>33</sup>

Hazlitt, like Peacock, although in a more nostalgic vein, saw Scott's strength in his fidelity to the past. Even if the powerful critique of doctrines and political issues was missing from Scott, nevertheless Scott was *true*, "reconciling all the diversities of human nature to the reader."<sup>34</sup>

Praising in particular the 'Scotch' novels, Hazlitt's most significant point was perhaps the direct contrast made between the novels and the contemporary world :

They are a relief to the mind, rarefied as it has been with modern philosophy, and heated with ultra-radicalism.<sup>35</sup>

Hazlitt's dissatisfaction with the present, and his finding relief in Scott, would become characteristics of Scott criticism. The 'escapist' potential in the *Waverleys*, however, was not for Hazlitt a vague longing, more rejection of the present than interest in the past. It was associated with an honest and confident transcription of bygone days which were *real*.

Hazlitt's perception, that Scott was not an 'art-for-art's-sake' species of writer, undoubtedly stood Scott in good stead for later morally-oriented critics, for whom the 'art' or 'craft' of fiction was inherently to be suspected. Scott, in Hazlitt's eyes, simply in his re-creation of the past, gave as much of truth as was needed :

The old world is to him a crowded map; the new one a dull, hateful, blank.<sup>36</sup>

He showed nature as it was, "in large concrete masses". Indeed, wrote Hazlitt,

...he has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life; and that if we can but arrive at what men feel, do, and say in

striking and singular situations, the result will be 'more lively, audible, and full of vent', than the fine-spun cobwebs of the brain. With reverence be it spoken, he is like the man who having to imitate the squeaking of a pig upon the stage, brought the animal under his coat with him.<sup>37</sup>

This dates from 1825. Hazlitt was committed to a positive view of Sir Walter as "the amanuensis of truth and history", i.e. a faithful recorder of nature in all its diversity. Hazlitt insisted, and was pleased, that Scott had not "tampered with" or "frittered...away" the materials found in oral recollection and dusty books.<sup>38</sup> This approach, concerned as it was with the composition of the work, would not, however, remain the mainstream critical methodology.

Hazlitt treated Scott as simply another, albeit very good, author, to be criticised from any perspective whatever, rather than as the most significant author of the age. This would not be so possible for critics soon afterwards.

#### *SCOTT'S WIDENING APPEAL*

It is important to note that it was not long after Hazlitt's essay that three events significant for this study occurred. Scott's bankruptcy, the confirmation of his authorship of the *Waverley*

Novels, and the commencement of the triumphant enterprise of the *Magnum Opus*, each contributed to a new and venerated status for Scott.

The long eulogy of Scott which would characterise the Victorian era had begun. As James T. Hillhouse puts it, the great qualities were acknowledged early, and remained fixed as "the prodigality and sweep of his genius, his nobility of spirit, and his sound humanity."<sup>39</sup>

The process of Scott's being largely institutionalised now took place by means of a range of developments, including the very public events of his life, but also through reprintings, with impressive commissioned illustrations, of the *Novels and Poems*. Wider developments, such as the rise of a Scott-oriented tourist industry around the sites of historic interest and beauty, enhanced his standing. The phenomenal success of the poems had already led to great interest in his settings, in particular around the Trossachs and the West Highlands. In his lifetime - as Lockhart told and Carlyle considered at length - Scott had already been besieged by visitors seeking to see him and his remarkable home. In the 1830s and beyond, the railways would play a great part in the development of the Scottish tourist industry in general, and would exploit to the full Scott's position of great eminence in Victorian life and letters.

In 'Rob Roy' or 'Lady of the Lake' tourism, or making the pilgrimage to Abbotsford, only the slightest acquaintance with the actual texts would be necessary, and detailed literary knowledge could be conflated with a more generalised appreciation of 'Scott'. The completion of the Scott Monument in Princes Street, Edinburgh, in 1840 should be seen as the culmination of the first phase of Scott's being lionised, and as a manifestation of his growing, very public esteem.

It mattered little, as far as his popularity was concerned, that Scott's value as Enlightenment historian was being marginalised. Indeed, Scott's value as a bona fide historian became an irrelevance. It was not simply that the historical research undertaken for the novels, and the importance of the historical process to the very enterprise of the novel as a form, were seen as somehow separable from his achievement as novelist. It was that Scott's *kind* of history didn't count in the historiography of the day. His history made a contribution only as *supplement* to *real* history. Macaulay, 1828 :

Scott...has used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them...He has constructed out of their gleanings...But a truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated...<sup>40</sup>

For Macaulay, there was a sense of territory to be regained, and a debate to be fought within the discipline of history. Absent from his social definition was the acceptance, as history, of that discursive collation of memory, legend, book-history and romance-fiction of which Scott's work largely consisted. History as practised by historians was very much a matter of presenting progress.

Macaulay's verdict was very much of its time, in that it has been a considerably more popular view of Scott than among his greatest achievements - as pointed out by John Stuart Mill in 1828 - was to present *balance* in his versions of the transition from past to present, and a sense of loss as well as gain in this process.<sup>41</sup>

So, Scott's ascendant status hinged, from this point onwards, on his acceptable morality and beneficial effects above all else. Undoubtedly his moral acceptability was broadly established within his lifetime, albeit in the face of mounting scrutiny by critics. A typical reviewer of these years was the *Westminster Review* critic of Woodstock in 1826 :

...the propriety of character and language is sacrificed to a worthless and vulgar image...<sup>42</sup>

The critique of his work as superficial and ultimately meaningless would remain a constant in criticism, but by and large the urge for 'propriety' would be applied less rigorously than by this critic.



Indeed, Scott's heroes in particular would tend to be seen as *too* proper to be interesting.

The sense of Scott's beneficence for the reader was never seen in terms of particular incidents and characters: it was always a general *tone* of healthiness which was recognised. For instance, John Henry Newman's references to Scott in the *British Critic* (1839) were admittedly employed by him as part of a theological debate immediately prior to his conversion to Catholicism, but certainly indicate Scott's power to achieve more than the mere giving of pleasure, and to fill a spiritual chasm :

The general need of something deeper and more attractive than what had offered itself elsewhere, may be considered to have led to his popularity; and by means of his popularity he re-acted on his readers, stimulating their mental thirst, feeding their hopes, setting before them visions, which, when once seen, are not easily forgotten, and silently indoctrinating them with nobler ideas, which might afterwards be appealed to as first principles...<sup>43</sup>

As previously indicated, the contemporary scene is important here. 1838 saw, for example, the appearance of a number of racy and titillating works, among which was The Memoirs of Harriet Wilson...the Whole forming the most astonishing picture of

Voluptuousness and Sensuality. The new lurid mass-market material was successful indeed. The best-sellers of the 1830s, such as Reynolds' Mysteries of London, and Mysteries of the Court of London, were selling up to 40,000 copies a week at their peak.

Perhaps the most representative and enduring of the new publishing, however, was *The Illustrated London News*, which began publication in 1835, and was selling 25,000 copies a week by 1837. Viewed over the longer term, this signified that the real peak of the early periodicals had passed, although *Fraser's* would still sell some 8,000 per week in the 1830s. The older publications settled down to a small and secure market mostly below 10,000, while the *Illustrated London News* would be selling 123,000 a week by 1855, and the *Cornhill*, when launched in 1860, would initially sell 120,000, before settling to an average of 84,000. The 1830s, then, saw the advent of the recognisably-modern magazine format, and the arrival of a new type of reading 'for pleasure'.<sup>44</sup>

Scott managed to gain favour with both camps, being both morally acceptable and a good read. His reputation was as above all harmless. He was not felt to be so obsessed with the details and actualities of life as to be threatening. As the earnest wish grew to a consensus, that art should serve the great cause of social betterment, so Scott's central role in this task was confirmed.

The moralist interpretation was archetypal through the essay or review in no feature more obsessive than in a fervent demand for

*truth*. An example of the vigorous terms of moral appraisal is in the work of Frederick Denison Maurice.

In a series of essays of 1828, Maurice, like many critics, praised Scott for his "shrewd good humour," and "general and good-humoured benevolence," attitudes which were remarkably potent ones for many Victorian critics, who would begin to place Scott in the light of a writer for amusement, lacking depth and insight into the operation of morality in the world. Importantly, though, Maurice also complained that Scott's novels "do scarcely anything toward making men wiser or better." Scott was *too* faithful to mere Nature, did not envisage wider and greater objectives for humankind than those he saw around him :

...he knows what is, but not how or why it is so...He seems to have no fondness for referring things to their origin; and instead of considering men's actions as worth observation, only in so much as they illustrate the essential character of the being from which they spring, he has treated them as if they had in themselves a definite and positive value...he does not appear to believe that there is any human nature at all, or that man is aught more than a means to certain external results, the which when he has described, he has done his task and fulfilled his ministry...<sup>45</sup>

Maurice's search was unmistakably for something much more than the mere recording of the 'facts' of society, the past or of human nature as materially observed. While Newman had felt that Scott's work brought to life spiritual ideas and yearnings which had been "in the minds of men" for a considerable time,<sup>46</sup> Maurice found little or no 'invisible' realm to the work. For him, the cause of the amelioration of the reader demanded nothing less than the most earnest questions. Maurice went on to point to the Waverley Novels as deficient in their slavish attention to the historical process, lacking any sense that the spiritual growth of the species was quite dissociable from the mere events of history.

Morality remained at the heart of critical practice, but by and large the 'general soundness' of the Waverley Novels countervailed what for many was inimical popularity and gratification for much of the nineteenth century. As the cause of the betterment of man and society became a consensus in the circle of the reading public, then, Scott appeared to emerge as an acceptable author, with much to recommend him. The Waverley Novels had, in themselves, sufficient merit to allay the worst fears about the effects of novels as a genre; and Scott himself appeared to be becoming increasingly popular as a man.

It was also to Scott's advantage that the new *seriousness* in intellectual life was simultaneously challenging and smug. Moral idealism became closely associated with social aspiration and material security. G.M. Young has noted the transition within

Evangelicalism, even as it ascended in importance in the British mind, from being a radical force at war with wrong, into one "grown complacent, fashionable, superior."<sup>47</sup> Scott, never just a morally-proper figure, offered what were felt to be stirring tales detached from social reality, which could be felt to be escapist, and to fly in the face of the constrictions and limitations of the moral emphasis.

Such a reading, combining escapism with moral acceptability can certainly be espied in Newman's comments, in his finding Scott's works' to give onto a world of fantasy and magic, while possessing the necessary moral dimension. Scott could be fulsomely asserted as valuable and substantial, but also exciting or intoxicating. This was the Scott - full of improbabilities and fantasies, and minus actual sociological material - whom Peacock had satirised. This 'magical' Scott, offering another world than the tangible and material, was at once a version of the 'moral' Scott and a less rigorous interpretation.

As the reading public grew, so it sought to meet its needs. What Altick has described as "the imperative need for escape on the part of the physically and spiritually imprisoned" was well met by the Waverley Novels.<sup>48</sup> There was, at the heart of Scott's work, a grandeur of scale and conception which clearly excited the nineteenth century. James T. Hillhouse has paraphrased the received view of Scott by the time of Queen Victoria's accession :

... (Scott's) broad historical scenes, his national character, and his imagination and 'poetic' quality had raised the novel above the realm of private life, of the local and even parochial sphere, where the great eighteenth-century novelists had been content to leave it. Thus Scott had ennobled the novel...<sup>49</sup>

Hillhouse, writing in 1936, was accepting the received view that Scott's primary concern was to broaden the frame of the novel. The 'ennobling' of the novel to which he refers in fact required that substantial areas of Scott's work be neglected in criticism. Scott the Enlightenment historian of men and manners of the relatively recent past was replaced by Scott the 'healthy' romancer of bygone days.

The increasing distance of critical removal from 'the parochial' may have been necessitated by the demands of the new reading public, but it meant that little attention was paid to the processes undergone by Scott's characters as recognisable individuals and members of communities, or to the role of the historical process as an agent in human affairs. Critics became far more concerned with ways of behaving, and abstract, apparently ahistorical dimensions.

As the era of philosophic radicalism and political economy began in the 1830s, so developed further the context of intense critical scrutiny and unrelenting condescension about Scott's world. Scott, in the age of Progress, must be seen to teach good and beneficial lessons about the past. His morality must not only be 'correct'; it must tend to improvement.

#### *PROGRESS AND HARRIET MARTINEAU*

Progress was a powerful ideology in the 1830s, involving the conception of history as divided into periods manifesting the development of human societies towards an enlightened and relatively triumphant present. Foremost among its proponents, Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte urged new approaches to the study of man and society. Deriving from this new temper of thought, there were consequences for Scott readings. There emerged the possibility of understanding the history of society not just in the Enlightenment terms of a progression from barbarism to 'civil' society, in which laws, institutions and social organisations changed to reflect more or less constant improvement, but also as a briefer catalogue of major shifts in the history of ideas. John Stuart Mill was heavily influenced by the Saint-Simonians in these years, and in his Autobiography he described the central conceptions of 'organic' and 'critical' periods, as he understood them in the 1830s :

During the organic periods (they said) mankind accept with firm conviction some positive creed, claiming jurisdiction over all their actions, and containing more or less of truth and adaptation to the needs of humanity. Under its influence they make all the progress compatible with the creed, and finally outgrow it; when a period follows of criticism and negation, in which mankind lose their old convictions without acquiring any new ones, of a general or authoritative character, except the conviction that the old are false... (An) organic period came in with Christianity. The corresponding critical period began with the Reformation, has lasted ever since, still lasts, and cannot altogether cease until a new organic period has been inaugurated by the triumph of a yet more advanced creed.<sup>50</sup>

In this newly-formulated perspective, the moral emphasis of literary criticism is unsurprising, for perfectibility was at stake. As Positivism exerted an increasing hold on critical and intellectual practice in the nineteenth century, so the role of the novel as an analysis of human behaviour in certain social and historical situations became more dominant. In a 'critical age', the reasoned appraisal of society together with its component parts, and its functions, was the duty of all thinking people. The novelist could no longer be permitted to indulge, and was now to be



judged very much as preacher and educator. "Books should be written," wrote the influential Richard Whately,

...not merely of grave instruction, but also such as may form in (the people) a taste that shall tend to withdraw them...from all that is gross and corrupting.<sup>51</sup>

Beneficial instruments of uplift and edification were a vital element in the progress of society. Scott was thus likely to appeal to those positivists who found in his pictures of society the discovery of certain fixed laws about humankind. His characteristic "contrast", as in Rob Roy, between "wild and lawless" forms of society and "civilised and cultivated" forms<sup>52</sup> fitted well the Comtean conception of transitions in human intellectual and social development. Indeed, his latitudinous breadth of source, and sociological methodology meant that his work not only showed the Comtean stages - the theological, the metaphysical and the positive - it also did this in new and, to a large extent, secular ways, further supporting the positivist method and philosophy.

The characteristic connection consistently made between Scott's world, and this massive intellectual movement which I have squeezed into a box marked 'the doctrine of Progress', is that between the notion of organic and critical periods, and Scott's own awareness of progressive stages. With whatever degree of sophistication

readers came to Scott, this kind of understanding permeated criticism of the Waverley Novels in this period.

Although the romanticised Middle Ages could, in particular, be confirmed as indubitably an 'organic' period by reading Scott, all his epochs spoke of the value of history. The past became generalised as a site of 'permanent' moral and political dilemmas, to which answers in terms of clear and self-evident truths about the progressive development of human nature could be provided. The romance of a Jeanie Deans or even of a Quentin Durward - in large measure their appeal - lay thus in their recognisably nineteenth century personal morality.

What is clear is that from this early Victorian era onwards, Scott had to do more than achieve verisimilitude. For the past taught lessons, of development and improvement. The eighteenth century, for example, as Harriet Martineau wrote (1849), was a time when

...international relations became more extended and refined; international morality was professed and to a certain degree fostered; wild tempers and immediate objects were subdued and postponed to ulterior considerations...the way was opened for commercial connexions and for mutual intercourse of every ameliorating kind.<sup>53</sup>

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The assertion of Progress through a new 'high seriousness', in the search for a literature showing positive and large truths about experience, was by no means exclusively a prerogative of established or evangelical religious groupings. Harriet Martineau, as one of the foremost figures in this critical development, was a Unitarian, and as such eager "to pursue and proclaim truth" in the teeth of the established order.<sup>54</sup> Her challenging work on Scott represented an important stage in her own career; and also set a characteristic tone in nineteenth century Scott criticism.

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802, the sixth of eight children of a Norwich manufacturing family of Huguenot origin. Her father's bombazine business collapsed in the mid-1820s, by which time she herself had lost her senses of taste and smell, and was only able to hear a little with the aid of an ear trumpet. As critics have written, her reputation has suffered considerably in the twentieth century, paradoxically by virtue of the extraordinary range and fertility of her endeavours in many fields. Valerie Sanders puts it thus: "To most commentators, she is an anomaly, a curiosity."<sup>55</sup> This is particularly true because her favoured form of writing was a blend of fiction and political economy which was soon outdated. However, a clear summary of her significance is this by Gaby Weiner:

Harriet Martineau would have been regarded as an unusual woman in any era; however, she was particularly outstanding in early Victorian

England. She was an economically independent woman, an acknowledged authority on politics and economics, a feminist who though wary of being identified too closely with the 'Woman Question', wrote continually about the extension of political rights, education and employment and employment to women, and was a brilliant journalist and social observer.<sup>56</sup>

Forced to support herself and her dependents from an early age, she, like many nineteenth century writers, produced mostly periodical and newspaper journalism. She wrote Reviews and Articles for a living for almost half-a-century from 1821, beginning with numerous works in the 1820s for the Unitarian *Monthly Repository*. She then progressed to published work in, for example, the *People's Journal*, the *Leader*, the *Edinburgh Review*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *Once a Week*, *Household Words*, the *Westminster Review*, and the *Daily News*, for which latter she published over sixteen hundred articles between 1852 and 1866.

Other work included her sole conventional full-length novel, Deerbrook (1839), her condensed translation of Comte's Philosophie Positive (1853), and the controversial Society in America and Retrospect of Western Travel of the late 1830s, which vehemently urged the abolition of slavery in the United States. Her health was frequently poor, and she wrote an Autobiography at a time of serious and life-threatening illness in 1855. In the event, she

recovered and lived until 1876. But the experience of the dramatic restoration of health by 'mesmerism' - now called hypnosis - was one of many subjects turned into copy of some form, and her range was immense. Histories, essays on animal husbandry, on colonial rule, on the population issue, on the provision of help for the deaf, and on the expansion of opportunities for women, as well as a copious correspondence, along with the hybrid 'fictional lessons' of such works as the Illustrations of Political Economy, Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated, and Illustrations of Taxation make hers a fascinating opus.

The essay published on Scott's moral power, a few months after his death and thus very topical, was very significant in this career, although literary subjects were far from being her mainstay. After seeking, unsuccessfully, to expand her critical work from the *Monthly Repository* into other publications, she had embarked on a new style of writing, forged out of such popular works as Jane Marcet's Conversations in Political Economy and Robert Plumer Ward's Tremaine. In this experimental vein, she had written a number of critical treatise-cum-novels, including Principle and Practice (1827) and Five Years of Youth (1831).

Her big break-through to both wider credibility and notoriety came in the following year, 1832, with the full-length, and again quasi-fictional Illustrations of Political Economy. This provoked an attack on her views by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* in 1833, by which time the study of Scott's work had appeared, and

the breadth and comprehensiveness of her controversial intellectual position was becoming established. It was typical that her response to Croker's criticism was not a further attack, but silence at the time, and ultimately, in her Biographical Sketches, a diagnosis, through Croker's own biography, of his own career disappointments and personal unhappiness, in the terms of "It was the heart element that was amiss."<sup>57</sup>

The positive and Positivist temper of all her writings is an important feature, representative of her belonging both to a tradition of 'radical conservatism' to which, for instance, Cobbett had contributed, and to clearly non-establishment, committed radical groups. As a Unitarian, one among the broad grouping of Dissenters at large, as an apostle of political economy, and as a feminist, Harriet Martineau addressed an age lacking an authentic central cultural voice. She found a ready readership.

*Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* had emerged as one of a number of new periodicals launched for a general readership in 1832. Martineau's essay on Scott which appeared in issue 2, of January 1833, was divided into two parts: 'Characteristics of the Genius of Scott,' and 'Achievements of the Genius of Scott.' For her, Scott's greatest significance lay in having paved the way for a new and vital fictional form which would be at once more democratic and didactic. Her purpose :

...to show what Scott had done for *the people*, and how far he has *unconsciously* opened a way for a new species of literature which shall stand in the same relation to them as he intended his to stand in to the aristocracy. Beautiful and glorious was he ! but how much so can only be known when the issues I am endeavouring to anticipate shall become obvious to all.<sup>58</sup>

Harriet Martineau took perennial pleasure in Scott, to whom, along with Jane Austen, she returned throughout her life. In particular, as we learn from the Autobiography, she enjoyed The Bride of Lammermoor, this being Scott's "one perfect plot" - although it has to be said that her own mastery of plot construction was limited. In 1842, as a letter to her brother James reveals, she gave a complete, 48-volume set of the Waverley Novels to her nephews for "a Valentine"; and in 1855 she recommended, in the *Daily News*, that Florence Nightingale send out copies of Scott to troops in the Crimea. Although she did not elaborate in the 1832 essay on her particularly favoured texts, and did no more than mention Scott briefly in the Autobiography, it is clear from the warm terms of these adversions that he held a special place for her, whatever her contemporary campaigns and demands.<sup>59</sup>

Martineau was a Unitarian, but more of a necessarian after David Hartley and Joseph Priestley than a Benthamite. She was convinced of the truth of Hartley's doctrine, after Hobbes, that there was a

"necessary connexion" between events and their origins, which could be traced back, step by step, to a first cause.<sup>60</sup> However, Martineau saw this as neither fatalist nor amoral in implication, since Priestley had insisted that both a larger scheme and individual liberty were consistent with the doctrine of philosophical necessity. The key ingredients in this balanced conception were optimism and a confidence in the power of the individual to make his or her own fortune.

The Benthamite Utilitarian deduced from this kind of understanding a need for administrative reform and the establishment of institutions fit to improve and enlighten. Martineau saw the need for individual activity and self-discipline in the abolition of the evils which remained as obstacles to a truly free and liberal society. Human potential must be actively directed towards change :

A faculty which moves without producing any result, no more fulfils its general purpose than a sunbeam darted on the eyes of the blind. It is made for action; and exercise is the condition of its health and vigour. This is true of all the intellectual faculties, and of all the moral powers generated by them.<sup>61</sup>

She argued that it was the exercise of reason, not the stubbornness of theology, which would show the facts about existence and lead to the amelioration of society. All action, for a necessarian, could



be attributed to specific and traceable motives, guided by natural laws which affected mental and moral activities as much as material. In this mechanical scheme of things, as she wrote, it was quite simple: "Ideas are classed in the order of Cause and Effect." Understanding was a matter of reasoning from a general principle :

When facts are...classed under general principles, the memory is relieved, the judgement unfettered, and the imagination rendered duly subservient to the reasoning power.<sup>62</sup>

#### *SCOTT AND 'SOCIALY USEFUL' FICTION*

From the above methodological approach, an early section in the Scott essay set out to establish a clear framework for literary endeavour. At a time when Scott was still seen by many as a romance writer, Martineau asserted the nature of that 'romance' form as *simply* form, and therefore able to be employed for the good offices of doctrinal inculcation. The didactic element was crucial to her, and the 'business' of "literary genius" unquestionably of the most serious :

If the office of casting new lights into philosophy, and adding new exemplifications and sanctions to morals, be not the 'business' of literary genius, we know not what is. It is the

'business', the first business of every man to deduce those very lessons from actual life; and we can conceive of no more important occupation than his who does the same thing for many, while doing it for himself.<sup>63</sup>

In some ways, the essay can be seen as very much a fore-runner of Carlyle's, with its insistence on the importance of a serious effect on the reader resulting from literature. More distinctively, it shows Martineau's consistent wish for a rational (i.e. non-superstitious) basis to society, one in which her own manufacturing classes and the new intellectual classes would have a greater part.

In Martineau's view, the world needed sermons - poverty, inequality and immorality demanded it - but these sermons must not be the merely conventional pap of established religion, with its unsystematic and detached methods. They must emanate from people committed to changes in society, but not so ignorant and ground down by suffering as to be unready to take moral responsibility. For all her commitment to improving the lot of the downtrodden, the sermons of the age would not emerge from the lowest in society, just as they would not from the highest. "The final purpose," she wrote early in the Scott essay, "for which the human intellect was made constructive," was by no means the depiction of a limited sphere, but the knowledgeable account of truth from the middle ground, the vantage point affording genuine apprehension of reality:

The most efficacious experience of reality must be looked for in the class above the lowest, and in individuals of higher classes still, fewer and fewer in proportion to the elevation of rank, till the fatal boundary of pure convention be reached, within which genius cannot live except in the breast of one here and there, who is stout-hearted enough to break bounds, and play truant in the regions of reality.<sup>64</sup>

Scott, although his novels had been greatly beneficial, had fallen into the trap, of too great fidelity to the accepted view of society. He had depicted the world from the point of view of "the aristocratic system in which (his) affections were bound up."<sup>65</sup> Even the ostensible "humble life" of the novels - characters such as Edie Ochiltree, Dirk Hatteraick, Gurth, Dougal, Caleb Balderstone, Fairservice and so on - were, she contended, nothing "to do with humble life," being "part of the aristocratic system."<sup>66</sup> This point about the Waverley Novels was central to her thinking: her commitment to social and political change demanded nothing less.

For her, moral sciences were too important to be left either to dry and abstract terms, or to the ignorant and superstitious. There was need for depiction of reality, for truth-telling, but no place for indifference on the writer's part. To illustrate her meaning on this matter, a typical approach to the mixed purposes she saw for

fiction was in a diary description of the goals of her own work of 1841, The Hour and the Man. This was a fictionalised account of the life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of a late eighteenth-century Haitian rebellion against French colonial rule :

...it flashed across me that my novel must be on the Haytian revolution, and Toussaint my hero. Was ever any subject more splendid, more fit than this for me and my purposes ? One generally knows when the right idea, the true inspiration, comes, and I have a strong persuasion that this will prove my first great work of fiction. It admits of romance, it furnishes me with a story, it will do a world of good to the slave question, it is heroic in its character, and it leaves me English domestic life for a change Hereafter.<sup>67</sup>

It was the vivification of causes, through human drama, that represented the populist didactic ethic she sought. We can see in a typical passage from her novel, Deerbrook, this pattern of elucidating wider moral and human truths through personal situations. Following a description of individual happiness, she extrapolates :

There needs no other proof that happiness is the most wholesome moral atmosphere, and that in which the immortality of man is destined ultimately to

thrive, than the elevation of soul, the religious aspiration, which attends the first assurance, the first sober certainty, of true love...The soul is then the very temple of adoration, of faith, of holy purity, of heroism, of charity. At such a moment the human creature shoots up into the angel: there is nothing on earth too defiled for its charity - nothing in hell too appalling for its heroism - nothing in heaven too glorious for its sympathy. Strengthened, sustained, vivified by that most mysterious power, union with another spirit, it feels itself set well forth on the way of victory over evil, sent out conquering and to conquer.<sup>68</sup>

Such *personal* translation to a higher state exemplifies Martineau's conception of the change needed in her society. The elevation is from individual selfishness to a sense of wider obligation. It is only a partial transition, and still in the dominant nineteenth century terms of the love between a man and a woman, but the continuum is clear. The contest with "evil" at large began with personal love. The model was, as Valerie Sanders has pointed out, one considerably developed by the next generation of writers, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, but Martineau's method was new in the 1830s.<sup>69</sup> She looked back to Scott for confirmation that there was a possibility of the union of moral purpose with drama and popularity.

While her own work unfailingly demonstrated the vital benefits of education to living, of a sound understanding of political economy, and of a non-superstitious basis to optimism as to mankind's ultimate progress, she nevertheless found much to inspire her in the Waverley Novels. The sheer popularity which they had already found, in particular in the pricing of the Magnum Opus at 5s. a volume, or even 10s. a novel (as compared with earlier editions at 31/6 for three volumes) was a source of reassurance for Martineau. These novels were reaching the many, or at least the middle class many. Good literature would, during the 1830s, become increasingly more accessible, as such work as The Pickwick Papers (1836-7) were available in monthly parts, thus circumventing the circulating libraries.

Martineau saw Scott's achievement as above all the dramatisation of moral codes, which made them more accessible to 'the many,' for whom so much was needed to be done. Scott's own ignorance of the true quality and extent of this achievement was as nothing, when considered beside the value of his work :

He has taught us the power of fiction as an agent of morals and philosophy; and 'it shall go hard with us but we will better the instruction'. Every agent of these master spirits is wanted in an age like this...Scott might have written, as he declared he wrote, for the passing of his time, and the amusement of his readers: he might have

believed, as he declared he believed, that little moral utility arises out of works of fiction: we are not bound to estimate his works as lightly as he did, or to agree in his opinion of their influences. We rather learn from him how much may be impressed by exemplification which would be rejected in the form of reasoning, and how there may be more extensive *embodiments* of truth in fiction than the world was before thoroughly aware of.<sup>70</sup>

The "incitement and amelioration" which Scott had already brought to all corners of the world were, she considered, invaluable. The Waverley Novels contained "kindliness of spirit," "pure tastes," and the moral excellences of "truth, simplicity, benevolence, and retribution." They had "quicken'd industry and created wealth," and had improved the "indolent," "licentious," and "vacant."<sup>71</sup> Distinctively, Martineau saw Scott as having achieved his most valuable results through "satire," and the "exemplification" of morals via characterisation. Scott was

...not only one of the most amiable, but one of the most effective satirists that ever helped to sweep the path of life clear of the strewn follies under which many a thorn is hidden.<sup>72</sup>

It was in terms of fiction as a means of populist instruction, like her own short tales, that Martineau adjudged Scott to be thoroughly useful. In this focus, she showed a concern with the form to which the writer had led the novel. His creativity was in having not merely copied life, having gone straight to the actual, but in having developed a sound and popular fictional form on the back of a shrewd understanding of history, combined with what Martineau perceived to be a rational and non-conventional philosophy of human nature. While Hazlitt, for instance, just a few years earlier, had laid great emphasis on Scott's verisimilitude - a reading which recognised the oral historian and the sociologist in Scott - Martineau set an important trend by her insistence on Scott's good work *with* the raw material of life. He

...has softened national prejudices; he has encouraged innocent tastes in every region of the world; he has imparted to certain influential classes the conviction that human nature works alike in all; he has exposed priestcraft and fanaticism; he has effectively satirized eccentricities, unamiablenesses, and follies; he has irresistibly recommended benignity in the survey of life, and indicated the glory of a higher kind of benevolence; and finally, he has advocated the rights of woman with a force all the greater for his being unaware of the import and tendency of what he was saying.<sup>73</sup>



The appeal of, particularly, Flora MacIvor, Die Vernon, Rebecca, and Jeanie Deans was, she believed, the greater because they were women acting in response to the circumstances around them, having "escaped from the management of man." "The discipline of circumstance" made these four characters stand out from the rest of Scott's women, who were, in Martineau's eyes, good examples of the condition of women under the existing social and political structures. Scott's "unconscious" argument for the emancipation of women emerged simply through his depiction of "the folly and contentedness of women under the present system" :

...a set of more passionless, frivolous, uninteresting beings was never assembled at morning auction, or evening tea-table, than he has presented us with in his novels.<sup>74</sup>

Others - such as Elspeth, Norna, Ulrica, the Highland Mother - were "viragoes" or "superstitious," and thus interesting for the strength of their instinct, but most were "*womankind* merely: pretty, insignificant ladies, with their pert waiting maids."<sup>75</sup> For the most part, Martineau felt, Scott, by his accurate depiction of the way women were, revealed the wrongs of their condition. But the possibilities shown by his four outstanding women characters were important "indications" of what women "might be, and therefore ought to be." In a point not taken up by any other Scott critic until Julia Wedgwood (and then only partially) half a century later, Martineau dwelt on the principles enunciated by Rebecca the

Jewess, and then by Scott's own commentary on her, as offering a profound "moral service" to mankind, in showing woman's enslavement as representative of wider wrongs :

...our author has contributed, in more ways than one, to female emancipation; by supplying a principle of renovation to the enslaved, as well as by exposing their condition; by pointing out the ends for which freedom and power are desirable, as well as the disastrous effects of withholding them.<sup>76</sup>

This is a substantial and strongly-argued section of Martineau's Scott essay. A long quotation from Scott's commentary on Rebecca forms an important part of her challenge in the essay - her expression of aspirations for the age and for fiction. In Martineau's criticism, the assertion of *practical* idealism not only reflected her own links with the Positive Science of Comte and Lewes, it also found immediate answering chords in the temper of the post-Reform Act years.

#### *MARTINEAU'S PROMOTION OF THE SECULAR SCOTT*

Harriet Martineau's reading of Scott, which, as I have suggested, had much in common with Carlyle's five years later, set a number of benchmarks for the ways in which critics approached the *Waverley*

Novels in the remainder of the nineteenth century. It was to be very much a feature of criticism that the integrity of the works, as documents of social history, or of Enlightenment speculation as to the development of civil society, was subordinated to critics' own social and cultural goals. In part because of the popularity of the novels, but also because of the didactic style of much criticism, many essays on the Waverley Novels became primers on 'How to read the Waverley Novels for the present day', rather than objective explorations of Scott's methods and goals. Most nineteenth century writers would, in any case, not have sought to achieve such objectivity, given the functions of criticism. But undoubtedly Scott was, because of his massive popularity, and also because of the relative indeterminacy or non-dogmatist ideological content of the novels, particularly suitable to be deployed in this way.

Harriet Martineau, then, set a trend, and it is important to see clearly her own purposes and achievement. At this time of increased literacy and significant political and constitutional change, she undertook to popularise the most visibly ascendant form of knowledge about the operations of society - Political Economy. Her work, in a variety of forms and genres, sought to unite the messages of a new philosophic secularism, founded on religious faith, with a strict and scientific economics. The combination, applied to literature, made for a powerful and confident morality towards the construction of some cultural consensus in early Victorian Britain.

For Martineau, the 'exemplification' of sound 'instruction' was an unequivocally effective means of communicating moral right. The very practicality, the *worldliness* of her reading has much to tell us of the principles to which she and others were moving at this time. In this consistent emphasis, in her writings, on the quality of human affections, Martineau expresses one of the ascendant and influential themes of the age, that of humanist, largely secular, routes to real moral progress in society. The doctrine - and its central figure, Auguste Comte - are best described in these terms by Owen Chadwick, in The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century (1975) :

Morality is founded in the affections. Therefore, in the end, it needs adoration. The mere assent of the mind is not enough. Most men have believed that such an effective devotion depends on perceiving something or someone absolute. For Comte nothing can be absolute. But he found the equal of an absolute in humanity. Men become more than an object of scientific enquiry. 'Humanity' is the object of worship. Man is raised above the animal because he 'shares in humanity', and finds by growing knowledge that he must live for humanity. History will become the sacred science of humanity, bringing humanity an ever clearer knowledge of itself and of its long advance towards the light and towards the good.<sup>77</sup>

In this light, Scott offered vivid pictures of *secular* morality, in documents affirming the centrality of human strengths and failings in history. The advance of mankind was measurable in conceptual stages; and so, no matter how diverse or pleasant may be the characters presented in fiction, the final judgement was in terms of the overall necessity of the collapse of certain societies.

Thus, while Martineau welcomed what Scott offered by way of range and diversity in his descriptions of communities, this folk aspect was subordinate to the greater truth within the Positivist vision of the historical process. The Waverley Novels told of the centuries of improvement which human society had undergone. They revealed the faults of the past. While praising Scott's "varieties of life and character," and regretting the inadequate followers to have emerged in his wake, Martineau pointed to the flawed conceptual framework of the people chronicled in the Waverley Novels :

...the adherents of a decaying mythology...were fiercely clinging to their Man-God, their scheme of salvation, their reward and punishment, their arrogance, their selfishness, their essential pay-system, as ordered by their mythology...<sup>70</sup>

Martineau saw the shift from individualised notions of moral health, including the impractical and overblown excesses of chivalry, honour and manly valour, as a necessary change over the

ages. Scott did a great service in showing the movement to more egalitarian and democratic structures and institutions. From individual whim and unfairness, increasingly unwanted in the modern world, she descried the far preferable advent of what she later summarised as "the blessings of social organisation and impartial law," the evidences of a progressive society. Scott's great message, although he himself did not know it, was that the past ages he had depicted in his work were characterised by chimera and false mythologies, of which the nineteenth century was well rid.<sup>79</sup>

However, she radically disapproved of Scott's principal focus in the higher classes. He had had no idea that the noblest of human qualities lived elsewhere also, indeed flourished the more in other social classes because honest and practically-engendered, less fettered by the dictates of custom and convention. She gave, in the second part of the Scott essay, a virtual checklist of dimensions of the life of the poor, to which Scott - indeed all writers - had hitherto paid insufficient attention. "The strength of character," she wrote, "the sternness of passion, the practical heroism, the inexhaustible patience, the unassuming self-denial, the unconscious beneficence..." - all these she exhorted as a fit subject for fiction, shunned by Scott no less than by others.<sup>80</sup>

In this aspect of her essay, Harriet Martineau developed her own manifesto for fiction. Her commitment to political economy was already controversial, as I have indicated, because of its secularism, and its urging that every member of society had a part

to play in the construction of a sound and practical basis to the economic management of society. Now she made of fiction another central instrument of her mission to educate and enlighten, and was just as radical. All of the ideals found in Scott - the human qualities - would have been just as available to the enquiring mind, on looking into humbler lives. Scott did not look, he

...knew not that all natural movements of society, that he has found in the higher, exist in the humbler ranks; and all magnified and deepened in proportion as reality prevails over convention, as there is less mixture of the adventitious with the true.<sup>81</sup>

The "*true-heartedness*" of humble life reverberated in worlds untouched by Scott, with his "faithful butlers and barbers, tricky lady's maids, eccentric falconers and gamekeepers". In this realm she was clearly setting out an agenda for herself and for others - the dramatisation of humble life. It was an opportunity for writers, she insisted, since "the true romance of human life lies among the poorer classes."<sup>82</sup>

The problem, as she did not hesitate to assert, lay in Scott's "Toryism." His "goodliness and kindly spirit" were praiseworthy, but did not by any means constitute the necessary active "philanthropy" towards the poor. "How," she asked,

...should a man be a philanthropist who knows not what freedom is ? - not the mere freedom from foreign domination, but the exemption from misrule at home, the liberty of watching over and renovating institutions, that the progression of man and states may proceed together. Of this kind of freedom Sir Walter had no conception.<sup>83</sup>

This diagnosis of the world around her we may see to have been one which romanticised the poor, dependent as it was on idealisation, and a view of the special qualities of the poor, and in particular

...the true-heartedness which is to be found in its perfection in humble life.<sup>84</sup>

This was a radical reading of the Waverley Novels, insisting that Scott's omissions and unconscious messages were in a way more important than his overt achievement. He had "taught human equality, while professing to exhibit human inequality."<sup>85</sup> Raising up the poor, and ending inequality, injustice, and immorality were the most important tasks facing Britain in the 1830s, and Scott was to be seen in that context.

Martineau's underlying necessarian argument - one with which far from all subsequent critics would agree - was that Scott had a purpose and a thesis in his work. These were moral, and therefore of benefit to all. For her, fiction was a vital means to achieve



the education and improvement of society at large. So, if even a writer as little preoccupied with the ordinary people as Scott, could achieve as much as had been done in the *Waverley Novels*, then the power of the morally-edifying writer of fiction was evident. She felt the times were with her in her assertion that the serious and the earnest were now indispensable.

In a sense Martineau's essay was a diagnosis of the changed literary climate. She felt that Scott's immense popularity would continue, in large measure because of the recognition of the "moral services" his work rendered to society. But she also felt that the "legitimate offspring" of Scott should look to other sections of society than had he; and would need to employ "new doctrine" on the foundation of Scott's excellent methods. Mere imitation of Scott would be insufficient :

The progression of the age requires something better than this imitation...If an author of equal genius with Scott were to arise to-morrow, he would not meet with an equal reception; not only because novelty is worn off, but because the serious temper of the times requires a new direction of the genius of the age. Under the pressure of difficulty, in the prospect of extensive change, armed with expectation, or filled with determination as the general mind now is, it has not leisure or disposition to receive even its amusements unmixed

with what is solid and has a bearing upon its engrossing interests.<sup>86</sup>

These were felt to be transitional times for the development of British society, and the need for right values was an imperative. Martineau - as Carlyle was to do - demanded that fiction be more than just a pleasant way of passing the time. However, as Carlyle did not, she clearly found a serious and worthwhile writer in Scott. Hers was no Scott who wrote merely to please his idle readership, or whose contribution to the age's pressing social and cultural problems was minimal.

Rather he had given a method to creative minds in Martineau's own age, through which they should meet the new challenges. The heroes of the present were less glamorous, but nothing could be more important for fictional undertaking than the political and moral development of societies. New fiction was needed, taking up where Scott had left off, dealing with "less picturesque but graver themes" :

...why not now take the magnificent subject, the birth of political principle, whose advent has been heralded so long ? What can afford finer moral scenery than the transition state in which society now is ? Where are nobler heroes to be found than those who sustain society in the struggle; and what catastrophe so grand as the downfall of bad

institutions, and the issues of a process of renovation ?<sup>87</sup>

She argued that the new writing must search for the real legacy of Scott's unparalleled depictions. His epic and mighty clashings of conflicting ideas did have a modern equivalent, and Martineau stated clearly where the search should be undertaken :

Heroism may now be found, not cased in helm and cuirass, but strengthening itself in the cabinet of the statesman, guiding the movements of the unarmed multitude, and patiently bearing up against hardship, in the hope of its peaceful removal. Love may now be truly represented as sanctified by generosity and self-denial in many of the sad majority of cases where its course runs not smooth. All the virtues which have graced fictitious delineations, are still at the service of the novelist; but their exercise and discipline should be represented as different from what they were. The same passions still sway human hearts; but they must be shown to be intensified or repressed by the new impulses which a new state of things affords.<sup>88</sup>

For Martineau the legacy of Scott's work was a marker for the present, a guide to the blend of fiction and moral instruction which was needed. For her, society's "ultimate obligations" to

Scott were by no means clear. Scott "did so much, and pointed the way towards doing infinitely more." In this way she proposed a wider understanding of morality than previous critics, one in which social and political change could not be shirked. Scott's permanence in the literary life of the nation would be enhanced still further, she felt, if her challenge to build on his strong foundation were taken up. Scott's "vast achievements" were in no way more valuable than "as indications of what remains to be achieved."<sup>89</sup> Her essay was thus immediate, passionate and optimistic - hallmarks of the early Victorian radicalism for which she spoke and wrote with such enthusiasm and conviction.

CHAPTER III:THOMAS CARLYLE- LITERATURE AS RELIGION*CARLYLE AND THE USES OF FICTION*

Thomas Carlyle's essay 'Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Baronet,' a Review of Lockhart's Biography, appeared in the *London and Westminster Review* of January 1838, having been completed early in December 1837. The contemporary success of the publication of Lockhart was canonising Scott by the minute. Carlyle endeavoured to take an objective and harsh look at the achievement of the author of the Waverley Novels.

Carlyle had written a number of Review articles since The French Revolution had reached final proof correction stage in April of that year. The Essay on Scott he considered at the time to be "a long, occasionally rather stupid Article," but it nevertheless earned him some £200, at a time when the wolf remained still at no great distance from the Carlylean door. The fame and greater financial security which were soon to follow the publication of The French Revolution would confirm his transition from a poor Dumfries home, through Edinburgh University, to a degree of literary

eminence. A permanent move to Chelsea in 1834, and the practical assistance and encouragement of others, such as Harriet Martineau, facilitated the subsequent elevation of Carlyle, Scotland's greatest living writer, to the position of centrality in Victorian British culture which he would occupy for the best part of three decades.

Carlyle's attitude to Scott had long oscillated between a positive and a negative perspective. In 1828 he had written a note to the celebrity, when delivering two medals on Goethe's behalf, a commission given by way of introduction. Carlyle's letter requested advice from "my native Sovereign whom I have so often...wished that I had claim to see and know in private and near at hand."<sup>2</sup> This had reached Scott's temporary London address in his absence, but he had failed to reply to the young writer. This semi-snub may be worthy of note, as regards the judgement on Scott given by Carlyle nine years later.

By 1831, Carlyle's notebooks intimated the kind of verdict on the value of Scott as writer in a decadent age, on which the Essay would expand :

To me he is and has been an object of very minor interest for many years; the Novel-wright of his time, its favourite child, and *therefore* an almost worthless one...<sup>3</sup>

Carlyle had a perpetual distaste for any popular fiction. This term "worthless" testifies both to his utter rejection of Scott as a writer inherently condemned because he was venerated by a corrupt age, and also to Carlyle's unrationalised criterion of value. This quasi-mystical judgement also allowed positive conclusions about Scott's historical writing. For there was

...something in his deep recognition of the worth of the Past, perhaps better than anything he has expressed about it: into which I do not yet fully see.<sup>4</sup>

Already the criticism, even in the relatively unmasticated form of notebooks, manifested some of the difficulties within Carlyle's Idealist discourse. Only a form of intuiting could provide the insights which the reader must find in literature; for 'essential' truths resided only within the *imaginative* experience of cultural, or spiritual production. Only the 'inward sense' of which Chapter Two of The French Revolution spoke, could make clear the endless flux and uncertainty of existence :

...ours is a most fictile world; and man is the most fingent plastic of creatures. A world not fixable, not fathomable ! An unfathomable Somewhat, which is *Not We*; which we can work with, and live amidst,- and model, miraculously in our miraculous Being, and name World. - But if the very Rocks and

Rivers (as Metaphysic teaches) are, in strict language, *made* by those Outward Senses of ours, how much more, by the Inward Sense, are all Phenomena of the spiritual kind: Dignities, Authorities, Holies, Unholies.<sup>5</sup>

The lot, indeed the *duty*, of the Poet/Writer was to 'body forth' the intimations, insights and imaginative leaps through which alone the reader or student of art was able to arrive at Truth. Success or otherwise in this task could be at best only accessible to the semi-mystical *insight* of the reader. This was the basis of the co-terminous natures of the Poet and the Critic in the Carlylean cosmos. These, indeed, could easily overlap with yet further roles within intellectual life. The functions and responsibilities incumbent on the Poet by his calling, were indicated in these lines from the 1839 Essay, 'Schiller,' which expounded the theme of the Poet as "a genuine interpreter of the invisible" :

Every Poet, be his outward lot what it may, finds himself born in the midst of Prose; he has to struggle from the littleness and obstruction of an Actual world, into the freedom and infinitude of an Ideal; and the history of such struggle, which is the history of his life, cannot be other than instructive. His is a high, laborious, unrequited, or only self-requited endeavour; which, however, by the law of his being, he is compelled to undertake,



and must prevail in, or be permanently wretched;  
nay, the more wretched, the nobler his gifts are.<sup>6</sup>

This theme of the role of the true Artist reverberated through the entire opus. This conception is vital to the terms of the Scott essay. Scott's low ambitions as a man, the ease of the life which he led, and his attitude to literature as an honourable occupation, but nonetheless a *job*, intervened crucially for Carlyle between the reader and the work. The enterprise of Literary Criticism was defined for Carlyle in the same terms as all attempts at *Prophecy*, as a seeking after the truth. Thus we find in Carlyle's Scott essay no aversion to specific texts, and no concern with analysis. The concerns were ever general, reflecting the *absolute* terms in which Carlyle believed literature was to be understood. The sense of morality armed with which he undertook criticism was less focussed than that of Martineau; but it is importantly indicative of just how important Scott's life would be to all subsequent critics.

In all his writings about literature, Carlyle made plain his view of the inseparability of Life and Work. He asserted the role of the "true Poet" as a very broad one, to our modern and more professionalised ways of thinking. Centrally, though, he was dealing with another, but fundamental theme - that of Work, or Struggle.

The basically dialectical structure to Carlyle's world set the Individual in perpetual, and above all *necessary* conflict with

Idleness, or Dilettantism, or Mammonism. In full-blooded pursuance of his own Calvinist inheritance, Carlyle placed this individual conflict at the centre of all contentions. Moreover, this took place within a World whose very Progress depended on these oppositions and tensions. This single psychological or emotional process determined all.

The resulting assertion of a kind of Nobility within Suffering was in the greatest Romantic tradition. Commitment and belief must brook no opposition, and deem no sacrifice too great :

Man and his Life rest no more on hollowness and a Lie, but on solidity and some kind of Truth. Welcome the beggarliest truth, so it be one, in exchange for the royallest sham ! Truth of any kind breeds ever new and better truth; thus hard granite rock will crumble down into soil, under the blessed skyey influences; and cover itself with verdure, with fruitage and umbrage...<sup>7</sup>

Here, in The French Revolution, just as in the supreme statement of Scoto-German idealism, Sartor Resartus, Carlyle urged the need for the illumination which could only be provided by access to, and awareness of the spiritual world *behind* all materiality. In his conception, Man's evident work was in the material world, this bearing witness to the *real* world behind. Much of Carlyle's work constitutes the assertion that a sense of the invisible world is

vital to true understanding. Without this sense, material understanding was inadequate, and could be, if too greatly trusted, even blasphemous. It may be considered that the poverty and distress Carlyle found in the world around him, particularly in London of the 1820s and 30s, was important to his philosophy.

Thus, the Teufelsdröckhian toast in *Weissnichtwo* "The Cause of the Poor, in God's name and the Devil's !" expressed a genuine anger about the social evils of the present in which Carlyle lived. But the real message of *Sartor* was that there were deep causes of the plight of the poor in industrialising Britain, for which men must look deeply :

The beginning of all Wisdom is to look fixedly on  
Clothes, or even with armed eyesight, till they  
become *transparent*.<sup>e</sup>

This was where 'the great man' came in. For the role of the Artist was to provide this kind of *insight*, or 'proper' way of seeing. In particular we can see this conception to be a part of the structure of feeling within which the biographical essays operated. A good instance of the impulse, and of a significant bearing on the Scott Essay, is in the invocation of Milton which, in the early pages of *Past and Present*, was adduced to an argument about wage-demands :

Fair day's-wages for fair day's-work! exclaims a  
sarcastic man: Alas, in what corner of this Planet,

since Adam first awoke on it, was that ever realised ? The day's-wages of John Milton's day's-work, named Paradise Lost and Milton's Works, were Ten Pounds paid by instalments, and a rather close escape from death on the gallows. Consider that: it is no rhetorical flourish; it is an authentic, altogether quiet fact,- emblematic, quietly documentary of a whole world of such, ever since human history began.<sup>9</sup>

This ostensibly conservative position, however, proved the basis of a somewhat more radical contemporary interpretation than we might have expected. For Carlyle here employed Scott, and the moral value of Work, to make the point that the Present discontent felt by the labouring population of Britain was an *unnecessary* one.

#### *CARLYLE'S CRITIQUE OF PAST AND PRESENT*

In the maldistribution of God's resources - human and all other - Carlyle found the site of the underlying problem :

Never till now, in the history of an Earth which to this hour nowhere refuses to grow corn if you will plough it, to yield shirts if you will spin and weave in it, did the mere manual two-handed worker

cry in vain for such wages as *he* means by 'fair wages,' namely food and warmth !'<sup>10</sup>

'If enough encouragement - be it through 'political economy' or any other got-up pseudo-science - be given, then men will work, and thereby avoid starvation,' Carlyle was saying here. He was in a sense ridiculing modern economics, with its money-based conception of value.

And he harked back to a perceived ideal past. "What depth and opulence of true social vitality, lay in those old barbarous ages!" he exclaimed in Chapter 9 of Past and Present.<sup>11</sup> Scott's Gurth, the swineherd in Ivanhoe was cited as the exemplar of a better age, when the meanest level of society had at least received the minimum needs of humanity. He, although "born thrall of Cedric the Saxon," whose task was to tend pigs in the wood, "did get some parings of the pork." This Carlyle compared favourably with the contemporary situation, in which more care was lavished on animals than on the workers, for there

...is not a horse in England, able and willing to work, but *has* due food and lodging; and goes about sleek-coated, satisfied in heart...

This Present, said Carlyle, was "a Platitude of a World," of which he asked: "were it not best to end it...?"<sup>12</sup> The contrast was total: the "*practical...heart-and-soul*" Past, once examined, was a

damning indictment of the Present "ruined World," with its attention on "its own navel," and its "noisy theoretic demonstrations." Work was the key: "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness," provided a dominant theme of Past and Present. The essential conclusion to the whole modern malaise lay in the maxim "Doubt, of whatever kind, can be ended by action alone."<sup>13</sup>

The important point here, as far as the Scott Essay is concerned, was the assertion of the importance of History as a touchstone to aid moral judgements on the contemporary world. For Carlyle, the thirteenth century was not of significance simply because there took place certain events, which shaped and structured the world after; indeed he was not really interested in this 'long-tunnel' conception of history.

Rather Carlyle saw the past as a completely-formed image, a discrete entity. His idealisation of the middle ages enabled a more powerful critique of the 'Mechanism' of the Present. Its internal operations and motivating forces were to be set alongside the present, with the object of revealing the true nature of that present. Such an approach conflicted with the idea of Progress, with the conception that the nineteenth century had left behind the primitive barbarity of the middle ages. But Carlyle's thinking was consistent with the Romantic School. Coleridge had made the point, in the Lay Sermons of 1816-17, that there was, indeed, a "moral duty" in

...the collation of the present with the past...the habit of thoughtfully assimilating the events of our own age to those of the time before us.<sup>14</sup>

Carlyle's essay 'On History' for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1830 made an important contribution to thinking about history and historiography in the 1830s. For him, as later for Augustin Thierry, Scott's role in nineteenth-century historiography was undoubted. For Thierry, in subsequent decades, Scott's sense of a racial dialectic within the historical process would be crucial. This historiographical development in later Victorian Britain was symptomatic of a wider acceptance of the terminology of racialism within society at large.

In the 1830s, though, there was felt to be a greater novelty in Scott's 'commonness,' his widening the scope of history. For Carlyle, central to the enterprise was the understanding that most of history went unrecorded by the conventional chronicle of 'courts and camps'; and that in consequence much insight could be gained by looking

...with reverence into the dark untenanted places of the Past, where, in formless oblivion, our chief benefactors, with all their sedulous endeavours, but not with the fruit of these, lie entombed.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard at least Scott's assiduity was clearly praised. He had made it clear that "living men" actually inhabited "the bygone ages of the world," and had thus rendered the world "a great service."<sup>16</sup> Where Scott fell down in Carlyle's estimation, was in the perceived failure to look beyond the outward show of events, the lack of "an Idea of the Whole" with which truly to understand "the Partial."<sup>17</sup> Thus, even the laudable portrayal of the historic past was too much mere "contrasts of costume...fashion of arms, of dress and life."<sup>18</sup>

Carlyle's work was a plea for a more substantial and respectful appraisal of the past, one which would appreciate his own veneration of its qualities. Carlyle's purpose in Past and Present - the summation of all his work on this theme - was to indict the Present of failing to be moral, or Christian, or humane, or in any way sympathetic to the working classes of Britain. This indictment he made first in the terms of the age itself, thus :

Descend where you will into the lower class, in Town or Country, by what avenue you will, by Factory Inquiries, Agricultural Inquiries, by Revenue Returns, by Mining-Labourer Committees, by opening your own eyes and looking, the same sorrowful result discloses itself: you have to admit that the working body of this rich English Nation has sunk or is fast sinking into a state, to



which, all sides of it considered, there was literally never any parallel.'<sup>9</sup>

The critique flew back and forth from material to spiritual impoverishment, strengthening his point of the essential identity of the two; and then he went on to connect these failings with the world as he perceived it to have been in the past. And here he used Scott's *Gurth* as evidence of the Great Truth about 'the Abbot-Samson and William-Conqueror' times.

This truth was that "no human creature then went about connected with nobody": that those had been no cash-nexus times, but times of a felt interdependence absent from present-day society. If there was contravention of socially-acknowledged rules, then judgement was instant and based on the evident facts of the matter, uncluttered by the *haberdashery* of the present. The plain reality of the Middle Ages was

...those were rugged stalwart ages; full of earnestness, of a rude God's-truth: - nay, at any rate, their *quilting* was so unspeakably *thinner* than ours; Fact came swiftly on them, if at any time they had yielded to Phantasm ! 'The Knaves and Dastards' had to be 'arrested' in some measure; or the world...found that it could not live...Dastards upon the very throne had to be got arrested, and taken off the throne,- by such methods as there

were; by the roughest method, if there chanced to be no smoother one. Doubtless there was much harshness of operation, much severity; as indeed government and surgery are often somewhat severe.<sup>20</sup>

In a curious and idiosyncratic way, Carlyle's argument elsewhere for a more considerate and tolerant attitude from employers, church and government towards the poor and the oppressed was completely at odds with his demands in Past and Present for action, for greater decisiveness than the present was capable of. This longing for firm government led on to the apparent support for despotism and intolerance which his later works evince. Moreover, he expressed a somewhat Calvinist wish for moral clarity in an age lacking this. For his, and many subsequent readings of Scott, there were reverberations here: principally, that the very guardedness of Scott's own conclusions about historical events constituted a clear demerit. The enterprise of a synthetic and speculative version of the past, from which absolute judgements were absent, was unacceptable to Carlyle.

On the Middle Ages alone, though, Scott's Gurth as a figure symbolic of the nobility of labour was praised. And in this symbol resided all the anti-materialism at Carlyle's considerable literary command. To cite a major aspect of Carlyle's critique of his own age, its belief in 'Mechanism', in the Middle Ages of Past and Present he found a resistance to that "faith in the all-importance of physical things," that belief "that man's true good lies without

him, not within," faults of which the 19th century was guilty. These he, of course, to some degree projected onto the 13th century, as inevitable outcrops of the barren landscape of the 1830s, when, as he considered, "The time is sick and out of joint."<sup>21</sup>

In History, Carlyle sought for other ways of being, which might be instructively counterpointed to the present. His conception of history was not in terms of an ongoing process, but as separate realms of limited interest in their own right, and above all useful for comparison with the present. The present was soulless, as Teufelsdröckh, looking back, put it in Sartor Resartus :

To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me from limb to limb. O the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death ! Why was the Living banished thither companionless, conscious ?<sup>22</sup>

The comment is surely one of those Teufelsdröckhian insights which are identifiable with Carlyle's own view, and it embodies that desolate stage of melancholy - a characteristic and widespread cast of mind for the 1830s and 40s - which must instinctively precede all Carlyle's more positive statements.

The fundamental struggle was that of Belief against Unbelief, and the assertion of something Positive in the face of this Mechanism. The present Carlyle found wanting in all comparisons. He turned, at one point in the 1840 Lectures on Heroes, to the earliest times, in his critique of the present :

How mean, dwarfish are their ways of thinking, in this time,- compared not with the Christian Shakespeares and Miltons, but with the old Pagan Skalds, with any species of believing men ! The living TREE Igdrasil, with the melodious prophetic waving of its world-wide boughs, deep-rooted at Hela, has died out into the clanking of a World-MACHINE. 'Tree' and 'Machine': contrast these two things. I, for my share, declare the world to be no machine ! I say that it does *not* go by the wheel-and-pinion motives, self-interests, checks, balances; that there is something far other in it than the clank of spinning-jennies and parliamentary majorities; and, on the whole, that it is not a machine at all !<sup>23</sup>

Typically, the assertion that the world was not essentially 'mechanical,' which was simultaneously a political and philosophical point, was not succeeded by any explanation of the positive values which he was proposing to institute in the place of 'mechanism.' The selfishness and shrivelled motives of the present

emanated, he seems to imply, from too much knowledge, from not enough wonder and ignorance. He clearly gives affirmations of the value of attitudes of wonder and innocence towards the world. The notion of machinery was abhorrent because it implied the measurability, the calculation of every aspect of humankind.

Against this Carlyle urged a fresh eye to all phenomena, a new objectivity. He argued that it need not be like this. In this connection, like Mill, he railed against the tyranny of Custom. But unlike Mill, he wished us to regain wonder in the face of great and divine evidences :

Innumerable are the illusions and legerdemain-tricks of Custom: but of all these, perhaps the cleverest is her knack of persuading us that the Miraculous, by simple repetition, ceases to be Miraculous...Am I to view the Stupendous with stupid indifference, because I have seen it twice, or two-hundred, or two-million times ? There is no reason in Nature or in Art why I should: unless, indeed, I am a mere Work-Machine, for whom the divine gift of Thought were no other than the terrestrial gift of Steam is to the Steam-engine...<sup>24</sup>

This advocacy of a renewed sense of the Divine and the Inexplicable was, of course, thoroughly against the grain of all contemporary

Utilitarian wishes to trace commensurability in all things. And, of course, it refuted such endeavours as Martineau's to locate within a conceptual system all developments, material and immaterial, in the history of humankind. But in so doing, it also cut across such attempts as Scott's had been, to trace progress in society by clear stages. Human activity for Carlyle was to be measured against an intuited sense of the Divine.

In Carlyle's conception, all was in the development of a critical *attitude*, above all in the resistance offered to the dominant values of the day. As 'Signs of the Times' put it,

This deep, paralysed subjection to physical objects comes not from Nature, but from our own unwise mode of *viewing* Nature...<sup>25</sup>

Scott's underlying and consistent acceptance of such materialism was what Carlyle considered to be crucial to his failings as an artist. As far as Carlyle was concerned, for Scott there had been no absolute, no utter end, to which he, fixed and unshakeable in conviction, would not go. There was simply too much acceptance, too little judgement, for Carlyle's exasperated temper. In this perception, or allegation, Carlyle, great denter of popular myths and assumptions, made a point whose impact on all later Victorian Scott criticism cannot be underestimated.

*CARLYLE'S CONCEPTION OF SCOTT AS AN 'ARTISAN' OF HISTORY*

Carlyle was determined to appear objective in his critique of Scott, but the force of his critique as ever took in a far wider scope than the matter in hand, and implied or urged much about the contemporary world. The apparently restricted terms of re-definition - the Review of Lockhart - belied the importance of this piece as social and cultural iconoclasm.

Four-fifths of the essay was concerned with Scott's life as told in Lockhart's work, a few pages covered, in the broadest terms, the Waverley Novels themselves, and the final section of the essay made overall judgements to be made about Scott, in particular as the last years of suffering and decline began. Carlyle, although not having seen the final volume of Lockhart, indicated his sense of the tragedy of Scott's end. To support this relatively sympathetic aspect of the essay, in his conclusion, just as earlier in the essay, Carlyle quoted substantially from Scott's Journal as used by Lockhart.

Specific texts were hardly mentioned, the briefest references to the work being made in the recounting of Scott's life, as Carlyle saw it. The essay was a full-frontal assault on any tendency to the canonisation of Scott. Scott, because popular, was not necessarily great, and the reader need not look hastily to resolve the issue :

Into the question whether Scott was a great man or not, we do not propose to enter deeply. It is, as too usual, a question about words. There can be no doubt but many men have been named and printed *great* who were vastly smaller than he: as little doubt moreover that of the specially *good*, a very large portion, according to any genuine standard of man's worth, were worthless in comparison to him. He for whom Scott is great may most innocently name him so; may with advantage admire his great qualities, and ought with sincere heart to emulate them. At the same time, it is good that there be a certain degree of precision in our epithets. It is good to understand, for one thing, that no popularity, and open-mouthed wonder of all the world, continued even for a long series of years, can make a man great. Such popularity is a remarkable fortune; indicates a great adaptation of the man to his element of circumstances; but may or may not indicate anything great in the man.<sup>26</sup>

Carlyle's long Essay on Scott operated, like so much of his work, as a topical intervention, intended largely to make its point by shock-tactics, by expressing views diametrically opposed to the popular consensus. But he was certainly in tune with the widespread contemporary urge for moral clarity. The Essay's oft-quoted dictum



on Scott's thoroughgoing materialism is perhaps the most succinct way of putting this fundamental point :

His life was worldly; his ambitions were worldly.

There is nothing spiritual in him; all is economical, material, of the earth earthy.<sup>27</sup>

Scott's failing as a Historian lay in a refusal to delve, to enquire. He was, indeed, an expert storyteller, and this Carlyle remarked as "a free flow of narrative, of incident and sentiment."<sup>28</sup> But this dissatisfied Carlyle, for Scott's world was but "effect", albeit drawn with "singular vividness." The accurate delineation of outward things Carlyle was happy to praise; but at this Scott stopped. He did not enter men's souls, and write, as Shakespeare, "from the heart outwards," but rather "from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them." The result, for Carlyle, was disappointing: "mechanical cases, deceptively painted automatons." This was above all a failure of historiographical method. For Scott's work would not endure, and "among the great of all ages, one sees no likelihood of a place for him." In the last resort, more was needed than the outer casing of existence :

Not by slashed breeches, steeple-hats, buff-belts, or antiquated speech, can romance-heroes continue to interest us; but simply and solely, in the long run, by being men. Buff-belts and all manner of

jerkins and costumes are transitory; man alone is perennial.<sup>29</sup>

There is constantly a sense of Carlyle's frustration with Scott for this limitation, this failure to explain more closely, and, perhaps most importantly, to relate past to present. This was an important facet of the critique, which bore on all nineteenth-century criticism of Scott.

Carlyle sought, like many who employed the past in this and subsequent decades - Disraeli, Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot are obvious examples - to speak to the contemporary world through allegorical or emblematic means. The urge was to imperatives in the world around them, and clear cultural messages may be discerned. For Carlyle, the issue was of the utmost importance. History *mattered*, and its limited or superficial attractions would not serve the present in the necessary ways. Scott's seeking to produce literature aimed at "harmlessly amusing indolent languid men," and "the reader lying on a sofa," meant that the serious uses of history were ignored.<sup>30</sup>

Scott was not among the Artists of History. As Carlyle had developed his thinking in the 1830 Essay 'On History,' there was a need to treat the Historical process as "Philosophy teaching by Experience," dependent on the skilled recorder. Indeed, Carlyle argued, it was only in the development of the Artist, rather than the mere Artisan, as recorder, that the value of History, as "the

true basis of Wisdom" could be recognised and brought forth into the world.<sup>31</sup>

In this respect, the very breadth and respectability of Scott's upbringing and early career led him away from this elect status:

Till towards the age of thirty, Scott's life has nothing in it decisively pointing towards Literature, or indeed towards distinction of any kind...<sup>32</sup>

The racial and cultural stock of Saxonhood, of John Knox, and of Robert Burns, was a blessing for Scott, imparting the national character of "hardy endeavouring considering men," and - from Presbyterianism - the urge to deliver a message.<sup>33</sup> But Scott showed little disposition to do anything with this heritage. As Carlyle pointed out, he merely retold. His narrative skills were fine, but hardly signs of a nascent prophet :

Scott's best qualities never shone out more freely than when he went upon anecdote and reminiscence...Here, if anywhere, his knowledge was complete, and all his humour and good-humour had free scope...<sup>34</sup>

It is clear throughout Carlyle's portrait of Scott that the damning was with faint praise. Being

...a stout effectual man...full of broad sagacity and good humour, with faculties in him fit for any burden of business, hospitality and duty, legal or civic...<sup>35</sup>

did not constitute the Artistry or Genius for which the world yearned. And when the Work began, both Metrical Romances and Prose Romances, the achievement appeared to be the more dramatically received by society for being *novel* rather than *great*. "Gospel-tidings" were utterly lacking; for the languid vacillation of the nineteenth century Scott offered no deep insight into the people of the past.

Instead he gave what were actually, for all the exciting spectacle of the re-animation of history, mere externals :

...the old life of men resuscitated for us: it is a mighty word ! Not as dead tradition, but as a palpable presence, the past stood before us. There they were, the rugged old fighting men; in their doughty simplicity and strength, with their heartiness, their healthiness, their stout self-help, in their iron basnets, leather jerkins, jack-boots, in their quaintness of manner and costume; there as they looked and lived: it was like a new-discovered continent in Literature...a bright El Dorado,- or else some...Paradise of Donothings. To

the opening nineteenth century, in its languour and paralysis, nothing could have been welcomer. Most unexpected, most refreshing and exhilarating; behold our new El Dorado; our fat beatific Lubberland, where one can enjoy and do nothing !<sup>36</sup>

*Activity* was vital. Indolence and passivity were, for Carlyle, tokens of the spiritual decay of the nineteenth century. The new age's ability to view the past as mere pictures, and as interesting spectacles passing before the eyes of the imagination, was sickness indeed. The Scott phenomenon - and in particular the popularity of the Poems and Novels - were symptoms of the moral and spiritual enfeeblement of the first decades of the nineteenth century. In Carlyle's eyes, these superficial glitterings and gaudinesses were not real History, and Scott only added to the age's inability to recreate the attitudes and conduct of the past.

By contrast, his own position was that the contemplation of past ages should not be seen as merely useful to the present as interesting explication, but in large measure as solution. Thus the pursuit of History must be undertaken as a serious investigation into *real lives*, real personages of the past. The past must truly live through History, which it could not do in Scott's puppeteering. As Carlyle put it, "History is the essence of innumerable Biographies."<sup>37</sup> Only in reaching to the deepest motivations, the uttermost impulses, could the writer of history find that Wisdom which the science offered an age sorely in need.

In this respect, Scott's superficiality was crucial to his final failure to meet the needs of the age. For all his "general *healthiness* of mind," Scott did not probe character. He could not be compared with a truly great writer :

...your Shakspeare (sic) fashions his characters from the heart outwards; your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them! The one set become living men and women; the other amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted automatons.<sup>38</sup>

Carlyle confronted the nature of the reception of the Waverley Novels, tracing a unity between Sir Walter's limitations and those of the age for which he wrote. For all the 'magical' and 'novel' power of such pictures as Scott's of romantic times past, the age had, in its own weakness, been bewitched by superficiality. There was, though, a logic, in the appeal of the past, for in the past had been no such spiritual inadequacies as were in the present. The Novels, said Carlyle, offered

...rough strong times, wherein those maladies of ours had not yet arisen...Brawny figures, all cased in buff and iron, their hearts too sheathed in oak and triple brass...<sup>39</sup>

These were insufficient as fiction, because, in the last resort, they allowed the reader's "languid imagination" to remain at rest. The modern Scott-reader, in Carlyle's estimation, was *unchallenged* by what were mere "high-painted scenes, with sequences of stirring action." Such insights into former times were but a casual glance along an attractive vista, no thoroughgoing examination, as Carlyle would have preferred. But the long run reduced Scott. Scott's popularity disturbed Carlyle hugely, in particular in the formulaic quality of his approach to novel-writing.

Carlyle found problems above all in the *reductive* nature of Scott's creations, their existence within a highly determined fictional structure. Carlyle would have had it otherwise in recreations of the past. In Past and Present, for example, he demanded that the thirteenth century *breathe*, for only thus could the enterprise succeed :

Yes, another world it was, when these black ruins, white in their new mortar and fresh chiselling, first saw the sun as walls, long ago...Another world, truly: and this present poor distressed world might get some profit by looking wisely into it, instead of foolishly. But at lowest, O dilettante friend, let us know always that it was a world, and not a void infinite of gray haze with fantasm's swimming in it. These old St.Edmundsbury walls, I say, were not peopled with fantasm's; but

with men of flesh and blood, made altogether as we are.<sup>40</sup>

If the present was "the Age of Machinery", forever "adapting means to ends", in its calculating and contriving, then Sir Walter was surely a tender of machines, in his "rapidity" and "productive facility". His writing was factitious. He did not confront the reader with moral truth, and did not issue challenges to the age whose ear he had for so long. Scott, revered, potential *Vates* to the age,

...our highest literary man, who immeasurably beyond all others commanded the world's ear, had, as it were, no message whatever to deliver to the world; wished not the world to elevate itself, to amend itself, to do this or to do that, except simply pay him for the books he kept writing.<sup>41</sup>

Carlyle rebuked this abdication of responsibility. For the lack of a message in Scott was particularly significant for an age "fallen languid, destitute of faith and terrified at scepticism."<sup>42</sup> The *Waverley Novels* pandered to the "indolent languid men" who so characterised the age for Carlyle.

In this judgement particularly, the central one of the whole Essay, Carlyle was bringing to bear his conclusions of the perceived close relationship between life and art, in so far as Scott exemplified



certain characteristics of the prevailing moral and cultural decay. This would be a recurring feature of later Scott criticism, but only in Carlyle was it unequivocally a demerit. The book of history lay open to Scott, he saw the great truth that

...the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men. Not abstractions were they, not diagrams and theorems; but men, in buff or other coats and breeches, with colour in their cheeks, with passions in their stomach, and the idioms, features and vitalities of very men.<sup>43</sup>

This strength Carlyle praised. But beyond this Scott did not venture. For all the "picturesqueness", "freshness", "healthiness" of Scott's art, yet there was a quintessential lack at the very core. This had to do in part with the excessive regard paid to Scott as a man in his lifetime - the fault of the age as a whole - and in part with his facility. "No great thing," the Essay counselled, "was ever, or will ever be done with ease, but with difficulty !" Scott chose the easy way, like the "man of the world" which he was.<sup>44</sup>

Carlyle was characteristically strident, and pulled no punches in the Scott Essay. It was, he felt, a time of spiritual bankruptcy, an age which demanded such leadership as Scott had steadfastly

avoided giving. Moreover, for Carlyle as for others, the past had an especial use in the early Victorian years, a time of immense doubt and confusion, as George Henry Lewes explained in 1844, for his and Carlyle's present was

...an age of universal anarchy of thought, with a strong desire for organisation; an age, succeeding one of destruction, anxious to reconstruct - anxious, but as yet impotent...In this plight we may hope for the future, but can *cling* only to the past: that alone is secure, well-grounded. The past must form the basis of certainty and the materials for speculation.<sup>45</sup>

To Scott, the motivation to challenge, to probe the psychological forces shaping the outer world, rather than simply to describe them, was somehow lacking, and with this Carlyle was dissatisfied. In his very competence Scott was tried and found guilty. Both in his celebrity and in the extent and quality of his achievement, he failed the Carlyle test.

The very concept of fame presented difficulties for Carlyle. 'Lionism', as he liked to call the phenomenon, offered only silence where wisdom was needed. At the beginning of the Scott Essay, Carlyle invented an imaginary soirée of lions :

# PAGE NUMBERING AS IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

In these evaluations of the men, just as in the case of Milton in Past and Present, Carlyle brought primarily moral judgements to bear on his criticism, judgements springing from the bank of rectitude to which he turned for guidance. Again and again in the biographical/critical essays, he sought for role-models with which to oppose the modern panoply of Dandyism and Drudgism, Dapperism and Dilettantism. In this modern world, the writer all too often "cannot stand at all, save in stays...(girt) with inherited, bought, or, as is more likely, borrowed or stolen whalebone."<sup>51</sup>

The age in which Carlyle wrote demanded that the artist take a lead in asserting the needful corrective to Mechanism. 'Signs of the Times,' of course, diagnosed brilliantly :

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions - for Mechanism of one sort or another, do they hope and struggle.<sup>52</sup>

In this context, the role of Literature blended easily into those of History, and Prophecy. That distinction between the Artist and the Artisan may be employed here again to illustrate the development of Carlyle's conception of Literature as identifiable with History in this one crucial regard: the seeking out of Truth

and the telling of it. The 'inward'/'outward' distinction present in the Scott Essay as well as in the above quotation, is vital to understanding the Carlylean view. There was, he believed, a need to see into the *true* nature of things.

The desire for a Seer, which underlay all of Carlyle's comments on Scott, was a profoundly anti-democratic urge. The decision which a society made, to establish what was an important event, might well be settled "by majority of votes," but the deeper changes could be invisible :

Suppose...that the majority of votes was all wrong; that the real cardinal points lay far deeper; and had been passed over unnoticed, because no Seer, but only mere Onlookers, chanced to be there ! Our clock strikes when there is a change from hour to hour; but no hammer in the Horologe of Time peals through the universe when there is a change from Era to Era.<sup>53</sup>

And nothing was of greater import to Carlyle than that Writers make challenges to received verdicts. They must offer alternatives to popular judgement. By this criterion too many in the modern world of letters were found wanting, according to Carlyle. Lockhart's biography of Scott - the ostensible subject of the Essay - was biography turned overlong recollection, all "breadth and length," "superficiality and saleability." This was because the life of

Scott, for Carlyle, was no mere telling of events and hagiography, as Lockhart seemed to have been content to produce. Carlyle would have the discourse of literary biography be a more enquiring and independent one. Lockhart had

...accomplished the work he schemed for himself in a creditable workmanlike manner.

However,

...his notion of what the work was, does not seem to have been very elevated.

The ideal for a biography would have been to achieve a work, of which the reader could say,

There is Scott, there is the physiognomy and meaning of Scott's appearance and transit on this earth; such was he by nature, so did the world act on him, so he on the world, with such result and significance for himself and us.<sup>54</sup>

In such an age as "the artificial nineteenth century" with its sham and its cant, the need for the genuine was especially intense. It is tempting to speculate, whether Carlyle's verdict on Lockhart, indeed on Scott, would have differed at all if he had waited a few months for the final volume of Lockhart's Life, in which the most

stirring, pathetic and heroic phase, the calamitous final years after Scott's bankruptcy, were prominent. But the judgement, it has to be said, was mostly a tough one; and Lockhart had clearly avoided the perceived need to criticise as well as praise.

For Carlyle, the *truth* about a figure so esteemed as Scott was vital, if the world of literature was to rise above and lead its culture away from the mire of mediocrity which so dominated things. Here Carlyle's demand for an enhanced role for, and a cultivation of, the imaginative faculty, was the most important aspect of his diagnosis of the Scott phenomenon. Just as Scott himself was guilty of insufficient interest in the inward part of men's lives, so the overall tendency of the age was towards being incapable of *insight*. In this regard, a basic Carlylean tenet - his demand of those who professed to be Artists - was as expressed in the 1828 essay 'Characteristics' :

Manufacture is intelligible, but trivial: Creation  
is great, and cannot be understood.<sup>55</sup>

Scott was altogether too visible, too comprehensible, to be great.

#### *SCOTT'S QUALITIES : HEALTH AND PRACTICALITY*

The portrait was not without some redeeming features. Scott was *healthy*. Carlyle made this important distinction in likening Scott

to William Cobbett. Language of geniality, good-humour, and above all *health*, characterised both men, appearing

...in the sickliest of recorded ages, when British Literature lay all puking and sprawling in Werterism, Byronism, and other Sentimentalism tearful or spasmodic.<sup>56</sup>

The relationship with Nature marked out the healthy. There was an "instinct," based on a primitive "harmony", which made for the healthy nature. Carlyle's Romantic conception of creativity, and therefore of the great, made the healthy nature identifiable as vastly more *practical*. In this there was good fortune :

Blessed is the healthy nature; it is the coherent, sweetly cooperative, not incoherent, self-distracting, self-destructive one !<sup>57</sup>

In the torrent of visitors, whom Carlyle labelled "bluebottles," who came to see and admire at Abbotsford, Carlyle saw a test for Scott's character. In this his healthiness showed itself "decisively." Scott, as a Captain Basil Hall noted, in an extract which Carlyle adduced, was tirelessly the good host. It was "impossible to touch on any theme, but straightway he has an anecdote to fit it"; "we strolled along, borne, as it were, on the stream of song and story." Carlyle quoted at length from Captain Hall, and found the example useful in confirming the verdict on



Scott as "a most robust, healthy man," "of true humour and humanity" :

Among such worshippers, arriving in 'sixteen parties a-day,' an ordinary man might have grown buoyant; have felt the god, begun to nod, and seemed to shake the spheres. A slightly splenetic man, possessed of Scott's sense, would have swept his premises clear of them: Let no bluebottle approach here, to disturb a man in his work...The good Sir Walter, like a quiet, brave man, did neither. He let the matter take its course; enjoyed what was enjoyable in it; endured what could not well be helped; persisted meanwhile in writing his daily portion of romance-*copy*, in preserving his composure of heart;- in a word, accommodated himself to this loud-buzzing environment...<sup>58</sup>

Here we may see Carlyle's view of Scott's essential *worldliness*, his phlegmatic and accepting temperament, which was in no way 'artistic.' Scott's great talents were of the world, to do with practical matters and everyday minds. The growth of his literary success, however, presented him with a fatal opportunity. Scott fell prey in this respect to the overarching faults of the age. His very practicality worked against him for once, as the flood of rapid success burst over the world, and the Waverley series grew, to be read "with a kind of rapt astonishment by all."

Importantly for Carlyle's judgement, material wealth inevitably made its way to Scott's door. The "cornucopia of wealth, honour and worldly good" that came his way, brought with it "hard cash," which the practical Scott found of all things "one of the most practical."

Here, in biographical points, Carlyle drew together his two central critical precepts. The Essay reached its conclusion with the connection between the thesis of Scott as "too little of a fantast," with too little interest in the immaterial; and his failing the test of the writer as prophet. The key lay in Scott's attitude to his role within society.

In Carlyle's conception, Scott could have had great and noble aims, he could have sought to offer guidance and enlightenment to the worried and fretting generations of the 1810s, 20s and beyond. This he did not. For Carlyle, Scott made of Literature a *trade*, a term not yet necessarily rich with the snob-value it would acquire in the course of the nineteenth century, but nevertheless a massive carbuncle on the possessor :

To write with never such rapidity in a passable manner, is indicative not of a man's genius, but of his habits; it will prove his soundness of nervous system, his practicality of mind, and, in fine, that he has the knack of his trade.<sup>59</sup>

The "extempore style of writing" which Scott achieved was ignoble, for Carlyle. His vast literary efforts were ultimately no better than machine-writing. This was the inevitable result of the otherwise-admirable genial good humour and Cobbettlike practicality. Scott's attitude crucially failed to meet the great end of what Literature should be in the Carlylean cosmos. What had been Sir Walter's aims ? Carlyle pondered, before sadly concluding that they were no more than "station in society, solid power over the good things of this world." His "precept of precepts", too, was a material one. Scott's spiritual vacancy could give him no better adage than Iago's *Put money in thy purse*. The limited ideals which fired Scott inevitably made his work a mechanical exercise:

Walter Scott, one of the gifted of the world...must kill himself that he may be a country gentleman, the founder of a race of Scottish lairds...one might say there was something eminently distracted in this, *end* as it would, of a Walter Scott writing daily with the ardour of a steam-engine, that he might make 15,000*l.* a-year, and buy upholstery with it. To cover the walls of a stone house in Selkirkshire with nicknacks, ancient armour and genealogical shields, what can we name it but a being a delirium of a kind ?<sup>60</sup>

Scott was infected with Ambition. The ease, the facility with which Sir Walter had put his work together, Carlyle happily reprehended,

for thus it had not been for Goethe, Shakespeare, Milton, Schiller or Virgil. Scott had presented page after page too readily, had been a "ready-writer," when the greatest of writing, genuine Creation,

...one would think, cannot be easy; your Jove has severe pains, and fire-flames, in the head out of which an armed Pallas is struggling!<sup>61</sup>

Scott's view of writing as a mere *trade* was crucial to Carlyle's low estimate of the value of the Waverley Novels. The absence of true Creation, the "ready-writing," seemed to him to be the reason for the novels' possessing no "opinions, emotions, principles, doubts, beliefs" of any serious nature, none at all, in fact, "beyond what the intelligent country gentleman can carry along with him."<sup>62</sup> But at least part of Carlyle's Crusade here was against wider tendencies in society at large. As publishing expanded, Carlyle would - in a similar vein to such later writers as Arnold or Leavis - have it play a moral and spiritual part in the life of the nation. He undoubtedly had great hopes for Literature, even in the present time. As he wrote in 'Characteristics,'

Literature is but a branch of Religion, and always participates in its character: however, in our time, it is the only branch that still shows any greenness: and, as some think, must one day become the main stem.<sup>63</sup>

There was a distinction between Literature, and what Scott perpetrated, which was Book-Publishing and Book-Selling. Literature, Carlyle asserted vigorously, was not the business "of writing impromptu novels to buy farms with." For all the admiration Carlyle could give to Scott as a "healthy" and good-natured individual, still he refuted the label 'great' for Scott.

This label would be of some significance in the context of Carlyle's career. The increasing definition of his ideas about the nature of individual greatness, individual worth, came to be the dominant force of his writing in the 1840s and 50s. In biography as a form, he saw the opportunity, not only for justification of individual lives, but also for vehemently *establishing* greatness. The absolutism and clarity that so characterised the Lectures On Heroes and Hero-Worship were a strong feature of the varied responses the mid-Victorian years offered to cultural and spiritual confusion. In Carlyle's expression of the deeper doctrine of Hero-Worship, the struggle, "with the whole World of Darkness that lay without one and within one," would seem soluble. And in this conception, the great were seen to merit not just the world's ear, but its *obedience*.

In this temper of thought was a dynamic version of Christian morality, a version from which Scott's measured tolerance and gradualism were inevitably excluded. For central was a rejection of 'secularism', of which Carlyle identified Scott as a ringleader. In the fundamentalist tones to which Carlyle increasingly moved, the

direct intervention of the Divine was unquestioned. For all their qualities, the great among humankind were finally only conduits of a greater Truth. Their role was the "new deeper revealing of the Secret of this Universe," which "is verily of the nature of a message from on high."<sup>64</sup>

This, then, was the direction in which Carlyle was incorrigibly heading. His Essay on Scott was influential, in the mainstream of Scott criticism. This Review of Lockhart's Life did more than challenge some of the conventions of literary biography: in its focus on Scott as an exemplar of the modern literary lion, it fundamentally questioned conceptions of Scott.

Undoubtedly Carlyle brought significant ideological 'baggage' to the Essay. His own reduced situation in the winter of 1837-8 may not be without relevance to understanding the Essay. His Journal refers to an oppressive sense of himself as "like a galley-slave, scourged by the whip of necessity" to return to writing on Scott, and his material circumstances he calls "this dreadful state." His distaste for popular fiction had never been higher than in this period, when he regretted the tendency in mankind to relax over "some Pickwick or lowest trash of that nature." His Journal at the time records much grumbling, typical being a note about friend Harriet Martineau's being "too happy and too noisy" at dinner one evening.<sup>65</sup>

The Essay, for all its distinctively Carlylean elements, is significant in its assertion of some particular views about Scott, which would last for several decades. Carlyle's lack of respect for the collective, which he saw in terms of mischief-making, and his lack of interest in the workmanlike, researching writer, excluded much of Scott's achievement from his gaze. But the notion of Scott's "shaggy honesty, sagacity and goodness"<sup>66</sup> - central to the Victorian consensus - in large measure derived from this Essay.<sup>67</sup> Although the image of a Scott who was quintessentially down-to-earth and ordinary appealed to many nineteenth century critics, for Carlyle, the innocent and inoffensive hours of reading which resulted from this genial Scott were irresponsible and indulgent.

The grand role for Literature which Carlyle envisaged as needful was not, he felt, shared by a Scott whom he saw as meretricious. For the sociological aims of Scott's work, even much of the antiquarianism and the formal experimentation, counted for nothing in Carlyle's eyes. The gaze, demanded Carlyle, must not long be away from the final and ultimate in human experience, and the object of the arts must be to act as a gossellike mouthpiece. They must connect the earthly with the Divine :

Art also and Literature are intimately blended with Religion; as it were, outworks and abutments, by which that highest pinnacle in our inward world gradually connects itself with the general level, and becomes accessible therefrom.<sup>68</sup>

Scott's position thereafter was strongly determined by this Essay. Carlyle's work would be a reference point for later writers on Scott such as Bagehot and Hutton, and, although his arguments were seen as over-stated and unkind to Scott, such charges as those of superficiality and lack of a spiritual dimension were accepted. In particular, Scott's greatness would now less easily be convincingly described as that of a sage. His genius would now be associated with humane and sympathetic qualities, with understanding the diversity, rather than the depths, of human nature. The 1830s conferred moral soundness in perpetuo on the Waverley Novels. But Scott's works would, after Carlyle, be seen less as catechisms of moral clarity, and more as generally benevolent excursions which now and then touched on moral themes. The 'innocent' entertainment-value they offered would be their greatest merit - a Waverley Novel became a *less serious* matter than much in the outside world. Picking up a Waverley Novel became a token of pleasant and healthy amusement. After Carlyle, it could not represent wrestling with the ultimate things.



CHAPTER IV :WALTER BAGEHOT- SCOTT, SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT AND DEMOCRACY*BAGEHOT'S THESIS : THE WAVERLEY NOVELS AND THE MODERN WORLD*

Walter Bagehot, the economist and essayist, published perhaps the most important essay on Scott of the mid-century. This came when there appeared, in April 1858, in the *National Review* - a periodical of which he was joint editor - an anonymous article, simply entitled 'The Waverley Novels.'

Born in Langport, Somerset in 1826, Walter Bagehot was educated at Bristol and University College, London. Initially a shipowner and lawyer, it was some time before writing became his principal occupation and source of income. But in the years before leaving the law in 1852, Bagehot had already contributed essays to the *Prospective Review* on a wide range of topics, including Mill's Principles of Political Economy, and the currency problem. On beginning work in the family bank, the opportunity for him to devote his attentions more thoroughly to review- and essay-writing increased. Eventually entering full-time journalism late in 1854 on

the cessation of the *Prospective*, Bagehot, in collaboration with Richard Holt Hutton, launched the *National Review*, a monthly periodical sold at 4s., whose circulation by 1858 had reached close to 1500. This success led Bagehot in 1860 to become editor of *The Economist*.

From the mid-fifties, then, the fertility, and above all the breadth, of Bagehot's criticism, was marked. Critical assessments of some major contemporary writers - Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontës and others - were notable by their absence, but lengthy essays appeared on, for example, Milton, Dickens, and Thackeray in the literary sphere; and Gibbon, Brougham, Peel and Gladstone outside it. Throughout his career he refused to accept rigid classification. As William Haley put it, "In almost the same breath he could write about currency and cantos."

The essay on Scott ostensibly served as a review of six new editions of the *Waverley Novels*, although Bagehot did not elaborate at all on the nature of each of these editions, and indeed references to individual novels are fleeting. For our purpose, it was a very useful stocktaking at a time when Scott was clearly becoming increasingly established in the Victorian world of letters. Not only in the intellectual and critical world did the middle century increasingly venerate Scott by sheer attention.

The popularity of the *Waverley Novels* was in a sense symbiotic with what was coming to be seen as Victorian culture itself. New

editions abounded in mid-century, including the People's, Library, Railway, Abbotsford and Roxburgh Editions, although only the latter two purported to be of importance in being more than mere reprints.

Scott's centrality in this period is indicated by the scale of printings and reprintings, but was perhaps even more encapsulated by such large references as Thackeray's, in his 1850 skit on Ivanhoe, entitled Rebecca and Rowena, and George Eliot's, in The Mill on the Floss (1860). These characterised Scott as culturally central, and in particular showed his work to possess remarkable powers of imagination and charm which the nineteenth century was enjoying vastly. George Eliot's use of relationships in The Pirate - also a reference in Middlemarch (1871-2) - as a partly ironic dimension in her development of Maggie Tulliver's understanding of herself, Philip and Stephen Guest, particularly emphasised the insistence of Scott's texts, their irresistibility.<sup>2</sup>

The Bagehot essay, especially when taken in the context of Bagehot's other work, was more than just a mark of Scott's undisputed place in Victorian life. At a time of continuing expansion in the publishing industry, there was felt to be a need constantly to clarify and re-assert 'good' reading matter. In Bagehot's essay, Scott was, while largely eulogised, very much put at the service of a range of contemporary social and political purposes. In the essay, we gain access to several currents of thought of mid-century, regarding democracy, the nature and demands

of representative government, and the 'essential' elements of English national-character. All of these issues concerned Bagehot in reading Scott, and for all the vestments of innocent reading donned by Bagehot, he was every bit as committed to his particular conclusions in regard to the Novels, as had been Carlyle.

Methodologically, again we may discern a reluctance to engage in detailed critical analysis, for reasons of the sensed 'corporateness' and dimensions of the opus. Bagehot was clearly encountering Scott *as a whole*. He did, however, pay particular attention to 'the Scotch novels' as a sub-group, these having become clearly established as the pre-eminent achievements.

Moreover, the essay confirmed, in its avowals of disinterest, what was becoming an inveterate critical practice. This was a 'common-sense' approach, an anti-intellectualism, which asserted the value of literature as downright *good*, never mind your theories. This approach may be seen as forming a response to the continuing boom in the publishing industry. This backdrop to the essay is not to be underestimated : pressure on traditional values was mounting as publishing reached a new stage of expansion, beyond the development of 'serial' novels from the 1830s, through Mudie's circulating libraries, to the mid-century advent of W.H. Smith, John Menzies and the wider availability of cheap literature. From some 372 new book titles per annum in 1792, in the region of 2,500 were appearing each year by mid-century.<sup>3</sup>

It was now virtually impossible for critics to deny that amusement and pleasure had a place in reading habits. As a result, in Bagehot's essay we see both the deprecating much of Carlyle's earlier excessive fastidiousness as to Scott's being commercial, and a first example of the promotion of Scott as acceptable matter in the face of modern sensationalism. The Waverley Novels became edifying amusement. There was no need for agonising and moralising: literature could simply offer 'useful' and 'healthy' axioms for living.

Bagehot's enterprise was to advise his readership of the value and pleasure to be found in Scott; and thereby to aid the creation of an appropriate literary canon. Through constructs of 'commonsense' and an idea of 'national' identity, he proselytised the essential quality of the Waverley Novels as a down-to-earth, practical conception of the world, with which no sensible person could disagree. Bagehot sought, above all, to marginalise 'art', to urge a view of literature as emerging from a sound, practical life. Today he would have been a critic of State subsidy for the arts.

Carlyle's criticism of Scott's extreme worldliness was taken firmly on board, but times had clearly changed. Scott does not *need* to be a preternatural figure, imparting wisdom and profundity. Opprobrium was no longer his due for being ordinary. For it was in common-sense, "natural feelings, plain thoughts and applied sagacity" - avowedly not "the attenuated striving intellect"- that Scott made his greatest contribution to the nineteenth century. Analogously,

in the appreciation of the 'ordinariness' of most lives, Scott was, with wonderful frequency, simply *right* :

No man had a stronger sagacity, better adapted for the guidance of common men, and the conduct of common transactions. Few could hope to form a more correct opinion on things and subjects which were brought before him in actual life; no man had a more useful intellect.<sup>4</sup>

All that Scott did was reducible to the notion of his complete relevance to the modern day. Scott *understood*. Scott's history, too, became, as it were, *simplified* by Bagehot, seen as illustrating perennial social and economic truths. The role of historiography was the exemplary recounting these truths. Literature, for Bagehot as for Carlyle, must be the site for the entry of important ahistorical values into the needy present. But, unlike Carlyle, Bagehot exemplified a peculiarly mid-Victorian kind of determined philistinism about the arts. For he had little conception of the artist as more than a servant to political or social movements. His version of the unseen world was less transcendentalist than Carlyle, urging rather the culturally-accredited myths of nationality and constitutional continuity than the moral or spiritual absolutes preferred by Carlyle.

Bagehot's was a very positive critique of the *Waverley* Novels. This essay, although, like Carlyle's, identifying writer and work,

unlike Carlyle appeared to reach positive conclusions as the result of 'prior' and 'felt' impulses. These purported to emerge from 'innocent' reading, pleasure and geniality of 'tone' being the criteria.

However, I believe that Bagehot, contrary to some understanding of his work, applied to the texts a very definite view of the respective natures of literature and contemporary society, and of the desired relationship between the two. The coherence of his view was highly concealed. Linguistic continuity and intertextual resonance within his opus reveal a far from ingenuous critic, who had social and cultural aspirations for what he perceived to be the national interest, as well as a strongly value-based critical practice. He saw the cultural centrality of the periodical, and asserted that it must, as a form, adopt a didactic role :

It is, indeed, a peculiarity of our times, that we must instruct so many persons...There is, as yet, no Act of Parliament compelling a *bona fide* traveller to read. If you wish him to read, you must make reading pleasant. You must give him short views, and clear sentences. It will not answer to explain what all the things which you describe, are *not*. You must begin by saying what they are. There is exactly the difference between the books of this age, and those of a more laborious age, that we feel between the lecture of a professor and the

talk of the man of the world...

In his Olympian authority, he would act as the voice of the age, would speak to the age in its own language. Bagehot, aware to the uttermost of the market in which he himself was competing, saw the review as the form of discourse par excellence for the times :

...glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in a jest, unfolding unanswerable arguments in an absurd illustration, expounding nothing, completing nothing, exhausting nothing, yet really suggesting the lessons of a wider experience, embodying the results of a more finely tested philosophy, passing with a more Shakespearian transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low, in season and out of season, with a word of illustration for each and a touch of humour intelligible to all, - fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends, disconnected yet impressing what he maintains. This is the very model of our modern writing.<sup>5</sup>

In this eclectic climate, the sifting through the weighty literary



heritage of the nation was part of the function of the reviews. Bagehot saw his mission as the making of an appropriate cultural identity to match the temper of the economically- and imperially-self-confident 1850s. This identity must confirm national character through literature, and must assert particular moral and social values. Regarding the Waverley Novels, his decision was that they represented a most valuable part of the heritage, and must, therefore, be re-valued and re-presented as good literature. The age was, as he saw it, a transitional one for Scott's status, so the 1858 essay was a timely one. By the 1850s, two decades had passed since Scott's death. The received status of vast popularity was open to question, with what Bagehot called the "languid impartiality" of a new readership.<sup>6</sup>

In seeking an avowed objectivity, Bagehot was creating an authority as literary critic, by which his verdict might count the more strongly. He was also purporting to combat the tyranny of custom, and to be establishing a relevant and particularised critical practice for the age. However, there were significant Whiggish traits in his work. A sense of gradualist political progress, asserting immense respect for the value of tradition in a notional common culture, permeated strongly his reading of Scott. The essay reverberates with the wish to place Scott at the centre of an acceptable British literary tradition.

Scott was, said Bagehot, in need of a good dusting. Bagehot noted that the "peculiar power" and "delight" which had previously

characterised Scott's reading, were waning. Both the generation contemporary with the novels, and that which had passed through boyhood in those years, had been in some way incapable of the distanced appraisal of Scott, for which Bagehot saw both need and opportunity as he wrote in the mid-Victorian Spring of 1858 :

A third generation has now risen into at least the commencement of literary life, which is quite removed from the unbounded enthusiasm with which the Scotch novels were originally received, and does not always share the still more eager partiality of those who, in the opening of their minds, first received the tradition of their excellence. New books have arisen to compete with these; new interests distract us from them. The time, therefore, is not perhaps unfavourable for a slight criticism of these celebrated fictions; and their continued republication without any criticism for many years seems almost to demand it.<sup>7</sup>

In the face of so much sensationalism in modern fiction, Scott, and in particular his 'Scotch' novels, might be a good counterweight in popular taste. The antiquarian and researching Scott was markedly absent from Bagehot's view, and for the most part we encounter only an 'overall' picture, whose main focus is the geniality and especially the 'charm' of these 'Scotch' novels. But only Guy Mannering and The Abbot were cited in any detail among the novels,

and this predominantly to illustrate single 'general' points, rather than as part of their examination as texts.

Scotland itself, of course, was charming the mid-Victorian public at large, in the years after the Queen's first journeys north in the 1840s. The delightful atmosphere of Scott's vanished recent past captivated Bagehot. For all that "great events, singular characters, strange accidents, strange states of society" were to be found in the Waverley Novels, yet, he wrote, there was no clear view of society :

Sir Walter had no *thesis* to maintain.<sup>8</sup>

While Scott had no grand plan, the novels did, however, amount to a single entity. "No one novel", said Bagehot, was "designed to be a delineation of the world." The Novels stood as a whole "for the slow critic of after-times to piece together their teaching." Scott was seen in terms of the functions performed by his work, which were common ones, shared by all the novels: solid teachings and useful leisure. At a time too much affected by the "passion of intellectual inquiry," the Waverley Novels

...are an excellent rest to those who have felt this passion, and have had something too much of it.<sup>9</sup>

Scott was wonderfully worldly. Scott's "healthy and genial" world

was acutely in tune with "undefined longing" whose universality united all religious creeds. It was in tune with "the worldly laws of moral government" which common-sense taught over the heads of fissiparous doctrines. And it offered the pleasure of an "appealing illusion" about the middle ages, very much to the taste of the present day.

In such qualities Bagehot found Scott to be perfect matter for the diverted and restless man of the modern world. In their essential and perennial truths about man, morals, society and faith, the *Waverley Novels* were considered suitable for the mind of the nineteenth century. The "inevitable superficiality of perusal," which the pace of modern living imposed on the mature reading public, made the novels ideal *popular* literature. It did not matter, asserted Bagehot, whether or not they were great - and he did find deficiencies - when they were so *appropriate* for the most important, and influential section of the reading public :

Their plain, and, so to say, cheerful merits, suit  
the occupied man of genial middle life.<sup>10</sup>

This was not only Bagehot's idealised Scott audience; it was also that of the *National Review* itself. And the 'broad sweep' version of Scott as a *generally* delightful writer - with whose detail, and whose literary, historical and social excavations we needed be little concerned - was ideally suited to the unfocussed remit characteristic of this form of review-writing.

This essay illustrates the ascendancy of the "review-like essay and the essay-like review,"<sup>11</sup> as vehicles for critical discourse in these years. Indeed, this kind of article served, in Houghton's words, as "the principal form of expository prose" at this time.<sup>12</sup> Bagehot, explaining the phenomenon in an 1855 essay on 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers,' saw the main elements as breadth of both subject-matter and perspective, and the inculcation of "suitable views" :

The modern man must be told what to think; shortly, no doubt, but he *must* be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes. *The Edinburgh Review*, which began the system, may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of 'right' thinking in Bagehot's work cannot be overestimated. His message for the modern world was very much of stability and continuity, and his work on Scott revolved around the idea of 'Common-sense.'

#### ***BAGEHOT'S CRITICISM : THE 'COMMON-SENSE' APPROACH***

The apparent disinterest of Bagehot's work, purporting to operate without a thesis was a vital part of his image as a critic. Indeed,

it was very much part of the tradition of Whiggish thought to which he belongs, in which his work has been significantly revalued in our own times. Norman St.John-Stevas, in editing the Collected Works in 1965, called him

...an amateur of genius with that breadth of mind and wide range of interests which to us looking back seems one of the most valuable and agreeable characteristics of the Victorian age.<sup>14</sup>

St.John-Stevas was himself attempting to place Bagehot in the centre of an idealised realm of 'disinterested' Victorianism, from which he could subsequently trace his own political ancestry. There was substance in this claim, in the extent to which the Victorian world of letters lacked a later dedicated professionalism in the critical sphere. Critics did, indeed, write about botany in the morning and Goethe in the afternoon. But to pretend that this 'amateur' eclecticism was ideological innocence would be folly. For in the notion of a 'common-sense' criticism we can too easily overlook the distinctive cultural territory inhabited by each of the periodicals. They did have an identity, and there was no mistaking the consistency of underlying viewpoint between editor and contributors.

But, said William Haley in an accompanying essay to that edition of the Collected Works, Bagehot on Scott was a great model of warm appreciation. There was no political motivation involved, because

Bagehot wrote from affection. It was the Bagehot who had Rob Roy beside him on his deathbed, his arm "always linked comfortably through Scott's," whom Haley saw. Bagehot, he maintained, was a wonderfully *uncompetitive* critic, who "ran a race with no one," and who, charmingly, "wrote about books and their authors because he liked doing so" :

Bagehot's approach to literature is rarely literary. As a critic, Bagehot evolved no theory that stands up to examination, inaugurated no fashion, made no discoveries, rearranged no order of values, founded no school. The literary quibbles that have long, and to an increasing degree, delighted the academic critics, he ignored. He was very often more interested in the man he was dealing with than in his writings. He used the works as signposts to the author's character, and he sought broadly to place both in a setting of the practice of life.<sup>15</sup>

The impression of objectivity has clearly been a convincing one. In his The Waverley Novels and their Critics (1936), James Hillhouse lighted on Bagehot's capacity to avoid undue prejudice for or against Scott. Bagehot wrote "sound, well-considered, and penetrating criticism," being "neither an encomiast nor a detractor." The 1858 essay was notable, in Hillhouse's estimation, as "the first thoroughgoing, carefully considered, and well-poised

analysis of Scott's genius," this based on an important quality in the writing - "dispassionate aloofness."<sup>16</sup>

This is a tribute indeed, to Bagehot's ability to create an atmosphere of easy, unsystematic criticism. Just as Arnold praised Bagehot's "simple truth", so Hillhouse was impressed by what appeared a cooler, more detached version of literary criticism than was previously the case.<sup>17</sup> What we should remark is the *absolute*, even holistic, manner in which Bagehot evidently apprehended artistic production. There were no room for equivocations and bifurcations. All was assertion, and there was certainly no place for analysis. In analysis, as he made plain in an 1864 essay, 'Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning,' was the death of art :

...a beautiful woman is a whole as she is; you no more take her to pieces than a Greek statue; she is not an aggregate of divisible charms, she is a charm in herself. Such ever is the dividing test of pure art; if you catch yourself admiring its details, it is defective; you ought to think of it as a single whole which you must remember, which you must admire, which somehow subdues you while you admire it...<sup>18</sup>

Not only do we here receive a sense of the man's Victorian sexual politics (Bagehot it was who epigrammed 'A man's mother is his misfortune, but his wife is his fault'), we also discover the



workings of 'commonsense' criticism - professedly innocent to the last. Bagehot's predilection for Scott expressed a quality in some literature which he calls a 'subduing'. This occurred not by minute delineation or intricacies of sensibility in the novels, but by an overall mood, an atmosphere which suited Bagehot's own sense of the *natural*. Bagehot's central contention about Scott was that the *Waverley* novels contained what he called a "sensible element", which rendered even Scott's historical inexactitudes acceptable and enjoyable.

The presence, above all, of "common sense" and a "healthiness" of outlook, were what impelled the eulogy of Scott which the essay increasingly became. Even in Scott's "errors" lay "a great... mixture of the mental element which we term common sense." In this element Bagehot lived and breathed. He located it in Scott, as the vital counterweight to any of the excesses - such as Jacobitism - to which the author was prone.

In this 'common-sense' element, too, was the excuse, the ballast which enabled Scott's forgiveness for perceived inadequacies, such as his depiction of women and understanding of the religious life. The fundamental "well-grounded sagacity and comprehensive appreciation of human life," on which the novels rested, were the assurances of a "healthy" message, deriving from a "strong *natural* nature."<sup>19</sup>

Bagehot's own work over several years as a critic was in some ways

epitomised in his essay on the *Waverley Novels*. It was at once literary, socio-cultural, and economic, considering what we may call their 'moral economy' and their use-value in the hurly-burly of the mid-nineteenth-century. Thus the essay gave an important contemporary perspective on Scott which went in tandem with Bagehot's constitutional and political preoccupations. These would, of course, lead, over the next decade, to the writing of his best-known work, The English Constitution (1865-67).

In this regard, Bagehot located some considerable importance in the diversity and range of Scott's characterisation. It was in a "*comprehensive* appreciation of human life" that Bagehot traced the origins of this strength. The role of oral culture and antiquarianism were not mentioned in the essay; Bagehot preferring to find a mystically 'natural' source for this fidelity to the lives of rural communities. Economic and social dimensions to the life of the poor were absent here. It was in their *acceptability* that the Novels were great achievements. Scott's art made the poor finer and nobler beings than they might have been :

His poor people are never coarse and never vulgar; their lineaments have the rude traits which a life of conflict will inevitably leave on the minds and manners of those who are to lead it; their notions have the narrowness which is inseparable from a contracted experience; their knowledge is not more extended than their restricted means of attaining

it would render possible. Almost alone among novelists Scott has given a thorough, minute, life-like description of poor persons, which is at the same time genial and pleasing...his artist's mind and genial disposition enabled him to dwell on those features which would be most pleasing to the world in general.<sup>20</sup>

In these charming poor of the Waverley Novels were the *real* poor of all ages. The nineteenth century poor, we can infer, could learn much from these characters. Far from being, as most later readings have found, individuals who speak their own minds, and mostly behave with a limited wish to be deferential to their social superiors, Bagehot described Scott's poor as "never coarse and never vulgar," and, above all, "genial and pleasing". Scott's instinct, Bagehot judged, was correct in presenting "those features which would be most pleasing to the world in general." Moreover, Bagehot urged his readers to find, in Scott's poor, fidelity to the "rough industry...plain joys and sorrows" of this class of our fellow-creatures.<sup>21</sup>

But Bagehot did acknowledge a formal problem in the novels, the fact of Scott's attention being incorrigibly directed towards the peripheral characters of, particularly, his 'Scotch' novels. In 1856 Bagehot had already made this point: but at that stage, digressing to bring in Scott in the course of an essay on Macaulay, he had merely mentioned what he perceived as a weakness :

...(the novels') central figure is frequently not their most interesting topic...their interest is often rather in the accessories than in the essential principle - in that which surrounds the centre of narration rather than in the centre itself.<sup>22</sup>

For Bagehot, the 'essential' part of a subject - be it literary, philosophical, or any other - was the underlying message which it had for the world. To what values in actual, practical living would it conduce? The need was at all times for sound instruction, that men would have better oracles and better moral touchstones than their own wayward judgements :

On politics, on religion, on all less important topics still more, every one thinks himself competent to think,- in some casual manner does think,- to the best of our means must be taught to think rightly...We must speak to the many so that they will listen, - that they will like to listen,- that they will understand.<sup>23</sup>

The task, for Bagehot, was that of a national proselytiser. To read his criticism is to uncover something of a mid-Victorian mission. The Prospectus to the *National Review* revealed this dimension: here was Bagehot setting out principal elements in the 'national character' to which he looked for a standard, for a continuity of

tradition :

As Englishmen we place unbounded confidence in the basis of English character - its moderation and veracity; its firm hold on reality; its reverence for law and right; its historical tenacity; its aversion to *a priori* politics, and to revolutions generated out of speculative data.<sup>24</sup>

The "healthy and natural sense" of the Waverley Novels was perfectly in keeping with this national character. And the purpose of reviewing itself was to be defined in these terms, too - as necessarily unspeculative, unsystematic, in a way certainly not shared by Stephen when editing the *Cornhill* some years later.

But, in what Bagehot saw as an unspeculative land, the notion of a literary canon was clearly anathema. He did not acknowledge that a canon was implied by the enterprise of selection for review. Rather the *National's* literary mission would be to make simple connections between national histories or biographical circumstances, and the heritage of great works :

We wish as before to secure more constant reference to ascertained principle than we think is now common; but at the same time, we shall not try to apply arbitrary canons to all writers and all ages, but rather to examine and describe the real

features of great literary nations and writers, and explain the manner in which the genius and circumstances of each have influenced the works they have bequeathed to us...<sup>25</sup>

In the term 'principle' is a hint of a body of ideas transferable from one review to another; and even this small nod towards the existence of a coherent and consistent literary-critical practice was rare in mid-century. But the unity, of what we might today conceive as discrete academic disciplines, was the most notable avowal here. The idea of the 'purely' literary, or indeed the 'purely' political or economic, would have baffled Bagehot's comprehension, for he saw interconnectedness on every hand. The predominant reference-points, though, were "the real life we see around us," "the facts of life." Constant reference thereto would ensure that literature of every kind inculcated sound morality, and the achievement of what in Scott's case he called "a hidden imperceptible principle of apportionment."<sup>26</sup> A good system of internal 'justice', such as Scott's works possessed, would finally reflect "the condition of life" :

Taking a firm and genial view of the common facts of life,- seeing it as an experienced observer and tried man of action,- he could not help giving the representation of it which is insensibly borne in on the minds of such persons. He delineates it as a world moving according to laws which are always

producing their effect, never *have* produced it; sometimes fall short a little; are always nearly successful. Good sense produces its effect, as well as good intention; ability is valuable as well as virtue.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of their teachings, the Waverley Novels exhibited the instinctive quality which marked out right morality. For Bagehot, morality was, as for Carlyle, felt, before understood. The strength of the inherited qualities of national character could help to provide an "inward consciousness" of right and wrong, that was more than conscience. Criticism must refer to this profound understanding in the national character, which lived by dint of the power of a good conscience. An 1862 Essay, 'The Ignorance of Man,' explained the process by which 'right' understanding was shaped :

We feel first the intrinsic qualities of good actions and bad actions...we expect consequences apportioned to our actions, good and evil...The coalescence of instincts effects what no other contrivance known to us could effect; it enables us to be disinterested...<sup>28</sup>

Disinterest was needed for the kind of indirect instruction which Bagehot perceived to be the most efficacious. The age was undergoing influences which were insidiously deleterious. It was through leisure, and above all through reading, that sound ideas

and 'right' thinking were to be inculcated. The threat of the opposing and valueless nihilism of cheap and sensationalist literature was too great to be ignored :

Exaggerated emotions, violent incidents, monstrous characters, crowd our canvas; they are the resource of a weakness which would obtain the fame of strength. Reading is about to become a series of collisions against aggravated breakers, of beatings with imaginary surf.<sup>29</sup>

For Bagehot, the role of the imagination was a limited one. Such loss of contact with 'the facts', with the practicalities of living, was irresponsible at such an excitable juncture in the nation's history. As he explained in an essay of 1856, 'healthy writing' could counteract feverish and sickly notions :

In such times a book of sensible attraction is a public benefit; it diffuses a sensation of vigour though the multitude... (people's) minds should be stimulated by a consciousness of health and power.<sup>30</sup>

The functions of literary criticism, then, incorporated those of a kind of moral guard-dog for the nation. In the wide-ranging concerns of the critic, the Waverley Novels were, because of their cultural centrality, important territory. Scott was 'safe' for the



masses to read; and, what is more, he was more exciting than most such 'safe' literature. No false notions of right and wrong would be inferred from Scott, whose distinctive "health and power" positively resonated through what Bagehot described as his "laws of retribution" whose "steady and consistent operation" provided the sure and common-sense centre of Scott's fictional world - and thus the reader's imagination.<sup>31</sup>

#### *SCOTT'S 'GENIAL' POOR AND THE TROUBLE WITH DEMOCRACY*

Bagehot did not so much seek to trace a rationale in Scott, as to claim an authority from him for the British constitutional settlement. Scott was seen to have underwritten the Victorian construction of consensus. Bagehot was committed to firm views as to the structuring of English - by which he implied British - society. This had ramifications for the nature of representative government under democracy. The axiom he set down early in The English Constitution was this :

The principle of popular government is that the supreme power, the determined efficacy in matters political, resides in the people - not necessarily or commonly in the whole people, in the numerical majority, but in a *chosen* people, a picked and selected people. It is so in England; it is so in all free countries.<sup>32</sup>

In this above all *representative* system of government, with all the limitations deliberately placed upon the number of those acting in the capacity of the Executive, Bagehot's was not, however, an attempt overtly to re-establish oligarchical government. Although both the Scott essay and The English Constitution appeared at a time of debate surrounding the extension of the franchise, Bagehot sought in these, as in his other works, more to trace the importance of continuity and stability within British representative government, than to recommend any one specific formula for a system of government. Having said that, however, he noticeably opposed moves for immediate expansion of the franchise.

He was, on the whole, setting out the continuities in elective government, those elements with whose abrupt cessation government would founder. He emphasised the need for consent in the electorate. No matter how small be the number of representatives, "The first pre-requisite of elective government is the *mutual confidence* of the electors."<sup>33</sup>

Even given this consent to govern, though, the argument from abstract right was for him insupportable. In repeated instances, he stressed the importance of *practicality* and the appeal to effectiveness in all constitutional matters. An example is the objection he made, in separate writings, to the proposed increases in the franchise. Logic, he claimed, was of limited value in the constitutional reality of Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century. His argument was that the number of those governing might,

in theory, be of any dimension, but was, at the end of the day, ever illogical. The number was essentially, and rightly, a matter of quite other issues than mere logic. In an 1866 essay for *The Economist* responding to a pro-Reform speech by John Bright, he made this point :

Nor can we recognise the implied assertion that seven millions of voters have a perfect right to govern the British Empire which contains 260 millions of people, while a million have only an imperfect right. As the Empire must be governed by a section of its inhabitants, the limit of that section must be a matter of policy and consideration and not of abstract right.<sup>34</sup>

This understanding of the meaning of democracy was of great importance in his reading of Scott. The people were not the culturally-distinct groups whom Scott had meticulously depicted; they were masses. Bagehot, consequently, was blind to the value of language and belief in the novels, and equated Scott's picture of the peasantry solely with the value of the profoundly unequal social system in operation. He was, in the representative phrase of his essay, that Scott's essence was the "strange varieties and motley composition of human life," undoubtedly making significant judgements about Scott's understanding of social hierarchy.<sup>35</sup>

Scott's depicting the qualities of pre-democratic society, pre-

French Revolution society, suggested, to Bagehot, that he was, in so doing, upholding the justice and correctness of inequalities. And this admittedly imperfect system was preferred to the drab monolith of democracy. As the essay put it, the novels gave the "varied imagination of humanity," lest the "uniform and stereotyped rights of man"

...sweep away this entire picture, level prince and peasant in a common égalité,- substitute a scientific rigidity for the irregular and picturesque growth of centuries,- replace an abounding and genial life by a symmetrical but lifeless mechanism.<sup>36</sup>

The Waverley Novels' greatest achievement, therefore, was in showing

...those varied crowds and assemblages which concentrate for a moment into a unity the scattered and unlike varieties of mankind.<sup>37</sup>

In this variegated, unequal periphery, and not the fictional centre, Bagehot found the essence of Scott's work. The tentative allusion to this dimension made in the Macaulay essay two years earlier, was now a confident assertion. For in rich, and removable inequality, he found the motive force for society's onward and upward movement. This was Scott's true subject :

...the principal form and object were...the undulation and diversified composition of human society; the picture of this stood in the centre, and every thing else was accessory and secondary to it.<sup>38</sup>

Crucially for Bagehot's argument, the preoccupation with 'ordinary' life, which clearly could be profoundly subversive, given the enormous readership, was ballasted by the anti-democratic foundations of Scott's thought. The Waverley Novels achieved much, and were works of distinction, for a wide range of reasons; but none was more important than their basis in a healthy 'common sense' about the structure of society. It was Scott's sound and *balanced* approach to practicalities, his "natural feelings, plain thoughts, and applied sagacity,"<sup>39</sup> more than 'literary' considerations, which Bagehot again and again stressed. Scott's achievement rested on his

...subtle compound of the natural instinct of the artist with the plain sagacity of the man of the world.<sup>40</sup>

And, in Bagehot's eyes, this compound made for a kind of innocent disinterest about political realities. Scott rendered the richness of the mass as it was, without drawing any imprudent political conclusions. In a bold sentence from The English Constitution, we see Bagehot's clear position on the 'masses' :

The masses of England are not fit for an elective government; if they knew how near they were to it, they would be surprised and almost tremble.<sup>41</sup>

And reasonable opinion, Bagehot asserted, would agree with his verdict. The 'understood' quality of 'civilisation' must remain at the centre of any criterion for the franchise. The masses were simply backward :

We have in a great community like England crowds of people scarcely more civilized than the majority of two thousand years ago; we have others even more numerous such as the best people were a thousand years since. The lower orders, the middle orders, are still, when tried by what is the standard of the educated 'ten thousand', narrow-minded, unintelligent, incurious.<sup>42</sup>

In Bagehot's view, the unevenness of progress had serious implications for any who would propound a more democratic system of government. The Essay on Scott cited the Chapter 18 arrival of Roland Graeme at Holyrood, in The Abbot, as a good instance of that richness in variety on which not only the Waverley Novels, but the whole of civil society rested. Here, in the "gay and splendid confusion" of the court, with the soldiery, tradesmen, suitors, courtiers, statesmen and others all around, Roland - and thus the

reader - felt an "exuberance of astonishment" at the scene.<sup>43</sup> The "common *égalité*" to which all would have been reduced under democracy, was, for Bagehot, no gain, when considered alongside the loss of this wonder, this marvelling at *difference* in degree and status.

Bagehot embroidered on Scott's objection to democracy. He used a vivid contrast of ideas - "an abounding and genial life" against "a symmetrical but lifeless mechanism" - to strengthen his own gradualist argument. And he saw the Waverley Novels as charming documents, whose political naiveté was a delightful tilt at the sour and mechanistic proponents of democracy.

Bagehot was associating Scott's political values with the broadly Whiggish consensus, against a precipitate extension of the franchise, which characterised the Palmerston years. Part of this consensus was the acceptance of individual self-improvement as the means by which society as a whole progressed. These words of Palmerston's echoed around the eighteen-fifties like a catechism :

...a nation, in which every class of society accepts with cheerfulness the lot which Providence has assigned to it; while at the same time every individual of each class is constantly striving to raise himself in the social scale - not by injustice and wrong, not by violence and illegality, but by preserving good conduct, and by

the steady and energetic execution of the moral and intellectual faculties with which his creator has endowed him.<sup>44</sup>

Bagehot saw Scott finally as a sensible man, uniquely combining Tory reverence for the past with Whiggish belief in selective, tasteful progress. He found a 'material' Scott because he looked for one. Bagehot, indeed, considered belief itself not to be a cultural construct, emerging from environment, tradition and economic realities. He saw it as a rather pliable element in human nature, superficial and eminently capable of being manipulated. The greatest power in a society, he averred, was the "theatrical show" which lasting institutions of the nation offered, for this element was what people actually deferred to in their relations with one another :

There is in England a certain charmed spectacle which imposes on the many, and guides their fancies.<sup>45</sup>

As a result Bagehot, by his cognitive emphasis on the intuited, and finding in Scott the explications, speculations, origins and so on, which underpinned culture itself in the novels, dubbed Scott 'spiritually vacant.' Bagehot made of faith itself exclusively a matter of *personal* sensibility. Scott, Bagehot told his readers, "omits to give us a delineation of the soul" :



We have mind, manners, animation, but it is the stir of this world. We miss the consecrating power...<sup>46</sup>

That consecrating power was the *personal faith*, which was, perhaps, in the novels, rather subordinate to social feelings. The perceived omission was the basis of the overall lack which Carlyle, too, had felt in Scott: "the cumbrousness and temporality, in short, the materialism, which is characteristic of the world."<sup>47</sup> There was a sort of freakish absent-mindedness in Scott, an aspect of his character which, in Bagehot's eyes, would have been better absent, but which readers had to put up with. For Bagehot saw Scott's "geniality", and "practical sagacity" as his *essential* nature, and the "half-poetic" side of him, which had led to these irrationalities of Jacobitism and superstition, as a regrettable adjunct :

...as a sort of absurd reliance on the hereditary principle modified insensibly his leanings in the practical world, so a belief in the existence of unevidenced, and often absurd, supernatural beings, qualifies his commonest speculations on the higher world.<sup>48</sup>

For all the weaknesses on the plane of religious conviction, though, Bagehot always saw the "easy satisfaction of the world" as a greater factor in Scott than "the uneasy belief of

superstition." Bagehot admitted, though, that Scott did not adequately bring these two opposing elements to a reconciliation, yet the "robust imagination" was ever carrying the reader along with the "vigorous fancy" of "unconscious creation."<sup>49</sup> It was a profoundly Anglo-Saxon practicality which characterised Sir Walter's work.

Bagehot attributed Scott's views to the "applied sagacity" which he brought to his work; melding detailed study of history with life-experience. This enabled him to detach himself from the perils of excessive "sentiment." Sir Walter thus achieved a *balance*. In the same way, Bagehot considered, the nineteenth century as a whole had moved through periods of exaggerated harshness and then sentimentality, to a balance in mid-century :

The unfeeling obtuseness of the early part of this century was to be corrected by an extreme - perhaps an excessive - sensibility to human suffering in the years which have followed. There was most adequate reason for the sentiment in its origin, and it had a great task to perform in ameliorating harsh customs and repealing dreadful penalties.<sup>50</sup>

Bagehot's preoccupation was with the social system. The middle century needed a responsible fiction, and Scott, for Bagehot, offered sufficient detachment to depict the wrongs of society in a truthful but safe way. He did not distort poverty, for example,

through excessive sentiment; neither did he attribute to the poor an unnecessary "Arcadian simplicity." By contrast, the poor in Dickens, for example,

...have taken to their poverty very thoroughly; they are poor talkers and poor livers, and in all ways poor people to read about.<sup>51</sup>

There were undeclared rules concerning what should be subject-matter for the novel. There were limits to the role of fiction in dealing with social realities :

A good deal of the character of the poor is an unfit topic for continuous art...Mean manners and mean vices are unfit for prolonged delineation; the everyday pressure of narrow necessities is too petty a pain and too anxious a reality to be dwelt upon.<sup>52</sup>

By the same token, Scott's "genial disposition" and "firm and instructed genius" prevented his entering the realm of unreality in his fiction. He avoided "theoretical plans of impossible relief," and instead, like a good practical honorary Victorian, "makes the best of the life which is given." His fiction, Bagehot considered, reflected his own approach as a landlord.

His poor people are never coarse and never vulgar; their lineaments have the rude traits which a life of conflict will inevitably leave on the minds and manners of those who are to lead it...He sympathises with their rough industry and plain joys and sorrows.<sup>53</sup>

Scott's success was in marshalling his study and his experience to produce

...a thorough, minute, life-like description of poor persons, which is at the same time both genial and pleasing.<sup>54</sup>

The issue of the depiction of the poor, for Bagehot, was as one with the creation of what he called "anomalous" characters - Meg Merrilies, Edie Ochiltree, Radcliffe and others. Because these were shown to emerge from a real and substantial world, their eccentricity is accepted :

...the fundamental explanation of this remarkable success is the distinctness with which Scott saw how such a character as Meg Merrilies arose and was produced out of the peculiar circumstances of gipsy life in the localities in which he has placed his scene...Monstrosity ceases to be such when we discern the laws of nature which evolve it; when a

real science explains its phenomena, we find that it is in strict accordance with what we call the natural type; but that some rare adjunct or uncommon casualty has interfered and distorted a nature which is really the same, into a phenomenon which is altogether different.<sup>55</sup>

There was here a notion of 'normality', in which Scott's characters fitted somewhat uneasily. If it weren't for some freakish upsets to the natural, healthy order of things - the Whiggish consensus - there would be no such abnormalities as these individuals. Literature was performing its correct function in society when it explained the curious in terms of the ordinary.

Moreover, the *practicality* for which Bagehot sought in Scott's work was of paramount importance here, as the essay excluded all but the briefest consideration of the creative process. Scott, Bagehot perfunctorily suggested, created "by one bounding effort," and this was the right way. This element of Scott's work, however, was but a brief supplement at the essay's close.

These aspects, and the whole matter of the role of 'Story' in fiction, were subordinated to the social and political implications of the writer's "strictly conservative" imagination. Bagehot's points of reference were 'in the world,' and the function of literature was quasi-sociological. It was in "practical human society, with its cares and troubles, its

excitements and its pleasures" that was to be found the basis of Scott's *Truth*.<sup>56</sup>

He could understand (with a few exceptions) any considerable movement of human life and action, and could always describe with easy freshness every thing which he did understand; but he was not obliged by stress of fanaticism to maintain a dogma concerning them...<sup>57</sup>

Bagehot, in sentence after sentence of confident prose, invoked the great mid-century spirit of practicality. The 'practical' cast of mind, a recognisable trait of the age, was a very Victorian feature, with which Scott was posthumously honoured. It had been espied arising, and subsequently defined, by John Stuart Mill in his 1831 'The Spirit of the Age.' Mill saw this as the end of the worship of the expert :

Every dabbler...thinks his opinion as good as another's...It is rather the person who *has* studied the subject systematically that is regarded as disqualified. He is a *theorist*: and the word which expresses the highest and noblest effort of human intelligence is turned into a bye-word of derision. People pride themselves upon taking a 'plain, matter-of-fact' view of a subject...Men form their

opinions according to natural shrewdness, without any of the advantages of study.<sup>58</sup>

Mill's words predicted the age of Bagehot and his kind, as illustrated in the comments above from the latter's 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers' essay of 1855. For Bagehot, the man of the middle century was the man of business, a man with a hatred of "elaborate trifling," who prided himself on probing the heart of the matter, most of his life being spent "in a sort of twilight...an atmosphere of probabilities and of doubt, where nothing is very clear."<sup>59</sup> In practicality of disposition he found clarity.

The predominant element in Bagehot's thought, however, which set him apart from the 'anti-intellectuals' of the time, and established him as a Whig, was his assertion of the necessity of governmental authority. The English Constitution may be a "curious accumulation" of various elements from the nation's past and present, but there were certain inescapable truths to its nature and composition, to which Bagehot adverted on many occasions. "The essence," he wrote, "of a civilised age, is that administration requires the continued aid of legislation."

Government must, moreover, be exercised with regard to the obvious unfitness of the majority of the population to govern, and the present need for his own brand of versatile disinterestedness:

A life of labour, an incomplete education, a monotonous occupation, a career in which the hands are used much and the judgment is used little, cannot create as much flexible thought, as much applicable intelligence, as a life of leisure, a long culture, a varied experience, an existence by which the judgment is incessantly exercised, and by which it may be incessantly improved...<sup>60</sup>

It was not only that Bagehot was promoting the social and political usefulness of his own social group - to which Scott was perceived to have, unknowingly, belonged - it was also that the maintenance of the discourse of a relatively few people was at stake. The appeal in the 1850s and 60s was to what Matthew Arnold later identified as 'Civilisation', an intuitive quality associated with "the accomplishments and taste of an upper class," but sometimes developed "among the professions, or military men, or literary men." It was, however, certainly not discernible below that rank :

If I say that certain things in certain classes do not come up to a high standard of civilisation, I need not prove how and why they do not; you will feel instinctively whether they do or no. If they do not, I need not prove that this is a bad thing, that a high standard of civilisation is desirable; you will instinctively feel that it is. Instead of



calling this 'the most aristocratic and exclusive place out,' I conceive of it as a *civilised* place; and in speaking about civilisation half one's labour is saved when one speaks about it among those who are civilised.<sup>61</sup>

Just as Bagehot stressed abstractions of national character, and essential institutions, so Arnold's mode of 'right' feeling sought to redirect middle-class discourse in a more useful direction at a pivotal time, given the changing social structure of the 50s and 60s. To the realities of continuing violence, exploitation and poverty, daily concerns of many, as Asa Briggs has pointed out, the mid century turned not an enquiring gaze, but "a comfortable blanket of morality", making the focus of attention the distinction between the 'respectable' or 'deserving' poor and the rest, rather than the causes of poverty itself.<sup>62</sup>

The conclusion of Bagehot's line of gradualist thought, steeped in the values of the beautifully inessential in society, was that there was a real social use-value in inequality, in distinction. Gladstone expressed this clearly in his assertion, that the "love of inequality," a complement of 'the ancient English love of freedom,'

...is an active, living, and life-giving power, which forms an inseparable essential element in our

political habits of mind, and asserts itself at every step in the processes of our system.<sup>63</sup>

The concept of the national character as innately competitive and combative, geared to the ideals of business and empire, had definite implications for culture. Bagehot, as a review editor, was himself acutely aware of competing in a market, and sought to present Scott as relevant for the modern literary market. Even the rarefied atmosphere of the world of letters demanded promotional tactics.

In this purpose, Bagehot set out not to show Scott as a writer whose concern was with human beings and their problems of identity in fluid social and historical situations. This would have involved a dynamic Scott, a more problematic one. Rather he presented Scott as simple, genial and prudent, and *thus* relevant.

What Bagehot emphasised above all in Scott's treatment of social relations was an insistence on pragmatism. In Guy Mannering, claimed Bagehot, more than any other text, the reader could see the importance attached by Scott to how change is introduced. Bagehot selected a long quotation from Chapter Six to illustrate Scott's "strong sense and genial mind" in matters of political economy. I here reproduce only a part of the quotation, whose length is significant in the context of the essay. "Like a new broom," as Scott put it, the new Laird of Ellangowan

...ruthlessly commenced his magisterial reform, at the expense of various established and superannuated pickers and stealers who had been his neighbours for half a century...He detected poachers, black-fishers, orchard-breakers, and pigeon-shooters ; had the applause of the bench for his reward, and the public credit of an active magistrate.

All this good had its rateable proportion of evil. Even an admitted nuisance, of ancient standing, should not be abated without some caution. The zeal of our worthy friend now involved in great distress sundry personages whose idle and mendicant habits his own *lâcheté* had contributed to foster until these habits had become irreclaimable...The "long remembered beggar" who for twenty years had made his regular rounds within the neighbourhood, received rather as an humble friend than as an object of charity, was sent to the neighbouring workhouse. The decrepit dame who travelled round the parish upon a hand-barrow, circulating from house to house like a bad shilling, which everyone is in haste to pass to his neighbour,...even she shared the same disastrous fate. The "daft Jock," who, half knave, half idiot, had been the sport of each succeeding race of village children for a good part of a century, was remitted to the county

bridewell, where, secluded from free air and sunshine, - the only advantages he was capable of enjoying, - he pined and died in the course of six months. The old sailor, who had so long rejoiced the smoky rafters of every kitchen in the country, by singing 'Captain Ward' and 'Bold Admiral Benbow,' was banished from the county for no better reason, than that he was supposed to speak with a strong Irish accent. Even the annual rounds of the pedlar were abolished by the Justice, in his hasty zeal for the administration of rural police.<sup>64</sup>

It is in this issue, of the relations between different social groups, that we see Bagehot most eager to be right. This was the only text selected for quotation in the Scott essay, and Bagehot was clearly keen to assert some sense of a wider, community interest in Scott's polemic. While there was no direct consideration of the implications of this passage, despite its length, nevertheless an important part of Bagehot's argument was involved here. For he made the point that "the formal deductions of abstract economy" had little appeal to Scott, whose depiction of life constituted not a paltry imitation of reality, with its "inexact distribution of good and evil". Scott had rather presented a version of reality imbued with a "healthy and natural sense" which lent his world its "characteristic charm." The analysis of Scott here implies his own assent to consensus and the common weal :

...with the facts before him, he could give a very satisfactory exposition of the genial consequences of old abuses, the distinct necessity for stern reform, and the delicate humanity requisite for introducing that reform temperately and with feeling...<sup>65</sup>

These typical features of "the Scotch novels" appealed to "the natural sense of common readers". Bagehot also considered them to be signs of a keen understanding of 'practical economics'.<sup>66</sup> What Bagehot was concerned with here was the *administration* of the estate, its management. Guy Mannering was reduced to a series of problems in judicious reform. Bagehot's interest in the characters ill-treated by the Laird's blundering reforms was minimal. The beggar, the dame, the "daft Jock", the poachers and all the others whom Scott identifies as types affected, were not considered other than as ciphers, as the passive objects of estate management practices.

#### *SCOTT'S ROLE IN BAGEHOT'S SUPPORT OF THE STATUS QUO*

Bagehot's has been described as the "typically Victorian" mind.<sup>67</sup> His most marked features - eclecticism, sense of tradition, and commitment to administrative efficiency - above all and most powerfully evinced in The English Constitution, were principally employed in defence of the political status quo. In this sense,

then, he perhaps perfectly represented the backward-looking and incurably cautious civil servant dimension of Victorianism.

Further in this regard, we can see his failure to understand such worlds as Scott depicts as a strong characteristic of the very metropolitan, literate, well-connected English culture, which has been the overwhelming basis of what we understand as 'Victorian'. His conceptions were throughout his opus vitally dependent on the <sup>^</sup>côterie nature of the political and cultural debate in which he engaged in mid-century. As Asa Briggs puts it,

Free discussion was possible only because a relatively small number of people took part in it. The free interchange of ideas was for the few rather than for the many, and it was more often conducted in private than in public.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, it was central to Bagehot's justification of a limited participation in government that there existed a certain racial stolidity, a resistance to change, found in 'the English'. Unfamiliarity, he pointed out, was frequently presented as sufficient :

'I never heard of such a thing in my life,' the middle-class Englishman says, and he thinks he so refutes an argument...<sup>69</sup>

Of course, this purports to be an accusation by Bagehot of racial narrow-mindedness; it emerges as rather more by way of admiration. What this faith in the status quo amounted to, in constitutional terms, was that habits of deference were present. Bagehot did not for a moment suggest the inadequacy of this; indeed, he saw political contentment and deference as both unalterable facts about "the English people." There was a contentment, above all, about "the theatrical show of society," that "charmed spectacle" to which they were habituated.

Tradition, for Bagehot, was not a matter of feeling, of sensed community, or of lives intermingled through numerous connections past and present; it was part of the means by which government maintained its small social base. There were certain elements to government, the "*theatrical*" elements, which were to be judged in terms of the *results* that accrued :

That which is mystic in its claims; that which is occult in mode of action; that which is brilliant to the eye; that which is seen vividly for a moment, and then is seen no more; that which is hidden and unhidden; that which is specious, and yet interesting - palpable in its seeming, and yet professing to be more than palpable in its results;- this...is the sort of thing - the only sort which yet comes home to the mass of men.<sup>70</sup>

This detachment from "the mass of men" had ramifications for his view of literature. For, as he wrote in the Scott essay, "An element of exaggeration clings to the popular judgement." The novelist's task was to recognise this truth, and to work within the popular conception of his subject, making no attempt to challenge that view. Froude's depiction of Henry the Eighth's character, Bagehot tells us, was only accepted by the public because substantiated by "a rigid adherence to attested facts and authentic documents." This, he wrote, was "reasoning." If the same views had been presented in a novel, they would have been rejected, because taken as mere "fancies."

These are revealing comparisons for Bagehot's view of the historical novel as a form. The received impressions would be immutable, except under certain conditions :

A great and acute writer may from an accurate study of original documents discover that those impressions are erroneous, and by a process of elaborate argument substitute others which he deems more accurate. But this can only be effected by writing a regular history.<sup>71</sup>

Literature, for Bagehot, was not meant to *change* views; it could only work within accepted meanings and understandings. Its function was not to avoid reality, and enter the realm of analysis or speculative thought, but rather to present worthwhile models



and examples *from life*. In the hurly-burly of the daily struggle should writers find their meed.

He set out his considerations on the 'true' nature of good and bad literature most clearly in an 1864 essay on English poets, in which he made the point that "poetry is a serious and deep thing," deserving of a coherent and serious criticism. In a rare moment of systematic exposition of his beliefs, Bagehot announced with confidence that "true literature...

...describes sorts, varieties, and permutations, by delineating the type of each sort, the ideal of each variety, the central, the marking trait of each permutation...On this account, the greatest artists of the world have ever shown an enthusiasm for reality. To care for notions and abstractions; to philosophise; to reason out conclusions; to care for schemes of thought, are signs in the artistic mind of secondary excellence... (The greatest artist) finds his mental occupation, the true home of his natural thoughts, in the real world - 'which is the world of all of us' - where the face of nature, the moving masses of men and women, are ever changing, ever multiplying, ever mixing one with the other.<sup>72</sup>

The 'real world' was the locus for valid literary raw material. From its unsystematic nature Bagehot could derive principles based on some kind of 'common sense' or prior knowledge. To this, in his considered opinion, the reasoner, the expounder of theories, and in particular the professional historian, such as Macaulay, had no effective riposte. A concern with stones or trees - as exhibited by the 'scientific' mind - and not with the struggles of 'real life', was reprehensible. The historian may not plumb the worst depths of abstracted and irrelevant scrutiny of the inanimate - like the naturalist - but still he was, ipso facto, "too dull to take the common interest in life." "Languor" and "sluggishness" predominated over "zeal" and "passion."<sup>73</sup>

Macaulay was the historian par excellence, and Bagehot was not moved by his dispassionate certainty. In historical study, doubts were of the essence, Bagehot asserted. The good writer of history did as Scott did, in celebrating with energy and enthusiasm the magic of the past. Wanting in abstract, dull, Macaulayite history, was a sense of the world passing "with a thrill of delight," "exultation in a daily event, zest in the 'regular thing,' joy at an old feast."<sup>74</sup>

Bagehot, in this emphasis on the everyday and the actual, kept a sense of the 'common reader' to hand throughout his work. But this sense was very much related to the supposed interests and habits of the modern 'common reader', and did not enable any concern with Scott's sociological interests. Bagehot's imaginary audience was a

market. The role and adequacy of criticism itself, as much as any works under consideration, was of central importance. But it was the market-view of the world, and the Whig's doubts about democracy, that fired this concern. It was ever the opinion of "the bald-headed man at the back of the omnibus"<sup>75</sup> of which Bagehot was most keenly aware. He would have writers canvass and mould :

The man of the modern world is used to speak what the modern world will hear; the writer of the modern world must write what that world will indulgently and pleasantly peruse.<sup>76</sup>

It was in that "applied sagacity" and "geniality," to which Bagehot frequently adverted, that Scott was most valuable. This value was especially significant, given the nature of modern reading and modern thought, about both of which Bagehot had reservations. "The multitude," he wrote in his essay on 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers' in 1855, "are impatient of discussion, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality." The modern reader had "a head full of sums," his mind preoccupied by "the buying and bargaining universe." The pursuit of review-writing, even,

...but exemplifies the casual character of modern literature. Everything about it is temporary and fragmentary...The race has made up its mind to be fugitive, as well as minute.<sup>77</sup>

Scott was increasingly being perceived as a bulwark against such trends. His lack of a sharp or systematic approach was a great strength, since in place of this he was perceived to have possessed more 'eternal' qualities. These were particularly associated, in Bagehot's view, with the immense continuities in society from a rich, stable and less "temporary" past. In Scott, "every habit and practice of old Scotland was inseparably in his mind associated with genial enjoyment."

In this access to the heart and soul of the past Bagehot located what he felt to be Scott's true genius. This was the 'health', 'geniality' and 'sagacity' for which the essay so fulsomely praised the novelist. By apprehending reality with zeal and passion, rather than a microscope, Scott brought to the reader the ebb and flow of everyday life in its complexity and fundamental 'truths'. In Scott's lack of systematic thought lay the key to his "fresh" pictures, his "healthiness", his "practicality". These attributes, Bagehot concluded, gave him the peculiar humanity for which his work should be most valued :

It is a great good that...(people's) minds should be stimulated by a consciousness of health and power.<sup>78</sup>

CHAPTER V :JOHN RUSKIN- SCOTT, PURITY AND HONOUR*RUSKIN - 'SCOTT'S GREATEST FAN'*

John Ruskin (1819-1900) art critic, would-be social reformer and philosopher, artist and architect, stands for us today visibly one of the great Victorian 'prophets', influential and unavoidable. As we survey his writings today, his abiding concern in a vast literary output over more than half-a-century, may be seen as having been a search for final Truth in the criticism of both art and society. In this enterprise he represents for us an amazingly self-assured side of Victorianness, striving to make sense of the world around, and consequently most at home in a teaching, advising, railing mode.

His quintessentially historicist approach to all issues made him, as Joan Abse has described, "Janus-faced, looking backwards and forwards for a synthetic solution to the unjust society in which he lived."<sup>1</sup> In his backward looking, he found the work of Scott a

fount of irreversible and unchallengeable truths. Ruskin was, quite simply, Scott's greatest fan.

As Peter Morgan has noted, from Ruskin's student days in the 1830s, and throughout his life, Scott occupied a pre-eminent position among creative minds of all ages. With Dante, Tintoretto, Velazquez, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Turner, Scott had an eternal standard of "ethical greatness." This emerged from the morality of conduct and idiom present in his work, and was felt to be most available in the personal qualities of his fictional characters.<sup>2</sup>

And this awe, this hero-worship, was largely the result of Ruskin's sense, that in the pages of Scott - just as in the works of the other giants of Art - there spoke the enduring voice of a superior past. Scott stood for a morally-powerful imaginative alternative to the present. Of systematic criticism there is none, characteristically for Ruskin, but there is a plethora of scattered, though significant references throughout the Ruskin opus. The full weight of Scottophilia can be discerned on a thorough trawl.

Scott popped up everywhere: in Modern Painters (1843-1860), The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849), The Stones of Venice (1851-1853), 'The Two Paths' (1859), 'Sesame and Lilies' (1865), Fors Clavigera (1871-1884), 'Val d'Arno' (1874), 'Fiction Fair and Foul' (1880), and Praeterita (1885-1889). Most reference was to novels, in particular The Heart of Midlothian, The Monastery, Redgauntlet

and The Fortunes of Nigel ; but the Poems were clearly lasting favourites also. The terms and commitment remained constant over the years, and so I have extracted thematically, rather than chronologically, from Ruskin's works.

In these adversions to Scott we find an admiration of both man and work, the two intertwined as a vital moral and spiritual force, on which Ruskin was veritably weaned. Ruskin's Scott recognisably overlaps with the idealisation of the past which strongly characterises much of his work. A dominating sense of the importance of the past, in a troubled present, was a direct result of his early educational experience, of which Scott was an important part, and which was related in the autobiographical Praeterita. Experience of his father's reading aloud from Homer, Shakespeare, Pope, Spenser, Byron and Scott, constituted, for the infant Ruskin, "the best poetry and prose" available to mankind. Such works seemed to give onto a realm of perfected humanity, all "heroic will and consummate reason."<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, this culture led Ruskin to develop a sensibility in which perception and emotion were fundamentally associated with the experience of literary narrative and artistic production, rather than direct life-experience. Ruskin's moral sense was thus his artistic sense. Both were rooted in his sense of the continuity of past into present, a sense which was most available in the creative act. This sense was a kind of artery in his understanding of the human condition in the nineteenth century, and the greatest motive

force within it was the enduring nature of great literary and artistic production.

In terms of the folk-truth of the Waverley Novels, the neglected antiquarian Scott, Ruskin offered a reading of Scott in which topography genuinely mattered, and was no mere backdrop to creativity. For Ruskin, location - particularly when 'Natural' - was the well from which creativity sprang. His imaginative association of place and feeling was so central to his perception of art and literature that it became more or less the imposition of religious faith onto specific locales, as *in themselves* blessed. Artistic creativity became in consequence the artist's innocent expression of the truth of nature.

In this chapter, it will be seen that Ruskin's reading of Scott shows more sensitivity to Scott's own concerns - with the environment and the *location* of creativity - than did the majority of other nineteenth-century critics. In this sense we can see that although he always lacked what we might call a 'social dimension' to his understanding of Scott, Ruskin loved both novels and poetry especially in their association with his own imaginative or actual experience of place. This it was which validated the literature.

Ruskin imbibed keenly from the first his father's old-school Toryism and associated love of Scott. The Waverley Novels asserted traditional values, social hierarchy: and to the young Ruskin they appealed most obviously through the ubiquitous romance of kingship



and castellated life. As a result Ruskin visited eagerly such imaginatively-vivid locations as Warwick Castle and Edinburgh. The past was very much alive : the Edinburgh High School which his own father had attended, still, in the 1820s and 30s, possessed "the... living and universal influence of Sir Walter."<sup>4</sup>

Both of Ruskin's parents adored Scott, and the impression we are given by biographers is that Scott served in many capacities in the young John's somewhat "patchy" education. His "cloistered existence" created a painfully gauche and sexually repressed individual, who found that his only unmitigated pleasures came through his precocious success in studies and writing.<sup>5</sup> His father's wine business enabled him to travel widely from the family home in London, and eventually to progress to Christ Church College, Oxford in 1836. Publishing Modern Painters, anonymously at first, from 1843 led to his dramatic catapulting to the forefront of mid-century art criticism. In these years of his spreading fame, however, social inadequacies led to his failing dismally in what was perceived to be an ideal connection with Scott's own granddaughter, Charlotte Lockhart. Other inadequacies led to his failure to produce any practical ideas for a suitable monument to Scott, when his help was sought for this in 1838.<sup>6</sup> Ruskin's interests, and talents, lay elsewhere than in either forming close adult relationships, or offering constructive expressions of his ideas. As Francis G. Townsend has put it, Ruskin "could not erect a structure to shelter other minds."<sup>7</sup>

As his principles developed over the huge mass of writing undertaken from that point on, we can see enormous consistency between his approach to differing subjects. But this consistency was not because of a rigid or scientific critical method. Whether dealing with aesthetic, biographical, social or political issues, Ruskin was incorrigibly Romantic in methodology. Sprawling syntax and grammar, arcane diction, intuited links, and the assertion of 'right' sensibility, made his work almost unanswerably nebulous on occasions. The formula, which persisted throughout Ruskin's career, was an approach to criticism constituting the idiosyncratic intermingling of literary interpretations, life-experience, aesthetic judgements of landscape, and political dispositions. For Ruskin, it was all Writing, and the notion of discrete disciplines with varying functions and methodologies was not in the picture.

For instance, his account of a visit to the Trossachs in 1838 immediately after another unhappy love-affair of youth, provides us with not only a sense of the beauties of the area, and a clear reference to its subsequent decline, but also a literary insight, a perception of the authenticity, fidelity, of this part of 'Scott's country':

Scott's country took me at last well out of it all.

It is of little use to the reader now to tell him that still at that date the shore of Loch Katrine, at the east extremity of the lake, was exactly as Scott had seen it, and described,

*'Onward, amid the copse 'gan peep,*

*A narrow inlet, still and deep.'*

In literal and lovely truth, that was so:- by the side of the footpath (it was no more) which wound through the Trossachs, deep and calm under the blaeberry bushes, a dark winding clear-brown pool, not five feet wide at first, reflected the entangled moss of its margin, and arch of branches above, with scarcely a gleam of sky.<sup>a</sup>

Here, in particular at Loch Katrine, we see Ruskin's characteristic mode of interpretation. He found Nature Herself validating the intensity of Scott's narrative poems. They were, ipso facto, praiseworthy. But he also found an early sense of the abuses of the nineteenth century :

That inlet of Loch Katrine was in itself an extremely rare thing; I have never myself seen the like of it in lake shores. A winding recess of deep water, without any entering stream to account for it - possible only, I imagine, among rocks of the quite abnormal confusion of the Trossachs; and besides the natural sweetness and wonder of it made sacred by the most beautiful poem that Scotland ever sang by her stream sides. And all that the nineteenth century conceived of wise and right to do with this piece of mountain inheritance, was to

thrust the nose of a steamer into it, plank its  
blaeberries over with a platform, and drive the  
populace headlong past it as fast as they can  
scuffle.<sup>9</sup>

The emotion which finally predominates here is not nostalgia, although this is present. Nor is it a positive feeling evoked by Loch Katrine itself. It is anger at the present. The irresistible bond between Ruskin's own experience of nature, and his pleasure in Scott's work were tinged with distaste for the present. It was impossible for him to divorce these.

As he explained much later in Fors Clavigera, he grew in the degree of his passionate commitment to certain locations, the lessons of his life reinforcing his early experiences :

Recent Vandalism has taught me, too cruelly, and  
too late, the moral value of such scenes as those  
in which I was brought up.<sup>10</sup>

Linking these strands of his own experience and the structure of his emotional response was the sense of history, the consecrating power of Scott's works upon the landscape. For what especially characterised Ruskin's reading of Scott was the emphasis on Nature as more than scenery. It was a moral agent, capable of influencing human lives and history, and in so doing, offering something of a challenge to the nineteenth century.

Of course, as I have indicated, Scott was, in the contexts of Ruskin's criticism, usually embroiled in an essay about something else. The *Waverley Novels* and the *Poems* were employed mostly to support, in their fundamental and for Ruskin undebatable Truth, arguments about the modern world.

Consistent to the critique, though, was Scott's identity with the condition of genius or seer in all ages and places. He was invoked as one with the settings of the books. These were clearly felt to be more heroic ages, of a deeper and more common religious faith, and thus of a higher morality than was available in the nineteenth century. Thus Scott could teach as could no other, for he gave access to *higher things*.

For Ruskin, the permanence of the species of mankind which may be called genius rested on its serving as essentially the faithful conveyor of immutable truths. Scott, like all great artists in his conception, Ruskin saw as quite neutral towards his material; and thus the *Waverleys'* characteristic form - the re-creation and assembling of evidence rather than fictional indulgence or novelty - expressed the right humility towards the past. Genius was thus less a social or cultural expression than a quixotic, Divine blessing upon the fortunate. Scott had a high status because he was seen as a writer loath to assert his own views.

But there were, we may discern, significant inconsistencies within Ruskin's work here. He vaunted the Imagination as the greatest

human faculty. Yet his geniuses did not bring imagination to their task: they were essentially functionaries of an Absolute truth. He himself railed against the modern world. Yet great artists, he insisted, were not revolutionaries. The genius did not possess a challenging attitude to the age in which he or (less probably) she lived. Art was a matter mostly of re-arranging the furniture on an anachronistic set:

Men of perfect genius are known in all centuries by their perfect respect to all law, and love of past tradition; their work in the world is never innovation, but new creation; without disturbing for an instant the foundations which were laid of old time.<sup>11</sup>

Such greatness was thrown into clearer relief, in its being evidently ignored by the awful nineteenth century. Here, in Modern Painters, Ruskin indicted the modern age :

...this century has caused every one of its great men, whose hearts were kindest, and whose spirits most perceptive of the work of God, to die without hope:- Scott, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Turner. Great England, of the Iron-heart now, not of the Lion-heart; for these souls of her children an account may perhaps one day be required of her.<sup>12</sup>

Men of genius such as Scott were beyond the comprehension of the increasingly enfeebled present, Ruskin claimed. And it was important for this thesis that Scott's was, above all, an *unconscious* genius. Perhaps the perfect summation of this Ruskinian Scott, is this, from Letter 31 of Fors Clavigera, dating from 1873:

...what good Scott has in him to do, I find no words full enough to tell. His ideal of honour in men and women is inbred, indisputable; fresh as the air of his mountains; firm as their rocks. His conception of purity in woman is even higher than Dante's; his reverence for the filial relation, as deep as Virgil's; his sympathy universal;- there is no rank or condition of men of which he has not shown the loveliest aspect; his code of moral principle is entirely defined, yet taught with a reserved subtlety like Nature's own, so that none but the most earnest readers perceive the intention: and his opinions on all practical subjects are final; the consummate decisions of accurate and inevitable common sense, tempered by the most graceful kindness.<sup>13</sup>

There were continuous strands from earlier criticism of Scott, and Ruskin's own massive popularity ensured the further cementing of certain central views on Scott. We see here a Scott possessing a

clear and correct personal and social morality, a sure understanding of the value and integrity of the cheery underclasses, and above all a down-to-earthness, which separated him from the tortured intellectuals, theorists, democrats and so on thrown up by the nineteenth century.

*SCOTT'S RUSKINIAN TYPE : 'THE INNOCENT ARTIST'*

But Scott's "common sense" for Ruskin was not simply that of the worldly, practical man. There was no room for the Laird of Abbotsford here, the promoter of railways and woollen mills, or the pioneer-customer of gas-lighting. Ruskin's Scott was *Natural*, was an *innocent*, qualities of which the novelist himself was only dimly aware. For he was a *genius*, and there was a kind of "mental chemistry" with which the greatest artists produced images, "the greatness" being "not *in* them, but *through* them."

They do their work, feeling that they cannot well help it; the story must be told, and the effect put down; and if people like it, well and good; and if not, the world will not be much the worse.<sup>14</sup>

In the use of the Imagination, great art was formed. But this was no matter of *individual* design. For the paltry human, with his pygmy-thought, had nothing to offer. It was only by his tapping



into the Divine, becoming a conduit for finer thought and design, that greatness came.

Thus Ruskin proposed a kind of Edenic purity about the greatest artists. They were innocent, *tabulae rasae*, whose art was not of their own making. In particular, he found in Scott - the man and the writer - a standard of 'innocent excellence' against which to set the present age. Ruskin thus saw Scott as a kind of Seer. To use Bagehot's terminology for an interpretation which Ruskin undoubtedly shared, Scott possessed no thesis. It was important for Ruskin that Scott did not, as did so many philosophers and metaphysicians, weave "cobwebs among the finest wheels of the world's business," but simply showed Truth :

The true Seer always feels as intensely as anyone else; but he does not much describe his feelings. He tells you whom he met, and what they said; leaves you to make out, from that, what they feel, and what he feels, but goes into little detail.<sup>15</sup>

This conception of the artist as a passive instrument of the Divine was at the heart of Ruskin's thinking. The great mind simply *could not help* producing great art. Ruskin's recurring metaphors for the construction of art were 'the dream' and 'witchcraft.' The imagination acted independently of the individual, partaking of a great universal imagination. In Fors Clavigera, Ruskin pointed to Scott's mention of the term 'sorcery' in the introduction to The

Fortunes of Nigel. Although the term was used half in jest, yet it was, said Ruskin, very true :

Alas, he did but half know how truly he had right to plead sorcery, feeling the witchcraft, yet not believing in it, nor knowing that it was indeed an angel that guided, not a daemon, (I am forced for once to use with him the Greek word in its Presbyterian sense) that misled his hand, as it wrote in gladness the fast-coming fancies. For truly in that involuntary vision was the true 'design,' and Scott's work differs from all other modern fiction by its exquisiteness of art, precisely *because* he did not 'know what was coming.' For, as I have a thousand times asserted - though hitherto always in vain, - no great composition was ever produced by composing, nor by arranging chapters and dividing volumes; but only with the same heavenly involuntariness in which a bird builds her nest. And among the other virtues of the great classic masters, this of enchanted Design is of all the least visible to the present apothecary mind...'<sup>6</sup>

Ruskin was working from a conception of 'inspiration' which was quite literal, creation from a Divine source breathed through the human form. In this scheme, the very 'ordinariness' of Scott could

be accommodated, indeed accentuated as an evidence of the wonder of the creation itself. Scott *could* be a genius, despite his mundane biographical baggage of very human wishes for land, the extravagance of Abbotsford, and the mismanagement of his financial affairs with Ballantyne's. This, said Ruskin, showed how much more deserving he was of that nomenclature than any 'peculiar', self-absorbed and arrogant species of artist. Scott was a model.

There was certainly no sign of a search for a tortured genius in Ruskin's Scott. For all his insistence on the solid Presbyterian soul, able to apply itself in a disciplined manner to the task in hand, he nevertheless praised an aspect of Scott the writer found reprehensible by others: Scott's supposed lack of a 'system'. Yet haphazardness - very much, we have to suspect, part of Scott's own propaganda - was not a weakness in Ruskin's eyes. Carlyle had seen prolific, unagonized writing as a symptom of the machine in Scott, and all readers of Lockhart had been given a daunting sense of the sheer extent of the opus, fictional and non-fictional, prose and poetic, critical, constitutional, and historical. Ruskin, by contrast, considered such ease of composition a sign of probable greatness :

...where the ease is manifest, as in Scott, Turner, and Tintoret, and the thing done is very noble, it is a strong reason for placing the men above those who confessedly work with great pains.<sup>17</sup>

Art was not the product of the individual of genius : Ruskin saw a universal and eternal well of right values and right morality, *from which* there emerged, via great art, truths. This emergence was, as he urged, "dream-gifted", was beyond the control of the great artists, such as Dante, Scott, Turner and Tintoret :

...their imagination consisting, not in a voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance, exactly at the right moment, of something they had actually seen. Imagine all that any of these men had seen or heard in the whole course of their lives, laid up accurately in their memories as in vast storehouses, extending, with the poets, even to the slightest intonations of syllables heard in the beginning of their lives...and over all this unindexed and immeasurable mass of treasure, the imagination brooding and wandering, but dream-gifted, so as to summon at any moment exactly such groups of ideas as shall justly fit each other: this I conceive to be the real nature of the imaginative mind...<sup>18</sup>

This involuntary act of creation set the genuinely great in art apart from the mass. Ruskin thus made the realms of great art quasi-arcadian, and in so doing made them, through juxtaposition, constant indictments of contemporary malaise. While on some occasions he did propose his own paradigm for change, and the

aesthetic criteria or political economy which he would himself have brought to bear were presented; on many occasions he did not.

Thus, unlike Carlyle in his comparisons, Ruskin tended to leave the matter at an indignant rhetorical question or a horrified throwing up of hands. References to Scott in comparison with the present, in particular, were most usually presented without Ruskin's driving the point home, and *as if the rightness of Scott's universe were self-explanatory*. It is as if the comparison with the present were so utterly damning of that present that no more invective were needed.

As Ruskin's own preoccupations changed from the aesthetic base of Modern Painters to wider social and environmental concerns, so Scott proved a touchstone on many counts. In whichever sphere Ruskin was working, Scott retained a position of privilege as an exemplar of what his readership were to understand as 'right values.' There was a constancy, across the opus, in Scott's function as a validating force, or opposing construct, for Ruskin's profound dissatisfaction with the present.

Ruskin's concern with models of behaviour was the logical apotheosis of many years of Scott criticism looking for morality above all else. Scott's world was accepted by mid-century to be a suitable venue for refreshing the soul and bathing the moral fibre, in the face of doubt and anxiety. Scott became - and not just for

Ruskin - a kind of lacuna, into which the nineteenth century reader placed his or her own baggage of confusion.

But Ruskin, of course, had distinctive qualities, as well as those characteristic of his century. His over-riding distaste for the present, which became a kind of flight-fantasy into the past, actually highlighted aspects of the emotional structure of the novels which were neglected by others. For he was totally immersed in their scenes and locations.

Ruskin's Scott belonged to a very different time and place. In his conception, the Waverley Novels were a locus gone, by far more than the few years of actual posterity, and identifiable as a fixed icon of the broadly-defined 'Past', to which he constantly looked. His was a Scott, quintessentially a faithful narrator of Nature's truths *in a former day*. Scott, as Ruskin saw him, was bound by inescapable destiny to depict humanity as subservient to Nature, and very much its child. The Waverley Novels existed in the realm of history, certainly; but more important than that, they lived in a relation to natural scenery, and thus to the moral value it imparted :

The excellence of Scott's work is precisely in proportion to the degree in which it is sketched from present nature.<sup>19</sup>

This iconic Scott led to the division of the Waverley Novels into the 'Scotch novels' and the rest, the latter being vastly inferior. Ruskin went further than most other critics in attempting to explain the alleged superiority of the one group of novels. His view of Scott was as a conduit, an apologist for landscape. Scottish settings were in themselves beautiful, and therefore the stuff of great art.

For Ruskin, Scott was the 'Scotch novels'. And when he compared the 'simple' and unsophisticated Scott with Wordsworth, say, another who dwelt much on landscape, we can see how greatness was Scott's alone :

Wordsworth is...like Scott, and understands how to be happy, but yet cannot altogether rid himself of the sense that he is a philosopher, and ought always to be saying something wise. He also has a vague notion that nature would not be able to get on well without Wordsworth; and finds a considerable amount of his pleasure in looking at himself as well as at her. But with Scott the love is entirely humble and unselfish. 'I, Scott, am nothing, and less than nothing; but these crags, and heaths, and clouds, how great they are, how lovely, how for ever to be beloved, only for their own silent, thoughtless sake !'<sup>20</sup>

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The basis of Scott's genius was, then, his reverence for Nature. This led to an ineffably right way of seeing it. Where the indulgent Romantic imposed self and obscured the thing seen, Scott exposed simply that which he saw. In Ruskin's mind, this 'Fully perceiving' was an act crucial to the creation of great art. True creativity lay in the co-ordination of the eye with a finely-tuned sensibility, in order virtually to *construct* the perception :

...fully *perceiving* any natural object depends on our being able to group and fasten all our fancies about it as a centre, making a garland of thoughts for it, in which each separate thought is subdued and shortened of its own strength, in order to fit it for harmony with others; the intensity of our enjoyment of the object depending, first, on its own beauty, and then on the richness of the garland.<sup>21</sup>

The whole was far greater than the parts. Scott's perception of Nature was the more remarkable because it partook of each of these elements quite spontaneously. This was largely Ruskin's own attempted critical method. His extrapolation and inference took on lives of their own, separate from the thing ostensibly analysed. Ruskin's criticism was far from systematic; yet he was always insisting that he was analytical. The structure of his greatest work, Modern Painters, for instance, was vastly complex : an



overbearing weight of section and subsection struggled constantly, to define and to hem in, a rambling and discursive interior.

What Ruskin was calling for, throughout his work, was not analysis, but a state of heightened awareness. What appears, particularly to the modern reader, as mere dreaming or fantasising was, he claimed, the dissection of experience, the ordered subduing and investigating of the feelings.

A perquisite in this state was delight in, and appreciation of, the natural world, allied to a constant expansion of knowledge, perseverance and humility. In Ruskin's view, Scott's possession of these qualities was the foundation of his excellence. He was the voice of Truth, of Nature.

*SCOTT, AND RUSKIN'S VIEW OF NATURE : 'SERENE AND STAINLESS THOUGHT'*

Ruskin's objective was to undermine and counterpoint the modern world. The evaluation of worth, of morality, and the conferring of value were, fundamentally, a question of epoch. There was The Past, and there was The Present. We can discern Carlyle's voice in this opposition, but this is by no means an unproblematic line of descent.

The distinction between the two critiques is important to the path of Scott criticism. For the deep and angry indictment of the modern

world, which beset Carlyle's writing on Scott, did not find many takers after the years of his greatest influence, the 1830s and 40s. Although the moral aspect of the Waverley Novels on which Carlyle lay such emphasis remained an important benchmark, his notion of permanent revolution in art - i.e. the repeated assault on the modern - does not cut much ice in later Scott criticism. Ruskin's rather hazier and more romantic view of Scott's world as a hermetic and perfected thing, utterly *different* from the present, is, we can see, far more in keeping with the Victorian consensus on Scott.

The distinction is, as I have indicated, an important one, between these two prophets, both of whom revered the past, admired Scott's achievement, and found much to loathe in the present. And both employed basically biographical methods by which to criticise the creative output. For Carlyle, even the largely admirable Scott was fatally flawed by the age in which he lived, and the critic's eyes dwelt perhaps exclusively on the years of Scott's celebrity. In consequence, Carlyle's criticism excoriated at length on the nature of Scott's significant failings. Carlyle enjoyed Scott's re-animation of the past, but saw it as flawed by the purpose to which it was put in the corrupt and corrupting nineteenth century.

Ruskin, by contrast, did not really look in detail at the nineteenth century in his consideration of Scott. His eyes were in The Past. Thus he sought to draw positive messages from Scott's failings, because he saw Scott as a great artist and therefore

outside the time-continuum. Ruskin saw mostly positive in Scott's work. This was by dint of Scott's actual life-experience, but in his capacity as a conduit. Nature Herself, investing the outdoor Scott with Her morality, had created the healthful part of the novels. Scott, from earliest childhood, had had much for which to thank the fortune which took him into direct contact with nature. As Ruskin emphasised in quotations of Scott's own words from the 'Autobiographical Fragment' in Lockhart, Scott's lameness as a child was banished by his experiences at Sandy-Knowe :

...my general health...was much strengthened by being frequently in the open air; and, in a word, I, *who in a city had probably been condemned to hopeless and helpless decrepitude*, was now a healthy, high-spirited, and, my lameness apart, a sturdy child.<sup>22</sup>

Scott had been, in Ruskin's conception, *trained* to enjoy Nature. He had developed a 'healthy' distaste for the city from the contrast between Edinburgh's foul streets and Sandy-Knowe's natural pleasures. The beginning of what Ruskin called his "conscious existence" had been a time of intimacy with the natural world.

Scott

...delighted to roll about in the grass all day long in the midst of the flock, and the sort of fellowship he formed with the sheep and lambs

impressed his mind with a degree of affectionate feeling towards them which lasted throughout life.<sup>23</sup>

Scott had been thus inspired by direct contact with Nature, the Living Past, while Carlyle, as Ruskin commented, had himself no such leavening of direct experience, and thus his sense of the past was limited. Moreover, Carlyle's life-experience confirmed him in that dark view of life for which his upbringing had predisposed him. The southern counties, Ruskin explained,- and in particular the area between the coastlines from Holy Island to Edinburgh and from Annan to the Mull of Galloway - had instilled in generations of Scotsmen the ancient virtues of "hardihood under suffering, and patience in poverty," without which life could not have been sustained in those parts. Landscape had 'made' Scott, just as practical want 'made' Carlyle :

It is farther strange to me, even now, on reflection - to find how great the influence of this double ocean coast and Cheviot mountain border was upon Scott's imagination; and how salutary they were in withdrawing him from the morbid German fancies which proved so fatal to Carlyle; but there was this grand original difference between the two, that, with Scott, his story-telling and singing were all in the joyful admiration of that past with which he could re-people the scenery he gave the

working part of his day to traverse, and all the sensibility of his soul to love; while Carlyle's mind, fixed anxiously on the future, and besides embarrassed by the practical pinching, as well as the unconfessed shame, of poverty, saw and felt from his earliest childhood nothing but the faultfulness and gloom of the Present.<sup>24</sup>

This admiration was importantly of Scott's essential *passivity* towards landscape, a *specific* landscape which, in Ruskin's mind, had a unity. It was at one and the same time the landscape of the past, and that of the present. Scott's "true historical knowledge" was born of the continuity of the dramatic, heroic, moral past with the present, that continuity being most vividly available through the direct experience of landscape.<sup>25</sup>

Landscape, for Ruskin, was an influence for good. It served as a kind of challenge for the creative artist, both technically and spiritually. Unless it *entered* the artistic experience, in its myriad forms and varieties, then the 'un-natural' world would enter. Thus Nature was inextricably part of the experience of high creative endeavour, and must rule. It inspired or diminished, according to the merit of the artist. In Scott, as in Turner, it was the artistic *sense* of Nature *in specific locations* which was, in a way, the author of the art. It was, as we read in Modern Painters, a question of painting Nature "in her own colours."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, for Ruskin, the positive moral values of Scott, of *The Past*, and of *Nature*, were woven into a single cloth. Typically, the way he asserted these values, was through the simple opposition of the present with the mediaeval world. Widespread contemporary conceptions of the present as an age of 'progress', and of the Middle Ages as "the Dark Ages" were, Ruskin insisted, wildly wrong. As he put it in Volume Three of Modern Painters (1856), the Middle Ages were

...on the contrary, the bright ages; ours are the dark ones. I do not mean metaphysically, but literally. They were the ages of gold; ours are the ages of number.<sup>27</sup>

This artistic judgment was capable of extension to all areas of life, because of art's role as mirror of the age. Scott's works of the Middle Ages, by their setting, were elevated to a great status comparable with the 'Scotch novels'. These mediaeval works evoked a world not merely attractive, but intrinsically appealing to the eternal human spirit. It was more than beauty which emerged from Ivanhoe or from the Tales of the Crusaders. Ruskin's attention to some of the historical realities in the Scotch novels gave way here to a more fundamental yearning. For the trappings of such a good age, the "accessories of armour and costume" captured the heart, and exercised an influence for good *by the very nobleness which was in them* :

The essence of modern romance is simply the return of the heart and fancy to the things in which they naturally take pleasure...And that delight and reverence which we feel in, and by means of, the mere imagination of these accessories, the Middle Ages had in the vision of them; the nobleness of dress exercising a perpetual influence on character, tending in a thousand ways to increase dignity and self-respect, and together with grace of gesture, to introduce serenity of thought.<sup>28</sup>

Scott's account of these golden ages simply reflected their actual qualities. In Ruskin's reading, Scott's was a complete and transfixing dream of the past. Descriptive paraphernalia, hints and ambiences - overall emotional ease - led inevitably to reverence of Scott, more rigorous methodologies going by the board. The 'right' reaction was the one you felt.

In this account, the novels served as a comprehensive reiteration of the Truth of the Past, illustrated eternal verities. *Understanding the Waverley Novels* was as good as reading any 'real' or 'academic' history. Thus, The Monastery, The Abbot, and Old Mortality gave us as "true and beautiful" an analysis of the Reformation as was to be found anywhere in literature, "if," Ruskin added darkly, "you know how to read them."<sup>29</sup> Knowing Scott's life, too, offered access to the values of the Past, 'better' values

which, for Ruskin, had remained untarnished over centuries. Scott had lived

...in a country and time when, from highest to lowest, but chiefly in that dignified and nobly severe middle class to which he himself belonged, a habit of serene and stainless thought was as natural to the people as their mountain air.<sup>30</sup>

This was as much Ruskin fantasising on his own childhood, with its regular visits to an aunt in Perth, as it was an accurate picture of the late eighteenth-century Scotland of Scott's growing-up. Where Scott approached the past with an active intelligence, Ruskin brought his fantasies. He clearly identified strongly with Scott, although he did on occasion bemoan Scott's being unable to avoid the crowning misery of his own age, its faithlessness, a habit which he shared with his age :

...looking back, in a romantic and passionate idleness to the past ages, not understanding them all the while, nor really desiring to understand them...Scott gives up nearly the half of his intellectual power to a fond, yet purposeless dreaming over the past.<sup>31</sup>

The limitations of such undefined nostalgia, and admiration for the "picturesqueness" of Romanism, Ruskin also found to be a



disappointing feature of Abbotsford. There the "melange of styles" revealed Scott's lack of "feeling" for "the true beauty and application of the Gothic architecture."<sup>32</sup>

Scott's nostalgia, though, according to Ruskin, was a characteristic which Scott could not very well help, being imbued with it as a man of his time and place. Ruskin's understanding was that in Scott's 'ordinariness', even in his flaws, was evidence of the down-to-earthness, the common-sense which prevented the novelist becoming one of those tortured artist-types whom Ruskin so reviled.

He was passionately interested in Scott's life, and was, indeed, planning for many years late in his life a full-scale biography. But the more Ruskin tells of the dignity and severity of his own childhood, of its "patient, accurate and resolute discipline," and of its imbuing him with a deep sense of the importance of good work, the more we have to conclude that he projected onto the screen of Scott's life the imaginings and fantasies of his own, making writing about Scott and his work largely an escapist exercise.

The dominant pattern of Ruskin's work on Scott was thus by and large formless meditation, imaginative fantasy on individual speeches, locations and characters. This passage in *Fors*, for instance, showed Ruskin in a location beloved of both himself and Scott :

As I drove from Abbotsford to Ashestiel, Tweed and Ettrick were both in flood; not dun nor wrathful, but in the clear fullness of their perfect strength; and from the bridge of Ettrick I saw the two streams join, and the Tweed for miles down the vale, and the Ettrick for miles up among the hills,- each of them, in the multitude of their windless waves, a march of infinite light, dazzling,- interminable,- intervaled indeed with eddies of shadow but, for the most part, gliding paths of sunshine, far-swept beside the green glow of their level inches, the blessing of them, and the guard:- the stately moving of the many waters, more peaceful than their calm, only mighty, their rippled spaces fixed like orient clouds, their pools of pausing current binding the silver edges with a gloom of amber and gold; and all along their shore, beyond the sward, and the murmurous shingle, processions of dark forest, in strange majesty of sweet order, and unwounded grace of glorious age.<sup>33</sup>

It is as if Scott was beatified by the country he kept. Such intense reflective emotions were virtually of a piece with Ruskin's descriptions of Turner's Nature, and to Ruskin represented powerful signs of the species of mind peculiar to greatness. Although this mind must also possess moral and intellectual greatness, the intuitive appreciation of Nature Herself was the first requisite.

It was a mind which, as he explained in Modern Painters, allowed emotions to come forth in Her presence, and was not distracted by petty anxieties and discontents :

...while these feelings of delight in natural objects cannot be construed into signs of the highest mental powers, or purest moral principles, we see that they are assuredly indicative of minds above the usual standard of power, and endowed with sensibilities of great preciousness to humanity; so that those who find themselves entirely destitute of them, must make this a subject of humiliation, not of pride.<sup>34</sup>

Ruskin asserted ubiquitously the primacy of emotional response over intellectual. Aesthetic and literary appreciation derived from intuitive understanding, particularly of Nature. Scott, and the nebulous Scott's country, could provide this. "The love of the fair Universe around us," in Ruskin, was "the beginning of Piety, and the end of Learning."<sup>35</sup> Scott's greatest gift, then, was the primacy of 'the heart' in his work, for this it was which gave access to the soul of Nature. This was a faculty "common to all great men."<sup>36</sup>

Ruskin saw Scott as 'gifted' in the conventional sense only in as much as he was felt to have brought to his entire environment the qualities of "infinite affection and quickness of sympathy." This

'gift' is, we learn, typical of the 'Scottish character.' The works of Scott were great because he was a Scot, and because he therefore made himself subordinate to Nature,

...follows her lead simply - does not venture to bring his own cares and thoughts into her pure and quiet presence - paints her in her simple and universal truth, adding no result of momentary passion or fancy, and appears, therefore, at first shallower than other poets, being in reality wider and healthier. And thus, as Nature is bright, serene, or gloomy, Scott takes her temper, and paints her as she is...<sup>37</sup>

In this relationship with Nature we find the dividing line between Scott's age and the present. Scott expressed the truth of Nature, while the nineteenth century abused Her. In so doing it defaced God's creation, which was the greatest witness to His love for humankind.

#### *RUSKIN'S CRUSADE AGAINST FALSE PROGRESS*

Ruskin saw all around him the loss of values, the decay of right relations, thought, and obedience. Just as 'unspoiled' Nature was, if fully perceived, a witness to a healthy and moral world, so a 'spoiled' Nature was an expression of present moral failing. All of

Ruskin's preoccupations - environmental, moral, political, spiritual - merged in his work on Scott, but the Waverley Novels themselves were seldom more than an object of fantasy, customarily opposed to the nineteenth century :

...when the iron roads are tearing up the surface of Europe, as grapeshot do the sea; when their great net is drawing and twitching the ancient frame and strength together, contracting all its various life, its rocky arms and rural heart, into a narrow, finite, calculating metropolis of manufactures; when there is not a monument throughout the cities of Europe that speaks of old years and mighty people, but it is being swept away to build cafés and gaming-houses...when the column is shortened and the pinnacle shattered, the colour denied to the casement and the marble to the altar, while exchequers are exhausted in luxury of boudoirs and pride of reception-rooms; when we ravage without a pause all the loveliness of creation which God in giving pronounced Good, and destroy without a thought all those labours which men have given their lives and their sons' sons' lives to complete...<sup>38</sup>

The process of Industrialisation, and these evidences of the nineteenth century's loss of faith, were intertwined. Important here for Ruskin's reading of Scott, was the close opposition established between past and present, to hammer home the point that decline had taken place. The precious element under assault was the sanctity of what had been hallowed by the passing of time. In its destruction of the natural world the nineteenth century committed its greatest sin. Divinity was banished from the world by the incursions of the modern, as in the spreading destruction brought by the railways and their false values. This resentful tirade was in Fors Clavigera and Praeterita :

There was a rocky valley between Buxton and Bakewell, once upon a time, divine as the vale of Tempe; you might have seen the gods there morning and evening,- Apollo and all the sweet Muses of the Light, walking in fair procession on the lawns of it, and to and fro among the pinnacles of its crags. You cared neither for gods nor grass, but for cash (which you did not know the way to get). You thought you could get it by what the *Times* calls 'Railroad Enterprise'. You enterprised a railroad through the valley, you blasted its rocks away, heaped thousands of tons of shale into its lovely stream. The valley is gone, and the gods with it; and now, every fool in Buxton can be at

Bakewell in half-an-hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton; which you think a lucrative process of exchange, you Fools everywhere!<sup>39</sup>

This was a questioning of the very word 'Progress' as understood by his age. The nineteenth century stood for decline and fall. The assumption of God's immanence, such as Scott was able to hold without qualm, had gone. But the present offered no viable alternative to which the doubter could turn. Like Carlyle an atavist, Ruskin was trapped by the consensus in nineteenth century Britain, that material progress through railroads, coal-mining, iron-smelting and steel-making - the engines of economic expansion and population growth - was consonant with the onward and upward progress of the species. These doubts led more widely, of course, to the kind of rationalised materialist theology of Stephen and Harrison; but for the romantic Ruskin no tenable construct could be found in the present age. Only in the longing gaze into fifteenth-century Florence, or sixteenth-century Venice, or Scott's vanished world of honourable Saxonhood and hearty Celticism, could Ruskin find solace.

And it is in rage against the people and conduct of the present that we find Ruskin ensconced with mounting frequency. The moral value of landscape was ironically associated most commonly with the very nineteenth century virtues of hard work and obedience, as is clear from this diatribe against false progress :

...all real and wholesome enjoyments possible to man have been just as possible to him, since first he was made of the earth, as they are now; and they are possible to him chiefly in peace. To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray,- these are the things that make men happy; they have always had the power of doing these, they never *will* have power to do more. The world's prosperity or adversity depends on our knowing and teaching these few things: but upon iron, or glass, or electricity, or steam, in no wise.<sup>40</sup>

Scott was a great artist, because of the humility towards Nature which he evinced. He embodied *immaterial* and emotional values. By contrast, no such great artist could emerge from the present because that age was obsessed with the rational, the 'intellectual' and the material. In an aspect of his critique which was directly consistent with Carlyle's, Ruskin urged that the most terrible loss of values from 'Scott's day' was the loss of any other than monetary satisfaction, the disappearance of all other forms of assessing worth. The merits of Scott - in both life and work - were identifiable with "honour...chastity and courage", criteria for excellence he felt to have been largely neglected by the nineteenth century.



Spiritual sickness infected art, as Ruskin expounded in a long disquisition in 'Fiction Fair and Foul'. This essay, devoted to showing the physiological evidences of moral sickness both in literature and life, and focussing predominantly on the Waverley Novels' exemplary "healthfulness", also recounted contemporary malaise. Ruskin revealed as characteristic of the diseased state of the age a lane in South London. This may be seen as the diametric opposite, in Ruskin's conception, of 'the Scott country' described above. This lane was no longer a haven of the natural world inspiring to art or to enquiry, but was mere pollution. Ruskin contended that Croxsted Lane had descended to "pits of stinking dust and mortal slime". And the present did not even bemoan this, but rather merely took note of it, analysed it. The whole experience was forgotten, in the study of the minutiae. There followed the sad neglect of the "sense" and the "fancy", a spiritual loss which underlay the physical decay in Croxsted Lane, which was, in the author's youth,

...a green bye-road traversable for some distance by carts; but rarely so traversed, and, for the most part, little else than a narrow strip of untilled field, separated by blackberry hedges from the better cared-for meadows on each side of it: growing more weeds, therefore, than they, and perhaps in spring a primrose or two - white archangel-daisies plenty, and purple thistles in autumn. A slender rivulet, boasting little of its

brightness, for there are no springs at Dulwich, yet fed purely enough by the rain and morning dew, here trickled - there loitered - through the long grass beneath the hedges, and expanded itself, where it might, into moderately clear and deep pools, in which, under their veils of duck-weed, a fresh-water shell or two, sundry curious little skipping shrimps, any quantity of tadpoles in their time, and even sometimes a tittlebat, offered themselves to my boyhood's pleased, and not inaccurate, observation. There, my mother and I used to gather the first buds of the hawthorn...<sup>41</sup>

In a rightly-ordered world, this ideal memory would still be the case, he was claiming. But Croxsted Lane, like the valley between Buxton and Bakewell, had become a victim of the profound forces of modernity. Here, Ruskin's writing becomes a catalogue of abuses aesthetic and cultural. Just as in the opposite case, in considering the landscape of Scotland, the merging of temporal and environmental judgements has occurred. Past and Beauty: Present and Ugliness. His 'Beauty' in this case remains relatively undefined, while ugliness takes on all too clear a shape :

Often, both in those days, and since, I have put myself hard to it, vainly, to find words wherewith to tell of beautiful things; but beauty has been in the world since the world was made, and human

language can make a shift of it, somehow, to give account of it, whereas the peculiar forces of devastation induced by modern city life have only entered the world lately; and no existing terms of language known to me are enough to describe the forms of filth, and modes of ruin, that varied themselves along the course of Croxsted Lane. The fields on each side of it are now mostly dug up for building, or cut through into gaunt corners and nooks of blind ground by the wild crossings and concurrencies of three railroads. Half a dozen handfuls of new cottages, with Doric doors, are dropped about here and there among the gashed ground: the lane itself, now entirely grassless, is a deep-rutted, heavy-hillocked cart-road, diverging gatelessly into various brickfields or pieces of waste; and bordered on each side by heaps of - Hades only knows what! - mixed dust of every unclean thing that can rot or rust in damp: ashes and rags, beer-bottles and old shoes, battered pans, smashed crockery, shreds of nameless clothes, door-sweepings, floor-sweepings, kitchen garbage, back-garden sewage, old iron, rotten timber jagged with out-torn nails, cigar-ends, pipe-bowls, cinders, bones, and ordure, indescribable; and, variously kneaded into, sticking to, or fluttering foully here and there, - remnants broadcast, of every

manner of newspaper, advertisement or big-lettered bill, festering and flaunting out their last publicity in the pits of stinking dust and mortal slime.<sup>42</sup>

To put this in overall terms: the present was degraded calamitously; none saw this; and, worst of all, the young were being inured to it, *as if it were normal*. The argument was a broader one than the concern of an appalled London conservationist: it was here the Arnold-Huxley arena, concerning the alleged exclusion of moral considerations from the ascendancy of science in the spirit of the age. This - and here Ruskin clearly concurred with Carlyle and Arnold - led to an impoverished soul. It was an age which was deliberately pushing the imagination offstage, was promoting mere *analysis*, and not *evaluation* of the world around. Thus the changes in Croxsted Lane were probably, he felt, only of interest in the narrowest scientific sense, and the scholastic issue to the children of the present day would be, sadly,

...the thrill of scientific vanity in the primary analysis of some unheard-of process of corruption - or the reward of microscopic research in the sight of worms with more legs, and acari of more curious generation than ever vivified the more simply smelling plasma of antiquity.<sup>43</sup>

In these petty matters, he felt the present was drowning the soul of man. And the more Ruskin poured scorn on the inadequacies of his own day, the more he exaggerated the virtues of bygone days. The worship of Scott - and all other exemplars of the Truth - grew, as the present became worse in his perception. From a past of "serene and stainless thought" had been formed a present of decay, pollution and pigmy-thinking. He questioned contemporary understanding of what was useful, and found the nineteenth century to possess a limited, materialist framework of knowledge.

*RUSKIN'S SCOTT : A ROMANTIC, AND A SCOT*

Among a few special realms, known through insight to the true nature of things, he harboured a dream of Scotland. This underpins all Ruskin's writings on Scott. Although actually confronted with as great natural despoliation as furth of the border, he urged an *essential* moral and spiritual difference. The great truths, the permanent moral values, which Scott embodied in his life, were present, too, in the work. Above all the 'Scotch novels' were "models of every virtue in their order of literature, and exhaustive codes of Christian wisdom and ethics."<sup>44</sup> Lessons of "flawless majesty of conduct", "virtue" and "honour" abounded in all Scott's works, but the novels actually set in Scotland were

...as faultless, throughout, as human work can be;  
and eternal examples of the ineffable art which is

taught by the loveliest nature to her truest children.<sup>45</sup>

Importantly, the repository of these values was 'Scottishness'. Although there was always some hyperbole surrounding Ruskin's conception of 'the Scottish character', it was mostly 'the Scott country' - flexible geographically, but usually the Borders - which was the source of the infinite moral good. The "highest intellectual and moral powers of Scotland" derived from that country, and although "sad associations have gathered round every loveliest scene," yet the refinement and sensibility imparted by history and these bleak climes led to the ideals, for Ruskin, of "hardihood under suffering, and patience in poverty."<sup>46</sup>

This *essential* difference cut across the sincere picture of a present Scotland with comparable physical and ecological decay to England. Rivers and burns, factories and morality were, as he told the readers of Fors, Letter XXXIII, evidence of unforgiveable slipshodness :

Scotchmen like to hear their rivers talked about, it appears! But when last I was up Huntly Burn way, there was no burn there. It had all been drawn off to somebody's 'works'...At Edinburgh there is a railroad station instead of the North Loch; the Water of Leith is - well, one cannot say in civilized company what it is; and at Linlithgow, of

all the palaces so fair,- built for a royal dwelling, etc.,- the oil (paraffin), floating on the streams, can be ignited, burning with a large flame.

My good Scottish friends, had you not better leave off pleasing yourselves with descriptions of your rivers as they were, and consider what your rivers are to be? For I correct my derivation of Clarty Hole too sorrowfully. It is the *Ford* that is clarty now - not the Hole.<sup>47</sup>

But this Scotland of the present was in need of attention mostly because such decline represented a kind of fundamental betrayal of the 'truth' of Scotland. Underlying the whole was a mythical image of Scotland - by no means banished in popular mythology today - which retained its magic through art and culture, in music, for instance :

...the distinction of the music of Scotland from every other is in its association with sweeter natural sounds, and filling a deeper silence...<sup>48</sup>

Ruskin's most entranced expressions of delight are in these considerations of the *Waverley* Novels. More allusions appear to Redgauntlet than to any other novel; and in this the terms of reference are significant. Essential 'Scottishness', the fantasies of a Romantic vision of Nature, and morality of character, were the

criteria by which Scott's achievement was judged. Redgauntlet was praiseworthy, to Ruskin's way of thinking, for no quality more than its exhilarating account of the landscape and the natural environment of its Dumfries-shire and Solway Firth setting. Ruskin, in Praeterita, related the 'faultlessness' and the 'power' of all the "literally Scotch" novels to the places of their origin; and saw the Scottish character as equally so made :

...the whole tone of Scottish temper, ballad poetry, and music, which no other school has ever been able to imitate, has arisen out of the sad associations which, one by one, have gathered round every loveliest scene in the border land.<sup>49</sup>

Fine and honourable feelings were virtually embedded in the earth, rocks, moors and lochs of admired renown in Scotland. Thus emotions in the novels were enhanced by being shown to be so closely associated with place. He quoted a section from Letter Ten of the novel, to show the intoxication of Darsie Latimer's ride over open downs. This was, in Ruskin's reading, associated with the freedom Darsie feels after leaving the Quaker house at Mount Sharon :

The air I breathed felt purer and more bracing; the clouds, riding high upon a summer breeze, drove in gay succession over my head, now obscuring the sun, now letting its rays stream in transient flashes upon various parts of the landscape, and especially



upon the broad mirror of the distant Frith of Solway.<sup>50</sup>

For Ruskin, this passage was supreme in the novel, because capturing so truly the spirit of place and time. Darsie's flight *was* freedom, and clearly reminded Ruskin of the pleasures he himself had known in the area around the Solway Firth. In consequence, he did not appraise Scott's literary or linguistic achievement, but instead entered a tone of high-flown extravagance, giving, in response, his own rapturous description of that self-same country :

...the whole glory and blessing of these sacred coasts depended on the rise and fall of their eternal sea, over sands which the sunset gilded with its withdrawing glow, from the measureless distances of the west, on the ocean horizon, or veiled in silvery mists, or shadowed with fast-flying storm, of which nevertheless every cloud was pure, and the winter snows blanched in the starlight.<sup>51</sup>

In his awareness of Scott's characterisation being forged out of the spirit of place, we may see Ruskin's ability to enter, albeit in a loosely romantic way, the very local context of Scott's works. This is a rarity among Victorian critics; and although Ruskin had no real interest in the textual and linguistic dimension of

competing cultural codes in the Waverley Novels, he was keen to attune his ear to that localised language used by a character such as Wandering Willie Steenson.

Here Ruskin entered his most poetic sensibility, in so far as he was very precise in his understanding of Scott's language. Willie describes himself in the novel as having been born "within hearing of the roar of Solway." This latter phrase was so striking for Ruskin as to be worthy of close examination. Scott, he said, never used words "in a hackneyed sense," and the word 'roar', though appearing to overstate, was completely apposite :

...no other sound of the sea is for an instant comparable to the breaking of deep ocean, as it rises over great spaces of sand. In its rise and fall on a rocky coast, it is either perfectly silent, or, if it strike, it is with a crash, or a blow like that of a heavy gun. Therefore, under ordinary conditions, there may be either *splash*, or *crash*, or *sigh*, or *boom*; but not *roar*. But the hollow sound of the countless ranks of surfy breakers, rolling mile after mile in ceaseless following, every one of them with the apparent anger and threatening of a fate which is assured death unless fled from,- the sound of this approach, over quicksands, and into inextricable gulfs of mountain bay, this, heard far out at sea,

or heard far inland, through the peace of secure night - or stormless day, is still an eternal voice, with the harmony in it of a mighty law, and the gloom of a mortal warning.<sup>52</sup>

For the Victorian temperament, the moral value of natural scenery was nowhere a more powerful element in the Waverley Novels than in such cases as this, where the Solway Firth transfixed not only Darsie Latimer, but John Ruskin. The openness to the experience of Nature, as important in absorbing the value of landscape as in the correct evaluation of art, was the force at work here in Ruskin's conception. This was not a reasoned analysis, for all Ruskin's occasional insistence that there is a methodology in his theory of the imagination. Rather this was a triumph of the critic as intuiter, the skill being in the return to a heightened, almost infantile state of innocence.

Ruskin's Scott was a Romantic conception. Ruskin used the Jacobitism in Redgauntlet to trace a supposed emotional and imaginative yearning in Scott's character. Similarly, in the long essay on Scott in Fors, he considered the true context of the novel to be the ancestral importance of Jacobitism to Scott. This judgement he reached by following biographical evidence, which, as he concluded, led the student unfailingly to perceive Scott's ultimately equivocal, but very deep-rooted commitment to Jacobitism. Recollections of Scott's ancestor, Walter Scott of Raeburn, whose intrigues in the Jacobite cause had led to his own

personal ruin, were perceived to be an essential and irrefutable part of Scott. The result of this family history, in Ruskin's view, was an abiding fear of too strong an attachment to Jacobitism; but also a sense of the power of the cause in men's hearts and minds.<sup>53</sup> Ruskin on no account considered Scott to have come to terms at all with the conflicting forces in Scottish history; rather he interpreted all of the works as the outpourings of an unconscious Scott.

#### *SCOTT'S MORAL, AND OTHER, LESSONS*

Typically, Ruskin's extrapolations on Redgauntlet were more to do with the world immediately around him than with the substance of opposed codes and value-systems in the novel. Thus, in 'Sesame and Lilies', he extracted Lillias Redgauntlet and placed her in a select team: Scott's 'model women'. These characters we may see as constituting one of the principal longings of his own life - that for what Ruskin described, after Dante, as *l'amor che move 'sol e l'altra stelle* - love for a 'perfect' woman.<sup>54</sup>

Scott's women characters, Ruskin argued, although inconvenient for many modern ideas, embodied the essential truths about womanhood and relations between the sexes. Here Ruskin constructed, on the basis of supposed past values, moral paradigms for his own age. These we can see to be neither objective pictures of the past, nor balanced portrayals of departed cultures and places, nor even

detailed appraisals of character, but simple assertions of moral lessons for the women of today :

...in his imaginations of women,- in the characters of Ellen Douglas, of Flora MacIvor, Rose Bradwardine, Catherine Seyton, Diana Vernon, Liliast Redgauntlet, Alice Bridgenorth, Alice Lee, and Jeanie Deans,- with endless varieties of grace, tenderness, and intellectual power, we find in all a quite infallible and inevitable sense of dignity and justice; a fearless, instant, and untiring self-sacrifice to even the appearance of duty, much more to its real claims; and, finally, a patient wisdom of deeply restrained affection, which does infinitely more than protect its objects from a momentary error; it gradually forms, animates, and exalts the characters of the unworthy lovers, until, at the close of the tale, we are just able, and no more, to take patience in hearing of their unmerited success. So that in all cases, with Scott as with Shakespeare, it is the woman who watches over, teaches, and guides the youth; it is never, by any chance, the youth who watches over or educates his mistress.<sup>55</sup>

This kind of extrapolative assertion was Ruskin's dominant technique when writing of Scott. Although here we see an

interesting point, that the above-mentioned women characters actually have an influential and positive role in the novels, it is overwhelmed by the earlier strident polemic.

This approach applies in virtually all of Ruskin's Scott writings. Of character study there was none, save fleeting comments, such as that Alan Fairford, along with Jonathan Oldbuck and Frank Osbaldistone, was a "definite and intentional" self-portrait by Scott<sup>56</sup>; or, elsewhere, that it was a good thing that Scott's young men characters were insipid, "simply incapable of doing anything seriously wrong."<sup>57</sup>

Ruskin was, however, on occasion able to see from a somewhat wider perspective. Again in the only text to which he refers at any length, we can see that he found a single central drama in Redgauntlet, and that a moral and eternal one. This was the opposition of the 'law of the sword', as urged by Sir Hugh Redgauntlet and available to Darsie Latimer, and the 'law of precept', as urged by Saunders Fairford upon his son Alan. The novel, Ruskin claimed, was able to show, in the fate of its characters, how the former, though triumphant, was inadequate. Its application was, he said, twofold - moral and civil, and in two characterisations Scott showed the failure. The character of Nanty Ewart, for example, constituted :

...the most instructive and pathetic piece of  
Scott's judgment on the abuse of the moral law, by

pride, in Scotland, which you can find in all his works.<sup>58</sup>

And, similarly, that of Peter Peebles showed "the abuse of the civil law by sale, or by simony."<sup>59</sup> This, for Ruskin, constituted a far superior portrait to Dickens' ostensibly similar Miss Flite in Bleak House. In Ruskin's view, it was because of *his* desolation, *his* utter degradation, and *not* because of the overstatement applied by the writer, that Peter Peebles was a total ruin, and miserable to the point that the reader could not pity, but only hate him as if real and morally responsible. And again Scott's simple method, telling "the facts he knows, - no more," made for a more instructive characterisation :

That, says Scott, is the beautiful operation of the Civil Law of Great Britain, on a man it has spent its best intelligence on, for an unknown number of years. His affairs being very obscure, and his cause doubtful, you suppose ? No. His affairs being so simple that the young *honest* counsel can explain them entirely in an hour; - and his cause absolutely and unquestionably just.<sup>60</sup>

Again, Scott's power lay in the revelation of the truth behind these events. For not only was there human law, in which Peebles placed his faith; there was also a Divine Law, which Peebles ignored. Here Scott was able to reveal "the full relation of

private and public act," that we may learn the necessary honesty and consistency which must subsist between the two. And Ruskin made an important insight into Scott's characteristic methodology of distinguishing characters as embodiments of certain moral and political positions - as in the placing of two young lawyers, one the son of a Cavalier, the other the son of a Puritan, at the centre of Redgauntlet. The novel was thus a model of well-constructed argument. He referred at one point to a kind of 'heraldic quartering', averring :

The best, by other masters, are a mere play of kaleidoscopic colour compared to the severe heraldic delineation of the Waverleys.<sup>61</sup>

Ruskin's enthusiasm for the novel is manifest. The Chapter surrounding the crisis of Alan Fairford's opening speech at the bar was, he wrote, "one of the supreme masterpieces of European literature."<sup>62</sup> And Alan, as the "real hero, next to Nanty Ewart,"<sup>63</sup> was so for Ruskin, not because historically progressive, but because acting like a hero, heroically and like a young man in love with an ideal young woman :

...there is a bit of love in Redgauntlet which is worth any quantity of modern French or English amatory novels in a heap. (Scott) is going to tell you how Love ought first to come to an entirely



strong, entirely prudent, entirely pure youth, of his own grave profession.<sup>64</sup>

In Ruskin's conception, Scott illustrated the necessity of final transition from the myths, dreams and dangers of Jacobitism, and the development of sensibility in terms of emotional, parental and national identity for Darsie. But, for Ruskin, the possibility of escape from the nineteenth century appears to outweigh all. The novel, for him, was about idealised worlds and characters.

Ruskin thus asserted that the skills of Wandering Willie were greater by far than that which anyone in the present could offer. Scott, in the novel, had prosaically introduced Willie through his "wild, complicated, and beautiful variations...in the exercise of his own very considerable powers."<sup>65</sup> Ruskin saw much more. He saw in Willie the "noble pride of a man of unerring genius."

Moreover, he went on to tell of the historical authenticity of the character of Willie Steenson, as testified by Joanie, his own Scots housekeeper. He then moved to the general plane, to make an important distinction, between the use of the term 'genius' for Willie, with all the respect it was accorded in days gone by, and the use of the term in the modern world, where

...the names of artists, whose birth was an epoch in the world's history, are dragged through the gutters of Paris, Manchester, and New York, to

decorate the last puffs written for a morning concert, or a monthly exhibition...<sup>66</sup>

Ruskin the élitist social critic could, without blenching, praise the beauty of a 'folk' creation in Scott, while deriding popular taste in his own time. The great cause of the novel - Jacobitism - Ruskin, like many Victorian readers of Scott, was happy to reduce to a label conveniently to attach to generally stirring deeds and more or less heroic conduct. Its significance to Scott Ruskin considered to be a matter of sentimental irresistibility, in accordance with a Romantic, rather than Enlightenment, view of creativity. Complexities and recalled suffering were shunned in Ruskin's Redgauntlet, in favour of a magical and hermetic world, where every aspect, down to the wonder of Liliias Redgauntlet's dancing, offered something of the Divine :

*Real* dancing, not jumping, or whirling, or trotting, or jigging, but dancing...winning applause from men and gods.<sup>67</sup>

As Green Mantle, Liliias, because as yet unknown to be Darsie's sister, was able to maintain the enigma of romance. She was thus, for Ruskin, invested with a 'classless', very 'Scots' and very 'womanly' grace. Such moments of 'magic', and of inexplicable bewitchment, here by womanhood, could be associated with a rootless and directionless phase in Darsie's life. But Ruskin shies away from Darsie's maturation, preferring to see idealised womanhood.

Ruskin, we can discern, felt the world of Redgauntlet to be very much a past icon, frozen and absolute, like the times it depicted. The novel itself was "inaccessible nowadays", because of cultural and moral changes.<sup>68</sup> It was to an idealised ineffable beauty, nowhere more quintessentially expressed than in Scotland, that Ruskin was looking when he described Wandering Willie's music as

...the glory...of all *Music*, rightly so called,-  
which is a part of God's own creation, becoming an  
expression of the purest hearts.<sup>69</sup>

Where Ruskin's ecstatic revelling in Darsie's 'innocence' is most Romantic is in the assumption that Darsie does not *have* to become a man of the second half of the eighteenth century. That transition, in the novel, involved evaluating, not idealising the traditional past. Scott's novel moved around the interface of memory and experience to show the role which these must play in the future. The experience of Nature given to Darsie Latimer was, for Scott, a kind of temporary admission to the now unavailable past; for Ruskin it was a dream.

But Ruskin was more of a mainstream Victorian than he realised. In the mass of teachings and preachings he gave the world, we find much assertion of the value of 'real' Work, which perhaps most succinctly reveals the inconsistency of his attitudes towards the nineteenth century's industrialisation and progress. Lawyers, for instance - such as Scott - were, like many contemporary

professional groups, chastised for not doing proper work. They were "living by their judgment, and sermons," and as such involved in "a deadly sin."<sup>70</sup> In so doing the sacredness of *honest work* was forgotten :

...all such professional sale of justice and mercy is a deadly sin. A man may sell the work of his hands, but not his equity, nor his piety. Let him live by his spade; and if his neighbours find him wise enough to decide a dispute between them, or if he is in modesty and simplicity able to give them a piece of pious advice, let him do so, in Heaven's name, but not take a fee for it.<sup>71</sup>

Ruskin's paradigm of alternative values, part-Italian Renaissance, part-Biblical, part-Scott country, was a generalised invocation of a better time. But for all the apparent radicalism of his separation between 'money-value' and 'moral value', nevertheless he was, as he conceded, a "violent Tory of the old school."<sup>72</sup> He had an irremovable aversion to democracy. He hated popular taste. He resisted utterly the enfranchisement of women, indeed any moves towards their emancipation. His quasi-Biblical idealism was resoundingly an endorsement of the Work ethic, as in this pronouncement from Fors Clavigera of the "three ultimate results," which evinces a kind of restricted meritocracy, with no fundamental change :

...the usurer's trade will be abolished utterly...the employer will be paid justly for his superintendence of labour, but not for his capital; and the landlord paid for his superintendence of the cultivation of land, when he is able to direct it wisely.<sup>73</sup>

His exhortation to the ruling classes was that, in their roles as employers of labour and landowners, they must act *responsibly*. This was rhetorically dramatic, but was very much aimed at improving the quality of management :

...neither will be permitted to establish themselves any more as senseless conduits, through which the strength and riches of their native land are to be poured into the cup of the fornication of its Babylonian 'City of the Plain.'<sup>74</sup>

In the loss of *correct* social relations within communities Ruskin was happy to assign much blame to workers, also. He used Scott as an example of 'right values' in the management of tenants, which could be opposed to the spread of usury, and of the mechanical principles of political economy to every corner of modern life. The ideal had been achieved at Abbotsford :

...there is not the least question about striking for wages on the part of Sir Walter's servants. The

law of supply and demand is not consulted, nor are their wages determined by the great principle of competition...<sup>75</sup>

Ruskin urged the moral lessons to be discerned in Scott's conduct. For even when his own financial affairs were parlous, Sir Walter had attended to the immediate needs of his dependents. This, said Ruskin, was the manner befitting his landowning status :

During the late distress, though his own immense rents remained in arrears, and though I know he was pinched for money...he absented himself from London in order to pay...the labourers employed on his various estates. These amounted...to nine hundred and fifty men.<sup>76</sup>

Ruskin was constantly eager to point to the moral lessons to be learned from Scott's biography; and he saw a seamless garment in the work and the life. But it was particularly the truths of right conduct and management which might be gleaned from a correct understanding of Scott's life :

...the conditions of the life of this wise man, that they may learn how to rule their own lives, or their children's, or their servants'...with this particular object, that they may be able to determine, for themselves, whether ancient

sentiment, or modern common sense, is to be the rule of life, and of service.<sup>77</sup>

Scott's moral lessons, for Ruskin, were many. He was, in Ruskin's judgement, severe about excess, even Scottish excess. And his perception was so "just and intense" that we can find lessons in even the failings of 'the Scotch character.' Scott's depiction of the errors of extremism, in Old Mortality, for example, was "intensely illustrative." To four of Scott's characters Ruskin pointed in particular. The Covenanters Bessie Maclure, Ephraim Macbriar, Mause Headrigg and Balfour were useful above all in the sincerity with which each held a distinctive position. This, he averred, was invaluable theological analysis :

Vulgar modern Puritanism has shown its degeneracy in nothing more than in its incapability of understanding Scott's exquisitely finished portraits of the Covenanter. In Old Mortality, alone, there are four which cannot be surpassed; the typical one, Bessie Maclure, faultlessly sublime and pure; the second, Ephraim Macbriar, giving the too common phase of the character, which is touched with ascetic insanity; the third, Mause, coloured and made sometimes ludicrous by Scottish conceit, but utterly strong and pure at heart; the last, Balfour, a study of supreme interest, showing the effect of the Puritan faith, sincerely held, on

a naturally and incurably cruel and base spirit. His last battle-cry - 'Down with the Amorites,' the chief Amorite being Lord Evandale, is intensely illustrative...<sup>78</sup>

These four Covenanters, with Davie and Jeanie Deans in The Heart of Midlothian, and Bailie Nicol Jarvie and Andrew Fairservice from Rob Roy, constituted, for Ruskin, "a series of theological analyses far beyond those of any other philosophical work...of any period."<sup>79</sup>

Specific virtues may be identified with individual characters. Thus, Old Mortality's Mause was a type of "solemn, fearless and patient faith", Alison Wilson of the fine quality of Frugality, and so on. The way to read a novel, as he explained to a young student, was thus :

Read your Waverley, I repeat, with extreme care; and of every important person in the story, consider first what the virtues are; then what the faults inevitable to them by nature and breeding; then what the faults they might have avoided; then what the results to them of their faults and virtues, under the appointment. Do this after each chapter; and write down the lessons which it seems to you that Scott intended in it; and what he means you to admire, what to despise.<sup>80</sup>



Moreover, Ruskin urged that, for consistency of moral tone, reading from *The Book of Abraham* should follow the perusal of a *Waverley* Novel. Scott offered the truths of the human heart; indeed, was the *Old Mortality* of the heart.<sup>81</sup> Above all, he achieved, in his life and in his art, a testament to truth and the divine, a genuine understanding of Man's purpose which answered the misguided utilitarian understanding. For Ruskin, the nineteenth century was an age when the *true* use and function of Man were

...to be the witness of the glory of God, and to advance that glory by his reasonable obedience and resultant happiness...Whatever enables us to fulfil this function is, in the pure and first sense of the word, Useful to us.<sup>82</sup>

There was, emphasised Ruskin, no question of Scott's secularity detracting from the value of his teachings. For that was not a matter of Scott's choice, and the 'neutral' Scott Ruskin depicted here was an essential element of nineteenth century views of him. As "the representative of the mind of his age," Scott was simply the apotheosis of a very modern inability firmly to believe in anything. What raised him above the secular, was "the instinctive sense...of the Divine presence, not formed into distinct belief."<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, Ruskin's assertion of a valuable and eternal humanity in Scott and his work confirmed dominant Victorian views, in clearly marginalising the folk-world of superstitions, tradition

and linguistic distinctiveness. Just as Bagehot saw folk characters as 'grotesques,' so Ruskin described language only in terms of quaintness and impenetrability. Scott's world was remote above all because the English had difficulty with the Scots dialect, even though Ruskin bemoaned its degeneration from being a "pure" form in Scott's time to a widespread "vulgarity."<sup>84</sup> In consequence, much "earnest effort" had to be applied to "understand the vastness" of Scott's achievement. His world had gone forever. But in its inaccessibility it was frozen as a perfect model. With striving, the reader would gain :

He must now be read with the care which we give to Chaucer; but with the greater reward, that what is only a dream in Chaucer, becomes to us, understood from Scott, a consummate historical morality and truth.<sup>85</sup>

Morality was eternal. Ruskin urged an eternal order, to which approximated the Scotland of old. And in the assertion of spiritual need in mankind, Scott was a good counterweight to modern materialism. Indeed, we see here a tolerant Ruskin, who in his assertion of the need for the Imagination, by no means excluded from human affairs non-Christian belief. Thus Scott's acceptance of the supernatural beliefs of the past, was a relatively positive feature. That the inexplicable had a status in the novels, that the empirically-verifiable and rational was only *part* of the story, were to Scott's credit. Indeed, only when Scott's "incapacity of

steady belief in anything"<sup>86</sup> led to the overbearing rationality and intolerance of Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft was the final decline of Scott's powers in evidence, according to Ruskin.<sup>87</sup>

In Ruskin's conception, however, all this was only supplementary grist to his mill of attacking the modern. Scott, because asserting the imaginative, was challenging the awful present. Even a ghost or a water-spirit were welcome in an age when imagination was so trampled by the Utilitarian view of mankind's needs being only "houses and lands, and food and raiment."<sup>88</sup> Thus, the Bodach Glas in Waverley and the apparitions of the White Lady in The Monastery were good because, like Shakespeare's ghosts and witches, they "were expressions of real belief, more or less hesitating and obscure."<sup>89</sup>

Ruskin's comments in this regard provide us with important clues to the immense nineteenth-century appeal of the peculiar balance of opposing systems of thought which Scott achieved. In this conception, Scott's greatest work emerged from his bringing into harmony and judicious balance the two conflicting elements of "absolute and known truth" and the supernatural.<sup>90</sup>

Ruskin follows this through to a ranking-order of novels. Where Scott expressed scepticism of the power of the supernatural upon human events, while still indicating a strongly-developed sense of that power, he achieved his most important work, as in Waverley. Where he limited the role of the supernatural, that is, where "his

worldliness too early makes him deny his convictions,"<sup>91</sup> or where he rendered it merely "vague possibility", as in Old Mortality or The Antiquary, the work had more of "intellectual truth."<sup>92</sup>

The finest work in this 'great' line was in the two succeeding novels, Rob Roy and The Heart of Midlothian. The latter had a 'stricter' truth than any other of Scott's works :

...rigid in truth, it is also the most exalted in its conception of human character...it is the clearest in acknowledgment of the overruling justice of God, even to the uttermost, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, and purifying the forgiven spirit without the remission of its punishment.<sup>93</sup>

The internal judiciary of the novels was as important for Ruskin as it had been for Bagehot, the morality of the whole novel being clearly visible in the sequence of events, and in the fortunes of the characters. The Heart of Midlothian thus achieved greatness :

It is...distinct in its assertion of the moral law; the assignment of earthly reward and punishment being, in this story, as accurately proportioned to the degrees of virtue and vice as the lights and shades of a photograph to the force of the rays. The absolute truth and faith of Jeanie make the

suffering through which she has to pass the ultimate cause of an entirely prosperous and peaceful life for herself, her father, and her lover: the falsehood and vanity of Effie prepare for her a life of falsehood and vanity: the pride of David Deans is made the chief instrument of his humiliation; and the self-confidence which separated him from true fellowship with his brother-Christians, becomes the cause of his eternal separation from his child.<sup>94</sup>

The comparison is a fascinating one, suggesting a perception of Scott as capturing the very essence of human society, and presenting accurate pictures of his world, at least in terms of a moral schema. This series of moral lessons available in the novels was inescapably a Divine one. And in characterisation related to unchanging, inescapable Truth, was the greatest value to be located. Character must relate to 'Nature', and to the eternal verities of human nature. This was 'accuracy' in literature. Great writers showed ethical and moral problems solved by the permanent laws of a Divine ordering of life. Like Shakespeare's, Scott's characterisation was great, because however "ridiculous, unreasonable...unjustifiable", nevertheless "that is the way God and Nature manage it." They simply could not help it.<sup>95</sup>

For Ruskin, Scott's pre-eminence was very much a simulacrum of issues and values of Ruskin's own. We see constantly his pre-

occupations with an abstracted tradition, conceptions of idealised womanhood, and the moral good of landscape. Scott simply fills out the foreground. But there were now developing patterns in Victorian criticism of Scott. Just as Carlyle increasingly turned to stern authority as the refuge and security for the torment he felt at the age's moral failings, so for Ruskin these demanded the authority of discipline, of social hierarchy and order.

Ruskin felt at home with Scott's novels, not least in their most conservative values, but, like many contemporaries, he was reluctant to delve too deeply into the reality of Scott's folk-world. Thus, whatever the depth of his appreciation of Scott's 'truth', he largely failed to take account of the localised and distinctive *cultural* basis for values, which Scott showed with such fine delineation in individuals and communities. Ruskin's concern with wider and more nebulous matters was easily comprehended by his Victorian audience, as a speciously simple one :

...the fact is, that there are certain eternal laws for human conduct, which are quite clearly discernible by human reason...the first duty of every man in the world is to find his true master, and submit to him; and to find his true inferior, and conquer him...A base nation crucifies or poisons its wise men, and lets its fools rave about the streets. A wise nation obeys the one, restrains the other, and disciplines all.<sup>96</sup>

For all the invective, for all the obloquy, this was consensual Victorianism. In obedience and duty all could yet be saved. Ruskin typically cited Scott in this call, invoking the ethic of The Fair Maid of Perth to substantiate his call for an enlightened attitude of submission to eternal laws. For in such was the true freedom which all people seek. Scott's own temporising would never have led him to this kind of assertion about the ages of feudalism; but he was being employed here to buttress more Victorian prejudices and moral complaints :

I know not if a day is ever to come when the nature of right freedom will be understood, and when men will see that to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him or to his place, is not slavery. It is often the best kind of liberty,- liberty from care...There is...a reverence which is servile, that is to say, irrational or selfish: but there is also noble reverence, that is to say, reasonable and loving; and a man is never so noble as when he is reverent in this kind...Which had...most of the serf nature in him,- the Irish peasant who was lying in wait yesterday for his landlord, with his musket muzzle thrust through the ragged hedge; or that old mountain servant, who 200 years ago, at Inverkeithing, gave up his own life and the lives of his seven sons for his chief?<sup>97</sup>

From the mid-century, there was very little dissent from the tenets of Ruskin's version of Scott. His evaluation of Scott summarised much essay-writing and reviewing opinion, in asserting Scott's greatness as based on agreed eternal verities of 'human character'. To this core critical territory he added his own passion for the natural world, and avowed its moral qualities. Although this understanding of the natural world, as intrinsically possessing such powers, was undoubtedly a diminishing one as the century neared its close, Ruskin's Scott manifestly offered the illusion to many conservative readers of a natural world with which mankind was at peace, and to which he could turn for solace or spiritual reassurance.

Ruskin also asserted the power of the imagination in an appealing critique during the greatest incursions of utilitarianism in social and civic planning. And he presented a picture of the innocent, unsophisticated artist which was very engaging to an age beset by the elaborations of pseudo-Brownings and aesthetes. The turpitude of the present was, in Ruskin, set easily alongside an idealised past, glorious, chivalrous, and vanished.

But for all his assertion of the Divine, the eternal Imagination, in Scott's achievement, Ruskin's excited adversion to Scott also substantiated his own Toryism. This resided in attitudes to women, in social and industrial relations, and in the romantic role which the rural world played in nineteenth century Britain. The real and lived world of the past was not important to Ruskin. Scott's own



support for industrial development and innovation, his complex picture of rural society and its distinctive culture, indeed his creation of a new plurivocal form for the novel: these featured not at all in Ruskin's simple dialectic, which, thereby, confirmed what were now becoming assumptions about the Waverley Novels. These were that Scott's work was a digression from the malign present, confirming the latter's opprobrium; and that it was vestigial of a pre-industrial world to which, alas ! one could not return.

CHAPTER VI :LESLIE STEPHEN- "SCOTT'S STRONG AFFECTIONS AND MANLY SPIRITS"*STEPHEN'S SECULAR MISSION*

Knighthood in 1902, critic and mountaineer Sir Leslie Stephen stood, as it were, at the summit of the Victorian world of letters. His work on Scott was but a small part of a prodigious literary output, his reputation, as Noel Annan has described, firmly based indeed :

After Matthew Arnold's death in 1888 he was regarded as the first man of English letters and an eminent Victorian. His eminence can scarcely be in doubt. When he rendered his account he had written five volumes of histories of thought, the five books of the *English Men of Letters* series, three full-length Life and Letters biographies, two short books of reminiscences, and well over a hundred and fifty long articles and introductions.'

This is not to mention the vast enterprise of the Dictionary of National Biography, of which Stephen was both editor and the author of many articles; nor his purely philosophical work and a mass of minor journalism. He made a truly awesome contribution to the world of ideas and of letters in the second half of the nineteenth century, and perhaps personifies to us today some of the dominant conceptions of what it was to be Victorian, above all in that quality which Michael Wood has described as "his remorseless but irreverent seriousness."<sup>2</sup>

Leslie Stephen's work on Scott is to be found in an essay commemorating Scott's centenary, written for the *Cornhill Magazine* in September 1871, and entitled 'Some Words About Sir Walter Scott.' This was unsigned, although its authorship would have been known to most readers. Considerable supplementary material was then added to this essay when included in Volume One of the collection Hours in a Library in 1874. An essay for the *Cornhill*, 'The Story of Scott's Ruin,' and a long entry on Scott for the Dictionary of National Biography, were published in 1897.

Stephen's principal objective in each of his writings about Scott, was to trace the reasons for Scott's popularity and the nature of his achievement. Less concerned with issues such as Scott's place in any notional literary canon, or with technical aspects such as narrative construction or language, he was essentially engaged in the analysis of a fact, the fact of Scott's popularity. He

recognised Scott as an important aspect of the age, a major influence

...to whom, whatever his permanent merits, we must trace so much that is characteristic of the mind of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

But, within this relatively objective appraisal, a serious delight shone through. The first essay, itself consistently and warmly praising Scott, was augmented on revision to be a very racially-deterministic and vigorous interpretation. Scott, Stephen urged in 1874, was

...a thorough Saxon...the race which has in the most eminent degree the typical English qualities. Especially his intellect had a strong substratum of downright dogged common sense.<sup>4</sup>

This development of this 'commonsense' Scott from earlier critics into an affirmation of evolutionary interpretations of society, was at the heart of Stephen's writing. The later essays were largely concerned with the re-establishment of Scott's personal reputation in terms of the circumstances surrounding his bankruptcy. These Stephen justified and explained, emphasising that Scott "forgot his prudence in the delight of being able for a time to realise his fondest dreams."<sup>5</sup>

Stephen placed Scott as a 'good man' in a tradition of national cultural achievement even more adamantly asserted than Bagehot's, and with a greater present relevance than for Ruskin. He spoke from and to a quite different age. There was precious little romance in Stephen's world. Both Carlyle's intolerance of artificiality, and a harsh Darwinian conviction, that what was wrong would be eliminated, were present in Stephen's scheme of things. The progress of the national identity took place in a veritable cockpit, as he explained in 1879 :

That is right, one may say briefly, which will 'work'. The sham is hollow, and must be crushed in the tug and wrestle of the warring world. The reality survives and gathers strength.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the *practicality* of Scott's novels was their paramount feature. They expressed qualities essential to the age :

...patriotism...hearty appreciation of manly, independent, and domestic and social affections...<sup>7</sup>

Stephen evidently found in Scott - as had the other critics referred to - a model, an educative literary institution. He saw the function of criticism as a matter of explaining what were the most important features of a work, that the public at large would gain most from it. Criticism in Stephen's case was even more criticism of a unified Scott than for previous writers. The

diversity of Scott's work commended itself equally. It was virtually of a piece, only Ivanhoe commanding significantly more column inches than the other novels, for reasons to be explained later. Scott, and his work, were becoming a massive single entity.

A lifelong reader of Scott, for whom Marmion served as a kind of litany from youth, Stephen, after the early death of his wife, readily shared his love of Scott as both man and writer with his daughters, Vanessa and Virginia. Virginia Woolf recalled that Lockhart's Life of Scott was among books chosen for her to read in 1897, when she was fifteen, along with numerous works of, among others, Carlyle, Macaulay, James Stephen, and Arnold. With regard to Scott, Leslie Stephen's pattern was to read the Waverley Novels aloud to her as a child in a kind of endless cycle, one after another of the thirty-two volume Magnum Opus set. Discussion was expected, as she remembered :

At the end of a volume my father always gravely asked our opinion as to its merits, and we were required to say which of the characters we liked best and why.<sup>e</sup>

This was very characteristic of Stephen. The appreciation of literature must be more than a matter of the simple response. Although, as we shall see, Stephen himself was capable of such simple reactions, his moral vigour, and assertion of 'right' values and conduct in literature, were central. The "essential beauty and

ugliness of virtue and vice" must be exhibited plainly and unequivocally, or the literature had failed.<sup>9</sup> Stephen's stern readings of all kinds of literature were thus noted for an insistence on high moral principle, and a profound scepticism in the face of, as he saw it, so much modern humbug, cant and sentimentalism. Excited or enthusiastic eulogy was never his style.

There are a number of significant ways in which Stephen, as Annan has put it, was "at an angle to his own generation,"<sup>10</sup> operating from a different baseline. Born in 1832, he was a compound of several intellectual forces, but was by no means paralysed by doubt and confusion. He hammered out a rough and ready philosophy of life, and developed a resistance to Victorian sentimentality. Stephen's was a steely disposition, in all things rigorous like the mathematician he was, and never seeking refuge in a heroic or embattled self-conception. His conflict was more with those who did not stick to facts, who got carried away, or who had inflated ideas of their own importance. The mid-nineteenth century middle-class consensus, arising from material affluence and a greater national social and economic security, dissatisfied his questing and doubting nature. In his estimation, the average individual in Victorian Britain was complacent, aiming "at respectability instead of virtue."<sup>11</sup>

Complacency, and in particular the unthinking association of moral qualities with wealth, breeding or literacy angered him bitterly, and we can see in him a radical liberal prepared to question the

society forming in the wake of early- and mid-Victorian reforms. His place as a member of an emerging intellectual aristocracy is now clear. The coming of competitive examinations for entry to the Civil Service, the changing constitution of representative government, along with the proliferation of scholarly work in new fields of knowledge, would be visible symbols of the new ascendancy of the 'professional classes.'

Stephen wrote for a secular world. He refused to opt out into homily or catechism. In the face of the loss of God, it was to men's virtues that he turned, not in the Arnoldian simplicity of 'Right conduct is all,' but in the partly utilitarian, partly nostalgic, and partly evolutionary commitment to moral values which would conduce to the general good and happiness of society. He sought to measure Scott in these terms, aligning Burkian reflection on lost nobleness with Mill-like analysis of human behaviour in terms of its moral utility.

The language of this extract from the DNB entry on Scott is very characteristic, and of his age, but there is a deep concern with what were felt to be the clearer and more widely-accepted moral verities of the past which Scott had inhabited :

...his life was the embodiment of the genial and masculine virtues of the older type so fondly celebrated in his writings.<sup>12</sup>



Here is not only the important placing of Scott as a man of a much earlier age, but also the assertion of particular kinds of moral value. Unsophisticated and warm characteristics received pride of place in Stephen's world: Scott as an intellectual, as a child of the Scottish Enlightenment was not on the agenda. Moreover, Scott's life and work were blurred. The one, as we see in the chosen focus of Stephen's own writing on Scott, justified the other.

In this unique fusion, however, we should recognise that Stephen's was a life of very representative changes and influences. His perennial attachment to the perceived homogeneity of eighteenth century intellectual society, his being always profoundly moved by the value and emotion of tradition, of lost virtues, lent his criticism a considerable authority. He buttressed his liking for certain books in terms of an alleged body of intellectual and cultural currents belonging to the previous century.

An essayist and reviewer from the 1860s, Leslie Stephen began that career after leaving his Cambridge fellowship because no longer able to profess the Christian faith. After writing for the *Saturday Review* and *Pall Mall Gazette*, from 1866 he wrote regularly for the *Cornhill*, as well as for *Fraser's* and John Morley's advanced *Fortnightly Review*. From 1871 he edited the *Cornhill*. In 1882, under pressure from the growing number of competing periodicals, it was selling poorly, and Stephen resigned, to take on the work which was to become his most distinctive monument to later generations, the Dictionary of National Biography.

Thus, his published works all post-date his professing agnosticism, and further consideration of his background and beliefs is important to an adequate understanding of his work on Scott. Stephen the eminent Victorian man of letters was an intellectual for whom all of life was underwritten, by the *absence* of any proof of Christianity's right to serve as the basis for our judgements as rational beings. His perennial enquiry, in whatever field he was writing, was for the moral society, for evidences of virtue, and for useful thought and conduct. But he was less at war with his age than either Carlyle or Ruskin. Far from offering a way out of the conflict of belief evident in the world around, agnosticism for Stephen provided a construct by which to understand and take the measure of his age.

Of Scots ancestry - a point he brought out in the 1871 essay on Scott - his Evangelical family tradition imparted to him a sense of the duty to exercise judgement in this world. Christ's sacrifice atoned much, but from childhood man must learn to distinguish good from evil, and right from wrong. But his rationalism importantly coexisted with his desire to judge. His was a particularly utilitarian liberalism, firm in convictions, but willing to hear both sides, before justifying in terms of moral utility one course or the other.

His *summum bonum*, however, was the rational society, and his commitment to an ideal of unprejudiced humility, over and above the seething miasma of petty opinion. The change in his religious

beliefs exemplified this. Writing to the philosopher William James in 1898, he made clear his agnosticism, a position he had by that time held for the previous thirty years :

You (as I fancy) say that there is no 'conclusive' evidence (I say none of any kind) for a certain belief. You infer that a man has a right to hold either the negative or the positive creed. My reply is that he has a right to hold *neither*. By agnostic I do not mean a negative creed but an absence of all opinion; and that I take to be the only rational frame of mind.<sup>13</sup>

With the predisposition to withhold judgement until rational enquiry provided an answer, the influence, early in his life, of utilitarian thought, with its insistence on the importance of the verifiable and the factual in human affairs, led to one large conclusion. In order to tell what was true and what untrue, a system enabling the close examination of human experience for factual evidence was necessary. Impartiality was at the heart, or at least in the central filing-cabinet, of utilitarianism. For Mill, this meant "being exclusively influenced by the considerations which it is supposed ought to influence the case in hand."<sup>14</sup> This approach was axiomatic in all Stephen's work. Dogged hanging on to facts, while others all around clutched at straws, counted for much, as his verdict on Dr. Johnson's morality testified :

...(he) expresses the determination to see the world as it is, and to reject with equal decision the optimism of shallow speculation and the morbid pessimism of such misanthropists as Swift.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, utilitarianism provided a tangible bridge between individual actions and the welfare of society at large. Society, for Stephen, was recognisably the individuated Evangelical world of personal worth or worthlessness, thus perhaps only an aggregation of more or less morally virtuous individuals. But he was seeking progress for society as a whole, taking the arguments about individual morality a stage further than the Evangelicals. And if the divide between reason and experience was to be ended, and unsuperstitious, un sentimental, unhumbugging beings to be acknowledged as the summit of mankind's progress, then the rational and sceptical - and therefore the individual standing above the movement of society, pointing the way forward - must be privileged. The progress of society understood in evolutionary terms offered a way of explaining change over time, of understanding the historical process by which the civilization of society could be measured. And it offered the basis of new dogma, new certainties.

The limitations of systematic utilitarianism, just as those of traditional religious belief, were borne in on Stephen by the 1860s. In his intellectual development, there was an increasing wish to assess the present by producing verities, and evidence of progress in the movement from past to present. This made for his

characteristically *rational* social science. His positivist background, as J.W. Burrow has pointed out, made the terms 'evolutionary' and 'sociological' indistinguishable.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the search for laws in human behaviour became the necessary successor of the millennial discovery, in the early decades of Stephen's life, of fundamental laws in biology and geology.

Spencer was always rather keener to locate causes and attribute blame than Stephen, but his words in Social Statics (1851) put the matter succinctly from the empirical-evolutionary perspective :

There is no alternative. Either society has laws, or it has not. If it has not, there can be no order, no certainty, no system in its phenomena. If it has, then are they like the other laws of the universe - sure, inflexible, ever active, and having no exceptions ?<sup>17</sup>

The laws determining human behaviour, then, were those which denoted good actions and bad, or, put another way, those which conduced to the survival of the race, and those which did not. Self-interest was not the only criterion for judging the good or ill of men's affairs; the welfare of society as a whole must be a criterion also.

Stephen consequently emphasised the progressive element in Scott's work: the clear distinctions between racial, national, religious

and political groups made in the novels gave some support to an evolutionist's readings. Morality and the course of history were interrelated. Moreover, the clarity of differing cultures and causes, as depicted in the novels, was a kind of challenge to the equivocating and temporising present. In short, Stephen saw the Waverley Novels as a highly factual testimony to the mounting rationality of society. This notwithstanding, he also saw them as celebrating moral and political clarity of a kind unknown by the present.

Conduct was integral to the survival of the race, and all philosophy of history must recognise the processes by which certain human qualities were maintained and enhanced by historical events. Ideas, for Stephen, preceded events. The focus in this quotation from 'The Science of Ethics,' (1882), in a description of national struggles, is, significantly, more on human qualities - virtues - than on competing political organizations :

A conquest is the extinction of a political organization, and the commonest result is that the qualities of the resulting group are determined as much by the conquered as by the conquerors. The race is not extirpated but incorporated.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, for Stephen, being a liberal did not imply indifference or contentment with compromise. Study and analysis were not simply in order to accumulate data or to see the beauty of both sides of an

argument. Positive science had imparted to him both the preparedness to seek for facts unstintingly, and an antipathy to overblown theoretical schemes for human progress via new churches and substitute religions. His marriage of reason and experience led to a belief in the existence of laws of progress, and in the possibility of gleaning Truth from the history of societies. For example :

If our grandfathers had looked at the French Revolution scientifically...the true moral, as we all see now, was that England should make such reforms as would obviate the danger of a similar catastrophe at home. The moral which too many people drew was that all reforms should be stopped; with the result that the evils grew worse and 'social strata' more profoundly alienated.<sup>19</sup>

In an age of increasing compromise and doubt, then, Stephen fused many traditions of thought to achieve system and clarity. His was indeed the type of mind which Walter E. Houghton, in The Victorian Frame of Mind (1957) considered to have combined "earnestness with tolerance", and whose characteristics Stephen's colleague John Morley saw as Mill's endless objective :

...the strength of an ordered set of convictions, with that pliability and that receptiveness in face of new truth, which are indispensable to these very

convictions being held intelligently and in their best attainable form.<sup>20</sup>

In his firm convictions, applied in a structure of impartiality, Stephen was able both to accept facts and to seek Truth. In this way he made of his agnosticism the basis of absolute moral principles. Indeed, the great certainty to which he held from the 1860s was that morality and religion could be separated. However, where he partook very firmly of his era, and was far from being a radical, was in the location of model or socially useful behaviour in a vigorous gentlemanly ideal. Indeed, the moral sine qua nons of a civilized society were those personified in the gentleman. These words come from shortly after his announcing his agnosticism :

I now believe in nothing, to put it shortly; but I do not the less believe in morality etc. etc. I mean to live and die like a gentleman if possible.<sup>21</sup>

This ideal, of course, was buttressed for many generations by very unequal relations between the sexes, and throughout both of Stephen's marriages, as well as through his devoted sister and daughters, he was supported emotionally and practically by women's work. In consequence, Stephen's morality for men and for women were very different ones, the result of this pattern of inequality. The difference was in the use of the intellect:



Every man ought to be feminine, i.e. to have quick and delicate feelings; but no man ought to be effeminate, i.e. to let his feelings get the better of his intellect and produce a cowardly view of life and the world.<sup>22</sup>

In chastity and sexual purity within marriage lay the keys to moral uprightness. There were, of course, particular implications for Stephen's reading of Scott from this understanding of sexual and gender relations. It was a "masculine common-sense" which he praised in Scott above all other qualities, this being associated with practicality, decisiveness and clarity in all matters.<sup>23</sup> Morality was derived from the conduct produced by masculine or feminine qualities, and the maintenance of a healthy balance was vital. Women, in this light, offered men the chance to be morally improved by correcting too great a tendency to the masculine. Stephen, indeed, was a neo-Ruskinian on this issue. Love, he wrote,

...not only affords the discipline by which men obtain the mastery over themselves, but reveals to them the true theory of their relation to the universe.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly the emphasis on the individual as the centre of the moral universe was crucial to Stephen here. The Evangelical tradition, as I have stated, placed the duty and responsibility for moral well-being on each individual in society. Institutions

exercised little hold over his imagination. An individual's exercising an influence on others was inevitable; but this influence must be a good one, a true one. Progress and civilization, good morality, depended on it.

What worked for the social sciences, however, did not apply very well in literary criticism. Stephen was aware of the difference of the enterprise, and was, as John Gross has indicated, unconvinced by Hippolyte Taine's attempt to produce a cast-iron scientific method for literary history. Stephen's review of Taine's History of English Literature, published in 1873, was, for Gross, testimony to a belief that no system was yet attainable :

(Stephen) is all the more convincing in view of his complete agreement with Taine's fundamental doctrine, that 'we ought to study the organism in connection with the medium'. Scientific literary history was both possible and desirable, but to get very far it would require precision instruments which still had to be developed.<sup>25</sup>

And Stephen was so fixed on a number of issues, that the absence of 'precision instruments' meant that his literary criticism was, in the event, dogmatic indeed. Assertions of differing status in terms of race and gender are significant - certainly as regards the Scott criticism - in crucially undermining Stephen's project in its attempts to be an objective and quasi-scientific pursuit.

*STEPHEN'S ART OF CRITICISM*

Stephen's Scott criticism is above all the celebration of those "genial and masculine virtues of the older type," and is most rooted in the underlying tenets of his intellectual career: the utilitarian, the evolutionary, and the unabashed nostalgic. Although intellectual traditions may be traced in the nineteenth century to major figures such as Coleridge and Arnold, Stephen's agnosticism shines through. The sole touchstone, he claimed, could only be the individual sensibility, along with such combinations of belief and culture as his own. He urged this inadequacy of literary criticism in 'Thoughts on Criticism, by a Critic,' (1876) where he differentiated the fortunate historian or scientist from the man of letters :

(In history or science) they have one great advantage. There is a definite code of accepted principles...The judge may give a wrong decision, but he is administering a recognised code. We can apply scales and balances, and measure the work done with something like arithmetical accuracy. In aesthetic questions the case is different. There is no available or recognised standard of merit. The ultimate appeal seems to lie to individual taste. I like Wordsworth, you like Pope - which is right ? Are both right, or neither, or is it merely a matter of individual taste, as insoluble as a

dispute between a man who prefers burgundy and one who prefers claret ? The question would be answered if there were ever a science of aesthetics. At present we have got no further towards that consummation than in some other so-called sciences; we have invented a sounding name and a number of technical phrases, and are hopelessly at a loss for any accepted principles. We can, therefore, talk the most delicious jargon with all the airs of profound philosophy, but we cannot convince anyone who differs from us. The result is unfortunate...<sup>26</sup>

Criticism, he insisted, was "only an expression of individual feeling." The critic's role was to attempt to anticipate the ultimate Truth which only time could provide. The worst possibility for a critic was to become part of a "clique," which could degenerate into "a mutual admiration society", with its "pet idols and its sacred canons of taste."<sup>27</sup> Sound critical judgement could only be achieved by distinguishing "between our own tastes and those which we adopt at second-hand," and by speaking out boldly the truth as seen. Stephen stressed that pronouncing one's own opinion implied no expectation that others would follow this verdict. Insisting on the individual's sovereignty over his own ideas, he rejected any enlarged role for the literary critic as a moral leader :

There is surely no harm in a man's announcing his individual taste, if he expressly admits that he is not prescribing to the tastes of others. If I say that I dislike Shakespeare, I announce a fact, creditable or otherwise, of which I am the sole judge. So long as I am sincere, I am no more to be blamed than if I announced myself to be blind or deaf, or expressed an aversion to champagne.<sup>28</sup>

But he did not go so far as to claim that all tastes are as good as each other. Stephen was no anarchist. Rather his thesis was that the critic spoke for an invisible order, was an authority: although he should never be dogmatic, because he was only putting forward the opinion of an individual, the good critic was nevertheless good in so far as he gave "a strong presumption as to that definitive verdict which can only be passed by posterity." This is important in regard to Scott, because insufficient time had passed :

No man's fame...is secure till he has lived through a century. His children are awed by his reputation; his grandchildren are prejudiced by a reaction; only a third generation pronounces with tolerable impartiality on one so far removed from the daily conflict of opinion. In a century or so, we can see what a man has really done.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the whole purpose of the *Cornhill* essay on Scott was to anticipate the verdict of posterity on the *Waverley* Novels. That time, when "the butt is drunk out," when "the judge himself has undergone judgment," was when the Truth itself was revealed.

Criticism alone, as a quasi-Arnoldian project standing outside the progress of society, was a singularly unimportant exercise, in Stephen's estimation. Literature's success

...will be in the long run what it deserves, or, which comes to much the same thing, will be determined by a tribunal from which there is no appeal. All that criticism does is slightly to retard or hasten the decision, but scarcely to influence it.<sup>30</sup>

Only at that later and truth-revealing stage could criticism claim to be scientific, because it was then founded on *facts*. At that stage a writer was accurately judged. Then

...we can measure the force of his blows. We can see, without reference to our likes and dislikes, how far he has moulded the thoughts of his race and become a source of spiritual power. That is a question of facts, as much as any historical question, and criticism which takes it properly into account may claim to be in some sense

scientific. To anticipate the verdict of posterity is the great task of the true critic, which is accomplished by about one man in a generation.<sup>31</sup>

These were key criteria. Art had a racial function: it emerged from and served the needs of the race. Moreover, evolutionary theory meant that criticism had to take into account the *facts* of racial progress, and that the critical voice had to be that of the more evolved posterity, expressing the decided truths about art.

Happy, then, in this conception of his critical task, Stephen renounced scepticism in aesthetic matters, and put forward honestly his own opinions. He insisted that he must customarily work from facts, and particularly biography, to aesthetic evaluation. In this regard, the greatest single characteristic of Stephen's criticism of Scott was the concern to establish the identity of Scott's literary achievement with his biography. Sticking to facts was not only truer, it was the only secure basis. He set out his position in Hours in a Library :

The foundation of all excellence, artistic or moral, is a vivid perception of realities and a masculine grasp of facts.<sup>32</sup>

Facing facts precluded the cant and humbug which were the enemies of sound morality. Countering

...the kind of literature which is bought with avidity at railway bookstalls, and, for some mysterious reason, is supposed to be amusing<sup>33</sup>

demanding that the fullest possible evidence of Scott's superiority be collated. The importance of what we may consider as 'extra-literary' material in the practice of criticism is considerable here. In evolutionary terms, Stephen argued, the reader of Scott should note the hundred years since Scott's birth as ones in which the development of thought had been internationally helped by this one great Scotsman's contribution. And Stephen's nostalgic ideal of the eighteenth century features here, too, for Scott was

...one of the last great English writers whose influence extended beyond his island, and gave a stimulus to the development of European thought.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, it was axiomatic for the Scott essay as biography-rooted literary criticism that practicality, and facing up to reality, were crucial touchstones, when, like Carlyle, he dwelt on Scott's worth as a man. Here, early in the 1871 essay, he indicates the positive value attached to the "manliness" of Scott :

The manliness and the sweetness of the man's nature predispose us to return the most favourable verdict in our power.<sup>35</sup>



*STEPHEN AND SCOTT'S "HEALTHY ANIMALISM"*

Again and again in the essay, Stephen points to Scott's rough-and-ready practicality. It is clear that, for Stephen, there were no purely literary criteria available, and the only facts being those about Scott's life, it was to those that he must predominantly turn to find the truth. In the case of Scott, he found that the result was always pleasing :

...certainly, whatever faults a critic may discover in the work, it may be said that no work in our literature places us in communication with a manlier or more lovable nature.<sup>36</sup>

All this "manliness" for Stephen meant the absence of sophistication, of false or pretentious notions. While Stephen is here firmly rooted in a conception of gentlemanliness and good morality which carried over to, for example, John Buchan, 'Some Words About Sir Walter Scott' is quintessentially a document of the nineteenth century. Stephen was concerned to challenge dominant notions of what the nineteenth century was, and what had been its principal intellectual features.

Nineteenth-century affectation was the enemy to which Stephen opposed Scott. In his promoting Scott as a man and writer "to whom...we must trace so much of what is characteristic of the mind

of the nineteenth century," he was exhorting the understanding of the present century as fundamentally misrepresented by those who bring affectation and theorising in place of the more permanent and true qualities of the race. These 'natural' qualities - spontaneity, patriotism, and manliness - were to be found in Scott. We could choose a "healthy open-air life with that manly companion" or we could choose the modern age, when men

...are rather in the habit of talking about a healthy animalism, and try most elaborately to be simple and manly.<sup>37</sup>

The current of nostalgia for a bygone and golden age of greater simplicity flowed readily in this essay. Scott offered an escape-route, his best qualities being those of his "strong Protestant race" and of his age, "that eighteenth century of time." In the longer version of the essay, for the Hours in a Library collection of 1874, Stephen emphasised Scott's emerging from a society which

...was equally afraid of bigotry and scepticism and had manufactured a creed out of decent compromises which served well enough for ordinary purposes.<sup>38</sup>

In this practical and compromising Scott we see the essence of Stephen's response to Carlyle. Truth was only attainable, if rash and precipitate notions were ditched, and workable syntheses of ideas accepted as necessary to an evolving society. Carlyle,

according to Stephen, could not accept this Truth, and, in inveighing against Scott for being commercial and for a lack of a spiritual absolutism, was himself guilty, "the moral preacher intruding a little too much on the province of the literary critic."<sup>39</sup>

Carlyle's critique, said Stephen, had undoubtedly some truth, but Scott's great strengths were more than justification enough to answer the failings. And Scott, he insisted, by no means paled in *true* comparison with other literary eminences. The qualities of the man were too easily reduced by Carlyle. Even the worldliness and superficiality could be overstated: in particular Scott's perfectly reasonable ambitions to make a fine estate at Abbotsford was actually no less noble than Shakespeare's own desire for "a good house at Stratford". And those qualities - the "prodigality" and "hasty overflowings" - to which Carlyle looked with disapproval, were, for Stephen, the "charm of freshness and fancy," to which "the perfectly spontaneous flow of his narratives" contributed. "Easy flow" was a sign here, not of the lack of conviction or purpose in writing, but of the absence of affectation and artificiality. For Stephen, Schiller's tragedies - to which Carlyle had unfavourably compared Scott's work - "smell rather painfully of the lamp," were too worked-up, and gave "remarkably platitudinous" and "miserably colourless" portraits of ordinary people, as compared with Scott's

...rough border dalesmen, racy of speech, and redolent of their native soil in every word and gesture.<sup>40</sup>

In Stephen's estimation, the creative process mattered only in so far as a recognisable member of the race, an ordinary man, was bringing to life the world he knew, in illustration of the progress of society. Scott's creativity was natural, and was bound up with what, for Stephen, was the essential truth that men of his age and race were altogether more vigorous, and 'real' than many in the present.

There were areas, Stephen conceded, where Scott could be justly accused of failings. But the contrast between his achievement and the alternative kind of writer to which Carlyle would point, was too great. In a significant sentence added in 1874, Stephen, echoing Ruskin, bluntly stated the facts of the matter :

Even in his errors...Scott had the merit of unconsciousness, which is fast disappearing from our more elaborate affectations...<sup>41</sup>

In Stephen's understanding, Scott had long been working on a book before ever he set pen to paper. He had been collecting and substantially rendering into acceptable 'copy' his material from the first hearing. Stephen noticed Scott the antiquarian, the oral historian, and perceived this to be a fine and valuable method of

producing literature. Scott "tramped through many a long day's march," and mined "popular tradition and antiquarian learning." In consequence, what appeared "impromptu" creation had, in fact, urged Stephen, been considered and prepared from long before.

Thus Scott was, for Leslie Stephen, the mouthpiece of a vanished world. But it was certainly not the generalised Past to which Ruskin looked; rather it was a specific time, and one which Stephen hugely admired. That faithlessness to which Carlyle adverted was a matter of the time in which Scott lived :

Scott could but share the intellectual atmosphere in which he was born, and at that day, whatever we may think of this, few people had any strong faith to boast of.<sup>42</sup>

If the Waverley Novels were, as he went on, "addressed to the every-day mind," then that was because Scott's age - the eighteenth century - had no such agonisings as did the present.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with his evolutionary thinking, Stephen was keen to see the past as a series of developments and discoveries, all conducing to the general progress, but by no means giving the present a monopoly on advancing wisdom. The nineteenth century did not have the answers to everything, and should acknowledge its debt, for those truths which then became known, to the eighteenth century,

...the century which loved common sense and freedom of speech, and hated humbug and mystery; the century in which first sprang to life most of the intellectual and social movements which are still the best hope of our own; in which science and history and invention first took their modern shape; the century of David Hume, and Adam Smith, and Gibbon, and Burke, and Johnson, and Fielding, and many old friends to whom I aver incalculable gratitude.<sup>44</sup>

This necessary acknowledgement of debt to the intellectual and social movements of the past is indicative of the respect for tradition, to which Stephen always held. His strong sense that individuals, whether artists or intellectuals, were merely representative figures, lends his work a nearly deterministic quality. "Great men," he wrote in 1869, "are only the brightest stars in a brilliant constellation."<sup>45</sup>

In this light, Scott's importance as a writer was not simply to be measured in the terms applied by Carlyle, i.e. popularity and the extent of his being tainted by commercialism. Rather Stephen's criteria were profoundly embedded in the evolutionary progress of society, a field where Scott scored highly. For he "understood ...the true mode of connecting past and present." By communicating his truth, by bringing to the present the "appropriate anecdotes", "enthusiasm" and "sentiment" with which he himself responded to the

past. Scott bore the values of the past to the present, his works assisted the 'incorporation' of the lost former virtues in the composition of the men of the present day. He showed "by concrete instances...the value and interest of a natural body of traditions," making the necessary connection between very different epochs :

His best service...was not so much in showing us the past as it was when it was present; but in showing us the past as it is really still present.<sup>46</sup>

In this role we can see the challenge to the present which Stephen found in Scott. That eighteenth century which came to life in the pages of the Waverley Novels prompted an equivocal but important reaction in the modern mind, he considered. He elaborated on this theme in an 1874 essay on Horace Walpole, in which we can discern the translation of the past into a highly polemic, alleged simplicity :

We are beginning to regard our ancestors with a strange mixture of contempt and envy. We despise them because they cared nothing for the thoughts which for the last century have been upheaving society into strange convulsions; we envy them because they enjoyed the delicious calm which was the product of that indifference. Wearied by the

incessant tossing and boiling of the torrent which carries us away, we look back with fond regret to the little backwater so far above Niagara, where scarcely a ripple marks the approaching rapids... We take imaginary naps amongst our grandfathers with no railways, no telegraphs, no mobs in Trafalgar Square, no discussions about ritualism or Dr. Colenso, and no reports of parliamentary debates.<sup>47</sup>

This appears, at first sight, an archetypal piece of Victorian fancy: at once nostalgic for a quite evanescent past and disappointed with a too-present modernity. But there are features which make it specific to the rationalist, evolutionist Stephen. For his were not Ruskin's aesthetic objections to the nineteenth century, on grounds of offence to the sensibility, offence against a permanent 'natural' order. Nor are there Carlylean implications that the past, because it hadn't discovered the anxiety and doubt which the present knew too well, was thereby better-off. For Stephen, the imaginary journey into the past was no more than a "nap", the occasional sojourn born of "fond regret", rather than any belief that the past was a suitable place for permanent retreat. Stephen, for all the apparent longings, was committed to the necessity of the present.

Thus, he asserted a rationalist Scott. This was done, however, not by directly associating him with the Scottish Enlightenment - even in the essay for the Dictionary of National Biography of 1897, no



intellectual conclusions were drawn from the names of Scott's educational mentors - but by showing Scott to be rooted in real social situations. It was

...reading widely and storing his mind, by long rambles in the country, with antiquarian knowledge<sup>4e</sup>

which was the basis of Scott's writing. This point Stephen developed at length in that piece, but in the earlier essay, we see what was a significant challenge to the idea that the *Waverley Novels'* pleasure could exist in isolation, need have no ulterior rôle in society. Stephen *insisted* on a role for the individual artist of social utility, a role which could take on moral responsibility and which did not strive for the vainglorious. When he began the more detailed critique of the novels themselves, Stephen happily ridiculed Scott's heroes. Here Stephen was unambiguously anti-romantic, and practical to a T. The Edward Waverleys and Frank Osbaldistones were

...chiefly remarkable for a punctilious pride which gives their creator some difficulty in keeping them out of superfluous duels. They can all run, and ride, and fight, and make pretty speeches, and express the most becoming sentiments; but somehow they all partake of one fault, the same which was

charged against the otherwise incomparable horse,  
namely, that they are dead.<sup>49</sup>

Stephen's points of reference were always practicality and moral utility. 'Do the Waverley Novels *work*, and will they last?' he asked. His own answer, a more considered and long-sighted one than any other Victorian critic, was that the effectiveness of the novels in making a "marked impression at the time" may not be enough to endure. His own criticisms partook to some extent of Carlyle's, but were a series of indictments derived wholly from his own biographical-literary concerns with the moral and cultural direction of the nineteenth century. Scott, for all that he was "the sturdiest piece of manhood in the British Islands," would not easily be forgiven, said Stephen, for having disguised "that elderly London debauchee," George IV, "in the costume of a wild Gaelic cattle-stealer" in the "national misfortune" of the King's jaunt to Edinburgh of 1822.<sup>50</sup>

Stephen's was a Scott apt to be carried away by, for instance, "a lavish display of mediaeval upholstery", or by the sham of plaster trying to look like oak, as at Abbotsford. Some of the novels removed from his known world - such as Quentin Durward, Ivanhoe and Kenilworth - lacked any "solidity or permanence in the workmanship." These gave us little more than "the dress of a bygone century," and "mere contrasts of costume."<sup>51</sup> Some of the later Waverley Novels showed Scott to have been 'written out', producing mere "extempore writing" in what was "a melancholy end."<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Scott, as was by now widely accepted, could not represent "the loftier passions", even The Bride of Lammermoor calling upon us

...to sympathize rather with the gentleman of good family who can't ask his friends to dinner without an unworthy device to hide his poverty, than with the passionate lover whose mistress has her heart broken.<sup>53</sup>

Notwithstanding this objection, Stephen's verdict as to the qualities which would prove to have a "genuine power of resistance" to the "severe" test of posterity was a clear one. Both the poetry and the novels may continue to have sufficient of the "unaffected and spontaneous love of nature," of "the sound healthy love of wild scenery" to act as 'inoculation' against such a life as was possible in London streets. But in that group of novels set in the recent past, confirmed Stephen, was located Scott's best counterweight to the mass of "stucco-work" he wrote in later years.

Scott, for Stephen, was "a thoroughly healthy, sound, vigorous Scotchman," and expressed his fidelity to this identity most perfectly in Waverley, The Antiquary, Guy Mannering, Old Mortality, and The Bride of Lammermoor. Two specific exceptions were made : The Heart of Midlothian, which was "defaced" by too much of "Scott's inferior style"; and St. Ronan's Well, which, for all that many contemporary "connoisseurs" favoured it, was too much "out of

Scott's peculiar line". This point is interesting, for Stephen's insistence that St. Ronan's Well was too "prosaic" does indicate the conception of Scott's essential merits to be other than the more analytical and comedic qualities of that novel. Scott was simply not allowed to be an enquirer into social and cultural mores, a speculative writer of a modern Scotland: he had to reach "immortality" through the quintessential charm which a particular period of Scottish history held for the second half of the nineteenth century. The best novels

...depend, for their deep interest, upon the scenery and society with which he had been familiar in his early days, more or less harmonized by removal to what we may call, in a different sense from the common one, the twilight of history; that period, namely, from which the broad glare of the present has departed, and which we can yet dimly observe without making use of the dark-lantern of ancient historians...<sup>54</sup>

These 'best' novels were so because they were *true*, they expressed a real Scott, the man who was a good friend, a charming companion, and a man who brought "kindly feeling" to all around. It was not as the products of one of those epigrammatic "coruscating geniuses" that Scott's best work would last; nor for any "deep meditation" in his literature. It was *as a man* that he should be judged. The endurance of Scott's reputation depended, however, on the literary

world, of which Stephen was sceptical. Above all Stephen feared that there was so much "rubbish" in Scott's work, that what was "coherent" may be neglected. What were, for Stephen, noble worldliness, and a commonsense approach to priorities in life and art, may not be recognised :

Scott will be severely judged by critics who hold, with Carlyle, that an author should be a prophet. Scott was neither a Wordsworth nor a Goethe, but an 'auld Wat' come again, and forced by circumstances to substitute publishing for cattle-lifting. The sword was still intrinsically superior in his eyes to the pen.<sup>55</sup>

Although he did identify the best work, and did suggest some essential criteria for the evaluation of Scott, Stephen nevertheless found it difficult to systematize his approach to literature.

The mixed origins of his thought, in Mill's Utilitarianism, Darwinist evolutionism, Evangelical Liberalism, and a range of contemporary tenets concerning Purity, Chastity, Manliness and Womanliness combined to produce an effective approach to social science and to philosophy. But in literature, while these components each contributed significantly to the substance of the criticism, he shied away from the assertion of any other than Scott's 'Truth' as the basis of quality. Terms such as "charm" and

"atmosphere" had to suffice, once he had elaborated the point about the best novels being those of worlds familiar to Scott :

A kind of mellowing atmosphere surrounds all objects in his pages, and tinges them with poetical hues; and difficult as it is to analyze the means by which his power is exercised, though we may guess at its sources, this is the secret of Scott's most successful writing.<sup>56</sup>

And much of this charm, in particular where Scott's work rose to its greatest heights, lay in the secondary characters of the 'Scotch' novels. For that ubiquitous production of tedious and absurd heroes meant that, for Stephen, the real focus of the works was "the admirable characters who are doomed to play subsidiary parts." In these Stephen found the confirmation of his own evolutionary thinking. For while Scott was a great story-teller, the colour and life of the books was in his "rough border dalesmen", "homely materials", which breathed the "common sense and common nature" of Scott's world.<sup>57</sup>

Looking with such interest at the society from which Scott's characters came, was an important development for literary criticism as a whole. Stephen was very concerned to see a social, and therefore moral, order in the novels. This took absolute precedence over any 'purely' aesthetic or literary enquiries. This interest also allowed the introduction of nationalist and racialist

perspectives of a kind which came to mean more as the century and the empire's expansion continued. In this context, Stephen took an interesting pride in being one of those who, with "Scotch blood in our veins," ought to feel "the promptings of patriotism"<sup>58</sup> when reading Scott. For Stephen conceived of Scott's world as inhabited by complete populations, complete races. Scott was seen to have distilled racial and national character in his work. He was

...the undisputed parent of a whole population full of enduring vitality, and, if rising to no ideal standard, yet reflecting with unrivalled clearness the characteristics of some of the strongest and sturdiest of the races of man.<sup>59</sup>

The essence of Scott's skill was in the *unmodified* form of the stories which poured forth from his pen. Here Stephen was issuing a corrective to Carlyle's criticism of Scott as a "mechanical" writer: the novels were the fruits of a mature and experienced observation of real life. Scott was, after all, as Stephen pointed out, forty-three when Waverley was published. But the "unconsciousness" of which Stephen wrote was not the receptiveness to some divine voice, which Ruskin had sensed. For Stephen it was a faculty which allowed the unmediated transmission of the truth, the facts, of the now-vanished values of the noble eighteenth century, and of British racial strength and progression.

Scott brought to these permanent truths his own historical knowledge and research. Above all, *Story* was of Scott's very being, just as it was of those societies and those epochs, from which the narratives came. Here the very language betrays Stephen's admiration and excitement :

...it is the very essence of story-telling that it should not follow prescribed canons of criticism, but be as natural as the talk by firesides, and, it is to be feared, over many gallons of whisky-toddy, of which, in fact, it is the refined essence. Scott skims off the cream of his varied stores of popular tradition and antiquarian learning with strange facility; but he had tramped through many a long day's march, and pored over innumerable ballads and forgotten writers before he had anything to skim. Had he not...been cramming all his life, and practising the art of story-telling every day he lived ? Probably the most striking incidents of his books are in reality mere modifications of anecdotes which he had rehearsed a hundred times before, just disguised enough to fit into his story.<sup>60</sup>

In Stephen's criticism of Scott, narrative was felt to have served only as a necessary integrating device for the fertile mind of the author, for the story was interwoven amongst uniquely vivid and



familiar characters drawn from life. Similarly the much-maligned heroes were largely "wooden blocks to hang a story on." It was the creation of "a whole population full of enduring vitality" which was Scott's most remarkable work, and one to which Stephen paid most attention. Stephen located Scott's principal pleasure in telling his remembered truth, as in the writing of Guy Mannering :

He was pouring out the most vivid and interesting recollections of the borderers whom he knew so well, of the old Scottish gentry and smugglers and peasants, and the old-fashioned lawyers who played high jinks in the wynds of Edinburgh. No more delightful collection of portraits could be brought together. But he had to get a story as a thread.<sup>61</sup>

Here Stephen projected his own disregard for narrative onto Scott, claiming the Waverley Novels for the rationalists, the social scientists. The underlying motivation of the novels, for Stephen, was the telling about the evolution of civilized society. In his setting up a Scott preoccupied with the anecdote, the character sketch, the creation of irresistible and vital populations, Stephen was finding an alternative to the Scott whom he had described as having been carried away by "that 'buff-jerkin' business of which Mr. Carlyle speaks so contemptuously."<sup>62</sup>

*STEPHEN'S CRITICAL SYNTHESIS : EVOLUTION AND HONOUR*

In finding a social scientist in Scott Stephen was able to justify his own evolutionary and racially-deterministic thinking about human nature. These aspects emerged with particular force in the additional sections of the essay written in 1874. Scott was above all

...the incomparable painter of the sturdy race which he loved so well - a race high-spirited, loyal to its principles, surpassingly energetic, full of strong affections and manly spirits, if crabbed, bigoted, and capable of queer perversity and narrow self-conceit.<sup>63</sup>

In this vein of thought, the delicacy of Scott's delineation of the minute social differentiation between classes, and his dedication to communicating the impact of historical forces on individual and community sensibility, was relatively unimportant. Stephen saw simply that every character, no matter his or her station, had been assigned a place in "the social organism which had been growing up since the earliest dawn of history." Onward and upward.

Race gave Stephen's criticism of Scott emotional and typological parameters. It permitted him to emphasise the racial, as opposed to cultural, religious or political, distinctions between groups in the *Waverley Novels*. This emphasis in turn confirmed his

evolutionary understanding of the blended strengths of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races in present-day Britain. On the other hand, Stephen was also able to blur Scott's own racial identity, as simultaneously Scot, Englishman and Briton. This led to the placing of Scott's life and work as *essentially* characteristic of the nation - a point also urged by Bagehot. Thus Scott the writer could be "the incomparable painter" of Scots noted above, and Scott the man, with his "downright dogged common sense" could be seen in terms of the wider 'Saxon' identity, as "a thorough Saxon" at bottom. Stephen was able, in this way, to applaud Carlyle's placing Scott amongst a bygone breed of Briton, quoting thus from the 1837 essay :

No sounder piece of British manhood was put together in that eighteenth century of time...his fine Scotch face, with its shaggy honesty, sagacity and goodness...<sup>64</sup>

Stephen could, through use of the construct of race, conflate his own eighteenth century ideal with the more broadly-understood myths of Saxonhood. The rational achievement of civilized society was the result of such *practical* and realistic men as Scott. In the *Waverley Novels* this historical process, the anatomy of an evolutionary process, was displayed as never before, for Scott was

...the first imaginative observer who saw distinctly how the national type of character is

the product of past history, and embodies all the great social forces by which it has slowly shaped itself.<sup>65</sup>

In the essential characteristics of the race, Stephen was confident that the evolutionary process found a sure and steady anchor. In consequence, social and political affairs must be allowed to find their own time for change. In a slightly different argument from Bagehot's against what he saw as precipitate Reform in the 1860s, Stephen argued from the basis of a rationalist Court of Ultimate Truth, with its scepticism about making *any* judgement, lest it be premature or too infected by the enthusiasm and zeal of the moment. His ultra-cautious approach in 1867 reveals an underlying prejudice against the immediate or beguiling solution :

The more we apply the scientific spirit to the investigation of social problems the more we are struck with the essential continuity of history and the impossibility of introducing spasmodic change.<sup>66</sup>

This cast of mind, constantly giving the benefit of the doubt to the status quo, makes for a lasting residue of anti-intellectualism. Thus, in his repeated asseverations of a greater respect for the judgement of posterity, of the wider voice, the public always being "a wiser critic than any clique of connoisseurs,"<sup>67</sup> we might conclude that in this determinism he saw

little role for an intellectual class. Certainly the ideal of action, conduct and good behaviour, seems to take precedence over that of contemplation.

Scott was, in Stephen's eyes, a rarity amongst writers in his boundless kindness, and never losing a friend, "unlike the irritable race of literary magnates in general."<sup>68</sup> But this was no simple reactionary trait in Stephen. For it was to human moral qualities that he was constantly looking. Reform of the franchise in itself was not the issue, it was the leading of individuals to better moral worth which mattered :

Men may not have been made equal by being called equal but the masses were encouraged in the great virtue of self-respect.<sup>69</sup>

Here, at least in metaphor, he sat alongside Charles Kingsley in a racialist aetiology. For Stephen's respect for Scott's "easy humour", "his perfect simplicity and dignity," "his personal charm" and "combination of masculine sense with wide and generous sympathy,"<sup>70</sup> were qualities not so very far away from Kingsley's advocacy in Hereward the Wake (1865) of the "true English man" with his "manful energy, self-respect...self-restraint," and the race as a whole being characterised as

...not scholars, but men; bold, energetic,  
methodic, liberal-minded, magnanimous.<sup>71</sup>

In this vein of thought lay Stephen's pleasure in Ivanhoe. Here was a novel which, as indicated above, he professed to hold far inferior to the very best of Scott; but which, nevertheless, he could not resist. For all its failings,

Ivanhoe cannot be given up without some reluctance.

The vivacity of the description - the delight with which Scott throws himself into the pursuit of his knicknacks and antiquarian rubbish, has something contagious about it.<sup>72</sup>

It might be "most amusing nonsense", ultimately only "delightful reading for boys", but it was still, as he in contented puzzlement reported, hugely popular.<sup>73</sup> The DNB essay, in which Ivanhoe alone merited more than a mere mention, put well this anomaly in his taste. For Stephen, in enjoying Ivanhoe so greatly, was contradicting his own frequently-expressed view of the superiority of fact over fiction. This we may see to have been for two distinct reasons. Firstly, because he found in the novel clear racialist and evolutionary lessons: lessons whose truth was 'prior', was 'essential'. And secondly, because he found the novel so stirring, so enjoyable, that its more 'rational' and socially-useful merit, of revivifying the past, predominated. That he approved on balance is undeniable, but it was almost against his better judgement, against his long-professed insistence that facing the facts of life, not just book-learning, was what counted. For Scott, importantly, was not writing direct from experience :

Ivanhoe...marked a new departure. Scott was now drawing upon his reading instead of his personal experience, and the book has not the old merit of serious portraiture of real life. But its splendid audacity, its vivid presentation of mediaeval life, and the dramatic vigour of the narrative, may atone for palpable anachronisms and melodramatic impossibilities."<sup>74</sup>

All this eulogy contrasted sharply with the tone of the 1871 essay for the *Cornhill*, where Stephen bemoaned more than praised Ivanhoe, denouncing it as "sham romantic", and part of Scott's regrettable tendency to produce "tinsel" rather than gold, and to work in "stucco" rather than marble. In the later piece, perhaps we can see Stephen, conscious of Ivanhoe's continuing popularity, eager to respond to the status of the novel as 'Innocent pleasure'.

The message of the earlier essay was that there should be no such 'aimless amusement' role for literature. While the novel was produced at a time when its limited qualities were all that a mediocre public could absorb, for the present day only "some unsophisticated youths" were likely to be its readership, as it was "no longer a work for men." In the 1897 piece, Stephen went to greater lengths to reconcile popular taste and moral usefulness. Ivanhoe was, reflecting his ultimate fondness for it, again by no means condemned out of hand, and in fact was shown, in the terms of

the fundamental dichotomy of that age, to be both beautiful and useful.<sup>75</sup>

In these contradictions, Stephen's is the most characteristic late Victorian Ivanhoe - a stirring tale of Normans and Saxons in time-honoured nationalist conflict, whose resolution is through arms. The consistencies with the popular History of the Norman Conquest of England (1871) by E.A. Freeman, where national identity was seen as relatively unproblematic and indeed a validation of nineteenth century forms of representative government, were strong ones. Writing on Ivanhoe, then, is not Stephen's most rigorous critique.

For Stephen, the pleasure of reading Ivanhoe was set apart from the systematized and ordered approach he adopted for other Scott novels. It is as if, in the last resort, for all the insistence on the attempt to withhold judgement "till the butt is drunk out", for all the suggestion that literary criticism *needed* a system like that of the social and natural sciences, yet he could not resist the "charm" of Scott. Never inclined to enter into complexities of characterisation or language in his criticism, he was predisposed to enjoy Scott's writing of any quality, because the morality was sound, the man was genial and manly. So even the "invincible boyishness" of Ivanhoe captured his heart.

Stephen was, ultimately, a very unsystematic promulgator of systems, a critic for whom, as he conceded in a *Cornhill* article on Lord Lytton in 1873, Ivanhoe's excellence was "an article of faith,



not of reason."<sup>76</sup> This is a strand of Stephen's thought which cannot be ignored. He was reluctant to see Ivanhoe as in many ways a realistic text, which tells, in Rebecca's words, of "a land of war and blood, surrounded by hostile neighbours, and distracted by internal factions,"<sup>77</sup> and which Marilyn Butler has seen as "almost cynical".<sup>78</sup> Thus Stephen was simply unable - because of *Ivanhoe's* ultimately-indefinable qualities - to place Scott under the microscope as he could Christianity or social processes.

Ivanhoe apart, the Waverley Novels had a very rational appeal to Stephen the evolutionist. His work on Scott was in many ways a challenge to his age, an answer to the dreamy-eyed eulogists of Scott, and those irrational and backward-looking people

...who would not only live in a picturesque ruin, but build modern ruins to be like it; the end of which is, of course, that which they most dread, a final revolution by catastrophe, instead of a continuous development.<sup>79</sup>

Stephen found a Scott firmly rooted in reality, a "poet of association" whose imagination was fired not by fantasies or wild and unrealistic proposals, but by the continuing presence of the past. Scott, for Stephen,

...could never see an old tower, or a bank, or the rush of a stream without instantly recalling a boundless collection of appropriate anecdotes."<sup>80</sup>

He found this social historian in Scott because he looked for reality in the novels. Uniquely in Victorian criticism, for Stephen the novels possessed the power of oral tradition, the magic and charm

...of anecdotes told to the narrator by some old man who had himself been part of what he describes.<sup>81</sup>

The whole package of Scott, the shelf-filling *Magnum Opus*, in its thirty-two volumes, assumed a unity for Stephen. It formed, at least in theory, a bulwark against sentimentalism, and the iniquity of many of the nineteenth century's most disappointing features. Scott was, as Noel Annan has testified, the novelist whom Stephen "never tired of re-reading."<sup>82</sup> The "natural delicacy of perception" which the critic, in Stephen's considered opinion, must needs possess, counted for nothing in the face of the marvellous scale and quality of Scott's achievement, with the constant genius of the man so apparent :

...an energy and fertility of mind which make the feat one of the most remarkable recorded in literary history.<sup>83</sup>

Scott represented for Stephen a symbol of right values, of the correct relations between conflicting impulses. As he put it :

We should preserve soundly those early illusions which, once dispelled, can never be restored...Let there be still a sanctuary to which we can retire by the help of memory, where the toys of childhood retain the ancient glow of the imagination and are not pulled to pieces by the colder reasoning faculty.<sup>84</sup>

The discrimination which he usually applied simply didn't matter in Scott, "difficult as it is to analyze the means by which his power is exercised". The only recourse was to give consideration to sources, and to look at verisimilitude. This the DNB article did at great length. Here Stephen, who had already preceded the article on Scott himself by articles on generations of the writer's forebears, gave documentary evidence of the truth of some of Scott's creations. The originals of characters, Scott's journeys to areas later the locations of poems and novels - all were geared to the version of Scott as serendipitist and anecdotist.

Scott, as Stephen understood him, had been for ever going on "a solitary ramble in the highlands,"<sup>85</sup> and collecting small incidents in the store-house of memory. That he was always inclined to Stephen's own approach to historiography was an important point for

this essay, Scott's first work to be mentioned being an essay of 1789

...intended to show that the feudal system was the natural product of certain social conditions, instead of being the invention of a particular period.<sup>86</sup>

Scott the writer had, in this understanding, strictly social and moral objectives. Stephen's relating the self-disciplined Scott, of "methodical industry", entering into responsible and creative adulthood marked the transition of the essay itself. From being a wide-ranging and biographical text, henceforth its nature is more that of a financial audit of Scott's life. Every detail of his income and its sources, his connections with the Ballantynes and with Constable, the scale of costs at Abbotsford, the sales of copyrights, the production of new editions - everything relating to Scott the man of business - forms the DNB essay. Stephen did not portray unalloyed heroism or tragic naïveté; rather he made the account of Scott's financial ruin as dry as possible.

Stephen's evident task was to give the facts about Scott's bankruptcy, to effect a kind of absolution of Scott's invaluable character. This he performed with the greatest dedication to objectivity. Stephen's only concession to those seeking an overt *viewpoint* on the bankruptcy was this final description of the connection with the Ballantynes :

Scott was in a thoroughly false position when he concealed himself behind his little court of flatterers rather than counsellors. He became involved in petty intrigues and reckless dealing in money.<sup>87</sup>

Important here was the context of the essay, which, as Stephen pointed out, was not only the publication of major editions of Scott, such as the Dryburgh and Border editions (both 1892-4); but these 1890s were also the years of the emergence of Scott's own Journal, whose

...publication in full in 1890 first revealed the full interest of this most pathetic piece of autobiography.<sup>88</sup>

We can thus see Stephen's essay of 1897 as a kind of attempt at rehabilitation of Scott, the 'setting the record straight' by meticulous presentation of the facts. Laborious plodding through materials, showing candidly where Scott himself misjudged, as well as where he was misled, makes this a distinctive and significant contribution to the opus of nineteenth century writing on Scott. Where others in these years poured forth unambiguous praise - as we shall see - here was Stephen being the balanced and judicious rational critic he had not really succeeded in being in the earlier *Cornhill* and Hours in a Library essay. This was indeed a serious scholar.

Here too was the serious doubting of the popular taste, increasingly a characteristic of literary criticism at this time: Scott's popularity told against him, and quite other qualities must be asserted in defence. And here, in the underplayed descriptions of Scott's "stoicism" and his personal strengths, we see Stephen writing at his best again.

Many of the same points applied to Stephen's contemporary essay in the *Cornhill*, 'The Story of Scott's Ruin.' This was an immediate response to Andrew Lang's Life of J.G. Lockhart, in particular to its coverage of the Scott biography for which Lockhart was best known. Stephen's purpose here was again to set the record straight on Scott's financial ruin, claiming that Lang was too lenient on the Ballantynes in their disagreement with Lockhart in the late 1830s. Stephen sought to make it clear, once and for all, that "Scott's whole life" was honourable, misguided on occasion, but also consistently

...moulded by the passionate desire to carry on the old traditions and preserve the ancient virtues of his race.<sup>89</sup>

In Stephen's careful denoting "the facts" about Scott's financial association with the Ballantynes, we find a man praised for his lack of acumen. Those ideals which Stephen found in Sir Walter Scott were perennial ones of the race, were ones rightly placed by Scott above the trivial matter of literature, "the harmless

amusement of life."<sup>90</sup> It was, in Stephen's judgement, a catalogue of Scott's characteristically over-valuing the qualities of others which had led to the disaster, beginning with the patronage of James Ballantyne from 1802. This is explained by Stephen in these terms :

...there never was a man who took greater satisfaction in helping a poor friend. To be a staunch patron of his followers and a staunch adherent of his leaders was an essential article in his ideal of manly duty, and his whole life is a series of such services.<sup>91</sup>

This typical trust in an inferior man had been the prelude to the whole episode, whose most prominent features over two decades were carefully detailed by Stephen. For him, all was explicable in this matter. That Scott "faced the crisis like a man" and finally "extricated himself by sound judgment and firmness" were important.<sup>92</sup> For the reader was presented with a Scott of admirable moral qualities: a man of "personal modesty", "genial goodwill", and "reverent and loyal affection", for whom none but the most favourable verdict was appropriate.

Over the course of these writings on Scott, then, Stephen assented to Carlyle's point that Scott was a child of the eighteenth century. But while broadly agreeing with Carlyle's clearly influential essay, Stephen differed in an important way - in his

ultimate *acceptance* of the visible and materialistic world around him. Where Carlyle was keen to devalue Scott for worldliness, for making of his writer's art a mere trade, and for seeking a patrimony, on these important points Stephen defended Scott. Everyone, he considered, partakes to a large extent of their own age, and, while he clearly did not accept the notion of a *Zeitgeist*, he was, in this essay, making the fairly advanced point of the interconnectedness of art and the society from which it emerged.

His defence of Scott on this issue was as much a defence of moderate and realistic ambitions, of the objective biographical viewpoint, and of honest worldliness, as of Scott himself. He made of Carlyle's comparison of Scott with Shakespeare a confirmation that the expansion of Abbotsford was a perfectly acceptable and *normal* goal, and urged Scott's place in a definite social context at a definite date. To re-iterate this point is important, for Stephen was asserting the 'ordinariness' of Scott, no 'wizard' or inexplicable magician, but a recorder of the truth he was fortunate enough to know. In being a writer who was far from 'deep', and no enquirer into the human soul, Scott was no more or less than an expression of his age, an age not conspicuous for its devoutness :

There is surely a poetry of doubt as well as a poetry of conviction, or what shall we say to Hamlet ? Appearing in such an age as the end of the last and the beginning of this century, Scott could



but share the intellectual atmosphere in which he was born, and at that day, whatever we may think of this, few people had any strong faith to boast of. Why should not a poet stand aside from the chaos of conflicting opinions, so far as he was able to extricate himself from the unutterable confusion around them, and show us what was beautiful in the world as he saw it, without striving to combine the office of prophet with his more congenial occupation ?<sup>93</sup>

Scott's not being a prophet was, for Stephen, a positive tribute. In Scott's doubt, uncertainty, and practical ability to compromise, he found not a man of the relatively recent past, but a figure admirable for qualities partaking of the virtues of the eighteenth century. His best qualities were perhaps, indeed, associated with his ability to convey the reality of that age. As Stephen put it in a brief allusion to The Heart of Midlothian in The English Utilitarians (1900), the world of which Scott wrote was, by contrast with the present, a time

...when the poor man was part of a social, political, and ecclesiastical order, disciplined, trained, and self-respecting, not a loose waif and stray in a chaotic welter of separate atoms.<sup>94</sup>

This idealisation was something of an outcrop in Stephen's writing on Scott's work, but it was, nevertheless, expressive of his sense that in life and work Scott embodied and expressed an actual social order. But this was far from being the area of his critique which was most characteristic of the late Victorian age.

This rôle was filled by his earlier unrestrained emphasis on Scott's "masculine" and "manly" qualities - bearded Victorian assumptions coming to the fore about the gulf between masculine and womanly qualities. Both Scott's life and work reflected this, to the very decided Stephen, and the subtleties of, for instance, Scott's distinguishing between the very different characters and physical beauty of Rebecca and Rowena, were able to pass by Stephen's criticism unnoticed, 'womanhood' being a homogeneous quantity. Now, with the knowledge of Stephen's own being, throughout his life, supported and cossetted by women, the repeated use of such language may be seen as more revealing of Stephen's psychological and emotional repression than of Scott's qualities.

Stephen's search for moral excellence concealed much pain and oppression, also. But, in his stern way, he was able to capture something of the conflicting impulses in the ageing Scott, some of the fervour with which Scott clung to gentlemanly honour and an old-world virtue. Here, in the DNB essay, Stephen made the final words of evaluation more contained :

In his own circle...he was idolised, and was at once a warm and judicious friend. The same qualities make all appreciative readers love him, even when the secret of the charm is not observed. No doubt these qualities are compatible with the characteristic which, in its unfavourable aspects, is called pride. We may be induced to forgive him, if, in the active discharge of his duties as friend and patron, he took a rather low estimate of the functions of preacher or artist, and was blind to the equivocal practices into which he was first seduced as the protector of an old friend. The pride, in any case, displayed itself as a noble self-respect and sense of honour when he was roused by calamity to a sense of his errors and made his last heroic struggle.<sup>95</sup>

This is a very considered verdict, concerned with moral well-being above all, and portraying Scott as morally self-defining in a way impossible in the troubled modern world in which Stephen wrote. In clearly uniting life and work, Stephen made Scott the child of the social Darwinists, his greatest creativity no more than the slight re-arrangement of actuality.

The Waverley Novels could not, after Stephen, be human and social dramas; they had become pellucid and harmless tales of ages tried and found wanting. Moreover, the moral verities were so

determinedly pronounced by so troubled a critic as Stephen that they could not, ultimately, but be thrown out with the bathwater of Victorianism.

CHAPTER VII :

RICHARD H. HUTTON  
AND JULIA WEDGWOOD

- THE MORAL IDEAL

*THE TASK OF SCRUTINISING SCOTT*

Frances Julia 'Snow' Wedgwood, the principal critic covered in this chapter, is an unduly neglected critic and woman of letters of the second half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1833, the great-grand-daughter of Josiah Wedgwood, grand-daughter of Scott's friend Sir James Mackintosh, and niece of Charles Darwin, her importance to this study is through her 1878 essay in the *Contemporary Review*, entitled 'Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic Reaction.'

Her attention, in this important essay on Scott, was on his rôle as a force for good and truth throughout the nineteenth century. A massively popular literary figure, Scott held great attractions for Julia Wedgwood; but his assessment had to be in terms of his contribution to the moral and spiritual health of the century. For her, Literature's primary function, its "most perennial realm" was as

...an expression of the deepest truth...as an answer to the most profound yearnings of our nature...'

She was utterly convinced of the validity of Scott's work in what she saw as a kind of moral crusade. In the fundamental struggle of humanity, that between the urge for materialism and that for religious faith, the best indication of worth lay in the acknowledgment of a precious *invisible* realm in human existence. And she considered that Scott had sufficient of commitment to this realm in his work to be praiseworthy, his genius being "rooted in a firm belief in the invisible."<sup>2</sup>

This element in his character had become an essential claim for his supporters, once Carlyle had set out clearly the sheer extent of Scott's materialism, the worldliness of his objectives. Julia Wedgwood, because of her own version of transcendentalism, thus defined in her criticism, more clearly than any other critic, the quality which permitted Scott to remain *valuable* in any but the most superficial terms. And the *Waverley Novels* could only be valuable because of the moral quality of Scott's own life. Importantly, it was both as man and writer that Scott was seen by Wedgwood as a pre-eminent model :

The thing that showed itself in Scott's character as kindness to the insignificant and lowly,- exaggeration of the powers of others, and

depreciation of his own,- showed itself in his intellect as that perfect simplicity which is one of the finest characteristics of his genius.<sup>3</sup>

Both personal and literary morality, then, may be seen as acceptable in Scott, thus confirming the terms of earlier critics' patronising of Scott as a man morally good largely by virtue of his being *simple*, unsophisticated, and thereby a good role model for the confused nineteenth century. Julia Wedgwood's essay was a piece of characteristically analytical writing, which made a distinctive and usefully synthetic contribution to later Victorian writing on Scott. Its origin was as a direct response to Richard Holt Hutton's volume on Scott in the English Men of Letters series.

Hutton was a theologian and journalist much admired by Wedgwood. Former joint editor, with Walter Bagehot, of the *National Review* and assistant editor of the *Economist*, he was, by 1878, well established as editor of the *Spectator*. His biography of Scott echoed Stephen and Bagehot, with its portrait of a "sunny and healthy-minded" novelist, a man of "masculine humour." The Waverley Novels and the poems offered "bold, bare and rugged" romance, and "simple, natural, unsophisticated, hardy, and manly characters."<sup>4</sup>

But, in addition to these conventional phrases, we have to note the area of most relevance to Wedgwood, and to the wider developments in Scott's place in the late nineteenth century. This was Hutton's useful delineation of the corollary to Scott's inadequacy with high

passions and intimacies of human feeling. For Hutton, this compensatory realm was a fine skill within the 'public' realm, a skill which rendered the novels useful texts of social morality. They were

...pivoted on public rather than mere private interests and passions...the novels give us an imaginative view, not of mere individuals, but of individuals as they are affected by the public strifes and social divisions of the age. And this it is which gives his books so large an interest for old and young, soldiers and statesmen, the world of society and the recluse, alike. You can hardly read any novel of Scott's and not become better aware what public life and political issues mean...no man can read Scott without being more of a public man.<sup>5</sup>

To this dimension of social responsibility in Scott - the conception of the Waverley Novels as documents of good morality, sound public conduct - many critics would turn in attempts to locate Scott as a kind of prophet of social imperatives for decadent and often-dishonourable times. Scott became, in this tradition, a figure to shore up what were felt to be 'declining standards'. To this phase Hutton opened the door. As study of Hutton's wider work shows, his notion of the 'public realm' was less about individual rights, than duties.



If the "nobler aims of life," "a stable society" and "social vitality" were to be achieved, all members of society must assume responsibility. Art must be responsible, avoiding the "monstrous and conscienceless shapes" too often produced in the modern age. Individuals, too, must be responsible, bringing "justice and strength and a certain heroism of courage" into their everyday lives. And all must realise that, if unchecked, the dangerous spread of an increasingly dogmatic atheism would result in no more moral or coherent a society than "the crash and battle of the various revolving cogs of self-interest".<sup>6</sup> Against these fears, Hutton's imperative was that

...we should daily become more earnest than we now are; and...without becoming so, the talk about rights and penalties, and strikes and lock-outs, will result in mere destructive passion,- petroleum and general chaos.<sup>7</sup>

In this stern framework, Hutton tested Scott too, and found him, as did most Victorian writers, embedded in physical reality. The author's "abiding...within the well-defined forms of some one or other of the conditions of outward life or manners" was both the basis of his genius and a limitation. Scott's was a mind ever concerned with "distinct embodiment," shunning the world of "twilight and cobwebs."<sup>8</sup>

Hutton saw Scott's old-fashioned values as somewhat reprehensible, when these led him to disavow his brother Daniel, who had been indicted of cowardice in the West Indies; or when they caused him nearly to fight a duel with Napoleon's former General Gourgaud over a tiny point of honour after the 1827 publication of Scott's Life of Napoleon. For Hutton, Scott's such conservative hanging doggedly onto a "conventional morality of a day rapidly passing away" showed a marked *impracticality* in Scott, which contrasts interestingly with other critics' views.

For Hutton, the age demanded the rigorous scrutiny of conduct which only a coherent conception of public morality could provide. Scott, therefore, was only really thoroughly redeemed, when he had passed from untarnished prosperity into difficulty. Hutton, in his quest here for a model for the present, needed to find the "highest ideal of a strong man" in Scott, and a greater depth than his being "generous, large-hearted and magnanimous". He needed to find qualities which could be acquired only in suffering :

The finer spiritual element in Scott was relatively deficient, and so the strength of the natural man was almost too equal, complete, and glaring. Till calamity came, Scott appeared to be a nearly complete natural man, and no more. Then first was perceived in him something above nature, something which could endure though every end in life for which he had fought so boldly should be defeated,-

something which could endure and more than endure,  
 which could shoot a soft transparence of its own  
 through his years of darkness and decay.<sup>9</sup>

To Hutton's mind, this was the power of the invisible world witnessed in Scott's life, as in no other writer. Scott was elevated by the experience of his financial wreck: he then showed his superiority to the very ordinary ends for which he was striving. Richard Holt Hutton thus represents, in this very challenging approach to Scott, the same implacable and earnest face of moral criticism as does Julia Wedgwood. He delighted in the simplicity and stir of the work, but the real pleasure - Scott's true lasting worth - was in the biography. This, for all readers after Lockhart, had been a silent bedrock to the power and appeal of the work.

For Julia Wedgwood, in her obituary essay on him of 1897, Hutton had not been "at his best" in his work on Scott. But while insufficiently probing in this case, Hutton's "wise and healing words" had frequently diagnosed wonderfully for her the inadequacy of "a merely rational faith" in modern life. Hutton had, from the 1860s, provided an effective answer to science, to the Broad Church, to the doctrine of the origin of species, and to Agnosticism, in terms of both the exercise of Justice and Mercy, and resignation to "a higher Will" and the "allotment of a hard fate."<sup>10</sup>

To this same indomitable line of resistance to rationalist and liberal thought she herself proudly belonged. Thus, she criticised Hutton on Scott for leniency, for too much allowing those flights into eulogy and uncensored pleasure. As we shall see, however, there was by no means a total absence of escapism in Wedgwood's Scott. And Hutton had simply joined the mass of his contemporaries in enjoying the *Waverley Novels*'

...vision of the 'old, simple, violent world' of rugged activity and excitement, as well as that power to kindle men's hearts.''

And Wedgwood's estimate of Scott's qualities depended very strongly on a myth of former values, just as had that of other major critics. However, although Scott represented a persistent moral touchstone in her work, he was by no means flawless; rather he illustrated, for her, possibilities within human nature. These possibilities were not at all consonant with the artistic and aesthetic life; but they mattered a very great deal to the wider moral and spiritual considerations which were her deepest and most enduring concern.

#### *JULIA WEDGWOOD AND THE BACKGROUND TO THE SCOTT ESSAY*

Julia Wedgwood thus perfectly expressed the breadth of Scott's role in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He was less a figure

of the literary world, than of the moral world. He was coming, also, to be synonymous with perceived national identity, as an exemplar of certain desirable characteristics in the people at large. This basically moral identity is also the dimension in which Julia Wedgwood has been most usually placed herself. Richard Curle wrote of her thus in 1937 :

...in her middle years, she did fill a distinct, small niche in the moral, rather than the artistic, world of the last century. She was a typical product of her age, learned, earnest, inspired by a somewhat arid cosmic morality.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed her work consistently revealed what she herself called a "thirst for the Infinite in the Finite," a preoccupation with "the Unseen World",<sup>13</sup> for which our own century has had less time. But her search for the transcendent was by no means a vague and incoherent thing, but rather a dynamic faith constantly correlating Christian conviction with practical morality. It was indeed a very Victorian syntax in which she wrote, but it was also a committed and confident voice in which she characteristically addressed the reader :

The commands of Christ mean not less but more than the commands of other men. Perhaps it will be discovered, by one who sets himself to obey them, that these commands, far from being mere

suggestions for a saintly perfection which the average man may admire at a distance, or mere rhetorical exaggerations of elastic rules of kindness and moderation, are just as absolute, and, in the mere natural order of things, just as impossible as they seem.<sup>14</sup>

Moral probity was at the heart of her work, frequently both as object and subject of enquiry. Christ's commands enjoined the best in human nature, and whether she wrote of the conducement to morality of photography, of the Parnell affair, of Democracy, or of being an invalid<sup>15</sup>, her touchstone was always the unseen Good against which all must be judged.

Julia Wedgwood's Scott essay was just one among a huge number of essays and reviews she produced over some fifty years from 1860, covering a range of topics from 'Invalids' and 'Apologies' to Biographical, Literary and Philosophical Sketches on notables of the contemporary intellectual scene, such as Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, Richard Holt Hutton and John Ruskin. Like many reviewers in these boom years for the periodical, she had a varied and lengthy literary career; but undeniably this career reflected the peculiar difficulties faced by an able woman of her generation in a constricting social and moral climate.

Biographical information about her is scant, but certainly assists us in understanding some of the degree of stoicism, and of

unruffled pleasure in Scott, which the essay reveals in her.<sup>16</sup> Physically handicapped by severe deafness, she was perhaps even more importantly held back from self-expression and independence by the heavily evangelical home in which she was brought up. An early and passionate attachment to an elderly Scots theologian, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, and an unrequited attachment throughout the 1860s to Robert Browning, combined with the incessant disapproval of her family, made for an unfulfilled and frustrated literary career.

After two early novels, Framleigh Hall (1858), which she published as 'by J.W.', and An Old Debt (1866) - as 'Florence Dawson' - she was dissuaded by her father, Hensleigh Wedgwood, from writing fiction. The disappointment this brought was shared by one of her family's closest friends, Harriet Martineau, who had done much to encourage the girl whom she knew as 'Snow'. However, the initial consequences of the break with fiction were relatively encouraging, in that she then made a weighty and well-argued long contribution, on Female Suffrage, to Josephine Butler's 1869 collection of responses to John Stuart Mill's essay 'On The Subjection of Women.' This was a direct and deeply-felt handling of contemporary social and political realities. But this overt association of herself with a radical cause soon became an isolated outcrop in a landscape of more opaque pious and philosophical work.

Following the suffrage essay came a worthy life of John Wesley (1870), her many essays for the *Contemporary Review*, the *Spectator*

and the *National Review*, on which most of her reputation was made; and the weighty disquisitions The Moral Ideal (1888) and The Message of Israel in the light of modern criticism (1894). A biography of Josiah Wedgwood was published posthumously in 1915.

Her firm stance on moral and sexual matters was coherent, urging both the value of the family as the unit par excellence for the enhancement of a sense of duty and loyalty, and the very different contributions to the progress of civilisation made by men and women. The clearest statement made by Julia Wedgwood of a feminist position is undoubtedly that 1869 essay on 'Female Suffrage' for Josephine Butler's collection. Through this essay we can discern a number of the skills which made hers a most valuable contribution to work on Scott in the later years of the nineteenth century. Here was her strong and analytical mind; and here too was her most characteristic methodology - an ability to state opposing points of view without assenting to them, before shrewdly placing them in a historical and cultural context, after which she clearly demonstrated the superiority of her own position.

Clearly setting out to establish criteria by which to assess moral value, Wedgwood brought to this early 'Suffrage' essay a deep care and attention. Critical method was important to her, and only when she had established her terms of reference did she make claims or form conclusions. Her firmness of purpose led to her unequivocal view that strong conviction was not simply acceptable, but a sine qua non of good writing on social and moral subjects. As she



explained, being 'balanced' had little to commend it when there were important truths to ascertain :

It is not the act of a partisan, but of an earnest seeker after truth, to contemplate any large subject, for a time, steadily from one side. No persons are likely to be more onesided than those who attempt to look upon anything from all sides at once; who hurry, that is, from one point of view to another too rapidly to correct their crude impressions of any.<sup>17</sup>

This essay is a dynamic argument for the enfranchisement of women, adducing the concealed benefits which both men and women would gain from this. The object is the presentation of a "*prima facie* case" for the concession of the suffrage "as a measure of expediency."<sup>18</sup> Her case was made in what was predominantly a meditation on the meaning in women's lives of marriage, in "a social framework which makes marriage woman's only career."<sup>19</sup> The areas to be 'common ground' must be enlarged, or all would be losers :

To deny men and women common ground except on the footing of man and wife is in a great measure to deny it to man and wife also.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere she simply warned of the danger that marriage may, in the worst circumstances, degenerate into "a mere magnified

selfishness."<sup>21</sup> Here she announced the divergence of man's world from God's, in the present iniquitous and "disastrous" social circumstances<sup>22</sup>, which forced women to focus on marriage as the *summum bonum* of life :

That women spend the best part of their lives in preparing for an event which may never happen - an event for which the very worst preparation is to hanker after it, while the very best is to be strenuously occupied with something different, is the result, not of God's decision that one form of life should be *happier* than another, but of man's invention that it should be deemed more *womanly*.<sup>23</sup>

In her contention, the abject failings of the social system had made womanliness a poor thing, a "mutilated ideal." Her principle of good relations as the moral centre of human conduct she translated into a call for a more varied world to be open to women. The false ideals of men and women had been brought about by the restriction of conceptions about what women were, what they could be. We can see from this element in Julia Wedgwood's thought the basis of her broader and more 'social' interpretation of the *Waverley Novels*: the novels were, just as for Stephen, documents of a better time, when, as it seems, a more varied and less suppressive social regime had obtained.

To much of the nineteenth century she objected, then. Women must have admission to "higher culture and wider responsibilities"; this would enrich both married and single life.<sup>24</sup> Too many "decorous theories of maidenly life," which "form to so many minds a cul-de-sac," had been allowed to hold sway over key issues - like the reform of the suffrage.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the best summary of this key component of her thought is in the phrase "the life of contrast." Julia Wedgwood located her moral ideal in an imagined former time, when there reigned not laws and external regulations, but invisible truths, administered by "the school of the Conscience."<sup>26</sup> Her abiding concern was a search for a world where contrast and variation predominated over repression and uniformity: for a "wide, enduring, common life."<sup>27</sup> Wider common ground for both sexes was vital to heighten the proximity between humanity's best self and the Divine life. Surely, she asked, the introduction of female suffrage would be generative of "wide-spread and deep-reaching good" ? Surely it would strengthen, deepen and enable a better race to find its way

...to a fuller and richer political life, like some  
 beneficent Nile-stream admitted to fresh  
 pastures?<sup>28</sup>

With this fervent enquiry the essay culminated. She had taken the reader on an imagined journey to a very different place, in which dwelt right feelings and true relations. This final rhetorical

question, although more of a flight of fancy than was characteristic, yet encapsulated the overall power of the essay, and also hinted at the blur of pragmatism and diffused principle which characterised the Scott essay nine years later.

But it was not only the oscillation between captivating imagery and disingenuous rhetorical questions which mark out Wedgwood's amalgamation of styles. There was also the evident balance of conflicting emotional impulses, in particular her understandably inconsistent attitudes to the Family and to Marriage. In some ways she herself mirrored the quality of "double feeling" which she later identified in Scott, and which she carefully differentiated from actual impartiality. Never entirely eschewing a vista of earthly divinity, Julia Wedgwood's moral strictures give us the clear prospect of Victorian equivocation, and remind us usefully that Scott was the writer most able to please the compromising or troubled Victorian spirit.

#### *WEDGWOOD AND THE 'ROMANTIC REACTION'*

Whatever the subject - there was, consistently in Julia Wedgwood's work, an avoidance of equivocation and pettifogging. Conviction rings out in every sentence, however hazardous the syntax. Love of Scott, for example, as she announced at the outset of the 1878 essay, was a matter of complete assent, the product of

...that indescribable delightfulness of nature which mingles like a perfume with the utterance of genius, blending our admiration for the creation and the creator, and making us doubt whether we love the writer for the sake of his work, or the work because it recalls the writer.<sup>29</sup>

Scott's life and work were blended for Wedgwood, as for other Victorian critics. She dwelt repeatedly on his *simplicity*, asseverating that in both life and work he communicated

...a robust and spirited nature, distinct with absolute simplicity, and graceful in its frank modesty...<sup>30</sup>

These qualities were indeed ideals. She later re-affirmed her high regard for him in this respect, in an essay entitled 'The Vanity of Men of Letters.' In this she extolled Scott as uniquely combining greatness in literary terms and freedom from vanity.<sup>31</sup> But for Wedgwood the ultimate test in all matters was to be found in the goals for which humans strove. "It is not what men think good, but what they think best" to which we must look, she urged.<sup>32</sup>

In her work on Scott, while quite ignoring the Hutton text purported to be under discussion, she supported fellow-transcendentalist Carlyle's judgement, that the Laird of

Abbotsford's greatest flaw, in searching for happiness on this earth, lay in his losing touch with his own immaterial side :

If Scott could have been content with his position in the world of imagination and thought, if he had craved no tangible, material expression of his link to the far-away, he would not only have been a greater man, he would have been a far happier, a far more prosperous man.<sup>33</sup>

She went on, however, to insist that Scott was redeemed from the severest of Carlyle's criticism. In what she perceived as Scott's profound dissatisfaction with much around him, he might finally be absolved :

Whatever in his career was worldly and disappointing, he did not sink so low as to be satisfied with it. He felt the emptiness and poverty of the things he grasped at. Such at least was the utterance of his truest self - such we will also believe...was the conviction that lay deeper even than the sense of their loss, and blended with the sense of things eternal that showed clearer as his brittle follies were swept away.<sup>34</sup>

In this point we find the only significant failing which Julia Wedgwood discerned in Scott. She eschewed specific analysis of any

Scott texts, and quoted mostly from the longer poems and from Lockhart. Lockhart's biography clearly underpinned any Victorian reading of Scott; and, as we have seen, Wedgwood was not alone in seeing Scott as a unity, both life and work of a piece. 'Scott' was an idea for Julia Wedgwood, a moral and spiritual construct, in whose detail we need not search.

Scott's faults, as Wedgwood saw them, as those of all people, were in the ideals. But those mundane aspirations of his were all that he could have chosen in his age. And this was an obvious strength in him. He was useful because of the world to which he gave access. He lived amid the "stir and throb" of the French Revolution and its effects, and was transfixed with the change :

...he knew not how profoundly, how permanently it was to influence the modern world, but unconsciously he turned with the tenderness of farewell to that great system of things it was to sweep away.<sup>35</sup>

She thus conceived a Scott sensitive to the fundamental changes in the world around him, a writer fired by the zeal of passing on to future ages the truth of what he knew and had known. This is an insight to a sociological Scott who saw not just political and constitutional change, but social and cultural change also. Wedgwood saw the primary impulse as moral, and the mission as born of fear, lest good be lost forever. She asserted the 'right

feelings' which motivated Scott, insisting that he wrote with the urgency of parting and the knowledge of impending loss :

...like a painter in a foreign land where he knows his sojourn will be short, he flung with hasty hand its lineaments on his glowing canvas.<sup>36</sup>

But, in failing to explore texts in any detail, she made of Scott's copious and various productions only the tale of the death of chivalry. Her thesis was that Scott's world is uniform and morally clear. The age in which he wrote, she claimed, had one preoccupation: it "was animated by the sympathy with chivalry that was created by its death-blow." Scott himself, although, she admitted, equivocal about chivalry and feudal values, was such a significant interpreter of his age, because he felt with peculiar force a

...sympathy for a past suddenly become remote; (and) the part of his nature that vibrated to an order of things doomed, indeed, everywhere to perish by more or less gradual decay, but which the great crash of the French Revolution banished with a sudden clamour of hatred and outcry...<sup>37</sup>

The massive changes, terrors and millennial imaginings of the French Revolution, as we know, affected Scott deeply, indeed comprised a kind of trauma in his life. His Toryism was to some



extent fixed by those events. But he was also thenceforth fanatically dedicated to charting that "suddenly...remote" past of the rural Scotland he himself had known, and to which folk memory gave him direct access.

However, even this urge in Scott, while recognised by Wedgwood, was placed strictly in historical context, as a symptom of a kind of mass ennui in the early years of the nineteenth century. She drew a parallel between Scott's, and her own age, in terms of a widespread sense of "the charm of the far-away, characteristic of a weary age".<sup>38</sup> For Scott's generation, she averred, a fascination with the Gothic and the mediaeval, together with rural idyllising constituted the 'Romantic Reaction' of her essay-title.

In this emphasis on Scott as the faithful recorder of a vanished world, Julia Wedgwood recognised in large measure the distinctiveness of Scott's fictional project. He was, for her, "the painter of nature...the painter of humble life," whose concern was to show an ideal which he would fain have lived.<sup>39</sup> And this ideal flourished, she believed, in the human feelings on which Scott dwelt. His greatest breakthrough was the creation of a new and more humane perspective on "those obscure lives which constitute the most important division of humanity"<sup>40</sup> :

The sorrows, not of warrior or bard, of fair lady or gentle knight, but of rude clod-hoppers hardly more intelligent than the four-footed companions

who share their cares and perils,- the hardships of the life that is associated in the minds of the genteel world with Dresden china figures and Arcadian inanities,- these things brought home to the mind...cannot, we think, so far as they influence the reader at all, fail to make him better.<sup>41</sup>

These 'common' values lived in her present world through the institutions of the Family and the Nation. The individual existence mattered little beside the strength and endurance of common experience and shared values. *There* resided right, resided the closest fidelity to the Divine :

...'the true life is the common life of all' - this phrase will, on the lips of less earnest men, become an unreal phrase, unless it is accepted in that gradation of outward grouping which is God's work and not man's; unless the sacredness of the Family and the Nation be upheld by a sternness of purity that can inflict as well as endure suffering, and enforce as well as renounce claim.<sup>42</sup>

The iron Victorian will behind these injunctions was a constant feature of her work, which was more dynamic than pious. And the remarkable consistency of her reviewing outlook over many years was perhaps in part due to her having begun her periodical career with

this kind of rigid perspective on matters. She simply could not get any sterner. Although her hope was always that there would soon come a time when civilisation would be

...animated by broader principles of association,  
and more generous springs of action,<sup>43</sup>

yet she urged the need for discipline in the meantime. It was only by learning from such men as Scott that the human reality of work such as his, the moral lessons needed on this earth would be heeded. Scott was eminently practical. He was, she insisted, concerned with "the political and practical life of commonplace men."<sup>44</sup>

This 'common' dimension was by no means identical with a literary democracy, but was about the commonness of a stable social, and consequently spiritual, order. In the 'Romantic Reaction' essay, Wedgwood was very much interested in how the "binding and permanent" in human nature was illustrated in literature.<sup>45</sup> She saw the 'common life' as never very far away in Scott, this quality conducing to the reader's amelioration :

We feel our own heart-beat...set to the rhythms of  
a larger measure, we have quitted the limits of our  
own individual completeness and explored a wide  
domain.<sup>46</sup>

The movement away from selfish concerns to a notion of the public realm, ipso facto to one of social responsibility, was Julia Wedgwood's version of the 'folk-life' element of the novels. This element she termed 'the common life,' seeing it as one of Scott's own central concerns. But it was not a specific social reality in each Scott text; it was an unchanging Truth, which could be translated into the terms of individual moral strictures and axioms. These overrode Scott's own inadequacies and inconsistencies as a human being. On three occasions she quoted his remarks to his daughter Anne - from Lockhart - to the effect that 'everything which is supremely precious is common.' The paradoxical blend of democratic and anti-democratic feelings in him she later described thus in The Moral Ideal :

He was essentially a Tory; his genius was quickened and stirred by all that was exceptional, the pomp of chivalry kindled his imagination, a tawdry imitation of it ruined his life; yet that gentle rebuke to his child expressed the deepest part of his ideal; to the very core of his being he felt, and rejoiced to feel, that all which is supremely precious is common. There is the ideal of the modern world...<sup>47</sup>

For Wedgwood, his interest in the common life demanded more than just the patronising smile which Bagehot had summoned for Scott's 'low' characters; for her Scott became a kind of photographer,

faithfully representing the vanished and enchanting past, almost without laying his thumbprint on the manuscript. Hutton had idealised and patronised Scott's "peasantry", finding in the novels evidence of Scott's command of both "the genius as well as the dialect" of these people,

...in whom a true culture of mind and sometimes also of heart is found in the closest possible contact with the humblest pursuits and the quaintest enthusiasm for them.<sup>48</sup>

While Scott's intellectual powers may not have been great, in the moral sphere he was, she insisted, exceptional. This quality declared itself in particular in the characters of 'the common people.' "The Scotch peasant owes his literary existence to Scott's portrait,"<sup>49</sup> she claimed, for above all it was the relations *between* high and low to which Wedgwood consistently looked :

...it is the *feudal* attitude of the poor which strongly interests him. What Caleb Balderstone would be apart from his paltry master, we do not gain much help from his creator to imagine. But to speak of this as a limitation of Scott's sympathies is simply to say that he should not have allowed them to be captivated by a feudal ideal...The relation of contrast will always, we believe, remain the most poetic and the most picturesque in

which any character can be represented. And perhaps, when the peculiar sense of bond between the lowly born and the highly born, which Scott delighted to paint, has faded into remoteness, it will be more distinctly seen than it is now that some excellences can only be thus developed.<sup>50</sup>

While finding much lacking in Scott's middle-class portraits, Wedgwood could hardly praise too highly these 'common' people. And there were fundamental consistencies across her work: for that part of Scott which vibrated with sympathy for the oppressed, the downtrodden, found an echo in her own aversion to the history of the Jews as a scar on Europe's moral past. "No tragedy of history," she wrote in an essay of 1890, "equals the fate of Israel on European soil."<sup>51</sup>

Hers was a powerful encomium indeed, on the suffering of Judaism, in her 1894 book, The Message of Israel in the light of modern criticism. In the tragedy of the oppression, genocide and hatred of the Jews she saw not only an important reminder of the dual imperatives of Family and Nation, but also the analogue, the unacknowledged parallel of the suffering individual soul demanding, but never receiving, the very best in human treatment. And in this model of a people whose striving had never blinded them to the need for attention to the invisible world, she found an invaluable counterweight to contemporary Gentile advocates of "a specious philanthropy," and of "the new 'enthusiasm of humanity.'"<sup>52</sup> The

. search for purity and righteousness was too important for such an insubstantial creed, with its too great attachment to secular individualism.

That Scott's faith was, if not thoroughgoing, certainly rooted in communal values, is the important point here. For Julia Wedgwood considered the "common life" the only true basis for right morality. Thus, what she felt to be Scott's most humane and sympathetic voice was that which spoke of shared experience of suffering undergone by Judaism. Central to the Scott essay is a passage in which she makes telling criticisms of the feudal ideal through consideration of the character of Rebecca the Jewess in Ivanhoe.

Through Rebecca, Wedgwood urged, Scott not only challenged the apparently dominant chivalric code, but offered a meaningful alternative in Rebecca's constant strength. Here was the power of comparison of which Wedgwood was so fond in Scott: it was because of Scott's assertion of the secular and cultural centrality of Chivalry, and of his associating it even with his eponymous hero, that Rebecca stood out so effectively. Wedgwood quoted from the exchange in which Ivanhoe and Rebecca heatedly debate the value of chivalry itself, and in which her compassionate understanding wins out. Ivanhoe urges upon her that 'Glory' is a dynamic concept, changing all for mankind. Glory, he avers, "gilds our sepulchre and embalms our name." To this "paltry hero" - as Wedgwood called him - Rebecca conclusively replies:

Glory...is the rusted mail which hangs as a hatchment over the champion's dim and mouldering tomb - is the defaced sculpture of the inscription which the ignorant monk can hardly read to the inquiring pilgrim - are these sufficient rewards for the sacrifice of every kindly affection, for a life spent miserable that ye may make others miserable ? Or is there such virtue in the rude rhymes of a wandering bard, that domestic love, kindly affection, peace and happiness, are so wildly bartered, to become the hero of those ballads which vagabond minstrels sing to drunken churls over their evening ale ?<sup>53</sup>

This extract from Ivanhoe was important for Wedgwood's view of Scott. She considered him to have held, in tension with his feudal flourish, a strong and compassionate moral ideal. This, she believed, acted within his character as a kind of democratic antidote. Between these poles, as she saw it, he swayed and swithered, and in their admixture the ultimate balance of his character emerged - not vacillating, but even-handed.

*WEDGWOOD AND HER SCOTT OF 'THE INVISIBLE WORLD'*

What perhaps most redeemed Scott on the moral battleground on which Wedgwood waged war with the invisible enemy, was the "good sense"



which tempered his "genius". This operated by harking back to the inadequacies of *any* code. For her, though, this insight did not emerge from a Scott perceived as historical scholar, who, by contact with the conflicting mass of evidence about the past, formed deliberately equivocal opinions. Instead she found a Scott instinctively alive to the unseen, a further positive quality present in his character by dint of his being a Scot of his time. Wedgwood's Scott was largely formed by the "indirect influence" of the deep faith of his own native land, a land "of stern faith and intense belief in a whole unseen universe."<sup>54</sup> No-one, she wrote, should doubt the power of such a deep cultural faith, even where the daily avowal of faith is absent, for 'indirect faith' can cut through "the luxuriant overgrowth" of the material world :

As well might you suppose that before sunrise or after sunset the sky would show no purple or golden hues, no hope or memory of the hidden orb. The dimness of a passing cloud, that seems rather to efface the shadows than the lights on the landscape, is not more distinct from the blackness of a cloudy midnight than unconscious faith from disbelief in the invisible.<sup>55</sup>

The power of passages such as these bespeaks the transcendentalist Wedgwood for whom Scott was, as for several others of the critics studied, a very deterministically-conceived figure. His greatness was unavoidable. Even though he "had not much definite faith of any

kind," yet he was seen to cleave to unwritten, instinctive truths. Moreover, he was seen to possess a set of unacknowledged convictions very consistent with the late nineteenth century paradigm of perceived racial progress, social concern, and questioning of the spiritual implications of an industrial age. Julia Wedgwood's belief in these could, importantly, on occasion undercut her more analytical work. And these prior truths of family and national identity and of the 'felt' invisible world did, in the modern world, lend definite configurations to the social, and therefore spiritual, map of existence.

And these dimensions operated in the national character as above question, as the received units of existence most powerful in the shaping of moral consciousness. It was not to the visible signs, but to "the permanence of national life," "the organic unity of the group, be it the family or the nation,"<sup>56</sup> that Wedgwood looked, for the underlying truths of identity and significance. The power of these realms - in particular that *national* identity - was very real for her, a clear and factual result of the perceived process of history. "An Englishman," for example, as she wrote in 1897,

...can hardly begin to enquire whether national life be a desirable result of social evolution. History is too strong for him.<sup>57</sup>

There is little question of mere individual will here; for all that the Conscience is the greatest arbiter and moulder of conduct. And

in this sense of a communal basis to all existence, Wedgwood may be seen to be the quintessential Victorian critic of Scott. She was ever seeking some wider validation than mere individualism, considered the vagaries of evanescent forms of both material and spiritual desire to be wholly inadequate to shape the future of the race. This we can see to equate with Scott's own abiding suspicion of the sudden upheaval in history, even of the ultimate transforming power of great individuals. Both are sceptical of quack solutions. Thus there is definite apprehension in these words, as Wedgwood espied serious changes on the social and political horizon :

...although the nation is still the starting-point of political action, a hundred signs bear witness that it is no longer that broad, simple unity which is the needed background for popular art. That vague movement which, under the title of Socialism, unites much of what is best and worst in our day, also bears witness that the nation holds its position by no uncontested sway; we hear much of 'nationalities', we no longer regard a nation as the ultimate unity of our thought.<sup>58</sup>

National life as a concept was only venerated because of the firm foundation it provided to those good human relations which she perceived as central to a healthy society, and which she so strongly intimated as present in Scott's work. Her mind, in this

regard, was focussed on the eloquent gaps between people, the nature of their bonds and their common or mutual obligations. Scott, in his work, was perceived to have offered a world in which good human feeling was so powerful a force as to provide a pathway to the unseen world. This world she treasured, and Scott's words were

...faint suggestions beyond which lies a world of secret meaning, intelligible to him who has the key.<sup>59</sup>

In analysing this power in Scott, Wedgwood lay great stress on the "divergence of feeling and reason" which she identified in him.<sup>60</sup> This quality allowed him a kind of moral dispensation, removing him from her most stringent tribunal as regards his frequent lack of a clear moral judgement in his work. Art, for her, had to bring some sense of judgement to the life it described. For some writers in this respect she wielded a big critical stick indeed, bemoaning a perceived amorality. Some actions

...are conceived, not as either moral or immoral, but as *natural*. And, so far as such a spirit as this predominates in any writings, the writer can hardly be said to exert a moral influence. The influence by which sympathy is widened and varied may be called moral in a certain sense, but this use of the word is an instance of that tendency to

make an epithet descriptive of one good thing describe all good things, which seems to us one of the commonest sources of intellectual confusion.<sup>61</sup>

This, in effect a re-definition of the term morality itself, is Julia Wedgwood's seeking to 'fix' Scott's moral schemata as very separate from those of the majority of writers. This was, she went on, principally because Scott stood outwith conventional criteria for literary merit. He was almost too simple and painted too 'essentially' true a picture of human nature to be judged in the same way as others. She almost absolved Scott from the supreme principles of morality, finding that in his ideal world the unseen good meant that he had a good moral effect almost in spite of himself. Scott was useful, although Wedgwood was sure she ought not to approve :

A great writer may be entirely moral in this sense, he may take the reader into a healthy moral atmosphere, without stimulating, perhaps even while somewhat deadening, the judgment of right and wrong. This might be said of Scott. His influence is moral only as the influence of Nature is moral. It refreshes the spirit as a lonely stroll by the sea-shore, as a gallop on a spirited horse, as a laugh from a child. Everything healthful is encouraged by it, but it holds in solution no distinctly moral truth. It cannot be denied that

there is a certain refreshment, a certain repose, in literature, which is in this sense unmoral. No faculty more needs rest than that which takes cognisance of the distinction between right and wrong...<sup>62</sup>

Scott, she insisted, gave access to the unseen, and his was a world affirming "the fugitiveness of all things earthly,"<sup>63</sup> by virtue of his singular awareness of the realm

...of mystery, of awe, of all that is awakened and typified in that nightly plunge of our planet into the shadow which reveals a heaven strewn with glittering worlds, where daylight shows a mere background for vagrant clouds...<sup>64</sup>

But this was not romantic delirium. For she was, in the 1878 essay, careful to rationalise her own transcendental imagining in terms of Scott's perceived sympathy with the Gothic, Teutonic, Scottish and Chivalric versions of the past. And these codes were, significantly, frozen and objective: they were iconic, and necessary as accompaniments of her underlying perception, that Scott took his readers "far away", and did not change them fundamentally.

In her taking us into a realm of shadowy and half-realized existence, Wedgwood asserted a fanciful world for Scott: his

territory was pre-rationalist, pre-scientific and pre-industrial, and disappeared with the event of the French Revolution. Her tone became increasingly one of lament :

Oh, arid, staring noon, where shall we escape from  
your prosaic monotony ? How shall we revive the  
sweet glimmering uncertainties of daybreak ?<sup>65</sup>

Thus emerged a powerfully escapist perception of Scott. If, as she repeatedly asserted in her writings, "In the visible world is much that is false,"<sup>66</sup> then Scott's greatest strength as a literary and moral colossus was to remove the reader from actuality. Verisimilitude, although present, was finally irrelevant. Thus much of the social reality of Scott's world - and a large measure of his purpose - was banished.

For Julia Wedgwood, the function of art was finally as she insisted in a letter to Robert Browning of 1868, "that the moral sense may go to sleep... (but) it should awake refreshed."<sup>67</sup> In this light, we may see her pleasure in Scott as akin to Leslie Stephen's. In another important respect she resembled the editor of the *Cornhill*. For her, too, Scott was almost a creature devoid of will, very much a product of certain historical and even racial developments. But his sympathies made him clearly invaluable to the contemporary world, an age in which the fight between good and evil taxed and wearied the individual soul. For Julia Wedgwood the visible world was one "where God hides his face and the devil shews his."<sup>68</sup> The

effect of Scott was to release the weary spirit from this terrible place.

And in the discovery in the Waverley Novels of a network of truths, of values, of assumed intangibles, also, Wedgwood traced the imprint of the invisible world. This was felt to be at its clearest in the quality of human relations to be found in Scott's world. These reverberated with the unspoken sense of Duty, of Honour, of Fidelity, of Reverence to God, and of clearly-understood Right and Wrong.

By contrast, the realisation that in the contemporary world all matters - be they theological, political, social, or moral - were in a way negotiable, increasingly horrified Julia Wedgwood. She wrote in 1897 of Thackeray's, and men of his age being able to make "quiet reference to a background of assumptions hallowed by the adherence of a nation."<sup>69</sup> The loss of this background, the sudden fact that

We cannot take up a novel or a magazine without finding something called in question which half a century ago seemed fixed as the stars<sup>70</sup>

meant for her that the landmarks of Conduct, the mandates to proper Duty on this Earth, had been washed away :



Men have been transported to a world where everything tends to shut out the meaning of the word *ought*.<sup>71</sup>

In the face of this sea-change, she referred constantly to the vanished past. But the important difference between her moral reference-point in the historic world, and, say, Ruskin's yearning for pre-industrial simplicity lay above all in her adamantly establishing a strong moral framework around the quality of human relations. Wedgwood, although making criticisms of aspects of the contemporary world, did not constantly hold up the past simply in order to impugn the present, as Ruskin did. Her interests, when she wrote of Scott's world, were genuinely in Scott's world, and not in the moral opposites it clarified. And where Ruskin located the very moral touchstone itself in that art and literature which spoke from the vanished past, for Wedgwood Scott was, while the most that was available, nevertheless only a vestige of the truth.

#### *SCOTT AND 'THE COMMON LOT' OF MANKIND*

While in Ruskin the blending of childhood, politics and cultural criticism rendered Scott at times little more than a stick with which - albeit eloquently - to beat the lax and dilettante present, Wedgwood's admiration and positive valuations exceeded her vitriol. She did seek, evidently, to effect change through her writing; she was too assertive and forthright not to do so. But at the end of

the day she sought to use Scott to change the ways in which her contemporaries thought, the ways in which they constructed personal and public moralities, as well as their ways of interpreting the past. This was a more sophisticated aim than Ruskin's, he being often content to be right, and not necessarily effective.

Scott's world, for her, comprised a pre-rationalist moral order in which many principles were taken for granted. It was a "sunny garden" and a store of "unfastidious sympathy". All of Scott's humanity, all who inhabited his world, deserved and offered a special, model sympathy, for this quality was the greatest available in literature. "Width of sympathy", Wedgwood stated, "is, in fact, in the moral world what dramatic power is in the intellectual."<sup>72</sup>

This wider dimension she opposed to the notion that only the implications for the individual were to be addressed in moral questions. She came, as in the 1905 'Brothers - An Address to Female Students,' to wax sagelike against the self-centredness which formed a constant lure. It was morally vital to recognise the limitations of the individual perspective, and

...the danger of all relations that refuse to recognise their own incompleteness, that shrink from a perpetual expansion in which the bud anticipates the seed so unlike it - against the self-centre of the brother who refuses to learn

from the father, who will not recognise that all earthly bonds need the touch of something beyond themselves to keep them from being, in some form or other, the channels of death.<sup>73</sup>

As ever in her work, the need was not merely to abjure a selfish individualism - although she did consider socialism to contain both the best and the worst in human nature - but to establish a real divinity in mankind's existence.<sup>74</sup> This could occur where, as in Scott, the sense of a rich 'common life' manifested the divine within the patterns of human conduct, in particular through relations of contrast. In terms of the religious politics of her own time, Wedgwood in consequence rejected not only any human polity devoted to individual aggrandisement, but also any 'individualized religion' which denied the widely applicable, the common in experience. "Introspective tendencies" she arraigned after Frederick Denison Maurice, urging her *British Quarterly Review* and *Contemporary Review* readership to strive for good in *relationships* and to heed not that which "concerns the difference between one person and another."<sup>75</sup>

The Moral Ideal could only be achieved when human relations partook of the divine and mirrored the Divine paternal relationship. As she wrote in an 1881 obituary essay on George Eliot, "In the relation of the human spirit to the Father of spirits lies hid the germ of every human relation."<sup>76</sup> The assertion of *necessarily* unequal relations in Scott's world - as for example that of Caleb

Balderstone to Edgar Ravenswood - was the most important consequence of this commitment in her work. Her clearest expression of this axiom, though, is in the essay on Maurice of 1884, where she describes the belief in Three Persons in one God in these terms:

...when from this misty void there emerges to the spirit of man the true meaning of Divine relationship, as the ground of human relationship, then this mysterious dogma is discovered to be at once the most practical of all moral principles, and the clue to man's highest ideal. The event by which each one of us owes our relation to a human being is then seen as the temporal expression of some relation independent of time, and all which this relation at its best can develop and express in humanity, as the reflection of some transcendent reality which existed as a type of human rightness before a human being was created. Human relation then takes a new meaning...Kindred ceases to be a mere accident of time - it is an outgrowth of something eternal. Goodness becomes in a new sense divine.<sup>77</sup>

In this context, Wedgwood's view of Scott as an elegist of feudalism takes on a new significance. Her conception of him was as a humane and sympathetic synthesist, focussing through all

political or social fog on stability and tolerance in human relations, these conducing to a greater divinity in mankind. For her, Scott the prosy and Whiggish historian of "a cool shrewdness of intellect" co-existed with the Jacobite Tory's "glowing fervour of imagination." Together these contrasting qualities lent his work what she described as a blend of "mellowness and force."<sup>78</sup> This blend was made so dynamic because of the sense that Scott's compassionate human relations, his overarching "sympathy with what is common" above all other qualities animated his world. His was a true understanding, and in Truth was "the healing power for all the ills of humanity."<sup>79</sup>

Scott's roots she extolled as fundamental to the greatness for which he was to be valued. His pragmatism showed him to be a true child of the eighteenth century, the age of 'criticism'.<sup>80</sup> His more escapist qualities - the essential romance of his project - showed him to be "above all a Scotchman." 'Scottishness' here implicitly equated the burgeoning tourist vision of Scotland as a mountainous and scenic backwater with lost moral qualities. Scott was seen to have emerged from a society and culture in which assumed, traditional values predominated. To this idealised construct the threatening cultural and religious notions of contemporary metropolitan England were as yet unknown. Scott's growth was perceived to be from "the soil of a rich and deep faith" which encompassed social stability and religious observance, and his own distinctive adjunct to this was the painstaking inquiry and travel

which early steeped him in the values of the recent, but very different past of rural Scotland.<sup>81</sup>

Wedgwood may be seen to have achieved something of a coherent rationale for the apparently knee-jerk and conventional Victorian admiration for Scott and his 'charming' characters. Her assertion of his admirable, if largely secular, "perfect simplicity" shows her conception of his "indirect" faith, that unspecified belief in the invisible. But she was by no means a wildly original thinker, and her conceptions in this regard are part-Ruskin, part-Arnold, and certainly indebted to Maurice and Carlyle.<sup>82</sup>

She had a stronger interest in the feelings with which Scott was read, and those to which he led the reader, than in any pretended 'literary' judgement. The 'common' emotions and yearnings provoked by Scott, and their challenge to materialism, made him, for her, representative of mankind's best condition. In a caveat, though, she warned that the modern-day reader may mistakenly, because "accustomed to the highly seasoned speculation of our own day" find "insipidity in what is simple." But, as she explained at the close of the Scott essay :

...the purity and simplicity of the thought which seems poor at first, and enriches itself with the growing experience of life, so that it expands to take in a part of all that we most vividly remember and hope.<sup>83</sup>

Wedgwood's essay in large measure constituted a defence and attribution of the concept of 'simplicity', as a set of values which were as apparently ingenuous as they were important. Her own abiding concerns with the fugitiveness of the visible, and the commonalty of humanity, were explored at length in her The Moral Ideal (1888). In the relational lay the eternal:

...it has been the constant temptation of human beings to impoverish...Unity, to refuse to recognize its organic, relational character, to ignore the multiplicity which lies at its base...Man knows himself only so far as he turns towards the eternal Other of the human spirit; he finds his true Unity only as he finds a larger Unity which makes him one with himself and with his brother man.<sup>84</sup>

Scott's all-important simplicity derived, she urged, from a "profound, unspeakable melancholy", a resignation born of his very human respect for the common, combined with an awareness of his own limitations as one too apt to turn away from the eternal.<sup>85</sup> This humility, this deep awareness of the widest spiritual dimension, was, she insisted, far more than the "vague emotional possibilities" which constituted much of religious thought.<sup>86</sup>

Importantly her Scott as a moral figure for the present was validated by his being an expression of national identity, national

consciousness. He spoke for a time when literature had flourished in a territory set apart from doubts and anguish, a desirable role formerly possible because of the communal strength of belief in the nation :

As long as a country accepts some corporate expression of faith in the unseen, the ultimate problems of life do not invade the world of literature.<sup>e7</sup>

The loss of that corporate faith, and the multiplicity of changes in the nineteenth century, rendered the need for moral guidance an imperative as far as Julia Wedgwood was concerned. She was, of course, not alone in this apprehension, but a comparison with another writer a decade or so older - Mary-Ann Evans, George Eliot - may show her distinctiveness.

Wedgwood acknowledged Eliot's influence on the age: "no preacher of our day," she averred, "has done so much to mould the moral aspirations of her contemporaries as she has." Eliot's novels were "the liveliest fiction held in solution by the most eloquent preaching."<sup>ee</sup> Wedgwood, however, bemoaned Eliot's creation of apparently non-moral actions, which were *natural*, before they were construed to be moral or immoral. And the greatest lack, in comparison with Scott, was to do with the sense of the invisible. Scott had it, Eliot did not. In terms of human evolution, Wedgwood's argument was with Eliot's idea of mankind's ultimate



direction. Duty, civil relations, the family, the nation - these were not options, but necessary obligations towards the progress of humanity. The ordinary and secular aspirations of mankind were simply not enough to constitute a religious creed. As Wedgwood wrote in an essay on 'Ethics and Science' in 1897:

...at least the idea that the development of humanity is towards something higher than itself more harmonises with the ideas of evolution than does the assumption that man, being once man, there is nothing beyond.<sup>29</sup>

Wedgwood was finally disappointed by Eliot's relative neglect of exceptional behaviour and exceptional characters. In many ways Wedgwood's conception of the role of 'the common life' was similar to George Eliot's *Sympathy*; but the crucial difference was a matter of the source of ultimate arbitration, the location of that horizon to which both writers looked for moral and spiritual guidance. George Eliot, in Wedgwood's conception, was essentially secular, and her characters - in particular those special, élite characters who should form the visible lodestone for all others - had no lofty ideals themselves :

Can genius be indeed the barren and desolate eminence which we must consider it if they alone to whom it is granted have no object for reverence ?  
Can it be that the ordinary mass of average mankind

- the stupid, animal, indolent crowd - have exercise for this elevating faculty whenever they lift their eyes, and that all who soar into a purer region must look downward when they would find anything to love ?<sup>90</sup>

These failings amounted to "the great misfortune of our time," namely the "severance of love of man from faith in God."<sup>91</sup> That symbiosis was, Wedgwood felt, unacknowledged by any writer other than Scott, and it might be traced in a very deterministic understanding of his identity and that of his work. In the "mellowing atmosphere" of the twilight-age in which he passed his life, with its deep sense of "mystery, of awe,"<sup>92</sup> Scott, for Wedgwood, wrote from the "tenderness of farewell." Thus he bore unconscious witness to the invisible and the Divine.<sup>93</sup> His Scottishness, too, was a vernacular sense, consistent with what was seen as his intellectual inheritance - the poetry of Gray and of Burns, and the importation of German literature. This 'Romantic Reaction' effectively constituted, in Wedgwood's estimation, a reaction against mechanistic and rational explanations for the development of society.

Julia Wedgwood was at one with the romantic in Scott who lingered on the cusp of historical change. Scott's typical process, as she saw it, of exploring the conflicting emotions provoked by change, yet never forgetting the value of the unseen, she likened to the nature of Gothic:

...the architecture which bears that name, is an unquestionable utterance of the spirit we would here indicate - the round and the pointed arch, side by side, expressing severally the feeling that returns to earth, and aspires to heaven - the contrasted genius of the people whose most characteristic remains are to be found in the road, the aqueduct, and the triumphal arch, and in the castle and the abbey. And the genius of one to whom hoary castle and ruined abbey were the most appropriate material, and who has set them against the imperishable background of blended poetic and historic feeling, is coloured throughout by that sense of mystery which nowhere emerges into prominence in his writing...a firm belief in the invisible...came very near some of his thoughts, and insensibly affects them all.<sup>94</sup>

In the Victorian critics' quest, Julia Wedgwood emerges as something of an apotheosis. Perennial nineteenth century concerns abound, in particular as her evident wish for clarity and certainty in the society around her led her effectively to make something of a rearguard action against naturalist or aesthetic trends in literature, and against the multiplication of participating voices in the religious, moral and political debates of the day. In her own century, as she announced in 1897, "literature altered its tone and lost its reserve."<sup>95</sup>

That Wedgwood achieved what I have termed a synthetic conception of Scott as the great master of moral and healthy literature, was in part a function of her tirelessly reasonable psychology; but it was also a result of a mature, mellow optimism fortified by faith. By comparison with more volatile writers on Scott such as Carlyle and Ruskin, Julia Wedgwood offers us an admirably tolerant integrity throughout her work. To late twentieth-century readers, she is preachy, and is certainly heavy going at times, but has that relatively rare attribute amongst nineteenth century essayists and reviewers, of writing about what she says she is going to write about. She has her recurrent themes, as I have indicated, and her predilections ; but manages to combine most skilfully consistency of outlook, with sustained and incisive attention to her subject. A typical passage would be this from the important 'Ethics and Science' essay of 1897, in which she explains the interconnectedness of moral imperatives and units of relationship.

The world of duty...has lost its landmarks. We may say that it has lost its organisation. It assumes the group; it started from the relations of father and son, husband and wife; it expands to take in civil relation; and deals with man as member of a family, as member of a nation...the duties of man to man will be all different if we refuse to recognise the duties of a son to a father, of a husband to a wife...The family in the view of the past was an organism. The moral relations of its

different members were almost as definite as the physical relations of the different members of the body. Now there is no conception of anything organic in the life of the family...<sup>96</sup>

Her argument here implies an unproblematic attitude to contemporary sexual politics. In fact, she held in tension conflicting views. For the concept of relation for her was importantly based on the difference between genders, races or national identities. All relations were underpinned by "the principle of difference", elsewhere called "the principle of inequality."<sup>97</sup> This conservative leaning involved very different spheres for men and women, not simply in the chauvinist Ruskinian mould, but in promulgation of the special - and interdependent - qualities of each.

And in this unequal conception of society, in which philanthropy and Sympathy had very political roles, Julia Wedgwood described not only a classic late Victorian compromised ideal, but a central point to the continuing appeal and perceived relevance of Sir Walter Scott. Her greatest fear was of the kind of society "which had no reverence for weakness, no compassion for suffering, no honour for purity." In Scott she could find values to oppose to this: a world where were "tenderness, compassion, and purity."<sup>98</sup> The contemporary world needed the recognition that abstract right and duty must claim precedence over individualism. This was an age

...when loyalty to an unchosen claim vanishes like a dream, and the variations of preference, alike in public and private life, settle the coherence of every union...<sup>99</sup>

In Scott's world were quite other values. Wedgwood was not only meditating on the value and relevance of Scott's ideas on feudalism and chivalry. She was also dwelling on 'the common life', and thus substantiating the reading of Scott as a purveyor of 'national' truths and unified societies. This emphasis was clearest in the depth and universality of the quality of *Sympathy*, and in the prominence and ethical nobility of Scott's 'common' characters.

The central reference point in the novels - if not the poems - is the commonality and transmission of lived realities. In particular these dwell on the hesitant, often reluctant acceptance of the new, in terms of its contrasted effects on what Wedgwood called "the extremes of social life."<sup>100</sup> Thus Wedgwood's interests - faith in the invisible realm and trust in 'contrast' as the central dynamic in human affairs - may be seen to be, if not judicial, at least important in Scott's work. That she found *extraordinary* things in the *Waverley Novels* - characters and motivations at some remove from nineteenth century reality - was an important feature of her critique. This resulted, for instance, in her concluding very differently from Harriet Martineau about the power of Scott's women characters, finding only Jeanie Deans and Rebecca of interest, in their *distance* from the mean.

Such assertion of Scott as a creature of the moral and invisible realms consolidated his separation from social reality. Increasingly important for the Victorian mind was Scott's identification of a deep compassion, born of long topographical and cultural association, which in full flight was seen to cut across class, religion and other social divides. These characteristics of Scott's world burnt from the page in a way which almost traumatised nineteenth century readers, partly because of that audience's receptivity to their sheer comprehensive humanity, and partly because of the unmissable bristling authenticity of language and of environmental location.

Julia Wedgwood's 'Romantic Reaction' essay can be read as a document less of coherent moral critique, than of the dreams and yearnings of a Victorian. The battles with the invisible forces of evil, or with the individual's perturbation in the face of moral or spiritual troubles - her customary preoccupations - dwindled here before the lure of Scott as escapism, and the appeal of values and lives beyond question. Amongst all the shapes of right feeling and humane conduct, Julia Wedgwood could not avoid praising Scott for indefinable greatness. Here was, surely, the characteristic nineteenth century big sweep, the luxuriant wash of Scott the epic, Scott the Victorian hero, who put to shame all the petty, doubt-ridden scribblers of the present :

That broad objective painting, that clear  
representation of simple feelings, that rapid

movement, that sense of life and stir, which we find everywhere in the best writing of Scott, we find almost nowhere in the literature of our own day.<sup>101</sup>



CHAPTER VIII :THE LATE VICTORIAN  
BELLES-LETRISTS- SCOTT : 'A PERFECT LIBRARY IN HIMSELF'*THE IMAGE IS FIXED*

The final years of the nineteenth century saw the confirmation of the dominant ideas about Scott's place and significance. 'Moralist' critical perspectives had established over many years the 'suitability' of the Waverley Novels, and in these years we may see the increasing elaboration and exaggeration of Scott's literary and moral qualities as parts of wider cultural developments.

In particular, these late Victorian years saw the clear intimation that Scott's most permanent characteristics - his 'genius' and 'simplicity' - might be attributed ultimately to his speaking for a bygone age perceived to have been more materially content, spiritually undoubting and socially stable. He was by no means seen as a brilliant and mercurial artist; rather he was a gifted but hard-working expression of his age, announcing in his every feature

the richness and naturalness of his (now-blurred) fictional and actual worlds.

By and by the name 'Scott' became synonymous with immutable *truths* and abstract moral and social ideals. And for all that these ideals had real political and cultural implications for nineteenth century Scotland and Britain, such mundane implications were not really on the agenda in readings of Walter Scott. In a series of strongly biographical writings, we see late Victorian critics converting Scott into two parallel and interdependent beings. For them he was simultaneously a poet and novelist of far away and long ago, and a (more or less) practical man of the world whose admirable human qualities were proffered as models for the muddle and fog of the present.

Scott was thus seen as a contradictory figure, both a dreamy Waverley of a man, a romancer essentially at odds with the realities of the world around him; and also an amanuensis of the perfect stabilities and certainties of the world from which he had sprung. On either account, he was *different*, and reached parts of the human soul other writers of the nineteenth century could not reach. He became a myth, his work a mental holiday. The archetypal approach to Scott is found in these words from Julia Wedgwood's 1878 critique :

The troubles of this life, after an hour of Scott,  
are what they were. The riddle of the painful earth

is as far as ever from being solved; we have found no rushlight even to throw its ray upon the gloom. But we have been far away, and everything looks different.<sup>1</sup>

It is as if Scott served to fortify the reader with eternal and unshakeable goodness of heart, with good fettle, that he might depart refreshed for the fray. This kind of language enshrined Scott as inhabiting a world from which the present was ineluctably cut off.

#### *ANDREW LANG*

In the light of such a crystallising image, as Andrew Lang exhorted in 1892, Scott could be utilised as a constant symbol, to confront the "vicissitudes of things and the overthrow of customs" which were so present in the world around.<sup>2</sup>

In Lang's terms, Scott was "the last voice of the old world", a figure of a more straightforward and chivalrous time, whose work still silently indicted many of the shortcomings of the practice of Empire.<sup>3</sup> In the face of "political cowardice or military incapacity", such as those to which the Sudan and Majuba bore witness, Walter Scott embodied the very best in the essential Scots character, qualities to which Lang the Scot paid tribute in several of his copious writings :

Scotchmen, methinks, who owe so much to you, owe you most for the example you gave of the beauty of a life of honour, showing them what, by heaven's blessing, a Scotchman still might be.<sup>4</sup>

In Lang we can see the sainting of Scott as the embodiment of this kind of old-world honour. But, more than this, we can see Scott as primarily a writer of action stories, a profound anti-intellectual whose work was seen to testify to the kind of vigorous and masculine imperial values supported by Lang in his collaborative work with the likes of W.E. Henley and Austin Dobson. Scott - in terms which echo aspects of both Ruskin and Stephen - was a buttress against the encroaching world of analysis, standing for an 'old-fashioned' simplicity already threatened in his own lifetime :

The deeds, not the thoughts of men, are his matter; passions expressed in action, not passions analysed in the poetic laboratory. So potent was his genius, so inspiring the martial tramp and clang of his measures, that he made the new world listen to the accents of the old...Scott drove the shadow back on the dial for an hour, as it were; but the shadow, the pale cast of *thought*, crept forward again.<sup>5</sup>

Born in 1844, and enjoying a long and prolific career writing in many genres, Lang had literature at the very heart of his existence. Whether composing letters to dead authors, translating

Homer, collecting fairy tales, writing his own poetry or studying anthropological curiosities, he saw literary life as an adventure. As John Gross has described him,

He clung tenaciously - and, if challenged, petulantly - to the conviction that literature ought to remain the same cheerful pastime that it had seemed when he was a boy.<sup>6</sup>

From Lang's childhood days, Lockhart's Life of Scott had been "a breviary."<sup>7</sup> By the time, in the 1890s, that he came to edit the Border edition of the Waverley Novels, and to write The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart, as well as a series of articles and introductions about both Scott's poetry and prose, Lang saw Sir Walter as a colossus of morality and human worth.

Lockhart had by now become a gospel on Scott, the only quibbles discernible being Leslie Stephen's minor objections to what he felt to be Lockhart's leniency towards the Ballantynes, over Scott's financial affairs. Stephen felt that Lang had too much condoned Lockhart's generosity to the Ballantynes, in the recounting of events; but Lang himself saw the actual charges against Sir Walter as slight, in the context of "the intense light of genius and goodness." Scott was, for Lang as for Stephen, a real man, a model to whom all should look up :

...how high is that noble nature above ours, if indeed it attains not to the rare perfection of the saints ! Scott, assuredly, was not a saint, but a man living in the world, and it is granted by his biographer, living too much for the world. But he lived for other men as few but the saints have lived, and his kindness, helpfulness, courage, temper, and moral excellence, his absolute, immaculate freedom from the literary sins of envy, jealousy, vanity, shine in Lockhart's pages as an eternal, if unapproachable, example.<sup>2</sup>

These qualities of Scott the man as perceived by late Victorian men of letters quite overshadowed literary appreciation. Novels and poems became quite conflated with biography, a feature which we can see to have been present at several stages in the century, over and above the continual publication and re-publication of complete editions of the *Waverleys*. Now there formed so complete a coalescence of biographical and literary concern that we can see the entire period under study in a slightly new light.

#### *SCOTT AS HERO*

The publication of Lockhart's Life certainly played a part in prompting critical interest, especially Carlyle's important essay. Those early years after Scott's death saw a flurry of stage and operatic adaptations of the *Waverley Novels* and the poems, as well

as the 1840 unveiling of the Scott Monument in Edinburgh. Later, the period around the centenary of Scott's birth in 1871 saw a further burst of activity, leading to Richard Holt Hutton's 1878 biography for the English Men of Letters series. And the 1890s virtually erupted with critical Scottolatry, in addition to such other events as Sir Arthur Sullivan's opera based on Ivanhoe, and the founding of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club.

Scott's Journal, describing, in what struck readers as anguished detail, the incidents of the crucial mid-1820s, was published in full for the first time in 1890. Lang's Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart (1897) sprang naturally, if perhaps opportunistically, from the revived interest in Scott. The publication of the canonising and authoritative Dictionary of National Biography - 'S' section appearing in 1897 - gave several generations of Scott's family as important figures in national life. Among others, the Border and Dryburgh editions appeared; as did a plenitude of end-of-century encyclopaedias and summations of literary achievement, in which Scott's canonisation as 'a great man' was given further authority. When, in May 1897, a bust of Sir Walter was unveiled in Westminster Abbey, we can see the climax of the Victorian era to have been also that of Scott's status.

Taken altogether, the single most important feature of this mass of late Victorian writing on Scott has to be its heavily biographical leaning. A key characteristic of the homage to Scott which much of this writing constituted, was that noted by Lang: that Scott had a

special relationship with the people of the present, that he was above normal criteria for criticism, because of the uniqueness of his literary magic.

He could, as Lang put it, "enrich our days with the very life blood of the past." It was not, however, a complete past which he brought, for Scott was, at bottom, a simple soul, concerned with pleasure for his readers far more than any social science-theorising. His role was, "almost alone among men of letters," to "win and charm us." It was an "unspeculative" Scott, "content with broad, obvious surfaces" whom Lang and other admirers saw at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

This 'specialness' was increasingly consensus opinion. For all the varieties of interpretation, there was a growing sodality amongst Scottophiles. This was disposed to be generous to a fault, and to lard Scott criticism with what now seems exaggerated approbation. We can see, in a glance back at Robert Chambers' writing of 1871, that there had for a number of years been a strand of opinion prepared, for reasons of fondness, almost entirely to overlook the strengths and weaknesses of Scott's literary achievement, in order to dwell on the unquestionable merits of Scott the man. Even biographical 'problems', like Scott's politics, might be seen as harmless :

...even as a politician, though blamed by many for his exclusive sympathy with the cause of



established rule, he was always acknowledged to be too benevolent and too unobtrusive to call for severe censure.<sup>10</sup>

To this 'irresistible' Scott, a man virtually above reproach, whose life reinforced the delights of his novels and poems, many were drawn. The dominant image of Scott became that of a man of dreamy unreality, incapable of the method and dry-analytical bent needed for financial security. He was seen as all imagination, as James Crabb Watt described in 1885 :

We believe he had hardly a scabbard or a snuff-box, a cabinet or a piece of armour, which his imagination did not invest with all the circumstance which unfettered reverie suggested.<sup>11</sup>

He thus became ossified as a man very much of his time, a gentler time, slower and more humane. For Charles Duke Yonge in 1888, Scott the man of honour, in so being, out-distanced all the critics. Scott's "sturdy manly spirit" in the face of real difficulty, was a more lasting patrimony than even the work. Shying away, like so many, from the profession of literary criticism, this being "after all...a matter of taste," Yonge saw the novels as healthy study for the young, and morally admirable, *because* of the man's great personal qualities. Literary merit was naturally intermingled with the impression of the man :

The impression...that there never was a man whom one would have been more glad to know. And it must strengthen our respect for the brilliancy of his genius when we see that he on whom all intellectual endowments, fancy, humour, invention, were so prodigally bestowed, was also one of the most lovable of mankind.<sup>12</sup>

The key events in the saga of Scott's achieving biographical greatness were the awesome struggles he conducted with "noble courage" at the times of his own illness in 1819, of his wife's death in 1826, and of the financial ruin. Scott's struggle after the shock of bankruptcy became, in this myth, a *national* crisis, the people "excited to one unanimous feeling of sorrow and sympathy"; and Yonge asserted that no other man could have withstood such a blow.<sup>13</sup>

Such a version of Scott's life was clearly consistent with much of the favourable writing in the major critics covered hitherto. And the Victorian mind - if it is possible to speak of this as a unified concept - had clearly come to terms with the indictments made by Carlyle. That age of moral damnation, had been replaced by more polyphonous - or muddled - moral ground, on which the foibles of Scott the Laird of Abbotsford were not really so dreadful, after all, given his other priceless qualities.

Thus, the advent, in 1890, of the further revelations provided by the publication of Scott's Journal, entered a tradition of adoration. This book, when surveyed by Richard Holt Hutton in his unbridled encomium 'Sir Walter Scott in Adversity,' made for instructive reading indeed. It was "such a book as the world has not often seen," was "one of the greatest gifts which our English literature has ever received." The "moral" power outweighed the "imaginative", and the Scott who resignedly avowed the dictum 'Agere et pati Romanum est' - rather than Scott the novelist - was the model for the present. This was, as Hutton had indicated in his earlier biography, a Scott ennobled by suffering. "Everywhere" in the Journal,

...you see the same large, clear insight, the same large, genial nature, the same indomitable resolution, the same sober suffering, the same calm fortitude, the same frank determination to face the worst and to do the best.<sup>14</sup>

Scott was, for Hutton, a moral hero, the Journal institutionalising his status. This essay quoted extensively from the new publication, and we see throughout it not only the iteration of Scott's 'acquired perfection', but also the reminder that Lockhart's work of fifty years before remained "the most delightful of all biographies," the status of this work, too, being beyond question. But Scott's image as a moral hero was irredeemably one of tireless, almost unreal and mythical qualities. In Hutton's estimation,

You see the grandeur of the man's whole make and character,- the large sympathy with all suffering, the magnanimity, the habit of endurance, the slight scorn for his own sensitiveness, and yet the frank and hearty desire not to suffer, to have an end of his sufferings, which bespeaks the true man of the world, though a high-minded and noble man of the world.'<sup>5</sup>

Scott was now become for ever the figure whom the Journal for the evening of April 15th 1826 recorded as perennially returning to his work, the eternal paying-off of the debt acting as a vouchsafe of his 'manly' honour:

'Fair words butter no parsnips,' says Duty; don't keep talking then but get to your work again...'<sup>6</sup>

His admonishing himself frequently for 'slackness' was a constant feature of the Journal. Several months after the above entry came another imaginary dialogue with 'Mrs. Duty', who urged the errant Sir Walter

...to think no thoughts in which I am not mingled - to read no books in which I have no concern - to write three sheets of botheration all the six days of the week per diem and on the seventh to send them to the printer.'<sup>7</sup>

*SCOTT THE CHARMER*

Hutton brought to the fore those qualities in Scott with which he was now clearly and consensually associated. But, for all the mass of writing at this time, the detailed basis of Scott's literary genius was the focus for but few critics, founded as it apparently was upon the fairly hazy qualities of "marvellous vividness and appearance of reality," as H.W. Dulcken put it in 1892. Scott's 'essential truth', if not verisimilitude, was now consensual general ground: even where "historic accuracy" was lacking, the sense of those past ages of brave deeds and honourable lives was so great and so powerful that Scott's work, too, became increasingly beyond question.<sup>18</sup>

When 'Mark Rutherford' adduced Scott, in his 1887 Revolution in Tanner's Lane, it was as a series of texts of marvel and extraordinary beauty that the Waverleys glowed in the "dull" present of the fictional Cowfold :

Sir Walter Scott...had been...what he can only be to people leading a dull life far from the world. He had broken up its monotony and created a new universe ! He had introduced them into a royal society of noble friends. He had added to the ordinary motives which prompted Cowfold action a thousand higher motives. Then there was the charm of the magician, so sensitive, so blessed, felt

directly any volume of that glorious number was opened. Kenilworth or Redgauntlet was taken down, and the reader was at once in another country and in another age, transported as if by some Arabian charm away from Cowfold cares. If anywhere in another world the blessings which men have conferred here are taken into account in distributing reward, surely the choicest in the store of the Most High will be reserved for his servant Scott ! It may be said of others that they have made the world wise or rich, but of him it must be said that *he, more than all, has made the world happier* - wiser too, wiser through its happiness.<sup>19</sup>

This is an archetype, conveying the power and special status of Scott in the late Victorian age. Here, in Rutherford's employment of Scott, is the admiration consistent with earlier 'casual' fictional uses, such as by George Eliot and Thackeray, in which Scott's popularity and 'simple' qualities were used to establish points about present fictional characters. But here also is a sense that, in the long run, in the judgement of posterity, the purely literary merits of Scott might not be sufficient to shore up his extraordinary present esteem. The notion of 'moral usefulness' was, as has been already established, a continuous theme from the very earliest commentaries; but in Rutherford's words we discern the new location of Scott, as firmly on the 'happiness' side of the fence.

Harmless pleasure was outweighing 'usefulness'. Other estimations may be contentious, but in terms of sheer enjoyment, the Waverley Novels - a single entity on the shelf - were pre-eminent.

And this 'special realm' for Scott was, we sense, very much outside the developing canons of great literature. It was only really from 1910 or so, when Professor George Saintsbury, Henry Newbolt and others began to formalise the actual University teaching of English literature, that we finally see clearly the face of that new literary world from which the Waverley Novels were largely excluded. And for all the pleasure given by them, which Saintsbury in particular acknowledged, the Waverleys were essentially perceived as light fiction, as *Romance*.

We have to see much favourable writing on Scott, from about the 1880s, as something of a rearguard action in his defence. He was now felt to be fundamentally out of kilter with the present, and a scion of unspecified 'essential' truths and practices. In this regard, G.K.Chesterton in 1903 saw "the modern theory" of literature as founded upon the fundamental mistake that Romance is irrelevant, and thus the foolish idea that such writing as Scott's "is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside." By contrast, he insisted,

...romance lies not upon the outside of life but absolutely in the centre of it. The centre of every man's existence is a dream.<sup>20</sup>

These must be the conditions for Scott's acceptance in the new age: he was, in Chesterton's estimation, a man with "much of the child in him", and the stories' "spiritual adventurousness" was founded upon "a quality that can only be called boyish." The romantic was increasingly the territory of the Buchans, Westermans and Hentys at this time, and so Scott's role as a writer for adults was seriously in question.<sup>21</sup>

There was, in consequence of these changes, a world of difference between the broadly-related estimations given by Walter Bagehot and George Saintsbury. In the earlier criticism, Bagehot referred to Scott's down-to-earth qualities of "natural feelings, plain thoughts, and applied sagacity." In the later, Saintsbury adduced Scott's greatest qualities - his prime contribution to the novel form - as

...a tradition of moral and intellectual health, of manliness, of truth and honour, freedom and courtesy.<sup>22</sup>

The latter was clearly more strident, more eager to assert honour and nobility of feeling. And such increasingly stiff-upper-lip



tendencies we may see as directly opposing any lily-tinged (or -livered) aesthetic nonsense of the age.

*FREDERIC HARRISON : SCOTT VS. DEGENERACY*

Although there had been a constant role for Scott, throughout the century, in opposing the worst of the present day, this theme reached a new pitch late in the century. The philosopher and critic Frederic Harrison, in particular, found in Scott an answering voice for his own combative atheism, as part of an argument on behalf of a new, secular source of authority. In Scott's humane idealism, Harrison saw an important paradigm for the age. In an essay for the *Nineteenth Century*, 'The Choice of Books,' (1879) as well as in allusions to Scott in many subsequent essays, Harrison saw a now-vanished "grand type of mind," which should be preserved.<sup>23</sup>

Harrison saw the present as utterly degenerate in literary taste: he referred to current reading-matter as "the reeking garbage of the boulevard," and as "sewage outfall."<sup>24</sup> Good literature was dwindling, and the reasons were important ones, for our understanding of what was felt to be the *opposite* of what Scott offered. Harrison perceived that society as a whole was losing differentiation, was degenerating, through many causes :

They are - the increase of material appliances  
vulgarising life, and making it a scramble for good

things. Next comes the vast multiplicity of numbers tending to uniformity, crushing individuality, flattening us out into a crowd of equal units. Lastly, comes the sudden spread of a low and mechanical instruction. Life has become infinitely faster, easier, machine-run; less spontaneous, less jovial, far uglier...The literary currency is debased by the machine-life we lead now. Steam, electricity in a thousand forms, telephones, motors, typewriting, photographs at every turn...<sup>25</sup>

Against this Harrison opposed the age of Scott. Ivanhoe, he feared, if published at the end of the nineteenth century, would be seen as "old-fogyish in form and obsolete in local colour", because romance was now identified with "Divorce Court scandal," "the smart set on a motor-trip," or "slum-talk in the East End."<sup>26</sup>

The characteristic note of Harrison's writing on Scott is that of energetic espousal of what he called "pure enjoyment", against the mass of worthless modern writing. And this vouchsafing of Scott's eternal value was clearly fringed with the awareness that a new climate of "indifference" had begun to afflict the Waverley Novels. Scott was increasingly felt to be "commonplace," since "the young men at our universities are far too critical to care for his artless sentences and flowing descriptions." The lack, insisted Harrison, was rooted in the modern trend to value literature by minutiae, for example "phrases", "as if phrases in themselves had a

value apart from thoughts, feelings, great conceptions, or human sympathy."<sup>27</sup>

Importantly, Scott's work remained an undifferentiated blur for Harrison: he asserted The Antiquary, The Bride of Lammermoor, Ivanhoe, Quentin Durward, and Old Mortality as works he could read "at least once a year afresh," but there was no analysis. This was largely because, at bottom, Harrison's purpose was the defence of 'Scott' as institution against what he saw as the barbarians of the present.

Scott had become the elegist of feudalism, his work attenuated. Even the secular idealist Harrison did not espy the sociological Scott, did not find any necessary fidelity to a given actuality. The depiction of eighteenth-century rural Scotland, which many earlier writers had seen as Scott's most characteristic and enduring achievement, did not feature in Harrison's reading. As the twentieth century began, and the terms for literary canons were being established, Scott's promoters - even those, like Harrison, actually concerned to consider literature as separable from biography - were tending to make Scott so special and morally atavistic a figure, that the subtleties and researched evidences of the Waverley Novels quite disappeared from view.

For Frederic Harrison, the Waverley Novels were one "plaintive death-chant" to the glory of the Middle Ages, showing "the genius of chivalry in all its colour and moral beauty." The novels had

been rendered, not merely a set combining to form a unified opus, but a blur: they were now a coherent series of action-dramas, bedazzling set-pieces of an idealised past. These "living pictures" - illustrations of historical facts to uphold the bedrock strengths of society - could be likened to Homer :

...we see in this prose Iliad of modern history, the battle of the old and the new, the heroic defence of ancient strongholds, the long impending and inevitable drama of mediaeval life. Strong men and proud women struggle against the destiny of modern society...How just is our island Homer!...We see the dawn of our English nation, the defence of Christendom against the Koran, the grace and the terror of feudalism, the rise of monarchy out of baronies, the rise of parliaments out of monarchy, the rise of industry out of serfage, the pathetic ruin of chivalry, the splendid death-struggle of Catholicism, the sylvan tribes of the mountain...beating themselves to pieces against the hard advance of modern industry; we see the grim heroism of the Bible-martyrs, the catastrophe overwhelmed by a practical age which knew little of its graces, and almost nothing of its virtues...<sup>28</sup>

The Waverley Novels were a collection of teachings for the confused present, according to Harrison. The end of the nineteenth century

was a pivotal time, when there was an acute danger that material progress may be overvalued. In the face of this spiritual chaos and incoherence, the need was

To organise our knowledge, to systematise our reading, to save, out of the relentless cataract of ink, the immortal thoughts of the greatest - this is a necessity, unless the productive ingenuity of man is to lead us at last to a sort of measureless and pathless chaos.<sup>29</sup>

The century had by no means been short of prophets. And a short glance at Frederic Harrison's synthesis of Humanism and Positivism, in its overviews of the great figures of nineteenth century criticism, can perhaps provide the best final summary of the desperate urge for transcending clarity and a final verdict, which beset the end of the century. In these judgements, while we have to take note of the surprisingly important place of sexual politics, the role of Scott as a moral and cultural icon was pivotal.

As Harrison asserted, such a time as the present could not afford the immoderate "spleen" of Carlyle; nor yet the complacency of Ruskin, with his resistance to all analytic thought, his inadvertent creation of yet more "chaos" by the unreasoning nature of his thought, and his elevation of the artist over the philosopher. Harrison insisted that the past contained not just idealised women like Camilla, but also practical women like Jeanie

Deans. Harrison looked to the past not just for solace, but for instruction and certainty. Scott shone above all others offered as sages by the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

While George Eliot had much to commend her, for Harrison she failed too, above all because of the moral insecurity she brought by her exhortations of the revocability of marriage; and thereby revealed the limitations of her powers as compared with the very greatest, who were Cervantes, Fielding and Scott. The latter wrote not because he had a burning thesis about the institution of marriage, but because he "was bursting with his story." Thus Scott showed both an evolutionist's and a romancer's understanding of morality, and suggested in his work a strong and secular future

...where the human heart itself shall furnish the religious ideal, and the march of civilisation be the source of creed, the fountain of all reverence!<sup>31</sup>

George Eliot, as the greatest of more recent novelists, paled beside Scott's true religion, his vision. Thus we can see that Scott, for Harrison, was crucially not only the repository of 'neutral' and 'eternal' moral values; but also an upholder of the "sanctity of every home," a resistance to "strange and unwholesome doctrines," such as divorce.<sup>32</sup>

Nor could the present, in Harrison's estimation, be saved by the admittedly "sound" and "worthy" message, and the "prosaic ideals", of Leslie Stephen. His was "not the whole message that we need". It was not sufficient to laud the eighteenth century en bloc, when the distinction was so vital between being "simply entertained" and being "taught, elevated, inspired" by great books.<sup>33</sup>

Matthew Arnold, said Harrison, strove for the "cool judicial temper", the "true proportion" necessary for good criticism; but fell away, as instanced by his not loving "with true ardour the glorious romances of Walter Scott." And, in an interesting emphasis, Harrison dismissed John Stuart Mill's work as "misguided", because failing to understand that society comprised not just "individuals", but was an "organic" entity. For all that Harrison everywhere extolled the need to systematize, he exhorted 'pure morals and manners' as the neglected alternative, where he uncovered Mill's distressing tendency to theory and abstraction - as over the subjection of women. Harrison urged a development of Comtist and evolutionist thought, into a new synthesis for the new age. He had a conception of society as coherent and necessarily corporate. His own role was the creation of a new, unifying cultural critique.<sup>34</sup>

Scott was set firmly in the context of Harrison's own project. This was a very value-based critical practice. Although Harrison was aware of the 'group' dynamic of the historical process, he was finally unconcerned with the minutiae of the novels except in so

far as they communicated "honesty, manliness, gentleness, patience." In the modern age, where ruled the "mechanical ...commonplace...uniform," the real truth of the past and of human nature was desperately needed. Scott could give "humour, truth, human nature in all its sides," and thereby make for a better Humanity. But we can best see Frederic Harrison's central purpose in these chiding words on Scott, addressed to the reader of the present day :

...this glorious, and most human and most historical of poets, without whom our very conception of human development would have ever been imperfect, this manliest, and truest, and widest of romancers, we neglect...<sup>35</sup>

The Waverley Novels were beginning to gather dust. At such a time, in the eyes of a fervent admirer, Scott could rescue Reading from the mire of the modern, the "bookmaker's prattle...idle tales...fugitive trifling."<sup>36</sup> Thus in Harrison, where the works themselves were seen as books, rather than irrelevant outflows from Sir Walter the wonderful, there was a very special place for Scott. Harrison's entire project, for all his professions, was actually the fairly unsystematic listing of his favourite books. He found in Scott an irresistible diversity and sense of scale, to oppose to a uniform and petty present. In variety, moral health, and essential truth were the sources of his greatness :



Scott is a perfect library in himself. A constant reader of romances would find that it needed months to go through even the best pieces of the inexhaustible painter of eight full centuries and every type of man; and he might repeat the process of reading him ten times in a lifetime without a sense of fatigue or sameness...It is the universality of his sympathy that is so truly great, the justice of his estimates, the insight into the spirit of each age, his intense absorption of self in the vast epic of human civilisation.<sup>37</sup>

Here was a Scott who almost alone represented an ideal Culture of secular progress and moral pedagogy. And the *completeness*, the *integrity* of the work is important. It was the case for Harrison as for other later critics, that there were not the fine distinctions between the qualities of different Scott texts, which we have seen in some previous writers. This was 'Scott', institution and moral force.

Scott's sedulous research, and the painstaking nature of his compilation of 'folk-culture' into his fictional *mélange*, had been banished from the stage of Victorian criticism. The interest shown by Peacock, the awareness visible in Ruskin, Stephen's perception of Scott as a storyteller above all else - all these pictures were marginalised in the 'established' version of Scott which entered the twentieth century along with many thousand shelves of his work.

Now he was seen as deeply romantic, and the principal impulse in his life to have been the re-creation of a ideal realm of chivalry, honour and manly duty. These terms, moreover, had been very much annexed by those critics resistant to developments such as the rise in democracy and the emancipation of women. Scott was a bulwark, helping in the very partial mission of refuting the social, political and cultural changes threatening the nation in the later years of the century. He had become a puppet, without clear form, identity or focus.

Scott's fictional world, for all that it was seen by several of the critics under consideration as a perfect mock-up of a golden past, was, nevertheless, ultimately dismissed as no more than an escapist exercise. Scott's world had to be accommodated within various and changing Victorian preoccupations. And the wider goals - political or cultural - determined interpretations. But we can assuredly marvel at the spectacle of each of many nineteenth-century intellectual traditions finding its own home in Scott's world, and how perfectly Scott was found to possess tones in which to speak so powerfully to these very different casts of mind.

But undoubtedly it was a Scott who was pre-eminently the painter of the martial or dramatic scene who entered the twentieth century, withal framed by the mellow twilight of fiction and the passing of time. The true feelings in Scott's work were seen as the large and all-encompassing ones, quintessentially related to action, and to the revolutionary social or political upheavals of the pages of

history. To the shadowier realms of Scott's world, few could give easy and unembarrassed attention. Few and far between were the acknowledgments that in Scott was not just a spinner of yarns, but also - if not by preference - a social historian, a faithful recorder of lives, and a proselyte for other, perhaps bygone, forms of society. If Scott enfranchised the worlds he had loved, the nineteenth century transmuted these into idealised objects for emotions of loss and nostalgia.

The unceasing "new delight" available to Frederic Harrison in the *Waverley Novels* was very largely in that rediscovery of the bitter-sweet of fond remembrance.<sup>38</sup> As Julia Wedgwood perceived, in the glare of "direct attention" Scott's pathos was "apt to become invisible", for he had ever "quitted a point almost as soon as you are aware that he has touched it."<sup>39</sup> And it was perhaps above all in this sudden sense of a truth, which was yet simultaneously fugitive, that Scott touched the Victorian spirit.

The idea that in Scott, past and present met in the myriad human emotions and varieties of human relations, struck a resonant chord indeed for the nineteenth century critics who have been the subject of this study. That century of change and uncertainty *did* effect very tangible fears and yearnings. For Victorians, Scott, as Richard Holt Hutton said, "catches an emotion that has its roots deep in the past."<sup>40</sup> The Victorian reader of Scott - as if there could be any such single being - was perhaps very like Scott's own

Last Minstrel, striving for practicality and skill, but finally  
captivated and transported, as

...scenes, long past, of joy and pain,  
Came wildering o'er his aged brain...<sup>41</sup>

## APPENDIX 1 :CRITICS' COVERAGE OF TEXTS

	WAVERLEY	IVANHOE	THE ANTIQUARY	GUY MANNERING	OLD MORTALITY	HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN	ROB ROY	BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR	REDGAUNTLET	THE PIRATE	THE ABBOT	FORTUNES OF NIGEL	THE MONASTERY	ST. RONAN'S WELL	QUENTIN DURWARD	ANNE OF GEIERSTEIN	COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS	PEVERIL OF THE PEAK	WOODSTOCK
MARTINEAU																			
CARLYLE																			
BAGEHOT																			
HUTTON																			
WEDGWOOD																			
STEPHEN																			
RUSKIN																			
HARRISON																			
LANG																			
CHAMBERS																			
CONAN DOYLE																			
GOSSE																			
SAINTSBURY																			
OLIPHANT																			
DENNIS																			
JOHNSTONE																			

N.B. ANDREW LANG'S ACTUAL COVERAGE OF SCOTT ALSO INCLUDES HIS EDITING A COMPLETE EDITION OF THE WAVERLEY NOVELS (THE BORDER EDITION)

APPENDIX 2:19TH CENTURY PUBLISHING HISTORY  
OF THE COLLECTED WAVERLEY NOVELS

Novels and Tales (Waverley-Montrose) 8mo 12 vols. 1820, 12mo 16 vols. 1821, new edn. 1824, 18mo 12 vols. 1823.

Historical Romances (Ivanhoe-Kenilworth) 8vo 6 vols. 1822, 12mo 8 vols. 1822, 18mo 6 vols. 1824.

Novels and Romances (The Pirate-Quentin Durward) 8vo 7 vols. 1824, 12mo 9 vols. 1824, 18mo 7 vols. 1825.

Tales and Romances (St. Ronan's Well-Woodstock) 8vo 7 vols. 1827, new edn. 7 vols. 1834, 12mo 9 vols. 1827, 18mo 7 vols. 1827.

Tales and Romances (Chronicles of the Canongate, Tales of my landlord, 4th series) 8vo 7 vols. 1833, 12mo 8 vols. 1833, 18mo 6 vols. 1833.

Introductions, and notes and illustrations 8vo 2 vols. 1833, 12mo 3 vols. 1833, 18mo 3 vols. 1833.

Waverley Novels Edinburgh 1829-33 (author's last revision with notes, known as the 'Magnum Opus' edn.), 48 vols. Edinburgh 1830-4.

Other significant editions :

Fisher's edn., 48 vols. 1836-9.

Cabinet edn., Cadell, 25 vols., Edinburgh, 1841-3.

Abbotsford edn., 12 vols., Cadell, Edinburgh, 1842-7.

People's edn., 5 vols., Cadell, Edinburgh, 1844-8.

Library edn., 25 vols., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1852-4.

Railway edn., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1854-60.

People's edn., (including Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.), in weekly parts, A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1855-7.

Roxburghe edn., 48 vols., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1859-61.

Cadell's 1s.-a volume edn., 48 vols., Edinburgh, 1862-3.

Shilling edn., 25 vols., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1862-4.

Sixpenny edn., 25 vols., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1866-8.

Centenary edn., 25 vols., A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1870-1.

Dryburgh edn., 25 vols., 1892-4.

Border edn., 48 vols., John C. Nimmo, London, 1892-4.

Standard edn., 25 vols., 1895-7.

Victoria edn., 25 vols., 1897.

Edinburgh Waverley edn. 48 vols., Edinburgh, 1901-3.

Also : Tales from Scott, ed. E. Sullivan, 1894.

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