**Romantic Borderlands: Scott and the Solway Coast**

Recent discussions of the ‘four nations’ of British Romanticism have shed new light on the role played by borderlands in shaping Romantic literary discourse. In *Cartographies of Culture*, for example, Damian Walford Davies has offered a revisionary reading of ‘Tintern Abbey’ as a poem ‘dynamically constituted’ by its movement across the ‘frontier topographies’ of England and Wales. In this seminar, which takes inspiration from Davies’s work, we’ll be turning our attention northwards to consider that most topographically dynamic—and yet, strangely, neglected— of Romantic borderlands: the Solway Firth.

Sprawling out along the western edge of Hadrian’s Wall, for centuries the intertidal waters of the Solway have served not only as a barrier or line of defence, but also as a line of approach and communication linking Southern Scotland with the Cumberland coastal plain. Situated at the margins of two nations (a place of shifting sands, identities and allegiances), the liminality of this littoral zone is reinforced by its literary heritage. Territorially, it belongs partly to landscapes of William Wordsworth and Robert Burns: being located more or less halfway between the former’s birthplace at Cockermouth and the latter’s mausoleum in Dumfries. Yet, by right, it is wholly of the border country sung and celebrated in the works of Sir Walter Scott.

Scott drew on the Solway as a setting in a number of his works, including *Guy Mannering* and his border *Minstrelsy*. In no other work, however, does it play as decisive a role as it does in his final major Scottish novel, *Redgauntlet* (1824). Reading passages from the novel alongside David Daiches’s pioneering essay ‘Scott’s *Redgauntlet*’ and Brian Blake’s ‘Sulwath’ (the first chapter of his topographical study *The Solway Firth*), we’ll explore how the geography of the Solway coast underpins Scott’s narrative and how it contributes to an alternative Romantic vision of the north Lakes region.

**Recommended readings:**

Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century*, *By the Author of “Waverley”*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1824): vol. 1 ‘Letter IV’; vol. 2 chapter ‘IV’; vol. 3 chapters ‘XX-XXIII’.

*Seminar participants are welcome—tho’ by no means expected—to read the whole of Scott’s novel, copies of which are freely available online. If you’re looking for a portable printed version, I’d recommend Kathryn Sutherland’s Oxford World’s Classics edition.*

David Daiches, ‘Scott’s *Redgauntlet*’, rpt. in *Walter Scott: Modern Judgments*, ed. D.D. Devlin (London, 1968), 148-61.

*This essay provides a terrific overview of the novel (doubly valuable for those who haven’t time to read the whole thing!) and is available from conference organisers.*

Brian Blake, *The Solway Firth* (London, 1955), 1-13.

*This chapter offers a concise topographical survey of the Solway, touching on its place in the turbulent history of the border country; it’s also available from conference organisers.*