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ALLEGIANCE AND HONOUR IN “THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR”

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ABSTRACT

This study brings into focus Sir Walter Scott's magnum opus *The Bride of Lammermoor* which is a compact narrative and a work of the mature years of Scott who wrote it while in great pain. The present study confines itself to the exploration of the great values of allegiance and honour as painstakingly discovered in the actions and interactions, dialogues, moods and calculations of certain characters that leave an indelible mark on the mind of the keen researcher. In this study we would be compassing the twin characters of Alice and Caleb, the two loyal inhabitants of the house of Ravenswood. This work offers a fresh look at the characters without a reference to any prior research undertaken on the topic.

**Keywords:** Scott, Bride, Lammermoor, Alice, Caleb, Edgar, Lucy, William

Sir Walter Scott's contribution to the field of letters has been a unique feat of unparalleled craftsmanship in the field of novel writing. The historical novel found a rare companion in Scott, whose superlative imagination gave rise to tales of myriad hues interspersed with characters of varied dimensions. The magic of Scott's quill endues prosaic pieces of history with the poetic charm of romance. The art of Scott discovers a rare balance between fact and fiction; and the reader is so enthralled by the racy narrative combining with it the brilliance of vivid description that he is not fain to put down the volume ere he has assimilated the last word on the final page of the novel. The characters of Scott are drawn from diverse sections of the social fabric of Scotland ranging from a monarch in his castle to a menial in his poor hovel; all serving a specific aim in the narrative. Knight errants in their chivalry wooing Ladies of high repute; fallen Lords paying visits to prophetic hags who guide them in great endeavors of future success; all these and more form the plethora of personae Scott uses to populate his dramatic narratives.

Among the novels written by Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* stands out for its compactness and well-knit narrative; and it “exhibits Scott’s art at its most mature.” (Brown, 1979, p.129) Scott wrote this masterly work while he was suffering from a strange ailment that was so painful that he was unable to move from the bed; and when he got a slight respite from the pain he would force “himself to go on with *The Bride of Lammermoor*, creeping downstairs to his study and stooping painfully over his desk.”(Johnson, 1970, p.646) Scott's story, inspired from a bizarre incident of the tragedy of a bride who is possessed and meets her untimely end after wounding the groom, has been artistically constructed. Scott makes extensive use of medieval gothic settings to impress upon the readers the subtle play of the supernatural in the story.

*The Bride of Lammermoor* recounts the love story of Lucy Ashton and Edgar, Master of Ravenswood. Edgar's father was asked to relinquish his position in the government since he had supported the cause of the deposed James VII. Lucy's father subsequently bought the Ravenswood estate and Edgar hated him for having usurped the rights of the Ravenswood family. Edgar falls in love with Lucy and consequently gives up the idea of avenging the wrong perpetrated by Sir William Ashton. Lady Ashton, Sir William Ashton's scheming wife, does not like the engagement between her daughter and Edgar, Master of Ravenswood. On the contrary, she desires a politically profitable alliance for her daughter; and for this she plays the devil by intercepting Edgar's letters to Lucy, and gradually begins to persuade her daughter that Edgar has forgotten her. In the meanwhile Edgar leaves for France to pursue his political activities that will help him bring back the lost glory of the Ravenswood family. Lady Ashton continues her villainous ways; first by asking Captain Westenho to tell everybody around that Edgar has planned to get married to a French girl in France itself; and later she even appoints a witch called Ailsie Gourlay to show Lucy omens and token of the faithlessness of Edgar. With her implicit faith in the genuine love of Edgar for her, Lucy continues to write letters to Edgar, most of which are intercepted by her mother. Lady Ashton also asks the Reverend to apply religious persuasion to Lucy to desist from communicating to Edgar. Incidentally the Reverend also tries to help Lucy in sending a letter but then there is no answer from Edgar. Edgar returns just a day before the wedding and chides Lucy for breaking off their engagement and planning to get married to Bucklaw; and in all this Lucy is hardly able to speak. Wedding takes place the following day. Later, while the celebrations are in progress and the guests are dancing; at the bridal chamber, Lucy stabs Bucklaw who gets severely wounded; and soon after that she suffers from insanity and dies. *The Bride of Lammermoor* is a masterly achievement of Scott and it is not surprising that it has won great acclaim at the hands of great critics. "In all, *The Bride of Lammermoor* offers a beautifully formed tale of tragic pride and the treachery of the self, smoothly interwoven with a Scottish peasant sense of the supernatural based on penetrating insight into the social life of the time and the hidden processes of the mind." (Jeffares, 1970, p.205)

Bucklaw recovers and later Lucy's brother challenges Edgar to a duel; and Edgar falls into the quicksand and dies while going to meet Lucy's brother.

The Ravenswood family has been trusted and looked up to for their benevolence and aid to the common folk of the highlands. The dependents and menials who have been serving the cause of this ancient family, suffer a great shock at the news of Lord Ravenswood losing his position and ultimately passing away. Their allegiance has always been with the family of the deceased; and therefore they continue to show their loyalty to the heir of the Ravenswood family Edgar, despite knowing very well that the castle of the Ravenswood now belongs to Sir William Ashton and that Edgar Ravenswood has been compelled by force of circumstance to dwell in a lonely tower called Wolf's Crag atop the hills of Lammermoor.

Among the dependents of the family of Ravenswood who display their unceasing loyalty to the house, the names of two individuals stand out doubtlessly; first one is that of Alice, the blind dame, and second that of Caleb Balderstone, the caretaker of Wolf's Crag. These two characters of Scott go to prove the age old belief that persons of the bygone days had an enduring belief system that was dearer to them than their life itself; and they were in no way prepared to give up their values and their beliefs.

Alice is a blind old woman dwelling within the bounds of the lands of the Ravenswood people which now belongs to Sir William Ashton who procured the Castle after the demise of the Lord Ravenswood. She dwells in a sequestered valley in a hut a mile away from the castle. Lucy is in the habit of meeting this old woman for her wisdom and her endearing way of speaking to her; and therefore, one of the evenings when Lucy is accustomed to take her father for a walk, she suggests that why take a walk to the humble hut of the old woman. Though Sir William is unwilling, Lucy compels her father to accompany her to the dwelling of the blind hag.

Forced to obey her daughter, Sir William Ashton is led to the simple dwelling of the blind woman; and Lucy, on reaching the gate of Alice solicits her attention to the fact that she is accompanied by her old father. Old Alice bids a warm welcome to the Lord Keeper and asks him to be her guest for some time. The Lord

Keeper complies with the request and soon both daughter and father are seated in the little garden of Alice where the Lord Keeper's attention is drawn to a bee hive and to break the awkward silence he asks old Alice about the upkeep of the bees and how she is assisted in this regard. To this query Alice informs the Laird that she has kept an assistant Babie by name; and this girl performs all the tasks of the hut including that of cooking victuals for the old woman. Alice now blows a small whistle that is dangling from her neck to call upon Babie to attend to the guests. The girl is ready to respond instantly and the moment she is there, Alice orders her to fetch bread and honey for the Lord Keeper and Lucy. Babie courtesies to the guests and soon she is there with the bread and honey on a large plantain leaf that she offers to the guests. The Lord Keeper is now comfortable sitting on the decayed tree trunk at the garden of Alice; and fain to protract the conversation with Alice, he essays to question her on her origin and her stay at Ravenswood. To this query the old dame cautiously replies that she has been the inhabitant of the place for sixty years and that by origin she is an English woman. When the lord keeper further questioned her, being quizzed about her attachment to the place despite her being an English woman, she replied that she had seen better days as the wife of an honorable hardworking husband and the mother of 6 children; and that the family lived an honorable existence for over twenty years. As time advanced, her husband reached the heavenly abode and in the years that followed she lost all her children one by one; all of them lay buried in the ruined chapel across the dilapidated hutment of hers.

Alice was not just an industrious woman, but a woman devoted to a cause and loyal to her people. Even though existing in conditions surrounded by poverty, she maintained her self-respect. She never asked, even of the successor of the late Lord Ravenswood, to repair her falling hut; and at the same time she cannot leave her allegiance to the age old name of Ravenswood. Her loyalty to the decayed family and her sense of honor for the present condition of her own self, provide us a lesson of self-reliance and self-respect hardly observed in most dwellings of the servitor classes. When the lord keeper draws her attention to her hut that is falling into ruins, and when Lucy herself comes up with support for her in the form of a request to her father to repair the collapsing hovel; Alice has a ready answer and replies that the hut is strong enough to last till her time; and that the lord keeper need not give himself any trouble on the account of repairing her hut.

Lucy then reminds the old dame of her flourishing house of the bygone days and her long gone prosperity. To this the blind woman replies that her present state is of her deserving; and that if her heart hasn't broken probably it is because of its resilience. The lord keeper then observes that she, with several years of experience behind her, must have witnessed many changes and must have learnt to expect them. To which the wise dame replies that time has taught her to endure those changes; and thus stressing on her inner strength and tolerance to various events that may not have been to her choice or liking.

The lord keeper tells her further that knowing the circumstances in which things were placed, she should have been ready for such a change. To which she cleverly, concealing her allegiance in a metaphor, replies that she very well knows that the stump on which he is seated was once a massive tree; and she regrets the taking down of the mighty tree that overshadows her dwelling. The metaphor of the tree conceals the benign form of the late Lord Ravenswood who is the object of her sweet remembrance and affection. And so the allegiance she owes to the old family of Ravenswood will continue and even the rise of lords like Sir William Ashton will not be able to take the place of the grandeur and magnanimity of the family of Ravenswood that she badly misses.

The lord keeper displays his generosity by suggesting to the old dame that she need not be worried about losing her credit with him for having gratitude for the late Lord of Ravenswood. He was willing to help her by getting her hut repaired and was ready to extend to her his hand of friendship. But Alice, who was a woman of loyalty, curtly refused the proffered friendship observing that she was reluctant to make any new friends in her age and also that she was unwilling to accept anything at his hands. This reply of Alice is an affirmation of her allegiance to the fallen family of Ravenswood. The lord keeper is a bit ruffled at her reply, and to bolster his hurt ego, tells her to keep staying on his property till she desires. Further, Alice offers a warning to the lord keeper to beware of the house of Ravenswood. She observes in a bold ringing voice: "Therefore I may well say, beware of pressing a desperate man with the hand of authority. There is blood of

Chiesley in the veins of Ravenswood, and one drop of it were enough to fire him in the circumstances in which he is placed. I say, beware of him.”(Scott, 1991,p.52)

Caleb Balder stone is a loyal old man in the service of the Ravenswood family for more than sixty years when the story opens. We observe him for the first time when the young master of Ravenswood Edgar, along with his guest in hiding ,the Laird Bucklaw, come up to Wolf’s Crag riding in haste, tired and hungry after the day’s hectic proceedings. The wind has risen and the weather threatens to be stormy and the master along with Bucklaw are in haste to enter the tower before it starts to rain. “ Open the gate, Caleb,” said his master, in a more soothing tone, partly from his regard to the ancient and faithful seneschal, partly perhaps because he thought that angry words would be thrown away, so long as Caleb had a stout iron-clenched oaken door betwixt his person and the speakers.”(Scott,1991,p.84) Caleb, at length undid the bar and let both master and the guest come in; meanwhile making excuses for his unpreparedness observing that he wasn’t expecting master to arrive so soon. At the same time Caleb is an alert old man and to avoid any further embarrassment concerning his ill preparedness to receive them, he shouts out to Mysie, the maid, in the local Scottish dialect, “ Mysie—Mysie, woman! stir for dear life, and get the fire mended; take the auld three-legged stool, or ony thing that's readiest that will make a lowe. I doubt we are but puirly provided, no expecting ye this some months, when doubtless ye was hae been received conform till your rank, as gude right is; but natheless—” (Scott,1991,p.85)

Family honour is at stake because the tower of Wolf’s Crag has no provisions left since the last time when it was occupied by the supporters of the late Lord Ravenswood. Many subordinates had attended the last rites of the late lord and later had given themselves up to orgies that had lasted far into the night and in the process had consumed all the wine and the provisions that the tower held at that time. Nothing remaining to assuage the hunger of the master and his guest, Caleb has to buy time and to do this he again calls out to Mysie in the following manner, expressed best in the original Scottish dialect so close to Scott, “ Mysie, kill the brood-hen without thinking twice on it; let them care that come ahint.” (Scott,1991, p. 85) In fact, when Caleb utters these directions to Mysie, actually there is nothing left but the bones of that poor hen which was consumed during the riotous festivity after the funeral. All this talk about killing the hen is just to convince Bucklaw that there is nothing lacking and that the preparations for feeding the guest are afoot. This is the first instance of how Caleb the loyal old man tries to uphold the honour of the Ravenswood family.

Later, when Bucklaw observes the horses have not been put up in the stables and they haven’t been provided for, he calls the attention of Caleb, who calls out for the stable boys and unable to find them , he ultimately promises to the master to do the work himself and he adds this “if ye dinna regard your ain credit, think on mine; we'll hae hard enough wark to make a decent night o't, wi' a' the lees I can tell.” (Scott,1991,p.86) Here what Caleb means by the word credit is honour i.e. if the master is not concerned about his honour, at least he (Caleb) is concerned that the honour of the family should not fade before a guest. When the master enquires of Caleb if sufficient hay and corn are available for the horses, Caleb who is a smart protector of family honour says, “Ou ay, plenty of hay and corn”; this was uttered boldly and aloud, and, in a lower tone, “there was some half fous o' aits, and some taits o' meadow-hay, left after the burial.” (Scott,1991,p.86) What is to be noted here is that the first part of Caleb’s statement about hay and corns is loud and clear meaning that there is plenty of hay and corn for the horses (for all to hear) , whereas the later half of his sentence is uttered in a lower pitch since it is meant only for the master to hear and not the guest; and the reality is that there is hardly any hay and corn left after the burial of the late Lord Ravenswood. The high sense of honour that Caleb possesses could best be summed up in the words of Edgar himself who says this of Caleb: “ His passion consists in representing things about our miserable menage, not as they are, but as, in his opinion, they ought to be;..” (Scott,1991,p.87)

Caleb is ever ready to cover up the shortcomings of the Ravenswood family by putting forth his best efforts to procure those things that will keep up the honour of the family. Apart from his own care in keeping up honour, Caleb also has a very sound piece of advice for Mysie to whom he observes: “tak it a' on yourself; never let the credit o' the house suffer.” (Scott,1991,p.88) Therefore the best advice to anybody who wishes to uphold his or her honour is - let not the credit of your house suffer at any cost.

The greatest ingenuity of Caleb in maintaining the honour of the house of Ravenswood is discovered when to cover up the fact that the wine had been consumed and nothing was left, he enacted the following drama which is expressed best in the words of Scott himself: "Still, however, Caleb was too good a general to renounce the field without a stratagem to cover his retreat. He undauntedly threw down an empty flagon, as if he had stumbled at the entrance of the apartment, called upon Mysie to wipe up the wine that had never been spilt, and placing the other vessel on the table, hoped there was still enough left for their honours."(Scott, 1919, p.90)

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