Studies in Scottish Literature

Volume 44
Issue 2 *Reworking Walter Scott*

Article 13

12-31-2018

Allegories of the Heart

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ALLEGORIES OF THE HEART

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How to chart and interpret reworkings of Scott in nineteenth-century literary and other art forms is complicated at every turn by the fact that the intricacies of these reworkings extend far beyond specific adaptations, translations, reinterpretations, or illustrations of his works (including the "work" of his life—shaped, for most nineteenth-century readers, by Lockhart's biography). We glimpse and half-hear Scott in unexpected places, and in the disguised and shadow modes which Judith Wilt and Ian Duncan have analysed, and which Ann Rigney, Nicola Watson, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, and others have brought to bear on reinterpretations of nineteenth-century popular and consumer culture.[1] In this essay I follow through some ideas about what happens, additionally to this, when Scott is a far less visible or audible presence in later works; when he seems, instead, to be veiled or told otherwise—to borrow terms which signal the figurative narrative of allegory.

The impetus for my analysis is a particular, though sometimes subsumed, meaning of the term "reworking;" that is, as in the arts of needlework and masonry, an intricate, crafted, retracing or remodeling of established patterns. In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne creates an emblem "glittering in its fantastic embroidery," an imposed identifier which is crafted as personal and which becomes, as an individual created object, read

[1] Judith Wilt, *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), esp. ch. 3, and "Afterlives," in Fiona Robertson, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 143-55; Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

and understood differently.[2] Allegory, or telling otherwise, is an apposite term for literary reworkings of Scott in a century saturated by his texts, their addenda, and the many alternative narratives his works explicitly set out as unexplored, discarded, or inexpertly realised. Scott's works proved unusually portable in a wider creative culture partly because they embodied earlier motifs and stories in styles which prompted continual refashionings by later writers and artists. The examples through which the present essay develops this sense of "reworking" are all versions of "the heart"—as physical organ, as emotional centre for an individual or for a group, and as emblem. "Allegories of the Heart" denotes the heart—and in particular *The Heart*—told or represented differently; it is also the title of a projected collection of stories, written in the early 1840s, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. My key texts are one of the stories from that collection, "Earth's Holocaust" (1844), Hawthorne's later, longer, tale, *The Scarlet Letter*, and Scott's novels *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818) and *The Monastery* (1820). The analysis begins, however, with a much earlier text and with reworkings of that text in Scott.

In Book 20 of John Barbour's epic poem, *The Bruce* (completed c. 1375), the dying King Robert plays on the physical and metaphysical properties of the heart when he asks his followers to bear his own heart into the battles he can no longer fight, in the Crusades:

> Sua that the body may na wys
> Fullfill that the hart gan devis;
> I wald the hart war thidder sent
> Quharin consavyt wes that entent.[3]

"So that [my] body can in no way fulfil what the heart called for, I wish that the heart, wherein that resolve was conceived, be sent thither." The heart, here, is already both substitute and synecdoche, and its later representations become, by turn, talismanic and emblematic. Scott draws on and cites Barbour's *Bruce* frequently in his texts and paratexts, but tells the story of the Bruce's heart most directly in the First Series of *Tales of a Grandfather*

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[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Brian Harding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 160; cited below in text.

[3] John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. and trans. A. A. M. Duncan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), 753. Scott's 1832 introduction to *Castle Dangerous* (1831)—a novel inspired partly by Barbour—describes the silver case containing the remains of the heart of Sir James Douglas in the church of St Bride of Douglas; and, on the tomb, "the introduction of the HEART, adopted as an addition to the old arms of Douglas, in consequence of the knight's fulfilment of Bruce's dying injunction." Walter Scott, *Introductions and Notes from the Magnum Opus: Ivanhoe to Castle Dangerous* ed. J.H. Alexander *et al*. [EEWN, vol. 25b], (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 590-591; cited below as *Introductions.*

(1828), though even in this tale for his grandson a complex series of substitutions is involved: the new resolve in place of the old; the heart in place of the body; the emblem of the heart represented in the heraldic charge of the Douglas family (argent, a man's heart gules, crowned with an imperial crown or); and afterwards the redeployment of heraldic marks from battle to display on "seals, or upon silver plate, or painted on their carriages."[4] He tells his grandson, that is, a tale of substitutions at once historically complex and graphically direct. As Scott relates, Robert Bruce's heart was buried below the high altar at Melrose. The casket was first unearthed by archaeologists in 1921, reburied in a lead container, rediscovered in 1996, and officially re-laid to rest in 1998. As Scott also recounts, Bruce's body, interred in Dunfermline, had been rediscovered in living memory, "a little while before Master Hugh Littlejohn was born" (*ibid*., 22:176). Bruce's remains, cased in lead and wrapped in a golden shroud, were discovered in a vault in the grounds of Dunfermline Abbey, on 17 February 1818. Examination in 1819 revealed that the heart had been removed; and the remains were reinterred on 5 November 1819. Scott displayed at Abbotsford a piece of the tomb, and a cast of the skull by William Scoular. The separation of heart from body, a funerary practice resonant elsewhere in Romantic-Period iconography, literally and figuratively, is in the instance of Scott and the Bruce's heart both historically specific and emblematically charged. At the same time, unearthing the heart of Robert Bruce can be located as an idea pressing on Scott's fiction in this especially potent period (1818-20) of his writing life; but also as an idea awaiting supplementation.

Considered retrospectively, Scott initiated his play on hearts as observable, and as emblematic, in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818). The frame narrative of his novel is over-full of "hearts," while also leaving all its hearts empty, in that Edinburgh's Tolbooth stands as both guarantor of and distraction from the substance of the tale. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* turns on punishing a negative, a so-called "constructive crime" and on a series of substituted signs. As the King's Counsel declares at Effie's trial: "It was the very purpose of the statute to substitute a certain chain of presumptive evidence in place of a probation, which, in such cases, it was peculiarly difficult to obtain."[5] *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* works by processes of substitution. So, Jeanie opens the needlecase which Queen Caroline gives her as if it contained Effie's pardon, but the note for fifty pounds which it

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[4] *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*., ed. J. G. Lockhart, 28 vols (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834-6), 22:175, in account of Bruce's death, and heart (170-76).

[5] Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818), ed. David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden [EEWN, vol. 6] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 213; cited in text below as *Heart*.

actually contains is not representative of that pardon, or is so only ironically, even subversively. Additionally, and despite its emblematic title, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* eschews signs of identity and display. Until the fourth volume, which suddenly breaks out in a rash of ducal insignia on boats, on flags, and on the decorated personage of Argyle's "worthy substitute," Duncan of Knockdunder, there is a persistent, intriguing, use of sublimated or negated armorial devices, especially noticeable when Argyle takes Jeanie to meet the Queen in "a plain chariot and four horses, the pannels without arms, and the servants without liveries" (*Heart,* 425, 328). The "Earl of Blazonburry, Lord Flash and Flame" whose order for "crests, coronets, housings, and mountings conform" is being delayed while Bartoline Saddletree opines on the law, is an alien extravagance at the start of the novel (*Heart,* 41). What armorials there are, notably at "this castle of the sluggard," Dumbiedikes, are clumsy and funereal, "exhibiting some attempt at armorial bearings" and a "mouldering hatchment"—that is, a mourning emblem (*Heart,* 230). Instead Scott gives us Effie's "inward wound" and the secret signs of penance only discovered on Staunton's body after his death (*Heart,* 468, 462-463). The negation and covert internalization of displays of identity extends to the "heart" itself; for, as the amateur antiquary Captain Clutterbuck points out in his closing editorial remarks, the heart has in any case been removed. The novel both represents and serves as substitute for the old Tolbooth, demolished in 1817, and in modern times the two are commemorated together in the inscribed stone inset to the pavement on Edinburgh's High Street. The novel comes to stand in for, but also to stand in the way of, any verifiable historical narrative. In another sublimation and negation the stones composing the Tolbooth's gateway for condemned criminals were reassembled in the South Court, what Scott in his Magnum note called the kitchen court, of Abbotsford. These substitutions of the heart are complex; but the result for readers, and for literary traditions engaging with this novel, the Heart of Mid-Lothian is an elusive centre in the novel which bears its name.

Two years after *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in the frame-narrative of *The Monastery*, Captain Clutterbuck reappears, this time helping a visiting ex-Benedictine monk retrieve from the ruins of Kennaquhair Priory (a fictional version of Melrose Abbey) the remains of the heart of its last abbot, Ambrosius, sealed in a porphyry case enclosed in a small leaden box. In return for this treasure, which he intends to remove from the "land of heresy" to a safe haven in Roman Catholic Europe, the Benedictine entrusts to Clutterbuck the tale of Reformation times which (it is alleged) forms the basis of *The Monastery* and its sequel *The Abbot* (also 1820).[6] The removal

[6] Scott, *The Monastery* (1818), ed. Penny Fielding [EEWN, vol. 9] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 17, 21-22; cited in text below as *Monastery*.

has contemporary relevance: the Benedictine is in exile from post-Revolutionary France, and in removing a Catholic heart symbolically returns his faith, too, to the Catholic states of continental Europe, in return for a narrative of Protestant ascendancy. In the Magnum Opus introduction to *The Abbot* Scott acknowledges that the heart of the *Monastery* frame is lost in the narrative that follows it, stating that "The Monastery was designed, at first, to have contained some supernatural agency, arising out of the fact, that Melrose had been the place of deposit of the great Robert Bruce's heart." Scott "flinched" from this idea and did not attempt to resume in *The Abbot*: "Thus, the incident of the discovery of the heart, which occupies the greater part of the Introduction to the Monastery, is a mystery unnecessarily introduced, and which remains at last very imperfectly explained."[7] This imaginatively potent invocation of loss is a prompt for any later writer attentive to its implications. Other details of the discovery of the abbot's heart carry forward to other times and places, too. The description of the burial site of the heart identifies a particular "sort of recess or chapel beneath a broken arch" marked by a stone carved with a coat of arms nobody, in Clutterbuck's present day, has been able to decipher (*Monastery*, 15). The Benedictine is better informed, telling him that "the arms on the dexter side are those of Glendinning, being a cross parted by a cross indented and countercharged of the same; and on the sinister three spurrowels for those of Avenel: they are two ancient families, now almost extinct in this country—the arms party *per pale*" (*Monastery*, 16). The Benedictine assumes that this information has been retained in the folk memory; but, replies Clutterbuck, "I have made several reconnoissances among the old people, in hopes to learn something of the armorial bearings, but I never heard of such a circumstance. It seems odd that you should have acquired it in a foreign land" (*Monastery*, 16). Exiles, in the Benedictine's view, are precisely those who retain memories of the "trifling particulars" lost in the original land: "It is possible, in like manner, that on the Potowmack or Susquehanna, you may find traditions current concerning places in England, which are utterly forgotten in the neighbourhood where they originated" (*Monastery*, 16).

In turning now to consider the heart in mid-nineteenth-century American fiction, I keep in particular view some details of the account so far: the heart found amid decay, "rubbish", and "trifles;" the heart's rendition as emblem and device; the unsettlingly physical ways in which (as in Barbour's *Bruce*) it can be displayed, and also concealed; and, most of all, the suggestion that it has been evoked and yet eluded in Scott's works. The iconography of the

[7] *Introductions*, 81. Scott returns to this in the Magnum note to the burial of the Abbot's heart in the Avenel Aisle in *The Abbot*, explaining that his original purpose had been to refer to the heart of the Bruce, and paraphrasing the passage from Barbour quoted earlier in this essay: *Introductions*, 101.

heart, as distinct from medical discourse upon it and also as distinct from a loose emphasis on feeling, romantic or otherwise, is marked in mid-century American prose, from Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) to the unsettling analogies with the Crusades which structure parts of Thoreau's lectures of 1851 and 1852, published ten years later as *Walking*, in which, Thoreau suggests, "We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return,—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms."[8] It was Hawthorne, however, who in the early 1840s worked on a series of tales which he conceived, but did not publish, as "Allegories of the Heart." Of the tales so grouped, which included "The Christmas Banquet," "Roger Malvin's Burial," "P's Correspondence," and "The Artist of the Beautiful," several were published instead in the *Democratic Review* and subsequently in the collection *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), and Hawthorne subtitled two of them—"Egotism; or, The Bosom-Serpent" and "The Christmas Banquet"—as being "from the unpublished Allegories of the Heart, casting them invitingly as part of a cluster readers could only glimpse, or imagine, and whose meaning is referred to, but also deflected from, a sequence of allegories. The broadly satirical direction of the dispersed "Allegories" (re-grouped for publication in the 1890s) is made all the more intriguing by the withholding of any key to the sequence, or direction about what kind of "heart" might be involved.

In one of the "Allegories," "Earth's Holocaust," published in *Graham's Magazine* in 1844 and subsequently in *Mosses*, readers are told that "this wide world had become so overburthened with an accumulation of worn-out trumpery, that the inhabitants determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire."[9] Into the flames are consigned, in turn, "all the rubbish of the Herald's Office;" the appurtenances of royalty; alcohol; tobacco; the marks of individual pride and affection, from millinery to sentimental memorabilia; all instruments of war; instruments of torture and execution; marriage certificates, paper money, title deeds; all of literature, "the weight of dead men's thought," including the narrator's own works; the decorative and architectural appurtenances of religion; finally, all bibles (*Tales*, 337, 349). All items consigned to the flames in "Earth's Holocaust" are mourned by a representative figure, such as "the Last Toper" and "the Last Hangman." The champion of heraldry is a gray-haired man "wearing a coat from the breast of which some star, or other badge of rank, seemed to have been forcibly wrenched away" (*Tales*, 338). Apparently a simple mark of his investment

[8] Henry D. Thoreau, *Essays*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 244.

[9] Hawthorne, *Selected Tales and Sketches*, ed. Michael J. Colacurcio (New York: Penguin, 1987), 336; cited below as *Tales*.

in the system he mourns, this unspecified "badge" becomes associated with deeper organs of existence as "Earth's Holocaust" progresses. Later, a spurned lover wishes to cast his heart into the fire, but cannot tear it from his breast; and a despairing young woman has to be restrained from throwing her whole body into the flames. As the conflagration reaches an end, however, one observer comforts those who are left to mourn the loss of their purpose in life, assuring them that the zealous reformers have omitted to consign to the flames the only thing which would have made any difference to the future of the world, "the human heart itself! ... Oh, take my word for it, it will be the old world yet!" The narrator is horrified by the possible truth of this: "The Heart—the Heart—there was the little, yet boundless sphere, wherein existed the original wrong, of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types." (*Tales*, 357).

The synecdoche of the heart torn from the body, of the disembodied and textually re-embodied heart, is recurrent in Hawthorne's writing. Perhaps most insistent of all is the remorselessly physical rendering of the heart in *The Scarlet Letter* as both an intricate emblem of a remorse "gnawing from the inmost heart outwardly," which has become a relic to be disinterred; and an investigable realm to be scavenged and probed (*Scarlet Letter*, 258, 124). For Hester, every stitch in the emblem has been felt "in her heart:" she feels "as if her heart had been flung into the street;" and covers her heart in case it can be "read" (as Dimmesdale does, also) (*Scarlet Letter*, 54, 55, 75). Chillingworth declares early in his investigations: "I shall read it [the letter of infamy] *on* his heart" (emphasis added), but his methods are increasingly invasive and excavatory (*Scarlet Letter*, 75). "He now dug into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold; or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave"—part of an insistent imaginary of grave-robbing going on throughout the novel (*Scarlet Letter*, 129; see also 124). In the graveyard, Chillingworth has gathered herbs growing on a grave of which he says: "They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret that was buried with him," a manifestation of hidden crime. Dimmesdale resists, arguing that there can be "no power, short of the Divine mercy, to disclose, whether by uttered words, or by type or emblem, the secrets that may be buried within a human heart" (*Scarlet Letter*, 131). Chapter 11 is titled simply "The Interior of a Heart." Finally, Dimmesdale reveals that Hester's scarlet letter "is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and that even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart!" (*Scarlet Letter*, 255). The embroidered letter '"A" is another type of heart, displayed outwardly but of hidden meaning—something to be interpreted, as it is in the "Custom House" frame narrative, in which Hawthorne discovers among "heaped-up rubbish" in a "forgotten corner" or "recess" of the second storey the small package containing the narrative record of Mr Surveyor Pue and the red embroidered "A," twisted

around the manuscript (*Scarlet Letter*, 28, 29, 32). In Hawthorne's 1838 story "Endicott and the Red Cross," another young woman wears the letter A on her breast, "in scarlet cloth, with golden thread, and the nicest art of needle-work," but, in contrast to the nuances of Hester's scarlet letter, this earlier "badge of infamy" is perfectly legible ("even her own children knew what that initial signified") (*Tales*, 219). What has happened to the "A" in *The Scarlet Letter* is that it has become allegorical of the heart—as in "Earth's Holocaust," "the little, yet boundless sphere." It has also, as I hope to have suggested by way of *The Bruce*, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, and *The Monastery*, taken on wider cultural and imaginative resonances that continually beckon out of the New England of Hawthorne's tale and back to much older stories, and the losses and ironies of which they tell. The Benedictine's potent words about the Potomac and the Susquehanna, in the frame narrative of *The Monastery*, deserve recognition, and new attention, in relation to "The Custom House," bringing as they do the Puritan past exhumed in *The Scarlet Letter* in relation to the Catholic remains of *The Monastery*. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in contrast to *The Monastery*, has been placed alongside *The Scarlet Letter* as an interrogation of Puritan modes of symbolization, most illuminatingly by Susan Manning.[10] But there is more to see even in this apparently more visible reworking. Some scenes in Scott's novel, entirely distinct from interrogations of modes of thought or of faith, are refashioned in *The Scarlet Letter*: Effie Deans in prison, crying out for "the sign of my shame, and the partner of my suffering," her absent child, and imagining herself on "a high, black gibbet, and me standing up, and such seas of faces all looking up" (as Hester stands on "a sort of scaffold" in "The Market-Place"); George Staunton walking in the procession to the General Assembly of the kirk at the right hand of the representative of monarchy, his resplendent outward identity about to unravel (as Dimmesdale walks in "The Procession"); the lost child "the Whistler," sold into slavery in America and escaping to live among an unspecified tribe of "wild Indians," in contrast to the insistently present emblem Pearl, translated into European aristocracy, her letters bearing "armorial seals upon them, though of bearings unknown to English heraldry."[11] It is appropriate to the figures by which Hawthorne approaches both emotional experience and the elusiveness of the remnants of the past to see these as subtle reworkings of Scott rather than as new renditions of aspects of his fictions.

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[10] Susan Manning, *The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 171-94.
[11] *Heart of Mid-Lothian*, 187, 190, and *Scarlet Letter*, 55; *Heart*, 446, and *Scarlet Letter*, 238-9; *Heart*, 467, and *Scarlet Letter*, 262.

Reworking Scott means being drawn into a dense fabric in nineteenth-century and later cultures. Scott is not always present in those cultures as a body of work to be redirected, translated, or told anew. His fictions continually present themselves as retellings: that is, his style of writing is always both weighty and provisional, already in imaginative dialogue with ways in which stories might be rendered differently. But there is something more elusive involved, too. When Scott tells the story of the Bruce's heart in *Tales of a Grandfather*, he describes, as I have indicated, a series of substitutions, by which the body is represented by the heart, and the heart, in turn, by an emblem. He then tells John Hugh Lockhart that Robert Bruce's heart was borne home again by "Sir Simon Lockhard of Lee," who took for his device "a man's heart, with a padlock upon it, in memory of Bruce's heart, which was padlocked in the silver case. For this reason, men changed Sir Simon's name from Lockhard to Lockheart, and all who are descended from Sir Simon are called Lockhart to this day. Did you ever hear of such a name, Master Hugh Littlejohn?"[12] The allegory of the heart is brought home and made specific to this reader, who is invited to take possession if it as an emblem "padlocked." Allegory is a public form relying on private interpretation and knowledge. Alongside "reworkings" of Scott we should also consider Scott as told otherwise, and as if with private insight.

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[12] *Miscellaneous Prose*, 22:175-6. In *The Talisman*, the amulet by which Saladin cures Richard I has its imaginative origin in the Lee Penny brought back from Spain by Sir Simon Lockhart: Scott, *The Talisman* (1825), ed. J.B. Ellis *et al.*, [EEWN, vol. 18b] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 369, and see also Scott's Magnum Opus comments on the novel in *Introductions*, 395-6.