

Walter Scott and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

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This chapter investigates two main angles of the relationship between Walter Scott and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Each concerns what we might call magical agency in literature, along with the development of new creations out of old across centuries of the *imitatio* tradition. The first angle brings together key markers in Scott's fascination with the *Furioso*, as revealed through autobiographical memories, letters, and journal entries. Those markers begin in Scott's schooldays, when Ariosto's best-known poem became a point of departure for the future 'Wizard of the North's' own understanding of chivalric romance. ('The Wizard of the North' was one of Scott's assumed adult pseudonyms.) I aim to reveal a developing framework of thought and improvisation in which Ariosto's romance poetics serve as a touchstone for Scott's literary career, and also for his handling of life more generally. The other angle to my chapter investigates the *Furioso*'s intricate structural and thematic influence on Scott. That influence, I argue, positions Scott's best known works — not just his collected ballads and early nineteenth-century narrative poems, but also his historical novels — as improvisations on an older tradition deriving from two strands: Scottish and English oral ballads on the one hand, and Italian chivalric romance on the other. My case studies will show Scott's development of Ariosto's storytelling mode of *entrelacement*. That technique of interlacing several concurrently developing stories within one overall narrative through interruption, digression, and narrative suspension not only provides a structural frame for Scott's narrative poems and novels, but also lies behind the arrangement and rearrangement of ballads in the first of Scott's

major publications, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.<sup>1</sup> The *Minstrelsy* in its various editions, accreting notes along with explanatory and literary historical essays, underpins everything that Scott wrote afterwards and is key to understanding his synthesis of Scottish vernacular poetics and the Italian Romance tradition.

In Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: a Romaunt* (the 1818 Italian final Canto), Lord Byron famously compares Scott and Ariosto in a pair of sobriquets that look back and forth across three centuries, and from Southern to Northern Europe:

first rose

The Tuscan father's comedy divine;  
 Then, not unequal to the Florentine,  
 The southern Scott, the minstrel who call'd forth  
 A new creation with his magic line,  
 And, like the Ariosto of the North,  
 Sang ladye-love and war, romance and knightly worth.

(Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 4.356-360)

Following Dante (the Tuscan father and Florentine), but as the 'southern Scott', Ariosto had 'call'd forth a new creation' with its own 'magic line'. Scott is then named as 'the Ariosto of the North', suggesting a relationship grounded in topic and style that connects some of the most innovative Italian renaissance and early nineteenth-century Scottish romance poetry. Innovation and improvisation are essential properties in Byron's choice of writers: Ariosto follows Dante, but with a new line that anticipates Scott. During the previous year, in the more private space of a letter to

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> For a further study of entrelacement in Scott's *Waverley* novels, see Fiona Robertson, 'Romance and the Romantic Novel: Sir Walter Scott', *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, Corinne Saunders (ed.) (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 287-304.

his publisher and Scott's friend John Murray, Byron explained his comparison. He pointed out that while Scott shared a thematic likeness to Ariosto, he also had chosen a new 'line':

Surely their themes Chivalry — war — & love were as like as can be — and as to the compliment — if you knew what the Italians think of Ariosto — you would not hesitate about that. — But as to their 'measures,' you forget that Ariosto's is an octave stanza — and Scott's anything but a Stanza [...] I do not call him the 'Scotch Ariosto' which would be sad provincial eulogy — but the 'Ariosto of the North' — meaning of all countries that are not the South.<sup>2</sup>

Scott's *imitatio*, deriving from classical and humanist practices of emulating, adapting, reworking and enriching sources from an earlier author, who in this case is Ariosto, extended through several stages, to move beyond poetic form and metrics, across genres to the prose fiction of the nineteenth-century novel. That generic development in itself manifests Scott's initiative as an author who adapted romance for a modern, popular readership that was changing its preferences away from long narrative poems towards the novel.<sup>3</sup>

Walter Scott made no secret that Ariosto was his favourite poet from the European romance tradition and that *Orlando Furioso* was the epic poem that he most enjoyed and valued. In the autobiographical fragment of his early life, completed in 1808 when he was just 37 years old but not published until after his death, in his son-in-law John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837-38 7-vol. ed., 1839 10-vol. ed.), Scott recalls how his consuming passion for romance poetry emerged while he was a schoolboy: 'all that was adventurous and romantic I

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<sup>2</sup> *Byron's Letters and Journals, 'So Late Into the Night', 1816-1817*, Leslie A. Marchand (ed.), 12 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973-82), V (1976), pp. 266. Letter to John Murray, dd. 17 September 1817.

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to a general trend towards prose fiction, and do not suggest that narrative poetry had entirely lost its popularity. Lord Byron's poems, in particular, were highly successful alongside Scott's historical novels. In the Victorian period, long poems retained a readership even though prose fiction was more popular.

devoured'.<sup>4</sup> I show later the extent to which topographical features became integral to Scott's mature version of romance, with particular reference to his 1813 poem *The Bridal of Triermain*. Here we see his early association of context and imagination, as he remembers developing his interest along with his close childhood friend John Irving in the dramatic context of the hills adjacent to Edinburgh's old city:

We lived near each other, and by joint agreement were wont, each of us, to compose a romance for the other's amusement. These legends, in which the martial and the miraculous always predominated, we rehearsed to each other during our walks, which were usually directed to the most solitary spots about Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crag.<sup>5</sup>

Scott emphasises the same early interest in romance in his 1829 'General Preface' to the *Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley Novels*, but with a confession that says more about his development of an Ariostan, neo-renaissance style. He indicates that *imitatio* came early in his life, before he had the technical skills needed or even the inclination to resolve through closure the multiple stories that come together to comprise *entrelacement*.<sup>6</sup>

The chief enjoyment of my holidays was to escape with a chosen friend, who had the same taste with myself, and alternately to recite to each other such wild adventures as we were able to devise. We told, each in turn, interminable tales of knight-errantry and battles and

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<sup>4</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* 10 vols (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1839), I, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of, and references to work on, Ariosto's development of *entrelacement* see Albert Ascoli, *A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 205-42.

enchantments, which were continued from one day to another as opportunity offered, without ever thinking of bringing them to a conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Irving's letters corroborate Scott's story, recalling that the boys took most delight in 'romances of Knight-errantry; the *Castle of Otranto*, Spenser, Ariosto and Boiardo'.<sup>8</sup> That early enthusiasm for tales of valour and enchantment, set in a partly historical and partly fantastical Britain and Europe, would become a defining characteristic of Scott's writing.<sup>9</sup> Arthur's Seat was already associated with King Arthur's legendary court at Camelot. A close affinity between enchantment, features of the land, poetry and storytelling emerged that would develop into a major theme in Scott's writing. Remembering his boyhood inspiration from the *Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, both of which at that point in his life he read in John Hoole's translations, Scott attributes to his early reading and imitation 'no small effect in directing the turn of my imagination to the chivalrous and romantic in poetry and prose'.<sup>10</sup>

Notably, these were the same years in which Scott was also furiously and furtively reading Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (first published in 1765). The *Reliques* were rendered even more exciting by their being embroiled in an authenticity controversy initiated by rival ballad and song collector Joseph Ritson, whose own antiquarian collections of medieval English songs and metrical romances would become inspirational for Scott. Moreover, reading the *Reliques* reputedly so captivated the boy Scott's imagination that he arrived late for family dinners: in his autobiography, he calls the songs 'the Delilah's of my imagination', remembering that 'I forgot the hour of dinner and was sought for with anxiety, and was still found entranced in my

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<sup>7</sup> 'General Preface', *Introductions and Notes from the Magnum Opus: Waverley to A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, J. H. Alexander, with P. D. Garside and Claire Lamont (eds) 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), I, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, I, 62.

<sup>9</sup> See Ascoli, pp. 205-42, for discussion of the structures and techniques underpinning history and literariness in the *Furioso*.

<sup>10</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, I, p. 63. For more on Hoole's edition, see Everson in this volume.

intellectual banquet'.<sup>11</sup> That heady blend of Italian romance epic and English vernacular poetry collected for a modern antiquarian readership shaped much of what Scott later wrote and published, from his early ballad collection, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (first published in 1802 and, like Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, revised through several editions), his metrical romances and narrative long poems mainly published between 1805 and 1814, to the historical novels for which he became best known. The latter include the five 'crusader' novels *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *The Betrothed*, *The Talisman*, and *Count Robert of Paris*, all published between 1820 and 1831 (*Count Robert* just nine months before Scott's death in 1832). I shall explore the impact of Scott's early reading and composition as this chapter progresses, but for now will continue with the personal context of Scott's ongoing interest in Ariosto and the *Furioso*.

At Edinburgh University, where he studied classics from the age of twelve, Scott recalls incurring the anger of Andrew Dalzell, Professor of Greek, for an essay that he wrote placing Homer behind Ariosto in poetic merit and interest.<sup>12</sup> In the light of that adolescent essay, it is perhaps pertinent that the Ariosto borrowings, references and imagery in Scott's mature work testify to a preference for the romance and magical episodes in the *Furioso* over the more classically inspired, later additions and revisions. Disappointed by the time he reached his teens with what he called Hoole's 'flat medium', Scott quickly took up Italian classes in Edinburgh in order to read Dante, Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso in the original, while he 'fastened [...] like a tiger, upon every collection of old songs or romances which chance threw in my way, or which my scrutiny was able to discover'.<sup>13</sup>

Still later, in an 1814 letter to William Southerby, he wrote 'I am delighted that you are turning your talents to the Italian poetry. I believe I am wrong but Ariosto is a greater favourite of mine

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<sup>11</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, I, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, I, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, I, pp. 52, 64.

than Tasso'.<sup>14</sup> Again, that preference shows Scott's inclination towards Ariosto's earlier romance style over the turn of Italian epic towards renaissance classicism that came to the foreground with Tasso. Moreover, in this letter to Southerby, Scott mentions that he had just received from his own Edinburgh publishers a copy of the latest edition of his poem *The Vision of Don Roderick*. That imitation romance, written in Spenserian stanzas, is one of several by differing authors published during the Napoleonic wars that treated the story of Spain's passing in the eighth century into Moorish Islamic rule and its subsequent return to Christian leadership. All these poems use epic tradition and historical semi-fiction to justify and glorify Britain's involvement in the Napoleonic Iberian wars. In Scott's metrical romance *Don Roderick*, the defeated Christian king of the Goths, takes refuge in an enchanted, cavernous underground where two giant statues armed with a combination of scythes, clubs, an hourglass and a book come to life and reveal to him the future of the Spanish nation down to the time of the defeat of Napoleon in the Peninsular wars. Scott's aim was to bring together, in the words of his introduction to that poem, 'strange tradition [and] many a mystic trace / Legend and vision, prophecy and sign', combining the 'wonders wild of Arabesque [...] with Gothic imagery of darker shade' (12.3-6)<sup>15</sup>

The influence of the *Furioso* in *Don Roderick* is evident not just formally and in the role of magical action and the coming to life of giants, but also in the poem's mode of *imitatio* or referential, intertextual dialogue with prior texts, such as Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella and Roberto Fedi have explored as being so central to Ariosto's own style.<sup>16</sup> Scott's intertextual *imitatio* extends back through his formal, metrical acknowledgement of Spenser, to thematic and imagistic borrowings from Ariosto and Boiardo, and only then to classical Latin and Greek tropes of sibyls, seers and visits to the underworld. Despite a deep time return to the Greek and Latin classical roots of the Western literary tradition, a romance-style narrative of martial and marvellous action

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Scott, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, H. J. C. Grierson and others (eds), 12 vols (London: Constable and Co, 1832-37), III, p. 468.

<sup>15</sup> *The Vision of Don Roderick* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1811), pp. 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella, Roberto Fedi, 'Introduction', *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 8-11.

combined with an early nineteenth-century aesthetic of vastness and the supernatural, consistent with the Burkean Sublime, carries Scott's poem to its conclusion. The relationship of style and purpose in *Don Roderick* also follows in Ariosto's romance epic tradition, as well as that of Spenser (and earlier, the classical epic of Virgil), because the poem works as a legendary, literary and partly historical paean to Britain's final, recent triumph over Napoleon at Waterloo, recalling, as it does so, the *Furioso*'s mythologisation of the rise of the House of Este.

Writing to Miss Marianne Clephane of the Isle of Mull, a friend and regular correspondent, Scott had five years earlier in 1809 distinguished between what he interpreted to be the moral and political allegories of *The Faerie Queene* and the less prominent political content of *Orlando Furioso* alongside its 'bona fide romance': 'If you read with attention the history of Queen Elizabeth's time you may perceive that besides his moral allegory Spenser had a political allegory couch'd under his tissue of romantic fiction [...] [S]ome traces of political allegory may be discovered in the *Orlando Furioso* but they are in detached portions of the poem, which generally speaking is a bona fide romance'.<sup>17</sup> At that time, Scott was also completing his next poem, *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), a tale in which romance and chivalry are embedded mainly in the Scottish western isles, west coast and highlands during the fourteenth-century reign of Robert the Bruce, culminating in the Scots' victory over the English army of Edward II at the Battle of Bannockburn. Motifs of romantic intrigue, veiling and disguised identity, particularly in the actions of the heroines Lady Edith of Lorn, who is abandoned by her fiancé, and the Bruce's sister Isabel, as well as on the part of the Bruce himself, help carry the narrative of the poem. Scott includes tropes of enchanted grottoes, sea nymphs and the actions of knights involved in pursuit of romantic liaisons, all of which show a debt of style and mode to the Scottish episodes in the *Furioso*. However, as with *Don Roderick*, there is clearly a political subtext to Scott's courtly romance, which historically grounds the teleological path of Scotland as one moving toward full British Union.

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Letters*, II, p. 228.

Taking Ariosto as the gold standard against which Romantic writers from other nations could be measured, Scott's journal entry for 15 February 1827 proclaims that Goethe is 'the Ariosto at once . . . of Germany'<sup>18</sup>. By this time Scott was fifty-six years old, had suffered a minor stroke and, because of his financial insolvency declared a year earlier, was rewriting his novels in order to pay his creditors. The *Furioso* remained important to him as a poem to which he could turn in order to provide space for the imagination during years that were dominated by material demands. Throughout his life the interplay between narratives of 'fact' and tales of myth and legend established a space where the mind could function at its most creative. In his late, 1830 epistolary exploration of superstition and the supernatural, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, he returned to the anonymous early fourteenth-century English romance *Richard Coeur de Lion*, which together with the *Furioso* had inspired his novel *The Talisman*. Scott wrote that

like other romances, [the *Coeur de Lion*] was written in what the author designed to be the Style of true history, and was addressed to hearers and readers, not as a tale of fiction, but a real narrative of facts, so that the legend is a proof of what the age esteemed credible and were disposed to believe as much as if had been extracted from a graver chronicle.<sup>19</sup>

Also in *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, Scott argues that just as 'by the inhalation of certain gases or poisonous herbs, necromancers can dispose a person to believe he sees phantoms', literature has a power of enchantment that enables the imagination to see the world in ways that are creative or destructive, depending on its use.<sup>20</sup> The responsibility for good or bad 'affect' lay with

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, Intro. W. E. K. Anderson (ed.) (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1998), p. 316.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Scott, *Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 46.

the author's use of words, a theme that he had taken up at the beginning of his poetical career, in the motif of the book of spells in *The Lay of the last Minstrel*.

To conclude this look at Scott's developing interest in the *Furioso* beyond the immediate context of his development as an author, there are moments and life circumstances when the *Furioso* informs his way of thinking about personal crisis and frustration. In late December 1814 his then thirteen-year-old son Walter junior contracted smallpox, despite having received both inoculation and Edward Jenner's still recently developed vaccination.<sup>21</sup> Early in the new year, on 10 January, Scott wrote to Lady Abercorn that he and his wife were 'alarmed enough, for the appearance of the smallpox in this generation is like one of the giants in Ariosto who comes alive after he is killed'.<sup>22</sup> In a letter nine days later to James Ellis, he re-uses the analogy: 'The circumstance of Ariosto's enchanted champion after it was supposedly fairly slain is a little startling'.<sup>23</sup> While it might be stretching analysis too much towards conceit to contend that these literary analogies to smallpox were any serious form of engagement with the original works in question, the medical allusion here is perhaps worth considering, because Scott extended it still further. The *Furioso*, as a poem that has at its centre infection with and recovery from feverish madness, comes to function as a form of vaccination against Scott's own distemper of the imagination. By 1821, his friend William Stewart Rose was working on the eight-volume translation of the *Furioso* that he would publish in 1831. As one of Rose's main supporters in that venture, Scott remarked that when he (Scott, that is) was required to stay in town for a month or more, he always succumbed to 'a sort of mental and bodily fever' that was best cured by daily reading in Ariosto's *Orlando*.<sup>24</sup> The prospect of an '*Orlando*

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<sup>21</sup> Variolation inoculation, consisting of infection with a mild form of smallpox, had been available since Lady Mary Wortley Montagu introduced it from Turkey in 1711. Edward Jenner's more effective vaccination from cowpox was discovered in 1796. Scott and his wife had decided not take chances with their son's health, so the boy had received both forms of prevention.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *Letters*, IV, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, *Letters*, IV, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, *Letters*, VII, p. 8. Letter dd. 18 December 1821.

cure' (my term) is intriguing. Scott claimed that he made a practice of reading the 'Orlandos of Boiardo and Ariosto once every year'.

Let us now look more specifically at Scott's literary relationship with Ariosto and the *Furioso*. Barbara Reynolds has argued that Lord Byron was the British poet most similar to Ariosto, on account of his combined use of style, material and metrics.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, while *Childe Harold* is written in Spenserian stanzas, *Don Juan* is in an *ottava rima* that goes back not just through Ariosto, but also through Tasso, Boiardo, Pulci, and other Italian romance poets to Boccaccio. The intertextual references in *Childe Harold* canto IV mentioned earlier — Scott as 'the Ariosto of the North' and Ariosto as the 'southern Scott' — are consistent with Ariosto's own humanistic practice of *imitatio*. Byron's admiration of Scott's affinity with Ariosto is layered back through Ariosto himself to Dante and, by dint of references to epic tradition, to Virgil and Homer. However, metrical variation does not relegate Scott. On the contrary, I suggest, formal creativity is part of a process that shows Scott to be perhaps the most significant *improvisatore*, in the traditional sense of that word, of his time.

### *Scott the Poet*

*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, published in 1805 and described by Scott as a metrical romance, was intended for inclusion in the 'Imitation of the Ancient Ballad' section of the 1806 third edition of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. However, the length of the poem along with its experimental narrative style and metrics led to the abandonment of that initial plan. In *The Lay*, Scott not only borrowed from oral folk traditions associated with the Scottish Borders, but from ballad and Romance poetics more generally. This first of his long narrative poems is written in paragraphs of varying length that move between sections of accentual verse, conventional octosyllabic couplets,

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<sup>25</sup> Barbara Reynolds, 'Introduction,' *Orlando Furioso, a Romantic Epic by Ludovico Ariosto*, trans. and into. Barbara Reynolds, 2 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1975), I, p. 83-86.

adapted Spenserian stanzas, and traditional ballad metres to exemplify what Daniel Cook has defined as an ‘improvisatory authorship’.<sup>26</sup> As J. R. Watson has argued, the focus on accented rather than syllabic metrics in parts of the poem shows Scott, like other Romantic poets including Percy Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, moving from older poetic forms to anticipate innovations such as Gerard Manly Hopkins’s late nineteenth-century sprung rhythm.<sup>27</sup> **The principle of poetic improvisation links Scott to Ariosto.** However, let us leave form aside for a moment, and look instead at the subject matter and pivotal function of this first long original poem by Scott.

The story of *The Lay* involves a frame narrative that begins with an aged minstrel who is lost in a bleak landscape; as a poet and a character, he is, in effect, out of time and place. That ‘last minstrel’ wanders alone, a creative combination of a romance character such as we find in the *Furioso* and an aged Romantic Wordsworthian solitary. His harp is out of tune. He has been relegated to the status of a sturdy beggar or vagabond. But, while following the flow of the river Yarrow, he comes to a castle where he is taken in. He regains his ability to sing and play — using all of the tropes of chivalric love and martial action — and brings alive, after a banquet, an historic tale of knights and ladies, goblin pages, enchanted woods and magic books. I have written about the poem elsewhere, so will get to my point where Scott’s *imitatio* of Ariosto’s storytelling is concerned.<sup>28</sup>

Scott as author brings together in *The Lay* a combination of popular Scottish oral traditions with features from Ariostan epic romance. The story of this poem is one of his most directly *Furioso*-like compositions. Interlaced episodes and digressions include the onward, running tale of a knight in pursuit of forbidden love, episodes of war and knightly combat, the mischievous

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Cook, ‘*The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and Improvisatory Authorship’, in *The Yearbook of English Studies* 47 (2017), pp. 162-85 (p. 168).

<sup>27</sup> J. R. Watson, ‘Metre and Form’, *A Handbook to English Romanticism*, ed. by Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 181.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Oliver, *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 69-8 and ‘Walter Scott: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. A Poem’, in *The Literary Encyclopedia* <https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?UID=384&rec=true> [accessed 20 April 2017]

interventions of supernatural goblin page Gilpin Horner, the motif of an iron-bound book of spells taken from the grave of mystic wizard and crusader Michael Scott, whose knowledge of magic in turn is linked to Malagigi, the cousin of Rinaldo from the *Furioso*.<sup>29</sup> Michael Scott appears towards the end of the poem, when he resolves the supernatural part of the story after a singing competition between bards. A context of recognisable haunted locations around Melrose, Selkirk, and Hawick features Melrose Abbey, Minto Crag, the Eildon Hills, and an ancient druidic earthwork known as Moat-hills mound.

There is a rhythmic, structural ebb and flow of the voice of the minstrel that is imperative to the unfolding connection of these stories. After the overall narrator has set the scene in a short introduction, the six cantos of the main poem are each framed by teasing pauses in the song that combine narrative interruptions with the minstrel's own reflections. This strategy builds a relationship between the poet-narrator and the minstrel, forging connections through romance tropes and song traditions stretching back from the late seventeenth-century frame narrative to the middle of the sixteenth century in which the action of the lay takes place (it begins approximately when Ariosto's lifetime ends). Scott's footnotes add the further, digressive voice of an historian that projects the poem back into pre-Christian Scotland, through references to archeological features and imagery of haunting presences. Of 'the Moat-hill's mound / Where Druid shades still flitted round (2.268-69), Scott writes, 'This is a round artificial mount near Hawick, which, from its name [...] was probably anciently used as a place for assembling a national council of the adjacent tribes. There are many such mounds in Scotland'.<sup>30</sup> Each interruption makes possible the poem's forward or sideways thrust into a new episode or story, all of which ultimately contribute to the denouement. In developing these devices for his first long narrative poem Scott was imitating and improvising on Ariosto's use of a delaying technique that made possible a series of suspensions of the main narrative line. Let us compare the pauses at the endings of Canto First and Canto Fifth of *The Lay*

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Scott, *Complete Poetical Works*, pp. 30 and 65, n.24.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Poetical Works*, p. 61.

with similar moments at the end of cantos XI and XXIV of the *Furioso*. The quotations here are from the 1634 edition of John Harrington's 1591 translation of the *Furioso* because Scott owned that edition and was by this stage mainly reading in it, along with a copy in Italian, rather than the Hoole translation of his youth:

Here pause'd the harp; and with its swell

The Master's fire and courage fell

[...]

Encourag'd thus, the aged man,

After meet rest, again began.

(*Lay*, 1.347-64)

After due pause, they bade him tell,

Why he, who touch'd the harp so well,

Should thus, with ill-rewarded toil,

Wander a poor and thankless soil.

(*Lay*, 5.525-28)

But now, although perhap my story please you,

To pawse a little may refresh and ease you.

(*Furioso*, 16.65)

But least my tale with tediousnesse molest you,

I wish you lay aside the book, and rest you.

(*Furioso*, 24.96)<sup>31</sup>

The above lines show Scott elaborating his narrative suspensions more than Ariosto had done. But the teasing and the self-deprecation, common to both, serve a similar purpose. Like Ariosto's storyteller, the minstrel's apparent self-doubt shrewdly solicits encouragement for him to continue. That strategy is a conceit, its *faux*-mocking mode echoing Scott's 'modesty' in self-nominating himself as the modern minstrel who adapts an older tradition for a new readership. The poem in consequence gains a still further temporal dimension: that of the early nineteenth century period of the Napoleonic Wars, in which old values of virtue and military prowess were being reclaimed in the interest of British patriotism, not least through a revival of romance poetry.

The minstrel of the *Lay* also has a cultural and literary function as the mediator between high and low poetic form. His association with Italian renaissance style alongside more commonplace Scottish border balladry addresses a literary argument from Scott's own time. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso were regarded as high cultural poets, while Scott well remembered the raging, late eighteenth-century Percy-Ritson argument over whether vernacular minstrels were elite professional *improvisatori*, or combined that group with popular entertainers including wandering *jongleurs*. Ritson, who maintained the latter position, was of course right. The combination of high and low literary forms in *The Lay* explores that argument in a manner that is consistent with the improvisatory style of Ariosto in the *Furioso*. James Coleman argues that the epic romance style of Pulci and other Italian Romance poets represents through the figure of the *improvisatore* a reconciliation of elite and popular forms for a unifying social purpose.<sup>32</sup> Scott's bringing together of old ballads with what, by that time, was

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<sup>31</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. John Harrington, 3rd edn (London: J. Parker, 1634).

<sup>32</sup> James K. Coleman, paper, 'Orality and Improvisation in the Chivalric Literature of Laurentian Florence', American Association for Italian Studies Annual Conference 2016.

regarded as high romance had a similar function, and his representation of himself as a latter day minstrel configures him as an *improvisatore* in the older Italian sense.

I mentioned earlier the importance of landscape to Scott's development of a distinctive and innovative romance form. The *Bridal of Triermain* integrates topographical features into supernatural action in a complexly interlaced poem. The power of landmarks to produce imaginative romance stories is essential to *Triermain*. Rocks on a steep hill above a river, surrounded by woodland, suggest a castle inhabited by an enchantress. The conceit is that under certain conditions of heightened sensibility and imagination, the castle becomes real, opening a portal to knightly adventure, but otherwise it fades into nothing more than picturesque fancy: quite literally, it is an enchanting view.<sup>33</sup> Scott cites William Hutchinson's tour narrative, *An Excursion to the Lakes in Westmoreland and Cumberland, August, 1773*, as a source for the poem's setting in the Vale of St John in Cumberland, while the romance storylines connect British romanticism with the early sixteenth-century Italian renaissance of Ariosto, through the practices of *imitatio* and *entrelacement*.<sup>34</sup>

As in the *Lay*, Scott uses an introduction and conclusion in *Triermain* to frame the historical romance stories. However, the structures of the two poems vary. *The Bridal of Triermain*'s leaner, three-canto form serves to counterpoint the rich complexity of its three main interlaced episodes. Even the frame narrative is a story in itself, voiced in the first person by a male lover of low birth who uses romance storytelling skills in an attempt to court his nobly ranked lady. The narrator's name, Arthur, links him with the interpolated Arthurian stories of high adventure that he tells, even as we know that he cannot aspire to such adventurous quests: rather, this latter day Arthur's achievement is his ability to enchant with song and with his knowledge of the landscape. The hero

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<sup>33</sup> Scott quotes Hutchison's description of the Vale of St John. Castle Rock, the topographical feature of the vale most prominent in *The Bridal of Triermain*, became a subject for artists and illustrators. The most notable paintings of the Rock from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are by Francis Towne in 1786, the Reverend Joseph Wilkinson in 1810, and Joseph Allom in 1835. Motifs of illusion and enchantment associated with the Vale occur at three main points in the poem: 1.10-12; 3.2-14; Conclusion.1. *Poetical Works*, pp. 557, 572-76, 584.

<sup>34</sup> Scott, *Poetical Works*, p. 588.

of one of his stories – the second in order of telling — is named Roland, and he seeks a lady, Gyneth, who sleeps in the elusive castle as a result of a spell cast on her by Merlin. Enclosed within the tale of Roland de Vaux and Gyneth is a third story that features King Arthur and the castle's previous resident, the half-mortal (maternal parentage) and half-genie (paternal parentage) enchantress, Gyneth's mother, Guendolen. The three main stories of *Triermain* could stand alone as narratives, but they connect in a manner that again looks back and forward across centuries: Arthur's lady, Lucy, is mesmerised and urges him to continue each time he finishes an episode. The convention of stories leading on from one to another according to the design of the teller and the desire of the listener also recalls *The Tales of A Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*. Scott owned *The Arabian Nights* in the six-volume 1811 translation by the English orientalist Jonathan Scott, lavishly illustrated with engravings after the paintings of Robert Smirke.<sup>35</sup>

Where *imitatio* is concerned, Scott reaches back into the *Furioso*'s world of knights, tournaments, magical characters, rivers, caves and castles, through influences including the eighteenth-century neoclassical poet, William Collins. Collins is identified in the poem and named in the fifth of the eight notes for a sensibility that enabled him to be inspired by topographical features. In the introduction, Arthur invokes Collins's ability to imagine 'the maze of fairy land' and 'of golden battlements to view the gleam [...] by some Elysian stream' (Intro. 8). Scott's first footnote points out that Samuel Johnson had said of Collins, 'He loved fairies, genii, giants, and monsters' as well as 'the meanders of enchantment'.<sup>36</sup> Scott includes all of those supernatural entities in his poem, along with hermits, a bard, a tournament, and tales of knightly quest.

*The Bridal of Triermain*'s innermost tale clearly resembles the story of Alcina from canto seven of the *Furioso*. King Arthur is detained and seduced by Guendolen, who appears beautiful

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<sup>35</sup> Scott's edition was *The Arabian Nights Entertainments; carefully revised and occasionally corrected from the Arabic. To which is added, a selection of new tales, and also an introduction and notes*. By Jonathan Scott, with engravings from paintings by Robert Smirke. He later bought a French edition,

<sup>36</sup> Scott, *Poetical Works*, p. 587.

and plies him with luxuries until he becomes sated and escapes to return to the Round Table, Guinevere, and his worldly responsibilities. At the point of his escape, the illusion of Guendolen's beauty disappears and she is revealed to be a five hundred years old maleficent sorceress. Gyneth is the daughter born of that affair. Roland's task, more than one hundred years later, is to defeat the subsequent enchantment of Gyneth, who on the one hand sleeps until woken by a virtuous knight, under a spell cast a century earlier by Merlin, and on the other hand must, through love, be released from the necromantic curse of revenge against Christian knights originating with a genie and passed down through her mother's influence.

*The Bridal of Triermain's* motif of a landscape implicated in enchantment selectively weaves together sources ranging from the early nineteenth century back to and beyond Ariosto. Marina Warner has shown that mythologies featuring caves inhabited by enchantresses can be traced in Italian (and before that Roman) literary history at least to the story of the cave of the Cumaean sibyl, but that they laterally involved several other sources extending outwards to the pre-Christian Middle and Far East.<sup>37</sup> Scott knew many of those stories from his childhood, formal education, and adult reading. The precursors for his tale of Roland and Gyneth include the fairytale of 'The Little Briar Rose', anthologised in 1812 in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Haus-Marchen* (*Childrens' and Household Tales* in English, and commonly known as Grimm's Fairytales), itself based on 'La belle au bois dormant', from Charles Perrault's 1697 *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*.<sup>38</sup> Scott integrates the redemptive kiss-awakening motif by the brothers Grimm with allusions to the several episodes, most of them more sinister or comedic, involving sleeping women and erotic awakening that occur in the *Furioso* (e.g. Angelica and Sacripante in canto 1; Olimpia, deserted by Bireno in Canto 10; Bradamante and Fiordispina in canto 25). The

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<sup>37</sup> See Warner's 'The Cave of the Enchantress', in her *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), pp. 3-11.

<sup>38</sup> Scott's owned an 1812 edition of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Haus-marchen* (Berlin: in der Realschulbuchhandlung). See the Abbotsford collection, Faculty of Advocates Library, Edinburgh. For discussion of the tales of 'The Sleeping Beauty', 'The Little Briar Rose', and their sources see Warner, pp. 219-22 and Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 207-230.

capacity of the Cumberland landscape sufficiently to inspire the imagination to conjure a view of the enchanted castle is the essential common feature that links together all of these stories in *The Bridal of Triermain*. Nancy Goslee has shown how the ‘neomedieval verse form and medieval subject matter’ of this poem and its sequel, *Harold the Dauntless*, published in 1817, identify both works as imitations of older romance, particularly including that of Ariosto and Tasso.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Novels*

Scott’s narrative poems, as we have seen, show how the *Furioso* helped shape the magic lines that Byron identifies as part of Scott’s method as a latter-day Ariosto. However, Scott is undoubtedly better known for his novels, and particularly for his historical fiction. My argument here is that his prose fiction, through its narrative style and treatment of love, conflict, trial by adventure, superstition, and place, shows sufficient debt to the themes and devices of Ariosto to be considered an improvisation in the form of nineteenth-century prose. Why would Scott take such a step and why didn’t he continue to express himself mainly in poetry? I suggest that the answer is more interesting than the usually cited anecdote about Byron having ‘bet him’ (beaten him) as a poet.<sup>40</sup> By the second decade of the nineteenth century the novel was becoming the most popular form of literature, read by people of all classes and ages, and by both genders. Scott achieved through a new mode of *imitatio* and improvisation the transformation of high-cultural chivalric romance epic and popular ballad into the contemporary form of prose fiction, where it would best be guaranteed a continuing readership. His harp, serving a similar function to the *lira da braccio* of the Italian *improvisatori* had been ‘re-strung’ and retuned, as the pen of the novelist.<sup>41</sup> The most obvious evidence of a connection between Scott’s fiction and Ariosto’s poetry is direct acknowledgement.

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Moore Goslee, *Scott the Rhymers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), pp.129-154 (133, 148-49). Goslee also traces motifs of castles and enchantresses through Scott’s other poems.

<sup>40</sup> Lockhart, *Life*, p. add.

<sup>41</sup> Coleman, in ‘Orality and Improvisation’, discusses the *lira da braccio* and *improvisatori*.

Of the twenty-seven major works of prose fiction that Scott published between 1814 and 1831, just five do not mention or recognisably allude to the *Furioso*. Two novels, *The Betrothed* and *The Talisman*, were published together in 1825 as *Tales of the Crusaders*. These last anonymously published novels, before Scott admitted authorship of his fiction in the 1827 *Chronicles of the Canongate* (incidentally, one of the works that does not reference Ariosto), share thematic material with the *Furioso*. Only *The Talisman* has a setting that involves Palestine and action that includes the crusades. A bond of friendship, established at the outset between the Scottish hero Sir Kenneth and a disguised Saladin, leads into a story of knightly love, treachery, disguise, combat, and revenge. *The Betrothed*, by contrast, is mainly set in the twelfth-century disputed border marches between England and Wales. Again, the plot involves love, treachery, knightly quest and adventure, while the crusader story this time is told in the form of a narrative digression. The case studies that I will concentrate on here, however, explore a more radical approach to *imitatio*, *entrelacement*, and the reinvention of Ariosto for a nineteenth-century readership.

*Waverley* was the first of Scott's novels to be published, in 1814. Studies have discussed the education of Edward Waverley, the hero, firstly through his youthful reading in the library of 'an affectionate old uncle to whose title and estate he was presumptive heir', and secondly through the mistakes he makes during a visit to the Scottish Highlands just before and during the last Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and 1746. Although much of Waverley's reading is in romance, the role of Ariosto has not so far been the main focus of any sustained enquiry.<sup>42</sup> Waverley's passion in chapter two for a library that includes enchanting romance literature, in a grand hall that he will inherit, figuratively gestures to Scott's own early passion for romance including the *Furioso*, which he would carry forward into his future as an adult author.<sup>43</sup> Jane Millgate acknowledges the importance of Ariosto in *Waverley*, showing how the young Edward is presented as an

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of romance in general and education in *Waverley*, see Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 35-57.

<sup>43</sup> The *Furioso* is not specifically mentioned in chapter two, but we know that Ariosto is included in Waverley's early reading because his copy features later in the novel.

indiscriminate reader who pursues ‘story rather than moral’ and who favours romance authors because he finds them most enjoyable. Among other things, ‘He delights in tales [...] which tell of heroic actions ending in tragedy’, then retreats to ‘the more solitary corners of the estate of Waverley Honour, especially the shores of Mirkwood Mere,’ to compose his own imitative verses.<sup>44</sup> That imitation is taken forward in Scott’s own narrative. Waverley’s knowledge and love of the *Furioso* is revealed at three important later points in the story. Each of those instances shows Scott interweaving into his story explicit references and Ariosto-like imagery, along with a meta-commentary on the value that he attaches to the Italian author’s example.

Firstly, Waverley is enchanted when he sees the beautiful Highland maiden Flora Mac-Ivor by a waterfall while her maid holds a harp:

Edward thought he had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagined a figure of such exquisite and interesting loveliness. The wild beauty of the retreat, bursting upon him as if by magic, augmented the mingled feeling of delight and awe with which he approached her, like a fair enchantress of Boiardo or Ariosto, by whose nod the scenery around seemed to have been created, an Eden in the wilderness.<sup>45</sup>

Waverley has just recovered from a swoon after seeing Flora and her maid standing on a pine-tree bridge, 150 feet above the chasm. He has imagined her as otherworldly and suspended in mid-air.<sup>46</sup> As in *The Bridal of Triermain*, the landscape is a transformative agent of romance storytelling that affects the imagination: ‘this narrow glen, at so short a distance, seemed to open into the land of romance. The rocks assumed a thousand peculiar and varied forms’. The episode shows Waverley thinking unreflectively through a combination of his readings in Italian renaissance romance and the aesthetics of the sublime and picturesque. He relishes the dizzying sensations that he feels.

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<sup>44</sup> Millgate, *Making of the Novelist*, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Scott, *Waverley*, P. D. Garside (ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 114.

<sup>46</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, p. 113.

Secondly, in a dispute over whether Italian or Gaelic is the language best suited to poetry, the mild mannered Rose Bradwardine – whom Waverley will eventually marry – is unusually (for her) assertive in her preference for Italian:

Rose, when asked for her opinion, gave it with animation in praise of Italian, which she had studied with Waverley's assistance. "She has a more correct ear than Flora, though a less accomplished musician," said Waverley to himself. "I suppose Miss Mac-Ivor will next compare Mac-Murrough nan Fonn to Ariosto."<sup>47</sup>

The discussion here has moved away from imagery toward a comparison of two languages and the cultures they represent. Rose's exclamation argues for the superiority of the high cultural merits of the *Furioso* over the more primitively represented oral traditions of Ossianic song. Mac-Murrough is an elderly male character in the Highland Chieftain Fergus Mac-Ivor's household retinue. He has been identified as a *Bhairdh* (Highland bard or minstrel) and is the singer to whom Rose is responding. Chris Bongie has shown how Waverley misunderstands what the *Bhairdh* sings, because he cannot comprehend either his language or his culture. In consequence, he is forced to reply solely on an interpretation of appearances.<sup>48</sup> While Rose's cultural prejudice draws attention to her rivalry with Flora for Waverley's affections, it also emphasises Waverley's need to acquire reading skills beyond the limitations of his existing level of education, if he is adequately to assess what he sees. The passage further serves to note Scott's reverence for Ariosto as the master of romance, whose example his own Scottish story follows.

Thirdly, in the chapter appropriately titled 'Desolation', the item that Waverley retrieves from among Rose's scattered belongings in the war torn ruins of the castle of Tully-Veolan is his own valued copy of Ariosto's poetry:

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<sup>47</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, p. 271.

<sup>48</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) p. 363.

Viewing the front of the building, thus wasted and defaced, his eyes naturally sought the little balcony which more properly belonged to Rose's apartment [...] several of her books lay mingled with broken flower-pots and other remnants. Amongst these Waverley distinguished one of his own, a small copy of Ariosto, and gathered it as a treasure, though wasted by the wind and rain.<sup>49</sup>

The salvage of the volume suggests Waverley's saving of what matters to him most, but also something more. Tully-Veolan was designed with an understanding only of what was already past: 'It had been built at a period when castles were no longer necessary'.<sup>50</sup> At the end of *Waverley*, it is reconstructed as a more modern domestic residence, while Baron Bradwardine's heraldic stone bears remain in place and 'the strictest attention' is given 'to maintain the original character'.<sup>51</sup> Learning through imitation and adaptation what will survive in a modernising society was a motif that Scott often used. One of his projects in *Waverley* is to draw attention to how rather than whether romance should be read. In this novel with its retrospective plot — the subtitle is '*Tis Sixty Years Since*' — the emphasis is on what can be taken forward and what will be lost. The adventure story leads Waverley to become caught up in the making of history. He exercises moral virtue in saving the life of Colonel Talbot and, in doing so, negotiates the gulf between the two factions to end on the winning side. Scott thereby brings recent history and romantic adventure together in ways not dissimilar from those that Albert Ascoli has identified as characteristic of Ariosto, but virtually absent in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. Ascoli explains how Ariosto 'uses structural means for representing within his poem [...] the historical violence that threatens him, his city, and his patrons', his technique of interlacing stories 'acknowledging, and ironising

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<sup>49</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 316-17.

<sup>50</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, *Waverley*, p. 357.

historical-political crisis'.<sup>52</sup> In the case of *Waverley*, a series of romantic episodes based around a war (including feasts, a visit to the cave of a highland robber, and a stag-hunting excursion) fictionalises the violence that had already torn Scott's own society. The focus of attention on a hero caught up in allegorising, romantic episodes means that Scott can get away with hardly mentioning in his tale the actual Battle of Culloden, which was the last major massacre to take place on British soil. Moreover, where *imitatio* and literary history is concerned, surely it can't be too fanciful to see in the ending of *Waverley* an echo of Scott's rescue of Ariosto from anachronistic attempts at imitation (such as he saw Hoole's translation to be), and his transformation of the *Furioso*'s romance style into the novel form that would so avidly be read by firesides in Regency and subsequent homes.

Other novels from across Scott's career that make express use of Ariosto include *Old Mortality* in the 1816 *Tales of My Landlord*, *Rob Roy*, published in 1817, and *Quentin Durward* in 1823. A longer study would explore those works, but I would like here just to say that each integrates episodic interlaced storytelling with the kind of meta-commentary I have shown as present in *Waverley*. To give a brief example, *Rob Roy* includes the running storyline of narrator Frank Osbaldistone's production of an English translation of the *Furioso*. The progress of that translation becomes the subject of a discussion about content and form between Osbaldistone and the novel's spirited heroine, Diana Vernon.<sup>53</sup> This episode contributes to the plot of the novel, while emphasizing anxieties about how Ariosto's poetry can most effectively be brought to a modern readership.

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>52</sup> Ascoli, pp. 217-219.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, David Hewitt (ed.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 130-31.

Returning to sources in British antiquarianism and folklore, including his own *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, the chronicles of Froissart and others, as well as French and Italian Romance, Scott's poems and novels are a hybrid of ballads and romances, bringing together the popular Delilah songs of his childhood and the imaginative food of romance poetry similarly discovered when he was a boy. To that end, his *Tales of My Landlord* covenanter stories, such as *Old Mortality* with its wandering restorer of words in stone on bleak moorland, and its storytelling of seventeenth-century love and violence, need to be read not only alongside his more obviously chivalric crusader novels, but also as developments of ballads such as 'Thomas the Rhymer' from the *Minstrelsy*, which tells a legendary version of the life and career of the archetypal Scottish poet. In that ballad, the third part of which was Scott's own addition to the older original, the Rhymer comes alive as a poet only after a seven-year visit to subterranean elfland among the roots of the mythic Eildon Tree. He emerges with the gift of prophecy, meaning wisdom as well a more magical ability to see into the future. The key point for Scott is that the Rhymer cannot become a poet of substance until he experiences something much older than himself: in this case folklore and legend, that has a vitality to enchant and inspire imaginative improvisation. The visit to elf land for Thomas functions similarly to Scott's early encounter with the *Furioso* and his composing of boyhood romances in nooks and hollows on Arthur's Seat.

Scott's expertise in romance and chivalric history led to him writing reviews and other articles on those topics for periodicals. He also contributed essays on Chivalry and Romance (as well as Drama) for the *Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In the 'Essay on Romance' (1824), Scott pays tribute to Ariosto's manner of tormenting and delighting his readers by 'digressing from one adventure to another' and then 'by the extreme ingenuity' gathering together those unresolved tales to 'weav[e] them all handsomely together in the same piece'.<sup>54</sup> Opening the essay with Samuel Johnson's definition of a romance as 'a military fable of the middle-ages; a tale

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Scott, 'An Essay On Romance' in *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and The Drama*, Essay Index Reprint Series (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), p. 195.

of wild adventures in love and chivalry', he establishes a contrast with the novel genre, which in his own definition is 'a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society'.<sup>55</sup> I argue that there is evidence showing how Scott's own historical fiction at least partly reconciled that difference by translating characteristics of romance into the novel genre. The 'Essay on Romance' is a comprehensive study, the length of a short book, in which the history of romance literature is traced across and beyond Europe. The earlier, 1818 'Essay on Chivalry' takes as its case for the connection between fiction and reality in medieval and renaissance literature a comparison between the motif of the Bridge of Rodomont in the *Furioso* and Miguel de Cervantes' treatment in *Don Quixote* of the six merchants of Toledo, who were travelling to Murcia to buy silks. Don Quixote sees the merchants and imagines an opportunity for adventure, to disastrous effect: he is beaten and abandoned by the roadside.<sup>56</sup> Once again, Scott shows his interest in how literature treats the potentially damaging effects of excessive, unreflective reading in romance and the virtues of learning how to relate reading to lived context.

Living up to the accolade 'Ariosto of the North', Scott honoured the *Furioso*'s style and importance three centuries after Ariosto by doing his part to keep alive the vitality of romance through imitation and improvisation. Dennis Looney has shown how Ariosto's 'process of literary historicisation' used paraphrase and allusion to encourage readers to return, reread and rethink the originals in light of later improvisation or *imitatio*.<sup>57</sup> Scott adapts precisely such a process. The Book of spells in his *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is easily recognised as an allusion to Canto 2 of the *Furioso*, in which the hermit whom Angelica meets in a wood during the duel between Rinaldo and Sacripante produces a book from which springs a mischievous Sprite, willing to use his powers to serve the master that he first sees. The sprite, like Scott's Goblin page, is able to change his outward

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<sup>55</sup> Scott, 'On Romance', p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Scott, 'Essay on Chivalry', in *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and The Drama*, Essay Index Reprint Series (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Dennis Looney 'Ariosto and the Classics in Ferrara', in *Ariosto Today*, Beecher, Ciavolella and Fedi (eds), pp. 26-27.

appearance in order to deceive. By drawing attention to the power of literature to work magic that could be benevolent or malevolent Scott emphasises the responsibility of authors as *improvisatori* to use their powers of *imitatio* in morally responsible ways. In doing so, the layers of original text remain visible to create a framework of literary memory. It seems fitting that as we celebrate this half a millennium of the first version of Ariosto's great poem *Orlando Furioso*, not just remembering but exploring its continuing contribution to literary memory, Scott's works, which count among the most internationally influential creations to emerge from the nineteenth century, are also reaching their bicentenaries.