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Homecoming and Liminality in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*

Retour et liminalité dans Guy Mannering de Walter Scott

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Homecoming and Liminality in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*¹

“He cannot deny, that, looking round upon the dreary region, and seeing nothing but bleak fields, and naked trees, [...], he did for some time suffer melancholy to prevail upon him, and wished himself again safe at home” (I, 1: 3): Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* opens on this epigraph, a quotation from Samuel Johnson² which serves as a motto for the whole novel. The idler, the Londoner Will Marvel, feeling estranged and yearning for home, while lost in the wilder and more desolate county of Devonshire, mirrors most of the characters of Scott's fiction. Whether a tourist, like the Englishman Guy Mannering visiting the north of England and extending his “tour into the adjacent frontier of the sister country” (I, 1: 3), or an outcast, like the orphan Brown and the gypsy Meg Merrilies, the exile is temporarily or permanently away from his home—epitomized by a house or a family—or even his homeland. Either internal or external, either involuntary as the result of abduction, expulsion, and banishment,³ or, in a more figurative sense, self-imposed and prompted by business or curiosity, the exilic journey is accompanied by a feeling of disorientation and homesickness, a “crippling sorrow of estrangement”,⁴ especially among the Scots in an age marked by the “consolidating of national consciousness”.⁵ Both displaced and out of place, the exile is an eccentric⁶ outsider leading his decentred life outside habitual order,⁷ and longing to return home.

1. All quotes from Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering, or the Astrologer* are taken from the Edinburgh UP 1999 version, edited by P. D. Garside.

2. S. Johnson, “The Idler”, No. 49 (Saturday, 24 March 1759), *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 2., W. J. Bate and others (ed.), New Haven, Yale UP, 1963, p. 154.

3. “Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider.” (E. Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 181.) Exile is literally the state of being forced to leave one's own country and live in another, especially for political purposes or as a punishment.

4. E. Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p. 173.

5. A. Lincoln, “Walter Scott and the Birth of Nation”, in *Romanticism*, vol. 8, April 2002, p. 3.

6. “eccentric” from Greek *ekkentros*, meaning “out of the centre”.

7. “Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” (Said, p. 186).

Whereas the first pages of *Guy Mannering* deal with emigrations, i.e. outward movements away from home, most of the novel focuses on the counter-journey, i.e. the return home. Homecoming is a concept based on a dynamic motion backward to a former home. No longer homeless outcasts and not yet home owners, homecomers are thus in an in-between, liminal⁸ state, standing at the threshold between home and abroad. Their liminality is symbolized by their transitional position as guests taking refuge at hospitable landlords' before settling back home as their own landowners: "Hospitality [...] identifies the hero as guest in preparation for his own part as host, as landlord; it marks the transition between exile and home."⁹ The young English artist Dudley, the Scottish farmer Dandie Dinmont, and even the gypsy Meg Merrilies offer Brown, alias Henry Bertram, both assistance and lodging on his return home.

If Walter Scott chooses to centre his plot on the return rather than the exile, it is owing to the much more liminal, and therefore problematic, status of homecomers: "*Guy Mannering* emphasizes returning populations [...]. Though their leaving and the time of their exile might be an occasion for sentiments of loss and sadness, Scott's novel turns to focus on their *return*, precluding, or at least complicating, such nostalgia."¹⁰ Indeed, the feeling of nostalgia does not necessarily fade away with homecoming as both concepts are semantically linked by the Greek word *nostos*¹¹; hence the complicated mixed feelings of achievement and longing, of restitution and deprivation experienced by homecomers. Is the return home a restoration, a re-establishment, or even an improvement after the loss and the feeling of regression brought about by the exile? The novel thus raises the question of the relationship between home and abroad, and more largely between the centre and the periphery, by focusing on the liminal concept of homecoming.

Guy Mannering presents different types of homecomers driven by a search for a home and a self. These homeward-bound exiles inhabit a liminal space—at the margin of society and at the edge of the country—and a liminal time between linear and cyclical chronology. And yet, returning home does not lead to homecoming. The latter can only take place within the literary home created by the author.

8. "liminality" from Latin *limen*, meaning threshold.

9. I. Duncan, *Modern Romance and the Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1992, p. 120.

10. A. Bardsley, "In and Around the Borders of the Nation in Scott's *Guy Mannering*", in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2002, p. 399.

11. *Nostos* is the Greek word for homecoming; it expresses a yearning for a place, while *nostalgia* (from Greek *nostos* + *algos* meaning pain, grief, distress) suggests a longing for the past. The concept of homecoming combines these two spatial and temporal notions, with home being a place in time.

Homecomers in Transit through Spatial and Temporal Liminalities

The homeward-bound displaced converging towards one home, the Ellangowan property

Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* is peopled with homeward-bound exiles, be they individuals or communities, be they rightful or self-proclaimed home owners. Henry Bertram, whose homecoming is at the heart of the diegesis, is early depicted as "a little wanderer" (I, 8: 40; later "a harassed wanderer" [III, 1: 243]) enjoying adventurous rambles around the family home of Ellangowan. As Deborah Epstein Nord has commented: "The miniature exiles and returns of his earliest childhood adventures are replayed in the exile abroad and return to the Scotland of his adulthood."¹² Henry is indeed abducted by a German smuggler and carried away from his Scottish home and homeland ("I left Scotland, which is my native country" [III, 2: 247]) to the foreign country of Holland, and then India. Even though he feels a very instinctive, sentimental, and almost patriotic attachment to Scotland,¹³ his homecoming is unintentional and directly linked to his romance with Julia Mannering whom he follows up north to Scotland after she has settled down at Woodbourne with her father, Colonel Guy Mannering. Like Homer's Odysseus, the exiled Henry longs to return home to his Penelope-like Julia after his partaking, not in the Trojan War but, in the Indian war fought to establish an imperial control over the British colony.

The gypsies are also doubly exiled from home, as they are both a Diaspora¹⁴ people, expelled from their alleged fatherland, "the land of Egypt" (II, 18: 231), and an "exiled community" (I, 8: 42) banished from their "city of refuge" (I, 7: 37) after trespassing on the "forbidden precincts" (38) of the Ellangowan property. This fault, akin to the Fall in the *Genesis*, causes the Exodus¹⁵ of these mock Israelites led by their female Moses described as "the wild chieftainess of the lawless people"

12. D. E. Nord, "A 'Mingled Race': Walter Scott's Gypsies", in *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807–1930*, New York, Columbia UP, 2006, p. 37.

13. "Despite my Dutch education, a blue hill to me is as a friend, and a roaring torrent like the sound of a domestic song that hath soothed my infancy. I never felt the impulse so strongly as in this land of lakes and mountains" (I, 21: 115).

14. "Diaspora, like exile, is a concept suggesting displacement from a center. [...] *Exile* suggests pining for home; *diaspora* suggests networks among compatriots. Exile may be solitary, but diaspora is always collective." (Naficy, p. 20.)

15. For an extensive comparison between the gypsies' exodus and the biblical Exodus, see the parallels between the community's expulsion by the officers (I, 8: 41) and the destruction of the Egyptians by the exterminating angel of the Lord (*Exodus*, 12, 7-13).

(III, 16: 340). Despite their former nomadic¹⁶ habit the gypsies long to return home to Derncleugh where they had settled and erected a few huts: “They had been such long occupants, that they were considered in some degrees as proprietors of the wretched sheelings which they inhabited” (I, 7: 37). The new sedentary lifestyle of “these old settlers” (38) is attested through the lexical field of immobility, with words such as “stationary” (37) and “harboured” (37) which convey the image of a ship finally dropping her anchor at a homely port after endless voyages across the seas. The notion of stasis is further brought forward by the anaphoric repetition of the adverbial pair “still, however”: “Still, however, the gypsies made no motion to leave the spot which they had so long inhabited” (I, 7: 39); “Still, however, they showed no symptoms either of submission or of compliance” (I, 8: 41). If the adverb “still” signifies “nevertheless”, it is also endowed with the adjetival meaning of “motionless”, thus echoing the negative noun phrases referring to the gypsies’ inertia (“no motion”, “no symptoms”).

Not only individuals or communities but also nations as a whole can feel exiled from home. The 1707 Act of Union merging England and Scotland together is interpreted by many Scots as an annexation of their country governed from London. Henceforth, the Scottish people features at the margin of the new kingdom of Great Britain and feels alienated from the centers of British power.¹⁷ The Scottish history of inner-colonization and exclusion is thus replayed in the story of *Guy Mannering*: the Scots’ dispossession of their own homeland is indeed re-enacted through the dismembering of the Bertrams’ home, a “diminished property” (I, 2: 9) in which the family feel sequestered and exiled after many a reduction of their possessions through the centuries.¹⁸ The part of the invading colonizer is acted by the learned English serviceman, Colonel Guy Mannering, an expatriate “Indian Nabob” (I, 14: 81) who, after making a fortune in Eastern India, now aims to return to Ellangowan and fulfill his early self-proclaimed promise to make the Bertrams’ property his home: “How happily, thought our hero, ‘would life glide on in such a retirement! [...] Here then, and with thee, Sophia!’” (I, 4: 22), he

16. Contrary to exile, nomadism dispenses with the idea of a fixed home or a centre.

17. For the emergence of a Scottish nationalism and patriotism, see Andrew Lincoln’s article entitled “Walter Scott and the Birth of the Nation”.

18. Godfrey Bertram’s son, Dennis Bertram, “was obliged to mortgage half of the remaining moiety of his paternal property” (I, 2: 8); “The appraiser, therefore, (as the holder of a mortgage was then called,) entered upon possession, and [...] cut the family out of another monstrous cantle of their remaining property.” (I, 2: 9.) Lewis Bertram, the father of the present owner, “sold parts of the land, evacuated the old castle, where his family lived [...] [and] pulling down part of these venerable ruins, he built a narrow house [...] which was the New Place of Ellangowan” (I, 2: 9).

daringly declares. His feeling of belonging is repeatedly hinted at in the narrative: “It may seem strange, that Mannering was so much attached to a spot which he had seen only once, and that for a short time, in early life” (I, 19: 102), or “he felt a mysterious desire to call the terrace his own” (I, 19: 102). If home can feel outlandish, abroad can also feel like home. Therefore, Walter Scott’s novel deals with three joined stories of homecoming, all converging towards the same home, that is to say the Ellangowan property.

Margin and Marginality: From the Periphery to the Centre

While trying to return home, the homeward-bound displaced are in transit, living in a grey area in between two homes. They are marginals confined to the margin of society and the outskirts of the country. “[M]uch estranged from general society” (I, 2: 12), the Ellangowan family stands in between two social castes. No longer part of the landed gentry after his financial difficulties and not yet part of the yeoman class, Godefroy Bertram is a “gentleman farmer”: “These occupations encroached, in [...] [the lairds’] opinion, upon the article of Ellangowan’s gentry, and he found it necessary gradually to estrange himself from their society, and sink into what was then a very ambiguous character, the gentleman farmer” (I, 2: 9–10). The class title reflects his liminal status as the compound noun is written in a spaced form which brings together the two conflicting nouns “gentleman” and “farmer” without connecting them.

Another inter-class character, Gilbert Glossin is a parvenu, a member of the minority *nouveaux riches* discriminated against by the “Old Money” sects of society for lack of historical and genealogical prestige:

[H]e was excluded from the society of the gentry of the country, to whose rank he conceived he had raised himself. He was not admitted to their clubs, and at meetings of a public nature found himself thwarted and looked upon with coldness and contempt. Both principle and prejudice co-operated in creating this dislike; for the gentlemen of the county despised him for the lowness of his birth, while they hated him for the means by which he had raised his fortune. (II, 11: 171)

Socially excluded from the gentry, this upstart is also scorned by the working class who deprive him of his home by refusing to acknowledge his new territorial appellation of Ellangowan after his purchase of the property: “With the common people his reputation stood still worse. They would neither yield him the territorial appellation of Ellangowan, nor the usual compliment of *Mr* Glossin;—with them he was bare Glossin” (171).

The most marginalised characters belong to the lowest order of the working castes; they are vagabonds, drifters and criminals. Branded as “the *Parias of Scotland*” (I, 7: 37), the gypsies are both outcasts and outlaws. Meg Merrilies is altogether a “[h]arlot, thief, witch, and gypsey” (I, 3: 15), which sets her four times as much aside from society. Her exotic and iconic turban (“a large piece of red cotton cloth rolled about her head in the form of a turban” [I, 8: 43]) casts her as both out of place and out of time in Enlightened Scotland: “the turban signifies being past one’s prime and out of place, if not out of fashion.”¹⁹ Neither man, nor fully woman with her gigantic size and her “masculine stature” (II, 2: 123), neither native, nor foreign with her outfit composed of both national and Eastern²⁰ features, she is the epitome of the liminal character.

Socially but also geographically excluded, the exiles find shelter on the fringe of a territory or on the periphery of a country. They live in limbo, either in desert wastelands or on the wild sea, like the permanent exile, the Dutch contraband trader Dick Hattaraick. The Waste of Cumberland, that English barren stretch of land, that moorish void running up to the border with Scotland, shelters many smugglers, vagrants, and criminals, who make this wild country their home as illustrated by the two armed ruffians’ violent attack on Dandie Dinmont (125). Henry Bertram himself falls victim to a gang of “mendicant strollers” (II, 7: 148) as he crosses the Scottish Borders on his way home to Ellangowan: “the thieves shared his property”, a “portemanteau contain[ing] various articles of apparel, a pair of pistols, a leathern case with a few papers and some money, &c. &c.” (150). Doubly deprived of his identity after the theft, the young outcast hides in the Marches and merges with the blank snow-white landscape around him. Hunted down as an outlaw after injuring Charles Hazelwood he first undertakes to flee to some peripheral countries such as “Ireland or the Isle of Man” (II, 10: 170), before resolving “to escape for the present to the neighbouring coast of England, and to remain concealed there” (III, 1: 237). His crossing and re-crossing of the Solway Firth, a geographical threshold between the two adjacent countries, symbolize the passage from immature youthfulness to unabashed manhood. Too impulsive and vindictive to come home, Henry must first come to term with himself before he can acknowledge his name, accept his lineage, and claim the Ellangowan property as his home. Living on

19. J. Lewin, “Legends of Rebecca: Ivanhoe, Dynamic Identification, and the Portraits of Rebecca Gatz”, in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues*, vol. 10, September 2005, p. 189.

20. She was “[e]quipt in a habit which mixed the national dress of the Scottish common people with something of an eastern costume” (I, 4: 23).

the margin, at the periphery of both the society and the country, home-comers are thus driven by a centripetal force homeward. They move from the periphery to the centre, but come home through “trap-doors and back-doors” (I, 21: 112) as Henry metaphorically puts it.

A Liminal Time Caught between Linearity and Circularity

If homeward-bound exiles live in a liminal space, they also live in a liminal time caught between past and future. The time-flow of the homecoming story is frequently broken up by a shift between fortune-telling, i.e. journeys into a predicted but uncertain future, and anamnesis, i.e. returns to a fixed and homely past. The first few chapters are forward-looking and mostly dedicated to foretelling as the fortune-teller and the astrologer use their occult powers to uncover the destiny of the Laird of Ellangowan's first-born. Spinning a thread and singing incantations, the prophetess Meg Merrilie measures up the loops wound between her forefinger and thumb to predict Henry Bertram's future, while Guy Mannering resorts to his “imaginary science” (I, 4: 20) and studies the position of the main planets to “calculate [...] [the boy's] nativity according to the rule of the Triplicities, as recommended by Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Diocles, and Avicenna” (I, 3: 16). Both predict three misfortunes and the “horoscope” (I, 4: 21) proves right.

The narrative, exiled from its chronological sequence, is left oscillating between its natural course forward and its desperate attempt at turning back time to replay the scene of the Fall and twist the tragic ending. The catastrophic turn of events of volume I, chapter 9 brings the diegesis to a climax and freezes it; hence the recurring allusions to the past scene of Henry's disappearance. This event of olden days keeps looming back throughout the narrative to haunt the characters: Glossin is so tormented by the return of Henry Bertram that at night his mind is assailed by a “mental phantasmagoria” (II, 12: 183) in which the heir is “approaching to expel him from the mansion-house of his fathers” (183). The homely past is also constantly revived through Henry's blurred memories of his youth. The anamnesic process is released by his encounter with the gypsy (II, 1: 123) and above all by his return visit to Ellangowan from volume III onwards. Henry's homecoming is at once intimated by the narrator's renaming of his main character: “Brown, (whom, since he has set foot upon the property of his fathers, we shall hereafter call by his father's name of Bertram)” (III, 2: 243). The recovery of his family name marks the first implacable step towards the restoration of his family home. The confrontation between the returning heir and the new *de facto* landlord emphasizes Henry's symbolic repossession of the Ellangowan

property before its legal restitution in volume III, chapter 19. Henry gains ground both literally, by stepping onto the property of his ancestors, and metaphorically, through his gradual recollection of the past. Conversely, Glossin retreats both physically, by “staggering back two or three paces” (III, 2: 245) when encountering Henry, and verbally, by the very short, vague (“extremely cautious in his replies”; “suppressing for obvious reasons the more familiar sound of Bertram”; “evasive answer”; “do not exactly know”; “something of that kind”; “only answered by a nod”) and hesitating replies (“N—n—no—not ours”; “—mine is—mine is—”; “compressed muttering”) which he makes to Henry’s volley of questions:

Glossing [was] [...] speaking as if his utmost efforts were unable to unseal his lips beyond the width of a quarter of an inch, so that his whole utterance was a kind of compressed muttering, very different from the round bold bullying voice with which he usually spoke. Indeed, his appearance and demeanour during all this conversation seemed to diminish even his strength and stature, so that he withered as it were into the shadow of himself, now advancing one foot, now the other, now stooping and wriggling his shoulders, now fumbling with the buttons of his waistcoat, now clasping his hands together—in short, he was the picture of a mean-spirited, shuffling rascal in the very agonies of detection. (III, 2: 247)

Deprived of a motto (“mine is—”) and his name questioned (“Glossin—Glossin?”), the upstart is actually dispossessed of Ellangowan in this very scene. His gradual fading away (“diminish”; “withered”; “shadow of himself”) contrasts with Henry’s progressive ascendancy and self-assertion. To the closed questions—“your name is Brown?” and “Vanbeest Brown?”—which Glossin puts to Henry, the latter does not reply in the affirmative but only answers with counter-questions—“And what of that, sir?”—as if he did not fully acknowledge the assumed name of Brown as his own any longer. His search for a self comes to an end when the faded black and white picture of the past is eventually coloured in by his final hunt in the caves of Ellangowan:

The scene, independent of the peculiar moral interest and personal danger which attended it, had, from the *effect of the light and shade* on the uncommon objects which it exhibited, an appearance emphatically dismal. The *light* in the fire-grate was the dark-red glare of charcoal in a state of ignition, relieved from time to time by a *transient flame of a more vivid or duskier light*, as the fuel with which Dirk Hatteraick fed his fire was better or worse fitted for his purpose. Now a *dark cloud* of stifling smoke rose up to the roof of the cavern, and then *lighted* into a reluctant and sullen *blaze*, which flashed wavering up the pillar of smoke, and was suddenly rendered *brighter* and *more lively* by some drier fuel, or perhaps some splintered fir-timber, which at once converted

the smoke into flame. By such fitful irradiation *they could see*, more or less distinctly, the form of Hatteraick, whose savage and rugged cast of features, now rendered yet more ferocious by the circumstances of his situation and the deep gloom of his mind, assorted well with the rugged and broken vault, which rose in a rude arch over and around him. (III, 15: 332, my italics.)

The red glow flaming up the black and white hues serves as a metaphor of Henry's homecoming.

Besides, Scott often sets the scenes of his novel between light and darkness, so that the most meaningful episodes take place at twilight, just at the equipoise between sunset and sunrise: Ellangowan is first presented “an hour after midnight” (I, 3: 18). Henry’s journey homeward to Scotland happens at night (“spending the whole night upon the firth” [III, 1: 241]), while the scene preceding his return home, the attack on the jail of Portanferry where he is kept prisoner, occurs “at the hour of midnight” (III, 9: 293). If homecomers evolve in a chronological time caught between past and future, day and night, they also evolve in a cyclical time as shown in the myth of the Eternal return (Eliade).

After exiling their tenants from the Ellangowan property the Bertrams are then, in turn, expelled from their home by Gilbert Glossin (“the last of their descendants [...] expelled, a ruined wanderer, from his possessions!” [I, 13: 73]), who is subsequently dispossessed of his newly-acquired home. The last scene of the novel mirrors the first one; the ending meets the beginning; the triple exile from the Ellangowan home leads to a triple return to the property. This cyclical movement is further developed by the constant reference to astronomy. The vocabulary of planetary and astral revolution permeates the narrative: Dominie Sampson is an “unexpected satellite” (I, 15: 83) revolving in “the orbit in which [...] Godefroy Bertram, Esq. J. P. must be considered as the principal luminary” (I, 6: 34), with a pun on the word “luminary” referring to a person of prominence, but also to one of the celestial bodies. This spiral motion suggests the image of the vortex, which is the movement of a flow rapidly and constantly spinning around a centre. The three movements homeward—centripetal, chronological, and above all cyclical—contribute to paving the way for a complete homecoming. And yet, even though the diegesis follows a circular pattern, it does not come full circle: the homecoming *topos* is a “recovery myth”.²¹

21. J. Wilt, *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott*, Chicago, UCP, 1985, p. 25.

A Return Narrative, or the Composition of a Literary Home

Coming Home without Homecoming

Despite Henry Bertram's re-establishment in his own home as a returned heir ("the creditors did not hesitate to recognise Bertram's right, and to surrender to him the house of his ancestors" [III, 19: 353]), there is no satisfying homecoming at the end of the novel. The Ellangowan property is fully handled by Colonel Guy Mannering, who pays for the family's former debts and "superintend certain operations which he had recommended to Bertram" (III, 19: 353). The latter's home is to be replaced by "a large and splendid house, which [...] [is] to be built on the site of the New Place of Ellangowan, in a style corresponding to the magnificence of the ruins in its vicinity" (353). Henry's passivity and effacement in the Ellangowan projects puts his homecoming into question. He is a mere "Scottish pawn"²² in the hands of an English imperialist who composes Henry's fortune ("[u]pon inspecting this paper, Colonel Mannering instantly admitted it was his own composition" [III, 18: 348]) from his birth by drawing a scheme of nativity. He is a character *in absentia* who leaves Guy Mannering in charge of ending both the Ellangowan tragedy and the novel: "the association of Brown/Bertram's approach to the land with Mannering's [...] qualifies any sense that his return home is a restoration."²³ Likewise, with Henry Bertram's legal rights to the property fully recognized, Guy Mannering's return is also challenged as their homecomings are mutually exclusive.

As for Meg Merrilies, she expires in her own bed in her half-destroyed cottage at Derncleugh: "To the Kaim o' Derncleugh—the Kaim o' Derncleugh— the spirit will not free itself o' the flesh but there" (III, 16: 336), the dying gypsy insists, while producing the key to her former home. "In death, Derncleugh is still a place of belonging, but the old relationship with the big house is never re-established",²⁴ and "there is no textual evidence that her deathbed wish for the reconstruction of Derncleugh, to make amends for earlier 'clearances' by Harry's father, is ever carried out".²⁵ At the end of the novel Henry has only "gone to plan out a cottage at Derncleugh" (353), and this textual silence makes the gypsy's home-

22. J. M. D'Arcy, *Subversive Scott: the "Waverley Novels" and Scottish Nationalism*, Reykjavik, University of Iceland, 2005, p. 83. See the link between Henry's fortune and Scotland's fate: both Ellangowan and Scotland go on being under English imperial rule despite the Scots' nationalist attempt at reclaiming their country and regaining their independence.

23. A. Bardsley, "In and Around the Borders of the Nation", p. 408.

24. J. Reed, *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality*, London, Athlone Press, 1980, p. 76.

25. J. M. D'Arcy, *Subversive Scott*, p. 82.

coming quite problematic too: “The final un-figuring of Meg would represent a betrayal more devastating in its effects than the elder Bertram’s original sin in evicting the Gypsies.”²⁶ If there are returns home, there is no homecoming in *Guy Mannering*. Indeed, home is less a place than a concept.

Home as a Utopia

If home was briefly thought to be a heterotopia²⁷ embodied by the Ellangowan property sheltering tourists, outcasts, and outlaws, it quickly appears that the Ellangowan home is only a utopia, an imaginary and indefinitely remote place: “Kippletringan was actually retreating before him in proportion to his advance” (I, 1: 5). The position of the village seems subjected to the passersby’s judgements as if it were a mere figment of their imagination:

Kippletringan was distant at first “*a gay bit*”. Then the “*gay bit*” was more accurately described, as “*aiblins three miles*”; then the “*three miles*” diminished into “*like a mile and a bittock*”; then extended themselves into “*four miles or there awa*”; and, lastly, a female voice [...] assured Guy Mannering, “It was a weary lang gait yet to Kippletringan, and unco heavy road for foot passengers.” (I, 1: 4)

This pattern of physical and psychological estrangement is constantly repeated throughout the novel. The closer to home Henry Bertram moves, the stranger and further away it seems, as if home were a mere chimera. On his first return home to Scotland, the thick layer of snow recovering the country makes the once familiar landscape look totally unfamiliar:

The scene, which we have already described in the beginning of our first volume, was now covered with snow [...]. A landscape covered with snow [...] has, both from the association of cold and barrenness, and from its comparative infrequency, a wild, strange, and desolate appearance. Objects, well known to us in their common state, have either disappeared, or are so strangely varied and disguised, that we seem gazing on an unknown world. (II, 12: 184)

The strange blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar conjures up the Freudian concept of the “uncanny”, *das Unheimliche*, literally “un-home-ly”.

26. P. Garside, “Meg Merrilies and India”, in J. H. Alexander and D. Hewitt (eds), *Scott in Carnival*, Aberdeen, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993, p. 168.

27. M. Foucault, “Dits et écrits, *Des espaces autres*” (conférence au Cercle d’études architecturales, 14 March 1967), in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5 October 1984, pp. 46–9.

Ellangowan²⁸ is so barely outlined in the novel that it is even called by the very vague and indefinite name of “the Place” (I, 1: 6), while the two buildings erected on the property are respectively called “the Auld Place” and “the New Place” (I, 1: 7). Dandie Dinmont’s home is similarly named “the town”: “This was the farm-steading of Charlieshope, or, in the language of the country, ‘the town’” (II, 3: 128). Homes and homelands are so indistinct that Scotland is just a mirror image of India: the parias of Scotland, nicknamed the “Maroons of Derncleugh” (I, 8: 41), live “like wild Indians among European settlers” (I, 7: 37). Both Guy Mannering’s friend, Mr Mervyn, and Henry Bertram’s companion, Dudley, compare themselves to wild Indians: “I am as free as a wild Indian” (I, 21: 115), the artist claims.

Neither here nor there, neither fully real nor utterly unreal, home is ungraspable and indefinable; it is the ultimate non place. To be able to return home the characters must first confront reality and history; hence Henry Bertram’s short visit to the historic Roman Wall (II, 1: 118) on his way back to Ellangowan. Yet, the young Scotsman fails to grasp the true meaning of the “celebrated work of antiquity” (118) and only moralizes on the grandeur of the Romans before soon “remember[ing] he was hungry” (118). This ironic punch line brings about Henry’s failure at confronting history and foretells that his return home will not be a homecoming.

A Narrative Return and a Paper Home: From Homeland to Homepage

Homecoming can only take place within the homely space of literary writing. *Guy Mannering* offers a narrative return and draws a paper home. The narrative hinges around Henry Bertram’s tentative homecoming, so that the actions preceding his return are concentrated in the first eleven chapters. The story even jumps five years (“years had rolled on, and [...] little Harry Bertram [...] now approached his fifth revolving birthday” [I, 8: 40]) and then seventeen years forward to accelerate the pace of the narration: “Our narrative is now about to make a large stride, and omit a space of nearly seventeen years [...]. The gap is a wide one [...]” (I, 11: 59). The large stride, this “chasm in our history” (59) already announced by the epigraph (“I slide / O’er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried / Of that wide gap.—” [I, 11: 59]) and heavily insisted upon in the course of the chapter (“about seventeen years after the catastrophe narrated in the last chapter” [59]), is then followed by a slow tread

28. “govan” is the Scottish generic word for daisy, which is the symbol of innocence and purity, but also of transience.

forward dealing with Henry's homecoming. The decelerated narrative dedicates its remaining three hundred pages to his return, while spanning over only two months, November and December. A final acceleration occurs in the last chapters once Henry has returned home.

Besides, the narrative is constantly brought back home to the heart of the plot dealing with the characters' homecoming: "Our narrative now recalls us for a moment to the period when young Hazelwood received his wound" (III, 1: 237); "we return to the party at Woodbourne" (III, 13: 322); "we must return to Bertram and Dinmont" (III, 14: 327). These anaphoric references to narrative returns are often stressed as they appear in capital letters at the very beginning of a new chapter: "WE RETURN to Portanferry, and to Bertram and his honest-hearted friend" (III, 8: 291), or "WE MUST now return to Woodbourne, which it may be remembered we left just after the Colonel had given some directions to his confidential servants" (III, 10: 296).

Homecoming remains prospective in *Guy Mannering*, and Scott uses this interspace, the liminal space between the homecoming project and the actual but never completed homecoming, to create his own literary home. Names of homely places are erased or invented by Scott to help him build an ideal home for his story: Henry Bertram "reached [...] the village which we have called Portanferry (but which the reader will in vain seek for under that name in the county map)" (III, 1: 237). "The function of many of the actual place names are kidnapped by Scott to create, directly or obliquely, a past space in which his own manufactured toponyms find room and can be accommodated" (Nicolaisen, 141). And the characters are co-writers drawing the outline of their dream homes:

[Dominie Sampson] was suddenly summoned by Mannering to assist in calculating some proportions relating to a large and splendid house, which was to be built on the scite of the New Place of Ellangowan, in a style corresponding to the magnificence of the ruins in its vicinity. Amid the various rooms, the Dominie observed, that one of the largest was entitled THE LIBRARY; and snug and close beside was a well-proportioned chamber, entitled, MR SAMPSON'S APARTMENT. —"Prodigious, prodigious, prodigious!" shouted the enraptured Dominie. (III, 19: 353)

Dominie Sampson's home takes the shape of a paper apartment adjoined to a huge library, while Guy Mannering's home is a paper bungalow: "And do you propose to continue at Woodbourne?", the lawyer Pleydell asks. "Only till we carry these plans into effect—see, here's the plan of my Bungalow" (III, 19: 355). Drawing their environment with paper and pencils, they also defend their homes by building barricades of books (II, 10: 166).

To conclude, homecomers—be they long-time owners abducted away from their family home, wandering gypsy communities banished from their temporary home, or homeless tourists moving away from their host's sheltering home—are border-line characters living on the fringe of society, on the edge of the country, and inhabiting a liminal time between past and future, day and night, linearity and circularity. Standing at the periphery, they long to settle back home and move to the centre. Yet, the home of their choice, Ellangowan, is a remote and barely outlined property located on the Borders, at the frontier between England and Scotland. The main centripetal movement is thus threatened by an underlying centrifugal force bringing them back to the periphery. Ellangowan can only become a centre through Walter Scott's creative narrative, which puts this peripheral home at the heart of the plot, and turns it into a literary home for both the characters and the reader.

Caught in a “tale of private life”²⁹ the reader is drawn away into the very heart of the story, thus inhabiting the literary home created by the author. Made intimate with the characters' private lives and personal thoughts through their correspondence, the reader goes through the looking glass, crosses the story frame to evolve inside the novel alongside the protagonists who become his acquaintances (“the old woman, whom the readers have already recognised as their acquaintance Meg Merrilies” [II, 1: 121]), or even his friends: “our friend Dinmont” (II, 16: 216). Sharing his home with the other characters conjured up by the author's imagination, he has “the privilege of looking over [Guy Mannering's] shoulder as he writes [...]” (I, 12: 68) in the room of an inn at Kippletringan. But is it not Walter Scott's last master stroke that, whereas he aims to write a “return home” story, he ironically ends up exiling his readership to a fictitious and romanticized Scotland?

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²⁹ W. Scott, *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, D. Douglas (ed.), Edinburgh, 1894.

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