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Prediction of Things Past: Scott and the Triumph of the Author's Antiquity

In an "Agenda for the 21st Century" it may seem odd to invoke a "Prediction of Things Past," especially for Walter Scott. Scott has long been considered the author of nostalgia – he writes, we are told, of a romanticized past, and pushes Scotland "Out of History" (in Cairns Craig's compelling 20th-century terms). However, Scott meets 21st-century concerns through his prescient interest in old age – in his characters, in the "Author of Waverley," and in himself. Foregrounding apparently superannuated players, Scott accomplishes a meditation on age and antiquity, not so much as lack and loss, but as duration, persistence, excess, mystery, and creativity.

Specifically, Scott embraces the translation of self into thing through the aging body. Paradoxically, his elderly and problematic characters, from the significantly named Jonathan Oldbuck (in *The Antiquary*) to the "Eidolon," or "Author of Waverley" (see *The Fortunes of Nigel*), and the aging author himself, thereby resonate with an unknowable and excessive vitality. For a 21st century that in the western world seems compelled to rise to the challenge of an aging population, Scott offers a strategic reconsideration of old age, at the furthest edge of life and even as a "thing past," as the site of unpredictable power.

Everything Old is New Again

In 1825, Walter Scott began a new literary venture: his journal. Trying to construct the present moment as a memorable past for family and other readers, Scott emulated the deceased Lord Byron, whose memoranda he had recently viewed (*Journal*, 3). But the author's timing seems unfortunate. At the outset, he acknowledges that already he has forgotten much – and more serious losses accumulated from the moment he started to write. The journal begins on 20 November; on the 30th Scott laments:

I am come to the time when those who look out at the windows shall be darkend.¹ I must now wear spectacles constantly [...]. I feel my lameness becomes sometimes painful and often inconvenient. [...] Seams will slit and elbows will out quoth the tailor – and as I was fifty four on 15 August last my mortal vestments are none of the newest. (*Journal*, 26)

Scott's finances, unbeknownst to him, were in a worse state of repair. On 14 January 1826, he caught the first hint of the news that would eventually threaten to sweep away not just money and reputation, but even his home at Abbotsford (70).

Thus the *Journal*, at first glance, seems a record of decline, rather than a triumph of biographical recuperation for an authorial self. Moreover, the Byron memoranda Scott admired pointed only to the impossibility of self-expression: two days after

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13: "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened" (King James Version).

Scott took them as his model, he recorded the Byron family's rapacious pursuit and destruction of his fellow poet's memoirs (9).² And if Scott's own journal did not require purgation by fire for the sake of the family reputation, as did Byron's, it suffered an arguably worse fate. Although Scott had imagined a "Life" would raise the value of the new edition of his works, J. G. Lockhart, his son-in-law and literary editor, and Robert Cadell, his publisher, did not produce the author's meditations on his closing years (448). Presuming that Scott's declining health mapped a dwindling of powers, and that further writing on the author's part would undermine the value of the Magnum, they instead programmatically sought to shut down his later work, intrusively critiquing his plots, rewriting his sentences, and ultimately substituting for his memoirs Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (1837-1838). In this context, Scott's journal signifies not the life but the slow demise and the deliberate killing off of Sir Walter. This is the "Death of the Author" with a vengeance.

What did Scott's journal do that required its usurpation by Lockhart's strange mix of hagiography and unwitting character assassination?³ The journal, standing for a life accumulating toward its ending, in Scott's son-in-law and the author's literary relations provoked anxieties about age and death. But with their focus on Scott's failing powers, Lockhart and Cadell missed something remarkable. Duration, Heidegger tells us, escapes us all. We are beings only in time. Yet, in the journal, Scott achieves persistence through the assertively told story of his decline. It is a persistence that can bother today's readers as much as it bothered his heirs, awaiting his death, and their assumption of his publishable properties.

Scott's journal, in fact, constitutes a foregrounding and even a celebration of the downward spiral toward death. Day to day, Scott recognizes a public discourse that shifts him, as he ages, from subject to object, and day to day he seizes upon it, aggressively turning himself into a thing. Such a move flies in the face of our most commonly held and deeply feared assumption – all that lives must die. For as Scott objectifies himself, he gains duration and intensifies the possibility of signifying when the bodily self is no more.

Such a claim needs philosophical context. Let me begin with Kathleen Woodward, who in her book *Aging and Its Discontents* critiques the Freudian notion that aging castrates all subjects. To Freud, the ego is "a mental projection of the surface of the body" (Freud 1962, 16 n. 1).⁴ Consequently, Woodward observes, "the aging body [is] [...] a narcissistic wound to the ego" (Woodward 1991, 10). Freud's later self-analysis, performed in age and illness, suggests to Woodward that we defend ourselves by a process of encrustation, becoming "progressively *inorganic*" (48). Indeed, for Freud, she says, "aging [was] more threatening than death itself. The emphasis on death [...] as an *event*, conceals a denial of aging" (39). Woodward, by contrast, seeks an understanding of aging that privileges "new forms of creativity in late life" (10). Still, she stumbles up against "[the] facticity of the mortal vulnerability of the body in

2 Scott had just reencountered Thomas Moore (28 May 1779 – 25 February 1852), the Irish poet, singer, and songwriter now best remembered for the lyrics of *The Minstrel Boy* and *The Last Rose of Summer*. He was responsible, with John Murray, for burning Byron's memoirs after his death.

3 Thomas Carlyle lamented that Lockhart had "recorded much that ought to have lain suppressed," and yet that his Scott was "altogether lovely" (Carlyle 1838, 299, 301).

4 The footnote appeared in the 1827 English translation, and was marked as authorized by Freud: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (Freud 1962, 16).

old age" (19). Heidegger, while emphasizing that being is possible only within time, nonetheless argues for an intensification of meaning in the context of impending demise: "being in the world" means having our horizons limited by daily needs and interactions – our awareness is forfeit to the world; however being in the context of the Nothingness that is death invites awareness and allows "authenticity" in those who can be in existence but not subject to the social world (Heidegger 2010, 241, 244, 250-253). Yet, once again, we come up against our mortality. As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, we exist in the body alone (Nancy 2006, 15). The flash of authenticity may only highlight the non-duration of being.

Here is where Scott's practice and Thing Theory helpfully align. For the intractable problem of psychological being that is posed by the declining body and by the fact of death, the author who embraces his objectification as an aged body, and through the artifacts that constitute the residue of a life once lived, suggests a further possibility. Merleau-Ponty wrestles with the oddity that in unexpected contexts "[a] thing presents itself to the person who perceives it as a thing in itself," not as something that exists merely in relation to ourselves. Things in such contexts "disclose the non-human element which lies hidden in them" (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 139-140). Bill Brown extrapolates: "[suddenly ...] things seem to assert their presence and power" (Brown 2004, 4). The thing, Merleau-Ponty suggests, then stands forth as "hostile and alien, no longer an interlocutor, but a resolutely silent Other, a Self which evades us no less than does intimacy with an outside consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 140). The body itself, Brown quotes Merleau-Ponty, emerges as "a thing among things" (Brown 2004, 4). Inanimate objects, that is, refuse recognition and disturb identity in others; they seem to enjoy meaning beyond Heideggerian being. Further, insofar as death marks the end of the human context that confines meanings within the social world, it is, Michael Taussig implies, "the harbinger and index of the thing-world" (Brown 2004, 381). At the end of being, our "death awakens life in things" (381). Perhaps, this paper will suggest, being erupts even as we are recast as things by death.

This brings us back to the objectification, the de-humanizing of the aging body – and why Walter Scott embraces his own failing body and advertises the damage inherent to his texts as the product of that body. The issue is not that Scott rises above the fact or discourse of decline. He wishes for "Bodily Health" as much as the next man, recognizing it as "the mainspring of the microcosm;" he fears for himself and his texts "that whoreson touch of the Apoplexy;" he laments "a wavering in my composition sadly visible. I am not the man that I was" (*Journal*, 68, 695). Moreover, he anticipates Freud's dread of aging, concerned that "I should linger on 'an idiot and a show'" (692). And his aging is a reality. Indeed, he fits Freud's theories and practices distressingly well. Abbotsford, with its accumulated artifacts, might figure at large that encrustation against the anxieties of decline, that transformation into the uncaring inorganic older self, which is recognized by Woodward in Freud's life as well as in his theory.

Moreover, Scott was fully subject to the discourse of aging. When he got confused about money, Cadell described him in bestial terms as "howling" about it (Cadell

copy letter to Major Scott, 30 April 1832, NLS MS 21003, f 43).⁵ This was some months before the author actually did follow his father, degenerating beyond speech in his last days.⁶ This "howling" author stood in no position of authority to his own texts, especially since he persisted in adding to their number. Cadell pondered to himself:

Sir Walter [cannot] get on with the *Castle Dangerous* [...] of the *Tales of a Grandfather* [...] there is about two volumes done – and as to Count Robert he has not touched it since I condemned the third volume – so that here are three unfinished works – Mr Laidlaw and I are quite agreed that it would be a most fortunate circumstance if he were not to write any more. (Cadell's Notebook, 9 August 1830, NLS MS21043 f 110)

When Scott wrote frenetically to beat the clock, yet failed to catch up with proto-Victorian sensibilities, Lockhart and Cadell registered his productivity as a process of encrustation that would only devalue the property of the *Magnum*. These active and relatively young men (in their own view) colluded to hustle the now objectified Sir Walter off the stage (Cadell to Scott, 15 December 1830, NLS MS 3915, f 172-75). Cadell stresses: "it might be as well to fix on either the Count or his successor being the closing work of Fiction," together with "a *farewell announcement*" (Cadell to Scott, 28 December 1830, NLS MS 3915, f 216-7). At the same time, the two encroached more and more upon Scott's texts in their role as editors (Cadell to Scott, nd, MS 21003, f 31-32). To the author's late requests, Cadell declared, "*I pay no attention*" (Cadell to Major Scott, 30 April 1832, NLS MS 21003, f 43). From the evidence of his body, Scott was delimited by youth according to the discourse of age. Of course, those whose being is "in the world," in Heidegger's terms, can recognize no other authenticity.

But strangely, in his work and in himself, Scott embraced this discourse of aging in a way that ultimately would trump it, and convert Lockhart and Cadell's momentary triumph of (apparent) youth into an anxiety of persistent and inescapable influence emanating from the space that once was the Author of *Waverley*. Scott was not naive about the problems of aging and the subjection of the aged through fact and discourse. He knew that he himself had acted against others on the grounds of age. Early in the journal, this prematurely old fifty-four-year-old laments the financial need to "[turn] old age and infirmity adrift" as he retrenches his household expenses (*Journal*, 95). And Crystal Croftangry, the character who in *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827) both coincides with and fictionally reenacts Scott's financial crash, through his age proves trivial to his new acquaintances and unrecognizable to his onetime friends. Age betokens the loss of presence and persistence both. When the sexton in *Castle Dangerous* (1831) feeds his fire with the funerary relics of long ago, Scott provokes us to wonder if even the supplemental signs of death can last.

So how can this author make decline resonate? How can the subject achieve persistence in the space of non-being – on the other side of death? Notably, Scott does not simply touch on his diminishing health and impending demise now and again in his journal. Rather, he insists on his decline into an object. Throughout this text,

5 NLS references manuscripts held by the National Library of Scotland. Permission granted by the Trustees.

6 In 1830 Cadell recorded Scott's fear that he would become "like my father – a man done before my days are done" (Cadell's Notebook, 19 December 1830, NLS MS21043 f 80).

which he advertises as for family and strangers alike, he discusses his illnesses and his treatments in ways that foreground his suffering and decaying body. Early on, a stumble compels him to give up walking: the body becomes a falling object that must be transported by the complex prosthetic that is a coach and horses (*Journal*, 17). Scott is remorselessly blistered and cupped (638, 708, 729). At the insistence of family, he suffers the installment of a "seton" to cut off an anal fistula.⁷ That is, unmentionable parts of the body and unspeakable illnesses usurp the conventional subject of autobiography, the unified mind coherently embodied. And as an assemblage of damaged body parts, the author repeatedly points out, he is detached from and an embarrassment to the world – mortified to be seen sprawling atop a pony, sorry to be tedious to his friends (*Journal* 705, 563). He even begins a count down to death, knowing that "[the] step of time is noiseless as it passes over an old man," and expecting to "be in the Secret next week" (631, 729). Scott, with a creativity perhaps not even Kathleen Woodward could have imagined, deliberately turns his body into a cynosure for the public eye. In so doing he recasts the self into a thing that can persist and insist well beyond the usual realms of identity. It is by his assertive unhealthiness that the author gains presence. Thus for putative literary heir Thomas Carlyle, Sir Walter becomes even in death that obtrusively "healthiest of men."⁸

Significantly, Scott's late strategy was no innovation in his work. Rather, the journal, with its focus on the aging body, epitomizes a long-standing practice. Woodward observes that age is the ultimate difference; it is what cannot be recognized and accepted (Woodward 1991, 16). From early in his career, however, Scott had expressed age and its resistance to containment. Generations of critics have wrestled to understand Scott's ingénue heroes. Yet, who even remembers the hero of *The Lay* in the context of the "Last Minstrel" or, even more so, Michael Scott (it is Baron Henry Cranstoun)? Baron Bradwardine provides the most memorable moments of *Waverley*, not the eponymous hero; Lovel fades into insignificance in the presence of the antiquary.

It is worth noting that all these supporting, yet usurping, players figure disease and decline. The minstrel is fading into the landscape at the beginning of *The Lay* ("Introduction"); the Baron with the boot-jack constitutes a weak-minded comic butt for the young men of the Chevalier's court in *Waverley*; *The Antiquary's* Monkbarns, with his misrecognized relics, enacts the encrustation of age that insulates it from the experience – good and bad – that is real life. All three are turned toward the past; all three seem static and should be even less heroic than a wandering *Waverley* protagonist. Yet all three display an astonishing intensity of life, a vibrancy that cannot be diminished by the smirks of a Fergus McIvor or the embarrassed condescension of an Edward Waverley. Conventional heroes may strive to fence these elders within the confines of the family plot or the discourse of age as opposed to youth, but such heroes are forfeited, in Heidegger's terms, to the world. Their being is only in the world, and a shallow being it is. They are easily trumped by those whose near relation to death has recast them not as persons, but as authenticities on the declining side of life. As

7 Anal abscesses, penetrating to the surface, create a track or 'fistula.' Pain and potentially lethal infection can ensue. The fistula can be treated by threading through it a 'cutting seton,' and gradually pulling the seton tight. The seton cuts through the flesh and allows for healing (Cirocco and Rusin 1991).

8 "An eminently well-conditioned man, healthy in body, healthy in soul; we will call him one of the *healthiest* of men" (Carlyle 1838, 305).

Waverley and his cohort discover, it is difficult to patronize an intractable object. Worse, the more annoying, ridiculous, or encrusted one of these anti-heroes becomes – the more the minstrel corrects his audience, the more Bradwardine insists on ritual, the more trash the antiquary accumulates – the more they move to the center of Scott's texts. The efforts of Scott's young men to evade them and of his readers to ignore them, only install them more obtrusively in the place of the increasingly inadequate hero.

Is this agency? Not really – for any protagonist, or at least any non-Scott hero, should be able to anchor his own book. Usurping a Lovel or a Nigel (see Sir Mungo Malagrowth in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, 1822) may seem no great achievement. But it implies a being – or at least a disturbing – from beyond the ending. What these elder characters figure is a kind of assertive objectness – the trait that a wavering hero is only learning as he is passed around from pillar to post. And this is a trait that makes Scott, through his illnesses, his decline from agency into suffering object and objectified character, the hero of his own journal.

Woodward explains when she recognizes in Freud's fear of aging not just a dislike of but also an obsession with the body: "we turn our attention away from the world and concern ourselves with our own bodies" (Woodward 1991, 48). The aging body, she argues, from this perspective can be seen as a tomb for the living well in advance of death (56). During the course of Scott's journal, a succession of strokes brought this reality progressively upon him (*Journal*, 661, 728-729). However, Scott had long ago demonstrated that we should not consider either the body entombed or the entombing body as the end, or as the limit point of effectiveness. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), Michael Scott epitomizes the connection between premature objectness and a deeply disturbing being beyond the ending. Interred – but never specified as dead – Michael is exhumed. Now light streams from the tomb; the wizard lies, years after his burial, as irreducible as an object (*Lay*, Canto 2 verses 18 and 19). When the mystic book is removed from his hand, the dead man seems to frown (verse 21). Are these light effects only? They matter nonetheless, for in the presence of the preternaturally persistent corpse of Michael Scott, the monk who assists in the book's theft is dead before the deed breaks on daylight (verse 23). Soon, the wizard, or random bits of him, intrude upon the wedding banquet (canto 6 verse 26). Death stalks the feast in the inaccessible object that is Michael Scott.

Lockhart, in *Peter's Letters to his Kinfolk* (1819), registered this unusual vitality in a character who has passed into the tomb and thus beyond subjectivity. And he knew which way it tended. He drew upon the *Lay* to describe the younger Walter Scott's imagination as "one majestic sepulchre, where the wizard lamp burns in never-dying splendour, and the charmed blood glows for ever in the cheeks of the embalmed, and every long-sheathed sword is ready to leap from its scabbard" (Lockhart 1977, 136). Perhaps it was this awareness that made the older Lockhart strangely anxious about his declining father-in-law. The tomb, Lockhart understood – at least as built by Walter Scott – does not so much contain the body as facilitate its expression. The detritus of a life, whether body or book, dangerously intrudes from the other side of death. It enacts the unmanageable otherness of the self when translated into a 'mere' thing.

Scott's practice further suggests that the aging, objectified, and perhaps even dead author can enjoy a potency that is enhanced through the supposedly disempowering gaze of others. For Woodward, the constrictions of old age arise in part through a perversion of the mirror stage. The first mirror stage unifies internal and external

selves, but, drawing on Christopher Lasch's suggestion that "our dread of old age has its origins not in a cult of youth but in a cult of the self," she infers that the mirror stage of old age divorces the two (Woodward 1991, 69). The outward image is further inflected by the unsympathetic and objectifying audience against which the aging subject must construct itself, for the mirror stage of old age "is inherently triangular, involving the gaze of others as well as two images of oneself" (69). Scott, again, recasts a weakness as a strength: he multiplies these points of triangulation and instances of objectification. He thus makes impossible the limiting positioning performed by those who seek to find their being, set against that of their community's elders, in a narrowly social world.

Scott well understood the inverted equation that fragmented and yet multiplied the self as object. Michael Scott persists not just in the body but in the book, and in the hand or the arm as much as in the whole. However, this division of selves allows for an intensification of effect; so dispersed, his powers cannot easily be directed by the Lady of Branksome Tower. In fact, they work against her and install the wizard as ever more potent. Not surprisingly, then, just as the antiquary encrusted himself with objects, the author encrusts himself with selves. Notoriously, as Ian Duncan has hinted, Scott went from being lawyer to poet to Author of *Waverley* and back to Walter Scott (Duncan 2007, 281). He vlogged as President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and companion to kings. Furthermore, the Author was *Eidolon*, or representation, and fittingly – given Woodward's observation that age alone trumps the hierarchies of gender – looms as either or neither man or woman in *The Fortunes of Nigel* (Woodward 1991, 16; *Nigel*, 5). Then too, s/he is a "postman," shifting according to various points of perspective as his/her works are delivered to one reader or another (*Nigel*, 9). Readers also multiply. In *Nigel* and in the journal, the reader alternately does and does not matter to the reception of Scott's novels: the author is "their humble jackall, too busy in providing food for them, to have time for considering whether they swallow or reject it" (9). "The publick favour is my only lottery," Scott insists, locating himself as an object/subject to the play of a randomized audience (*Journal*, 73). This variable reader in turn encounters books presented not as ideas, or even as stories, but as objects. *Waverley* is ostentatiously denied any generic category in Scott's introduction, and recast in his postscript as the equivalent of fishing tackle (*Waverley*, 3-4; "General Preface," xvii). Volumes are so many pages, wont to be used for scouring pots by over-enthusiastic cook maids (*Nigel*, 11-12). Abbotsford, in this context, is no expensive stately home, but an *Antiquary*-like hodge-podge of objects in lieu of a self. And the assemblage that tumbles together as "Walter Scott" allows no reductive triangulation of authorial identity.

So what did it mean when Scott eventually took his works upon himself? Was this a closing down into limited selfhood and toward the conventional death of the author – placed in time and according to literary and geriatric criticism? In February 1826, after the financial crash that required his writings to be declared as property and assessed according to monetary value, Scott was outed as the Author of *Waverley*. At the Theatrical Fund dinner, he accepted the role in terms that seem oddly absolute: "He meant, when he said that he was the author, that he was the total and undivided author: [...] there was not a single word that was not derived from himself" (Vedder 1997, 38). To his journal he declared: "I am firmly and resolutely determined that I will tilt under my own cognizance" (*Journal*, 244). Yet, by this time there were so many Scotts in circulation, as a thing and in things such as books and houses, that

belated insistence on the body of the author only foregrounds an objectification that had long escaped any individual or temporally located definition of the self. If we exist in the body, and cannot exist outside the body, thus only "ex-isting" and only at the time we cease to be, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, Scott ostentatiously was and was not in numerous bodies, partial and whole, among which the Scott at the Theatrical Fund dinner was simply one more (Nancy 2008, 15). Ian Duncan suggests in *Scott's Shadow* that Scott's fiction so haunted his literary successors because it stood as "inexhaustible surplus, cultural production as the sublime, redemptive double of an industrial political economy" (Duncan 2007, 284). But the stories were only part of the surplus that betokened Walter Scott. Woodward ponders whether "the 'essence' of a memory of someone would [...] have to be that which we could *not* remember, never having known it" (Woodward 1991, 119). A being thus dispersed into many simultaneously different yet overlapping things cannot be avoided, but cannot be remembered in place or contained in time.

Can such being yet come to an end? Scott himself deploys a discourse of ending. In his journal, increasingly he wishes for death: "when the awakenings came a strong feeling how well I could dispense with it for once and for ever" (*sic*, *Journal*, 78). But this discourse, too, was of long standing. If Freud looked to death as an event to conceal the fact of aging, Scott had drawn lastness out over so many years, the discourse itself had aged. To give just a few examples: in Scott's first long poem the minstrel is already "the last of all the bards" (*Lay*, "Introduction," line 7); Scott ended as a poet even as he began as a novelist; *The Antiquary* supposedly "[completed] a series of fictitious narratives" (*Antiquary*, "Advertisement" [3]). During Scott's latter years this discourse accumulates: *Castle Dangerous* went under the imprint "Tales of My Landlord, Fourth and Last Series;" its postscript insists the novel is "the latest tale which it will probably be the lot of the present author to submit to the consideration of the gentle reader;" the belated introductory address purveys it as the last manuscript of Peter Pattieson; and the author steps from behind his personae to cap Jedediah Cleishbotham's account of Cervantes's last days with a statement about his last voyage and his own impending death (*Castle Dangerous*, 193, 189, 195, 207-208). The novel vies for last place with *Count Robert of Paris*, *The Siege of Malta*, and *Bizarro*, each of which Scott determines as his last (*Count Robert*, 361; and as an example: Cadell to Scott 15 December 1830, NLS MS3915 f 172-75). Scott insisted upon lastness so much, in fact, that this discourse trumped criticism in the novel's reviews: *The Border Magazine* runs on: "In all human probability, these Tales of my Landlord are not only the last of the series, but the finale of the whole" (Anon. 1831a, 90-91); the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* began by declaring Scott's ending: "THE LAST! The last echo of the last Bard's harp – the farewell prophecy of the silenced oracle" (Anon. 1831b, 317).

Did Scott know what he was doing? His epilogue to *Count Robert* characterizes the novel "as being very probably the last work of fiction in which [I] may be tempted to engage," but he jokes that "[this] assertion has been, for different reasons, so often solemnly made – and reiterated – and again departed from [... I have] very little credence to expect from the mildest of critics" (*Count Robert*, 361). Against the discourse of decline, Scott had instantiated a discourse of authenticity at the point of death – a finishing that escapes an ending. Thus even *The Centenary Memorial of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, which we might imagine able to use its long view to force into perspective one Sir Walter, still resounds with this language of many lastnesses: con-

tributors to Charles Stewart Montgomerie Lockhart's volume obsessively remember Scott's last days, his last words, his last works. That is, Scott's being emanates from the moment in which he insisted on himself as no longer a person but, transmuted by death, about to be a thing. From early in his writing, and long after his decease, Scott was always and already damaged, dispersed, belated, fractured, irreducible – and thus ever being past the ending.

Bruno Latour ponders how matters of fact require, in order to exist, to figure as matters of concern (Brown 2004, 172). Scott, by embracing his objectification, fragmenting it and multiplying it, produced himself, in Latour's terms, as "a bewildering variety of matters of concern" for those working to maintain their own being in the world. Thus, even as Scott died, Lockhart and Cadell struggled to stop his persistence as story and his disruption of their own more romanticized and commercial tale. When James Hogg and William Laidlaw verged to publication with their biographies, which would further multiply and fragment Sir Walter, Scott's heirs degraded the one and feared that the other would "do us [the *Life*] an unwitting injury" (see Mack's introduction to *Anecdotes*, and Major Walter Scott to Cadell, 29 July 1833, NLS MS21003 f 164-165). But lives swarmed upon them. The objectification embraced by the author only increased, and Sir Walter persisted as a disturbing thing, such that even Lockhart's seven volume *Life* and Carlyle's devastating critique of it stand only as symptoms of a containment, a closing down of Scott into the life before death, that they cannot achieve.

Woodward suggests that one of the most unsettling phenomena of aging is that bodies lose their coherence; but at the same time in psychic space they can lose their boundaries (Woodward 1991, 100). "[As] we move toward the limits of old age – and that limit is death – "she says, "we move toward the limits of representation" (194). Scott demonstrated that the limit of representation as a self, the decline into the thing that is produced at the moment of death, also constitutes the horizon of opportunity for being hereafter. Scott, despite Heidegger, operates as authenticity *beyond* death.

One final story tells the tale for Scott and for that other preeminent author, already outdistanced by time and the tomb, William Shakespeare. At the moment when Scott shockingly falls, instantaneously transmogrified into that degraded object, the failed Author of Waverley, he is simultaneously transmuted into a transcendent matter of concern: "Funny thing at the theatre," he writes:

Among the discourse in *High Life below Stairs* one of the Ladies' ladies asks who wrote Shakespeare. One says "Ben Johnson" [*sic*] another "Finis." "No" said [another player], "it is Sir Walter Scott; he confessd it at a publick meeting the other day." (*Journal*, 322)

Rumors of Scott's death, it seems, have always been "greatly exaggerated."⁹

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⁹ Mark Twain responded to his premature obituary, "The report of my death was an exaggeration" (Anon. 1897) – popularly misquoted as in the text.

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