

Historical realism and Romantic imagination in Scott's "Quentin Durward"

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I

Introduction

A historian is usually concerned with real events that truly happened in the past and, therefore, his writings should present a realistic picture of past events as they had truly happened. A historical romancer, on the other hand, is basically committed to being less realistic and more imaginative in presenting his point of view of life and of past events. The combination of truth and imagination results in presenting historical events in romantic settings, so as to use these events not only as a means towards an end but as an end itself. Such an idea is clearly reflected in Sir Walter Scott's historical romance, *Quentin Durward* (1823). He combines in this novel his historical abilities in a very beautiful romantic setting which is at the heart of the Romantic Movement, France.

Sir Walter Scott was the inventor of the Modern historical novel, who laid out the bases of writing historical novels. His love for this kind of literature stems from his upbringing which characterized many of his work. He read classical writings and plenty amount of work that included chivalric romances, poems, history and travel books. All these combinations had helped him to shape many of his novels including his popular European novel *Quentin Durward*.

This paper deals with how Scott combines a real historical picture of the past with an imaginative romantic setting. Scott is known to be both a historical literary writer and a romancer that exhibits certain features of the Romantic Movement. He still shared many features with great romantic writers such as William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge. With Wordsworth, Scott had a tendency for using picturesque and wild landscape. Scott himself admits this fact in an autobiographical note in one of his novels saying:

My principal object in these excursions was the pleasure of seeing romantic scenery, or what afforded me at least equal pleasure, the places which had been distinguished by the remarkable historical events. The delight with which I regarded the former, of course had general approbation, but I often found it to procure sympathy with the interest I felt in the latter.¹

¹ Robin Mayhead, *Profile in Literature: Walter Scott* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968) p.6.

Scott also shared with Coleridge the taste for supernatural elements as we shall see in the character of King Louis XI in *Quentin Durward*. His love for old buildings, antique things and Gothic elements reveals his sense of romance in his writings. But what Scott was writing in the late 18th century was much different from his English contemporary writers. His passionate interest in history and in romance reflects more the spirit of the European Romantic Movement than the English that is why his popularity in Europe was greater than his country. Most of his novels were set in a European setting that reflected the social, economic and political background of the country. But his most obvious influences are his use of the romantic imagination which gave him a wide range of space to present his ideas.

Scott aimed in his writing to teach virtue through the blend of real historical events and romance, combined together in a way that makes his characters move in a real historical context and sometimes in passions for their own sakes as will be shown in the characters of King Louis XI and Quentin. He presents through his novels a new kind of romantic interest in the past, and a new kind of response to the historical process. His mind is more concerned with trying to find out why and how society had reached to its circumstances the historical period he was trying to write about.² These concerns had their impact on Scott since he was born in the second generation of Scotsmen who were born in a society that had already banished tribal and feudal system. Thus, he was torn between the old way of life which was fading away with all its beliefs and customs, and the new way of life which brought prosperity to the middle classes.

The changes had created a kind of nostalgia for the past and thus, Scott began to write according to what society at that time needed to read. He presented characters from both the new and the old orders of life; men and women whom he personally knew and others whom he had read and heard about.³

II

In writing *Quentin Durward*, Scott based his picture of France basically from history books and few visits to France. Even then the French people had received him with great admiration and respect. The story contains a very impressive rendering of historical conflict. The hero, Quentin, plays a vital role in bringing out the picture of France and the French society at the time of King Louis XI even though he was originally a Scotsman who had fled from his native country. This, of course, makes him a neutral hero that plays a positive role in the development of the story.

The story renders the journey of a Scotsman who escapes from his country to live in exile in France. During his journey he encounters King Louis XI who

² Angus and Jennie Calder, *Literary Critiques: Scott*, (Arco literary critiques: New York, 1971)pp.68-69

³ *Ibid*, p22.

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is disguised as a merchant and calls himself Maitre Pierre. Mistaking Quentin for a Bohemian spy, the king allows Quentin to cross over with him.

Admiring his courage, King Louis employs Quentin on a mission to escort Countess Isabelle of Croye, who has run away from Charles, Duke of Burgundy, to seek the safety of Bishop of Liege. Throughout the journey, Quentin manages to escape a plot set by the king himself to take Isabelle to the hands of William de la Mark, the despicable Wild Boar of the Ardennes. Quentin rescues Isabelle again after William de la Mark takes over the Castle of the Bishop of Liege. Afterwards, Quentin and Isabelle fall into the hands of Charles, Duke of Burgundy, who is the enemy of King Louis XI. The Duke decides to put them on trial and forces them to testify against the King for inciting the revolt of the citizens of Liege. But Louis, with his cunning acts, manages to clear himself from the charge.

Acting as a typical hero, Quentin takes part in the battle to restore order in Liege and because his uncle, Le Balafre kills William de al Mark, Quentin is given the hands of Isabelle who has already developed some feelings towards him for his courageous acts for saving her.

The basic material of this story is a mixture of both imagination and truth which is basically taken from history. Scott tries his best to be as accurate as possible, but he knows that such a novel would only be another rendering of history and thus would not be received well. Therefore, he presents a combination of characters that are either non-historical or historically neutral and sometimes even unnecessary for the purpose of molding his story.⁴

In writing the story, Scott presents two types of characters, each one embodies a certain feature of the story. The first is Quentin, who represents the romantic side of the story. His existence represents the nostalgia for the past, for heroism, and for chivalric ideals and high aspirations which are ridiculed in the story as being "moonshine in the water."⁵ This means that it stems more from the romantic imagination of the hero rather than from the realistic world of Louis's France.

Quentin's love for Isabelle is discouraged many times throughout the story because it is seen as a mere dream since she was promised to the Duke of Burgundy's friend by feudal right. In a conversation with Count Crevecoear, for instance, the Count explains to Quentin this idea when he says that, "I can allow thee, like a youth who hath listened to romances till he fancied himself a paladin, to form a pretty dream for sometime, but then must not be angry at a well-meaning friend, though he shanke thee sometimes roughly by the shoulders

⁴ Joanna Maciulewicz, "Sir Walter Scott's *licentia historica*.....the historical novel as a displaced romance," V.40 (Adam Mickiewicz : Adam Mickiewicz University press, 2004)p. 323

⁵ Sir Walter Scott, "Quentin Durward," (London: J.M. Dent & Son LTD, 1960), p82. Subsequent references within my text are to this edition.

to awake thee."(p. 317) He tries to awake him from the imaginative world that he puts himself in sometimes. Quentin constantly faces situations that put him at times in a romantic imaginative scene and then at times in a realistic situation that makes him realize the ridiculousness of his ideals, especially his hopes of marrying Isabelle. But as a romantic hero, he is determined to achieve his goal:

He thought of his love no longer as a desperate and fantastic dream, but as a high and invigorating principle, to be cherished in his bosom, although he might never propose to himself, under all the difficulties by which he was beset, to bring it to any prosperous issue. (P.320)

From his experiences, Quentin learns that even though dreams and ideals cannot give way to reality but ideals can be pursued even though they cannot be fully achieved. Quentin realizes that his love for Isabelle is more than a dream; it is a reality that is taken away from him constantly as he is separated many times from her at Leiege and Burgundy's court. But he pursues this need of love that he sets his mind on.⁶ Scott does not present Quentin as a naive imaginative romancer nor as a representative of the fulfillment of reality. Even though Quentin gains Isabelle and helps keep peace between Louis and Burgundy which fulfillment of the romantic, yet Scott does not complete this romantic image in the sense that Quentin lies to Burgundy's court for the sake of maintaining peace and for the sake of the King, therefore, compromising his moral principle of chivalry and heroism.

The second type of character is represented by King Louis XI, through which Scott presents the realistic side of the story. He characterizes him as being a selfish man, who thinks only of himself. He is also pleasure-loving, crafty when it comes to facing his own deeds and getting what he wants, merciless with his friends and enemies and superstitious. Clearly this characterization is in share contrast with those of Quentin. Scott even goes to the extent of explaining in the Introductory Chapter, the reason for selecting this historical figure, i.e. the King, "as the principal character in the romance-for it will be easily comprehended, that the little love intrigue of Quentin is only employed as the means of brining out the story." (P.10) But what Scott calls as "the little love intrigue" is in fact basic to brining balance between what is realistic and imaginative in the story.

Though Scott deviates sometimes from the historical facts surrounding King Louis, he was able to penetrate clearly into this complex character by showing some of the interior thoughts and ideas that this character holds in his mind.⁷ Mostly, Scott's portrait of him is historically realistic, especially with his ways

⁶ Jana Davis, " Sir Walter Scott and Enlightenment Theories of Imagination : Waverley and Quentin Durward," Vol.43, No. 4 (Californian :University of Californian press,1989)P.463

⁷ W .M. Parker, preface to Sir Walter Scott: Quentin Durward (London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1960)P. ix

of bluffing, bribing, flattering and joking his way out of all the difficult situations that face him. He presents him as a superstitious figure who depends highly on Martius Galeotti, the King's court astrologer who advises him on matters of utmost urgency. He, also, presents him as a new force of nationalism as apposed to feudalism which was fading in history at that period of time. King Louis is a national character since he represents France, so Scott was very careful in making this character triumph at the end, even though he uses his new forces in the utmost selfish way to achieve his goals, because his fall will definitely mean the fall of France itself.⁸

The setting of the novel can also be seen as a combination of both historical realism and romantic imagination. Scott draws the picture of the novel by looking into the medieval world which is filled with chivalry, courtly love and then recreates it with the help of romantic conventions. But at the same time, the novel represents the decline of this romantic chivalric world. In the "Introductory Chapter," Scott carefully presents both of these ideas; he talks about the Chateau at Hautlien which is an ancient castle that represents a historical Gothic element of France. His description of how it was and how it became represents the decay of chivalry. This breakdown of this romantic code is paralleled by the breakdown of the structure of society upon which is built. At the beginning of the novel, chivalry is being replaced by greed and political cunning represented by many characters such as Louis, while feudalism is being competed by capitalism as the city becomes the center for the king to collect all the wealth of the State.⁹

The condition that the society lived at that time is also a historical truth. It was a time that represented the repression of feudalism which can be seen in Scott's explanation of Isabelle of Coye's case. This young woman has been promised to the Duke of Burgundy's friend, the Italian Campo-basso, by the feudal right. In this system, no woman in a certain feudal lord's control has the ability to marry without the consent of the feudal lord, while women who came from a special ranking class were assigned dowries and married according to some political advantage for the lord.¹⁰ But within all these efforts made by both Louis and the Duke of Burgundy to take Isabelle, Scott's romantic touch is revealed when Quentin tries to win her heart.

The manners of the characters that is presented also represents the manners or features of France at the time of Louis XI. Scott's main is Philip de Comines, the great historian of France who belonged to the court of Charles, Duke of Burgundy. Through this historian, Scott shows that the conditions at that time did not allow humanity to survive without being stained by evil. As the character

⁸ William Harmon and Hugh Holman, A handbook to Literature (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003) PP.207-208.

⁹ Walter Allen, The English Novel: A short critical history (London: Penguin Books, 1976) P.125.

¹⁰ Angus and Jenni Calder, P.137.

of Quentin may be seen in everyman he encounters so does the character of Louis, who is unlike Quentin, a mystery from the beginning to the end. Also, Crevecoeur, a count from the court of Charles, is a shrewd, courageous and true leader; he too is convincingly drawn into such evil. So, every character in this story is drawn according to his age, place in society, and native intelligence.

As it seems, Scott's realistic history completes his romance through his presentation of "Highland individualism and Lowland law-abiding attitudes, or the tension in his work between distributive and restraining forces."¹¹

III

Conclusion

Quentin Durward is a historical novel that combines both realism and romantic imagination. It is a historical realism in the sense that Scott mentions various historical incidents that actually happened in the history of France. He mentions the struggle between King Louis XI and Charles the Bold and the raiding of William de La Marck and the citizens of Liege because it represents for him the rising of capitalism and Nationalism and the dissolve of Feudalism and chivalry. His realistic portrait of Louis XI and his cunning acts is also another important feature of realistic history.

On the other hand, the novel also represents the nostalgia for the past, a past that is filled with chivalry, courtly love, and heroism, all which reflect Scott's tendency for using romantic features and settings. The character of Quentin combines both realism and imagination but sometimes it seems that he leans more on being imaginative in his acts than realistic.

Using France as a location for his story is a typical romantic setting. France has always been seen as the symbol of love and romance, its natural landscape and surroundings filled with old building give it a certain romantic element and has been an inspiration for many writers including Scott.

Though Scott uses medieval elements, which becomes part of the imaginative world that he tries to create within the chaotic world that already exists in the story; he mentions the gradual decay of these elements which leaves him only with facts of history.

¹¹ Boris Ford, ed. *From Dickens to Hardy: the pelican Guide to English Literature*, V.6 (London: penguin Books, 1958) P.8.

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الواقعية التاريخية والخيال الرومانسي في روايه " كونتن

دارود " ل ولتر سكوت

م . م . مها كاظم كريم

جامعة بغداد - كلية اللغات

ان مايميز المؤرخ عن الكاتب الرومانسي هو قدرة الاول على تقديم صورة واقعية للاحداث وقعت في الماضي ي حين امتلاك لآخرالخيال الذي يفسح له المجال لسبر اغوار عوالم جديدة تبعد كل البعد عن كل ماهو واقعي ملموس في الوقت الذي تجتمع فيه عناصر الخيال مع الحقيقة ليشكلان مزيجاً ادبياً هدفه المتعة والفائدة يصبح الاثنان كائنان يكملان احدهما الاخر باطارادبي شمولي رصين لايتبع فكر واحدة ولايستغني عن الاخر وهذا هو بعينه الثراء الادبي، والتر سكوت الكاتب الانكليزي الشهير نجح في جمع وتقديم مزيج ادبي يتناغم فيه الواقع مع الخيال ليقدمان تحفة ادبية من تحفه الرائعة الا وهي رواية (كونتون دارود)(١٨٢٣) ليعتلي بذلك عرش الرواية التاريخية المعاصرة.

يتناول البحث الحالي دراسة العناصر التاريخية التي اجتمعت في اطار رومانسي خيالي استخدمه ووظفه والتر سكوت في رواية (كونتن دارود) القائمة على حقائق تاريخية معكوسة باطار رومانسي يشكل

جزءاً بل انعكاساً قوياً للحركة الرومانسية في تلك الفترة. ألا ان هدف والتر سكوت لم يقتصر على تقديم هذا المزيج الرائع بل تعداه ليشمل وليحاول معرفة الاسباب التي ادت الى وصول مجتمعه في تلك الفترة الى ماوصل عليه. فلقد عاش الكاتب في خضم احداث متنازعة مابين الاسلوب القلبي والنظام الاقطاعي بكل ما يحمله من عقائد وافكار ومفاهيم وما بين اسلوب عصري اعاد الحياة الى الطبقات الوسطى. وقد خلق هذا التغير نوعاً من الحنين الى الماضي بكل افكاره ومفاهيمه الامر الذي عكسه الكاتب في روايته التي حاول فيها جاهداً على تلبية رغبة القارئ في تلك الفترة ،فاشخاص الرواية هم نساء ورجال حقيقيون يجسدون ادواراً حقيقية كما هو الحال مع كونتون دارود ذلك اللاجيء الاسكوتلندي الذي وجد في فرنسا ملاذاً طيباً له فنجح في تقديم فرنسا لويس الحادي عشر في ابهى واحلى صورها وحينما يلتقي بلويس الحادي عشر الذي يتكرر بزي تاجر يدعى مايتز بيير وليكون سبباً في وقوعه بغرام ايزابيل كونتسية كروي بعد ان يخلصها من دوق بيركوندي العدو للدود للويس الحادي عشر. وعلى الرغم من ان الرواية قائمة على احداث تاريخية حقيقية استطاع الكاتب تقديم نوعين من الشخصيات الاولى تتمثل بشخصية كونتن دارود الذي يمثل الجانب الرومانسي في الرواية الذي يعكس رغبة وحنين المجتمع في تلك الفترة للماضي بكل ما يحمله من قيم البطولة والشجاعة والعنفوان. اما النوع الاخر من الشخصيات تمثل بشخصية الملك لويس الحادي عشر الذي يمثل الجانب التاريخي الواقعي في الرواية والسبب وراء ادراج شخصية لويس بكل مساؤه وعيوبه وجبروته ودهائه يعود الى ان قصة الحب الرومانسيه مابين كونتن دارود وازابيل ماهي الاوسيلة تضي صيغة جمالية ادبية على الرواية وتساعد في تحقيق الهدف الاساسي من وراءها الا وهو ابراز الجانب الواقعي من القصة بطريقة مستساغة مقبولة ، ففي الوقت الذي يبتعد فيه الروائي عن الجانب الواقعي في الرواية ويغوص في سبر اغوار شخصية لويس الحادي عشر كاشفاً بذلك افكاره ومعتقداته لنجده رجلاً يؤمن بالخرافة مستهزئاً بكل ما يواجهه من مصاعب كما انه ياتي صورة لنظام وطني يناهض نظاماً اقطاعياً متداعياً ولانه جاء ممثلاً حقيقياً لفرنسا فلقد حرص الكاتب كل الحرص على ان يخرج في اخر الامر منتصراً فخوراً .وبذلك اصبحت قدرات الكاتب الرومانسية صورة مكمله للواقع التاريخي الذي تحتويه الرواية لنتمازج في تقديم تحفة لائعة من تحفه الادبية.