"A LIVING DEATH":
THE MADWOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF WALTER SCOTT

by

Sharon Anne Ragaz

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ABSTRACT

“A Living Death”:
The Madwoman in the Novels of Walter Scott

Walter Scott’s 1825 novel, The Betrothed, describes a condition of psychological entrapment as “a living death.” The description is apt for the madwomen who feature in numerous Waverley novels and who, the thesis argues, represent a nightmare inversion of the more hopeful fictions the novels tell about a historical and social progress.

The introduction elucidates the relevant literary, philosophical, and medical contexts. It documents Scott’s reflections on his own psychology, his stress on a vigilant mental discipline, and his fear that psychopathology is a function of an obsessive preoccupation with past events. While Scott’s fiction powerfully locates in female characters a psychic vulnerability to the pressures of intense historical change and social disruption, it also represents an increasingly complex engagement with the predicament of women who are shut out of community and history.

The Waverley madwomen form two distinct groups. Chapter One discusses the hag-like or sibylline figures that feature in Guy Mannering, The Antiquary, Rob Roy, Ivanhoe, The Abbot, The Pirate, and “The Highland Widow.” These figures are characterised by alienation from a progressivist history and possession by memory. Through their association with the madwoman, such qualities are not only identified as symptoms of derangement, they are also contained: the madwoman’s visibly aging body
is evidence that her fanatical convictions or extreme passions are decaying relics of a primitive past.

*The Heart of Midlothian* includes the mother-daughter dyad, Meg Murdockson and Madge Wildfire, and Chapter Two shows that this doubling complicates the representation of the madwoman figure. In particular, the troubled negotiation of stereotypes and narrative distance that characterises the account of Madge prepares the way for the three tragic novels. Chapters Three and Four argue that madness or a diagnosis of madness emerges in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Kenilworth* as a consequence of society’s failure to recognise the potential for a promising future that the young heroine encodes. The thesis concludes by examining the narrative tensions evident in *Saint Ronan’s Well*, a novel with a contemporary setting and where, from the outset, the heroine and madwoman figures are collapsed together.
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I have been fortunate that my work on this thesis has coincided with the on-going publication of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels. Wherever possible, my references are to this edition. The Edinburgh editors use as base-text the first editions of the novels. For novels not yet available in the Edinburgh edition, my references are to a first edition. Where I do refer to material included in the Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley novels, I have used the set published by Robert Cadell in 1829-33.
“That Way Madness Lies”: Scott’s Madwomen, Literary Backgrounds, and Romantic Psychology

Introduction

Long shall I see these things forlorn
And long again their sorrows feel.

George Crabbe, “Sir Eustace Grey” (as quoted by Scott in a journal entry recording the visit of a madwoman).1

Walter Scott’s 1819 novel, The Bride of Lammermoor, depicts the shocking fate of a young and impressionable woman. Lucy Ashton is forcibly estranged from her chosen lover and coerced by her parents into making another, more socially and politically advantageous match. When she is literally imprisoned in the family home prior to the wedding, Lucy gradually enters an impenetrable mental enclosure of madness, although outwardly she appears merely to have resigned herself to her parents’ commands. On her wedding night, the formerly gentle young woman stabs and wounds her bridegroom with a stolen dagger near the threshold of the bridal chamber. Attracted by the sound of piercing screams, the horrified guests rush into the room to discover both the bleeding bridegroom and the now apparently exultant bride, who is by the fireplace, “seated, or rather couched, like a hare upon its form—her head-gear dishevelled—her night-clothes torn and dabbled with blood—her eyes glazed, and her features convulsed into a wild

Lammermoor tells a tale of devastating entrapment in which the title character’s developing inability to communicate the extreme nature of her predicament by any means other than wordless gestures and mute appeals reaches its terrible climax in the madness that becomes fully apparent only in the bridal chamber. Lucy is a compelling image of the individual who is actively prevented from fostering any potentially salutary communication with others, and becomes inescapably locked within the destructive repetition of thoughts that can find no healing expression or chance of diverging from the single track which they pursue to their violent conclusion. This is single-mindedness grown to monstrous proportions, thought as a form of demonic possession. The result, Lammermoor shows, is soul-destroying and ultimately fatal. When Lucy becomes a raving and almost bestial lunatic, madness is imaged as a terrifying absence—of reason and also of the qualities of gentleness and compassion that formerly distinguished her. And here the condition of absence is finally irreversible and implacable: it can be the immediate prelude only to the still more decisive form of absence that is death.

In Lammermoor, the heroine’s transformation into a violent madwoman starkly expresses a socially and personally devastating failure of accommodation between society—represented in its narrowest, most concentrated form as the family and home—and the vulnerable female subject whose undervalued virtues are those of sympathy, imagination, and respect for tradition. The unerring narrative skill with which Scott renders the depiction of the mad bride leaves open certain tantalising but ultimately unanswerable questions that haunt the novel’s ending. As it is revealed in the bed chamber, Lucy’s madness suggests a terrible emptiness, a devastating erosion of self-

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2 Walter Scott, The Bride of Lammermoor, ed. J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995) 260. Subsequent references to the novel are to this edition, which is based on the first, published in 1819 as Tales of My Landlord, Third Series (Volumes 1-3). Page references are given in parentheses in the text, and the title abbreviated to Lammermoor.
hood, identity, and humanity. But madness is also associated here with a violent surge of passionate energy, with primitive forces that work through Lucy to mock and destroy the carefully laid plans of an apparently civilised and progressive society. The novel's account of the mad bride vividly captures what Louis Sass describes as "the two poles around which images of madness have revolved for so many centuries: on the one hand, notions of emptiness, of defect and decrepitude, of blindness, even of death itself; on the other, ideas of plenitude, energy, and irrepressible vitality—a surfeit of passion or fury bursting through all boundaries of reason or constraint."3

The ambiguous duality and striking emblematic quality of the representation in Lammermoor make it unsurprising that Scott's account of the bride who is driven insane by the aching incongruity between her private dreams of life and love—or what Robert Polhemus aptly terms her "erotic faith"4—and her enforced role in the plot of her wealthy family's crudely material ambitions proved such an exceptionally fertile one for authors, composers, and artists of the later nineteenth century. As Elaine Showalter notes, Scott's rendering of Lucy's story was one of the century's most imaginatively resonant, disturbing, and compelling images of female insanity.5 However, although the generative appeal of the novel has meant that Lammermoor and its mad heroine are frequently discussed in isolation from their place in the entire range of historical fiction that Scott began publishing in 1814, versions of the madwoman—Lucy's tragic sisters—feature prominently and memorably in numerous other Waverley novels. The emblematic and


thematic significance they hold for Scott’s fiction vividly attests to the importance the figure of the madwoman has for his imaginative vision and his extended series of meditations on the relationship between the individual, society, and history.

At the centre of Scott’s fiction are those young men and women—the Waverley heroes and heroines—who successfully negotiate the obstacles and challenges that history throws in their path, and who are eventually rewarded with love and hope as they embark on a future whose threshold is the last pages of the novels we read. Lucy’s story, the story of the madwoman, is markedly different from these because, for her, the future is not a promise but a curse. Her world does not unfold outwards into a community in which she finds her rightful place; rather it shrinks into itself, shrivelling into a prison of painful obsession, loneliness, and prolonged suffering. In this sense, the stories of the madwomen are a nightmare inversion of the other more hopeful fictions that the novels tell about a social progress that intertwines with the individual’s pursuit and discovery of a meaningful identity and role. The madwomen’s stories chronicle a wrenching loss of identity and the bitter solitude that is the condition of society’s outsiders, or the fate of those whose experiences, estrangement, and increasingly warped or obsessive psychology only further bar them from the possibilities for narrating their own tale to the meaningful other whose listening might promote healing, reconciliation, and reintegration. Moreover, in the Waverley novels, the madwoman suffers doubly because, whatever the intensity and extent of her mental disorder or fixation, it fails to shield her from self-awareness, a lacerating insight into her own condition and the knowledge of how she is perceived by others. The madwoman both suffers and knows that she suffers. In this respect, mad Lucy in the bed chamber seems an anomaly because her manic gibbering in the corner of the fireplace shows the presence of no such awareness. But, later, Lucy sleeps and her awakening is evidently accompanied by a painful return of
memory and knowledge. In the end, it is the convulsive, shuddering fit that follows this awakening into a realization of what she has become that heralds and immediately precipitates death.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the existing tradition of literary models and conventions for depicting madwomen was a venerable and remarkably consistent one. As I will show later in this introduction, the tradition formed a grammar of conventions and associations with which Scott could expect his contemporary readers to be fully conversant. However, while the representations of madwomen in the Waverley novels draw on and knowingly exploit these conventions, they are also importantly shaped by beliefs and fears about the causes and consequences of psychopathology that derive from contemporary debates about the nature of mind and make the madwoman a figure for flexibly expressing a range of anxieties pressingly related to Scott’s own project as a novelist. Scott’s autobiographical writings attest to his familiarity equally with the theories of mind and society developed by the Glasgow school of “Common-sense” philosophers, and with a more specifically medical concern about various mental disorders and their relationship to both an individual’s well-being and the health of the broader community. In Scott’s time, philosophy and psychology had not acquired their

6 Although this study treats only of Scott’s novels, examples of female insanity can be found in his poetry where it is usually depicted in a perfunctory way. However, elements can be found that recur in the fiction. One such example is pertinent here. After saving King James, mad Blanche of Devan in The Lady of the Lake says in Canto 4.27: “This hour of death has given me more/ Of reason’s power than years before; / For, as these ebbing veins decay/ My frenzied visions fade away.” See The Lady of the Lake in The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., vol. 8 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1833-34) 195. (Subsequent references to the poetical works are to this edition and the title is abbreviated to PW).

7 An account of contemporary views of psychopathology with special reference to the Scottish situation is in: R. A. Houston, Madness and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2000). Houston’s book became available too late to be useful for this thesis. Nevertheless, his work, which draws extensively on a vast range of Scottish legal records, confirms that Scott would have been well acquainted with issues of legal definitions of insanity from his work as Sheriff of Selkirkshire. The book is especially informative when it examines exactly what kind of behaviours were accounted evidence of insanity; as Houston notes, “[m]adness is a subset of deviant behaviour, but it is not congruent with deviance as a whole” (265).
present-day disciplinary separation, and both were vitally committed to investigating and mapping the human mind and its relationship to the body, the phenomenal world, and society. And both were centrally concerned with the problems raised by the abnormal, the mind that pursues an apparently wayward path of its own. In this introduction the discussion, which follows a general account of the literary traditions concerning madwomen, aims first to establish the extent and focus of Scott’s own awareness of these complex fields of investigation into the human mind. Secondly, it traces the relevant beliefs exemplified in contemporary philosophical and medical discourse about the nature of obsession--its relationship to habits of thought, memory, and gender—and about the potential of education as a means to limit, control, or prevent a personally and socially dangerous mental morbidity. As we will see, these beliefs have an important place in Scott’s musings on the operations of his own consciousness. They are also central to his depictions of female madness in the Waverley novels.

Scott’s fictions typically represent female insanity as reactive. In depicting the mind diseased, the novels emphasise factors such as war, violent encounters, social displacement, or thwarted love affairs that are the external triggers prompting forms of derangement. Equal importance is, however, also accorded to the internal, psychological factors or to mental responses to external triggers. In the end, it is the particular response of the individual woman that has the potential either to block or facilitate progression into a more or less debilitating mental disorder. Turning again to Lammermoor for an illustration, we see that Lucy’s madness is clearly associated with the extraordinary social and familial pressures brought to bear on her, the solitude in which her plight is experienced, and the coercive psychological cruelty to which she is subjected; in the novel’s larger fabric, these are related to the uncertain and volatile political and social situation that characterises early eighteenth century Scotland. When Lucy with her stolen dagger turns violently on her bridegroom, her act seems to express the terrible but
perhaps predictable consequences of the treatment meted out to her in the particular community she inhabits: she is mad because the world has made her so. However, *Lammermoor* also stresses that Lucy’s response to her predicament is both a product of and inextricably related to her character, education, and habits of mind. In this novel, as elsewhere in Scott’s fiction, the course of female psychopathology is characterised by the closing down of mind, by an increasing and ultimately fatal capitulation to an evermore narrow focus of thought and destructively obsessive beliefs. Lucy’s violence affirms her erotic faith and, to that extent, it seems almost to invite a troubled admiration; it may be read, as Philip Martin has argued, as the sign of a just revolt against an unfeeling despotism and ruthless commodification.\(^8\) However, madness ultimately makes Lucy the victim of an imprisonment darker and more implacable than any other—an imprisonment that oppresses the spirit or psyche rather than the body. Madness here is a form of possession that is not the work of some malevolent deity but a condition of Lucy’s own tragic failure of vision. Her own habits of memory and imagination become the very tools for enforcing a contraction of her mind until it communes only with itself to plot out a single course of action. In this context, the concept of choice that is invoked by the notion of a revolt against unjust authority becomes finally and utterly irrelevant. Lucy does not knowingly embrace madness as a fate preferable to the one to which family interests would sacrifice her. Rather, madness and violence can claim her as their handmaiden because she increasingly lacks both the external and internal resources that would allow her to resist their pressures, or the particular form of possession they enact.

The fixed patterning of obsessional thought that proves fatal for Lucy is also a determining factor in the derangement of Scott’s other madwomen figures. These

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characters are properly divided into two groups, of which the first includes the old women with evidently scarred psyches who are committed to modes of thinking about the past that the novels themselves repeatedly expose as destructive of progress, civility, or a desirable political and social evolution. Such characters are ones that Scott's contemporaries and later nineteenth century readers consistently identified as some of his most remarkable and enduringly memorable: Meg Merrilies, Elspeth Meiklebackit, Helen Macgregor, Ulrica Wolfganger, Magdalen Graeme, Norna of the Fitful Head, and Elspat MacTavish or the Highland widow.\footnote{For a range of critical commentary that singles out these characters, see Scott: The Critical Heritage, ed. John O. Haydon (London: Routledge, 1970). A review of The Highland Widow which Haydon does not include can be found in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 22 (1827) 556-70. The review comments at length on the subject of Elspeth's madness and its relation to memory and revenge, and notes that "[a]lone, destitute, wicked, world-abandoned old women, are, in a certain melancholy measure, mad" (566).}

In common with much other literature of the early nineteenth century, the Waverley novels are fascinated with the plight of the outsider, with the psychological and emotional responses of those who face extreme conditions and ordeals, and with questions about how the individual endures and is shaped by experiences of social alienation. Women like Meg Merrilies are depicted as social outcasts whose usually startling appearance, sometimes gnomic pronouncements, and strange habits mark them almost as the living relics of another and more primitive time. Such women experience their lives through a lens of alienation from a progressivist history or are committed to some form of either restoration or revenge and, in so doing, reveal their obsession with the past. In this heterogeneous grouping of characters, the women's madness takes different forms and may be more or less extreme; the range and varied intensity of the different disorders represented by these women cannot be reduced to a single, monolithic, and indiscriminate "madness."\footnote{Houston is useful on the differences between types of madness; see especially 331-55, and on the different causes; see 269-92.}

The second distinct group of madwomen includes the young heroines of
Lammermoor, Kenilworth, and Saint Ronan's Well, which together make up Scott's only tragic novels. In contrast to the marginalised women of the first group, those of the second may seem to have much in common with the more fortunate heroines of Scott's other works. Young, beautiful, and apparently poised on the threshold of the self-defining experiences of love and marriage whose depiction is conventional in novels of the period, they make unlikely outsiders. But Lucy Ashton, Amy Robsart, and Clara Mowbray are actually shown to be in the process of being pushed to the margins—and beyond—of communities that they once graced, and for which their beauty and nubility imaged continuity and a fruitful future. For these three tragic heroines, there is no saving eleventh-hour intercession such as we find in other Waverley novels and which serves both to validate the heroine's choice and facilitate a fortunate outcome. Rather, the women's lives prove to be set on a course from which, in the end, no escape route opens out. The novels in which they appear both expose and cautiously or ambiguously critique the typically ruthless historical and sociocultural forces that play no small part in furthering the heroine's eventual destruction. The details of acute suffering and isolation that convey the immediacy of the young women's plight and the entrapment from which they suffer make affectively compelling the stories of women who, in contrast to the older madwomen, stand at the centre of the novels in which they appear. However, the novels also insistently turn their lens on the deeply troubling emotional and psychological causes and consequences of the narrowing of possibilities and hope that they also depict.

For an example of such an intercession, see Walter Scott, The Black Dwarf, ed. Peter D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) Chapters 16 & 17. Typically, the heroine does not passively wait for help; rather, she is actively involved in securing the fortunate resolution. And this involvement may be at some risk to herself. In The Black Dwarf, Isabella Vere seeks out the solitary abode of the misanthropic Dwarf to secure his aid in preventing her arranged marriage. Although she is prepared to go through with the marriage in accordance with her father's demands, the Dwarf intervenes at the altar. The Dwarf is an example of a man driven mad by loss and alienation, who (like many of the madwomen) has privileged access to knowledge about the past. Unlike some of his female counterparts, however, he does not seek to control the heroine's (or hero's) future.
as strongly determining the tragic outcomes for the heroines. And, while the fictions relentlessl
y expose the pernicious failures of vision that characterise the novels' wider societ
es, they also persistently identify the young woman's madness (or, uniquely, in the case of Amy Robsart, an equally devastating vulnerability to being diagnosed as mad) as inextricably related to and dependent on the nature of her individual response to her plight. In ways that are more complex and unsettling than we find in the accounts of the aged women, the representation of female madness in the tragic novels is morally charged; as readers we are called upon to sympathise but also to judge.

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Scott's madwomen figures—with the notable exceptions of Lucy, Meg Merrilies, and Madge Wildfire in The Heart of Midlothian—have not been the focus of sustained critical attention that takes into account the range of Scott's fiction. However, the study of madness has itself been something of a growth industry in recent years and, before turning to a closer examination of the influences relevant to the Waverley madwomen, it is useful to identify the parameters and direction taken by recent discussions and debates about both the cultural meanings with which insanity can be invested and the past treatment of those identified as mad.

Madness has proven a fertile field of investigation both for literary critics who theorise the discursive importance and ideological content of textual representations of insanity, and with social and medical historians who stress the recovery of details about how mental disorders were understood, diagnosed, categorised, and treated in the past. The ways in which a given society or culture understands madness—a condition which, since at least the time of Plato, has been seen as one in which the unique capacity of human consciousness for sustained reasoning, reflection, and analysis is either in
abeyance or severely disordered\textsuperscript{12}—are perceived to be singularly revealing of the particular values, concerns, and fears of that society. In his influential study, \textit{Madness and Civilization}, Michel Foucault implies that the ability of madness to fulfil this function is itself the product of a shift in the conceptualisation of its meaning that occurred during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{13} Foucault’s narrative is one whose focus is explicitly identified by his book’s original title, \textit{Folie et Dérainon: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique}. He describes the loss of the tragic sense of madness or \textit{folie} that dominated the mediaeval and early modern periods and its replacement with the concept of “non-reason” or \textit{deraison}. In the period that he calls the classical age of madness, those identified as lacking reason were subjected to confinement in which the state took responsibility for them, just as it increasingly also did for the poor, the sick, and other marginal groups. Confinement meant hiding madness from view but, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, an emphasis on the possibilities of cure through “moral treatment” produced a further shift in which madness came to signify error. As a result, physical methods of restraint and punishment were gradually replaced with moral therapy that attempted to cure various forms of mental derangement by working on the mind and self-concepts of the afflicted. Actual confinement then became what for Foucault is far more insidious: a surveillance that is eventually internalised and works perpetually on the individual’s soul or spirit. Moreover, madness became medicalised; it was identified as an illness, a health problem properly to be treated by doctors in whom was invested the authority to identify and treat the insane or psychologically “deviant.”

This is a compelling account of the history of madness, but details of it have not gone unchallenged especially by historians who find that its conclusions rest on

\textsuperscript{12} For a concise discussion of consistency and change in views of madness. see Sass 1-2.

sometimes flimsy historical evidence, or who are impatient with Foucault's apparent
tendency both to generalise and be highly selective in his use of data. However, it is
important to recognise, as Mark Micale points out in a synoptic account of the history of
hysteria, that the historical moment of Madness and Civilization is itself that of the
anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The writings produced by this
movement constitute an important intervention in the history of psychiatry because they
prompted a reevaluation of the nature, direction, and focus of studies about madness and
past attitudes to madness. And, as both Micale and Nancy Tomes note, when the initial
flurry of ideological and counter-ideological debate subsided, research increasingly
tended to eschew “unilateral allegiances to any one of the grand schemes which research
on the detailed empirical level has shown time and again to be inadequate or
inaccurate.” Subsequently, the books and articles that resulted from close work

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14 The fullest treatment of this debate can be found in: Arthur Still and Irving Velody, eds. Rewriting the
problem of Foucault's work on madness has been the apparent generalisations; for example, British
historians have argued that the so-called “great confinement” described by Foucault did not in fact take
place in Britain to the extent claimed, and that the mad were not indiscriminately incarcerated with other
“deviant” groups such as the poor or the criminal. Nikolas Rose's essay, “Of Madness Itself: Histoire de la
folie and the object of psychiatric history” (Still and Velody 142-49) argues that this attention to historical
detail reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of Foucault's project, which he describes as “a history . . .
of the ways in which diverse problematizations of existence along a range of political, social, ethical and
philosophical dimensions have been linked together and rendered intelligible in terms of madness” (143).
Of course, one may grant the validity of the project while remaining attentive to the book's
misrepresentations; this is the method of Roy Porter's essay (“Foucault's Great Confinement,” Still and
Velody 119-25). For another useful analysis of the significance of Foucault's work on madness, see Gary
Gutting, “Michel Foucault's Phénoméno!ogie des Krankengeistes,” Discovering the History of Psychiatry,

15 See Mark S. Micale, “Hysteria and its Historiography: the future perspective,” History of Psychiatry 1
(1990) 35, For another excellent account of the twists and turns in the history of psychiatry, see Mark S.
of Psychiatry 3-36. Micale and Porter contend that revisionist historians use the “Whiggish” historian
(alleged to depict the history of medicine as a triumphal progress) as a straw-man “against which to define
his or her own self-consciously radical interpretations” while an actual examination of the literature in
question reveals that it is often shaded by nuance and doubt (8).

16 Micale (1990) 36. See also Nancy Tomes, “The Anatomy of Madness: New Directions in the History of
archival materials were strongly marked by a concern, Micale says, "with the interconnected social, medical and intellectual aspects of their subjects, and a strong sense of the aching, existential realities of mental illness in the past." And as Tomes acknowledges, the attention to detail and the nuanced specifics of temporal and regional variations means that historians working in the field must begin with the premise that it is characterised by a "fundamental lack of certainty" and with an awareness that no theory can possibly be capacious enough to accommodate all of the complexities and variables.¹⁷

That historians have embraced the challenge this poses is evident from the burgeoning numbers of journals and books devoted to the social and medical histories of psychiatry. Moreover, the redefinition and redirection that have taken place have a corollary in a similar shift in accounts of the literary representation of madness. Recent studies often make excellent use of archival materials and combine this with a keen awareness of the densely local, and historically and culturally specific nature of the somatic and psychological expression of mental phenomena, and of the discursive function images of madness serve in narratives. One area in particular where the shifting modes of a theoretical engagement with the meaning of any representation of madness have been most hotly debated is feminist criticism. Although there is a general agreement that the persistence of conventions and stereotypes in both medical and literary accounts of women identified as mad or suffering from some form of mental disorder are potentially damaging in terms of fostering and sustaining entrenched notions of women's inherent physical, moral, and intellectual weakness, the debate in feminist criticism has sometimes taken surprising or unexpected turns.¹⁸ Helen Small, in the introduction to

¹⁷ Micale (1990) 36 & Tomes 360.

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter notes that "[h]ysteria has taken many strange turnings in its long career, but one of the most surprising is the modern marriage of hysteria and feminism." See Elaine Showalter, "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender," Hysteria Beyond Freud, eds. Sandra Gilman et al. (Berkeley: U of California P. 1993) 286. For another account, see Nancy Tomes, "Feminist Histories of Psychiatry," Discovering the History of Psychiatry 348-83.
Love's Madness ably summarises the complex and evolving relationship between feminism and madness from its conceptual beginnings in the 1970s, through the post-structuralist celebration of the “hysteric” and “hysteric text” as uniquely expressive of the condition under patriarchy of women whose madness “speaks” of and through a culturally imposed silence.\(^1^9\) The lines of connection between this latter theoretical approach and the writings of the anti-psychiatry movement are readily apparent, both may be said to value madness as insight and freedom, and as potentially subversive when it exposes the disciplinary structures that are organised around and dependent on the identification and suppression of madness.

As Small notes, this view of the madwoman is appealing because it seems to offer a valuable key to understanding and interpreting a range of texts and representations of deranged women. But, as both Small and, still more recently, Marta Caminero-Santangelo argue, the view and the readings to which it has given rise themselves represent an insidious danger because “the celebration of hysteria risks culpably reinscribing women in precisely the debilitating gender constructions feminism might hope to free them from, equating them once again with irrationality, silence, nature, and body.”\(^2^0\) The title of Caminero-Santangelo’s book--*The Madwoman Can’t Speak, or Why Insanity is Not Subversive*--is unequivocal, and the book specifically addresses the vexed issue of the political implications of reifying the madwoman as a symbol of revolt against patriarchy. Caminero-Santangelo usefully highlights the mode in which a celebration of the hysteric is perversely committed to presenting madness as a willed choice, an


\(^{20}\) Small 27.
alternative to the culturally-enforced roles of wife and mother that women have traditionally been expected to fulfil in society. It is much more likely, she argues, that instead of choice and freedom, madness represents a final and devastating removal from the field of agency.21

Despite evident differences in the epistemological assumptions of the medical and social historians, and the efforts of critics working to recover the meanings of madness encoded in literary texts, recent work by both groups shares in a fundamental recognition of the reality of madness as a condition that affects individuals and causes devastating suffering and sometimes even death. This is not to deny that madness is socially constructed. Indeed, because Western civilisations think of madness as striking at the core of what makes us human and tend to identify it as a disorder that can be the object of description but cannot be known or reflected upon in any cogent or meaningful way from within a state of madness itself, the possibilities for interpretation and construction are endless. It is a state with which is associated a profound disquietude about disorder and dissolution, a loss of control over both the inner and outer realms of experience, an abrupt descent into an abyss from which no return may be possible. And even when a more hopeful schema is adopted, the possibility of an ascent or transfiguration with its promises of special insight can also involve an alienation from the familiar comforts and communities of the known human world.22

Sander Gilman argues that both the experience and the idea of mental illness are

21 Marta Caminero-Santangelo, The Madwoman Can’t Speak: Or Why Insanity is Not Subversive (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998) 3–4. Like many other women critics who address the women/madness nexus, her primary focus is on texts by women. Questions which await a fuller exploration include: 1. the relationship between representations of madwomen by men and those by women, and 2. the relationship between accounts of male madness and of female madness.

22 The manic phase of bipolar disorder is especially likely to be experienced as a form of transcendence. For a discussion relevant to the Romantic period and that focuses on madness and creativity, see Frederick Burwick, Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) 1-17.
realities which are "mirrored in and conceptualised through the pressures of social forces and psychological models." That is, they are realities which are strongly mediated by beliefs and, as Small notes with particular regard to women's madness, by a set of conventions that give expression to and shape those beliefs in powerfully enduring ways. Throughout history and in writing by both men and women, the madwoman has been a character who is narratively and symbolically overburdened because of the extraordinarily rich history of representation and convention which enfolds her. The madwoman, as a recognisable type, possesses an uncanny ability to pass through literary history in a form that appears to be at once relatively unchanged and uniquely protean, capable of expressing—or challenging—a range of cultural, social, and psychological anxieties and beliefs. Lillian Feder argues that the types and traditions evident in representations of madness remain remarkably consistent over time. Although in part this claim justifies her own psychoanalytic approach which assumes that aspects of the landscape of the human psyche are transhistorical and universal, her point is well-taken. In our attempts to understand conditions that even advanced scientific knowledge fails to render less strange and alarming, we reach for the ancient images and depictions which culture offers as modes perhaps not of making sense of madness but of organising a response to an apparently inevitable but still terrifying fact of human life. And, although these images are not uniquely female—as critics have noted, literature and art also depict many different types of madmen—representations of women's madness are often

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23 Sander L. Gilman, Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 9. As Gilman notes, "Madness" is often the test case for those who claim that there is nothing but the social construction of disease, that these models of mental illness exist independent of any reality.


25 For examples, see Feder and, for the eighteenth century, Max Byrd, Visits to Bedlam: Madness and Literature in the Eighteenth Century (Columbia, S.C.: U of South Carolina P, 1974); Allan Ingram, The
contextualised by scenes of a more pervasive social or political disorder, or by fears of a malign female influence that threatens to undo civilisation or unleash primitive or primal impulses.

Scott’s two groups of madwomen each develop from distinct literary origins that tend to express somewhat different views of madness and the feminine. If Scott’s own vast reading and considerable powers of memory made available to him a wide range of literary prototypes for his accounts of madwomen, his depictions often stress the shaping role of convention, the degree to which the madwoman is inescapably read through a prism of existing associations and prototypes. In the Waverley novels, this may be expressed by the madwoman’s own painful sense of entrapment within a stereotype or, alternatively, she may be shown deliberately taking on a culturally available role that promises to confer a certain power, legitimise inspired speech, or license the transgression of otherwise fixed social boundaries or rules.

As work by Ruth Padel on ancient Greek drama or by Marina Warner on the story-telling crone of folk tales establishes, these associations are age-old. If madness, as Padel argues, is inextricably intertwined with notions of what is tragic, one important aspect of this has to do with prophecy and foreknowledge, or with a condition of exaggerated insight that rightly belongs to the gods and cannot be borne without suffering by the merely human individual. The gendered locus classicus is the figure of Cassandra, the woman who is doomed to know the future but be incapable of convincing others of the validity of her vision. Cassandra’s madness is a function of the painful burden of knowledge that cannot be shared, or words that cannot be heard. Her condition is one of


terrible isolation from her kind, of a painful suspension between the worlds of gods and the human.\textsuperscript{27} Figures like Cassandra, the Cumaean Sibyl, or the Delphic Pythia make of madness an experience of frenzy and inspiration.\textsuperscript{28} In so doing, they express a wildness that in classical literature is even more notably associated with the Maenads, Amazons, and Furies. Accounts of the Maenads add to the mix an element of extreme transgression, of breaking out of the bonds of society.\textsuperscript{29} When the Maenads roam through mountains and woods in an ecstatic state of oblivion to human conventions, their wildness is coupled with a sexual freedom and blood lust to forge a powerful connection between female savagery, ecstatic insanity, and the resulting threat to social rules or civilisation. Likewise, the androgynous figures of the Furies express a relentless, unreasoning, and single-minded pursuit of revenge.\textsuperscript{30} However, they are associated less with being mad themselves than with causing madness in others and this is an element that persists in later accounts of women in whom revenge becomes the single principle of action. Images of the frenzied prophetess, wild female figures irrepressibly driven by primal desires or fuelled by vengeance, or women who are half-men and assume masculine traits and roles are, as Padel acknowledges, separable from the original context in which they emerged, and they can establish themselves as endurably adaptable images describing (and constructing) the behaviours and appearance typical of female insanity.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{27} Padel discusses Cassandra on pp. 38-39; she emphasises Cassandra's awareness of her condition. For another discussion, see Feder 84-90.

\textsuperscript{28} For the Sibyl, see Warner 67-79.

\textsuperscript{29} There are various accounts of Dionysian ecstasy, but the best-known is Euripides, The Bacchae in The Bacchae and Other Plays, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) 191-244.

\textsuperscript{30} For a discussion of the Furies and the association with madness, see Feder 76-84. As Feder notes, although the Furies are alluded to elsewhere, it is in Aeschylus' Oresteia that they have a major role. See Aeschylus, The Eumenides in The Oresteian Trilogy, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1959) 147-82.

\textsuperscript{31} Padel insists on the fundamental distinction between the ancient Greek conception of madness and our
In the madwoman's later incarnations, an iconography of female madness continues to stress links between women, madness, and nature. Depending on context and moral import, nature may be depicted either as a savage wilderness or in a more picturesque, tamed version. Thus, in Shakespearean tragedy, the witches in Macbeth are encountered in a desolate, howling wilderness with which they seem at one; such depictions look back to the Maenads or Furies and also forward, for example, to Scott's own accounts of witch-like madwomen such as Norna in The Pirate who self-consciously styles herself the genius loci of wild regions fearfully shunned by other people. Witchcraft and female madness merge in an emphasis on a secret knowledge of hidden truths or arcane lore which is a condition of the women's privileged access to a primitive world that the surrounding landscape embodies in the most immediate ways. In stark contrast to the striking conjunction of an unruly female with the untamed wilderness are the images of a more gentle or domesticated nature that are evoked by the garlands of flowers with which Ophelia bedecks her madness. In the latter case female insanity signifies not an elemental primitivism but an enforced retreat from a world turned incomprehensible, an instinctual, blind return to nature; it is this aspect which is later often evoked in eighteenth century depictions of the sentimental madwoman.

In general, the division into types apparent in Shakespeare's depictions of female madness prefigures that later deployed by Scott, who also stresses associations between insanity and substantial social or political instability. In Shakespearean drama we find the older women who are represented as psychologically on the edge, teetering on the brink of obsession or derangement. Women like Lady Macbeth or Margaret of Anjou (particularly as she appears in Richard the Third) are characterised either by a voracious
lust for power or an all-consuming sense of wrong and vengeance, and a willingness to cause extreme violence or blood-shed in the pursuit of their goals. These are women whose gender seems increasingly ambiguous when they steel themselves for the roles they enact in an unstable climate of armed conflict, suspicion, and betrayal. Of especial importance is their harnessing of the power of language to effect goals that can be achieved only through the persuasive speeches (or curses) they address to men. Once again, a marked contrast to these figures of disruption and aggression is the young woman who feels herself to be a powerless victim within a larger plot whose contours remain invisible to her even while the nightmare of alienation and accidental murder it engenders becomes ever more pressingly inescapable. Showalter notes the popularity in the nineteenth century of Ophelia as an image of female insanity in which poetic and theatrical elements dominate, as an enduring emblem of the young woman who does not merely die for love but first goes mad. Pertinent too is the element of conflict between filial duty and sexual love. Ophelia’s story pits filial love against romantic love in a manner that was to prove particularly adaptable to an eighteenth and nineteenth century context of concern about arranged marriages and the duty of daughters to male heads-of-household.

In Restoration and eighteenth century drama, fiction, popular and literary ballads, and poetry the woman who is driven mad by love or abandonment becomes a stock figure

32 Margaret of Anjou features in Scott’s own late novel, *Anne of Geierstein* (1829). However, Scott’s portrait of her is almost elegiac in nature and she is described as if she were mad in only one scene. J. H. Alexander notes that Scott’s Queen Margaret owes more to Holinshed than to Shakespeare: J. H. Alexander, historical note, *Anne of Geierstein* by Walter Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 511. In the one scene where she does appear, briefly, as mad, the description inevitably recalls figures such as Meg Merrilies or Magdalen Graeme, and Scott may have been all too aware that his own success with such characters created a powerful but ultimately delimiting or stifling precedent. It is also possible that he wanted to avoid having his Margaret compared to Shakespeare’s.

embodying the fragility of female reason. But if these accounts tend to depict women who go mad when they find themselves hemmed in by circumstances they cannot control, they also repeatedly draw connections between morality, obedience, and sanity. To go mad is in good part an effect of having broken a moral or social rule; madness is firmly equated with some form of minor or more major transgression. Such transgressive acts may be ones that are performed unknowingly. For example, the subtitle of Thomas Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage: or The Innocent Adultery* is telling; the heroine, Isabella, remarries only when she believes that her husband is dead. When the husband, Biron, later returns, Isabella is faced with an impossible situation that involves the ruin of her reputation and an acute, irresolvable division in her allegiances; in consequence, she goes mad and dies. Triangular relationships are commonly associated with female madness—as they are in Scott’s three tragic novels. In Nicholas Rowe’s *Jane Shore*, the eponymous heroine knowingly commits adultery for which she is punished both by the requirement that she perform public penance, and by her madness. At the end of the play, Jane’s death comes about because of her psychological and emotional inner strife, although the spectacle of female madness here also retains its established links to political perturbations. One interesting aspect of *Jane Shore*, which also figures in

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34 For the traditional association of madness with sin and guilt, see Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974) 1-2.


Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d*, is that the madwoman is disposed to see visions or ghosts. When Jane sees her own husband, she thinks at first that he is a vision; a similar scene occurs in *Saint Ronan’s Well* when Clara Mowbray first encounters her lover, Francis Tyrrel, after an absence of many years. The madness of Belvidera, in *Venice Preserv’d*, is of a particularly horrific kind; at the end of the play she is depicted as if grappling with ghosts who seek to draw her into the grave.38

*Venice Preserv’d* is the play that Lovelace takes Clarissa to see in Samuel Richardson’s novel, and Clarissa herself provided the eighteenth century with an especially compelling image of female derangement in the account of her acute distress following the rape. If in *Clarissa* madness is again associated with the loss of a woman’s virtue and reputation, it is also closely linked to the workings of memory and to a kind of linguistic paralysis or narrative disorder. Madness for Richardson’s heroine seems almost a form of psychological protection, a means for keeping memory at bay when it becomes too acutely painful. In addition, the betrayed woman’s mental distraction is represented typographically when the papers Clarissa produces immediately after the rape feature broken sentences and lines dispersed randomly about the page.39

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38 Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserv’d* (1682), ed. Malcolm Kelsall (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P. 1969). Sarah Siddons made the roles of Isabella, Jane Shore, and Belvidera especially famous, and her final appearance on the Edinburgh stage, in April 1810, was in the role of Belvidera. She was also well-known for her Lady Macbeth, Margaret of Anjou, and Lady Randolph (from John Home’s *Douglas*). An account of the affecting nature of Siddons’ performances in these roles can be found in The Beauties of Mrs Siddons By a Lady of Distinction, (London: Strahan, 1786). See also James C. Dibdin, The Annals of the Edinburgh Stage (Edinburgh: Cameron, 1888) 263. Depictions of female madness were also popular in plays written in the Romantic period; Joanna Baillie’s *Orma* is an example about which Scott said the mad scene in Act 5 is “certainly one of the most sublime ever written.” Letter to Joanna Baillie, 17 December 1811. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, vol 3 (London: Constable, 1932-37) 35. (Subsequent references to this edition appear as Letters with volume and page numbers). Burvick (11) comments on Orma and on Baillie’s use of the *idée fixe* in *Plays on the Passions*.

Although Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison* includes a popular and also more extended portrait of a madwoman in the narrative of Clementina, it was to *Clarissa* that later Gothic novelists looked for the model of the heroine who is incarcerated and menaced alike with sexual violation and madness. These accounts may stress elements of sexual impropriety in ways that hint at a punitive aspect to the woman’s madness. Perhaps the most notorious example is found in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*. When the nun, Agnes de Medina, gives birth to her illegitimate child in a prison cell, the infant dies and the mother, deranged by grief and guilt, refuses to give up the decomposing corpse.

Female madness in Lewis’s account is grotesquely charged with horror but, as with so much else in *The Monk*, Lewis seems merely to be taking to its limit an already established connection—here, between insanity and an excessive maternal grief that crosses over into obsession. Other ballads and poems that depict deranged bereaved mothers tend to make the grave rather than the corpse an object of fixation which literally becomes the locus of the woman’s madness. The example that is now best-known is William Wordsworth’s *The Thorn* but, as Robert Mayo has established, the bereft mother who may or may not have been responsible for her child’s death was a frequent subject of ballads and magazine poetry. Scott would have known this convention not only from

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42 Robert Mayo, “The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads,” *PMLA* 69 (1954): 486-522. The classical prototype of the murdering mother is Medea. Versions of the “Maniac’s Song” were very popular, and can
his own reading and the work with ballads that he undertook at the start of his literary career, but also from his acquaintance with German literature. Gottfried Burger’s “Des Pfarrers Tochter von Traubenhain” was a popular subject for translation, and Scott was also familiar with the more complexly presented account of maternal insanity and infanticide featured in the account of Gretchen/Margareta from Goethe’s Faust.43 Such women are victims of men and also of their own desires; madness in these accounts is inescapably associated with a sense that the first step to disaster occurs when the woman allows herself to be flattered and yields to her lover’s importunity, while the subsequent infanticide or child-death starkly emblematises the terrible social consequences of female immorality. But if insanity thus acquires a punitive valence, these accounts often refrain from explicit statements of condemnation to focus rather on female weakness and male heartlessness or on contributing factors in the social environment.

Narratives of maternal madness share with another popular image of female insanity a stress on the traumatic rupture of affective relations. Examples of women whose madness results from the death or loss of a lover include Lawrence Sterne’s Maria from Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, the incarcerated madwoman whom

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43 The most popular translation of Bürger’s ballad was: William Taylor, “The Lass of Fair Wone,” Monthly Magazine 1 (April 1796): 223-24. Charlotte Dacre also published a version which Scott may have known. It appears in Hours of Solitude (1806) (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1978) 83-96. It is remarkable for Dacre’s decision to alter the ending; in her version the mother commits suicide out of remorse after she kills her infant (in the original she is hanged). For Scott’s reading of Faust, see John Gibson Lockhart, Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., vol. 4. (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1837-38) 192. Lockhart had the impression that this was a rereading: Faust was first published in 1808 and Scott could have read it in the original German. For the scenes of Margareta in prison, see Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Faust: Part One (1808), trans. David Luke (Oxford: World’s Classics-Oxford UP. 1987) 142-48. Goethe makes particularly powerful use of the various conventions associated with female madness and infanticide.
Harley encounters in Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, and Crazy Kate who is described in Book One of William Cowper’s *The Task*. Both Philip Martin and Helen Small stress the generative significance of these late eighteenth century portraits of the madwoman as sentimental icon. Perhaps the most important feature common to all three is the extent to which the woman, portrayed as she is encountered or observed by a male traveller or spectator, localises madness; her story figures in each case as an inset narrative told by a man who, although emotionally touched by the encounter or spectacle, is then free to move on, leaving the madwoman in her place to continue endlessly mourning her loss. Such women do, however, remain troubling. As Lawrence Lipking argues in his study of the abandoned woman in literature, they threaten to “subvert the rule of action” or “to retard the inexorable forward motion of events.” These women are descendants of Dido who briefly diverts Aeneas from the fulfillment of his destiny; in Virgil’s account, the tragedy of the woman who devotes herself to love and is abandoned forms but a single episode in a much larger (and, implicitly, more enduringly significant) history. When the demands of history recall Aeneas from this interlude, the bereft Dido commits suicide—but not before cursing Aeneas in prophetic tones. Eighteenth century accounts of abandoned women tend, however, to stress the woman’s bodily survival

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44 Martin 17-22 & Small 12-14. Martin does not discuss Sterne. Scott, however, mentions Maria in his note about “Feckless Fannie” (the original of Madge Wildfire) in *The Heart of Midlothian*. See Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian, Waverley Novels*, vol. 13 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1829-33) 39: “in attempting to introduce such a character into fiction, the author felt the risk of encountering a comparison with the Maria of Sterne.” Cowper’s Kate was the subject of a painting by Johann Heinrich Fuseli (1806-07); it is reproduced in Martin’s book. Matthew Lewis’s popular poem, “Crazy Jane,” is, as Helen Small notes, an imitation of Cowper and finds a late expression in William Butler Yeats’s “Crazy Jane” poems. (Small 13-14).


which accompanies the death of her reason. The narratives depict a response to loss that involves becoming psychologically fixed in time, moving sideways out of history to assume the role of the perpetual mourner who comes to embody loss itself. The fascination with describing such figures may register the eerily erotic appeal of the woman's complete devotion of herself to the memory of the dead beloved even while it also makes apparent the specifically female perversity of such an extreme response. But if pathological sorrow is then gendered female, the disturbing spectacle of female abandonment may also threaten to absorb the male observer—as it does in The Thorn where the narrating sea captain finds himself becoming obsessed by the woman’s own obsession, or, more ambiguously, in the pedlar's tale of Margaret and the ruined cottage in Wordsworth’s 1814 The Excursion.47

These accounts of female madness, like those involving infanticide, are tinged by imputations of immorality, a failure to preserve a Christian sense of duty and resignation: these women have invested so much in their emotional lives that both their moral awareness and their reason fail. For these women, all time is past time and their pathological grief erases the future. However, that the women can become objects of sympathy for an onlooker marks them as quite different from another group of women whose madness is portrayed as the result of insatiable, monstrous desires for power and control over others. For such women, madness is punishment for ambitions that typically involve some transgression of gender roles. This type is particularly prominent in work by women writers where the figure of the power-hungry woman who eventually goes mad is deployed in tales that caution against an aggressive, amoral, and implicitly masculine over-reaching. Examples include Charlotte Dacre’s popular 1807 The

47 The Excursion explicitly associates the woman's grief for her lost husband with a place, the cottage which, like the woman, decays in the man’s absence. Like other madwomen, Margaret wears the tattered clothes whose condition physically expresses her mental state. Torn garments also evoke Biblical images of actually rending clothes; see for example Job 1.20.
Libertine, in which Milborough, after a career of extreme self-seeking and plot-making, is incarcerated in the Bicêtre, the Paris lunatic asylum. There, in a scene which radically reworks the sentimental encounter between Harley and the madwoman in The Man of Feeling, she is viewed by the male protagonist who discovers her to be animal-like, without shame, and raving "in wildest madness." Like the sentimental madwoman, Milborough is in tattered clothing, but the emphasis here is on bestiality rather than pathos, and on her alienation from any possibility of sympathy: "in her whole aspect there was an expression of savage fierceness, that shocked rather than interested the beholder." Another example, one which Scott knew well, is found in Jane Porter's 1810 The Scottish Chiefs. Joanna, Countess of Mar, is driven by both sexual and political ambitions. If she is depicted as repulsive in her amorality and selfishness, her actions are also explicitly associated with the betrayal of the Scottish hero, William Wallace—the man after whom she lusts. As with Milborough, Joanna's behaviour and her failure to regulate her passions according to the dictates of reason and a concern for others is eventually punished not by death but by madness and fruitless remorse; at the end, she too is subjected to a "viewing" which reveals her to be locked in a mental hell evidently of her own making. The punitive aspects of the woman's madness as an effect of her over-reaching and immorality are here readily apparent; the men who observe the transformation of Joanna's beauty into a "haggard glare" and her attempts at self-violence, leave the room "with an awful sense of Divine retribution."

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By the beginning of the nineteenth century, images of the madwoman in literature were freighted with a rich range of associations and, as Small notes, this could either hamper or prompt innovation in writers who chose to depict female madness. In formulaic writing, conventions may become an end in themselves. But they also have the potential to feature as a kind of shorthand that enables an author to situate his or her work within a familiar tradition, shared literary history, and cluster of beliefs while also reforming and renegotiating the conventions themselves. Reworked for a contemporary audience, conventions can make strange the familiar even while they also draw on well-known or stereotypical images; they can simultaneously evoke recognition and a sense of change, of the historically particular.

When Scott takes from the literary history of the madwoman the various elements that include associations with theatricality or the expression of mental states through a system of bodily signs, prophetic frenzy, nature, immorality, victimhood, or fixation on a single event in the past, he also emphasises a culturally specific and intense contemporary awareness of the problem of mental disorders generally and the perceived threat they pose to both individual and social stability. Contemporary theories of mind allowed for—and indeed required—adjunct theories about the proper regulation of thought as a prophylactic against extreme psychological states and obsessions, or as a way of limiting the individual’s sense of being the powerless victim of uncontrollable emotions and nervous responses. If the development and widespread acceptance of these theories certainly corroborate Foucault’s important insight about the emergence of new technologies of the self in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the focus in the following discussion will be on identifying the precise meaning such beliefs and theories held for Scott in the context of his concerns about the relationship between

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50 Small 32.
memory and depression, a widespread social anxiety about the individual’s vulnerability to random assaults by “nervous” ailments or even insanity, and a changing ethos of concern both for the mad and for the social implications of the various psychopathologies.

“That way madness lies,” the despairing and grief-stricken Lear counsels himself, and he thereby identifies madness as a function of thought and memories to which the mind insistently but self-destructively recurs. In terms of the representation of madness in the Waverley novels, his warning has a special resonance. Common to both of the identified groups of Waverley madwomen is a sense that madness both emerges from and expresses a particular relationship to time and to memory. The concept of memory current in late eighteenth century Edinburgh at the time of Scott’s education derived essentially from Locke and Hume. Memory was understood as the ground of individual identity and imaged as an orderly storage cabinet wherein the further away an event is in time, the less vivid and particularised are the details of its image. In Hume’s words, if it is “a peculiar property of memory, to preserve the original order and position of its ideas,” the more distant in time an event, the more “weak and feeble” its image in the mind.

Memory is the mental record of an individual’s past experiences, and in the normal course of a life the place a given memory occupies in that record is continually being modified. As new recollections form, older ones are gradually pushed back to a point at which, Hume says, it can become difficult to distinguish between records of real events

51 Scott quotes the line from Act III, scene 4 of Lear in a journal entry for 14 February 1831 where he expresses a fear that his mind is weakened by illness and age. See Journal 711.

52 David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner (London: Penguin, 1985)132. Defining memory as “a faculty by which we raise up the images of past perceptions.” Hume added that “[a]s memory alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of past perceptions, ‘tis to be consider’d upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory, we never shou’d have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of cause and effects, which constitute our self or person” (308-09). For Locke on memory, see John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1975) 149-55 & 335.
and the workings of the imagination. Over time, memories fade like the ink on a manuscript, and new memories interpose between the old ones and present experiences. This, at least, is how memory functions in the healthy mind. But some memories—those strongly tinged with the emotions and violent or intense passions of love, fear, hatred, or desire—can resist their fate. They refuse to submit to the normal processes of storage and modification and, instead of becoming attenuated or gradually rendered spectre-like by the interposition of new impressions, remain vividly present in a way that distorts the individual’s sense of identity, and of time and its relationship to self or to the history of the larger community in which the individual claims a place.

The correlative of the pathologised memory is obsession; fixity of memory is linked to a fixity of thought that is increasingly resistant to any moderating influences and becomes literally hardened in place. In its most extreme manifestations, this may constitute madness. But Scott’s time was one in which insanity and sanity were commonly conceptualised less as mutually exclusive states of being than as the poles of a continuum on which could be plotted an apparently infinite number of more or less disabling mental disorders. If this meant that the minor varieties of obsessional thinking were states to which nobody could claim absolute immunity, there was at once an unsettling sense of the continuity of these minor variants with more florid or extreme examples, and a recognition of the mind’s need continuously to reflect upon the direction and focus of thought and the recovery of memories in order to avoid going the way of madness.

53 Hume 134.

54 For a discussion of memory (particularly as it relates to history), see Frances Ferguson, “Romantic Memory,” Studies in Romanticism 35 (1996): 509-33. See Dr. Samuel Hibbert, Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1824) for the argument that apparitions result from the recall of memories which become so emotionally charged and vivid as to take on physical characteristics. Scott was acquainted with Hibbert and evidence that he drew on his work for his exploration of superstitious beliefs may be found in Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft addressed to J.G. Lockhart, Esq (London: Murray, 1830) 22-34.
As an apparently innate but troublesome propensity of the human mind, obsession was something about which contemporary accounts of the workings of mind, and writings on mental disorders and the prophylactic or immunological properties of education and mental training were particularly preoccupied with regard to the psychology of both men and women. Much recent criticism has paid attention to the treatment of women by nineteenth century psychiatry, and has identified the ways in which women were consistently singled out as being more vulnerable to certain types of mental disorder. However, it is important to note that the context in which this identification took place was one of a fearful perception of an indiscriminate increase in forms of derangement; men were understood to be only marginally less likely to show signs of any one of a host of disorders affecting the mind. Although this study takes as its starting point the preponderance of women characters in the Waverley novels whose representation powerfully sustains an association between madness and gender, it understands those representations to be conditioned by a general concern about the potential for the human mind to become obsessed by certain thoughts, memories, or beliefs, and about the causes and consequences of insanity. With this in mind, it is helpful to register at the outset the degree to which Scott’s autobiographical writings repeatedly chronicle an awareness of his own susceptibility to a debilitating depression, and a corresponding sense of his responsibility to be self-vigilant and impose various therapies


56 For statistics which establish that 54% of those admitted to the asylum at Bethlem over a period of 46 years were women, see Rev. of Haslam, Arnold, etc. on Insanity, Quarterly Review 2 (1809): 171. Of those discharged as cured, 54% were also women. For more statistics, see [W. H. Fiton], "Lunatic Asylums," Edinburgh Review 28 (1817): 458-59. Fiton notes that more women than men suffer from insanity, but he is puzzled by regional variations; in some areas the proportions are reversed. Houston notes "that males and females were equally liable to be termed mentally incapacitated in national surveys of the early nineteenth century, and to be placed in an institution. Local variations mean there were more men than women in asylums in some areas, while the ratios were reversed elsewhere" (123).
as a potent counter against disorder.

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Entries from the journal that Scott began to keep in 1825 rather contradict the long-standing view—which Scott himself liked to encourage—of his innate mental health, his freedom from dark thoughts and fears. The years during which he kept the journal were ones of great change and difficulty in Scott’s life because they saw his near financial ruin, the death of his wife, the progressive and ultimately fatal degenerative disorder of his grandson, and Scott’s own increasing ill-health as he suffered a series of debilitating strokes. However, although these events seem likely to have increased the visitations of depression or melancholy, it is notable that in one entry, the journal records his suffering from “[a] touch of the morbus eruditorum” only to add that it afflicts him “less now than when young.” This entry describes his symptoms with diagnostic precision: “a tremor of the heart the pulsation of which becomes painfully sensible—a disposition to causeless alarm—much lassitude—and decay of vigour of mind and activity of intellect . . . the mind is apt to receive and encourage gloomy apprehensions and causeless fears.” The description is one that accords with contemporary assumptions about the vital interdependence of mind and body. It also makes both the somatic and psychological symptoms seem as if not under conscious control; the disorder is one that threatens


59 Journal 41.
completely to take over or possess the individual.

The journal is punctuated throughout by similar entries that record episodic spells of “nervous affection.” However, Scott’s vigilant attention to his own mental hygiene is evidently based on the widespread conviction that the ability and willingness to pay such attention distinguishes the sane from the truly mad. The difference involves insight or self-analysis, and the journal entries repeatedly stress the individual’s freedom—and responsibility—to combat spells of nervous affection by deploying tactics of careful monitoring, diversion, and redirection. At one time, however, Scott came to believe that even the act of documenting his condition could foster a morbid introspection and, accordingly, for a period in 1829 he ceased writing the diary entries altogether. The entry for 23 May 1830, the date of the journal’s resumption, states: “by recording my gloomy fits I encouraged their recurrenc[e] whereas out of sight out of mind is the best way to get out of them.” Elsewhere the journal documents other strategies made use of by Scott in an effort “to get out of’ spells of depression. An entry for 24 October 1827 is typical:

Vilely low in spirits . . . A thick throbbing at my heart, and fancies thronging on me. A disposition to sleep, or to think on things melancholy and horrible while I wake. Strange that one’s nerves should thus master them, for nervous the case is as I know too well . . . But the best is a little exertion or a change of the current of thought relieves me.

God who subjects us to these strange maladies, whether of mind or body I cannot say, has placed the power within our own reach and we should be grateful. I wrestled myself so far out of the Slough of Despond as to take a good long walk and my mind is

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60 *Journal* 662.
restored to its elasticity.  

In the journal, the ability to change the mind’s current of depressive thoughts is often associated with physical work which gives “steadiness to [the] mind which when abandoned to thought without any personal and mental application [is prey to dejection].” The potential for the mind to become lost in a labyrinth of thought, with deleterious consequences for the individual’s health, has long been considered something that affected studious men—as Scott’s mention of the “morbus eruditorum” reminds us. An important preventative strategy consists in mixing different kinds of activities and, as the journal also notes, women possess an advantage over men in this regard:

Women it is said go mad much seldomer than men. I fancy if this be true it is in some degree owing to the little manual works in which they are constantly employed which regulate in some degree the current of ideas as the pendulum regulates the motion of the timepiece. I do not know if this is sense or nonsense but I am sensible that if I were in solitary confinement without either the power of taking exercise or employing myself in study six months would make me a madman or an idiot.  

Scott’s use of the time-piece simile with reference to the mind is particularly apt given the evidence, found elsewhere in the journal, of his belief that depression is

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61 Journal 415. It is interesting to note that Scott later had occasion to link his gloomy spirits on this day to his own failed love affair with Williamina Belshes. On 25 October he received an unexpected letter from the mother of the deceased Williamina and this prompted him to write, “Methinks this explains the gloom which hung about me yesterday. I own that the recurrence to these matters seems like a summons from the grave. It fascinates me” (415).

62 Work was a central aspect of moral therapy. For one view of this, see Foucault (248). A more neutral account is in Leonard D. Smith, ‘Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody’: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth-Century England (London: Leicester UP, 1999) 208-09.

63 Journal 234.
causatively linked to the workings of memory. He writes, for example, about the "nervousness" he feels on a day spent in rearranging old papers and observes that "[t]he memory though it retains all that has passd has closed sternly over it and this rummaging, like a bucket dropd suddenly into a well, deranges and confuses the ideas which slumbered on the mind." The conclusion of the passage records his dismay and self-chastisement when it describes his feelings on this occasion: "I am nervous and I am bilious and in a word I am unhappy--This is wrong--very wrong--and it [is] reasonably to be apprehended that some thing of serious misfortune will be the deserved punishment of this pusillanimous lowness of spirits. Strange! that one who in most things may be said to have enough of the 'care-na bye' should be subject to such vile weakness." Scott registers a belief that "lowness of spirits" may be interpreted as evidence of personal cowardice or even of sin; the individual who suffers from such a condition incurs the likelihood of some just punishment for a serious moral failing, a reprehensible weakness. The entry also articulates a concept of memory in which the mind must ruthlessly "close" over events which, if not exactly done with, nevertheless belong to a past that cannot be changed. To handle the artifacts or papers of the past is to make that past almost palpably present and so to risk conferring on it the power of disordering new ideas, or resurrecting it in all its perhaps painful immediacy. Because memories are potentially dangerous and disruptive, they must be kept safely in their ordered place in the mind's layered topography where they can be contemplated but produce no agitation of body and mind.

As, to adapt Mark Micale's words, "post-Freudians and post-Foucauldians," we might call the process of mental schooling identified in the journal by other names--repression or discipline. Scott's own understanding of this schooling was of a critically

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64 Journal 495.

65 Micale (1990) 41. Micale describes us as entering "a new post Freudian and post-Foucauldian period."
necessary element in the maintenance of a salutary balance, a moderation which allows
the individual to be at once socially productive and personally content because free from
the onslaughts of an introspection with the damaging potential to disrupt the health of
both mind and body. If his views on this matter were decisively shaped by an early
schooling in the concepts of mind theorised by the philosophers of the Scottish
Enlightenment, the language deployed in the journal entries also reveals a considerable
acquaintance with ideas about psychology that were debated in the early years of the
nineteenth century. This acquaintance was no doubt the result of his position from 1820
as President of the Royal Society in Edinburgh; his friendship with Sir David Brewster
whose interest in psychology is evident from entries in his Edinburgh Encyclopædia,66
and his extensive reading in magazines such as the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly, and
Blackwood’s. Although Scott remained uninterested in abstruse philosophical inquiry or
research into psychology, these activities ensured his familiarity with a range of views
and writings about contemporary theories of mind and mental illness at a time when these
matters were highly topical and of pressing concern.

Scott’s novels, like his journal, reveal a deeply held conviction that, within certain
limits, individuals usually have the freedom to choose a course of action, a pattern of
response, or a mode of thinking about the past and its relationship to the present which
may be more or less beneficial. Behind such beliefs in individual freedom, the
relationship between the individual and society, and the nature of responsibility to self
and community, we can discern the influence of the moral philosophers Adam Smith and,
especially, Thomas Reid. These men successively held the professorship at the University
of Glasgow, and both subsequently had their writings edited and their theories

66 For example, the entry on insanity, probably written by Dr. H. Dewar. Papers read at the Royal Society
meetings not infrequently dealt with psychology. An interesting example is H. Dewar, “On Uterine
Irritation, and its Effects on the Female Constitution,” Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, vol
9.2.26. 1823: 365-79, which treats of an extreme but temporary dissociative disorder in a young servant
girl. As the title indicates, the disorder is understood to originate in a somatic complaint.
popularised by Dugald Stewart. It would have been through the latter that Scott’s own access to Smith’s and Reid’s work was mediated. Although a journal entry from June 1828 recording Stewart’s death says only that he was "famous for his intimate acquaintance with the history and philosophy of the human mind," the two men were in fact far closer than this suggests. Stewart gave the lectures on philosophy which were attended by Scott during his years as a student in Edinburgh, and served Scott in the capacity of mentor. Moreover, it is possible to know in some detail what Scott would have learned from Stewart since the latter’s Outlines of Moral Philosophy, first published in 1793, was intended to be used as a guide to the contents of his lectures. The book strongly reflects the influence of key Glasgow figures.

In the writings of the Scottish moral philosophers, madness figures as the most extreme example of what can go disastrously wrong in the orderly and predictable workings of the human mind. If madness is the wild card that disrupts rational explanations of how we think, it demands accounting for in terms of origins and pathogenesis precisely because of the extreme nature of the threat it poses to the individual and the society in which the individual lives. As a state in which reason and the will cannot dependably function, madness is terrible both because the mad person is incapable of determining on and undertaking a wise course of action, and because the mad are excluded from establishing and maintaining the all-important and life-sustaining connections of sympathy and communication with others. They are alienated from community by a difference which positions them perhaps irretrievably outside the very possibility of sharing experiences, emotions, beliefs, hopes, and fears. In The Theory of

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67 The journal entry also notes that "[t]here is much of water painting in all Metaphysics which consist rather of words than ideas." (Journal 550).

68 See Dugald Stewart, Outlines of Moral Philosophy (Edinburgh: Creech, 1793) v for the Preface which states that the author’s object is to facilitate the studies of students attending his lectures. Scott attended Stewart’s classes from about 1788; see Lockhart (1837-38) 1.129.
Moral Sentiments. Adam Smith says that “[o]f all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind, the loss of reason appears, to those who have the least spark of humanity, by far the most dreadful, and they behold that last stage of human wretchedness with deeper commiseration than any other.” A recognition that the spectacle of madness could generate compassion in onlookers may be seen as an important determining factor in the popularity of sentimental depictions of madness in the eighteenth century. As Smith notes, however, sympathy for those afflicted with the loss of reason cannot be the essentially reciprocal exchange that characterises other social interactions. The situation of the mad is special because they can be only the objects and never the subjects of sympathy; their mental derangement and corresponding loss of insight into their condition mean that they are cut off from the rest of humanity, beyond the circuit of sympathetic interconnection that, in Smith’s theory, is the force binding societies together. If the mad may generate expressions of sympathy from others, they nevertheless remain outsiders, solitary inhabitants of a self-inclosed world.

Smith’s comments apply to those afflicted by the most extreme forms of madness, who entirely lack any awareness of and insight into their own situation. However, the writings of the moral philosophers share with the Waverley novels an intense interest in less-extreme states, ones in which the suffering of afflicted individuals is painfully augmented by an acute awareness of their plight and the challenge of finding some means to ameliorate it or risk a potentially irreversible aggravation of the disorder. Amelioration may come through communication; to tell of some sorrow or painful episode is inevitably to subject it to a process of ordering by narrative and, literally, to being shared and

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69 Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 12. Smith adds that the mad person is himself insensible of his plight. Therefore, the pity generated in the spectator is unusual in that it cannot be “the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer.” In Scott’s novel’s that the mad are aware of their plight considerably complicates the operations of sympathy or pity. For a discussion of the connection between sympathy and theatricality which results from the impossibility of ever really entering into someone else’s sentiments (even when they are not mad) see David Marshall, The Surprising Effects of Sympathy (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 3-5.
thereby diminished in terms of the burden felt by the one individual. Sympathy, Smith
tells us, “enlivens joy and alleviates grief” and only rarely is the mind disturbed to such
an extent that it cannot be soothed by company.⁷⁰ “Society and conversation,” Smith
concludes, “are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquillity.”
This is so both because the mere presence of the other has some effect in moderating an
individual’s sorrow or passion, and the actual process of communicating one’s
experiences requires a conscious effort to keep the emotions composed since very
extreme mental states are likely to generate only curiosity rather than sympathy in others.
Individuals may be isolated by circumstances but also by their refusal (or inability) to
temper their feelings in order to render their experiences communicable to the
sympathetic other. Moreover, such isolation leaves the individual vulnerable to an
erosion of self-control, an inability to take corrective measures against entrapment in the
memory of their affliction or painful experience. It is then through the discovery of the
other with whom a sorrow may be shared, and through the process of telling—even when
that process in some measure involves a possibly painful imaginative reliving of past
events—that we again become “masters of ourselves” and the proper hierarchy in the
ordering of memories is restored.⁷¹

Writings by the moral philosophers also show a concern with extreme states of
mind which may be categorised as morbidly contagious or self-perpetuating rather than
amenable to amelioration and modification through communication as a means of
sharing. Such extreme states or passions verge on madness, and they may so work on the
mind as to cause it to come increasingly under their domination. They thereby overrule or
exclude the moderating influences of other, more personally and socially beneficial,

⁷⁰ Smith 14 & 22.

⁷¹ Smith 23.
sentiments. Thomas Reid disputes Hume’s use of “passion” to refer to every principle of action in the mind, and adopts from Francis Hutcheson a more precise use of the word to refer only to “turbulent and vehement” emotions. Reid bases his preference upon a notion of the mind’s ability, in some circumstances, to engage in a disciplined process of reflection:

[our natural desires and affections may be so calm as to leave room for reflection, so that we find no difficulty in deliberating coolly, whether, in such a particular instance, they ought to be gratified or not. On other occasions, they may be so importunate as to make deliberation very difficult, urging us, by a kind of violence, to their immediate gratification.]

Reid further argues that “[p]assion, or violent appetite, first blinds the understanding, and then perverts the will.” If passion is defined as “some agitation of mind, which is opposed to that state of tranquillity and composure, in which a man is most master of himself,” we can understand how violent passion is related to madness since both represent a loss of self-command and ability to reason calmly. And, although Reid states that passion is essential to give life and vigour to the human individual--hence his ringing claim that without passion “man would be a slug”--its great danger lies in its resistance to being kept within bounds, or remaining subject to a sense of perspective and rational judgment. The influence of passion on the mind may be utterly disastrous: “[i]t turns the thoughts involuntarily to the objects related to it, so that a man can hardly think of anything else. It gives often a strange bias to the judgment, making a man quicksighted in everything that tends to inflame his passion, and to justify it, but blind to every thing that

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73 Reid 180.
tends to moderate and allay it. Like a magic lantern, it raises up spectres and apparitions that have no reality, and throws false colours upon every object.”74 This striking and telling description is one of a mind that gradually loses its connection to an external reality and becomes locked within its own distortions.

Dugald Stewart’s discussion of passion in *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* follows Reid’s account to such an extent that his section on malevolent affections is a virtual paraphrase. In common with Reid, Stewart stresses the effects of passion on both body and mind when he states that “a sensible agitation or commotion of the body is produced; our reason disturbed; we lose, in some measure, the power of self-command, and are hurried to action by an almost irresistible impulse.”75 However, while Reid singles out the desire of emulation and resentment as the two most significant of the “malevolent affections,” Stewart focuses in particular on resentment and its effects. In fact, he concludes that, in common speech, it is generally to resentment that we refer when we speak of passion. The reason for this popular identification of resentment with passion lies in its exceptional ability to upset the mind’s equilibrium: Stewart argues, in terms that prove resonant for the depiction of madwomen in the Waverley novels, that “this affection disturbs the reason more, and leaves us less the power of self-government, than any other active principle of our nature.”76

Believing that any philosophy of mind must encompass the study of both society and consciousness, Stewart is acutely aware of the dangers any excessive indulgence in resentment can pose to a stable community and the individual. Like Reid, he believes that a moral sense is intuitive in humans but, if such a sense is not fostered and cultivated in

74 Reid 176.
75 Stewart 102.
76 Stewart 102.
early education, the knowledge of what constitutes right action may be overwhelmed by “the animal or instinctive impulse” which may propel an individual to do wrong and, thereafter, habitually to follow such a course. As a corrective to this threat, education is singled out as especially or even uniquely potent. Education produces its effects “by cooperating with the natural principles of mind” or through “the law of our constitution” which, following Lockean associationist psychology, Stewart identifies as the innate tendency of the mind to form associations of ideas. Locke, in a statement that was immeasurably influential on the future course of psychiatry, had proposed that the mad “do not appear to have lost the Faculty of Reasoning but having joined together some Ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for Truths, and they err as men do that argue right from wrong Principles.” The corollary is that a simple corrective to wrong thinking is reeducation. By encouraging reflection or calm deliberation, Stewart argues, education supplies tools first for “suppressing . . . the external signs of peevishness, or of violence” and for correcting what he calls “mental disorders.” And once those external or somatic signs are controlled, through the allied further process of calm thought and rational assessment “much may be done to produce a gradual alteration in the state of mind; and to render us not only more agreeable to others, but more happy in ourselves.”

Arguments about the individual’s ability to control his or her responses equally to external and internal stimuli and thus to limit or resist the damaging effects of obsessive thoughts, immoderate passion, prolonged grief, or melancholic depression also play a central role in the medical debate about the causes and etiology of insanity. The attention paid by both the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers and late eighteenth and early

77 Stewart 273.
78 Locke 161.
79 Stewart 274-75. In general, education has an important place in Stewart’s discussion.
nineteenth century doctors to identifying techniques for schooling the mind meant that many mental disorders came to be thought of as preventable. Contemporary trends in medicine favoured programmes of “moral management” which were based on notions of the mind’s innate receptiveness—something which can be damaging when it comes to mental disorders but could be turned to good account in terms of the learned modification of behaviours and thoughts.

If moral management came to dominate the asylum-based care of the insane, its correlative in the wider society was education which, particularly in the popular treatises that focus on the schooling and conduct of young women, stressed moderation, self-discipline, and a practical scepticism that would function as a brake on the imagination.

The female mind was to be trained in habits of thought and mental pursuits that would prevent a single subject from being fastened on for any prolonged period, and education was to armour the mind against the disruptive force of an excessive or inappropriate love attachment, ideal imaginings, or a religious enthusiasm. As Alan Richardson notes, writers of educational treatises “asserted the need for a more substantial education and condemned the emphasis on superficial “accomplishments”” that dominated girls’ education.

Implicit in these arguments is a belief that “substance” in education can provide the ballast necessary to guard against mental disorders; an article in the

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82 There is an extensive literature on women’s education in the period. A particularly useful account is in: Alan Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 167-202.

83 Richardson 170.
Quarterly Review says that the only counter to the overload of sensory data in modern society is to make ourselves "as independent as possible of external circumstances." That is, the disciplining structure of a "substantial" education that trains the mind will also cultivate an inner self, stably grounded in knowledge and principles, and resistant equally to the corrosive influences of multiplying external impressions and a preoccupation with a single idea or belief.

Complicating notions of the possibly preventable nature of certain disorders were questions about the physiological basis of mental phenomena. As Scott's journal entries make clear, contemporary thought understood the relationship between the various bodily organs to be mediated by the nervous system, which in turn is exquisitely sensitive to and can be profoundly affected by the feelings, passions, memories, and impressions that are a function of mind. To be "nervous" or "irritable" meant to have this system in a hyperalert, over-stimulated, and tightly strung (rather than "elastic") state; the terms had a precise meaning indicating an agitation of the nerves which, if not controlled or resolved, produces a seriously deleterious and possibly permanent effect on the entire vascular system and, in particular, on the brain. Although this understanding of the basic principles of action and reaction in human physiology was widely accepted—as too was a recognition of the underlying and necessary interconnection between the material body that included the brain, and the mind or psyche—opinion varied considerably on questions concerning the extent and importance of the physical basis of mental phenomena.

However, both those who stressed the physical causes and those who favoured metaphysical explanations shared in an insistence on the mutual influences of mind and body whereby the prolonged indulgence of certain passions could actually cause some physical abnormality to develop in the brain because of the disturbance in the nervous system or, alternatively, a "pressure on the brain" might result in the individual

84 [David Uwins], "Insanity and Madhouses," Quarterly Review 15 (1816): 398.
exhibiting strange behaviours, delusions, or obsessions.

As many critics and historians have noted, contemporary beliefs about the role of the body in mediating mental phenomena were especially important in shaping a perception that women are particularly susceptible to nervous disorders.85 Scott’s journal comment about women and madness notwithstanding, there was a widespread and pressing awareness that women’s more delicate, less robust physical constitution makes their overall nervous system and, in particular, the vascular system of their brains, especially vulnerable to what Thomas Gisborne, in a treatise on education, called an “irritability” linked to “unsteadiness of mind.”86 Other causes of women’s susceptibility to mental disorders relate more particularly to their emotional and imaginative life. However, these too find their origins in the facts of biology, the delicacy of minds characterised by an innate emotional sensibility and vulnerability to the potentially malign influence of the imagination. Mary Poovey and John Mullan note the paradox of the contemporary valuation of women’s sensibility and compassion that combined with a fear of its excesses.87 This is relevant too for the privileging of women’s affective life in terms of their relationship to family and children since the dark side of a “natural” female attachment to others is the pathological grief which can come about because of a sudden rupture of emotional ties. In the popular case studies which increasingly dominated

85 An excellent summary of contemporary views with specific relevance for a Scottish context can be found in: Guenter B. Risse, “Hysteria at the Edinburgh Infirmary: the Construction and Treatment of a Disease, 1770-1800,” Medical History 32 (1988): 1-22. Risse’s article is based on his analysis of lecture notes and patient histories from the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, which treated working class women. He thus refutes the notion that hysteria was a diagnosis applied only to upper-class women, and he presents a range of data about the realities of treatment in the Infirmary and the causes that led women to seek care.


contemporary medical texts, women are frequently described as suffering from a mental disorder because of the death of a loved one; in accounts of male insanity such losses are rarely designated as the cause.\(^{88}\)

If it was hoped that some aspects of women’s vulnerability could be limited through a careful programme of education, other factors identified to be of importance in causing mental disorders in women were understood to be much less amenable to control. In particular, the delicate and complex nature of women’s biological functioning and the diseases to which they are uniquely susceptible during pregnancy and parturition were associated with an increased vulnerability to madness. John Haslam, the surgeon at Bethlem and author of a number of popular works on insanity, claims that “[t]he natural processes which women undergo, of menstruation, parturition, and of preparing nutriment for the infant, together with the diseases to which they are subject at these periods, and which are frequently remote causes of insanity, may, perhaps, serve to explain their greater disposition to this malady.”\(^{89}\) Although Haslam here states his conclusions in what is for him an uncharacteristically hesitant manner, his views were widely shared by other doctors and, in fact, the notion of a special susceptibility to madness that occurred at the time of childbirth played a role in contemporary legal arguments about infanticide.\(^{90}\)

If medical texts tended, however, to convey an image of women as unlikely to pass through life without being struck at one period or another by some form of mental illness, these accounts took their place within a contemporary debate about a wholesale


\(^{89}\) Haslam 108.

increase in the numbers of those afflicted with a psychopathology. If certain forms of illness were identified as being most prevalent among women or, even, as female-specific, there was also a general concern with the toxic mental effects of modern life or, as Scott's journal establishes, with the fear that some aspects of the mind might tend to escape control by the self-regulating and observant consciousness. A developing sense of optimism about the preventable nature of some mental disorders was accompanied by a dismayed perception of the ever-greater numbers of the types of disorder and of the afflicted—both men and women. The dark side of historical progress was its role in causing this increase in sufferers from a range of more or less debilitating disorders.

David Uwins, the author of a number of informative articles published on the subject in the Quarterly Review, comments that 'insanity being an evil almost confined to the social state, it would seem a very natural supposition, that with the progress of refinement and the multiplication of artificial excitants, mental derangement and disease would also increase.' Uwins's remarks date from 1821, but claims for the increase date back to the beginning of the century and, according to contemporary statistical analysis, the situation was only deteriorating, with the rate of increase in the numbers of the afflicted far outstripping the general rate of population increase. In the years of the Napoleonic wars, post-war economic depression and unrest, growing industrialisation and the attendant tremendous social change, concern about an epidemic of mental disease was intricately and inextricably bound up with issues of nationalism and the cultivation of the morally upright, dependable, and healthy citizen, free alike from nervous disorders and "morbid introspection." Fears generated by an awareness of the association

91 [David Uwins], "Burrows on Insanity." Quarterly Review 24 (1821): 176.

92 Uwins (1821) 179.

93 For an account of "morbid introspection" as a diagnostic category in the mid to late nineteenth century, see Michael J. Clark, "'Morbid Introspection', unsoundness of mind and British psychological medicine, c. 1830-1900," The Anatomy of Madness, eds. W. Bynum, R. Porter, and M. Shepherd, vol. 3 (London:
between a prevalence of mental disorders and the advanced state of civilisation in a modern nation, struck at the heart of concerns about social or national stability, and accounts often stress the vulnerability of a psychologically weakened population, and the potential for the reversal or undoing of progress itself.

The question of whether these claims about an epidemic of madness were empirically justified is perhaps now undecidable. One explanation for the perceived increase is that, in this period, more types of behaviours than ever before were being identified as evidence of a mild or more severe psychopathology. With the diagnostic net being cast wider, greater numbers of people came to understand themselves as afflicted by some type of disorder, and they (like Scott) developed the habit of an introspective self-analysis intended to identify and root out problems before they could fully develop. This understanding of individual vulnerability is complexly intertwined with a changing ethos of concern for the care of the mad, which was in part fostered by the widespread dissemination of information about actual conditions in the asylums during the years of the government-appointed Select Committee’s investigation into the matter. But the increasingly inescapable realization that no-one can claim to be immune from any and all forms of mental disorder was undoubtedly also significant in changing attitudes. When madness is domesticated, so to speak, it becomes perhaps less alien but also more frightening. In an 1816 article in the *Quarterly Review*, David Uwins comments on the horrors of a state “which seems to deprive man for a time of the destiny of his being, and link him with perishable matter . . . severs the bond of social and domestic affection, and

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Routledge, 1988) 71-101. Clark especially notes the issue of controlling the power of the imagination (77).


95 For a contemporary account that quotes extensively from the Committee’s report, see Fitton 431-71. The most comprehensive recent account is in Leonard D. Smith 2-7. For a critical discussion, see Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700-1900* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).
places a barrier of separation between man and his fellow man”:

Nothing, indeed, can weigh in the smallest degree against mental sickness,--against that state in which the imagination is only active as the agent of cruelty--in which conscience, always alive to guilt, is now furnished with the tormenting implements of fancy and fear;--when there are no distinct impressions upon the brain but those of misery;--when all besides this is indistinctness, tumult, hurry, distraction.\footnote{Uwins (1816) 388. The article was written at the height of the debate over government regulation of madhouses, and Uwins is strongly supportive of the proposed reforms.} Uwins is describing “real madness” which he defines as a state in which “the imaginative ideas become so vivid as to be exalted to the strength of actual belief.”\footnote{Uwins (1816) 390.} If this condition is comparatively rare, he notes that it shares a family resemblance with less pronounced states. Another writer in the Quarterly begins an article on the same subject with the observation that “[f]ew persons have passed through life, without experiencing, at certain moments, some affections of the mind, which approach very near to the character of true mania” and he lists “[t]he dreams of the poet, the fables of the mythologist, and the fictions of the romancer . . . as subordinate varieties of the wanderings of an imagination, freed from the restraint of a conformity with dull matter of fact.”\footnote{Rev. of Haslam, Arnold, etc. on Insanity, Quarterly Review 2 (1809): 155.}

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The preceding discussion attempts to show how, in Scott’s time, various beliefs and anxieties clustered around ideas of mental illness or psychological disorders to provide a
means for talking about the psychological consequences of social change, the penetrability of the mind of an individual who is psychologically, intellectually, and morally unprotected, and the potential for the traumatised person to retreat into a radically circumscribed and self-sustaining private world of memory and obsession. Despite Scott’s expressed opinion about the relative infrequency of insanity in women, the Waverley novels insistently localise these concerns in the madwoman—a figure whose literary antecedents unite associations of social unrest, transgression, contagion and theatricality, or the ascendancy of primal passions in particularly compelling and yet deeply familiar ways. While Scott’s representations of madwomen often explicitly draw on an inherited literary tradition to exploit or stress the apparently timeless universality of such figures, his madwomen are also always the product of specific historical forces and events, of the cataclysmic clashes between opposing beliefs, cultures, and values that the novels repeatedly portray. Their mental states may be the product of destructive modes of thought but they are also shown to be forged in the crucible of a history that creates victims as well as victors, losers as well as winners.

The stories of one group of madwomen stress the dissonance between a private remembrance of old wrongs or beliefs that still carry a latent potential to divide a community or to cause further traumatic disruptions, and a public history that looks to the past for instruction rather than inspiration while remaining acutely aware of the dangers of certain ways of thinking and remembering. Although in general the goals and beliefs of these women are not those evidently endorsed by the novels, the group is not homogenous and, as Chapters One and Two argue, while some of the depictions do allow for the development of a measure of readerly sympathy for the woman’s fate, others are more likely to stress the gross and irremediable deformity of the woman’s psyche. In contrast, the stories of the tragic heroines discussed in the remaining chapters record the vulnerability of young women who find themselves pawns in struggles to establish
supremacy or accumulate power and wealth. For these women, whose stories evoke troubling questions about both female morality and the requirement to be obedient even to an unreasonable or cruel authority, psychological distress evolves in situations where they are denied agency, shut out of history, or painfully alienated from the healing possibilities of telling and listening that promote sympathy. Another Scott heroine, Eveline Berenger, laments that it is peculiarly women's lot to "feel in the spirit a more keen anguish than the body knows, and in the gnawing sense of present ill and fear of future misery, suffer a living death." The "living death" described by Eveline forcefully expresses a condition of psychological entrapment. In different ways, it is this entrapment which the Waverley novels register as quintessentially that of the madwoman.

Chapter 1

Sibyls, Hags, and Avenging Furies

"The Highland Widow," one of two stories in Chronicles of the Canongate (1827), has as its ostensible source a memorandum presented to the "author" Crystal Croftangry, by Mrs Bethune Baliol. During a Highland tour, Mrs Baliol visits a place which her local guide advises her is "not canny" because of the solitary presence there of an old woman, Elspat MacTavish. Pressed for the story of one whose appearance seems charged with allegorical or Biblical significance and interest, Donald MacLeish tries to convey something of the woman's nature by insisting that "she has been a fearfu' bad woman" ("Highland Widow" 162). When Mrs Baliol mishears this as "mad woman," Donald prefaces his actual telling of Elspat's history with a somewhat hesitant assurance that the case is not actually one of full-blown insanity:

"No--she is not mad," replied Donald; for then it may be she would be happier than she is; though when she thinks on what she has done, and caused to be done, rather than yield up a hair-breadth of her ain wicked will, it is not likely she can be very well settled. But she neither is mad nor mischievous; and yet, my leddy, I think you had best not go nearer to her. ("Highland Widow" 163).

That Donald thus advises Mrs Baliol to keep her distance from the old woman indicates the extent to which, in the popular imagination, Elspat and her dwelling have come to be identified as a site of potential infection, the zone of the outcast from which society must

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1 [Sir Walter Scott], "The Highland Widow," Chronicles of the Canongate, First Series, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1827) 160. Subsequent page references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
insulate itself. Although Mrs Baliol's response is more sophisticated than Donald's, the story proves to be one that she hears "with a mixture of horror and sympathy." When she actually approaches Elspat, Mrs Baliol witnesses what might indeed be madness reflected in her evident mental suffering and this creates and sustains an unbridgeable gap between the two women. In Elspat's eyes "shone the wild and troubled light that indicates an unsettled mind" and she "seemed a being rapt by the very intensity of her affliction above the sphere of ordinary humanities" ("Highland Widow" 165).

The story that in *Chronicles of the Canongate* is wrapped in layers of narrative, observation, and speculation is starkly terrible in its details and import. The wife of a Highlander and fiercely independent cateran, Elspat was fighting by her husband's side when he was brutally slain. Subsequently she raises her son in the belief that his destiny is to adopt his father's cause for his own while the impoverished circumstances of life in their lonely cottage combined with the intense fervour of Elspat's conviction make her indifferent to "the substitution of civil order for military violence" that gradually transforms the country ("Highland Widow" 173). Her own imagination is preoccupied with "anticipating the future from recollections of the past" ("Highland Widow" 192). However, although her command over her son has an absolute "imperious authority," it lacks, we are told, "[t]he moral principle which so naturally and justly occurs to the mind of those who have been educated under a settled government of laws" ("Highland Widow" 177 & 185-86). In time, the adult Hamish perceives that only by leaving home can he escape from Elspat's unyielding domination and the burden of an inheritance of hatred and violence. However, when Elspat learns that her son has joined a Highland

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regiment of the British army, she mounts a fierce opposition to his perceived treachery. Hamish responds by telling his mother, "you walk as it were in a dream, surrounded by the phantoms of those who have long been with the dead" but even he fails to recognise just how powerfully inclusive that dream is ("Highland Widow" 200-01). Elspat drugs her son to prevent him from rejoining his unit and, later, Hamish submits to her passionate urging and kills the potentially conciliatory sergeant who seeks him out. Hamish is then executed as a deserter and a murderer. When Elspat hears of her son's death, she utters a final denunciatory curse before lapsing into a silent state where "the world was to her a wilderness, in which she remained without thought, care, or interest, absorbed in her own grief, indifferent to everything else" ("Highland Widow" 282).

In the end, Elspat simply disappears and this seems the logical final stage for one who, in life, has abjured human companionship and its possible consolations. Local conjecture has it that she may have done as animals do and retreated to some remote den to await death. If so, this would confirm what has already been implied about the nature of Elspat's understanding. Isolated from society, conversation, and sympathy, a mind prone to fanaticism and obsessive beliefs has returned at the last to an elemental primitivism, an affinity with some feral urge. This conjecture is countered by others: perhaps Elspat has drowned or, according to her more suspicious neighbours, perhaps she has completed her reputed pact with the devil. "The Highland Widow" concludes abruptly, leaving open the possibility of different interpretations. By directing attention to the business of narrative transmission and reception, the ending contrasts vividly with the kind of closed telling and interpretation favoured by Elspat.

How are we to judge Elspat's story and the terrible consequences of her obsession with the past? Is the old woman "mad," "bad," or both? Elspat stands as a late reworking of figures who appear in a group of novels that includes Guy Mannering, The Antiquary.
Rob Roy, Ivanhoe, The Abbot, and The Pirate, and the stark telling of her tale in “The Highland Widow” brings into sharp focus issues associated with characters who, like Elspat, are ambiguous and troubling. Famously, the Waverley novels have as their great themes civil war and strife, change and continuity, the origins of the present. But the novels also reveal a fascination with those areas of human experience that seem to be outside of rational accounting; with the persistence of doomed beliefs and causes, and an obsessive desire for revenge. The ancient bodies and scarred psyches of women like Elspat--Meg Merrilies, Elspeth Meiklebackit, Helen MacGregor, Ulrica Wolfganger, Magdalen Graeme, and Norna of the Fitful Head—seem vividly expressive of the cost to the individual of traumatic events such as dispossession, social marginalisation, and rape or sexual victimisation as acts of war and conquest. But the novels, like the short story, never allow us to identify these women solely as victims because, in important ways, they are represented as being fully implicated in their fate. In “The Highland Widow” when Mrs Balfour travels to the Highlands it is with the ostensible purpose of visiting the sites of long-ago battles—those reminders of civil strife whose function as tourist attractions serves to measure present distance from a violent past. Elspat functions here almost as a counter-site, the embodiment of another version of intensely localised memory. She is a visible reminder of the potential for national political conflict to persist in potently destructive ways at the level of the domestic and of individual memory. To look at Elspat is to see an individual who has chosen entrapment by the past, and who, by clinging to notions of the primary bonds of paternal and ethnic inheritance, has ultimately destroyed her one hope for the future.

If the other women share with Elspat an appearance of age, of a life painfully stretched beyond its desirable limit, they also share her blinkered obsession with a single idea. Moreover, these women repeatedly generate speculation about their sanity and
whether their behaviour should be assessed and judged in medical or moral terms. In representing these women, the novels' focus is on obsessional states which are persistently associated with the adoption of certain views about history and the endurance of the past. Elspat, for example, remains unaware of changes in society and the political order because these changes belong to a progressive history from which she, with her notions of tribal identity and inheritance, is alienated. Typically, the issue of whether such views are a symptom or a cause of psychopathology is left deliberately unresolved because the characters' narrative interest is dependent on their ability to sustain moral awareness of the nature of their predicament and the implications of their behaviour. When Donald MacLeish says that Elspat would be happier were she completely insane, he presumably means that she would then lack insight into her condition and its causes. In general, the novels are less interested in showing unequivocally that a particular individual is insane than in exploring the narrative, ideological, and symbolic potential of characters whose place in all respects—historically, geographically, and psychologically—is on the edge.

In a suggestive discussion of Old Mortality, Ina Ferris shows how the enabling condition of Scott's narrative model is produced by an emphasis on differentiating the past as memory from the past as history. She argues that "[w]hereas the past as memory turns the narrative act into commemoration or execration . . . the past as history defines the narrative act more self-consciously as reflection (in several senses) and interpretation." To consign an event to history (rather than to engrave it on memory) may be to make possible a move out of violence, repetition, and circularity. But the ability to do so depends on the self-conscious adoption of a distancing perspective, the willingness to see the past as then and not now, there and not here. This perspective is

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3 Ferris 167.
what the madwomen lack. Entrapped by an endlessly reduplicating image of the past or of certain formative events they respond as Elspat does when she anticipates the future from her recollections of the past: their imaginative failure involves neglecting to seek any way out of such patterns of thought. Hamish reminds his mother that “yesterday was yesterday . . . and today is today” but Elspat has pledged to remember the past in all its specificity and horror; she yet hears in her head her own mother’s voice telling stories of massacres and she believes that it is her duty in turn to pass on the legacy of this haunting voice (“Highland Widow” 203). But Scott’s tale reveals this to be history as a morass that holds individuals and societies fixed in time and place. For Elspat there can be no change because ancient enmities flow in the blood and are deep-rooted in a landscape whose details memorialise each sacrifice, moment of suffering, and painful death. There are, she believes, two opposing and irreconcilable choices: to remember (which is an expression of faith) or to forget (which is a betrayal of the sacred dead). The problem for Hamish (as in progressively less immediate ways it is for Donald MacLeish, Mrs Bariol, Croftangry, and, ultimately, the reader) is to keep from being drawn into the powerfully self-sufficient and self-replicating dimensions of Elspat’s thought, to sustain a perspective that registers the horror but also takes the further step, through sympathy, of humanely acknowledging the suffering. It is this last which, in moral terms, is crucial to distinguishing between entrapment and critical awareness, observed and observer.

**Meg Merrilies: The Exceptional Prototype**

As Ferris shows, the Waverley novels generally associate views of the past as never-to-be forgotten experience with the violent cataclysms of civil war. But Elspat’s story suggests that when the individual who is committed to the past as memory is a woman, the effects
may be felt close to home. Her actions transform a narrowly domestic realm into a place of violence and personal destruction. However, Scott’s earlier tellings of the madwoman story are not always so severe and, typically, they plot a way out of the impasse that, in “The Highland Widow,” sees both the death of Hamish and Elspat’s punishment by a survival that is fruitless in every sense. Nineteenth-century readers understood the great prototype of the madwomen figures to be Meg Merrilies and, on the publication of Guy Mannering in 1815, readers and reviewers alike enthusiastically celebrated the depiction of the Gypsy woman who was to become one of Scott’s best-known characters. To read Meg’s story backwards from the perspective afforded by Chronicles of the Canongate is to register the degree to which the Gypsy becomes increasingly sympathetic through the course of a novel that also chronicles the events which gradually neutralise her power.

Guy Mannering has a double plot in which a pattern of loss and exile in the first part is followed by one of homecoming, recognition, and restoration in the second. In its review, the Augustan Review called Meg “the great agent” of the novel, and it is Meg who supplies the crucial links that forge the necessary connections between the two parts to facilitate a resolution. The novel has been the subject of detailed analysis by critics who have illuminated the significance of the double plot and the structure of its parallelism. Recently, Katie Trumpener, in her study of the historical novel and the

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4 Properly speaking, Meg Merrilies’ depiction must be said to owe something to that in Waverley of Janet Gellatly, the old Highlander who is accused of witchcraft. But Janet has only a minor role in the earlier novel and functions to indicate the archaic but mutually supportive nature of the relationship between the Baron of Bradwardine and the old woman he tries to protect. Janet’s story is told by Rose Bradwardine in a way that emphasises its remoteness. For an account of Meg’s popularity and of the various representations of her as a picturesque figure, see Peter Garside, “Picturesque Figure and landscape: Meg Merrilies and the gypsies,” Copley and Garside 145-74.

5 Rev. of Guy Mannering, Augustan Review 1 (July 1815): 232. Extracts from this review are reprinted in Hayden 87-89.

national tale, has paid attention specifically to the character and function of Meg Merrilies. Trumpener identifies Meg as an agent of memory; the Gypsy presides over a recovery of childhood memory by the lost (that is, kidnapped) heir, Harry Bertram, while, simultaneously, she works to restore him to his paternal estate. Intent on tracing the modes by which the novel represents and forges links between nation and empire, Trumpener notes that Meg (who, as a Gypsy, is historically associated with an Eastern zone to which both Guy Mannering and Harry Bertram have connections) embodies these links and thereby “raises the political questions that haunt the rest of the novel.” She argues, however, that the authority of Meg’s speech and social analysis is undermined by the repeated emphasis on the Gypsy woman’s madness. Ultimately the result of this, Trumpener concludes, is severely to diminish the force of Meg’s message so that, by the end of the novel, the Gypsy serves as a primarily conservative force.

Trumpener’s elucidation of the links between a broad horizon of imperial activity and a more narrowly domestic plot, and the psychological dissonance engendered by a simultaneous awareness of both is an important one. However, her discussion does not closely examine the precise nature of Meg’s message. Nor is it entirely clear that this message, as she claims, undergoes modification through the course of Guy Mannering. Indeed it may be precisely the point that Meg’s plan remains firmly fixed to a pattern set


8 A problem with Trumpener’s argument is, however, that she gets the plot wrong in an essential point. This does not invalidate her general argument, but it is of significant consequence for her reading of Meg. At least one reviewer has noted the error; see David C. Lipscomb, rev. of Bardic Nationalism, by Katie Trumpener, Wordsworth Circle 28 (1997) : 249-51.
in the early days of Harry Bertram’s life. Moreover because, like Elspat and the other characters who resemble her, Meg is not a woman whose inner thoughts and motives the narrator claims to know, she remains at some level unfathomable and inaccessible. Certainly Guy Mannering is alert to the historical and social determinants of Meg’s plight as a woman doubly outcast by virtue of her racial affiliation and the individual peculiarities that even the other Gypsies remark upon. But it is also notable that her representation is characterised by a shifting and often ambivalent control of distance and perspective. This is an element that recurs, with significant modifications, in the later novels and it is worth noting here in some detail especially since it affects any assessment of the narrative import of Meg’s “message.” The apparent inaccessibility of the madwoman’s inner thoughts may be a function of her alterity and estrangement from normative patterns of thought and memory, but it also marks a highly desirable distance between narrator and narrated, or observer and observed. In Guy Mannering this distance generates the space for a certain protective wariness in interpreting Meg’s goals, speech, and the contours of her story.

The two parts of Guy Mannering each include significant encounters between Meg and male travellers who, benighted, wander off their expected paths to encounter worlds that require decipherment and interpretation. In the first of these, involving the English Guy Mannering, the distancing techniques that are an important aspect of Meg’s representation are clearly evident. Mannering is immediately struck by Meg’s bizarre appearance and apparent gender ambiguity. Remarkably tall, Meg wears clothes that are more masculine than feminine. Mannering notes too that her “dark elf-locks shot out like the snakes of the gorgon” and that “her eye had a wild roll that indicated something like real or affected insanity.” The description reveals an attempt to interpret Meg’s

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appearance by invoking stereotypes, but it also stresses how Meg’s true nature remains undecided. Mannering cannot know if she is truly mad or merely an accomplished actress. Later he sees her framed by the ruins of the old Bertram castle where, like one of the Fates, Meg spins and chants Harry Bertram’s nativity. But, although Mannering listens intently, all he can produce is a paraphrase of a song to which we as readers are therefore granted only mediated access. The motif of translation is one that recurs particularly with reference to the madwomen, in such novels as *The Antiquary, Ivanhoe, The Pirate*, and *The Heart of Midlothian*.

The encounter between Meg and Harry Bertram, the returning and as yet unknowing and unrecognized heir, recapitulates the first with Mannering. But because Bertram is himself in a highly anomalous legal and social situation and because of his former childhood connection to the Gypsy, the distance between him and Meg threatens to diminish or even to break down entirely. Mannering overhears Meg singing a birth prophecy in the light of the morning sun; Bertram hears a death chant at night in a desolate building. Moreover, Bertram’s desperate plight makes necessary his dependence on the Gypsy; she cannot remain for him a local curiosity viewed from some distance. As Mannering had done more than twenty years earlier, Bertram tries to read Meg’s appearance for clues to her character and motivation but he can see only that “her withered and dark countenance” reveals no hint of “those feelings of compassion which females, even in their most degraded state, can seldom altogether smother.” He concludes that Meg so far violates the norms of female character that she must be mad or under the

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references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text. A discussion of the relationship between the various elements in Meg’s appearance and the picturesque is in Garside. “Picturesque figure and landscape.”

10 For the view that the scene represents Bertram’s estrangement from his past, see David Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1979) 38.
influence of "some internal, and probably capricious association of feelings" (Mannering 146). His diagnosis draws on the prevailing associationist theories of mind, and thereby shows that Bertram's educated views are clearly removed from more superstitious ones that see Meg as a witch. But it also suggests an attempt firmly to maintain a space between Bertram and the Gypsy--a space nevertheless threatened by Bertram’s awareness that Meg's mysterious talk, directions, and gnomic utterances imply a deep familiarity with his personal past of which the details are yet obscure to him. Bertram may be able to observe Meg at her work and draw conclusions about what he sees, but she in turn seems able to look into him and his history with uncanny prescience. Somewhat later Bertram's assessment of what ails Meg becomes more explicit: "[t]he woman is insane," he thinks. In turn, the Gypsy proves herself fully aware of how she appears when she asserts: "I am not mad, although I have had eneugh to make me sae--I am not mad, nor doating, nor drunken--I know what I am asking, and I know it has been the will of God to preserve you in strange dangers, and that I shall be the instrument to set you in your father's seat again" (Mannering 152-53). Rather than a function of madness, her actions, she insists, are the product of her special knowledge and ability to discern in Bertram's life a teleology whose purport and direction remains inaccessible to him or to others. Meg lays claim then to a prophetic capacity, an ability to see through the limited or muddled perspective of the present to trace the shaping patterns of Bertram’s life.

Meg further insists that her words have a performative agency. It is this quality that she invokes in the dramatic scene of her denunciation of Godfrey Bertram for his eviction of the Gypsies from their "city of refuge" (Mannering 37). The Gypsy claims--

11 The Biblical cities of refuge offered protection to individuals accused of accidental killing. The significance of the phrase's use in Mannering is difficult to gauge. Some writers who, in the period of the novel's composition, considered the "problem" of the Gypsies, asserted that integration was essential in order to ensure both a reduction in crime and widespread access to education amongst the gipsies. Although the novel is critical of Bertram's specific methods, it seems probable that Scott also felt that breaking up the
and the novel seems to confirm—that her outsider status and its associated suffering confer a potency on her words so that, as she nears death, these words stand as an emblem of a stark truth that can no longer be suppressed. “When I was in life,” she says on her death-bed, “I was the mad randy gypsey, that had been scourged, and banished, and branded, that had begged from door to door, and been hounded like a stray tyke from parish to parish—wha would hae minded her word?—But now I am a dying woman, and my words will not fall to the ground, any more than the earth will cover my blood!” (Mannering 337-38). The Biblical cadences and invocation in Meg’s speech of the essential suffering of the archetypal outsider are powerfully emotive. The speech seems both to affirm and create Meg’s worth: the words spoken at death have a weight, a resonance, and an endurance that exceeds that of the individual who utters them and the private history of the speaker falls away to reveal something more elemental. If there is madness here, it is akin to the ecstasy of ancient prophets who speak truths for all time.

This, at least, is how Meg sees it. But the novel leaves the issue of Meg’s madness less firmly resolved. At a late stage and as part of the process of transferring Meg’s story about Harry Bertram from its place in female memory to a written record under the care of the lawyer Pleydell, the question is reinvoked of whether Meg is insane or acting. As Pleydell notes, the answer eludes us because to play a role may be, after all, to believe in its truth (Mannering 299). Meg’s psychology is not given its own clearly defined history in the novel, and if we are invited to trace connections between the peculiarities of her thinking and certain social conditions, these reveal as much a reactive irrationality or a

encampments was an important first step in acculturation, and the ending of the novel validates this inference. For the gypsy problem see, for example, John Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Gypsies (York, 1816). Scott owned a copy of this book: see John George Cochrane, Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford, (Edinburgh: Constable, 1838) 202.

12 See Duncan 132-33.
pathologically intense and enduring response to experience as something closer to
 involuntary, a primitive system of thought and belief that belongs to a still-enchanted
 world in which prophets have real power, words are agents, and a retributive justice
 prevails. The distance separating Meg from Mannering and Bertram has as much to do
 with a historical difference as with a psychological one.

 Associated with this is another perplexing question concerning the nature of
 Meg’s aims in restoring Bertram to Ellangowan. What narratives of the past and future
 underpin these aims? Trumpener notes how Meg is the bearer of Bertram’s memory and
 that, in her nursing of him, she has a bardic function. When Bertram is held on Meg’s
 lap at Derncleugh to listen to “songs of the auld barons and their bloody wars,” he is
 given privileged access to such memories of his forebears as Meg thinks it her duty to
 transmit. Moreover it is Meg who identifies the hardy and adventurous child as the best
 hope for the Bertrams “since the death of Arth Mac-Dingawaie, that was killed in the
 battle o’ the Bloody Bay” and she speaks as familiarly of ancient events as if she had
 witnessed them (Mannering 40). As nurse and bard, Meg is the stern upholder and fierce
 advocate of a cultural memory which, like that of Elspat MacTavish, is characterised by a
 temporal sense coloured by no notion of distance and change. The past is not long ago;
 rather, it is here now in the memory of an old woman who strives to see the reanimation
 or resurrection of figures held in a memory which is both personal and cultural.

 It is in this context that Meg’s work on behalf of Bertram’s restoration must be
 understood. Her interest is in him not as an individual but as the promising representative

\footnote{\cite{Bewell1989} For a discussion relevant to this that focuses on Wordsworth’s anthropological interest in primitive
 thought and the relationship to sympathy, see Alan Bewell, \textit{Wordsworth and the Enlightenment} (New
 Haven: Yale UP, 1989) chap. 2 especially. pp. 71-78.}

\footnote{\cite{Trumpener2000} Trumpener 220. For a discussion of the long-standing association between nurse and bard, see also
 Warner 23-24.}
of a family to which she is devoted and which, as the narrator explains, has always favoured the losing side in Scotland's political struggles. Meg's reading of the Bertram history has an apocalyptic dimension to it that is in keeping with her concern for the family over the individual; she is the prophet who foretells a second coming. But the prophecy seems hardly propitious. Apart from the particular resonances of Arth Mac-Dingawaie's name with its implications of repeated senseless violence, we note that he did, after all, die at Bloody Bay. We note too that if, in his infancy, Bertram listened to Meg's tales, the returning adult acknowledges her familiarity while remaining essentially estranged from her--and from the plot into which she has written him. Even as Bertram remembers who he is, his precise memories of Meg are limited to a vague awareness of her presence at the kidnapping scene. If exile allows Bertram to become a man different from his father, it also means he can be distinguished from the models powerfully invoked by Meg. The sixteen year gap between kidnapping and return survives in the form of a profound difference in outlook and, although Bertram sees in Meg a figure who haunts his dreams, he (unlike Hamish MacTavish) will not be drawn into the powerful vortex of that dream. While he agrees blindly to follow her on the path that retraces his personal history, this does not constitute an agreement to pursue her into the more perilous regions leading to Bloody Bay.

Meg dies when the lost heir is acknowledged by the community as a Bertram. Because of her determination to effect just such a restoration, the death of the ancient woman at such a moment seems entirely appropriate. Out of the aged body of his long-ago guardian, the lost child is reborn into his inheritance. That Meg had foretold it would be so suggests just how narrowly her life has been bound to this one purpose. If Meg has possessed the secrets of the past, she has also been limited by them; she is the servant of
particular patterns and ways of seeing. The emblematic significance of the death, however, tends to minimise awareness of just how fortuitous it is. As Elizabeth Bronfen remarks about the death of another nineteenth-century literary madwoman—Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Rochester—death puts closure on her liminality and suppresses her power to disturb. For other characters, Meg’s death may serve as potently as the retelling of the events of Bertram’s kidnapping to open the way to a different future. That Meg dies means she can be sentimentalised; she can evoke tears from Bertram who can be grateful without ever having to confront the hard questions about her sanity, his indebtedness to her, the possibility of allowing the exiled Gypsy encampment to be rebuilt, and his desire or capacity to fulfil the role of warlike champion. When, in the orgy of rebuilding and debt repayment that occurs at the end of Mannering, Bertram plans to rebuild Meg’s cottage at Derncleugh, it is as a memorial. The cottage will be a home not for the potentially troublesome Gypsy but for a ghost in whom we may not believe; the memorial effectively consigns Meg to the past and contains that past.

**The withered souls of Elspeth Meiklebackit and Ulrica Wolfganger**

In general the depiction of Meg Merrilies has several significant elements that continue to figure in the representations of the madwoman in the later Waverley novels. These women are shown as vividly embedded in particular socio-historical contexts, and they are marginalised by their belonging to distinct minorities or subscribing to belief-systems which the novels associate with the dead ends of history. As a Gypsy, Meg belongs to a

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15 This is a point Warner makes about fairy and folk tales generally. Warner 181.

group whose development is perceived to be non-synchronous with the rest of society. In this context she is represented as an individual whose notions of feudal loyalty and adoption of a bardic or prophetic role signal her belatedness, her being out of step with the cultural and political developments of the rest of society. While this is a factor that also figures in later accounts of the madwoman, it is often—as in “The Highland Widow”—imbued with a sense of the woman’s own wilfulness. Indeed, in the later novels, the characters of Meg’s successors are shown to be unalterably fixed in moulds of fanaticism, hatred, guilt, or vengeful desire, and their depictions form portraits of minds from which influences other than a single dominating one have been banished. Although such monomania has a discernible history when it is rooted in certain actions and events, it is impossible to determine the precise nature of the causative link between being “bad” or “mad”, wicked or irrational. A note penned by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the margins of his copy of The Heart of Midlothian makes the point with regard to Meg Murdockson:

There is an intensity of Wickedness, as in the character of Mother Murdockson, that is incompatible with the presence of Reason. But whether it be the exclusion of the Light of Reason, that has occasioned the Wickedness, or the growing Wickedness that has finally quenched the Reason—on the answer to this question it depends, whether the Culprit is to be punished for Guilt, or pitied and protected as Mad.¹⁷

The perplexing taxonomic problem of criminal insanity is a persistent one that in our own time continues to occasion legal, ethical, and medical debates. With regard to the old

madwomen in Scott’s novels, the ruthless single mindedness of these characters suggestively indicates the development of a definition of mental health for which an intellectual and emotional openness to ideas and differing viewpoints is fundamental. In contrast, the intense solipsism of the madwomen reveals an impenetrable, anti-social, and baffling narrowness of purpose and thought, which--tellingly--isolates them even within the specific communities to which they are linked.

The character of Elspeth Meiklebackit in *The Antiquary* invites understanding as an attempt to rein in the imaginative excess that the account of Meg Merrilies had released and that was evident in the enthusiastic response she occasioned in critics and readers. The first readers of *The Antiquary*, invited to read as a complete unit the three novels with which it ostensibly formed a trilogy, noted similarities with Meg and some reviewers conclusively identified Elspeth as the new novel’s version of the Gypsy.\(^{18}\) Unlike Meg’s first appearance in *Mannering*, however, Elspeth’s is delayed in the narrative and when she does appear it certainly seems unlikely that such an apparently insensate being could have much to do with the novel’s larger plot. Her height and appearance recall Meg but in cadaverous form: “bent with age and rheumatism, [she] stood . . . like a mummy animated by some wandering spirit into a temporary resurrection.”\(^{19}\) A bleak figure of death-in-life, Elspeth converts Meg’s incantatory and purposive spinning and singing into mechanical activities that the body continues to perform long after the mind that conferred meaning on them has lost its awareness.

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\(^{18}\) On the first three novels as a unit, see Millgate 104-05. For reviews, see Hayden 98-105. The wandering beggar, Edie Ochiltree, vied with Elspeth for identification as the Meg Merrilies of *The Antiquary*: for example an unsigned review in *British Lady’s Magazine* 4 (August 1816): 103-05 claimed that “Meg Merrilies is split into two personages, called Edie Ochiltree and Elspeth.”

\(^{19}\) Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995) 218. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
mystery even to the family at whose hearth she is ensconced, Elspeth is an all but lifeless parody of the grandmotherly woman who sits at the fireside spinning tales. Such tale-telling is usually intended to pass on wisdom and memory, build bridges between generations or between past and present. But in Elspeth the vital connective function has been lost; her daughter in law says that “she minds naething o’ what passes the day” and, instead, seems to inhabit a past about whose “auld tales” she can “speak like a prent buke” (Antiquary 214).

The lives of the other madwomen also show signs of being stretched beyond their natural limits. These women are not merely old but truly ancient. Meg Merrilies, we recall, is said to be “mair than a hunder year auld” and in The Bride of Lammermoor the description of Ailsie Gourlay’s “leathern chops” aptly conveys an impression of her indeterminate age and a mummification or shrivelling that is like death (Mannerings 272 & Lammermoor 192). Elspeth’s closest affinity is, however, with Ulrica Wolfganger in Ivanhoe. In particular, these two women share the plight and appearance of being suspended between life and death, equally unable to live or to die. When the young Jewess, Rebecca, is captured by Normans and taken to the castle that once belonged to Ulrica’s Saxon family and is now the stronghold of Front-de-Boeuf, ominously she is incarcerated in “a distant and sequestered turret.” There she finds “an old sibyl, who kept murmuring to herself a Saxon rhyme, as if to beat time to the revolving dance which her

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20 For an account of the significance of old wives’ hearth-side tale-telling, see Warner chapter 1. As a collector of ballads, Scott depended on just such tale-telling and the cultural memory it presupposes.

21 For a commentary on this, see Warner 21.

22 Ulrica’s Norman name is Urfried but for convenience I have referred to her as Ulrica throughout. Helen Small claims that Scott does not call her Ulrica until her “moment of insane triumph” at death. See Small 122. In fact the change is earlier but not less significant; it comes when Urfried/Ulrica encounters the Saxon Cedric.
spindle was performing upon the floor.” Fairy or folk-tale motifs are associated here with an image of perversity; Ulrica looks at Rebecca’s beauty with “malignant envy” and she gleefully imagines that the young woman’s fate will be identical to her own or that the future will inevitably be a reenactment of the past (Ivanhoe 193-94). Later Ulrica refers to herself as a “wrinkled, decrepit hag . . . whose wrath must vent itself in impotent curses” (Ivanhoe 216). A description of her as resembling that which “arises from the grave of the dead, when a fiend has animated the lifeless corpse” recalls the account of Elspeth to emphasise not so much the old woman’s devitalization as her dehumanisation (Ivanhoe 218). And if both Elspeth and Ulrica are referred to as “sibyls” their appearance suggestively invokes the Ovidian story of the Cumaean Sibyl whose fate is not death but a perpetual joyless shrivelling and fruitless regret.

For Elspeth and Ulrica the seemingly endless eking out of their days is associated with their alienation from the companionship and communication that Scott’s novels particularly—and Romantic novels generally—represent as vital for the sanity and health of individuals and societies. Women whose lives are severely bound by prisons formed of mind and memory, they are overlooked or forgotten by a world that has moved on without them. Like Janet Gellatly in Waverley or Meg Merrilies, Elspeth feels the bond

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23 Walter Scott, Ivanhoe, ed. Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998) 193. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

24 In "The Highland Widow" Elspat also describes herself as "one who journeys in wretchedness between life and death" (“Highland Widow” 275). Elizabeth Bronfen, again with reference to Bertha Rochester, describes the maniac woman who is kept imprisoned in the house as a figure for death (Bronfen 221). Her discussion makes evident the degree to which Brontë drew on Scott’s representation of Ulrica for more than her uncannily similar account of the madwoman’s death.

25 For the sibyl’s story, see Ovid, Book 14 of The Metamorphoses, translated into English Prose, 5th ed. (London, 1822). 484-86. Eventually the sibyl’s fate is to be invisible and known only by her voice. Warner discusses the ambiguous tradition on sibyls in some detail in chap. 5. Meg Merrilies is also repeatedly referred to as a sibyl.
of ancient feudal allegiances that derive from a distant history she seems actually to recall, and she reminds the present Lord Glenallan that no forebear of his went to war "but an ancestor of the frail, demented, auld, useless wretch that now speaks . . . carried his shield" (Antiquary 261). Although lord and vassal actually share a deforming isolation from society, the point for Lord Glenallan is that he yet seeks to redeem something out of the tragedies of the past. Tellingly, he has long believed Elspeth to be dead. In Ivanhoe the Saxon Cedric recoils from Ulrica less because of her victimization by the Normans than because he interprets her survival of such terrible events as evidence of her lack of will, her failure to go through with the potent gesture of refusal that death under such circumstances would be. In the stories the Saxons have told about the slaughter of Ulrica’s father and brothers, they have included Ulrica as one of the dead victims and she has been mourned along with the men. But if the world has already written endings for the lives of Elspeth and Ulrica, the women themselves show little concern with the wider significance of events. Each interprets the world egotistically as it impinges on a consciousness that is progressively more narrow in its awareness, imaginative facility, and moral conscience or sympathy.

In Mannering, Meg’s age, apparent eccentricity, gender ambiguity, and ethnic affiliation underpin her freedom of movement so that marginalisation and exile are associated with a geographic mobility that confers a measure of power. Her unsettling or uncanny ability to appear suddenly and unexpectedly makes it seem likely that she has privileged access to knowledge unavailable to more ordinary mortals. Some of the other madwomen are also associated with this kind of itinerancy: Magdalen Graeme in The Abbot is also known as Mother Nicneven, a woman whose sudden appearance typically portends a crisis or unusual occurrence; and in The Heart of Midlothian Jeanie Deans is shadowed by the Murdocksons with their intimate knowledge of hidden by-ways. In
contrast, Elspeth and Ulrica are associated with confined interior spaces or with physical stagnation. The spaces they occupy are homes become prisons or tombs. But the novels explicitly relate this quality to the women’s own action or inaction and their failure to consider the long-term implications of specific behaviours. Elspeth’s loyalty to the Glenallans, for example, takes the form of a destructive, passionate jealousy that brings her to the brink of murdering the family’s infant heir, while Ulrica’s status in the household of Front-de-Boeuf is said to derive at least in part from her own pleasure-seeking, her immoderate and indiscriminate sexual appetite.

Unlike that of Meg or her own ancestors, Elspeth’s devotion is not to the male line of inheritance but to the Countess of Glenallan for whom she is willing to perform violent deeds of domestic terrorism. The sternly romanist Countess and her like-minded servant both develop an irrational hatred for the chosen wife of the then Lord Geraldin. Together they plot to destroy Eveline not through direct action but by telling stories intended to convince the secretly married couple that their union is incestuous. The three women who are the principal figures in this darkly Gothic tale—plotter, perpetrator, and victim—form a triad later to reappear to devastating effect in Lammermoor in the characters of Lady Ashton, Ailsie Gourlay, and Lucy. In the time scheme of The Antiquary the events have become a matter of a distant past whose baleful effects still linger. Alone and persecuted, Eveline has chosen death as an alternative to a moral stain that would also affect her child, but when she throws herself off a cliff she survives just long enough for the infant son to be born. In fact her death is only part of the destruction produced by hatred; there are other long-term consequences that result from the planned murder and actual kidnapping of the Glenallan heir.

Elspeth’s harnessing of the power of words for the story that precipitates the destruction is an act of violence which, as the comparison with Lammermoor shows, is a
feminine one that rends domestic space and hope for the future. The violence fragments the narrative of Lovel’s origins and identity and, although the Glenallan family perpetuates the violence when it refuses to speak about the past (even while remaining haunted by that past), it is the original telling of a false story that lies at the heart of Elspeth’s subsequent mental enclosure and leaves the surviving participants to the tragedy unable to reconcile the past and cut off from a future. The consequences of Eveline’s death and the infant’s unresolved disappearance seem fated to be an enduring sterility, the entrapment in the past that Elspeth’s mental and physical inertia so aptly expresses. Moreover, Elspeth’s sense of the events as somehow definitive for the course of her own life brings her to interpret other disasters—the deaths of all but one of her children and the drowning of her grandson—as belated but causally-linked effects of these events; her gaze is fixed on the past not for its lessons but merely to trace the course of a fate to whose inevitability she submits.

If Ulrica, like Elspeth, is associated with interior spaces that seem expressive of her mental fixity, initially she may be guilty less of a specific crime or deed than of surviving acts done to her or witnessed by her. In a singularly horrific description, she tells Rebecca how she watched her father and brothers defend the castle and of how each chamber and stairway remained slippery with their gore when she “became the prey and the scorn of the conqueror” (Ivanhoe 194). Ulrica is a trophy of war and military conquest, and her life is spared when the building that had been her childhood home becomes the scene of her sexual degradation. But such survival, as Cedric suggests, may obliquely imply her complicity in what happens to her or even in the murders themselves. In Cedric’s logic, Ulrica is the parricide from whom he recoils. And the novel appears to confirm his darkest suspicions when it emphasises how such survival is denaturing and disfiguring. Ulrica’s withering is the outward expression of a moral ugliness, and the
story she tells is one in which the sole purpose of her life comes to be her devotion to an intensification of horror. Rather than oppose the Normans from a principled position located outside their depravity (as Rebecca is poised to do), she is drawn into an incestuous triangle and uses her sexual power to incite more violence and to become the eager witness of yet another parricide when the older Front-de-Boeuf is killed by his son. In this sense, the juggernaut released by Ulrica’s initial victimisation is allied to what Cairns Craig aptly terms “the unrelenting expansion of unfulfillable desires that become self-consuming, self-destructive.”

Perhaps even more than Elspeth, Ulrica is eaten away by guilt, hatred, and an obsessive desire for revenge; her character is an emblem of how such passions find no outlet but in feeding on themselves to starve out more positive or potentially ameliorative emotions. Both The Antiquary and Ivanhoe point to conclusions in which the women’s plight cannot be dissociated from their own profound ethical deficiency. This is Coleridge’s question about the nature and direction of the causative relationship between wickedness and irrationality. Which comes first? Should we speak in these cases of a moral madness characterised by an inability to distinguish between right and wrong?

Ivanhoe tells us that moral madness may be contagious. In it and The Antiquary, just as in Mannerings, we find staged scenes of encounters between the madwomen and men. Such meetings lead to the telling of stories but, if for someone like Elspat MacTavish in “The Highland Widow” a refusal to speak her story is linked to her rejection generally of sympathy, that others of the madwomen are bearers both of narrative and of memory does not necessarily mean that their moments of speech can

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26 Cairns Craig Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996) 46.
serve to resituate them in the communities from which they are alienated.27 As Millgate notes, The Antiquary is like Mannering in having a double plot structure whose fulcrum is the lost heir, and Elspeth’s story, like Meg’s, also proves instrumental in reuniting and thereby making sense of past and present.28 That story, however, remains locked in the old woman’s memory until the death of the old Countess frees Elspeth to “unlade her mind” and seek to be “relieved frae her long pilgrimage” (Antiquary 218-19). But because Elspeth’s self-directed narrative desire is unshaped by notions of reparation or restoration, it has the potential to be curiously empty or impotent. Indeed, although it most resembles the “confession” that seems appropriate to Elspeth’s religious faith, it actually exemplifies the extent to which her beliefs have lost their moorings since she explicitly and vigorously expresses an aversion to seeing a priest. Furthermore, she cannot narrate her tale to the lost heir himself, and she speaks only to old men—-to Lord Glenallan, or to Jonathan Oldbuck and Edie Ochiltree. Elspeth’s story is rightly described as Gothic in its dimensions and moral sensibilities, and Gothic is associated with the mode of memory or an obsessive engagement with the past that Ferris identifies.29 Elspeth’s story then requires mediation by figures whose life experience may inoculate them against being drawn into her ways of seeing. When Oldbuck and Ochiltree visit her cottage, the encounter recalls Guy Mannering listening to Meg’s song because Elspeth is chanting a ballad. Here, however, we note a difference between the antiquary Oldbuck’s

27 For studies that emphasises the contrast between community and alienation with regard to Elspeth, see Joan S. Elbers, “Isolation and Community in The Antiquary,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction 27 (1972-73): 405-23, and Millgate 95-96; the latter especially stresses the role of narration or utterance.

28 Millgate 89.

29 The Gothic aspect of the Glenallan story has long been noted. For a summary of the critical problem, see Robertson 198-99.
desire to acquire the ballad for his collection—a desire that actually signals his saving
distance from the events of the past even while it comically illustrates his magpie-like
fascination with its artifacts—and Elspeth’s own deepening possession by a memory she
cannot now escape. Finally, the old woman’s actual demise occurs when she believes
herself to be reenacting scenes from twenty years earlier, but that death seems a non-
event, a barely perceptible slippage out of life.

If Ulrica, like Elspeth, also seeks the proper individual to hear her story, for both
women narration figures as an apparently necessary prelude to death. Indeed, it is as if
the burden of their story is all that has kept them in life and, if the full moral significance
of their stories continues to elude them, these women are to be no Ancient Mariners
condemned perpetually to tell and retell their stories: for Ulrica and Elspeth there is time
for only one telling. In Ivanhoe, however, the scene of narration is more ambiguous than
in The Antiquary. Ulrica addresses Cedric at a time when, disguised as a priest, he has
entered Front-de-Boeuf’s castle in order to effect the escape of a group of prisoners that
includes Cedric’s own son, Ivanhoe “the Disinherited” who does not fully share his
father’s Saxon enthusiasms. Ulrica wants to make her confession, to utter “what it would
raise the dead to speak aloud” (Ivanhoe 218). If this notion of the agency of language
exceeds even that of Meg Merrilies, Ulrica is also cursed by a reanimating memory in
which “deeds, long since done, rise now before [her] dressed in new and irresistible
terrors” (Ivanhoe 219). She supplies Cedric with a history of the clinical course of a
madness that, as she describes it, is founded in moral confusion and an unrestrained
desire: its origin “requires the maddening love of pleasure, mingled with the keen
appetite of revenge, the proud consciousness of power; draughts too intoxicating for the
human heart to bear, and yet retain the power to prevent.” In old age when “revenge itself
dies away in impotent curses,” the afflicted individual becomes “like the fiends of hell,
who may feel remorse, but never repentance.”\textsuperscript{30} When he is able to suppress his
instinctive repugnance, Cedric’s response is to feel some sympathy for Ulrica and he
urges her to repent. But repentance is precisely what, after her long isolation, the Saxon
woman cannot feel and, ironically, when she tells Cedric that his words have “awakened
a new soul” she means one wholly devoted to revenge. In effect Ulrica dedicates herself
to a monomania that she believes will serve as a redemptive act of consecration; the
definitive act of revenge, she says, will make of her the stuff of stories describing how
“her death well became the daughter of the noble Torquil” (\textit{Ivanhoe} 220).

Ulrica’s final acts resonate as those of the archetypal outsider who, in the end,
glories in her separation from human society and humanity when she turns her difference
into a tool of destruction and vindication of her suffering. She sets on fire the castle that
is both her home and the location of a moral and physical degradation and decline. The
scene of the crime thus also becomes the means of a vengeful triumph. In her discussion
of Ulrica’s fiery death, Helen Small argues that, at the last, Ulrica “is reunited with her
Saxon origins and repairs the cowardice of her youth.”\textsuperscript{31} This reading acknowledges that
there \textit{is} something redemptive about a death in which individual identity is merged—or
submerged—in that of the tribe. But the novel as a whole is much less certain about the
worth of such primal ethnic identities. \textit{Ivanhoe} is “Disinherited” precisely because he
cannot share his father’s convictions and, ultimately, his joining the side of Richard
acknowledges both the inevitability and desirability of a new dispensation. When Ulrica
appears on the battlements of Torquilstone “in the guise of one of the ancient Furies,

\footnote{30 Ulrica’s distinction between remorse and repentance is an interesting one. I assume that remorse is
intended to indicate her being visited with memories that cause pain but not the contrition or penitence that
are associated with repentance. The latter has a more explicitly religious significance and carries
implications of a determination to sin no more. It is suggestive of mourning for one’s own past deeds.}

\footnote{31 Small 122.}
yelling forth a war-song, such as was of yore chaunted on the field of battle by the scalds of the yet heathen Saxons” we recognise elements familiar from the representations of other women entrapped by the past (Ivanhoe 269). The description invokes a mythological past to authorise a bardic function but it also shows Ulrica embracing a violent pre-history (in telling phrase, that of the “yet heathen Saxons”) to grasp a power that is ultimately both self-consuming and potentially destructive of good as well as of evil.

The perspective that in the final scene of Ulrica’s manic dance on the battlements makes her appear as if viewed through the wrong end of a telescope expresses a historical distance. Ferris describes how a “living memory” is construed in Scott’s fiction as a patriarchal legacy passed down from father to son.32 If this is the legacy Ivanhoe (like Bertram in Mannering or Lovel in The Antiquary) must resist, it is one that Ulrica takes up to reassert a biological as well as a social identity. She becomes the avenger of evils done to herself, her father, and her tribe. But, by its very nature, revenge is tied to the past and commits the individual to an unending cycle of violence: the work of an eye for an eye is never done. As the representation of Ulrica affirms, this is nothing less than madness. But because Ulrica’s action does ultimately allow for the escape of Front-de-Boeuf’s other captives—including Rebecca and Ivanhoe—her story and its outcome share with those of Meg and Elspeth a potential for opening the way out of the cycle, or for plotting a future course in which, with time, Ulrica’s conflagration does become narratable as a last ditch but finally hopeless resurgence of a tribal ethnic identity.

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32 Ferris 172.
Warriors and Fanatics: Helen MacGregor and Magdalen Graeme

Although both The Antiquary and Ivanhoe imply that specific character traits (jealousy or love of pleasure) are causative factors in women’s madness, the narratives place special emphasis on the acts of violence which precipitate Elspeth’s and Ulrica’s psychopathology. Rob Roy and The Abbot also show the effects on women’s lives and sanity of violent disruptions in the domestic realm. In these novels, however, such violence deprives the women of their homes and, rather than occupying the confined interior spaces associated with Elspeth and Ulrica, Helen MacGregor and Magdalen Graeme become wanderers, women whose embrace of political causes underpins their mobility or presence in the landscape. Violence is associated with a condition of exile from the domestic home. Both women live in times of civic and religious upheaval when, as we are told in The Abbot, “misery so often makes wanderers.”

In the case of Helen MacGregor, violence literally shatters the walls of the house and, when Helen is also raped, it unites this destruction with a brutal violation of bodily sanctity. And Magdalen, who proudly claims descent from “the Graemes of Heathergill . . . a people of ancient blood,” tells her story in brief phrases to the Lady of Avenel: “I have no home . . . it was burnt by your Border-riders—my husband and my son were slain” (Abbot 1.33)

Violence prompts a pathological response of memory. For Helen and Magdalen, as for Elspeth and Ulrica, madness is a function of memory in which certain traumatic events loom large and become definitive for the shaping of a life. The response of these women is, however, markedly different from that of the other two women whose physical disfigurement or mummified appearance signifies a mental turning inward, a deforming concentration of hatred and guilt. In contrast, Helen and Magdalen focus their energy

33 Walter Scott, The Abbot, ed. Christopher Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 15. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
outwards in a single minded and ruthless pursuit of specific political goals: Helen is a Highlander and *Rob Roy* is set at the time of the 1715 Jacobite uprising, and Magdalen, as a supporter of Mary, Queen of Scots, is embroiled in plots to restore a Catholic monarchy. But because the novels insist on a psychological connection between an activism that, in these women, is represented as obsessive and denaturing, and personal experiences of trauma and severe loss, they account for the origins of that activism not with reference to an intellectual perspective but to a largely affective, pathological—and feminine—reaction to singular events.

Helen MacGregor is the only one among the group of madwomen discussed in this chapter to be firmly based on a real historical personage. In this context it is significant that her story, with its details of violent sexual trauma, is mediated for the first person narrator of *Rob Roy* and for the novel’s readers by being relayed through an older man, Bailie Nichol Jarvie. It is then as if the woman’s story is already, in Helen’s lifetime, a matter of the larger historical record drawn on by the “Author of Waverley” for his account. That Helen’s story is told before she actually appears in the narrative suggests how the mediated telling allows for a perspective that may not be available to Helen herself. As it is, the telling is brief and starkly eloquent. Jarvie tells Frank Osbaldistone that Rob Roy MacGregor was a drover until the day, when he was absent from home, that his Lowland creditors “grippit to his living and land; and they say his wife was turned o’ the house to the hill-side and sair misguided to the boot.”

When Rob returns to find “desolation” and his home laid waste, he becomes an outlaw. His motivation, therefore, may be understood in reactive terms. Nevertheless, because his distance from the actual violence offers the chance for some reflection, that he becomes

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34 [Walter Scott], *Rob Roy*, 1st ed., 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Constable, 1818) 2.285. Subsequent references are to this edition and volume and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
an outlaw represents, in some measure, a choice. For Helen, in contrast, the violence is directly personal; it strikes at and destroys the twin sanctities of home and body. One result, Rob Roy shows, is that the concept of home actually expands to become securely identified with a territory and political cause. Violence, Helen claims, has freed her: she is made "free by the very act which left us neither house nor hearth, food nor covering—which bereaved me of all—of all—and makes me groan when I think I must still cumber the earth for other purposes than those of vengeance" (Rob Roy 3.109). Freedom is associated here with a fervent commitment to a single purpose, with the subsumption of the individual in the larger Jacobite cause with which she so wholly and ruthlessly identifies. But it is also a function of what Helen perceives as the imperative to put aside domestic values and a narrow sense of home in order to embrace this much larger project of self-dedication and sacrifice.

When Helen appears in person, she seems such a sublimely remote and unapproachable figure that she can be compared only with the noble beauty of the Biblical heroines, Judith and Deborah. More troubling is the fact that the moment is prepared for when, in the Clachan of Aberfoil, Frank sees ancient and malevolent "sibyls" whose Gaelic speech when translated proves to be "grewsome wishes that men should be slaughtered like sheep—and that they [the women] should lapper their hands to the elbows in their heart's [sic] blude" (Rob Roy 3.73). When Frank later meets Helen, it is she who has "specks of blood on her brow, her hands, and naked arms" while "keen black eyes and features expressed an imagination inflamed by the pride of gratified revenge" (Rob Roy 3.103). And it is by Helen’s orders that the informer Morris is

35 Writing about Rob Roy, Lady Louisa Stuart singled out this scene for particular praise and describes the effect of Helen's appearance in telling terms: "This work seems to me more sparing than the rest in descriptions of scenery; however it has one superexcellent, where Helen Macgregor appears, to thrill one's blood, & overpower one's reason." Letter to Walter Scott, 16 February 1818. NLS MS. 3889, ff 30-31.
slaughtered in a manner that haunts Frank and drives him to reflect on how it is “that a single deed of violence and cruelty affects our nerves more than when these are exercised on a more extended scale” (Rob Roy 3.125). If Helen’s nobility and high purpose generate comparison with Deborah, her ruthlessness—the absence of the compassion that Bertram seeks in Meg’s face—diminishes the distance between her and the barely human figures of the old women in the village. Indeed, while those women resort only to the verbal expression of “growsome wishes,” Helen has the power and authority to make their words come true.

With regard to Helen the boundary between potentially noble woman warrior and vengeful hag seems not merely unstable but in danger of dissolving altogether. In The Abbot Magdalen actually has two names that distinguish dual aspects of her character and role. The first, Magdalen Graeme, is “a stately looking woman ... whose appearance was so much above the poverty of her vestments” (Abbot 15) In contrast to the controlled dignity of this figure is the appearance of “Mother Nicneven,” a tall old woman of exotic appearance and gnomic speech about whom, according to the doctor whose own practice she threatens, “[m]en pretend the ancient wretch is a sorceress, a witch, and what not” (Abbot 246). A fanatic, Magdalen’s division into the two characters suggests that her single-minded pursuit of a goal threatens the grounds of her own identity. In Magdalen’s

36 For commentaries on this event and on Frank’s response see Everett Zimmerman, “Extreme Events: Scott’s Novels and Traumatic History,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 10 (1997): 63-78 and Bruce Beiderwell, Power and Punishment in Scott’s Novels (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P. 1992) 50-52. Zimmerman notes the special abhorrence that Scott, in his study of the French revolution, reserves for women involved in violent and bloody acts. However the emphasis in Rob Roy on Helen’s own history marks her substantive difference from the French market-women “half unsexed by the masculine nature of their employments, and entirely so by the ferocity of their manners.” See Life of Napoleon Buonaparte in MPW vol. 8 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1834) 170-71.

37 A note about the meaning of Nicneven was added to the 1831 edition, where it is identified as “the name given to the grand Mother Witch, the very Hecate of Scottish popular superstition.” See The Abbot. Waverley Novels vol. 21 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1831) 117.
case—as in Helen’s—her alter ego and its associations with primitivism reveal a darker, more elemental side to that other self, the stately woman to whom we are first introduced.

Magdalen’s two identities depend on the suppression of secrets; as the stately woman she does not reveal her true motivation and religious affiliation, and as Mother Nicneven she assumes a traditional or folkloric identity in order to conceal her real objectives. But nowhere is she more secretive than with regard to her grandson, Roland, because, although she demands from him an unquestioning complicity in her work of revolutionary subversion, she keeps concealed from him knowledge that would authorise his own real choice. If in *Rob Roy* and *The Abbot* the destruction of the home by acts of terrorism and war makes wanderers and fanatics of the women involved, Helen and Magdalen demand from a younger generation an implicit obedience and a blind faith in the worth of the causes they embrace. The women claim membership in communities bound by political aims and also by suffering, by an awareness of how they are being pushed to the margins or in danger of being superseded by a history that is the official narrative of change and progress. The communities, threatened alike by a sense of their own redundancy, by dissolution, and by the forces of acculturation, counter this history with alternatives based on notions of enduring identity. Because such alternatives have all the compelling emotional intensity of traditions that are both familiar and familial they powerfully substitute for a notion of home in its more limited domestic sense. And when these alternatives are urged on young men by women who are biologically related to them, their force is further augmented by associations of maternal nurture and of duty owed to someone whose suffering and high sense of destiny makes its own emotional claims to significance.

In this matter of transmission and committal, we see the work of memory at its potentially most destructive. Like Elspat MacTavish or the Highland Widow, Helen
assumes on her sons' behalf the dedication which, for her, is alone what can grant meaning and worth to their lives. When they report that Rob has been captured, she upbraids them fiercely, calling them “coward dogs” and asking “did I nurse you for this, that you should spare your blood on your father's enemies? or see him prisoner, and come back to tell it?” (Rob Roy 3.115). Magdalen, who believes that suffering steels the soul “to undertake that which must be performed,” insists that “it is not for vengeance of my own that my hate pursues these people.” Disclaiming any purely personal interest, she tells Roland “sooner than thou shouldst abandon the noble cause to which I have devoted thee, would I see thee lie a corpse at my feet” (Abbot 72). Such fervency verges on the cannibalistic; the old women make of the children entrusted to their care fodder for causes about which the children themselves may have more conflicted and ambivalent feelings. Furthermore, the women's reaction to learning that the children seek other paths for themselves is telling: hearing of Hamish's decision to leave home, Elspat MacTavish tells her son “may the road you are going be the track of your funeral” (“Highland Widow” 179). In The Abbot Magdalen goes so far as to threaten Roland that if he betrays his trust “I could slay thee with mine own hand” (Abbot 263): the caregiver who received the infant Roland taken from the body of his mother on a battlefield is revealed as someone who could readily shed his blood.

But if the madwoman seeks a direct influence over the lives of young men and thereby, as the novels show, threaten to hijack the future and deform it to their purpose, they exert a more insidious and also more complex influence over the lives of young and vulnerable women. With the exception of the historically-based story of Helen MacGregor and “The Highland Widow”, the accounts of the bonds between the older woman and young men invariably end hopefully. In Guy Mannering, for example, we have seen how Meg Merrilies' death is timely in terms of Bertram's future while, in The
Abbot, Roland is finally freed from his commitment to Magdalen’s Catholicism by her transmission of the narrative she has kept suppressed—the one concerning his parentage and connection to the Protestant House of Avenel. But the novels also show that the madwoman figure has a special affinity with that of the heroine and it is in association with her that the old woman’s way of seeing and the powerfully comprehensive stories she tells may prove most dangerous. In The Antiquary, Elspeth’s stories are told only to old men but, in the past, her tale-telling served to destroy Eveline. The potency of women’s stories is a theme that resurfaces in The Bride of Lammermoor, to be discussed in Chapter Three. Such stories seek to draw the heroine—as they do the hero—into a world view that fashions a future infused with a passionate and distorting commitment to a single desire or based on a narrow understanding of the meaning of the past. But because the horizons of possible action and choice are more narrowly limited for a heroine who is strictly judged by standards of duty and morality, the potential for the kind of fortunate escape experienced by the hero is also more restricted. Furthermore, for all the madwoman’s characteristic gender ambiguity, for the male hero she remains marked by the alterity of her psychic economy and also of her biology. For the heroine, in contrast, she threatens to prove a mirror, an image of a future whose contours may be impossible to escape other than by the death not of the madwoman but of the heroine herself.

The imagination of the madwoman is unable to see beyond cycles of repetition and reenactment; in Ivanhoe when Ulrica meets Rebecca she instantly recognizes in her a successor as the Norman’s sexual prey and victim. In fact, because Rebecca has the moral courage to see a way out of a cycle of victimisation, hatred, and revenge, Ulrica’s story lacks power to touch her or shape her destiny. In Rob Roy the connection between the madwoman and the heroine may be more problematic because Helen does not so much write Diana Vernon into a reenactment of her role as warrior and avenger as commit her
to a cause and devotion to which all merely personal desires and emotions must be sublimated. While the future Ulrica imagines for Rebecca requires a narrowing or closing down of the dimensions of her life, what Helen has in mind for Diana involves a fervent self-consecration to a destiny that is larger than any one individual. Frank Osbaldistone’s final meeting with Helen has her acting as intermediary between him and Diana but it is only with the purpose of claiming the young woman for her side that she does so. When she insists then on the importance of memory and forgetting, she also claims that human love has neither the urgency nor the endurance of the emotions propelling her own actions: “[a]ll may be forgotten... all--but the sense of dishonour, and the desire of vengeance” (Rob Roy 3.247).

In the end, Rob Roy decisively rejects the plans for Diana which see her dedication to a political cause embraced not only by the MacGregors but also—and more dangerously for Diana—by her father. The death of this father rescues Diana from the Jacobite cause which, as the novel’s historical perspective knows, is doomed. For Queen Mary, in The Abbot, there can be no such fortunate escape. In that novel too the madwoman exerts her influence to reaffirm that Mary’s life cannot be that of the individual but must be dedicated to a cause. In a confrontation between the women at Lochleven Castle, Magdalen reminds Mary that she is not merely a woman but a queen, not an individual but the figurehead of a cause. As she speaks, “the words flowed from her with a profuse fluency” that will brook no interruptions. Nowhere in the novel do we find a more explicit insistence on Magdalen’s insanity than in this scene where she has the look of a “sibyl in frenzy,” an expression that is “heightened by an enthusiasm approaching to insanity.” And, ominously, Mary’s own response argues her contagion by Magdalen’s frenzy: she “caught the infection as if by a sort of magnetic influence.” The scene is one of story-telling but the reader is acutely aware of the toxicity of the story
which can end only with Mary’s death; indeed even Magdalen says that “[t]here is darkness in [Mary’s] destiny” (Abbot 310). But while, in Magdalen’s apocalyptic eschatology, such “darkness” is the martyrdom of passionate commitment that alone gives meaning to life, for Mary destiny is troublingly experienced as entrapment in a historically determined design. Magdalen appears there to exhort the faltering queen, to remind her of a purpose that she cannot escape, but: the old woman’s madness eloquently exposes the costs of such singleness of purpose and commitment even while her words also conjure up images of the glory awaiting Mary not as a mortal woman but as a monarch for whose assistance “the land shall lend its earthquakes, the water its wavers, the air its tempests, the fire its devouring flames” (Abbot 310).

The story that Magdalen tells Mary is a powerful one about how meaning is found not in the solitary individual but in the self as an agent of history, as a being united with larger purposes and patterns. When we turn to The Pirate, a novel in which the depiction of the madwoman verges on parody as it shows how the old woman’s disorder may be contained and even decisively cured by stories that potently counter hers, we also see how the madwoman role is one that has both a dangerous allure and a generative logic when it offers a way of making sense of the world and of the past. But this novel more than any other also decisively identifies the real dangers to the heroine of memories for which she is the designated heir, and it makes the whole question of the nature and transmission of certain kinds of female stories even more problematic.
Heuling the madwoman: Norna of the Fitful Head

...pray (wherever the scene is laid) no more Meg Merrilies...

--very good the first and second times, but now quite worn out and always recurring.

Sidney Smith on The Pirate

Among early readers of The Pirate, Sidney Smith was not alone in thinking that the character of Norna of the Fitful Head owed much to that of the Gypsy in Guy Mannering. Norna's appearance seems deliberately calculated to raise memories of the earlier figure. Like Meg, Norna is "tall enough almost to touch the top of the door with her cap." In addition, "[h]er features were high and wellformed, and would have been handsome but for the ravages of time" (Pirate 1.118); and she wears strange and striking clothes and carries a staff not unlike Meg's "goodly sloe-thorn cudgel" (Mannering 1.24). The widespread criticisms of Norna's lack of originality in fact prompted Scott to make the comments that conclude the introduction to the 1831 edition. With uncharacteristic asperity, he directs the reader to consider the principal difference between the women as a not insignificant matter of degree:

...nor can I yet think that any person who will take the trouble of reading the Pirate with some attention, can fail to trace in Norna,--

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39 Lady Louisa Stuart commented on this in terms that anticipate Scott's discussion of the matter in the 1831 introduction: "Norna is accused of being Meg Merrilies over again: to me the peculiar superstition of the country, Norna's early misfortune, and her tinge of insanity mark the difference very strongly. She reminds me more of Roland Graeme's old catholic grandame." Letter to Sir Walter Scott, 10 January 1822. NLS MS 3894, ff. 9-10.

40 [Sir Walter Scott], The Pirate 1st ed. 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Constable and Co., 1822) 1.115. Subsequent references are to this edition and volume and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
the victim of remorse and insanity, and the dupe of her own
imposture, her mind, too, flooded with all the wild literature and
extravagant superstitions of the north,--something distinct from the
Dumfriesshire gipsy, whose pretensions to supernatural powers are
not beyond those of a Norwood prophetess.41

If Meg is acknowledged queen of the Gypsies and claims a prophetic ability, Norna’s
character is determined by her life during an earlier historical period and the more remote
settlement of Zetland where a distinctive cultural environment fosters her belief in her
own powers over the elements, health, and sickness.42 Furthermore Norna aligns herself
with a specifically female legacy and inherited memory: “[i]f the men of Thule have
ceased to be champions,” she says, “the women have not forgotten the arts that lifted
them of yore into queens and prophetesses” (Pirate 1.117). Scott’s introduction construes
this legacy as influential in terms of the particular manifestations of Norna’s enthusiasm;
inherited superstitions prove an imaginatively compelling model upon which “the victim
of remorse and insanity” seizes. Furthermore, when Scott follows his account of Norna’s
condition by quoting the couplet, “The pleasure is as great/ Of being cheated as to cheat,”

Norwood is a suburb of London known in the eighteenth-century as a rendezvous for Gypsies. The
reference here may be to the most famous of its “prophetesses,” Margaret Finch, who reputedly died at the
age of 108. See Hoyland 180 and J. B. Wilson, The Story of Norwood (London: Borough of Lambeth,
1973). With reference to Joanna Baillie’s play, Witchcraft, A Tragedy in Prose, Scott wrote in his journal
on 22 July 1827 a comment relevant to his description of Norna: “[Mrs Baillie] is writing a tragedy on
witch craft. I shall be curious to see it—Will it be real Witch craft—the Ipsiissimus Diabolus—or an
impostor—or the half crazed being who believes herself an ally of condemn’d spirits and desires to be so?
That last is a sublime subject” (Journal 375).

42 According to Dr. Samuel Hibbert, “Nornies” were Shetland witches skilled in divination. See Samuel
Hibbert, A Description of the Shetland Islands. Comprising an Account of their Scenery, Antiquities, and
Superstitions (Edinburgh: Constable & Co., 1822) 265. The Nornies “assisted at the birth of children, and
determined their fate and age” (266).
he suggestively indicates how extensive a role desire plays in the formation of belief.\textsuperscript{43} The introduction makes the point that the Zetland community is a primitive one but it also asserts more generally the continuing powerful attractions of a sense that some events simply defy rational explanation or are explicable by reference only to magic or fate.

The 1831 introduction to \textit{The Pirate} connects Norna’s ideas about her abilities to her madness when it notes that her “belief in her supernatural powers” had “distracted her own mind.” However, Norna herself tells a different story when she identifies the history of her belief, investing it with a genealogy that derives from a family background traceable to Erland who taught Norna “whatever of legendary lore Scald and Bard had left behind them” in addition to a historical geography whereby each place has its own “appropriate tale” (\textit{Pirate} 2.133). Erland passes on to his daughter the gift of his bardic voice and memory but also that of old enmities and the hatred of brother for brother. This patriarchal inheritance is further augmented by the reach of Norna’s own restless striving for more, “to possess the power of the Voluspae and divining women of our ancient race” and she invokes the powers of darkness to assist her in a search for sacred knowledge (\textit{Pirate} 2.135). What then begins as an education in tribal memory becomes an imperialising quest and the price Norna pays for this is her own innocence: she exchanges her father’s (and teacher’s) life for access to power. In fact the circumstances of Erland’s death are mysterious since he is known only to have suffocated in a closed room. But what matters in terms of the subsequent shape of his daughter’s life is what Norna believes, and the story she tells, as Judith Wilt notes, has a compelling logic: the price of the daughter’s inheritance of power is parricide.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Scott does not identify the couplet. It is from Samuel Butler, \textit{Hudibras}, part 2, canto 3, lines 1-2.

Norna’s story, however, also has another dimension. Her midnight flight from her father’s house was to meet her lover and to avoid the marriage (to Magnus Troil) that had been arranged by her father. That Norna’s madness thus emerges out of this potent nexus of violence, sex, and Faustian desire makes it seem as if Norna’s assumption of the role of ancient queen and supernatural agent actually represents a great cover-up intended to transform rather sordid and ordinary events into something extraordinary. By linking herself with an ancestral and ethnic tradition that has a political dimension in the context of Zetland’s relationship to Scotland, Norna remakes herself into a formidable force located beyond the merely human and also beyond understanding. As Norna explains it to Mordaunt, the difference between her youthful self (Ulla Troil) and “the queen and protectress of these wild and neglected isles” (Norna of the Fitful Head) is the difference between the human and divine, the natural and the supernatural (Pirate 1.235). All of this, as the romantically inclined and yet sceptical Mordaunt suspects, is explicable in terms of Norna’s insanity. But Norna’s life on a remote island where cultural isolation and the harshness of the environment tend to encourage the persistence of beliefs in the supernatural means that she finds a ready audience for the role she subsequently adopts. Belief then generates belief until prophetess and community are locked into a self-perpetuating cycle.

The narrator’s more sceptical voice, however, resonates from outside this cycle when it records Norna speaking “in a tone in which the imaginary consequence and importance so often assumed by lunacy, seemed to contend against the deep workings of some extraordinary and deeply-rooted mental affliction” (Pirate 1.234). Because, in this assessment, Norna’s beliefs proceed from guilt and sorrow the “prophetess” is resituated in the human world of emotion—a world from which she believes herself to be forever alienated. Moreover, the narrator has the key to a cure, a corrective not only to the
erroneous stories about origins and identities but also, as it turns out, to Norna’s insanity. To expose the fallacious basis of Norna’s stories—specifically to show that Cleveland rather than Mordaunt is her son—is to collapse the entire elaborate superstructure of belief. When Norna comes to understand the true extent of her delusions, she coincidentally also sees their real danger since, in her ignorance, she almost causes the death of Cleveland and thereby complements her “parricide” with filicide. The result of her belated understanding is an abrupt return to the world of the human; deflated, she is no longer the inspired queen but an old and sick woman found lying in a swoon. Unlike the madwomen of the earlier novels, she does not die. Instead, when it is discovered that “her mind for the time had totally lost its equipoise,” she is placed under restraint and careful watch (Pirate 3.334). Her experience, as it is described in The Pirate, adapts the logic of a “moral management” based on principles of reeducation as a prelude to social reintegration. And, for Norna, the experience proves purgative; along with her old beliefs, Norna casts off her identity as Norna to become Ulla Troil again and to embrace Christian faith. “She appeared deeply to repent of her former presumptuous attempts to interfere with the course of human events” and, on her death, she has all the paraphernalia of her former occult studies burned in a fire which, unlike that of Ulrica, is not one of revenge but of a final awareness of the dangers of obsession and fanaticism (Pirate 3.340).

Wilt notes the political dimension of Norna’s pretensions that inheres in the claims to queenship.\(^4^5\) In the context of the other madwomen narratives, we see how these claims, if acted upon, further commit Zetland to isolation and enclosure or entrapment in the fatalistic beliefs of an unchanging past. Although comically presented, it is significant that Norna is fiercely opposed to Triptolemus Yellowley, the utilitarian

\(^{45}\) Wilt 120
and miserly agriculturist bent on improvement. Norna condemns him for a “sordid slave.” But in invoking “what was once noble and generous,” Norna is also asserting a more general claim for the attractions of large-scale beliefs and explanatory narratives, a preference for flights of the imagination over the passageways of verifiable facts (*Pirate* 1.117). This is the theme of quixotism with which fiction must always contend and in *The Pirate* it is gendered female. What is especially significant however is that, although Norna has a child who is her son by blood, she also claims Minna Troil as her daughter because of the kinship of their enthusiasms and imagination. And it is through its effect on the character of Minna Troil that Norna’s madness is most dangerous because the old woman has chosen the young one as her successor, as the wife of her putative son and the inheritor of her secrets. Norna holds up a mirror to Minna and believes that what she sees there is a younger version of herself, but she additionally burdens the younger woman with the requirement that she redeem the errors of Norna’s own past. If Norna failed to marry Magnus Troil, then her son must marry Magnus’s daughter. Furthermore, the inheritance that Norna received from her father is one that she, in turn, will pass on to this chosen daughter. But what Norna is unable to consider is the degree to which Minna is more truly her heiress than she knows. Minna is fatally attracted to Norna’s dream not because she wishes to marry Mordaunt but because the world is for her as it had been for Norna: too narrow for the reach of her desires and imagination.

*The Pirate* seems to confirm the accuracy of Norna’s identification of Minna as her spiritual heir. Like Norna but unlike the more practical Brenda, Minna has an “unusual intensity of imagination” that is accompanied by intense spiritual yearning, “the aspiration of a soul bent on more important objects than those by which she was surrounded” (*Pirate* 2.127 & 1.45). This other-worldly imagination may make Minna “noble-spirited”—as Norna describes her (*Pirate* 3.133)—but it also puts her at risk
because the distance between her and Norna constantly threatens to erode. This is especially evident when Norna enters the sisters' bedchamber at night to tell them the details of her story. Norna's compulsion to narration does in fact recall the Ancient Mariner and because of her refusal to brook interruptions—or sceptical questions from Brenda—the telling becomes a monologue that reveals the old woman less as a victim of circumstance than as an agent fully complicit in the events she recounts. Furthermore, Norna's midnight telling shows her weaving a spell of words intended to draw in her listeners and, although Brenda has the good fortune to swoon during the story's delivery, Minna listens rapt by the "tale of wonder and horror" (Pirate 2.153)

Later another potentially fatal likeness between Norna and Minna is established when Minna too is burdened with a dark secret. She believes that her beloved Cleveland has murdered Mordaunt although this, like Norna's belief in her parricide and Mordaunt's identity as her son, is based on conjecture and circumstantial evidence. But in terms of their effect on the susceptible individual psyche, false stories are indistinguishable from true ones. Moreover, it is not only this conviction about Cleveland's crime that produces a deleterious effect on Minna's well-being; she is further harmed by the impossibility of sharing her knowledge. Pointedly the narrator comments on this: "[t]here is no grief so dreadful as that which we dare not communicate, and in which we can neither ask nor desire sympathy" (Pirate 2.298). An alienation from sympathy and, indeed, from the very possibility of sympathy leads to Minna's increasing withdrawal from any engagement with society and, as she turns inward to focus obsessively on the story that cannot be told, her increasing abstraction leads others (depending on the nature of their own beliefs) to attribute the evident change in her "to witchcraft, [or] . . . to incipient madness." Some of the characteristics of her disorder ominously recall those of Elspeth Meiklebackit, a woman for whom secrecy and a private
sense of horror prove toxic: “[s]he became unable to bear the solitude in which she
formerly delighted to spend her time; yet, when she hurried into society, it was without
either joining in, or attending to what passed” (Pirate 2.299).

Minna’s father acts decisively to save his daughter by taking her to the individual
who, in significant ways, is the source of the problem: that is, to Norna. When they arrive
at Norna’s cave-like dwelling in the hope of an exorcism or a cure, two things transpire.
The first is that, in the midst of the elaborate showmanship of Norna’s conjuring, Minna
speaks “the first words to the purpose, which she hath spoken these many days” (Pirate
3.21). The second is that she comes to understand that “Norna was completely acquainted
with the secret cause of her sorrow” (Pirate 3.22). To the evidence of the last, Minna
responds by pressing the old woman’s hand and such sympathy in turn generates in
Norna “more of human feeling than she usually exhibited” (Pirate 3.24). While,
outwardly, the exchange may suggest that the two are being drawn further into a folie à
deux, Minna’s return to speech and the sympathetic exchange between the women prove
to be stages in the eventual recovery of both Minna and Norna when it is decisively
revealed that they do not have privileged access to special knowledge but, rather, that
they have been deluded by “a tale of nothing.”

Speech and sympathy—and the revelation of concealed truths—are essential to the
final understanding that comes at the end of The Pirate when, uncharacteristically for the
madwoman stories discussed in this chapter, both Minna and Norna survive although in
severely chastened and diminished form. Fiona Robertson, who notes that the mysteries
in The Pirate could at any moment be solved by the right word spoken at the right time,
argues that in this novel Scott exposes “the dangers of allowing the world of private

46 Minna’s words to the pirate Cleveland. See Pirate 2.225
imagination to dominate the social, public world.\textsuperscript{47} Gender is a particularly significant and powerful element in this because, while male characters may be able to negotiate a way out of seeing the relationship between the past and the present as one dominated by repetition or entrapment, for a woman like Minna mere survival—despite the narrator’s forceful address to the reader about the heroine’s subsequent happiness—seems at best a limited affair.

It is Cleveland whom Minna tells “you cheated me into listening to a tale of nothing,” but her words are even more applicable to Norna (\textit{Pirate} 2. 225). That Minna survives at all has to do with the decisive breaking of Norna’s wand, of the spell of words that enchant with their promises of access to a world of discernible patterning and certain meaning where all doubt or scepticism is excluded or silenced. This is the madwoman’s siren song to which at the end of “The Highland Widow” Hamish MacTavish falls prey. When the Waverley novels link the madwoman’s tale of personal trauma to larger historical contexts, they make the old woman a figure for the individual suffering that civil war, conflict, and change invariably entail. But they also do something more: they repeatedly show how the response to such trauma can serve not only to perpetuate cycles of violence and hatred but also to immobilise, psychologically and temporally, the madwoman herself and those younger individuals she draws into her circle of contagion. As weavers of stories and plots and as bearers of memory and narrative, the women discussed here may be kin to the “Author of Waverley” himself, but the stories they tell, finally, are enfolded within a perspective that maps out and valorises an entirely different relationship to the past.

\textsuperscript{47} Robertson 176-77.
Chapter 2

Mad Mother, Mad Daughter: 
The Heart of Midlothian

Meg Murdockson in The Heart of Midlothian exhibits in extreme form a number of the characteristics typical of the madwomen discussed in Chapter One. It is with reference to Meg that Coleridge penned the note that appears in his copy of Scott's 1818 novel, published as Tales of My Landlord, Second Series. Coleridge's identification of the crucial question—is Meg mad or bad?—reminds us that this hag-like and vengeful old woman is properly one of a company that includes such characters as Elspat MacTavish and Ulrica Wolfganger. Meg Murdockson shares with these women a view of life shaped by the extreme resentment and abiding hatred that possess and deform her mind. Moreover the destructive effect these passions have on Meg's psyche is made manifest by her grotesque and haggard appearance. As it does for Elspat and Ulrica, hatred withers Meg Murdockson's body as much as it petrifies her soul. Although she is loosely associated with a band of outlaws, it is notable that even these male criminal accomplices insist upon their distinctness from Meg; calling her "Mother Blood" or "Mother Damnable," they identify something of their own difference from one who acknowledges no higher authority than her own desire. That desire is explicitly for revenge. In "frantic and vindictive ravings" Meg describes revenge as "the sweetest morsel to the mouth that ever was cooked in hell." Significantly, in a novel so much concerned with questions of

1 Quoted in Chapter 1, page 67. Coleridge 589-90.

2 [Walter Scott], Tales of My Landlord, Second Series, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1818) 96 & 102: 284 & 286. Subsequent references are to this four volume first edition, and volume and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
justice, she adds, “I have wrought hard for it—I have suffered for it, and I have sinned for it—and I will have it,—or there is neither justice in heaven nor in hell!” (3.117-18).³

If Meg recalls the ancient women whose plotting, vengeance, or fanatically-held beliefs threaten the life or future of the young hero or heroine in other Waverley novels, in Midlothian matters are complicated by an explicit doubling of the figure of the madwoman. Meg has an insane daughter, Magdalen Murdockson or, as she is more usually known, Madge Wildfire. The two women are bound by indissoluble ties of blood, by their shared experience of extreme marginalisation and exile, and by a history that includes both the terrible events associated specifically with the daughter’s insanity and what Madge remembers as the happier days “lang syne” from which their present condition represents a disastrous and ultimately irredeemable falling-off. The facts of a story which must be teased out piecemeal by the reader reveal that the seduction of the beautiful but susceptible Madge by George Staunton, the son of Meg’s English employer, had apparently been encouraged by Meg with an eye to its possible financial advantages. But when Staunton later discarded Madge, Meg murdered the child that resulted from the liaison because its existence interfered with a new plan to marry Madge to a wealthy but elderly and deformed man. Although the specific circumstances of the child’s death seem to have been kept from public attention, the lasting consequence of the episode for the two women is their exile from the English village of Willingham and from the social security it ostensibly offered. For Madge, the disastrous effects are additionally severe because the murder of her child at the hands of her mother makes her mad. Between

them, then, the murderous mother and the bereaved (and betrayed) daughter whose own maternity is so violently and grotesquely thwarted divide the face of madness into a grimly purposive and intractable malevolence that grubs at the underside of society to feed off the shortcomings and misfortunes of others, and a more pitiable but ultimately incurable mental errancy.

Together, the madwomen in Midlothian are representative figures for a frightening, extra-legal world of vertiginous possibility and dangerous power. To come close to this world is to risk being irrecoverably lost. This is what George Staunton and Effie Deans (mother of another of Staunton’s illegitimate children) discover. As the novel’s ending makes clear, this couple is permanently scarred by events that cannot finally be erased or suppressed from consciousness: the past always comes back and in Midlothian it is literalised in the figure of the lost child who, found too late, inadvertently enacts the role of avenger when he kills Staunton. Effie’s trial for infanticide establishes her as a double for Madge, but in her case events that remain secret or a matter for rumour and conjecture when they concern the Murdocksons are brought into shameful public view. In contrast to the suppressed secrets and crimes, however, events that are made public have a potential to be healed; Effie’s trial and sentence mean that her sister, Jeanie Deans, will embark on her hopeful journey to London to secure a royal pardon.

Nevertheless, the events and their consequences also tend to bring the forthright Jeanie within the purview of the extra-legal world from whose incorporative or contagious power she is protected only by the talismanic virtues of her own plain-speaking and persistent assertion of an absolute and finally unbridgeable moral distance between her and the madwomen. In this case, the talisman prove sufficient and, unlike Minna in The Pirate and despite the personal dangers she faces on her solitary journey to London, Jeanie’s identity proves not to be at risk. She will successfully shake off the madwomen
and leave them mired in the wasteland from which they cannot escape while she regains her chosen path, fulfils her mission, and—as her father says—redeems the family’s honour.

However, while the broad outlines of the novel seem to map out an archetypal struggle between good and evil, openness and secrecy, the blessed and the damned, the doubling of the madwoman figure renders this schema rather less well-defined. In particular, the representation of Madge—whose real name, Magdalen, signifies the archetype of a suffering but penitent female sinner⁴—repeatedly hovers between stereotype and a fully historicised and psychologised portrait. In so doing, it creates a tension which finally remains unresolved, and in this sense the novel foreshadows the complex and troubling depictions of female entrapment, victimhood, and suffering that characterise the later tragic novels. The novel’s account of Meg Murdockson becomes increasingly uncompromising in its emphasis on her malign obsessions and on their potential to unleash a spreading evil. It would seem that Meg is indeed just as wicked as she looks to be. Meanwhile, the depiction of Madge often invokes the familiar conventions for representing female insanity, and invites reading through a lens of stereotypes and assumptions about madness. However, in contrast to the account of Meg Murdockson, the depiction and narrative function of Madge are made more problematic by the excavation of a history that establishes her as the sad product of a violent past whose debased but virulent energies are localised in her mother, by the detailed evocation of Madge’s suffering and the consolatory strategies of her imagination, and by the

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⁴ Markham Ellis documents the eighteenth century use of “Magdalen” to signify a repentant prostitute. As he notes, this use derives from a misreading of New Testament references to Mary Magdalene, and the name became attached to the London hospital for the relief and reform of prostitutes. Its use in Midlothian is interesting, therefore, because although, in comparison to the texts discussed by Ellis, Scott’s novel was written at a time of moral severity with regard to such matters, it does imply that Madge’s sexual fall need not exclude the possibility of her rehabilitation. It is the child’s murder and Madge’s madness that make this unlikely or impossible. See Markham Ellis, The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 160-89.
nature of her relationship to Jeanie.

**Exemplifying the "Unsocial Passions": The Malign Mother**

Middlemarch's first description of Meg Murdockson recalls the moment in Guy Mannering when Meg Merrilies suddenly and unexpectedly interrupts a discussion between men and, speaking in a barely intelligible dialect, utters phrases whose meaning is largely inscrutable. But in Midlothian the old woman's appearance and talk neither hints at any sibylline potential nor alludes to a respected traditional relationship between her and the men she addresses. Indeed, from the very beginning the relationship described here seems likely to be an exclusively adversarial one, and in an urban world that is more anonymous than the rural one inhabited by the gypsy woman in Mannering, Meg Murdockson appears merely strange and quite mad. The Edinburgh magistrates are discussing the recent Porteous riots, an account of which begins Midlothian, when "they were interrupted by an old woman of the lower rank, who thrust herself into the council-room" (2.143). In the context of the novel's focus on the suspicious disappearance of Effie Deans's illegitimate child and Effie's subsequent imprisonment on a charge of infanticide, Meg's demand that her "puir crazy bairn" be restored to her confusingly suggests proliferating numbers of lost children (2.144). For the magistrates she addresses, Meg's words are as inexplicable as they are for the novel's readers, and the men conclude that the old woman is but "a gude ane"—that is, a madwoman (2.145).

Meg's response to questions about her identity are, however, far from confused when in striking language and vehement tones she describes a perilous existence at the

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5 Adding emphasis, the "Magnum" edition has after "of the lower rank" the phrase "extremely haggard in look, and wretched in her apparel." See Sir Walter Scott, The Heart of Midlothian, Waverley Novels vol. 12 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1830) 67.
very edges of society. The officers, she asserts, always "ken us weel aneugh when they rive the bits o' duds aff our backs, and take what penny o' siller we hae, and harle us to the Correction-house in Leith Wynd, and pettle us up wi' bread and water, and siclike sunkets" (2.144-45). If her speech identifies a violence enacted against women who have no social standing or accepted place within the community, it might further recall Meg Merrilies and her accounts of the penalties suffered by the gypsies. As protection against such treatment, the gypsies in Mannering rely—however unwisely—on the security offered by the Ellangowan estate and a quasi-feudal relationship with the Bertram family. But for the Murdockson mother and daughter, such protection is unavailable and the dimensions of the particular community they inhabit have shrunk to the size of the single bond between parent and child. Meg concludes her plea to the magistrates by plaintively asserting a biological and emotional tie to the child she claims to protect; "[h]er bairn, . . . was her bairn, and she came to fetch her out of ill haft and waur guiding. If she wasna sae wise as ither folks, few ither folks had suffered as muckle as she had done" (2.147).

It is Meg’s insistence on her natural maternal feeling that induces the magistrates to feel sufficient sympathy that they release into her care the daughter who has been held for questioning in connection with the riots, whose male leader (Staunton) had temporarily adopted the name and dress of Madge Wildfire. However, the actual reunion of mother and daughter casts Meg’s insistence on her motherly affection in a distinctly darker shade. Whatever her expressed parental concern for her daughter, Meg greets Madge as a "crazed hellicat Bess o' Bedlam, that sall taste naething but bread and water for a fortnight" (2.151). If it is tempting to read in Meg’s earlier words a trenchant social criticism akin, for example, to what Katie Trumpener discerns in similar speeches made by Meg Merrilies, her actual response to Madge supplies a different perspective, one that indicates that Meg Murdockson may be less a victim than someone who is fully
implicated in the fate she decries. That is, her existence on the very margins of society may be the result not so much of her wilfully cruel victimisation by that society and the law than of her own ready propensity for violence.

This is a question of which has priority: Meg’s obduracy or her apparent scapegoating by society. It may be that the persecution Meg describes has perverted her understanding to make it impossible for her to express herself to Madge in any terms other than threatening and abusive ones. Certainly the reunion more than hints at the strangeness of a relationship in which vestiges of a more positive bond may be detected under a present brutality. Madge herself addresses Meg as an “auld ne'er-do-weel deevil’s buckie o’ a mither” and observes with no small irony that they are “a hopeful family, to be twa o’us in the Guard at ance.” But when she adds that “there were better days wi’ us ance” she also implies that, however strange, outlandish, or suspicious the women now appear, their present state has its own history through which may be traced a process of decline and degradation (2.151). However, the novel leaves open the question of how to interpret Meg’s response to her daughter and the reminder of a better past life. Her face, we are told, “had glistened with something like an expression of pleasure when she saw her daughter set at liberty.” But this expression may be no more than an involuntary reflex and her reaction to the return of her daughter is otherwise characteristically pitiless and severe. Meg’s maternal affection, Midlothian implies, is less human than it is akin to “that of the tigress.” Or it may be, as the passage further proposes, that Madge’s reminder of former better days inopportuneely awakens

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6 Trumpener claims that Meg Mertlles’s criticisms of the gypsies’ condition identify “the blatant social injustices of a nascent capitalism.” See Bardic Nationalism 222. With regard to Midlothian, Jon Thompson constructs a similar argument about how the novel offers a critique of social injustice only, later, to shut down its radical implications. His analysis focuses on Madge rather than on Meg. See Jon Thompson, “Sir Walter Scott and Madge Wildfire: Strategies of Containment in The Heart of Midlothian,” Literature and History 13 (1987): 188-99.
recollections that act as an irritant on the old woman’s memory; perhaps “there was something in the ideas which Madge’s speech awakened, that again stirred her cross and savage temper” (2.151).7

This early account of the two women sketches an ambiguity that characterises the relationship between mother and daughter throughout the novel. Increasingly, however, there is nothing ambiguous about Meg Murdockson’s actual character and its effect on others. While the encounter in the Edinburgh Tolbooth does faintly hint at Meg’s own suffering in her knowledge of what has been irretrievably lost or the sharp contrast between her past circumstances and present plight, this is not further developed. Rather, a representation that draws on long-standing assumptions about the unholy trinity of witch, bawd, and mid-wife, gradually develops the details of Meg’s suspicious involvement in the secret birth and disappearance or death of children and establishes the old woman’s deep or constitutive relationship with various sinister unmapped places—“those solitary and secret purlieus of villainy” (2.245-46)—whose clandestine, secretive nature invests them with a frightening disruptive or subversive energy.8 Meg and her dark world are associated with an actual crime—the infant’s unexplained disappearance—that sets in motion the plot of Effie’s trial and Jeanie’s redemptive journey, and also with a lingering psychological potency: Effie’s brief immersion in Meg’s world leaves her haunted by

7 For an analysis of the maternal/savage nexus in eighteenth century literature, see Felicity A. Nussbaum, ““Savage” Mothers: Narratives of Maternity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” Eighteenth-Century Literature 16 (1992): 163-84, especially 165-68. Nussbaum notes the domestic woman’s power to shape society through her care of her children and argues that “the “unnatural mother” refuses these duties and is instead capable of heinous acts that threaten lineage and even civilization . . . [she] is a center of energy and violence.” If maternal instinct was understood to be natural, it nevertheless required the addition of an educated reason and principle to prevent it being corrupted by other instincts or passions such as anger.

8 For the unholy trinity, see Robert A. Erickson, Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (New York: AMS P, 1986).
after-images of the old woman’s “fearsome face” (2.211).9

Meg’s second actual appearance in *Midlothian* unequivocally establishes that she is indeed no innocent victim of social injustice but, rather, actively criminal. Meg arranges for her outlaw companions to kidnap Jeanie Deans, the character whose quest to secure a royal pardon for the condemned Effie necessitates the solitary journey to London which constitutes in good part the main narrative thread of the novel. When Meg orders the outlaws to capture and strip Jeanie before setting her loose on the common, the proposed treatment recalls that which Meg herself claims to have endured in Edinburgh. Contrary to her orders, however, Jeanie is brought by the outlaws to the isolated Lincolnshire barn where Meg is hiding, and there Jeanie sees the old woman bending over a fire “with the reflection of the red light on her withered and distorted features marked by every evil passion.” Meg appears now as no mere witch but as “the very picture of Hecate at her infernal rites” and her face “had a hideous cast of hardened and inveterate malice and ill-humour” (3.101 & 111).

The use here of “hardened” suggestively indicates how the representation of Meg has moved beyond the possible ambiguity of the initial descriptions; she is fixed in a degeneracy and cruelty that make her incapable of experiencing the least sympathy for others. “[D]islike and hatred,” Adam Smith warns, “harden us against all sympathy.”10 Notably, the scene in the barn also establishes that Meg’s obduracy considerably exceeds even that of the male criminals with whom she associates. Although the outlaws are

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9 See Duncan 158-60 for an account of Meg’s function as the pivotal figure for an occult and unpoliceable world of secret female rituals of birth and death. There is no evidence for Duncan’s claim that Meg procures George Staunton’s mistresses, but it is made clear that she had no objection to his sexual relationship with her daughter. Thus, while Meg’s status as a bawd remains a matter of conjecture, the main point is that she belongs to a dark world where anything is possible.

10 Smith 68.
clearly operating according to the dictates of a code of conduct requiring, for example, that they respect Jeanie’s possession of a “jark” or pass authorised by one of their former confederates, Meg will not acknowledge such codes. In describing the reciprocity and recognition of rules that are necessary to bind together the individuals who form any given society, Smith concludes that “[s]ociety . . . cannot subsist among those who are at all times ready to hurt and injure one another.” In a statement relevant to Midlothian and its depiction of Meg Murdockson, he adds that “[i]f there is any society among robbers and murderers, they must at least . . . abstain from robbing and murdering one another.”11

In the earlier meeting with the magistrates, Meg appears precariously situated between maintaining self-command and engaging in a violence that remains almost entirely verbal; although she greets Madge with a hard shove, the blows she aims indiscriminately at society and the officers are formed out of words, taunts, and innuendo. But here, in company with men whose own extra-legal trade does not prevent them from allowing the binding force of their own rules or unwritten laws, Meg is shown to be immune to the moderating influence of such constraints. Enraged by the outlaw who calls her “Mother Blood,” she “darted her knife at him with the vengeful dexterity of a wild Indian” and, later, threatens indiscriminately to beat either Jeanie or Madge about the head with a pair of fire-tongs (3.96 & 101).

By showing Meg to be unable to adapt to any form of society or social bonds, such violence confirms Meg’s slide into a netherworld of an unregenerate savagery. Moreover, given the contemporary understanding of mania as a condition in which the individual lacks self-command or is under the sway of passions unchecked by the operations of reason or recognition of social conventions, it also establishes her as truly

11 Smith 86.
Mad. Indeed, as far as the outlaws are concerned, the old woman’s behaviour is immediately recognised to require the rigorous imposition of external checks. They must “teach [her] who’s master” and, tellingly, resort to menacing her in the manner “by which a maniac is intimidated by his keeper.” Such treatment is intended, quite literally, to keep her in her place, and Meg is forced into a seat from which she is unable “to resume any measures of actual violence, but wrung her withered hands with impotent rage, and brayed and howled like a demoniac” (3.97).

Meg Murdockson’s final actual appearance in the novel records the concluding stage in an intertwined process of degeneration and response called forth from those who identify her as a threat to a given social group. As a consequence of Meg’s uncurbed criminality, she is eventually caught and punished by due process of law. It is at this precise moment that Jeanie Deans, returning home to Scotland after the successful completion of her mission to “[s]ave an honest house from dishonour, and an unhappy girl . . . from an early and dreadful death,” chances to arrive at the scene of the hanging (3.325). In terms of the overall narrative design of Midlothian, it is significant that this scene which potently symbolises the triumph of the “heroine of truth” over Meg’s malignancy symmetrically balances the earlier one where Jeanie is kidnapped on Meg’s orders and finds both her life and mission to be at risk from the old women’s counter-plotting. Since, as critics have long acknowledged, the novel invites us to think in terms of archetypes and figures familiar from fairy and folk tales, the moment resonates as one in which Jeanie, the beneficial white witch, finally and conclusively prevails over the black diablerie focused in Meg. Now on her journey home, Jeanie is moving towards a triumphant social reintegration and personal apotheosis; in this context, the punitive and

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12 For Jeanie as the “heroine of truth” see Millgate 153.

13 For the archetypes see, for example, Duncan 158-60.
purgative elements of Meg's death establish it as an enabling condition for the future that Jeanie is poised to enjoy. Meg's death by hanging conclusively reestablishes between Jeanie and the old woman the moral and social distance that had been narrowed by the circumstances of Effie's out-of-wedlock motherhood, her imprisonment for infanticide, and the shame that threatens to overwhelm her family.

The unexpected sight of a hanging body distresses Jeanie whose "mind and feelings" are affected by the sight of a "female culprit" undergoing the penalty so nearly suffered by Effie. However, because the identity of the woman being hanged is not immediately apparent to Jeanie (or the reader), her response is specifically called forth not by any sense of personal connection to Meg but by an involuntary reaction generated by the sudden and unexpected reminder of what Effie might have had to suffer. And, in notable distinction from contemporary broadside accounts of legal executions or, indeed, from the novel's earlier scene of the smuggler Wilson's hanging, the description of the hanging entirely eschews focussing on the humanity, repentance, or suffering of the condemned individual. If the expression "female culprit" makes of Meg something both anonymous and rather less than a woman, so too does the actual sight of the hanging; from a distance the body appears "not larger than a spider dependent at the extremity of his invisible thread" (4. 55). The technique, like that used in Ivanhoe to describe the death or suicide of Ulrica Wolfganger, is one which visualises the madwoman's violent demise

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14 For another view, see Beidenvell 74-76. He argues that Jeanie's "revulsion" at the sight arises "from an intensely inward morality" and that Jeanie "feels degraded by a legal act of killing."

15 Broadsides contemporary with Scott's writing of Midlothian tend to take seriously an educative, admonitory function. The accounts stress the criminal's "good death," faced with fortitude, resignation, and courage. NLS L. C. Folio 73, a collection of Glasgow Broadsides from the early nineteenth century, contains numerous examples.
as if through the wrong end of a telescope. Moreover, the comparison with a spider is especially significant because it makes the woman appear to be caught in a web of her own making. Her death, then, is less an execution than the undoing of self by self; the woman swings from a thread she has woven and the implication is that her public death is the necessary and logical result of the anti-social impulses and wilful pursuit of self-interest which dominated her in life. In legal terms, Meg is hanged as the “bluidy fingered thief and murtheress” she is called by another old woman who, although she too is thought to be a witch, shares with the outlaws a wish to distance herself from Meg (4. 58). But, significantly, Meg also dies the victim of those forces of enmity and hatred she has fostered because, for the mob attending the execution, the desire to witness her death is also one for revenge against a woman who is made a scapegoat for the community’s misfortunes. Meg’s quest for justice—by which she means vengeance—thus finally rebounds back on herself. Grimly ironic too is the fact that although Meg’s own all-embracing malevolence is neither bound to region or place nor tethered to any particular national prejudices, the mob’s hatred of her is additionally fuelled by a virulent Scotophobia that enables the community to think of harm as originating elsewhere and so


17 For a discussion of the puzzle surrounding the immediate cause of Meg’s hanging, see Beiderwell 73. The confusion as to the cause allows for the implication that Meg’s malevolence (rather than a specific criminal act) both generates and makes her the target of the crowd’s revenge. For scapegoating in a society in crisis, see René Girard, The Scapegoat, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P. 1986) 12-23. The notion of the scapegoat is critical in Midlothian, and not only for Meg. When Davie Deans tells Jeanie that Effie fled home after her reprieve, he describes her as “a withered branch . . . a scape-goat gone forth into the wilderness of the world, to carry wi’ her, as I trust, the sins of our little congregation” (4.100). Jeanie’s own view is less harsh, but the ending of the novel nevertheless seems to endorse that expressed by Deans.
to avoid, as Meg has done, turning the lens onto its own bigotry and harmful practices.

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Meg Murdockson is the only one of the madwomen in the Waverley novels actually shown undergoing judicial execution. In Midlothian such a death is made to seem the only possible end for a woman so far gone in ferocity and perversion that she cannot possibly be recuperated in any meaningful way—as, say, Norna of the Fitful Head is reclaimed from madness and delusion in The Pirate. In discussing Meg, critics typically focus on her archetypal status as the embodiment of a specifically female wickedness, of an unrepentant and obdurate malignity that, as Duncan notes, is closely tied to a perverse maternity. Emblematically, this is how Meg functions in Midlothian, and in this regard there is something both terrible and compelling about a character whose wayward trek through life, in contrast to the narrowly-focussed pursuit that Jeanie exemplifies, is characterised by a sheer excess of malignant passion. In some sense, we need look no further than this to explain Meg’s narrative function in Midlothian; her unchecked obsessions are a negative counterpoint to the careful restraint of a heroine schooled since infancy to be “grave, serious, firm, and reflecting” (1.205; 83). Nevertheless, it is worth

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18 But see Lammermoor 241 where, with regard to the witch-like Ailsie Gourlay, the narrator parenthetically confides that “it is some comfort to think that the old hag was tried, condemned, and burned on the top of North-Berwick-Law.”

19 Duncan 160.

20 The language of this early description of Jeanie explicitly draws on contemporary psychological theory: the passage continues: “An uncommonly strong and healthy temperament, free from all nervous affection and every other irregularity, which, attacking the body in its more noble functions, so often influences the mind, tended greatly to establish this firmness, simplicity, and decision of character.” The account of Jeanie’s early training contrasts her with the madwomen and also with Effie who has an indulgent upbringing (1.242-44). For a discussion of Effie’s character, see Hart 133-36.
noting that Meg is also given a history which goes some way towards explaining the origins of her nature in the light of contemporary theories of mind. This history emerges from several details mentioned only briefly in the novel, and also from two longer accounts given in the form of confessions—one made to Jeanie by Staunton and one written down by a clergyman who attends Meg on the eve of her execution. Because some of the facts of this history remain obscure it may seem perverse to press too hard on them in the expectation that they will form a coherent narrative. However their general tendency is clear. The account of the Murdocksons’ decline is itself established as a dark shadow for the much more hopeful narrative involving the Deans, while some of the history’s details implicitly point up the contrast between the different responses and outcomes of two families who are both obliged to grapple with the dislocations inaugurated by civil war, and with personal poverty and marginalisation.

The details of Meg’s history reveal that she and her husband Donald had fought, like Davie Deans, on the side of the Covenanters in the Scottish religious wars. That is, the two families share a background in extreme Presbyterianism. However, Donald Murdockson had been a soldier in the Cameronian regiment which Deans in fact singles out for condemnation because of the soldiers’ reputation for riotous behaviour. Following the religious and political settlements, Davie Deans remained in Scotland and struggled to survive while vigorously maintaining the strength of his beliefs even in the face of changing social conditions. The details of the Murdocksons’ subsequent fortunes

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21 I am grateful to Claire Lamont for discussion clarifying this point. Richard Cameron was one of the Covenanting martyrs. Davie Deans says that he objects to being called a "Cameronian" because the name was also given to a Lowland regiment of soldiers "whereof . . . many can now curse, swear, and use profane language" (2.167). In other words, he sees the Regiment as representing a falling-off from the ideals espoused by Cameron (that is, they are professional soldiers first and fighting for a religious cause only secondarily). Scott gives a history of the regiment in Tales of a Grandfather. See MPW vol 24, 384-91.
are considerably more murky, but the novel seems to suggest that Donald’s regiment had gone to the West Indies where the English father of George Staunton also served in a military capacity. By some unspecified means, the Murdocksons eventually became Mr. Staunton’s servants and they subsequently followed him to the Lincolnshire village of Willingham where he served as rector. The West Indies connection is a particularly obscure element in this story, but what is certain is that when George Staunton was born there, Meg Murdockson possessed the “confidence and esteem” of the family to such a degree that she was asked to be the boy’s wet-nurse (4. 266).22 Her use for this office reveals that she must recently have born a child herself and probably lost the infant at birth since she describes Staunton as “the first bairn I ever nursed” and, based on the evidence of the text, he is some seven years older than Madge.23 Although this is a potentially highly significant point, its status remains that of a tantalizing hint that the novel does not further develop. Its importance is, however, implicit in the depiction of Meg’s fierce attachment to Staunton— an attachment which, as she later rages, is but the

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22 The West Indies connection in Midlothian has received no significant critical attention. Trumpener, for example, does not mention it in Bardic Nationalism although it is relevant to her argument about colonial psychology, memory, and the challenges of returning “home”. Although the details of its influence remain at best sketchy, the West Indies in Midlothian is persistently associated with a moral enervation infecting both George Staunton and Meg.

23 That Meg’s employment as a wet-nurse requires her to have given birth is a point that may have been more evident to Scott’s contemporaries than it has been to modern critics. Meg’s mention of her past is further complicated. In the first edition of Midlothian there is just enough ambiguity in her account of her relationship to Staunton to support the suggestion that she—like Effie or Madge—may have been sick with child-bed fever after she delivered the lost (presumably deceased) child. She says of Staunton, “he was the first bairn I ever nursed—I had been—and man can never ken what woman feels for the bairn she has held first to her bosom.” (3.119). In the “Magnum” edition, this is changed to “but man can never ken” (italics mine); (Waverley Novels, vol. 12, 262). The revised wording supports a reading in which “ill” means morally bad rather than sick. That is, in the context of the whole passage, Meg is saying that despite her depravity she cannot now hurt Staunton because he was the first child she nursed. The manuscript of Midlothian, however, clearly has “and”, not “but”; see NLS MS 1548, f. 194. The “Magnum” change is the second of two that refer to Meg and seem designed further to stress her moral degeneracy (for the first, see p 104n). The standard general history of wet nursing is Valerie A. Fildes, Breasts, Bottles, and Babies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1986).
"natural" and enduring product of maternal feeling for a woman’s first nursling.24 In any event, it is some time after the Stauntons and the Murdocksons return to England that Donald Murdockson dies, and with his death begin the troubles that lead ultimately to the disgrace and subsequent banishment of his widow and daughter.

The epitaph which the Reverend Staunton causes to be engraved on Donald’s headstone in the Willingham cemetery is quoted in full, and it succinctly identifies the condition from which the Murdocksons fall when it describes “A SINCERE CHRISTIAN, A BRAVE SOLDIER, AND A FAITHFUL SERVANT” (3. 157). In a novel which has been aptly described as centrally concerned with the “failure or absence of patriarchy” there is a striking incongruity between an inscription commemorating a dead man who—as the epitaph conspicuously fails to note—was also a husband and father, and the present wretched circumstances of Donald’s surviving womenfolk.25 But Midlothian additionally and unequivocally establishes that it was not Donald’s death which exposed the family to hardship and set in motion the decline and degradation that end so dramatically near Carlisle. The roots actually lie elsewhere in the past, in the permanent and devastating effects on Meg’s psyche of her exposure to bloody violence, warfare, and rapacity.

While Donald Murdockson is alive, it is implied, Meg’s violence remains in check, and only with his death does it begin to prove disruptive. This, at least, is the narrative that emerges from Meg’s confession, written down on the eve of her execution and preserved in a document invested with special authority as a final explanation and clarification of the various mysteries associated with the shadowy lives and deeds of the

24 Scott’s conviction that this made for a permanently special relationship is best expressed by the comments in his Journal about his son after the death of Lady Scott in May 1826: “Walter... was much affected, poor fellow, and no wonder. Poor Charlotte nursed him and perhaps for that reason She was ever partial to him.” See Journal 170.

25 Duncan 150.
Murdocksons and their connection to the novel’s other, more major, characters. The clergymen who hears Meg’s last confession and commits it to paper is concerned with identifying the causes of her behaviour, and it is his narrative that lays blame for Meg’s criminal nature on her having “long followed the camp [of the Cameronian regiment].” Under these circumstances, the clergymen states, she had “doubtless acquired in fields of battle, and similar scenes, that ferocity and love of plunder for which she had been afterwards distinguished” (4. 265). This claim draws generally on the contemporary understanding of the potentially sustained psychological effects of a violence that corrupts the mind by its deleterious influence on the nervous and vascular systems. It is important to note, however, that if both Davie Deans and Donald Murdockson were soldiers, neither of them is accused of ferocity or rapacity. That distinction is reserved, rather, for the woman whose participation in warfare (like that of Elspat MacTavish or Helen MacGregor) represents such an extreme perversion of her feminine and domestic nature that it inevitably carries the risk of permanently and negatively affecting her mind and character. That is, if primarily her decline is dependent on the particular circumstances of Meg’s life as a camp follower or even as a female warrior alongside her husband, it is secondarily but tellingly made a function of a peculiarly feminine vulnerability to a moral degeneracy that is a direct consequence of an engagement in scenes of brutality and slaughter. The implication is that women, unlike men, are constitutionally less able to maintain a psychological separation between the realms of war and peace. If involvement in war is at times necessary for men, they are not usually denatured by the experience. Indeed, war may elicit the very “bravery” for which Donald Murdockson is eulogised on his headstone. In a woman, however, the aggression provoked by war may overwhelm or erase the mind’s overlay of civilising influences, and a prolonged exposure to the extreme or violent passions of the battle-field will mean
irreversible psychological damage or, to use a word that Midlothian persistently invokes with regard to Meg, “savagery.” In general, women’s involvement in war blurs the boundaries between states of peace and armed aggression, between public and private realms of experience. And, as we have seen with the accounts of Elspat and Helen in, respectively, “The Highland Widow” and Rob Roy, the most pernicious aspect of civil war in particular may be that it disrupts the home or domestic realm in terms not only of a fight over territory and power, but also of a damaging influence over women in whom it may readily generate the denaturing obsession that is a particularly devastating and insidious form of madness.

Although the comparison of Meg to women like Elspat or Helen is broadly valid with respect to psychology, it does not hold with regard to her commitment to larger causes or beliefs. In the present time of Midlothian’s narrative, Meg is curiously uncommitted to any cause or ideology, and it is this aspect of her characterisation that makes her background as a Covenanter so easy to overlook. In “The Highland Widow” Elspat’s powerful sense of grievance and her ferocious commitment to a cause that she cannot perceive is no longer relevant to a changed world is explained but not excused with reference to her husband’s gruesome death at her side during battle. Her distorted psyche is shaped equally by personal loss and a fanatical willingness to suppress self in the service of a group identity as a Highlander. But this is not the case in Midlothian where, apparently, Donald has died not in the exercise of his duties as a soldier but under peaceful circumstances. That Meg’s vengeance ultimately lacks a dimension clearly anchoring it in beliefs (however erroneous, ill-advised, or outmoded) or in more specific social and historical causes ultimately serves to establish it as a horrifying cultivation of personal resentments and destructive traits which are allowed to perpetuate themselves, to make of the mind a self-enclosed and perpetually festering wound.
Scott’s narrative impulse to historicise, to seek out causes, means that Midlothian’s account of Meg is concerned to identify the origins of what Adam Smith calls the “unsocial Passions.” Moreover, the novel is committed to making clear the contagious or contaminative nature of these passions. In particular, the novel stresses the profoundly negative psychological effects Meg has on her foster-son George Staunton and her daughter Madge although, paradoxically, it is in regard to these two characters that the only powerful exceptions can be found to her focus on self. In perverse fashion, Meg claims on several occasions to be inextricably and deeply attached to these “children.” The bond between them is, however, like that of drowning individuals whose clinging together may be suggestive both of a lingering desire for some form of human contact and, more ominously, a determination that one will not go down alone. If Meg is the emblem of a monstrous maternity where the giver of life is also its destroyer, the individuals who are fettered to Meg by an enduring biological connection are doomed to remain trapped within her plot-making or habits of mind in ways that other more fortunate characters escape. For these children, Meg cannot be safely distanced or rendered both irreducibly alien and ineffectual, to bray and howl in her “impotent rage.”

**Inheriting Madness: The lost children**

In the account of the Murdockson’s history which Jeanie hears from Staunton, Meg is specifically singled out for blame as the cause of his attachment to low-life and criminal activities. As he explains it, “the source from which I derived food, when an infant, must have communicated to me the wretched—the fated—propensity to vices that were...

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26 These are hatred and resentment. But Smith wonders if it is “the intention of Nature, that those rougher and more unamiable emotions, which drive men from one another, should be less easily and more rarely communicated” while Scott’s fiction seems more intent on showing the dangers arising under certain circumstances from the contagious aspect of such feelings. Smith 37.
strangers in my own family" (3.201-02). Even given the widespread contemporary belief in the transmission of character traits and moral propensities from the wet-nurse to her charge, Staunton’s explanation seems a special pleading that insulates his family from the taint of vice; we discern here a proleptic hint of Staunton’s later extreme preoccupation with family status. Nevertheless, his account of Meg’s damaging influence has significance for any discussion of Staunton’s engagement with smuggling or the Porteous riots—the incidents of the novel’s violent public history. Like Meg’s, Staunton’s engagement with these activities is uncoupled from any political commitment or belief. He explains that he became a smuggler and outlaw not because of any sympathy with the economic plight and political circumstances of Scotland, but because Scotland, as it was in the early eighteenth century, offered him a ready outlet for the lawless energies he imbibed from Meg and that were only aggravated by his indulgent upbringing in the West Indies and by the feelings of social alienation he suffered on his return to Britain. Fiona Robertson, who exhaustively identifies Staunton’s literary forebears and the social and spiritual dangers he represents, describes him as a revolutionary and anarchist. It is the latter term which most accurately registers the anti-social or nihilistic impulses that Staunton shares with Meg and which, manifested in a well-born and charismatic young man, have the potential to exert a fatal appeal and prove all the more dangerous.

Staunton’s excessive self-dramatisation has been widely noted by critics. In

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27 Robert Burton devotes a section of The Anatomy of Melancholy to discussing the transmission of traits from the nurse (327-30). Belief in its importance lingered in the eighteenth century. For madness and heredity generally, see Houston 288-92.

28 Notably, contemporary medical texts identified the returning colonial as particularly susceptible to mental disorders. See, for example, Haslam 35. That Haslam particularly associated madness with having dark hair and skin suggests that his description has a racist sub-text.

29 Robertson 205-14, especially 206-08.
particular, this impulse takes the form of a compulsion to narrate his own story.\textsuperscript{30} If for Staunton phrases such as "it is madness to look back, and misery to look forward" are vividly expressive of a soul-deforming alienation from any normal perception and experience of temporality, they are not the products of a disorder so extreme that he cannot self-reflexively comment on it (3.206). As an adept chameleon with a ready ability to shift identities and histories as required, Staunton strives to remain the owner of his history, able to determine how and to whom the various versions are transmitted. Such narrative facility is vitally connected to plot-making; Staunton tells Jeanie his story in order to secure her compliance with his plans. However, from the viewpoint of the novel's conclusion in which Staunton dies at the hands of the lost son whom he seeks to make his heir, his plotting proves grimly hubristic. And Staunton ultimately proves to have more in common with Meg than he knows since the impoverished hag and the wealthy aristocrat share both a propensity to think of others in instrumental terms and an inability to escape the consequences of their actions. As a final ironic twist in the story of their connection, Staunton's death results from the chance exhumation of Meg's final confession in which she reveals that she knows something about the fate of Effie's and Staunton's son. This narrative allows Staunton to trace the boy, but it is also indirectly responsible for provoking the violence in which he becomes a victim of parricide. In the end, for both Staunton and Meg, plot-making takes on its own destructive and monstrous life to turn on its creator.

\textsuperscript{30} Staunton is depicted as suffering from a nervous complaint like that described by Thomas Trotter who singles out as symptoms of nervous disorder, "an irksomeness, or dislike to attend to business and the common affairs of life; a selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings ... fickleness and unsteadiness of temper, even to irascibility." See Trotter xiv. In his study of the emergence of the "nervous body" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Peter Logan analyses the narrative compulsion of this body. See Peter Logan, \textit{Nerves and Narratives} (Berkeley: U of California P. 1997).
If Staunton is doorned to live out a brief and tormented existence, the condition of a much more severe mental alienation is reserved for Madge Murdockson. Given the various connections between Staunton and Madge, it is worth paying attention to what his confession has to say about his foster-sister and the mother of his murdered child. When Staunton goes to Scotland, changes his name to Robertson, and becomes an outlaw, he again meets up with Meg and Madge. As he tells Jeanie, he then first discovers that Madge is mad:

The unfortunate girl . . . seemed hardly even to know her seducer, far less to retain any sense of the injury she had received. Her mind is totally alienated, which, according to her mother's account, is sometimes the consequence of an unfavourable confinement. But it was my doing. Here was another stone knitted around my neck to sink me into the pit of perdition. Every look—every word of this poor creature—her false spirits—her imperfect recollections—her allusions to things which she had forgotten, but which were recorded in my conscience, were stabs of a poniard. (3. 210-11)

Clearly Staunton’s self-dramatising is here in full flight. His words also make evident his perception of Madge as not only irretrievably lost but also beyond suffering and—in contrast to his own condition of being haunted by painful recollections—unable to remember or tell her story. In Staunton’s version of the reencounter, the sight of Madge does not provoke his sympathy but merely increases the intensity of his own suffering while his feelings exemplify precisely the kind of acute awareness and conscience which mad Madge cannot experience.

As Staunton tells it in describing his relationship with Madge, he was guilty of abusing a familiarity that their connection “seemed to permit” and he thereby, as he adds,
“wronged her cruelly” (3.204). Although their connections to Meg makes foster-siblings of the pair, their relationship is an unequal one in all respects: Madge and Staunton are divided by social rank, education, age, and wealth. To this degree, Madge’s story is like that in numerous ballads about country girls who fall victim to the sophistication and promises of a man who is her social superior, and Staunton’s sense of having wronged her seems in part to derive from a recognition of the social inequalities. He also tells Jeanie that Madge was a giddy girl whose folly “should have been her protection” from his exploitation (3.204).

Despite these acknowledgments of responsibility on Staunton’s part, the beginning of *Midlothian* shows him to be not averse to further abusing Madge. His expressed concern for her condition does not prevent him from making use of her dress and name for his role as the leader of the Porteous riots, and this action on his part subsequently leads to Madge’s arrest and interrogation by the Edinburgh officers. Helen Small argues that *Midlothian*’s description of Staunton leading the riots dressed in the clothes of a madwoman memorably exploits the potent but ambiguous links between female madness and political rebellion.\(^{31}\) These links are forged, for example, by such plays as *Jane Shore* or *Venice Preserv’d*. They also, as Fiona Robertson notes, find a topical dimension in accounts of the French Revolution that both decried women’s involvement in the worst excesses of mob behaviour, and found in images of cross-dressed men an emblem for the breakdown of all known rules and order.\(^{32}\) But while the descriptions in Scott’s novel certainly exploit the associations of transgression and social-breakdown inherent in the cross-dressed figure, some care is needed in interpreting

\(^{31}\) Small 121.

\(^{32}\) Robertson 209-10. As Robertson notes, Scott’s own account, in *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, of the march on Versailles is replete with references to "Amazons." See MPW, vol 8, 170-83.
the significance of Staunton’s use specifically of Madge’s identity. When the riots are first described, we cannot actually know that the real Madge is a madwoman. Moreover, the explanations that later emerge for Staunton’s conduct effectively evacuate his role of any political or historical meaning by establishing that he acts from narrowly personal reasons: to rescue Effie and to avenge the death of his surrogate father, the smuggler Andrew Wilson. And, finally, Staunton’s appropriation of the madwoman’s identity is entirely self-interested and depends on his perception of Madge as a nonentity, a non-person whose incapacity to remember and tell will effectively keep him safe even while her own security is endangered. If identity is grounded in memory, Madge’s failure to recall the past combines with her “total alienation” to make her—in Staunton’s eyes and despite his acknowledged share in causing her condition—available for exploitation, an individual defined by the details of a past that she cannot remember and by a readily apparent eccentricity of dress and manner. From this perspective too, it is significant that Staunton is responsible for calling Madge “out o’ her ain name” since it is he who christens her Madge Wildfire (2.146).

At times the novel itself seems to endorse Staunton’s assessment when its repeated association of Madge with the symptoms, behaviour, and mannerisms supposed to be typical of the mad verge almost on caricature. On her first appearance, in the scene with the Edinburgh officers, Madge is described in some detail as “a tall, strapping wench . . . dressed fantastically, in a sort of blue riding jacket, with tarnished lace, her hair clubbed like a man” while her features are “coarse and masculine” although, from a distance, she “appeared rather handsome” (2.89-90). Again, the description may recall that of Meg Merrilies or, alternatively, look ahead to that of Norna in The Pirate; like those women, Madge carries a stick (here a switch rather than the stout staff favoured by the older women) and her clothes reveal a mingling of styles inappropriate to her class
and sex. For Meg Merrillies and Norna, however, fantastical costume is an aspect of self-conscious role-playing as wise women and it serves in part to identify their racial or national origins. In contrast, the bizarre mix of sartorial styles adopted by Madge is associated only with the madness that is otherwise characterised by exaggerated notions of her own beauty and importance, an excessive emotional vulnerability to external triggers affecting her moods, and an inability to know how she is perceived by others or to exert any command over the direction of her own thoughts. Midlothian repeatedly and insistently reminds us of Madge's affliction by these symptoms. When she walks out at night, "the ascent of the moon, supposed to be so portentous over those whose brain is infirm, made her spirits rise in a degree ten times more loquacious than she had hitherto exhibited" (2.114); her behaviour may suddenly be prompted by "wild fancy" (3.100; 286); when she is dressed in the most ragged finery, "poor Madge . . . was completely elated with personal vanity" (3.154); her emotions alternate rapidly between extravagant happiness and sobbing misery (3.129-30); and her displays of good humour are punctuated by sudden outbursts of violence generated by the "suspicions, to the impressions of which, persons in Madge's unsettled state of mind are particularly liable" (3.142-43). If Madge's erratic patterns of thought and speech make a striking contrast to Jeanie's "naturally calm, sedate, and firm" mind, they are also very different from Meg's obsessive fixity of purpose (3.112). Madge's mind is utterly vulnerable to the slightest of external circumstances: "the mind of this deranged being resembled nothing so much as a quantity of dry leaves, which may for a few minutes remain still, but are instantly discomposed and put in motion by the first casual breath of air" (3.134).

If Midlothian invites us to read Madge through conventions and stereotypes, contemporary readers would also have found in the details of her story a familiar narrative of the psychological consequences of loss associated with parturition or
maternity and of the operations of grief on a mind entirely unprepared through education or principle to resist the permanently devastating effects of such a blow. Moreover, Madge’s unmarried state and her susceptibility to seduction invest events with a certain moral logic; on one level, hers is a cautionary tale of wrong-doing and its dire consequences. When he summarises the sequence of events that produces Madge’s madness, the Midlothian narrator briskly concludes “[t]hat the consequence should be the total derangement of a mind which was constitutionally unsettled by giddiness and vanity, was extremely natural” (3.141-42). As Ian Duncan notes, Madge is a “ballad-archetype of the seduced and abandoned country lass” who is also a type of the female quixote, the woman whose imagination roams wildly and is uncoupled from the ethical considerations that would have kept her safe.\(^{33}\) And, in the context of a contemporary concern with the need for a “substantial” education that will anchor the individual in knowledge and principled reflection, and serve as a safeguard against the relentless spreading out of a mind that is open to every fleeting impression and impulse, it seems that Staunton’s perception of Madge actually manifests a dark insight. At some level, Madge’s madness is the product of a failure to cultivate a deep self. Her apparent reduction to a unpredictable bundle of mannerisms and evanescent moods reveals the truth about the erosion of identity that was overseen by Meg and, implicitly, is a consequence of the subterranean working out of psychic forces that have their roots in the past.

However, neither the poignancy of Madge’s story nor its potential to convey the acute suffering of those who experience life as a condition of entrapment by roles and circumstances can be fully explained in terms of the madwoman’s representation as a

\(^{33}\) Duncan 159.
stereotype, a being hollowed out by the now unalterable past. While stressing Madge’s “total alienation,” Midlothian also focuses attention on her intermittent self-awareness and determination to find a way out of the devastating marginalisation from which she suffers. The reminders about her insanity and its symptoms coexist with an insistence that she is not “the most raving lunatic” but, rather, possesses “a doubtful, uncertain, and twilight sort of rationality” (3.125). Staunton emphasises Madge’s utter inability to remember and Madge herself claims to know nothing about yesterday for, as she puts it, “ae day is aneugh for ony body to wun ower wi’ at a time, and ower muckle sometimes” (2.94). But what the text actually confirms is that she remembers only too well. For Madge, the traumatic and enduring memory of her child’s murder by Meg effectively freezes time, alienating her from the deep sense of meaningful purpose and temporal progression which is what enables Jeanie to get things done, to map out the goals that she finally and triumphantly attains.

To inhabit a world in which distinctions between past, present, and future have been ruptured is also to be alienated from explanatory narratives, as interrogators quickly discover when they press Madge for details about the “yesterday” she claims to forget or about the fate of Effie’s child. At the heart of Madge’s madness lies a tragic inability to tell her story in a way that will carry any kind of narrative authority for her listeners. Her story is not so much told as it is recovered, pieced together from allusive hints and fragments. Such hints emerge through the representation of Madge’s relationship not to history or a community in which she belongs, but to places which are the affective sites of her memory. Tellingly for the outcome, the three locations with which Madge is most explicitly associated are graves—burial places that function as fixed or static reminders of loss, of the unrecoverable but also unchangeable past that, for Madge, is generative only of the homeless wandering characterising her condition of madness and exile. In
particular, since two of the graves—Muschat’s Cairn near Edinburgh and the Lincolnshire burial mound of the murdered child—are unmarked by any official sign or text, they bear, like Madge herself, a relationship to official history that is tangential, obscured, or severed; in Cairns Craig’s memorable phrase, they and the woman for whom they have meaning are “out of history.”

When, early in the novel, the Edinburgh officers hope to entrap Staunton at Muschat’s Cairn, their unfamiliarity with a place that effectively exists off the map forces them to make use of Madge as a guide. The place is one associated very precisely with the horrific details of a violent private life and the crime of uxoricide. Indeed, as a marginal zone that remains unmappable or unknowable and yet dreaded, the cairn is much like Madge in evoking primal or superstitious fears of undisciplined and unpredictable forces that resist being brought into conformity with a more familiar topography. But if Madge serves as the appropriate guide to such a place, the expedition also reveals how different from the norm is her response to the horrors with which it is associated. For Madge, the cairn is a place where, briefly, she can feel at home. When she describes the apparition of the murdered woman, it is not in fear of a bloody ghost whose presence is for her as real as that of the living people she accompanies; rather, she imagines that she and the dead Ailsie Gourlay can enjoy conversation and “a grand boughing washing” (2. 117). The description is suggestive of the contemporary understanding of the links between a disruption in memory and a disposition to see apparitions, a condition in which mental images take on physical characteristics and the boundaries between mind and the phenomenal world are unstable or break down altogether. In Midlothian, however, Madge’s words also become evocative of her creation of an alternative community that substitutes for the one from which her

34 The phrase serves as the first part of the title of Craig’s study of narrative and Scottish history.
condition estranges her; they imply the imagination's consolations for her state. They also reveal Madge's psychological distance from those who experience life in inevitable relation to time, flux, and progress; her sense of community is experienced in relation to the dead who remain outside of change. However, when Madge rewrites in positive terms the ending of Ailsie's story by stressing forgiveness and reconciliation—“byganes suld be byganes”—we discern hints of a praiseworthy desire to find a way out of the impasse created by the violence of the past but also, in the context of her particular focus, a poignant suggestion of the impossibility of the task, of the indelibility of the past.

While Madge's rambling talk about washing day includes mention of blood-stains from “a bit skirling wean that was hurt some gate” and that will not wash out even with the help of “Deacon Sander's new cleansing draps,” she also alludes to a child whose death she regrets (2.117). And, in a later pivotal encounter, Madge's hijacking of Jeanie Deans (which takes the form also of effecting Jeanie's rescue from Meg and the potentially fatal trajectory of her plotting) represents the madwoman's attempt to imagine her life in terms of a pilgrimage to the specific sites of her trauma and, thereby, to make possible a different future. Jeanie—who has not known that the world contained “sic folk” as Madge and who is prompted by the encounter to wish herself “safe at hame amang mine ain leal and true people” (3.139)—is truly horrified by Madge and her strange claims of kinship and hints about occult connections between the two women. She is in the nightmare condition of someone encountering a strangely enigmatic figure whose riddling language alludes to mysteries that resist any easy solution; Jeanie's wish to be “safe at hame” expresses her desire to wake up out of her nightmare, to insulate herself from horror by returning to the familiar securities of a known community. For Madge, however, the interlude seems to offer an opportunity of replacing the influences of Meg the demonic mother with the beneficial ones of Jeanie; she seizes on a woman whose
forthright nature so markedly contrasts with her own errancy as someone who may not only attend to the fractured details of her story but also help her to construct its sequel.

When Madge takes Jeanie to the burial place of her murdered child, Midlothian’s narrator identifies the site in explicitly literary terms. The two women travel deep into the woods to encounter the place which is the heart of Madge’s story, “a hillock of moss, such as the poet of Grasmere has described” (3.129). The reference to Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” resonates as a means of locating Madge and her tragedy within a specific literary tradition, and in so doing it creates a supplementary meaning for the site—one that could not be available to Madge and Jeanie. Yet the text also challenges the adequacy of this meaning. In Wordsworth’s poem, Martha Ray is suspected of having murdered her own child; in Scott’s novel the child was murdered by a grandmother apparently motivated by financial motives. Unlike Martha, Madge seeks to escape the stasis in which she is entrapped and of which the child’s grave is a symbol, but she shares with Martha a condition of being repeatedly and compulsively drawn back to the mossy hillock; as Peter Murphy notes, “[f]or Madge all roads originate at her baby’s grave.”

Finally, in “The Thorn,” the onlooker who witnesses the woman’s grief and becomes obsessed with the mystery of her story is an old man; in Midlothian, Madge’s tears are observed by a woman who, for at least a short span of time, is also a wanderer far from the community in which she belongs.

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35 The sentence concludes “... in the motto to our chapter.” In fact, the motto to this chapter is from Fletcher, not from Wordsworth’s "The Thorn." The error is corrected in the "Magnum" edition, where the sentence in part reads "a variegated hillock of wild flowers and moss, such as the poet of Grasmere has described in his verses on the Thorn" (Waverley Novels, vol. 12, 269). The error occurs in the manuscript of Midlothian. The manuscript further reveals that Scott may have had the parallels with Martha Ray in mind from early on. The description of Madge’s “blue riding-jacket” occurs as a manuscript correction to what originally was “red jacket”; famously, Martha Ray wears a red cloak. See NLS MS 1548. f. 114.

In “The Thorn” the old mariner is finally unable, despite his fascination with Martha Ray, to establish any meaningful connection with her. Perhaps the most significant difference between Wordsworth’s poem and *Midlothian* is that in the novel the presence of the grave and the story it encodes does briefly enable a moment of sympathy between the madwoman and the female onlooker who observes her distress. Madge flings herself to the ground beside the unmarked grave site of the child whose birth and death alike have not been accorded any official recognition. Her acute suffering suggests that if seeing the ghosts of those who have met their deaths by violent means (she variously claims to see Ailsie Muschat and Jack Porteous, and to hold her child on her knee) is a symptom of her madness, the emblematic source of that madness is best captured here in the grave’s terrible separation of the quick from the dead, the living mother from the murdered child who, she poignantly affirms, was no curse but a “blessing” (3.136). But to Jeanie, the meaning of the site remains illegible, and she initially thinks only of taking advantage of Madge’s inattention to escape. In fact, however, the sight of Madge’s acute grief does call forth Jeanie’s sympathy precisely because Madge is least mad when she is here, at the very place that marks the beginning of her insanity. As Madge tells Jeanie, the grave contains her child and also her “best wits,” without which “I have never been just mysell yet” (3.139-40). Moreover, Madge can now briefly express a sense of her alienation or profound self-division when she notes the incompatibility between her being able to speak about the “bit bairn and the rest of it, just as if it had been another body’s” and her feeling “like to break [her] heart about it” (3. 143). An opportunity for healing then opens when a genuinely reciprocal understanding between her and Jeanie seems momentarily possible; human loss will be soothed by the establishment of a human connection that will be utterly unlike the perverse bond between Madge and her mother. Jeanie herself perceives that Madge
shows her "kindness" and comes to understand that this originates in her own long-ago act of charity when she had been prompted by pity to give milk to the destitute madwoman. And if that single but never-forgotten gesture of kindness has invested Jeanie with special significance for Madge, the madwoman now becomes aware that she can engage in real or meaningful conversation with the cow-feeder's daughter. As she says, "I hae spoke mair gude words to you in ten minutes, than I wad speak to my mother in as mony years" and she compares this to her usual experience of madness as a state in which her own narrative capacity is taken away to leave her as if possessed by satanic language (3. 132). In response Jeanie draws on the tenets and practices of her Presbyterian background to urge Madge "to settle [her] mind, and make [her] breast clean" or to allow for a release in words of what she has expressed in tears (3. 133).

Here, fleetingly, it seems as if there is a chance for some real communication. But when Madge begins to explain the circumstances of her past life and the plans for the future which her encounter with Jeanie has generated, she speaks not in historical but in metaphorical or apocalyptic terms that draw on her own familiarity with Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. She wants Jeanie to facilitate her redemption from the "wilderness" and show her the "narrow way, and the strait path" (3. 133). Madge's speech increasingly becomes all but incomprehensible to the more strictly-educated Jeanie whose capacity to perform her task and not get lost in the wilderness depends precisely on remaining grounded in present realities and practicalities, on her very inability to think in the imaginative terms that might open up a dizzying range of possibilities, of paths waiting to be taken. Unlike the Waverley heroes, this Waverley heroine cannot experience her sojourn away from the beaten path as one in which she can experiment with different options for belief and commitment, and Madge is no Fergus MacIvor whose charismatic personality offers a compelling vision of the meaning and identity such a commitment
has the power to confer. Rather, and despite her moments of insight into the
circumstances of her suffering, Madge remains merely a woman driven mad by the sordid
events of the past, an exiled wanderer tethered to a criminal mother. Moreover, as Jeanie
comes to perceive, Madge finally cannot tell her own story in the context of an interactive
conversation according to the usual question and answer format. Ultimately the
madwoman must be allowed to pursue “the wild disjointed chat which her rambling
imagination suggested; a mood in which she was much more communicative respecting
her own history, and that of others, than when there was any attempt made by direct
queries . . . to extract information” (3. 143); this is a reprise of the information we are
given earlier in the novel when the Edinburgh officers of the law interrogate Madge only
to find themselves thwarted in their attempts to follow a determinate logic. But here, in
the encounter with Jeanie, Madge’s return to mental rambling after her brief moment of
lucidity has a terrible significance for the eventual outcome. The moment of sympathy--
the healing interaction that, for example, occurs between Minna and Noma in The
Pirate--passes without fully realising its potential. Madge’s narrative incoherence is a
symptom of her retreat into a strange world of the imagination that hovers between the
bleak reality of her condition of homelessness, wandering, or exile, and a fantasy in
which the past is miraculously washed clean and the madwoman who is “poor, lost,
demented” will be found, restored to a community where “the good times will come back
again” (3.148-49).

The third grave site which Madge and Jeanie visit is that of Donald Murdockson
in the cemetery at Willingham, and the inscription on the father’s grave serves notice that
the madwoman has not always occupied a place in the wilderness. But the grave with its
text commemorating Donald as a servant, soldier, and Christian is a monument to a past
from which Madge seems not merely excluded but actually erased; there is nothing now
except Madge’s own memory to connect the madwoman with her absurd clothes and manners to the respectability that the inscription records. And yet, that memory is potent enough; Jeanie’s reading of the “very words’ chiselled on Donald’s head stone serves to sober Madge by evoking a calming “deep melancholy” suggestive of her sense of loss of both the father and the possibility of a meaningful life (3.157).

In returning to Willingham, Madge revisits the scene of the past in the belief that only there may she be released from entrapment by that past. But Madge’s sentence of banishment will not be lifted, and Jeanie will finally prove no enabling intercessor who smooths the way to reconciliation. Rather, Jeanie is preoccupied with an awareness that here she is at risk of being identified with the madwoman when the villagers gather round to view the spectacle of “mad Madge Murdockson and another Bess of Bedlam” (3.167). To regain her own “narrow way and strait path” Jeanie must distance herself from Madge by insisting upon the radical alterity of “sic folk” as the madwoman, or by aligning herself with the intentions if not the brutal actions of the villagers who tauntingly pursue Madge from Willingham. “I maun gang my ain road,” she tells Madge, and the madwoman has finally no choice but to return to her mother, the bond with whom reasserts itself when the one with Jeanie is abruptly severed (3.166). Madge’s departure is figured as a return to the wilderness in which she is nameless and homeless, and where, ominously, her only human connection is with Meg, her “puir auld mother... in the stocks at Barkston”; “God help me,” she says on leaving, “I forget my very name in this confused waste” (3.168).37

When Madge is separated from Jeanie at Willingham, she immediately blames her for both her own and Meg’s condition. In part, such blaming takes its place as one of the

37 Judith Wilt notes that Madge's lament "is a fundamental subtext in the Waverley world." See Wilt 142.
strategies deployed by the madwomen in which responsibility for their plight is ascribed to outside causes or individuals. Yet, in *Midlothian*, the question of Jeanie’s responsibility for Madge is an important one that resists easy answers. Jeanie herself is made to acknowledge the significant debt she owes to Madge; although she watches the madwoman’s departure with “delight” she also wishes that “she could have requited the service Madge had conferred upon her” (3.169). Jeanie knows that Madge has rescued her from Meg—the more obviously threatening of the madwomen. But she, in turn, cannot reciprocate by rescuing Madge from the particular forms of her entrapment. Jeanie’s task lies elsewhere or, indeed, closer to home; she must save her own family from the loss by which it is most threatened: the loss not of Effie but of the narrative by which the family understands itself to be upright, morally stalwart, honourable. And what *Midlothian* shows is that for Jeanie successfully to accomplish this task involves recognising that Madge cannot be saved; the madwoman must be “kept off” precisely because—as the text reaffirms—she is irrecoverably mad.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Jeanie is actually given a second chance to rescue Madge when she reencounters her near Carlisle when Meg is hanged. Because the episode recalls the earlier one and occurs after Jeanie has successfully completed her mission in London, it is freighted with certain expectations. On one level, certainly, it serves neatly to tie up a loose end in the narrative by establishing what eventually happens to the two madwomen. But even this is no simple thing because while the particular nature of Meg Murdockson’s characterisation makes it possible for her violent but apparently just execution to be reported on as a distant event, the sustained interest that has been generated by the troubling account of Madge establishes a certain narratorial and even ethical responsibility that cannot be disposed of in any summary way. Madge’s fate, the working out of her history, cannot be lightly dismissed or
recounted, for example, at second hand. It is worth considering this in more detail, because it seems evident that, by this point, Madge has become something of a problem in the narrative. While the conventions within which she is originally framed make it certain that there can be no good outcome--ballad maidens who bear illegitimate children who die under suspicious circumstances are doomed regardless of their apparent remorse--Midlothian has brought itself close to the details of Madge’s suffering and the existential pain of her condition in decidedly unconventional ways. Moreover, her relationship with Jeanie, the woman traveller, is quite different from that, say, of the narrator of Cowper’s The Task to Crazy Kate. Unlike Kate, Madge firmly establishes a claim of connection to Jeanie, she takes her to the locus of her suffering, and she identifies Jeanie as one who has the potential to reclaim the lost madwoman from her exile in the wilderness. And, despite Madge’s madness, these things carry a moral weight; they are claims which Jeanie must be shown to redeem or, alternatively, from which she must be set free.

That Jeanie arrives near Carlisle at the precise moment when Meg is being hanged and Madge is in danger from the anger of the crowd seems on one level an astonishing coincidence—one which only further increases expectations that the episode will show Jeanie, having saved her sister, now turning her attention to the other lost woman who has sought her intercession. On the other hand, the scene also has an extraordinary nightmare quality as if, despite all the comfort in which Jeanie is now travelling, she is still vulnerable to being hijacked by an alternative reality, the vertiginous world of violence and anarchic possibility represented by the madwomen. Moreover, and entirely as if she has been expecting Jeanie to appear, Madge immediately reasserts a claim of kinship when she cries out to Jeanie “they hae hangit our mother” and begs, “O gar them let me gang to cut her down!—let me but cut her down!—she is my mother, if she was waur than the deil” (4. 60). The episode near Carlisle carries the weight of an acute
narrative pressure akin to that at the end of the novel when Peter Pattieson must exert all his authority as narrator to compose a moral that asserts a necessary inevitability about the trajectory of the events he has narrated. However, the Carlisle episode does not spell out its lessons in the strained or unsatisfactory way of Pattieson’s conclusion; rather and more complexly, it attempts to relieve the pressures created by the problem of Madge through a description of doubled scenes—one of exceptional and terrifying violence, and another that embodies a haunting moment of purifying transcendence. Together the scenes tell us that Madge’s wildness cannot finally be healed but must be purged in order to release Jeanie from the madwoman’s burdensome claims that are irresolvable in the terms established by the novel’s moral schema and its account of Jeanie becoming, in Ian Duncan’s words, “the central, constitutive figure of a new domestic patriarchy.”

The brutal treatment meted out to Madge near Carlisle acts out the violence that has menaced her throughout Midlothian. From the outset Madge is made the object of threats: the Edinburgh officers call for someone to “knock out that mad bitch’s brains” (2.124); later Madge describes the severity with which the keeper at Bedlam treats her and the beadle at Willingham intimidates her with his whip. And if the violence characterising Meg’s treatment of her daughter is the thread uniting the other episodes or descriptions, in the end the mob assaults Madge as much because she is tainted by association with Meg as because her madness once again makes her a ready scapegoat, a convenient object for the venting of a collective hatred and discontent. But in the sudden outbreak of popular violence that follows hard on the old woman’s hanging, Madge actually endures much the worse treatment because, while Meg dies swiftly at the end of the hangman’s rope, Madge suffers a prolonged torture at the hands of the “parcel of

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38 Duncan 164.
savage-looking fellows, butchers and graziers” who “laid violent hands on [her]” (4. 61). Afterwards, Jeanie can hear “the hoarse roar with which the mob preface acts of riot or cruelty, yet even above that deep and dire note . . . the screams of the unfortunate victim” who reportedly becomes insensible only when she is repeatedly ducked into a muddy pond (4.63). If Meg’s death is distanced and thereby sanitised, Madge’s torments seem all too vividly present.

Subsequently, the belated and limited success of Jeanie’s entreaties on Madge’s behalf means that she is taken to the work-house hospital where, in that orderly or purifying institutional space, Madge is shown to find a home of sorts. Here the character of her insanity is transformed, to appear both more pathetic and still closely tied to the experience of maternity whose rupture was the original precipitating cause:

Madge was singing . . . singing her own wild snatches of songs and obsolete airs, with a voice no longer overstrained by false spirits, but softened, saddened, and subdued by bodily exhaustion. She was still insane, but was no longer able to express her wandering ideas in the wild notes of her former state of exalted imagination. There was death in the plaintive tones of her voice, which yet, in this moderated and melancholy mood, had something of the lulling sound with which a mother sings her infant asleep. (4.66-67)

It is as if the violence done to her has cleansed Madge of her wild imagination to return her, briefly, to a human world from which she had been alienated. Moreover, that Madge now can refuse to answer Jeanie’s questions about the fate of Effie’s child and expresses that refusal by turning away to face the wall suggests that she acquires a poignant dignity at the moment of life’s dissolution. In contrast with the violence that has preceded it, her singing generates a final expression of pity and sympathy. Yet, that Madge chooses to
look away from her interlocutors also implicitly passes sentence on them and on Jeanie’s desire to take advantage of Madge’s last moments to gain access to her knowledge about Effie’s child. Madge’s gesture allows for a retreat into what Kathryn Sutherland describes as the “unreadable core” in Scott’s novel and that is inhabited by the madwoman. If the novel has in fact delineated the causes and effects of Madge’s condition in detail, her final haunting expression of fragmentary melodies makes her suffering in some sense unknowable and even, when Madge slips finally into the silence that heralds death, beyond the reach of human language.

The death-bed scene and Madge’s songs—one of which, “Proud Maisie”, endures as perhaps the most popular written by Scott—aestheticise her death. The scene shows the on-lookers feeling sympathy for the madwoman’s suffering at precisely the moment when Madge’s potential to cause disruption or lure others into her wildness is effectively and conclusively contained by the pressing imminence of death. Moreover, if the novel’s consoling account of the healing calm of Madge’s final moments seems to resist too minute an interrogation—especially given the stark contrast with the preceding violence—it also implies that such a death may be the best that can be hoped for in the circumstances.

By doubling the figure of the madwoman, Midlothian directs attention to the fate of individuals who are the products of a violent historical past and shows that violence has a lingering but potent afterlife when it goes underground or endures, localised in the contaminating influence of an old woman who works her mischief not in the public arena of political concerns but through striking at the heart of family life. At the end of the

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39 Kathryn Sutherland, “Fictional Economies: Adam Smith, Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century Novel,” English Literary History 54 (1987): 121. Ina Ferris takes up Sutherland’s point when she describes this “core” as the place “where the outcasts, gypsies, and madwomen exist in the discursive eccentricity of their fragments of song, dark sayings, and opaque tales.” See Ferris 214.
novel, Meg's disruptive impulses resurface in the figure of the avenging child. But he escapes to America where, it is rumoured, he finds his proper home with a tribe of “savage” Indians. In other respects, the line of disruption associated with the madwomen is extinguished or purged with Madge's death, and a space is cleared for the establishment of the “Highland Arcadia” that the remainder of the fourth volume depicts.\(^{40}\)

This, at least, is the lesson we might retrospectively draw from the narrator's concluding moral: “guilt,” Peter Pattieson reminds us, “can never confer real happiness; [and] . . . the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission” (4. 372).

However, as this chapter argues, in Midlothanian stereotypes of female madness and the particular plot patterns to which they are committed are held in strained tension with the detailed evocation of Madge's agonised experience of her condition, and with the depiction of her as one whose madness, to adapt what Katie Trumpener says in another context, is in some sense the delayed and deeply personal effects of an historical causation working its way, in particularly insidious fashion, through Meg's deformed psyche.\(^{41}\) That for modern readers, the moments at which this tension may become most problematic are the scenes near Carlisle perhaps says something about the nature of the moral pressures or expectations we carry to our own reading. As Peter Murphy has persuasively argued, we want Jeanie to have learned something on her journey, and we also want her to be able, now that her mission is accomplished, to supply a way out of the

\(^{40}\) For the argument that Jeanie is the central figure in the “regeneration” that occurs in the novel’s final section, see: James Kerr. *Fiction Against History: Scott as Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 64.

\(^{41}\) Trumpener 151. Trumpener finds this to be typical of the national tale rather than the historical novel.
impasse facing the madwoman who has claimed kinship with her. This desire may be an effect of our own historically-determined reading. However, in the context of the pressure the novel’s sustained focus on the causes and consequences of female madness exerts on any conventional reading, it is worth noting that Midlothian’s account of Madge also caused problems for Scott’s contemporaries. As one reviewer implied, the portrait of the madwoman simply violates received standards of literary decorum. The review, which appeared in Blackwood’s Magazine, complains that “[t]he madness of Madge Wildfire is pushed rather far, and . . . [is] not sparingly enough introduced.” This criticism is further justified in uncompromising terms: “[i]nsanity, as a disease, is always disgusting,—or, if not disgusting, it has a sacredness about it, . . . which should save it from being unnecessarily exhibited.” The reviewer concludes by adding a decisively prescriptive statement: “[i]nsanity] should only be exhibited in short and broken snatches.” Writing a few years later, Nassau Senior also discusses the madwoman to comment, with some perplexity, “[w]hat to say of Madge Wildfire we scarcely know.” However, the assigned cause for his hesitation is itself revealing since it indicates that he finds the madwoman to be rather more realistic than conventional: “[t]he depiction] is more like what we suppose madness to be than any other representation of it that we recollect. But whether it is really like, those only can tell who have had the misfortune to see more of the insane than has fallen to our lot.”

42 Murphy 188-90

43 Rev. of Tales of My Landlord, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine 3 (1818): 572. According to Peter Garside, the reviewer was almost certainly Henry Mackenzie—which, given Midlothian’s rewriting of the madwoman conventions used in The Man of Feeling, makes the comments especially interesting. See P. D. Garside, “Walter Scott and the “Common” Novel. 1808-1819.” Cardiff Corevy: Reading the Romantic Text 3 (September 1999), Online: Internet 23 March 2000: <http://www.cf.ac.uk/uwc/encap/corevy/articles/cc03_n02.html>

44 [Nassau Senior], “Novels, by the Author of Waverley,” Quarterly Review 26 (1822) : 120.
That early readers of the novel identified in Jeanie Deans a new type of heroine has long been acknowledged. What both Senior’s remarks and the more negatively-phrased comments in Blackwood’s indicate is that they also recognised and were troubled by novelty in Midlothian’s haunting depiction of Madge Wildfire. It is this depiction that opens the way to the complex accounts of the psychological suffering endured by the heroines of Lammermoor, Kenilworth, and Saint Ronan’s Well.
Chapter 3

Potential and Perversion:
The Bride of Lammermoor

From the first publication of The Bride of Lammermoor in 1819, the tragic nature of the novel’s subject matter combined with the claustrophobic intensity of the plotting has made it seem something of an anomaly in the Waverley series.\(^1\) John Gibson Lockhart’s account of the novel’s composition while Scott was in a pain-induced delirium confirmed this view by providing a convincing biographical explanation for the apparent differences between Lammermoor and its fictional brethren.\(^2\) Indeed, his account may have served to establish an association between the depiction of the heroine’s unraveling sanity and the temporary derangement of an author whose illness produced an apparently uncharacteristic preoccupation with psychological perversity. Lockhart’s view of the matter continued to be accepted into the second half of the twentieth century, although critical interest in the novel gradually shifted its focus. A fascination with the mad bride prevailed in the nineteenth century when Scott’s rendering of the tragic love story and heroine’s madness made the novel an inspiration for other writers, artists, and composers.\(^3\) For twentieth century readers, however, Lucy Ashton has come to seem

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\(^1\) For a contemporary view, see [Senior] 120-26. Senior comments on the unusual “excellence of plot” (120). Helen Small uses the review to support her argument that the unchangeable nature of the madwoman convention meant that the nature of the outcome was evident even to readers of the 1819 edition (128). But Senior’s discussion is structured by his generic categorisation of Lammermoor as a tragedy, and the foreboding he discusses refers generally to the tragic denouement rather than specifically to the heroine’s madness.

\(^2\) Lockhart 1837-38. 4. 257-58 & 274-75. Subsequent biographers embellished Lockhart’s account; an example is John Buchan, Sir Walter Scott (London: Cassell, 1932). Buchan compares the circumstances of Lammermoor’s composition to those of Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (193).

more conventional and certainly much less interesting than the complex and conflicted character of the hero, Edgar Ravenswood. Moreover, that Scott changed the date of his Scottish source story to place the action in the early 1700s prompted critics to reconsider the novel's larger historical dimensions. Jane Millgate's use of the manuscript to demonstrate the doubtfulness of the Lockhart composition narrative as well as the significance and coherence of the first edition dating of events has led to further discussion of the specifically historical dimension of the novel that points to Scott's use of the failed nuptials of the source story as a way of engaging with issues of public history in the uncertain political landscape at the time of the 1707 Act of Union.4

The emphasis on the larger public issues that determine the status of *Lammermoor* as an historical novel has meant, however, that the predicament of the heroine and the finely detailed rendering of her transformation under psychological pressure are usually discussed only briefly in terms of a few by now standard assertions about her quixotic imagination.5 This perspective sees Lucy's madness as an extension or

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5 For example, George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 120. Lucy "is destroyed by an undisciplined imagination." Caroline Franklin argues that Lucy is "made mad by means of her imaginative vulnerability to superstition" (Franklin 29), while James Kerr notes that "Lucy's romancing is an essentially subjective activity, the solitary exercise of an imagination that creates a world after its own image." (Kerr 134). Ian Duncan describes Lucy as "a type, just this side of parody, of the romance-reading female quixote" (Duncan 139). For readings more sympathetic to Lucy, see Hart 308-25 (Hart does, however, conclude that Lucy is a "will-less" dreamer): Jane Millgate, "Two Versions of Regional Romance: Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor and Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles," *Studies in English Literature* 1500-1900 17 (1977): 729-58; Fiona Robertson, introduction, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, xxiv-xxviii; Polhemus 55-78; and Small 123-38. Robertson also discusses the novel in *Legitimate Histories* 214-25; both she and Small explore the links between female madness and revolution, and compare the novel to Charles Robert
intensification of her existing delusional state rather than in terms of a transformation or perversion. It also subordinates the question of Lucy's suffering—its origins, destructive course, and specific nature—to other issues raised by the novel's pessimistic interrogation of the possibilities for mapping out a path that can negotiate between competing versions of past and future while not being destroyed by the passions, narrowly-focused ambitions, and prejudices of the individuals concerned. The result is to minimise the significance of the novel's attention to Lucy as a central character, and also to obscure both the extent to which she represents a locus of value and potential in Lammermoor and the almost clinical precision with which the factors that contribute to and condition her madness—the perversion of her potential that occurs when Lucy becomes a figure of violent and irrational action—are isolated and described.

As we have seen, Scott's other treatments of the madwoman theme begin with an account of an already deranged understanding and proceed through the course of the novel to recuperate details of the woman's history while stressing the dangers to others of her contagious disorder or the incorporative nature of the plots she weaves. However, in Lammermoor, the progress of the heroine's decline is narrated sequentially, as it happens. The resulting attention to detail and process addresses a problem with which Scott's seventeenth century source story is not concerned when it sketches an outline of the publicly observable happenings that end with a young woman, in an evidently deranged state, stabbing her bridegroom on her wedding night. The source story about an arranged marriage leaves the nature of the young woman's actual experience a mystery because the story's attention, like that of the folk tales it resembles, is on actions rather than on issues of psychology, motivation, or emotional experience. But when Scott transforms the

Maurin's 1812 The Milesian Chief.
story into a novel, the challenge he sets himself involves not only creating an historical
and political resonance for the account of a failed alliance, but also exploring the hidden
or undocumented mental events that lead to the bride’s violent outburst. As a result—and
strikingly unlike the other madwomen stories that Scott tells—the emphasis falls on the
process of Lucy’s metamorphosis from a modest and promising heroine into the “exulting
demoniac” of the novel’s remarkable denouement (26). This difference of emphasis,
combined with Scott’s apparent determination to adhere to the broad outlines and fatal
outcome of his source, means that the novel stresses the heroine’s potential even while it
also registers the narrowing of possibilities for a hopeful resolution to her predicament.6
Lucy Ashton must go mad; the challenge is to explain why she must and, in so doing, to
make her madness both plausible and affectively compelling, to invest it with tragic
significance.

The title of The Bride of Lammermoor overtly signals the novel’s attention to
Lucy Ashton. For contemporary readers, it would also have hinted at the heroine’s
ultimately unrealised potential and the extent to which she is the victim of contending
forces. In choosing it, Scott could not fail to be aware of echoes with the title of Lord
Byron’s 1813 The Bride of Abydos.7 Byron’s “Turkish Tale” represents an important

6 Millgate says that the novel shows “Pattieson’s compulsive fidelity to his story.” See Walter Scott, 180.
The amplified second edition of Lockhart’s biography reports on Scott saying, with regard to Lucy’s death,
“of all the murders that I have committed in that way . . . there is none that went so much to my heart as the
poor Bride of Lammermoor; but it could not be helped—it is all true.” See Lockhart (1839), 10. 191.

7 Both also recall Schiller’s Die Braut von Messina (1803). The revenge theme, so strongly marked in
Scott’s novel, is common to all three works; so too is the focus on the daughter as an embodiment of the
possibilities for reconciliation. Well-read in the German drama, Scott would have been familiar with
Schiller’s play. He read Abydos when it was first published; on 6 January 1814, he wrote to John Murray “I
have read Lord Byron’s Bride of Abydos with great delight.” See Letters 3:396. For Byron’s poem, see
Clarendon P, 1980-93) 107-47. References to the poem are to this edition and canto, verse, and line
numbers are given in parentheses.
and hitherto unacknowledged precedent for Lammermoor, and the resonances with Scott’s title and its signalling of the nature of the heroine’s role and fate can best be illuminated through a brief comparison of the two works.

The titles of both poem and novel draw on the powerful sentimental associations of “bride” to locate the heroine at the interstices of innocence and experience, girlhood and womanhood. If, in contemporary usage, “bride” usually meant a woman just married (rather than one about to be married), then as now the word implied a threshold experience of definitive change. Moreover, this change represented the single most important one in a woman’s life, and late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers united in identifying it as one that could not, in good conscience, be made without her express agreement. If the poem and novel describe earlier societies where the woman’s inclinations were little considered, both works make this is a symptom of a general state of tyranny and even of decadence; The Bride of Lammermoor, for example, compares the seventeenth century Scottish situation with that “of France before the revolution” to imply a link between domestic practices and political instability (233). The two works

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8 Byron noted criticism of his title because his heroine, Zuleika, is never actually married. Lord Byron, Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP. 1973-82) 199 & 232-33. Writing of Zuleika, Byron records a wish “to preserve her purity without impairing the ardour of her attachment.”

9 See Caroline Gonda, Reading Daughters’ Fiction 1709-1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 1-37. The problem, as Gonda notes, was to preserve paternal authority while granting the legitimacy of the daughter’s wishes and autonomy (within the limits of her family and social situation). Education, as usual, was held to be key. Another relevant discussion is in Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage-Random, 1990)106-10. Foucault discusses the interpenetration, from the eighteenth century on, of “the deployment of alliance” and “the deployment of sexuality”: the former is explicitly a function of economic and political structures, but so too is the latter, only in more covert ways. His argument is amplified with reference to women and fiction by Nancy Armstrong in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). Scott himself argued that attachments based on romantic rather than mercenary motives had the potential for a lasting, important, and morally formative role, even when they otherwise ended badly. See [Walter Scott] Review of Emma, Quarterly Review 14(1815-16) : 200-01. No doubt he had in mind his own early attachment to Williamina Belsches.
depict societies in which the content of the young woman's affective and intellectual life is severely undervalued. Within this context, the heroine is shown imaginatively to transcend externally imposed limitations when she cultivates a psychological space of sympathy associated with both nature and her responsive engagement with legends, poetry, and romance. The works are also alike in representing the death of the heroine as a direct consequence of the domestic tyranny that, by pursuing its own self-interested goals, asserts an inhuman power over the heroine's body while failing to acknowledge the redemptive potential of her soul, her inner life. The effects of such a failure are catastrophic for the heroine and also for the wider community. Both Zuleika and Lucy Ashton die but, in addition, the genealogical line of the father is obliterated and the land is laid waste, to be marked only with the signs and artifacts through which the bride's story may be traced and its importance memorialised.

Focusing on the similarities of Byron's "Turkish tale" and Scott's "Scotch novel" tends to erase their considerable differences. But these too are instructive. Byron turns to a place far away and long ago to represent and critique, through the figure of Zuleika, the treatment of women in a rigidly conservative society whose violence and cruelty are harsh realities just barely masked by a sumptuous appearance of luxury. The poem metaphorically links the complete subjugation of women in Turkish society to the power-conserving tactics of a despotic government fanatically obsessed with shoring up its own position. Tyranny is, however, represented as ultimately self-destructive because of its ruthless dealings with the daughter who may point the way out of a sterile perpetuation of cycles of violence. Like Lucy's father, Giaffir is emotionally attached to his daughter but feelings to which he fails to accord much significance remain subordinated to other, stronger ones: "Affection chain'd her to that heart,/ Ambition tore the links apart" (1.6.191-92). In contrast to the poem and although it is also set in the
past, Scott’s novel is a domestic history in both the narrow and broad sense:
Lammermoor is no exotic tale of an oriental and safely distant tyranny. By focusing
attention on events set in a clearly identifiable regional landscape, Lammermoor brings
home the coercion and cruelty that the poem exiles. Moreover, in the novel matters are
additionally complicated by the presence of the heroine’s mother—a woman who, Lady
Macbeth-like, ruthlessly spurs her husband’s ambition and comes to regard her daughter
as instrumental to her purpose.

In terms of the brides’ fate, the difference in the manner and significance of their
deaths is also striking. Conflicting loyalties break Zuleika’s heart, and she dies just
moments before her lover, Selim, is murdered by her father’s soldiers. Zuleika
metamorphoses into a white rose whose daily withering and renewal implies transience
and fragility even while the flower sustains a lasting and consolatory memory of her
beauty and faith. Death saves Zuleika from knowledge and suffering: she will “ne’er . . .
feel nor fear the force/ Of absence—shame—pride—hate—revenge—remorse!/ And, oh! that
pang where more than Madness lies!” (2.27.643-45). Transformed into the solitary
“coldly pure and pale” flower that blooms in a land now “the place of a thousand tombs,”
Zuleika becomes a potent symbol for love’s arrest of time and of time’s power to cause
decay (2.28.664).10

That for Lucy there can be no consoling memorial reminds us of what Ina Ferris
calls Scott’s “profound distrust of the whole idea of the moment” to capture and convey
meaning.11 Lammermoor stubbornly resists invoking the kind of image into which the
painful details of Zuleika’s tragedy dissolve, and neither will it supply the “word

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10 For a discussion of Abvdos that focuses on Zuleika, see Caroline Franklin, Byron’s Heroines (Oxford:
Oxford UP, 1992) 47-64.

11 Ferris 220. Ferris makes the remark in reference to Scott’s “open and inconclusive starting points” and,
in this context, she discusses the opening chapter of Lammermoor.
"explanatory" that can succinctly and summarily account for the horrifying turn events take in the novel (261). If here, as in the poem, death seems a final escape, transcendence is impossible for one whose demise comes as no sudden or painless removal from a world made unbearable. In Lammermoor it is Lucy’s own violence in stabbing her bridegroom that attempts to stop time, to halt the inexorable sequence of events that alienate her from her chosen lover, Edgar Ravenswood, and lead instead to the wedding to Bucklaw and to the couple’s presence in the bridal chamber. But both the cause and consequence of the attempt are madness and, if Bucklaw survives the stabbing, Lucy is found gibbering in a corner, apparently unaware of time, memory, or self. It is not death but life that transforms her. Her final words --“So, you have ta’en up your bonnie bridegroom” (260)—uttered as she is carried past the threshold where the wounded Bucklaw fell, point to Lucy’s absorption into the horrifying figure of madness that features in the source story as Scott received it. Subsequently, after Lucy dies as the result of a series of convulsions, her body is hastily buried in an unmarked coffin “with as little attendance and ceremony as could possibly be dispensed with” (262). The novel’s account of the heroine’s madness and death makes Lucy’s fate involve an erasure of a type not found in Byron’s tale about Zuleika and, although here too the consequences for the family’s future are severe, in the end it is the unrepentant Lady Ashton who claims the last word when her own tomb memorialises her “name, titles, and virtues” (269).

In structural terms, the novel’s representation of Lucy’s history falls into two parts. The first part, including all of volumes one and two in the first edition, takes up the subject of Lucy’s romance with Ravenswood. Here we see how the novel, in some important respects, begins where Waverley, Guy Mannering, The Antiquary, and The Black Dwarf end—that is, with the possibility of forging a meaningful future in the union of the hero and heroine. Certainly this part hints at Lucy’s as-yet untapped propensity for
passionate feeling and the manner in which her position as the only daughter in an ambitious family tends to foster in her a dissociation between her evident pliancy and submission, and an imaginatively rich inner life. We are told, for example, that "under a semblance of extreme indifference, [she] nourished the germ of those passions which sometimes spring up in one night" (27). However, despite the presence of such hints, the overwhelming emphasis in this part is on representing Lucy as an ideal heroine who may function as a conciliatory force capable of bringing together her father and lover, and of eliciting the best qualities from the men by whom she is surrounded.\(^\text{12}\) The union between Lucy and Ravenswood follows the pattern of other Waverley novels in joining the representatives of old and new worlds, of an ancient aristocracy and a new professional and monied class. And, on a personal level, the relationship is one that also promises to heal the self-divisions both Lucy and Ravenswood have cultivated in their attempts to appease those demands of family that are at odds with their own natures.

The domestic idyll unfolding at Ravenswood Castle is disrupted by the return of Lady Ashton—a woman whose "fierce audacity of temper" and ruthless willingness to make her daughter a pawn in her plotting recalls an apparently very different character: Meg Murdockson in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Lady Ashton’s arrival causes Lucy to be struck with fear and to withdraw her presence from Ravenswood’s side in a manner that portends the lovers’ enduring physical separation and their inability to communicate with each other. The second volume ends with Ravenswood’s alarmed reception of Lucy’s note in which she describes herself as being under close and unremitting watch and insists, in prophetic phrase, "I will be true to my word, while the exercise of my reason is

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\(^{12}\) That an early review refers to Lucy as "the most happily conceived of all our author’s heroines" and notes that the "modest, unmarked character of this maiden is contrasted throughout in a masterly manner with the desperate part she plays in the sequel" indicates how she was read by Scott’s contemporaries. Rev. of *Third Series of The Tales of My Landlord*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 5 (1819): 343.
vouchsafed to me” (224).

The second and concluding part of Lucy’s story commences with the novel’s third volume and focuses on her confinements to an interior landscape under the surveillance authorised by Lady Ashton. In this part, Lucy becomes increasingly remote, and her thoughts and feelings gradually become inaccessible even to the novel’s narrator who, earlier, claims knowledge of those areas of her inner life that she generally keeps concealed. Under conditions in which Lucy is denied access to a community and natural world that nourished her sympathies, her dissociative response ceases to be an adaptive or self-protective mechanism when her imagination is harnessed as a tool by her oppressors—a tool whose ultimately destructive and singular force they cannot accurately gauge.

The beginning of Lammermoor includes strong hints of a coming tragedy. In the opening chapter, Dick Tinto’s painting makes the bride seem incapable of being more than an anguished onlooker to arguments about her own future; in subsequent chapters portents and omens such as Thomas the Rhymer’s prophecy, the story of the mermaid’s fountain, the raven killed by Lucy’s brother, tend cumulatively to create a sense that a tragic outcome may be inescapable. Nevertheless, the novel eschews a supernatural explanation when it stresses that this outcome is the result, at each step, of choices, decisions, or of interventions that simply fail to happen or come too late. That events unfold as they do is partly related to historically-determined circumstances, as critics have noted. But it is also a function of psychology, and in this regard Lammermoor is committed to describing the process by which the characters of its hero and heroine ultimately become fixed in terribly destructive ways.

It is, however, important to recognise that neither Ravenswood nor Lucy begin by being fixed. If, at the outset, both have certain predispositions and, like other Waverley heroes and heroines, carry a weighty burden of family expectations, they also display an
openness to hopeful modes of thinking. The trajectory of Scott’s source story requires Lucy to go mad and die. However, as Scott develops the bride’s tale, Lammermoor remains haunted by the possibility of another, more promising outcome, and the narrative sequencing that gives priority to the heroine’s potential underlines and makes powerfully immediate the nature of the loss the tragedy entails when it shows this potential perverted to violent insanity. The following discussion will stress the depiction and contextualising of Lucy’s potential as an ideal heroine before it turns to consider more closely the specifics of Lammermoor’s history of female madness.

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In Scott’s domestic version of the bride’s tale, his title appropriately establishes a link between place and heroine for a novel in which the fulcrum of the plot ostensibly turns on the question of land and its ownership. Though the use of Lammermoor in the title is problematic, the explicit concern with the territorial and dynastic is unquestionable. The occupation by Ravenswood’s ancestors of the lands and castle still identified with their name was a matter of their role as warlike defenders against the military incursions

13 This is usually discussed with reference to Ravenswood: for example in Millgate, Walter Scott 182. For an opposing view, see Robertson, introduction. The Bride of Lammermoor xxi. It is interesting to speculate about how the novel was experienced by its first readers who did not encounter the tale through the lens supplied by the “Magnum” introduction which recounts in detail the historical version of the bride’s tale. It seems likely that early readers would have brought strong expectations of a hopeful outcome as a result of their familiarity with earlier novels in the Waverley series and, despite the auguries of disaster, may have found the denouement shocking and even unexpected. The “Magnum” introduction is in Waverley Novels, vol. 13, 237-55.

14 Problematic because Lucy is principally associated with the Ravenswood estate, not with the larger geographical area encompassed by the Lammermoor hills. If the title is meant to invoke Byron’s poem, it seems at once specific (this is a Scottish bride) and carefully vague in a way that allows it to suggest that, in death, Lucy is freed from the dynastic considerations that deformed her life. Byron’s title generally implies the East, but it is also remarkably non-specific, especially when compared with the Schiller play.
of English invaders. But the ancient story of Malise Ravenswood is a reminder that such ownership may be unstable and dependent on a state of continuous preparedness and aggression. Moreover, once the historical conditions change, a new kind of instability takes over. The Ravenswoods ultimately lose their land as a result not of war but in a manner typical of a less overtly violent time: through the wiles of a Scottish lawyer adroit at manipulating the law to his advantage. But the new ownership, by Sir William Ashton, faces its own challenges. The right to possession, as Locke tells us, derives from labour, and the Ravenswoods' warlike defence justified ownership of their territories. But how is ownership to be secured in modern times when the strategic location of the estate is no longer of importance, but when political life remains unpredictable and volatile?

While *Lammermoor* aligns itself with conservative arguments for the perpetuation of a system of estates and ownership that concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a few, it does not uncritically endorse the sanctity of inheritance. The right to possession must be earned, and the loss of the estate by Ravenswood's father is said to come about not solely through the legal wiles of Sir William but as a consequence both of choosing the losing side in the 1689 civil war and of a continuing failure to adapt to the new order. Comments by one of their former dependents, Mortsheugh, are bitter reminders that when the Lord of Ravenswood carelessly "loot his affairs gang to the dogs," this negatively affects the lives of those who served and counted on the family (198). And, when they stubbornly cling to the ancient ideals of an outmoded warrior society, the Ravenswoods also reveal that their "legendary pride and turbulence" are unsuited and even dangerous to more peaceful times (15). Notably, one element in the Lord of Ravenswood's downfall derives from the passionate and ultimately self-destructive intensity of his hatred for Sir William. When his mind obsessively focuses on that hatred, a poisonous madness possesses him so that he dies "during a fit of violent and impotent fury." Moreover,
because his passion blocks him from reflecting on the nature of his own fate or the actions and preoccupations that have brought it about, the Lord of Ravenswood learns nothing from his experience and, instead, bequeaths to his son “a legacy of vengeance” (19). Much as, in “The Highland Widow,” Hamish MacTavish is expected to sacrifice himself to the past by embracing the cause which occasioned his father’s death, Edgar Ravenswood is devoted by his father to a destructive course of violence and revenge.

In the quarrel between the Ravenswoods and the Ashtons, two models of ownership are presented: one is based on aggression and ancient hereditary rights, and the other on an opportunistic use of the legal system that structures and governs modern society. There is, however, a third option that could mediate between, on the one hand, the unthinking continuation of a tradition that values the estate as an hereditary entitlement conferring dynastic and individual identity, and, on the other, an emphasis on land solely as property that ensures status and wealth. This third option is the one represented by Lucy, and it implicitly critiques the other two by exposing the fact that an insistence on the rights and privileges of ownership can be accompanied by a pervasive and damaging neglect of the deep value of the land itself. In this option, claims of ownership are naturalised through a discovery of the moral, spiritual, and imaginative basis of attachment to the land.15 For Lucy, the land is a layered repository of history and memory, and a locus for the healing power and enduring beauty of nature. Alone among the Ashtons, it is Lucy’s labour in becoming familiar with the estate through her exploration of “each land, alley, dingle, or bush dell” and her interest in its legends of

15 Vivien Jones has described the “romance topos of the socially marginal heroine, discovered in an isolated rural house, subjected metonymically to “improvement” and eventually revealed as true heir, either actually or metaphorically, to the estate.” See Vivien Jones, “The coquetry of nature: politics and the Picturesque in women’s fiction,” Copley & Garside 120. Lucy is not socially marginal but, at the outset, she is poised to fulfil the role Jones describes.
human use and the histories of the inhabitants that allow her to enter into full imaginative possession of the property (29). Such labour, Lammermoor implies, transcends the strictly strategic, economic, or status-enhancing value of the land, to make ownership a matter of identifying and nurturing an immaterial or spiritual value.

Lucy can symbolise that value precisely because she is her father’s daughter: powerless, excluded from actual possession, and with her mobility strictly limited, Lucy is bound to the estate by an active exploration and developing knowledge. In this regard, it is significant that Lucy is unique in her ability to draw Sir William away from the pursuit of sophistical legal dealings in his study, and out into the physically immediate world of the estate where he is forced up against reminders of his obligations to a wider community. We can see how this works in the early episode when Lucy’s overheard music diverts Sir William’s thoughts from a preoccupation with ensuring the continued downfall of the Ravenswood family.

That Lucy’s overheard song explicitly counsels the listener to “[e]asy live and quiet die” has led to conflicting critical interpretations. Ian Duncan suggests that the song encodes Lucy’s inner vacancy, while Robert Polhemus, who notes the song’s importance in granting Lucy a lyric voice, argues that both it and the subsequent portrayal of Lucy imagine “the deep human impulse to make lyrical those thoughts and emotions that join beauty and love.”\(^\text{16}\) The context of the song supports this latter claim. On hearing the song, Sir William enters Lucy’s domain as if it were a place entirely secluded from and with no connection to the “real” business in which he engages. Yet Sir William, seated in his study surrounded by the “ponderous volumes” that are the required accessories for a man of law, seems to be engaged in his own brand of fiction-making and even to be

\(^{16}\) Duncan 139–40 & Polhemus 59.
mired in his own self-divisions between contending ambitions and fears. On close inspection, “a stranger could have discovered something vacillating and uncertain in his resolution,” while his attempts to write a memorandum incriminating Ravenswood leave him “labouring to find words” (23-24). Thus, although he enters Lucy’s presence as if seeking a mere diversion from his work and oppressive reminders of the legendary Ravenswood vengeance, the language suggests that Lucy may actually enable him to enter a world that is more, not less, real.

Lucy’s introduction indicates the manner in which she is read by her father and brothers as offering a refuge to which they may retreat but that otherwise bears no significant connection to the larger world.17 But once she and Sir William move into the outside realm of the estate, her role takes on an additional complexity. That Sir William is “not indifferent to the beauties of nature” identifies a contrast with his wife who is associated exclusively with interior spaces whose elaborately dressed surfaces, like those of the woman herself, are intended to impress the viewer with a sense of status, the apparent solidity of power. The father’s turn to Lucy for companionship suggests the degree to which the two are united by taste, and the depiction also implies that Lucy may provide Sir William with a conduit to nature and “natural” emotions that are otherwise unavailable to him (25). Lucy’s presence allows him to appreciate the estate not as merely the visible and tangible evidence of his material success but as “nature” which he enjoys “doubly” because of the presence of “the beautiful, simple, and interesting girl” (31). Indeed, it is as if Sir William can encounter the estate only with Lucy’s help, and it

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17 Pertinent here is Maaja Stewart’s discussion of the construction of brother-sister love in Jane Austen’s fiction. She notes that the relationship with the sister promises the brother a perfect, desexualised companionship based on the sister’s training in making neither emotional nor economic demands. The sister represents the home as a place of refuge and nurture. See: Maaja Stewart. Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions (Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P. 1993) 15-16.
is her sensibility that defines the landscape. For Lucy is no passive companion; rather, she actively guides her father’s experience:

[Lucy] now called him to admire the size of some ancient oak, and now the unexpected turn, where the path developing its maze from glen or dingle, suddenly reached an eminence commanding an extensive view of the plains beneath them, and then gradually glided away from the prospect to lose itself among rocks and thickets, and guide to scenes of deeper seclusion. (31)

The description, with its developed contrast between dark and light, depth and prospect, draws on the picturesque landscape theory that, as Vivien Jones notes, is concerned “to naturalise and fix the country house in the face of political instability.”18 Lucy’s familiarity with the topography and scenery gives the walk meaning both as an aesthetic encounter and as a way of claiming possession of the estate. The description also establishes, through the use of selected details like the ancient oak with its associations of stalwart independence, the permanent and enduring qualities of the land as the locus of specific social and national values. It functions, that is, as a reminder that the importance of the estate is not confined to the personal ambitions of the two families who contest its ownership; it has a larger significance which, to be retained, requires both aesthetic and literal cultivation.

As J. H. Alexander notes in his edition of Lammermoor, the final words of the quoted passage allude to William Wordsworth’s “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (346n).19 The allusion suggests the extent to which Lucy, as her father’s

18 Jones 121.

companion and guide, may represent Sir William’s still unrecognised hope for the future. In the poem, the poet reveals his belief that his sister may constitute just such a hope for him, while the concluding lines record the degree to which her presence makes “these steep woods and lofty cliffs./ And this green pastoral landscape” yet “more dear” (158-60). While the allusion is immediately suggestive for an understanding of the nature of Lucy’s relationship with Sir William, it also points ahead to hint at what she might offer Ravenswood, the disinherit “Master” of the estate. For it is Ravenswood who, like the poet, returns to a landscape familiar to him from the past and who, in order not to become a ghostlike figure endlessly haunting the scenes of his family’s former glory days, needs to experience what the poem idealises as the therapeutic potential of memory working in conjunction with the landscape. In “Tintern Abbey,” the release of this potential is dependent on the presence of the poet’s sister, and it is a direct address to Dorothy Wordsworth that brings the poem into being. In Lammermoor, it is Lucy who has the power to make the estate a physically tangible and spiritually resonant reality not only to Sir William but also to the dispossessed heir who stands to find his identity reaffirmed through a reawakened memory and by reexperiencing the land through the softening influence of a dependent but aesthetically alert woman.

Lucy and Sir William visit the old blind nurse of the Ravenswoods, Alice Gray. Sir William notes that Lucy makes it “a point of conscience to record the special history of every boor about the castle” but Lucy herself concedes that Alice provides the “best authority” for such histories (29). If Lucy chronicles the past lives of the estate’s inhabitants, this activity carries with it a clear moral directive: the owner of the estate must show respect for tradition and for those inhabitants by attending to present needs. However, Lucy’s stance on tradition and the past actually establishes itself in contrast to that of both Sir William and Alice. Sir William is intent on extirpating the traces of a
history whose lingering claims in the present he experiences as threats to his security.

The more fatalistic Alice believes that there is no escaping the past and that individuals are doomed to walk in the paths laid down for them by ancient customs and patterns of inheritance; in this regard, she has an ominous affinity with the old madwomen discussed in Chapter One. When Lucy encourages her father to direct his attention to the decaying state of Alice's cottage, she implicitly questions Alice's own conviction that its condition should remain as a memorial to her suffering and refusal to contemplate a better future, the possibility of progress. Lucy construes the work of improvement not as an attempt to cover over the traces of the past but, rather, as part of a system of mutual obligation and dependency established between the estate owner and its inhabitants. That she must urge her father to take on such work makes the point that the owner can fulfil his obligations only if he makes himself familiar with the specific conditions of his estate, and that the community's future depends on this awareness and the labour it presupposes.

Lucy's walk with Sir William represents on one level an idealised version of the father-daughter relationship--one that is familiar from other Waverley novels. However, in Lammermoor the point is quickly made that this relationship is subject to codes of conduct that severely limit its potential. The rules governing the behaviour of young women prevent Lucy from speaking to her father about his conversation with Alice on the matter of his quarrel with Ravenswood: "[a]ccording to the ideas of the time, which did not permit a young woman to offer her sentiments on any subject of importance unless especially required to do so, Lucy was bound to appear ignorant of all that had passed" (36). When Lucy must remain silent on a subject about which her opinion might prove a valuable counter to Alice's insistence that old ways of violence and vengeance yet prevail and must be feared, Sir William can again retreat to his solipsistic thoughts about the need to force a presumptive strike against the Ravenswoods' sole and
impoverished survivor, and the promising interlude of shared interest abruptly passes. Moreover, when she is denied a chance to speak truthfully about this important matter, Lucy finds herself constrained to account for her thoughtfulness by representing herself as something she is not: a timid young woman alarmed by the nearby presence of wild cattle. The incident is a reminder that, within the terms dictated by her society and family, Lucy is obliged to adopt a role that does not always accurately reflect an inner reality. The culturally-determined practise of suppressing a young woman’s speech encourages an appearance of ignorance and may impoverish society through a neglect of a capacity to reflect and comment on matters of more than a limited importance. But it may also be to sustain, in the young woman herself, a personally damaging split between the thinking and observing self, and the speaking or public self.

In Lammermoor, the mutual inability of Sir William and Lucy to acknowledge and discuss her views has nearly fatal consequences when the bull, which Lucy claims to fear, actually charges and Sir William is unable to offer protection. In some sense, the episode encodes in miniature the logic of a relationship between words and events that is repeatedly evoked in a novel where to say something is often to make it happen. Lucy expresses her fear of the bull and the bull charges; elsewhere ominous predictions about the outcome of Lucy and Ravenswood’s relationship will also be translated into events. For such a world, old Alice may be an accurate prophet; there is no escaping destiny, no free will, and the future is already written to the patterns of the past. And yet, the scene also suggests another reading. Ravenswood, present on the estate with— as Alice predicts—the intention of harming Sir William, intervenes to save both Lucy and her father. Such an action at this critical moment emblematises Lucy’s shift from her father to Ravenswood as a protector and object for her affections. In terms of the desirable pattern for a young woman’s life, the shift is an appropriate one. Of perhaps even greater
significance in this context is that the episode also confirms Lucy’s potential as an agent of reconciliation. Because Ravenswood saves Lucy, he does not kill Sir William, and he thereby may secure his own release from the enforced vow to be his father’s avenger, to enact a role that will further perpetrate violence and hatred.

The effect on Lucy’s mind of the encounter with Ravenswood is, we are told, “more permanent than the injury her nerves had sustained” (44). The language here links this comment to an earlier one made when Lucy is unable to speak to her father about Alice. When the narrator records Lucy’s familiarity with the presence of the wild cattle, he adds that “it was not then, as now, a necessary part of a young lady’s education, to indulge in causeless tremors of the nerves” (37). Taken together, the remarks imply a desire to distinguish what happens to Lucy from the debilitating nervous ailments whose apparent prevalence among young women concerned medical writers contemporary with Scott. Lucy, we are to remember, is not susceptible to “causeless” or fashionable complaints that have no identifiable cause; her coming illness will be of a different order. Meanwhile, claims about the “effect on her mind” distinguish psychological processes from somatic ones to affirm that the effect is concealed from others who readily conclude that Lucy has suffered no lingering consequences from the incident. Thus, although we are told that “[t]ime . . . absence, change of place and of face, might probably have destroyed the illusion in her instance as it has done in many others,” Sir William remains blind to the need for any intervention and, in fact, interprets the situation as personally advantageous since Lucy’s charms may effectively disarm Ravenswood.  

20 For the 1830 edition, Scott modified the criticism of contemporary educational practice. The 1830 sentence reads, "... it was not then, as it may be now ..." (Waverley Novels, vol. 13, 321). The 1819 edition is more emphatic.

21 The therapeutics mentioned are those frequently described by medical writers as beneficial in cases of mental distress. See, for example, William Cullen, First Lines of the Practice of Physic (Brookfield, 1807) 557.
Felt at the level of Lucy’s inner life, the effect prompts the growth of the “germ” of passions and Lammermoor has prepared the ground for this development by an earlier account of how Lucy’s untapped inner intensity finds an outlet in her reading of romance narratives. The description of this sensibility has resulted in the critical estimation of Lucy as fatally entrapped by her dreams of an outmoded chivalry, a “secret delight in the old legendary tales of ardent devotion and unalterable affection” (25). Certainly her perception of Ravenswood is strongly coloured by the ways in which his appearance and the episode of the charging bull conform to the narratives whose plot lines structure her imagination; in her dreams the mysterious Ravenswood readily becomes a chivalric hero, and Lucy herself is the damsel in distress who is snatched from certain death. Yet, as it is described in Lammermoor, the episode is indeed as powerfully charged as Lucy’s subsequent dream life makes it, and it is only the prosaic Lady Ashton who determinedly rewrites it in banal terms when she speaks of the bull as but a “dun cow” (182). Because the narrator’s description confirms the real extent of the danger from which Ravenswood saves the Ashtons, we understand that Lucy’s dreams are not the equivalent of Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Moreover, it is notable that while it would not be anachronistic to represent Lucy’s reading as like that of Charlotte Lennox’s heroine in The Female Quixote who devours voluminous seventeenth century romances, Lucy’s imagination is said to have been nourished by a specifically British literary tradition. She draws her heroines from a literature that, in Scott’s own time, formed part of an approved educational programme, especially for young women. This literature is one that, as Alan Richardson notes, promoted a sense of “an ideal mental community” or that sustained

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22 Scott added the information about Lucy’s private feelings and romantic disposition as a revision in manuscript. The added material begins with “Yet her passiveness of disposition” and ends with “sought for in vain in her own choice.” The manuscript is in the Signet Library, Edinburgh, and the relevant passage appears on f 15v.
links between the individual reader's consciousness and that of a national audience for books. And there is nothing random about the list of literary texts specifically invoked. If the allusions to the tragic heroines Juliet and Ophelia are suggestive for the coming fatal denouement to Lucy's own tale, the references to Spenser's Una or Shakespeare's Miranda carry more hopeful associations since the one is an exemplary figure of fortitude and faith triumphant while the other is a daughter whose isolation is more extreme even than Lucy's and whose fidelity to father and lover opens the way to reconciliation for all.

Ian Duncan argues that if Una and Miranda are "vessels of patriarchal grace," they belong to "a lost cultural past" which, for Lucy, retains its form but not its ethical content. Lucy, he says, is unlike the earlier heroines in that, from the beginning, she is a being who gives the appearance of an ideal femininity but lacks substance. Yet the depiction of Lucy's secret pursuit of an imaginative life implies that, in his search for answers to the question prompted by the source story about the hidden, psychological reasons for the bride's madness, Scott is concerned to invest his heroine with a deep self that aspires to establish a sustaining connection with a community, that ardently longs to discover meaning, beauty, and the individual with whom they might be shared. For Scott's contemporaries, as trained readers in the Waverley sequence, the description of Lucy's reading would have recalled Edward Waverley's similar delight in tales of chivalry, his attempts to find a role that might satisfy his passionate and book-fed yearnings for a world of passionate intensity. Both Lucy and Edward associate fiction with private, embowered spaces in a landscape where their mental topography is mapped

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23 Richardson 262. For the approved reading material see, for example: Hannah More, "Unprofitable Reading," in The Works of Hannah More vol. 2 (New York: Harper, 1835) 473. Also the discussion in Richardson 167-212.

24 Duncan 140.
and nourished. And their imaginative responsiveness retains a strongly positive valence even while it carries the risks associated with escapism, an emotional dependency on an ideal dream-world. Reading, as contemporary theorists on education argued, may promote sympathy and a sense of connection to others. Deidre Lynch notes that reading allows the individual “to sound the depths of her own special self and manifest her distinctive sensibility” even while, in general, her “intimate transactions with the inner meanings of literature are public-spirited.” Problems arise only when the actual community the individual inhabits neither confirms nor sustains this public-spirited aspect of the reading or imaginative experience and, thereby, drives it underground where it may take on a distorted or even self-destructive form.

The great difference between the hero of Waverley and the heroine of Lammermoor is, as Jane Millgate notes, that the conditions of Lucy’s life as a high-born woman make impossible an education of the kind Edward undergoes as he journeys north. The comparison with Waverley suggests that in part this is a question of the difference between an active encounter with history and the condition of remaining secluded and remote from events that shape and engage the wider world. Yet, matters are more complicated than this. In Lammermoor, Lady Ashton’s engagement with political events is made the evidence for her unnatural and dangerous ambition. Lady Ashton’s interest is narrowly committed to self and the prestige of family; she lacks the humanity and breadth of vision to be wise in her interference. Appropriately she is compared to Lady Macbeth because her decisions are not based on a measured and ethically-informed assessment of the public good. As Fiona Robertson argues, Lammermoor is “troubled by


26 Millgate, Walter Scott 181.
images of female rule,” and nowhere is this more evident than in the portrayal of Lady Ashton.27 In this context, however, the novel opposes to Lady Ashton an image of the potential benefits of female influence exemplified by Lucy. Like Rose Bradwardine, Lucy confines expressions of her interest to the immediate world of the estate or home. And when contemporary theorists like Hannah More asserted that the home is the nation writ small, they also insisted that women’s influence, correctly asserted within that sphere, should shape and inform the larger community. Under these terms, Lucy’s education both can and should occur within the confines of the paternal estate and she—unlike her mother who is “in Edinburgh, watching the progress of some state intrigue” (45)—is ideally situated to influence her father and Ravenswood. Moreover, this influence might continue to benefit the men when they move out into a public world from which Lucy properly “shrinks” (25). In addition, the gestures and moments of communication on which influence depends also promise to minimize the split between the beautiful but apparently passive surface Lucy presents, and the self with its engaged imagination and sympathies.

Against the claims of those critics who deplore Lucy’s and Ravenswood’s choice of each other as wrong-headed, Polhemus argues that “Scott’s story means anything but that these two blindly and foolishly ignore all wisdom and improperly follow deceiving romantic love to their death” because, as he adds, the spiritually impoverished world they inhabit offers “no way to try to satisfy their desires except through love.”28 When Lucy and Ravenswood meet and fall in love, even the ostensibly unromantic Sir William, who is later to complain that his life’s only tragedy was caused by “a very temporary

27 Fiona Robertson, introduction, The Bride of Lammermoor xxiii. Robertson also implies that Lucy’s violence acts out Lady Ashton’s female misrule.

28 Polhemus 75.
predominance of sensibility over self-interest,” is inclined to believe that the relationship is an appropriate one (137). He sees that “his favourite child—his constant play-mate—seemed formed to live happy in union with such a commanding spirit as Ravenswood; and even the fine, delicate, fragile form of Lucy Ashton seemed to require the support of the Master’s muscular strength and masculine character” (136). Both the heavy irony with which the narrative reports on Sir William’s later view of the matter and the representation of the physical harmony of the couple endorse a view of the essential fitness of the union. Indeed, the contrast of Ravenswood’s latent power with Lucy’s softness suggests the erotic yet spiritual nature of the attraction; the two seem to represent aspects of the sublime and beautiful, aesthetic categories that complement rather than oppose each other. While Ravenswood’s features are “dark, regular, and full of majestic, though somewhat sullen expression” and may produce sensations of “pity or fear,” Lucy is described as “[b]eautiful and pale,” her mantle clinging “to her slender and beautifully proportioned form” (41 & 40).

In Lammermoor it is Lucy who, in contrast to the dire predictions of Alice, appreciates Ravenswood’s capacity for behaving generously. It is she who implicitly expresses her faith that Ravenswood will not remain tied to a bloody past, a desire for vengeance. A walk undertaken by Lucy and Ravenswood to Alice’s cottage reprises the earlier one with Sir William and again hints at Lucy’s ability to prompt her male companion to a sense of sympathy, a willingness to see what has been obscured by his other preoccupations.29 Thus, when Lucy “could not help mentioning her sense of the pain he must feel in visiting scenes so well known to him, bearing now an aspect so

29 Lammermoor implies that Alice may have been Ravenswood’s nurse; if so, this is interesting in the context of other Waverley nurse/madwomen type figures (Meg Merrilies, Meg Murdockson). Alice occasions the only mention of Ravenswood’s mother in the novel when he notes that his mother praised Alice for her “sense, acuteness, and fidelity” (153).
different, and so gently was her sympathy expressed, that Ravenswood felt it for a moment as a full requital of all his misfortunes" (149). That the feeling may be only momentary ominously implies that Ravenswood, like Sir William, will ultimately prove unable to sustain the awareness evoked by Lucy's conversation. Nevertheless, the exchange does work to breach the walls of his corrosive solitude, and subsequently Ravenswood is moved by the knowledge of Lucy's devotion to him and his awareness of the promise she seems to represent, to engage himself to her. If the engagement is the result of an impulse that fails fully to register personal and social obstacles to their union, Lammermoor remains insistent that it has remarkable potential. We are told that "although their mutual affection seemed to increase rather than to be diminished as their characters opened more fully on each other, the feelings of each were mingled with some less agreeable ingredients" but also that "the very points in which they differed, seemed, in some measure, to ensure the continuance of their mutual affection" (163-64). As it does in other Waverley novels, a difference of outlook on matters religious or political promises to be successfully mediated when it is conditioned by erotic love. Lucy and Ravenswood are shown to be engaged in the process of accommodation between the ideal and the actual that George Levine says is an essential aspect of the Waverley project.\(^{10}\) The hero and heroine who can achieve such an accommodation without breaking faith are precisely the ones who can inherit a meaningful and hopeful future.

If it is thanks to Lucy that Ravenswood sets aside his vengeful project, for Lucy's part, the relationship may allow her fruitfully to bring together the various aspects of her being that remain divided or suppressed in the context of her family. However, while critical discussions of the novel have often focussed on Lucy's misreadings of

\(^{10}\) Levine 255.
Ravenswood, it is important to register that, while Ravenswood is struck by Lucy’s beauty and angelic appearance, he—like others—has difficulty in believing in the depths of the soul behind that beauty. In part this is because, if Lucy rejects the inevitability of Alice’s prophecies of coming doom, Ravenswood is haunted by a continuing fear that Lucy may break faith and so further disgrace him. This fear is not allayed by his own perception of Lucy’s passivity and a belief that “a mind so ductile” is infinitely malleable. While he is not afraid that she intends to deceive him—it is “impossible to look into the clear blue eye of Lucy Ashton, and entertain the slightest permanent doubt concerning the sincerity of her disposition” (160)—he lacks insight into the strength of her faith.

Ravenswood’s doubts about Lucy’s ability to resist the influences of others leads to an extraordinary exchange between them when Lucy plights her faith in the terms required by her lover. When Ravenswood voices a fear that she might be led to renounce the engagement, Lucy assures him that “the mirrors which receive the reflection of all successive objects are framed of hard materials like glass or steel—the softer substances, when they receive an impression, retain it undefaced” (164). The claim recalls earlier descriptions of Lucy’s ability willingly to reflect back to the male members of her family their most serious interests, and it serves as a timely reminder that softness is not the same as feebleness. Lucy simultaneously affirms her pliancy and the strength which, she notes, finds its origins in her softness itself. But Ravenswood, fearful of being misled by superficial appeal, is determined not to be drawn in by the potentially fallacious qualities of poetry or by the seductive magic of words; he requires a prose translation of Lucy’s speech. It is this more than anything that indicates the degree to which Ravenswood’s situation has caused him to develop an abiding fear of the imagination and an almost
pathological insistence on literal meanings.\textsuperscript{31}

The hero’s anxieties about the “feebleness” of the heroine’s mind align him with the figure who stands in implacable opposition to a successful resolution to the romance. Lady Ashton’s own “hot and impatient character” makes it impossible for her properly to evaluate her daughter and she shares with Ravenswood a blindness to Lucy’s capacity for deep feeling. Indeed, Lady Ashton and Ravenswood are alike in several ways. Both are proud and vengeful, and both negotiate their way in the world by adopting roles or masks. Each is judged differently for this: while Lady Ashton is without any redeeming qualities and is the one principal character in the novel who is never accorded a moment of grace or apparent enlightenment, Ravenswood is depicted as alternately struggling against and embracing a role that he recognises as tying him to a plot not of his own devising.\textsuperscript{32} Whatever the differences in the ethical valence accorded their behaviour, however, the fatal result of their similarity is borne by Lucy, who becomes the counter whose possession is in dispute. That this is so is apparent in the novel’s introductory chapter when Peter Pattieson, the narrator, describes a sketch made by his friend, Dick Tinto. The sketch shows “a figure of exquisite beauty, who, in an attitude of speechless terror, appeared to watch the issue of an animated debate betwixt two other persons” (12). The composition of Tinto’s sketch reveals that the powerful and proud mother and lover both focus on their claims to ownership of Lucy rather than on her evident suffering.

When Lady Ashton returns home, she abruptly ruptures Lucy’s developing relationship with Ravenswood. Lammermoor attends to the damaging effects this has on

\textsuperscript{31} Ravenswood’s literalising tendencies are an aspect of his desire to establish presence. For a discussion see Bruce Beiderwell, “Death and Disappearance in The Bride of Lammermoor,” Alexander & Hewitt 245-53.

Ravenswood himself when it stresses that, despite his apparent success in making his way in the world, he, rather like Morton in Old Mortality, is rendered almost spectre-like by his sense of being exiled, and by the difficult terms of a life still haunted by the claims of the past. With regard to Lucy, in this second part of her story, the positive elements of the first are now shown to become the tools of her destruction, the means by which the mind not only turns in on itself but also becomes committed to one single belief that, when Lucy can no longer sustain a meaningful connection to other people and her environment, becomes overgrown and misshapen. In comparison to Ravenswood's, Lucy's condition is that of the "living death" described by Eveline Berenger. Her contraction within a narrow sphere of wounding thoughts accomplishes the reduction to merely physical matter, the limitation of the individual's zone of extension out into the world that Elaine Scarry describes in her account of the effects of torture.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Lammermoor} makes it clear that to speak of torture in this regard is entirely appropriate. When Lady Ashton sets herself to break Lucy's resolve to keep her solemn pledge to Ravenswood, she is said to prepare "every species of dire machinery, by which the human mind can be wrenched from its settled purpose" (235). These techniques or machines work in three ways: they appropriate Lucy's voice, confine her within an invisible line of surveillance, and render toxic the narrative structures and tales that Lucy values. In some respects, these techniques seem intended to make Lucy into a clone of her mother. Her speech is to be ventriloquized by Lady Ashton, she must become an indoors creature whose appearance is groomed for sumptuary display, and she is gradually committed to a mode of thinking in which her view of the world is coloured by unshakable prejudices and immovable beliefs.

Fiona Robertson makes the point that "[t]he link between powerlessness and voicelessness is a particularly interesting aspect of Lucy's plight." An obedient daughter whose betrothal to Ravenswood was governed both by her own inclination and by an apparently well-founded belief that Sir William intends the match, Lucy now writes to her estranged lover only those words dictated by her mother. This appropriation of Lucy's voice has several significant consequences. Ravenswood is denied access to Lucy's own thoughts or wishes, and communication is limited to what is allowed by a mother who does not hesitate to burn the letters that might bridge the distance separating the lovers. Another consequence is related more to Lucy's listening and what this means both for her community and for the cultivation and nurturing of Lucy's own character. When the first part of the novel stresses what Polhemus calls Lucy's lyric voice, it also notes, for example, that her brothers love Lucy best because she listens to them. Henry Ashton makes her "the confidante of all his pleasures and anxieties" and his sister pays "patient and not indifferent attention" to him (26). And when Sir William notes that Lucy has made it her business to learn the histories of the estate's inhabitants, he confirms her role as a collector of stories who finds meaning and value in the details she commits to memory. Lucy's responsive listening contrasts her with Lady Ashton who tends to close down explanations, to view the world through a self-interested lens, or to rewrite stories to suit her purposes—as she does the one about the charging bull. In essence, the contrast is between a linear, purposive shaping of experiences and events according to the will of a single individual, and a lateral expansion of understanding that depends on an imaginative interpenetration of place, community, and memory, and on acts of communication that include both listening and talking. Under the conditions of her

persecution, this expansion gives way to a contraction expressed, when Lucy does speak, in her adoption of a “tone of obstinacy” or in her turning with “spirit and even fierceness on those by whom she was long and closely annoyed” (241 & 238). Lady Ashton misreads these signs as “symptoms of Lucy’s expiring resolution” but such passionate aggression—an uncharacteristic tendency to violence that is here expressed only verbally or through bodily gestures—combined with a continuing isolation from the possibility of real communication, must recall the situation and response of some of Scott’s old madwomen.

Lucy’s concentration of being is also related to a physical confinement whereby “[t]he verge of her parents’ domains became, in respect to her, like the viewless and enchanted line drawn around a fairy castle” (235-36). In a review of Lord Byron’s “The Prisoner of Chillon”, Scott notes how solitary confinement works “in gradually chilling the mental powers as it benumbs and freezes the animal frame, until the unfortunate victim becomes, as it were, a part of his dungeon, and identified with his chains.” As the walls of her home seem literally to be closing in on the young woman who, formerly, had roamed her father’s estate, Lucy becomes an indoors creature for whom the spatial structures of the house are intended to enforce a choreography of mind as well as of body. Moreover, physical confinement is associated with an increased emphasis on the outward grooming of Lucy’s body as a means to display the family’s wealth or make the daughter an emblem of its status. Thus, for her betrothal to Bucklaw, she is “splendidly arrayed” in a dress “composed of white satin and Brussels lace and her hair arranged with a profusion of jewels” (244). Such descriptions fit incongruously with Lucy’s own sense that, without the truth that fidelity to her word signifies, she is a mere empty “casket,”

35 For the comment, see the reprint included in: “Memoir of Lord Byron.” MPW, 4.388.
and also with Lucy’s appearance in which the lustre of her jewels “made a strange contrast to the deadly paleness of her complexion and to the trouble which dwelt in her unsettled eye” (241 & 244).

The third “machine” deployed by Lady Ashton is perhaps the most lethal of all—and the most unpredictable in its effects. Under the pressure of intense solitude, of knowing herself to be “alone and uncounseled,” Lucy is vulnerable to the stories of Ailsie Gourlay (233). If the mother-daughter pair in Lammermoor recalls the one in The Heart of Midlothian, in the 1819 novel, the malign influence of the mother is diffused and rendered omnipresent when she has recourse to another female agent in her work of destroying the daughter. Ailsie Gourlay, ostensibly brought in to nurse the ailing Lucy, is a demonic version of old Alice. Like Alice, she tells Lucy stories, but she does so under conditions which prevent her listener from contesting them. If Lucy’s mind is characterised by the strength of its interpretive and metaphoric imagination, when “weakened by sorrow, distress, uncertainty, and an oppressive sense of desertion and desolation,” it readily proves susceptible to stories that replace Lucy’s own more hopeful narratives with perverted versions that rely not on romance but on superstitious belief (241). Kept isolated from other human contact, Lucy becomes a victim of language intended to limit her possibilities for thought and reflection. Thus Ailsie “gradually narrowed her magic circle around the devoted victim on whose spirit she practised” and focuses Lucy’s thoughts such that one belief—in an evil fate—predominates over all else. Ailsie tells her stories “by the midnight lamp” with the result that “the gloom of superstition darkened [Lucy’s] mind” and the images vividly convey a sense of the irreversible extinguishing of other possibilities for reflection as Lucy becomes entrapped

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36 Duncan notes that Ailsie is an anagrammatical form of Alice (143). The name also has verbal affinities with Lucy.
within the web of a nightmare; words, we remember, make things happen (240). And, as in Lady Ashton’s treatment of her daughter, there is a logic of reproduction at work here too; Ailsie’s stories are potent tools for moulding Lucy into her image. This pattern is like the one repeatedly invoked by other scenes of story-telling involving madwomen in the Waverley novels. We can think, for example, of Norna of the Fitful Head recounting her tale to Minna by firelight in The Pirate under the conviction that Minna must be her heir. Ailsie, like Norna, is the high priestess of a set of primitive beliefs in the occult but, unlike Norna, she regards these with cunning scepticism and is evidently driven by a generalised and thoroughly destructive malevolence rather than by her own delusions. Like Meg Murdockson, the highest authority she acknowledges is her own desire. As such, she is a machine that rather escapes Lady Ashton’s control; because the novel tellingly deploys images of warfare to describe the masculinised Lady Ashton’s behaviour, it seems appropriate to describe Ailsie as a kind of Trojan horse who lets loose within the Ashton home forces that will inaugurate the family’s downfall.

If characters like Minna are ultimately able to escape being acolytes of the old women who tell them stories, what are the conditions under which escape proves impossible for Lucy Ashton? Initially, Lucy is said to respond to Ailsie with horror, but the old woman cunningly overcomes her repugnance “by a show of kindness and interest to which Lucy had of late been little accustomed.” Moreover, Ailsie’s “attentive services and real skill gained her the ear if not the confidence” of her charge (240). When she responds to the lonely and isolated Lucy apparently as an individual for whom she feels kindly interest, Ailsie creates the conditions for the sympathetic exchange in which her stories can acquire credence. By including such descriptions of the manner in which Lucy’s defences are eroded, Lammermoor seems concerned to protect her from charges that she succumbs too readily to the old woman’s poison even while it also notes that
Lucy is peculiarly susceptible not only because of her present isolation but also because of her “existing habits of reading and reflection” (240).

The scenes of Lucy’s succumbing to Ailsie’s psychologically astute treatment bears no little affinity to the Biblical scene of Satanic temptation; Ailsie shares with the Serpent a subtlety and cunning against which the young woman can have little defence. The comparison is an apt one because Ailsie’s techniques involve exposing Lucy to other kinds of knowledge which she previously would have rejected as false or evidence of an outmoded, primitive superstition. Thus Lucy becomes convinced through stories and legends told and embellished by Ailsie that “an evil fate hung over her attachment” and she is encouraged to think of herself as a character in a plot already woven, a story whose outcome is written (240). These stories disable Lucy’s sense of free will and of herself as an autonomous individual for whom, within the limits of her social position and historical time, the future remains open. What Lammermoor describes here is a reprehensible mode of using the past or history to erode a sense of individual identity, moral responsibility, and meaning. Ailsie’s stories impose a rigidly deterministic model in which the individual is a mere cog in the impersonal machine of fate. Moreover, not content with harnessing history for her purposes, Ailsie also makes use of the future when she “directed Lucy’s thoughts to the means of inquiring into futurity—the surest mode, perhaps of shaking the understanding and destroying the spirit” (241). Here, it is implied, prophecy and prognostication are a source of madness because to believe that the future can be accurately foretold—or even, with the help of Ailsie’s magic, actually witnessed in a magic glass—is to know that choice and free agency are no more than illusions, and that all human life is inescapably constrained by external forces.

The kind of thinking in which Ailsie indoctrinates Lucy recalls the old madwomen who see themselves as faithful handmaidens of larger forces, whether of
politics, religion, or revenge. In this context, it becomes appropriate to inquire whether Lucy should be described as suffering from the "love-sickness" often associated with her.\(^37\) At least to some degree, Lucy seems a textbook case of the "Erotomania" described by Erasmus Darwin. This disorder, he says, is sometimes associated with reading "the works of poets and romance writers," and, in the late stages, if the individual meets with disdain, a lapse into "furious or melancholy insanity" is typical and may prove fatal.\(^38\) In general, love-sickness (or erotomania) involves an endless longing for the lost beloved, and a condition of perpetual waiting that substitutes for a full engagement with life. However, in Lucy's case, the focus is increasingly on the question of keeping faith rather than on pining for Ravenswood's company. This is an aspect of love-sickness too, since the woman's waiting, her psychological paralysis, becomes the mode through which she expresses her faith. The difference is that, for Lucy, the requirement to keep faith supersedes all other considerations; if love has encoded Lucy's hopes and yearnings, fidelity now becomes the manner in which she embraces fate. Keeping faith transcends all moral, legal, or prudential considerations and makes it possible for Lucy to think of stabbing Bucklaw as a required and right action—and, in this regard, evokes comparisons, for example, with Elspat MacTavish's behaviour in "The Highland Widow."

At the crucial moment when she might speak to assert her faith, Lucy fails to do so and, into the space left open by her silence, rush Ravenswood's doubts—doubts fuelled equally by his pride and by an existing belief in Lucy's malleability. The pivotal betrothal scene where this happens is one for which we have been prepared since the first chapter

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\(^37\) See, for example, Small 128-29.

where it is described as the subject of Dick Tinto’s painting. Here we see the debate between Lady Ashton and Ravenswood while, apparently unnoticed by them, the bride watches in speechless anguish. As the scene is actually depicted in the novel, it seems to confirm the total eradication of Lucy’s will. She appears “petrified to stone” by Ravenswood’s appearance (247); responses “seemed rather to escape from her lips than to be uttered as a voluntary answer” (248); she explains herself to Ravenswood by reference to her mother rather than by any positive affirmation of her own wishes; and she can act for herself neither to retain nor to untie Ravenswood’s love-token which she keeps about her neck. All of this suggests that Lucy has indeed become the victim of a drastically constricted sense of self in which she can no longer make use of the words or actions that would affirm and sustain both an inner integrity and connections out into the world.

The significant question Ravenswood poses to Lucy demands, “Are you willing to barter sworn faith, the exercise of free-will, and the feelings of mutual affection?” (251). For Lucy’s part, we are told that “[t]error, and a yet stronger and more confused feeling, so utterly disturbed her understanding” that she perhaps cannot even comprehend what is being asked of her (248-49). Under these circumstances, it remains in doubt whether Lucy can now be said to possess any free will; coming at the end of a long course of persecution and indoctrination in superstitious beliefs, this scene represents the heroine’s behaviour almost as that of an automaton. And it is immediately after this encounter that Lucy appears not merely beset but truly mad when she displays behaviour “that was foreign to her character and situation” and a singular impairment of memory that subsequently apparently prevents her from recalling the episode. Lammermoor represents Lucy’s condition as one in which she is entirely estranged from her former self and as if possessed, and when she says of her loss of the token by which she and Ravenswood had
pledged their faith “it was the link that bound me to life,” she implies a conviction that she is now death-devoted, prepared to sacrifice herself on the altar of the faith that her lover believes she has “bartered” away.

Lucy’s manner suggests that she is a victim of what, in the entry on insanity that appears in Dr David Brewster’s *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*, is called “furor,” a condition that “consists in an extreme irascibility, and an invincible propensity to commit indecent or atrocious actions” and “is considered as a disease of the will.”39 It is a condition that in Lucy is strikingly transformative: the once reserved and gentle maiden becomes a violent fury capable of conceiving and carrying out a potent counter-plot against her oppressors, of unflinchingly resorting to a terrible violence. The chapter of *Lammermoor* in which Lucy’s aggressive act against Bucklaw is described is remarkable for the contrast it establishes between the beautiful bride in her splendidly ornate dress, and the animal-like and blood-spattered creature found in the bridal chamber, “her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity” and making “the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac” (260). If the scene represents the apotheosis of Lucy’s reduction to matter, to a body hollowed out of soul or spirit, it also reveals that Lucy’s act encodes a regression to a primitive state that here decisively affirms this heroine’s affinity with the group of old madwomen. Regression is emphasised too by the way in which, uncharacteristically, Lucy speaks in dialect when she notes that the body of the “bonnie” bridegroom has been “ta’en up.” Moreover, her words point ahead to her role in the legend that will be told and retold about the mad bride. Lucy’s entrapment by her role marks her as utterly distinct from those other, more fortunate, Waverley heroes and heroines who feature in scenes of prophetic story-telling by inspired madwomen. In this case the malevolent energies or

logic of regression and repetition that are elsewhere absorbed and localised in the aging
or dying body of an old woman are transferred to the young heroine whose mode of
expressing her fanatical fidelity strikes at once at the intimacy of private life and at the
larger community that, by failing to recognise her value, is complicit in the violent events
of the bridal chamber.

Lucy’s madness implies her final, irrevocable removal from the possibility of
being understood by others—including the novel’s narrator. After she sleeps, however,
she appears briefly to return to a world in which understanding is possible; the apparent
return of her memory (and, implicitly, of some rational understanding) is identified in her
physical gesture of searching for the token of her pledge. But, under these circumstances,
memory can prove no consoling presence that affirms both individual and collective
identity. Lucy’s experiences, madness, and violent action, have placed her beyond the
limit from which a return to community would be possible, and she is destroyed finally
by “a tide of recollections” whose annihilating force convulses her body. And if the
memory of loss and violence is fatal for Lucy, her psychological and physical dissolution
is represented as the prelude to a wider destruction of the community from which
persecution exiled her. In the immediate aftermath there occurs a near riot at the castle
where “the fury of the contending passions between the friends of the different parties . . .
surpass description” --and perhaps suggest a return to the grim and bloody days of Malise
Ravenswood. Meanwhile, Ravenswood, once intent on his role as the injured lover and
disinherited Master, now recognises too late both the extreme degree to which Lucy kept
faith and the extent to which his own blindness precipitated the disaster. Having rightly
refused to redeem the rash vow of revenge made at his father’s funeral, he is now
projected into a gesture equally futile and anachronistic--the engagement with Lucy’s
brother in that attenuated, vestigial form of chivalry, the duel. By a final bitter irony, he is
denied even the satisfaction of dying at Sholto's hands, sinking instead into the quicksand of the Kelpie's Flow in apparent fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. For their part, the Ashton men seem to have little of life left them, and the family—with the exception of Lady Ashton—does not survive long. It is as if, with Lucy’s death, what might have conferred value and substance has simply vanished to leave behind bodies incapable of advancing into the future or of establishing an enduring community.

The individual losses that are described at the end of *Lammermoor* are played out against the background of the reader’s existing knowledge of the devastation of the estate. The novel’s introductory chapter has made it clear that, in the time of Pattieson and Tinto, only a few stones mark the location of Ravenswood Castle while Ravenswood’s home of bitter exile, Wolf’s Crag, is untenanted and ruinous. What survives is the story of Ravenswood and Lucy, and if the former estate and tower become tourist destinations because of their picturesque appeal, for Dick Tinto this appeal becomes emotionally charged by the tale of the bride with which he becomes fascinated. Subsequently, Pattieson’s narrative affirms that Lucy’s history can be told only through the kind of narrative structure she herself is represented as cherishing in making sense of the world and, despite the commitment his “ower true tale” makes to the outcome determined by its source, the stress on the heroine’s potential means that his account refuses to close down interpretation and possibility in the manner of Ailsie Gourlay’s toxic stories. Here, no single “word explanatory” will prove sufficient.

Scott’s history of the bride is, like Byron’s *Bride of Abydos*, a cautionary tale about love and hope, tyranny and ambition. It explores ideologies of gender to endorse a view of women not as emotionally labile and helpless but as capable of embodying and ensuring the values that guarantee the stability and integrity of society. But unlike Byron’s poem that ends with the consoling image of the beautiful white rose, the novel
reveals no faith in the power of symbols to speak to us, to create moments of transcendent understanding. The comparison with Byron’s poem suggests that ultimately what is disturbing is not solely the tragic outcome, but also the bride’s dehumanisation; the images that we carry away from our reading of Lammermoor must encompass both the beautiful heroine walking in her father’s estate, and the terrible spectacle of the gibbering demoniciac in the bridal chamber. The bleak message of the novel seems to be that against the pressures of history, of political life, or ambition, a private integrity and faith in love and self may not be able to prevail. Even more disturbingly, rather than being transformed into an enduring and hopeful symbol of beauty, they may be warped and corrupted into the perverse, unknowable, and frighteningly empty figure of female madness.
Chapter 4

The Journeys of Amy Robsart:

Kenilworth

The second of Scott's three tragic novels was published in January of 1821. Kenilworth is exceptional within both the sequence of tragic novels and this discussion of Scott's madwomen because its heroine, Amy Robsart, does not go mad. Indeed, as the following discussion aims to show, Kenilworth depicts her as becoming increasingly sane in terms of her moral awareness, her commitment to principles of truth and right action. Nevertheless, Amy's story is a tragic one and, significantly, the novel depicts the final disaster as the direct consequence of a diagnosis of madness. That this is so makes questions about the conditions of social and political life in which such a diagnosis acquires potency and credibility of central importance to Kenilworth. From the perspective of this thesis, it also makes Scott's 1821 novel a text that, by disrupting the established pattern, focuses and complicates issues involving the relationship between the heroine who finds herself shut out of community and history, and an unstable society that will not--or cannot--acknowledge her potential and the vital nature of her role. In Lammermoor the heroine's potential is twisted into madness. In Kenilworth the denouement is made all the more terrible because Amy Robsart's ruinous vulnerability to being called mad occurs at the very moment when she is morally and spiritually most ready to step into the future she has planned and, in the end, also earned.

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Late in Kenilworth Amy Robsart becomes the subject of a physician's diagnosis of insanity. This has the effect of confirming her exile from a community in which her
unacknowledged but rightful place is that of the Earl of Leicester’s Countess. The diagnosis facilitates an interpretation of Amy’s increasingly hesitant attempts to assert her true identity as the evidence for an insanity characterised by a pathetic delusion about her own importance. The historical theme overtly signalled by the novel’s title is that of the Revels staged by Leicester for Queen Elizabeth in 1575, but much of the text is actually taken up with the fictional story of Amy’s journey to Kenilworth castle and her desperate attempts to find a place of refuge from the dangers threatening her as a woman who, confronted with her husband’s persistent refusal to acknowledge her, can claim no powerful male protector or intercessor. When Queen Elizabeth’s personal physician, the aptly named “Master,” pronounces Amy mad in the presence of the court, her doom becomes certain. His act of classification legitimises the various technologies of confinement, control, and isolation to which the Countess is already subject, and assimilates her speech and her silences to its own interpretive logic when it declares that both are proof of the accuracy of the diagnosis.

In terms of Amy’s eventual fate, Master’s diagnosis is all the more ominous because the physician has been called in as an impartial expert to settle a dispute between the claims of Sir Richard Varney, an amoral master-plotter who serves as Leicester’s advisor, and Amy herself. Master represents a court of final appeal but because Amy recognises the dangers her speech may pose to the husband she loves, her contradictory, and incoherent explanations prove no match for the newly-knighted Varney’s easy fluency. Determined that Leicester should marry the queen, Varney has represented Amy as his own wife in order to suppress any knowledge of her real relationship to the Earl. Because the latter is a self-divided man increasingly dependent on the “dispassionate firmness” of his Mephistophelean advisor, the husband who could save the heroine fails to speak out at the crucial moment and, instead, proves willing to sacrifice her to his
personal ambitions and his jealous suspicions about her adultery.\footnote{Walter Scott, \textit{Kenilworth: A Romance}, ed. J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 345. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are in parentheses in the text.} Amy’s silence and Leicester’s failure create the space for Varney’s potent misrepresentations of a woman whose own emotional struggles have left her physically weakened and even “disfigured” (315).

Varney’s explanatory fictions are readily accepted as the truth by the court. When Elizabeth asks Master to diagnose and report on Amy, it is about the “Lady Varney” that she inquires. Moreover, the physician’s response confirms that the trouble with Amy is her continued unwillingness appropriately to recognise just authority:

“She is sullen, madam...,” replied Master, “and refuses to answer interrogatories, or be amenable to the authority of the mediciner. I conceive her to be possessed with a delirium, which I incline to term rather hypochondria than phrenesis; and I think she were best cared for by her husband in his own house, and removed from all this bustle of pageants, which disturbs her weak brain with the most fantastic phantoms. She drops hints as if she were some great person in disguise--some Countess or Princess perchance. God help them, such are the hallucinations of these infirm persons.” (348)

The account begins with a general statement of Amy’s resistance to authority—a claim with political overtones in the context of a regime engaged, after a long period of religious and political upheaval, in the crucial processes of consolidation and image-making represented by the theatrical displays of the Revels. It then moves to a specific, professionally-based differential diagnosis of a disorder identified as chronic or incurable rather than the result of an acute fever, to an outline of an appropriate treatment regimen
associated with seclusion in the quiet of the "husband's" (that is, Varney's) house, and, finally to some general reflections on the delusions of the mad. These last in particular supply a ready framework for dismissing Amy's "hints" about her true status.

Although Master's speech itself provides an effective and powerful means of containing or limiting Amy's suspected potential for disrupting the Kenilworth community, Elizabeth's response is immediately to insist upon the further measure of actual physical removal from the castle: "away with her at all speed," she orders. The castle must be "rid" of one who might "think herself lady of all" or usurp—if only in her fantasies—the queen's own preeminence (348). As Master notes, Amy's condition may be aggravated by the pageantry; the various dramas being staged may actually encourage her—and others—to believe in the truth of Amy's "phantoms." It is this potentially contagious element in her madness which Elizabeth identifies as possibly subversive of the legitimate order. That is, in the context of the authorised theatricals and their function in establishing a single, indisputable truth, Amy's half-voiced claims threaten to take their place as potent counter-fictions—or truths.

The scene places Amy in a situation where, when she has been driven to despair and illness by her situation in a world which appears to her as alien, disorienting, and actively hostile rather than as festive, she is further entrapped by a diagnosis that functions to circumscribe her power to communicate as effectively as incarceration has limited her physical movement. Kenilworth is actually the second of Scott's novels to treat of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; the other is its immediate predecessor in the Waverley series, The Abbot, and the two share a thematic concern with stories of confined and silenced women and with their struggles to receive recognition of their

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2 For an early account of the distinction between chronic and acute types of madness, see Burton 1.132.
legitimate status. This fact suggests that Scott—who, in the 1831 “Magnum Opus” introduction to Kenilworth claims a Scotsman’s right to some prejudices in the matter—could approach the subject of “England’s Elizabeth” only obliquely through stories that underline the uncertainties rather than the triumphs of the period. In depicting a society whose ruler is a woman, Scott’s focus is not, for example, on military exploits such as the Armada—the topic actually suggested to him by his publisher, Archibald Constable. Rather, his attention is on how such a society might represent itself to itself in the stories it tells about its origins, the past, and the progress whereby ancient tribal conflict actually produces present glory under the providential rule of a “Royal Maiden” or “angelical Princess” (351). But the presence of the confined or unacknowledged woman means that the novel is no mere celebratory fiction; its doubled vision sees the Revels from Amy’s perspective as a fearful outsider as well as from the viewpoint of a centre whose concern is to affirm and consolidate its legitimacy and authority.

That this is so may, as Scott seems to imply in the 1831 introduction, have to do with the particular angle of vision of the Scottish author. But the novel also invokes a question related more to gender than to nationality when it considers the anomalous nature of a culture where the most powerful individual is a woman and the consequences

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3 Sir Walter Scott, introduction, Kenilworth, Waverley Novels vol. 22 (1831) xii.

4 For an account of the novel’s origins, see Lockhart 1837-38, 5.28. Following the success of Ivanhoe, Constable proposed another English novel which he envisaged as forming a pair with The Abbot. The plan had the additional benefit of reducing the role of the original companion volume, the much-criticised The Monastery, to that of an introductory walk-on part.

5 For the claim that the novel is unreliedly celebratory, see John Sutherland, The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 247-48. Sutherland is particularly critical of the novel’s anachronistic handling of the two stories since Amy’s death actually preceded the Revels by some fifteen years, and he does not consider that for the purposes of Scott’s “Romance” the linking of the two stories is integral to the novel’s thematic concerns. In any event, the anachronisms did not go unnoticed by contemporary readers; see, for example, a letter signed “J. M. L.” in Gentleman’s Magazine 129 (1821): 387-89. A useful table of the relevant historical dates is in: J. H. Alexander, Historical Note, 476.
of this for male access to power. Elizabeth’s position as queen means a reversal of
gendered roles, so that a man like Leicester finds himself having to rely on personal
qualities of appearance, sexual attraction, flattery, and even marriageability to facilitate
his continuing upward mobility. Kenilworth depicts a country in the process of
negotiating a shift between the values of an explicitly masculine and martial culture and
those of a polite, civil society where attention may be as much on representation or
appearance as on actual doing; the change is exemplified in the antagonism between
Sussex, the blunt man of action, and Leicester, the sophisticated courtier. England is a
place with vivid memories of a recent and still-threatening past in which, as the novel’s
opening chapter reveals, the survivors were the political and religious chameleons like
Anthony Forster who is as able to play the rigid Puritan as the fervent Catholic. But it is
also a country where open warfare or violence now belongs to the peripheries or to the
colonies—such as Ireland, for example, where Walter Raleigh, a man who successfully
negotiates the apparent disjunction between the gallant courtier and the brutal warrior,
garners fame for his slaughter of “a whole band of wild Irish rebels” (147). The centre of
the nation, in contrast, is to be a place of “blithe, sunshiny weather” and of order
guaranteed by the rule of a woman defined in domestic, relational terms as the “wife and
mother of England alone” (9 & 317).

It is in this context that the Revels are staged as a way of augmenting Elizabeth’s
evolving iconic status. But as the scene of Amy’s diagnosis and the pronouncement of
banishment show, there is a lingering uncertainty in a realm where maintaining security
and domestic peace may be achieved only at the cost of certain suppressions and
evasions. If the name of the novel is what Scott called a “taking title” certain to elicit
specific readerly expectations about the subject matter, the text itself actually generates
an additional meaning for the name through its focus on the confined woman.\footnote{Sir Walter Scott, introduction, The Abbot, Waverley Novels, vol. 20 (1831) xii. For a discussion of Scott's titles, see Ina Ferris, "The Historical Novel and the Problem of Beginning: the Model of Scott," Journal of Narrative Technique 18 (1988): 74. Ferris notes that the disinclination to make use of a "taking title" reflects a "generic prudence, a reluctance to compete with the more prestigious genre of history." To her example of the one exception to Scott's usual practice in the matter—Rob Roy—I would add Kenilworth. In a letter written during the period of the composition of Kenilworth, Scott admonishes Archibald Constable "not to say a word about Kenilworth. The very name explains so much. . . ." Letter to Constable, 10 September 1820, Letters 6. 266. Lockhart's account of Scott's desire to use the name "Cumnor Hall" shows how important from the beginning was the Amy story to his imaginative conception of the novel. See Lockhart 1837-38, 5.28. Shortly before publication, Scott reaffirmed this in writing to Lady Louisa Stuart when he noted that "the story is the tragedy of Leicesters [sic] first wife" (Letter to Lady Louisa Stuart, 14 December 1820, Letters 6.311)}

"Kenilworth" is the site of the celebration confirming England’s preeminence and Elizabeth’s legitimacy. But Kenilworth Castle is also the place where the character with least power, Amy, has her legitimacy denied. Her story is a counter to the one about the queen, becoming its nightmare double where the desired scene of affirmation turns into one of disavowal and disgrace, of utter vulnerability to the shaping power of others’ representations and constructions. Through its contrapuntal mode of establishing parallels and alternating descriptions, the novel brings the stories of the two women ever closer together until, finally, at Kenilworth they collide briefly only to have the authoritative pronouncement on Amy’s madness justify their immediate separation.

The most pressing and immediate consequence of this separation is absorbed by Amy herself, and her departure is intended to remove any threat to Elizabeth that the madwoman might embody. But Master’s diagnosis also serves to augment the power of Varney who is the one character most fully aware both of Amy’s true identity and of the fact that she has not committed the adultery of which Leicester—ever susceptible to his advisor’s stories—is convinced. This knowledge leaves Varney in sole possession of all the cards in play; it grants him control over Amy but also over Leicester and, finally, over a queen who is powerful and often wise but personally and politically vulnerable.
In fact, Varney's manipulations of matters with regard to the discredited Countess represent the tip of a more extensive and insidious plot in which Amy unwittingly functions as a major blocking agent to the fulfillment of a plan to garner power through the Leicester-Elizabeth marriage. Behind Varney, who is a self-confessed atheist in matters of faith and Satanic in terms of his verbal fluency and anarchic energies, is Alasco, astrologer, “white witch,” and alchemist, who preys on the pervasive credulity of a culture poised on the cusp between an unquestioning belief in supernatural causation and a more sceptical rationalism associated in the novel primarily with the character of Edmund Tressilian (89-90). Alasco's grandiose plans exceed even Varney's when they aim at nothing less than arriving at a time “when sages shall become the monarch of the earth, and death itself shall retreat before their crown” (228). Ian Duncan notes how the Waverley novels make the East “the arena of forces proscribed from enlightened civil society” and these forces include “magic and fatality, but also those moral, psychic and political energies exercised in imperial conquest.”7 In Kenilworth such potentially disruptive energies are associated especially with Alasco who is a disciple of the Arabian Geber, and he easily gains power in an unstable political and social economy engaged in mapping out the direction of its future and where “the prime men of the land” turn to make eager use of corrupt agents (90). But if Varney and Alasco map their ungodly desires and imperialist ambitions onto an English realm ruled by a woman for whom, the novel shows, the mechanisms for holding power must be different from those of a man, their way is actually smoothed by the court’s foremost nobleman, the Earl of Leicester. The Earl’s own ambitions, psychological dependencies, and fantasies of power make him believe that private love, associated with Amy, can and must be kept separate from the

public dimension in which, as Alasco assures him, his star is in the ascendant (187). His gullibility, born out of ambition, leaves him readily vulnerable to being made the front man for an enterprise to whose depths and extent he is blind and whose linchpin is his own politically motivated marriage to the queen.

David Punter, who notes how the homosocial relationship of Leicester and Varney is predicated on the exclusion of women, describes “the conspiracy, the gang, the male group” formed by Leicester and the others. But this “group” is one in only the loosest sense because its plots actually derive from an aggressively anti-social individualism antithetical to the sense of a cohesive national community which the Revels are engaged in making and celebrating. In the narrative economy of Kenilworth, such plotting appropriately functions by way of implication as a potentially disruptive presence rather than as an openly acknowledged element. Similarly, behind the theatrical spectacles of Elizabeth’s court, it is present as what Alasco calls a “long, deep, and dark and subterranean progress” that threatens right rule rather than as a visible force that may be identified and effectively countered (191). Eschewing such openly adversarial means as the civil war Leicester briefly imagines to be the cost of an honourable acknowledgment of his wife, Varney and Alasco’s plotting works through psychological manipulation, a ready facility with role-playing that is the dark side of the Revels’ celebratory theatricality, and such distortions of fact as those that convince the court of Amy’s madness.

What the Varney-Alasco element means, however, is that Amy’s actual presence

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8 David Punter. “‘To Cheat the Time, a Powerful Spell’: Scott, History and the Double.” Alexander & Hewitt 10. Punter’s account usefully emphasises Leicester’s self-divisions but he is less clear on how the relationship with Varney enacts a process whereby Varney gains power as Leicester loses it. Punter describes Varney and the others as Leicester’s acolytes, but Varney is never a mere follower and, by the end of the novel, he no longer even plays at being one. Ironically, this is the point where Leicester—too late—does return to a single view of himself.
at Kenilworth and its corollary, described by Punter as "the possibility of a real understanding between Elizabeth and Amy," clearly do not represent a potentially unsettling force levelled against the queen’s position as "lady of all." Instead, the story of Leicester’s secret marriage which Amy’s presence encodes actually has the ability to serve an essential function in generating a timely awareness of the subversive plotting of a rampant male ambition and thus protecting the queen and the hard-won political stability of her kingdom. It is not an armed man who protects the woman ruler but, rather, a frail woman whose truth becomes identified as madness.

To read the novel in this way is to give a woman whose actual story is one of being pushed securely to the margins, a central role in the structure and plotting of the novel Kenilworth. One of the difficulties of Scott’s text is that, as a character, Amy is represented at the outset as a provincial girl easily lured from her father’s estate by romantic attraction and the promise, embodied in Leicester, of a glamorous future at the royal court. Amy’s susceptibility in this regard has prompted Graham McMaster to describe Kenilworth as a deeply pessimistic fiction which shows "a provincial society sapped by its own vanity and unable to resist the viciousness of the centre." The ideological investment in the daughter as a locus for the values of home, the estate, and the promise of a meaningful future means that the negative image of what happens when these values do not prevail is also concentrated in her. Putting self-aggrandisement above the claims of local community and continuity, the vain daughter exchanges rural seclusion for promises and the jewels and dresses that deck her out “like an image with gold and gems” (217-18). This role explains Amy’s vulnerability to Leicester (and

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9 Punter 11.
through him to the other plotters) as a logically coherent but disastrous effect of particular circumstances and actions; it makes of Amy’s story a cautionary tale.\footnote{In this context, Punter describes how “an early failure in the acquisition of reliable information about the outside world cannot be healed in later life” (10).} There is, however, also a second role which builds on but is different from the first. Here Amy is the woman whose countering of the demonic forces working through Leicester must involve a physical and moral vigour associated with her rural origins or with nature, and her establishment as an increasingly idealised heroine whose exemplary status and modesty are revealed most clearly in her difficulties in speaking out publicly on her own behalf. Such constraints on her speech are formed out of notions of duty and responsibility to others that the novel invites us to admire—even if the costs of their expression are represented as an extreme erosion of Amy’s own power to command sympathy and the resulting diagnosis of madness.

What the two roles mean is that Amy actually reverses the process described in Lammermoor. Lucy is a character who is hollowed out, emptied by the unrelenting pressure of the plots against her. The result is the demoniac in the bridal chamber. In contrast, at the outset of Kenilworth, Amy seems a superficial woman whose very identity disappears, in the novel’s first description of her, behind the minute details of a mercer’s enraptured and professional description of her elaborate and fashionable dress. But Amy’s experiences and acute suffering endured especially through her journey to the historical realm of Kenilworth are then shown to deepen her character, to concentrate in the core of a woman who becomes physically increasingly frail, the values that may prove a potent counter-charm to the demonic plots threatening the novel’s other principal female character, the queen who dominates the centre of the historical dimension.

Amy’s first actual appearance in the novel is in a meeting with Tressilian,
adopted son of Sir Hugh Robsart and, formerly, Amy's intended bridegroom. Tressilian's quest has been to find the errant daughter and bring her home. But his very freedom to undertake such a quest seems to derive from his own burden of disinheritance as the descendent of defeated Cornish rebels; he thus occupies a tangential position with regard to a dominant culture. The opening scenes show how this burden is only exacerbated by his sense of loss and grief at Amy's flight and its imagined reasons; he feels himself to have little hope of shaping a positive or meaningful future. The quest for the lost daughter is palliative but not redemptive. When Tressilian actually penetrates the barriers surrounding Amy in what the Cumnor villagers, accounting in fairy tale terms for the mysterious, beautiful lady, describe as an “enchanted manor,” he finds that Amy's view of her situation is utterly incompatible with his own (16). That Amy's story, as the novel tells it, does not begin with an account of her life at home but, rather, with the descriptions of her at Cumnor is a telling modification of Scott's more usual practice in depicting the domestic intimacy and potential of the father-daughter relationship. Although Amy briefly shows distress when Tressilian tells her how her disappearance has made her father ill, her hints about the grandeur of her situation, her looking ahead to a time when she will appear before Sir Hugh “in such manner that all the grief Amy has given him shall be forgotten,” and her resistance to Tressilian's entreaties that she return to Lidcote Hall in penitence, indicate that we have here to do with a different kind of heroine. Amy is a woman who believes that her future glory can effectively erase the memories of present pain. Clearly not one to put her father's needs before her own, Amy appears not only superficial but also unworthy of Tressilian's devotion as he risks personal danger in the attempt to rescue her from what he soberly perceives to be no enchanted space but "a prison, guarded by one of the most sordid of men" (32).

Amy's refusal to accede to her father's wishes leaves Tressilian alone to make his
melancholy way back to the paternal home. That home has been devastated not by war or a military assault on its fortress-like structure, but by an erosion from within that is occasioned by the loss of its “principal joy” (117). This leaves the house, as Tressilian enters it, strangely silent without the accustomed chiming of the entrance-tower clock and as if the diurnal beat of its heart has been stilled. What we are shown at Lidcote reveals how the trauma that, in the madwomen narratives, is shown to affect the perception of normal temporal processes in a deranged woman like Madge Wildfire, here afflicts a group of bereaved men with a disabling sense of how the daughter’s flight has ruptured notions of continuity. In Kenilworth it is the father who is possessed by a single recurring memory and who complains that his “poor head forgets all it should remember, and remembers only what it would most willingly forget” (115-16).

In Kenilworth, incomprehension is often a function of incomplete knowledge. If the reader is aware of Amy’s true status, Tressilian and the entire Lidcote community are wounded by a conviction that, far from being the legal wife of an Earl, Amy is the mistress of the more lowly Varney. This mistaken perception makes Amy’s flight doubly the cause of the household’s shame because the daughter is understood to be not only deceitful but immoral. And this latter sin will permit no rewriting in social terms; the lost daughter’s return home can be meaningful only in a private context of forgiveness. Although the future Tressilian has offered to Amy should she return to Lidcote is one of a penitence which will “efface the memory of all that has passed” and where all will be “forgot” and “forgiven,” his words make it clear that such a future cannot now include marriage (32).

When the men piece together the story of the daughter’s relationship with, as they believe, the treacherous home-wrecker Varney, they assume that the story must follow the conventional plot of the seduction narrative, and the model used to explain her
perceived fall and its poisonous effect is the story of Eve’s transgression. Sir Hugh speaks of how “by woman, shame, and sin, and death, came into an innocent world” (116). Further shaping the father’s anger and shame is yet another explanatory fiction: the story of how a courtly moral decadence reaches out to contaminate a rural society through its infection of the daughter. It is, Sir Hugh bitterly states, “honour enough for the daughter of an old De’nshire clown to be the lemman of a gay courtier” (115). But that the reader knows how wrong are the conclusions about Amy’s connection to Varney means that the Lidcote scenes are viewed through a lens different from the one available to the grieving community itself. This is an effect of the novel’s beginning elsewhere, in Amy’s present against which Tressilian’s return to Lidcote vividly represents the cost to others of her past behaviour even while it is also a regressive movement that takes us into an elegiac space which is no Eden but, rather, a limbo shaped by the daughter’s absence and the narrative of her seduction. There remains, however, a central question that is unaddressed by the Lidcote narrative about how evil must come from elsewhere, from outside. To what extent is Amy’s flight explicable not solely in terms of a woman’s ready vulnerability to the corruptions of an outside influence but also as the home’s failure to protect her not merely through its strength as an enclosure but through internalised precepts and moral vigour?

In contrast to Lammermoor, the father’s choice of Tressilian as a husband for his daughter seems precisely the one that guarantees the future of both the estate and the daughter. But there is a negative side to this: the choice shows the father putting off to the future work which he should undertake in the present. The estate has been impoverished by Sir Hugh’s penchant for a life of conviviality and the pursuit of sports. Sir Hugh’s interests, and his portrayal, on Tressilian’s return, as a man who cannot leave his parlour (more usually represented in contemporary fiction as a woman’s space) suggest the extent
to which Lidcote may be afflicted with a dangerous propensity to be inwardly focused on the pleasures of the moment. Such a home may be characterised by the belief that it can maintain its impregnability without vigilance and can indulge in a self-regarding turn away from involvement in issues of the wider world. Where the effects of this are felt most disastrously is in the daughter and in this novel the right choice of bridegroom ironically proves unavailing.

Amy is motherless, and a fondly weak-willed Sir Hugh has let his daughter have her own way:

Her mother had died in infancy; her father contradicted her in nothing; and Tressilian, the only one who approached her, that was able or desirous to attend to the cultivation of her mind, had much hurt his interest with her, by assuming too eagerly the task of a preceptor; so that he was regarded by the lively, indulged, and idle girl, with some fear and much respect, but little or nothing of that softer emotion which it had been his hope and his ambition to inspire. And thus her heart lay readily open, and her fancy became easily captivated by the noble exterior and graceful deportment, and complacent flattery of Leicester, even before he was known to her as the dazzling minion of wealth and power. (217).

If there is no single cause for the failures of Amy’s education, the passage is emphatic in its identification of the results: Amy is superficial. The particular invocation here of "cultivation" suggests the degree to which education is imaged not as the superimposition of manners onto a surface but in terms of work that improves upon existing, natural conditions.

Elsewhere in the novel, the causative link between Lidcote’s failure properly to
educate Amy and her attraction to Leicester is still more conclusively established:

The unfortunate Countess of Leicester had, from her infancy upward, been treated by those around her with indulgence as unbounded as injudicious. The natural sweetness of her disposition had saved her from becoming insolent and ill-humoured; but the caprice which preferred the handsome and insinuating Leicester before Tressilian, of whose high honour she herself entertained so firm an opinion—that fatal error, which ruined the happiness of her life, had its origin in the mistaken kindness that had spared her childhood the painful, but most necessary lesson, of submission and self-command. (249)

The origins of action and of character are associated not with the dead hand of a distant past whose secrets and desires shape the present, but with an immediate and personal history of childhood indulgence. Words like “submission” and “self-command” have a potent force in conveying a notion not of blind obedience to rules but of internalised moral precepts. Lacking the strength conferred by this, Amy is also said to lack “presence of mind”- the kind of interiority that could make her into a rounded character and preserve her from the workings of a “fate” associated here with her choice of Leicester.

The various accounts of Amy’s upbringing are separated in the novel’s narrative design from the description of Lidcote and its bereft community, but they nevertheless serve to reflect back in decisive terms what is already implicit in the actual depiction of the home. They must also reflect on the account of Amy as she is shown at the novel’s outset, at Cumnor Hall, because they supply an explanatory framework for understanding her presence there. The description of Lidcote is suggestive of a bower which is easily penetrated by Varney (and through him by Leicester). But when Amy flees to Cumnor
she finds herself in another embowered space, one created to satisfy Leicester’s dreams of a quiet life apart from the demands of life at court. Although Amy believes Cumnor to represent but the first stage in her progress to that court, Leicester is increasingly committed to denying the possibility of there being any connection between the bower and the larger political world. If Cumnor is to maintain its status as a place apart from the demands of Leicester’s quotidian life at court, it must be one he can enter or leave at will—and which, as Amy discovers, he can conveniently ignore when another and more glorious future seems to beckon. Leicester’s freedom to do this depends on denying Amy’s freedom, on suppressing the “uninfluenced, free, and natural will” that Tressilian exhorts her to exert in making her escape from Cumnor (33). Tressilian contrasts such freedom with the “state of slavery and dishonour” of Amy’s present condition and, although his description is based on only a partial knowledge of the facts, the actual account of Amy at Cumnor makes his words seem prescient. Amy, who is elsewhere described as an “Indamora,” may become associated with an Eastern luxury and morality that depends on a gendered and extreme imbalance of power (134).¹² There is a degenerative, master/slave quality to Leicester’s relationship with Amy that is a function of the heroine’s willingness to flee the protection of her home and make herself vulnerable to the workings of male desire.

The rooms that Amy occupies at Cumnor are lavishly decorated to resemble a royal palace. The novel’s description of these rooms lingers over the details of their rich furnishings to show that the intent of the decorations is to combine enclosure with exclusion. Located deep within Cumnor Hall, the rooms are filled with dazzling reflective surfaces of polished metals and mirrors which are complemented by sumptuous textiles.

¹² Indamora is the heroine of Dryden’s Aureng-Zebe. She, however, is saved by her constancy.
But when they are illuminated "oaken shutters, carefully secured with bolt and padlock, and mantled with long curtains of silk and of velvet, deeply fringed with gold, prevented the radiance from being seen without" (46). More a seraglio than an Elizabethan apartment, the rooms feed the sensual gratification of a delight in surfaces and splendour, and they are explicitly intended to become all the world to Amy, to separate her—as Varney says—from an outside world which may foster any sense of other possibilities (38). That Amy is at risk of being not only contained by the rooms but also absorbed into their reduplicating reflective surfaces is apparent when their description is followed by one of the heroine's own appearance, seen as it is reflected in a mirror. The emphasis is on the degree to which Amy's own "nature" (which Tressilian has associated with her free will) must be subdued to make her the rooms' fit inhabitant. Looking in the mirror, Amy complains that she has "more of the milkmaid than the countess" because her cheeks are flushed and her curls are "straying as wild as the tendrils of an unpruned vine" (49). Like the raw materials of the rooms' furnishings, she must be worked on to make her worthy of Leicester's notice. But if the work of grooming—unlike the labour of cultivation—is intended to shape and train a provincial nature to make it fit for an aristocrat's enjoyment, it also threatens to turn Amy into an articulated doll who moves only at Leicester's bidding.

The actual encounter between Leicester and his wife, however, draws attention to the beginnings of Amy's developing awareness of her inability to resolve moral ambiguities which, as Tressilian's visit makes clear, are a function of her present position. When Leicester responds to Amy's expressed wish to relieve her father's anxiety about his daughter, it is with anger and threats against Tressilian. For Amy, this forces an awareness that she must keep silent to protect others from the powerful Earl. Moreover, it also generates recognition of the enduring claims of the home she has left,
and an incipient understanding of Leicester’s world as one that generates an atmosphere of suspicion in which human sympathy cannot prevail. If these elements are hinted at rather than fully articulated, they are nevertheless shown to have a powerful effect on Amy’s mental equilibrium: she turns abruptly pale, appears faint, and tells Leicester “[s]omething there was I would have told you, but your anger has driven it from my recollection” (67). Indeed, it begins to seem that a condition of Amy’s occupation of Cumnor hall and of her status as Leicester’s wife is that all “recollection” must be suppressed; if Amy is to have a future as Leicester’s Countess, she must literally and psychologically leave behind her own personal past—and it is this to which, in undertaking the clandestine flight from Lidcote, she has unwittingly agreed.

At this point it becomes possible to discern a shift in the manner of Amy’s representation as it becomes increasingly evident to what degree she is a victim not merely of her own superficiality but of the male ambitions that make her own pale into insignificance. The change becomes especially marked in the context of an implied contrast with Leicester. The Earl is engaged in a struggle between his political ambitions (fuelled by the astute Varney) and his dream of a private life (associated with Amy). The internal conflict comes to the fore when Varney urges him to write a letter to Amy saying she must agree to play the role of Varney’s wife; the Earl and his servant have arrived at this plot as part of a ploy to deceive Elizabeth. Leicester has trouble writing the letter and, after making several attempts “which he after tore into fragments,” he finally produces only “a few distracted lines” (214). Amy’s response to this letter in fact repeats Leicester’s earlier act of shredding the text urging her to submit to a deception. She “tore to pieces Leicester’s letter, and stamped, in the extremity of impatience as if she would have annihilated the minute fragments into which she had rent it” (222). The very excessiveness of Amy’s response may be said to attempt the destruction of that part of
Leicester's character which, by denying his wife's identity, menaces his own integrity. If Amy and Varney are doing battle for Leicester's soul, the tearing of the letter expresses the extent of Amy's faith since it is intended to destroy not only the physical evidence of Leicester's apparent infamy but also its very "remembrance" (222).

That Leicester is willing to allow Varney to mediate between him and his wife leaves Amy without any direct access to her husband. This makes her reaction seem the futile one of a woman who has no power, who exists off-stage and out of view of the larger world. Amy's enraged response to the letter (and to the associated opportunistic attempts by Varney to initiate a sexual relationship with her) is represented as an extreme act of violence, as desperate attempts to maintain her integrity against the plots she perceives forming against her. For a moment she appears sublimely larger than life but also as threatened with madness:

The Countess stood in the midst of her apartment like a juvenile Pythoness, under the influence of the prophetic vein. The veins in her beautiful forehead started into swollen blue lines through the hurried impulse of the circulation—her cheek and neck glowed like scarlet—her eyes were like those of an imprisoned eagle, flashing red lightning on the foes whom it cannot reach with its talons... [t]he gesture and attitude corresponded with the voice and looks, and altogether presented a spectacle which was at once beautiful and fearful; so much of the sublime had the energy of passion united with the Countess Amy's natural loveliness. (220)

Beyond the spectacular nature of the images, there is a marked emphasis on the physical

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13 As Punter notes, Varney is the "one true companion of [Leicester's] bed chamber" (10).
nature of Amy's response as speech itself becomes an overwhelming act of body. Amy has been a woman absorbed by her dreams of splendour and enervated by her luxurious surroundings, but now her very words seem "the eager and abundant discharge of indignation . . . from the lips of a being, who had seemed till that moment too languid, and too gentle, to nurse an angry thought" (222). But this crisis is also one that may break her apart; the very veins of her body are about to burst grotesquely through her skin.

As a sublime spectacle, Amy is distanced: she appears dangerous, awe-inspiring, and yet depersonalised. Her physical excess seems a necessary and yet potentially destructive way of countering the erasure implicit in Leicester's proposal. But if it throws up a potent protective barrier, this involves a significant cost. Her resistance threatens her with absorption into a role different from but not any less dangerous than that proposed by the men. She may be drawn into the part of the inspired madwoman who defies normative categories and therefore stands outside the possibility of integration into any community. That is, the description shows Amy teetering on the brink of collapse into a condition from which there may be no escape even as it also eloquently expresses the energy of her response.

There is, however, another aspect to the scene. Amy is defending herself, but her struggle also involves her defence of Leicester because she perceives his vulnerability to Varney. When she strives to erase the remembrance of Leicester's words, she does so to protect herself from the knowledge--and the attempted erasure of herself--that his letter forces on her. But, in a larger context, the words and the planned deception of another woman, the queen, also reflect on Leicester's status as the esteemed Earl who is Elizabeth's closest advisor and the most powerful man in England. In that wider world, Leicester believes himself to be located at the very apex of power, with Varney and his astrologer, Alasco, located beneath him as his servants. In reality, as Amy dimly
perceives, Leicester is in danger of becoming the puppet of men even more ambitious than he is. The force countering these ambitions is Amy, associated—despite her faults—with a “natural” English virtue, with the “uninfluenced, free, and natural will” described by Tressilian.

It is this natural vigour that allows Amy to contest the constructions of her morality and identity implicit in Leicester’s letter and Varney’s treatment. But Amy’s oppositional stance, combined with her continuing enforced seclusion leave her—as the charged language describing her response to Varney makes evident—at risk not only of madness but also of death. In the historical and poetic sources of Amy Robsart’s story that Scott identifies in the 1831 “Magnum Opus” introduction as Elias Ashmole’s Antiquities of Berkshire and William Mickle’s ballad “Cumnor Hall”, Amy is fated never to leave Cumnor Hall because she is murdered.14 In the ballad, to which the introduction grants an imaginative priority, Amy’s lament about her seclusion, Leicester’s neglect, and her fears about her coming fate substitute for action. Her speech, addressed to a remote and apparently uncaring Earl, is all that is available to counter the suspected plots that, at the ballad’s end, have succeeded in silencing the solitary woman. Such a fate also threatens Scott’s Amy. When she refuses to countenance the plan that has her agreeing to adopt a disguise, an alternative plot that makes use of a stupefying potion concocted by Alasco is put into play. Alasco’s arrival concentrates the forces of evil at Cumnor; the presence there of the laboratory where he works on his plans for world domination represents in extreme form the dangers of a potential moral enervation associated with Amy’s bower. When Amy swallows Alasco’s poison under Varney’s hypnotic gaze, it

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produces a near-death experience not from its inherent toxic properties but, tellingly, from its psychological influence on a mind driven to despair by an inability to imagine any means of escape from the influences pervading Cumnor. Amy survives only with the timely help of her maidservant and the medical knowledge of Wayland Smith, whose ordinary English name and humble occupation as blacksmith mark him as the appropriate counter to the dark corruption represented by Alasco. Such help transforms a potentially fatal experience into a crisis from which Amy emerges with an added sense of purpose.

What we see here is Scott’s imaginative reworking of his sources, the stories that emphasise Amy’s status as a pathetically powerless victim. In Mickle’s ballad, Amy’s story is assimilated to the ballad convention of the rural maiden corrupted and deserted by an uncaring aristocrat. But Scott’s version, even while it recognisably draws on this convention, adds a transformative twist. In the novel, the heroine does not submit to her expected fate. Instead, Amy, who has already undertaken one journey in fleeing her father’s home, embarks on another, directed to Kenilworth in the hope of a saving acknowledgment of her identity by Leicester. This change means that the story has the potential to escape the narrative outline powerfully imposed by both the ballad and Ashmole’s history.

When Amy insists that her flight from Cumnor must take her to Kenilworth, she argues that to be effective her plea to Leicester must be made through her physical presence. “[W]riting winna do it—a letter canna look, and pray, and beg, and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart,” as another heroine says at the beginning of her journey. The comparison with Jeanie Deans’ journey clarifies an important aspect

15 The Heart of Midlothian 3.51-52.
of Amy’s task. When her maidservant asks, “[h]ave you strength of body?--have you courage of mind,” Amy responds by asserting “[s]he that flies from death . . . finds strength of body--she that would escape from shame, lacks no strength of mind” (230). The shame relates not only to Varney’s sexual advances and to his proposals, but to the general belief in Amy’s immorality—a belief that, as Amy knows, darkens the father’s house at Lidcote. This shame can be removed only by Leicester’s acknowledgment of her, and Amy’s response indicates the consideration driving her enterprise and conferring on it moral purpose and direction. Amy expressly asserts that she must go forward to Kenilworth in order to make possible a return to a “native home” which she left when her “name was honourable” (233). The quest becomes a way of rediscovering a future for the bereft paternal home through establishing that the shame and infamy associated with her first journey away from the home are unwarranted; like Jeanie’s journey to another queen’s court, Amy’s too may redeem the father’s house.

But in both The Heart of Midlothian and Kenilworth there are larger issues involved. If these may be ones about which the heroine is only dimly aware when her focus is on immediate needs, they mean that the journey has a resonance beyond that envisaged by her. In fact, the heroine’s focus must be a narrow and undeviating one since her capacity to undertake the journey and to survive it without irreparable damage to her fragile reputation depend on this. For the male hero, the journey may involve a dilatory wandering that exposes him to a series of tests which, in the end, prove his essential worth. Female journeys are a much more hazardous business because women’s mobility beyond the home always risks an association with immorality. But the beginning of Amy’s journey away from Cumnor sees her fast dwindling in terms both of the extravagance of her dress and of a physical body that, having survived Varney’s sexual predation and administered potion, now becomes increasingly pale and weak. She seems
threatened with actual disappearance. Moreover, the journey brings Amy into what seems a wasteland. In part this is an effect of the notable lack of descriptive density in Scott’s account of the English landscape; when, for example, “a small thicket of trees” or “a gentle hill” are mentioned, these details seem uncoupled from a broader fabric of history and memory or, for that matter, from each other (238-43). The effect is to intensify a sense of Amy’s alienation from all that is familiar in terms of place and community. She, in company with Wayland, must travel in disguise and the two find themselves on the margins of communities like that of the travelling players--communities whose very cohesion and purpose reinforce the impression of Amy’s isolation. In this context, the consequence to Amy of the persistent denial or evasion of her rightful identity is the attenuation of her physical being. This effect is witnessed by Wayland who, knowing little about this “damosel-errant” he accompanies, sees that she looks “deadly pale” with symptoms of “decaying strength,” that she has an alarming “paleness of countenance,” and, as they near Kenilworth, that her “fits of indisposition” and “obvious distraction of mind” only increase (254, 243, & 253). The observations mark a transition from symptoms of physical decline to those of mental distress and Wayland believes he observes an incipient madness.

When Amy actually arrives at Kenilworth, the fictional journey through which Scott reworks his sources to forge a connection between the story about Elizabeth and the one about the forlorn bride becomes an entrance into an historical dimension that has no space for Amy. The description of the castle stresses the varying ages of its ancient and more modern structures, and its encoding of British history. While the castle no longer serves an overtly defensive purpose, the massiveness of a structure described as “a huge pile of magnificent castellated buildings” has an apparently enduring symbolic function akin to that of the Revels themselves (254); it represents the past and its culmination in
the present moment as a natural and organically accretive process. Evoking permanence and order, the "grey and massive towers . . . rise above the embowering and richly shaded woods, over which they seemed to preside" (255).16

The description of Kenilworth unites perspectives that emphasise both the castle's monumentality, and its daunting appearance to the woman who has a right to claim her place as mistress of Kenilworth but who finds herself able to enter the castle only with the aid of unlikely, even grotesque, companions. The focus on Amy's perceptions makes the castle appear a disorienting labyrinth in which the heroine's attempts to establish her identity are met with a disbelief and ridicule that cast doubt on her mental state and morality alike as "light heads" are equated with "light heels" (263). There is no instant recognition of Amy's worth and status, but only a swift descent into a nightmare world of jeers and insinuations that culminates with her being put into a room whose narrow dimensions and former use as a prison—"for some unhappy person who had been there murdered"—make it function as a chilling anticipation of her own possible end (262). Amy's placement here encodes her exclusion from the historical events surrounding her and serves notice that the most difficult task is one she has yet to face: the negotiation of the hierarchical division between Leicester's eminence and her own state of being outside Kenilworth's official zones of legitimate and acknowledged identity.

When Amy enters the castle, she is called "Bess of Bedlam" and the diagnostic gesture performed by the name foretells the nature of the means later used to expel her. The name has an additional resonance because it links Amy with the other Bess--with Queen Elizabeth. The arrival at the castle aligns Amy's story with that of the queen

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16 There is an irony here however—one which is available to the narrator's historical perspective and which, at this point, he knowingly shares with his readers. In the present time of the story's telling, the castle is a ruined heap of rubble, a monument not to permanence but to the reckless overreaching of Leicester.
whose own journey to Kenilworth has been in the nature of a royal progress whereby, through the physical act of travelling across her domains, Elizabeth establishes her rights of possession and of rule over her subjects. Such a progress depends for its effect on a visual element; the queen must be seen by her subjects and, in being seen, her iconic identity is affirmed as a monarch capable of uniting the disparate or unruly factions of a state and as the true descendent of the father she resembles.\(^\text{17}\) In contrast, the success of Amy’s journey depends on her invisibility, on her adoption of disguises that allow her to evade the prying eyes and tattling tongues that could prevent the journey’s completion. The formidable queen seems both physically and emotionally far-removed from the lonely bride who enters Kenilworth to huddle in her turret room. Yet the bringing together of the two women in the space of the castle (and in the textual space of the novel) evokes a sense of the hidden or implied connections between their stories that markedly diminishes the apparent distance between the two women. Thus, for example, if Amy is entrapped by a private story whose conventionally tragic end she struggles to escape, Elizabeth is caught within the demands of her role as a public historical figure who cannot know the consolations of private life and affection. The obvious link between the two is Leicester, the owner of the castle in which their stories are brought together, but also the man whose own plotting has cast the women into opposing and irreconcilable roles.

The bringing together of the two stories involves a shift in narrative strategy. Up to this point, with the two women separated by geographical distance, the novel has alternated and balanced accounts of Amy with those depicting the court. But when the

representation of Amy changes from showing her as the rather static and superficial character at Cumnor Hall, to the figure who undertakes the journey to Kenilworth, her dynamically unfolding narrative comes ever more to occupy the foreground of the text’s interest and attention. By way of contrast, the account of Elizabeth and the Revels appears more like a large-scale but remote history painting in which individuals are portrayed in various stylized and predetermined ways as they engage in ritualistic activities associated with pageantry and court-life.

After Amy leaves Cumnor Hall and especially after her arrival at the castle, she is often solitary, and her representation depends for its force and vitality on an account of a largely inner, emotional or imaginative experience. The details of this account of a woman whose movements are severely curtailed by her lack of status and acknowledged position in the castle establish Amy as the emotional centre of interest. The reader’s unique knowledge of her identity and her presence as the uninvited guest at Leicester’s celebration is accompanied by an awareness of how Amy’s story, should it come out, may disrupt the Revels by exposing the full extent of Leicester’s duplicity and, therefore, of the plotting in which he is implicated. For the reader, Amy’s story has already disrupted the Revels; indeed, that story proves the available lens through which Kenilworth and the Revels are viewed. The emphasis on Amy’s imagination and inner experience makes her the locus of emotional truths that may lie outside the range of possibilities for a queen limited by the demands of her own role and the theatrical pageantry of the court. Where the other characters see only a fading body and hear half-stammered explanations suggestive of actual derangement, the narrative affirms that the inner truth of Amy’s condition is that she is an acutely suffering soul.18

18 I am indebted to Deidre Lynch for her account of how readers come to perceive the true meaning of characters (typically of the heroine) beneath the surface read by other characters in the novel. Lynch 152.
The awakening of Amy’s imagination means that she becomes insistently aware in symbolic terms of the dimensions and complexity of her plight. Such an awareness may have an educative value for the individual for whom the literal or psychological journey is later followed by a successful reintegration into a social world or by the discovery of a meaningful private destiny. This is the case with many of the male protagonists of Scott’s earlier novels. But in Amy’s case, reintegration depends first on her ability to communicate with Leicester and, second, on Leicester’s willingness to grant Amy’s importance in a setting beyond the embowered retreat to which he has consigned her. Reintegration, in other words, must be negotiated and mediated through a man who has become treacherously entangled in a web of intrigue where the queen and not Amy forms the object of a specifically political desire. Private life, in this scheme, is to be kept in exile. When Amy looks out of the window of her turret room, she is struck anew by a painful sense of the difficulties of bridging the distance between her present solitude and that observed world. Through the window, Amy sees the fireworks celebrating Elizabeth’s arrival. Their short-lived brilliance “is instantly swallowed up in the surrounding darkness” and induces “fantastic terrors” prophetic of her own possible fate. Apostrophising Leicester, Amy asks if he is “the Magician at whose nod these enchantments arise” while his wife sees them “as an outcast, if not a captive” (309).

For the isolated and alienated individual, the imagination may prove the path to an actual madness with no possibility of escaping from the entrapment of solipsism. But Amy, the narrative affirms, is clearly not mad, and her strength emerges from her rural past and an ultimately incorruptible nature: “although spoiled by an over-indulgent system of education, Amy had naturally a mind of great power, united with a frame which her share in her father’s woodland exercises had rendered uncommonly healthy” (308). Yet, having made the journey to Kenilworth, the heroine finds herself facing an
impossible dilemma. In a nightmare world where locked doors are easily opened, dreams yield up images of her own funeral, and her identity is constantly being rewritten. Amy must and yet cannot save herself by uttering the right words. Not to speak out is to allow for the imposition of other identities or for the diagnosis of madness. But her status as a proper heroine means that all speech must be private speech, spoken only to the husband whose own proper task is to intercede between his wife and the larger public world. The lessons in duty and faith of Amy’s female journey—a journey which, finally, is distinct from Jeanie Deans’s rescue mission—teach that ambition must yield to an internalised discipline. Amy knows now that her life depends on “self-possession” and “mental fortitude” (308). The terrible irony is that the price of such knowledge is the attenuation of Amy’s power to communicate. Amy intrudes on the margins of the historical dimension as a ghostly presence, reminding us that the novel’s rewriting of her story is powerless to affect its historically-determined outcome. Scenes at Kenilworth repeatedly represent the failure of words to communicate, clarify, or arrive at a resolution. In a series of encounters between Amy and those others who could help her, the narrative identifies the thresholds of dialogue moments when real communication might occur. But the thresholds prove impassable; different narratives or agendas intervene to shape interpretation and they gain credibility from the elisions and apparent incoherence of Amy’s own obstructed speech.

Structurally the most significant of these encounters is the one to which the narrative seems to be moving and that brings together Amy and Elizabeth. The meeting exposes Amy to a group of onlookers who have no knowledge of her past. In this context, Amy’s unexpected appearance, stammered words, and half-explanations hint at perhaps dangerous mysteries, and are especially unwelcome to a queen who prides herself on the penetrating power of her own intellect and the legibility, the transparency, of her own
motives and actions. The encounter shows Amy turning to another woman, believing that there she can expect sympathy and help. But the individual she encounters is both a woman and a queen. At the moment she meets Amy, Elizabeth is in the midst of coming to her own hard-won realisation of how an ordinary woman’s life is necessarily denied her by the pressures of her role as spouse and mother to the nation. In that role, the queen’s duty is to seek out truth and dispense justice, and this is affirmed in the Revels’ mythological version of history. And yet, what the scene between the outcast woman and the powerful queen shows is how in life motives are likely to be tangled, complex, and contaminated by personal desires, fears, and ambitions. Elizabeth swiftly recognises that Amy’s story is in some way bound up with her own; to hear that story must be to confront the limits of her own power and her ability to read character. It would be, that is, to recognise how, in the part of her life involving Leicester, she has unwittingly been cast in a role very different from the one she (and the Revels) imagines.

But if Elizabeth cannot hear Amy’s story, it is equally true that Amy cannot coherently tell that story. Faced with Elizabeth’s peremptory questioning and increasing fury, Amy is silenced by a sudden realisation of the dangers her speech poses to Leicester. When Elizabeth drags Amy’s already “half-dead” body in front of Leicester to insist upon a clarification of the connection between the Earl and a woman labelled as “brain-sick” the question of whether Amy could save herself by speaking out is left open and yet also limited to a brief parenthetical aside. Asked for an explanation of her presence and her identity, Amy can see only the danger to Leicester of the queen’s anger at his deception, and therefore she “forgot her own wrongs, and her own danger.” This prompts the narrator’s editorialising remark, “(and, alas! how many women have done the same)” (322-23). Amy becomes here a generalised emblem for a pathetic, potentially fatal, and yet exemplary female fortitude.
Recognition of Amy's truth can, finally, be achieved only in brief private moments. The public scene with Elizabeth is framed, on one side, by a meeting with Tressilian and, on the other, by Amy's final interview with Leicester. These scenes occur in spaces remote from the ceremonial activities of the court, and it is only in them that Amy can be accorded a measure of recognition or affirmation. Yet the scenes also represent her words as inadequate to effect any real change. When Tressilian sees Amy in her turret room, he thinks she must be an apparition, conjured into being by his thoughts of her. But even when he is reassured that she is real, her refusal to tell him the details of her story allows him to assimilate it to the conventional outlines of the seduction narrative. In this plot, Amy is the rural maid who has been seduced and abandoned and who hovers on the brink of insanity. Challenging the potency of this interpretation, Amy utters her most impassioned plea for understanding when she cries, "I am not mad—I am but a creature unutterably miserable" (271). That Tressilian registers the force of her words is evident from his parting statement when he tells her, "I have ever remarked, that when others called thee girlish and wilful, there lay under that external semblance of youthful and self-willed folly, deep feeling and strong sense" (272). Yet the remark is made all the more poignant by the fact that Tressilian remains trapped within his own version of her story, and because he, like Amy, is located on the margins of a culture which acknowledges no place for him. His very appearance at the castle seems merely to point up that he is a man whom circumstances have deprived of the possibility of achieving full stature as a hero who can make things happen. Indeed, when he later attempts to supply a corrective to the stories about Amy that Varney circulates in the court, he is called mad and swiftly removed to a closet where he is temporarily confined to bed; the image is one of a silencing almost as extreme as Amy's own.

Tressilian's acknowledgment of Amy's "deep feeling and strong sense" is a
private recognition that draws on his knowledge of her past. In the scene with Leicester we find a more explicit and emphatic assertion of Amy’s embodiment of a potential whose ethical valence is relevant to the public world of the court. When Leicester asks the imprisoned Amy to play a role in the continued deception of the queen, she argues for an upright adherence to principles of truth. Her response, the narrator insists, reveals how her “natural” vigour has the potential to renovate a decadent court culture:

It was then that the Countess Amy displayed, in the midst of distress and difficulty, the natural energy of character, which would, had fate allowed, have rendered her a distinguished ornament to the rank which she held. She walked up to Leicester with a composed step, a dignified air, and looks in which strong affection assayed in vain to shake the firmness of conscious truth and rectitude of principle. (332)

Here a physically weakened and dishevelled Amy is an “ornament” not because of her beauty but because of her moral constitution. Moreover, although Amy’s trial begins when, at Lidcote, she allowed affection to hold sway over “rectitude of principle,” she now remains unmoved by any inclination to deviate from a path which has been illuminated by “distress and difficulty.” The narrator’s affirmation of Amy’s potential briefly imagines a future in which she occupies an earned role in Elizabeth’s court. The nature of this role is given a wider political significance and made only more clear when Amy further insists that Leicester’s duplicity has meant a “tyranny” from which he can be released only by the timely resurrection of his character as “a true English gentleman, knight, and earl, who holds that truth is the foundation of honour.” It is, in fact, as if at the very moment when the Revels are celebrating England and the English, these things are most threatened by forces held at bay only by “a young and timid woman” who is
said to be mad. But Amy’s words have an impact on Leicester as they had on Tressilian.

In terms of the journey from surface to depth that the novel’s account of Amy traces, if this Amy is the genuine one with all finery and ambition stripped away, her appearance generates a reciprocal effect in the man who has embraced duplicity and deception; her speech “moved all that was noble and generous in the soul of her husband” and “[t]he scales seemed to fall from his eyes” (332).

Leicester’s moment of vision is, however, limited to the space of his actual encounter with Amy. Subsequently Varney works swiftly to reassert his power and ensure that Amy’s removal from Kenilworth and even her death are doubly authorised by Leicester’s rage at a woman he is convinced is an adulteress and by Master’s diagnosis of madness. The impossibility of reversing the “fate” written into Amy’s story is all too readily apparent from her absence from the diagnosis scene itself and, indeed, from the novel for the space of several chapters. When Amy does return to the narrative, it is in a retrospective account of events that make her seem a strangely distant figure, one whom circumstances and a belief in her madness have deprived of all power to act for herself. She is bundled into a carriage, carried away from Kenilworth, and returned to Cumnor Hall which now explicitly assumes the character of a prison. Amy is placed in yet another turret room reached by a draw-bridge and “except in name, little different from a prison vault” (386). Immured in this last of the spaces which variously contain, confine, and determine her possibilities for speech and action, Amy’s final act is to run out of the unlocked door and fall through the unsupported bridge to her death. But the fall comes about not because of any attempt to escape but because Varney (in a final appropriation of others’ voices and narratives) imitates Leicester’s well-known call. Because she runs out in the belief that Leicester has actually requited her faith and trust, her death is as much a last affirmation of her enduring fidelity as it is the result of Varney’s cruel deceit.
As a final act, Amy’s death belongs off the historical stage, away from the centres of power and public events. It belongs to Cumnor Hall, to the enclosing private space in which Leicester had meant to keep Amy contained and which, at the moment of her death, threatens to erase her journey to Kenilworth, emptying it of its imaginative, ethical, or transformative potential when, in a description that ironically recalls the opening one of her splendid dress, Amy becomes the “heap of white clothes” seen by Varney and Forster (390). The final image of Amy’s body lying at the bottom of a vault augments the sense of her as somehow strangely distanced--as a woman who, like Lucy Ashton, has been inexorably reclaimed by the historical and poetic versions of her story that emphasise her silencing, her status as a victim, and her “mournful termination.”  

The novel does, however, allow for a decisive telling of Amy’s story in the place from which she has been excluded and, therefore, for a somewhat different reading of her death. After she has been physically banished from Kenilworth, a letter which Amy has written to Leicester to explain the motives behind her journey, is suddenly and almost miraculously found and read. The errant letter, still tied with a lock of Amy’s hair, substitutes for the heroine’s now exiled body, and its text conveys the words Amy cannot publicly utter. It represents a displacement so that Amy, for whom the letter’s contents are a private matter between her and Leicester, can remain associated with the feminine quality of modesty and a reluctance to force her own interests on the attention of the public world. That the contents of the letter are not reproduced in the narrative itself affirms that they specifically encode Amy’s desire not to have her story circulate promiscuously. When Amy assigns Wayland Smith to the task of delivery, the letter is

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19 The phrase is Scott’s, from his letter to Lady Louisa Stuart. His use of it emphasises his inability to change the outcome of a story which, as we have seen, he otherwise modified for his fictional purposes. Letters 6.311.
intended to do what is denied to Amy herself, to enter the labyrinthine space of the castle and penetrate the secure space surrounding Leicester. Its journey must be as end-directed and purposeful as Amy’s own. But the letter’s meaning remains ambiguous. As a text--especially at the moment of its unexpected reappearance—it seems but a faint shadow of Amy’s self, a mere stand-in for the actual presence that Jeanie Deans believes is necessary for human voice to speak to human heart. When Leicester reads it in the absence of a Varney who could reassert his influence over the Earl’s contested nature, he suffers what appears to the watching Tressilian as an episode of madness in which he is possessed by a “strange fit of passion” (367). His state is comparable to Amy’s own much earlier near-death experience from which she is roused to action and a sense of purpose. But when Leicester comes to himself—literally becoming the man of honour Amy has tried to call forth—his actions publicly to tell the truth and to save the banished Amy prove too late. Here too, as Ian Duncan says about Lammermoor, timing is bad timing; not providential but belated.

Yet, it is only in death that Amy is granted a place in the public world of the Revels. When “[t]he news of the Countess’s dreadful fate put a sudden period to the Pleasures of Kenilworth,” it is as if the ostensible meaning of the novel’s title has finally and conclusively been superseded by the supplementary meaning generated by Amy’s journey (391). In Lammermoor Lucy’s death has disastrous consequences for the private world in which she remains secluded. But in Kenilworth, the impact of the heroine’s death is disruptive of all the novel’s communities. Lidcote is left without an heir on the

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20 The description of Leicester’s state seems likely to derive from William Wordsworth’s "Lucy" poem, "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known". If so, it seems particularly apt given that Leicester, like the lover in the poem, fears that his beloved is dead.

21 Duncan, Modern Romance 137.
death of Sir Hugh Robsart. Tressilian, haunted even in a self-imposed exile by the enduring memory of Amy’s “disfigured corpse,” is tied to a past which can neither be forgotten nor transformed into something personally meaningful (392). His refusal to play any role in Elizabeth’s court implicitly impoverishes that court. For Varney and Alasco, the narrative reserves appropriately horrific fates. Alasco actually dies before Amy does, and in a grotesque emphasis on his corporeality, his body is said to be found bloated and putrid in his laboratory where its poisonous exhalations are expressive of the contagious, toxic nature of his influence while living. Imprisoned as a result of his involvement in Amy’s death, Varney chooses death by suicide—a choice which, as one of Scott’s friends approvingly noted, might allow the reader to hope for his everlasting torments afterwards.22 Leicester’s own fate is scarcely preferable; although he is eventually restored to an elevated position at court, there was, we are told, “something retributive in his death” (391).

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At the end of the novel, Amy’s journeys have not merely confirmed her fitness to play a role in the historical realm from which she is excluded. The narrative design actually functions to make her important to the preservation of that realm. It is, above all, the

22 The comment is from a letter by the Marchioness of Abercorn. The letter as a whole provides a very engaged commentary on the novel; for example, it asks “why did you not my kind Sir Walter save that sweet creature? had you but sent Sir W Raleigh, and Tressilian half an hour sooner you wd have saved the reader a World of Misery.” Letter to Sir Walter Scott, 5 March 1821, NLS MS 3892, ff 65-66. The letter reflects a different response from that of contemporary reviewers who were perturbed by a perceived generic impropriety in the novel’s linking of the celebratory and the tragic, or by a sense that the horrific nature of the private story actually contaminates what should be a celebratory history. For examples see: Rev. of Kenilworth, a Romance, Gentleman’s Magazine 129 (1821) : 246-253 & [Francis Jeffrey], Rev. of The Fortunes of Nigel, Edinburgh Review 37 (1822) : 207-08. For an opposing view which identifies as a positive element the way in which Amy’s story exposes the hollowness of the Revels, see: Rev. of Kenilworth, a Romance, London Magazine 3 (1821) : 188-200.
letter which, by alerting Leicester to Amy’s truth, accidentally and yet conclusively exposes the extent of the anarchic plotting whose presence threatens to undermine the whole edifice of the Elizabethan court and its celebrations. In this sense it is as if Amy and Elizabeth exchange places: the queen becomes a vulnerable woman whose intellect and penetrating vision do not allow her to see through a pervasive play-acting that obscures the truth and who, at Kenilworth, occupies a space that is itself a kind of bower enclosed by the Revels’ representations of history as an inevitable matter of providential design. Meanwhile, Amy is the woman whose story is kept to the margins of history but who, in the end, concentrates precisely those stabilising and renovative virtues of which the centre stands in acute need. In its anatomising of the story of Amy’s journeys and their origins and consequences, Kenilworth reinforces notions of woman’s association with nature, of the need for an education that cultivates certain “natural” qualities while subduing others, and of the extent to which the virtues and values nourished in private life must inform and infuse a public world that, otherwise, risks becoming a splendid yet essentially static show behind which other forces work insidiously to gain strength and power. While the novel makes Amy’s early vanity a symptom of more generalised problems, it also shows her later insistence on truth and honesty to be a potent force countering the anarchic energies that find an opening in the personal failings exemplified by Leicester. It is this second element of the heroine’s characterisation that requires Scott’s transformation of his historical and literary sources, and that for a brief span opens the way to another, imagined future for Amy. When the end comes, it is as definitively closed as that endured by Lucy Ashton; Amy is returned to the contours of a private plot from which there can be no escape. But, in juxtaposing the account of the Revels that show Elizabeth’s England telling stories whose focus is a triumph over the past, with the case study of Amy’s own painful lessons about representation and
meaning, the narrative of Amy's journey to Kenilworth locates madness finally not in the heroine but in the dangerous self-deceptions of a world that excludes her.
Conclusion

A Melancholy Ending:

Saint Ronan's Well and the Mad Heroine

Scott's only novel with a nearly contemporary setting, *Saint Ronan's Well* is an uneasy and disturbing blend offering both a satiric depiction of a rootless and theatrical society, and a tragic narrative of loss, remorse, and madness. The novel in which Scott ostensibly turns away from historical themes is also one where the depiction of a group of narrowly self-absorbed individuals at a Spa expresses the social consequences of a failure to engage in any meaningful way with the events of contemporary history. As Mark Weinstein aptly notes, the group is "turned in on itself . . . culturally incestuous." *Saint Ronan's Well* stresses the lack of substance and instability of a society that is not a community united by a shared history and common goals, or by bonds of sympathy but, rather, a miscellaneous collection of atomistic individuals each separately in pursuit of power, status, or sensual pleasures. Spa society is shown to function simultaneously as a site of contagion that threatens to infect the surrounding world with its corrupt values, and as a focal point where behaviours that have already gained an insidious hold in that world are played out in their most glamorous and emulative form. The new Spa buildings are superimposed on the decaying landscape of the existing village or Aulton of Saint Ronan's in what seems an aggressively imperial act, but this is possible only because the

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1 Mark Weinstein. Historical Note. *Saint Ronan's Well*, by Walter Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995) 443. Subsequent references to the text of *Saint Ronan's Well* are to Weinstein’s edition, and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text. While the first edition was published as *St. Ronan’s Well*, Weinstein corrects this on the basis of manuscript evidence to *Saint Ronan’s Well*. The novel’s events are said to be set some twenty years in the past, say, around 1804. However, Weinstein argues for a later date of at least 1809. Some of the novel’s references would place the action later still. The point may be to avoid making the events precisely dateable.
local laird, John Mowbray, illegally feued out the land for their construction; the
development of the Spa is thus enabled by preexisting local conditions in which the chief
landowner chooses to act in accordance with neither principles nor the law. The Spa is
also a forum for other types of immoral behaviour; instructive in this regard is the story
of Lady Binks and the calculated manner in which she entraps the loutish Sir Bingo in
matrimony by, as the novel implies, using her sexual favours as counters.

As critics have noted, Saint Ronan's Well stresses the collective social psychosis
of the society at the Spa. In particular, its depiction of the nervous ailments of women
such as the "freakish--fanciful" Lady Penelope Penfeather may suggest that Scott's theme
here is the alleged increase in mental disorders, particularly in women, that contemporary
commentators lamented as a side-effect of a bustling progressive society where
traditional ways and values are fast disappearing (66). The novel makes the point that, at
the Spa, nervous disorders are deployed as fashionable accessories intended, in Lady
Penelope's case, to conceal a cold calculation and ruthless egotism. However, Lady
Penelope's carefully cultivated appearance of nervousness also serves here as a foil for an
account of a far more serious and deeply-rooted psychological distress. Faced with the
unpromising--and, for Scott, uncharacteristically bleak--material in this novel, the trained
reader of the Waverley series looks to the love affair between the hero and heroine for
emotional interest, a sense of hope, and an opening into the future. But in this fiction of
modern life where the geographical setting is more confined than in any other Scott
novel, a debilitating paralysis affects those who might otherwise supply an antidote to the

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2 With reference to the Spa's superimposition on the landscape, it is interesting to note Linda Colley's
argument that travellers to spas in remote areas of Wales and Scotland enjoyed a sense of travelling back in
time while remaining protected from too close an encounter with the exigencies of the local situation. She
also argues that such travels had much to do with establishing and enhancing status. Linda Colley, Britons:

3 For example, Hart 282. and Joan S. Elbers, "A Contrast of Fictional Worlds: Redgauntlet and St.
Spa. It quickly becomes apparent that for Francis Tyrrel and especially for Clara Mowbray, hope lies already “crushed down and buried” by a past whose effects, in the form of a disabling psychological distress, linger to contaminate the present and erode the promise of the future (83).

In the Waverley series, Saint Ronan’s Well is remarkable not because it begins with hints of past events whose actual details are gradually disinterred through the course of the narrative, but because those hints refer to the actions of the present generation. In this it differs significantly from, for example, The Antiquary, with its two-generational plot and its focus on the young hero’s quest to discover the truth about his identity so as to loosen the crippling hold on his own life of a legacy of ancient hatreds and malign passions. His successful quest makes possible a future that is not a mere repetition of the past: Lovel learns his family’s history in order to free himself from its burden. But Saint Ronan’s Well imagines a rather different story—one where, instead of extricating themselves from the past, the hero and heroine are fatally vulnerable to the unseen web it weaves about them and their love affair. Yet, oddly, this story is not itself the subject of the novel but figures rather as a prehistory belonging to a time some seven years before the novel’s opening chapters; to alter Peter Brook’s description of the usual function of narrative plotting, we could say that readers of Saint Ronan’s Well are required to “read backwards” in search of information about the causes that underlie the present state of affairs.5

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4 Lockhart argues that the novel had its origins in “a tale of dark domestic guilt” which came under Scott’s notice in his capacity as Sheriff, and which Lockhart compares to George Crabbe’s “The Hall of Justice.” When Scott told this tale to Lockhart and William Laidlaw he proposed writing a novel in which he would “never let the story step a yard beyond the village . . . yonder” (Lockhart, 1837-38, v. 285). Although, on the basis of dating, Weinstein says it is unlikely this conversation actually inspired Saint Ronan’s Well, the reference to the geographical confinement of the narrative does imply that the novel was in Scott’s mind.

5 Brooks notes that plotting is that aspect of a narrative that makes us “read forward” in search of meaning. Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (New York: Knopf, 1984) xiii.
The initial chapters that Graham McMaster describes as “elegiac” include comparison of “the faded hues of the glimmering landscape” to “those of human life, when early youth and hope have ceased to gild them” (23). The description is reminiscent of the final chapters of The Tale of Old Mortality where the exiled Henry Morton returns to the scenes of his youth. Such a return has a disconcerting psychological effect similar to that Scott describes in his journal after he has been sorting through old papers: it “deranges and confuses the ideas which slumbered on the mind” or causes the individual to feel almost like a ghost peering through a veil of time at a younger self—a self who remains ignorant of the particular turn events will take. In Old Mortality the concluding account of Morton’s return to his former home actually opens onto a new beginning that extends beyond the final pages of the novel to promise the “glimpse of sunshine” that Miss Martha Buskbody would like to find actually described in the text.

In that novel, public and private plots do eventually cohere, and if history endangers Morton and separates him from his beloved Edith Bellenden, it also saves him by allowing for his return home and the lovers’ reunion. In contrast, in the claustrophobic world of Saint Ronan’s Well, the private plot seems cut adrift from any wider context that might supply a solution or enabling perspective. In this novel, when the love affair that in other Waverley novels is a redemptive force came to its disastrous end it was for reasons that time can neither heal, neutralise, nor render irrelevant. As the story of the love affair and its aftermath is gradually disclosed in a process that is completed only near the very end of the novel, it becomes clear that here the sins of the fathers involve a myopic, and

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6 McMaster 216. McMaster says that the opening is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s Michael. It is also appropriate to invoke “Hart-Leap Well,” a poem to which the novel’s epigraph directs our attention.

7 Journal 495.

unprincipled pursuit of immediate pleasures and desires, and an utter disregard for the education of the succeeding generation or for the care and preservation of the estate. And here, when Clara and Tyrrel’s relationship encounters intemperate opposition from Clara’s father because of Tyrrel’s apparently lowly status as an unknown English student, the intercessory figures who ostensibly aid the unhappy couple by striving to facilitate a fortunate outcome prove to be master plotters who have in mind a vastly different trajectory for the affair. Clara and Tyrrel become victims of Hannah Irwin, Clara’s cousin and companion, and of Valentine Bulmer, Hannah’s lover and Tyrrel’s half-brother. The result is that a single sexual indiscretion on the part of Clara and Tyrrel is followed, in quick succession, by plans for a clandestine wedding by the remorseful couple, Bulmer’s impersonation of Tyrrel at the marriage ceremony, a violent encounter between the half-brothers when Tyrrel rescues Clara, and Clara’s subsequent flight back to her father’s house where she lives on, tormented by guilt and oppressed by the requirement to keep secret a story that would threaten both her family’s reputation and Tyrrel whom she believes to have accidentally killed Bulmer.

The difference in the consequences that these events hold for Tyrrel and Clara is in good part an effect of gender and its significance in determining the individual’s freedom of choice and of movement. Certainly, Tyrrel’s early promise is blighted and he becomes a melancholy and restless exile. His return to the village of Saint Ronan’s shows that the intervening years have prematurely aged one who now displays an unwonted “cold and sarcastic” countenance that makes him all but unrecognisable to the old innkeeper, Meg Dods (12). Nevertheless, if Tyrrel’s exile and travel—a traditional therapeutic for grief resulting from a failed love affair—have not had any truly curative effect, and the young man appears embittered and saddened by experiences about which he maintains a steadfast reserve, he has been able to escape the worst effects of a psychologically and emotionally deleterious obsession with the unchangeable past.
Although it reactivates painful memories, his return to Saint Ronan's is just that: a return characterised by an achieved awareness of distance, an ability to reflect on change, and thus it is Tyrrel who philosophically (if in a self-consciously melancholy manner) compares the appearance of the landscape to the alterations in his own life.

In stark contrast is the plight of Clara Mowbray who has remained at Saint Ronan's, surrounded by scenes that are ever present reminders both of the love affair and of its disastrous outcome that was decisive for the future course of her life. When Meg Dods describes for Tyrrel how, ever since the death of her father, the dependent Clara dutifully keeps house for her brother who, like the old laird, neglects the estate in his pursuit of pleasure and the easy money won by gaming, she says that John Mowbray obliges his sister to be always "jinketting about, and back and forward wi' a' the fine flighting fools" at the Spa (22). The account concisely conveys Clara's powerless status, her inability to remain aloof from the Spa, and a physical confinement and restlessness that are expressed in the repeated dashing to and fro between her home and the Spa along the same narrow track. Confinement in Clara's physical world turns out to parallel a psychological entrapment characterised by an inability to cultivate a saving perspective or hope for future change. And this entrapment has its devastating effect on Clara's mental well-being. When Tyrrel meets with Clara for the first time after his return to Saint Ronan's, he is forced to a painful acknowledgment of "the plain indications that her mind was clouded, more or less slightly, with a shade of insanity which deranged, though it could not destroy, her powers of judgment" (85).

Clara describes her condition as one of being mired in a bog of memory and she poignantly describes for Tyrrel her incapacity to stop thinking about the past: "'O Tyrrel! often and often have I thought of this--thought of it often? Alas! when will the time come that I shall be able to think of anything else!' " (85). Yet, if past events remain a constant preoccupation, she cannot resort to the kind of response typical of so many literary
madwomen who, wounded by the destruction of their hopes and plans, become highly visible and recognisable emblems of the psychic and social effects of sorrow. The florid madness of a woman like Blanche of Devan in The Lady of the Lake clearly announces to passersby that, for her, a fatal moment in the past locked her into an incurable grief that will end only with death. In Clara’s modern world, such a role may no longer be available. Moreover, Clara’s situation is further complicated by another element. For her, a sense of being possessed by memories of past events that definitively close off her access to the usual pattern of a young woman’s life in which courtship is followed by marriage, is strongly inflected by an accompanying recognition that the story of her past must not be told, that the truth must be kept hidden. Thus, Clara is additionally tormented by the recognition that she is condemned to playing a role intended to obscure the truth while, at the same time, she is beset by fears that her story will one day be excavated and circulated: “[f]or years, her life, her whole tenor of thought, had been haunted by the terrible apprehension of a discovery” (358).

Why write such a bleak fiction? Although this is a question that confronts us with many works of literature, it seems an especially pertinent one with regard to Scott because philosophically, as the comments in his journal about his own mental health make clear, he was acutely aware of the dangers of encouraging or cultivating gloomy reflections, and the more usual pattern of the Waverley novels with their ending with a hint or promise of future “sunshine” bears witness to a strong sense of the novelist’s responsibility to his audience in this regard. Moreover, Saint Ronan’s Well is a special case even within the triad of tragic novels because of the absence of an identifiable

9 Commentators have argued that in some measure the bleakness expresses Scott’s anxiety about social changes (McMaster 220-22) or about the political turmoil of the late 1810s and early 1820s (Lars Hartveit. “Silent Intercourse” The Impact of the 18th-Century Conceptual Heritage on The Antiquary and St. Ronan’s Well,” English Studies 1 (1996) : 35. and H. Michael Buck, “A Message in her Madness: Socio-Political Bias in Scott’s Portrayal of Mad Clara Mowbray of St. Ronan’s Well.” Studies in Scottish Literature 24 (1989) : 181-93).
preexisting historical source: for this novel, the bleakness represents an authorial choice. In this light, it is curious to note that when Scott came to review the novel for the “Magnum” edition some years after its first composition, he both complained that “[t]he story is terribly contorted and unnatural” and noted prescriptively that “the catastrophe is melancholy which should always be avoided.” Accordingly, the “Magnum” introduction may deliberately be calculated to divert attention from these aspects of the novel when, instead of focusing on Clara’s story, it stresses the satirical depiction of the Spa. However, readers since the time of the first publication of Saint Ronan’s Well have found Clara’s story of greater interest than the depiction of the Spa and, in this light, the “Magnum” introduction seems something of a red herring. John Gibson Lockhart’s comments may be more to the point for, although his biography praises the accuracy of the account of Spa-life, it especially singles out the character of Clara for attention, noting “that the whole character of Clara Mowbray, but especially its development in the third volume, formed an original creation, destined to be classed by posterity with the highest efforts of tragic romance.”

While Lockhart was certainly not an impartial critic of Scott’s writings, his comments are often astute and in this case should certainly be taken seriously: Clara is an original creation. Although there are thematic affinities between Saint Ronan’s Well and

10 Journal 203. The entry is for Friday 28 July 1826.

11 Sir Walter Scott, introduction, St. Ronan’s Well, Waverley Novels, vol. 33 (1832) iii-x.

12 Contemporary reviews are typically very critical of Scott’s apparent turn away from historical fiction. However most of the reviews are taken up with Clara’s story. While the British Critic complains about the generic incompatibility of the satire and tragedy, it strongly praises the depiction of the distress of Tyrrel and Clara: “In the wayward reckless flightiness of Clara, and the suppressed irritability and austere thoughtfulness of Tyrrel, we observe the effects of the same gnawing sorrow and fruitless regret operating on a sensitive girl, and a man of a firm enduring temper of mind.” Rev. of St. Ronan’s Well, British Critic 21 (1824) 23. Another more severely critical review is in Monthly Review New Series 103 (1824) : 61-75.

13 Lockhart, 1837-38, 5.314.
The Bride of Lammermoor in the elements of a failed love affair and a forced marriage, the focus of each novel is distinct. Lucy Ashton is presented sequentially as a heroine who becomes a madwoman, and the novel's attention is on the process of transformation, on the events, circumstances, and character traits that combine to produce the demoniac in the bedchamber. In contrast, Clara is a heroine who, from the very beginning of her novel, is clearly mentally unstable. In other words, in Saint Ronan's Well, the figures of heroine and madwoman are collapsed together, and this allows for several important effects. The account of Clara as a self-divided heroine is remarkable for the depiction of the acute suffering that is shown to result from feelings of hopelessness and the impossibility of genuine communication, and from a sense of lacking agency or being unable to influence any real change. Because Clara is a young woman who occupies the role of the heroine in the narrative, and her "mental malady" is said to be accompanied by the judgment that allows her to think about and reflect on that suffering, to remain intensely and painfully aware of its causes and consequences, her psychological distress seems less distanced or conventional, and more poignantly conveyed than we find, for example, with the hag-like madwomen (82). As a heroine, Clara is the madwoman modified or made less strange, and her experiences of feeling herself to be powerless and without hope therefore have the shape of a familiar but terrifying nightmare. That it is Clara's rather than Tyrrel's psychic pain that is the focus of the novel's attention is a function of the more serious consequences the sexual indiscretion holds for her as a high born woman in the early nineteenth century and also of her inability, as a woman, to turn to the occupations and plans that evidently prove at least somewhat helpful for Tyrrel. In this regard, her condition is preeminently that of the "living death" described by Eveline Berenger but with the difference that, while for Eveline such a state is temporary and soon alleviated, for Clara it is permanent.

The circumstances of Clara's life and history make her an ideal subject through
whom to explore the debilitating effects on the human mind of a sense that possibilities for the future are shackled by a critical misstep in the past, and of the loss of any meaningful connection to a community that could foster an ability to think about the self in relation to a wider world. Clara is at an impasse: if, like Madge Murdockson, she is bound by past events and memories, she is also—unlike Madge—painfully aware of the implications her past holds for her future. But when the novel also weaves the mad heroine's story into one about a society that is shown to unleash a degenerative power by its failure actively to engage with history or to think of itself in relation to any larger world, it makes Clara seem a Cassandra figure, a woman who is mad and destined to be unable to persuade others to right action, but who speaks prophetic truth about the spreading destructive "instability" of the "tottering pinnacle of rank and fashion" to which her brother has indentured himself (333). If it is Clara who suffers, the wider world is implicated in allowing and even causing that suffering. When the novel depicts a society that eats its young and destroys its best hopes, it is in only the narrowest sense a cautionary tale about the immediate personal consequences of Clara's sexual indiscretion. In its broader schema, _Saint Ronan's Well_ is a devastating exposure of the behaviours that underlie a blinkered society's failure both to acknowledge and nurture the hope for the future that is represented by and focused in the vulnerable female subject.

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"Heroine" and "mad" are not terms that fit together in any unproblematic way, and this makes it unsurprising that Clara, as Fiona Robertson notes, may appear curiously marginal in her own novel.14 The account of Clara is under pressure, on one side, from

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conventions that govern the representation of her as a heroine and, on the other, from conventions associated with the madwoman. Clara’s beauty, reserve, dutiful obedience to the wishes of her brother, right thinking about the perils of Spa society, attention to “little female tasks” and to charity work on the decaying estate, and her still remarkable “powers of judgment” are familiar elements in the constellation of exemplary virtues with which the heroine is conventionally endowed in fiction of the period (98). Typically while the Scott heroine’s devotion to a paternal figure encodes her emotional acknowledgment of the merit of past ways or the requirement that a younger generation not ignore tradition, her other qualities (and her attachment to the hero) signal the promise she embodies; they orient her towards a future in which she will take her rightful place. The madwoman, in contrast, represents almost directly contrary forces. Like the heroine, the madwoman appears invested with an aura, a special presence that compels attention from her onlookers in the fiction itself and from readers of the novel in which she features. But unlike the heroine whose transparent innocence and sincerity require that she be unencumbered by any story of a private past, a secret history that is susceptible to being excavated and circulated, the madwoman is always associated with a certain opacity of character and intention, an unreadability. Her strange appearance and disordered or obsessive thinking are telling emblems for the continuing presence and psychic significance of her history. Moreover, if Scott’s fiction typically stresses that the past requires accommodation in some way, the madwoman reveals in grotesquely exaggerated form a terrible inability to escape the past because her life is fixed to a certain course that, the novels insist, effectively closes down the potential of the future.

15 Judith Frank makes an interesting argument about the relationship between charity work and the perception in the period of the problem of women’s excessive grief. With regard to Burney’s *Cecilia*—a novel with a heroine who goes mad but recovers—she argues that “charity functions as the social act that authorizes and controls the expression of emotion.” Judith Frank, *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 132.
In the novels discussed in Chapters One and Two these elements—the one pointing to the future and the other bound by the past—are divided between the hero and heroine, and other possibly malign figures whose most memorable representative is the madwoman. Where this is the case, the madwoman’s story ultimately remains marginal, and her attempts to hijack the central narrative and to bend it to a shape determined by her own desire, vengeance, or fanaticism, prove unavailing: despite Meg Merrilies’s efforts, Harry Bertram will not follow the path laid down by his ancestor, Arth Mac-Dingawaie; Magdalen Graeme’s prophetic capacity does not extend to foretelling the fatal dimensions of the cause she has embraced; and Ulrica’s appearance as a wild Saxon avenger is the dying gasp of a cause that the interests of peace and prosperity will conclusively leave behind. In Saint Ronan’s Well the madwoman’s story is not a secondary thread that will ultimately be superseded. But neither will the heroine’s story open into the future. Clara dreams of a meaningful alternative to a present life of pointless “jinketing” and urges her brother to reject the gaming and gossip at the Spa in order to undertake work on the estate and make her “the happiest of living creatures” whose grief would be “buried as deep as a funeral urn in a cold sepulchre” (101). But even when Clara thus vividly expresses her hopes, she is likely to be dismissed as merely “whimsical” or “a little—a very little—touched”—terms that identify Clara not as unique in the manner of the heroine, but as odd or bizarre (54 & 65).

Clara’s dreams are acutely fragile wishes held out against the realities not only of John Mowbray’s deepening financial crisis and entanglement with Spa-life but also of her own disorder and an associated sense of being unable to engage fully even in the occupations that she undertakes in the privacy of her own rooms: for example, she can read only “as one seems to read in a dream, without being able to comprehend one word of the matter” and her various tasks are “flung aside before any of them was completed” (99 & 98). When Clara is forced into company, she becomes the focus of often hostile
observation in a manner that, despite the evident class differences between the two women, is reminiscent of the treatment shown in *The Heart of Midlothian* to be accorded Madge Wildfire. And if there are similarities between Clara’s own likeness to a ghost or to “the finest piece of statuary” and the death-in-life condition of women like Ulrica Wolfganger or Elspeth Meiklebackit, she cannot, like these aged hags, find the listener to whom she might transmit a story that she herself believes to be unutterable (84). Yet, when compared with the conventional heroine, she also lacks the saving innocence of those with no secret past. Such heroines, though vulnerable to being plotted against, can rely on intercessory figures to facilitate a fortunate outcome. In this novel, the presence of possible intercessors such as Meg Dods, the Reverend Cargill, or the Monkbbarns-figure, Peregrine Touchwood, seems intended deliberately to recall other Waverley novels where such mediator figures are invested with a potency to act. That in *Saint Ronan’s Well*, with its self-divided heroine, the intercessors are themselves marginalised, blinded by other preoccupations, or unmotivated to act until the moment for meaningful intervention has passed merely points up the paralytic, stagnant nature of a world characterised by the pervasive lack of any real connection or communication between individuals.

That the heroine of *Saint Ronan’s Well* is also a madwoman has implications for her mode of presentation in the novel. The madwomen are typically depicted as objects for observation rather than as subjects who reflect in solitude on their predicament. For example, as a character, Madge Wildfire “exists” only as she is experienced by other characters. Although Madge is portrayed as suffering, she seems incapable of sustained or meaningful reflection or introspection, and for her life to be made available for representation requires mediation or interpretation by other sane characters. In contrast, conventions associated with the heroine require, Deidre Lynch argues, a stress on a narrative of an inner life that unfolds in relation to or against the background of a
community. To speak of a “narrative” of an inner life with regard to many of Scott’s heroines may be misleading since the Waverley narrators typically do not claim to have privileged access to the exact contents of such a narrative. Nevertheless, its existence is clearly intended to be inferred from the cumulative pattern of behaviour, gestures, and language used by or associated with the heroine, and that form a coherent set evidently keyed to her inner integrity or sincerity. The tragic heroines form a distinct subset in the group of Waverley heroines, and their representation is complicated by the fact that these women are depicted as being forced into conditions of extreme isolation. Their solitariness makes necessary the deployment of other narrative strategies to represent the changing and vulnerable nature of the heroine’s inner life. Amy Robsart is increasingly described as soliloquising in private about the difficulties of her situation, and a telling measure of the degree to which the net woven around her by the circumstances in which she is embroiled begins inexorably to tighten is that access to her solitary reflections diminishes and eventually breaks off altogether. Likewise Lucy Ashton— but with the critical difference that when Lucy’s rare comments about a situation she is determined to resist give way to a narrative focus on her external appearance that seems increasingly unfathomable, it signals the erosion of an inner life and the perversion of a character who is fixated on (or by) one single belief. In Saint Ronan’s Well, episodes such as Clara’s encounter with Tyrrel or her conversations with her brother as well as her occasional self-reflections or soliloquies make clear the existence of an inner life which, however, is evidently unstable. Tyrrel, for example, witnesses Clara’s cogency when she analyses the

16 Lynch 210. Lynch’s argument about the relationship between this inner life and a culture of proliferating material goods is suggestive for Saint Ronan’s Well which is filled with references to the business of purchasing and displaying goods.

17 A point recently reaffirmed by Harry Shaw. See Harry E. Shaw, Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 169 & 214-17. Shaw makes the important point that where Scott does allow his readers to experience the movements of a character’s thoughts, he does so in a manner that retains an inescapable awareness of historical distance.
consequences of her past actions. But he also observes that her clarity of thought coexists with another quality that continually threatens to undermine it, making her liable to fall "into a still more disturbed state of mind" in which she seems erratic, flighty (84).

As heroine and madwoman, Clara is shown to suffer from a debilitating self-awareness. This is made especially evident in the episode that forms the novel's centrepiece, an account of the Spa's summer entertainment that takes place at the Mowbrays' home of Shaw's Castle. The entertainment involves making Shaw's Castle into a kind of theme park, a protected enclave for the Spa elite from which the local children "who . . . were rather favoured by Clara Mowbray, were excluded . . . by a couple of grooms or helpers armed with their whips" (187-88). If Clara feels herself powerless to prevent the crass transformation of her home and the invasion of her private space by the Spa-dwellers, she also feels obliged to please her brother—whose actions in this regard are determined by mercenary and selfish motives—by playing Helena in the planned tableau from *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*. Moreover, she agrees to wear the costly Indian shawl that Mowbray purchases using funds that Clara usually devotes to charitable purposes. The shawl, we are assured by the traveller Peregrine Touchwood, is no mere imitation but a genuine and much-coveted item that serves Mowbray’s purpose well in highlighting his sister’s own beauty and desirability—qualities that Clara’s usual adoption of an old riding habit and veil seems deliberately designed to obscure. If Clara’s immobility in the tableau shows the heroine’s proper unwillingness to court attention—she consents merely to be "a piece of the scene, not . . . an actor"—the unexpectedness of her appearance generates startled applause from the Spa society. But when it is uncertain whether the audience’s appreciation is directed at her or at the beautiful shawl, the conflation of the heroine with the object she is obliged to wear is made only more ominously apparent—especially since Mowbray wishes in particular for his sister to be admired by Bulmer (now the Earl of Etherington) who, also for exclusively mercenary
motives, is seeking a public reenactment of the fraudulent marriage to Clara.

One aspect of Clara’s appearance that apparently escapes notice by her audience at Shaw’s Castle but is stressed for readers, is the extent to which, even as she remains otherwise still and silent in the part of Helena, Clara’s face is vividly expressive of her sense of self-division: “[t]he expression of her countenance seemed to be that of deep sorrow and perplexity . . . over which wandered at times an air of irony or ridicule as if she were secretly scorning the whole exhibition, and even herself for condescending to become part of it” (191). Irony, ridicule, and self-directed scorn are not qualities associated with the standard heroine who is typically characterised by sincerity of character and transparency of motive. But neither are they associated with the madwoman whose obsessions and total immersion in her role deny her the critical perspective that irony especially requires. Clara’s irony emerges at this moment because an awareness of the moral ambiguities of her position is made all the more pressing in the context of her acting a model heroine in an exhibition she is unable to prevent and that is calculated to attract the attention she usually tries to evade. “Impersonation leads to the negation of self; thence to the weakening of the social fabric,” Lionel Trilling told us with reference to the theatricals in Mansfield Park.\footnote{Lionel Trilling, \textit{Sincerity and Authenticity} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971) 75.} The Spa-visitors embrace theatricality and impersonation; these represent the \textit{modus operandi} of this factitious society. When Clara is obliged to play her role in the tableau, she is implicated in the practices of that society--making her situation tellingly different from that of Fanny Price in Austen’s novel. But Clara is already implicated: for her, the role of Helena is superimposed on a role she habitually plays--that of “Clara Mowbray,” the young woman without a secret history. Moreover, Clara knows this to be the case, and when she appears in the tableau, her expression reveals the threat this poses in further undermining a self already
vulnerable to a fracturing disintegration. Notably, immediately following her exhibition as a model heroine and eminently desirable woman, Clara abruptly gives away the shawl. The gesture signals a telling rejection of all that the luxurious and "genuine" shawl implies about her own qualities and worth, and Clara follows it with a retreat to her private rooms and to her other role as madwoman, for which she dresses herself in the familiar riding habit. When the angry Mowbray arrives to remonstrate with his sister, Clara replies with phrases that invoke the witches in Macbeth—unmistakable outsiders who, however, belong to a vastly different time and context—and express both an exacerbation of her self-division and the inescapability of theatrical models: "Paddock calls . . . anon—anon," and "I come—I come, grimalkin" (208).

If Clara's air of irony in the tableau and the subsequent apparent intensification of her disorder when she retreats to her solitary rooms reflect her painful self-consciousness, this is revealed to be a function of another quality not typical of other madwomen: an awareness that goes beyond the mere apprehension of guilt to encompass an ethically based commitment to accepting responsibility for her own actions, a refusal to make the easy gesture of shifting blame onto others. Another heroine-madwoman, Lucy Ashton, speaks of having acted "alone and uncounselled" and therefore being required to seek unaided a solution to her predicament.\(^{19}\) In *Saint Ronan's Well*, Clara accepts responsibility but, despite her dreams of a better life, also believes that for her there can be no solution. Moreover, these elements—the acceptance of responsibility and the belief that past acts cannot be redeemed—form a potent combination that effectively causes her disorder and her suffering. Clara feels responsible for her actions because she is a right-thinking woman, but this is also what underlies her preoccupation with the past. On one level, it decisively distinguishes her from a Lady Binks; on another, it is what makes her

\(^{19}\) *Lammermoor* 233.
mad. Speaking to Tyrrel, Clara describes their crime as being specifically against time. Theirs “has been a sad and tragic scene”—and this couple’s compulsive invocation of literary models is symptomatic of the degree to which they feel their past has severed them from any full engagement with life—and it began in “youth and folly”:

“You and I would, you know, become men and women, when we were yet scarcely more than children—We have run, while yet in our nonage, through the passions and adventures of youth, and therefore we are now old before our day, and the winter of our life is come on ere its summer was well begun.” (85)

A passage that contains a covert references to the sexual relationship shows Clara explaining that the result of a wilful disruption of the usual sequencing of a life in time is to be condemned to premature old age. And, importantly, this figures a devastating erosion of the horizon of hope that the novel identifies as an essential counter to despair, as productive of a sense of life not as a mere eking out of days but as purposive and meaningful.

Like some Dantean lost soul speaking to her partner in sin, Clara can be thus cogently—even beautifully—articulate when addressing Tyrrel precisely because it is only to him that she can account for the cause of her condition and, therefore, also acknowledge before a witness that she accepts responsibility for her actions. Yet if it is only to Tyrrel that Clara can speak about and weep over the past, Tyrrel is also the one individual to whom she is denied access because, for this couple, the still-potent memories and effects of that past create an insuperable barrier. In the present world of Saint Ronan’s Well, she is shown to meet with her former lover only twice: their early meeting when Tyrrel becomes aware of the effect on her psyche of their shared

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Hart argues that Clara is in fact merely “a more attractive form of Lady Binks; both are too wild, undisciplined” (Hart 279).
experience of love and betrayal is balanced, at the end of the novel, by an encounter that takes place immediately before Clara’s death. And in ordinary society, confronted by people who do not and must not know her history, she suffers from a linguistic paralysis or even a type of aphasia. Even when she slides into her madwoman role after her exhibition in the tableau, she can only ventriloquise the words of other literary madwomen. These echoings are readily interpretable merely as further evidence of her disorder and, unlike the gnomic speech of other madwomen, they lack any prophetic power or ability to inspire fear or awe in her listeners. Moreover, they do not even help to preserve inviolate her reclusive solitude. Indeed, her brother responds only with heightened irritation at the wayward and recalcitrant sister who seems to be wilfully evading the particular role he has planned for her and thwarting his hopes of attaining financial security through her marriage. After another encounter with Mowbray, Clara mourns, “I have had no power to speak out,” and compares herself to “the unhappy creatures who, it is said, lie under a potent charm that prevents them alike from shedding tears and from confessing their crimes” (103).

Unable to confess, powerless to reject the Spa for better company and pursuits or to influence her brother in his choices, doomed to endless and apparently inescapable role-playing, the victim of a lacerating self-consciousness, and devastated by a sense of guilt and the erasure of hope, Clara feels herself condemned to be an impotent onlooker to a world in which she lacks agency. The narrative structure of Saint Ronan’s Well makes the point: for Clara life was something in which she participated fully only in the past and, in the present, her best option is a quiet endurance, a private life shielded from public display. But the novel also makes a point about the high stakes at issue with regard to a story that, it shows, continues to disrupt the present. Marilyn Orr convincingly describes a pattern of repetition that dominates the novel.21 With regard to Clara, this

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21 Marilyn Orr, “Repetition, Reversal, and the Gothic: The Pirate and St. Ronan’s Well.” English Studies in
repetition takes the form not only of a kind of reanimation of the past in the gossip that is promiscuously relayed about her in the Spa but also of the simultaneous reassembling at Saint Ronan’s of the original cast of characters and of Bulmer’s threatened reenactment of the forced marriage. There can be no quiet retreat for Clara such as we read, for example, in the inset story about Lady Hermione Dalgarno in The Fortunes of Nigel. Here Clara’s story is not fenced off from or only distantly connected to another, implicitly more important, narrative, and her debilitating condition is both symptomatic of and causally related to a more pervasive and insidious state of paralysis affecting the wider society.

This paralysis is expressed in the moral decadence which, in the particular world of Saint Ronan’s Well, there seems to be no energy to check—especially when the Reverend Josiah Cargill, the one individual who might be expected to supply appropriate guidance, is wholly absorbed by abstruse historical research into events far distant in time and place. Unchecked by any restraining or corrective influence, the histrionic culture at the Spa flourishes and reduces everything to a salacious fascination with gossip. Moreover, this culture proves a boon to the charismatic Bulmer who, as an adept and unscrupulous chameleon, deftly inhabits each and every role he takes on. Bulmer is motivated entirely by financial imperatives and the intervening years between

Canada 16 (1990): 187-99. Orr argues that the novel depicts a self-replicating doublessness evident in, for example, the status of the two half-brothers, products of a bigamy that undermines social structures, and she suggests that this doublessness (which she contrasts to a fruitful duality in The Pirate) “effectively stops time” (194).

22 See [Walter Scott], The Fortunes of Nigel, vol 2 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1822) 196-223. The scene of Hermione’s story-telling makes an instructive contrast to those associated with the madwomen. Hermione tells Margaret Ramsay her story in the hope she “will take warning by the tale.” In fact Margaret is, at the moment, too preoccupied with Nigel’s fate to be very interested in the older woman’s history. It is made clear that Hermione has not become mad as a result of her disastrous adventures because she is able to keep herself from being mentally preoccupied with them; it is only when she sees Margaret’s agitation that her “own sorrows [are] awakened” (196). At one point during the narration, Margaret explicitly inquires why she dwells on facts that seem particularly to distress her (219).
the fraudulent marriage to Clara and his return to Saint Ronan’s have taught him only to be more ingenious in his manipulations, while, as the acknowledged Earl of Etherington, he is rendered all the more dangerous because of the social influence he commands. And this master plotter and consummate actor—who seems self-consciously but anachronistically to model himself after Richardson’s Lovelace—is content that his avowed intention of forcing Clara to submit to his wishes exposes an entirely instrumental view of people that is indistinguishable from that of his bigamous and even deranged father. Despite his own strong sense of irony, Bulmer is incapable of responding appropriately to the lessons observable in his father’s miserable life. John Mowbray too, like the old laird his father, shows himself to be preoccupied with frivolous pursuits, unwilling to commit himself to working for the good of his inherited estate and its dependents, or to pay heed to Clara’s attempts to remind him of his responsibilities. The result is that the estate decays, the condition of the local economy declines despite the tourist income derived from the Spa, and Mowbray, rejecting the human connection to Clara that might preserve him from a dire course, is willing to “enslave” his sister in marriage to a man she detests and about whom even he is deeply suspicious (337). Even Peregrine Touchwood, a man whose critical commentary on the general state of affairs at Saint Ronan’s seems closest to the perspective offered by the narrator, and who ostensibly rejects the social-climbing and selfishness dominant in his own forefathers, imagines himself to be omnipotent and all-knowing, fails appropriately to convey telling information about Bulmer’s past and motivations, and scripts a role for himself that he will play out only when action will have the most dramatic effect.⁵³ Although, unlike Clara, the men believe that they act freely, they in fact repeat behaviours long evident in

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their respective families, and seem doomed not simply to pay the price of the sins of the fathers but to reenact them.

It is this impasse from which Clara and Tyrrel’s story, at its outset, promised an escape. In consequence of her father’s irresponsibility—one which hastened the decline of an already compromised estate and laid the foundation for John Mowbray’s later role in establishing the Spa—the motherless Clara was obliged, quixote-like, to acquire her education haphazardly and, partnered by Hannah Irwin, to find her company by chance. The obligatory nod to the inadequacies of the tragic heroine’s education is here balanced by a deliberate stress on Tyrrel’s essential fitness to be Clara’s lover-mentor; the couple’s first meeting finds Tyrrel rescuing Clara from the uncalculated effects of her quixotism when she dresses up like a peasant girl and is violently accosted by a countryman who, in Bulmer’s words, “saw not the nobility of blood through her disguise” (236). That Clara makes a wise choice of partner when she prefers the steady and scholarly Tyrrel is evidence for her right-thinking “powers of judgment.” Tyrrel’s own background includes the story of his father’s bigamy, Tyrrel’s stigmatisation as illegitimate and, much later, the revelation that Tyrrel and not Bulmer is the rightful heir to the earldom and therefore also, should he marry a Mowbray, the inheritor of a valuable estate through Touchwood’s family. That this is so establishes that circumstances were poised to work out well, fortuitously to cohere in the union of Tyrrel and Clara, the representative of the English aristocracy (who has the Waverley hero’s good fortune to have grown up believing that he must make his own way in the world) with the daughter of the Scottish landed gentry.24 When Clara’s choice fails to meet with her father’s approval because of his

24 Colley notes the importance of cross-border marriages between English men and Scottish women in creating an integrated ruling class (Colley 170-73). Ian Dennis’s discussion of the triangulation of desire in historical fiction is relevant to Saint Ronan’s Well where the Scottish heroine is pursued by two half-brothers—one of whom desires her solely because he also desires the land he will inherit through marriage to a Mowbray. See Ian Dennis, Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1997).
irrational prejudices and pride, this indicates a fatally short-sighted attitude that harms Clara and, implicitly, also the estate and Clara’s brother, since all would have benefited from Tyrrel’s sobering influence and inherited wealth. The novel does not excuse Clara for the subsequent commitment to a secrecy that opens the way for Bulmer’s and Hannah’s plotting. But the full weight of condemnation falls on a more thorough-going and widely damaging selfishness and neglect on the part of an older generation, on a refusal to perceive that every action or failure to act must carry implications for the larger world outside the immediate arena of the self. And here, perhaps even more clearly than in Lammermoor, such behaviour is shown to let loose a spreading and pernicious evil: it creates the conditions for Clara’s tragedy and also facilitates the establishment of the Spa, an enclave entirely dedicated to self-seeking.

As heroine and madwoman, Clara stands at the pressure point of a long history of blinkered thinking and neglect, and her suffering and paralysis focus the terrible personal and social consequences of an entire constellation of failures. When the stories of the old madwomen are contextualised by histories of social disruption and disorder that are implicated in the development and etiology of the women’s psychopathology, they stress that individuals whose characters are dominated by primitive passions turn to violence as a means of vengeance or of striving to turn back the clock and put in place an alternative vision of the future. More than anything else, the turn to violence identifies these women as anachronisms when it shows that they represent a bygone time characterised by rule of sword rather than of law. In Lammermoor it is by violence that Lucy ruptures the plot of family aggrandisement into which she has been scripted, and when she does so her actions imply the resurgence of old ways not seen since the days of Malise Ravenswood but now jarringly embodied in the delicate and beautiful daughter. In Saint Ronan’s Well violence is not an option for a heroine whose madness and circumstances are different from Lucy’s, and the ending of the novel seems deliberately to eschew generating the
kind of horrified fascination that attaches to the figure of the mad bride. In fact, the novel sustains its identification of Clara as both a heroine and a madwoman to its conclusion, and, as a heroine, Clara cannot resort to the violence that acts out powerfully destructive desires, while, as a madwoman, she remains bound by the conditions of those ultimately irremediable past events from which the only escape will be found in death. Nevertheless, the representation of Clara as a woman in whom the two roles are collapsed together comes under most acute pressure at the end of the novel, and the ending is notable for its depiction of several encounters that encode displacements of both Clara’s madness and responsibility.

The first such encounter is between Clara and John Mowbray. When gossip about Clara’s past begins to circulate among the Spa society, Mowbray is faced with the potential collapse of his plans to marry Clara to Bulmer. In consequence, he furiously upbraids his sister for allegedly dealing a death blow to the family “honour”—thereby shifting onto her blame for losses that have much deeper roots and deflecting attention from his own role. Mowbray is confronting the demise of his own dreams—he sees the siblings reduced to the status of “gentle beggars”—but his response, unlike Clara’s, is to refuse responsibility for his predicament. He turns on his sister with “violent and inflamed passions” that reveal a latent sadism when he insists that he will “sell” Clara as a slave to Bulmer in order to conceal the family’s dishonour (333-37). Reduced to the encounter between the orphaned siblings that occurs in the remote and decaying Shaw’s Castle, the scene encapsulates a devastating social breakdown. When Clara falls to her knees in front of her enraged brother, her evident vulnerability and the threats of utmost violence uttered by the enraged Mowbray combine to create a sense of Gothic nightmare that exposes the truth about the society depicted in Saint Ronan’s Well, one in which a fashionable surface masks a family and social life in which the corrosion of sympathetic bonds by the tyranny of self-interest produces a spectacle of horror. Earlier, Mowbray
taunted Clara for believing “that the days of Clarissa Harlowe and Harriet Byron are come back again, when women were married by main force” (218). But now it is he who seems mired in outmoded ways of thinking and behaving even to the point of adopting the role of Gothic tyrant, while Clara still clings to her hopes of a better future and argues for a life of “honest poverty” over one of enslavement and degradation, for a quiet retreat in preference to violent action (334-35). And here, while Clara is reduced to a terrified state, it is Mowbray who reveals himself to be the victim of his own destructive possession by a passion for retribution against Clara, Bulmer, and the whole Spa society. When he threatens to stab his sister, even he comes to think that he is prey to a “fiendish possession” (336). Moreover, it is evident that if rumours about Clara’s long-ago indiscretion are the ostensible source of his fury, his greater preoccupation is with his imminent financial ruin and with hatred for Bulmer whom he now knows to have outplotted him.

When Clara responds to Mowbray’s threats by fleeing her home, the narrative insists that such a flight is a function not of any deliberate choice to disobey her brother’s injunctions but, rather, of a final failure of agency; it results from “a rapture of fear, which probably left her no other free agency than that she derived from the blind instinct which urges flight, as the readiest resource in danger” (358). As Alison Case argues, the heroine in fiction of the period is not a plotting woman and Clara—unlike Lucy whose violence is premeditated—will not plot even to save herself.25 But the kind of extreme erosion of agency suffered by Clara also evidently functions to attenuate her physical being. Even the narrator, who now asserts that there are “no means of exactly tracing the course of this unhappy young woman,” seems to be in retreat from his previous position of narrative authority with regard to a heroine for whom the irreconcilable elements in

her depiction push towards her final disappearance. However, if Clara is now motivated only by blind instinct, that instinct will, for the first time in a novel which has spatialised her entrapment between the geographic points represented by the Spa and Shaw’s Castle, take her to the Aulton of Saint Ronan’s. Simultaneously, it will take her towards an understanding of the hitherto hidden elements that contributed to her tragedy and towards a final escape from paralysis that is expressed not by any action but by her ability to utter words of forgiveness and sisterhood to the dying Hannah Irwin.

Clara’s encounter with Hannah takes place in Cargill’s manse and is of particular interest. While the depiction carries the implication that Clara’s flight to understanding and the expression of forgiveness can finally lead only to death, it serves to displace not only Clara’s madness but also, to some degree, her transgression onto her former companion. In other words the figure of the heroine/madwoman bifurcates, momentarily to release Clara as the heroine. If Clara’s sense of paralysis and entrapment by memory have rendered her spectre-like, a pattern of doubling with Hannah depicts Clara’s suffering being literalised or given flesh in her former companion. Hannah’s history is one of physical desire (for Bulmer), prolonged physical degradation (Bulmer gave her to a husband who maltreated and even “sold” her), and final corruption (the puerperal fever from which she dies) (364). The effect is, by comparison, to stress the psychological nature of Clara’s suffering which is an effect of her deep sense of personal culpability. This is a sense conspicuously lacking in Hannah who, even at the point of death, insists to Cargill, “my heart is hardened . . . I have sinned with my eyes open” (362-63). That such claims recall characters like Elspeth and Ulrica who explicitly reject repentance positions Hannah as kin to such madwomen. As Hannah’s confession reveals, although she created the circumstances that prompted Clara and Tyrrel’s prenuptial sexual relationship because of her “envy and hatred” for her cousin, the couple fell victim to her plotting
apparently almost without any conscious will on their part. In this regard, the erring Clara comes to seem a less fortunate version of a character like Rebecca in Ivanhoe because her fault, in the world she inhabits, is to be ultimately unable to escape ensnarement by the narrative the other woman has projected for her.

Hannah is made to absorb Clara’s transgression and her tale has a relentlessly and fully documented punitive trajectory. When Clara reveals herself as a witness to Hannah’s death-bed confession, she appears a ghostly visitant conjured up by the dying woman’s utterance and elicits from Hannah a terrified response, a grotesque and overwhelmingly physical expression of terror: “her eyes starting from their sockets, her lips quivering, her eyes pale, her emaciated hands grasping the bed-clothes” (365). In the context of the various scenes of a potent telling by madwomen that this study has documented, it is tempting to read this as Clara’s revenge on behalf of those like Lucy who are transfixed and destroyed by words formed out of passions of hatred and resentment. Here it is the teller who finds that the narrative clarifying her instrumental role in Clara’s downfall has an unexpected potency, that it escapes the plotter’s conscious control to turn on her. Yet the account also emphasises that this is not part of Clara’s intention. Clara’s appearance—Hannah believes she sees “an apparition of her betrayed friend” (365)—expresses a fatal intensification of a bodily attenuation giving her the status almost of a ghost haunting a narrative that remains, for her, literally unspeakable. But her sudden appearance at just this moment also allows Clara the space to utter words that, at the very time when the full details of her story and early transgression are made explicit for the reader, establish her voice as one of moral authority and are poignant.

Bulmer apparently also remained ignorant of the full extent of Hannah’s duplicity. Her plan was to punish him by abetting his marriage to the woman whom Hannah knew to be Tyrrel’s sexual partner (that is, the lover of Bulmer’s half-brother and within the proscribed degrees of relationship). Here the most heinous act of plotting that is undertaken with the intention of poisoning private life is performed by a woman—for whom the novel reserves an appropriately wretched punishment that is quite different from Bulmer’s swift death in a duel.
reminders of her potential as a heroine. In response to the revelation of the degree to which, from the beginning, Clara has been the victim of others' plotting, she addresses Hannah as one deserving of pardon, one whose life-story and "crimes" are inextricably bound up with her own: "I pardon thee as freely as if you had never wronged me--as freely as I desire my own pardon" (365).

That Clara's words affirm a moral parity, a sisterhood between Clara and her former companion, makes the scene resonate as an eerie reformulation of Madge Wildfire's death-bed—a scene in which the dying Madge does not confess and where Jeanie Deans, despite showing some pity for the madwoman, must not by the least gesture or word attempt to bridge the distance between her and Madge since to do so would threaten the trajectory of her own successful journey. Here, if Hannah represents a site of displacement for Clara's error, her confession also exposes the full extent of that error and thereby affirms the basic equivalence of the two women: both are fallen and both are journeying to imminent death. And yet, when the narrative grants Clara the opportunity to speak the all-important words of forgiveness—and of contrition—it also implicitly reinvests her with agency, a power to close over the wounds of the past precisely because Clara, unlike other madwomen and especially unlike Hannah, does not embrace vengeance or seek retribution. Moreover, uttering the words effectively allows Clara to reclaim her own story because she crafts its ending in forgiveness, and a tale that has been rendered horribly public, exposed for gossipy retail and rumour, is resituated as a private matter to be spoken of here by the two women, at Hannah's deathbed and witnessed only by the Reverend Cargill.

In all other respects, such agency seems a meagre consolation for the evident rapidly increasing attenuation of Clara's bodily substance. If Hannah is struck by her cousin's ghostly appearance, so too is Tyrrel when Clara next appears in his chamber at Meg Dods's inn. That this final encounter between the former lovers occurs at all
represents a remarkable transformation of the conventions for depicting the demise of women whose madness involves an element of sexual immorality. That such women typically remain solitary or are denied the consolation of any final meeting with their former lover serves harsh notice that a wrongly conducted relationship can never be redeemed—even at the point of death. In contrast, Clara’s meeting with Tyrrel at this moment is a reminder of the potential embodied by the couple. Yet, like all else in the cheerless world of Saint Ronan’s Well, it is too little and too late. Tyrrel first becomes aware of Clara’s presence when he sees her reflection in a mirror: “[h]e stood for an instant with his eyes fixed on this fearful shadow, ere he dared turn round . . . When he did so, the fixed and pallid countenance almost impressed him with the belief that he saw a vision” (366). That Clara is represented first as an image shadowed in a glass and then as a vision of a self whose hold on life is so diminished that Clara seems literally to be disappearing into air makes clear the imminence of death.

The description also recalls the only other meeting between Tyrrel and Clara that is actually depicted in the novel—one in which it is Clara rather than Tyrrel who believes that she sees the vision of the individual whose memory is so intimately bound up with the origins of her mental disorder and suffering. And in fact it is Tyrrel who, in a further curious displacement, will inherit Clara’s grief and sense of impotence or hopelessness. When Clara dies, Tyrrel displays such excessive emotion that he seems feminised; raising “a shriek of despair . . . he threw himself on the pale hand of the corpse, wet it with tears, devoured it with kisses, and played for a short time the part of a distracted person”; even now, at this moment of extreme emotion, role-playing seems an inescapable mode of being (367-68; italics mine). Subsequently when he decides to seek revenge against Bulmer, he is thwarted by the knowledge that Mowbray, armed with information he belatedly receives from Touchwood in yet another telling of Clara’s story, has already killed Bulmer. At this, Tyrrel announces in words that signify the complete erasure of his
own hope and purpose, "there is nothing in this world left that I should live for" (368). And, as the conclusion tells us, Tyrrel enacts the retreat from history that conventionally belongs to women who find themselves with no meaningful role: he ends his days immured in a Moravian mission.

Although the ending of Saint Ronan's Well seems concerned to shield the heroine from any easy condemnation at the time of Hannah Irwin's revelations, it also displays an almost heavy-handed insistence that Clara's death is entirely inevitable and unavoidable. We are told that her flight "exhausted the powers of her body, and alienated those of her mind" and that Hannah's confession proves "a tale sufficient to have greatly aggravated her mental malady" (365). Later, like Lucy Ashton's, Clara's body collapses under the strain of her mental agitation: "[a] convulsive fit followed, and seemed, by its violence, to explain that she was indeed bound for the last and darksome journey" (366). Finally, the hastily summoned country surgeon supplies a commentary on her death. Although the novel has persistently stressed the psychological causes of Clara's disorder, he authoritatively ascribes her condition to a physical ailment when he diagnoses "a pressure on the brain, probably accompanied by a suffusion" which would have forestalled any return of reason and makes "death, in comparison to life . . . a mercy" (368).

The surgeon's words do not, however, have power to console. If Tyrrel undertakes the male equivalent of entering a convent, Mowbray also leaves Saint Ronan's, exiled in the wake of the duel with Bulmer. That Clara's remorseful and now solitary brother joins in the Peninsular war against Napoleon suggests his new engagement with the larger contemporary events against which the insulated life at the Spa was a shield. But Mowbray's flight and exile are presented in equivocal terms, and are, in their origins, the result of a dire and lawless but belated act of retribution, of Mowbray's failure to learn Clara's lesson of forgiveness. Mowbray buys back the land he
had feuded out for the Spa, orders the destruction of the new buildings, and becomes *in absentia* a cautious landlord whose planting of the estate ensures its future prosperity. Nevertheless, at least for his lineage, it is an ultimately barren prosperity since Mowbray is destined to be the last representative of his family. If both Tyrrel and Mowbray have the contours of their lives permanently deformed through their association with the tragedy, the rapid ending of the novel shows a trio of unmarried and childless men when it also describes how Touchwood, having intervened too late with his information about Bulmer, now finds himself burdened with wealth for which there is no heir. Clara’s death does finally disrupt the patterns of repetition, of an endlessly degenerative cycle of selfishness and wrong-doing that indiscriminately blights each succeeding generation. Yet, because the men who are left behind are doomed to a sterile endurance, it seems that, in the end, Clara’s own agonised sense of hopelessness is displaced onto and absorbed by them: the heroine may be condemned to die by the trajectory of her story, but the particular nature of the men’s survival leaves unresolved questions about their responsibility and points up her importance to a world that is left bereft by her death.

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Early readers of *Saint Ronan’s Well* were troubled by its ending. One reviewer described Clara’s death as a “wilful literary murder” and several of Scott’s women correspondents wrote to complain about the author’s failure to rescue his heroine. Maria Edgeworth, for example, argued with some asperity that the ending indicates the author’s wish to wind up the novel in the most expeditious manner and with no thought to the distress it would occasion readers who wish for a happy conclusion to the heroine’s trials.\(^{27}\) According to

\(^{27}\) The comment about the heroine’s “murder” is in the review in the *British Critic* (21). The *Monthly Review* devotes some space to discussing the legality of Clara’s marriage to Bulmer, which it understands to be the single impediment to a successful resolution. Excerpts from the various letters about the novel are
Lockhart, Scott responded to at least one such reader with the claim that the nature of the ending was made inevitable by Clara Mowbray’s madness: “I could not save her, poor thing--it is against the rules--she had the bee in her bonnet.” Although, in the preceding analysis, I have used the text of the novel that Scott wished to see published, early readers actually encountered the novel in a censored version that omitted explicit mention of Clara’s sexual indiscretion. It is certainly possible that the inclusion of this detail in printed versions would have helped to reconcile readers to the ending by making clear the true nature of the events underlying Clara’s madness and predicament.

That the detail of the heroine’s sexual experience was intended by Scott to make Clara’s situation seem unequivocally irremediable is made clear by a note he sent to his printer, James Ballantyne. The unpublished note was evidently written during the course of the debate over the inclusion in Saint Ronan’s Well of the revelation in Hannah’s death-bed confession of Clara’s indiscretion. According to Lockhart, our chief source for the details of this debate between Scott and his more primly cautious printer, the issue was simply one of decorum. However, the note to Ballantyne establishes that Scott’s argument for retention derived from his understanding of his heroine’s psychopathology. The note is brief and I quote it in full:

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in Grierson. See Letters 8.142 for Maria Edgeworth’s comments; and 8.196-97 for Lady Abercorn’s letter in which she warns the author “never again to end his novels so unfortunately--weak nerves cannot bear it.” Anna Jane Clephane also comments on the ending, but says that she is content for it to be tragic; see 8.157.


29 The sexual relationship with Tyrrel complicates matters because, under Scottish law, it leaves Clara open to charges of bigamy or—as Hannah intended—of incest. A useful discussion of Scottish marriage law is in Letter to the Editor, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine 22 (1827): 69-74. John Cairns has argued that Scott’s awareness of a recent case of “Scotch marriage” informs the plot of Saint Ronan’s. See John W. Cairns, “A Note on The Bride of Lammermoor: Why Scott did not mention the Dalrymple Legend until 1830,” Scottish Literary Journal 20 (1993): 19-36.
My dear James

I am far from chiding—there is much in what you say—But there
must be a deep cause for Clara’s whole conduct otherwise it would
be sheer lunacy. Always yours,

WS

Scott’s argument for a “deep cause” tends to confirm the long-standing literary
and medical association of female sexual transgression with madness, but it does so for
very specific reasons. The distinction between the disorder actually suffered by Clara and
“sheer lunacy” inheres in the difference between behaviour that originates in genuine
mental trauma and behaviour that exists as a set of symptoms with no proportionate
cause. Scott’s insistence, attested to by his journal comments, on the responsibility and
duty of the individual for disciplining injurious habits of thought and memory is clear.
But so too is his recognition that for some individuals and in some situations the exercise
of such control may be unable to limit deleterious preoccupations and prevent mental
disorder. In such cases, the “deep cause” may resist modification by mental discipline or
by new information or beliefs. The sexual transgression with Tyrrel cannot be undone,
and precisely because Clara is unlike the other women at the Spa whose morality is
determined by expedience rather than on the basis of principle, she understands it to be a
defining fact of her history. The subsequent marriage to Tyrrel’s half-brother, no matter
under what fraudulent circumstances, as well as the belief that Tyrrel has accidentally
killed Bulmer, not only complicate the legal situation but also deepen the psychic wound
in a woman who accepts responsibility for her actions although she remains convinced

30 Walter Scott, letter to James Ballantyne, no date, Volume of Scott Letters #13, Signet Library,
Edinburgh. A copy of the note is in a volume of copies of letters that Grierson decided against including in
his edition; see NLS MS 1753, f. 10. The probable date is November 1823. Weinstein seems not to be
aware of the note’s existence; he does not mention it in his edition although it supplies compelling evidence
for his claim that the detail of Clara’s transgression was fundamental to Scott’s conception of the novel.
that confession is not an option. The novel’s attention is on the psychological and social consequences of these events and circumstances—and it is arguable that the obfuscation of the initial transgression in the censored text renders both Clara’s symptoms and the tragic ending all but inexplicable. It is interesting that, in deferring to Ballantyne’s opinion as likely to represent that of many of his readers, Scott actually made the required changes in as perfunctory a manner as possible—with the result that the censored novel includes a number of undeveloped hints about the actual nature of Clara’s past behaviour. But there is also textual evidence for Scott’s concern about the psychological hole he was leaving in the novel when his censoring hand severed Clara’s symptoms from their underlying occasion. When he altered the relevant passages, he felt it necessary to stress the irremediable aspect of Clara’s predicament by having Hannah speak specifically of the heroine’s “cureless misery” and “her utter wretchedness—her deep misery, verging even upon madness.”

This detail of the novel’s textual history suggests that Saint Ronan’s Well may indeed be read as a cautionary tale about the psychological consequences of a young woman’s immoral act. In part, this reading seems exactly right: the lesson of the novel is that imprudent actions will have repercussions, and Clara earns her fate by being different from those other Waverley heroines who successfully achieve their heart’s desire—and access to a hopeful future—by negotiating and acting within the limits of the possibilities and mores defined by the world in which they live. However, to speak of the novel in such terms tends reductively to flatten the texture of the actual description of Clara’s suffering and of the context, of the particular depiction of the society in which this heroine is condemned to play her tragic part. In this Waverley novel as in others,

31 [Walter Scott]. St. Ronan’s Well, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1824) 302-03. The phrases persist through all subsequent printed versions until the Edinburgh Edition which is the first to restore the manuscript reading for the censored passages.
individual actions cannot be considered in isolation from the complex social and historical structures of causes, circumstances, and psychology out of which they emerge. Scott told his importunate reader that the heroine of _Saint Ronan’s Well_ has to die because she is mad: he could not save her. But another way of looking at the ending would be to reverse the terms of his statement and say that, as a madwoman, Clara dies because she is a heroine. Unlike Norna of the Fitful Head—the only one of the madwomen to recover her sanity—Clara’s end is determined by the fact that she is the central character in her novel. Her death is required for _Saint Ronan’s Well_ to make its point about the horrors of a world characterised by unchecked individualism and selfishness, and her condition must be understood to be irremediable. Hannah Irwin describes Clara’s indiscretion as the result not of a willed choice to follow a certain course in full knowledge of the moral implications, but of something that seems, on the face of it, almost casual, the result merely of a lapse of caution, of what the narrator calls Clara’s ignorance of “the important truth, that some forms and restraints are to be observed, less in respect to others than to ourselves” (67). As such it emerges out of a world that persistently fails to pay attention, to accord proper significance to events and actions. That it is Clara who is most immediately punished for her momentary lapse renders her a scapegoat for the dangerous and insidious faults of the larger world. And for the purposes of this narrative, there can be no final rescue with the potential retrospectively to colour what has gone before, to imply that such a world is meaningful and coherent, that right and timely action will occur and create the conditions for progress or point a way out of cycles of sterile repetition.

In novels where the madwoman is a minor character, her narrative insistently localises and focuses particular patterns of thought, behaviour and belief that are shown to be fatally destructive. Through their association with the madwoman, the beliefs to which she adheres or the primitive passions she displays are rendered clearly identifiable.
as evidence of deranged thinking, of madness. They are also contained or even exiled; the madwoman’s visibly aging body is a reminder that her beliefs, shown to emerge from and belong to an outworn past, will decay and die with her. But when the madwoman is a heroine, a despairing vision of a world without a future, one that is doomed endlessly to reenact its errors, becomes all-pervasive and all-threatening. The three tragic novels depict societies that feed upon their young, that destroy their best hopes when they fail to value, nurture, and educate the vulnerable young woman in whom those hopes are most fully embodied precisely because her power lies not in action but in her moral constitution, her cultivation of sympathetic connections to others. The mad heroine’s story is one that belongs to private, domestic life rather than to the substantial social perturbations and cataclysms often associated with the old madwomen. But for Scott the home is the nation writ small, and private morals are the source of public ones. If the heroine’s mental disorder figures corruption or disorder in the home, it is also made emblematic of a devastating malaise in a larger world. And for the real horrors of that malaise to be registered, the novels must show not only the heroine’s death but also the surviving futile sterility of a world that is implicated in her destruction.

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Scott never wrote another tragic novel and his comments, recorded in his journal when he subsequently revisited Saint Ronan’s Well for the “Magnum” edition, reveal a conviction that the “melancholy” ending should be resolutely avoided—perhaps because, in an age preoccupied with the mental effects of reading, he understood that such an ending could foster the kind of mental gloom or preoccupation with unchangeable past events that the journal elsewhere describes as psychologically damaging. When, with “The Highland Widow,” Scott returned to the theme of the madwoman, the story is one that, in an almost
reductive form, identifies the moral blindness and danger that result from a too-rigid adherence to certain beliefs, and it represents the consequences as a terrible rending of domestic life when it portrays Elspat MacTavish as a woman who quite literally destroys her young. Through the distancing perspective of its emphasis on narrative transmission, it also depicts Elspat’s lonely survival in terms that convey a sense of her as a relic—the human equivalent of the other historical sites visited by Mrs Balliol on her northern tour—to be observed, described, and puzzled over. A bleakly solitary figure of a woman whose obsolete convictions and goals caused the death of her one true hope for the future, Elspat becomes for others a pitiful and yet terrible reminder of the destruction wrought by the urge to reanimate a past whose moment is, quite simply, passed.

When the Waverley novels weave together history and fiction, they repeatedly affirm the importance of knowledge about the past to a society’s collective consciousness. They teach that we must remember the past in order to escape enslavement by it, to understand that past events should survive into the present only as stories to be told over and wondered at rather than as siren calls to violent action or a passionate committal of the self to a cause. The madwomen’s stories express the fate of those individuals or communities that fail to learn this lesson, and that, in remembering too well, think in terms not of sequences of completed events—of memories, as Scott says in his journal, that the mind “has closed sternly over”32—but of cycles of repetition, reenactment, revenge, or retribution. In so doing, they create a powerful and still-resonant image of madness, in both individuals and societies, as a function of a pathologised memory that, by its compulsive looking back, contaminates hope and obscures the future. However, when the tragic novels document the psychological suffering and grief of young women who are poised to project a path out of a morass of narrow self-interest but

32 Journal 495.
who find themselves shut out of their communities and, in Cairns Craig's phrase, "out of history," they create a somewhat different legacy for Scott's nineteenth century heirs in whose works the Waverley madwomen have a durable after-life. Traces of Scott's influence are evident in characters such as Bertha Rochester—the account of whose death in *Jane Eyre* draws knowingly on *Ivanhoe*'s description of Ulrica but omits the specific resonances of tribal identity and conflict—or, alternatively, the Miss Havisham and Estella dyad in *Great Expectations* with its stress on memory, revenge, and toxic storytelling. But they also emerge in the depiction of characters like Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, or Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*—depictions for which Scott's tragic novels made possible new ways of imagining a heroine as someone who is at once psychologically complex, flawed, and even strange while remaining identifiably a heroine struggling to make her way in a world that refuses to acknowledge her.
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