Where We Never Were: Scottish Women Writers at Walter Scott's Abbotsford

By Caroline McCracken-Flesher

'Our house is the least that ever harboured decent folks since the traditionary couple who lived in the Vinegar bottle', Walter Scott wrote to the actress Sarah Smith in 1814.[1] Still, 'if you come […] we will find a corner for you.' As with Smith, a substantial number of Scott's visitors to his house in the Scottish Borders were women. Joanna Baillie and Susan Ferrier came as invited. Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Beecher Stowe figure among authors touring Abbotsford after Scott's death.

Women, however, often appear in the guest books that mark the house's later transition to a museum anonymously—as 'and wife', 'and family', or 'and party'.[2] Moreover, visitors in search of either the living or the dead Scott proved curiously blind to the house's women. No matter that Scott's wife, Charlotte, and daughters Sophia and Anne were integral to his domestic establishment, and were succeeded by a female line.[3] Every stone, declared Horace Smith, even though he had just met Anne in Edinburgh, 'might literally be said to "prate [of Scott's] whereabout."'[4] No woman could make a showing.

This article considers the dynamic between Abbotsford, its guests and its inhabitants. It ponders the constitutive function of visits to this author's house, and particularly of author visits to such houses. Specifically, it pursues how the memories constructed by Abbotsford's visitors resist presence—especially when that presence is female.

Notoriously, the fantasy assemblage of 'Sir Walter Scott and His Literary Friends at Abbotsford', painted by Thomas Faed in 1849, features none but men.[5] People who never met together surround Sir Walter. Even Byron is evidenced by the urn he gifted to his fellow author. But there is no sign of a Joanna Baillie, a Susan

Ferrier, a Maria Edgeworth. Less surprisingly, stories of the family turn always toward Scott. He, of course, is the only reason why any family members appear at all. Still, a charming example points to the inaccuracy of this tale of masculinity that we have come to take for granted. A cavalcade to hunt hares, in which biographer J.G. Lockhart lists many notable men, is interrupted when '*the Lady Anne* broke from the line, screaming with laughter, and exclaimed, "Papa, papa, I knew you could never think of going without your pet."'[6] Scott is being followed by 'a little black pig', and Lockhart can then turn to discuss the author's unusual attraction for all dogs, pigs, chickens and donkeys. Anne's gleeful humor is a thing of the moment; like all beasts of the field, all biographers turn to Scott. Thus Alison Booth can see in Abbotsford a touchstone for 'homosocially male' authors' houses.[7]

Certainly, Scott was the host in his home, and the guests were predominantly male. Lady Scott and Sophia, who would marry Lockhart, accompanied the intrepid hunters of the hare, and unpacked the picnic basket.[8] But it is Scott, Lockhart, William Allan, Humphrey Davy, Dr. Wollaston, Henry Mackenzie, his 'negro follower', steward William Laidlaw and game keeper Tom Purdie who make the narrative that is the hunt.[9] Davy wonders that it is by hunting he comes to visit 'the scenery of the Lay of the Last Minstrel', and quotes with abandon; gathered round the evening fire and swapping stories with Scott, he prompts Laidlaw to declare this a "very superior occasion!" and wonder "if Shakespeare and Bacon ever met to screw ilk other up?"[10]

Such guests, furthermore, typically were sure that they belonged. Lockhart suggests that many a visitor presumed Scott broke off his labor as lawyer and author just to entertain *him*, for:

> *it was physically impossible, that the man who was writing the Waverley romances at the rate of nearly twelve volumes in the year, could continue, week after week, and month after month, to devote all but a hardly perceptible fraction of his mornings to out of doors' occupations, and the whole of his evenings to the entertainment of a constantly varying circle of guests."*[11]

Like Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law, who now lies in single state at his feet in

Dryburgh Abbey, guests were prone to turn from the reality of women at Abbotsford. Women, even when evident, were functionally absent—no matter if they unpacked the picnic basket or celebrated enthusiastic piggies. They simply didn't belong.

James Hogg typifies the pattern and begins to reveal the issue. Meeting Charlotte in the Scotts' Edinburgh home, he stretched himself out on a sofa in emulation of the lady of the house, though bearing 'legible marks of a recent sheep-smearing'.[12] Later, with both Scott and his wife dead, he proposed a memoir that pointed to Charlotte's possible opium addiction.[13] The published version dropped the opium but now all could read: 'Who was Lady Scott originally? … There is a veil of mystery hung over that dear lady's birth.'[14] Hogg may, as Fiona Robertson sensitively suggests, hereby claim with Charlotte a 'shared tangentiality to polite Edinburgh life'.[15] However, if Hogg was a farmer yet a friend, and Charlotte a French and female emigrée, she was nonetheless Scott's wife and a nineteenth-century lady. By the discourses of the day, Hogg displaces Charlotte from her role in society and as the respectable Mrs. Scott. Indeed, he literally invades her domestic space and even her most personal, family secrets.

As guests or acquaintances, and biographers too, seek to stand by the author, their inclusion, it seems, requires a gendered exclusion. This is a phenomenon that proves revealing in terms of what they, and scholars themselves, seek in asserting proximity to a writer. It shows how public and literary desires are both met and compromised by the myth that was Walter Scott's home at Abbotsford.

What all seek is not hard to find. Herman Melville visited Britain to connect with family, with publishers and, at Abbotsford, with the memory of Scott. His own Scottish father, his biographer points out, had 'squandered a fortune but had not heroically recovered it [like Sir Walter] before dying'.[16] Touring Abbotsford on 3 November 1856, then, Melville is triply related to Scott as Scot, as writer, and as son.[17] His own role is thereby informed. With a like relational impulse, perhaps, Washington Irving left an Abbotsford under construction to build his own Sunnyside; Fenimore Cooper, who never got to Abbotsford but who corresponded with Scott, eventually built a house characterized as 'Abbotsford' for America's author;[18] Mark Twain, signing as Samuel Clemens, visited in 1873 and, whatever

his later critiques of Scott, built a similarly expensive and expressive author's house in Hartford—where he would write the novels that cemented his fame.[19] As Paul Westover has made clear, Scott at Abbotsford came to serve as the formative node in a network of houses that valued their owners as authors.[20]

Nathaniel Hawthorne, visiting Abbotsford for the second time, became suspicious of its narrative glamour. In 1857 he concluded: 'I do abhor this mode of making pilgrimages to the shrines of departed great men. […] it seldom or never produces (in me, at least) the right feeling.'[21] Mendelssohn, a drop-in guest during Scott's lifetime, figured out the problem. On 30 July 1829 he exhorts: 'Most astonished friends! O most amazed readers! Under us the great man is snoring, his dogs are asleep and his armoured knights awake. […] and we look down very much on Europe.'[22] But then fascination turns to farce: 'This is all […] invention. We found Sir Walter in the act of leaving Abbotsford, stared at him like fools, drove eighty miles and lost a day for the sake of at best one half-hour of superficial conversation. Melrose compensated us but little: we were out of humour with great men, with ourselves, with the world, with everything. It was a bad day.'[23] Abbotsford constitutes the *lieu de mémoire* for a collective self-authentication project. It is all about us.

Hawthorne astutely observed: 'a house is forever after spoiled and ruined as a home, by having been the abode of a great man. His spirit haunts it, as it were, with a malevolent effect.'[24] More accurately, there is a tussle for home, and it is not between fathers and children. Mendelssohn, supposedly sleepless with awe, owns up to the issue in his spoof, which reads more completely: 'it is twelve o'clock, and the sweetest ghostly hour which I have ever spent, for Miss Scott makes the most delicious marmalade. […] Never was a letter begun with greater relish.'[25] Mendelssohn, that is, imagines suffering indigestion through Miss Scott's very hospitality. If visitors seek to elide the Scott women, it is because with their regular lives and family relationships, and in the nicest and homeliest of ways, these women disrupt the visitors' affecting Abbotsford experience.

Scott may have welcomed all and sundry to his home, but notably, his women friends often advised him to bring in the welcome mat. Joanna Baillie, with an eye to what it took to maintain open house, and with substantial understanding of

what Scott's visitors sought, warned to avoid 'idle Travellers' who might 'make an Inn of your house […] that they may boast in their stupid Tours afterwards of the great attentions they received from their Friend Mr Scott.'[26] Susan Ferrier saw what was at stake for author and family alike. Visiting Scott late in his life, she sees him, under pressure of visitors, entangled in his own narratives of place, thralled to their continuing performance.[27] '[He] proposed to wind up [an evening of entertaining] by all present standing in a circle with hands joined, singing, / "Weel may we a' be! / Ill may we never see."' To Ferrier it all seemed 'forced and unnatural'. As for Sophia, strumming away at her harp despite being ill, she is disturbingly constituted moment by moment as a thing among things. And this is the issue at Abbotsford. Women, perversely displaced in their home *as* home by the ethos of entertaining, risk becoming functions.

Yet, functioning as female, like Anne with her fictive marmalade, women disrupt the self-serving narratives of proximity to place and to the person of Walter Scott sought by visitors to Abbotsford. William Wells Brown, visiting in 1851, enacts a striking example. He remembers: 'we saw a grand-daughter of the Poet. She was from London, and was only on a visit of a few days. She looked pale and dejected, and seemed as if she longed to leave this secluded spot and return to the metropolis. She looked for all the world like a hothouse plant.'[28] He pivots: 'I don't think the Scotch could do better than to purchase Abbotsford.' To Wells, who it is worth remembering had escaped slavery in America and now wrote as "A Fugitive Slave," the house should belong to the nation. It cannot belong to the young woman who actually owns it.[29] Indeed, he effectively uproots her as a 'hothouse plant' who can't possibly want to live in her own house. The house, that is, should allow every visitor an apparently unique access, with no interferences. A man escaped to Boston, and newly classified as 'fugitive' by an 1850 law, of course has every right to forge a near relation with the home and literary precursor of his choice. Still, whatever Brown's circumstances, he manifests how the woman, with her descent from Abbotsford and the author, disrupts the relation between author and visitor. For too many visitors, the woman must consequently be re-conceived as a thing and ejected.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, a literary lion herself, looked around her with a significant difference. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852; in 1853 Stowe was speeding into Scotland on the train. At first, Stowe seems un-selfconsciously

committed to the constitutive lure of Scott's national romance: 'The sun went down, and night drew on; still we were in Scotland. Scotch ballads, Scotch tunes, and Scotch literature were in the ascendant. We sang "Auld Lang Syne", "Scots wha ha'", and "Bonnie Doon", and then, changing the key, sang Dundee, Elgin, and Martyrs.'[30] With her own consciousness already raised, and on a fundraising abolitionist tour, Stowe meets working men and women and ponders human relations. She thus sees all the women who make Abbotsford work. At the house, her first thought is of the guide who facilitates her tour: 'came a trim, little old woman in a black gown, with pattens on; she put up her umbrella, and we all put up ours.'[31] Of the house, she ponders how it 'violates one's ideas of mere housewifery utility', while recognizing that there are other questions to ponder around such an unusual home.[32] And she remembers the owner, 'Scot's only surviving daughter'—properly, his grand-daughter, the same girl who gave William Wells Brown such pause.[33] She even took a wry pleasure in hearing the old woman repeat the same speeches to the next tour.[34] It wasn't all about her.

The gender problem of Scott's Abbotsford, then, lies in ourselves. Whether as visitors or as biographers focused on the great man, 'ideas are what we project', in Leo Stein's terms and, by contrast, '[things] are what we encounter'.[35] As we project our idea of ourselves across and through the fictions of Abbotsford, its women disturb us; they cannot simply be at home. Consequently they strike us, and strike against us, as Bill Brown's has it, like things. But if there's a negative—we thus seek to eject or elide them—there's also a positive.

Shifting our own focus from the narrative of great men at Abbotsford, and even men in general, changes the picture. Biographers aplenty have praised Scott's touch with men like game-keeper Tom Purdie or Dalgleish, the butler. These functionaries visibly supported the myth of Walter Scott as, in Carlyle's terms, 'the *healthiest* of men', and assisted visitors' participation in Scotland's literary mystique as the land of the heather and the deer.[36] But Abbotsford boasted, too, a community of women that allowed the illusion of direct access to the author. Letters between the governess Miss Millar and her charges Sophia and Anne hint at a quite different social network without which Lockhart's would have collapsed.[37] Mrs. Scott asks Miss Millar to tell the cook about the next week's guests, but also to let her know that Charlotte herself has done a lot of the

shopping.[38] When Miss Millar leaves, the whole family stays in touch, enquiring about her pupils, encouraging her to visit, and later supporting her when she is hunting for jobs.[39]

Networks also overlap. Sophia and Anne tell Miss Millar of their escapades, and it is thus that we see them on excursions along with everyone else—restricted from visiting Rob Roy's cave because of the lack of accommodation other than an ale house, yet striding out across the battlefield where the Scots met the Danes.[40] The girls place themselves very differently at Abbotsford, as well: Sophia gleefully tells that 'We spend most of our time in airing ourselves upon the top, and I think it will be wonderful if [the house] is finished without any of us breaking our necks.'[41] Girls who are sometimes cyphers even for Lockhart, and who are often impediments to Scott's admirers, spring into life in the community of women.

This supportive network trends toward the critical. Scott, we might be surprised to learn, taught his daughters how. In the first letter in Miss Millar's collection, he tasks young Sophia to list kings, rank their reign as peaceful or warlike, note their governmental strategies, assess their goodness, and determine for each 'Whether the condition of his subjects was amended or became worse under his reign'.[42]Thus, when Sophia reports that 'our poor house has been honoured by a visit of his Royal Highness Prince Leopold', she takes a view at once literary, political, domestic and acerbic. The visit is comic: 'as great an event […] as Lady Margaret's dejeune at [Tillietudlem]'—in Scott's *The Tale of Old Mortality*, chairs may never again be pressed by lowly buttocks after they have supported the king.[43] Prince Leopold, met at Selkirk by assembled dignitaries, including the Scott family, had suddenly invited himself to tea. "[It] would be impossible", he said, "for him to leave Scotland without seeing Mr. Scott in his own house."[44] "Figure", Sophia declares, "the dismay of the female part of our family." Honor was upheld, but not, by the women, uncriticized.

Not surprisingly, whatever the foibles of his literary satellites, the author who spent time with his daughters and cultivated their intellects appreciated and celebrated all the womenfolk of Abbotsford. When he finds the women of the house have been tricked into hospitality to brazen Americans, he and Charlotte turn into an efficient and humorous team to eject the intruders. 'Mrs Scott', says

Lockhart, 'with all her overflowing good-nature, was a sharp observer', and had no qualms about asking them, if belatedly, for their letters of introduction. With no letters forthcoming, 'Scott, signifying that his hour for dinner approached', indicated that if they intended to walk to Melrose, 'he could not trespass further on their time'. With these unexpected guests gone, Scott and Charlotte joke together. "Hang the Yahoos, Charlotte" Scott laughs with her, "we should have bid them stay dinner."[45]

Biographers and chance visitors keen to denigrate, distance, and disconnect Charlotte from their hero have gone to some lengths during and after his life. William Howitt, whose *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* ran through multiple editions from the 1840s, on seeing her portrait hanging within Abbotsford accomplished a very Victorian slur against her origins as well as her looks. "Oh! Such a round-faced little blackamoor of a woman!" he exclaims on seeing her portrait. "One instantly asks—where was Sir Walter's taste? Where was the judgment which guided him in describing Di Vernon […]"[46] We read interminably that Charlotte was Scott's second choice for a wife.[47] But giving these biographizing usurpers the lie, Scott consistently showed his respect, value and love for his wife. When she is dead, and he sits at work, 'The solitude seemd so absolute—my poor Charlotte would have been in the [room] half a score of times to see if the fire burnd and to ask a hundred kind questions.'[48] He remembers her human sympathy, and the daily communication and support of their life together that enabled his public roles and constituted his private joys.[49]

Nor does Scott find his daughters obtrusive. Washington Irving noted that a seventeen-year-old Sophia sang at her father's request: 'She never waited to be asked twice, but complied frankly and cheerfully.'[50] With Sophia gone, Anne takes on the role, at some cost to herself. 'Anne is practizing Scots songs', Scott writes. This 'I take as a kind compliment to my own taste as hers leads her chiefly to foreign music.'[51] If Ferrier did not appreciate the singing that characterized Abbotsford hospitality, within the family it represented respect and generosity.

That generosity, however mocked, allowed the hospitality and facilitated the proximity that visitors sought, in their various ways, to Scott. Irving, an atypical guest, was enchanted by the manner in which Scott's young family supported his

visitors and he recognized that they had the potential to weave those visitors into a nearer relation with the author. Sophia, 'looking up archly in [her father's] face', revealed the intimacy that 'papa shed a few tears when poor Camp [the dog] died'.[52] Indeed, the family was essential to the illusion of Scott's general availability. Teenage Charles squired Irving around the property; when Charlotte is ill, Anne takes on the duty of entertaining, hastily breaking off a letter to Miss Millar: 'Pray excuse this horrid scrawl, as I have written this in a great hurry, as I must go to play the agreeable to Lady Ravensworth.'[53] A hint of the necessary forbearance comes from Maria Edgeworth's departure after a long-anticipated and rather intense visit. 'The great Maria nearly went into fits; she had taken such a fancy to us all', Scott's more acerbic daughter, Anne, observed. Yet if Edgeworth 'talks a great deal, and does not care to hear others talk', Anne stressed, 'I like Miss E. very much.' Even Anne sustains her facilitating and connecting role, whatever the pressures.

Scott recognized his womenfolk's human generosity in their contribution to the family industry, and their seamless support of his commitments. Yet he also appreciated them for their difference and the very disruption they constituted within the access they allowed. In his novel *The Antiquary*, Jonathan Oldbuck is outraged by the intrusion of women with dusters into his study.[54] Still, 'Amid [his] medley [of books and antiquarian trumpery], it was no easy matter to find one's way to a chair, without stumbling over a prostrate folio, or the still more awkward mischance of overturning some piece of Roman or ancient British pottery.'[55] Women intrude, but they facilitate; in facilitating, they obtrude. But Oldbuck's study, a place of delusion as much as of enlightenment, could use a bit of practical disruption. Similarly, when Captain Clutterbuck encounters the 'Eidolon, or Representation, of the Author of Waverley' in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, it retells the story of the cook-maid who used antiquarian folios to clean pots and light fires. The cook's depredations, however, have actually increased the value of those 'greasy and blackened fragments […] which were not totally destroyed.'[56] So it is at Abbotsford.

While descriptions of Scott at Abbotsford are more likely to celebrate his dogs than his daughters, it is the women of the house who have contributed most to visitors' experience in the past, and who also help to understand it most. Dogs do not disturb what Lawrence Grossberg calls the 'mattering maps' that help us

position ourselves in the world; they are more likely to situate us, as he says, 'temporarily […]' at home.'[57] But women's roles are more complex. If Scott did not like a 'literary *picnic',* resisting editorial intrusions from his male coterie, the author who joked about a 'joint stock company' for novel production actually embraced such a relation with his wife and daughters.[58] Abbotsford may be, as some have suggested, a fiction in its own right.[59] In that case, Scott's wife and daughters are surely its co-authors. And if 'ideas are what we project' but 'things are what we encounter', in our encounter with these women whom we would rather elide or eject, they author us, as visitors, too. They point to and actually manifest the author's other relations. They thus unbind the links of sentimental sympathy between visitor and author; they disrupt the identity that is anxiously undergoing formation. Toward visitors' selective and exclusionary acts of cultural memory they stand, inevitably, as contradiction and critique. If we are literary pilgrims, to take Hawthorne's view, they show that we are also, thereby, problems to ourselves.

Hawthorne worried at Abbotsford that the spirit of a great man and the tread of his followers take 'hearth and hall away from the nominal possessors of an author's house.[60] Perhaps he need not have worried so much. Ever seeking a meeting with ourselves through association with a person and a place, we are ever tripping over the narrower relations of our hero in all the intimacy of home. The anonymous 'wife' or 'party' in the guest books might well have appreciated the irony

'Our house is the least that ever harboured decent folks since the traditionary couple who lived in the Vinegar bottle', Walter Scott wrote to the actress Sarah Smith in 1814.[61] Still, 'if you come […] we will find a corner for you.' As with Smith, a substantial number of Scott's visitors to his house in the Scottish Borders were women. Joanna Baillie and Susan Ferrier came as invited. Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Beecher Stowe figure among authors touring Abbotsford after Scott's death.

Women, however, often appear in the guest books that mark the house's later transition to a museum anonymously—as 'and wife', 'and family', or 'and party'.[62] Moreover, visitors in search of either the living or the dead Scott proved curiously blind to the house's women. No matter that Scott's wife, Charlotte, and daughters

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Yet, functioning as female, like Anne with her fictive marmalade, women disrupt the self-serving narratives of proximity to place and to the person of Walter Scott sought by visitors to Abbotsford. William Wells Brown, visiting in 1851, enacts a striking example. He remembers: 'we saw a grand-daughter of the Poet. She was from London, and was only on a visit of a few days. She looked pale and dejected, and seemed as if she longed to leave this secluded spot and return to the metropolis. She looked for all the world like a hothouse plant.'[88] He pivots: 'I don't think the Scotch could do better than to purchase Abbotsford.' To Wells, who it is worth remembering had escaped slavery in America and now wrote as "A Fugitive

Slave," the house should belong to the nation. It cannot belong to the young woman who actually owns it.[89] Indeed, he effectively uproots her as a 'hothouse plant' who can't possibly want to live in her own house. The house, that is, should allow every visitor an apparently unique access, with no interferences. A man escaped to Boston, and newly classified as 'fugitive' by an 1850 law, of course has every right to forge a near relation with the home and literary precursor of his choice. Still, whatever Brown's circumstances, he manifests how the woman, with her descent from Abbotsford and the author, disrupts the relation between author and visitor. For too many visitors, the woman must consequently be re-conceived as a thing and ejected.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, a literary lion herself, looked around her with a significant difference. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852; in 1853 Stowe was speeding into Scotland on the train. At first, Stowe seems un-selfconsciously committed to the constitutive lure of Scott's national romance: 'The sun went down, and night drew on; still we were in Scotland. Scotch ballads, Scotch tunes, and Scotch literature were in the ascendant. We sang "Auld Lang Syne", "Scots wha ha'", and "Bonnie Doon", and then, changing the key, sang Dundee, Elgin, and Martyrs.'[90] With her own consciousness already raised, and on a fundraising abolitionist tour, Stowe meets working men and women and ponders human relations. She thus sees all the women who make Abbotsford work. At the house, her first thought is of the guide who facilitates her tour: 'came a trim, little old woman in a black gown, with pattens on; she put up her umbrella, and we all put up ours.'[91] Of the house, she ponders how it 'violates one's ideas of mere housewifery utility', while recognizing that there are other questions to ponder around such an unusual home.[92] And she remembers the owner, 'Scot's only surviving daughter'—properly, his grand-daughter, the same girl who gave William Wells Brown such pause.[93] She even took a wry pleasure in hearing the old woman repeat the same speeches to the next tour.[94] It wasn't all about her.

The gender problem of Scott's Abbotsford, then, lies in ourselves. Whether as visitors or as biographers focused on the great man, 'ideas are what we project', in Leo Stein's terms and, by contrast, '[things] are what we encounter'.[95] As we project our idea of ourselves across and through the fictions of Abbotsford, its women disturb us; they cannot simply be at home. Consequently they strike us,

and strike against us, as Bill Brown's has it, like things. But if there's a negative—we thus seek to eject or elide them—there's also a positive.

Shifting our own focus from the narrative of great men at Abbotsford, and even men in general, changes the picture. Biographers aplenty have praised Scott's touch with men like game-keeper Tom Purdie or Dalgleish, the butler. These functionaries visibly supported the myth of Walter Scott as, in Carlyle's terms, 'the *healthiest* of men', and assisted visitors' participation in Scotland's literary mystique as the land of the heather and the deer.[96] But Abbotsford boasted, too, a community of women that allowed the illusion of direct access to the author. Letters between the governess Miss Millar and her charges Sophia and Anne hint at a quite different social network without which Lockhart's would have collapsed.[97] Mrs. Scott asks Miss Millar to tell the cook about the next week's guests, but also to let her know that Charlotte herself has done a lot of the shopping.[98] When Miss Millar leaves, the whole family stays in touch, enquiring about her pupils, encouraging her to visit, and later supporting her when she is hunting for jobs.[99]

Networks also overlap. Sophia and Anne tell Miss Millar of their escapades, and it is thus that we see them on excursions along with everyone else—restricted from visiting Rob Roy's cave because of the lack of accommodation other than an ale house, yet striding out across the battlefield where the Scots met the Danes.[100] The girls place themselves very differently at Abbotsford, as well: Sophia gleefully tells that 'We spend most of our time in airing ourselves upon the top, and I think it will be wonderful if [the house] is finished without any of us breaking our necks.'[101] Girls who are sometimes cyphers even for Lockhart, and who are often impediments to Scott's admirers, spring into life in the community of women.

This supportive network trends toward the critical. Scott, we might be surprised to learn, taught his daughters how. In the first letter in Miss Millar's collection, he tasks young Sophia to list kings, rank their reign as peaceful or warlike, note their governmental strategies, assess their goodness, and determine for each 'Whether the condition of his subjects was amended or became worse under his reign'.[102]Thus, when Sophia reports that 'our poor house has been honoured by a visit of his Royal Highness Prince Leopold', she takes a view at once literary,

political, domestic and acerbic. The visit is comic: 'as great an event […] as Lady Margaret's dejeune at [Tillietudlem]'—in Scott's *The Tale of Old Mortality*, chairs may never again be pressed by lowly buttocks after they have supported the king.[103] Prince Leopold, met at Selkirk by assembled dignitaries, including the Scott family, had suddenly invited himself to tea. "[It] would be impossible", he said, "for him to leave Scotland without seeing Mr. Scott in his own house."[104] "Figure", Sophia declares, "the dismay of the female part of our family." Honor was upheld, but not, by the women, uncriticized.

Not surprisingly, whatever the foibles of his literary satellites, the author who spent time with his daughters and cultivated their intellects appreciated and celebrated all the womenfolk of Abbotsford. When he finds the women of the house have been tricked into hospitality to brazen Americans, he and Charlotte turn into an efficient and humorous team to eject the intruders. 'Mrs Scott', says Lockhart, 'with all her overflowing good-nature, was a sharp observer', and had no qualms about asking them, if belatedly, for their letters of introduction. With no letters forthcoming, 'Scott, signifying that his hour for dinner approached', indicated that if they intended to walk to Melrose, 'he could not trespass further on their time'. With these unexpected guests gone, Scott and Charlotte joke together. "Hang the Yahoos, Charlotte" Scott laughs with her, "we should have bid them stay dinner."[105]

Biographers and chance visitors keen to denigrate, distance, and disconnect Charlotte from their hero have gone to some lengths during and after his life. William Howitt, whose *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* ran through multiple editions from the 1840s, on seeing her portrait hanging within Abbotsford accomplished a very Victorian slur against her origins as well as her looks. "Oh! Such a round-faced little blackamoor of a woman!" he exclaims on seeing her portrait. "One instantly asks—where was Sir Walter's taste? Where was the judgment which guided him in describing Di Vernon […]"[106] We read interminably that Charlotte was Scott's second choice for a wife.[107] But giving these biographizing usurpers the lie, Scott consistently showed his respect, value and love for his wife. When she is dead, and he sits at work, 'The solitude seemd so absolute—my poor Charlotte would have been in the [room] half a score of times to see if the fire burnd and to ask a hundred kind questions.'[108] He

remembers her human sympathy, and the daily communication and support of their life together that enabled his public roles and constituted his private joys.[109]

Nor does Scott find his daughters obtrusive. Washington Irving noted that a seventeen-year-old Sophia sang at her father's request: 'She never waited to be asked twice, but complied frankly and cheerfully.'[110] With Sophia gone, Anne takes on the role, at some cost to herself. 'Anne is practizing Scots songs', Scott writes. This 'I take as a kind compliment to my own taste as hers leads her chiefly to foreign music.'[111] If Ferrier did not appreciate the singing that characterized Abbotsford hospitality, within the family it represented respect and generosity.

That generosity, however mocked, allowed the hospitality and facilitated the proximity that visitors sought, in their various ways, to Scott. Irving, an atypical guest, was enchanted by the manner in which Scott's young family supported his visitors and he recognized that they had the potential to weave those visitors into a nearer relation with the author. Sophia, 'looking up archly in [her father's] face', revealed the intimacy that 'papa shed a few tears when poor Camp [the dog] died'.[112] Indeed, the family was essential to the illusion of Scott's general availability. Teenage Charles squired Irving around the property; when Charlotte is ill, Anne takes on the duty of entertaining, hastily breaking off a letter to Miss Millar: 'Pray excuse this horrid scrawl, as I have written this in a great hurry, as I must go to play the agreeable to Lady Ravensworth.'[113] A hint of the necessary forbearance comes from Maria Edgeworth's departure after a long-anticipated and rather intense visit. 'The great Maria nearly went into fits; she had taken such a fancy to us all', Scott's more acerbic daughter, Anne, observed. Yet if Edgeworth 'talks a great deal, and does not care to hear others talk', Anne stressed, 'I like Miss E. very much.' Even Anne sustains her facilitating and connecting role, whatever the pressures.

Scott recognized his womenfolk's human generosity in their contribution to the family industry, and their seamless support of his commitments. Yet he also appreciated them for their difference and the very disruption they constituted within the access they allowed. In his novel *The Antiquary*, Jonathan Oldbuck is outraged by the intrusion of women with dusters into his study.[114] Still, 'Amid [his] medley [of books and antiquarian trumpery], it was no easy matter to find one's way to a chair, without stumbling over a prostrate folio, or the still more awkward

mischance of overturning some piece of Roman or ancient British pottery.'[115] Women intrude, but they facilitate; in facilitating, they obtrude. But Oldbuck's study, a place of delusion as much as of enlightenment, could use a bit of practical disruption. Similarly, when Captain Clutterbuck encounters the 'Eidolon, or Representation, of the Author of Waverley' in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, it retells the story of the cook-maid who used antiquarian folios to clean pots and light fires. The cook's depredations, however, have actually increased the value of those 'greasy and blackened fragments […] which were not totally destroyed.'[116] So it is at Abbotsford.

While descriptions of Scott at Abbotsford are more likely to celebrate his dogs than his daughters, it is the women of the house who have contributed most to visitors' experience in the past, and who also help to understand it most. Dogs do not disturb what Lawrence Grossberg calls the 'mattering maps' that help us position ourselves in the world; they are more likely to situate us, as he says, 'temporarily […]' at home.'[117] But women's roles are more complex. If Scott did not like a 'literary *picnic*', resisting editorial intrusions from his male coterie, the author who joked about a 'joint stock company' for novel production actually embraced such a relation with his wife and daughters.[118] Abbotsford may be, as some have suggested, a fiction in its own right.[119] In that case, Scott's wife and daughters are surely its co-authors. And if 'ideas are what we project' but 'things are what we encounter', in our encounter with these women whom we would rather elide or eject, they author us, as visitors, too. They point to and actually manifest the author's other relations. They thus unbind the links of sentimental sympathy between visitor and author; they disrupt the identity that is anxiously undergoing formation. Toward visitors' selective and exclusionary acts of cultural memory they stand, inevitably, as contradiction and critique. If we are literary pilgrims, to take Hawthorne's view, they show that we are also, thereby, problems to ourselves.

Hawthorne worried at Abbotsford that the spirit of a great man and the tread of his followers take 'hearth and hall away from the nominal possessors of an author's house.[120] Perhaps he need not have worried so much. Ever seeking a meeting with ourselves through association with a person and a place, we are ever tripping over the narrower relations of our hero in all the intimacy of home.

The anonymous ‘wife’ or ‘party’ in the guest books might well have appreciated the irony

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