Fiction And Experience In The Works Of Sir Walter Scott

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I would like to start by saying how much pleasure it gives me to be in Canada, talking of Sir Walter Scott on his bicentenary. The revival of interest in Scott seems to be world-wide; certainly in Scotland he is receiving more attention than ever before. Classes and seminars are being arranged, summer schools and conferences promoted, critical studies and articles published, and everywhere people are paying him the ultimate tribute -- they are buying and reading his novels.

The neglect of Scott's novels has been a subject of continuing surprise to Scots and particularly to Europeans, who regard Scott as one of the major figures in British literature. Yet in plain fact I think the neglect springs from a simple cause; we read Scott, often under compulsion, far too early. Often at school we read IVANHOE and GUY MANNERING, perhaps ROB ROY, and an impression remains of enormous length, exciting action and wonderful scenic description largely lost in deserts of unrelieved boredom as volume succeeds volume. The length of the novels, the (to younger eyes) preposterous introductions, like the massive one to ROB ROY, have a chilling effect on future intentions to dig deeper into the rows of Scott on the shelves. If he is appreciated, I think it is safe to generalize that it is for exciting action and description, and it is from this point that I would like to start.

This fictive experience which we may derive from Scott, this vicarious thrill and pleasure, definitely exists, and it should not be discounted in an attempt to account for Scott in a more mature fashion than earlier likes and dislikes. It exists, and in context it is an important part of any judgement of the man and his work. What is dangerous is the possibility that this is ALL he has to offer. An extreme statement of this point of view we could find by looking at Carlyle's diary, where he jotted down an impulsive judgement of Scott (which bears little relation to his more fully thought out judgement in his essay written more than a decade later).

It is a damnable heresy in criticism to maintain either expressly or implicitly that the ultimate object of poetry is sensation. That of cookery is such, but not that of poetry. Sir Walter Scott is the great intellectual RESTAURATEUR of Europe. He might have been numbered among the Conscript Fathers. He has chosen the worsser part, and is only a huge Publicanus. What are his novels-- any one of them? A bout of champagne, claret, port, or even ale drinking. Are we wiser, better, holier, stronger? No. We have been amused.

Carlyle, it is worth emphasizing again, was very young and very earnest critically when he wrote this, and he did not intend it for publication. Yet in something he did intend for publication, he did let some of the same mood slip through. Writing of WILHELM MEISTERS LEHRJAHRE, which he had just translated, he spoke warmly of its German success.

That it will be equally successful in England I am far indeed from anticipating. Apart from the above considerations, from the curiosity, intelligent or idle, which it may awaken, the number of admiring, or even approving judges it will find can scarcely fail of being very limited. To the great mass of readers, who read to drive away the tedium of mental vacancy, employing the crude phantasmagoria of a modern novel, as their grandfathers employed tobacco and diluted brandy, WILHELM MEISTER will appear beyond endurance weary, flat, stale and unprofitable. (2)

The distinction between fiction as a substitute for real-life experience, and fiction as a moral and educative force, is one Carlyle was willing to make, one which he explicitly used to Scott's disadvantage, and one I wish to pursue in talking of "fiction" and "experience" in Scott's work.

Scott, as we all know, liked to surround himself with relics of the times of which he loved to write (Carlyle's method was the same), yet unlike Carlyle he liked to live in a make-believe world like that of which he wrote. Abbotsford was his castle, and he loved nothing better than to act at being its Laird. His fiction transported its readers to a make-believe world of the past, of other countries and other experiences which they would not themselves know at first-hand, and Scott drew strength for his literary labours by living out the same sort of life in Abbotsford. When he was well, this was a natural part of his life, a healthy extension of his own experience from which he benefited in his writing.

Yet Scott, increasingly, knew moods when this substitute experience was a less harmonious part of his life. He wrote of them in the opening of HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

There is a mood of mind we all have known
On drowsy eye, or dark and low'ring day,
When the tired spirits lose their sprightly tone,
And nought can chase the lingering hours away;
Dull on our soul falls Fancy's dazzling ray,
And wisdom holds his steadier torch in vain...(3)

In these moods Scott the man of reason was quite another person, and he too used his journal to put down his thoughts in order. Irritable and restless, he felt,

This is childish; I tell myself so, and I trust the feeling to no one else. But here it goes down like the murderer who could not help painting the ideal vision of the man he had murdered, and who he supposed haunted him. A thousand fearful images and dire suggestions glance along the

mind when it is moody and discontented with itself. Command them to stand and show themselves, and you presently assert the power of reason over imagination. But if by any strange alterations in one's nervous system you lost for a moment the talisman which controls these fiends, would they not terrify into obedience with their mandates, rather than we would dare longer to endure their presence? (4)

The "fearful images" and "dire suggestions" of substitute experience, of fancy could, he knew, run riot if not controlled. Control is something which it could be argued, characterizes Scott's finest fiction; recent critical attention has been focused on how far Scott's most effective novels are successful in their organization and control of material and writing. For the present, I would like to suggest that one criterion by which Scott's successful fiction might be judged is control of the substitute for real-life experience for which we have been looking for some definition, some description, which for convenience we might simply call "experience", bearing in mind that in this sense we refer to a second-hand, vicarious experience felt by the novel's reader. What part does it play in a critical judgement of the novels?

Let me start by categorizing two kinds of "experience", by choosing and illustrating them from Scott's poetry. One is the experience of beauty in natural surroundings, one that I will call the "FRISSON" of terror or fear at some imagined occurrence or circumstance.

One could look almost anywhere in Scott for descriptions of scenic beauty, and not just Scottish beauty -- witness the Swiss scenes of ANNE OF GEIERSTEIN. I have chosen this description from THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL for a special purpose.

O'er Roslin all that dreary night
A wondrous blaze was seen to gleam;
'Twas broader than the watch-fire's light,
And redder than the bright moon-beam.

It glar'd on Roslin's castled rock,
It ruddied all the copse-wood glen;
'Twas seen from Dryden's groves of oak,
And seen from cavern'd Hawthornden.

Seem'd all on fire that chapel proud,
Where Roslin's chiefs uncoffin'd lie,
Each Baron, for a sable shroud,
Sheath'd in his iron panoply.

Seem'd all on fire within, around,
Deep sacristy and altar's pale;
Shone every pillar foliage-bound,
And glimmer'd all the dead men's mail.

Blaz'd battlement and pinnet high,
Blaz'd every rose-carved buttress fair--

So still they blaze when fate is nigh
The lordly line of high St. Clair.

There are twenty of Roslin's barons bold
Lie buried within that proud chapel;
Each one the holy vault doth hold —
But the sea holds lovely Rosabelle!

And each St. Clair was buried there,
With candle, with book, and with knell;
But the sea-caves rung, and the wild winds sung,
The dirge of lovely Rosabelle. (5)

Here the realities of Scottish scenery, well-known to Scott but not perhaps to the majority of his readers, are presented with stress on the picturesque, with a deliberate manipulation of the process of description to highlight a mood. This is the note I want to strike in talking of Scott's scenic descriptions. They make the audience aware of scenery he may not know, but they blend it with a mood. Many illustrations could follow, but the above must suffice. This "experience" is a mind-widening one for the audience; it reveals to them scenic grandeur and beauty, it awakened in many an urge to see Scotland. In Scott's hands it becomes a backdrop to some mood, to some occurrence, it helps orchestrate the feelings of the readers to a desired end.

The next "experience" is the *FRISSE*, to illustrate which I have chosen two stanzas from *Marmion* which describe the fate of Constance de Beverley, captured after she broke her vows to the Church, and brought back to the convent to be walled up alive.

XXIII

Yet well the luckless wretch might shriek,
Well might her paleness terror speak!
For there were seen in that dark wall,
Two niches, narrow, deep and tall:
Who enters at such grisly door,
Shall ne'er, I ween, find exit more.
In each a slender meal was laid,
Of roots, of water, and of bread:
By each, in Benedictine dress,
Two haggard monks stood motionless;
Who, holding high a blazing torch,
Show'd the grim entrance of the porch:
Reflecting back the smoky beam,
The dark-red walls and arches gleam
Hewn stones and cement were display'd,
And building tools in order laid.

XXIV

These executioners were chose,

As men who were with mankind foes,
 And, with despite and envy fir'd,
 Into the cloister had retir'd;
 Or who, in desperate doubt of grace,
 Strove, by deep penance, to efface
 Of some foul crime the stain;
 For, as the vassals of her will,
 Such men the Church selected still,
 As either joy'd in doing ill,
 Or thought more grace to gain,
 If, in her cause, they wrestled down
 Feelings their nature strove to own.
 By strange device were they brought there,
 They knew not how, nor knew not where. (6)

The difference between this and the preceding passage is really one of balance. Here the plight of the human characters outweighs the scenic interest, deliberately the passage is set in the dark and so the light in the reader's imagination falls not on the dimly-seen walls and apparatus of the fearful death, but on the hideous executioners, and the luckless victims. This is as Scott wants it. He wants the FRISSEON to be for the human victims, not for the backdrop. He has refocused the reader's attention, while using essentially the same technique as he was in the passage from *THE LADY OF THE LAST MINSTREL*.

Here, then, are two ways in which Scott is presenting substitute experience to his readers. One is to show them scenic beauty, for a purpose; one is to give a peaceful reader a shudder of shared terror in a described scene. These two discriminations of "experience", applied to extracts from novels, open out the possibility of an interesting critical judgement.

I want to use three passages from the novels, one from *WAVERLEY* (1814), one from *OLD MORTALITY* (1816), finally from *ROB ROY* (1817). Firstly, Scott writes of Flora singing to Waverley in a Highland Glen. It is an outstanding case of Scott's description of the sublime, where the natural beauty presses all around, and raises Waverley's already too-susceptible nature to a fever-pitch. He accompanies a maidservant up the glen, on Flora's orders, to await the song she is to sing for him.

Having gained the open air by a postern door, they walked a little way up the wild, bleak, and narrow valley in which the house was situated, following the course of the stream that winded through it. In a spot, about a quarter of a mile from the castle, two brooks, which formed a little river, had their junction. The larger of the two came down the long bare valley, which extended apparently without any change or elevation of character, as far as the hills which formed its boundary permitted the eye to reach. But the other stream, which had its source among the mountains on the left hand of the strath, seemed to issue from a very narrow and dark opening betwixt two large rocks. These streams were different also in character. The larger was placid, and even sullen in its

course, wheeling in deep eddies, or sleeping in dark blue pools; but the motions of the lesser brook were rapid and furious, issuing from between precipices, like a maniac from his confinement, all foam and uproar.

It was up the course of this last stream that Waverley, like a knight of romance, was conducted by the fair Highlanddamsel, his silent guide. A small path, which had been rendered easy in many places for Flora's accommodation, led him through scenery of a very different description from that which he had just quitted. Around the castle, all was cold, bare, and desolate, yet tame even in desolation; but this narrow glen, at so short a distance, seemed to open into the land of romance. The rocks assumed a thousand peculiar and varied forms. In one place a crag of huge size presented its gigantic bulk, as if to forbid the passenger's farther progress; and it was not until he approached its very base, that Waverley discerned the sudden and acute turn by which the pathway wheeled its course around this formidable obstacle. In another spot, the projecting rocks from the opposite sides of the chasm had approached so near to each other that two pine trees laid across, and covered with turf, formed a rustic bridge at the height of at least one hundred and fifty feet. It had no ledges, and was barely three feet in breadth.

While gazing at this pass of peril, which crossed, like a single black line, the small portion of blue sky not intercepted by the projecting rocks on either side, it was with a sensation of horror that Waverley beheld Flora and her attendant appear, like inhabitants of another region, propped, as it were, in mid air, upon this trembling structure. She stopped upon observing him below, and with an air of graceful ease, which made him shudder, waved her handkerchief to him by way of signal. He was unable, from the sense of dizziness which her situation conveyed, to return the salute; and was never more relieved than when the fair apparition passed on from the precarious eminence which she seemed to occupy with so much indifference, and disappeared on the other side Here, like one of those lovely forms which decorate the landscapes of Poussin, Waverley found Flora gazing on the waterfall. Two paces further back stood Cathleen, holding a small Scottish harp, the use of which had been taught to Flora by Rory Dall, one of the last harpers of the Western Highlands. The sun, now stooping in the west, gave a rich and varied tinge to all the objects which surrounded Waverley, and seemed to add more than human brilliancy to the full expressive darkness of Flora's eye, exalted the richness and purity of her complexion, and enhanced the dignity and grace of her beautiful form. Edward thought he had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagined a figure of such exquisite and interesting loveliness. The wild beauty of the retreat, bursting upon him as if by magic, augmented the mingled feeling of delight and awe with which he approached her, like a fair enchantress of Boiardo or Ariosto, by whose nod the scenery around seemed to have been created, an Eden in the wilderness.

Flora, like every beautiful woman, was conscious of her own power, and pleased with its effects, which she could easily discern from the re-

spectful, yet confused address of the young soldier. But, as she possessed excellent sense, she gave the romance of the scene, and other accidental circumstances, full weight in appreciating the feelings with which Waverley seemed obviously to be impressed; and, unacquainted with the fanciful and susceptible peculiarities of his character, considered his homage as the passing tribute which a woman of even inferior charms might have expected in such a situation. She therefore quietly led the way to a spot at such a distance from the cascade, that its sound should rather accompany than interrupt that of her voice and instrument, and, sitting down upon a mossy fragment of rock, she took the harp from Cathleen.

"I have given you the trouble of walking to this spot, Captain Waverley, both because I thought the scenery would interest you, and because a Highland song would suffer still more from my imperfect translation, were I to introduce it without its own wild and appropriate accompaniments." (7)

Flora, of course, knew exactly the effect her stage-management was likely to produce, especially on a man like Edward Waverley, and indeed "...the wild feeling of romantic delight with which he heard the first few notes she drew from her instrument, amounted almost to a sense of pain". The purpose of the description, Scott's purpose in leading the reader through Highland scenery at this length, is achieved. Yet it is not, I think, quite controlled. For while it fulfills its end in showing how unsatisfactory is Waverley's own self-control, how "excessively romantic" he was, it puts a certain strain on the construction of the novel.

In the first place, it was not really necessary to take Waverley out into the open to sing the song; by taking him out, Flora overplays her hand because the sublime scenery outdoes the intended effect, and she then has to undo her work to bring him back later in the book to something approaching normality. In the second, it is not necessary AT THIS POINT to show Highland scenery; Scott has done so earlier in the novel, and will later. The point was to highlight the song, and the scenery actually diminishes the effect of the song because Waverley is too overcome to pay proper attention to it. In the third place, a strain is placed on our credibility by the FRISSON which Scott introduces, mildly, into this episode. Waverley and his guide leave first, and they take a path "rendered easy in many places for Flora's accommodation", yet even so Flora appears far, far above them on the overbridge so that Scott can record the effect on Edward Waverley! She must have employed prodigious athletic feats to make this too-neat piece of stage management possible.

This is a contrived episode; it fulfills the purpose of scenic description in Scott to some extent, yet it holds up the novel, provides a gratuitous (and not unpleasant) episode to do so. The same cannot be said of the following description, taken from the trial of MacBriar in the old Tolbooth of Edinburgh in OLD MORTALITY. There is a very strong resemblance to MAR-MION, beginning with the description of the curtain over the.....

Gothic recess in the wall, (which) rose at the signal, and displayed the public executioner, a tall, grim, and hideous man, having an oaken table before him, on which lay thumb-screws, and an iron case, called the

Scottish boot, used in those tyrannical days to torture accused persons. Morton, who was unprepared for this ghastly apparition, started when the curtain arose, but Macbriar's nerves were more firm. He gazed upon the horrible apparatus with much composure; and if a touch of nature called the blood from his cheek for a second, resolution sent it back to his brow with greater energy.

"Do you know who that man is?" said Lauderdale, in a low, stern voice, almost sinking into a whisper.

"He is, I suppose", replied Macbriar, "the infamous executioner of your bloodthirsty commands upon the persons of God's people. He and you are equally beneath my regard; and, I bless God, I no more fear what he can inflict than what you can command. Flesh and blood may shrink under the sufferings you can doom me to, and poor frail nature may shed tears, or send forth cries; but I trust my soul is anchored firmly on the rock of ages."

"Do your duty," said the Duke to the executioner.

The fellow advanced, and asked, with a harsh and discordant voice, upon which of the prisoner's limbs he should first employ his engine.

"Let him choose for himself," said the prisoner, stretching forth his right leg, "take the best—I willingly bestow it in the cause for which I suffer."

The executioner, with the help of his assistants, enclosed the leg and knee within the light iron boot, or case, and then placing a wedge of the same metal between the knee and the edge of the machine, took a mallet in his hand, and stood waiting for farther orders. A well-dressed man, by profession a surgeon, placed himself by the other side of the prisoner's chair, bared the prisoner's arm, and applied his thumb to the pulse, in order to regulate the torture according to the strength of the patient. When these preparations were made, the President of the Council repeated with the same stern voice the question, "When and where did you last see John Balbour of Burley?"

The prisoner, instead of replying to him, turned his eyes to heaven as if imploring Divine strength, and muttered a few words, of which the last were distinctly audible, "Thou hast said thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power!"

The Duke of Lauderdale glanced his eye around the Council as if to collect their suffrages, and, judging from their mute signs, gave on his part a nod to the executioner, whose mallet instantly descended on the wedge, and, forcing it between the knee and the iron boot, occasioned the most exquisite pain, as was evident from the flush which instantly took place on the brow and on the cheeks of the sufferer. The fellow then raised his weapon, and stood prepared to give a second blow.

"Will you yet say," repeated the Duke of Lauderdale, "where and when you last parted from Balfour of Burley?"

"You have my answer," said the sufferer resolutely, — and the second blow fell. The third and fourth succeeded; but at the fifth, when a larger wedge had been introduced, the prisoner set up a scream of agony.

Morton, whose blood boiled within him at witnessing such cruelty, could bear no longer, and, although unarmed and himself in great danger, was springing forward, when Claverhouse, who observed his emotion, withheld him by force, laying one hand on his arm and the other on his mouth, while he whispered, "For God's sake, think where you are!" (8)

It is a ghastly episode, and yet one where the FRISSEON and the facts of history are connected; a reader of PITCAIRN'S SCOTTISH CRIMINAL TRIALS will know that the use of the boot was fully as ghastly as this, and that McBriar was fortunate to escape with suffering of such short duration; witches and wizards suffered IN EXTREMIS. Scott is attacking his reader's SYMPATHY, their power to feel with a sufferer, at a time when Henry Mackenzie had made this feeling one whose existence was widely recognized, and whose operation in literary criticism was widely discussed. To this extent, the FRISSEON already serves a useful purpose. Further, it builds up the audience's respect for the sufferer. Scott has often been accused of bias against the Covenanters in OLD MORTALITY, but in this passage he is keeping a reasoned balance. Many of their actions seemed to him unreasoned, barbaric, unenlightened, but his pride in the manly suffering of McBriar is combined with a description of his death which tallies with the last words and deaths of real historical Covenanters. No one can dismiss Scott's Covenanters entirely after this episode. It is not mere FRISSEON, it is a major contribution to a rational judgement of the characters and ideologies involved.

Interestingly, it is more. Morton is saved from making a fool of himself, perhaps putting himself in mortal danger, by Claverhouse, the villain of Scottish popular legend, the bloody persecutor of the common people and Covenanters. This action, enlightened, rational, humane, is part of Scott's complex portrayal of Claverhouse in OLD MORTALITY. The complexity is presented very largely in terms of Claverhouse's relationship to Morton, the hero, and this episode is demonstrably more than the mere "substitute experience" — vicarious thrill — by permitting such asides as this action of Claverhouse's which neither mars the attention of the reader to the main action, nor falls from sight unnoticed in the lurid torture scene. The substitute experience is under control.

ROB ROY is the last, in time, of the three novels I choose for illustration to-day, and in it the control seems to me to be the most perfect. Osbaldistone, the English traveller who has reached Glasgow, and is writing home of his experiences, finds himself outside the Cathedral at service-time on Sunday.

Notwithstanding the impatience of my conductor, I could not forbear to pause and gaze for some minutes on the exterior of the building, rendered more impressively dignified by the solitude which ensued when its hitherto open gates were closed, after having, as it were, devoured the multitude which had lately crowded the churchyard, but now, enclosed within the building, were engaged, as the choral swell of voices from within announced to us, in the solemn exercises of devotion. The sound of so many voices united by the distance into one harmony, and freed

from those harsh discordances which jar the ear when heard more near, combining with the murmuring brook, and the wind which sung among the old firs, affected me with a sense of sublimity. All nature, as invoked by the Psalmist whose verses they chanted, seemed united in offering that solemn praise in which trembling is mixed with joy as she addressed her Maker. I had heard the service of high mass in France, celebrated with all the ECLAT which the choicest music, the richest dresses, the most imposing ceremonies, could confer on it; yet it fell short in effect of the simplicity of the Presbyterian worship. The devotion in which every one took a share, seemed so superior to that which was recited by musicians as a lesson which they had learned by rote, that it gave the Scottish worship all the advantage of reality over acting.

As I lingered to catch more of the solemn sound, Andrew, whose impatience became ungovernable, pulled me by the sleeve -- "Come awa', sir -- come awa'; we maunna be late o' gaun in to disturb the worship; if we bide here the searchers will be on us, and carry us to the guard-house for being idlers in kirk-time."

Thus admonished, I followed my guide, but not, as I had supposed, into the body of the cathedral. "This gate -- this gate, sir", he exclaimed, dragging me off as I made towards the main entrance of the building -- "There's but cauldrie law-work gaun on yonder -- carnal morality, as dow'd and as fusionless as rue leaves at Yule -- Here's the real savour of doctrine."

So saying, we entered a small low-arched door, secured by a wicket, which a grave-looking person seemed on the point of closing, and descended several steps as if into the funeral vaults beneath the church. It was even so; for in these subterranean precincts -- why chosen for such a purpose I knew not, -- was established a very singular place of worship. (9)

The complexity of the material Scott is using here, and the control he exercises over it, seem to me quite extraordinary. Here is an Englishman, experiencing with some bewilderment a trip through the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland, and shortly to be caught up into violent action, pausing to analyze his feelings outside a Cathedral. He is very much alert to feeling, and it was an age which encouraged such analysis. He listens, he looks, rationally he accounts for his emotions, he concludes that notwithstanding his preferences, he has found something here which affects him more profoundly than the most gorgeous forms of worship he has heard so far. The Scott hero has been educated, by his experiences, into a right knowledge of Scottish tradition, and he admits the Scottish mode of doing things to be better than one might think, possibly the best possible. It might seem, at this level, like a very well-executed version of one of several of the best Scott novels.

Yet when the reader remembers Scott's own episcopal leanings, his dislike of the Presbyterian form of worship for the same reasons as James Boswell earlier expressed, its crudity and oversimplification, its barbarity

and lack of musical and artistic beauty, this statement of Osbaldistone's is remarkable. Scott has trodden the tightrope between Scottish nationalism (Scottish is best) and personal preference (presbyterianism is ugly), and made his neutral hero choose what he hears outside the cathedral.

This is not all, however. The point is not made here, for Osbaldistone finds reality very different when he goes into the crypt and finds one of the more extreme forms of Scottish worship in progress.

What he finds there is narrowness, intolerance, oppressive morality, even a rather gratuitous FRESN provided by Scott when the mysterious stranger hisses out to the visitor from behind a pillar that there is danger in the city. What really emerges from a close acquaintance with the more narrow version of Scottish worship, rather than a half-heard generalization of a less extreme version, is intolerance, distaste. The detailed description of the audience Osbaldistone saw in the crypt amply reinforces this point.

The nationalistic point Scott made in the quoted passage seems lost — but is it? Notice who destroyed the golden moment — it was Andrew Fairservice, a Scot, who spoiled the Englishman's self-achieved sympathy for Scottish Presbyterian worship, and took him to a place which would only repel him from Scottish church life. A Scot is thus responsible for spoiling appreciation of Scotland. Subtly, Scott never gives Osbaldistone the chance to go to the Cathedral proper, to recapture the golden moment, to join in the non-extremist worship and see if reality matched up to the moment overheard in the graveyard outside the Cathedral. Reality remains speculative; what is in the novel is a wonderful blend of contradictory moments of experience, from a multitude of points of view, Scottish, English, episcopal, Presbyterian, extremist, enlightened, cultured, barbaric -- all crowd into these pages, all jostle each other, and nothing the author says provides a final answer. The experience the reader has shared in leads to no ready-made conclusion. Scott, increasingly given critical credit as a man of the eighteenth century enlightenment as well as of a more romantic age, has assumed in his reader an enlightened approach to his environment, a passionate desire to see and understand it more fully, and to see his own position alongside his environment.

One way, I suggest, Scott might do this, is to extend his readers' awareness of their environment, to help them see more and understand better what they see. This is, arguably, what he is doing when he gives them "substitute" experience. Of course to some extent this experience is a retreat from reality, a second-hand life which can be warm and comfortable in comparison to the reality without. Yet I think there exist the materials for a strong case that when Scott has his "experience" under control, when he enlarges his readers' sympathies and awareness by their participation in episodes like those described from ROE ROY, he is giving them a chance to see themselves in relation to their own culture, art, history in the moment of reading, and afterwards in critical consideration of what has been read. As it happens, the passages I have chosen display a growing mastery of this control, and they also come from novels which follow each other in chronological order. This is not to offer a foolproof

case that this use of "experience" was something which grew in Scott as he matured as a novelist. Such an argument would require many illustrations, many thousands of words of argument, and it would have to face the problem of the unevenness of Scott's work when treated as a chronological sequence.

The purpose of the examination which I have undertaken to-day has been to suggest that the too-busy dismissal of Scott as a make-believe writer who gives his reader a pasteboard world into which to escape from reality will not do. We have been entertained -- yes, and magnificently. But we have perhaps taken more from our reading of Scott. By participating in these worlds of "experience" and by retaining a critical stance towards them and their author, we have emerged with a wider world of imagined possibility, a wider frame of reference for comparison when we consider day-to-day reality. We have been offered the chance to judge places and situations in Scott's imagined world, and in exercising our reasons in this way to work towards a better understanding of our own universe. This, too, is part of the magic of the Wizard of the North.

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NOTES

1. Carlyle's journal entry dates from 1826, and is here quoted from J. A. Froude, THOMAS CARLYLE, A HISTORY OF THE FIRST FORTY YEARS OF HIS LIFE (London, 1908), I, 386-387.
2. T. Carlyle, "Translator's Preface to the first edition of Meisters Lehrjahre", quoted from T. Carlyle, WORKS, Centenary edition, (London, 1897), XXIII, 6.
3. W. Scott, HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS, Introduction.
4. W. Scott, JOURNAL (Edinburgh, 1891), 323.
5. W. Scott, THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL, Canto 6.
6. W. Scott, MARMION, Canto 2.
7. W. Scott, WAVERLEY, ch. 22.

8. W. Scott, OLD MORTALITY, ch. 36.

9. W. Scott, ROB ROY, ch. 20.

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