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Article

Henry James Reads Walter Scott Again

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Abstract: This article reassesses Henry James's attitude to the historical novels of Walter Scott in light of James's observation, made early on in the First World War, that the current global situation "makes Walter Scott, him only, readable again". Scott's novels were strongly associated for James with young readers and a juvenile, escapist mode of reading; and yet close attention to James's comments on Scott in his criticism, notebooks and correspondence, and examination of a recurring image of children as readers and listeners to oral stories in the work of both authors, indicate that James engaged with Scott's presentation of the historical and personal past more extensively and in more complex ways than have hitherto been suspected. Scott's example as a novelist and editor notably informs James's practice in several late works: the family memoir *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), the New York Edition of his novels and tales (1907–1909), and the unfinished, posthumously published novel *The Sense of the Past* (1917).

Keywords: Henry James (1843–1916); Walter Scott (1771–1832); historical novels; collected editions; periodicals; oral tradition; autobiography; history of reading

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In a letter to Edith Wharton dated 9 November 1914 Henry James wrote of the difficulty he found in getting "back to work" on fictional composition in the early months of the First World War:

> It's impossible to "locate anything in our time." Our time has been *this* time for the last 50 years, & if it was ignorantly & fatuously so the only light in which to show it is now the light of that tragic delusion. And that's too awful a subject. It all makes Walter Scott, him only, readable again. (James 1990, p. 316)

The fiction James had most recently been attempting to locate in his time was *The Ivory Tower*, a novel set in the contemporary world of American finance which he had abandoned on the declaration of war in August. By the time of his letter to Wharton he had begun and then laid aside a volume of memoirs, *The Middle Years*, and was at work on *The Sense of the Past*, an unfinished story of time-travel which he had started to write as long ago as the autumn of 1899 and had abandoned after a couple of unavailing attempts; none of these books would ever be completed. The shift from contemporary to historical and historical-fantastical subjects reflects James's new sense of the impossibility of "our time" as a setting for fiction; and this feeling is congruous with the lament that recurs in letters to other correspondents from these months, that in failing to foresee a global war James had misunderstood the historical meaning of his own lifetime. As he wrote to Edward Emerson on 4 August 1914: "It fills me with anguish & dismay & makes me ask myself if *this* then is what I have grown old for, if this is what all the ostensibly or comparatively serene, all the supposedly *bettering* past, of our century, has meant & led up to. It gives away everything one has believed in & lived for" (James 1999b, p. 542).[1] In the context of all these developments and reactions, the question I propose in this essay is, simply, What does James mean when he tells Wharton, "It all makes Walter Scott, him only, readable again"? That is to say, what is it for James not just to re-read Walter Scott at this historical juncture but to find him "readable again," and *only* him?

[1] For James's immediate response to the outbreak of war in 1914, see Jolly (1993, pp. 206–14).

Two possibilities suggest themselves, and seem at first to point in opposite directions. On the one hand, *Scott is all that James can manage to read these days* ("Walter Scott, him only"). Familiar and unchallenging, Scott offers an escape from a state of current affairs "too awful" to write or even think about; to read him again would thus be a way of not dwelling on the "tragic delusion" of modern European history. Alternatively, and more interestingly, *the outbreak of war has done something to Scott to change the way he looks to James*, something that has made him "readable again" where for long years he had been unreadable. On this view, re-reading would count as a historical engagement rather than an escape from history. There is a real hesitation here, as the halting syntax of James's sentence indicates: "It all makes Walter Scott, him only, readable again." Scott draws a long train of associations for James on each side of the question; as I shall try to show, those associations play into each other over the course of his life, so that the provisional sense of opposed sides that I begin with will become harder to sustain as we go along.

James consistently refers to Scott as a suitable author for juvenile readers, especially young girls: for the sheltered Pansy Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), for instance, whose suitor Edward Rosier "was sure that Pansy had never looked at a newspaper, and that, in the way of novels, if she had read Sir Walter Scott it was the very most." To this way of thinking, Scott is safe reading because he does not raise questions of sexuality: besides venturing no further than the Waverley Novels, Pansy, Rosier knows, "would not have walked alone, nor have received letters from men, nor have been taken to the theatre to see the comedy of manners" (James 2011, p. 389). In his essay of 1899 on "The Future of the Novel" James has Scott in mind, amongst others, when he notes that it was for the sake of "the young" that the nineteenth-century Anglophone novel tended to avoid "any but the most guarded treatment of the great relation between men and women, the constant world-renewal" (James 1984b, p. 107). There is thus "an immense omission in our fiction," and yet James is not prepared to say that it has "vitiated the whole": "One can only talk for one's self, and of the English and American novelists of whom I am fond, I am so superlatively fond that I positively prefer to take them as they are. I cannot so much as imagine Dickens and Scott *without* the 'love-making' left, as the phrase is, out" (James 1984b, p. 108).

Taking Dickens and Scott "as they are," however, apparently need not commit one to re-reading them. In an essay from the same period on an unfinished novel by Thackeray, "Winchelsea, Rye, and 'Denis Duval'" (1901), James observes that as one gets older one finds "better" and "more generous" reasons for liking a particular book "than the particular book seems in a position itself at last to supply": "You go on liking 'The Antiquary' because it is Scott. You go on liking 'David Copperfield'—I don't say you go on reading it, which is a very different matter—because it is Dickens" (James 1901, p. 45). The logic of the Scott-Dickens pairing here seems to be that they are writers whom one might not expect to "go on reading" after one is no longer young, or no longer one of "the young." In a retrospective notebook entry made on 26 December 1881, at the end of the year *The Portrait of a Lady* came out, James records a failed attempt to read Scott again that yet coexists with a pleasant sense of going on liking him. He is recalling a tour of Scottish houses from the previous summer, in the course of which he visited Lord and Lady Reay at Laidlawstiel in the Scottish Borders, "in the midst of Walter Scott's country": "While I was at the Reays' I took up one of Scott's novels—*Redgauntlet*: it was years since I had read one. They have always a charm for me—but I was amazed at the badness of *R.*: *l'enfance de l'art*" (James 1987, p. 226). A little earlier in the same notebook entry James recalls his arrival at Cortachy Castle in Angus, the seat of the Earls of Airlie, one evening "in the gloaming," driving "through the dim avenues and up to the great lighted pile of the castle, where Lady A., hearing my wheels on the gravel (I was late) put her handsome head from a window in the clock-tower, asked if it was I, and wished me a bonny good-evening. I was in a Waverley Novel" (James 1987, p. 225). The novels of Scott "have always a charm for me"; and yet "it was years since I had read one": the durable *charm* of Scott is separable from reading experience, and seems to be more reliably experienced by extrapolating from memories

of early reading to fancy oneself "in a Waverley Novel" than by taking up any one of the Waverley Novels. So it may be significant in the first place that James in 1914 should have been moved, as it appears he was, to re-read Scott *at all*.[2]

In this mildly prejudicial system of associations, the infancy of the novelist's art ("*l'enfance de l'art*") recommends itself to child-readers. Exactly fifty years earlier, in a review of Nassau W. Senior's *Essays on Fiction* (1864) the twenty-one-year-old James had figured the experience of reading Scott as a beguiled return to the condition of childhood:

> Scott was a born story-teller: we can give him no higher praise. Surveying his works, his character, his method, as a whole, we can liken him to nothing better than to a strong and kindly elder brother, who gathers his juvenile public about him at eventide, and pours out a stream of wondrous improvisation. Who cannot remember an experience like this? On no occasion are the delights of fiction so intense. Fiction? These are the triumphs of fact. In the richness of his invention and memory, in the infinitude of his knowledge, in his improvidence for the future, in the skill with which he answers, or rather parries, sudden questions, in his low-voiced pathos and his resounding merriment, he is identical with the ideal fireside chronicler. And thoroughly to enjoy him, we must again become as credulous as children at twilight. (James 1984b, pp. 1203–4)[3]

James's review of Nassau W. Senior, his first piece of published criticism, appeared in October 1864 towards the close of the American Civil War. To pursue the line of thought I have been sketching so far, one could argue that for James to revert to Scott in 1914 at another moment of world-historical crisis means, simply, escapism: into a childishly irresponsible, "credulous" style of reading, in which fiction assumes a counter-factual authority; or again, into memories of his own early life as a reader or audience for narrative "improvisation," or as a younger brother.[4] All those associations and impulses are undoubtedly at work in the re-reading James describes to Wharton, and yet to trace out their ramifications in James's correspondence, criticism and textual practice is to find evidence of a more complex and engaged response to Scott's example.

James spent the first Christmas of the twentieth century with the child of his older brother: his niece Peggy, then thirteen years old. She had been placed at a school near London while her parents travelled in Europe, and James had offered to take her for the Christmas holidays at Lamb House, his home in Rye, East Sussex. He would need some time to himself, though, if only to keep up with seasonal correspondence, so Peggy would have to occupy herself a little; one can imagine him wondering what book she might enjoy, and not taking long to come up with Scott. The happy outcome of that choice can be glimpsed in the scenes of absorbed twilight reading that punctuate the letters James sent to friends during this week. Thus, as he writes to W. E. Norris "between tea and dinner" on 23 December 1900, Peggy "sits near me immersed in *Redgauntlet*" (James 1984a, pp. 171–72), the same novel he had taken up during his visit to the Reays' in 1881; later that evening James tells Norris that he has "now dined, and re-established my niece with the second volume of *Redgauntlet*," leaving him free to finish the letter "with a good conscience" and

[2] Of course, to say "It all makes Walter Scott, him only, readable again" is not quite the same thing as saying *I am reading Walter Scott again*. That James was or had lately been re-reading Scott in November 1914 is, strictly speaking, an implication of that sentence, not a fact directly stated; for the purposes of my argument I shall assume nevertheless that he does refer to an actual process of re-reading. Nor does he specify any works by Scott in this letter to Wharton, though he does name two modern novels he has found disappointingly unreadable: H. G. Wells's *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1914) and the second volume of Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1914).

[3] The view James voices here was conventional for critical readers of the period. Ann Rigney quotes this passage, alongside comments by Walter Bagehot, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others, to show that by the mid-late nineteenth century "appreciation for Scott [was] linked to 'youthfulness', either in the sense that he belonged to the childhood pleasures of those who were now middle-aged or that he offered 'cheerful' pleasures to people who were now young. [. . .] Enjoyment of Scott and adulthood were apparently incompatible" (Rigney 2012, pp. 207–8). Richard Maxwell notes a comparable feeling about Scott's suitability for readers of limited capacities: for nineteenth-century figures as various as Nietzsche, Ruskin and Marx, Scott was "a sickbed author," "the classic entertainment of the convalescent, the slowly recovering patient separated from the grind of the outside world but struggling to recover contact with it" (Maxwell 2001, pp. 464 n.5, 420–21).

[4] For connections between James's critical comments on the narrative procedures of "improvisational" novelists (Scott, Dickens, George Sand) and his own recollection of the personal past in his memoirs, see Follini (2000).

walk out to post it (James 1984a, p. 173).[5] Peggy is still reading two days later, as after dinner on Christmas Day James goes up to his study to write another letter (to Jessie Allen) and leaves her "alone, by the fire and the lamp in the little oak-parlour—if a young thing may be said to be alone who is deep down in Sir Walter." All the attention Scott is getting has made James "jealous," he remarks: Peggy "doesn't read her uncle; and perhaps it's as well!" (James 1984a, p. 175). Perhaps so, considering he was just about to publish *The Sacred Fount* (1901) and had recently brought out *The Other House* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *In the Cage* (1898), "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) and *The Awkward Age* (1899), complex fictions of sexual irregularity often centrally involving and sometimes viewed from the perspective of children or adolescents or very young adults, and absolutely unsuitable reading for the thirteen-year-old girl of the period, on both technical and thematic grounds. James's novels and tales of the late 1890s are persistently concerned with "the young" and with the older persons who worry about them; which includes worrying about when they may be judged old enough to not need worrying about, or when one might make oneself foolish or dangerous by carrying on worrying about them, and what the proper social mechanisms are for arranging to stop.

If these are most obviously problems for the nursery, the school room and the drawing room, there is for James nevertheless a cultural politics of such matters—and one that he figures, tellingly, in terms of the national politics of the historical past. In "The Future of the Novel" he notes that it appears to be the young themselves who are "making the grave discovery" of all that has been left out of fiction on their account, and figures their likely protest at these omissions as an impending revolution: "The simple themselves may finally turn against our simplifications; so that we need not, after all, be more royalist than the king or more childish than the children" (James 1984b, pp. 108, 109). It was the French Ultra-royalist faction during the Bourbon Restoration (1815–30) who were declared to be *plus royalistes que le roi* ("more royalist than the king") for opposing the constitutional monarchy of Louis XVIII. James's tart expansion of this formula—"more royalist than the king or more childish than the children"—offers a suggestive link with the associations Scott repeatedly draws, in *Redgauntlet* (1824) and other novels on episodes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scottish history, between Jacobitism, juvenility and story-telling.

It was well known to nineteenth-century readers that Scott's sympathetic interest in the Jacobite cause derived from tales he heard as a child. In the autobiographical fragment that was printed as the first chapter of the standard biography, John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, Scott refers to having conceived in early childhood "a very strong prejudice in favour of the Stuart family" from "the songs and tales of the Jacobites" recounted in the family circle at his paternal grandfather's farm in the Scottish Borders, and from "the stories told in my hearing of the cruelties exercised in the executions at Carlisle, and in the Highlands, after the battle of Culloden"; an uncle had seen the Jacobite prisoners executed in 1746, Scott recalls, "and it was probably from him that I first heard these tragic tales which made so great an impression on me" (Lockhart 1839, vol. 1, pp. 24–25).[6] As Scott acknowledged in a letter of 17 December 1806 to the antiquarian Robert Surtees, who had urged him to write on the Jacobite uprisings of the previous century, "the subject has often & deeply interested me from my earliest youth." His father, an Edinburgh solicitor, had "transacted business for many Highland lairds, and particularly for one old man, called Stuart of Invernahyle, who had been out both in 1715 and 1745, and whose tales were the absolute delight of my childhood":

[5] I assume that the copy of *Redgauntlet* mentioned in these letters belonged to James, and was not one Peggy had brought with her: the reference to "re-establish[ing her] with the second volume" of the novel suggests that in the interval between tea and dinner she had finished and returned to him the first volume and had received the second in exchange. *Redgauntlet* was originally published in three octavo volumes, a bibliographical format that Scott's success had made standard for nineteenth-century novels (Duncan 2012, p. 105); the revised and annotated text of the novel that Scott brought out in 1832 occupied two volumes of his Magnum Opus Edition. We cannot know what edition Peggy was reading, as no copies of novels by Scott are recorded in Leon Edel and Adeline R. Tintner's published listing of the contents of James's library. As they point out, volumes were dispersed from Lamb House at various moments after James's death, sometimes untraceably, and their list is thus "by no means complete; but it comprises in all probability the largest part of the library" (Edel and Tintner 1987, pp. 15, 56).

[6] James owned a copy of the 1839 second edition of Lockhart's *Memoirs* (Edel and Tintner 1987, p. 56).

> I believe there never was a man who united the ardour of a soldier and tale-teller, or man of talk, as they call it in Gaelic, in such an excellent degree; and as he was as fond of telling as I was of hearing, I became a valiant Jacobite at the age of ten years old; and, even since reason & reading came to my assistance, I have never quite got rid of the impression which the gallantry of Prince Charles made on my imagination. Certainly I will not renounce the idea of doing something to preserve these stories, and the memory of times and manners, which, though existing as it were yesterday, have so strangely vanished from our eyes. (Scott 1932, pp. 342–3)[7]

Scott's autobiography and correspondence alike testify to the historical force of oral story-telling. In the passages I have quoted, the tales he listened to in childhood create an "impression" of romantic Stuart royalism that survives the age of "reason" and the critical work of independent "reading," and outlasts as well the vanishing from cultural memory of the losing Jacobite cause and the Highland culture that supported it.

The historiographical project of Scott's novels is founded on a dual commitment, on the one hand to a progressive understanding of historical change, and on the other to a romantic antiquarianism.[8] A central line in Scott's Enlightenment plotting of history exposes ardent, imaginative young persons to romantic tales of the Scottish past, takes them some of the way towards embracing the Jacobite cause as a present-day manifestation of that narrative tradition, and brings them into personal and ethical peril before allowing them to retreat to a safe Hanoverian position and, as it were, grow up. The titular hero of Scott's first novel *Waverley* (1814), accidentally separated from the retreating Jacobite army in Cumbria in December 1745, sketches the overall trajectory of such narratives when he puts it to himself, "firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced" (Scott 2015, p. 312). And yet Scott never renounces his attachment to the tradition of past acts, manners and narratives, as source-material and as a repository of cultural value, even as he demonstrates the tragicomic folly of adhering to the past as a political cause. As with the relation to Scott and Dickens that James described in "The Future of the Novel," for Scott himself the resolution is a conscious compromise: his final choice is for progress and modernity, but he offers at the same time a richly equivocal critique of the losses, betrayals and reclamations on which that progress is inevitably founded.[9]

On a much smaller scale, Scott's role in James's relation to his niece displays a comparable doubleness: Scott functions both as a milestone to measure progressive temporal change and also as an agent of affective and imaginative continuity. Writing to Peggy on 8 November 1906, nearly six years after her *Redgauntlet* Christmas, James invites her to imagine her "poor fond old Uncle" at home at Lamb House, "where he sits writing you this of a wet November night and communes, so far as possible, on the spot, with the ghost of the little niece who came down from Harrow to spend her holidays in so dull and patient and Waverley-novelly a fashion with him" (James 1920, vol. 2, pp. 54, 55). Scott has become a shared reference for them. Known to James from his own youth and presumably recommended to Peggy on this basis in December 1900, we can imagine Scott serving them on that occasion as an all-but familial source of narrative ("a strong and kindly elder brother, [. . .] the ideal fireside chronicler" (James 1984b, pp. 1203–4)) and a substitute for the person who most obviously was *not* there at Lamb House: William James, who was seeking medical advice on the continent and whose ill health was a cause of anxiety for both his brother and his daughter. In November 1906 James is replying to a "delightful, though somewhat agitating letter" sent him by Peggy in her unhappy first weeks as an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr; he warmly commiserates with her on her homesickness,

[7] The letter to Surtees is printed, with some errors of transcription, in David Douglas's edition of Scott's *Familiar Letters* (Scott 1894, 1: 66–7); once again, we know that James owned a copy (Edel and Tintner 1987, p. 56).

[8] For a standard account of this duality in Scott, deriving from the historical, legal and philosophical writings of eighteenth-century Edinburgh *literati* and from the oral traditions of balladry and local history, see Daiches (1971).

[9] Ian Duncan gives an exemplary outline of the working of that critique in *Waverley* (Duncan 2012, p. 110).

but also takes the occasion to recall, with surprising vehemence, "the scant and miserable education, and educative opportunity, *he* had" in childhood and youth by comparison with "his magnificent modern niece": "No one took any interest whatever in *his* development, except to neglect or snub it where it might have helped—and any that he was ever to have he picked up wholly by himself" (James 1920, vol. 2, pp. 54–55). As in the final chapter of *Waverley* ("A Postscript, which should have been a Preface"), an act of retrospect is necessary to make apparent a historical transformation that, "though steadily and rapidly progressive, has, nevertheless, been gradual": "we are not aware of the progress we have made until we fix our eye on the now-distant point from which we set out" (Scott 2015, p. 375). James's letter looks back across forty-five or fifty years to a stage of his own life corresponding to Peggy's adolescence and young adulthood, and correlates that retrospect with a glance at her stay at Lamb House six years ago. The letter's immediate act of imagination puts James in touch with "the ghost of the little niece" she used to be; she has outlived that moment, and in her magnificent modernity is almost certainly not reading Scott at Bryn Mawr. At the same time, the value of her past reading persists in the historical texture of her relation to her uncle and contributes to the ground-work of their continuing friendship. Closest to the moment of writing, and substantiating his vision of Peggy's present conditions, James also harks back eighteen months or so to his American tour of 1904–1905, when he made two visits to the college Peggy has just entered: he read aloud his lecture "The Lesson of Balzac" at Bryn Mawr on 19 January 1905 (see James 1984a, p. 341) and returned for Commencement on 8 June to lecture on "The Question of Our Speech."[10]

Another relevant dimension of James's later sense of Scott concerns Scott's place in nineteenth-century print culture, in particular his association with certain modes of publication and with the textual practices involved in assembling a collected edition. The most significant reference to Scott in James's memoirs occurs in a passage that thinks about the serialization of Victorian novels. James closes the opening chapter of his second memoir, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), in pursuit of a train of associations fired by an extract from one of William's letters describing the family's life at Geneva in the winter of 1859–60; during these months, in an instance of the educational snubbing he referred to in his letter to Peggy, James was enrolled at a technical school following a scientific curriculum entirely unsuited to his interests and abilities, before joining William at the Académie de Genève in 1860. James picks up a reference to the *Cornhill Magazine*, then just launched, and notes "the lively importance, that winter, of the arrival, from the first number, of the orange-coloured earlier Cornhill—the thrill of each composing item of that first number especially recoverable in its intensity" (James 2016, pp. 267–68). The most important item for his present retrospect is Anthony Trollope's novel *Framley Parsonage*, which began its 16-month serial run in the inaugural January 1860 number of the *Cornhill Magazine*. The "thrill" of that recollected bibliographical circumstance moves him now "to live back into the time of the more sovereign periodical appearances" and make the highest claims for the cultural significance of serial publication:

> For these appearances, these strong time-marks in such stretches of production as that of Dickens, that of Thackeray, that of George Eliot, had in the first place simply a genial weight and force, a direct importance, and in the second a command of the permeable air and the collective sensibility, with which nothing since has begun to deserve comparison. They were enrichments of life, they were *large* arrivals, these particular renewals of supply [. . .]. These various, let alone numerous, deeper-toned strokes of the great Victorian clock were so many steps in the march of our age [. . .]. (James 2016, p. 268)

[10] For James's Commencement-day reading of "The Question of Our Speech" see the notes to Pierre A. Walker's edition of the lecture (James 1999a, p. 198), and O'Donnell (2003, pp. 140–43). James refers to this occasion when he tells Peggy that "by a blest good fortune, I happen to *know* your scholastic shades and so am able, in imagination, to cling to you and follow you round. I seem to make out that you are very physically comfortable, all round, and I have indeed a very charming image of Bryn Mawr, though I dare say these months adorn it less than my June-time" (James 1920, vol. 2, pp. 54–55).

In this vision, serial fiction *marks the time* of its periodical appearances, punctuating and enriching a period for those living through it, and *toning* it for those, like James, looking (or listening) back.

Scott enters this passage in *Notes* as a prior instance of the bibliographical principles of regularity and continuity that James reads out of the Victorian practice of serialization: "So it was, I remember too, that our parents spoke of their memory of the successive surpassing attestations of the contemporary presence of Scott." He emphasizes for both generations of readers "the never-to-be-equalled degree of difference made, for what may really be called the world-consciousness happily exposed to it, by the prolonged 'coming-out'" of a serialized novel (James 2016, pp. 268–69); or, as in Scott's case, of a series of novels. The Waverley Novels were not serialized in periodicals but appeared straight away as three-volume sets; Scott, however, consistently published a new novel each year, so that there is a sense in which these first editions approximated to the status of annuals. Upping the tempo, the 48 volumes of the Magnum Opus Edition—the first complete edition of Scott's fiction, with introductions and annotations by the author—would achieve a recognisably periodical frequency, coming out monthly between 1829 and 1833. By the time James came to write *Notes of a Son and Brother*, moreover, Scott's meaning for him was shaped in part by his exemplary status as a collecting, republishing, revising and preface-writing author, and by James's own recent, prolonged and laborious experience of assembling a collected edition of his own works: the 24-volume New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1907–1909).

While collected editions appear static and monumental after the fact, for the duration of their coming-out they are dynamic and periodical. In her study of the publishing history of the Magnum Opus, Jane Millgate observes that the autobiographical thread running through Scott's introductions contributed not only to the edition's discursive and bibliographical coherence, but also to the continuity of readers' experience of the successive volumes: "for those who were already familiar with the tales themselves the experience of waiting for the next introduction month by month must have provided a milder version of the interest that anticipation of the next title in the sequence had originally engendered" (Millgate 1987, pp. 111–12). For the first readers of the New York Edition likewise, the critical Prefaces James wrote for each novel or volume of tales could seem like a single work in process of serialization. The American issue of the New York Edition was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in America and appeared in two-volume instalments at irregular intervals between December 1907 and July 1909; the British issue, published by Macmillan, began coming out in September 1908 (Edel and Laurence 1982, pp. 137–38). In March 1908 a review of the first six volumes (comprising *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Princess Casamassima*) hailed "the series of prefaces" as "the feature of highest value that the new edition presents" and looked forward to the continuation of that series: "So rich and suggestive are the little essays presented in the volumes already published that the future positively hangs weighted with rich promise as the procession of volumes approaches. Here already is earnest of an *apologia* of the novelist's art such as no one else has ever given" (Anon 1908b, p. 418).

As Scott explained in the 1829 Advertisement to the Magnum Opus Edition, the introductions and notes to the volumes were designed to give accounts of "such circumstances attending the first publication of the Novels and Tales, as may appear interesting in themselves, or proper to be communicated to the public," to record "the various legends, family traditions, or obscure historical facts, which have formed the ground-work of these Novels," to identify "the places where the scenes are laid, when these are altogether, or in part, real," to give sources for "particular incidents founded on fact" and to explain references to "ancient customs, and popular superstitions" (Scott 2015, pp. 383–4). Millgate draws out the Magnum Opus notes' resemblance to "the kind of annotation Scott as antiquarian editor had supplied to the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*," the anthology of Border ballads that had been his first substantial literary work in 1802; she also shows how Scott's longer notes "helped to tie the historical moment of the narrative itself to the

moment of narration, or rather, the moment of annotation, thus affirming the continuities of past and present and the power of historical investigation and narration to make those continuities manifest" (Millgate 1987, p. 86).[11] The compound auto-biographical function of the notes in supplying sources for fictional characters and incidents in Scott's experience also has a commemorative, obituary aspect, as in the note in *Waverley* on the death of the Laird of Balmawhapple—a fictional character—at the historical Battle of Prestonpans (21 September 1745). The note is placed at the end of a chapter and follows a depreciatory comment by another character, a horse-dealer opportunistically attached to the Jacobite army, on Balmawhapple's stubbornness and poor horsemanship: the narrator describes this bathetic observation as the Laird's "elegy." The incident makes an unexpectedly grim conclusion to the essentially comic plotting of Balmawhapple's prior appearances in the novel; tacked on as a postscript to the main account of the battle, it is offered as an example of the "very trifling" losses suffered by the victorious Jacobites, a collateral death without military significance (Scott 2015, p. 251).

Scott's note re-inflects the episode in various ways. It informs us that "the character of this brutal young Laird is entirely imaginary" but that another Perthshire gentleman, "who resembled Balmawhapple in the article of courage only, fell at Preston in the manner described." Scott narrates that historical death, and then reveals its source:

> I remember, when a child, sitting on his grave, where the grass long grew rank and green, distinguishing it from the rest of the field. A female of the family then residing at Saint Clement's Wells used to tell me the tragedy of which she had been an eye-witness, and showed me in evidence one of the silver clasps of the unfortunate gentleman's waistcoat. (Scott 2015, p. 418 n.77)

This scene of memory concludes the note: as in his letters and autobiographical fragment, here again Scott appears as a child being told a story of the past. The authenticity of the tale rests on the testimony of the teller, who was also "an eye-witness," and by the material confirmations of the silver clasp and the grave. Like the "rank" grass that marks the continuing liveliness of this memory, the note itself distinguishes that grave "from the rest of the field"—marks it as part of the novel's historical "ground-work" (Scott 2015, p. 383), but also establishes it as the site of narrative transmission, a seat for story-listening.

Amongst the miscellaneous company commemorated in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, straggling along beside "the march of our age" (James 2016, p. 268), are many small casualties. The same letter of William's that contains his reference to the first numbers of the *Cornhill Magazine* mentions as well a little boy called Louis Osborne, the youngest son of another American family then living at Geneva, whose brother was at school with the younger James brothers. Henry quotes William: "'H. is telling a story to Louis Osborne, and I will try to make a sketch of them'" (James 2016, p. 264). The scene puts Henry in a version of the same fraternal story-telling position he would assign to Scott four years later, in his review of Nassau W. Senior. But not in *exactly* the same position: Henry was not Louis' elder brother; and his own elder brother, though present on this occasion, was not telling the story but drawing the scene of narration. The page of William's letter that contains this sketch is reproduced in facsimile in *Notes* (James 2016, p. 265), where it functions as an authenticating link to the recollected episode and to William himself—the ostensible subject of James's memoir, whose death in 1910 had been the cause of his undertaking a "Family Book" at all.[12] James remarks: "The story I told Louis Osborne has quite passed from me, but not little Louis himself, an American child of the most charming and appealing intelligence, marked by some malady that was more or less permanently to cripple, or was even cruelly to destroy him, and whom it was a constant joy to aspire to amuse" (James 2016, p. 267). At this time Louis' father was absent from Geneva on a tour of the Holy

[11] For readings of the Magnum Opus notes that consider their historical and autobiographical work as complicating the fictional status of the Waverley Novels, see Robertson (1994, pp. 143–61), and Mayer (1999).

[12] For the genesis of James's memoirs in this commemorative project, see the "Note on the Texts" in Philip Horne's edition of *Autobiographies* (James 2016, pp. 767–69).

Land; he died there, and James was present when the news of his death arrived, brought to Mrs Osborne by the French couple who ran the school that Louis' brother was attending. James now writes: "With little Louis on one's knee one didn't at all envy M. and Madame Maquelin; and than this small faint phantom of sociable helpless little listening Louis none more exquisite hovers before me" (James 2016, p. 267).

The value James accords to Louis' survival in memory is most obviously determined by the child's helplessness in the face of death (others' and his own): like the Magnum Opus note on the Laird of Balmawhapple, James's aside on Louis Osborne is importantly, though not solely, a registration of simple mortality. Louis is also strongly associated with the act of *listening*, as it were with his submission to the narrative scene, and in this respect too he resembles the very young Scott, who had been lamed by polio in infancy and who first listened to stories of the Scottish past on health-seeking visits to relatives in the rural Borders. In his memoirs James becomes more like Scott than he ever was in fiction: that is to say, closely concerned with real history and the lives of dead individuals and societies, and wholeheartedly committed to an imaginative restoration of the romantic, proscribed past—a region of time that he felt had become difficult to refer to not, as often in Scott, as a consequence of political disgrace and failure, but from ordinary generational forgetfulness and social taboos on speaking of the dead.[13]

James's textual practice around the New York Edition offers a different model of the relation between past and present; and here again Scott is relevant. The Advertisement to the Magnum Opus Edition figures revising and republishing in terms that James seems to recall in the New York Edition Prefaces. Besides correcting "errors of the press and slips of the pen," Scott writes,

> The Author has also ventured to make some emendations of a different character, which, without being such apparent deviations from the original stories as to disturb the reader's old associations, will, he thinks, add something to the spirit of the dialogue, narrative, or description. These consist in occasional pruning where the language is redundant, compression where the style is loose, infusion of vigour where it is languid, the exchange of less forcible for more appropriate epithets—slight alterations in short, like the last touches of an Artist, which contribute to heighten and finish the picture, though an inexperienced eye can hardly detect in what they consist. (Scott 2015, p. 383)

Millgate finds James "eager to accept the licence afforded by the *magnum* both to comment and revise," approaching "the Scott precedent not merely as a model but as a challenge": as she argues, "Taking up Scott's metaphor of the 'last touches of the artist,' James makes of the act of revarnishing a transforming process completely different from anything Scott had envisaged" (Millgate 1987, p. 115). She refers to a passage in the first New York Edition Preface, that to *Roderick Hudson*, which figures the revising novelist as a painter cleaning and newly varnishing an old picture, a process James characterizes as reaffirming the artist's "creative intimacy" with the work under revision and making his "critical apprehension" of its qualities "essentially active" (James 1984c, p. 1046). That *activity* is manifest too in what James does with the painterly figure: what had occupied half a sentence in Scott expands in the *Roderick Hudson* Preface to fill the better part of two long paragraphs (James 1984c, pp. 1045–6). Scott also speaks in the Advertisement to the Magnum Opus Edition of the authority he was reclaiming in the act of revising and republishing, now that the formal cover of his anonymity had been blown by the bankruptcies of his publisher and printer: "the course of events which occasioned the disclosure of the Author's name, having, in a great measure, restored to him a sort of parental control over these Works, he is naturally induced to give them to the press in a corrected, and, he hopes, an improved form" (Scott

[13] Explaining the origin of his story "The Altar of the Dead" (1895) in the Preface to the relevant volume of the New York Edition, James recounts two anecdotes of encounters in London society where his instinct to refer fondly and commemoratively to dead acquaintances met with shock or indifference; he describes the "prime idea" of the story as that of "a restorative reaction against certain general brutalities" of this type (James 1984c, p. 1249).

2015, p. 382). James draws an imaginative connection between this figure of "parental control" and another, equally conventional, that occurs later in the Advertisement when Scott hopes that the Waverley Novels, "in their new dress [the Magnum Opus volumes], will not be found to have lost any part of their attractions in consequence of receiving illustrations [introductions and notes] by the Author, and undergoing his careful revision" (Scott 2015, p. 384).

In a long passage on textual revision in the final Preface, that to *The Golden Bowl*, James splices these metaphors in a comically extended figure that casts his early novels and stories as a family group of children who must made presentable for company:

> [. . .] I had rather viewed the reappearance of the first-born of my progeny—a reappearance unimaginable save to some inheritance of brighter and more congruous material form, of stored-up braveries of type and margin and ample page, of general dignity and attitude, than had mostly waited on their respective casual cradles—as a descent of awkward infants from the nursery to the drawing-room under the kind appeal of enquiring, of possibly interested, visitors. I had accordingly taken for granted the common decencies of such a case—the responsible glance of some power above from one nursling to another, the rapid flash of an anxious needle, the not imperceptible effect of a certain audible splash of soap-and-water; all in consideration of the searching radiance of drawing-room lamps as compared with nursery candles. But it had been all the while present to me that from the moment a stitch should be taken or a hair-brush applied the *principle* of my making my brood more presentable under the nobler illumination would be accepted and established, and it was there complications might await me. (James 1984c, p. 1331)

This passage of the Preface is about James's fears—amply realized in the event—that once he had begun to revise he would find it difficult to leave off, and the consciously absurd elaboration and concretization of his metaphor is itself a part of that process: this is the Prefaces' characteristic mode of expansiveness, their equivalent to the unchecked "antiquarian zeal" (Millgate 1987, p. 86) that led Scott to multiply historical sources and witnesses in the Magnum Opus apparatus. James upholds the nursery figure as he continues to wonder "what discrimination against the needle and the sponge would be able to describe itself as not arbitrary": how could one feel sure that a given amount of revision was enough, and that having done just so much one might honourably stop? And yet the arbitrary decision *not* to revise—imagined as a cry of "'Hands off altogether on the nurse's part!'"—is simply unthinkable for him as part of "any fair and stately, [. . .] any not vulgarly irresponsible re-issue of anything" (James 1984c, p. 1331). James's figuration of the revising impulse differs from Scott's in that it imagines the author as a mother or maternal delegate (a nursery nurse), and he is less concerned with "parental control" and *correction* of offspring than with the uncontrollable anxiety that attends the business of caring for them—an anxiety comically imaged in the promiscuity and expansiveness of metaphor. James also sees a link between this nursery group of figures and the earlier figure of re-varnishing that coordinates different ways of thinking about revisionary process, or different aspects of that process: the "wet sponge" that the painter "passes over his old sunk canvas" in the *Roderick Hudson* Preface to see "what may still come out again" does similar work to the nurse's "sponge" that accompanies, or produces, the "audible splash of soap-and-water" in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (James 1984c, pp. 1046, 1331), but not exactly the same work; so that to think about the adequacy of James's figures is to begin a theoretical investigation into the technical variety, emotional tone and cultural status of the work of revision. James does not just extend Scott's revisionary figures individually, that is to say, but draws out and fosters their implicit convergences.

A final link between Scott's imagination of textual practice in the Magnum Opus Edition and James's in the New York Edition, once more touching on the care of children and returning us to a now-familiar narrative scene, can be found in the reason Scott gives in the Advertisement to the Magnum Opus Edition for not making substantial narrative

revisions to his novels, not attempting "to alter the tenor of the stories, the character of the actors, or the spirit of the dialogue":

> In the most improbable fiction, the reader still desires some air of *vraisemblance*, and does not relish that the incidents of a tale familiar to him should be altered to suit the taste of critics, or the caprice of the author himself. This process of feeling is so natural, that it may be observed even in children, who cannot endure that a nursery story should be repeated to them differently from the manner in which it was first told. (Scott 2015, p. 383)

It is a commonplace that children set the standard for narrative conservatism. Although James does not say this himself of the New York Edition, we find the same thought in a journalist's objection to the publishers' announcement of authorial revision as a selling-point: "There are those who would resent the re-clothing of 'Daisy Miller' in more studied and elaborate dress very much as the young folk of all Christendom would cry out against any recasting of the tale of 'Little Red Riding Hood'" (Anon 1908a, p. 10). James had long associated Scott with childhood story-listening, however, and his most significant use of the trope of children rejecting a familiar tale told with a difference comes in a context that repeats the wartime circumstances of his first critical engagement with Scott.

A scene of children listening to a story appears for the last time in James's work in his essay "Within the Rim" (1917), written in the spring of 1915 for a projected charitable album and only published after his death. And yet here, by contrast with Scott's use of the conventional trope in the Advertisement to the Magnum Opus Edition, the variation on the known and expected story is *a wholly different story*, the change more substantial and less endurable than could be produced by textual revision. In "Within the Rim" James is thinking about the difference made by the war to his sense of the English national character. Set in Rye in the late summer of 1914, with the first fighting going on just out of sight across the Channel, the essay records how he found that the familiar fact of English insularity "suddenly shone in a light never caught before"; the word itself, "'Insularity!'," which James recalls "mocking or [. . .] otherwise fingering the sense out of" in the past, was now "in the air wherever one looked and as stuffed with meaning as if nothing had ever worn away from it" (James 1999a, p. 181). Its primary meaning for him is England's "exemption" from the violence of invasion then being visited on Belgium and France. Read in that light, English history up to the threatened present appears as "the record of the long safe centuries," a narrative that shows James the nation in "her settled sea-confidence," "with all her long unbrokenness thick and rich upon her" (James 1999a, p. 182). Under the pressure of anxiety experienced during August and September 1914, James recalls feeling that all the loved details of familiar, long-frequented Rye, "the blades of grass, the outlines of leaves, the drift of clouds, the streaks of mortar between old bricks, not to speak of the call of child-voices muffled in the comforting air, became [. . .] extraordinary admonitions and symbols, close links of a tangible chain":

> When once the question fairly hung there of the possibility [. . .] of a world without use for the tradition so embodied, an order substituting for this, by an unmannerly thrust, quite another and really, it would seem, quite a ridiculous, a crudely and clumsily improvised story, we might all have resembled together a group of children at their nurse's knee disconcerted by some tale that it isn't their habit to hear. We loved the old tale, or at least I did, exactly because I knew it; [. . .] (James 1999a, p. 184)

Scott is relevant to this passage in several ways. "Within the Rim" reuses the terms James had applied to Scott in the Nassau W. Senior essay, but inverts them: where before fictional *improvisation* had produced an effect of compelling factuality, now it is history that improvises, and does so implausibly, substituting "a crudely and clumsily improvised story" for "the old tale" that had been accepted as historical fact. The substitution is at once corrective and destructive: an inevitable exposure of "the whole fool's paradise of our past," as James called it on 8 August 1914 in a letter to Esther Sutro (James 1920, 2: 402),

but also the tragic invalidation of a historical form of life. That doubleness of feeling is profoundly characteristic of Scott's novels, and is a function of their balance of progressive and conservative or restorative attitudes to history. In this context, and in light of the work of personal and societal retrospect that James had recently conducted in his memoirs, we may be able to imagine him reading Scott differently in wartime than he had thought to up to now, newly attending to his dramatization of historical change and using the novels not as escape hatches but as studies in historiography and coordinated acts of commemoration.

Another ground of Scott's relevance to James's feeling about the war relates to his presentation of history as a mode of story-telling. For James in "Within the Rim," "the old tale"—loved because known—*is* English insularity, a continuity of narrative sameness that models the unbroken security of national tradition. Yet James invokes the metaphor to figure a breakdown in that continuity, and the passage moves tellingly from actual "child-voices" picked out by James amongst the local signs of insularity, to (within the simile) a group of children *including James himself*, all uneasily listening to the unfamiliar new tale. In the space of two sentences James has entered his own figure, becoming again, as the review of Nassau W. Senior had put it, "as credulous as children at twilight," and yet has done so in the act of noting the collapse of that position of uncritical narrative receptivity (James 1984b, p. 1204): the recurrence of what we may call the *disconcerted listening* trope in "Within the Rim" seems to imply that historical crises expose the ongoing work of credulity that sustains traditional history. The threat to cultural and historical traditions at such junctures and their recovery through narrative are central subjects of the Waverley Novels, and Scott is unfailingly alert to history's complicity with story-telling. Jerome McGann argues that James in mid-career would have found the metafictional playfulness of Scott's intrusive, characterized narrators incompatible with the principles of realism formulated in "The Art of Fiction" (1884).[14] That is probably so; but a sense of the past as a quasi-fictional construct is differently manifested in the novel James had been working at shortly before his niece's visit to him in 1900,[15] and that he was once more trying to write in the autumn of 1914: *The Sense of the Past*, a fantasy in which a historian travels back in time from 1910 to 1820 via an inherited London townhouse, enters his own family history in the shape of an American ancestor, and experiences the personal and historical back-story of this alter-ego as a narrative that he cannot securely remember but must improvise on the spot, conjuring material proofs (a miniature portrait, a bundle of love-letters) into existence by the mere force of conviction.[16] The novel that Peggy James was reading at Christmas 1900 offers a striking precedent for James's imagination of history as fiction: drawing on attested Jacobite conspiracies of the 1750s but shifting them forward in time, the plotting of *Redgauntlet* moves towards a forestalled *third* Jacobite rebellion—a counterfactual event, or non-event, that is supposed by the novel to have *nearly* taken place in 1765.

Walter Scott is not the only Walter in the letter to Edith Wharton that I began with. James refers as well, with wonder and anxiety, to their mutual friend Walter Berry, "the adventurous & invraisemblable Walter," a diplomat and international lawyer who as President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris was about to travel to Berlin:

> It is very "sporting" & very wonderful his going, & I grasp in a measure the curiosity & the quest of impressions that prompt the enterprise; but the exhibition of such "detachment," such judicial & impartial ease, costs me, I confess, a sort of pang of anguish. I am infinitely redder-hot than I have any right to expect *him*

[14] McGann speculates that Scott is the "real target" of a passage in "The Art of Fiction" deploring Trollope's habit of admitting the fictional status of his novels in asides to the reader: "Scott's name seems written in invisible ink, that favored Jamesian medium, across this passage" (McGann 2004, p. 113).

[15] James wrote to W. D. Howells on 14 August 1900 that *The Sense of the Past* had "broken down for the present. I am laying it away on the shelf for the sake of something that *is* in it, but that I am now too embarrassed and preoccupied to devote more time to pulling out" (James 1999b, p. 343).

[16] For interpretations of *The Sense of the Past* as an allegory of its own compositional processes, or of fictional invention as such, see Jolly (1993, pp. 214–18), Miller (2005, pp. 291–326), and Herford (2016, pp. 58–69). Philip Horne reads *The Sense of the Past* as "a critical, philosophical, and moral commentary on the vogue of the historical novel" in America at the turn of the century; it is "less a historical than a metahistorical novel," a demonstration of the "anachronism" that James felt to be an insuperable obstacle to the genre (Horne 2008, p. 25).

> to be—that I recognize; but when I think that he *wants* to go where he will hear this country foully vituperated & vilified without being able (save under great complications) to so much as attenuate perhaps—well, it kind of makes *me* want to cry. But I am doubtless a ridiculous old fanatic—& I find indeed I *am* more fanatical than many persons I have encountered here. (James 1990, p. 315)

America was a neutral country in November 1914, to James's dismay. He knew that he cared more about the fate of Britain than as an American he perhaps ought—certainly more than he could expect Berry to care, and apparently more even than some of his British acquaintances cared. And yet his upset at Berry's impartiality is registered in an audibly American style: "well, it kind of makes *me* want to cry." Divisions of loyalty and national-political consciousness at moments of historical crisis are amongst Scott's great subjects. James would ultimately respond to his age's version of the question that Scott had reissued in the Shakespearean epigraph to *Waverley*—"Under which King, Bezonian? speak, or die!" (Scott 2015, p. 1)[17]—by renouncing his American nationality and becoming a British subject. Even the remote bearing of Scott on any of these acts and writings must remain a matter of speculation; it is difficult in any case to conclude about James's wartime attitudes, since there was so little time left for him to organise and register his thoughts before the onset of his last illness in December 1915. But if there could have been a "Lesson of Scott" for him, to match the lesson of that other great conservative, assembler of editions and romantic chronicler of lives in history, Honoré de Balzac, these might have been some of its dimensions.

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[17] The source is Pistol's exchange with Justice Shallow in *Henry IV Part 2* (5.3.114) on the succession of the crown from the just-deceased Henry IV to his son Henry V (Shakespeare 2005, p. 565).

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