

Byron and Scott



Drawing Room at Fifty Albemarle Street. Watercolour by L. Werner c.1850.
Courtesy of The John Murray Collection

Byron and Scott:
The Waverley Novels
and Historical Engagement

By

Roderick S. Speer

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Byron and Scott: The Waverley Novels and Historical Engagement, by Roderick S. Speer

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, on text citations. My publisher has wisely adhered to the principal of, 'Whatever you do, be consistent,' with minimal expression of definite preferences, though these did exist. But in trying to be consistent, I have found little support, even from 'definitive' sources. For example, Canto stanza numbers are expressed in Arabic numerals, sometimes with a period, sometimes without in the definitive source. I have used the latter form only. For drama citations I have simply used a pointed numeral style, e.g. I.ii.335-36.

In terms of acknowledgments, my first goes to the scholar who tweaked my interest in Lord Byron, retired Professor Gabriele B. Jackson of Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., who departed from her Ben Jonson area to conduct a Byron seminar at the University of Pennsylvania, and found at least one responding scholar. I must also record a tribute to that great Scottish man of letters, Angus Calder, whose mention of my 'Byron and the Scottish Literary Tradition' in a 1989 University of Edinburgh Press book, led to my revival of activity in the Byron arena. Angus has since passed, but not before we met in Edinburgh on two occasions in the 2006 time period. Thanks for this connection go to that noted literary bean-counter and devoted Byronist, Eric Wishart of Edinburgh. They also certainly go to the first distinguished scholar who knew of my line on Byron and Scott, Byronist John Clubbe, and to leading Byron scholar, Peter Cochran. To Harriet Cullen and the KEATS-SHELLEY REVIEW, who saw fit to award me their second prize in the 2007 Essay Contest for what appears here as Part Two of Chapter One, albeit with a slightly revised conclusion. And to that essential infrastructure offered by the International Byron Society, its English face, Alan Rawes at Manchester, and its American, Charles Robinson, University of Delaware, for prompt support and responses. All would be so halting and difficult, without these true helpmates of Byron scholarship, though none had any hand in the writing of the book itself.

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pursuing matters Byronic in a respite from editing the papers of the great North Carolina Revolutionary, Richard Caswell.

I also salute the seventh generation John Murray for allowing use of the Fifty Albemarle Street picture from the John Murray collection. And as always, to my wife Virginia, for tolerating my absorption in this enterprise.

In earlier times, I had academic affiliations with the University of Pennsylvania and with Huron College of the University of Western Ontario, Canada. In more recent times, I have not had an academic affiliation, but rather institutional ones: to the Fenwick Library of George Mason University and the George Mason District Library, both in Fairfax County, Virginia; and to the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., for their provision of superb collections or finding services. Lastly, the kind patience of the Cambridge Scholars Publishing crew, Carol Koulikourdi, my editor; Amanda Millar, my understanding typesetter who tolerated the fact I am no Word expert; and Soucin Yip-Sou, graphics editor *sans peril*.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURE

In the nineteenth century, Byron and Scott were often cast as opposites. Hazlitt criticized Byron for falling short of Scott's objectivity, for casting his descriptions 'in the mould of his own individual impressions' rather than 'in the mould of nature' as Scott had done.¹ Carlyle found such subjectivity in Byron exemplary of 'the diseased self-conscious state of Literature,' while Ruskin praised Scott for his faithfulness to the object, his 'unselfishness and humility.'² John Nichol reported that in the decades before 1860, Scott and Byron were 'perpetually contrasted as representatives of the manly and morbid schools.'³ Leslie Stephen replaced such Manichaean oppositions with the more generous concept of complementarity, but still saw the two writers as opposites:

If Byron and Scott could have been combined; if the energetic passions of the one could have been joined to the healthy nature and quick sympathies of the other, we might have seen another Shakespeare in the nineteenth century. As it is, both of them are maimed and imperfect on different sides.⁴

The first significant criticism of Scott in the twentieth century, that of the Marxist, Georg Lukacs, found essentially the same polarity as Hazlitt, attacking Byron for maintaining a 'lyrical-subjectivist absolute' and praising Scott for his objectivity and socio-historical concern.⁵

In these critical pairings of Byron and Scott, the two are polarized, and critic and reader are usually forced to choose sides without exploring the possibility that one author could have influenced the other. The fact that Scott's most important work is agreed to be in the novel and Byron's, of course, in poetry has further tended to discourage comparative studies of these authors; instead, students have retreated, each to his preferred genre. Biographers, however, have had to acknowledge that Byron and Scott enjoyed a close friendship from 1815, when they met, to the end of their lives. Leslie Marchand finds the friendship 'curious,' and one of Scott's recent biographers memorably calls it 'queer but sincere.'⁶ John Nichol in

1880 seemed to sense in their friendship a significance inconsistent with the fact that Byron and Scott were 'for a season perpetually pitted against one another, as the foremost competitors for literary favour,' and belying the subsequent critical contrasting of them. He concludes, 'The fact therefore that from an early period the men themselves knew each other as they were, is worth illustrating. . . .'⁷ Nichol illustrates by examining the correspondence between them and concludes that their praise of each other is not flattery, for they spoke of each other to third parties in the same way. While 'illustrating' the friendship of the two, Nichol does not develop its implications, biographical or critical. R. W. Chambers later suggested a biographical benefit in such an inquiry, by way of defending Byron's humane nature:

His relations with Scott show how chivalrous he could be in dealing with men of politics and temper different from his own. ... more profit is to be got out of thinking of Byron's friendship with Scott than by giving historic value to his libels upon Castlereagh or Southey.⁸

The call for a study of the humane Byron has been virtually answered by G. Wilson Knight who defends 'Byron's true greatness, his generosity and kindness, his chivalry, courtesy, humility and courage.'⁹ Although these are qualities traditionally ascribed to Scott, Knight does not treat the friendship with Scott at all. Byron scholars received Knight's study snappishly, claiming it did not show the whole Byron. It did, however, show a side of Byron that had always been neglected, and one to which Scott testified.

If Knight's revision of traditional views of Byron (as gloomy, perverse, diabolic) brought Byron closer to the personality usually ascribed to Scott, closer attention to Scott's private life and especially his post-bankruptcy *Journal* have made him seem more like the old Byron. Christina Keith's provocative biographical study finds Scott a man of enigma, duplicity, amorality, and Bohemianism. She asserts that Byron 'probably fitted in to every facet of Scott's many-sided personality more closely than anyone else Scott ever met.'¹⁰

Such revisions of the traditional biographical contrarities concerning Byron and Scott raise the possibility that the critical contrarities also may have been misconceptions. Recent critical comparisons of Byron and of Scott treat mainly of the personal relationship, but stop short and only suggest some possible literary implications of the relationship.¹¹ The study presented here, in addition to showing that the friendship of Byron and Scott was no anomaly, argues that the impact of Scott's literary endeavors and direction on Byron was more considerable than has been

assumed. The study falls into two major sections: Chapter ONE, which examines the apparent effect of Scott, his novels, and the ethos of Scotland which they invoked, on Byron's life; and four subsequent chapters, which examine the possible effects on his poetry. An influence of Scott on Byron is implied, but since of course no provable direct causal relation is provable, we have the benefits of at least a comparative study, wherein 'A fund of insights becomes available which might escape direct approach.'¹²

Chapter ONE establishes a biographical base for considering the effect of Scott and his works on Byron. The meeting of the two writers in 1815 and their affinities are discussed. One of these, their Scottish background, seems to have been of especial importance to Byron: that he continued throughout his life to be imaginatively sustained by things Scottish helps explain his extraordinary enthusiasm for Scott and his novels. Scott put Byron in touch with the positive ideals of his boyhood, ideals essential for Byron's turn to a life of action and to the depiction of heroes active in the crises of history. Scott's novels, with their presentation of heroes braving historical crisis, served as models for this new orientation of Byron's life and art.

Chapter TWO reviews Byron's poetry before 1814 to show that it was not the characteristic utterance of a man of historical action: the 'Byronic Heroes' of this work operate on a suprahistorical plane. Scott's early writing, his verse romances, is reviewed to show how he moved away from melodrama to historical fiction, a development culminating in his Waverley novels. After becoming an avid reader of Scott's novels, Byron also turned to the examination of historical situations and heroes involved in the sociopolitical crises of their times. The last three chapters examine in detail Byron's major explorations of historical involvement, in three bodies of work: the Historical Dramas, *Don Juan*, and *The Island*.

Chapter THREE shows that in the Historical Dramas—*Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari*—Byron depicts three varieties of Byronic Hero: the irascible Marino Faliero, the epicurean Sardanapalus, and the stoical Doge Francis Foscari. It is only in the third case that Byron develops a hero with the qualities necessary for significant involvement in the affairs of the world. Byron's uneven handling of the hero in historical crisis is a token of the unsuitability of the Byronic Hero for such involvement. Scott's relatively successful handling of Henry Morton in *Old Mortality* is presented for contrast.

Chapter FOUR argues for a comparison of *Don Juan*'s Juan with the typical modest hero of Scott's novels, as exemplified by Edward Waverley of *Waverley*. It is concluded that Juan has been underrated as a hero, and

that he exhibits qualities central to Byron's developing concept of heroism.

Chapter FIVE argues that in *The Island* Byron produced his most Scottian work, for he depicted both the Byronic Hero's destruction and the modest hero's transcendence of the terrors of history. Scott's themes and approaches are compared.

An Afterword brings this biographical-critical study to a close, noting Byron's plunge into the Greek war of independence, and concluding that Scott and his novels played an important part in the development of Byron's life and works. In placing on common ground two writers so frequently assumed to be antithetical, I have hoped to add to the coherence of our view of the major Romantics, and perhaps to have brought a new perspective to the charge that Byron had 'an uncritical regard for the novels of Walter Scott.'¹³

Notes

¹ *The Spirit of the Age* (1825; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p. 106.

² Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics' (1831), *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*. ed. H. D. Traill, Centenary Edition, 30 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1899) 28, 24; and John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (1856) 3, Part 4, Ch. xvi, 'Of Modern Language,' *The Works of John Ruskin*. ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library Edition, 39 vols. (London: Allen, 1903-12) 4, 342.

³ Byron. E.M.O.L. Series (London: Macmillan, 1880), p.79.

⁴ 'Some Words about Sir Walter Scott' (1871; rpt. *Hours in a Library*, London: Smith, Elder, 1876), p. 278.

⁵ Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*. 2nd ed., trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 34.

⁶ Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1957), II, 530; Hesketh Pearson, *Walter Scott: His Life and Personality* (London: Methuen, 1954), 106.

⁷ *Byron*, 78-79.

⁸ 'Ruskin (and others) on Byron,' English Association Pamphlet no. 62, Nov. 1925.

⁹ *Lord Byron: Christian Virtues* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1953), p. 29.

¹⁰ *The Author of Waverley: A Study in the Personality of Sir Walter Scott* (London: Robert Hale, 1964).

¹¹ John Clubbe, in 'Byron and Scott,' *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 1973, stresses the friendship and declines to pursue 'any reciprocal literary influence,' although he does suggest some connections, such as the appreciation of the truths in history. Andrew Rutherford in 'Byron, Scott, and Scotland,' in *Lord Byron and his Contemporaries*, ed. Charles E. Robinson, (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press 1982), pp. 34-65, likewise stresses the congeniality of the two men, but helpfully draws a comparison between Byron's life and that of Scott's

young Waverley heroes. The present study keeps the biographical context in mind while exploring the literary concepts of heroship of both writers.

¹² Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: a Mutual Interpretation* (London: D.Dobson, 1963), p. 23.

¹³ Editorial comment in Leslie A. Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973-1982), 16 vols. 3, 271. Hereafter, *BLJ*.



Byron in the Highlands © Currier & Ives

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGIN AND RETURN: BYRON, SCOTT, AND SCOTLAND

Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
—Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*

Part I: Byron's Meeting with Scott

We have a memorable vignette of Byron and Scott on the occasion of their first meeting, at John Murray's office in April 1815:

After Scott and he had ended their conversation in the drawing-room, it was a curious sight to see the two greatest poets of the age—both lame—stumping downstairs side by side. They continued to meet together in Albemarle Street nearly every day, and remained together for two or three hours at a time.¹

Two points are brought out in this brief description which suggest part of the basis for the two men's intimacy at the Albemarle Street meetings and for their subsequent lifelong fascination for and allegiance to each other.

First, Byron and Scott were 'the two greatest poets of the age,' at least in terms of public acclaim. We know how Byron after publishing the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* in 1812 had 'awakened to find myself famous.'² His subsequent 'Oriental Tales' with their exotic, conscience-afflicted heroes further fired the public fascination with Byron. Scott's popularity was of longer standing, having begun with *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in 1805, and continued with *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). In 1813 Byron commented in his *Journal* that Scott 'is undoubtedly the Monarch of Parnassus.'³ In a later *Journal* comment, Byron was curiously self-effacing on hearing his name coupled with Scott's, for he felt it 'a compliment—though I think Scott deserves better company.'⁴ By the time Byron and Scott were in company at Murray's,

Scott's own verse had become less popular, largely because of Byron's superior Tales. Because of this decline in popularity—Scott's famous explanation was that 'Byron *bet me*'⁵—but more importantly because of the aesthetic demands of his own development, Scott had turned to prose fiction with *Waverley* (1814) and entered a period of new and greater popularity. Although the authorship of *Waverley* was anonymous, Byron for one believed it was by Walter Scott and was very enthusiastic about it.⁶

Since Scott was Byron's literary peer in respect of popularity, he was above the crowd of lionizers who were always besieging Byron. Lady Blessington explains:

Circumstances had rendered Byron suspicious; he was apt to attribute every mark of interest or good-will shown to him as emanating from vanity, that sought gratification by a contact with his poetical celebrity. . . . But as Sir W. Scott's own well-earned celebrity put the possibility of such a motive out of the question, Byron yielded to the sentiment of friendship in all its force for him, and never named him but with praise and affection.⁷

A second point made by John Murray, Jr., is that both writers were lame. Byron's lameness has been viewed by many scholars as the cause of his sense of bitterness and personal isolation from the earliest age. Scott's lameness has not usually been remarked upon, however, because it does not seem to jibe with the conventional view of his supposedly benign personality and works.

One exception among his works, which John Gibson Lockhart singles out, is *The Black Dwarf* (1816), in which we encounter the feelings of a misanthropic, hunchbacked dwarf,

the dark feelings so often connected with physical deformity; feelings which appear to have diffused their shadow over the whole genius of Byron—and which, but for this singular picture, we should hardly have conceived ever to have passed through Scott's happier mind.⁸

Lockhart, approaching Byron and Scott in a Manichaeian way, refuses to see their points in common. The later biographer, Christina Keith, sees in Scott not a happy man, but a secretive one, his whole life marked by his early response to his brothers' taunting of his lameness:

The sensitive child who hid all his real feelings from the scorn of his coarser brothers became the man who hid his partnership with the Ballantines from the scorn of the aristocratic legal world. The child who read Shakespeare in secret by firelight became the man who wrote the *Waverley Novels* in secret and denied their authorship.⁹

From Scott's lameness, too, came his frustration in young manhood at being unable to go to the French wars—the origin, perhaps, of his great amateur's interest in warfare. Feelings of inadequacy may well have motivated his creation of that monument of neo-feudal grandeur, Abbotsford. Furthermore, a dark vision of life is revealed by those works which Scott produced under physical or emotional stress—*The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), written in the delirium of sickness, the *Journal* entries made under the pressure of the 1825 bankruptcy; this vision is unlike that of the better known (and more numerous) novels with happy endings. Scott's lameness, then, quite possibly played a more considerable part in his life than we have been accustomed to think.

In addition to the literary eminence and physical lameness commented on by Murray, Byron and Scott shared a dislike for pure *literati* and saw each other as men of wider experiences. Scott made the point in his 6 November letter to Byron, when he criticized Southey:

. . . every atom of his soul and every moment of his time dedicated to literary pursuits, in which he differs from almost all those who have divided public attention with him. Your Lordship's habits of society, for example, and my own professional and official avocations, must necessarily connect us much more with our respective classes in the usual routine of pleasure or business, than if we had not any other employment than *vacare musis*.¹⁰

Byron at times had felt Scott to be too lacking in experience.¹¹ But he agreed with Scott's depreciation of literary men and came to exclude him from their number:

In general, I do not draw well with literary men—not that I dislike them, but I never know what to say to them after I have praised their last publication—There are several exceptions, to be sure; but then they have either been men of the world such as Scott—and Moore &c or visionaries out of it—such as Shelley &c....¹²

Along with these deep agreements in perspective were to be found Byron and Scott's shared humaneness, social charm, and sense of humor.¹³ These qualities put both men beyond the range of differences in politics and supposedly of personality which so many commentators seem to have expected should have divided them.¹⁴ Once their friendship had begun, there was a matter which was to prove of growing importance to Byron: their shared Scottish background. Scott in his person and his works came to serve as a link for Byron between his life in exile (after 1816) and his childhood in Scotland. That Byron valued such a link revealed his need to

return to the idealism of his boyhood as a basis for a new life and poetry. The ethos of Scotland early felt by Byron and then returned to through the medium of Scott and his novels may now be explored.

Part II: Scotland in Byron's Life and Poetry

Legally speaking, of course, Byron was English, born in line to the English peerage, heir to Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire, and educated after the age of ten in England. Scotland is pertinent to Byron's life on the basis of his having spent early boyhood, from the age of two to the age of ten (1790-98), in Aberdeen with his mother.¹⁵ When Scott wrote Byron in 1812 of 'Scotland which has a maternal claim on you,' he was not personifying Scotland but referring to Byron's mother, the former Catherine Gordon of Gight, whose family name Byron bore.¹⁶ As Byron was to express it in *Don Juan*, he was 'half a Scot by birth, and bred a whole one' (X.17).¹⁷ He first knew himself as 'little Geordie,' and as a boy is reported to have stressed his Scottish name, calling himself 'George Byron Gordon.'¹⁸ He spoke with a thick Scots accent, for his widowed mother's poor financial situation did not permit social isolation from the uneducated classes who spoke Scots.

The whole environment of his Aberdeen years conditioned him to the views of the lower-middleclass Scottish world with which he was daily associated in the streets and later at school.¹⁹ Byron later explained another important feature of his life in Scotland. When he was eight, 'after an attack of the scarlet fever at Aberdeen, I was removed by medical advice into the Highlands. Here I passed occasionally some summers, and from this period I date my love of mountainous countries.'²⁰ This love is first asserted in Byron's early lyrics.

Published in several volumes from 1806 to 1808 and collectively referred to now as 'Hours of Idleness,' Byron's early poems show him practicing many voices and playing many roles. The roles significant to this essay are two, from two groups of poems: the Scottish-set poems, 'Lachin y Gair,' 'I Would I Were a Careless Child,' and 'When I Roved a Young Highlander,' in which the speaker is a young boy; and the Newstead Abbey poems, 'Elegy on Newstead Abbey' and 'To an Oak at Newstead,' in which the speaker pictures himself as the last 'heir of a noble tradition.'

The three Scottish poems fit the general pattern in 'Hours of Idleness' of a nostalgic return to the happier conditions of childhood. But here the happier conditions are not those of a lost Eden of abundance or innocence,

but rather of a lost tradition of heroic struggle, expressed in terms of the Scottish national wars with England. In 'Lachin y Gair,' the Scottish Highlands are contrasted with the England of the poet's present. Byron focuses on topographical symbolism: Scotland's mountainous, wild, uncultivated landscape, while lacking in fruitfulness, is nevertheless preferable—'I loved my bleak regions' he says in 'When I Roved' (st. 2)—to a garden like England, 'tame and domestic' (st. 5). The greatness of the Highlands results from the race of men bred there, the 'chieftains, long perish'd' (st. 2), who have proven the value of the place by their struggles. Their spirits populate the setting:

'Shades of the dead! have I not heard your voices
Rise on the night-rolling breath of the gale?'
(st. 3)

The poet identifies with the dead warriors through Ancestry, calling them 'the forms of my fathers.' They represent for him a noble response to the human condition for they died at Culloden in defiance of fate. 'Ill-starr'd, though brave' (st. 4). In 'I Would I Were,' the English-Scottish contrast is articulated as being between those who are heavy in spirit and slavish and the Highlander with his 'freeborn soul' (st. 1). To die fated though free is thus seen as preferable to a servile security. The values of Highland life expressed in these Scottish poems are consistent with Byron's lifelong exploration of man's fated condition and are far from a weakly sentimental nostalgia.

Newstead Abbey, on the other hand, seems to symbolize man's capitulation to such fatedness. The Newstead Abbey poems are in a melancholy, elegiac style, and while the history of the poet's forebears and of the Abbey is recounted fully in 'Elegy on Newstead Abbey,' the weight of this poem and 'To an Oak at Newstead' comes down on a decadent present, not a glorious past:

The last and youngest of a noble line,
Now holds thy mouldering turrets in his sway.
(st. 35)

The Elegy ends with the weak hope that 'Hours, splendid as the past, may still be thine' (st. 39), but the narrator does not seem personally involved in this resurrection; in 'Oak' he hopes merely to be revered in his grave by posterity. Nowhere is the melancholy graveyard tone broken by a passionate cry like that of 'Lachin,' 'Oh! for the crags that are wild and majestic' (st. 5).

The Scottish poems thus seem central to the poetry Byron was yet to write. An exultant sense of personal freedom in defiance of fatedness is exemplified by the heroes of all Byron's serious, non-satiric poems, and by the narrator of *Childe Harold*. The importance of Scotland as the first setting for this basic vision should not, therefore, be underemphasized. Byron in 1807 even contemplated making a collection of folk ballads to be called *The Highland Harp*.²¹

However, the young Byron was to suffer, as so often in his life, public censure for his self-exposure. The result was a period of public concealment of his affections for Scotland, lasting until the development of his friendship with Scott. This period is worth examining briefly, for it would appear on the face of it that Byron came completely to hate Scott and Scotland.

Byron had written reverently of his ancestry and of Scotland; the *Edinburgh* reviewer censured both his egocentricity and his misuse of a Scots word:

There is a good deal also about his maternal ancestors, in a Poem on Lachin-y-gair, a mountain where he spent part of his youth, and might have learnt that *pibroch* is not a bagpipe, any more than duet means a fiddle.²²

Byron thus stood accused of affectation in his feelings and knowledge about Scotland. (To be fair, the reviewer might have noted the use of a distinctly Scots pronunciation in the poem criticized, in lines ten and twelve, where 'plaid' has the long 'a' to rhyme with 'glade.') Byron felt himself 'cut to atoms' by the review.²³ Ethel Colburn Mayne asks whether we can doubt, 'on even slender knowledge of him, that during that turmoil Scotland became the very Hades?' and goes on to recount an incident as evidence:

A girl, at the time of the notorious article, happened to observe that she thought he had a slight Scotch accent. 'Good God' he cried, on hearing of it, 'I hope not. I would rather the d—d country was sunk in the sea. I, the Scotch accent!'

Moore's account of the incident has Byron in only half playful rage, and explains Byron's syndrome in such moments of crisis:

Cordial, however, and deep as were the impressions which he retained of Scotland, he would sometimes in this, as in all his other amiable feelings, endeavour perversely to belie his own better nature; and, when under the excitement of anger or ridicule, persuade not only others, but even himself, that the whole current of his feelings ran directly otherwise. The abuse

with which, in his anger against the Edinburgh Review, he overwhelmed everything Scotch, is an instance of this temporary triumph of wilfulness.²⁴

Byron's wilfulness in defending himself against a hostile world achieved literary form in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), where he attacked the contemporary literary establishment for its debased values. He took a position on Scott and his poetry, and on the concepts of nationalism and literature. Both positions are relevant to the question of Byron's affirmation of his Scottishness: on the one hand we find Byron dissociating himself from literary provincialism, that is, a specifically Scottish literature; on the other, we find him making the first, albeit negative, move toward a relationship with Scott, a relationship which would ultimately return Byron to that sense of his Scottishness which he now seemed so eager to disavow.

While Byron treated Scott more favorably than he did his other contemporaries, his praise was ambiguous. He did not like Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: 'Lays of Minstrels—may they be the last!—I On half-strung harps whine mournful to the blast' (11.153-54). His ambivalent description of *Marmion* reflected contemporary criticism of it for being irreverent in its depiction of medieval knighthood:

Next view in state, proud prancing on his roan,
The golden-crested haughty Marmion,
Now forging scrolls, now foremost in the fight,
Not quite a Felon, yet but half a Knight,
The gibbet or the field prepared to grace;
A mighty mixture of the great and base.
(11. 165-70)

Responding to accounts of Scott's commercial success with these verse romances, Byron then attacked Scott *ad hominem*:

And think'st thou, SCOTT! by vain conceit perchance,
On public taste to foist thy stale romance,
Though MURRAY with his MILLER may combine
To yield thy muse just half-a-crown per line?
No! when the sons of song descend to trade,
Their bays are sear, their former laurels fade,
Let such forego the poet's sacred name,
Who rack their brains for lucre, not for fame:
Still for stern Mammon may they toil in vain!
And sadly gaze on Gold they cannot gain!
Such be their meed, such still the just reward
Of prostituted Muse and hireling bard!

For this we spurn Apollo's venal son,
 And bid a long 'good night to Marmion.'
 (11. 171-84)

Scott responded angrily to this charge in a letter to Southey:

In the meantime, it is funny enough to see a whelp of a young Lord Byron abusing me, of whose circumstances he knows nothing, for endeavouring to scratch out a living with my pen. God help the bear, if, having little else to eat, he must not even suck his own paws. I can assure the noble imp of fame it is not my fault that I was not born to a park and 5000 a-year, as it is not his lordship's merit, although it may be his great good fortune, that he was not born to live by his literary talents or success.²⁵

But while Byron's attack on Scott's motives may have been unfair, it is evident that he still regarded him as a potentially great poet, as we see in this passage showing the whole complex of Byron's feeling for Scott and Scotland:

But Thou, with powers that mock the aid of praise,
 Should'st leave to humbler Bards ignoble lays:
 Thy country's voice, the voice of all the Nine,
 Demand a hallowed harp—that harp is thine.
 Say! will not Caledonia's annals yield
 The glorious record of some nobler field,
 Than the vile foray of a plundering clan,
 Whose proudest deeds disgrace the name of man?
 Or Marmion's acts of darkness, fitter food
 For SHERWOOD's outlaw tales of ROBIN HOOD?
 Scotland! still proudly claim thy native Bard,
 And be thy praise his first, his best reward!
 Yet not with thee alone his name should live,
 But own the vast renown a world can give;
 Be known, perchance, when Albion is no more,
 And tell the tale of what she was before;
 To future times her faded fame recall,
 And save her glory, though his country fall.
 (11. 931-48)

Byron thus indicated his faith in Scott's as yet unfulfilled potential, and his high regard for what Scotland had been in ages past (but was not in an age of Scotch Reviewers). But Byron's vision now transcended provincialism in arguing that a writer could move from being Scottish to being British (telling the tale of Albion) and finally to being world-renowned. Clearly, he was preparing himself for his own career, which

had already carried him away from Scotland to an English schooling and now found him on the verge of travels in the Mediterranean. His Scottish identity was not to any point at this time; instead, Byron spoke for all Britain:

For me, who, thus unasked, have dared to tell
 My country, what her sons should know too well,
 Zeal for her honour bade me here engage
 The host of idiots that infest her age;
 No just applause her honoured name shall lose,
 As first in freedom, dearest to the Muse.
 Oh! would thy bards but emulate thy fame,
 And rise more worthy, Albion, of thy name!

(11. 991-98)

Byron was even capable of writing vicious anti-Scottish diatribe just before returning from the Mediterranean (in *The Curse of Minerva*).²⁶ But this was to prove the last time he let himself be upset over anything Scottish. Already in his travels he had viewed some scenes filtered through his own memories of Scotland and through Scott's verse.²⁷ Even more significant was the paradoxical effect of *Bards*, alluded to above: because Byron had attacked Scott, he had begun a relationship with Scott which was to result, after reconciliation of these early differences, in friendship. That friendship, in turn, was to bolster Byron's re-identification with Scotland.

It was Byron who, through the graces of John Murray, made the first step towards Scott.²⁸ A cordial correspondence followed, in which Byron apologized for *Bards*, explaining that 'The Satire was written when I was very young and very angry, and fully bent on displaying my wrath and my wit, and now I am haunted by the ghosts of my wholesale assertions.'²⁹ This correspondence culminated in the meeting at Murray's discussed above. Byron and Scott saw each other over a period of two months thereafter. The friendship which had begun with correspondence was carried on through it after Byron left England in 1816.³⁰

Scott had begun even by the time of the 1815 meeting to represent more to Byron than a Scottish verse romancer: in 1814 he was the author of *Waverley*, and Byron was aware of his authorship within the year.³¹ That novel seems to have had a profound effect upon Byron. It revived thoughts of Scottish life for him:

Waverley is the best and most interesting novel I have redde since—I don't know when. Besides, it is all easy to me, because I have been in Scotland

so much (though then young enough too), and feel at home with the people, Lowland and Gael.³²

One account of Byron's conversation at this time indicates indeed how extensive and emotionally involved were his thoughts of Scotland. Isaac Nathan reports that during his period of acquaintance with Byron, circa 1814-15, Byron discussed the writers, music, warriors, history, and clergy of Scotland.³³ He regretted his inability to read Ramsay in dialect, but had the highest praise for Burns. More revealing comments on other topics had as theme the integrity of the Scottish people. Byron argued, for example, that Scottish music was not so indebted to the Italians as some had supposed, an important matter 'for the honour of the country.' The Scottish clergyman 'is quite independent in the performance of his duties,' unlike the hierarchical English clergy. Scottish education had higher standards of qualification for its masters than the English.

What most captured Byron's imagination on the matter of Scottish integrity was the history of her national struggles for independence, a history of which he seemed to have a quite detailed knowledge. For Byron, Scottish history was a record of great leaders—Wallace, Bruce, Knox, the Pretender—fighting against oppressive English rule, and being served sometimes quite faithfully by their people, but sometimes not, when power had corrupted allegiance. Nathan observed of the first case, that no one in all of Scotland was base enough to betray the Pretender for a huge reward; Byron agreed that the fact 'draws forth the highest encomiums on the national character, and was one fine specimen of the retreat of avarice at the approach of integrity.' But Byron was especially incensed by examples of betrayal. Of that of Wallace by the Scot Monteith, he observed that 'even at this distant period, the deeds of the father are visited upon the descendants, who are often reproached with the barter of their country, in the part taken by their ancestors....' Most horrible of all in the record of Scottish self-betrayal, Byron found, was the 1692 Massacre of Glenco (where Campbells acting as agents of the English government massacred clan Macdonald):

That deed, [said his Lordship], stamps the Conqueror with more infamy than any atrocity of savage barbarity. Only think for a moment, an ancient clan exterminated in a few hours: a family enjoying every comfort, and kindly entertaining a supposed friend with all that hospitality so peculiar to the Scotch: the soldiers quartered upon their tenants, and in the midst of festivity, the troops are ordered to fall upon the unsuspecting family, and in cold blood put every living thing to the sword. The carnage did not cease, when the stillness of death reigned at the mansion, but the whole

valley of Glenco was laid waste, by the merciless hand of a traitor, armed with unrestricted power from a merciless monarch.

When Byron had finished this story, Nathan noted his extreme emotion:

Lord Byron's feelings were here strongly excited—he clenched his fist—knitted his brow, and grinding his teeth, appeared in great agitation: several moments passed before he recovered his usual composure.

Byron's deep involvement in this story suggests how much his characteristic hatred of tyranny could be aroused by awareness of the injustices inflicted upon Scotland. It is no wonder then that *Waverley* with its story of the '45 and subsequent *Waverley* novels about other crises in Scottish history were such potent experiences for him.

Without exaggeration one can say that from their inception, Byron was a fanatical reader of the *Waverley* novels. In his conversations, letters, and *Journal*, Byron praised Scott's novels unstintingly and continuously: 'As a prose writer he has no rival; and has not been approached, since Cervantes, in depicting manners. His tales are my constant companions,' he told Pryse Gordon Lockhart in 1816.³⁴ He claimed in his *Diary* for 5 January 1821 that 'I have read all W. Scott's novels at least fifty times.'³⁵ Byron told Medwin that 'I never travel without Scott's Novels; they are a library in themselves—a perfect literary treasure. I could read them one a-year with new pleasure.'³⁶ Even with Byron's reduced baggage at Cephalonia, Scott's novels 'were always scattered about his rooms.'³⁷ His letters to Murray are filled with anxious questions about and entreaties to send the latest Scott novel, even to the point of producing this amusing juxtaposition which suggests that a Scott novel was for Byron a necessity of life: 'Send me some soda-powders. some of "Acton's Corn-rubbers." and W. Scott's romances.'³⁸

There were several reasons for Byron's obsession with the *Waverley* novels. For one thing. Byronic hero-types abound, to the point where Byron's sister and aunt thought he must have written some of the novels.³⁹ But this point is better taken up below. Most important, both for the discussion of Byron's sense of his Scottishness and for a demonstration of those concerns which preoccupied him in exile and to his death, is the Scottish matter of the *Waverleys*. This matter dramatized two areas of greatest concern for Byron: his Scottish backgrounds in ancestry and boyhood, and wars of national liberation.

Byron in his continental 'exile' must have been naturally attracted to the dominant plot convention of most of the *Waverleys*, that of the missing or neglected rightful heir who is restored to his inheritance and honor. Byron had sold Newstead Abbey in 1817, but his good name in Britain

had very few buyers at this time—in fact, he was to return only vicariously, through Don Juan.

The return the Waverleys offered was a deeper, psychological one to his own boyhood. Byron wrote Scott in 1822 that ‘to me those novels have so much of “Auld lang syne” (I was bred a canny Scot till ten years old),’ and added, quoting from *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (Ch. xlix),

my ‘heart warms to the tartan’ or to anything of Scotland, which reminds me of Aberdeen and other parts, not so far from the Highlands as that town, about Invercauld and Braemar, where I was sent to drink goat’s *fey* in 1795-6....⁴⁰

One aspect of ‘auld lang syne’ was recollections of his ancestry roused in Byron by *The Abbot* (1820). The work is set in the time of Queen Mary, when Catholic Scots were trying to restore her to the throne. Byron recounted in much detail to Murray an ancestor’s participation, as he remembered the account of it:

The Abbot will have a more than ordinary interest for me; for an ancestor of mine by the mother’s side, Sir J. Gordon of Gight, the handsomest of his day, died on a Scaffold at Aberdeen for his loyalty to Mary, of whom he was an imputed paramour as well as her relation. His fate was much commented on in the Chronicles of the times. If I mistake not, he had something to do with her escape from Loch Leven, or with her captivity there. But this you will know better than I.

I recollect Loch Leven as it were but yesterday: I saw it in my way to England in 1798, being then ten years of age. My Mother (who was as haughty as Lucifer with her descent from the Stuarts, and her right line, from the *old Gordons*, not the *Seyton Gordons*, as she disdainfully termed the Ducal branch,) told me the Story, always reminding me how superior *her* Gordons were to the Southron Byrons, notwithstanding our Norman, and always direct masculine descent, which has never lapsed into a femalet as my mother’s Gordons had done in her own person.⁴¹

This passage is revealing not only for the gossipy detailed interest shown by Byron but for the significant mistakes of memory which, nine days later, he wrote to Murray that he had made. Byron had apparently checked an historical source and found among other matters that John Gordon

suffered, *not* for his loyalty, but in an insurrection. He had *nothing* to do with Loch Leven, having been dead some time at the period of the Queen’s confinement. And...I am not sure that he was the Queen’s paramour or no...

I must have made all these mistakes in recollecting my Mother's account of the matter, although she was more accurate than I am, being precise upon points of genealogy, like all the Aristocratical Scotch.⁴²

Byron's mistakes reveal a pattern of self-projection into John Gordon: handsome, loyal to an underdog, a lover, and the lover of a blood-relation. Thus was Byron imaginatively entering into the life of his own forbears.

In the last few years of his life, Byron reversed thoroughly and explicitly the public stance he had taken toward Scotland in the time of *Bards*. Speaking of fighting in Spain, he tells Douglas Kinnaird there will be 'some *fechting* as we Scottish say.'⁴³ In *Don Juan*, his narrator pays a tribute to Francis Jeffrey (whose *Edinburgh* had pilloried the young Byron, as we have seen, but whose own criticism thereafter was quite fair and judicious toward Byron), offers 'a Health to 'Auld Lang Syne,' and gives this famous reminiscence in Canto X:

17

And when I use the phrase of 'Auld Lang Syne!'
 'Tis not addressed to you—the more's the pity
 For me, for I would rather take my wine
 With you, than aught (save Scott) in your proud city.
 But somehow,—it may seem a schoolboy's whine,
 And yet I seek not to be grand nor witty—
 But I am half a Scot by birth, and bred
 A whole one, and my heart flies to my he

18

As 'Auld Lang Syne' brings Scotland, one and all,
 Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills, and clear streams,
 The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's brig's black wall,
 All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams
 Of what I *then* dreamt, clothed in their own pall,
 Like Banquo's offspring;—floating past me seems
 My childhood, in this childishness of mine:
 I care not—'tis a glimpse of *Auld Lang Syne*.'

19

And though, as you remember, in a fit
 Of wrath and rhyme, when juvenile and curly,
 I railed at Scots to show my wrath and wit,
 Which must be owned was sensitive and surly,
 Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit,
 They cannot quench young feelings fresh and early:
 I 'scotched not killed' the Scotchman in my blood,
 And love the land of 'mountain and of flood.'

Thus Byron reaffirms the ‘Hours’ Scottish poems as sincere (‘it may seem a schoolboy’s whine. . . But I am half a Scot’). The enduring centrality and importance of the early Scottish experience is also asserted in his last long poem, *The Island*. Speaking of the young Scottish sailor Torquil and his native bride, Neuha, Byron argues for the formative nature of childhood experience:

Both nourished amidst Nature’s native scenes,
 Loved to the last, whatever intervenes
 Between us and our Childhood’s sympathy,
 Which still reverts to what first caught the eye.
 He who first met the Highlands’ swelling blue
 Will love each peak that shows a kindred hue,
 Hail in each crag a friend’s familiar face,
 And clasp the mountain in his Mind’s embrace.
 Long have I roamed through lands which are not mine,
 Adored the Alp, and loved the Apennine,
 Revered Parnassus, and beheld the steep
 Jove’s Ida and Olympus crown the deep:
 But ‘twas not all long ages’ lore, nor all
 Their nature held me in their thrilling thrall;
 The infant rapture still survived the boy,
 And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o’er Troy,
 Mixed Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
 And Highland linns with Castalie’s clear fount.
 Forgive me, Homer’s universal shade!
 Forgive me, Phoebus! that my fancy strayed;
 The North and Nature taught me to adore
 Your scenes sublime, from those beloved before.
 (II.12. 276-97)

If foreign settings stirred memories of Scotland in Byron, so did the literary and political fight for liberation—a fight which led finally to his own death—take on the coloring of Scott’s novels. By 1819 the Scots idiom of those novels, especially where they deal with warfare, had entered Byron’s correspondence and journal. His own *Don Juan* he saw figuratively as leading to civil war:

I am particularly aware that *Don Juan* must set us all by the ears; but that is my concern, and my beginning: there will be *Edinburgh* and all too against it, so that, like Rob Roy, I shall have my hands full.⁴⁴

Shortly after, Byron, now in Ravenna, was involved in a literal insurrection (of Italian nationalists fighting the Austrian occupation). He

talked of defending the Pope, then by implication identified himself with Bucklaw, the reckless bandit in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, by calling a visitor 'Captain Craigengelt,' Bucklaw's associate:

for I must 'boot and saddle,' as my Captain Craigengelt (an officer in the old Napoleon Italian army) is in waiting.⁴⁵

Like Andrew Fairservice watching the Highlanders revolt in *Rob Roy*, Byron watched the Italian war developing:

At last, 'The kiln's in a low.' The Germans are ordered to march, and Italy is, for the ten thousandth time to become a field of battle.⁴⁶

When the Neapolitans commenced hostilities, Byron quoted from *Old Mortality* (Ch. v):

in a short time 'There will be news O'thae craws,' as Mrs. Alison Wilson says of Jenny Blana's 'unco cockernony' in the *Tales of My Landlord*.⁴⁷

And when Murray considered coming to Ravenna at this time, Byron wryly asserted in terms from *Waverley* (Ch. xviii).

I will exercise the rites of hospitality while you live. and bury you handsomely (though not in holy ground), if you get 'shot or slashed in a creagh or splore.' which are rather frequent here of late among the native parties.⁴⁸

The *Waverleys* did not serve merely to color Byron's language in this last period of his life. In a sense they were primers both for his own artistic rendering of historical crisis and for his own participation in such crisis. Committing himself to the Greek war of independence, Byron expressed himself in terms from *Waverley* and *Old Mortality*: 'At any rate, I shall cast in my lot with the puir Hill Folk!'⁴⁹ The surgeon on the ship which carried Byron to Cephalonia thought he had a Scottish accent, and Moore states that while on the island, Byron wore chiefly a Gordon tartan jacket.⁵⁰ And one might note that the day before leaving for Missolonghi. Byron shut himself away from officers and friends to read *Quentin Durward*, just received.⁵¹ At his death. Byron seems to have felt he had that same 'ill-starr'd,' fated quality of the old Highland chieftains: he recalled that a fortune teller in Scotland had told him as a boy to beware his thirty-seventh year.⁵²

The charting of Byron's attitudes to Scotland reveals a definite pattern of early affection for the land and its warrior tradition, a subsequent covering-over but not loss of affection in response to critical ridicule of it,

a deliberate cosmopolitanizing of his sense of nationality, but finally, through his love of Scott and his novels, a reidentification with the early Scottish background. Byron's Scottish associations with his final Greek adventure would seem a silly sort of play-acting were it not for the depth of those associations as he came to see them. There was no question of any current Scottish nationalism, as Byron was reconciled to the 1707 Union of England and Scotland.⁵³ Committing himself first to Italian and then to Greek independence, Byron apparently felt that his commitment had a prior origin in his boyhood admiration of Scottish fighters for freedom. His manner of leadership, pragmatic and unillusioned, even makes Byron resemble Edward Waverley (of *Waverley*) or Henry Morton (of *Old Mortality*), who like Byron tried in vain to discipline mobs into efficient military forces.⁵⁴

The sureness of his *Don Juan* style and the realism of the work, and the desire to participate directly in the fight against tyranny, are part of that same process by which Byron embraced the memory and values of his Scottish boyhood, while moving into engagement with history.

Notes

¹ *BLJ*. There is also a famous painting of this meeting, in the John Murray Collection, but it is an imagined view by one C. Werner from the 1850's. However, it makes a point: sitting are Isaac D'Israeli, John Murray II, Sir John Barrow, George Canning, and J.W. Croker. Standing off to the side by the window, conferring with each other as if in a world apart, are Byron and Scott. See also the editor's discussion of the meeting in Andrew Nicholson, ed., *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 207), n.5, p.133-134. The Currier & Ives image is much more fanciful but likewise symbolic of the study which follows.

² Recounted in Thomas More, *Life of Lord Byron*, 1830.

³ *BLJ*, 3, 219 (24 Nov. 1813).

⁴ *BLJ*, 3, 250 (15 March 1814).

⁵ John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs, of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, Author's Edition, 10 vols., 1839 (Edinburgh: Black, 1871), Ch. lxxxii.

⁶ *BLJ*, 4, 146 (to Murray, 24 July 1814).

⁷ Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., ed., *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 137.

⁸ *Life*. Ch. xxxvii.

⁹ *The Author of Waverley*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰ H. J. C. Grierson, ed., *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*. 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932), III, 373. Hereafter, *Letters*.