

Dabbling Among the Unhallowed Relics of the Grave: Waking the Dead in Scott's *Castle Dangerous* and *Count Robert of Paris*

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ABSTRACT

This article considers Scott's late fiction by examining its treatment of the body and in particular the ways in which it challenges a Cartesian split between mind and body. More specifically, it explores the ways in which broken and fragmented bodies are presented in *Castle Dangerous* and *Count Robert of Paris*, Scott's last two novels. It also examines the ways in which Scott explores issues of bodily and gender performance in these texts and interrogates these acts via the theories of Judith Butler. It relates these "bodily" challenges to essentialist ideas of identity and binary notions of gender to a more widespread resistance to closure and epistemological certainty in Scott's work, thus arguing that rather than embodying the last works of an author approaching death, these texts offer a resistance to death through their disruption of bodily stability. This article builds on the editorial reconstruction of these late fictions by the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels and on some recent re-evaluations of these particular texts. By doing so it seeks to suggest one of the many ways in which Scott's fiction has been "re-awakened" by recent scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Walter Scott, *Count Robert of Paris*, *Castle Dangerous*, abject bodies, Judith Butler, gender

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One of the challenges of teaching Scott's work both in Scottish and international contexts is the repeated assertion that his novels have nothing to say to a modern readership, and the often repeated mantra that "no-one reads Scott"; Scott *was* a great author, this argument goes, but he has nothing to say to our times. Even excellent works such as that by Ann Rigney propose that Scott contributed to his own demise and to an indifference to his work by "turning the past into an imaginative comfort zone" and by "working hard to smooth over the conflicts of history and turn them into objects of imaginative display" (223). Less sympathetic studies, such as that by Stuart Kelly, ask "Can Scott ever become popular again" and conclude that this is improbable (218). However, Rigney also suggests that criticism can "roughen up surfaces that have been worn smooth by over-exposure or indifference to make old texts readable again" (225). Both the republication of Scott's fiction in the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels and a wave of criticism published over the last thirty years has done much to "roughen up" our reading of Scott and his work.

In particular, much attention has been given to Scott's Scottish texts and their relationship to Scottish identity. Of the medieval texts *Ivanhoe* has been approached in interesting ways, particularly with regard to its treatment of Jews and for the ways in which it deals with myths of Robin Hood and constructions of Englishness. Scott's work also has been looked at via the prism of multiple theoretical approaches—Bakhtinian, post-structuralist, narratological, post-colonial, and post-humanist to name just a few—all of which have offered fruitful readings of his work. This critical revival can be traced to the conference papers published in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference in Edinburgh, 1991*, and is summarised by Evan Gottlieb in *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* (3). That Scott can be exposed to such theories, and that such theories offer new ways to excavate his texts, suggests that this author is far less of a museum piece than some would imply, and that his work offers a productive site for readings of many different sorts.

As Ian Duncan argues, "a modest amount of attention and guidance can reconnect twenty-first-century readers with the energies that made these the most popular and influential works of fiction of the Romantic Era," and many recent approaches have given Scott more than merely modest attention (Introduction 19). However, with a few notable exceptions, such as the work done by Judith Wilt and Chriselle Mackinnon, very little work has been done

to read Scott within feminist frameworks, and the first book-length study on Scott and gender by C. M. Jackson-Houlston was published as recently as 2017. This essay will consider two late and often neglected works, *Castle Dangerous* (1831) and *Count Robert of Paris* (1831), using in particular feminist paradigms relating to ideas of the body, to suggest further models by means of which Scott can be read in ways that intersect with our most current concerns. In particular, this article will suggest that reading these late novels in terms of the “corporeal” may offer another way of “roughening up” Scott’s corpus, thereby recovering ways in which it may resonate with issues that are relevant for our own times, both within Scotland and globally.

In relation to gender it has been argued that Scott seems determined to erase the physical body from his texts and that by concentrating on the intellectual and socio-political development of his characters (or even by using them as cyphers for historical moments) he reinforces a Cartesian opposition between mind and body. Scott’s women, in particular, are sometimes seen as inherently textual, but lacking in any real physicality. For example, Diane Long Hoeveler argues that “the female body in the novels of Scott is most frequently presented as a bifurcated figure, a split woman who embodies both positive and negative aspects of a fairly stereotypical notion of ‘femininity’” where “the female characters are sometimes to be read as the embodiment of the Scottish nation in formation” (105).

However, I would like to consider what seems to be in many ways an *excess* of the body in *Castle Dangerous* and *Count Robert of Paris*, where bodies are in many ways *overtly* physical, allowing Scott to consider the limits and limitations of corporeal embodiment. I will suggest that this in turn can be equated with a concomitant exploration of the limitations and potentialities of the body within these fictional texts, and by extension within the body of Scott’s fiction as a whole.

In his 1818 review of *Frankenstein* Scott describes Mary Shelley’s eponymous hero, if we can call him that, in the following manner:

He engaged in physiological researches of the most recondite and abstruse nature, searching among charnel vaults and in dissection-rooms, and among the objects most insupportable to the delicacy of human feelings, in order to trace the minute chain of causation

which takes place in the change from life to death, and from death to life. . . .

. . . The feverish anxiety with which the young philosopher toils through the horrors of his secret task, now dabbling among the unhallowed relics of the grave, and now torturing the living animal to animate the lifeless clay, is described generally, but with great vigour of language. (*Prose Works* 18: 257)

I have argued that reviewing *Frankenstein* was liberating for Scott and that it inspired him to write his own ghost story, “Phatasmagoria” (Lumsden, “Walter Scott” 220-21). By the time Scott was writing *Count Robert* and *Castle Dangerous*, *Blackwood’s* had established itself as a vehicle for the Gothic more generally, and this form was emerging as part of the landscape of Scottish fiction. Scott revisits the Gothic in late short stories such as “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror” and it is thus no surprise that it also features in his last novels.

Indeed, *Frankenstein* is mentioned explicitly in *Count Robert of Paris*. When offering a farewell to his audience, Scott discusses the limits of readerly credulity and states that *Frankenstein’s* improbable circumstances have been forgiven because they give rise to “a great number of interesting situations, which could not have existed between two creatures who did not hold, with respect to each other, the impossible and extravagant relation which is here supposed” (*CR* 363). However, while this reference is overt, it is arguably the case that Shelley’s novel lurks somewhere more obliquely behind Scott’s late fiction, which itself dabbles among the unhallowed relics of the grave and at times seems obsessed with wandering through charnel houses. The most obvious examples of this appears in *Castle Dangerous*. Early on in the novel Sir Aymer de Valence tells the story of the Douglas Larder, a massacre associated with *Castle Dangerous* itself:

Douglas caused the meat, the malt, and other corn or grain to be brought down into the castle cellar, where he emptied the contents of the sacks into one loathsome heap, striking out the heads of the barrels and puncheons so as to let the mingled drink run through the heap of meat, grain, and so forth. The bullocks provided for slaughter were in like manner knocked on the head, and their

blood suffered to drain forth into the mass of edible substances, and lastly, the quarters of the cattle buried in the same mass, in which were also included the dead bodies of those in the castle, who, receiving no quarter from Douglas, paid dearly for having paid no better watch. This base and ungodly use of provisions intended for the use of man, together with the throwing into the well of the castle carcasses of men and horses, and other filth for polluting the same, has since that time been called the DOUGLAS LARDER. (36)

This graphic description conflates the physical needs of the body—drink, meat, grain—with the physical frailty of the body—here reduced to no more than body parts and carcasses. The “piteous cries” of cattle, the “groans and screams of men” and the “screeches of the poor horses” are conflated in one “fearful chorus” (CD 37), thus drawing attention all too graphically to the physical nature of corporality and the similarities between human and non-human animals.

This emphasis on the disaggregated body—one that cannot be viewed as a whole—and the physical remains of human experience is one that persists throughout *Castle Dangerous*. Later in the novel Sir Aymer is charged with travelling to the Abbey of St Bride’s and has to pass through the near deserted town of Douglas. Here he encounters a ghostly knight who rides through the streets, and then apparently disappears. In what may seem a rather pointless digression Sir Aymer is then directed to the home of “Goodman Powheid, who has the charge of the muniments” (CD 89) and who will allegedly solve the riddle of this mysterious knight. Powheid (or Lazarus as he is appropriately known) does no such thing, but gives Scott ample time to dwell upon the circumstances of Powheid’s dwelling in the vicinity of the dead. His very abode is described as “made of paving stones, laid together with some accuracy, and here and there inscribed with letters and hieroglyphics, as if they had once upon a time served to distinguish sepulchres” (CD 92).

His firewood, too, is gathered from graves and he tells Sir Aymer that it “will catch fire, although it is some time ere the damps of the grave are overcome by the drier air and warmth of the chimney” (CD 92). The mystery of the knight is resolved later in the text, but not before he has appeared rather bizarrely in the guise of the “Knight of the Tomb” (CD 141) with armour

painted “so as to represent a skeleton” (134). He then escorts Lady Augusta to the point where she is led to safety through ruinous buildings and via a course which, curiously “appeared neither direct nor easy, and through an atmosphere which was close to a smothering degree, and felt at the same time damp, and disagreeable to the smell, as if from the vapours of a new made grave” (CD 144).

Death, body parts and the all too physical nature of the human body are never too far away from the reader’s view in *Castle Dangerous*. Body parts are not so prevalent in *Count Robert of Paris*, but here the emblems of death and encryption are, nevertheless, always at hand. Indeed, Constantinople is presented to us as a city in a state of partial ruin, the monuments and grave decorations of former years and former religions falling into decay alongside the modern city. In this late text Agelastes meets Hereward in a temple devoted to the Egyptian goddess Cybele, populated by half-demolished shrines and stone remains of the bovine deity Apis (CR 91), ruined vaults, and the fragments of huge stone statues (94). One could contrast this with the more overt faith in tomb restoration, and by implication the possibility that fiction may operate as a site of commemoration, in the much earlier *Tale of Old Mortality*. Several of the characters in the novel are themselves entombed in various ways; Ursel seems captured within a living death in the dungeons of Alexius’s castle, inhabiting what is described as a region at odds with “the inhabitants of the upper world.” As Alexius travels towards this prison we are told that he passes ranges of dungeons until he reaches “the lowest story of the building, the base of which was the solid rock, roughly carved, on which were erected the side walls and arches of solid but unpolished marble” (CR 274). This, we discover, is a kind of living grave which emits no sunlight and which is carved out of the solid stone.

Indeed, while actual body parts may not be as overtly present in *Count Robert* as in *Castle Dangerous*, nevertheless there is one bizarre incident where bodies do become fragmented. This is, of course, that ludicrous moment when Count Robert, deceived by Alexius’s automaton creatures, strikes at a lion with a sword so that “its head burst, and the steps and carpets of the throne were covered with wheels, springs, and other machinery, which has been the means of producing its mimic terrors”; once again the body is reduced to its mere component parts, here equated with no more than the springs and cogs of a ludicrous machine. By their very nature these automatons challenge the limits

of the body as they mimic (but of course are not themselves) physical creatures, just as some of the statues in the palace are described as being human all but for the breath of animation (*CR* 130). Similarly, the orang-outan Sylvan, as Ian Duncan acknowledges, challenges the limits of what it is to be human since he is apparently so in nearly every form except his excessive size and hairiness, and in his incapacity for speech (“Trouble”). This “furry gentleman” as he is called thus inhabits some kind of strange liminal state, in comparison with which the parameters of a *human* body are simultaneously defined and limited (*CR* 170). Evan Gottlieb has suggested that “there are plenty of moments in Scott’s prose that anticipate at least some of the spirit of posthumanism as it regards human-animal relations,” and indeed if we read these episodes in terms of recent critical approaches we might argue that the post-human (mechanical creatures that emulate living ones) and non-human animals (the orang-outan) challenge the limits of an Enlightenment model of the human subject, thus foreshadowing more recent fiction (127).

Furthermore, the weakness and frailty of the human body is very much to the fore in *Count Robert*. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than with the controversial issue of Brenhilda’s pregnancy and her consequent failure to fight with honour in the lists. Throughout the novel Count Robert and his wife are described as being of magnificent strength and bodily prowess, constantly on the lookout for new opportunities to display their physical strength. Brenhilda is famed for her womanly vigour and is described as being “a figure, of the largest feminine size,” and “with as much beauty as can well fall to the share of an Amazon” (*CR* 114). However, even Brenhilda’s body is eventually defeated by the limits of its own physicality. Appearing in the lists while four months pregnant, Brenhilda stumbles and falls and does not rise again until attended to by Vexhalia, who has warned of the dangers of such a contest when a woman is in this condition (*CR* 341). And in case this might be read simply as drawing attention to the limits of the *female* body, we should recall that even Count Robert is “desperately wounded” at the Battle of Dorylaeum and as a result never reaches Jerusalem, but “disabled from combat” returns to Europe by sea (361).

Disabled and mutilated bodies also feature in *Castle Dangerous*. The most prominent example is that of the unfortunate Margaret de Hautlieu, who has been injured by a fall from the walls of the Abbey of St Bride as she tries to escape to join her lover. In a manner reminiscent of Frankenstein’s creature,

this poor patchwork girl has a face “seamed with many a ghastly scar” and with “the light of one of her eyes extinguished for ever, causing it to roll a sightless luminary in her head” (CD 106). To Lady Augusta she is like the “Loathly Lady in ‘The Marriage of Sir Gawain’” (113), a grim memento of her own bodily frailty that causes her to shudder “at the thought of her own beautiful countenance being exchanged for the seamed and scarred features of the Lady of Hautlieu” (114).

This concentration on broken bodies, on body parts and on the frailties of the physical body in Scott’s fiction foregrounds the fragile and potentially repulsive nature of the human body. As such, it could be argued that in these texts Scott is interested in the human body in what Julia Kristeva has called a state of *abjection*. This state, rather than re-inscribing the superiority of the mind, reinforces the idea of a body without a mind (or expelled from the mind) and thus inhabiting a space on the borders of culture, threatening, via its associations with the uncanny or frightening, “to reduce culture to chaos” since it is “shapeless, monstrous, damp and slimy” (Kristeva 14). The term “abjection,” associated with the “other” or the “not me” (Butler 181), is most often used in relation to female bodies (and both Margaret’s broken body and Brenhilda’s pregnant one offer good examples). As Chriselle Mackinnon has demonstrated, several of Scott’s women inhabit this potentially disruptive space. However, here it seems that this monstrous and potentially threatening space can equally be applied to corpses, body parts and mutilated or diseased bodies of either gender, and would certainly seem appropriate for those who haunt the damp and uncanny charnel house spaces that are included in a text like *Castle Dangerous*.

It is tempting to see this interest in the gross physicality of the body, isolated or perhaps “abstracted” from the mind, as being symptomatic of Scott’s own failing body as he writes these late texts. While Scott was disabled from childhood, he always resisted the idea that this placed physical restraints upon him. However, by the time that he was writing *Count Robert* and *Castle Dangerous* he had suffered several strokes and he spoke of a kind of “stuttering” between his head and his pen (Scott, *Journal* 261). In *Count Robert of Paris* he makes overt reference to his illness, describing it as a “dangerous disorder, incident to the time of life which he has reached,” which has “attacked the author with a severity not very capable of being consistent with the works of the imagination” (362). Many critics have explained the strangeness (and

usually also the inadequacy) of these late texts in this way, and while some, like Philip Hosbaum, Kurt Gamerschlag, and more recently Ian Duncan and Caroline McCracken-Flescher, may have argued for more positive readings of them, many more critics have seen them as being unreadable, taking Scott's own suggestion that they "smelt powerfully of the apoplexy" simply as a statement about their failure.

However, it is also possible that the whiff of the grave which surrounds these late texts can be read more meaningfully, and that Scott's concentration on the body (including his own) as abject, or to put it more straightforwardly, his interest in body parts, mutilation and the limits of the body, might be interpreted in more positive terms. Rather than simply re-inscribing a Cartesian split between diminishing mind and increasingly disintegrating body Scott begins to question the very nature of a whole or essential body that can be placed in opposition to the mind, since such abject bodies refuse to be fixed into any stable or unified form.

It is in this that the reading offered here intersects with feminist criticism, as many feminist theorists suggest that to see the female body as abject may not necessarily be a negative perspective, since it also allows for that body to be transgressive or subversive. For Kristeva, for example, the abject can be salvaged for feminism. Positioning the body within this liminal condition allows it to be seen as dynamic rather than static, thus evading containment (Brook 45). Within this framework pregnant bodies, such as Brenhilda's, may be in some sense monstrous, or at best socially embarrassing (thus explaining Cadell's and Lockhart's squeemishness about publishing the novel at all), but they are also transgressive, since they are in a continuously changing form and, moreover, by their very state of gestation, dissolve the boundaries between self and other.

It is perhaps hardly surprising that much commentary on the body has been generated by feminist criticism, since it is the female that is frequently equated with the body, rather than the mind, in the history of western philosophy and thought. Feminist criticism has sought to find ways out of this limiting binary opposition, both by attempting to reposition the feminine in relation to the mind and, more fundamentally, by challenging the very nature of the binary by positing the body as being in a state of fluidity. This resists any straightforward essentialist conception of it that would seek to place it in simple opposition to

the mind (which of course has itself been recognised as being in a state of flux since the outset of the twentieth century).

Perhaps the most relevant example of this challenge to any idea of essentialism in relation to the female body is that offered by Judith Butler who, following Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement that "one is not born a woman but rather *becomes* one" (301), suggests that all gender is, in fact, an act of continuous performance. She writes:

Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. . . .

. . . Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts there would be no gender at all. . . .

. . . Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (Butler 190-91)

These ideas offered a compelling intervention in feminist thought and suggested a challenge to binary ideas of gender that has become more prevalent ever since. By challenging the idea of an essential gender identity that pre-dates its insertion in a series of performative acts, Butler's theories break down the hierarchy of male/female, masculine/feminine which has pervaded western thought. Moreover, by positing that there is no stable identity of agency outside of these repeated acts constituted in space and time, they also break down that Cartesian boundary between body and mind since the subject is located neither in body nor in mind, but in that series of performances (or discourses) by which it is constituted.

These ideas may seem quite far removed from Scott. However, it has long been noted that there is a good deal of cross dressing in his work (one might think of George Staunton when dressed as Madge Wildfire, for example, or Darsie Latimer in female attire when held captive by his uncle), and a concern

with the more overt *performance* of gender is a feature of Scott's late texts. To give an example, *Castle Dangerous* opens with a description of the minstrel Bertram entering Scotland in the company of Lady Augusta who, of course, is disguised as the page Augustine. This is reminiscent of the treatment of Clare in one of Scott's earliest works, *Marmion*, reminding us that such transgressive episodes are evident throughout this author's career. The language with which this is described in *Castle Dangerous* is, however, particularly worthy of note:

The younger voyager was apparently in early youth, a soft and gentle boy, whose Scalvonic gown, as the appropriate dress of the pilgrim, he wore more closely drawn about him than it would seem the coldness of the weather authorized or recommended. His features, imperfectly seen under the hood of his pilgrim's dress, were prepossessing in a high degree; and though he wore a walking sword, it seemed rather to be to comply with fashion than from any hostile purpose. There were traces of sadness upon his brow, and of tears upon his cheeks; and his weariness was such, as even his rougher companion seemed to sympathize with, while he privately participated also of the sorrow which had left its marks upon a countenance so lovely. They spoke together, and the eldest of the two assumed the deferential air peculiar to a man of lower rank addressing one to whom he is willing to pay the respect due by an inferior to his superior, and had even in his tone something that amounted to interest and affection, though couched in the most respectful attitude and manner. (*CD* 7-8)

Dressed as a page, Augustina not only mimics but has become a "he"; his looks suggest to the reader (or observer) not that he is female, but that he is "a soft and gentle boy" in early youth. His weariness, tears and lovely countenance denote not that he is a woman, but that he is a superior being addressed by his rougher companion. It is Augustina's dress that is "so shaped as to give her the air of the other sex," as if gender is something that can be assumed by wearing the appropriate clothes. Moreover, Bertram advises her that if she also adopts "an unwashed brow, an unkempt head of hair" and a "saucy" look she will easily "resemble the minstrel boy, whom [she wishes] to represent in the present pageant" (*CD* 9). As Nancy Moore Goslee recognises, while Augusta may

ultimately fall into the happy ending expected of romance narratives, her behaviour is potentially transgressive and she “is no passive pawn,” both dressing as a boy and assuming, for a time at least, the active role associated with masculinity (67).

If gender is simply a matter of performance, however, so too are other aspects of identity and these are also foregrounded in the opening pages of the novel. Instructed by Augustina to treat her/him not as a female superior but as the page whose identity she has assumed, Bertram comments: “If your ladyship can condescend to lay aside your quality, my own good-breeding is not so firmly sewed to me but that I can doff it, and resume it again without losing a stitch of it” (CD 8). Again, the language used here is suggestive. Identity is not something intrinsic to the self—“firmly sewed” to the body—but something which can be put on and off at will, a set of clothes that constitutes the self we choose to become at any given moment; gender—and indeed other aspects of identity—can be considered a form of agency since we can, as our society now acknowledges, “choose to identify” our own sense of self rather than perceiving it to be either fixed or static.

An apparent awareness of the fluidity of identity and of its essentially performative nature is also to be found later in the text. While dining at the home of Tom Dickson, for example, Bertram again suggests that outward clothes may alter the character of the man, for he comments that “the young knight, when he is sheathed in his armour, is as it were a different being from him who feasts in halls among press of ladies” (CD 12). Sir Aymer, increasingly frustrated by Sir John Walton’s fears and superstitions, suggests that he “was become a very woman” (CD 64) by his exhibition of these, and later instructs him to “be a man, and support with manly steadiness these unexpected occurrences.” It is as if by giving way to his confusion and adopting the part of a woman in his uncertainty, Walton has literally been unsexed, not simply *acting* as a woman, but *becoming* one (CD 124). Indeed, all the events in this text are presented as if they were being staged in some way, as if all the characters are no more than performers of the events that are described; Turnbull, for example, reminds Lady Augustina that she “plays [her] own part in the drama, which, unless [she] continues on the stage, will conclude, unsatisfactorily to us all” (CD 146). Similarly, the unfortunate Margaret of Hautlieu recalls her duty and “assumed the look proper to a heroine of that age” (CD 185).

Corrupt, political, scheming and hypocritical to varying degrees, there is a sense in which all the characters in *Count Robert of Paris* are playing a part. Brenhilda is the most interesting character to look at here because she subverts the expectations of gender through her performances, that is, through the roles she assumes. Brenhilda's subversion of gender expectations is interesting for it is never suggested that she is simply *manly*, but, rather, that she performs the actions of a man, and in doing so subverts the normal set of assumptions that accompany gender. Our first encounter with Brenhilda exemplifies this, for she is described as being "An armed knight, brilliantly equipped—yet of something less than knightly stature" (CR 111). She is, then, both a woman and unlike one, like a knight but not quite one either.

It is this combination of gender performances by one person that confuses others in the novel; Agelastes for example describes Brenhilda as "female in her lineaments, her limbs, and a part at least of her garments; but, so help me . . . most masculine in the rest of her attire, in her propensities and in her exercises" (CR 180). It is similarly the mixed roles she plays—the combination of her beauty and her strength—male and female attributes in the one body—that disconcerts the suitors who are invited to fight against her in the lists, as "the gallants who encountered Brenhilda were one by one stretched on the sand; nor was it to be denied, that the situation of tilting with one of the handsomest women of the time, was an extremely embarrassing one" (CR 113).

It is clear that such behaviour is in many ways transgressive, both at the time when the novel is set (as Scott imagines it) and when it was written. While Anna Comnena and her mother Irene admire the Count and his wife as fine specimens of human strength and beauty, they also find Brenhilda "rather too haughty and too masculine to be altogether pleasing" (CR 135). Relatively late in the novel the philosopher Agelastes tells her that by her behaviour she has "sacrificed everything that is honourable or useful":

Believe me, fair lady, that the true system of virtue consists in filling thine own place gracefully in society, breeding up thy children, and delighting those of the other sex; and anything beyond this may well render thee hateful or terrible, but can add nothing to thy amiable qualities. (CR 268)

For Agelastes, by refusing to perform the gender roles normally assigned to her sex, Brenhilda has rendered herself abject and is thus “hateful” and “terrible.” Some of the resistance to *Count Robert of Paris* by Cadell and Lockhart possibly also came from their distaste for this transgressive behaviour. While attitudes toward women were changing during the Romantic period, and while women were beginning to have some new freedoms, Brenhilda’s behaviour was still not acceptable for upper-class women. However, the novel is more positive about what Brenhilda represents than we might have expected from the period of its composition. As Jackson-Houlston puts it: “Though we can recognize Agelastes’ speech as a rejection of the imitation of an inadequate version of masculinity, it is heavily ironized by his role in the novel” (214).

While the appearance of two women in the lists is described as being “neither suited [for] the presence of a Christian people, nor that of an emperor who derived his authority from a Christian gospel” (*CR* 338), nowhere in the text is Brenhilda’s transgressive behaviour anything other than condoned. Interestingly, Scott could see no way of completing his text without including such an “unChristian” encounter. Indeed, Scott seems to have been so fascinated by the fluidity of gender and identity which Brenhilda represents, and by the possibilities of reconstituting identity which she apparently offers, that he recorded in his *Journal* that it made his head “swim” to think of bringing the novel to a close in any other way (654). Just as Scott’s interest in these late texts with broken bodies and body parts seems to signify a concern with the lack of a unified subject and of a unifying body for it to inhabit, so too his concern with the performance of identity—both gendered and otherwise—reinforces the fluidity of an identity that is not contained by the body but which is rather acquired via the clothes we put on, the manners and actions we assume, and the social acts we choose to perform. As such, in these late texts subjectivity seems to be located neither in mind nor body but rather, to adopt Butler’s term, in “corporeal style.”

So what, if anything, does this suggest about Scott’s late fiction and how we might encounter it as readers? While the parallels that can be drawn are richly suggestive, I am not of course claiming that Scott was some kind of early pre-cursor of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. However, what I would suggest is that once we become more aware of the exploration of the fluidity of identity that is offered in these late texts, and of the ways in which they disrupt the notion of identity as being something located within an

essential and essentialising body, we may also begin to find new ways to comprehend and discuss the modes of discourse through which they operate.

The strange narrative style of these novels has been long recognised by readers and critics, and has contributed to their dismissal as being virtually unreadable. Recent re-assessments of the late fiction, however, have begun to suggest that we should re-visit it in order to consider whether there may be more of value in it than has been hitherto recognised. This reassessment has been greatly aided by J. H. Alexander's editions of *Count Robert* and *Castle Dangerous* for the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels. These offer a master-class in textual reconstruction. However, it can be argued that the unconventional narrative style of these novels is a reflection of Scott's on-going exploration of how creativity might proceed in the face of epistemological indeterminacy. Scott's work, I have proposed elsewhere, follows a trajectory through which he develops an increasing scepticism towards the ways in which language (and hence narrative) can communicate. This culminates in the late texts, with the author's attempt to move beyond the "exhaustion" (to borrow a postmodern term) that such scepticism generates, toward a regeneration based on and in the act of story-telling. For example, one might consider the ways in which, rather than following expected teleological narrative modes, these texts instead seem to operate by strategies of disruption, dead ends, false start and fractures (Lumsden, *Walter Scott* 197-226).

To elaborate, this can be readily seen in a tendency towards digression and a resistance to closure in *Count Robert of Paris*. Franco Moretti has noted that the bare bones of plot are seldom really the point in the nineteenth-century novel, which operates by adopting what he terms "filler," the "spaces between plot development" that are inhabited by apparently excess material (388). This is certainly the case in Scott's late texts, and was a feature of *Count Robert* that was noted by Ballantyne, who cited such digression as a reason for his objections to the early stages of the manuscript. Writing to Scott after reading the opening of the novel, he said: "I confess I think 24 pages an enormous length for a single conversation, of no great interest perhaps, between Achilles & Hereward; but it would be grievous to stop before the experiment is fairly made. *You* are of the opinion the subject is an excellent one, whereas *I* do not even know what the subject is" (qtd. in Alexander, "Essay" on *CR* 388). As this comment implies, digression has apparently been substituted for plot by Scott,

as if it has become the primary subject of the text, thus evading the impulse to reduce the novel into any final or closed form of determinacy.

Similar strategies can also be seen at work in *Castle Dangerous*. Many of the long conversations in this text—such as that between Aymer and Bertram near the start of the text—were thought to be superfluous and were cut. However, by doing so, Cadell and Lockhart failed to recognise that these discursive and digressive elements are in fact intrinsic to the meaning that is being generated. This lengthy conversation is, in fact, an opportunity for Aymer and Bertram to tell each other a series of stories, and it becomes apparent that this is less a dialogue than a vehicle for story-telling, thus pre-figuring the imperatives that dictate the novel as a whole. Rather than only being generated by a series of teleological drivers, this narrative is also founded upon a series of dead-ends and false starts before finally splintering off into a series of tangentially related stories—that of Augustina, of Thomas the Rhymer, of Border Warfare, and of Margaret de Hautlieu, for example—none of which can be readily identified as the main plot line. The novel ends, consequently, less with resolution than with what Alexander has called “the protracted to-ing and fro-ing of the negotiations” so that the text fractures into a series of broken narratives, dead ends, and digressions. As Alexander concludes, “The reader soon accepts that this is a dreamlike fiction, in which transitions are sometimes abrupt and characters like the sacristan appear and disappear in response to imaginative requirements, rather than as part of more conventional plotting” (“Essay” on *CD* 279).

If we set this observation about the fragmented narrative style of the body of Scott’s late fiction alongside a more keen understanding of the ways in which physical bodies are treated in it, we begin to see that the fragmented, broken and transgressive corporeal bodies with which *Count Robert* and *Castle Dangerous* are inhabited in many ways mirror the style of discourse by which these texts are operating. In other words, if the way in which bodies are treated in them offers a challenge to essentialist notions of corporality, so too the discursive styles of these texts may offer a similar challenge to teleological, fixed and/or closed forms of narrative, thus resisting epistemic closure and its well-rehearsed associations with death. These novels that “smell of the apoplexy” may offer, then, not an acceptance of encroaching old age and death but rather a resistance to them.

These concepts come together particularly well in the treatment of Thomas the Rhymmer in *Castle Dangerous*. Bertram's ostensible reason for visiting the castle is to consult Thomas's manuscript, and early in the novel he indicates that his motivation for doing so was inspired by an event that occurred just after the events of the "Douglas larder" described above. It is worth considering this episode in some detail. Here Bertram informs Sir Aymer that on the night of the massacre, the minstrel Hugo Hugonet attempts to rescue a book of Thomas's poetry from being destroyed as part of the general destruction. Having secured the volume, Hugo falls into a "fit of reverie" during which he is approached by a vision of Thomas himself. As Hugo reads, an invisible hand seems to move the book and a shadowy human form begins to appear:

The Bard of Douglas . . . gazed upon the object of his fear, as if he had looked upon something that was not mortal; nevertheless, as he gazed more intently, he became more capable of discovering the object which offered itself to his eyes, which themselves grew by degrees more keen to penetrate what they had witnessed. A tall thin form, attired in, or rather shaded with, a long flowing dusky robe, having a face and physiognomy so wild and overgrown with hair as to be hardly human, were the only marked outlines of the phantom before him; and, looking more attentively, Hugonet was still sensible of two other forms, the outlines, it seemed, of a hart and hind, which appeared half to shelter themselves under the robe of this supernatural person. (*CD* 39)

The body of Thomas described here captures many of the features of physical corporality described in Scott's late fiction generally; his body appears as parts rather than as a whole—his hand appears, the form of his clothes and then a face. Like Sylvan, he is so overgrown with hair as to be hardly human, and, existing only as shadow and apparition, he inhabits a liminal space both within and without the body. Described in this way, Thomas's body, like other bodies in these texts, is rendered abject, a subject of horror and terror that makes this uncanny spectre a "ghastly and fearful companion for the living," as Hugo puts it (*CD* 39).

Moreover, if Thomas encapsulates the fluidity of bodily form that offers a challenge to any essential construction of it, so too his own written text offers

a kind of fractured discourse similar to that which generates Scott's own. It has, we are told, "been so often altered and abridged as to bear little resemblance to the original" (CD 38), thus ironically reflecting the plight of Scott's late novels at the hands of Cadell and Lockhart. More significantly, Bertram himself later discovers that Thomas's manuscript is virtually "incomprehensible": "Accordingly the minstrel began to recite verses, which, in our time, the ablest interpreter could not make sense out of" since they are "not the less wearisome as they were, in a considerable degree, incomprehensible," and the excerpts Scott provides are a good illustration of this point. Indeed, these verses are described as no more than "dubious and imperfect vaticinations" (CD 156).

The treatment of Thomas the Rhymer in *Castle Dangerous*, then, brings together the bodily and textual indeterminacy that marks Scott's late texts. Moreover, Scott's re-engagement with Thomas at the end of his career is also, in a sense, an act of waking the dead, since it resurrects the motif of the minstrel poet, and of Thomas in particular, that has been present since the start of his career. Thomas reminds the reader of this when he states that he is "permitted at times to revisit the scenes of [his] former life" (CD 40), and Hugo comments that it is indeed "a night of terror that calls even the dead from the grave, and makes them the ghastly and fearful companions of the living" (39).

However, in presenting both the physical body and the narrative body in this way, Scott is, of course, also offering an act of resistance to death in a more abstract way. By positing the body as a fluid site of performance and discourse, these texts subvert the binary split between body and mind that has shaped western thought, since the abject or transgressive body destabilises the scaffolding upon which such dialectics may be built. Similarly, by resisting epistemological determinacy in his texts, Scott evades the closure intrinsic to teleological narrative and instead re-inscribes the discursive and open-ended practices of story-telling. The textual body and the representation of bodies within the text thus come together in *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous*, and in doing so privilege neither mind nor body but rather, I would suggest, offer a challenge to the very categories upon which such binaries rest.

Reading these late texts in this way may encourage us to re-engage with Scott's fiction and to recognise that it addresses questions that are particularly relevant for our own age, when concepts of gender identity are increasingly interrogated. From the publication of *Scott in Carnival* onwards, a generation of critics has "roughened up" our readings of Scott's fiction and encouraged us

to read it in new and innovative ways. That such readings are possible, however, perhaps reveals something fundamental about Scott; he was translated into many languages both in his lifetime and afterwards, and his work was also adapted into many forms. Ann Rigney suggests that this is indicative of the fact that Scott's work was inherently "portable," but argues that this was a phenomenon that came to an end in the early twentieth century. However, while Scott's work may have been diminishing in popularity in the English-speaking world, it was being introduced into China and elsewhere, bringing it to a whole new group of readers who were finding it both deeply interesting and relevant. As Tara Ghoshal Wallace recognises, this "quintessentially 'Scottish' novelist was also a deeply engaged citizen of the world," and so can be read globally (176). Similarly, recent criticism has shown that Scott's fiction is vitally open to new ways of reading. As Gottlieb states: "Scott's fictions make particularly fertile ground for the seeds of contemporary theory to take root and grow" (5). Through such approaches his work can, perhaps, once again be awakened from the dead.

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