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Rob Roy:
The Miscellaneous Novel

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Introduction

0.1 General introduction

In the early 19th century, Sir Walter Scott wrote a novel which came to be entitled *Rob Roy*. According to Edgar Johnson, this was the result of a dinner conversation where a bookseller named Constable suggested the title. “Nay,” replied Scott, “never let me have to write up to a name. You know well I have generally adopted a title that told nothing.” But Constable pressed, and by the end of the meal Scott had accepted the title.’¹ The novel is mainly based on Scott’s own life and experiences, including his great historical interest which led to him writing the legendary Robert MacGregor, or Rob Roy, into the story. At this time Scott wrote his novels under the pseudonym Will Tresham, and even though he actually tells us that he is going to share his memories with us, he does it under yet another assumed name, as the hero of the novel, Frank Osbaldistone. Wanting to protect his true identity and/or as a way of marking off his earlier life as past history, Scott set the story in the turbulent times of the early 18th century Britain in which MacGregor, who Scott claimed ‘is still remembered in his country as the Robin Hood of Scotland, the dread of the wealthy, but the friend of the poor, and possessed of many qualities, both of head and heart, which would have graced a less equivocal profession than that to which his fate condemned him.’², lived and fought for the preservation of the ways of the Highlands.

The novel was, as far as I can see, greatly appreciated and well received in Scott’s own time; however, later it has been severely questioned. The main issue seems to be how to categorise it, a difficulty created by the “misleading” title and the historical introduction of the MacGregors and Rob Roy, according to some. Is it a romance, a realistic novel, a historic novel or even a Gothic novel? I would like to suggest that it is simply a drama, a family drama, set in a historic time, containing elements from all the categories mentioned above.

¹ Introduction by Edgar Johnson, Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. vii.

² Sir Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 399.

Consequently, the aim of this essay is to show that, if read and interpreted as a family drama, the novel is consistent with a clear plot. Firstly, a brief presentation of Robert MacGregor is included as part of the introduction, this since I have found that at least one modern publisher has excluded the introductory biography Scott wrote about MacGregor when re-printing *Rob Roy*. Secondly, Sir Walter Scott and a few of his critics are presented, followed by a discussion of the novel as a family drama. From there the discussion moves on to Scott's handling of the MacGregors and "himself", under the names Frank Osbaldistone and Nicol Jarvie Jr., as characters, before my conclusion is presented.

0.2 Robert MacGregor - The Man and the Legend,

Born at Loch Katrine, Robert MacGregor (1671-1734) was the descendant of a long line of MacGregors, who can be traced back to 'Gregor, or Gregorious, third son of Alpin, King of Scots, who flourished about 787.'³ Since then the clan MacGregor had been both very powerful and wealthy, as well as outlawed. Rob's father, Donald Glas of Glengyle, had been adopted into the MacGregor clan and was acting clan chief during Rob's youth. Rob's mother, Margret Campbell, whose surname he used after the MacGregor name had been banned from use, died when he was in his late teens. This is said to have left Rob's father without a reason for living and to have broken his spirit. Frances Watt and Andrew Carter state that: 'From this point, Rob Roy's convictions were formed. He despised needless bloodshed, and fought against the injustice that plagued his clan -- aggressively but with foresight. He was to become a hero of the Highlands.'⁴

Rob is described as red-haired, broad shouldered and as having exceptionally long arms, which in turn is said to have made him an excellent swordsman. He is also said to have been

³ Francis Watt and Andrew Carter, *Picturesque Scotland*, 'Rob Roy and the Clan MacGregor', included in 'Rob Roy MacGregor (McGregor)', InCallander.co.uk, p. 2.

⁴ 'Rob Roy: Highland Hero', Tartans.com, pp. 1,2.

very well educated in areas such as literature and politics, as well as in the history of the Highlands and of his own clan. Besides this he acquired the skills needed for a Highland cattle owner. Cattle dealing became his legitimate trade, and even though it was based on cattle raids, he was seen as an honest and fair businessman. As a side-trade he offered “protection” to land and cattle owners to insure that they would not get raided, or that, if they were raided, he would bring their cattle back to them.

Later on, Rob married Mary Helen MacGregor, who bore him at least two sons who lived to a mature age. (The number of sons varies between two and five in different biographies.) Rob had been financing his cattle raids with money borrowed from the Marquis of Montrose, however, when ‘one of Rob’s agents absconded with one thousand pounds, a fortune even for a relatively wealthy landowner, [...] he [Montrose] spared no mercy for Rob.’⁵ Montrose wanted Rob’s land and now saw his chance to obtain it by declaring Rob a thief and demanding restitution through seizure of Rob’s property. Rob fled north to avoid imprisonment, leaving his wife Helen (or Mary as she is sometimes referred to) at their home from which the family was evicted. It is said that when the soldiers carried out the eviction, Helen was both raped and branded. (Scott mentions that they actually lost their home twice in his biography.⁶) From here on, Montrose kept chasing Rob who was doing what he could to disturb Montrose’s life, by cattle raids and by helping poor people who had financial problems with Montrose, which rendered him his Robin Hood reputation. At one time Montrose managed to capture Rob, but he escaped. Rob was imprisoned more than once, but he always escaped. Furthermore, Rob fought in two battles for the Jacobites, once in his late teens and again in 1715, after which he was declared an outlaw and was charged with treason. Again he was imprisoned, but managed to escape. He lived the rest of his life as an outlaw but

⁵ ‘Rob Roy: Highland Hero’, Tartans.com, p. 2.

⁶ Scott, *Rob Roy*, Scott’s Introduction, pp. xxxii, xlii.

was able to return to Balquhiddy in 1720, where he died and is buried together with Helen and two sons.

Many are those who have been inspired to tell the story of this unusual man, however, some stand out more than others since they themselves have become known worldwide. We are for instance told, on the website of RampantScotland.com, that ‘In 1723, Daniel Defoe (author of Robinson Crusoe) was in Scotland as an English Government spy and he wrote an embellished account of Rob’s adventures entitled *Highland Rogue*. This, like the later novel by Sir Walter Scott, helped to enhance his reputation.’⁷

⁷ ‘Famous Scots’, RampantScotland.com, p. 2.

1. *Rob Roy* by Sir Walter Scott

1.1 Scott and His Critics

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was born, mainly raised and educated in Edinburgh where he studied and became a solicitor like his father. His poetic side is said to have been stimulated by his mother and he worked both as a solicitor and a writer throughout his life. He was devoted to Scotland and its history, which led to him setting quite a few of his novels in 17th and 18th century Scotland. These novels have been called historic, romances, and picaresque novels of chivalry and romance, which tells us that his reputation, in his own time, as being an author who catered for quite a wide audience, was well deserved. How greatly appreciated he was may be shown by this quote from 1825 where William Hazlitt exclaims the following: 'How many hours of heartfelt satisfaction has our author given to the gay and thoughtless! How many sad hearts has he soothed in pain and solitude! It is no wonder that the public repay with lengthened applause and gratitude the pleasure they receive.'⁸

If the criticism of Scott's work in the 19th century was nothing but positive, the 20th century seemed to bring with it a change in the way Scott was read and criticised. Now quite a few critics came down hard on Scott, accusing him of shapelessness, mixing of styles, lack of coherence and plot, and of having wooden heroes in his stories. One less than enthusiastic critic, Robin Mayhead, wrote:

SCOTT, most critics seem to agree, is not characteristically the conscious artist in the sense in which Henry James, Jane Austen, and Virginia Woolf are conscious artists. Inconsistencies of plot and character, internal contradictions, anachronisms, and the like, appear to have disturbed neither him nor the greater number of his enthusiastic contemporary readers. He is normally content to let the tale, with its rather grey prose and its slack construction, amble along as it pleases, quickening the pulse and tightening

⁸ William Hazlitt, 'The Spirit of the Age' (1825), in the introduction to: *Modern Judgements Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin, p. 11.

the grip only when the matter is of more than usual interest to him.⁹

When it comes to criticism of *Rob Roy*, it is scarce since most critics and biographers seem to have focused on Scott's other achievements. Most of them leave it at just mentioning *Rob Roy* as one of Scott's novels or as one of his weaker novels compared to *Waverly* and *Redgauntlet*, for example. However, a few, such as Donald Davie, have written more thoroughly about their displeasure with Scott and *Rob Roy*. Davie was clearly one of those who felt misled by both the title and the introductory biography of the MacGregors and Rob Roy, as well as by the opening chapters which he deems 'a very good introduction to a novel, but not to the novel we have been led to expect, a "high romance"'¹⁰ and goes on to declare the novel a failure.¹¹

1.2 *Rob Roy* -A Family Drama

In reading the novel, which might be better introduced, and more easily understood, as a family drama, I have found that Scott writes with warmth, humour and a touch of adventure, about what he knows, namely the importance of life choices, honour and morality. He manages to communicate both the seriousness of the situation in Britain at the beginning of the 18th century and how we sometimes have to venture out, far and wide, in order to discover that that which we seek is to be found at home. Besides being a family drama where several families' destinies are paralleled and interwoven, it is a novel where the old meets the new, where some individuals are free to choose their own way of life while others are forced to conform.

In discussing and analysing the novel as a family drama, we find, when the story begins, the young, rather naive and idealistic main character, Francis (Frank) Osbaldistone, at a

⁹ Robin Mayhead, 'The Heart of Midlothian: Scott as Artist (1956)', *Modern Judgements Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin, p. 112.

¹⁰ Donald Davie, 'Rob Roy (1961)', *Modern Judgements Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin, pp. 123, 124.

¹¹ Donald Davie, 'Rob Roy (1961)', *Modern Judgements Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin, pp. 123, 124.

crossroads in his life. Frank, who has been given the opportunity to live and study abroad, which was meant to prepare him for a future in his father's business, has during this time discovered a poetic side in himself which he burns to pursue, much to his father's disappointment. However, being a wise man, William Osbaldistone sends Frank on yet another journey of education. This time Frank is to be educated through real life, and through meetings with people who are living the consequences of their life choices.

Frank's destination is his father's parental home, Osbaldistone Hall, in the north of England, which William Osbaldistone left in his youth under rather dramatic circumstances when his father both showed him to the door and disinherited him. Here Frank discovers a, to him, completely new way of life with new values in the home of his uncle Sir Hildebrandt Osbaldistone and his sons. Frank learns that in this household drinking, sports and decadence prevail, and such things as literature, formal education and honest work are belittled. In other words, nothing of what Frank has been brought up to appreciate and respect by his honest, conscientious and hardworking father is to be found at Osbaldistone Hall. The contrast is striking and young Frank would have been completely lost had it not been for Diana Vernon, a young, beautiful, well educated cousin who lives at the Hall. She is said to be an orphan and through her Frank learns that there are those whose fathers have condemned them to a much worse future than that which Frank's father had intended for him. Diana's choice is between marrying one of Sir Hildebrandt's sons or to join a convent, something that seems less frightening to her than to Frank, who falls in love with her.

There is one exception among Sir Hildebrandt's sons, Rashleigh, a cunning, unpleasant and jealous young man who has chosen to educate himself and now is to take up Frank's intended position at William Osbaldistone's firm. As it turns out, Rashleigh has no other intention than to ruin his uncle, and through his actions Frank is forced to leave the Hall and journey to Scotland in order to save his father from ruin, if he can.

In Scotland Frank meets Nicol Jarvie Jr., a man who, unlike himself, gladly followed in his father's footsteps and in no way regrets his life choices. In Jarvie Jr. he finds a honest and reliable friend, who helps him in every way he can to prevent Frank's father from being ruined. Jarvie Jr. is also a good judge of character; he does not only speak highly of Frank's father and his own, but also of those he knows to be of good character even if they have ended up on the wrong side of the law, such as his cousin Robert MacGregor in whose defence he exclaims 'Ah! but ye judge Rob hardly, [...] ye judge him hardly, puir chield.'¹² Through meeting Jarvie Jr. Frank seems to gain insight which leads to him seeing both his father and his own future in a different light.

Through Rashleigh and his actions, Frank becomes further acquainted with a man called Campbell whom he met during his journey to Osbaldistone Hall. Later he discovers that this Mr. Campbell is the cousin of Jarvie Jr. and as Campbell promises to help Frank recover the documents which Rashleigh took from William Osbaldiston, Frank once again sets off on a journey, this time to the Highlands, accompanied by Jarvie Jr. Here Frank discovers that his Mr. Campbell in fact is the legendary Rob Roy. If his visit to Osbaldistone Hall was something of a shock to Frank, nothing could have prepared him for the experiences that awaited him in the Highlands. Through these experiences which included meeting Rob Roy, his wife Helen, their sons and clansmen, Frank learned about not having the security of a home. He learned about a family where each could hold their own and they all fought side by side for the preservation of their way of life. He learned about the life of an outlawed father who was constantly on the run, a father who had nothing in terms of wealth and security to offer and pass on to his sons. He learned about a man who wished for a better future for his sons, having realised that the Highlander's cause was about to be lost, fearing that his and his wife's ill-fate would become that of his sons. He learned about a man who gave hope to a whole community, a strong, honest friend even to a stranger.

¹² Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 242.

What took place in the Highlands must have been the most frightening and important lesson Frank learned during his journeys. Not only because of the brutalities and the hardship he witnessed, but also because he must have realised that Robert MacGregor's destiny in some ways might become his, should he decide not to join his father's business, since he then would become homeless, penniless and in a sense nameless. However, strengthened by his new knowledge, Frank is reunited with his father whom he, with the aid of his new found friends, managed to save from ruin.

2. Scott's Handling of the MacGregors and "Himself" as Characters

2.1 Scott's Portrayal of Rob Roy

In a sense, I can agree with the critic Donald Davie, when he points out that together with the title, Scott's thorough introductory biography of Rob Roy functions as a build up and raises expectations as to what the novel will be about¹³. Judging by the criticism delivered by Davie (as quoted above), what Davie expected was "a high romance", which to me translates as Davie expecting yet another "Robin Hood story". When we as readers "instead" are introduced to the main character of the novel, Mr. Frank Osbaldistone, now an elderly man who presents a friend with his memoirs, thus telling the story of the adventures of his youth, it is a surprise. However, it is not a disappointment, as Davie seems to regard it, since this, in that moment, unexpected twist, adds to the suspense as we understand that this Englishman, somehow, was to cross paths with the Scottish legend.

Why, may we ask, did Scott choose to write about the legendary Rob Roy as one of many characters in a story about a relatively ordinary young man? I believe the answer to that question may be captured in a few words – his great respect for the legend. Had Scott chosen to take the easy way out, he would have written quite a different story, with a glorified and glamorous hero, who with ease brandished his sword, jumped on to his horse, tricked and escaped his adversaries before riding off into the sunset with a fair maiden by his side. That would have worked, and we would all have read it and cheered the hero on, with a smile. However, that was not the reality in which Robert MacGregor lived, far from it. He was a real man, of flesh and blood, who for most of his life endured hardships and sorrows, and lived under conditions most of us cannot begin to understand. I believe that, that is what Scott hoped to stress by writing MacGregor into the story about Frank Osbaldistone.

¹³ Donald Davie, 'Rob Roy (1961)', *Modern Judgements Walter Scott*, ed. D.D. Devlin, p. 123.

Scott's respect for the man, MacGregor, is visible in how meticulous he was in compiling the biography of MacGregor which he included in the book. It is also visible in that Scott does not add anything to Rob's character, but keeps to what is known about Rob, such as him being a natural born leader and having great political knowledge. As, for instance, in the discussion at the inn where Frank met MacGregor (Campbell) for the first time:

Mine [Frank's] host and his Sunday guests, after an effort or two to support their consequence by noise and bold averment, sunk gradually under the authority of Mr. Campbell, who thus fairly possessed himself of the lead in the conversation. [...] it was easy to see that his natural powers had never been cultivated by education. But I found him much better acquainted than I was myself with the present state of France, the character of the Duke of Orleans, who had just succeeded to the regency of that kingdom, and that of the statesmen by whom he was surrounded; and his shrewd, caustic, and somewhat satirical remarks, were those of a man who had been a close observer of the affairs of that country.¹⁴

Other examples are to be found in MacGregor's obvious love and understanding for his wife and her actions as reflections of her inner pain, as well as in how his moral code does not allow kinsmen to shed each other's blood, which he declares when he puts an end to Frank's and Rashleigh's altercation in the university park. It is also visible in the network of friends he has, such as the turnkey of the Glasgow prison, Jarvie Jr., the female Inn-keeper and the villagers in and around Clachan of Aberfoil, Diana Vernon and her father, just to mention a few. Another important trait of Rob's, which Scott shows us in the novel, was his willingness to aid those who had been subjected to injustice, such as Frank and his father.¹⁵

¹⁴ Scott, *Rob Roy*, pp. 34, 35

¹⁵ Scott, *Rob Roy*, pp. 337, 343, 234-236, 198-222, 277-278, 341-342, 338, 79-83.

2.2 The Character of Helen MacGregor

Even though some rather negative criticism has been written about Scott as a writer and the novel *Rob Roy*, it seems as if most critics agree that Scott has an extraordinary ability to make his characters come to life through dialogue rather than through descriptions. However, when it comes to the character Helen MacGregor, I am puzzled. When she first appears in the novel, she is described and referred to as being an Amazon who speaks in a commanding tone, followed by Frank's descriptive reflection on her person:

I have seldom seen a finer or more commanding form than this woman. She might be between the term of forty and fifty years, and had a countenance which must once have been of a masculine cast of beauty; though now, imprinted with deep lines by exposure to rough weather, and perhaps by the wasting influence of grief and passion, its features were only strong, harsh, and expressive. She wore her plaid, not drawn around her head and shoulders, as is the fashion of the women in Scotland, but disposed around her body as the Highland soldiers wear theirs. She had a man's bonnet, with a feather in it, an unsheathed sword in her hand, and a pair of pistols at her girdle.¹⁶

In spite of this, for Scott, unusually lengthy description of Helen's appearance and a dialogue consisting of many strong words, coloured by bitterness and mercilessness, the picture of Helen remains flat. She does not become a visible person, as the other characters do. Still, my impression is that Scott wished to portray her with the same respect as he portrayed Rob Roy. The question is, what held him back? Was it lack of knowledge and understanding of women who acted out of character, and/or was it because he could not, or knew not, how to deal with Helen having been ravished, which obviously distressed him as we can see in how he writes about the incident in the introductory biography:

¹⁶ Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 296.

It is said that this diligence of the law, [MacGregor's property as collateral for the loan from Montrose was to be confiscated and sold] as it is called in Scotland, which the English more bluntly term distress, was used in this case with uncommon severity, and that the legal satellites, not usually the gentlest persons in the world, had insulted MacGregor's wife, in a manner which would have aroused a milder man than he to thoughts of unbounded vengeance. She was a woman of fierce and haughty temper, and is not unlikely to have disturbed the officers in the execution of their duty, and thus to have incurred ill treatment, though, for the sake of humanity, it is to be hoped that the story sometimes told is a popular exaggeration.¹⁷

Furthermore, the total change in behaviour displayed when Helen next appears in the novel, as the welcoming hostess who embraces Bailie, whom she a day or two earlier had refused to acknowledge as a kinsman and had ordered to be drowned, adds to the confusing picture of Helen and gives a lasting impression that she in fact was mad. Should this have been the case, the picture of Scott having difficulties in relaying the essence of Helen, changes completely, since he then has succeeded magnificently.

Then again, there is another, less glamorous, explanation to be taken into consideration, namely that of Helen's character being the resulting product of Scott suffering from severe stomach cramps. Edgar Johnson's introduction to *Rob Roy* has an anecdote telling how Scott 'Once when James Ballantyne [was] dunning him for copy,' replied: "'Ay, ay, Jemmy", [...] "'tis easy enough for you to bid me get on, but how the deuce can I make Rob Roy's wife speak, with such a *curmurring* in my guts?'"¹⁸

Regardless of how we interpret Scott's portrait of Helen as a character in the novel, there can be no discussion about her making a life-altering choice by marrying Robert MacGregor.

¹⁷ Scott's introduction, Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. xxxii.

¹⁸ Introduction by Edgar Johnson, Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. vi.

We can also agree that he in turn made an, maybe even more, important choice by trusting his agent, since it would prove to be what sealed the whole family's fate in ways no one could have foreseen. Not only did this lead to Rob being accused of theft, but also to him making the choice to flee, leaving Helen alone when the soldiers came to confiscate their home, a home which Helen apparently was not ready to give up quietly. In choosing to defend her home Helen became the victim of brutalities which scarred and changed her and her family for all future. In light of these events it is not surprising, and to some extent even understandable, that Helen took up the sword in order to defend herself and became merciless enough to kill anyone who represented the government she must have held responsible for all the evil she and her family had been submitted to.

2.3 How Scott Wrote Himself Into the Novel

That Scott wrote himself into the novel as the character Frank Osbaldistone has been generally acknowledged by both biographers and critics. What, on the other hand, seems to have been completely neglected, is that he also wrote himself in as the character Nicol Jarvie Jr. who keeps the balance between the other characters and events in the novel. Jarvie brings in the calm and the laughter, and to use Scott's own words, he has an 'air of wisdom and superior authority'¹⁹ which shows in his understanding of the other characters, their feelings and reactions. Being in his mid-forties when he wrote *Rob Roy*, Scott had reached the stage in life where most people start re-evaluating the lives they lead. To me, it is more than likely that this is the process that inspired Scott to create both the characters Frank Osbaldistone and Nicol Jarvie Jr., to reflect different sides of himself.

In Chapter One we meet Scott in the aged Frank Osbaldistone talking to a friend to whom he entrusts the transcript of his memoirs. From the first line throughout the whole chapter, it is

¹⁹ Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 343.

clear that Scott is “playing”, and he does it brilliantly with much intelligence and wit. He is verbally enacting the moment when he hands over the pages of this novel to his friend and publisher, John Ballantyne. In doing so he is also telling Ballantyne and us, his audience, that he indeed has based the story on his own life experiences combined with ‘stories of a past age,’²⁰ as he states: ‘- I put into your hands a faithful transcript of my thoughts and feelings, of my virtues and of my failings, with the assured hope, that the follies and headstrong impetuosity of my youth will meet the same kind construction and forgiveness which have so often attended the faults of my matured age.’²¹ This playfulness is heightened on more than one occasion, but especially so in Scott’s reference to Sully’s Memoirs followed by his comment that ‘-My situation is not quite so ludicrous as that of the great Sully, and yet there would be something whimsical in Frank Osbaldistone giving Will Tresham a formal account of his birth, education, and connexion in the world.’²² And it would be whimsical indeed, since they are one and the same, namely Scott under assumed names.

As the story moves on we are introduced to the young Frank Osbaldistone in whom we, for instance, recognise Scott by Frank’s studying to follow in his father’s footsteps, his passionate desire to become a writer starting in a modest manner by translations of other peoples work, and of course, in Frank being sent to relatives where he gets acquainted with the people and the history of the Border. Based on the impression I have got from studying various biographies of Scott, the father, William Osbaldistone, also seems to be taken from Scott’s own life. He is a stern, rather unaffectionate man who only seems pleased when his son makes progress within the professional field he, the father, has chosen for him.

Moving on from the young, passionate and rather naive Frank, we meet Scott once again, this time in the character Nicol Jarvie Jr. Here we find a man who is mature, contented, well

²⁰ Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 1.

²¹ Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 2.

²² Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. 3.

balanced and well rounded, and in my opinion this character very much reflects Scott as he was at the time he wrote the novel. Having left the years and, to some extent, the passionate desires of his youth behind him, Scott had at this point in his life found balance. It is interesting to see how well Scott has managed to portray this balance and contentment with life in Jarvie, with his good nature and humour. He is the one who has found his place in the new order, can distinguish who is trustworthy and who is not, never neglects to take a moment to enjoy good food and to have a drink or two, regards his home as his castle, and last but not least, he is loyal to his heritage and his relatives on the Scottish border. It is also interesting to see how Scott has changed the picture of the father in Jarvie Sr., mirrored in a very positive manner through his son Jarvie Jr., and I wonder if this might be due to Scott seeing his own father in a different light as he himself matured.

Comparing Frank and Nicol Jr., I get the impression that Frank at the beginning of the novel represents the young Scott. However, as the story continues he comes to represent the life that could have been, especially if his marriage to Diana Vernon whom he seems to love passionately, is included. (Diana Vernon here represents Scott's love, Williamina Belsches, who in reality left him and married another.) Whereas Nicol Jarvie Jr. represents Scott's life as it actually turned out to be, including the fact that Jarvie, like Scott, had two parallel careers and that Jarvie married the caring and faithful Mattie, as Scott did Charlotte Carpenter, not out of passion but out of the warm affections which represent a different, but not lesser, kind of love.

Conclusion

By writing the novel, *Rob Roy*, Scott took us on a journey to the past to show us what he knew, namely that history is there for us to learn from. This was how he himself lived his life, and the fact that he has written himself into the story as the characters Frank Osbaldistone and Nicol Jarvie Jr. strengthens my belief that the novel is about learning by studying the past in order better to understand the present and the choices we have to make.

Not only did Scott show us the conflict between the old and the new way of life in Britain, but also how it affected the individuals, which Scott made visible through Frank's encounters with representatives of different societies during his journey. By bringing the man and the legend, Robert MacGregor, into the story as a man who still was able to find a way to fight the system and who could lend a helping hand to a stranger, even though he, his family and fellow Highlanders lived under extremely hard conditions, we are shown the honour, morals and way of life of a people the modern person may have difficulty to understand. My first thought was that the way of the Highlanders of that time may be compared to the way of the Vikings but, then I realised that there is very little that separates MacGregor's trading in cattle, even though based on raids, and his selling protection from present-day trading on the exchanges and the selling of insurance policies. MacGregor conducted his business outdoors, on foot (or horseback) and was handling livestock whereas the businessmen of today stay indoors, use the latest technology and handle documents. What really separates them, is that the profit MacGregor made was used to provide for the whole community, not to fill his own pockets as is customary today.

The uniqueness of Scott and the novel is indisputable and it is sad to see how deeply misconstrued both have been by some earlier critics. The negative criticism Robin Mayhead delivered regarding Scott's way of writing and constructing a story, goes beyond my understanding since it, in my opinion, could not be farther from the truth. The same holds

true, again in my opinion, for the critique Donald Davie delivered regarding *Rob Roy*, writing it off as a failure. Both seem to have missed the many layers of Scott's writing which give it its wonderful flow. There is the overall lightness of tone which shows Scott's inspiration and joy in writing, the shifting of pace which gives the reader time to breathe and consider before the next wave of swift happenings, the seriousness of the events interposed with humour which brings relief to the reader, and last but not least, the eloquently written dialogue which contributes to the ever shifting pace and makes the characters come to life. Next there is the plot and the development of the story starting with Scott himself telling us that he is going to share memories from his own life with us. And he does, by allowing us to understand the dilemma he, in the shape of Frank Osbaldistone, had as a young man torn between the duty to his father and his burning desire to pursue a career as a writer. Furthermore, he shows us a possible turn his life could have taken by the development of Frank's character and marriage to Diana Vernon. And by adding his mature self in the shape of Nicol Jarvie Jr., he shows us the person he had become in reality, leaving us with no doubt that he was a happy and contented man who counted his blessings.

In hindsight, it is easy to see that Scott's agreeing to choose *Rob Roy* as the title for the novel may have led to both being unjustly criticised by modern critics. Then again, should we judge the book by its covers or, even worse, based on our preconceptions, blame the author for not delivering what we expected? To answer this, which needs no answer, and to round off this discussion, I would like to finish by quoting two gentlemen, with whom I fully agree. First, Edgar Johnson, when he concludes that '*Rob Roy* is not a perfect novel; it is simply a great one.'²³ Next and last, Tomas Crawford, who declared that 'If criticism leads to a new interest in Scott, and if a Scott revival helps writers and readers to a genuinely historical understanding of their own condition, then criticism will not have been in vain.'²⁴

²³ Introduction by Edgar Johnson, Scott, *Rob Roy*, p. ix.

²⁴ Thomas Crawford, *Scott*, p. 114.

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