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TRAUMA AS SOCIAL VACCINE IN WALTER SCOTT'S GUY MANNERING

Keywords*: trauma; absence; loss; memory; social vaccine; Scottish Enlightenment; marginal social forces.*
Abstract*: This article looks into Scott's use of trauma as a fictional construct. Despite Scott's indebtedness to the Scottish Enlightenment Weltanschauung, his descriptions of trauma in* Guy Mannering *come incredibly close to the distinctions analyzed in trauma studies today. Very sensitive to the elements of absence and loss, Scott mirrors traumatic memory in his narrative strategy as well. Young Bertram and the readers are able to process the traumatic experience into a narrative and recover the lost 'historical' narrative only after a long process in which Bertram's 'acting out' memories trigger responses in his former community which help him recover a narrative of the traumatic events. Scott fulfills the task of the 'historian' to detraumatize events (White 87). Trauma and the element of absence have a social cause and a deeper ripple. They function as a social vaccine, strengthening the weakened social structure against radical impulses. These impulses are at loggerheads with Scott's conservative view, which unites Whig principles with a Torry perspective (Trumpener 715). Being at the center of a social imbalance caused by radical measures, trauma can be healed only with the help of the community whose immune mechanisms expel and neutralize the pathological development, of a society in which enlightened official forces cooperate with the marginal social strata and outcasts.*

I will argue that in *Guy Mannering*, Scott uses trauma fictionally as a means of restoring social order and of restoring society to its proper balance. Trauma functions as a vaccine to empower a weakened race and social structure. The intellectual weakness in the father gets cured in the son, via tribulations and trials experienced in a marginal/ liminal state in the wake of the traumatic event. However, the striking element is the description of the effects of trauma, very much resembling the trauma studies analysis today. Scott was uncannily precocious, anticipating both the morally embedded trauma of the early Victorian literature, and the refined psychological analysis a century later.

Previous centuries did not operate with the notion of trauma that we have today, however wide the disagreement on an actual definition may be. As Cathy Caruth explains, trauma is a wound of the mind, "a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (Caruth 61). "Evading the continuity of memory, trauma is marked by its very incomprehensibility, its defiance of understanding." (May 102).

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I would start from Dominick LaCapra's theoretical considerations regarding trauma, well aware of the anachronism involved in using a term coined and theorized much later in order to look back at past writings.

> Victims of trauma tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurences intrude on their present existence, for example, in flashbacks or in nightmares or in words that are compulsively repeated and that don't seem to have their ordinary meaning, because they're taking on different connotations from another situation, another place.(Capra 2014: 142-3)

Defining trauma, LaCapra distinguishes between absence and loss, wherein absence implies a non-historical past, a memory acting out which resists transformation into a narrative.

> Moreover, I would situate the type of absence in which I am especially (but not exclusively) interested on a transhistorical level, while situating loss on a historical level.' In this transhistorical sense absence is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future). By contrast, the historical past is the scene of losses that may be narrated as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future. The past is misperceived in terms of sheer absence or utter annihilation. Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant. (Capra 1999: 700)

Scott's character undergoes these symptoms to a certain extent. The cure provided by Scott uses a memory different from the normal element of loss and chronological narrative. The acting out memory, disconnected from a chronological narrative, is taken over by the community which offers help in the restoration from absence to loss (to use La Capra's words).

Young Bertram doesn't remember anything from the traumatic events he witnessed as a five years old. He could only feel an unexplainable urge to visit his native country, without any memory of his early childhood.

> Of the Scottish hills, though born among them, as I have always been assured, I have but an indistinct recollection. Indeed, my memory rather dwells upon the blank which my youthful mind experienced in gazing on the levels of the isle of Zealand, than on anything which preceded that feeling…….And by the blank which I felt while gazing around for them in vain, they must have made an indelible impression on my infant imagination.(Scott 154)

Trauma seems to have enveloped every childhood memory in the element of absence. Encountering Meg Merrilies at an inn he has no recollection of his former childhood companion.

> At present, she stood by the window of the cottage, her person drawn up so as to show to full advantage her masculine stature, and her head somewhat thrown back, that the large bonnet, with which her face was shrouded, might not interrupt her steady gaze at Brown. At every gesture he made, and every tone he uttered, she seemed to give

> an almost imperceptible start. On his part, he was surprised to find that he could not look upon this singular figure without some emotion. "Have I dreamed of such a figure?" he said to himself, "or does this wild and singular-looking woman recall to my recollection some of the strange figures I have seen in our Indian pagodas?"
> While he embarrassed himself with these discussions, and the hostess was engaged in rummaging out silver in change of half a guinea, the gipsy suddenly made two strides, and seized Brown's hand. He expected, of course, a display of her skill in palmistry, but she seemed agitated by other feelings. (Scott 164)

On arriving on his family estate, Bertram is completely unaware of his family history and cannot remember the traumatic events or anything prior to them. How to get beyond the "shock as the end of syntax"? Here nursery rhymes and folk songs help, as well as the connection with the culture of the marketplace and marginal social strata, existing on the periphery of officialdom and legality.

Young Bertram returns by instinct to his paternal castle, without any remembrance of his past there.

> And thus, unconscious as the most absolute stranger, and in circumstances which, if not destitute, were for the present highly embarrassing; without the countenance of a friend within the circle of several hundred miles; accused of a heavy crime, and, what was as bad as all the rest, being nearly penniless, did the harassed wanderer for the first time, after the interval of so many years, approach the remains of the castle, where his ancestors had exercised all but regal dominion…(Scott 309)

The impossibility of remembrance and of narrating the traumatic events had been used by Bertram's enemies in order to deceive him with regard to his past. Goslin allowed the boy to live on account of this patchwork of traumatic memories, convinced that nothing could be reconstructed from the debris. However, with Scott's heroes, the community has an important function to fulfil. Despite several attempts to prevent narrative and historical memory from getting the better of the 'acting out' part, which kept coming up via songs and rhymes, Goslin cannot prevent the healing effects and Bertram's recovery, because former ties with the community have a role to play.

> "It is odd enough," said Bertram, fixing his eye upon the arms and gateway, and partly addressing Glossin, partly as it were thinking aloud--"it is odd the tricks which our memory plays us. The remnants of an old prophecy, or song, or rhyme, of some kind or other, return to my recollection on hearing that motto--stay--it is a strange jingle of sounds:...cannot remember the last line--on some particular height-- height is the rhyme, I am sure; but I cannot hit upon the preceding word."
> "Confound your memory," muttered Glossin, "you remember by far too much of it!" (Scott 314-5)

The recovery from trauma, as unprocessed memory, begins via nursery rimes and songs which Bertram can partly remember, but disconnectedly, functioning almost as an acting out, self- performing memory. However, people in the community take up the songs and rhymes and finish the forgotten lines, triggering associations:

> "I have forgot it all now--but I remember the tune well, though I cannot guess what should at present so strongly recall it to my memory."
> He took his flageolet from his pocket, and played a simple melody. Apparently the tune awoke the corresponding associations of a damsel, who, close beside a fine spring about half-way down the descent, and which had once supplied the castle with water, was engaged in bleaching linen. She immediately took up the song:
> "Are these the Links of Forth, she said, Or are they the crooks of Dee. Or the hannie woods of Warroch Head ….
> "By heaven," said Bertram, "it is the very ballad. I must learn these words from the girl." "Confusion!" thought Glossin; "if I cannot put a stop to this, all will be out. Oh, the devil take all ballads, and ballad-makers. (Scott 316)

The society inside the novel is more hospitable to the culture of the marketplace than to the Habermasian enlightened convention and consensus. Gipsies and outsiders help strengthen the weakened race.

> Scott's strong endorsement of fortunetelling in Guy Mannering departs from earlier presentations of this traditional gypsy profession. In a Spectatorpiece Joseph Addison aligns fortunetelling with criminality and superstition, featuring a palm reader who is also a pickpocket and who takes advantage of people's propensity to indulge the irrational.(Yahav-Brown 1137)

Individual trauma is at the center of a larger social imbalance triggered by a violation of conservative principles. Old Bertram chased the gipsies off his property and countenanced drastic measures against the smugglers, breaking with the past and adopting a radical solution. His lack of acumen is the main cause which ushered a social turmoil at the center of which is young Bertram's childhood traumatic experience. Old Elangowan is considered by the narrator weak and his having succumbed to social pressure, giving way to radical solutions, is the main point of accusation. The wise and normal status quo implied, in Scott's view, a peaceful cohabitation with other ethnic groups and cooperation with liminal forces, existing on the fringes of legality. A break of the existing bonds would trigger a radical change, very much against what Scott conceived as a natural way of social growth.

> A tribe of these itinerants, to whom Meg Merrilies appertained, had long been as stationary as their habits permitted, in a glen upon the estate of Ellangowan. They had there erected a few huts, which they denominated their "city of refuge," and where, when not absent on excursions, they harboured unmolested, as the crows that roosted in the old ash-trees around them. ….Latterly, their services were of a more pacific nature. The women spun mittens for the lady, and knitted boot-hose for the laird, which were annually presented at Christmas with great form. The aged sibyls blessed the bridal bed of the laird when he married, and the cradle of the heir when born. The men repaired her ladyship's cracked china, and assisted the laird in his sporting parties, wormed his dogs, and cut the ears of his terrier puppie. (Scott 59)

Influenced by other noblemen in the council, Elangowan took the radical decision of evicting the gipsies and of betraying the smugglers (who had been using

the old castle to store their merchandise), selling them to the English exciseman Kennedy.

> The Laird had, by this time, determined to make root-and-branch work with the Maroons of Derncleugh. The old servants shook their heads at his proposal, and even Dominie Sampson ventured upon an indirect remonstrance. (Scott 64)

The community around the laird seems to disagree with such drastic measures, driven by ambition and, according to the narrator, insufficient reflection. After breaking with the gipsy tribe, Elangowan, having, out of sheer incapacity for deep reflection, surrounded himself with the charms of Kennedy's society, proceeds next to harm the smugglers.

> At Ellangowan, Kennedy was a frequent and always an acceptable guest. His vivacity relieved Mr. Bertram of the trouble of thought, and the labour which it cost him to support a detailed communication of ideas; while the daring and dangerous exploits which he had undertaken in the discharge of his office, formed excellent conversation….. it chanced that Captain Dirk Hatteraick had landed a cargo of spirits, and other contraband goods, upon the beach not far from Ellangowan, and, confiding in the indifference with which the Laird had formerly regarded similar infractions of the law, he was neither very anxious to conceal nor to expedite the transaction.
> The consequence was, that Mr. Frank Kennedy, armed with a warrant from Ellangowan, and supported by some of the Laird's people who knew the country, and by a party of military, poured down upon the kegs, bates, and bags, and after a desperate affray, in which severe wounds were given and received, succeeded in clapping the broad arrow upon the articles, and bearing them off in triumph to the next custom-house. Dirk Hatteraick vowed, in Dutch, German, and English, a deep and full revenge, both against the gauger and his abettors; and all who knew him thought it likely he would keep his word. (Scott 69-70)

the Laird's wife does not countenance his newly adopted radical stance either, and looks askance upon his ambition to become a strict justice of peace.

> "I wish," replied the lady, "Frank Kennedy would let Dirk Hatteraick alane. What needs he make himself mair busy than other folk? Cannot he sing his sang, and take his drink, and draw his salary, like Collector Snail, honest man, that never fashes [*Troubles] onybody? And I wonder at you, Laird, for meddling and making--Did we ever want to send for tea or brandy frae the Borough-town, when Dirk Hatteraick used to come quietly into the bay?…..and what the waur were the wa's and the vault o' the old castle for having a whin kegs o' brandy in them at an orra time? I am sure ye were not obliged to ken onything about it; and what the waur was the King that the lairds here got a soup o' drink, and the ladies their drap o' tea, at a reasonable rate?" (Scott 70-1)

Bertram's recovery of the element of absence and its transformation into loss, till full recovery and reinstatement in his family rights and place, is continuously being helped along by social forces belonging more to the ordinary people and the culture

of the marketplace (the very liminal forces old Elangowan chose to alienate), but in close cooperation with the official culture.

The issue of responsibility in the wake of the trauma in the novel is twofold. On the one hand it follows the perpetrators to actual punishment. Rupture of the link with the smugglers and gipsies opened excellent opportunities for a sharper like Glossin, ready to use the opening and bend the law in his favour, taking over the Elangowan estate. But he would be an improper substitute, causing a cancer in the future society. Hatteraick offers the surgical manoeuvre.

On the other hand, the responsibility to bring the heir back is shouldered by Meg Merrilies and her allies, Dinmont, and even Hatteraick in close cooperation with the reflective, "enlightened" officials like Pleydell, Mannering and Mac-Morlan.

> But the novel also features an intriguing instance of 'internal Orientalism' in the person of Meg Merrilies, a beturbanned gypsy 'sybil'. Meg's concealed knowledge of the fate of the kidnapped heir is of more importance in articulating the diffuse plot than the feeble device of Mannering's astrological predictions. Scotland's traditional social hierarchy is restored rather than subverted by an unlikely alliance of Mannering's Indian rupees and Meg's gypsy wisdom. (Leask 161)

"Enlightened" officials know how to keep active the link with the liminal strata mentioned and how to tune in into their channel of communication. Healing responsibility needs these qualities. When they find Pleydell he is at one of his hebdomadal diversions, playing the fool. Despite Mannering's seemingly radical stance, he sends a carriage when Meg Merrilies asks him to, in a very outlandish manner.

> "Why," said Mannering, rather reluctantly, "I was loth to risk any opportunity of throwing light on this business. The woman is perhaps crazed, and these effusions may arise only from visions of her imagination;--but you were of opinion that she knew more of that strange story than she ever told. "
> "And so," said Pleydell, "you sent a carriage to the place named?"
> "You will laugh at me if I own I did," replied the Colonel.
> "Who, I?" replied the advocate. "No, truly, I think it was the wisest thing you could do." (Scott 381)

At the end of the difficult recovery, when young Bertram could process the traumatic event into a coherent narrative, the social structure and the young heir were healed and vaccinated against future similar radical infections. The radical adherence to the letter of the law, betraying lack of reflection, was the initial cause of the traumatic experience. In young Bertram that deficiency is cured, and the cure is visibly marked upon his appearance. "Let me look at him.--By Heaven!" he muttered to himself, "the very image of old Ellangowan!--Yes, the same manly form and handsome features, but with a world of more intelligence in the face--Yes!--the witch has kept her word."(Scott 388)

Confronted with the persons he knew and loved as a child, Bertram gradually manages to recover the traumatic past and process it into a "historical" account. "Harry Bertram!--look at me--was I not the man?" "Yes!" said Bertram, starting from his seat

as if a sudden light had burst in upon his mind,--"Yes--that was my name!--and that is the voice and the figure of my kind old master!"(Scott 392)

Scott paves the way for the morally embedded trauma present in the first half of the Victorian era, but his analysis of the traumatised subject is more profound than previously thought. Scott's stance is deeply rooted in the Scottish Enlightenment thought and its conservative penchant. The fact that Scott's fictional society is hospitable to "the culture of the marketplace", to use Bakhtin's words, is not a random chance. The Scottish Enlightenment public sphere relied on a network of taverns, clubs in which the philosopher could discuss with the mechanic, or rub shoulders with the shopkeeper. Later on however this condition experienced a change with the move of the magistrates and intelligentsia to the new city, an event Scott attempts to detraumatize in his novel.

> Chambers, Cockburn and others evoke Old Edinburgh, before the flight of the gentry and professional classes across the North Loch to the New Town, as an 'organic' society in which the different ranks lived side-by-side, or rather on top of each other in the same tenement buildings (stratified on different floors), mingling in the streets and taverns, their eccentric types preserved (like images of a vanishing fauna) in John Kay's Edinburgh portraits. ….Hume dispelling 'philosophical melancholy' in a game of backgammon with his friends, well-born ladies dancing reels in oyster cellars, judges presiding in court still drunk from their heroic toping the night before, advocates and merchants transacting business in howffs frequented by their clerks as well as thieves and whores. (Pittock 2011)

Scott's novel is to a certain extent reacting to these changes. It is also a traumatic episode refusing to be narrated historically, postponing the uncovering of the "historical" events until the end.

Readers find out the full narrative gradually, almost recovering from the traumatic absence together with young Bertram. Shortly after the description of the traumatic violence, we don't get a narrative of the events. We are presented with a gap, to be filled later on, in the process of passage from absence to loss (Capra's critical insight, explained at the beginning). We receive only a list of details, the result of Pleydell's initial investigation.

> Under the Sheriffs minute and skilful inquiry, many circumstances appeared, which seemed incompatible with the original opinion, that Kennedy had accidentally fallen from the cliffs. We shall briefly detail some of these…..
> The short turf about the brink of the precipice was much trampled, as if stamped by the heels of men in a mortal struggle, or in the act of some violent exertion. Traces of the same kind, less visibly marked, guided the sagacious investigator to the verge of the copsewood, which, in that place, crept high up the bank towards the top of the precipice.
> Here they found plain vestiges of violence and struggling, from space to space. Small boughs were torn down, as if grasped by some resisting wretch who was dragged forcibly along; the ground, where in the least degree soft or marshy, showed the print of many feet; there were vestiges also, which might be those of human blood. ….he magistrate caused the footprints which marked this spot to be carefully measured and

> examined. Some corresponded to the foot of the unhappy victim; some were larger, some less; indicating, that at least four or five men had been busy around him. Above all, here, and here only, were observed the vestiges of a child's foot; and as it could be seen nowhere else, and the hard horse-track which traversed the wood at Warroch was contiguous to the spot, it was natural to think that the boy might have escaped in that direction during the confusion. (Scott 79-81)

In this way, with his historical fiction, Scott fulfils the task of the historian, in H. White's vision, detraumatizing events.

> And we might say that the events are detraumatized by being removed from the plot structure in which they have a dominant place and inserted in another in which they have a subordinate or simply ordinary function as elements of a life shared with all other men. Now, I am not interested in forcing the analogy between psychotherapy and historiography; I use the example merely to illustrate a point about the fictive component in historical narratives. Historians seek to refamiliarize us with events which have been forgotten through either accident, neglect, or repression. Moreover, the greatest historians have always dealt with those events in the histories of their cultures which are "traumatic" in nature and the meaning of which is either problematical or overdetermined in the significance that they still have for current life, events such as revolutions, civil wars, large-scale processes such as industrialization and urbanization, or institutions which have lost their original function in a society but continue to play an important role on the current social scene. In looking at the ways in which such structures took shape or evolved, historians familiarize them,not only by providing more information about them, but also by showing how their developments conformed to one or another of the story types that we conventionally invoke to make sense of our own life-histories. (White 87)

Conclusion

Scott's finesse as an analyst surpasses his age, as his description of traumatic experience comes close to what we encounter in trauma studies in the late 90s. However, he uses trauma as a cultural construct with useful powers of social coagulation and with the function of a vaccine, strengthening a weakened race and social structure against radical changes. Trauma helps break the routine of failure and provides a virtual space for social reconfiguration and healing.

Vanbeest Brown is cured by a society in which common-sense goes hand in hand with the culture of the marketplace. Scottish Enlightenment relied less on a Habermasian consensus and more on a Bakhtinian hospitality to liminality, harnessing the potential of the grass roots, outsiders and outcasts.

> Thus Meg's fortune-telling inspires the novel's characters to progress from inaction and narrowly individualist action to collaborative action; and it inspires the novel's community to progress from laws that presume the inevitability of harmful acts among members of a community to laws that reflect individuals' own recognition of their positive connections with one another. (Yahav-Brown 1137)

Personal trauma goes a lot further and is embedded inside the nexus of social rupture and imbalance. This social trauma in turn is set in motion by radical plans and revolutionary decisions, the very enemies of a Scottish Enlightenment Weltanschauung, uniting Whig principles with a Torry worldview. (Trumpener 715)

The very start of the social imbalance and individual trauma has at its root the unreflective measure of severing old ties with people representing forces of otherness and liminality.

In his description of traumatic memory, Scott comes closer to Capra's model than many early Victorian writers, who describe a very large range of "traumatic experiences", but give very little attention to the traumatic memory (Mathus 6).

Scott offers the element of absence both with regard to Bertram's memory, but also at the level of the narrative, the traumatic memory being mirrored by Scott in his narrative strategy. We find out the real historical account together with Bertram, witnessing his gradual recovery and the passage from absence to loss.

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