

## Jane Austen in Scotland

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Many readers will know of Sir Walter Scott's favourable critique of *Emma*, which appeared in the magazine *Quarterly Review* in October 1815. Scott commended his fellow-novelist for her "neatness and point, and a quiet yet comic dialogue, in which the characters of the speakers evolve themselves with dramatic effect." Yet London's *Literary Gazette* (10 August 1833) noted that Jane Austen's reputation "took some time to penetrate beyond the Tweed," and suggested that this was the result of Sir Walter Scott having published his review anonymously.

This accusation was repeated by *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (September 1833), which argues that Scott was motivated by professional jealousy when he merely "contented himself with the anonymous notice." A signed review by the most popular novelist of the day would have meant instant fame for Jane Austen, as it did for "many secondary novelists"; but by refusing to put his name to the critique, Sir Walter effectively kept this potential competitor in the shadows. According to *Tait's*, Scott was as arrogant as Emma Woodhouse, and could never have understood *Emma's* ironies: "The aim of the book must have altogether escaped him."

For her part, Jane Austen took great pleasure in the poems and novels of the Wizard of the North, although she too was quite capable of literary jealousy. In a letter to her niece Anna, written on the twenty-eighth of September 1814, she declared ruefully,

Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths.—I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it—but fear I must.

Despite the possible antagonism of Walter Scott, the first Scottish review of Jane Austen appeared in the *Scots Magazine* (or *Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*) as early as May 1818, just a year after Jane Austen's death. This critic liked her novels for their "good sense, happiness, and purity," and their "deep feeling of the spirit of Christianity." *Persuasion* showed "the highest perfection of the art of novel writing," ensuring that "The delightful writer . . . will be one of the most popular of English novelists." On the other hand a reviewer in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (June 1824) rated Jane Austen lower than several other women novelists of the age, on the grounds that her character-portrayal was realistic only when limited to the middle stratum of society:

nothing can be better than Miss Austen's sketches of that sober, orderly, small-town, parsonage, sort of society, in which she herself had spent her life, and nothing more feeble than Miss Austen's pen, whenever she steps beyond that walk, either up the hill or downwards.

Evidently no other reviews of Jane Austen's fiction appeared in Scotland prior to Victorian times.