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SIR WALTER SCOTT AS HISTORIAN

IN OBSERVING THE METHODS by which Sir Walter Scott used history in his creative writing, the reader is aware of this one general characteristic—variety. Just as he varied techniques, he changed his period of history. The date of his earliest story is 1098, *Count Robert of Paris*; the date of his latest—that of his only “contemporary”—novel, *St. Roman’s Well*, is 1812. Much as he admired the Romans and knew Roman history, he never wrote about them, although he constantly talked about the Roman Wall in Britain. In composing his novels he set the first three in the eighteenth century, then *Old Mortality* in the seventeenth. Three more had the eighteenth again for setting. In his tenth novel Scott wrote about the twelfth century, an epoch he used further in *The Talisman* and two inferior tales. From British history, Scott chose the themes of nineteen novels, four narrative poems, and a drama. These include the periods of seventeen British monarchs, five rulers of Scotland, and the period of the Civil War and Cromwell. In addition to these twenty-four works treating strictly of themes of British history, Scott wrote six other novels and a narrative poem which treat it incidentally. Besides Scotland and England, Scott wrote of Constantinople and Scutari of 1098; Wales of 1187; Syria of 1191; France and Flanders of 1468; Switzerland, Germany, and France of 1474; the Isle of Man of 1678; Holland of 1679; the Shetland and Orkney Islands of 1700; Flanders of 1702; Holland and India of 1765; the Isle of Wight and India of 1780. A listing of the historical characters in the novels ranges from Henry II to Caroline, Queen of George II, and includes most of the famous personages of English and Scottish history from 1187 to Scott’s own century. Even the presentation varies: Mary, Queen of Scots, is an admirable woman the reader loves; James I is a ridiculous Scot who happens to wear a crown.

Scott’s study of history began early in life. At first, the acquisition of historical knowledge was difficult for him. Professor Robert S. Rait was Historiographer Royal for Scotland when he commented on Scott as an historian. He believed that it was in overall, general knowledge of the great issues and movements in history at which Scott excelled, and wrote: “On . . . larger

and greater questions, Sir Walter would be, and is, the master of any modern student."¹ This could be explained by Scott's assertion in the *Ashestiel Memoir* (I, 38) of how his study was a gradual process developing throughout his life:

My memory . . . seldom failed to preserve most tenaciously a favorite passage of poetry, a playhouse ditty, or above all, a Border-raid ballad; but names, dates, and the other technicalities of history, escaped me in a most melancholy degree. The philosophy of history, a much more important subject, was also a sealed book at this period of my life; but I gradually assembled much of what was striking and picturesque in historical narrative; and when, in riper years, I attended more to the deduction of general principles, I was furnished with a powerful host of examples in illustration of them.²

In another section of this memoir (I, 57) Scott confides that applying his memory to history stood him in well in his youthful literary-society meetings:

Yet there occurred opportunities when this odd lumber of my brain, especially that which was connected with the recondite parts of history, did me, as Hamlet says, "yeoman's service." My memory of events was like one of the large, old-fashioned stone-cannons of the Turks—very difficult to load well and discharge, but making a powerful effect when by good chance any object did come within range of its shot. Such fortunate opportunities of exploding with effect maintained my literary character among my companions.

During his early youth Scott had an opportunity to exercise his quickening memory by having time to read history. He broke a blood-vessel and was confined to bed:

I fought my way thus through Vertot's *Knights of Malta*—a book which, as it hovered between history and romance, was exceedingly dear to me; and Orme's interesting and beautiful *History of Indostan*, whose copious plans, aided by the clear and luminous explanations of the author, rendered my imitative amusement peculiarly easy (I, 50).

The "imitative amusement" consisted of acting out the battles on his bed with shells, seeds, and pebbles.

This incident illustrates a characteristic of Scott: whenever he could, he always combined two or more of his interests. Here he unites his interests in history and in the military. A similar combination occurred as a result of his early interest in ballads. In 1802, a friend sent him a manuscript collection of ballads. Mention is made of a battle which aroused Scott's curiosity. In tracing this information Scott combined his interest in ballads, history, and

military operations.³ In a letter to Lord Dalkeith, Scott also shows the combination of another interest with history. He had always been interested in the patriarchal rights and dominions of the clans, and in a letter to Lord Dalkeith (I, 329-335) he displays a complete familiarity with the acts of James VI's parliaments on clan statutes.

Scott's interest in history also extended during his later life to a desire to preserve Melrose Abbey as an historical object. He had often before directed the attention of the Buccleuch family to the progress decay was making to an alarming extent upon it. John Gibson Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law and biographer, mentions his touching on this site in writing to persons who had never seen Melrose and speaking "out of the fulness of the heart" (IV, 22). In a letter to his daughter Sophia he insists she must learn about it "a good deal . . . which you must fix in your recollection as we are now going to live so near it." He also mentions that it was founded by David the First, "one of the best of our Scottish Kings" (III, 102-3). Later (Lockhart, IV, 22), the young Duke of Buccleuch allowed Scott to direct such repairs as might seem to him adequate. The result was satisfactory to all who appreciated the abbey's classical ruins.

In his letter to Sophia, Scott suggested that his daughter could find historical information on Melrose Abbey in Lord Hailes' *Annals*. This reference shows how familiar Scott was with the histories that were available to him. The *Annals* he recommends is by Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, a Scottish judge, and is entitled *Annals of Scotland from the Accession of Malcolm III to the Accession of the House of Stewart*. This three-volume work was printed in Edinburgh in 1776-1779. The reference also illustrates the facility with which Scott could find appropriate historical works for himself, or suggest them to others. He suggested to the Duke of Buccleuch books which he recommended for the Duke's beginning a course of Scottish history. In addition to Lord Hailes' *Annals*, Scott wrote (IV, 322) recommending three other histories as a series which contained the full history of Scotland. He realized that the books were very different in merit. The same books were recommended four years later to Benjamin Robert Haydon. For Haydon, Scott supplied a brief paragraph as description for each of the works. To both the Duke of Buccleuch and Haydon, Scott indicated a preference for older historians. He wrote to Haydon:

. . . if you wish to find subjects for the pencil I believe you will have the best chance of finding them in some of the old historians or writers of memoirs, who,

without being either so full or so accurate as the philosophical historians of the last or present century, had, nevertheless, the art of placing their actors clearly before you (VI, 321).

Scott had mentioned that his recommended histories were different in merit. In suggesting (in the same letter) an ancient history of Scotland to Haydon with the reservation that Haydon will have difficulty with the Scottish phraseology and spelling, he says nothing of the historical accuracy of the work, but recommends it for its "very rude and homely style, yet . . . often picturesque in the highest degree." Scott knew that many of the histories were incorrect on certain points, and in accusing them of historical inaccuracy he based his decision on original documents. In a letter to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (III, 142) he mentions obtaining a copy of a chronicle which he believes is the most ancient and authentic account of the reign of James II and which contradicts many common histories. For his research, Scott collected original letters. As an example, he sent to a member of the Glengarry family (IV, 198) information he had found about the family from a letter of Charles II to General Middleton. In a footnote to *The Betrothed* (ch. 4) he uses a letter from King Henry II to the Greek Emperor Emannel Commenus on the extraordinary courage and fierceness of the Welsh to bolster his assertion that he has not exaggerated in his text.¹⁷ In a similar footnote to *Quentin Durward* (ch. 9) he quotes the original French of a letter of Louis XI to the Comte de Dammarten.

Scott thought it necessary to have this knowledge of history for his two professions. In one of the most famous quotations in his novels Scott has Pleydell in *Guy Mannering* say, "A lawyer without history or literature is a mechanic, a mere working mason; if he possesses some knowledge of these, he may venture to call himself an architect" (ch. 37). And he sets forth in the Introduction to *Pevekil of the Peak* his preparation in this important tool of his trade as a novelist in the simple statement: "My memory was well stored both with historical, local, and traditional notices . . ." For this novel he shows that he has even acquired a limited knowledge of economic history, for he discusses (ch. 38) stock-jobbing, or, as he defines it, "dealing in shares of monopolies, patent, and joint-stock companies of every description," in the reign of Charles II and in his own time. He also found of value to the novelist the knowledge of another division of history—military history—that he had earlier displayed in his letters. In 1791, he wrote to William Clerk (I, 18-20) that he wished for his company when he rode over Flodden Edge and then described to Clerk the battle fought there, referring him for further details

to Pitscottie's history. In another letter the following year (I, 23-26) he again shares this interest in military history with Clerk by discussing battles of the Wars of the Roses. These two letters show how he delighted in visiting battlefields and tracing for himself the knowledge he obtained from the written word. In 1812, he wrote (III, 90) that he intended to travel by Otterbourne and examine the field of battle. And when his son became a professional soldier Scott shared with him (VI, 451) his knowledge of battles fought at places visited by the younger Walter.

Because of interest, desire, and necessity, Sir Walter knew the history he used as background for his novels. It is surprising, therefore, to see someone who could consider himself more than an amateur historian, who could recall facts and had the training to obtain the facts he could not recall, occasionally making mistakes which an historian would not make. Three examples will illustrate these blunders, which can be excused only by carelessness and haste. Scott at times depended on reference to the easiest accessible source rather than on tracing the original. In a footnote to *Peveiril of the Peak* (ch. 40), he mentions a story concerning the legends of the Tower which he found recorded in one of the little manuals distributed to visitors and he adds that the story is not found in later editions. Dependence on such a handout could hardly be considered historical accuracy. At other times, Scott found his fantastic memory betraying him, as when, in *The Fortunes of Nigel* (ch. 3), he admits that he is unable to produce his authority. And again, as with information from the *Chronique de Jean de Troyes* bearing on *Quentin Durward* (ch. 6, n.), he has to admit that he obtained it too late.

Historical inaccuracies are abundant in Scott's novels. The novel that has been most attacked is his most popular, *Ivanhoe*. Freeman (in his *Norman Conquest*) and other writers have laboured over the errors of the book. It is confused in the combination of the customs of three centuries. Cedric, Athelstane, and Ulrica belong to an earlier period than 1194; Robin Hood belonged a century later. The Saxon gods are Scott's own creation. Edward the Confessor left no descendants. In preparation for this novel Scott read widely in medieval chroniclers and acquired a mass of accurate antiquarian knowledge of arms, heraldry, monastic institutions, dress, and habits of the Middle Ages. But instead of attempting to depend entirely on historical sources for his material, Scott admits in his Introduction that he turned to the historical romances. He writes that Logan's tragedy of *Runnamede* contains no attempt to contrast the Norman and the Saxon races, but reading this work gave him the idea for one of the best parts of the novel. The meeting of the King

with Friar Tuck at the cell of the hermit is not history but is directly borrowed from old romance. Scott lists the Eastern tales, the songs of the French minstrels, the Scottish metrical romances, and the popular ballads of England which supplied this theme. To his novel Scott added "with a sparing hand" such annotations as he considered useful to assist the reader in comprehending the characters of the Jew, the Templar, the Captain of the mercenaries, and "others" proper to the period, but he suggested to the reader that "sufficient information on these subjects is to be found in general history." The name of *Ivanhoe* was chosen from an old rhyme, and the "formidable" name of Front-de-Bœuf from the Auchinleck Manuscript, merely because Scott liked their "ancient" sound. And, Scott confesses, "indeed it was obvious, that history was violated." This violation of history in *Ivanhoe*, which Freeman and others have made so much of, is unimportant in comparison with the accomplishment of the novel in opening an entirely new field to the historical novel. Despite its inaccuracies, *Ivanhoe* more than justified Scott's introductory explanation:

Whether this reasoning be correct or otherwise, the present author felt, that, in confining himself to subjects purely Scottish, he was not only likely to weary out the indulgence of his readers, but also greatly to limit his own power of affording them pleasure . . . when men and horses, cattle, camels, and dromedaries, have poached the spring into mud, it becomes loathsome to those who at first drank of it with rapture. . . .

Victor Hugo pointed out the errors in *Quentin Durward*. The fool of the Duke of Burgundy makes a remark which correctly belongs to the fool of Francis I. The Order of the Knights of the Holy Spirit was only instituted under Henry III, and the Order of St. Michael by Louis XI after his coronation. Hugo apparently did not realize that Scott was incorrect in not knowing (ch. 13) that the invention of printing was really first practised in Mayence, on the Rhine, and that while the first book issued from that press bears the date 1457, the first from Frankfort is dated 1507, thirty-nine years after the setting of Scott's novel.

Students of English literature hasten to comment that in *Kenilworth* Scott requires the reader to suppose that in July of 1575, when Shakespeare was actually but little beyond his eleventh birthday, he was personally prominent and famous for nearly all of his literary masterpieces. This should no more bother them than Scott's retelling the story of Sir Walter Raleigh's cloak. Both are excellent dramatic embellishments. Criticism could better be aimed at Scott's characterizations of two of England's poets.

In most lapses from historical accuracy, such as the introduction of Shakespeare as a character, the historical error is contrived. Scott admits in *Peveril of the Peak* that Charlotte de la Tremouille, Countess of Derby, represented as a Catholic, was, in fact, a French Protestant, but changing her religion enhanced his use of the Popish Plot as background. In a note to *The Fortunes of Nigel* Scott shows that he knew that it was John Ramsay, afterwards Earl of Holderness, and not Scott's imaginary Lord Huntinglen, who rescued James I from the dagger of Alexander Ruthven. In a footnote to *Quentin Durward* he admits that he knows that the real bride of William de la Marck was Joan D'Arshel, Baroness of Scoonhoven. He writes, "It is almost unnecessary to add, that the marriage of William de la Marck with the Lady Hameline is as apocryphal as the lady herself" (ch. 36). In a note to the novel he also states that history has been violated by the date assigned to the murder of the Bishop of Liège, Louis de Bourbon. And he again cautions the reader: "It is scarce necessary to repeat that, if he in reality murdered the Bishop of Liege in 1482, the Count of La Marck could not be slain in the defence of Liege four years earlier."

Scott indicates that having to admit changing history for dramatic purposes conflicted with his conscience as an historian. In a conversation between the "Author of *Waverley*" and the Rev. Dr. Dryasdust in the Introduction to *Peveril of the Peak*, Dryasdust accuses the Author:

We severer antiquaries, sir, may grant that this is true—to wit, that your works may occasionally have put men of solid judgment upon researches which they would not perhaps have otherwise thought of undertaking. But this will leave you still accountable for misleading the young, the indolent, and the giddy, by thrusting into their hands works which, while they have so much the appearance of conveying information as may prove perhaps a salve to their consciences for employing their leisure in the perusal, yet leave their giddy brains contented with the crude, uncertain, and often false statements which your novels abound with.

The "Author of *Waverley*" answers by reciting the story of the Duke of Marlborough, who, having quoted some fact of English history inaccurately, was requested to name his authority. The Duke's answer is Scott's answer: "Shakespeare's Historical Plays, the only English history I ever read in my life."

More important than Scott's accuracy or lack of accuracy is his method of using history in his creative writing. In *The Waverley Novels and Their Critics* (Minneapolis, 1936), James T. Hillhouse makes the following statement: ". . . invariably Scott thought of a given novel as illustrating some trait of national character, describing some phase of civilization, or painting the por-

trait of some great historic figure—Mary Stuart, Elizabeth, or Louis XI (p. 21).” Nothing could be farther from the truth. In his first novel (*Waverley*, ch. 57) Scott opened a chapter by writing, “It is not our purpose to intrude upon the province of history.” Part of the success of Scott’s novels is due to his not making an historic personage the principal figure in any novel. Although the novels were often written because of the great figures of history and of the times in which they lived, they nevertheless occupy a secondary place to the heroes of his fictions. It is *Waverley*, not Prince Charles; *Ivanhoe*, not Richard the Lionhearted; *Quentin Durward*, not Louis XI; the *Abbot*, not Mary Stuart. In explaining why he never used Alfred as a subject, Scott stated his creed as to the place of actual figures: “In the first place it has always seemed to me that the majesty of history is rather injured than improved by the ornaments of poetical fiction and that where historical characters are introduced it ought only to be incidentally and in such a manner as not to interfere with established truth.”⁴ Scott did not always follow his creed, but he certainly shows that his novels were not written for the reasons that Hillhouse suggests.

Of all the historical figures that Scott portrayed, by far his best is Mary, Queen of Scots, in *The Abbot*. He had for her the romantic devotion which was held by all his countrymen. As early as *Waverley* (ch. 45) he spoke of her as “the lovely Mary.” In *The Abbot*, Scott makes the reader appreciate her beauty of person and her dignity and intelligence as a queen, and he also provides her with some of the wittiest dialogue in his novels. But he was fortunate in not making her his heroine or basing his plot on a main incident in her life such as the murder of Darnley. The interest of the reader makes her the dominant figure, but Scott did not. He cast her as a secondary character, serving as an accessory in the love story of Catherine and Roland Graeme; but the force of his characterization causes the reader to sense her compelling power.

Charles Edward in *Waverley* does not illustrate this power of delineating character with which Scott succeeded in portraying Mary, possibly because Scott did not admire Charles Edward. Most critics believe that Scott did almost no research for this novel since the sub-title “‘Tis Sixty Years Since” indicates that the date of the happenings provided numerous living witnesses to the Forty-Five. He did, however, use the *Memoirs* of General Sir James Stuart Denham of Coltness, and apparently depended upon the Chevalier Johnstone’s *Memoirs of the Rebellion of 1745* for his picture of Charles Edward. Johnstone had written: “Had Prince Charles slept during the whole of the expedition and allowed Lord George Murray to act for him according to

his own judgment, there is every reason for supposing he would have found the crown of Great Britain on his head when he awoke."⁵ Scott wrote his opinion in his *Journal* (February 10, 1826): "At the same time, Charles Edward had not a head or heart for great things, notwithstanding his daring adventure, and the Irish officers, by whom he was guided, were poor creatures. Lord George Murray was the soul of the undertaking."

Since the attempts of Charles Edward to retake the throne involved military operations, Scott was able to utilize his interest in military history more than in any other novel. Bannockburn and the feats of Wallace are recalled (ch. 39). In a footnote (ch. 44) he tells of the war of La Vendée in which the royalists, consisting chiefly of insurgent peasantry, attached a superstitious interest to the possession of a piece of brass ordnance which they called Marie Jeane. To his own fictional account he also adds a footnote (ch. 47) which consists of two lengthy paragraphs from an eye-witness account of the death of Colonel Gardiner. Scott used the *Account of Somerset's Expedition* as an historical source for research into the Scottish broadswords he describes, and he reproduces a lengthy description of the skirmish at Clifton extracted from the manuscript *Memoirs of Evan MacPherson of Cluny*, Chief of the clan MacPherson. Detailed study of these documents as well as conversations with living participants were necessary for the battle descriptions in the novel.

Similar research on the history of beggars was necessary for *The Antiquary* and of gypsies for *Guy Mannering*. *Old Mortality*, which Lockhart always called the "Marmion" of the novels, was the first book in which Scott's imagination worked on materials furnished entirely by books. Lockhart pictures him:

strong in the confidence that the industry with which he had pored over a library of forgotten tracts would enable him to identify himself with the time in which they had birth, as completely as if he had listened with his own ears to the dismal sermons of Peden, ridden with Claverhouse and Dalzell in the rout of Bothwell. . . . To reproduce a departed age with such minute and life-like accuracy as this tale exhibits, demanded a far more energetic sympathy of imagination than had been called for in any effort of his serious verse (III, 131).

It is strange that Scott is more of a champion of Claverhouse in his letters than in this novel, in which the judgment passed on him is harsher than is justified by history.

Pevekil of the Peak represents several different methods by which Scott used history. John Buchan thinks that the book "smells of the apoplexy":

He chose a period of history in which he was not perfectly at home, and had to lean upon hastily-read documents. He was very conscious of the book's imperfections, and in the preparatory letter thought it right to apologize for other defects besides anachronism.⁶

Chapter one of *Peveril* illustrates Scott's method of often referring to historical background and places of historical interest without supplying the reader with either a source or adequate information. In later editions of the novel other editors have often supplied this for the reader. In the chapter cited it is history of the Presbyterian party that is necessary. In Chapter XV of the same novel Scott does not supply needed information. When he does, it enhances the reader's appreciation of the period. In one section of the novel he writes a brief history of the Castle of Holm Peel from the War of the Roses until the date of the story, 1678. In a conversation between the Countess of Derby and her son, Scott shows through her words the changes which have come about in the behaviour patterns of nobles in one generation.

If Scott did not always include sufficient historical information, as in *Peveril*, he did often tell the reader where it could be found. In *Redgauntlet*, when he is discussing the "bloody" Earl of Douglas (ch. 11), he writes in a footnote: "The reader is referred for particulars to Pitscottie's *History of Scotland*". More frequently he cited his source in the body of the novel, and he did this most consistently in *Quentin Durward*, where such phrases as "Comines assures us" are frequent. In the first chapter of *St. Ronan's Well* he cites David M'Pherson's historical map and in chapter seventeen he lists three historians of the "Dark Period". Two paragraphs of Fletcher of Saltoun's picture of banditti are reproduced in the text of *Guy Mannering*. A passage by Sir John Harington is printed in the body of chapter twenty-one of *Kenilworth* so that Harington rather than Scott can describe Elizabeth I. At the beginning of chapter thirty-one of this book, Scott again takes the easiest way to write a description: "It is by no means our purpose to detail minutely all the princely festivities of Kenilworth, after the fashion of Master Robert Laneham, whom we quoted in the conclusion of the last chapter". If such original sources as Sir John Harington supplied descriptions of historical characters, Scott also used them for his dialogue. In *The Betrothed*, Father Aldrovand says, "Sir Cook, let me have half-a-yard or so of broiled beef presently". In a footnote Scott explains: "Old Henry Jenkins, in his *Recollections of the Abbacies before their dissolution*, has preserved the fact that roast beef was delivered out to the guests, not by weight, but by measure" (ch. 7).

The Fortunes of Nigel is the novel in which Scott wishes more than

in any other to share with the reader his knowledge and opinion of a period in history. In the Introduction there is a complete essay on the social history of the reign of James I. As far as Scott believed, the period was characterized chiefly by brothels, alehouses, dicing-houses, taverns, and places of iniquity. His opinion was formed from a "History of the First Fourteen Years of King James's Reign" which was contained in the Somers's *Tracts* which Scott edited. The novel is an attempt to justify Scott's opinion to the reader.

In the first chapter of *Quentin Durward*, there is a complete historical essay on the latter part of the fifteenth century in France. Chapter eight contains a shorter historical essay on the balances of power between England, France, and Burgundy. In this chapter Scott makes an historical comparison between the France of Louis XI and the England of Henry VIII because he believes that his reader will be more familiar with the English history. In a footnote to chapter twenty-eight, Scott illustrates what he often attempted to do with an historical character in making him fictional:

The author has endeavored to give to the odious Tristan L'Hermite a species of dogged and brutal fidelity to Louis, similar to the attachment of a bulldog to his master. With all the atrocity of his execrable character, he was certainly a man of courage, and was, in his youth, made knight on the breach of Fronsac, with a great number of other young nobles, by the honor-giving hand of the elder Dunois, the celebrated hero of Charles the Vth's reign.

In this same novel, the historian Philip Des Comines is also introduced (ch. 30) as a character.

The same sort of variety characterizes Scott's history which was not fictional. His first contribution to the art was as editor in presenting before the public such historical memoirs as Slingsby's, Hodgson's, Cary's, and Somers's. As early as 1811, he edited Wilson's *Secret History of the Court of King James I*. The first history he wrote was for the *Edinburgh Annual Register*; the historical department was in the hands of Robert Southey, but Scott wrote the historical sketch for several years. The composition for the year 1814 ran to thousands of pages. It was written hastily but with interest, spirit, and clarity. Most of the same material was later covered in his *Napoleon*. His history of 1815 for the *Register* was written during the summer of 1817. By 1818 other commitments made Scott turn the history over to Lockhart, who wrote the account of 1816. In 1818, unable to finish *The Bride of Lammermoor* because of illness, Scott wrote a series of historical essays entitled *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland* because, as Lockhart says (III, 308), of "his own love of the subject, and because, well or ill, he must be doing something."

A reader of the *Journal* (October 19, 1826) will see detailed Scott's labour in producing his nine-volume *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, which was published in 1827. Written during all the anxiety of the financial ruin, it is one of Scott's most remarkable achievements of sheer taskwork. Materials were not available for a full and accurate history had Scott desired to use them, and the work is admittedly history for the ordinary reader rather than the scholar. As long as five of his novels, the *Life* is at times a well-proportioned narrative, but inspiration flags until the reader cannot help being bored. While writing the *Napoleon*, Scott had read Southey and determined his own concept of how to write history:

I rose at my usual time, but could not write: so read Southey's *History of the Peninsular War*. It is very good indeed,—honest English good principle in every line; but there are many prejudices, and there is a tendency to augment a work already too long by saying all that can be said of the history of ancient times appertaining to every place mentioned. What care we whether Iæen be the Aurigi Pringi or Onorigis of the ancient Spaniards or no—whether Saragossa be derived from Caesarea Augusta? Could he have proved it to be Numantium, there would have been a concatenation according.

Scott knew that his own Napoleonic history was filled with inaccuracies. After admitting this in his *Journal*, he shows the depression which his financial losses had caused. He stated that if he were to do it again he would have someone look over it, but he is so depressed that he believes there is no one of the human race with whom he could be so intimate.

Scott's attitude toward writing for children was shown as early as the *Ashestiel Memoir*: "Indeed, I rather suspect that children derive impulses of a powerful and important kind in hearing things which they cannot entirely comprehend; and therefore, that to write *down* to children's understanding is a mistake: set them on the scent and let them puzzle it out" (I, 25). He echoed this thought years later in his *Journal* (May 24, 1827) when he first planned *Tales of a Grandfather*:

A good thought came in my head—to write stories for little Johnnie Lockhard [*sic*] from the History of Scotland, like those taken from the History of England. I will not write mine quite so simply as Croker [*Tales from English History*] has done. I am persuaded both children and the lower class of readers hate books which are written *down* to their capacity, and love those that are more composed for their elders and betters. I will make, if possible, a book that a child will understand, yet a man will feel some temptation to peruse should he chance to take it up. It will require, however, a simplicity of style not quite my own. The grand and interesting consists in ideas, not in words.

Three months later he reflected that some authors would think it a degradation to write a child's book, but he did not agree. "It is to be inscribed to my grandson, and I will write it not only without a sense of its being *infra dig.* but with a grandfather's pleasure" (*Journal*, June 7, 1827). The first "Tales" appeared in December, 1827, and the public appetite for them was insatiable. The second series appeared in 1828, the third in 1829, and the fourth (a history of France) in 1830. The narrative of the "Tales" is easy and natural with each paragraph designed to interest a child; however, he is successful in following his plan not to write "down" to children and still present the history so that it is within the comprehension of a child's mind. He was writing (except for the fourth series) what he knew and liked best—Scottish history. Although he often accepted traditions which later research has shown to be untrue, the work is of value in illustrating what Scott thought both interesting and important in Scottish history.

In July of 1828 the proprietors of *Dr. Lardner's Cyclopaedia* offered Scott £500 for an abstract of Scottish history in one volume, which he declined. When the price was raised to £1000 he reluctantly accepted, believing that he would find the task a heavy one. He soon became interested in the work and pursued it with "cordial zeal and satisfaction", as Lockhart reports (V, 239), using a phrase which can apply to Scott's attitude toward all his historical writing. Insisting he "must have elbow-room", Scott wrote two volumes for which he received £1500. This work shows how profitable Scott found all his histories.

Sir Walter Scott knew history, especially the history of his own country. B. J. Whiting writes: "It has become a truism that no man knew more of the history and historians of Scotland than did Sir Walter Scott". In "Sir Walter's Pageant", Professor Robert S. Rait writes, "Sir Walter Scott knew Scottish history better than any other man has ever known it, better than any other man ever will know it, until some mind of genius equal to his own chooses to devote the same time and attention to it" (p. 14), and (p. 16), "Not only did Sir Walter know Scottish history better than anybody else; he told it better than anybody else. . . ."

Whiting and Rait have limited their praise of Scott's knowledge of history to that of Scotland. It is true that it was the history of his native country that he knew best and that he chose as the background of most of his novels. But he did not limit his background nor did he limit his knowledge. The history of France was necessary for both *Quentin Durward* and the *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*; his novels vary from the Constantinople of 1098 in

Count Robert of Paris to the spa near the Firth of Forth of 1812 in *St. Ronan's Well*. In addition to the scholarly histories that he attempted, Scott was an historian in all his novels, and in many of his dramas and poems. Possessed of a remarkable memory, he made history flow from his pen with facility. Of his training and knowledge he wrote:

One advantage, I think, I still have over all of them [his imitators]. They may do their fooling with better grace; but I . . . do it more natural. They have to read old books and consult antiquarian collections to get their information; I write because I have long since read such works, and possess, thanks to a strong memory, the information which they have to seek for. This leads to a dragging-in historical details by head and shoulders, so that the interest of the main piece is lost in minute descriptions of events which do not affect its progress (*Journal*, October 18, 1826).

As the innovator of the historical romance Scott initiated a new era in story-telling. Until *Waverley* all the great English novels had been studies in contemporary life. For Scott, the past ceased to be history; he eliminated the time factor and made all life contemporary. There are historical errors, but Scott was writing fiction, not history. It is unjust to submit his romances to the rigid test of historical accuracy, but there is no reason to suppose that he was ignorant of facts. Most of his rearrangements are intentional. He had a faculty for keeping the centuries distinct. And he succeeded in doing what he proposed to do when he wrote, also in the *Journal* for October 18, 1826, "Must not let the background eclipse the principal figures—the frame overpower the picture". Scott's greatest merit lies in his uniting his knowledge of history, which critics are correct in stating he knew better than anyone else, with the genius of a creative artist.

NOTES

1. Robert S. Rait, "Sir Walter's Pageant of Scottish History", *The Sir Walter Scott Quarterly*, April, 1927 (I, 14).
2. Citations from the *Ashesiel Memoir* are to John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Boston, 1901).
3. H. J. C. Grierson (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1932), to R. Cleator, June 4, 1802 (I, 143).
4. *Letters*, to Richard Sainthill Jones, March 12, 1813 (III, 234).
5. Quoted in John Guthrie Tait (ed.), *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1950), 99.
6. John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1832), 254.
7. B. J. Whiting, "Scott and Wyntoun", *Philological Quarterly*, XIII (July, 1934), 296.