The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

Scott's Writing for the Edinburgh Stage

A talk given on Thursday 4th April 2019 at 7:00pm by ***Gillian Hughes*** *to members of The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club at The New Club, Edinburgh.*

[*The present talk concerns just one among the diverse topics that Peter Garside and I have been presented with in our research for the forthcoming volume of Scott's* Shorter Poems*, and is in its way a sequel to the talk for the Club about Scott's German-influenced poems that my co-editor gave last year. The forthcoming volume will include some fourteen or fifteen poems with a direct link to the theatre of the early nineteenth century. Besides acknowledging my co-editor, I would also wish to thank the National Galleries of Scotland for permission to illustrate my talk with images of paintings and engravings in their care, and Lee Simpson for helping me with the technical business of showing them.*]

Scott seems to have been an enthusiastic theatre-goer ever since as a child of six years old he was taken to a performance of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at Bath. He referred many years later to the theatre as 'the enchanted palace of his childhood', giving a vivid account in an article for the *Quarterly Review* of 1826 of the impression made on him by the performance. Scott recalls 'the astonishment with which we looked upon the apathy of the elder part of our company, who, having the means, did not spend every evening in the theatre'. The theatre was also 'the favourite resort of the youth', the price of admission being 'no trifling incentive to labour' at the copying of legal documents Scott undertook as an apprentice Writer to the Signet in his father's office and for which he was paid by the sheet. In Charlotte Charpentier he chose a bride who was also a keen theatre-attender and Lockhart comments that for many years 'I doubt if they ever spent a week in Edinburgh without indulging themselves in this amusement'.[1]

In Scott's early manhood the Edinburgh theatre was very much a satellite of the London theatrical scene, where the patent theatres represented an unbroken tradition of performance going back to the Restoration of 1660. While as a young man Scott was simultaneously stimulating his early interest in Scottish folklore and ballads and familiarising himself with German Romantic literature, he also translated several German plays into English. Apart from his translation of Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*, published in 1799, several of his manuscript translations of German plays dating from the late 1790s have survived, including those of Maier's *Fust von Stromberg*, Steinberg's *Otto von Wittelsbach*, and Iffland's *Die Mündel*. Michael Wood knows a great deal more about these early translations from German plays than I pretend to do, but probably they were exercises undertaken as part of Scott's learning the German language rather than preliminary drafts of scripts intended ultimately for the London theatre. *The House of Aspen* is rather different. It is a loose version rather than a close translation of a play by Leonhard Wächter (1762-1837), writing under his pseudonym of Veit Weber, entitled *Die Heilige Vehme oder Der Sturtz Der Aspenauer* (The Holy Tribunal, or the Downfall of Aspenauer). This does look like Scott's attempt to start a career as a playwright. His version included several songs to suit the taste of the theatre audiences of his day, and it was certainly offered for production at Drury Lane, since Scott's letter to Richard Heber of 19 October 1800 records its rejection by Kemble, who managed that theatre.[2] The play was then set aside for almost thirty years, until Scott offered it to Charles Heath in fulfilment of a somewhat troublesome promise to contribute to Heath's annual *The Keepsake* for 1830. Although *The House of Aspen* was staged at the Old Surrey Theatre in London as well as at Edinburgh's Theatre Royal soon after its eventual publication, this was a tribute to Scott as veteran poet and novelist of European reputation

rather than for its theatrical qualities, and he appears to have had no direct involvement in either production, other than giving the manager of the Edinburgh theatre a reluctant consent to its staging. The rejection of Scott's play by Drury Lane in 1800 seems to have marked the beginning and end of any serious attempt by Scott to become a playwright for the London stage. Three songs from *The House of Aspen*, however, are to be included in our volume of Scott's *Shorter Poems*.

As a good and helpful friend Scott did have some limited involvement with the London theatrical scene after his failure to get *The House of Aspen* staged at Drury Lane, helping Daniel Terry, for instance, with a dramatisation of *Guy Mannering* for London, sending him the 'Lullaby of an Infant Chief' to be included in the production. But on the whole Scott's involvement with the theatre, meant the Edinburgh Theatre Royal. [**Illustration: Thomas Shepherd's drawing.** *The engraving, from a drawing by Thomas Shepherd, shows the building as it was in the 1820s.*] This was conveniently situated in Shakespeare Square, at the junction of the Old and New Towns close to the North Bridge, opposite Register House and roughly occupying the site of the later General Post Office building. As opened in 1769, it had originally been a very plain building, but around 1788 the colonnade you can see at the front was added, and also the three statues on the roofline: these depict Shakespeare at the apex with the Comic and the Tragic muse on either side.[3] The repertoire of the theatre tended to be somewhat restricted, partly perhaps because of the after-effects of earlier eighteenth-century opposition to the theatre by the presbyterian Church of Scotland, but at any rate by the status of the Edinburgh theatre as a satellite of the more robust London theatrical scene. Moreover, the very idea of a national theatre for Scotland was politically compromised in two ways in Scott's youth and early manhood.

As Barbara Bell and others have argued, from a London perspective a 'national' theatre for Scotland was one that had been at least potentially tainted with Jacobitism, so that a politically safe Scottish repertoire largely meant performances of such plays as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Home's *Douglas*, and Schiller's *Maria Stuart*.[4] A further complication specific to the 1790s was that in France revolutionary activity often featured at theatres. In April 1794 the young Scott and his friends set themselves in opposition to a group of Irish medical students who mustered in the pit of Edinburgh's Theatre Royal and lost no opportunity of 'calling for revolutionary tunes, applauding every speech that could bear a seditious meaning, and drowning the national anthem in howls and hootings'. On a chosen evening Scott and his party 'assembled in the front of the pit armed with stout cudgels, and determined to have *God save the King* not only played without interruption, but sung in full chorus [i.e. all together and probably in unison] by both company and audience' (*Life*, I, 216-17). The theatre, Scott argued years afterwards, was (like the printing-press) potentially 'as powerful an instrument for evil as for good'. As he saw it, 'A full audience, attending a first-rate piece, may be compared to a national convention, to which every order of the community, from the peers to the porters, send their representatives'.[5] Royal attendance enhanced this representative effect and when George IV, during his Scottish visit of August 1822, attended the Theatre Royal Scott composed a new verse to the national anthem that effectively exorcised the Jacobin as well as Jacobite threat of the past when sung aloud that evening:

Bright beams are soon o'ercast,
Soon our brief hour is past,
    Losing our King:
Honoured, beloved, and dear,
Still shall his parting ear,
Our latest accents hear,

GOD SAVE THE KING![6]

In Scott's lifetime the auditorium of a British theatre as well as the stage was fully lit during the performance, rendering the audience itself more prominent and encouraging such interactions between the stage and different sections of the auditorium. Scott himself, at the height of his European fame as avowed poet and more-than-suspected historical novelist, undoubtedly formed part of the public spectacle. When Gatty Bell, the country heroine of James Hogg's novel *The Three Perils of Woman* of 1823, visits Edinburgh's Theatre Royal her attention is taken as much by the audience around her as by the actors on stage:

Sir Walter Scott and one of his daughters were in a box right opposite. She was dressed with simplicity and good taste. But I looked most of all at him, and thought him exceedingly good looking, although my companions would not let me say it. He did not look often at the players, but when he did he made his lips thin, and looked out at the tail of his eye, as if he deemed it all a joke.[7]

Lockhart relates that it was usual when Scott entered his box for him to receive 'some mark of general respect and admiration' from the audience (*Life*, IV, 227-28), applause which he would acknowledge, for example, with a bow.

Attendance at and involvement with the Edinburgh theatre were very much related to Scott's social life. He had been introduced to the young Irish actress Sarah Smith (1783?-1850; *ODNB*), for example, by 'the Buccleuch ladies' as he told Anna Seward in a letter of 11 August 1807, adding that she was a person for whom he had 'an especial regard as a very good and pleasing Girl with high talents for her profession' (*Letters*, I, 375). This star performer of London's Covent Garden Theatre was engaged to play for the first time at Edinburgh's Theatre Royal in the summer of 1807. She made her first appearance on 25 July as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, following this up with a number of tragic roles and playing Madame Clermont in a new play entitled *Adrian and Orilla, or, A Mother's Vengeance* for her benefit night on 8 August (Dibdin, 251). Scott composed a poetic address for her to be delivered on the occasion, sending it from Ashiestiel with a compliment on her performance skills on 4 August, only a few days before the occasion for which it was intended:

> I send you the promised lines; which indifferent as they are have proved better than I durst venture to hope considering that I have been obliged to postpone the task of writing them till this morning. The idea is better than the execution, but I comfort myself that many better lines have wanted the advantages which your recitation will give mine. (*Letters*, I, 372)

In his letter Scott invited Miss Smith to visit him at Ashiestiel on her way southwards after the conclusion of her Edinburgh engagement (*Letters*, I, 372), an invitation which was thankfully accepted. The friendship was continued over the following years, with Scott giving Miss Smith a copy of *Marmion* and the actress in turn seeking his advice about dramatising his narrative poems for the Dublin Theatre (*Letters*, II, 29, 410-13, 471). In his poem for her Scott compares her trip northwards from London to a religious pilgrimage, making her express her own diffidence of the new audience in terms of the pilgrim's sense of unworthiness as he approaches the shrine of the saint:

She, as the flutterings *here* avow,
Feels all the pilgrim's terrors *now*;

Yet sure on Caledonian plain
The stranger never sued in vain.
'Tis yours the hospitable task
To give the applause she dare not ask;
And they who bid the pilgrim speed,
The pilgrim's blessing be their meed! (*Shorter Poems*, Item 63)

Scott's most important social connections among actors, however, were with various members of the celebrated Kemble clan. He first met the stellar tragic actor John Philip Kemble (1757-1823; *ODNB*) during the Easter holidays of 1807 at Bentley Priory at Stanmore in Middlesex, the country house of the Marquess of Abercorn, a welcome interlude from his business in London of petitioning the government on behalf of the Clerks of Session. Kemble became a friend and visited at Ashestiel as well as Scott's Edinburgh home in Castle Street, and Scott was also on familiar terms with other members of Kemble's famous theatrical family, including his even better-known sister, actress amd cultural icon Sarah Siddons (1755-1831; *ODNB*).

By 1809 the patent of Edinburgh's Theatre Royal had expired and was up for renewal, at which point Scott intervened decisively to facilitate a takeover by Henry Siddons (1774-1815; *ODNB*), Kemble's nephew and son of Sarah Siddons. He was to hold the patent for twenty-one years, paying an annual instalment of two thousand guineas of the purchase money, so that the theatre would become his property when the patent expired in 1830.[8] With the assistance of Henry Siddons's talented actress wife, Harriet (1783-1844; *ODNB*), and her brother, William Henry Murray (1790-1852; *ODNB*), Scott hoped that the theatre would henceforward provide drama superior to what he termed 'the garbage of melo-drama and pantomime' (*Letters*, II, 118), and of course engaging Henry Siddons would ensure the appearance and support of the older generation of the Kemble dynasty. At this time Scott joined the proprietors of the theatre by purchasing a share, and also became one of its trustees.

Immediately he set about fostering a native dramatic tradition, bringing the manuscript of Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend* back with him from London in June 1809, and quickly securing the enthusiastic support of the new theatre manager for putting it into production. Scott regarded Joanna Baillie (1762-1851; *ODNB*) as 'the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger' (*Letters*, II, 29), and she was also Scottish by birth. He was extremely active in promoting the success of *The Family Legend* in Edinburgh in every possible way, even superintending rehearsals at the theatre. Incidental music was to consist predominantly of Scottish airs, in keeping with its historical subject-matter of a sixteenth-century feud between two Highland clan chieftains, and the play was to be supported by a prologue written by Scott himself and an epilogue written by veteran Scottish author Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831; *ODNB*). Scott's prologue emphasised the attraction of Scottish legends to a Scottish audience at home and abroad, Baillie's fame as the author of *Plays on the Passions*, the Highland origins of the plot, and lastly he asked 'Caledon' to approve 'The filial token of a daughter's love' (*Shorter Poems*, Item 66). The *Edinburgh Annual Register* in its article on 'Scottish Drama' thought Scott's prologue written 'with a romantic nationality of allusion to the subject of the tragedy, a loveliness of imagery, and a glow of feeling strongly characteristic of the bard of chivalry'.[9]

Baillie's play was successful, but could not on its own secure the national drama Scott wished to establish. Two years later, trouble was taken to present the new Icelandic play of Scottish traveller and antiquarian Sir George Steuart Mackenzie as a worthy successor. The *Edinburgh Evening Courant* of 18 January 1812, for instance, anticipated that if *Helga, or The Rival Minstrels* 'be as successful as the Family Legend, there can be no doubt but we

shall find many gentlemen of literary abilities willing to come forward to assist the drama of the country'. Icelandic scenery was specially commissioned and, as with Baillie's play, Scott and Henry Mackenzie wrote a Prologue and Epilogue for it. Scott's Prologue satirises the spectacular and contrived stage-effects of pantomime and melodrama:

Then rushed the stage-auxiliaries along
Man, monster and machine, a moteley throng—
For now no more our mean processions pass
In Hamlet's phrase, each actor on his ass:
Car, camel, war-horse, water-dog appear
And Bluebeard's elephant o'erwhelms the rear. (*Shorter Poems*, Item 77)

He then contrasts these with 'the historic lay' of Icelandic saga and legend, and urges the audience to 'List then and learn now northern Minstrels strove / Stung by the rivalry of fame and love'. Unfortunately, Mackenzie's play was markedly unsuccessful, the first-night audience rendering the whole tragedy ludicrous. Scott himself reported to Joanna Baillie that 'even those who went as the authors friends caught the infection and laughd most heartily all the while they were applauding' (*Letters*, III, 101). Initially, according to the *Caledonian Mercury* of 25 January, Sir George hoped to revise it for a second performance, but ultimately decided to withdraw his play.

The tragedian John Philip Kemble was widely known as a studious, scholarly actor and was clearly sympathetic to Scott's wish to raise the tone of the Edinburgh theatre. When due to retire from the stage in 1817 it was natural both that Kemble should take a formal farewell of his appreciative Edinburgh audience and that he should invite Scott's participation. Writing to his old friend Mrs Clephane on 23 March 1817 Scott expressed his particular appreciation of Kemble's acting 'the Roman Patrician' roles such as Coriolanus, Brutus, and Cato, as well as expressing some annoyance, given his own current ill-health from gall-stones, about the process of producing a poetic farewell for the celebrated actor:

> He made me write some lines to speak when he withdraws and he has been here criticizing and correcting till he got them quite to his mind, which has, I think, rather tired me, for he would not make the alterations on the broad ground that as he was to speak them, he had a title to please himself, but dragd me into the land of metaphysics and rythmical harmony where I am not at present very equal to follow him. (*Letters*, IV, 421)

Kemble's final Edinburgh performance (as the eponymous hero of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's Scottish play) took place less than a week later, on 29 March 1817 when he recited a shortened version of Scott's lines in costume at the end of his performance. These were delivered, according to Ballantyne's weekly paper, *The Sale-Room*:

> with exquisite beauty, and with an effect that was evidenced by the tears and sobs of many of the audience. His own emotions were very conspicuous. When his Farewell was closed, he lingered long on the stage, as if unable to retire. The house again stood up, and cheered him with the waving of hats and long shouts of applause.[10]

Interestingly, however, Scott declined to write a second poem for the London commemorations of Kemble's retirement from the stage. Responding on 5 May 1817 to an appeal from London actor George Bartley, husband to the former Miss Smith, Scott stated that 'from the literary talents belonging to the names you enumerate you must certainly be

considered as having Moses & the Prophets on your side of the border and cannot need assistance from our northern regions' (*Letters*, IV, 441).

Scott's Edinburgh tribute sees Kemble on stage for the last time at the end of his long stage career as the 'worn war-horse' of Job 39.25 who rouses himself at the sound of the trumpets and 'smelleth the battle afar off'. However, the actor knows that his powers must soon fade and that some time is necessary for reflection 'between the theatre and the grave'. Kemble is then finally compared by Scott to 'the Roman in the Capitol', and the address concludes with the Latin *ave atque vale*:

And all that you can hear, or I can tell,
Is—Friends and Patrons, hail, and FARE YOU WELL! (*Shorter Poems*, Item 97)

By this time it had become obvious that the Siddons lease of the patent for the Edinburgh Theatre Royal was not going well, and the *ave atque vale* salutation might well apply to the Siddons management as well as to Henry Siddons's famous uncle. When Siddons had died in 1815, his speculation in becoming manager of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal had been publicly revealed as an unsuccessful one. Murray, in addressing the Edinburgh audience to request permission for a rise in admission prices, revealed that Siddons had sunk his own private property in the theatre and that even so the new season would begin with a debt of £3,100 (Dibdin, p. 270), his late brother-in-law having struggled to meet the most recent instalment of the purchase money. Scott seems to have been deeply and permanently affected by the precarious financial position in which Siddons's widow, Harriet, was left. [**Illustration: Harriet Murray, Mrs Siddons by John Wood, NGS PG 214**. *The date of this portrait is not given, but is perhaps a fair representation of Harriet Siddons at the time of her husband's death when she was in her early thirties. With her dark hair elaborately styled and contrasting attractively with her white shoulders and pearl and garnet ear-rings, she presents a confidently glamorous and fashionable image, but nevertheless carried heavy responsibilities not only for the Theatre Royal patent but also for the upbringing of several young and dependent children.*] Scott obviously admired her, describing her as 'a great friend of mine and a most excellent person as well as a charming actress' (*Letters*, XII, 363). He was accordingly always amenable to an appeal from this lady for a theatrical address for a special occasion, as for instance when she had a summer engagement in 1821 at Henry Harris's grand new Dublin Theatre Royal. Scott wrote to his son Walter on 27 June, 'I am happy to see Mrs. Siddons has been so well received in Dublin and am very sorry you are not there to shew her some attention and civility' (*Letters*, VI, 483). Mrs Siddons had clearly requested Scott to write a closing address for her final performance on 7 July, and Scott obliged, although his letter enclosing the lines did not reach her in time to be used and probably arrived in Dublin almost as she left the city (*Shorter Poems*, Item 111). Another poetic address specially written for her to speak after performing in the character of Mary, Queen of Scots, also remained unused as the production of the relevant play was apparently cancelled. Scott stresses the attraction of such a heroine to a Scottish audience ('There is a talisman in that word Mary'):

O'er Mary's memory the learned quarrel;
By Mary's grave the poet plants his laurel;
Time's echo, old Tradition, makes her name
The constant burthen of his faultering theme;
In each old hall his gray-haired heralds tell
Of Mary's picture, and of Mary's cell,—
And show—my fingers tingle at the thought—

The loads of tapestry that poor Queen wrought. (*Shorter Poems,* Item 115*)*

It was first published as Scott's contribution to a literary annual, the *Literary Souvenir for 1825*, and of course will be included along with the Dublin address in our forthcoming volume of Scott's *Shorter Poems*. The farewell address Scott wrote for Harriet Siddons to speak when she retired from the Theatre Royal in March 1830 showed he well remembered the early distressing days of her widowhood, though fifteen years after the death of her husband she was a secure and prosperous woman and indeed (having paid up the annual instalments of the purchase price) now the outright owner of the Theatre Royal. She was made to refer to the kindness of the Edinburgh audience

In Misery's hours of deprivation shewn
When Sympathy Hope's dying lamp renewed
And Anguish softened into gratitude?
Ah generous soothers of a widow's cares
Despise not now her blessings and her prayers
Tis all she has—but warrant high is given
Such prayers and blessings find the path to heaven. (*Shorter Poems*, Item 129)

Harriet Siddons had been able to continue with the Edinburgh Theatre Royal partly by relying on her financially capable brother, actor William Henry Murray. [**Illustration: John Murray by Sir William Allan, 1848, NGS, PG 190.** *This William Allan portrait of Murray dates from 1848, clearly much later than the Wood portrait of his sister and shows a middle-aged man. Murray was in fact around seven years younger than she, and the two were so strikingly alike physically as to give real point to their playing of Viola and Sebastian, the twin sister and brother whose identities are frequently confused by the other characters in Shakespeare's* Twelfth Night. *Scott alludes to the 'exquisite effect' of their likeness in these roles in noting the striking resemblance between Fergus and Flora MacIvor in Volume 1, Chapter 21 of* Waverley.**]** Scott included in his retirement address for Harriet Siddons an earnest appeal to the public for continued support for her brother's management of the theatre, even though he had noted five years earlier that 'Murray is making a fortune for his sister and family on the very bargain which Siddons, poor fellow, could not have sustained for two years longer' (*Letters*, IX, 57).

Murray's rather startling success was founded on the establishment of a 'national drama', though perhaps not quite the one that Scott had envisaged originally when manoeuvering for the patent to be taken by Henry Siddons. The Waverley Novels were a runaway publishing success and contained memorable characters and pithy, racy dialogue that could easily be extracted and reworked into a theatrical script. They were also unquestionably decorous reading for the drawing-room and parlour, so that dramatisations would attract a more extensive family audience of wider middle-class background, one traditionally inclined to doubt the respectability of theatre-going. On 15 February 1819 a dramatised version of *Rob Roy* opened at an almost-bankrupt Edinburgh Theatre Royal, which filled the house for forty-one consecutive nights and was repeated many times each season during Murray's management and long after that. According to the theatrical historian James C. Dibdin it was known as the 'Managerial sheet anchor', and when in doubt Scottish theatre managers for many years seem invariably to have staged *Rob Roy* (Dibdin, p. 286). The outstanding performance of the original cast was that of a comic actor recently transferred from Glasgow to the Edinburgh company, Charles Mackay (1787-1857), playing Bailie Nicol Jarvie. [**Illustration: engraving of Mackay as Jarvie by John Horsburgh after Sir William Allan's painting.** *This is clearly a popular genre engraving, of the type*

that depicts actors in their most famous roles, one of the best-known earlier examples of which is Hogarth's portrait of Garrick as Shakespeare's Richard III.] Scott reported enthusiastically both on the financial implications of the success of the play for the Theatre Royal and on Mackay's performance in a letter to his friend Terry of 18 April 1819. Murray, he noted

[…] has absolutely netted upwards of £3000: to be sure, the man who played the Bailie made a piece of acting equal to whatever has been seen in the profession. For my own part, I was actually electrified by the truth, spirit, and humour which he threw into the part. It was the living Nicol Jarvie: conceited, pragmatical, cautious, generous, proud of his connexion with Rob Roy, frightened for him at the same time, and yet extremely desirous to interfere with him as an adviser' (*Letters*,V, 362)

The original painting by Sir William Allan, from which this engraving was made, is now at Abbotsford, a tribute to Scott's admiration of Mackay's acting in this play.

Several other Waverley plays rapidly followed at the Theatre Royal, including *The Antiquary; or, The Heir of Glen Allan* and *The Heart of Midlothian* in 1820, and *The Legend of Montrose, or the Children of the Mist* and *The Bride of Lammermoor* in 1822 (Dibdin, pp. 294, 296, 297). Here was an indisputably loyalist Scottish national drama, supportive of the Union and of the Hanoverian monarchy, and when George IV, on an official royal visit to Edinburgh in1822, attended the theatre the bill announced that the play to be performed at this Command Performance of 27 August would be 'the National Opera of Roy Roy Macgregor, or Auld Langsyne' (Dibdin, illustration facing p. 298).

The company had a problem two years later, however, when *Saint Ronan's Well* was to be staged at the Theatre Royal for the benefit night of William Murray the manager on 5 June 1824. As Barbara Bell and John Ramage have indicated in their article 'Meg Dods—Before the Curtain', the dramatisation of Scott's novel by James Robinson Planché (1796-1880; *ODNB*), the stock author at London's Covent Garden Theatre at this time, contained no role for Charles Mackay, since the chief comic role was a female one, that of Meg Dods, the elderly landlady of the St Ronan's Inn.[11] In the event Mackay played Meg Dods in drag, though not as the pantomime dame we might envisage, since Scott praised him to Terry for the way in which he 'kept his gestures and his action more within the verge of female decorum than I thought possible' (*Life*, V, 317-18).

It was traditional at the close of the theatre manager's benefit evening, for him to come forward at the end of the play and thank the audience for their support during the current season. To support Murray's company Scott wrote an epilogue for the first performance of *Saint Ronan's Well* for Murray's benefit performance to be spoken at the end of the evening as the traditional manager's address would have been, but by Mackay as Meg Dods rather than by Murray himself. It seems likely, however, that Murray was on stage, among the boys who surround Meg, 'following and teazing her', since she opens her lively address by telling the Stage-keeper to 'lend yon muckle ane a whack'. Meg's address is substantially a catalogue of physical and social changes in Edinburgh during Scott's lifetime, among which the Theatre Royal itself stands out as the single constant feature both of past and present Edinburgh. Meg strongly disapproves of novelties such as the modern Edinburgh hotels. At the previous Old Town taverns 'gentles used to drink good wine / And eat cheap dinners', whereas at the new-fangled pretentious hotels

They are sae greedy and sae glegg
That if ye're served but wi' an egg
And that's puir picking

In comes a chield and makes a leg
And charges chicken. (*Shorter Poems*, Item 118)

She follows this up with an appeal to support Murray's management of the Theatre Royal that also contrasts the new-fangled unfavourably with the traditional:

And since I see ye're in a hurry
Your patience I'll nae langer worry
But be sae crouse
As speak a word for ane Will Murray
That keeps this house.

Meg notes that plays are 'auld-fashioned things in truth', especially by comparison with the 'wonders mair uncouth' of ventriloquism. This is a topical allusion to the performances given during April and May that year by the French ventriloquist Nicholas Marie Alexandre Vattemare (1796-1864) to capacity crowds at the Caledonian Theatre at the head of Leith Walk. (Scott himself, it should be noted, enjoyed Vattemare's performance when he gave a private display of his talents at Abbotsford that summer, and indeed wrote him a poetical tribute.[12]) Meg urges that Murray has a special claim not available to visiting novelty performers, as the man who has 'stooden sentry / Ower this big house that's far frae rent-free / For a lone sister'.

Murray's advertisements for his benefit night had mentioned that Scott's epilogue was 'Written expressly for this Occasion',[13] and Mackay's delivery of it was clearly a continuing draw for an Edinburgh audience. When *Saint Ronan's Well* was staged again during the succeeding autumn the advertisement noted, 'At the End of the Play, Mr Mackay will deliver the Address in the character of Meg Dodds, which was last season attended with so much applause'.[14]

Only towards the end of his life did Scott's interest in the Edinburgh stage appear to flag. His wife, with whom he had shared this taste, died in 1826 and his friend Harriet Siddons had moved to London on her retirement in the spring of 1830. Scott's own lameness was also increasing, and early in 1830 he had the first of a series of strokes. A regretful entry in his *Journal* for 16 June 1830, noting that he is about to see the young Fanny Kemble act for the first time, adds 'It is two or three years since I have been in a theatre once my delight'—though as W. E. K. Anderson points out he had clearly forgotten at least one theatre visit during the previous year.[15] Of Fanny Kemble herself he had written in the autumn of 1829 that he was 'not surprized that she has shone forth from a constellation which has long been so brilliant' (*Letters*, XI, 253). To him she was clearly a youthful reminder of theatrical friendships with other members of the Kemble clan in his past, in something of the same way that the young 5th Duke of Buccleuch obviously recalled to Scott's mind the Duke's parents, who had been among the closest friends of his prime.

Although he was never a significant playwright for the theatre, Scott's writings for the Edinburgh stage serve as a reminder that altogether there was probably no man outside the theatrical profession who had a greater impact on the Scottish theatre than he had exerted, by one means and another, during his best years as a celebrity poet and novelist.

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[1] 'Article XI. Life of Kemble—Kelly's Reminiscences', *Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols (Edinburgh, 1834-36), XX, 152-244 (p. 156); John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1837-38), I, 44, 287 (hereafter referred to as *Life*).

[2] *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson and others, 12 vols (London, 1932-37), XII, 170-71 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*).

[3] James C. Dibdin, *The Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* (Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 201-02 (hereafter referred to as Dibdin).
[4] Barbara Bell, 'The Nineteenth Century', in *A History of Scottish Theatre*, ed. Bill Findlay (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 137-206 (p. 139).
[5] *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, XX, 161, 159.
[6] Walter Scott, *Shorter Poems*, ed. P. D. Garside and Gillian Hughes, EEWSP (Edinburgh, [?]), Item 114. Poems are quoted from page-proofs of the volume and referred to by item number since pagination is not yet fixed (hereafter referred to as *Shorter Poems*).
[7] James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman; or, Love, Leasing and Jealousy. A Series of Domestic Scottish Tales*, ed. David Groves, Antony Hasler, and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 40.
[8] Mary Cosh, *Edinburgh: The Golden Age* (Edinburgh, 2003), 572.
[9] 'Scottish Drama', *Edinburgh Annual Register for 1809*, 2 part 2 (1811), 385-401 (p. 398).
[10] *The Sale-Room*, 5 April 1817, p. 112.
[11] Barbara Bell and John Ramage, 'Meg Dods—Before the Curtain', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre*, 1 no. 2 (2000), available at https://ijosts.ubiquitypress.com/articles/248/.
[12] See 'To Mons. Alexandre', *Shorter Poems*, Item 117.
[13] *Caledonian Mercury*, 31 May 1824.
[14] *Edinburgh Dramatic Review*, new series, 1 (23 November 1824), p. 24.
[15] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford, 1972), p. 597.