

SCOTT'S INGENIOUSNESS IN THE AMALGAMATION OF HISTORY AND SCINTILLATING IMAGINATION IN *THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR*

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ABSTRACT

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), a Scottish novelist descended from the one of the oldest families of the Scottish Border country. He was interested in reading Old plays, Middle-Age legends, romances and ballads from an early phase of his life. His grandmother used to entertain him with tales of Border warfare between Scots and the English as well as the stories of his own family's struggle during the civil and religious turbulence of 17th and 18th century Scotland. Scott was enthralled by the legends associated with the Scottish history and conventions that find reflection in his historical novels.

The aim of the paper is to focus on revealing the ingeniousness of Scott in curiously amalgamating the historical facts and the scintillating imagination while writing his most illustrious novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*.

KEYWORDS: Whig, Tory, Presbyterian, Episcopacy, Cavalier, Jacobean.

INTRODUCTION

The Bride of Lammermoor is one of the legendary novels authored by Sir Walter Scott, a leading historical novelist of the 18th century Scotland. The novel is in the form of extended ballad in prose and is based on the actual story of a family of Stairs and that of Lord Rutherford who falls in love with Janet Dalrymple, the only daughter of the Stairs. The novel is a moving manifestation of a series of events that leads to an eerie end on account of the political rivalry between Stairs and Lord Rutherford. Sir Walter Scott has demonstrated his art of inventiveness by skillfully fusing the actual incident of history and the imaginative episodes narrating the social and political condition of the times.

HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE NOVEL - LEGEND

The original story is that of James Dalrymple, First Viscount Stair and Lord President of the

Court of Session who was a subtle politician and a Whig. He was profited from the Revolution of 1688 and was married to an arduous woman called Margaret Ross of Balniel. It is said that she had ensured the family's prosperity by entering into a league with the Devil, not an uncommon accusation in seventeenth-century Scotland. She was compared to the Witch of Endor, and it is even said that she had been seen, in the guise of a cat, sitting on a cushion beside her husband while he acted as Lord High Commissioner at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This may seem improbable but it is an evidence of the awe amounting to fear which this formidable lady aroused.

The Stairs had a daughter, Janet Dalrymple, who fell in love with a certain Lord Rutherford, and vowed to marry him without the knowledge of her parents. He was not acceptable to the parents either on account of political principles or due to his want of fortune. But the girl abided by her vow. She simply refused to give him up. Another suitor, favoured by her parents presented himself before her. But Janet clung to her engagement with Lord Rutherford. Lord Rutherford also insisted on his rights, saying that he would abandon his claim if Janet herself asked him to do so. Lady Stair was therefore compelled to agree to arrange a final interview between the lovers, but insisted that she should be present herself. Lady Stair believes in Biblical authority (Numbers XXXV 2- 5) which declared that a vow of engagement made by a girl should not be binding if her father disallowed it. Meanwhile Janet who had been subjected to bullying pressure from her mother, remained silent and motionless. At last, when her mother commanded her to break the engagement with her lover, she tore from her neck the piece of broken gold which he had given her as a pledge of their engagement and returned it to him. He flew into a passion, cursed both mother and daughter, and soon afterwards left Scotland, dying abroad some years later.

Meanwhile Lady Stair hurried on with preparations for Janet's marriage to the man she had chosen for her, a certain David Dunbar of Baldoon. The girl agreed, but did so in a state of complete passivity. The wedding was celebrated, and the feast was followed by dancing. The bride and groom retired to the chamber set aside for them. Then the festivities were interrupted by terrible screams coming from the bridal chamber. The door was opened, and they found the bridegroom lying on the floor; he had been stabbed and was lying in a pool of blood. The bride could not first be located in the

dim light, but then she was found crouched in the corner of the chimney. There was a vacant smile on her face. She never recovered and died a fortnight later. The bridegroom recovered from his wounds, but would give no account of what had happened. Scott followed closely this incident and based his novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* on it. Though much has been written on the sources of the tale, Crockett opines that "it has no historical foundation, and was probably only a bit of ancient gossip fossilized into legend" (Baker: 168) Baker also observes "Scott transplanted the scene from the west to the east coast of Scotland, and composed a story that accorded with what he assumes to be the facts." (Baker: 168)

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL

In the novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Sir William Ashton is a Whig who has profited from the long ascendancy of his party, while the Ravenswoods are Tories whose misfortunes have been compounded by the suspicion of treasonable sentiments attributed to them. The novel depicts the conflict between Tories and Whigs, Lord Ravenswood and William Ashton. Lord Ravenswood was a nobleman who inherited the pride and turbulence but not the fortune of the house. He lost his hereditary title and his castle. On the other hand, William Ashton had risen to wealth and political importance during the great civil wars by his false legal practices. He had, previous to the purchase of the estate of Lord Ravenswood, been associated with extensive pecuniary transactions with the former proprietor. Ashton becomes the proprietor of Ravenswood, though he descended of a family much less ancient than that of Lord Ravenswood. He "contrived to amass considerable sums of money in a country where there was but little to be gathered, and who equally knew the value of wealth, and the various means of augmenting it, and using it as an engine of increasing his power and influence" (14). Both law and politics in Scotland at this time were at low ebb. "There was no supreme power, claiming and possessing a general interest with the community at large, to whom the oppressed might appeal from subordinate tyranny, either for justice or for mercy".(15) The administration of justice was tainted by gross partiality. The judges were biased and corrupt. They considered it to be their sacred authority to support a friend and crush their enemy. Their decisions were founded on family connections or political relations. Very often "the purse of the wealthy was

often believed to be thrown into the scale to weigh down the cause of the poor litigant." (16). Bags of money and gifts were sent to the king's counsel to influence their conduct *without even the decency of concealment* (16).

Sir William Ashton becomes successful in all his mean and treacherous dealings against the successor to Lord Ravenswood. His ambition and desire of extending his wealth is supposed to be found "*as strong a stimulus in the exhortations of his lady, as the daring aim of Macbeth in the days of yore*" (16). Thus "*qualified and gifted, he was a dangerous antagonist to the fierce and imprudent Ravenswood*" (16). Allan Lord Ravenswood, the former proprietor of that ancient mansion and the large estate annexed to it, continues to wage ineffectual war with his successor William Ashton, but the judgment is determined in favour of Ashton. Ravenswood's son "witnessed his dying agonies, and heard the curses which he breathed against his adversary, as if they had conveyed to him a legacy of vengeance" (18).

FUNERAL CEREMONY OF LORD RAVENSWOOD IN VIOLATION OF PRESBYTERIAN TRADITION

When Lord Ravenswood dies of heart failure, his funeral is arranged. It is to be held according to Episcopalian faith and not according to Presbyterian faith, a faith of those who wielded power. The Presbyterian Church judicatory considers the ceremony as a daring insult upon their authority. So they request the nearest Privy Councilor, the Lord Keeper to issue a warrant to prevent the ceremony. As soon as the clergyman opens his prayer-book, an officer of the law, supported by some armed men, orders him to be silent. The insult is immediately resented by the only son of the deceased Edgar Ravenswood, popularly called the Master of Ravenswood, a youth of about twenty years of age. He claps his hand on the sword and threatens the official person to death if he further interrupts the funeral ceremony. The man still tries to enforce his commission. But since hundred swords at once glitter in the air, he stands aloof as a spectator.

When the ceremony gets over, Edgar vows to take revenge upon the Ashtons. He declares, "I know from what quiver this arrow has come forth. It was only he that dug the grave who could have

the mean cruelty to disturb the obsequies; and Heaven do as much to me and more, if I requite not to this man and his house the ruin and disgrace he has brought on me and mine!" (20) The next morning after the funeral, the legal officer who had failed to interrupt the funeral solemnities of the late Lord Ravenswood, hastens to narrate the entire account of the happening to the Lord Keeper who listens with great composure, the description of the contempt of his own authority and that of church and the state. He does not react even to the faithful report of the insulting and threatening language which had been uttered by the young Ravenswood and others. When the Lord Keeper was alone, he mutters,

"Young Ravenswood is now mine - he is my own - he has placed himself in my hand, and he shall bend or break ... I must see that he gains no advantage of some turning tide which may again float him off." (23)

Robert Gordon contends, "*The Bride of Lammermoor* is an extreme reaction against modernism - an eruption of the Tory vapors intense enough to constitute a crisis with significant effects upon Scott's later Scottish fiction." (Gordon: 130) Daiches also stresses the historical significance of the novel that depicts the conflict between feudalism and modernism shortly after Scotland's union with England in 1707 *in naked, almost melodramatic terms.* (Gordon: 130)

AMALGAMATION OF HISTORICAL EVENTS AND SCOTT'S SCINTILLATING IMAGINATION

On its apparent level, *The Bride of Lammermoor* is a love story that ends at a tragic note. Edgar Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton cannot marry because Lucy's mother insists upon finding a suitor for her daughter herself. Her cruelty in achieving her objective and fulfilling her wishes leads the novel towards tragic end. Lucy stabs the man who has been chosen for her by her mother and later dies herself in complete insanity. While narrating the story, Scott has taken into consideration certain social and historical circumstances that lie behind the difficult situation of Edgar as he fights to win his love. Scott gives an account of meticulous history of the Ravenswood family and relates that history to conditions in Scotland since the union of the crowns over a century ago. The Ravenswood have declined gradually in prestige and authority. The father of Edgar Ravenswood had *the sinking*

side (14) in the civil war of 1689, and “although he had escaped without the forfeiture of life or land, his blood had been attainted, and his title abolished” (14). He is in fact victimized by the political influence of Lucy's father, Sir William Ashton, who is “a skilful fisher in the troubled waters of a state divided by factions, and governed by delegated authority... who contrived to amass considerable sums of money... and who equally knew the value of wealth, and the various means of augmenting it, and using it as an engine of increasing his power and influence.” (14) Ashton had engaged Lord Ravenswood in a series of lawsuits over the title to Ravenswood Castle. Scott infers that Ashton's influence in the dominant Whig party was largely responsible for his ultimate legal victory that resulted in the final eviction of the Ravenswoods from their castle. The decline of ancient families, the corruption of justice and a vicious political factionalism were in vogue in Scotland during this period that resulted in the social disintegration due to *naive Tory pessimism* (132). Scott has narrated the events of the novel keeping in mind the political condition of Scotland that was dominated by Whig-Tory conflicts.

EDGAR - A VICTIM OF WHIGS AND TORY POLITICS

Edgar could be considered to be a victim of social injustice with respect to his relations with three leading characters of the novel - William Ashton, Lucy Ashton and the Marquis of A. Among them, Sir William Ashton and the Marquis of A are both political opportunists. Though Ashton is a Whig and Marquis is a Tory, “they have in common a cynical tendency to adjust ideological principles to the prevailing political winds that documents, within the historical assumptions of the novel, the assault on factionalism.(133) The Marquis takes a keen interest in Edgar's quarrel with the Ashtons over the Ravenswood estate in order to gain political support from Sir William Ashton. Sir William, on the other hand tries to be friendly with Edgar so that he can extricate political benefit in case the Marquis and his fellow Tories win their struggle for power. Edgar also enters a political partnership with the Marquis thinking that he would be able to offer Lucy something better than a life of poverty and an outcast lord. His fortune takes a good turn when the Tories, guided by the Marquis come to power. Although Edgar does not get involved in party politics like Ashton or the Marquis, yet he becomes intricately involved in their nasty world of political scheming.

Throughout the novel, it appears that Edgar is incapable of taking aggressive role in resolving conflicts in his political factions. Gordon remarks, "He exhibits an old-fashioned loyalty to the land that has nothing to do with partisan warfare, and like many a fictional victim of society, he reluctantly falls into bad company because he cannot help it." (Gordon: 133) Gordon also asserts, "Edgar represents an ancient Scotland where men were given fewer incitements to squander their energies in factional conflicts." (Gordon: 133) As far as Sir William Ashton is concerned, he proves himself an unscrupulous and shrewd politician who has no room for any apolitical object. This is evident when Edgar, visiting Ravenswood castle, asks Sir William what he has done with the relics and memorials of the Ravenswood's former greatness, Sir William shows apathy and ignorance towards such apolitical question. As regards Marquis, he is no better than Sir William Ashton. His apparent concern for Edgar springs from his self-interest and his Jacobitism. Scott has revealed the selfishness, cunningness and apathy of politicians who are capable of inducing a great harm to others to derive a little benefit from them.

LADY ASHTON - A MAESTRO IN PARTY POLITICS

Lady Ashton is a chief antagonist of Edgar Ravenswood. She is clearly at home with the party politics. Her political ambitions are boundless and her skill in politics is irrefutable. She belongs to a family more distinguished than that of her lord, an advantage which she always takes in maintaining and extending her husband's influence over others. Even her husband "regarded her with respectful awe rather than confiding attachment". (17) Though apparently, she regards the honour of her husband as her own, but "... there was something under all this which rung false and hollow; and to those who watched this couple with close, and perhaps malicious scrutiny, it seemed evident, that... the lady looked with some contempt on her husband ... rather than with love and admiration." (17-18)

When Lady Ashton was in Edinburgh, away from Ravenswood castle, there also, she had her eye on the progress of state intrigue. She had political ambitions for her son Sholto. *My Sholto*, she says, "will support the untarnished honour of his maternal house, and elevate and support that of his

father.” (27). Lady Ashton hates Edgar because he is poor. She belongs to an aristocratic family and is superior to the Master of Ravenswood. Moreover, she is proud of her wealth and possessions but she overlooks the fact that she has not acquired it or inherited it lawfully. She is haughty and has a vain pride. Also she is domineering and willful. When she returns to the Ravenswood Castle from Edinburgh after a long period and finds Master of Ravenswood as a guest in her house, she angrily asks her husband, “My Lord, I am not greatly surprised at the connexions you have been pleased to form during my absence - they are entirely in conformity with your birth and breeding; and if I did expect anything else, I heartily own my error.” (200) Lady Ashton rebukes her husband “...what has prompted you to become a renegade to your political party and opinions, and led you,...on the point of marrying your only daughter to a beggarly Jacobite bankrupt, the inveterate enemy of your family to the boot” (200) Through the portrayal of Lady Ashton, Scott puts forth the importance of power of wealth that marks the success of person in the all times.

CALEB BALDERSTONE: WILTED VESTIGE OF ARISTOCRATIC SOCIETY

Caleb Balderstone is a steward and loyal servant of the Ravenswoods. He is so devoted to the family that the joys and sorrows of the family are regarded by him as his own. He is an old servant of the family who has seen brighter and prosperous days. His Master has now fallen on bad days and he tries his best to hide his adversity. Scott has painted him as the typical Scottish servant, familiar, possessive and inventive. David Brown opines that “In Caleb, Scott shows the inevitable degradation of the feudal ideal in the modern age. A picture of absolute fidelity to the Ravenswood family, Caleb’s actions is motivated entirely by his desire to uphold the *honour of the family* and the *credit of the house*. (Brown: 145)

In *Wolf’s Hope*, the new Scotland is conceited in its rejection of social traditions. The townsfolk, who were once subservient to the Ravenswoods, have achieved independence, and their community has become microcosm of the realm as a whole. The local people in the village of *Wolf’s Hope* are interested in the goings-on of the upper classes, but they are far more interested in their own lives. Moreover, set in contrast to Caleb, they show how one form of society is passing away. They have no time for the old feudal loyalties which still preoccupy him. Through the character of Caleb, Scott has

presented a harsh reality that honour is directly proportional to the financial success of an individual. It proves the maxim that, "*The rich has many friends but the poor has none*". The picture of the deteriorating society in terms of moral values has been presented by Scott in a discreet manner.

CONCLUSION

The Bride of Lammermoor reflects the political conditions of the early eighteenth century Scotland. Men of importance could easily win the favour of those that were supposed to maintain peace and order. The political world of the time was a corrupt world and those that dealt out justice could be easily approached or influenced. Sir William usurps the whole estate of Lord Ravenswood and obtains orders in his favour. The Lord Keeper is a typically intriguing man of importance of the early eighteenth century Scottish political scene. Moreover, in the novel, it is the dispossessed heir, Edgar Ravenswood who dies, while the usurper, Sir William Ashton continues to enjoy the estate. Lucy Ashton and Edgar Ravenswood appear to be caught in the web of circumstance, victim of a destiny which they cannot escape. They are surrounded by husky voices foretelling their indomitable fate. Yet the Master in reality is the victim of his own character and of political misfortunes, whereas Lucy is destroyed by her mother's intensity of will rather than ominous admonitions. David Daiches maintains, "Scott was no mere victim of romantic nostalgia for the past. Nevertheless there lay within him a deep hatred of historical change that forced its way to the surface in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and necessitated a more profound act of imaginative renunciation than any he had previously known. (Daiches: 141)

Edgar Ravenswood and his servant Caleb Balderstone are the representatives of the feudal and heroic past; they have their eccentricities but they are the *embodiments of ancient virtues in a world that has abandoned those virtues* (Daiches: 130) They present the condition of Scotland after the union with England which could be considered to be the most important milestone in Scotland's movement away from feudalism. It is something which proves that injustice thrives on social change and brings good men to destruction. Walter Scott concentrates on historically little known characters. Yet, though there are references to the Privy Council and the Queen, no historically important person comes in the novel. This gives Scott further opportunities to exercise his historical imagination and impart an

exquisite touch of romance to the novel. In spite of the lurid aspects, however, the author's fine portrayal of both nobility and village folk and his subtle use of historical events to lend authenticity to this action make this novel an enthralling one. It is evident that Scott's own perspectives regarding debasing political environment are incessantly dominated throughout the novel. But a curious combination of history and imagination lends an exquisite touch to the novel and makes it a masterpiece of British literature.

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