# *WALTER SCOTT AND THE GREENING OF SCOTLAND: EMERGENT ECOLOGIES OF A NATION*

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**Note: the content of my slides is included in the following text.**

Thank you to the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club and the University of Edinburgh of Edinburgh for inviting me to give this lecture, and to everyone here this evening. I am deeply honoured to speaking to you. I also thank Professor Peter Garside for nominating me as speaker, and Professor Penny Fielding for likewise recommending me. Peter and Penny have been inspirational throughout my work on Sir Walter Scott, and I have constantly looked up to their example and scholarship. It's more than an honour to have their support.

My lecture is based on my book *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland*, with its subtitle *Emergent Ecologies of a Nation* (2021). My aim in writing that book was to re-read Scott, one of the most globally influential – if not *the* most influential - and popular writers of the nineteenth century, in order to uncover something that I knew was there from the first time that I started reading him. I wanted to know and write about the full extent of Scott's contribution to environmental literature and ecological historiography. Since he was educated in the Edinburgh of the Scottish Enlightenment, it is to be expected that he would have explored the way societies evolved, the relationships between people, communities and their development. Yet natural science was also an important area of Scottish Enlightenment enquiry, and one of its significant intellectual and literary exports. Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* (Russian partial edition 1937; English translation 1962), one of the most enduring pioneering studies of the socio-historical focus of Scott's work, still has plenty of relevance. And since Lukács, the expansive volume of critical enquiry into Scott's groundbreaking representations of people and the events that shaped their lives has brought a variety of theoretical and critical perspectives to bear on Scott studies. What I've tried to do is to foreground his equivalent contribution to the memory mapping of the non-human world. Green zones emerge in his writing, attending to several centuries of changes in land use, ranging from the drainage of marshes in "debatable" lands to the increase in monocultural pasturage for sheep farming, from deforestation and reforestation using native rather than imported species, to the effects on the land of depopulation through mass migration (effectively, an exchange with Canada of people for trees), and from storytelling that depends upon shifting riparian environments to the folklore of mountains, islands, lakes, and seashores.

The move from Enlightenment science to Romantic writing, with its emphasis on feeling as a means to knowledge, provided a perfect literary environment for Scott to write about environmental change and its impact. And write about it, he did – over almost four decades (1795-1832) and across genres of poetry in translation, ballad collections, original short and long poetry, verse drama, prose fiction, literary journalism, letters, and personal record keeping. In doing so, he left us with one of the nineteenth century's most significant critical enquiries into a nation's environmental history.

Everyday people in Scott's novels comment on the effects of a decline in the number of salmon in Scotland's rivers, due to over-netting in estuaries. Fictional fisherwomen haggle over the pricing of common and rarer species (i.e. herring, John Dory and turbot). People lose their livelihoods. Some lose their lives. Modern breeds of cattle are compared with extinct species whose larger bones had been found preserved in peat marshes. Descriptions in Scott's novels even formed the basis for breed standards for some types of working dog. Fruit trees and pasture for livestock are watered by streams that flow through sites of massacre, transferring minerals and organic compounds along the food chain, even hinting at vicarious cannibalism and vampirism (I refer here to *Old Mortality*). At a less gruesome but environmentally worrying level, wildflowers tenuously cling to existence at the edge of trails, near to the spot where, according to legend, the fourteenth-century Scottish poet Thomas of Erceldoune, known as the Rymer, was taken on a subterranean journey of discovery by an elf-woman. Stones accumulate deer hair, lichens, and particles of soil that permeate their surface and reveal a still-unfolding history beyond the human lives

memorialised in their inscriptions: the unchanging solidity of rock is brought into question by that organic process of constant, if slow, transformation. These stories of environments and their agency were told, retold, and elaborated on by Scott.

If I were to look at all those areas of his writing, we would be here for hours longer that we have. So the rest of my lecture will focus on two main areas from my book: first, I'll talk about trees and then about Islands and seas as they are represented in Scott's 1821 novel *The Pirate.* In my conclusion, I will touch briefly on some other aspects of the book. So to trees. . . **[SLIDE 2]**

**TREES**

> The planting and cultivation of trees always seemed to me the most interesting occupation of the country . . . Planting and pruning trees I could work at from morning till night and if my own poetical revenues enable me to have a few acres of my own that is one of the principle pleasures I look forward to.
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> Scott, Letter to Joanna Baillie dated 23 November 1810.[1]

Scott wrote these words a year before he bought the property that would become Abbotsford, where he would most fully exercise his passion for planting trees. But as an author, he had already explored from his 1790s translations of German poetry onwards, connections between people and the woodlands, forests, and individual trees with which they lived. His version of Goethe's 'The Erl-King' (1797) focuses on the relationship between trees and the occult imagination: a father and son ride 'by night thro' the woodland so wild', the father trying in vain to convince the child that the low-pitched whispering the boy hears is nothing but 'the wild blast, as it sung thro'

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[1] Scott, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 402. Letter to Joanna Baillie dd. 23 November 1810.

the trees'.[2] The disjunction between the sound the father responds to – "a wild blast" – and the hushed whisper that the boy hears draws attention to how they hear quite different sounds. While the Black Forest informed Germany's folklore and literary imagination, Scott would soon argue for the centrality of trees to Scottish literature as well as to his nation's character and ecology. As I mentioned in my last Lecture for the Edinburgh Walter Scott Club in 2016, his version of 'Thomas the Rhymer' for *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, entwines the roots of Scottish poetry with those of the legendary Eildon Tree that grew on Huntlie Bank near Melrose: in that hybrid version of an old ballad with Scott's own additions, the Eildon tree – probably a hawthorn - becomes the point of origin for Scottish literature.

Sixteen years later *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* is as arguably concerned with the environment as with its main moral and legal storyline. The practical advice of the Laird of Dumbiedikes to his son is 'when ye hae naething else to do, ye may be aye sticking in a tree; it will be growing, Jock, when ye're sleeping'.[3] Scott reused those words in October 1827 in the closing sentence of his anonymously published review of Robert Monteath's *The Forester's Guide and Profitable Planter* for the *Quarterly Review*, presenting them as the economic and environmental wisdom of a dying landowner, passed on for the benefit subsequent generations.[4] He argued in that essay, an important example of Scott the journalist, that a thriving forestry industry in

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[2] Scott, *The Poetical Works*, p. 648.

[3] Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, p. 69.

[4] Scott, '*The Forester's Guide and Profitable Planter*. By Robert Monteath. (With Plates) Second Edition. Edinburgh, 1824', *Quarterly Review*, 36:72 (October 1827), 558–600.

Scotland would provide good jobs that could stem the tide of migration towards similar work in Canada: **[SLIDE 3]**

> The woods, requiring in succession planting, pruning, thinning, felling, and barking, would furnish to the labourers a constant source of employment. They would be naturally attached to the soil on which they dwelt.[5]

To return to *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, for Dumbiedikes, trees represent economic opportunity as much as stewardship of the land, although Scott's note in the Magnum Opus edition takes a cultural and aesthetic view, in which a restoration of woodland would also improve the character of the countryside: 'The author has been flattered by the assurance that this naïve mode of recommending arboriculture . . . had so much weight with a Scottish earl as to lead to his planting a large tract of country.'[6] He is referring there to the Duke of Argyll.

Let's return to Scott the journalist and pamphleteer. Metaphors of ecology and forestry also underpin the arguments through which he ensured Scotland's retention of its banknotes and independent legal system, further showing how trees shaped his imagination when he was thinking about nationhood and its character. Green Scotland is pressed into service of the economy, but perhaps not in the expected way. In the three letters he wrote in the fictional persona of Malachi Malagrowther, *On the*

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[5] Scott, '*The Forester's Guide and Profitable Planter*', p. 558.

[6] Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, ed. Tony Inglis (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 80.

*Proposed Change of Currency*, which were published in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal* and as pamphlets in 1826, the economy and legislature are represented as interconnected ecosystems. In the first letter, arguing for the retention of Scottish banknotes, the Bank of England is compared with an English oak tree, the branches and roots of which have spread only as far as where England borders with Scotland, while its custodians in London insist that it be given sole rights further northwards to the soil, water and air. Malagrowther complains of the damage that Scotland would suffer from being forced fully to adopt English currency: 'We receive no benefit from that immense establishment, which, like a great oak, overshadows England from Tweed to Cornwall — Why should our national plantations be cut down or cramped for the sake of what affords us neither shade nor shelter, and which besides can take no advantage by the injury done to us?' He then uses an analogy in which other tree species symbolically stand in for banknotes, differentiating between what might successfully be grown in Scotland and in England. Referring to the mulberry as a species that grows best in milder climates, and which he knew to a popular tree in London and England's southern counties, he dismissed the idea that something as fundamental as currency and laws can easily be replaced with those that have grown to maturity in different socio-political soils: **[SLIDE 4]**

> In transplanting a tree, little attention need be paid to the character of the climate and soil from which it is brought, and the greater care must be taken that those of the situation to which it is transplanted are fitted to receive it. It would

> be no reason for planting mulberry-trees in Scotland, that they luxuriate in the south of England.[7]

Where actual trees are concerned, Scott was most interested in species that had flourished within Scottish ecosystems for millennia, and which were part of the ancient Great Caledonian Forest. His planting journal *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*, letters, and journal all show that those species predominated in his planting at Abbotsford. It's fair to say that Scott mourned the loss of Scotland's old-growth forest, mentioning it in every form of his writing. Today, remnants of that Forest still exist in Grampian and a few parts of the northern and western Highlands, where they are protected as Special Areas of Conservation.[8] Historical chronicles, natural science, stadial history, the beginnings of archaeology, and discoveries made during bog drainage – mainstays of the Scottish Enlightenment, agricultural revolution, and Romantic period in which Scott lived - all contributed to his understanding of the areas once covered by these ancient forests, and of the species that grew in them.

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[7] Scott, *A Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Weekly Journal, from Malachi Malagrowther, Esq., on the Proposed Change of Currency, and other Late Alterations, as they Affect, or are Intended to Affect, the Kingdom of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1826), pp. 37, 52.

[8] The Joint Nature Conservation Council identifies these areas, their soil types and tree species: jncc.defra.gov.uk/ProtectedSites/SACselection/habitat.asp?FeatureIntCode=h91c0 [accessed 27 October 2018] and jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/JNCC_P10Sept08Annex1_amendedFeb09.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2018]

Modern technologies have enabled the tracing of the interaction between people and the woods. We know that human habitation occurred in what is now the Scottish Borders around 8,000 BC, when tree growth was flourishing in the moraine soils that had been left after the retreat of the ice sheets from the last great period of glaciation.[9] In the chapter in my book on rarity and extinction, I discuss how the remains of Scotland's ancient forest provides habitat for rare animal and bird species and how, in Scott's novel *A Legend of the Wars of Montsrose*, it was also home to persecuted people who shared their legal status with a rare species, wolves, which at the time of the action of the story had already been selected for extinction.

I want to say a bit more about tree species and prehistoric, pre-national landscapes, because individual tree types so fascinated Scott. Looking back to before human settlement and shortly after the end of the last period of glaciation, the trees that first grew were mainly birch and then hazel, followed by a more varied evergreen and deciduous woodland that included oak, elm, ash, alder, hawthorn and Scots pine.[10] Aspen, juniper and rowan also grew abundantly. Birch and hazel were dominant species across Scotland's pre-national landmass, with Scots pine predominating in parts of what would become the Highlands. By the end of the fifth millennium BC

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[9] Robert A. Dodgshon, *Land and Society in Early Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1981), pp. 1–2.

[10] Gordon Noble, *Neolithic Scotland: Timber, Stone, Earth and Fire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 7–12.

almost all the tree species that are now regarded as native to Scotland were widely distributed.[11] I am drawing here on the work of Gordon Noble.

Scott could not have known the timeline of this early development of forestation, but the species just mentioned all feature repeatedly in his writing. Along with Scots pine, birch plays a prominent role in his fiction and as a major focus of his planting program and as an uncanny species in *The Monastery*, where a monk is unsure whether he sees a ghost or a decaying birch tree. Even if he sees a tree, it is effectively a ghost – Scott wrote about the absence of birch along the Tweed valley and put in place his own programme to replant them, at least as far as he could. His frequent references to the Ettrick and Caledonian Forests in main texts, footnotes, and personal writing from the beginning of his literary career until his death show an interest that surely shades into obsession. We know that plantsmanship contributed to his insolvency.

Scott knew from his antiquarian's interest in historical chronicles that the Ettrick and Caledonian forests had been mostly destroyed by the late Middle Ages. Memories of lost areas of woodland recalled in his fiction haunt the high moorland and riparian valleys of the Borders, the Highlands and their margins, agricultural land, parkland and the managed commercial woodland of more recent times. He explores how real trees in the material environment had been replaced with those of myth and legend in the cultural imagination after the trees themselves had gone, in a form of

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[11] Noble, *Neolithic Scotland,* p. 12; Anderson, vol. I, p. 17; Hunt, p.10 identifies four main vegetational regions: 1. Predominant birch forest; 2. Predominant pine forest with birch and oak; 3. Predominant oak forest with birch and 4. Exposed treeless coastal areas.

environmental mourning. Writing to George Ellis in May 1804, less than a year after the completion of the first edition of the *Minstrelsy*, he expressed concern about a modern Borders ecology dominated by grass and sheep at the expense of older mixed woodland and flora that he felt sure would quickly return if given the chance: **[SLIDE 5]**

> Long sheep and short sheep, and tups and gimmers, and hogs and dinmonts, had made a perfect sheepfold of my understanding, which is hardly yet cleared of them . . . Ettrick Forest boasts finely shaped hills and clear romantic streams; but, alas! they are bare, to wildness, and denuded of the beautiful natural wood with which they were formerly shaded. It is mortifying to see that wherever the sheep are excluded, the copse has immediately sprung up in abundance, so that enclosures only are wanting to restore the wood wherever it might be useful or ornamental, yet hardly a proprietor has attempted to give it fair play for a resurrection.[12]

The emphasis here is on use or utility on the one hand, the ornamental value of trees on the other hand and – of course, since this is Scott – nostalgia for what has been lost. But I suggest that in this short piece of confessional epistolary writing Scott shows a remarkable anticipation of what we now call rewilding, and an understanding of fundamental principles of what has become in the 21st Century restoration conservation. He also endorses an eighteenth-century aesthetic scale of values consistent with artist William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, in which aesthetic beauty

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[12] Scott, *Letters*, vol. I, p.222. Letter to George Ellis dd. 16 May 1804.

must incorporate principles of design and – crucially – an essential fitness for purpose if it is to meet the definition of the beautiful. The woods provide practical shade for people and livestock, yet they appear to him as instances of natural beauty.

Scott's preference for this kind of approach to arboricultural practice and environmental stewardship is easily seen in his planting at and near Abbotsford, and in literary records in his notebooks, letters, and journals. Those documents testify to his privileging the re-creation of an earlier, Scottish wooded landscape over the fashion for collecting exotic specimen trees. Of the nineteen species that he named as either existing or being planted on land that he owned in and after 1819, only four – larch, sweet chestnut (brought to Britain by the Romans), North American black pine and North American white pine – are not anciently native to Scotland.[13] Larch is an interesting case, because Scott recognised it both as an invasive species needing constant thinning and care, and as a valuable introduced tree to Scotland when planted in the right place. He differed there from William Wordsworth, who in his *Guide to the Lakes* expressed his loathing for the larch as "an alpine tree" that was out of place in Britain. Larch came to Scotland in 1738 in the form of several trees gifted by agricultural improver and exiled Jacobite Menzies of Culdares to the 2nd Duke of

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[13] The nineteen species are: alder, American black pine, American white pine, ash, beech, birch, sweet chestnut, horse chestnut, elm, larch, oak, sand willow, Scots pine, silver fir, spruce, sycamore, thorn, Weymouth pine, and willow. Other less specific listings include evergreens, firs, hardwoods, mixed trees, natural wood, old trees and other smooth-leaved trees.

Atholl, for the latter's Perthshire estate.[14] Menzies had been exiled to North America after participating in the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. The gifted larches therefore represent a transatlantic ecological connection forged between Scotland and what would later in the century become the United States. In turn, the Duke of Atholl experimented with these trees by using them as the main species in his creation of Scotland's first mountain tree plantation at Craigvinean Hill, Perthshire. Subsequent Dukes capitalized on the commercial value of growing larch in that soil, which was otherwise difficult to cultivate, not just for their commercial value as fast-growing softwood but also because of the tourist appeal of what became in the nineteenth century (and still is) the distinctive Craigvinean Forest.

Scott wrote excitedly in an 1813 letter to Joanna Baillie that he had been busying himself at Abbotsford 'planting and screening and dyking against the river and planting willows and aspens and weeping birchs [sic]'.[15] His excitement is so evident. There were also some moments of horror, though. A sudden infestation of caterpillars in June 1824 gave rise to an ecogothic account of a sight that stopped Scott in his tracks: **[SLIDE 6]**

> A green caterpillar (not an aphis) has appeard on these trees in quantity as thick as the leaves which it devours & resembling them both in colour and in shape [. . . ] You see that the tufts are composed of caterpillars instead of leaves. The

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[14] For Scott's concern about larch growth on hardwoods see *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*, pp. 8, 9, 11. For a succinct, informative account the introduction of larch to Scotland at the Duke of Atholl's Dunkeld estate, its part in the onward development of Craigvinean Forest, and that plantation's connection with the tenanted Torrvald Farmstead, see Forestry and Land Scotland's forestryandland.gov.scot/learn/heritage/historic-woodland-use/torrvald?highlight=larch [accessed 17 September 2018].

[15] *Letters*, vol. III, p. 223. Letter to Joanna Baillie dd. 13 January 1813.

> insect writhes & agitates itself in a very lively manner [. . . ] Upon the whole the sight is equally disgusting and discouraging. They eat all leaves bare excepting the summer shoot which they do not seem to touch. The numbers on one tree were some thing quite frightful and their powers of destruction seem to rival those of the locust [. . . ] The plantations above the road are quite alive with them.[16]

These were almost certainly the caterpillars of the Pine hawk-moth (*Sphinx pinastri*). The "leaves" that Scott refers to are the needles of Scots Pine, a tree to which the Pine Hawk Moth is particularly partial. There is a happy ending, though. By August the caterpillars had pupated, and Scott would later exclaim his delight at the lack of lasting damage to the trees.

## Islands and Seas

I want to move on now to a different part of my book, which looks at Scott's interest in weather, sea conditions, and island environments. Before I do so, let's just look at how substantial Scotland's coastline is. **[SLIDE 7].** This map is provided online by the Scottish Government and it maps Scotland's current territorial waters. Under the *Scotland Act 1988*, based on fishing rights, the nation's sea territory is nearly six times the size of its land mass. Always a maritime nation, and archipelagic in every sense of the word, the nation's sea territory is nearly six times the size of its land mass. More than 900 islands and the mainland share a coastline that extends to around 18,743 kilometres. Scott wouldn't - and couldn't - have known those statistics, but his

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[16] Scott, *Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*, pp. 74–6.

writing shows how compelling he found the coastal and marine nation and its environment.

As 1821 drew to a close, *The Pirate* took Scott's fiction northwards to Shetland, and some of its action extended to the open sea. Scott had travelled there during the summer of 1814 at the invitation of the Northern Lighthouse Commissioners, spending two of the six weeks of his tour in the islands. As Mark Weinstein and Alison Lumsden have shown in their volume for the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels[17], the diary he kept of the excursion is one of the most important sources for his novel, with its observations on farming and fishing (including whaling), cultural life and social class, architecture, archaeology, history, topography and seascapes. Almost all the material in the lighthouse tour diary was reworked and integrated into the fictional narrative of Scott's novel,, including the tale of John Gow, an early eighteenth-century pirate from Wick  who was the model for the title character. But I am interested here in Scott's treatment of environmental conditions and phenomena.

Given its location, *The Pirate* predictably concerns an island community torn between two key economies, farming and seafaring. The community described by Scott argues over whether there really is a need to improve the subsistence agriculture on which it has depended for hundreds of years, while simultaneously struggling to meet an increasing demand for its young men to go to sea in the expanding fishing industry.

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[17] Scott, The Pirate, ed. Mark Weinstein and Alison Lumsden, EEWN (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

The representation of the sea *throughout The Pirate* is sublime, with weather, sound and daylight adding to the sense of a dangerous environment. Scott addresses the effect on the mind of the northern seas experienced in subarctic winter daylight and of the poor visibility brought about by fog, as a prelude to an episode of dramatic storytelling: 'The ocean also had its mysteries, the effect of which was aided by the dim winterlight, through which it was imperfectly seen for more than half the year.' In fact, his own visit had taken him closer to an experience of the opposite effect: the 'simmer dim' or 'midnight sun', when the sky doesn't fully darken at night. After all, he visited Orkney and Shetland in the summer. The Shetland day lasts for just 5 hours 49 minutes on 21 December, with no emergence from astronomical, nautical, or civil twilight. By contrast, on 21 June (the longest day), daytime accounts for an astonishing 18 hours 55 minutes. These extremes on the scale of experience of day and night blur boundaries in ways that encourage imaginative thinking about how we perceive the environment. Scott follows with a conjectured account in which the north sea is said to have 'bottomless depths' and 'secret caves', where marine monsters including 'the kraken, that hugest of living things' might be found. Banks of fog, a combination of water and air, provide him with a plausible meteorological background to reports from sailors who claimed to have seen 'the horns of the monstrous leviathan welking and waving midst the wreaths of mist'. Sightings of snakes with glossy manes are also mentioned, in accounts of a creature resembling the later fabled Loch Ness monster. All this is described by Scott as a mixed ecology of actual and fantastical living things in what was still understood in his lifetime to be a deep sea marine wilderness, often with biblical undepinning. Scott attributes the existence of these speculative ecologies to Shetland's northern latitude and its

maritime environment, weather, and boreal seasonal light conditions. **[SLIDE 7]**

> the imagination is far more powerfully affected . . . on the deep and dangerous seas of the north, amidst precipices and headlands, many hundreds of feet in height, – amid perilous straights, and currents, and eddies – long sunken reefs of rock, over which the vexed ocean foams and boils.

In *The Pirate*, the character Mordaunt Mertoun's 'Romantic disposition' enables him to treat superstitions involving sea monsters as 'a pleasing and interesting exercise of the imagination'. But in his note on 'Monsters of the Northern Seas" for the Magnum edition Scott proposes that reports of sea serpents are probably attributable to natural circumstances such as Norwegian spruce trunks washed out to sea and seen in fog. He also comments on the remains of a mysterious animal that had been washed ashore and sent to London, where Joseph Banks identified it as a basking shark that had drifted northwards. In all these instances, the boundaries between living things and organic elements break down to allow anomalous, metamorphic forms to emerge. That process encourages readers to think about the biodiverse environment of Scotland's seas, in a blend of Enlightenment classification that shifts towards more disturbing and disruptive, later nineteenth-century Darwinian evolutionary processes. In another instance in *The Pirate*, the incoming night tides of calmer, inshore waters, rippling over shingle and shells on the shoreline, apparently brings a mermaid who is reported to skim the water's edge of sand and shell beaches, 'mingling her voice with the sighing breeze . . . to sing of subterranean wonders'. Here, once again, is an

example of the aural sound environments that Scott so effectively captures, bringing to readers through storytelling a sense of natural agency that was ahead of his time. For Scott, the marine grotesque and wonderful enable the imagination to feed off the reality of environmental conditions and the boom in natural scientific enquiry into the bio-systems of the sea. What is old in terms of folklore translates into the modern in terms of environmental science and understanding.

Island settings in the *Pirate* also emphasize the instability that undermines the perceived natural boundaries by which human lives are shaped. The Atlantic-facing, 450-foot sandstone stack in the Orkney archipelago known as The Old Man of Hoy features toward the end of the novel as a place of transformative and shifting appearance. Scott writes that as a landmark Hoy may or may not be visible from land or sea, since it appears to sink into or rise from the water depending on tidal swells and the position of the viewer. It dematerializes entirely when sea mist rolls in from the west. The cries of eagles, fish hawks and other birds for which it forms ‘a dark unmolested retreat’ provide the only continuous evidence of its existence, drawing attention to what Scott understood there and elsewhere in his writing as aural ecologies. Hoy is a liminal environment where even the soil is characterized by Scott as anything but ‘dry’ land. ’Wet, mossy, cold’ and generally ‘unproductive’, it supports a limited range of primitive vegetation that goes back to the thawing that followed the last great Ice Age that I mentioned earlier, the growth here comprising ‘dwarf bushes of birch, hazel, and wild currant’.

A storm episode in *The Pirate* explores how stone, water and air have the capacity to dissolve into a total environment, where constituent parts not only become

indistinguishable but actually merge. Saturated with water from crossing the Atlantic Ocean, air blown ashore with the force of a gale releases a torrent of 'rain mixed with hail that dashed with unrelenting rage against the hills and rock', leaving a landscape that is perilous to navigate because 'often uninterrupted by large pools of water, lakes, and lagoons'. Mertoun experiences a heightened sense of awareness as he stands alone: after the 'elemental war' of the tempest, 'the salt relish of the drift' beating against his cheek to produce the frisson of realization **[SLIDE 8]** that 'the spray of the more distant ocean, disturbed to frenzy by the storm, was mixed with that of the inland lakes and streams'. By modern standards, this lesson in meteorology and hydrology is elementary. But in a story published in 1821 for a public who, for the most part, would not have visited this northern archipelago or sailed its seas, it dramatizes a strange environment in ways that refuse the resolution of familiarization.

**CONCLUSION**

I hope my lecture has both entertained you and helped to show how varied and important was Scott's environmental writing. Scott's version of Romantic melancholy finds expression in a sense of agonized sympathy for what has been lost, mostly through political and cultural culpability in the degradation or destruction of people and the land on which they lived. In the traces that remain in fragments, whether of ballads, buildings, forests or heather moors, he in turn uncovers a powerful environmental history that long pre-dates nationhood but continues to shape Scotland's physical and cultural character. Yet his explorations through storytelling of cruelty, hardship and conflict take place alongside a naturalization of the importance to the imagination of joy and exhilaration. Scott's exhortation of what he believed to

be a fundamental need for understanding and unity is never reducible to mere personal, political or cultural fictions. *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland* seeks to raise awareness of how the sense of belonging for which Scott has long been known is vibrantly and marvellously ecological. **[SLIDE 9]**

Thank you for listening.

Susan Oliver