

Trees, Rivers, and Stories: Walter Scott Writing the Land

Author(s): Susan Oliver

Source: *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 47, Walter Scott: New Interpretations (2017), pp. 279-299

Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/yearenglstud.47.2017.0279>

Accessed: 19-10-2017 14:28 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Yearbook of English Studies*

Trees, Rivers, and Stories: Walter Scott Writing the Land

SUSAN OLIVER

University of Essex

Land Ethics

Walter Scott has probably contributed more than any writer to perceptions of Scotland as a land of mountains, moorlands, heather, mists and water. Does his writing look beyond such a stereotypical terrain to demonstrate an agency arising not just from the human histories that form the basis for his plots, but also from the land itself? To what extent did he write about woodlands, rivers, soil and mountains as phenomena existing outside the control of, or manifesting resistance to, the interventions of modern society? Is there anything in his poetry and fiction that advocates or supports what we might call a land ethic? I refer here to something understood as ‘a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence’, specifically relating to humankind’s ‘relation to the land’, as first proposed by Aldo Leopold in the late 1940s.¹ The relevance of Leopold’s land ethic, published 117 years after Scott’s death, is its basis in something of primary importance to Scott: the necessary relationship of communities with the land and environment. For Leopold, a land ethic ‘enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land’.² He proposes responsible land management (not the exclusion of humans) in which love and sympathy exist among people for everything that comprises the ecology of an area.³ Scott certainly loved the land in ways that valued it beyond its potential to generate economic wealth. His writing makes the case time and again for a sympathetic and collectively responsible approach by people to place. However, whether he evinces a philosophy of land relations that is willing to

Acknowledgement: this essay was produced with the support of the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust. I am also grateful to the Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, which has kindly given permission for me to read, quote from, and comment on Scott’s MS unpublished planting journal, *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis: Memoranda concerning the woods and plantations at Abbot’s Ford. Commenced 1st January 1819*.

¹ Aldo Leopold, ‘The Land Ethic’, in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 201–26 (pp. 202–03).

² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 223–25.

relegate human interests to the survival of vulnerable non-human elements is a complex matter requiring further investigation.

Other questions arise: was Scott mostly concerned with a Romantic pastoral Scotland, nostalgic for a time when a mainly rural society had closer ties to the land than to cities, such as would support the maintenance of a strong local as well as national communal identity? Does his representation of environmental issues, including concerns about state and commercially motivated deforestation, planting policies, changes in land use, and his own intervention to preserve stocks of fish in rivers, provide a counterpoint to identity politics based in political economy? These are pertinent questions for readers in the twenty-first century, when it is difficult to imagine a Scotland unaffected by climate change, acid rain, habitat and species loss, and without debates about how to balance an economy based upon exploitable resources (oil and gas, in particular) with the demands for access made by the tourist industry and the lobby for conservation. They are also questions that draw attention to the scale and significance of the contribution that Scott's writing has made to the environmental historiography of Scotland, as a nation always needing to mediate and address the effects of changing land use.

As a self-styled Borders 'minstrel', 'Wizard of the North', and latter-day 'Rhymer', Scott was a storyteller of the environment as much as a writer about social history.⁴ All three sobriquets have literary geographical roots in which words derive at least part of their power from an uncanny strangeness associated with the soil: for example, from the Borders lowlands and moorland in which lie buried medieval poets, popular heroes, and travellers who returned from Italy and the Middle East with knowledge of alchemy and occult science gained during foreign travel. His stories are written as ballads, long narrative poems, fiction and verse dramas, but many are also incorporated into letters or essays published in periodicals. Others are found in his journals, notebooks and in contributions to the proceedings of associations such as the Tweed Commissioners, founded in 1805 with the aim of implementing managed stewardship of the overall ecology of the River Tweed. Scott's first long poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), establishes a connection with Scotland's rivers for everything that he subsequently writes. The minstrel of the poem's title chooses to live his last days beside the River Yarrow, a tributary of the Tweed, and the poem closes with a merging of the living sound of the running river with the dying minstrel's song: 'And Yarrow, as he rolled along | Bore

⁴ These names that Scott used of himself are based in the peripatetic British and European ballad tradition of medieval minstrels, the travelling scholarship of mathematician and astrologer Michael Scotus (1175–c. 1232), and the legend of Borders poet Thomas of Erceadoune, known as Thomas the Rhymer (c. 1220–1298).

burden to the Minstrel's song.⁵ The idea that sounds from the land (a river) synthesize with those from literature (the song of the poet) might well be interpreted as part of a conventional ideology of national identity: but an ecologically responsible approach to the non-human environment is necessary if memory and ongoing creativity are to remain possible.

That Scott was caught in some contradiction by today's standards when it comes to land ethics cannot be ignored. He contributed to the rise in the early nineteenth century of Scotland's carbon economy, through involvement in the oil and coal extraction industries. That episode tells a story of Scott's interest in the conversion of fossil fuels into sources of energy, albeit with concern for economic viability alongside some awareness of environmental responsibility. One of the first people to use gas central heating in his home, in 1823 he also literally bought into what he described as the 'mania of the day' by taking shares in the Edinburgh Oil and Gas Company, the aim of which was to light the city of Edinburgh with gas manufactured from oil. Within a year, he was the company's Chairman. The venture failed financially, and five years later the Oil and Gas Company was bought by its rival the Edinburgh Coal Gas Company.⁶ Scott lamented in a letter to John Gibson Jr. in January 1828 that he would never see a financial return on his investment.⁷ Meanwhile, the location of the oil gas works at Tanfield, Inverleith, next to the Experimental Garden of the Caledonian Horticultural Society (now the Edinburgh Royal Botanical Garden) was creating an environmental controversy. First the distillation plant and then the proposed transfer to coal gas production generated complaints about air pollution that was already affecting health in residential areas as well as damaging trees and plants at the Experimental Garden. Coal was already understood to be a dirtier fuel than oil, as Scott points out in a Statement to Parliament supporting the Edinburgh New Gas-Light Bill in 1827.⁸ The same document argues that the Oil Gas Company was controlling lime, tar, and ammonia disposal in environmentally responsible ways, using its dry lime by-product for agricultural manure and taking more secure measures than the Coal Gas company to avoid smells and gas escape.⁹ By contrast, the Coal Gas Company was a major polluter,

⁵ *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 2nd edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805), 6. 586–87, p. 202.

⁶ *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by H. J. C. Grierson et al., 12 vols (London: Constable and Co., 1832–37), ix, 56. Letter to Daniel Terry, dd. March/April 1825.

⁷ *Letters*, x, 335.

⁸ *Edinburgh New Gas-Light Bill. Statement for Sir Walter Scott, Bart. Chairman, the other Directors, and the Proprietors of the Edinburgh Oil Gas Company, applying for a repeal of a Prohibition in their Act of Parliament to make Gas from Coal*. Sess. 1827. National Library of Scotland.

⁹ *Considerations Relative to Nuisance in the Coal-Gas Works with Remarks on the Principles of Monopoly and Competition, as Applicable to those establishments* (Edinburgh: John Anderson,

disposing of its liquid lime effluent directly into common drains and rivers. With that contrast as one of his arguments, Scott travelled to London in a bid to persuade Parliament to allow the Oil Gas Company to use its improved methods of production to make their own coal gas to light the city. The bid was unsuccessful. Scott recorded in his Journal on 4 June 1828, 'By the way, we have lost our Coal Gas Bill. Sorry for it, but I can't cry.' The case for oil as less wasteful of energy than coal was supported by thermo- and electrochemist Michael Faraday.¹⁰

In 1825, Scott nevertheless had staked a substantial £1500 in the development of a railway that would more cheaply than previously bring coal and lime to Abbotsford, not least to supply cheaper coal for the gas plant that he was using to light and heat his home, but also in order that lime from the process could be used to enrich the soil of the estate on which he claimed to have planted a million trees. His method of using dry lime was indeed efficient in turning an energy by-product into manure, and lay behind the plans for the oil gas lighting bill. Planting trees as an offset to the footprint of carbon fuel consumption is a trade-off in our own time that controversially gestures towards a land ethic. Scott could not have known that he was living during the emergence of a carbon-driven anthropocene epoch associated with the rise of technology deriving from chemist and engineer James Watt's improvements to the steam engine in the 1760s.¹¹ The Grangemouth oil refinery on the banks of the Forth and twenty-first century arguments over fracking for shale gas in Edinburgh, the Lothians and other Lowland areas of Scotland seem a relatively short step from the oil gas and coal gas production that Scott helped to finance.¹² However, Scott's writing shows him to have been concerned two centuries ago about forms of violence towards

1828). The comparative benefits and nuisances arising from oil and coal gas production were debated in the periodical press, mostly with a concern for economic efficiency. See 'Gas-Lights', *The Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts*, 384 (29 May 1824), 345–46. A version of this article was published in the *New Monthly Magazine* (September 1824), pp. 393–94. See also 'On the Illuminating Power of Coal and Oil Gas', *Monthly Magazine, Or, British Register*, 60 (1825), 106–08.

¹⁰ Faraday was one of several scientists whose experiments and findings were used in letters of support for the Oil Gas Light Company's tender. He is particularly invoked as an authority on cleaner types of gas for lighting. See *Letter from Edward Turner, M. D. Lecturer on Chemistry, Edinburgh, and Robert Christison, M. D. Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Edinburgh* to the Directors of the Edinburgh Oil Gas Light Company dated 9 September 1824; Letter from Dr. D. Brewster, F. R. S. &c &c. to the same, dated 14 September 1824; and Letter from John Pollock, Esq. Secretary to the Oil Gas Company, Dublin to the same, dated 21 September 1824. All at the National Library of Scotland.

¹¹ Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, "The "Anthropocene"", *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Newsletter*, 41 (2000), p. 17; Crutzen, 'Geology of Mankind', *Nature* (3 January 2002), p. 23.

¹² On 1 June 2016, the Scottish Parliament voted in favour of a ban on fracking. The Scottish National Party abstained from the vote. See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-36422083>> [accessed 24 June 2016].

the land and towards society resulting from changes in energy policies and farming practice.

Aesthetics

Most scholarship on Scott's storytelling has prioritized his treatment of people, social systems facing crisis, and events from human history. Books and journal essays have explored his development of literary genres from early translations of poems by Goethe and Bürger, to the ballad anthology *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, to the three-volume novel. Studies of his use of narrative methods ranging from framing devices, voice, language, constructions of character, and techniques such as the *entrelacement* of storylines, have shown how he developed original ways of writing from older points of departure, bringing together British and European literature from high and popular cultural sources. Where Scott focused on the natural, non-human environment, critical enquiry over two centuries has investigated how he integrates memory with place and establishes a social politics rooted in landscape aesthetics. Those aesthetics are framed by a combination of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Uvedale Price's *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794), and William Gilpin's many essays on painting and picturesque landscapes (1768 to 1809), together with numerous other works that develop and critique those theories. Since Scott was educated in the schools of the Scottish Enlightenment and wrote throughout the Romantic period, such a context would be expected. However, his acceptance of parts of Burke's aesthetic philosophy alongside an idiosyncratic alteration of the standard viewpoint implied in the 'picturesque in scenery' requires deeper enquiry.

Burke's argument that the land has an innate capacity to generate feelings of fear and pleasure is given a degree of counterpoint in Price's and Gilpin's recourse to a visual language of knowledge based on how land can be understood through an appreciation of art. Scott's copy of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, in the Library at Abbotsford now owned by the Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, contains a dedication dated 1789. He was then aged eighteen. He also owned an 1810 copy of Price's *Essay on the Picturesque*¹³ and several books of socio-geographical tourism by Thomas Pennant, including a 1790 fifth

¹³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: With an introductory discourse concerning taste, and several other additions*. New edition (London: J. Dodsley, 1787). There is a manuscript dedication on endpapers to Walter Scott Junr from Jane Russell, dated July 13th 1789. Faculty of Advocates Library, Edinburgh. The Faculty of Advocates Library also holds Scott's copy of Price's *Essays on the Picturesque: as compared with the sublime and the beautiful; and, on the use of studying pictures, for the purpose of improving real landscape*, 2 vols (London: Mawman, 1810), with brief marginal notes.

edition of his *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides in 1769*.¹⁴ In a letter to Joanna Baillie dated March 1813, eighteen months before he published *Waverley* (1814), Scott attributes to Price's theories his taking of land at Abbotsford out of cereal farming for the purpose of planting trees: 'many of our jog-trot Country-men would revolt at being made my instrument of sacrificing good corn land to the visions of Mr. Price's theory'.¹⁵

While Scott went along with Price's argument for a moral value to landscape that can override economic profit, his response to Pennant was more complex. An example of how his storytelling became a vehicle for a critique of the picturesque Highland tourism that Pennant inspired can be seen in the episode in Chapter 22 of *Waverley*, titled 'Highland Minstrelsy', where Flora Mac-Ivor literally takes Edward Waverley's breath away by waving to him from the 'perilous pass' of a pine-tree bridge, 150 feet over a rocky chasm. In a moment of sensibility, Waverley is 'unable, from the sense of dizziness which her situation conveyed, to return the salute'.¹⁶ The scene demonstrates Burke's theory that the Sublime is a force capable of producing psychological terror and physical paralysis in a viewer who can enjoy both sensations only by remaining at a sufficient distance. At the same time, Scott's levity in using a comic tone interleaves a lightness that tempers any realistic threat to life into a perspective that readers would recognize as more consistent with the picturesque: the spectacle looks like a landscape painting or an illustration from a book. Scott's edition of Pennant's *Tour* contains a description and accompanying illustration of just such a bridge at the Fall of Fyers in the Highlands, made famous by Robert Burns's 1787 poem 'Written with a pencil, standing by the Falls of Fyers, near Loch Ness'. In the illustration, a woman and a man stand on a narrow pine bridge, while the narrative describes 'a true *Alpine* bridge of the bodies of trees covered with sods, from whose middle is an awful view of the water roaring beneath'.¹⁷ Landscape painter Thomas Walmsley painted the falls in 1810 using a similar composition, with print copies sold through commercial printmakers.¹⁸

Edward Waverley's swoon at Flora's apparently dangerous behaviour is set in 1745, twelve years before Burke's *Enquiry* would have explained his condition.

¹⁴ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides; MDCCLXIX* (London: printed for Benjamin White, 1790). Scott's Library at Abbotsford, now held by the Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, also contains Pennant's *Journey to Snowdon* (London: printed for Henry Hughes, 1781); his *Tour in Wales* (London: printed for Benjamin White, 1784); and *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford, and Holywell* (London: printed for B. and J. White, 1794).

¹⁵ *Letters*, III, 237.

¹⁶ *Waverley*, ed. by P. D. Garside, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 113.

¹⁷ *A Tour in Scotland; MDCCLXIX*, 5th edn, 2 vols (London: Printed for Benjamin White, 1790), I, 219 and plate xxix.

¹⁸ Thomas Walmsley, *Upper Falls of Fyers, Near Lough Ness, Northern Highlands, Scotland*, aquatint print (London: F. J. Sarjent, 1810). British Library.

He reverses eighteenth-century gendered behavioural and medical conventions in which women, rather than men, would be expected to display such heightened physical signs of fear at the sight of a dangerous situation. To that end, Scott anticipates, and satirically derogates, the 'man of feeling' that emerged from the culture of sensibility at the turn of the nineteenth century. At this midway point in the novel, Waverley's incapacity falls notably short of the masculine vigour that the rugged country of the Highlands might be expected to inspire. Unable to do anything to render Flora's situation safer than he believes it to be, and about to join the losing side of an armed conflict that ends with the 1746 massacre at Culloden, he is a failure as a 'natural' soldier and protector type.

There is more to explore in this episode, though, in terms of the function of the land in question beyond its aesthetic agency. Waverley is a tourist, not a Highlander. He views the land north of the Highland fault line from a cultural as well as a physical distance, perceiving it to be simultaneously magnificent and vulnerable. But the bridge on which Flora stands, barely three feet in width and made of two Scots pine trees, is familiar and entirely safe from her close-up perspective. She is firmly in touch with the trees, rocks, cataracts and expansive skies; so much so that rather than being suspended in air, as Waverley fancifully imagines, she is securely part of a connected ecology at the top of which she stands. While Waverley displays a less-than-masculine misunderstanding of a scene viewed like a painting or book illustration, Flora is part of the land itself. Even her name implies a natural system, rooted in sympathy with plants. Scott's 'Highland Minstrelsy' chapter grounds Flora Mac-Ivor's story in a complex system that comprises geology (rocks), botany (pine trees and flowers) and the elements (air and water). Moreover, her gestural wave draws attention to a natural harmony that establishes a point of contrast with the ending of *Waverley* where, as I have shown elsewhere, an act of violent intervention attempts to terminate the land's capacity for revealing stories.¹⁹ That violence against the land centres on the removal of ancient trees, a subsequent levelling of land contours, and the planting of a monoculture of grass at Tully-Veolan. The re-landscaping, which extends deep below the surface of the soil and affects everything that lives in and grows from it, tells its own story of how the Highlands as the managed 'estate' of modern Scotland was transformed into sheep pasture from an older, mixed system of land use dominated by cattle husbandry and wild game hunting. That process is ultimately identified by Scott as an act of violence against the land as well as an act of cultural erasure. Moreover, the abrupt discontinuities of Davie Gellatley's consequential forgetting of his old songs and Flora Mac-Ivor's silence after entering a convent represents an enforced muteness that bleakly contrasts with the onwardly rolling music of the Yarrow

¹⁹ 'Sir Walter Scott's Transatlantic Ecology', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 44.2/3 (2013), 115–20.

that concludes *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and the ‘brawling’ mountain rivulet ‘heard among the stones or in the clefts of the rock that occasionally interrupted its course’ that gives ‘life and animation’ to a different landscape of massacre and remembrance in *The Tale of Old Mortality*.²⁰ In order to enjoy the sight of Flora at the cataract, Waverley must come to his ‘senses’. He must defer to a Romantic myth driven by picturesque aesthetics that underpins the politics of creating a desirable pastoral out of a wild and threatening wasteland.

Scott’s combination of Romantic adventure and comedy in ‘Highland Minstrelsy’ accords with his dislike of Pennant’s representation of Highlanders as barbarians whose behaviour was in keeping with the savagery of the land. Scott mentioned that matter in a late letter to Donald Gregory, dated 17 July 1831, writing that he had ‘been shocked at the anathema [Pennant] has pronounced’ on the Clan MacGregor, in particular, and had ‘tried my best to laugh the world, the southern world at least, out of these absurd prejudices’.²¹ As successor to a tradition of poetry rooted in the soil, he adds that ‘the border Minstrels made a man of me’.²²

Changes in land use had altered the appearance of much of Scotland during the second half of the eighteenth century, largely due to the agricultural revolution and economic pressures that affected the Highlands in particular. These had been recorded and investigated before Scott began writing *Waverley* in 1808, but sufficiently recently to influence that novel. The most comprehensive enquiry was John Sinclair’s twenty-one-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791–99), which included descriptions of every parish. Sinclair’s survey, with its reports commissioned from local contributors, tells its own story of the decline of cattle farming in the Borders and Highlands, and particularly in older native breeds of cattle, along with a rise in sheep numbers. Scott’s fiction addresses those changes in ways that respond to Sinclair’s manner as a storyteller. In *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), part of the *Tales of My Landlord, Second Series*, the narrator, Jedediah Cleishbotham, repeatedly refers to the Duke of Argyll’s contributions to animal husbandry in the agricultural revolution. His account is at least a twice-told tale, since the conceit of Scott’s frame narrative is that it has been filtered through the papers of the fictional schoolmaster and clerk, Peter Pattieson, who in turn had heard the details from the landlord of a local inn. The layered narrative and distancing of a historical setting in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century works similarly to the aesthetics of the sublime

²⁰ For an analysis of the landscape of *Old Mortality*, see Susan Oliver, ‘Walter Scott and the Matter of Landscape: Ecologies of Violence for Our Time’, in *The Bottle Imp*, 16 (November 2014), n.pag. <<http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBIIssue16/Oliver.html>> [accessed 12 May 2016].

²¹ *Letters*, xii, 24.

²² Connections made in Scott’s fiction between clan MacGregor and the land are discussed in my forthcoming book, *Green Scott: Historical Fiction and National Ecology*.

and picturesque already mentioned. But *The Heart of Midlothian's* treatment of human tragedy and misfortune is packed with a different kind of detail that relates to land use. Again midway through the novel, a letter from Jeannie Deans to her father anxiously comments on Argyll's introduction of Devonshire dairy cattle in place of the older native Ayrshire breed. Jeannie expresses her affection for the native cattle and traditional Dunlop cheese. Her father later becomes the Duke's cowman. A parenthetical narrator's note inserted into the letter refers to a report intended to be sent to the Board of Agriculture: 'Here follow some observations respecting the breed of cattle, and the produce of the dairy, which it is our intention to forward to the Board of Agriculture.'²³ Many rural readers and landowners would have understood the implication of that foreshortened note of intent in Scott's own time. Jedediah Cleishbotham has already just said of the letter that 'it is too long altogether [...] so we only give a few extracts'.²⁴ Scott is likely here satirizing the length of agricultural reports such as Sinclair's — the kind that Mr. Knightley and Robert Martin discuss in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815). Indeed, he remarked that Sinclair could be tiresome because of his obsession with detail.²⁵ The references to cattle and farming practices continue throughout *The Heart of Midlothian* in a dialogue about the agricultural revolution that forms an aside to the main story.

The Board of Agriculture and Improvement perhaps needs some explanation. Established in London by Royal Charter in 1793, with the intention of producing a full survey of the parishes of England in the style of the Scottish *Statistical Account*, its founder and President until 1798 was John Sinclair. While the English survey was never compiled, the reports that Sinclair sent from Scotland to the Board provide a detailed account of changing farming practices north of the border. Sinclair's edited two-volume *General Report of the Agricultural State, and Political Circumstances, of Scotland*, produced for the Board of Agriculture and published in Edinburgh and London in 1814, contains sections about climate, rivers, trees and livestock farming. The volumes include some direct storytelling, while their overall narrative builds into a saga of rural Scotland. The section on trees includes a brief history of the *HMS Glenmore*, an 800-ton frigate built in 1796 entirely of Scots pine, a species that Sinclair notes to be exceptionally valuable for its compact and durable wood.²⁶ The *Glenmore*

²³ *The Heart of Midlothian*, ed. by David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 350. Not the modern Ayrshire breed of cattle, which was first recorded in the 1870s and recognized as a herd in 1877. See Cattle Society of Great Britain and Ireland breed standard at <<http://www.ayrshirescs.org/ayrshires-cattle-society/society/the-breed/>> [accessed 12 May 2016].

²⁴ *Heart of Midlothian*, p. 350.

²⁵ *Letters*, VII, 231, 296.

²⁶ *General Report of the Agricultural State, and Political Circumstances, of Scotland*, ed. by Sir John Sinclair. Drawn up for the Consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal

survived service in the Far East, the Americas and the Napoleonic wars and was sold into merchant naval service in 1814. Sinclair includes a passionate account of the value of the Scots pine generally in shipbuilding and architecture, which entirely accords with Scott's love of that species. He includes details of by-products from the wood, including turpentine, lamp-black and even the potential food value of the bark (for which he references Carl Linnaeus). In Scott's *Tales of my Landlord*, *Third Series* novel *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose* (1818), Highlanders use blazing torches made of bog-pine, with Scott adding: 'this wood, found in the morasses, is so full of turpentine, that, when split and dried, it is frequently used in the Highlands instead of candles'.²⁷

Trees

It is no secret that while writing poetry and novels alongside his work as a lawyer, journalist and public intellectual, Scott invested time, effort and money that he did not sufficiently have in his passion for planting trees at Abbotsford. The move of house from Ashiestiel in 1811 involved his relocating downstream along the Tweed, close to Galashiels and Melrose, where the river was wider than at his previous, rented home. The new estate included half a mile of river frontage with flood meadows that lived up to their reputation. There were few trees. Scott wrote of the new property to his brother-in-law Charles Carpenter, 'it is very bleak at present having little to recommend it but the vicinity of the river', but adding 'the ground is well adapted by nature to grow wood'.²⁸ The story of Scott's growing of that wood, and his passion for the Tweed, reads like a ballad of love and near loss. The cost of planting trees without doubt contributed to his insolvency crisis of 1826, after which he was able to continue living at Abbotsford on a life-rent but had to sell his Edinburgh house. Journals and letters comment on the unfolding arboricultural programme, but the most intimate and concentrated record of tree species and where they were planted, along with Scott's notes about their success or failure, is the unpublished manuscript journal in which he made entries between 1819 and 1825, *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*. The *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis* pays attention to soil types, aspect, and local climate: sandy, wet, exposed or sheltered. Those accounts, combined with descriptions of water sources and notes on the competition between wildlife, domestic animals, wild plants and tree species, build a picture of the ecology of the estate as it was during six of the busiest years of Scott's planting activity.

Improvement, under the Directions of The Right Hon. Sir John Sinclair, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co; London: Longan, Hurst, Rees, Orme Brown, 1814), II, 206–07.

²⁷ *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, ed. by J. H. Alexander, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 33.

²⁸ Lockhart, p. 201.

As Alison Lumsden and Gerard Carruthers have argued, the 'Preface' to the *Sylva* indicates that it was probably intended to become a public document about land use and tree cultivation: Scott addresses an imagined reader using a conversational tone and concluding that he was writing 'at least to amuse myself and to interest those whose lot it may be to walk under the shade of the trees which I am now engaged in planting'.²⁹ The *Sylva* can indeed be read as a source of interesting stories that develop across the different parts of the estate, based in the experiments that Scott conducted, and linking arboriculture to the ecological and literary history of the region. His acquisition of the 'Glen at Huntley Burn', and description of 'The Rhymer's Glen' are cases in point. Both are connected by name and, even if only arbitrarily, by location with Thomas of Erceldoune, the Rhymer and archetypal Scottish poet of the old Borders ballad, which Scott had extended by adding a third part for the 'Imitation of the Ancient Ballads' section of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in 1803. Scott's entry in the *Sylva* on the Rhymer's Glen demonstrates the extent to which he combined a Romantic sensibility with a practical approach to livestock farming and cultivating trees:

A romantick glen with a rivulet wandering down amongst rocks with remains of natural wood and a quantity of underwood of different kinds. The timber-trees of the upper part were estimated to me at £14, on account of the difficulty in clearing them out of the ravine.

In 1817–18 many full-grown plants of from six to ten feet high were planted in this glen but without inclosing. They have suffered by the sheep as was to be expected but still live & may thrive when cut over.

The glen has been inclosed this season 1818–19 and it is proposed to plant it up but so as to preserve its wild & natural character.

It was accordingly planted up in spring 1819 and must succeed well.³⁰

The Rhymer's Glen, located not far from the stone that then as now commemorates a location where Thomas just might have composed his verses underneath the fabled Eildon tree, is an enigmatic presence in the *Sylva*. Describing it also in other sections, in terms of and with a perspective from the land that surrounds it, Scott seems to have wanted to preserve its sense of mystery. Near to the glen's entrance at Mar's Lea, Tofffield, oaks and larches are the main planted species growing in what Scott describes as an 'indifferent soil' that slopes to the east. He records that 'the hares have done much damage among the larches'.³¹ The larches are not thriving. The soil is indifferent. Furthermore,

²⁹ *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis: Memoranda concerning the woods and plantations of Abbot's Ford. Commenced 1st January 1819*, p. 5. See Lumsden and Carruthers, 'Introductory Note' to transcript for the Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust <<http://www.advocates.org.uk/media/1606/sylvafinalrevisedtranscript-web-version-010512.pdf>> [accessed 10 March 2016].

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

at Ushers Stripe, ‘a small stripe running south east from the south side of the Rhymer’s Glen’, ash and larches are ‘choked by coarse grass’ and the trees are ‘bent’, while ‘a few sweet or Spanish Chestnuts’ are just ‘beginning to thrive’. North and west, and running to the bottom of the glen, more larches are affected by strangulation by coarse grass. In each of the instances just mentioned, tree species introduced to the area — planted ash, but also non-native larches and Spanish chestnuts³² — have had their growth curtailed by the quiet violence and silent resistance of local ecologies manifest in the aggressive action of hares, and tangled and coarse grass. It is as if the land were protesting against invasion.

If the *Sylva* tells part of the story of Scott’s planting programme, it also reflects on the connection between Scottish literature and the land made in Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–03). Partly an old, anonymous ballad, probably from the fifteenth century, and partly an improved fragment, ‘Thomas the Rhymer’ recalls a legend set in the late thirteenth century that, as Scott says in his notes to the *Minstrelsy*, is mentioned in early Scottish literature in the fourteenth-century long narrative poem *History of Wallace*, by Henry the minstrel (Blind Harry), in Andrew Wynton’s *Chronicle*, and by John Barbour.³³ In these respects, ‘Thomas the Rhymer’ demonstrates the evolution of Scottish literature down through five centuries to Scott’s own lifetime. Set in a particular, although legendary, location in the Borders — Huntlie Bank,³⁴ near the Eildon Hills, not far from the village of Erceldoune, and under the Eildon tree — the ballad argues for a literary rootedness in place. Included in all editions of the *Minstrelsy*, ‘Thomas the Rhymer’ grounds the origins of Scottish literature in the material substance of the soil of a local community, in the country of the Borders more generally, and in the land of Scotland as a nation. However, the earth in the poem begins as a strange place, alien, primal, prior to, and outside the socio-political structures of nationhood. It constitutes the deep history and material ecology on which Scotland is founded. Thomas must discover the nature of what lies beneath the tree and sustains its growth before he can transcend the limitation of mere verse to become a truly inspirational poet. The soil is the catalyst for that process, both symbolically and as a substance made of particles with their own history.

The first and older part of ‘Thomas the Rhymer’ is explained by Scott to be a composite of two source copies: one copy he gained from Anna Gordon, Mrs.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³³ Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1802), II, 247–48, 258. The poems Scott refers to are Harry’s *The Actes and Deidis of the Illustre and Vallyeant Campioun Schir William Wallace*, Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, and John Barbour’s, *The Brus*.

³⁴ ‘Huntlie’ is the spelling used in the *Minstrelsy*, while ‘Huntley’ is used in the *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*.

Brown, of Aberdeen, but the other is described only as being ‘obtained from a lady, residing not far from Erceldoune’.³⁵ While Mrs. Brown’s copy indicates the mobility of ballads through their transfer from one place to another, the second copy remains rooted where the poem was originally set. Its source is enigmatic: ‘a lady, residing not far from Erceldoune’ tantalizingly suggests a character from the ballad itself, the ‘Ladye’ or Elf Queen whom Thomas encounters, not far from Erceldoune. It is that first, composite part of the ballad that I am interested in here. The ballad begins with the story of how Thomas came intimately to know the soil of the land through an encounter linked to a tree. The process is one of immersion, like a Scottish vernacular version of the classical literary trope of the visit to the underworld. Before his encounter, we know only that Thomas composed verses. Then, while sitting on Huntlie bank beneath the Eildon tree, he ‘spies wi’ his ee’ a ‘ferlie’, or strange lady, riding a horse. A supernatural creature whose ‘skirt was o’ the grass green silk’, and, I argue, representing the land’s compelling and magical strangeness, she carries him down under the surface of the soil, among the roots of the tree. Beguiling him, the Ladye sings ‘Thomas, ye maun go wi’ me’, urging him to sing his rhymes:

“Harp and Carp, Thomas,” she said;
 “Harp and carp along wi’ me:
 And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
 Sure of your bodie I will be.”
 [...]
 All underneath the Eildon Tree.
 (5–6. 17–24)

The Rhymer lives with the elf queen underground for seven years before returning to the surface. When he returns to the world of late thirteenth-century Scotland, his poetry has been transformed by this environmental version of the visit to the underworld: he is changed, and his words now take the form of prophecy, involving wisdom as much as an ability to see the future.

‘Thomas the Rhymer’ is fundamental to the deep ecology of the *Minstrelsy*. The ballad tells a history of the land on which all of Scottish literature depends, putting that land first. Poetry comes afterwards. Dirt, like soil, as ecocritic Heather Sullivan has argued, is usually regarded as a ‘less glamorous’ substance.³⁶ The Rhymer’s encounter with the ‘ferlie’, however, recognizes the earth precisely as entrancing matter: something that not only cannot be ignored, but that absolutely cannot be resisted and that will not be forgotten. The success of the ballad, which is evident in its endurance down through centuries, relies on the

³⁵ *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), II, 250.

³⁶ ‘Dirt Theory and Material Ecocriticism’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)*, 19.3 (Summer 2012), 515–31 (p. 515).

agency of the earth both as matter and symbol. The Eildon tree, with its roots in the soil and its branches above the poet, connects the human world with the material earth. Beneath its canopy, and coming to know what normally remains unseen, the creative imagination is transformed into part of something more expansive in time and space than the temporally limited and changing world.

Rivers

By the time Scott published the *Minstrelsy*, he knew that not just the appearance but also the substance of the soil of the Borders had been changed. An older, more densely wooded landscape has been transformed into one dominated and defined by pasture. Sheep farming changes the soil. The animals' grazing habits and the matt-like roots of the grass affect the water content and composition of the earth, which in turn defines everything that lives below the surface of the ground. Scott's later poem, *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), the story of which concerns a sixteenth-century situation of human conflict on the geological fault-line that marks the border between the Highlands and Lowlands, notoriously includes an anachronistic reference to that very matter of land use change in the Borders (anachronistic because what is being described was actually the result of changes in times much closer to Scott's own):

From Yarrow braes and banks of Tweed,
Where the lone streams of Ettrick glide,
And from the silver Teviot's side;
The dales, where martial clans did ride,
Are now one sheep-walk, waste and wide.
(Canto 2: v. 28)

Those lines spoken by Roderick Dhu also identify four Borders rivers, each of which meant a great deal to Scott: the Yarrow, Ettrick, Teviot and Tweed. Indeed, the first three are tributaries of the Tweed. Despite significant changes in land use, including 'the sheep-walk, waste and wide', and a number of artificial alterations in their own courses, the rivers together constitute images of permanency over that of mutability. If we read Roderick Dhu's words as intertextual dialogue as well as a statement about environmental degradation, they reflect on Scott's first poem from five years earlier in 1805, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. They also hint at the opening of Wordsworth's 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', where the poet comments on hedgerows close to the river Wye that had changed from their appearance of only five years earlier to become 'hardly hedge-rows, little lines | Of sportive wood run wild (16–17)'.³⁷

The 'last minstrel' as character in the frame narrative of *The Lay* wanders alone, a creative composite from medieval romance (Scott was deeply influenced

³⁷ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* (London: J. and A. Arch, 1798), p. 202.

by the Italian Romance poets Pulci, Ariosto, Boiardo and Tasso), Scottish Borders folklore and a Romantic peripatetic Wordsworthian solitary. He is a figure strangely out of time and place, with no one to sing to and no one to hear him. Culturally reduced to the status of a sturdy beggar or vagabond, his harp is out of tune. But he walks until he comes to a castle by a river, where he is offered lodging, regains his ability to sing and play and — using all of the tropes of chivalric love and martial action — brings alive after a banquet a vigorous tale of knights and Ladies, goblin pages, enchanted woods and magic books. Indeed, the minstrel is able to sing again only when he passes ‘where Newark’s stately tower | Looks out from Yarrow’s birchen bower’ (27–28). The river Yarrow not only features at eleven other points in the poem but becomes the place where the minstrel finally makes a new home that enables him to continue singing. He chooses a cottage close to its banks where he can hear its music, rather than reside in the castle. Again, Scott draws attention to the connection between storytelling and the land, in this instance not through subsoil but the sound of flowing water:

When throstles sung in Hare-head shaw,
 And corn waved green on Carterhaugh,
 And flourished, broad, Blackandro’s oak,
 The aged Harper’s soul awoke!
 Then would he sing achievements high,
 And circumstance of chivalry,
 Till the rapt traveller would stay,
 Forgetful of the closing day;
 And noble youths, the strain to hear,
 Forsook the hunting of the deer;
 And Yarrow, as he rolled along,
 Bore burden to the Minstrel’s song.
 (6.576–87)

Scott was writing here about rivers that had materially inspired his own imagination. As mentioned, his houses at Ashiestiel and Abbotsford were both close to the banks of the Tweed, at points downriver from the confluence with the Yarrow. A well-known anecdote is that when Scott was near to dying, he asked to be brought back to Abbotsford so that he could to hear the sound of the Tweed once more from his bedroom. The river is indeed audible from Abbotsford.

Scott continues to stress the importance of rivers in his novels, not least in his treatment of the Solway Firth in *Guy Mannering* (1815) and in *Redgauntlet* (1824). In both novels the liminal nature of the estuary contributes to the mystery of the plot. The epistolary chapters of book 1 of *Redgauntlet* not only establish how protagonist Darsie Latimer’s part in the novel’s plot is shaped by ‘the great estuary’ and its ‘fatal sands’, but also allow for a discourse on changes in fishing practice, in which game fishing and commercial stations had taken over from

less efficient, common practices in which fish supplied food for every social class.³⁸ The subtitle of *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century* promises a story about time looked back upon. That time concerns Scotland's transition from older traditional ways of life towards modern innovations associated with improvement and *laissez faire* economics. Darsie Latimer recalls to Alan Fairford in letter III how he was scorned by a local village urchin for his lack of skill in using a rod, landing net and 'gorgeous jury of flies' — the game fishing gear of a sporting gentleman. The urchin, who is revealed to be a skilled fisherman and probably a poacher, borrows the equipment and within an hour has 'not only filled my basket [...] but taught me to kill two trouts with my own hand'. The social class implications of the encounter are compelling. Darsie reflects dismissively on Charles Cotton's additional 1676 treatise to Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, a copy of which Scott owned: 'old Cotton's instructions, by which I had hopes to qualify myself for one of that gentle society of anglers, are not worth a farthing for this meridian'.³⁹

The next letter establishes the point of departure from which the plot develops as a mounted fish hunt that ends only moments before the ebb tide turns. However, even that episode serves as the prelude to an argument over new and old methods of fishing for salmon, with implications that extend much further than the 1765 setting of the story. Old Jacobite Mr. Herries and Joshua Geddes, a Quaker fisherman who owns a share in a salmon netting business, quarrel over the effect of netting on communities that had traditionally fished for and eaten salmon. Their dialogue concerns salmon stations:

'Friend Joshua [...] has thy spirit moved thee and thy righteous brethren to act with some honesty, and pull down yonder tide-nets that keep fish from coming up the river?'

'Surely, friend, not so [...]. Thou killest the fish with spear, line, and cobble-net; and we, with snares and nets, which work by the ebb and flow of tide.'

'I tell you in fair terms, Joshua Geddes, that you and your partners are using unlawful craft to destroy the fish in the Solway by stake-nets and wears [...]. You will destroy the salmon which make the livelihood of fifty poor families.'

'I tell you, we are under the protection of this country's laws; nor do we the less trust to obtain their protection.'⁴⁰

³⁸ *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by G. A. M. Wood and David Hewitt, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 20–21.

³⁹ Scott's 1797 edition of *The Complete Angler; or, Contemplative Man's Recreation: being a discourse on rivers, fish-ponds, fish and fishing: in two parts. The first written by Mr. Isaac Walton, the second by Charles Cotton, Esq. With the lives of the authors, and notes, historical, critical and explanatory. By Sir John Hawkins, Knt.* is in the Library at Abbotsford.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

Redgauntlet is the last of Scott's Jacobite novels, set in 1765.⁴¹ While Scott clearly uses the motif of fishing to comment on the hardships experienced by remaining Jacobites two decades after the '45 rebellion, he also shows interest in the efficiency and ethics of modern techniques of fishing in an environment where the river maintains an ancient and enduring power. The Solway Firth and its fish in *Redgauntlet* exert an overwhelming influence over the story, as does Egdon Heath and its furze in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), another novel in which violence erupts in a society transitioning into modernity.

Scott was interested in salmon and trout fishing as more than a marker of political or social development. His treatment of fishing in *Redgauntlet* and other novels responds to topical anxieties from the early nineteenth century. In 1824, the same year that *Redgauntlet* was published, a report was made public on Scotland's salmon fisheries with particular attention to the effects of 'the stake-net mode of fishing, the regulation of the close-time and the necessity of a legislative revisal of the antiquated Scots statutes'.⁴² Observations in the report include a detailed description of tide-net fishing in the Solway Firth, tracing its development into the more recent stake-net method and arguing that the innovation transformed the yield of Scottish salmon fishing.⁴³ Scott owned a copy.⁴⁴ The Rivers Tweed and Tay are also covered in the report. A further, separate statement that was published on fisheries in the River Tay blames stake-net fishing for the reduction in fish numbers upstream.⁴⁵ As already mentioned Scott and a group of other interested parties established The Tweed Commissioners, in 1805, with the aim of responsibly managing the river so that the salmon population could be protected.

The best-selling status of Scott's fiction enabled him to address a wider audience than could be reached by official and scientific reports. His interventions on the decline in salmon stocks in Scotland's rivers, delivered through narrative digressions that often take the form of dialogue between commonplace characters, drew popular attention to an important ecological debate. The episode from *Redgauntlet* makes use of the technique of *entrelacement*, which he learned early in his life from the early sixteenth-century poetry of Ariosto.⁴⁶

⁴¹ G. A. M. Wood and David Hewitt, 'Historical Note', *Redgauntlet*, p. 440.

⁴² *Observations regarding the salmon fishery of Scotland: especially with reference to the stake-net mode of fishing, the regulation of the close-time and the necessity of a legislative revisal of the antiquated Scots statutes* (Edinburgh and London: printed for Bell & Bradfute, and James Duncan, 1824).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–10.

⁴⁴ A copy of the above report is in the Library at Abbotsford.

⁴⁵ *Statement relative to the fisheries in the River Tay* (Edinburgh: G. Ramsay, 1824).

⁴⁶ Scott's fuller involvement in this debate is explored in more depth in my forthcoming *Green Scott*. I address his adoption of *entrelacement* as used in Ariosto in my essay 'Walter Scott and Orlando Furioso', in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (forthcoming 2017).

Meals and letters are frequently the point of departure for telling these digressive stories. In *Old Mortality* (1816), salmon is the subject of a narrative aside describing a meal served by the Laird of Milnewood: 'A large boiled salmon would now-a-days have indicated more liberal housekeeping; but at that period it was caught in such plenty in all the considerable rivers in Scotland, that it was generally applied to feed the servants.'⁴⁷ Jonathan Oldbuck comments in *The Antiquary*, also published in 1816, on 'the space allotted for the passage of a salmon through a dam, dike, or weir, by statute [being] the length within which a full-grown pig can turn himself round'.⁴⁸ While the narrative here represents Oldbuck as being concerned with the finer points of language, the topic draws attention to an environmental concern of Scott's: the increasing number of impediments to the movement of salmon caused by the weirs, caulds and dams introduced to control the flow of rivers or divert their courses. Published seven years later, *Saint Ronan's Well* (1823) links the history of western political systems with natural law and the management of rivers:

There must be government in all society — Bees have their Queen, and stag herds have their leader; Rome had her Consuls, Athens had her Archons — and we, Sir, have our Managing Committee.

The committee in question is the Tweed Commissioners. In the 1805 minutes of that NGO's nascent founding association, *The Western Association of Noblemen and Gentlemen for Procuring due Observance of the Laws respecting Fisheries in the River Tweed*, the purpose and aims of the association are established:

1st For the express purpose of enforcing a strict observance of the act regarding the Period when the river is to remain open and unmolested [...].

2nd For obtaining a free course for fish thro' such Caulds, Dams, or Damheads as are already erected or hereafter may be made in the River Tweed or other rivers connected with it.

3rd For the protection of the water in close time and the preservation of the young fry.⁴⁹

Those minutes also report that 'a very inadequate proportion' of fish returning from the sea were able to reach the upper streams of river, a fact not surprising when 'no fewer than fifteen thousand Salmon, Gilses & co. were shipped from Berwick for London in the course of one week'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *The Tale of Old Mortality*, ed. by Douglas Mack, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 61.

⁴⁸ *The Antiquary*, ed. by David Hewitt, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 66.

⁴⁹ From 'Section 1: Introduction: Fisheries Management on the Tweed — its Background and present day Structure', *The Tweed Foundation* <tweedfoundation.org.uk> [accessed 26 May 2016].

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

By the early nineteenth century a booming industry in supplying Scottish salmon to London had developed, helped by faster shipping transport. David Montgomery has shown that by 1817, a year after publication of *The Antiquary* and *Old Mortality*, 750,000 pounds of chilled Scottish salmon per year was being exported to satisfy demand in the British capital.⁵¹ Salmon stations using stake-netting technology in estuaries, as well as landowners further inland taking advantage of the trade, were depleting stocks. Sinclair's *Agricultural Report* comments on the extent to which commercial fishing was contributing to Scotland's economy, noting the problem of overfishing only insofar as it threatened the value in property of fishing rights:

There is no species of property in Scotland, that has, in various instances, so much increased in value, as the salmon fisheries, owing to the more effectual means employed for catching the fish, the improved modes of conveying them to market, and the increased consumption and luxury of the metropolis, where this fish is in great request. In some cases, however, the value of that description of property has rather diminished, in consequence of the laws for the protection of the fish not having been properly attended to.⁵²

Conclusion: where do we go from here?

This essay has explored a small segment of Scott's attention to the land and his interest in the developments of environmental management in Scotland. My aim has been to provide a brief investigation of how his storytelling drew public attention to real ecological problems, and how the agency of his writing mediates relationships between memory, mythmaking and the biosphere. That investigation shows why it is necessary to look comparatively across the range of Scott's writing, with attention to topical debates and concerns about environmental degradation and land use at the time that he was writing, if we are fully to understand the extent and importance of the history of Scotland's environment that he provides. Scott's dexterity in using different kinds of writing — poetry, fiction, letters, journals, and official documents including statements to parliament — in its turn responded to a variety of already existing texts including ancient ballads, treatises on aesthetics and land surveys. In so doing his responses to Scotland's evolving ecology closely match Scott Slovic's recent definition of the environmental humanities as a set of related and intersecting discourses embodying 'a loosely shared vision or set of concerns', in which agency is produced from solidarity in diversity.⁵³ Strength founded in unity in diversity has long been recognized as the foundation of Walter Scott's writing about

⁵¹ David Montgomery, *King of Fish: The Thousand Year Run of Salmon* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), pp. 66–67.

⁵² Sinclair, *Agricultural Report*, I, 119.

⁵³ Scott Slovic, 'Editor's Note', *ISLE*, 23.1 (Winter 2016), 1.

Scotland as a meeting point of diverse cultures and social practices, and as the underpinning motivation for his belief in the political union of the United Kingdom. A question that demands an answer, then, is whether Scott's writing about the environment is more than of a process of instrumentalization of the land, in which trees, rivers and the soil as the points of origin for stories are agents of a nationalism that function by representing Scots as intimately related to the land on which they live? It would be wrong to claim that Scott was not interested in the political and social identity of Scotland. But I find sufficient evidence to argue for a commitment to an early form of land ethic in his critique of environmental negligence and irresponsibility, made through a sustained series of remarks and digressions in best-selling poetry and fiction that continually engaged with topical ecological anxieties such as overfishing, the extension of sheep farming, and the planting of non-native trees in unsuitable locations.

Scott's novels and poetry recognize the value to Scotland's sense of identity of separate social and ecological cultures of the Borders, central Lowlands, Highlands, western Isles and Hebrides, east coast, and Orkney and Shetland Isles. In doing so, they look beyond the simple polarity of the Highlands and Lowlands with which he is usually associated, to establish ways of seeing a more complex set of interconnected communities that each had a deeply rooted relationship with its particular environment. This essay has not allowed for a more expansive investigation of his attention to each of those regions, so attention has been focused on particular locations that feature in some of Scott's best-known poems and novels. I began with a question as to whether Scott anticipated an ethical approach to the land that is in any way similar to the version proposed by Aldo Leopold. Leopold's land ethic demands that humankind change from 'conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it'. He argued that an 'ecological interpretation of history' shows man to be 'only a member of a biotic team' in which 'the characteristics of the land determined the men who lived on it'.⁵⁴ History is a keyword here, for Leopold tells the story of land ethics as an evolutionary social process 'impeded' by a society where 'the space between cities' means little to people who imagine they have 'outgrown the land'. Scott's voice can be heard in that account. Moreover, Devin Griffiths has persuasively argued that 'the literary mode that made it possible to narrate the evolutionary past convincingly [was] the historical novel, particularly as authored by Scott'.⁵⁵

The problem of fetishization of that land for national interests remains, however. Taking a recent critical perspective, Jane Bennett warns that we should be cautious of the urge always to demystify the vitality with which the nonhuman

⁵⁴ Leopold, p. 205.

⁵⁵ Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature between the Darwins* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 5.

is invested in literature.⁵⁶ On the one hand, the assumption that human agency has always been ‘illicitly projected into things’ is acknowledged by Bennett to be a valuable theory for exposing hidden systems of socio-political domination. The pastoral mode and aesthetics of the picturesque referred to earlier in this essay must surely be included in the exercise of such political and ideological power. But on the other hand, Bennett warns that habitual demystification can obscure the existence of a contrapuntal subversive vitality through which the nonhuman in the environment acts in its own ways, challenging the authority of anthropocentric control. The echo of human agency *in sympathy* with nonhuman nature emerges as a necessary counter to many of the abuses of power that result in violence towards the land. Scott’s emphasis on the marvellous power of the soil as an originary source for Scottish literature in ‘Thomas the Rhymer’, his recourse to the Tweed to recover the sound of the border minstrels, and his depiction of Flora Mac-Ivor’s place in a Highland ecology all bear out that argument. The disrupted grounds of the modernized estate at Tully-Veolan become increasingly troubling. Ultimately, the contribution that Scott made to writing the environmental history of Scotland must be read in terms of what he displayed, and of what further might be expected, by way of a recognition of the value of the land in itself.

⁵⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xiv–xv.