To View Fair Melrose Aright

By Margaret Russett

Walter Scott's first full-length romance, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, pivots on a set of instructions to the cultural tourist:

> If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight;
> For the gay beams of lightsome day
> Gild, but to flout, the ruins grey.
> When the broken arches are black in night,
> And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
> When the cold light's uncertain shower
> Streams on the ruin'd central tower;
> When buttress and buttress, alternately,
> Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
> When silver edges the imagery,
> And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
> When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
> And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
> Then go—but go alone the while—
> Then view St. David's ruin'd pile;
> And, home returning, soothly swear,
> Was never scene so sad and fair![1]

This set-piece of picturesque description opens Canto Two of the six-canto poem. Evidently addressed to the poem's present-day readers, it breaks both the late-seventeenth-century frame-narrative (the 'last' of the wandering minstrels, 'infirm and old', is hospitably entertained by the widowed Lady of Buccleuch), and the embedded narrative that takes place around 1560.[2] The stanza is, therefore, an invitation to 'view' one scene of the poem's action, but not as that scene appeared while the action was taking place. What now remain to be seen are ruins, presented as a spectacle for aesthetic consumption rather than, for example, as a site for antiquarian research. In this way Scott's instructions seem both to elicit the reader's historical imagination and to deflect it — a strategy characteristic of

the poem as a whole.

Figure 1. Melrose Abbey by moonlight from John Christian Schetky's Illustrations to the Lay of the Last Minstrel

Figure 2. From Thomas Pennant's Tour in Scotland

It worked like a spell. Published in 1805, the *Lay* was an unprecedented bestseller — 27,000 copies sold within three years — and made Scott's own reputation as the 'mighty minstrel' or 'wizard' of the North. Beginning in 1808, with John Christian Schetky's *Illustrations to the Lay of the Last Minstrel*, handsome, expensively illustrated editions both exploited and extended Scott's success. Schetky's volume, unlike Richard Westall's and many others that followed in later years, was a collection of landscape and architectural engravings rather than imaginative visualizations of the poem's action. Its twelve plates naturally included an image of Melrose Abbey by moonlight (figure 1). Melrose had, indeed,

been recognized at least since the eighteenth century as a site of unusual beauty and historical interest, featuring prominently in Thomas Pennant's 1772 *Tour in Scotland* and in Francis Grose's 1789 *Antiquities of Scotland*(figures 2, 3). It had been painted by George Barret and Thomas Girtin; a rarer interior view appeared in James Fittler's 1804 *Scotia Depicta* (figure 4). Nevertheless, it was Scott who put Melrose squarely on the map for visitors from England and abroad.

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According to Scott, the former steady trickle of English tourists had become a flood by 1816, prompting him to complain that they had 'injured the old fashioned Scottish character' by creating 'a trade of showing rocks and ruins', making the common people 'rapacious in their dealings with strangers, greedy after money,

and extortionate in their demands for the most trivial services'.[3] Washington Irving, to whom Scott voiced this lament, rebutted that 'he had a great deal to answer for on that point, since it was the romantic associations he had thrown by his writings, over so many out of the way places in Scotland, that had brought the influx of curious travelers' (Irving 63). Among the first of those were William and Dorothy Wordsworth, who heard Scott recite the first four cantos of the *Lay* on their trip to Scotland in 1803, and whom he then escorted around Melrose Abbey.[4] Irving followed suit thirteen years later, 'partly to visit Melrose Abbey and its vicinity, but chiefly to get a sight of "the mighty minstrel of the north"' (Irving 1). Among the many, many Scott-besotted travelers to visit the abbey in later years were the Irish poet Thomas Moore, in 1825, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, in 1853. Moore had hoped 'to see the Abbey by the beautiful moonlight we had then', but settled for a daytime tour guided by the Wizard himself.[5] Stowe, coming along too late for that privilege, told her traveling companions that 'Scott says we must see it by moonlight; it is one of the proprieties of the place, as I understand'.[6] By 1863, averred 'Cuthbert Bede', Scott's recommendation had made it 'the fashion to visit the ruins by the light of the moon', although travelers 'who endeavour to follow out the poet's suggestion are usually as unsuccessful as those who go up Snowden to see the sun rise'.[7] The problem is that the moon is only visible for part of each month, and even then, it rarely *shines* in Scotland. The alluring spectacle of Melrose by moonlight has this much in common with the fetish as understood by Giorgio Agamben: it is an unattainable object that 'satisfies a human need precisely through its being unattainable'.[8]

This is not to say that efforts to supply the unattainable object were lacking. 'In consequence of [Scott's] admonition', Irving noted in 1816, 'many of the most devout pilgrims to the ruin could not be contented with a daylight inspection' (Irving 14). The heavy demand for moonlit viewings posed a dilemma for the abbey sexton, John Bower, who began simulating moonlight by attaching a candle to the end of a pole and shining it through the tracery; according to Irving, 'at length he began to think [this substitute] even preferable to the moon itself' (Irving 15). Bower also confided to Irving his particular twist on Scott's instructions, on which he so piqued himself that he published the advice in his own guidebook. To view fair Melrose aright, Bower instructed, 'turn your back to the building, stoop down and look at it through your legs, when the effect is

astonishingly grand'.[9] 'This topsy-turvy view' (Bede 354), a homespun variation on the *camera obscura*, inevitably recalls Marx's memorable description of how the object of labor is 'changed into something transcendent' — a fetish — when it 'steps forth as a commodity' which 'stands on its head' in relation to the world of other made things.[10] At the same time, any view taken through forked legs cannot but remind us of how *Freud* defines the fetish, as a metonymy of the unbearable absence between those legs.[11]

Bower's view of Melrose may be understood as the vision of an unattainable or phantasmatic object, deriving its effect from being at once 'frame[d]' and 'inverted' — hence, partially de-realized (Bower 41). Be that as it may, the vision was at any rate unattained by Scott, who, despite living within daily sight of the abbey for twenty years, 'candidly acknowledged [to Moore] that he himself had never seen' it 'under the advantage he recommended, which of course would apply to any fine ruins'.[12] Stowe, for one, was 'crestfallen' to discover Scott's ruse, which prompted a lively exchange in *Notes and Queries* a few years later.[13] When he tells his readers how to see Melrose, then, Scott does not, like Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey', bid them reproduce his 'picture[s] of the mind'.[14] Rather, he adopts the pose of the native informant to elicit a specifically non-native experience of place. Viewed aright, through 'the modifying colors of imagination', Melrose will possess the 'charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape'.[15] That is to say, if — as Coleridge suggests — moonlight renders the familiar unfamiliar, then a moonlit edifice, whether local or foreign, will be seen *as if* for the first time.

Correctly viewed by the solitary pilgrim, the ruins of Melrose are 'fair' inasmuch as they are 'sad', because their picturesque ruination testifies to the abbey's lost religious and political relevance, and so also to the loss of sovereignty represented by 'St. David' — otherwise known as King David the First of Scotland, founder of the abbey in 1136. Melrose Abbey had once been among Scotland's wealthiest and most powerful religious foundations. The mother-church of the Cistercians, it was even rumored to house the heart of King Robert the Bruce, one of its great patrons. Because of its location near the Scottish-English border, however, it was repeatedly destroyed by invading English armies from the mid-fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, and never fully rebuilt after the

'rough wooing' instigated by Henry VIII of England in 1544. The last abbot or 'commendator' of Melrose, James Stewart — one of the many illegitimate sons of Scotland's King James V — died in 1557. In 1560, the Reformation Parliament 'set out a religious future for Scotland in which monasticism had no place', although, unlike in England, monasteries were not formally dissolved but instead 'left to wither away' (Fawcett and Oram 63-64).[16] By about 1560-65, when *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* takes place, the titular minstrel was not the only belated remnant of his epoch; the monk who admits William of Deloraine to the abbey must also be among the 'last' of his kind, and the abbey itself already falling into decay. In retrospect, this period was also a tipping point in Scottish political history. Although Queen Mary, Scotland's last Catholic monarch, failed catastrophically in her attempts during the early 1560s to claim the English throne, it was the accession of her son James to that throne in 1603 which eventually led to the Act of Union.

As this briefest of historical sketches implies, fair Melrose is an apt synecdoche for Scotland itself, conceived as a lost or unattainable object. This description once again evokes the logic of fetishism, which, as Freud notes, is not always confined to the sexual realm but may also surface 'when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger' (Freud 153). Adapting a different rubric, we might propose that fair Melrose, viewed by moonlight, is the 'fantastic form' taken by a 'definite social relation between men' (Marx). In this case, however, the relation so disguised is not that of owners and producers but the tangled history of conflicts among Catholics and Presbyterians, Scots and English, which culminated in a Protestant state religion, the oath of allegiance, and the absorption of Scotland into 'Great Britain'.

In Scott's time, this history was still just legible in the abbey itself, which had been converted into a parish church of the Scots Kirk in 1608 and continued to serve this function until 1810. A more modest place of worship had been contrived by clumsily inserting a roof within a portion of the older structure. Scott regarded it as fair game for 'antiquarian plunder'; when Irving visited, during the early phases of Abbotsford's construction, he noticed 'various morsels from the ruins of Melrose Abbey, which were to be incorporated in [Scott's] mansion'. 'There is no telling', said Scott, 'what treasures are hid in that glorious old pile' (Irving 43).[17] These treasures, such as the casket believed to contain Robert the Bruce's heart, are unearthed in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. There the casket

takes the ‘fantastic form’ of a ‘Mighty Book’ (a book of spells), buried with the undead wizard Michael Scott under the abbey floor (*Lay* C. 2 st. xv). A red cross, the ‘bloody stain’ cast by moonlight shining through the ‘Cross of Red’ in the storiated east window, marks the spot (*Lay* C. 2 st. xi). When, with herculean effort, the gravestone is raised, an unearthly light breaks forth from the tomb, at which the dauntless moss-trooper William of Deloraine’s ‘breath came thick, his head swum round’, while the monk of Melrose ‘might not bear the sight to see’ (*Lay* C. 2 st. xx). A bloody stain, an appalling aperture, an unmanned warrior, a magic talisman: as a diagram of psychoanalytic fetish-formation this could hardly be clearer.[18] And in true psychoanalytic form, fetishistic affect attaches to the sight immediately preceding the opening of the tomb. This is the famous east window, paneless in Scott’s time (and in 1560), but adorned in the Lay with a stained-glass portrayal of Saint Michael:

> The moon on the east oriel shone
> Through slender shafts of shapely stone,
> By foliaged tracery combined;
> Thou wouldst have thought some fairy’s hand
> ‘Twixt poplars straight the ozier wand,
> In many a freakish knot, had twined;
> Then framed a spell, when the work was done,
> And changed the willow-wreaths to stone.
> (*Lay* C. 2 st. xi)

The enormous east window of Melrose (with an opening of thirty-six by sixteen feet, according to Bower [40]), is particularly admired for the delicacy of its shafts in proportion to their height. Stowe agreed that ‘for a thing so airy and spiritual to have sprung up by enchantment, and to have been the product of spells and fairy fingers, is no improbable account of the matter’, and considered Scott’s description ‘as perfect in most details as if it had been written by an architect as well as a poet — it is a kind of glorified daguerreotype’ (Stowe 151, 159). We may notice how precisely the depiction of skilled handicraft executed *as if* by a spell evokes the Marxist account of the commodity, whose magical allure hides the secret of labor in plain sight. Among those most thoroughly enchanted was John Bower, who believed that he had identified Michael Scott’s tomb by pinpointing the spot on the flagstones where Scott’s (imaginary) red cross cast its reflection. As Irving commented, much amused, ‘the fictions of Scott had become fact with

honest Johnny Bower' (Irving 13). Stowe likewise expected to see Saint Michael's image in the window, but found to her disappointment that 'the painted glass was all of the poet's own setting'; 'I never knew', she adds, 'how fervent a believer I had been in the realities of these things' (Stowe 154-55). Scott's depiction of the east window offers a peculiarly vivid instance of 'glamour', the 'magic power of imposing on the eyesight of the spectators' (*Lay* C. 2 N. 20), which is exerted by Michael Scott's Book of Might and by the latter-day Wizard of the North (*Lay* C. 2 N. 20). Glamour does not alter the nature of things, merely their perception; it is a species of enchantment wielded by language — spells, or poetry — and can make 'a sheeling seem a palace large', a granite buttress 'seem framed of ebon and ivory', or a shaft of stone seem woven poplar (*Lay* C. 3 st. ix; C. 2 st. i, st. xi).

Figure 5. J.M.W. Turner's 'Melrose Abbey: Moonlight'

It is Scott's depiction of the transcendent object, routinely quoted in published guidebooks to Melrose from Bower's *Description* onward, that forms the subject of J. M. W. Turner's 1822 watercolor 'Melrose Abbey: Moonlight' (figure 5).[19] Commissioned by Turner's patron, the Yorkshire politician and connoisseur Walter Fawkes, as part of a series honoring modern poets, Turner's composition was evidently drawn from memory. Although he had visited and sketched Melrose

in 1797 and 1818, the second time to illustrate Scott's *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, Turner did not make a repeat visit in the early 1820s; the painting can thus fairly be described as an image of Scott's 'vision'. It shows a tiny male figure, back to the viewer in a pose vaguely reminiscent of Caspar Friedrich's solitaries, gazing up at the moonlight streaming down on him through a gigantic window and into the nave of the abbey church.[20] It is Turner's innovation to depict the requisite moonlight smiting the visitor — a clear surrogate for Scott's readers, and also for the painting's spectators — as it illuminates the interior of the ruin. Perhaps this unearthly light, radiating from directly behind the aperture, is a transposition of the terrifying glare that bursts from the wizard's opened grave in the poem. It doesn't take much imagination to detect a vulval shape in the pointed arch of the window-frame; no wonder the little guy looks so overwhelmed. This is, in other words, the picture of a fetishist and his fetish. But the master-stroke is to insert two lines from Scott's poem into the depicted scene, as an engraved inscription on the architectural fragment in the foreground. Turner offers the ultimate tribute to Scott's enchantment of Scotland: those who view fair Melrose aright see, not the history of the abbey or even its architectural distinction, but the words of Scott himself, the Wizard of the North. In short, we see Scott telling us how to see.

Figure 6. Myles Birkett Foster,

Melrose Abbey

Figure 7. Melrose Abbey albumen print

After Turner, this perspective — from the nave, looking outward through the east window — becomes the canonical image of Melrose. Whereas most earlier pictures showed the abbey from the outside, in its entirety, variations of Turner's interior view gained popularity in the nineteenth century, adapting it as a metaphor for Romantic 'interiority' *per se*. Stowe's *Sunny Memories*, for example, includes not one but two depictions of the east window, one by day and one by moonlight. The same moonlit scene was executed by Myles Birkett Foster about twenty years further on (figure 6), while figure 7 is a late-nineteenth-century albumen print, necessarily shot in daylight, from the Dundee photography firm J. Valentine and Sons. These pensive architectural studies, often empty of human figures, suggest how thoroughly Scott's advice to 'go alone' has been internalized, and how the passage of light through 'foliaged tracery' offers itself as an analogue for the viewing eye, or I: the viewer sees as Turner sees Scott's admonition. The fact that Turner manages to misquote Scott's verse — 'If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright' is rendered 'Who'er would see fair Melrose right' — presents only a superficial irony, for Scott's verse is not *itself* the talisman; rather, its uncanny achievement is to cast the fetishistic spell even while demonstrating how the magical feat is accomplished. Stowe, describing the architectural extravagances of Abbotsford, coined the term 'architectural romance' to describe Scott's peculiar gift for realizing his poetic visions in material form (Stowe 133). Turner's painting of the Lay is a testament to architectural romance as the genre of history's enchantment.

References & Further Information

[1] Sir Walter Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (www.theotherpages.org/poems/minstrel.html), Canto 2, stanza i (ll. 1-18). Accessed 1/19/2016. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Lay*. I would like to thank Evan M. Gottlieb, for convening the panel that gave rise to this paper, as well as my fellow panelists — Charles Snodgrass, Randy P. Schiff, and especially Susan Oliver — both for their stimulating presentations and for their valuable comments on mine. Audience members, particularly Miranda Burgess, also helped me refine the argument in this version.

[2] Although this date is approximate, Scott's copious historical notes indicate a span of about seven years (1558-1565) that can be determined with some confidence. Janet Beatoun or Bethune, the widowed sorceress of the inner narrative, was 'Ladye' of Buccleuch beginning in 1544, when she married Sir Walter Scott. He died in 1552, she in 1569. Her feud with the Cranstouns, an important plot point, began in about 1557. Lord William Howard, who figures as a minor character, succeeded to his title in 1569, but, 'by a poetical anachronism, he is introduced into the romance a few years earlier than he actually flourished' (*Lay*, N. 26). Archibald Douglass, introduced in Canto VI, was the 8th Earl of Angus from 1558 to 1588 (see Lay, N. 35).

[3] Washington Irving, *The Crayon Miscellany. By the Author of the Sketch Book. No. 2 Containing Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1835), p.62. Google Books, accessed 1/19/2016. Hereafter cited parenthetically as Irving.

[4] See John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1839); 2 vols.; vol. 2, pp.159-61; and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland in 1803*, (www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usebooks/wordsworth-scotland/33.html), entry for Monday, September 19, 1803, accessed 1/19/2016.

[5] Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, ed. Lord John Russell (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853-56); 8 vols.; vol. 8, p. 339 (Diary, October 31, 1825). Google Books, accessed 1/19/2016.

[6] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands. Illustrated from Designs by Hammatt Billings* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co.; New York: J. C. Derby, 1854); 2 vols.; vol. 1, p.164. Google Books, accessed 1/20/2016. Hereafter

cited as Stowe. For Stowe's lengthy account of her combined visit to Abbotsford, Dryburgh Abbey, and Melrose, see pp.128-168.

[7] [Edward Bradley], *A Tour in Tartan-Land. By Cuthbert Bede* (London: Richard Bentley, 1863), p.132. Google Books, accessed 1/20/2016. Hereafter cited as Bede.

[8] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 33; qtd. in Catherine Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 51. Google Books, accessed 1/20/2016. This claim is not contradicted by the fact that Stowe did, in fact, manage to arrange a midnight viewing, given the miasma of anticlimax that hangs over her account of that visit (Stowe, pp. 164-68).

[9] John Bower, Junior, *Description of the Abbeys of Melrose and Old Melrose, with their traditions* (Kelso: Alexander Leadbetter for the author, 1813), p. 41. Hereafter cited as Bower.

[10] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pt. 1, chp. 1, sect. 4, 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof'; https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4. Hereafter cited as Marx.

[11] Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press; rpt. Vintage, 1999), pp. 147-57. Hereafter cited as Freud. See esp. Freud's statement that 'the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in' (pp. 152-53).

[12] H[enry]. R. Montgomery, *Thomas Moore, His Life, Writings, and Contemporaries* (London: Thomas Cauley Newby, 1860), p. 125. Google Books, accessed 1/20/2016.

[13] See Stowe, p. 164; *Notes and Queries*, 3rd Ser., vol. VII, Feb. 25-Mar. 18, 1865, pp. 156, 230.

[14] William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798' (from *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798), l. 62.

[15] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, chp. 14; http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm. Accessed 1/20/2016.

[16] For an efficient, well-contextualized history of Melrose Abbey, see Richard Fawcett and Richard Oram, *Melrose Abbey* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus

Publishing, 2004), esp. pp.11-67. According to Fawcett and Oram, one of Walter Scott's ancestors, also named Walter Scott, stole roofing materials from the desecrated abbey in 1569, resulting in 'its collapse or severe instability' (pp.66, 205).

[17] Scott was, however, later deeply involved in the preservation of the abbey, and Stowe came to the conclusion that he had not pilfered actual stonework, but had merely made plaster casts of his favorite carvings (Stowe 162-63).

[18] See Freud, pp.154-55.

[19] Melrose Abbey: Moonlight' is reproduced in Eric Shanes, *Turner: The Great Watercolours* (London: Royal Academy, 2000), p.136, with a brief caption. It is currently housed in the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. I have not thus far discovered any significant secondary literature concerning it. For a thorough historical account of Turner's work and movements during the relevant years, see David Blayney Brown (ed.), *J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours*, Tate Research Publication, December 2012.

[20] The window is shown as even higher than its actual thirty-six feet.

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Bower's view of Melrose may be understood as the vision of an unattainable or phantasmatic object, deriving its effect from being at once 'frame[d]' and 'inverted' — hence, partially de-realized (Bower 41). Be that as it may, the vision was at any rate unattained by Scott, who, despite living within daily sight of the abbey for twenty years, 'candidly acknowledged [to Moore] that he himself had never seen' it 'under the advantage he recommended, which of course would apply to any fine ruins'.[12] Stowe, for one, was 'crestfallen' to discover Scott's ruse, which prompted a lively exchange in *Notes and Queries* a few years later.[13] When he tells his readers how to see Melrose, then, Scott does not, like Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey', bid them reproduce his 'picture[s] of the mind'.[14] Rather, he adopts the pose of the native informant to elicit a specifically non-native experience of place. Viewed aright, through 'the modifying colors of imagination',

Melrose will possess the 'charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape'.[15] That is to say, if — as Coleridge suggests — moonlight renders the familiar unfamiliar, then a moonlit edifice, whether local or foreign, will be seen *as if* for the first time.

Correctly viewed by the solitary pilgrim, the ruins of Melrose are 'fair' inasmuch as they are 'sad', because their picturesque ruination testifies to the abbey's lost religious and political relevance, and so also to the loss of sovereignty represented by 'St. David' — otherwise known as King David the First of Scotland, founder of the abbey in 1136. Melrose Abbey had once been among Scotland's wealthiest and most powerful religious foundations. The mother-church of the Cistercians, it was even rumored to house the heart of King Robert the Bruce, one of its great patrons. Because of its location near the Scottish-English border, however, it was repeatedly destroyed by invading English armies from the mid-fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, and never fully rebuilt after the 'rough wooing' instigated by Henry VIII of England in 1544. The last abbot or 'commendator' of Melrose, James Stewart — one of the many illegitimate sons of Scotland's King James V — died in 1557. In 1560, the Reformation Parliament 'set out a religious future for Scotland in which monasticism had no place', although, unlike in England, monasteries were not formally dissolved but instead 'left to wither away' (Fawcett and Oram 63-64).[16] By about 1560-65, when *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* takes place, the titular minstrel was not the only belated remnant of his epoch; the monk who admits William of Deloraine to the abbey must also be among the 'last' of his kind, and the abbey itself already falling into decay. In retrospect, this period was also a tipping point in Scottish political history. Although Queen Mary, Scotland's last Catholic monarch, failed catastrophically in her attempts during the early 1560s to claim the English throne, it was the accession of her son James to that throne in 1603 which eventually led to the Act of Union.

As this briefest of historical sketches implies, fair Melrose is an apt synecdoche for Scotland itself, conceived as a lost or unattainable object. This description once again evokes the logic of fetishism, which, as Freud notes, is not always confined to the sexual realm but may also surface 'when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger' (Freud 153). Adapting a different rubric, we might propose that fair Melrose, viewed by moonlight, is the 'fantastic form' taken by a 'definite social relation between men' (Marx). In this case, however,

the relation so disguised is not that of owners and producers but the tangled history of conflicts among Catholics and Presbyterians, Scots and English, which culminated in a Protestant state religion, the oath of allegiance, and the absorption of Scotland into 'Great Britain'.

In Scott's time, this history was still just legible in the abbey itself, which had been converted into a parish church of the Scots Kirk in 1608 and continued to serve this function until 1810. A more modest place of worship had been contrived by clumsily inserting a roof within a portion of the older structure. Scott regarded it as fair game for 'antiquarian plunder'; when Irving visited, during the early phases of Abbotsford's construction, he noticed 'various morsels from the ruins of Melrose Abbey, which were to be incorporated in [Scott's] mansion'. 'There is no telling', said Scott, 'what treasures are hid in that glorious old pile' (Irving 43).[17] These treasures, such as the casket believed to contain Robert the Bruce's heart, are unearthed in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. There the casket takes the 'fantastic form' of a 'Mighty Book' (a book of spells), buried with the undead wizard Michael Scott under the abbey floor (*Lay* C. 2 st. xv). A red cross, the 'bloody stain' cast by moonlight shining through the 'Cross of Red' in the storiated east window, marks the spot (*Lay* C. 2 st. xi). When, with herculean effort, the gravestone is raised, an unearthly light breaks forth from the tomb, at which the dauntless moss-trooper William of Deloraine's 'breath came thick, his head swum round', while the monk of Melrose 'might not bear the sight to see' (*Lay* C. 2 st. xx). A bloody stain, an appalling aperture, an unmanned warrior, a magic talisman: as a diagram of psychoanalytic fetish-formation this could hardly be clearer.[18] And in true psychoanalytic form, fetishistic affect attaches to the sight immediately preceding the opening of the tomb. This is the famous east window, paneless in Scott's time (and in 1560), but adorned in the Lay with a stained-glass portrayal of Saint Michael:

> The moon on the east oriel shone
> Through slender shafts of shapely stone,
> By foliaged tracery combined;
> Thou wouldst have thought some fairy's hand
> 'Twixt poplars straight the ozier wand,
> In many a freakish knot, had twined;
> Then framed a spell, when the work was done,
> And changed the willow-wreaths to stone.
> (*Lay* C. 2 st. xi)

The enormous east window of Melrose (with an opening of thirty-six by sixteen feet, according to Bower [40]), is particularly admired for the delicacy of its shafts in proportion to their height. Stowe agreed that 'for a thing so airy and spiritual to have sprung up by enchantment, and to have been the product of spells and fairy fingers, is no improbable account of the matter', and considered Scott's description 'as perfect in most details as if it had been written by an architect as well as a poet — it is a kind of glorified daguerreotype' (Stowe 151, 159). We may notice how precisely the depiction of skilled handicraft executed *as if* by a spell evokes the Marxist account of the commodity, whose magical allure hides the secret of labor in plain sight. Among those most thoroughly enchanted was John Bower, who believed that he had identified Michael Scott's tomb by pinpointing the spot on the flagstones where Scott's (imaginary) red cross cast its reflection. As Irving commented, much amused, 'the fictions of Scott had become fact with honest Johnny Bower' (Irving 13). Stowe likewise expected to see Saint Michael's image in the window, but found to her disappointment that 'the painted glass was all of the poet's own setting'; 'I never knew', she adds, 'how fervent a believer I had been in the realities of these things' (Stowe 154-55). Scott's depiction of the east window offers a peculiarly vivid instance of 'glamour', the 'magic power of imposing on the eyesight of the spectators' (*Lay* C. 2 N. 20), which is exerted by Michael Scott's Book of Might and by the latter-day Wizard of the North (*Lay* C. 2 N. 20). Glamour does not alter the nature of things, merely their perception; it is a species of enchantment wielded by language — spells, or poetry — and can make 'a sheeling seem a palace large', a granite buttress 'seem framed of ebon and ivory', or a shaft of stone seem woven poplar (*Lay* C. 3 st. ix; C. 2 st. i, st. xi).

Figure 5. J.M.W. Turner's 'Melrose Abbey: Moonlight'

It is Scott's depiction of the transcendent object, routinely quoted in published guidebooks to Melrose from Bower's *Description* onward, that forms the subject of J. M. W. Turner's 1822 watercolor 'Melrose Abbey: Moonlight' (figure 5).[19] Commissioned by Turner's patron, the Yorkshire politician and connoisseur Walter Fawkes, as part of a series honoring modern poets, Turner's composition was evidently drawn from memory. Although he had visited and sketched Melrose in 1797 and 1818, the second time to illustrate Scott's *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, Turner did not make a repeat visit in the early 1820s; the painting can thus fairly be described as an image of Scott's 'vision'. It shows a tiny male figure, back to the viewer in a pose vaguely reminiscent of Caspar Friedrich's solitaries, gazing up at the moonlight streaming down on him through a gigantic window and into the nave of the abbey church.[20] It is Turner's innovation to depict the requisite moonlight smiting the visitor — a clear surrogate for Scott's readers, and also for the painting's spectators — as it illuminates the interior of the ruin. Perhaps this unearthly light, radiating from directly behind the aperture, is a transposition of the terrifying glare that bursts from the wizard's opened grave in the poem. It doesn't take much imagination to detect a vulval shape in the pointed

arch of the window-frame; no wonder the little guy looks so overwhelmed. This is, in other words, the picture of a fetishist and his fetish. But the master-stroke is to insert two lines from Scott's poem into the depicted scene, as an engraved inscription on the architectural fragment in the foreground. Turner offers the ultimate tribute to Scott's enchantment of Scotland: those who view fair Melrose aright see, not the history of the abbey or even its architectural distinction, but the words of Scott himself, the Wizard of the North. In short, we see Scott telling us how to see.

Figure 6. Myles Birkett Foster, Melrose Abbey

Figure 7. Melrose Abbey albumen print

After Turner, this perspective — from the nave, looking outward through the east window — becomes the canonical image of Melrose. Whereas most earlier pictures showed the abbey from the outside, in its entirety, variations of Turner's interior view gained popularity in the nineteenth century, adapting it as a metaphor for Romantic 'interiority' *per se*. Stowe's *Sunny Memories*, for example, includes not one but two depictions of the east window, one by day and one by moonlight. The same moonlit scene was executed by Myles Birkett Foster about twenty years further on (figure 6), while figure 7 is a late-nineteenth-century albumen print, necessarily shot in daylight, from the Dundee photography firm J. Valentine and Sons. These pensive architectural studies, often empty of human figures, suggest how thoroughly Scott's advice to 'go alone' has been internalized, and how the passage of light through 'foliaged tracery' offers itself as an analogue for the viewing eye, or I: the viewer sees as Turner sees Scott's admonition. The fact that Turner manages to misquote Scott's verse — 'If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright' is rendered 'Who'er would see fair Melrose right' — presents only a superficial irony, for Scott's verse is not *itself* the talisman; rather, its uncanny achievement is to cast the fetishistic spell even while demonstrating how the magical feat is accomplished. Stowe, describing the architectural extravagances of Abbotsford, coined the term 'architectural romance' to describe Scott's peculiar gift for realizing his poetic visions in material form (Stowe 133). Turner's painting of the Lay is a testament to architectural romance as the genre of history's enchantment.

(c) The Bottle Imp