

# Disfigurement and Disability: Walter Scott's Bodies

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Were I conscious of any thing peculiar in my own moral character which could render such development [a moral lesson] necessary or useful, I would as readily consent to it as I would bequeath my body to dissection if the operation could tend to point out the nature and the means of curing any peculiar malady.<sup>1</sup>

This essay considers conflicts of corporeality in Walter Scott's works, critical reception, and cultural status, drawing on recent scholarship on the physical in the Romantic Period and on considerations of disability in modern and contemporary poetics. Although Scott scholarship has said little about the significance of disability as something reconfigured – or 'disfigured' – in his writings, there is an increasing interest in the importance of the body in Scott's work. This essay offers new directions in interpretation by opening up several distinct, though interrelated, aspects of the corporeal in Scott. It seeks to demonstrate how many areas of Scott's writing – in poetry and prose, and in autobiography – and of Scott's critical and cultural standing, from Lockhart's biography to the custodianship of his library at Abbotsford, bear testimony to a legacy of disfigurement and substitution.

In the 'Memoirs' he began at Ashestiel in April 1808, Scott described himself as having been, in late adolescence, 'rather disfigured than disabled' by his lameness.<sup>2</sup> Begun at his rented house near Galashiels when he was 36, in the year in which he published his recursive poem *Marmion* and extended his already considerable fame as a poet, the Ashestiel 'Memoirs' were continued in 1810-11 (that is, still before the move to Abbotsford), were revised and augmented in 1826, and ten years later were made public as the first chapter of John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* In this later manifestation the Ashestiel 'Memoirs' came to represent, for Victorian and subsequent readers, the authoritative version of Scott's family background and early history, told in his own words.

It is clear from the 1826 additions that Scott, by this stage much more aware of (and more wary of) the scope and appetite of his reading public, embellished details which could be described, broadly, as historical, illustrative, and contextualising, rather than as personal. In 1826 he was also in the very early stages of projecting the new introductions and notes of what was to become the Magnum Opus edition of his novels, published between 1829 and 1833. In 1826, that is, he added to rather than revised

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<sup>1</sup> *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Scott on Himself*, 35. Scott is describing himself at the age of about sixteen.

the core account of his early years and memories, while not adding to (or revising) the two driving forces of the Ashestiel 'Memoirs'. One of these driving forces – genealogy – is generic. The other – an acute, life-threatening, infant illness which resulted in a lifelong impediment - is not just individual, but acutely individualised, in Scott's account. The Ashestiel 'Memoirs' trace the lasting consequences of poliomyelitis, which Scott contracted when he was about eighteen months old and which left his right leg permanently lame. They describe the immediately disabling onset of the fever, its slow and uncertain cure - which, for Scott, included his removal from his parents and siblings in Edinburgh to his grandparents' farm in the Borders - and its lingering aftereffects, involving Scott in a number of medicinal and dietary regimes, the mixed experience of limited and heightened physical activity, an absorption in books, and an emergence into what could eventually be claimed as 'disfigurement' instead of 'disability' – that is, an impairment to the body's appearance rather than to its functionality. Concluding that his consciousness of lameness 'seems to have caused no psychological damage', David Hewitt nevertheless remarks: 'The physical feats of later life ... suggest that his lameness did not restrict him, but at least some of this physical activity, or perhaps even the reporting of physical activity, was deliberate overcompensation for his disability.'<sup>3</sup> Medically, it is considered extraordinary that Scott recovered such relatively, and eventually, free use of his paralysed limb after such a serious condition, which was at this time erroneously thought to be an extreme complication of infant teething.<sup>4</sup> Scott's emphasis on his family history, and on his connectedness with story and place, has been more easily absorbed into subsequent biographical and critical tradition than has his equally strong preoccupation, throughout the Ashestiel 'Memoirs', with the stages of his illness and recuperation, and with the psychological and social effects of physical restriction. His illness provides the framework for the 'Memoirs', explaining his physical removal to the Borders, with all that that brought him in terms of local tradition and a love of storytelling. His earliest memories involve arcane attempted cures and a household concentrated on his recovery: 'I recollect distinctly that my situation and appearance were a little whimsical', he writes, remembering being swathed in the skin of a recently-slaughtered sheep while his grandfather tried to entice him into crawling across the floor.<sup>5</sup> 'My lameness and my solitary habits had made me a tolerable reader'; 'My lameness and the

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<sup>3</sup> David Hewitt, 'Scott, Sir Walter (1771-1832)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49: 490-510 (491).

<sup>4</sup> See Sir Arthur S. MacNalty, *Sir Walter Scott: The Wounded Falcon* (London: Johnson, 1969), 146-9. In a note in *Pediatrics* 51.1 (1973): 35, T. E. Cone comments that Scott's poliomyelitis 'probably amounts to the earliest case on record in the British Isles – or possibly anywhere.'

<sup>5</sup> Scott on Himself, 12.

efforts which I made to supply that disadvantage'; 'This personall disadvantage did not prevent me from taking much exercise on horseback and making long journies on foot': repeatedly, the 'Memoirs' structures Scott's experience through and against impediment.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond its immediate context in the Ashestiel 'Memoirs', the differentiation between 'disfigurement' and 'disability' is more widely resonant in Scott's creative thinking, and in theories of creative practice. When Scott reflected on his childhood self in the epistolary 'Introduction to Canto Third' of *Marmion*, he described himself in his grandparents' home as 'But half a plague, and half a jest'. The split between contemplative and autobiographical verse epistles to six of his friends and the narrative pace of the six cantos these epistles preface are the major technical innovation of *Marmion*, and were, for some contemporary readers, the major technical source of disruption and frustration in the story. Intriguingly, there has long been a biographical and critical tendency to 'divide' Scott, usually into halves.

For William Hazlitt, in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Scott represented one half of what the human intellect could be, seeing only the past, never the future: 'The cells of his memory are vast, various, full even to bursting with life and motion; his speculative understanding is empty, flaccid, poor, and dead.'<sup>7</sup> One contemporary theory of the mysterious authorship of the Waverley Novels posited that 'the authorship was a joint-stock business – Sir Walter being one of the partners, and the other an unfortunate lunatic, of whose papers he had got possession during a lucid interval'.<sup>8</sup> Jane Millgate, analysing his 1813 poem *Rokeby*, argues that Scott split himself and his early experiences of love between the contrasted male characters of sickly, poetical Wilfrid de Wycliffe and the active hero, Redmond O'Neill;<sup>9</sup> while the two heroes of the 1824 novel *Redgauntlet*, Darsie Latimer and Alan Fairford, are traditionally regarded as two halves of the young Scott, one a wilful fantasist and the other a pragmatic lawyer. Scott's image and reputation have long been fissured between supposedly conflicting parts of his character, as if his evident compulsion to produce bifurcating fictions of the origins and authorship of his many fictions, in all their various genres and mixings of genre, were the product of a fundamentally disfigured approach to creative process.

<sup>6</sup> The quotations in this sentence are from *Scott on Himself* 19, 21, and 35.

<sup>7</sup> Hazlitt, 'Sir Walter Scott', in *Lectures on the English Poets and The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, introd. Catherine Macdonald Maclean (London: Dent, 1967), 223-34 (224).

<sup>8</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 10 vols. (Edinburgh: Cadell; London: John Murray, Whittaker, 1839), vii. 226.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 29-34.

For an unusual combination of reasons, ranging from the anonymous publication of his novels and his development of an array of pseudo-authorial and editorial personae in their frame narratives to the unavoidable physical presence of Scott in the nineteenth century in memorial and totemic structures, in performative re-creation, in allusive architecture, and in substantial arrays of volumes on shelves, it has been simultaneously all too easy and very difficult to consider ‘the body’ of Scott’s works and the significance of bodies – sometimes as works – in Scott. In many ways, this jarring conjunction between inconspicuous and hyperobtrusive presence is how we have come to formulate Scott’s presence in literary and cultural history – that is, as a connective force like eighteenth-century aether, invisible, intangible, but also as textually excessive in terms of published output. In the *Waverley Novels* themselves, too, critics have become accustomed to thinking of the ‘Eidolon’ of the Author, as first envisaged in Scott’s frame narratives to *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Pevekil of the Peak* (both 1822) – his Emanation, in William Blake’s also disconcertingly physical realisations – as a paradoxically robust, disputatious, presence, a Fitz-Fulke of a spectre.<sup>10</sup> As they so often do, Thomas Carlyle’s criticisms in his review of Lockhart’s *Life of Scott* point to the difficulty in establishing the significance and resonance of the idiosyncrasies of Scott’s writings. How can someone of the earth, earthy, lacking in spiritual purpose, as Carlyle portrays Scott, nevertheless also fail to give his characters imaginable corporeal form? Lack of physicality is not the impression given of Scott’s novels in Hazlitt’s *Spirit of the Age*, in which Hazlitt writes: ‘There is a hurtling in the air, a trampling of feet upon the ground, as these perfect representations of human character or fanciful belief come thronging back upon our imaginations.’<sup>11</sup> Strangely mixing the aerial and the earthly, these presences are both material and immaterial, but Hazlitt’s roll-call of Scott characters emphasises their physicality, and extends on it: ‘old Balfour of Burley, brandishing his sword and his Bible with fire-eyed fury’; ‘the fawning Claverhouse, beautiful as a panther, smooth-looking, blood-spotted’.<sup>12</sup> For contemporary readers –or, at least, here, for the best of them – Scott’s characters were fully-fleshed, trampling and thronging. For generations of readers, moreover, the physical expansiveness of the *Waverley Novels*, the poems, plays, and ‘Miscellaneous Prose Works’ (encompassing everything from essays and articles to the *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland* and *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*) has testified to the substantial textual presence of Scott. At the same time, only with the completion of the Edinburgh

<sup>10</sup> Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 136. On Scott’s spectral authorship, see particularly Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Hazlitt, ‘Sir Walter Scott’, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Hazlitt, ‘Sir Walter Scott’, 229.

Edition of the Waverley Novels (1993-2012) has the complicated textual history of Scott's prose fiction been resolved and reconciled. Editorial work on the poetry has now begun; modern readers of Scott are beginning to be in a position not easily imaginable at any previous stage of his reception and afterlife, of having the textual fractures between manuscript and first edition, and between first, intermediary, and Magnum Opus states of his writings healed, even though such resolution depends on the careful separation of Magnum Opus revisions from what can be reconstructed as an 'original' ideal state of each text. Textually, that is, resolution has been effected through independence.

Nineteenth-century representations of Scott emphasise his 'healthiness' (a strong refrain in Carlyle's review of Lockhart) but also his size, materially and textually, while editing out from this image any complications of sexuality or physical deviation. For modernist writers hostile to Scott, too, the image of the large, well-functioning body operating semi-instinctively and without what E. M. Forster called 'structure', shapes the ways in which he is read. (So, in the notes he made in his *Commonplace Book* towards the Clark Lectures which metamorphosed into the 1927 *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster praised *Great Expectations*: 'Beating heart instead of good digestion of Scott.')13 Both nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interpretations of Scott, that is, rest on what they assume to be his expansive and easy physicality. In modern scholarship, interpretations are more likely to attend to Scott's shadows, spectres, and eidolons; or to his various substitute-bodies: Abbotsford House, the statues crowding the Scott Monument in Edinburgh, Lockhart's textually incorporative *Life of Scott*, and Scott's own work on the Magnum Opus edition, its very nickname suggestive of magical, elusive, perhaps fraudulent transubstantiation.

It might seem probable that the richly nuanced, self-aware present-day critical and creative discourses of disability should have much to contribute to an understanding of Scott's work in this context. In a new essay on 'Disabled Poetry', for example, Anthony Mellors considers avant-garde poetry's investment in breaking traditional form, writing, in the context of one of Paul Celan's poems from the collection *Schneepart* (1971), of '[t]he crippled enablement otherwise known as poetry'. Mellors's conclusion, envisaging 'disablement as an intensive force or negative capability', implicitly draws the aesthetic terminology of (Keatsian) Romanticism into the frame.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 172. See also the sketched contrast between eighteenth-century writers and 'the upholstery of Scott', also in Forster's 'Commonplace Book', *Aspects of the Novel*, 165.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Mellors, 'Disabled Poetry', *Textual Practice* 27 (2013), 1-20, quoted from 8 and 17: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.848927> (online publication 20 November 2013). The essay

In other studies of contemporary poetics, however, the distinctive preoccupations and discourses of present-day disability aesthetics seem over-determined as potential approaches to Scott's writings and cultural influence. Susannah B. Mintz's 2012 essay, 'Lyric Bodies: Poets on Disability and Masculinity', responds to what Mintz identifies as a curious disconnection in contemporary criticism, exemplified by the history of contributions to the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*: that is, that they focus on prose narrative, or 'stories'. Mintz's analysis of three contemporary American poets – Tom Andrews, Floyd Skloot, and Kenny Fries – emphasises the ways in which poetry, rather than prose, can carry forward an implicit re-writing of conventional notions of beauty, form, and value. Writing of Tom Andrews' *The Hemophiliac's Motorcycle* (1994), Mintz identifies what she calls 'the poet's own awareness of a theatricality compelling his representation of illness, recovery, and sport'.<sup>15</sup> It is clear to see what modern criticism could do with the formal fractures, fragmentations, parallel and alternative narratives of Scott's work, in and maybe especially across different literary forms. However, it is not possible simply to transport modern ways of writing about the experience of disability to the early nineteenth century. Scott and Byron were the Romantic Period's great disabled poets, but they rarely described themselves in these terms. Questions of self-identity, and self-representation, were different. In his headnote to his drama *The Deformed Transformed* (1824), Byron explains that of his drama's projected three parts, only two are supplied, and that the missing third part may follow later. This wry textual joke is, however, part of Romanticism's aesthetics of fragmentation, not a distinguishable aesthetic of disability. In order to carry forward the analysis of the body and its infirmities in Scott's writings, it is necessary to formulate an approach more specifically attuned to the discourses of physical ability and impairment in his lifetime; and to the implications of his casually introduced, but carefully considered, differentiation between disfigurement and disability.

### Scott's Bodies

Scott's sensitivity to questions of disability and physical weakness has always featured prominently in biographical accounts – the most dedicated biographical treatment of it, and of Scott's medical history more generally, being Arthur S. MacNalty's *Sir Walter Scott: The Wounded Falcon* (1969). It is also recognised as a factor in some of his most intense affections and loyalties, some of them resulting in literary

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further develops Mellors's approach to poetic impersonality in *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), ch. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Susannah B. Mintz, 'Lyric Bodies: Poets on Disability and Masculinity', *PMLA* 127.2 (March 2012): 248-63.

work. So, for example, Scott composed his histories of Scotland and France for children, the four series of *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828-31), for his invalid grandson John Hugh Lockhart (or, as Scott reconfigured his name, ‘Hugh Littlejohn’). However, his heightened sensitivity to impaired and damaged bodies has not been a topic of much interest in critical accounts of his writings. Indeed, the wider subject of Scott’s treatment of physicality in his fictions, and its relationship to his literary corpus, is relatively underdeveloped in Scott scholarship, and has been most notable in considerations of the female body in his novels and poetry (by Judith Wilt, Nancy Moore Goslee, Caroline McCracken Flesher, and Tara Ghoshal Wallace). My own earlier investigation of a specific aspect of the topic, in a 1998 essay ‘Scott’s Halting Fellow: The Body of Shakespeare in the Waverley Novels’, concluded that Scott’s fictional Shakespeares helped him define ‘the manly arts’ through ‘a heroic, distinguishing, disability’.<sup>16</sup> Very specifically, but unusually, in the history of bardolatry, Scott seized on the notion that Shakespeare was lame. This had been asserted, most influentially, by Edward Capell in his 1768 edition of Shakespeare, which took Sonnet 37 (‘As a decrepit father takes delight’) as a literal testament of Shakespeare’s disability. Scott’s representations of Shakespeare take up the venerable associations between infirmity of body and intensified gifts of mind; they also assert a physicality in keeping with Scott’s reflections on himself as ‘rather disfigured than disabled’ by lameness. The painting ‘Sir Walter Scott on the occasion of his visit to Shakespeare’s tomb in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon on 8 April 1828’ (by David Roberts, though also attributed to Sir William Allan and Benjamin Haydon) portrays him prominently leaning on a stick for support, ‘halting’ at the shrine to the Bard, but also asserting a physical comradeship.<sup>17</sup> The newer work of Nicola Watson and Ann Rigney on Scott in material culture has expanded the scope of this field;<sup>18</sup> but, even so, the topic of Scott’s own body and his representation of others’ bodies remains underdeveloped.

In contrast, critics have written extensively about physicalities, corporeal desires and consumptions, in the works of several of Scott’s literary contemporaries. To take just one of these as an especially relevant case in point, in Ian Duncan’s chapter ‘Hogg’s Body’ (in *Scott’s Shadow*, 2007), James Hogg, ‘the theriomorphic clown’ with his brown, irregular teeth (a prominent feature in *Blackwood’s* standard anatomy of Hogg) comes to

<sup>16</sup> Fiona Robertson, ‘Scott’s Halting Fellow: The Body of Shakespeare in the Waverley Novels’, *The Scott Newsletter* 33 (Winter 1998): 2-13.

<sup>17</sup> The painting is discussed in Robertson, ‘Scott’s Halting Fellow’, 10, and in Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 34, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Watson, *The Literary Tourist*, and ‘Afterlives’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 143-55; Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

represent an idealised physical masculinity but also a class-bound corporeality implicitly contrasted to the authoritative presence of Scott, his ‘wizardlike patron’. In the early nineteenth century, Duncan observes: ‘The language of cultural authority was increasingly a language that obliterated its origins not just in speech and locality but in the body.’<sup>19</sup> Hogg’s body, as Duncan shows, is overdetermined, though not by Hogg. The supposed absence of the body in Scott’s novels, in contrast, has had profound interpretative consequences, notably a tendency among critics to allegorise relationships in political and national terms. References to ‘union’ in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, for example, have invariably been taken to suggest the difficulties of uniting nations, political factions, and class identification; no reading that I know of considers problems of ‘union’ in this novel in relation to (for example), spirituality, which might well be a traditional locus in some other authors’ works.<sup>20</sup> In some recent readings of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, instead, supposedly absent physical tensions have supported a critical focus on the revealed inadequacy and fragility of the marriage-plot formula (see, for example, Oliver Buckton’s essay on teaching *The Bride of Lammermoor* through queer theory.)<sup>21</sup> What is curious about this, as I have suggested with reference to Carlyle, is that the physical or material is simultaneously thought to be lacking in Scott and so abundant that it has to be explained in other terms – all of them, insistently, material, geographical, national, political. In Ian Duncan’s terms, the language of cultural authority has ‘obliterated’ its origins in the body.

Scott’s fictional bodies share some of the qualities of his texts, his bodies of fiction, in that they are open to interpretation and to supplementation. If Scott seems sometimes not to focus on physical detail, it is not because he does not fully imagine or see it, but because he sees its indeterminability, present and future. Sometimes his descriptions of physical appearance function proleptically in terms of narrative, quasi-historically from the reader’s point of view. Describing Effie Deans, the most interpreted body in all his fictions, he remarks: ‘Her brown russet short-gown set off a shape, which time, perhaps, might be expected to render too robust, the frequent objection of Scottish beauty, but which, in her present early age, was slender and taper’.<sup>22</sup> Scott writes here as a practised observer, even as a connoisseur, though in fact Effie’s body does not become what he expects or what the narrative at this early stage of *The Heart of Mid-*

<sup>19</sup> Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 181.

<sup>20</sup> For the most influential of readings to take this approach, see Peter D. Garside, ‘Union and The Bride of Lammermoor’, *Studies in Scottish Literature* 19 (1984): 72-93.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver S. Buckton, ‘“This Monstrous Passion”: Teaching *The Bride of Lammermoor* and Queer Theory’, in *Approaches to Teaching Scott’s Waverley Novels*, ed. Evan Gottlieb and Ian Duncan (New York: MLA, 2009), 157-63.

<sup>22</sup> *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels*, editor-in-chief David Hewitt, 30 vols. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993-2012), vi. 84-5.



*Lothian* offers as its likely development. When Effie, by now Lady Staunton, reappears at Roseneath years later, she is described as a lady ‘rather above the middle size, beautifully made, though something *en bon point*, with a hand and arm exquisitely formed’. Although over thirty, ‘she might well have passed for one-and-twenty’, so powerful is the effect of her new social class, dress, and deportment, though her manner, Scott is careful to distinguish, ‘seemed to evince high birth and the habits of elevated society’.<sup>23</sup> Effie’s body has not genuinely transmuted, in keeping with her new social status, but, even so, there is a world of evaluative and cultural difference between ‘too robust’ and ‘something *en bon point*’.

If bodies, as here in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, exist as assemblages of evidence to be read, not always accurately, in other Scott fictions the semi-materialised body functions metafictionally. Scott’s novels demonstrate a particular fascination with figuring characters as statues or as still-life participants in tableaux, of the kind called ‘playing a picture’ in the Shaws-Castle entertainments in *Saint Ronan’s Well* (1824). When Queen Elizabeth encounters Amy Robsart amid the pageantry of *Kenilworth: A Romance* (1821), she is ‘doubtful whether she beheld a statue, or a form of flesh and blood’:

... she stood with one foot advanced and one withdrawn, her arms, head, and hands perfectly motionless, and her cheek as pallid as the alabaster pedestal against which she leaned. ...

Elizabeth remained in doubt, even after she had approached within a few paces, whether she did not gaze on a statue so cunningly fashioned, that by the doubtful light it could not be distinguished from reality.<sup>24</sup>

Amy has had a comparable experience on arriving at the ‘palace of enchantment’, *Kenilworth*: some of the giant guards she sees ‘were real men, dressed up with vizards and buskins; others were mere pageants composed of paste-board and buckram, which, viewed from beneath, formed a sufficiently striking representation of what was intended’.<sup>25</sup> In *Kenilworth*, such effects and uncertainties are essential to the novel’s self-conscious blend of almost-believable historical recreation and fantasy. Scott drew important details from his principal sources for the *Kenilworth* pageants of 1575, Robert Laneham and George Gasgoigne, though Amy Robsart died 15 years before this, in 1560, and Shakespeare, who appears as an admired dramatist, was 11 in 1575. In cases like this, it is important to Scott’s purpose to make bodies not-quite-real, but as part of what he calls in *Kenilworth* ‘this symbolical dance’ of representation.

<sup>23</sup> *EEWN* vi. 435; emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> *Kenilworth: A Romance* (1821), *EEWN* xi. 318.

<sup>25</sup> *EEWN* xi. 259.

In contrast to the Victorian vogue for collections of ‘romantic’ and sentimental illustrations of Scott heroines, Scott’s heroes have sometimes seemed interchangeable (‘what the players call a *walking gentleman*’, ‘a perfect automaton’, ‘but wet or dry I could make nothing of him’, ‘a sneaking piece of imbecility’, as he berated some of them in his private correspondence).<sup>26</sup> As is so often the case with Scott’s self-critiques, these are defensive exaggerations; and depictions of the male body in Scott’s writings actually call for far more discriminating attention. What Scott’s heroes are, rather, is interpretable, and sometimes more inward than they first appear. In chapter 2 of *Quentin Durward* (1823), the body of the hero is assessed not only by the narrator and by the reader but also by two male observers, one of them the disguised French king, Louis XI. Unusual, but not unique, attention is paid to his physical qualities, and to the equivocal, potentially sinister, role of those who observe him. Quentin’s introduction seems exaggeratedly focussed on the physical, though in fact it is the common lot of the body of the young hero in Scott’s fictions to fall under intense scrutiny while placed outside his usual national, social, or cultural context, most frequently by judgemental older men. Quentin, we are told, is ‘about nineteen’; his face and person are ‘very prepossessing’; his dress, of which Scott gives details, ‘was very neat, and arranged with the precision of a youth conscious of possessing a fine person’.<sup>27</sup> ‘His features, without being quite regular, were frank, open, and pleasing. A half smile, which seemed to arise from a happy exuberance of animal spirits, shewed, now and then, that his teeth were well set, and as pure as ivory; whilst his bright blue eye, with a corresponding gaiety, had an appropriate glance for every object which it encountered, expressing good humour, lightness of heart, and determined resolution.’<sup>28</sup> ‘Seemed’; ‘corresponding’; ‘appropriate’: Quentin’s appearance is measured by those who encounter him: ‘measure’ and ‘read’ are the terms Scott uses of the men who watch Quentin; while ‘the dark-eyed peasant girl looked after him for many a step when they had passed each other’.<sup>29</sup> (That is, the viewing woman is herself objectified, the eyes with which she views him themselves viewed by the narrator and reader.) The detail of Quentin’s ‘consciousness’ of his fine person is worth emphasising. His interiority is contrasted with the physical markings of his uncle, Le Balafre, and, later, with the singularity of the Bohemian, Hayraddin, and with the over-written Wild Boar of the Ardennes, whose

<sup>26</sup> The first three of these phrases are used of the young hero of *The Lady of the Lake*, Malcolm Graeme, in letters to Lady Abercorn in 1810 and Miss Smith in 1811; the fourth of Edward Waverley, in a letter to J. B. S. Morritt in 1814: *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson et al, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-7), ii (21 January 1810, 14 March 1810, 12 March 1811), iii (28 July 1814).

<sup>27</sup> *Quentin Durward* (1823), *EEWN* xv. 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> *EEWN* xv. 30.

<sup>29</sup> *EEWN* xv. 30.

herald, we are told in chapter 33, is so over-loaded with boar's heads and bloody tusks that his whole-body blazonry is described as 'caricatured and overdone'.<sup>30</sup> Quentin Durward is unusual, though again not unique, in Scott's fiction in owing so much of his fortunes to his physical appeal, as the narrator acknowledges in his postscript, which describes the novel as 'concluding, as I thought, with a moral of excellent tendency for the encouragement of all fair-haired, light-eyed, long-legged emigrants from my native country' who might chance their fortunes in foreign wars.<sup>31</sup>

The intensive physicality of *Quentin Durward* is typical of Scott's novels of the early 1820s. Over the course of his novelistic career, in fact, his attention to disfigured bodies increased, as did his depiction of physical lack and disability. When he published *The Black Dwarf* in the First Series of *Tales of My Landlord* in 1816, he made it the 'minor' part of the four-volume publication, constituting one volume with three volumes devoted to *The Tale of Old Mortality*. By the early 1820s, the dwarf Pacolet in *The Pirate* (1822) the diminutive fake-mute Fenella and Queen Henrietta Maria's (historical) dwarf Sir Geoffrey Hudson in *Pevekil of the Peak* (also 1822), play more central roles in his writing; just as, in the parallel textual worlds of the frame narratives of this period, the corpus of Scott's fictions itself is an increasingly weighty presence, always tending towards excess, collapse, exposure, and dissolution. By the time of his last novel, *Castle Dangerous* (second of the two novels in the Fourth Series of *Tales of My Landlord*, 1831), Scott returned to the materials of his first published work, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3) only to find, as Ian Duncan has expressed it, that 'this romantic superstructure of cultural memory and youthful fancy keeps disintegrating into a ruinous, labyrinthine, rubbish-strewn terrain, a material substrate of death and waste'.<sup>32</sup> By the end, textually, the body of Scott's work was collapsing into itself.

### **The Body Refigured**

The final section of this essay turns, first, to an incident which might be called (after Stephen Crane's novel of 1895) Scott's 'red badge of courage' moment. The incident occurred during his visit to Paris in 1815, and is related in Lockhart's *Life*. The argument then moves to Scott's visit to Warwick Castle and Kenilworth Castle in September of the same year. The special interest of the first incident rests on the interpretation, or misinterpretation, of Scott's 'hitch', as he and his friends called it. (Lady Charlotte Bury, recalling her first encounter with Scott, found 'something I think

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<sup>30</sup> *EEWN* xv. 359.

<sup>31</sup> *EEWN* xv. 400.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Duncan, 'Late Scott', in *Edinburgh Companion to Scott*, 140.

graceful in Walter Scott's hitch; it would be a pity he should walk like any body else'.<sup>33</sup> The interest of the second lies in the suggestiveness of a friendship which has not received much attention from Scott scholars, and which I shall use to draw together the strands of my argument for the importance of disfigurement and disability in Scott's imagination and self-construction. The essay closes with a detail of an inhabiting of Scott's most private space which has not previously been recorded or commented on.

In 1815 Scott, his kinsman John Scott of Gala, Alexander Pringle, and Robert Bruce set out for the battlefield of Waterloo, the basis of *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk* (1816) – of which, Lockhart said, 'the whole man, just as he was, breathes in every line'.<sup>34</sup> Scott's letters from this visit are immediate and physically detailed, as in the letter Lockhart quotes, to Joanna Baillie: 'A thin Prussian boy, whom I sometimes see, eats in one day as much as three English ploughmen.'<sup>35</sup> British soldiers, Scott writes, 'pique themselves on imitating the Duke of Wellington in *non-chalance* and coolness of manner; so they wander about everywhere, with their hands in the pockets of their long waistcoats, or cantering upon Cossack ponies, staring and whistling, and trotting to and fro, as if all Paris was theirs.'<sup>36</sup> Post-Waterloo France, too, is physically detailed, and physically imagined: so, Scott writes, 'France is at present the fabled giant, struggling, or rather lying supine, under the load of mountains which have been precipitated on her'.<sup>37</sup> The context of post-Waterloo France is also the moment at which Scott's own physical disability enters his narrative of himself, albeit in apparently comic form. In Lockhart's words: 'He used to tell, with great effect, the circumstances of his introduction to the Emperor Alexander, at a dinner given by the Earl of Cathcart', when he was wearing the blue and red dress of the Selkirkshire Lieutenancy:

... the Czar's first question, glancing at his lameness, was, "In what affair were you wounded?" Scott signified that he suffered from a natural infirmity; upon which the Emperor said, "I thought Lord Cathcart mentioned that you had served." Scott observed that the Earl looked a little embarrassed at this, and promptly answered, "O, yes; in a certain sense I have served – that is, in the yeomanry cavalry; a home force resembling the Landwehr, or Landsturm." – "Under what commander?" – "Sous M. Le Chevalier Rae." – "Were you ever engaged?" – "In some slight actions – such as the battle of the Cross Causeway and the affair of Moredun-Mill." – This, says Mr Pringle of Whytbank, "was, as he saw in Lord Cathcart's face, quite sufficient, so he managed to turn the conversation to some other subject."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Lady Charlotte Bury, *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons*, 4 vols., vols. iii and iv ed. John Galt (London: Henry Colburn, 1838-9), iii. 153-4.

<sup>34</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 80.

<sup>37</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 81.

<sup>38</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 83.

Lockhart emphasises Scott's subsequent dramatisation of this exchange, and Donald Sultana, in his recreation of the 1815 excursion, calls it Lockhart's 'hilarious retelling' of Scott's rendition, with its 'clever parrying' with 'mock-heroic answers'.<sup>39</sup> As John Sutherland points out, however, fobbing the Czar off with unfamiliar place-names in Edinburgh was not just a 'private joke', but 'must have had a sharp edge for its maker. Crosscauseway was the street next to George Square where he fought bickers as a child. Moredun Mill was where he had helped put down starving and unarmed Scottish rioters.'<sup>40</sup> The encounter with the Czar anticipates some of the ironies of Stephen Crane's novel in that it is the moment at which his body and its accoutrements were made to make an unexpectedly and undeservedly heroic sense. Especially interesting, moreover, is the insistently marshalled way in which this story is related. Scott is answering the Czar, but watching Lord Cathcart's face. His answers, and his eventual swerve to another subject, are, in Lockhart's account, entirely choreographed by his desire to spare the Earl's 'embarrassment'. It is not possible to tell where this narrative obedience comes from: from Lockhart, careful to make respectable an otherwise subversive liberty with the Czar; or from Pringle; or from Scott himself. The indeterminate personal pronoun in the last sentence quoted from this episode ('as he saw in Lord Cathcart's face') makes it momentarily unclear who is watching Cathcart's face and deciding when best to close Scott's increasingly exuberant, and increasingly risky, performance. (In John Sutherland's reading, it is Cathcart who turns the conversation.) Lockhart emphasises the first-person authenticity of the anecdote, anchoring it in Pringle's memory. At its heart, however, is something to which Scott pays a great deal of attention in his own accounts of the body, which is its openness to interpretation, and, concomitantly, its vulnerability to misinterpretation.

Lockhart's account, carefully factual, registers something of this sudden visibility, and parsability, of the body, in the aftermath of the Cathcart dinner. At this same dinner, Scott met the Russian general, Count (Matvei Ivanovich) Platoff, whom he later described as an original of Peregrine Touchwood in *Saint Ronan's Well*, who has a face which looks smooth, but which 'appeared, when closely examined, to be seamed with a million of wrinkles, crossing each other in every direction possible, but as fine as if drawn by the point of a very fine needle'.<sup>41</sup> On their return to London, Scott and Gala dined with Byron, Daniel Terry, and Charles Mathews. The accounts of this, Scott's last

<sup>39</sup> Donald Sultana, *From Abbotsford to Paris and Back: Sir Walter Scott's Journey of 1815* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993), 94.

<sup>40</sup> John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 187.

<sup>41</sup> Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, v. 83n., quoting a note from the Magnum Opus edition of *Saint Ronan's Well*, i. 252.

meeting with Byron, emphasise Byron's physical beauty, though Lockhart is not alone in contrasting this with Scott's finer beauty of mind and disposition.

Lockhart's account of 1815, one of the most eventful years of Scott's life, makes comparatively little of the visit Scott made - after returning from Paris, but before making his way home to Abbotsford - to Warwick and Kenilworth with the comic actor and impersonator Charles Mathews, who was engaged to perform at Leamington. Donald Sultana's detailed account of Scott's excursions in 1815, *From Abbotsford to Paris and Back*, provides more of the vivid impressions this journey made on Scott, but does not comment on the special appropriateness of Mathews as Scott's companion on this occasion. Mathews was remarkable, in private as well as on the stage, for his brilliant impromptu impersonations and ventriloquisms: he conjured up, but also displaced from himself, other bodies and voices. He has become a disembodied presence in Romanticism, though he was a powerfully connective figure.<sup>42</sup> I can only suggest rather than prove in this essay that what no account of Scott's physical directness in conveying the historical and architectural particularities of Warwick and Kenilworth Castles and other parts of this visit have begun to imagine is the theatricality and inventedness of experiencing those places in the company of the greatest mimic and impersonator of the day, someone whose improvised voices and sounds took liberties with the architecture, and the history. Scott spent a morning in London with Anne Jackson Mathews, Mathews's wife and the author-editor of his *Memoirs* (1838), partly looking at Mathews's collection of theatrical paintings, now in the Garrick Club in London. But being with Mathews was a theatrical experience: projected voices of porters, parrots, a mail-coach horn, out of body, embodied. Another link repays attention. Like Scott and Byron, Mathews was physically disabled, lamed in a carriage accident in 1814 which redirected his whole career. It is not alluded to in any account of Scott's meeting with Byron and Mathews, but their mutual lameness could hardly have gone unnoticed by any of them. Biographically, as is reflected by Lockhart, there is no connection between Scott's teetering-on-subversive improvisations to the Czar's questions about his impediment and the dinner with Byron and Mathews, followed by the trip to Kenilworth, with Mathews. These weeks of Scott's life highlight what is still not known or said about him. Lockhart describes the Czar story as one Scott told many times. It is an appealing though fanciful conjecture that he first told it at Long's, on 13 September 1815, over dinner with Byron and Mathews. It was a performance at Lord

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<sup>42</sup> See Fiona Robertson, *The United States in British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 6.

Cathcart's, subsequently re-performed as a favourite anecdote of a disability reconfigured as narrative and social reempowerment.

As the bodies of Scott's texts take newly-edited form in modern scholarship, and as modern discourses of disability draw readers' and critics' attention to a neglected element in Scott's creative thought, so the ongoing refashionings of Scott's cultural place and reputation provide new material for critical reflection. The process by which Scott's house and estate at Abbotsford came to figure his entire creative project began in his lifetime, and was partly his own projection and disguise. One part of the story of this process, however, has not previously attracted scholarly attention. From the 1950s, the Honorary Librarian of Abbotsford was Dr James C. Corson (1905-88), a figure central to Scott scholarship as the creator of one of its most indispensable reference works, the *Notes and Index to Sir Herbert Grierson's Edition of the Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (1979). Also indispensable to Scott's descendants Patricia and Dame Jean Maxwell Scott as the overseer of Scott's collections – the greatest private library ever collected by a single literary figure in Britain, and a weighty responsibility for Abbotsford's successive inheritors – James Corson was accommodated during his work at Abbotsford, though living mainly in his own home in Lilliesleaf, near Melrose. Until its recent redevelopment, the extensive refurbishment and redesign opened by the Queen in July 2013, Abbotsford had always been a family house, partially opened to the public within a few months of his death. It was never the ancestral home imagined by Scott for his eldest son, Walter, and Walter's heirs (who did not materialise); but it was inherited and lived in by a continuous line of Hope Scotts and Maxwell Scotts until the death of Dame Jean in 2004. As such, it underwent many changes; many redeployments of furniture; many reconfigurations of rooms. In the Abbotsford Scott designed and built, his own suite of rooms, above the ground-floor study and library and connected with the study by a private staircase, consisted of a bedroom, dressing-room, and lobby giving on to the corridor which led first to Lady Scott's and then to their children's rooms. During Dr Corson's librarianship, Scott's suite of rooms were reconfigured and subdivided to provide a bathroom and small kitchen as well as somewhere to work and sleep.<sup>43</sup> The arrangement was practical, but can now also be seen as richly suggestive, beyond its practicality, of the role of guardianship and scholarly curatorship in the new dispositions of Scott's material goods, home, and body of work. At the end of *Guy Mannering*, a room next to the library in Colonel Mannering's new design for a new

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<sup>43</sup> I am grateful to the Chief Executive of the Abbotsford Trust, Jason Dyer, and to Beverley Rutherford and Matthew Withey for enabling me to visit the private rooms of Abbotsford House in August 2011, just before restoration work began and when Dr Corson's apartment was still in place.

house is marked, to Dominie Sampson's rapture, 'MR SAMPSON'S APARTMENT'.<sup>44</sup> In Mannering's domestic ordering, the scholar has a dedicated, privileged, but secondary place. In Abbotsford's twentieth-century history, the scholarly has moved to the centre of operations, with new domestic and economic necessities. The restoration of Abbotsford has removed the bathroom and kitchen from Scott's private rooms, but a substantial part of the reinvention of Abbotsford has involved creating visitor accommodation of different kinds and in different parts of the house, from exhibition and study space to bedrooms and suites.

In the wider cultural sphere, Scott has long been both excessively present and, as an actually-read rather than as a read-about writer, missing and still, commonly, underestimated. This disjunction is also true of the representation of corporeality in Scott's writings, which, as in Hazlitt's account, is fully realised, 'rushing' on readers' attention and memory, detailed, and idiosyncratic, yet also enigmatic – something to be watched, interpreted, and re-told. Acutely self-aware as a physical being, Scott develops in all his fictions the difficulties of interpreting the body, with all its capacities for disguise and revelation. In the critical and cultural traditions generated by his works, and by accounts of his life, disfigurement and disability - shifting and, historically, differently inflected terms – now have a revitalised part to play.

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<sup>44</sup> *Guy Mannering; or, The Astrologer* (1815), *EEWN* ii. 353.