Modern Judgements

WALTER SCOTT

MODERN JUDGEMENTS

General Editor: P. N. FURBANK

Dickens A. E. Dyson

Henry James Tony Tanner

Milton Alan Rudrum

Walter Scott D. D. Devlin

Shelley R. B. Woodings

Swift A. Norman Jeffares

IN PREPARATION

Matthew Arnold P. A. W. Collins

Freud F. Cioffi

Marvell M. Wilding

O'Casey Ronald Ayling

Pasternak Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone

Pope Graham Martin

Racine R. C. Knight

Walter Scott

MODERN JUDGEMENTS

edited by

D. D. DEVLIN

Macmillan Education

Selection and editorial matter © D. D. Devlin 1968
Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1968

Published by

MACMILLAN AND CO LTD

Little Essex Street London WC2

and also at Bombay Calcutta and Madras

Macmillan South Africa (Publishers) Pty Ltd Johannesburg

The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty Ltd Melbourne

The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd Toronto

ISBN 978-0-333-04239-7

ISBN 978-1-349-15253-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-15253-7

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	7
<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	9
<i>Introduction</i>	11
<i>Chronology of Scott's Life</i>	25
EDWIN MUIR <i>Walter Scott: The Writer</i>	27
DAVID DAICHES <i>Scott's Achievement as a Novelist</i>	33
ALEXANDER WELSH <i>Scott's Heroes</i>	63
S. STEWART GORDON <i>Waverley and the 'Unified Design'</i>	71
DONALD DAVIE <i>Waverley</i>	84
P. F. FISHER <i>Providence, Fate, and the Historical Imagination in Scott's <i>The Heart of Midlothian</i></i>	98
ROBIN MAYHEAD <i>The Heart of Midlothian: Scott as Artist</i>	112
DONALD DAVIE <i>Rob Roy</i>	122
ROBERT C. GORDON <i>The Bride of Lammermoor: A Novel of Tory Pessimism</i>	130
JOSEPH E. DUNCAN <i>The Anti-Romantic in <i>Ivanhoe</i></i>	142
DAVID DAICHES <i>Scott's <i>Redgauntlet</i></i>	148
B. A. PIKE <i>Scott as Pessimist: A View of <i>St Ronan's Well</i></i>	162
FRANCIS R. HART <i>The Fair Maid, Manzoni's <i>Betrothed</i>, and the Grounds of <i>Waverley</i> Criticism</i>	171
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	185
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	188
<i>Index</i>	189

Acknowledgements

Edwin Muir, 'Sir Walter Scott: the Writer', from *Sir Walter Scott Lectures 1940-1948*, in *The University of Edinburgh Journal*, vol. xiii, no. 2 (Edinburgh University Press); David Daiches, 'Scott's Achievement as a Novelist', from *Literary Essays* (Oliver & Boyd Ltd); Alexander Welsh, extract from *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (Yale University Press); S. Stewart Gordon, 'Waverley and the Unified Design', from *English Literary History*, vol. xviii (The Johns Hopkins Press); Donald Davie, 'Waverley and Rob Roy', from *The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, Barnes & Noble Inc.); P. F. Fisher, 'Providence, Fate, and the Historical Imagination in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*', from *Nineteenth-century Fiction*, vol. x (University of California; © The Regents 1955); Robin Mayhead, 'The Heart of Midlothian: Scott as Artist', from *Essays in Criticism*, vol. vi (Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd); Robert C. Gordon, 'The Bride of Lammermoor: A Novel of Tory Pessimism', from *Nineteenth-century Fiction* vol. xii, (University of California; © The Regents 1957); Joseph E. Duncan, 'The Anti-Romantic in *Ivanhoe*', from *Nineteenth-century Fiction*, vol. ix (University of California; © The Regents 1955); Professor David Daiches, 'Scott's *Redgauntlet*', from *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, ed. R. C. Rathburn and M. Steinmann (pub. by University of Minnesota Press); B. A. Pike, 'Scott as Pessimist: A View of *St Ronan's Well*', from *A Review of English Literature*, vol. vii, 1966; Francis R. Hart, 'The Fair Maid, Manzoni's *Betrothed* and the Grounds of Waverley Criticism', from *Nineteenth-century Fiction*, vol. xviii (University of California; © The Regents 1963).

General Editor's Preface

LITERARY criticism has only recently come of age as an academic discipline, and the intellectual activity that, a hundred years ago, went into theological discussion, now finds its most natural outlet in the critical essay. Amid a good deal that is dull or silly or pretentious, every year now produces a crop of critical essays which are brilliant and profound not only as contributions to the understanding of a particular author, but as statements of an original way of looking at literature and the world. Hence it often seems that the most useful undertaking for an academic publisher might be, not so much to commission new books of literary criticism or scholarship, as to make the best of what exists easily available. This at least is the purpose of the present series of anthologies, each of which is devoted to a single major writer.

The guiding principle of selection is to assemble the best *modern* criticism – broadly speaking, that of the last twenty or thirty years – and to include historic and classic essays, however famous, only when they are still influential and represent the best statements of their particular point of view. It will, however, be one of the functions of each editor's Introduction to sketch in the earlier history of criticism in regard to the author concerned.

Each volume will attempt to strike a balance between general essays and ones on specialised aspects, or particular works, of the writer in question. And though in many instances the bulk of the articles will come from British and American sources, certain of the volumes will draw heavily on material in other European languages – most of it being translated for the first time.

P. N. FURBANK

Introduction

How many hours of heartfelt satisfaction has our author given to the gay and thoughtless! How many sad hearts has he soothed in pain and solitude! It is no wonder that the public repay with lengthened applause and gratitude the pleasure they receive.

Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825

In 1817 Scott reviewed anonymously the first series of his 'Tales of My Landlord' and had this to say about his early novels:

Our author has told us it was his object to present a succession of scenes and characters connected with Scotland in its past and present state, and we must own that his stories are so slightly constructed as to remind us of the showman's thread with which he draws up his pictures and presents them successively to the eye of the spectator. He seems seriously to have proceeded on Mr Bay's maxim – 'what the deuce is a plot good for, but to bring in fine things?' – Probability and perspicuity of narrative are sacrificed with the utmost indifference to the desire of producing effect: and provided the author can but contrive to 'surprise and elevate', he appears to think that he has done his duty to the public. Against this slovenly indifference we have already remonstrated, and we again enter our protest. It is in justice to the author himself that we do so, because, whatever merit individual scenes and passages may possess, (and none has been more ready than ourselves to offer our applause), it is clear that their effect would be greatly enhanced by being disposed in a clear and continued narrative. We are the more earnest in this matter, because it seems that the author errs chiefly from carelessness. There may be something of system in it however; for we have remarked, that with an attention which amounts even to affection, he has avoided the common language of narrative, and thrown his story, as much as possible, into a dramatic shape. In many cases this has added greatly to the effect, by keeping both the actors and action continually before the reader, and placing him, in some measure, in the situation of the audience at a theatre, who are compelled to gather the meaning of the scene from what the *dramatis personae* say to each other, and not from any explanation addressed immediately to themselves. But though the author gains this advantage, and thereby compels the reader to think of the personages of the novel and not of the writer, yet the practice, especially pushed to the

extent we have noticed, is a principal cause of the flimsiness and incoherent texture of which his greatest admirers are compelled to complain. . . . In addition to the loose and incoherent style of the narration, another leading fault in these novels is the total want of interest which the reader attaches to the character of the hero. Waverley, Brown, or Bertram in Guy Mannering, and Lovel in the Antiquary, are all brethren of a family; very amiable and very insipid sort of young men. We think we can perceive that this error is also in some degree occasioned by the dramatic principle upon which the author frames his plots. His chief characters are never actors, but always acted upon by the spur of circumstances, and have their fates uniformly determined by the agency of the subordinate persons.¹

All the objections of later critics to the Waverley novels – to their carelessness and feeble plots and wooden heroes – are already suggested here by Scott himself: but for nineteenth-century readers there were compensations. Hazlitt detested Scott's political opinions: he accused him of recoiling from the present, but could still (in *The Spirit of the Age*) whole-heartedly admire the novels:

Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life. . . . Our author has conjured up the actual people he has to deal with, or as much as he could get of them, 'in their habits as they lived' . . . It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is. . . . His works (taken together) are almost like a new edition of human nature. This is indeed to be an author! . . . He is a writer reconciling all the diversities of human nature to the reader. He does not enter into the distinctions of hostile sects or parties, but treats of the strength or the infirmity of the human mind, of the virtues or vices of the human breast, as they are to be found blended in the whole race of mankind. . . . [Scott] draws aside the curtain, and the veil of egotism is rent, and he shows us the crowd of living men and women, the endless groups, the landscape back-ground, the cloud and the rainbow, and enriches our imaginations and relieves one passion by another, and expands and lightens reflection, and takes away that tightness at the breast which arises from thinking or wishing to think that there is nothing in the world out of a man's self! – In this point of view, the author of *Waverley* is one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived, by emancipating the mind from petty, narrow, and bigoted prejudices. . . . Sir Walter Scott is the most *dramatic* writer now living. . . .

¹ *Quarterly Review*, xvi (1817) 431.

As Francis R. Hart has recently remarked: 'Nineteenth-century readers knew all we do about the imperfections of the Author of *Waverley*: we merely rehearse their strictures and omit or overlook their admiration. . . .'¹

In 1924 John Buchan said that 'the really penetrating criticism of Scott could be collected in a very slim volume';² and two things are remarkable about Scott criticism since that date: there is still very little of it, and the little there is repeats the same charges and objections. There is a pattern in the criticism of Scott in this century and it is a pattern of complaint: only since the 1950s has the quality and quantity of critical comment improved and increased. But revaluation has only begun: its success will depend on how clearly and soon we recognize that certain critical approaches and tools cannot help us to read his novels, and that traditional discussion of Scott's characters and heroes and plots will lead nowhere. Nearly everything remains to be done: the articles in this collection suggest in various ways how the modern reader may read and enjoy the *Waverley* novels, and even accord Scott something of Hazlitt's 'lengthened applause'. Thomas Crawford has recently written:

Despite the enormous amount of critical analysis in our age, there has as yet been no full-scale modern study of Scott's writings. A definitive work is hardly possible until the debate on *The Heart of Midlothian* has been extended to all the Scottish novels, and until we have many more essays like Gordon's '*Waverley* and the Unified Design' and Daiches' treatment of *Redgauntlet*.³

The year 1932 conveniently focuses current attitudes and objections to Scott. Donald Carswell noted that 'In this centenary year nothing could be more remarkable than the general indifference to the occasion',⁴ and in the same year four writers in *The Modern Scot* contributed a very brief Centenary Commentary.⁵ They record the occasion reluctantly and come to bury Scott, not to praise him, and

¹ Francis R. Hart, *Scott's Novels: The Plotting of Historic Survival* (Charlottesville, 1966) p. 1.

² John Buchan, *Some Notes on Sir Walter Scott* (English Association Pamphlet, no. 58: 1924).

³ Thomas Crawford, *Scott* (Edinburgh, 1965) pp. 112-13.

⁴ Donald Carswell, 'The Legend of Abbotsford', in *The Nineteenth Century* (1932).

⁵ 'Sir Walter Scott: A Centenary Commentary', in *The Modern Scot*, III (1932).

they rehearse what for long have been some of the cliché criticisms. He was not, it seems, a serious artist. After noting that 'Posterity firmly refuses to read him', Donald Carswell continues:

But there is a deeper reason for the modern neglect of Scott than is to be found in his own nature. He presents the case, probably unique, of a man of high genius who was not faithful to his artistic vision – not wholly unfaithful, but faithful only 'in his fashion'. He was an artist of the rarest creative gifts, but for some reason was always ashamed of the fact.¹

This echoes R. L. Stevenson's remark that 'Scott was hardly a great artist: hardly in the manful sense, an artist at all' and the complaint is still made. Thomas Crawford in 1965 says:

He had little of the artist's dedication to perfection which characterises the literary hero of modern times, and none of the ruthlessness which will sacrifice wife and children, wealth and success to satisfy creative needs . . . Scott's tragedy was that, as a creative artist, he 'sold out'. His successes, great though they were, were less than they ought to have been, for the simple reason that he would not regard his obligations to literature as having precedence over all other duties.²

Several explanations are given. For A. T. Cunningham (another of the writers in the Centenary Commentary) 'Scott spent his life running from contemporaneity', and very recently David Craig has said that 'Scott recoiled from it [the present] disgusted: and such a revulsion, in a novelist, is unlikely to affect only day-to-day politics and economics'.³ Edwin Muir (another contributor to the Centenary Commentary) finds 'all that Scott wrote disfigured by the main vice of gentility: its inveterate indifference to truth, its inability to recognize that truth is valuable in itself'. It is fair to add that a few years later Edwin Muir qualified this view and found that it was not so much Scott who was to blame for his lack of high seriousness, as the age in which he lived, the absence of a proper Scots literary tradition.

I was forced to account for the hiatus in Scott's endowment by considering the environment in which he lived, by invoking the fact . . . that he spent most of his days in a hiatus, in a country, that is to say, which was neither

¹ Ibid.

² Scott, p. 16.

³ David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830* (1961) p. 155.

a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it. But the nothing in which Scott wrote was not merely a spatial one; it was a temporal Nothing as well, dotted with a few disconnected figures arrayed at abrupt intervals: Henryson, Dunbar, Allen Ramsay, Burns, with a rude buttress of ballads and folk songs to shore them up and keep them from falling. Scott, in other words, lived in a community which was not a community, and set himself to carry on a tradition which was not a tradition; and the result was that his work was an exact reflection of his predicament.¹

In one sense Scott is to blame for these accusations: he brings them on himself by constantly belittling his own work. For example some words from the Advertisement to *The Antiquary* are used in evidence against him:

I have now only to express my gratitude to the public, for the distinguished reception which they have given to works, that have little worth to recommend them, and to take my respectful leave, as one not likely again to solicit their favour.

And worse things are produced from Lockhart, who tells us 'that in no instance did Scott re-write his prose for the press'. Scott himself describes his own method of composition.

But I began and wandered forward, like me in a pleasant country, getting to the top of one hill to see a prospect, and to the bottom of another to enjoy a shade; and what wonder if my course has been devious and desultory, and many of my excursions altogether unprofitable to the advance of my journey.²

It is true that he is here describing *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, but for many critics it describes the Waverley novels ('devious and desultory'). More damning still, it seems, is Scott's insistence that there are greater things than literature and more worthwhile occupations than that of a writer.

Keenly enjoying literature as he did, and indulging his love of it in perpetual composition, he always maintained the same estimate of it as subordinate and auxiliary to the purposes of life, and rather talked of men and events than of books and criticism.³

¹ Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (1936) pp. 11-12.

² J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1839) ch. 13.

³ *Ibid.* ch. 17.

We cannot be expected to take seriously a writer who did not take himself seriously, and who could say:

I promise you my oaks will outlast my laurels; and I pique myself more upon my composition for manure than on any other composition whatsoever to which I was ever accessory.¹

If this approach to Scott seems especially odd today, when we quote with approval Lawrence's maxim 'Never trust the artist, trust the tale', the answer given will be that in Scott's case the tale confirms the teller. For the complaints against the tales are of shapelessness, wooden heroes and comic characters who exist *in vacuo* and are not responsible for the plot.

The complaint of shapelessness, the charge that Scott's novels are 'slightly constructed' and have an 'incoherent texture' is, as we have seen, as old as the novels themselves. Scott's own comments in the *Quarterly Review* have been taken as the whole truth, and even his admirers repeat the old cries. 'Redgauntlet has no organic unity', says Lord David Cecil, and he complains that in Scott's novels 'the most thrilling incidents are irrelevant to the main theme'.² For John Buchan 'Only *Old Mortality* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, I think, are really well constructed'.³ and even Patrick Cruttwell, who almost alone of modern critics repeats the customary nineteenth-century comment that 'the only possible parallels in English [to the Waverley novels] are Shakespeare's History Plays', finds that this effect is gained not through whatever structure the novels may have, but precisely because they have no structure at all.

Though the extreme looseness of structure prevents any one of the Waverley Novels from being an absolute success, judged by the highest standards, it was only by a helter-skelter shapelessness that Scott could create anything at all.⁴

No one will be persuaded to read Scott, or think him a great writer, by this kind of talk. When modern critics offer any defence of this

¹ Ibid. ch. 54.

² Lord David Cecil, 'Sir Walter Scott', in *Life and Letters*, VIII (1932).

³ *Some Notes on Sir Walter Scott*.

⁴ Patrick Cruttwell, 'Walter Scott', in *From Blake to Byron*, ed. B. Ford (Harmondsworth, 1957).

'shapelessness' they concede too much, and narrow too vigorously the areas of his work which they are prepared to defend. Robin Mayhead writes:

When a writer is artistically so slack as Scott most often is, it is reasonable to assume that this is a direct result of the absence of a central theme or preoccupation to give his work government and coherence. . . . There is, however, one novel [*The Heart of Midlothian*] in which, if only for one-half of its length, Scott is sufficiently mastered by a theme to be inspired to a piece of almost entirely consistent artistic achievement.

And a few lines later he adds that 'even the first part of the novel is not all of a piece'.¹ Robin Mayhead's essay is excellent; but, by taking over the usual chief objection to Scott (that his novels are 'artistically slack'), he can place to Scott's credit only a nearly perfect half of one novel. *The Heart of Midlothian* is approved because it has a theme; but there are other Waverley novels (*Redgauntlet*, *Waverley*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *A Legend of Montrose*) with an even more sharply presented theme which gives to them an even greater 'government and coherence'. But this 'government and coherence' is of a less familiar kind; and *Redgauntlet* and the others are still accused of having 'no organic unity'.

Scott suffers from the critics because current critical tools cannot be used on the sort of novel he writes: in particular he suffers from an unsatisfactory notion of what narrative structure is or can be. What his critics neither consider nor account for is the narrative velocity of his best novels, a narrative energy and sweep which reaches a worked-for and inevitable climax in Scott's great final scenes. When Professor Ransom sets about judging a novel on the basis of short extracts from it, he says 'they will not be poetry, but they will be like fictional analogues of lyrical moments'.² This states what many critics imply when they assess a novel by the quality of isolated extracts. But not all novels are dramatic poems. The novel, and particularly the eighteenth-century novel, 'works by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration'.³ No single passage, or group of passages, can suggest the narrative energy of a novel whose effects 'are secured, not locally, in the short run, but in the long run by accumulation and

¹ See below, p. 112.

² J. C. Ransom, in *Kenyon Review*, xii (1950) 193.

³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) p. 30.

progression'.¹ It is not the single passage or scene which illuminates and explains the whole, but the total work which enriches and explains the single scene or paragraph. The image of the whole is communicated to every part. As we reach the last page of *Waverley* what must impress us most is the narrative energy of the novel to which everything has contributed; and it is from this powerful impression of unity that criticism must begin.

E. M. W. Tillyard finds *Rob Roy* a great success and yet says this of the most famous scene in the book:

The fight at the inn of Aberfoil is superfluous – there is enough and more important fighting to come – a piece of irrelevant romantic sauce such as Scott thought himself obliged to supply lavishly to please his public.²

Dr Tillyard is wrong; no other fighting in the novel is more important; no other scene contributes so richly to the structure of the novel. When the Bailie attacks the 'gigantic Highlander' so successfully with a fire-brand that he forces him to retreat, he acts out the essential shape of the novel (and of other *Waverley* novels) which tells of the inevitable defeat of an older way of life by the new commercial Scotland.

If Scott has for too long been naïvely discussed in terms of his plots, he has been given high marks (though more and more grudgingly) for his comic characters – more and more grudgingly because the comic characters too often seem to take over the novel, to be irrelevant to it, to be there for their own splendid sakes and to shatter completely any possibility of coherence and shape in the novels. What the Victorians considered the most Shakespearean side of Scott, his gift for creating endless memorable characters, is now turned against him. When David Craig writes about *Redgauntlet* he finds that 'Peter Peebles is no more than a grotesque fitted into a loose ensemble of the author's memories of Parliament House'.³ Ian Jack finds that

Captain Dalgetty is in a sense the most successful character in the *Legend of Montrose*, but he is quite out of keeping with the general tone of the book and goes far towards turning into farce what had been designed as tragedy.⁴

¹ Philip Rahv, in *Kenyon Review*, xviii (1956) 289.

² E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (1963) p. 98.

³ *Scottish Literature*, p. 144.

⁴ Ian Jack, *Sir Walter Scott* (Writers and Their Work, no. 103: 1958).

Even Donald Davie is irritated by some of Scott's great comic characters:

We are sometimes asked to applaud the vitality of the figures of Jarvie and Andrew Fairservice, and to contrast this with the woodenness of the villain, Rashleigh, of the heroine, Diana Vernon, and indeed of the hero, Frank. But this is to beg an important question. Vitality, yes – but to what purpose? The trouble with Nicol Jarvie is that this figure has altogether too much vitality for the good of this book as a whole. And if this is true of Jarvie, it is still more true of Fairservice, who is nothing more than one huge excrescence on the story. He has no part to play in the logic of the theme, so far as this can be discerned. Those critics who choose to applaud him, like those who make too much play with Savelyich in *The Captain's Daughter*, see the novel-form as no more than a gallery of colourful and verisimilar 'characters', a form to which the matters of theme, action or 'plot' are irrelevant.¹

In Scott the comic characters very often *are* the structure of the novel; they create 'a central pattern which is not, however, that laid down by the external plot'.² Peter Peebles is an 'insane pauper' who has been ruined and made crazy by endless litigation. Superficially there is no resemblance to Redgauntlet; but they have both been destroyed by the Law; their unbalance shows itself in their trying obsessively to support a lost and hopeless cause (both trace their disasters to events in 1745). And in the final scene of the novel the adventures of both are so entangled that the folly of Peter Peebles makes us wonder if the heroism and gesturing of Redgauntlet are not folly too.

Ian Jack's comment on Dalgetty gets some confirmation from Scott when he says in his introduction:

The author has endeavoured to enliven the tragedy of the tale by the introduction of a personage [Dalgetty] proper to the time and country.

But as we read we see that Dalgetty is not there simply 'to enliven the tragedy'; he is not 'out of keeping with the general tone of the book'. He in fact creates the general tone of the book. He is the ironic detached observer; through him we have Scott's ironic qualification of the romantic and the glamorous; and in his escape from the losing side

¹ See below, pp. 127–8.

² David Daiches – see below, p. 48.

at the end of the book, and in 'his pacific intermarriage with Hannah Strachan, a matron somewhat stricken in years', he parallels, and so mocks, the 'hero' Menteith's escape and marriage to the daughter of one of his opponents.

Similarly Andrew Fairservice parodies and 'places' Frank Osbaldistone (those two protestants who set out for Scotland together); and by his own undignified survival in the skirmish at Osbaldistone Hall he directs our attention to Frank's too neat and unheroic evasion of the consequences of his entanglement with Rob Roy and the Jacobites. It is through the comic characters, very often, that Scott's dramatic intention is achieved.

The article which has done most in recent years to revitalize and change the direction of Scott criticism is David Daiches' 'Scott's Achievement as a Novelist'.¹ In this article, and in his article on *Redgauntlet*,² Professor Daiches has done much to indicate the coherence of Scott's best novels and to suggest more profitable ways to read them. Much criticism of the Waverley novels has since been in many ways a series of footnotes to his comments.

Writing of *Redgauntlet* Professor Daiches says:

Scott's imagination was kindled most effectively not by the contemplation of life in distant times and lands – his novels of medieval life are cardboard affairs compared with those dealing with recent Scottish history – but by observing the immediate past of his own country and chronicling, with deliberate ambiguity of feeling, the transition from the age of heroic violence to the age of prudence. . . . We cannot escape from the past, for it has created us; yet we must escape from the past if we are to live in the real world. And the antiquarian can only write books; he cannot re-enact the past he writes about. And, in a profound sense, that for Scott was a tragic insight.

The 'deliberate ambiguity of feeling' Daiches defines more fully:

He was a lover of the past combined with a believer in the present, and the mating of these incompatible characters produced that tension which accounted for his greatest novels.³

¹ See below, pp. 33–62.

² See below, pp. 148–61.

³ See below, pp. 38, 149, 161.

Many of his comic characters dramatize this ambivalence, or this capacity to move from the past to the present; Bailie Nicol Jarvie and Provost Crosbie (in *Redgauntlet*) are attached to the past but they know it is 'a' moonshine in water' and that one must live in the present or not at all. In 'Wandering Willie's Tale' (*Redgauntlet*) Willie's 'gudesire', Steenie Steenson, triumphantly survives political change – the movement from past to present – with safety and honour; and this survival capacity is contrasted with the curse on Redgauntlet, who, heroic and anachronistic, cannot accept or face the present. For Professor Daiches 'Scott's best and characteristic novels . . . might with justice be called "anti-romantic" fiction' and he notes what is often an essential part of Scott's best work; it was

his tendency to look at history through character and at character through the history that had worked on it that provided the foundation of his art.¹

Georg Lukács has made the same point when he notes that 'Scott's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types';² and these historical-social types can often be Scott's comic characters, for example Bailie Nicol Jarvie.

Professor Daiches has other important things to say about the structure of the Waverley novels:

Many of Scott's novels take the form of a sort of pilgrim's progress: an Englishman or a Lowland Scot goes north into the Highlands of Scotland at a time when Scottish feeling is running high, becomes involved in the passions and activities of the Scots partly by accident and partly by sympathy, and eventually extricates himself – physically altogether, but emotionally not quite wholly – and returns whence he came.

And Daiches goes on to call this peripatetic Scott hero

the disinterested observer. His duty is to observe, to register the proper responses, and in the end to accept, however reluctantly, the proper solution. . . . To censure Scott for the woodenness of his heroes – characters like Edward Waverley, Francis Osbaldistone, and many others – is to misunderstand their function. They are not heroes in the ordinary sense, but symbolic observers.³

¹ See below, p. 60.

² Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1937), trans. H. and S. Mitchell (1962) p. 35.

³ See below, p. 37.

To call them 'observers' is to underestimate the extent of their emotional involvement. (The only truly disinterested observer is Dalgetty in *A Legend of Montrose*.) But these comments are valuable because Scott's heroes and their function have been consistently misunderstood. Once again Scott is, in part to blame. Since he called Edward Waverley 'a sneaking piece of imbecility' his heroes have been considered as (at best) concessions to popular taste. For Lord David Cecil 'the plot, the wretched exigent conventional plot is responsible for Scott's dull heroes'.¹ Their part in the structure of the novels has scarcely been recognized.

They act out, in their involvement with and final withdrawal from a glamorous heroic past, Scott's answer to the problem of how to reconcile the past and the present.

In Scotland when Scott wrote, no question was so vital as that of the possibility of 'marrying' two cultural traditions – the one, barbarous and heroic, the other Hanoverian.²

Scott knew that no marriage was possible.

These 'wooden' heroes must not be especially attractive; they are, in contrast to those around them, to be unheroic. They are to be trapped more and more in the world of commerce. Frank Osbaldistone stops writing poetry and goes back to his father's counting-house; Edward Waverley cannot marry Flora and settles for Rose Bradwardine amid the detailed discussion of marriage settlements. But they have Scott's reluctant respect: they survive when better men do not; they have life, even if they have it less abundantly.

The most important discussion of Scott's heroes is in Alexander Welsh's *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*. Critics (and Scott himself) have always remarked on the passivity of the typical Scott hero. Professor Welsh sees the structure and explanation and importance of the Waverley novels solely in terms of the passive hero who 'has always seemed to me the most extraordinary and significant feature of the Waverley novels'. Through this hero

Scott was responsible for establishing prose fiction as the dominant genre of Victorian literature: he accomplished this not in the negative sense of

¹ In *Life and Letters*, viii (1932).

² Donald Davie – see below p. 129.

writing 'clean' novels, but by showing how the novel might project an affirmative and permanent ideal of society. . . . He [the hero] represents . . . a social ideal, and acts or refrains from acting according to the accepted morality of his public.¹

This perhaps overlooks the fact that, as Francis R. Hart points out, 'the passive hero is hardly peculiar to Scott'. One weakness of Professor Welsh's approach is that it does nothing to explain how one Scott novel is better than another; and it is clear that in some cases (*The Bride of Lammermoor*, for example) discussion of the hero in terms of 'a social ideal' is no help at all. Professor Welsh admits that in that novel Edgar Ravenswood 'presents a special problem'.

Professor Hart is the most recent critic of Scott and admirably explains what the modern critic of Scott must do:

Croce complained that there are just too many Waverley novels. One cannot blame the weary critic for seeking to save both Scott and himself by limiting his close attention to one or two masterpieces. Perhaps Ian Jack is right, that no service is done Scott's memory 'by enthusiasts who find *Woodstock* as rewarding as *The Heart of Midlothian* and persist in prescribing *Ivanhoe* as a set book'. But how can we tell until we have tried *Woodstock* and *Ivanhoe*, or *The Abbot* and *The Fair Maid of Perth* (better books) on what appear to be their own terms? And this means avoiding many familiar traps, refusing to condemn the self-effacing Scott out of his own mouth, and trying not to defend him on grounds partly or wholly irrelevant.²

It means, in fact, giving Scott something of the critical attention and intelligence that has been lavished on other novelists in the past thirty years.

D. D. D.

¹ Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New Haven and London, 1963) pp. vii and 35.

² *Scott's Novels*, p. 13.

Chronology of Scott's Life

- 1771 Born in Edinburgh.
- 1773 Contracts a form of poliomyelitis which leaves him lame for life. Spends over a year on his grandfather's farm at Sandy Knowe in the Borders.
- 1786 Enters his father's office as apprentice Writer to the Signet.
- 1792 Becomes an advocate.
- 1797 Marries Charlotte Mary Carpenter, daughter of a French royalist refugee.
- 1799 Appointed sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire.
- 1802 *Border Minstrelsy* published.
- 1805 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Becomes a partner in James Ballantyne's printing business.
- 1808 *Marmion*.
- 1809 Helps to found the *Quarterly Review*.
- 1812 Buys Abbotsford on the Tweed.
- 1813 Refuses the offer of the Laureateship.
- 1814 Edition of Swift's works. *Waverley*.
- 1815 *The Antiquary*.
- 1816 First series of *Tales of My Landlord* (*Black Dwarf* and *Old Mortality*).
- 1817 *Rob Roy*.
- 1818 Second series of *Tales of My Landlord* (*The Heart of Midlothian*).
- 1819 Third series of *Tales of My Landlord* (*The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Legend of Montrose*).
- 1820 Created a baronet. *Ivanhoe*.

- 1824 *Redgauntlet*.
- 1826 Failure of Constable and Co. Scott liable for £130,000.
Lady Scott dies.
- 1828 *The Fair Maid of Perth*.
- 1832 Dies at Abbotsford, 21 September.
- 1837-8 J. G. Lockhart (Scott's son-in-law) publishes his *Memoirs of
the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*