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Illustration, Historicism, and Travel: The Legacy of Sir Walter Scott

Where’s the Poet? show him! show him!
John Keats

In this final chapter, I take up again the story of long Romanticism, tracing a neglected line of literary history from the eighteenth century to the Victorian period. The chapter delineates generative interactions between travel, antiquarian texts, and book illustrations. The central figure in this story is Walter Scott, who inspired many of the nineteenth century’s most groundbreaking illustration projects. To engage with Scott-inspired illustration requires stretching this account beyond Scott’s death, beyond even the mid-century moment of Brown, Hawthorne, and Stowe, in order to highlight the persistence of necromanticism in the age of photography.

Scott seems the inevitable focus here for several reasons. First, his fictions, widely read across the Anglophone world throughout the nineteenth century, bridged the supposed Romantic-Victorian and Atlantic divides: for much of the century, no self-respecting American tourist in Britain would miss Walter Scott sites. More to the point, Scott’s writings inspired tourism on an unprecedented scale.\(^1\) In life, Scott participated in and promoted literary tourism, and in death, he continued to haunt it, resting at the center of a massive web of tourism-promoting texts. Together, these now-obscure texts constitute an essential archive for tracing the reconfigurations of necromanticism though time.

Furthermore, the case of Scott refocuses several facts about tourism and literary culture. First, within the purview of literary tourism, the idea and image of “text” seem continually to expand. The scholar has to account for imaginative texts that ignite tourists’ desire, travel texts that guide and record their responses, and countless peripheral artifacts,
ranging from illustrated tourist guides to engravings of authors’ homes. Beyond such texts, the scholar must account for tourist sites themselves—“texts” subject to recognizable reading practices—and for the texts known as authors, which tourists are most keen to decipher and add to their experiential repertoires. As Watson observes, literary tourism gives a sharp point to Derrida’s pronouncement that there is “nothing outside the text” (6). At the same time, literary tourism reveals how strongly readers wish to locate something outside of text, to prove that something substantial underwrites it. Tourism materializes the quest for the fundamental signified, for presence, making it uniquely visible, determined, and dramatic.

Second, we find that intimate relationships become established between texts and travel performances; indeed, we see that travel performances take on the formal personality of texts that inspire them. Texts and travel do not merely energize one another, they mirror each other, in part because tourism finds templates in literary form (and vice versa). Examples abound: Thomas Gray’s *Elegy*, while not speaking of tourism, nevertheless prompts readers to visit graveyards, adopt the persona of Gray’s speaker, and reenact his meditations; Washington Irving’s sketches invite readers to identify with a culture tourist who both celebrates and authorizes imitation; Walter Scott’s Waverley novels feature peripatetic heroes, so that readers become armchair travelers as they follow the characters’ movements and then, after reading, wish to recreate their mental journeys in actual travel. “Quotation,” which I have highlighted especially in the work of American writer-tourists, actually appears in all the texts of literary tourism, as tourists and authors recall and imitate each other. The rule that literature and travel model each other seems to hold in nearly every case (Watson 12). However, certain texts model tourism in a particularly scholarly way. In unique ways, such texts encourage readers to seek out the objects, places, and people they depict, nourishing tourism’s blend of ideal and material quests. These texts may be fictional, locodescriptive, antiquarian, biographical, or some combination of these. In all cases, however, the biographical element remains crucial: texts route tourism through authors, through the dead. As the nineteenth century progressed, new tools and forms emerged for doing such work. The Author of Waverley, marketing himself as a biographical mystery, a purveyor of footnoted fictions, and an antiquarian tourist in his own right, arguably did more than any other author to drive such developments.

One of the long Romantic period’s distinctive paraliterary genres became closely associated with Walter Scott, his fictions, and tourism: the