CHAPTER FOUR

SIR WALTER SCOTT
(1771-1832)

Of all the major Romantic poets, it is Sir Walter Scott, whose excursion into the field of dramatic composition was, perhaps, least purposive. Like Coleridge and Wordsworth, Sir Walter, as far as we know, had no definite dramatic aim, or ambition. In other words, his dramatic composition may be regarded as something of casual nature, and not as a consistent pursuit of well thought-out plan, or theory. He did not, for instance, pretend to reform the English Stage, though he was thoroughly conscious, that the theatre of his time had been crying for reform.

Scott was quite critical of the contemporary theatrical audience "who have least real taste for the stage as an elegant amusement."¹ Despite his recognition of the deplorable condition of English drama and theatre, Scott practically did nothing to turn the tide in favour of the revival of drama. He maintained, it seems, a sort of callous aloofness as a dramatist even though Scott wrote a number of plays. For his

prefaces to the plays are indicative of the spirit; he declares, that his plays were "in no particular, either designed or calculated for the stage," and this means nothing short of Scott's unwillingness to maintain any connection with the living theatre. So, it may seem that he wrote plays for the sake of his private and personal satisfaction and pleasure. In a letter to Miss Smith, Scott writes -

"If I were to write anything for the stage, it would be for the delight of dressing the characters after my own fancy. But I am sure I never shall have that pleasure."^2

Sir Walter later wrote plays, and it is obvious, he wrote after his "own fancy," caring little for the stage presentation, or public pleasure. Perhaps, he also could not please himself with his performance.

In the early years of his study of the German literature, Scott became a translator of various German dramas. "All this," writes G.H. Needler, "gave him for a time a decided bent in the direction of the drama, and finally led him, through translations and adaptations, to try his hand at original composition....."^3 Needler maintains that "Goethe's early drama, Gotz von Berlichingen, towers above all others as an inspiration to Scott." ^4 It is difficult to say exactly how many plays Scott wrote. For, as Needler says, some of his plays

^2Ibid.


"were destroyed or remain in manuscript." We shall, however, devote ourselves to the examination of those pieces which were published, and are available in Scott's Poetical Works.

There is insufficient record as to the date of composition of Scott's plays. It is, therefore, not possible to examine the plays in their chronological order. We first take up The House of Aspen, written, as G.H. Needler says, in 1800, and published in the Keepsake of 1829. This was written at a time, as Scott says,

"when my taste was very green, and when, like the rest of the world, I was taken in with the bombast of Schiller."

and based on Veit Weber's Der Heilige Vehme - a German dramatic romance. Scott calls The House of Aspen "rather a rifacimento of the original than a translation." Scott's Poetical Works, edited by J.L. Robertson, (Oxford, 1967) has excluded this play, probably for the reason, that it is a translation work of Scott. But in the Advertisement of the play Scott himself says -

"The drama must be termed rather a rifacimento of the original than a translation, since the whole is


7Needler, op. cit. p.30.

8Scott's Letters I, (To Lady Abercorn, dt. May 17,1811.).

9Scott's Works (1892), III. p.378.
compressed, and the incidents and dialogue occasionally much varied."\(^{10}\)

Original work though it is not, it is neither a translation (according to Scott), like Coleridge's *The Piccolomini* and *The Death of Wallenstein*, and Shelley's *The Cyclops*, and as such, *The House of Aspen* deserves inclusion in the study of Scott's dramatic works.

*The House of Aspen* presents a conflict between the two ancient families of Knightly order - the house of Aspen and that of Maltingen. Rudiger - the Knight of Aspen married Isabella, the widow of Arnolf of Ebersdorf, who had been poisoned to death by Isabella with the aid of her accomplice - Martin, squire to Rudiger's eldest son - George. Isabella's niece, Gertrude is betrothed to Henry - the younger son of Rudiger; but Roderic, a count of Maltingen seeks to marry her. And over this issue the conflict starts afresh between the two families. In an open fight between George and Roderic, Martin is wounded, and thinking his end near, gives out a part of the secret of Arnolf's death to George, who turns away from Martin out of loathing, and leaving him alone in the woods he goes back to the field to join the fight. Martin thus lies alone and soon falls unconscious. Roderic who is the president of the Invisible Tribunal overhears, while escaping through this woods, the unconscious muttering of Martin, and learns the secret crime of Martin and Isabella.

\(^{10}\)Ibid.
He finds it now a very effective instrument to wreck vengeance upon his victor in the fight - George by bringing ruin to the house of Aspen. Roderic convenes a meeting of the Invisible Tribunal at once. George (who is also a member of the Tribunal), knowing the motive of Roderic and the consequence of the trial, sends Henry to the Duke of Bavaria - the chief, and most powerful member to hand over to the Duke his letter. By this time Isabella is arrested in the name of the Invisible Tribunal. Ebersdorf's brother - Bertram disguised as a minstrel has been taken into confidence by Roderic, and he, in turn, joins hands with him to pursue a common end - the vengeance upon the house of Aspen.

In the secret mid-night meeting of the Invisible Tribunal, George holds himself guilty of breaking the vow by seeking to defend his mother - Isabella. By the orders of the Tribunal he is knifed to death as a penalty. Isabella is also done to death for the crime she had committed in the past. The old Knight - Rudiger is also brought before the Tribunal. The old Knight baffled by the death of George and Isabella, challenges Roderic in an open combat. Roderic now prevails upon the members that the old Knight should also be done to death, for he has known the secrets of the Tribunal. But on the eve of the execution of Rudiger, the Duke of Bavaria suddenly enters and finds the dead bodies of George and Isabella. The Duke has been a little late, for which he could not avert the death of these two. The Duke now dismisses Roderic from the Chair of the Tribunal, because Roderic is found to
have dishonoured it. He is also declared unworthy of Knighthood. The Duke further orders Roderic to leave, on pain of death, the land of Bavaria within two days; Bertram has also to pay dearly for "his outlawry."

The plot of The House of Aspen is, all but tolerably built. But the mental conflict of George could not be fully brought out; the scene between the mother and the son (III.i.) which is the most impressive scene and well conceived, and which contains a very sure source of dramatic potentiality could not be made fully effective. Miss Joanna Baillie is certainly right to have called the scene "under-written." Miss Baillie's suggestion to Scott for improvement of the play is dramatically wise. She writes to Scott -

"If you ever make use of this piece, I would have you to disencumber your plot of some things that might easily be spared, and bring more into view the character of George, which you have so justly imagined, while he is in the terrible state of suspense in regard to his mother's guilt."\(^1^\)

The plot of this drama is based on a number of conflicts of various kinds - conflict between family-honour and family-interest centering round Gertrude, conflict between natural private affection and the public duty, or group-loyalty, and so on. But all this conflict could not fully be brought into

\(^1^\)Scott's Letters, I. (Joanna Baillie's letter to Scott, dt. April, 1808.)

\(^1^2\)Ibid.
view and properly dramatized. Despite these defects however, the plot of *The House of Aspen* is better constructed than the plots of Scott's most of the dramas. The full credit does not yet go to Scott for the reason that he found the German model before him which he, only little, changed for his purpose. The plots of his other dramas which he built all by himself without any model before him, point out Scott's actual capacity, better or worse, for plot-construction. The actual Scott the dramatist cannot be found in *The House of Aspen*, as he is found in *Halidon Hill*, *Macduff's Cross*, *The Doom of Devorgoil*, and in *Auchindrane*. For real assessment of Sir Walter Scott's dramatic talent, we shall have to wait till we go to these plays.

Of the characters of *The House of Aspen* something has to be said. The character of George is best developed through action and speech. He is a Knight and also a member of the Invisible Tribunal, and he is keenly aware of his duties and responsibilities of the position he holds. This sense of his duty and responsibility creates for him a conflict, when he comes to know of his mother's guilt. His knightly duty and the judicial responsibility assigned to him by the secret Tribunal demand of him such action as the disclosure of his mother's guilt to the Tribunal and an objective attitude to the trial; while his natural bond with his mother demands concealment of the crime and the defence of the mother — which amount to disloyalty to the ideal of the Tribunal, he once vowed to preserve for public interest. But these two opposing but equally strong demands create for George a terrible mental
conflict which shakes his very soul, and would have split his personality, if the conflict had remained unresolved. Ultimately, George stands before us, not as a split personality, but as one who is ready to save his mother at the expense of the ideal of his austere position, and also at his own peril.

Geo. No! No! The ties of Nature were knit by God himself. Cursed be the stoic pride that would rend them asunder, and call it virtue!

(III.i.)

The personal and the natural at last triumph over what is public and general.

Geo. (struggling for breath.). Nature will have utterance: mother, dearest mother, I will save you or perish! (throws himself into her arms). Thus fall my vows.

(Ibid)

Henceforward, we find no more conflict in George; his actions follow the decision he takes. He sends Bertram in the guise of a priest to have wounded Martin released from Roderic's custody, and the end of this is to suppress the witness of Isabella's crime; he sends Henry with a letter to the Duke of Bavaria, whose presence in the meeting of the secret Tribunal may frustrate Roderic's plot and design, and save his mother and himself. Even the last speech of George in the meeting of the Tribunal before his death shows the final resolution of his conflict. He accepts the doom of punishment pronounced by the Invisible Judges and says:
Geo. Welcome be your sentence - I am weary of your yoke of iron. A light beams on my soul. Woe to those who seek justice in the dark haunts of mystery and of cruelty! She dwells in the broad blaze of the sun, and Mercy is ever by her side. Woe to those who would advance the general weal by trampling upon the social affections! they asoire to be more than men - shall become worse than tigers. I go: better for me your altars should be stained with my blood, than my soul blackened with your crimes.

(V.i.)

This last important speech of George is a sufficient proof of his newly enlightened soul - a sort of deep awakening of himself to a profound truth of life, for whose sake his death is not death, but a life - a martyrdom. It shows a mind free from conflicting thoughts - a mind calm and serene. This is the last and the final phase of the development of George's character.

George is the hero of The House of Aspen. The tragic mistakes he has committed are his alignment with the Invisible Tribunal, and his leaving the wounded Martin alone in the woods even after knowing that Martin's knowledge of Isabella's guilt is dangerous.

The character of the old Knight - Rudiger has also individuality. He is like an old lion - lionly strength is no more in him, but lion-hearted he still is. He sorrows that he is physically unable to help his sons in the fight with the house of Maltingen. He says to Isabella -
Rud. Now, there lies the difference: you sorrow that they are in danger, I that I cannot share it with them. (I. i.).

The emotionally agitated knight forgets his own state at the mention of victory and cries out: "Saddle my black barb; I will head them myself. (sits down). A murrain on that stumbling roan! I had forgot my dislocated bones" (I. i.). The old knight yet seeks to satisfy himself with the sight of his brave sons on war-horses. "Help me to the gallery, that I may see them on horseback" (Ibid.). Rudiger is beside himself with joy when he is told that his sons are seen returning victorious.

Rud. ........ Welcome! welcome! once more have my old eyes seen the banners of the house of Maltingen tramoled in the dust. - Isabella, broach our oldest casks: wine is sweet after war. (III. i.).

The knight in him rejoices in his brave sons' preserving the honour of his house, and calls for celebrating the occasion with wine; it is the same knight in him who challenges Roderic to a "mortal combat" in the meeting of the secret Tribunal (V. i.). Rudiger is a loving husband, and an affectionate father. His love for Isabella is deep. "Oh! let me go - let me but try to stop her blood, and I will forgive you all" (V. i.). Rudiger is ready to forgive the judges of the Invisible Tribunal, if he can save his love from extinction; for it sustains his old age.

The character of Isabella also deserves some notice. Her love for Rudiger is equally deep. She was in love with
Rudiger, but she was forced to marry Arnolf of Ebersdorf who did not love her, and used to torture her. Her love for Rudiger remained strong behind the commission of her husband's murder, and led her actually to the remarriage with Rudiger. But she conceals her guilt from Rudiger. She suffers from a secret sense of guilt, that pricks her conscience day and night, and even after her remarriage, "Isabella's light heart returned no more" (I.i.). Isabella undergoes a secret penance. The consciousness of the secret guilt is ever-fresh in her mind, and leads her to the "unnatural zeal with which she performs her dreadful penances" (I.iii.). Isabella is a life-affirmative character; she loves life, for whose sake she suppresses her guilt and wants to live. Her greatest anxiety before death is that, her husband - old Rudiger will be shocked to learn of her crime, and his love for her will be deeply wounded. She wishes that "Never shall he hear it till the author is no more" (V.i.); for the thought of losing the heaven of love she has found in Rudiger is the most tormenting thought of Isabella. Other characters of the drama are not successfully drawn; they are types, rather than individuals.

The House of Aspen belongs to the Gothic tradition and is written in prose. Scott's debt to the German dramatic tradition is beyond any dispute, and it is The House of Aspen, which admits this debt all the more. It is a terrible drama replete with Gothic and melodramatic horror, bloodshed, violent death. The story of the secret Tribunal on which the dramatic actions are based, is extremely terrifying. The scene in the
Chapel at midnight in which Isabella is led off by a figure speechless and muffled in black, who appears from behind her first husband's tomb, is one that strikes us with horror to the extreme (IV.ii); the last scene (V.i.) is also spectacularly terrible. A sombre atmosphere prevails all through this scene steeped in bloodshed and gloomy by the shadow of death. The House of Aspen is a drama which is Gothic both in form and substance. Here are ancient Gothic buildings, old ruins, castle, and various other Gothic machinery; the over-all atmosphere of the drama is dark and dreadful. The "work is thoroughly in the German style," says Allardyce Nicoll, "and can take rank only with the spectacular plays of The Castle Spectre class.  

Sir Walter Scott himself admits the fact. In a letter dated May 17, 1811, Scott writes on the play:

"I do not know anything of a play of mine, my dear friend, unless it be a sort of a half mad German tragedy which I wrote many years ago when my taste was very green, and when, like the rest of the world, I was taken in with the bombast of Schiller."

Not only the style, the story of the secret Tribunal itself is borrowed from Germany; and the ending of the drama promising the restoration of the honour of the house of Aspen, after so many tragic incidents is essentially melodramatic. The Duke of Bavaria stands in the end like Destiny, saving the house of

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14 Scott's Letters, I. (To Lady Abercorn).
Aspen from its impending total extinction so contrived by Roderic and Bertram, and punishing the protagonists of the conspiracy.

The House of Aspen is a stageworthy drama though never staged. Scott offered it to the stage for performance, but it was rejected. We come to learn that once Scott's friend - John Kemble, an actor of great repute took an initiative to perform this drama, but the attempt was thought to be too risky an experiment with a Drury Lane English audience; for "there was danger that the main spring of the story, - the binding engagements formed by the members of the secret tribunal, - might not be sufficiently felt by an English audience, to whom the nature of that singularly mysterious institution was unknown from early association;" besides, there is "too much blood, too much of the dire catastrophe of Tom Thumb, when all die on the stage." But though not staged, none can yet deny that this drama of Sir Walter Scott possesses many dramatic qualities not found in any other drama of the author.

To turn from The House of Aspen to Halidon Hill is to pass on from Scott's early stage of dramatic adaptation

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16 Scott's Works (1892), III. p.378.

17 Ibid.
and imitation to his purely original composition. It is a march, so to say, from the author's stage of borrowing of plot from the foreign source to the discovery of the dramatic potentiality of native history of the middle ages. Henceforward, Scott did not turn towards Germany, or any other country for his dramatic plot; the Scottish history of the distant past was able to provide him with the material needed to build up the story of his dramas written later. Halidon Hill, published in 1822, consists of two acts only. It is an historical tragedy based on the history of the battle that took place between Scotland and England at the hill of Halidon, and was concluded with the defeat of the former with a heavy loss of life. "It is designed," says Scott, "to illustrate military antiquities, and the manners of chivalry."¹⁸

The plot of Halidon Hill is dramatically poor. When the battle takes place between Scotland and England at Halidon hill, a meeting of the Scottish Chiefs and Nobles is immediately convened by the Regent. In the meeting Lennox suggests a retreat from the Halidon hill for a better advantage, but the Regent is keen on facing the English there, for to him a retreat is not an honourable thing for Scotland, especially when

"...King Edward sent a haughty message
Defying us to battle on this field,
This very hill of Halidon; if we leave it
Unfought withal, it squares not with our honour."

(I.ii.)

¹⁸Scott's Works. p.963.
Swinton, an older warrior also does not think it quite wise to meet the English there merely for the sake of country's honour. So, a debate takes place in which some support the proposal of retreat, while a few others side with the Regent. The Chiefs and Nobles are, therefore, in a state of disunity. Swinton tries to unite them all with words of patriotic fervour, and seeks to rouse in them a noble sense of duty to the motherland. These wise speeches and patriotic feelings of the older knight, Swinton especially influence Gordon — a young noble whose father was slain by Swinton, and who has been hatching a plan to avenge his father's death.

Gor. ........................
And I must slay my country's sagest leader,
And crush by numbers that determined handful,
When most my country needs their practical aid,
Or men will say, 'There goes degenerate Gordon;
His father's blood is on the Swinton's sword,
And his is in his scabbard'!

(I.ii.)

Gordon gives up the idea of revenge. He, moreover, falls on his knees before the older Knight, begs his pardon and desires to be dubbed a Knight by no other than Swinton himself. Then Swinton and Gordon set out with limited force to meet the English at Halidon. The Regent and other Chiefs and Nobles maintain an indifferent attitude towards them, and do not aid them with soldiers and horses. The two Knights fight valiantly and prove a terror to the English, but ultimately fall wounded
and die. The dying speech of Swinton pin-points the mystery of their fall and Scotland's defeat.

Swi. Rashness, and cowardice, and secret treason, Combine to ruin us; and our hot valour, Devoid of discipline, is madmen's strength, More fatal unto friends than enemies! (II.iii.)

The plot of Halidon Hill apparently seems to have been based on a conflict between Scotland and England at the national level, but Scott has conceived a deeper conflict at the individual level too. There are conflicts based on family-feud, on envy and pride and such other mean passions and motives. The resolution of the conflict between Gordon and Swinton virtually intensifies the conflict between the Regent, and Swinton. Gordon inspired by the wise and patriotic speech of Swinton desires to be dubbed a Knight by him, and refuses the boon of knighthood from the Regent, saying -

Gor. Who would drink purely seeks the secret fountain, How small soever, not the general stream, Though it be deep and wide.

(I.ii.)

Gordon's metaphorical reply in regard to his choice of the giver of Knighthood on one hand, and Knights' and Nobles' respect for and faith in Swinton (I.ii.) on the other, provoke Regent's envy and jealousy that give rise to a base and personal conflict, to which the national interest is sacrificed. For dramatic purposes, such things are good, no doubt, but
Scott has not been able to present the clash of interests and motives that may give rise to actions dramatically interesting. Moreover, the transformation of the young Gordon from Swinton's mortal foe into his devout follower is hasty, and for this reason, a little unnatural.

The plot contains only a very few visible actions. The entire first act of Halidon Hill is all but actionless, and may be taken as preparatory to what takes place in the last act. The only spectacular scenes are the battle-scenes (II.ii. & iii) displaying mainly the courage and chivalry of Swinton and Gordon, ending in their ultimate death and Scotland's defeat. The story as conceived by Scott has not been fully brought out to view through the dramatization of the play's different incidents; the potential source of interest - the conflicts, has not been properly explored; and the result is that the story of Halidon Hill has become more a story of the military conflict between Scotland and England than one of the tragedy of the two star-crossed knights - Swinton and Gordon, though the author seems to have aimed at the dramatic presentation of this personal tragedy. Scott remains, after all, an explorer of the surface, for he has failed to work into the depth of the story in clear terms of action and speech; a clear lack of knowledge necessary for building a well-knit dramatic plot is noticeable here, and though dramatic in form, Halidon Hill gives the impression more of a narrative of historical event than a drama proper.
The characters of the play are mostly thumb-nail sketches. Of them only Swinton and Gordon show some sharp individuality. They also show some development of their characters and some vitality. Swinton is the hero of *Halidon Hill*. "His discipline and wisdom mark the leader" (I.i.); he is a man of grand personality. His mortal foe - Gordon makes it clear when he says -

Gor. ................. There's in his presence

Something that works upon me like a spell,

(I.ii.)

Swinton is an old knight, "the wisest warrior" of "high experience." His sons and most of his followers were killed in wars with England and also in the family-feud with the house of Gordon; a knight of thousand followers is reduced now to a knight of only "sixty lances/In twelve years' space;" a father of four brave sons is now a childless man surviving the most cruel wreck of his life - a man desolate but grand.

Swi. .........................

I'm an old oak, from which the foresters
Have hew'd four goodly boughs, and left beside me
Only a sapling, which the fawn may crush
As he springs over it.

(I.i.)

There is also a great vacuum in the personal life of the old knight; the father in him cries for a son. His psychological
loneliness and want suddenly finds out a son in his sworn enemy - Gordon.

Swi. ........................ while we live
    Gordon shall be my son. If thou art fatherless,
    Am I not childless too?

(I.ii.)

Mortally wounded in the battle, Swinton asks Gordon at the last moment of his earthly life to close his dim eyes, never to open any more.

Swi. ..........................
    Let thy hands close them, Gordon; I will dream My fair-hair'd William renders me that office! (Dies)

(II.iii.)

Before he dies, Swinton tries to save the life of his son of chivalry from the mortal fight. Soft heart of the father in him looks with solicitude into the impending danger of young Gordon - a youth whose promising life with his love for Elizabeth will soon be cut short. He advises him to run to his safety; nay, he commands him. But Gordon does not leave the old man. The old warrior cries -

Swi.  Not at my bidding? I, thy sire in chivalry,
    Thy leader in the battle? I command thee.

(II.ii.)

The character of Sir Alan Swinton is the study of nobility, heroic grandeur and valour of the knightly order. Scott says that he designed the play "to illustrate military antiquities,
and the manners of chivalry," and it is mainly the second part of his programme that directly involves Scott's attempt at dramatization of Swinton's nobility and majesty, valour and especially his wisdom. The plot of the play was, therefore, built to bring out, not only the chivalrous past of Scotland, but also the tragedy of Swinton who is, in the words of De Vipont, the Knight Tamplar, "the best, the bravest, strongest, and sagest of our Scottish chivalry" (II.iii).

The character of Gordon is also a noble creation. Much of his personality is revealed through his intercourse with Swinton who serves virtually as a canvas for the portrayal of Gordon. Though poorly displayed, Gordon's transformation shows not only the transforming power of Swinton's character, but also the intrinsic worth of Gordon's essential character and personality. He feels the importance and urgency of the hour, when his motherland stands in peril, and when the broad national sentiment should not be muted by any narrow and mean passion of personal revenge. He feels the loss Scotland will suffer at the death of a personality like Swinton in his hand, when the country needs the wisdom, valour and guidance of the old experienced knight. The noble sentiment rises in him, and Gordon gives up the idea of avenging his father's death. Gordon fights with his leader in the battle of Halidon against the English army, and like his leader falls wounded and dies. After Swinton's death when Symon De Vipont offers to guide him to safety, Gordon, pointing to the dead body of Swinton says —
Gor. Look there, and bid me fly! The oak has fallen; And the young ivy bush, which learn'd to climb By its support, must needs partake its fall.

(Il.iii.)

Gordon is the worthy follower of his "sire in chivalry" in life — nay, in death as well. To die with Swinton and be a follower even in death are not a small privilege for Gordon; he does not like to miss the chance.

In private life, Gordon is a romantic youth. He is a romantic lover of his mistress — Elizabeth whom the young knight remembers even in the battle-field. His speech describing the merits of his beloved during a short respite of the battle rises to the height of poetical eloquence. He recalls her singing which is "like the wild modulation of the lark" (II.ii.); hers is an enchanting voice.

Gor. ....................

To listen to her, is to seem to wander In some enchanted labyrinth of romance, Whence nothing but the lovely fairy's will, Who wove the soell, can extricate the wanderer. Methinks I hear her now!

(II.ii.)

This sweet reminiscence of love and romance against the background of the harsh reality of death in the battle-field is at once sweet and sad, showing the workings of his mind which instinctively muses on the unfulfilled hopes and
longings of life to be soon eclipsed by death. Swinton's soft and feeling heart realizes the pathos:

Swi. Bless'd privilege

Of youth! There's scarce three minutes to decide 'Twixt death and life, 'twixt triumph and defeat, Yet all his thoughts are in his lady's bower, Listening her harping!

(II.ii.)

The character of Sir Alan Swinton and Gordon also need study, side by side. They are in close relation, serving an important dramatic function: they are not only self-revealing, they also reveal each other in the drama. Other characters of Halidon Hill do not deserve much notice; they are vague, indistinct and bloodless.

As drama Halidon Hill is, rather a failure, even though it is a stageable one. Its main defect lies in the fact that Scott was guided more by historical truth than by dramatic consideration. The dramatic interest of the work would have been enhanced, if the author had emphasized the love-episode of Gordon, and developed the element of jealousy between Swinton and the Regent. Scott seems to have been aware of the play's dramatic weakness, and writes in the prefatory note -

"The drama (if it can be termed one) is, in no particular, either designed or calculated for the stage."

19 Scott's Works, p. 963.
When Scott says that the play is not "designed or calculated for the stage," he does not perhaps mean that it is not presentable, but that it can hardly interest the average audience; for he could not rise above the level of history. Although it was written in blank verse style, *Halidon Hill* shows only limited poetical merit. Only on rare occasions we notice the poetic imagination of Scott sustaining his dramatic verse of the play. Let us take some examples -

Lin.

\[\text{On the plain}\]
\[\text{Bright gleams of armour flash through clouds of dust,}\]
\[\text{Like stars through frost-mist;}\]

(I.ii.)

Or,

Gor.

\[\text{To listen to her, is to seem to wander}\]
\[\text{In some enchanted labyrinth of romance,}\]
\[\text{Whence nothing but the lovely fairy's will}\]
\[\text{Who wove the spell, can extricate the wanderer.}\]

(II.ii.)

The dialogue, however, shows that Scott tried to come nearer to the conversational pattern of language.

*Halidon Hill* is free from Gothicism; but it is steeped in mediaevalism. The atmosphere of the play is mediaeval; the
characters are knights and templars and nobles; there are knightly chivalry and mediaeval way of life and family-feud calling blood for blood. **Halidon Hill**, after all, is history dramatized, and not an historical tragedy; it shows Scott's antiquarian interest more than his dramatic talent.

The next work of Scott to be discussed now is **Macduff's Cross**, written in one scene only, and published in 1830. This "dramatic sketch," as the author calls it, is founded on the semi-historical material. Macduff's Cross belongs to the Scottish antiquarian tradition, and "was a place of refuge to any person related to Macduff (the Thane of Fife) within the ninth degree, who, having committed homicide in sudden quarrel, should reach this place, prove his descent from the Thane of Fife, and pay a certain penalty." 

**Macduff's Cross** is an attempt to re-create the past in dramatic terms.

Maurice Berkeley, a Scottish Baron belonging to the line of Macduff, is supposed to have killed "the Lord Louis in his own hall at Edzel." Louis' brother - Lindesay pursues Berkeley to avenge his brother's death. Berkely, thus pursued, arrives at the spot where Macduff's Cross stands and claims the privilege. Lindesay is stopped by the monks - Ninian and Waldhave who are there to see the so-called privilege duly honoured. Berkeley relates to the monks the circumstances in

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20 *Scott's Works.* p.964.
which he killed Lindesay's brother: Berkeley loved the wife of Louis "ere yet her father/Conferr'd her on another." Out of "frantic jealousy" Louis one day invited Berkeley to his hall to kill him. He then caused a quarrel with Berkeley and attacked him with a drawn sword. Louis' wife at once came between them to stop the bloodshed and was herself killed by her husband. Berkeley only then "fought for vengeance." His wife's innocence being established, Lord Louis disguised as Waldhave, comes out from his disguise and joins hands with Berkeley in friendship.

There is something of the Othello-situation in the plot; there is an element of sexual jealousy under which a wife innocent and faithful is killed. The atmosphere is mediaeval, and the ending of the play is melodramatic. The setting is mountainous and, therefore, natural. Scott's antiquarian interest is the only thing that is displayed in this playlet. The characters show little development, and the blank-verse is used rather unimaginatively. The dialogue is as poor as the dramatic conduct and the story is defective and uninteresting.

"Our time creeps on,
Fancy grows colder as the silvery hair"\(^2\) - says the author in the Prelude to this work, and Macduff's Cross shows that the poet is right; for Scott's poetic power is very poorly displayed in it. The verbal part of this work, unlike

\(^2\)Scott's Works. p.866.
that of most of the verse dramas of the period is very weak.

Scott's next drama is The Doom of Devorgoil, written, it seems, not later than January 14, 1818, and published in 1830. Scott's introductory note on this work, and his letter to Morritt,\(^{22}\) throw some light on the circumstances leading to its composition. It is learnt from these two sources, that in order to oblige his friend—Mr. Terry, the comedian and once, the Manager of the Adelphi Theatre, (who "named a child after me, and I am preparing a god-father's gift in the shape of a drama"),\(^{23}\) Scott undertook the composition of The Doom of Devorgoil. "The general story of the Doom of Devorgoil is found on an old Scottish tradition,"\(^{24}\) and the work again indicates the author's love for the Past and antiquarian interest in the Scottish legend. The work was composed apparently with no definite theatrical ambition, or end in view. But we may guess one thing. There might have been a lurking intention to get the play staged through the pleasure and influence of Mr. Terry. For it is not unreasonable to think, that by making "a god-father's gift" to Terry's child, Scott perhaps, wanted to make his way on to the stage sure. Scott could have obliged Mr. Terry with "a god-fatherly gift" of any other of hundred and one things, but he chose a drama which might have been intended to serve a double purpose.

\(^{22}\)Scott's Letters. II. (Letter dt. Jan.14, 1818)

\(^{23}\)Ibid.

\(^{24}\)Scott's Works. p.965.
The story of *The Doom of Devorgoil* may be outlined thus. The castle of Devorgoil is a decayed and accursed castle inhabited by the family of a Scottish Baron - Oswald of utterly broken fortune. Oswald's daughter - Flora and his niece - Katleen living with Oswald are in love with Leonard (a forest Ranger) and his companion - Lancelot Blackthorn respectively. His wife - Eleanor is of obscure parentage. The drama opens with Flora waiting for her lover outside the castle in the evening. Leonard has not turned up according to the appointment. The night is very stormy; and three persons - Gullcrammer, Leonard, and Durward (an old palmer) take shelter in the half-ruined castle of Devorgoil. Gullcrammer - a conceited student intending to marry Flora is approved by none except Eleanor. An humble feast, however, is arranged, and when everything is ready for it, a tremendous burst of thunder, all on a sudden, darkens the merry atmosphere of feasting and drinking; the lightning seems to have stricken the suit of black armour hung on the wall; the armour falls with a crash, and all rise in surprise and fear. A scroll falls with it, and the content conveys a terrible warning to the inmates of the castle. All pass the night sleepless out of fear, and in the dead of night the spirit of Oswald's ancestor - Black Erick appears in his usual armour. The figure of Erick strikes the wall; the wall opens, and a treasure-chamber is discovered. The figure now asks Oswald to cut off all relation with Eleanor, but Oswald disobeys. At this the door of the treasure-chamber is closed. And before the figure of Erick disappears,
it tells Oswald that the door of the secret chamber can be opened by no one but an heir of Aglionby, whose wealth he had plundered and kept there, and this also cannot be done without the key of Black Erick. In the meantime, the alarming news comes that the lake upon which the castle of Devorgoil stands is rapidly rising, and the danger for the inmates is imminent. It appears that -

Dur. Upon the opening of that fatal grate
Depends the fearful spell that now entraps us.

(III.iv.)

At this critical moment Katleen gives a key which she has found in the castle. Oswald tries to open the grate with the key so found, but fails. Thereafter Leonard applies the key, and the lock opens with a violent noise. Oswald now enters the chamber and comes out with a scroll which reads -

"No more this castle's troubled guest,
Dark Erick's soirit hath found rest.
The storms of angry Fate are past,
For Constancy defies their blast.
Of Devorgoil the daughter free
Shall wed the Heir of Aglionby;
Nor ever more dishonour soil
The rescued house of Devorgoil!"

(III.iv.)

What is more, the lake that was rising rapidly to down the castle itself is now seen "ebbing with as wondrous haste as
late it rose" (III.iv.), and with it, all dangers for the house of Devorgoil pass away.

The plot of The Doom of Devorgoil shows Scott's characteristic manner as a story-teller. Unlike the plot of his other plays, the plot here is built on actions of much dramatic value. But the dramatic tension that constitutes deeper beauty of a play and gives rise to actions deep and moving is all but absent. The dramatic value of the actions of The Doom of Devorgoil lies mostly in their concreteness and spectacularity; in other words, the visual scenes of what is marvellous, strange and real are here to captivate the eyes of the audience. Against the supernatural background is balanced the natural; the comedic episode of love is set against an atmosphere of tragic doom. This kind of balancing of the opposites in a plot is dramatically interesting and valuable. The general atmosphere of the castle of Devorgoil is one of extreme hardship and suffering caused by a revengeful fate threatening some tragic catastrophe. The seriousness of the main plot deepens at a moment when "Devorgoil's feast is full" (II.ii.); when "A tremendous burst of thunder follows these words of the Song; and the lightning should seem to strike the suit of black Armour, which falls with a crash" (II.ii.). The gay atmosphere of singing, drinking and feasting of the accursed castle, like a bright ray of sunshine in a dark, chilly cave of despair, turns sombre at once; the content of the scroll points out, to the horror of all, the gathering storm of Devorgoil's doom. The situation is now under strong and stern
control of the supernatural; the phantom of Lord Erick appears, and opens the door of the treasure-chamber, then closes it at the disobedience of Oswald and vanishes, giving a mysterious and cryptic solution to the problem; the lake rises with a threat to execute the doom - and all are prognostic of a tragic ending. But within the framework of this tragic situation lies a potential source of comedy, capable of transmuting the impending doom into a happy resolution.

The love-stories of the plot effect this happy resolution. The two love stories have different purposes to serve. The main solution of the problem is offered by "the Heir of plunder'd Aglionby" (III.iv.), the lover of Flora - Leonard. The love-story of Katleen and Blackthorn is also no less important for the plot. It brings in true comic relief in an atmosphere of gloom. Katleen with her lover - Blackthorn plays her "comedy" of Owlspiegle and Cockledemoy in the dark hall of the "haunted castle" of Devorgoil at mid-night "to scare poor paltry Gullcrammer out of his paltry wit" (I.ii.). Blackthorn dressed fantastically plays the part of the goblin of the Spanish barber, Owlspiegle, and Katleen dressed as the page, plays her part of Cockledemoy. The goblin of the barber with his page's aid shaves the head of ridiculous Gullcrammer in his bed-chamber; the goblins sing, dance and jump in the dark chamber of the scared Gullcrammer, playing tricks on him in the manner of some mischievous goblins. They assume something of the role of the mischievous Puck of Mid-Summer Night's Dream. Act III.sc.ii of The Doom of Devorgoil is truly
comic; the readers and the audiences are invited into a "make-believe world" of pure comic fun. Scott has been able to relate this comic episode to the main stream of actions of the play.

Kat. ........................

This Gullcrammer hath vex'd my cousin much,
I fain would have some vengeance.

(II.i.)

Katleen with her lover takes her vengeance on him and by presenting him as a ridiculous fool with a fool's cap on his head, proves indirectly Gullcrammer's unworthiness of Flora's hand. Moreover, Katleen is instrumental to the ultimate happy-ending of the play; for, it is she who got the Key to the Treasure-Chamber (III.iv.), and offers it at a moment, when all with one mind want only this (III.iv.). The ghost of Erick (in the guise of a Palmer) gives this Key to no other but Katleen.

Pal.  Maid, before thy courage,

Firm built on innocence, even beings of nature
More powerful than thine give place and way;
Take then this key, and wait the event with courage.

(III.iii.).

At the crucial moment when all are at their wit's end and helpless, finding no solution to the problem (of opening the grate), Katleen virtually saves the situation by offering that strange key.
The Doom of Devorgoil shows, that Scott's power of plot-construction improved a great deal at that stage. Here, as nowhere in his other plays, Scott employed sub-plots and joined them dexterously with the main plot of the play. It shows a new phase of development of Scott the dramatist. But the plot-construction is not altogether faultless.

The play's ultimate happy-ending does not justify the title which may even appear to be misleading. Besides, there are some inconsistencies in the plot that naturally arouse questions. We are, for example, left quite in the dark why Oswald with his family has suffered. Oswald's crime, if any, is that he happens to be the grand son of Lord Erick, for whose crime he has suffered. There is nothing in his own character that may justify the hardship he has faced. Of course, Scott seems to show that Oswald's marriage with Eleanor of mean and obscure parentage is responsible for this. But to suffer so great a punishment for such a crime is improbable to common sense. The readers' impression is that, Scott has laid undue importance on Oswald's marriage with Eleanor only to show some reason of Oswald's misfortune. And if it is so important, how does the fortune of Devorgoil return through other means, despite Oswald's disobedience to the command of Erick's ghost? The last part of the story is a patch-work - neither convincing, nor logical, and as such, the happy-ending is forced.

The Doom of Devorgoil has, in one respect, some affinity with the comedies of Shakespeare: here as in the
Shakespearean comedies, the heroines are more important and more sorightly than their male counter-parts. Actually speaking, there is no hero worth the name in this play. Neither Oswald, nor Leonard is the main-spring of action. Scott has failed to create living characters, especially, male. His Katleen and Flora are actually the only two living characters of the play. Flora is an essentially good character. She is, in the words of Gullcrammer, "a lily on the lake" (I.i.). Flora is a gentle, mild and soft-minded girl, but conscious of her virtues and superiorit.

Flo. .................. Mother,
    Flora of Devorgoil, though low in fortune,
    Is still too high in mind to join her name
    With such a base-born churl as Gullcrammer.

(I.ii.)

Her dislike for Gullcrammer does not make her, however, unfeeling towards him. Flora feels for him when Gullcrammer enters the hall, a little distracted, after the goblin-episode.

Flo. If I could think he had lost his slender wits,
    I should be sorry for the trick they play'd him.

(III.iv.)

Her soft beauty and softness of her virtues distinguish her from her cousin - Katleen. Flora is an embodiment of virtues and innocence, born in the castle of Devorgoil to share its miseries. Her lover - Leonard feels for her and has firm faith in her virtues.
Leo. I tell thee, Flora's virtues might atone
   For all the massacres her sires have done,
(I.i.)

The character of Flora is a study of feminine virtues, though Scott has not fully succeeded in creating a complete womanhood, as Shakespeare has done in Portia of The Merchant of Venice.

The character of Katleen is, to some extent, a contrast to her cousin - Flora. Katleen is slyly, and active, as Flora is docile and passive by nature. There is something of Shakespearean Beatrice in her, as something of Hero is there in Flora. Katleen has her freedom of will.

"and I might wed
   A forester tomorrow, nothing fearing
   The wrath of high-born kindred,"
(I.i.)

She is witty, intelligent, assertive and active. She plans a mischievous frolic to be played on Gullcrammer, and executes the plan to her satisfaction with the aid of her lover (III.ii.). Katleen is capable of showing boldness and strength of nerve when situation demands it. She does not even spare her Blackthorn when the latter is frightened on the discovery of Erick's spectre in the hall (III.iii.).

Kat. A yeoman thou,
   A forester, and frighten'd! I am sorry
   I gave the fool's-cap to poor Gullcrammer,
   And let thy head go bare.
(Ibid.)
Her speeches in this context contain some implied insinuation at her frightened lover's lack of manly courage.

Kat.  

Will you allow a maiden to be bolder
Than you, with beard on chin and sword at girdle?

(Ibid.)

When Blackthorn returns to his mistress whom he left alone to face the spectre of Erick, Katleen's insinuation is more pronounced.

Kat.  

Surely I hope that from this night henceforward
You'll never kill a hare, since you 're akin to them;
O, I could laugh, but that my head's so dizzy.

(Ibid.)

Katleen cannot tolerate her lover's lack of manly qualities, especially, boldness.

Kat.  

Thou art a fool to ask me to thy cottage,
And then to show me at what slight expense
Of manhood I might master thee and it.

(Ibid.)

Katleen's boldness is the boldness of innocence; she is morally strong, and therefore, courageous. Palmer (Erick's ghost) says to her -
Pal. Maid, before they courage,
Firm built on innocence, even beings of nature
More powerful far than thine give place and way;

\[(Ibid.\)]

Katreén is not only witty, intelligent, and bold, but she is also grateful to her benefactor. She is asked by the spectre of Erick (in the guise of a Palmer) to leave the castle of Devorgoil which is on the verge of some rapid and thorough change.

Pal. .................

Quit this castle:
There is a fate on't; if for good or evil
Brief space shall soon determine.

\[(Ibid.\)]

But Katleen does not obey the command; for it will be an act of ingratitude on her part to leave her benefactors alone to their fate. Her reply indicates her strong and fearless mind, bent more upon sharing the good, or ill to come with the family of Oswald for whom an uncertain fate is waiting, than upon looking for her own personal safety.

Kat. ........................

Know, I will not
Desert the kinswoman who train'd my youth;
Know that I will not quit my friend, my Flora;
Know that I will not leave the aged man
Whose roof has shelter'd me. This is my resolve:
If evil come, I aid my friends to bear it;
If good, my part shall be to see them prosper, -

(Ibid.)

With the happy turn of event in the end, Katleen declares her purpose of leaving the castle of Devorgoil to live her own life with her lover, but the manner in which she declares her will is extremely humorous.

Kat.  ................. Katleen's fate is fix'd:
There is a certain valiant forester,
Too much afear'd of ghosts to sleep anights
In his lone cottage, without one to guard him.

(III.iv.)

This last speech of Katleen is tinctured with a feeling of love for Blackthorn - her lover, and expresses her natural gift of humour both tolerant and kindly. Katleen is Scott's life-affirmative character. Her vivacity, wit and humour, her intelligence, strength of mind and light-hearted loquacity distinguish her from all other men and women of Scott's dramatic world. She is a Beatrice of Scott, and not much below in rank with her Shakespearean counterpart. Katleen possesses qualities of the queen of a comedy, and by her presence in The Doom of Devorgoil, she adds much to the dramatic value of the play. Katleen is a sure success of Sir Walter Scott's characterization.

Gullcrammer, and Durward, among others, deserve a few words. Gullcrammer, even his name suggests, is "the
fop, The fool, the low-born, low-bred, pedant coxcomb!" (I.i.). He loves Flora, but is hated by her. There is something of Ben Jonson's Bobadill (Every Man in His Humour) in him. Gullcrammer's braggartism is mostly about his pedantic learning. He provides fun when, with an air of a learned philologist he tries to decipher the language and divine the meaning of the scroll (II.ii.). Gull proves himself to be a "pedant coxcomb," an impudent braggart, who is a butt of other's ridicule. When he offers to take and read the second scroll, Oswald simply says in a sarcastic tone -

Osw. ............... But soft you, sir, We'll not disturb your learning for the matter;

(III.iv.)

He is, like Bobadill, a thorough-going coward. He is actually frightened in his lonely chamber of the castle of Devorgoil at night, and when Flora says: "In plain truth you are frighten'd" (III.ii.), he protests: "What! frighten'd! - I-I-am not timorous." Picking up his word, Flora tells him, that other people may find it hard to sleep in this haunted chamber, but as he is a scholar and especially, not "timorous," he should not complain his being in it. At this Gullcrammer's reply is laughter-provoking.

Gull. I did not say I was not timorous, I said I was not temerarious. I'll to the hall again.

(III.ii.)
When Gull describes his experiences about the goblin-episode to others in the hall, most of his characteristic traits come out.

Gull. Sirs, midnight came, and with it came the goblin
I had reposed me after some brief study;
But as the soldier sleeping in the trench
Keeps sword and musket by him, so I had
My little Hebrew manual prompt for service.

(III.iv.)

In his description of his encounter with the goblin (III.ii.), Gullcrammer is both foolish and funny, like Bobadill, and reminds us at once of Falstaff (Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I) in Gadshill adventure (II.iv). The goblin-episode centres round Gullcrammer, who is made really a pathetic figure, and though we burst out laughing at the discomfiture he has faced, yet we do not fail to pity him for his foolishness. Gullcrammer serves a very important dramatic function: he adds to the entertainment value of the play, he heightens the play's comic effect.

Durward is an old Palmer. He appears like a guardian angel, especially to Leonard. Durward tells Leonard -

Dur. ............................
Thee from the wreck I saved, and for thy sake
Have still dragg'd on my life of pilgrimage
And penitence upon the hated shores
I else had left ever.

(I.i.)
Durward plays this role all through. He saved him once, and on the fatal night of Devorgoil's feast he is also with Leonard and guards him against all dangers. Durward's care for others too is not less. On the fatal night when the scroll reveals "some change impending o'er this house" Oswald wishes for the guidance of "some holy man." The old Palmer holds up a Cross "which they should anchor on," and performs the office of the holy guide till the threatening situation takes the final happy turn.

A strong supernatural atmosphere which we find in the Gothic melodramatic tradition, and which heightens a sense of mystery and horror, pervades this play. Here are present much of the stuff that a Gothic melodrama possesses in common. There are ancient Gothic Hall, haunted castle, where

"Ghosts dance as lightly in its moon-light halls,
As ever maiden did at Midsummer
Upon the village green."

(I.i.)

and ghosts, goblins and so on. Even Durward's role in the play is typical of the Gothic tradition which shows the recurrence of convents, monks and the wandering Jew.

Scott has maintained the unities in the play almost with perfectness. The scenes lie mostly in the decayed castle of Devorgoil and in its neighbourhood; the actions begin with the dusk and end before the dawn; the actions concern the fate of Devorgoil, its misfortune and ultimate deliverance from danger. The resolution of the plot implies no less, the union
of the house of Devorgoil with the house of Aglionby through the bond of marriage between Flora and Leonard.

There is a strong combination of romantic and poetic elements in the play that distinguishes *The Doom of Devorgoil* from other dramatic writings of Sir Walter Scott. The general medium of expression is blank verse of occasional poetic beauty, but Scott, on the whole, displays his incapacity for the blank-verse form. He is, in this respect, not an equal even to his contemporaries. The poetic merit of the play lies mostly in the songs which reveal the real Scott as a poet. The songs of *The Doom of Devorgoil* are in the pattern of Scott's general verse; they are vivid in description, smooth and soft in diction and in flowing versification; they are rich in lyric beauty and poetic imagery. Let us give some examples -

"The sun upon the lake is low,
   The wild bird hush their song,
   The hills have evening's deepest glow,
   Yet Leonard tarries long."

(I.i.)

or,

"When glees are sung, and catches troll'd,
   And bashfulness grows bright and bold,
   And beauty is no longer cold,
   And age no longer dull;"

(II.ii.)

Besides these songs, we find some genuine poetic fancy, on occasions, in the blank verse dialogue.
Dur. Thus do I play the idle part of one
Who seeks to save the moth from scorching him
In the bright taper's flame; and Flora's beauty
Must, not unlike that taper, waste away,
Gilding the rugged walls that saw it kindled.

(I.i.)
or,

Dur. ............................

Now, go pluck
Its single tendril to enwreath thy brow,
And rest beneath its shade - to share the ruin.

(Ibid.)

The play's romantic character is also obvious. The
Doom of Devorqoil, by its atmosphere, brings in a sense of
mystery; the romantic element of the play consists of the
supernatural and the mysterious that lie beyond the scope of
any rational explanation. The atmosphere of The Doom of
Devorqoil is mainly the supernatural atmosphere much in the
same way, as the atmosphere of The Tempest is magical. Nature,
it is seen, works in collaboration with the supernatural force
that guides its course of action. On Oswald's disobeying the
spectre of Erick, the lake rises to drown the castle in it; on
Leonard's opening the grate, "the lake is ebbing with as
wondrous haste/As late it rose" (III.iv.); and this indicates,
that the spectre's wrath and pleasure are also the wrath and
pleasure of Nature. The two love-stories also add to the
romantic character of the play. For these are the stories of
romantic love - the lovers are romantic lovers, each is a queen-worshipper. Even the foolish Gullcrammer is not an exception.

*The Doom of Devorgoil* is much better than some of the dramas of the contemporary poets, and is, perhaps, the best, on the whole, among the dramatic works of Scott. With some minor alterations, it can also be made quite stageworthy. The story is interesting; actions are vivid and spectacular, but the dialogue is not always free from defects. On this play, Scott writes -

"It is not good, but it may be made so. Poor Will Erskine liked it much."²⁵ and he was confident that he could have improved this play.

"After all, I could greatly improve it, and it would not be a bad composition of that odd kind to suit some pick-nick receptacle of all things."²⁶

Scott had his own justification when he brought in the tragic and the comic together, and in doing so, he too consciously set himself free from the rigidity of rules, and critical judgment.

"I have tried," writes Scott in a letter, "to coax the public to relax some of the rules of criticism, and to be amused with that medley of tragic and comic which life presents us; not in the same course of action but in the same character.

To deprecate all rigidity of judgment, I introduce the marvellous, the absurd, and something like the heroic, all to make the gruel slab.\(^\text{27}\)

The *Doom of Devorgoil* has its peculiarity not to be found in the other dramatic works of the Romantics. In no other drama of the Romantic poets do we find the mingling of the tragic and the comic; in no other drama of these poets there are sub-plots joined with the main plot; in no other, the supernatural elements are so profusely present as in this drama of Scott. It is the typical product of a romantic mind.

The last of Scott's drama is *Auchindrane, Or The Ayrshire Tragedy*, written in three acts, and published in 1830. The subject-matter of this tragedy was also taken from the Scottish chronicular tradition.\(^\text{28}\) It is not known what were the circumstances that led Scott to the writing of this work. *Auchindrane* is a study of crime and selfish egoism.

Before the actions of this tragedy begin, John Mure - a Baron of Auchindrane had the Earl of Cassilis murdered on the latter's way to Edinburgh, and the lone witness to the Baron's hand in this foul murder is Quentin Blane - a youth educated for a clergyman under Mure's patronage. Mure thought Quentin's presence in Scotland dangerous for him; for he might be used to bear witness to what he knew about the murder. Quentin was, therefore, sent to the wars of the Netherlands to avert any possible risk.

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\(^{27}\) *Scott's Letters*, II. (To Morritt, Jan.14,1818.)

\(^{28}\) *Scott's Works*, pp.965-70.
The drama begins with the return of Quentin with an elderly English Sergeant - Major Hilderbrand and a few others - all dismissed from the army. On his return to the Scottish shore, Quentin with his companion, Hilderbrand takes shelter at night in the house of one Niel MacLellan, a forest Ranger under the Baron of Auchindrane. But the news of Quentin's return to the neighbourhood of Auchindrane reaches the Baron at once. The news comes to Mure at a time when King James I has arranged to send the Earl of Dunbar to Auchindrane to investigate the matter relating to the murder of Cassilis. Baron Mure and his profligate son - Philip run on horse-back at midnight to the tower of Niel MacLellan, and taking MacLellan into confidence, succeed in murdering Quentin on the sea beach. Philip performs the foul deed with the help of MacLellan whom the former later stabs to death on the same spot; the bodies are thrown into the sea. But strangely enough, Quentin's deadbody does not sink; the sea seems to be unwilling to conceal the crime by hiding the body of innocent Quentin. Strong suspicion of the murder falls on Baron of Auchindrane. Dunbar, in the meantime, arrives and Mure and Philip are arrested on the charge of murder to face the stern hand of Justice.

The plot of Auchindrane was not built skilfully to make the play dramatically interesting. The central action of play is the murder of Quentin, but Quentin appears in this play as a destined victim, born to be murdered by his terrible so-called benefactor - Mure. Quentin is conscious of his fate - he is conscious that his return to Scotland means his death.
Quentin cannot find any more reason as to why he yet returns, than

Que. Wherefore does the moth
Fly to the scorching taper? Why the bird
Dazzled by lights at midnight, seek the net?
Why does the prey, which feels the fascination
Of the snake's glaring eye, drop in his jaw?

(I.i.)

In the very first scene of the play, we are given to understand that Quentin's murder is the most natural event, and as such, this murder does not surprise us. Act I and Act II are all but too weak in dramatic action. From the last part of the Act II the concrete preparation for the murder of Quentin starts; Philip takes the lead, and the bloody act is accomplished in Act III. sc. i. There is very little conflict in the play. Only in Act III, sc. i before the bloody deed is done, we notice Auchindrane suffering from a very short-lived mental conflict between his affection for Quentin, and the interest in personal safety. But it is so slight that it cannot heighten the dramatic value of the play. Auchindrane, in spite of this short mental tension, maintains the essential wholeness of his personality. On the visual plane too, there is no conflict of action; there is no situation offering physical resistance to the motive of Mure and his son. Quentin is too weak and entrapped by the circumstances to offer any resistance; he is a victim who seems to have surrendered to the will of his murderer.
Que. ................
But I purpose
Return to my stern patron, there to tell him
That wars, and winds, and waves, have crossed his pleasure,
And cast me on the shore from whence he banish'd me.
Then let him do his will, and destine for me
A dungeon or a grave.

(I.i.)

The closing scenes of *Auchindrane*, especially after the commission of the murder, attract our attention to the workings of some retaliative force creating proper situation for the punishment of Mure and Philip. It is the spirit of Quentin that gains momentum towards the end of the play. Nature sides with the spirit of the dead, and shapes the situation for the criminals' ultimate fate. Despite Philip's repeated attempt to conceal the body of Quentin, the body does not sink into the sea; "But his misused body/Comes right ashore, as if to cry for vengeance;/It rides the waters like a living things,/Erect, as if he trode the waves which bear him" (III.ii.). Mure calls it "enchantment". And it is this enchantment that attracts our attention. Alive, Quentin was under the will of his "stern patron;" while dead, he defies him. In the earlier part of the drama, we watch with horror the criminal intent or plan of Mure and his son and its bloody execution. The dramatist's emphasis on the two different things in the two different parts of the story has actually marred the unity of action, and indicates that Scott had not had a total tragic vision.
Besides, some improbability is also noticed in the play. The part and speech as assigned to Isabel by the dramatist bring in a sense of improbability. Isabel is a daughter of MacLellan, and is a girl of only six summers. But she understands sexual jealousy of her father (I.ii.); she can understand what is what. Let us look at her speech describing Quentin and his elderly companion—Hilderbrand—

Isa. one is old—

Old as this tower of ours, and worn like that,

Bearing deep marks of battles long since fought.

(I.ii.)

She describes to her mother the old English Sergeant—Hilderbrand, like an experienced man who knows what is battle, and the marks of battle left on persons who have fought it; and this is improbable, especially when speaker's age is only six.

Boleslaw Taborski thinks that the story of Auchindrane is interesting. "The story is not profound," he says, "but touching and interesting. It could be enjoyed even now." But our feeling about the story of Auchindrane is just the reverse. It is worse than the story of even Halidon Hill. For the potential source of interest of the plot could not properly be exploited. The story of Auchindrane is something like the story of a sheep killed by a butcher. Quentin's part in the

29 Taborski, op. cit. p.8.
play is no better than the part of a sheep destined to meet its end in a slaughter-house. It has no resistance to offer, nor the slaughterer has any psychological conflict over the deed. Scott could have improved the story, if he had made Quentin a strong character, and developed the element of jealousy in MacLellan. Only then, the story would have been interesting.

Scott's characterization in Auchindrane is equally weak. There is not a single full-length character in the play. Mure of Auchindrane is a remorseless and cruel character, but not as cruel as his son - Philip. Mure wanted to avoid murder of Quentin by himself at first; he sent him to war to be killed there. But Quentin's fate brings him back to Scotland at a crucial time. The necessity of his personal safety gives rise to the necessity of Quentin's murder.

Philip clears the situation:

Phi. ......................
This object of our fear and of our dread,
Since such our pride must own him, sleeps to-night
Within our power : - to-morrow in Dunbar's,
And we are then his victims.
(II.i.)

Auchindrane only then hears of Quentin's return, and feels the necessity of immediate action. He rides with his son to the sea beach for the foul purpose, but before the deed is done, he shows some weakness - a sort of slight mental conflict. He,
at first, forbids his son to murder him.

Auch.  ,  By the blue heaven,
Thou shalt not murder him, cold selfish sensualist!
Yon pure vault speaks it! Yonder summer moon,
With its ten million sparklers, cries Forbear!
The deep earth sighs it forth - Thou shalt not murder!

(III.i.)

Quentin's innocence brings soft thoughts to Auchindrane's mind.

Auch. ...............................
And let me soeak him truly, he is grateful,
Kind, tractable, obedient; a child
Might lead him by a thread. He shall not die!

(Ibid.)

The scene (III.i.) reminds us of Macbeth before he murders
King Duncan. But Auchindrane's conflict is only skin-deep; he
tries to save Quentin by sending him to Ireland. But Philip's
arguments conquer him soon. "Do thou the deed - I cannot look
on it" - says he to his son (III.i) at last.

Auchindrane is selfish. He is an egoist too. He is
cruel and blood-thirsty. But this is all for his family-honour,
or family-prestige. It is a sort of weakness of his character,
from which he contrived and had the murder of Cassilis done.
Auchindrane, unlike his son, has still some principle to follow.

Auch. .................................
I practised prudence, and paid tax to virtue,
By following her behests, save where strong reason
Comoell'd a deviation.

(II.i.)
But Philip surpasses his father far in cruelty. Philip is not only cruel, he is base, sensual and heartless.

Auch. ...........................

Philip, thou art irreverent, fierce, ill-natured,
Stain'd with low vices, which disgust a'father;

(II.i.)

Philip is perverse, profligate, remorseless, made of sterner stuff. But Scott could not develop fully the character of Philip, after all.

Quentin's character is equally sketchy. He appears in this drama as a victim destined to be sacrificed. "I'm like a babe,/Doom'd to draw poison from my nurse's bosom" (I.i.). Destiny draws him nearer to his danger - to one whom he dreads to face. He has no choice of his own; he has no resistance. Scott's conception of the character of Quentin is dramatically not sound, and the execution is faulty as the dramatist's idea of the character is shallow. In a word, Scott's characterization in Auchindrane is worse than that of any other play save Macduff's Cross.

Auchindrane, like most of Scott's plays belongs to the Gothic dramatic tradition. Here we find "half-ruined Tower" (I.i.), wicked Barons, rocky sea coasts, blood, gruesome murders, the supernormal effects (as the deadbody defies all power of the murderers by frustrating the attempts at concealing the body; again, the body starts bleeding from the wound as soon as Isabel touches it) which cannot be rationally explained.
Auchindrane is a verse drama without much poetic merit. Scott's employment of blank verse style in the play is as unimaginative and abortive in its effect as in other plays of the poet.

This examination of the plays of Sir Walter Scott reveals certain characteristics of the author as a dramatist. Unlike most of the contemporary poets, Scott had no metaphysical or philosophical thoughts and ideas to project in his dramas. As in his poems, so also in his dramas, Scott did not show any interest in abstract thoughts, nor did he attempt self-expression which was a very common tendency of the poets of the Romantic period. Scott, in this respect, betrayed an important Shakespearean quality — a quality of maintaining a perfect dramatic detachment, which none of the poets of his time showed in a way as Sir Walter did. Even John Keats, who thought 'Negative Capability' so essential for a poet could not fully be successful in putting into practice the theory he propounded. But Scott was successful; he, in this respect, is with Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Scott's interest in the past is as evident in his dramas, as in his poetry and novels; his fascination for the Scottish historical tradition is revealed equally by his poems, plays and novels. The essential Scott remains the same everywhere, though his artistic excellence varies with the variation of the form of art he attempted. The plots of his dramas (except The House of Aspen) were taken from old chronicles and legends of Scotland; the mediaeval feudal
atmosphere charged with mystery and romance, horror and bloodshed, and supernaturalism prevails in them. Sir Walter had little interest in the world he lived in, or in the world that should be. The political, the social and the philosophical tendencies of his time did not touch his mind. He kept himself confined to the exploration of the past, and to a revival of interest in the past Scott contributed more than anyone of his time.

Scott's dramatic works show another characteristic worth noting. Unlike other Romantics, Scott hardly tried to imitate Shakespeare. He was, so to say, an exception. There is very little influence of Shakespeare on Scott; his adoption of the blank-verse style alone may not be taken to prove the Shakespearean influence. Scott, while adopting this, perhaps, adopted it as the fashion of the time. This is not to indicate, that Scott is without any influence of the past literary tradition. In so far as his exploration of the past is concerned, he is, no doubt, original, but he could not remain free from the influences of the Romantic Germany, and the Gothic melodramatic tradition which overwhelmed the taste and the dramatic writings of the time. The general structure of Scott's dramas is melodramatic and Gothic. His dramas, with the exception of The House of Aspen, are verse dramas, but unlike the dramas of the contemporary poets, they are poetically not very rich.

Scott's dramas have less literary value, and as such, do not invite the readers' mind in a way as the dramas of other Romantics usually do. The reason for this may, perhaps, be found, if his limitations as a poet are referred to. As a poet, Scott lacks creative imagination, faculty of invention,
power of soaring above the level of his subjects offered by history, or legends. Hazlitt says -

"But Sir Walter (we contend, under correction) has not this creative impulse, this plastic power, this capacity of reaching on his first impressions."30 - and this is, because Scott is actually a narrative poet; and where there is no fact, where there is no scope for narration, Scott as a poet fails. His narrative genius fails quite naturally to adjust itself to the dramatic dialogue; his poetic talent which displays itself in narrative verse, makes a very poor show in the verbal part of his verse dramas. The blank-verse expression in his plays is therefore, generally speaking, uninsoired, insipid, and dull, lacking in vigour and passion, force and movement, and poetic fire.

The historical and the antiquarian interest of the author predominates the dramatic. The love and passion for the past seem to have made Scott blind to the essential requirements of drama; the nearer he comes to history, the farther he goes away from drama. Halidon Hill, Macduff's Cross, and Auchindrane give this impression even to a casual reader. They are history dramatised, rather than historical dramas.

Scott's dramatic works, generally speaking, have certain common defects: they have weak plot, weak and vague characterization, often lengthy dialogue in dull and uninsoired

blank verse, obscure motives and uninteresting story. They do not deal with any problem, or truth of universal human interest at the most. No deep truth of life, no grand idea, or total tragic vision is discovered in them. The study of his dramas neither helps us to define Scott's dramatic theory or tragic conception in any clear terms. Moreover, they cannot also show Scott's definite dramatic progress in a clear and unmistakable way.

Scott's dramatic conception, it may however be said, is somewhat a tragi-comic conception. His letter to Morritt is, to some extent, enlightening:

"I have ................. to be amused with that medley of tragic and comic which life presents us, not only in the same course of action but in the same character." 31

Though written with reference to The Doom of Devorgoil, the letter indicates Scott's general preference for a sort of tragi-comic view of life. The Doom of Devorgoil, Macduff's Cross and The House of Aspen somewhat conform to this. Of them The House of Aspen is a little puzzling. The death of George and Isabella in the last act may not be taken to indicate the play's tragic resolution. After all, the honour of the house of Aspen against which Roderic conspired, is left undisturbed. The Duke of The House of Aspen says -

Duke. .......... Be it mine to soothe his sorrows, and to restore the honour of the House of Aspen.

(V.i.)

The play, therefore, gives a sort of tragi-comic impression. But Scott's two other plays — *Halidon Hill* and *Auchindrane* are attempts at tragedy. In the former, the tragedy of the hero is superimposed by some external factors, and the hero is not the author of his tragedy. Swinton's dying speech is enlightening:

_Swi. Rashness, and cowardice, and secret treason,

Combine to ruin us;_  

(II.iii.)

but in *Auchindrane*, the character is fate. Here hero is a criminal who meets with the punishment for his prolonged criminality. In none of them, proper tragic stuff and situation are properly formed and one may think, that to Sir Walter, tragedy means simply an unhappy-ending, no matter, how it comes. Scott again seems to have laid stress on the principle of Poetic Justice which he maintains in all the five plays he wrote; but Scott's Poetic Justice is a little different. The villainous are punished, though the virtuous are not always rewarded. Scott's dramatic world is ultimately governed, on the whole, by some moral laws which do not let the crime go unpunished.

The supernatural machinery is employed in some of the plays, either directly, or through suggestion. In *Devorgoil*, this is direct, while in *Auchindrane*, is only suggested. The mysterious defiance of Quentin's deadbody (III.ii.) cannot be explained in terms of the natural behaviour. To *Auchindrane*, "It was enchantment!" (Ibid.); and this
suomennatural machinery (as suggested) serves an important dramatic function, and helps the dramatist to work out his play's resolution through the revelation of the crime.

Despite his gift of a very important and essential quality of a dramatist - the objective attitude of Chaucerian and Shakespearean kind, so lacking in the poets of his time, Sir Walter Scott could not succeed in the field of drama. His clumsy dramatic conception as manifested by his works, and his artistic faults made him falter. His passion for history and antiquity of Scotland was too strong to grant him leave for looking into the interest of drama and the dramatic audiences. Sir Walter as a dramatist has shown little originality and strength, and earned neither fame nor fortune.

It is, perhaps, for their comparatively negative value, that the dramas of Scott have hardly been able to claim critical attention. But one feels that Scott's dramas do not deserve such wholesale rejection. Among them, The House of Aspen, and The Doom of Devorgoil are the pieces certainly not worse than many plays of the period.