

Essay 2 - due in Ses #9 (3 pages)

Choose one of the following and write a 3 page essay in which you do your best to use **specific** words and scenes from Scott's "The Highland Widow" to **convince** your readers of your **thesis**. Try your best to distinguish between plot summary and argument, to captivate your reader's interest in your opening and concluding paragraphs, and to strive toward a clear logical arrangement of paragraphs. Read out loud. Give your essay a thoughtful title, double space throughout, number your pages, and proofread very carefully.

Finally, do not feel obliged to answer each and every question I pose. The questions are designed to help you clarify your thoughts, not to trap you into a rigid format.

1. In his book *The Historical Novel*, the Hungarian critic Georg Lukacs wrote that "Scott's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types. The typically human terms in which great historical trends become tangible had never before been so superbly, straightforwardly and poignantly portrayed." Think about Hamish and Elspat MacTavish in these terms. Consider one or two scenes in which their distinctive characters and their historically determined personalities are impossible to distinguish. Then, drawing upon your discussion, consider why Scott chose to write historical novels rather than straight history. [Note: you might prefer to restrict your discussion to a single character.]

2. One could argue that Oedipus was not responsible for the killing of his father since the oracle had foretold that he would do so. Early in his novella, Scott compares Elspat MacTavish with Oedipus: "she was regarded by the Highlanders in the neighbourhood," he writes, as the Greeks considered those who were pursued by the Furies, and endured the mental torment consequent on great criminal actions. They regarded such unhappy beings as Orestes and Oedipus, as being less the voluntary perpetrators of their crimes, than as the passive instruments by which the terrible decess of Destiny had been accomplished; and the fear with which they beheld them was not unmingled with veneration. (75)

Examine several scenes in which Elspat is depicted as the "passive instrument" not so much of Destiny as of History and then consider whether she, like Greek tragic heroes, is the object of not only fear, but also veneration.

3. Consider how Hamish's last gesture and execution are depicted very differently from his father's bloody death. Consider too the narrator's comment that, "The untamed and angry passions which he inherited from father and mother, were awakened by the supposed hostility of those who pursued him; and the restraint under which they were held by his sober judgment, began gradually to give way" (109). Is Hamish more like or unlike his father? Is his murder of Cameron out of character or a revelation of his true character?

4.

The **moral principle** which so **naturally** and so **justly** occurs to the mind of those who have been **educated** under a settled government of laws that protect the property of the weak against the incursions of the strong, was to poor Elspat a book sealed and a fountain closed. She had been **taught** to consider those whom they called Saxons, as a race with whom the Gael were constantly at war, and she regarded every settlement of theirs within the reach of Highland **incursion**, as affording a **legitimate** object of attack and plunder. (83)

How do the highlighted words in the passage above betray the narrator's ambivalence about "poor Elspat"?