



## SCOTT'S *KENILWORTH* – A TALE OF TORMENT AND MISERY OF A WOMAN IN MALE DOMINATED SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), a leading Scottish novelist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and great lover of ancient legends and folklore carved a niche in the sphere of historical novels by his innovative and artistic bent of novel writing in English. He was a prime architect of historical romance and was possessed with an excellent skill of inculcating life in inanimate things and enlivening the historic past through his superb gift of imagination.

Scott's *Kenilworth* (1821) is a moving tale embodying the torment and misery of Amy Robsart, the heroine of the novel at the hands of men folk whose wretchedness turns out to be so severe that it claims her life at the end of the novel. The paper presents the anguished heart of Amy who in spite of getting secretly married to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester in Queen Elizabeth's court, is not publicly declared as his wife. Her only desire is to be acknowledged as the Earl's countess but her husband's Master of the Horse, Richard Varney conspires so horrendously that Amy falls into the trap of death maneuvered by him putting an end to her life.

**Keywords:** fair prisoner, Cumnor Place, Kenilworth, machinations, hypochondria, iniquitous.

### INTRODUCTION

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the Father of historical novel, endeavoured to present history in entertaining form and redeemed the reading of novel from the charge of being a useless waste of time. A deep sense of Scottish history and nationhood coloured his novels; he reanimated, revitalized and rejuvenated the historical novel and rendered their reading an invigorating experience for the reader. As regards women characters of his novels, Scott painted them as embodiments of beauty, dominated by men folk and struggling throughout their lives for the fulfillment of their ambitions.

#### Amy Robsart – A gloomy and desolate figure

Amy Robsart, the heroine of *Kenilworth* is depicted by Scott as a woman who is always dictated and governed by the male folk of the society. She is just a beautiful woman, a *fair prisoner* of the Cumnor Place and nothing else. Though she is married to the Earl of Leicester, she is not publicly declared as his wife. She is taken away from her parent's home and kept in isolation. She is not allowed to meet her father Hugh Robsart, a broken hearted knight who loves his daughter dearly. She is penitent for having wronged her lover Tressilian whom her father had chosen for her marriage. She feels that she should do him justice "*before her husband's friend, before her husband himself and before the whole world.*"(54) When asked by Varney whether she would tell her husband Leicester regarding Tressilian's arrival at Cumnor Place, she says, "*It will be the first thing I tell him, together with every word*

that Tressilian said and that I answered. I shall speak my own shame in this... I will speak, therefore, with pain, but I will speak, and speak all."(54) Amy's confidence receives a shattering blow when she speaks about Tressilian to Leicester who harshly warns her her not to mingle with him as he would "rather the foul fiend intermingle in our secret than this Tressilian!"(63)

Amy tolerates every move of Leicester and strives to attune herself with his mindset. As regards the material arrangements made by him in the Cumnor Place, she has no grievance, but her heart beats only for him and craves for his company whose only occasional visits to the Cumnor Place tears her heart apart. Yet when Leicester is to arrive, Amy asks her maid to "put these rebel locks in order, and imprison within lace and cambric the bosom that beats too high". (49) On his arrival, Amy entreats her husband to go to London with him and stay there "as the avowed wife of England's noblest Earl." (60) Leicester assures her that this desire of hers would certainly be fulfilled. But at present, "this cannot yet be; and these dear but stolen interviews are all I can give to the loveliest and the best beloved of her sex." (60) Amy insists Leicester to give her a reasonable answer for this denial. Leicester annoyingly answers,

"Amy, you speak of what you understand not. We that toil in courts are like those who climb a mountain of loose sand-we dare make no halt until some projecting rock affords us a secure footing and resting-place... To declare my marriage were to be the artificer of my own ruin." (60) Leicester tries to calm down the aggrieved Amy, "Now, God be with thee, my dearest and loveliest! (65)" He takes her in his embrace and kisses her while bidding her farewell.

On the other hand, Tressilian feels sorry about Hugh Robsart who sitting at home, struggles with his grief of losing his daughter, engages himself in the practice of field-sports, and the recollection that he once had a daughter. Tressilian believes that Amy has been taken a prisoner by Varney. Therefore he wants to release Amy from the custody of Varney and send her home to her father. He decides to "appeal to the Queen herself." (83) He strongly says,

"I am resolved to accuse this villain, at the very foot of the throne, of falsehood, seduction, and breach of hospitable laws." (118)

As regards her life in the Cumnor Place, she leads a solitary life but the unexpected arrival of a pedlar thrills her heart as he brings with him various articles of her choice. She tells her maid Janet, "We lead a heavy life here, and this may while off a weary hour... call the man hither-I want some things." (203) As the pedlar Wayland Smith exhibits his choicest collection of essences and perfumes, he tells Amy that the cost of these articles has almost increased to double value, since the magnificent preparations are being made by the Earl of Leicester to entertain the Queen and court at his princely Castle of Kenilworth. He informs Amy that, "The Queen of England feasts with the noble Earl for a week during the Summer's Progress; and there are many who will tell you England will have a king, and England's Elizabeth-God save her!" (204) He tells Amy that he has said "what many men say". (204) Observing the succession of events in the Cumnor Place, Wayland Smith feels "much compassion at beholding so lovely a creature as the Countess,...exposed to the machinations of such a gang of villains." (208)

Tressilian, a former suitor of Amy gets extremely upset at the plight of Amy. He therefore complains to Queen Elizabeth through Earl of Sussex about the seduction of Amy by Varney. The Queen asks Varney if he has seduced Amy. Varney, being a ready-witted, cunning and unscrupulous person, fully conscious of the advantages he could obtain from Leicester, kneels down and replies "There had been some love passages betwixt him[Varney] and Mistress Amy Robsart." (159) When asked by Elizabeth whether he is married to Amy, Varney answered in affirmative. To this Queen command, "Varney, thy wife must be at Kenilworth... My Lord of Leicester, we expect you will look to this." (165) The Queen orders Varney to remain present on Saturday, the 9<sup>th</sup> of July with Amy Robsart.

Varney asks Leicester, if Amy for a brief period could act as his [Varney's] wife. Leicester shockingly asks, "How, sirrah? My Countess term herself thy wife!" (213) Leicester knows Amy would never agree to

such terms. He therefore waving his hand in the negation, says, *"It is impossible I know neither authority nor entreaties would make her endure thy name for an hour... I cannot urge her to aught so repugnant to her noble nature as a share in this stratagem; it would be a base requital to the love she bears me."* (213)

The Earl believes that Amy is so noble that whatever he has done for her has been overpaid a thousand times by her virtue and beauty. Varney is hopeful that he would be able to convince Amy to act as his wife for a brief period. He therefore requests the Earl to write a letter to Amy making this plea. Leicester writes some distracted lines in which he pleads her to consent to bear the name of Varney for a few days during the revels at Kenilworth as it is a matter of life and honour for him. Varney then heads towards the Cumnor palace with a firm determination in his mind that even if he has to take help of Alasco, the astrologer, he would accomplish his aim. Amy is a state of utter desolation and considers her an obscure prisoner. She shares her distress with Janet, *"What signifies that I have rank and honour in reality, if I am to live an obscure prisoner, without either society or observance, and suffering in my character, as one of dubious or disgraced reputation?"* (pp 217-218)

As she was thinking thus, she hears the hasty clatter of horse's feet in the courtyard, she joyously exclaims, *"It is Leicester!-it is my noble Earl!-it is my Dudley!-every stroke of his horse's hoof sounds like a note of lordly music!"* (218) But to her disappointment, it was not the Earl but Richard Varney who wanted to speak to Amy immediately. When Varney tells Amy about the whole plan in which she has to temporarily act as his wife, she gets extremely furious. She understands the true nature of Varney, for he *"speaks to gain ends of his own, equally execrable and unattainable."* (220) Amy is well aware of her dignity and she is not ready to be called Varney's wife even for a moment. She tells Janet,

*"...hither he came to persuade me it was my lord's pleasure... -that I should go with him to Kenilworth, and before the Queen and nobles, and in presence*

*of my own wedded lord, that I should acknowledge him-HIM there-that very cloak-brushing, shoe-cleaning fellow-HIM there, my lord's lackey, for my liege lord and husband;... and destroy my character to be regarded as an honourable matron of the English nobility!"* (221)

Amy is confident that her husband would never propose such a dishonourable plan. She tears her lord's letter and stamps on it so that she can completely destroy it. She gets ferocious and abuses Varney, *"Thou liest, thou treacherous slave!"* (221) She annoyingly tells Janet, that Varney is *"the cold-blooded, calculating slave!"* (224) She declares that she will not remain there longer and would escape from Cumnor Place. But before she is able to run away there, she is forced by Varney to consume a drink prepared by the alchemist Alasco. The drink she was forced to consume was not life threatening but was capable of inducing temporary illness to her and plunge her in sound sleep. When Janet returns from her evening prayer, she sees her mistress with her head resting on her arms that were crossed upon a table that stood before her. Amy tells Janet *"I have drunk it... disturb me not-leave me at peace-let life pass quietly. I am poisoned."* (229) Janet gives moral support to Amy and helps her escape with Wayland Smith.

Amy makes a successful escape from the Cumnor Place with assistance of Wayland Smith. She has a great regard for her husband Leicester but she is compelled to leave the place assigned to her because of the villainy of men surrounded by her. She understands the importance the Earl attaches to the concealment of their marriage and knows that taking any step to make it public without his permission would incur the insult of her husband. She decides that at Kenilworth, she would tell her husband the entire story of her misery. Wayland Smith and Amy reach the castle; Amy is amazed to see the magnificent view of the castle. She speaks to her own self, *"I have given him, all that woman has to give. Name and fame, heart and hand,...and England's Queen could give him no more. He is my husband-I am his wife-whom God hath joined, man cannot sunder... Amy will weep, and Dudley will forgive her."* (257)

After reaching the abode of Leicester, Amy writes a letter to Leicester and seals it with a braid of her own beautiful tresses. She requests Wayland to put the letter into Lord Leicester's own hand and tell her the reaction of Leicester on receiving it. Wayland, before delivering the letter to Leicester, thinks of communicating to Tressilian, the arrival of Amy at Kenilworth so that he can get rid of any further responsibility. But in the process, he misplaces the letter and so fails to deliver it to Leicester.

As Tressilian enters his apartment and finds Amy sitting inside, he is utterly shocked. He greets her as Varney's wife. Amy replies, *"The wife of Varney!... With what base name, sir, does your boldness stigmatize ..."* (270) Amy is confused as she knows that fatal consequences might result if she tells Tressilian that she is the wife of Leicester. She feels that it would be a betrayal of the secret on which her husband had assured her that his fortunes depended. She decides not to break her promised silence. She therefore prepares herself to submit to every suspicion rather than revealing the truth. Tressilian feels hurt to see the pitiable condition of Amy. Tressilian then asks Amy why she is alone in his apartment. Amy is surprised to know that she is in fact in the apartment of Tressilian. She rises to go but pathetically says, *"I know not where to go."* (270) Amy is in such a pressing situation that she is unable to reveal her identity and therefore cannot seek help from Tressilian. She miserably utters, *"I am not mad-I am but a creature unutterably miserable..."* (271)

Amy incidentally meets the Queen who asks her whether she is married to Varney, she answers, *"No, madam, no! as there is a God above us, I am not the sordid wretch you would make me! I am not the wife of that contemptible slave-of that most deliberate villain! I am not the wife of Varney! I would rather be the bride of Destruction!"* (320) The Queen asks Amy whose wife she is. Amy replies in sheer despair, *"The Earl of Leicester knows it all."* (320) Queen Elizabeth gets furious and gives command to attach Leicester of high treason. Realizing that her husband is in the utmost danger from the wrath of the Queen, Amy instantly throws herself before the Queen, embraces

her knees, and exclaims, *"He is guiltless, madam-he is guiltless; no one can lay aught to the charge of the noble Leicester!... I foully belied him. May God so judge me, as I believe he was never privy to a thought that would harm me!"*(323)

As soon as Amy sees Varney there, she immediately gets up and requests the Queen to imprison her in *"the lowest dungeon of the castle ...but spare the sight of that unutterable and most shameless villain!...I shall go mad if I look longer on him.* (pp 323-324) Amy is sent in the custody of Hunsdon with whom she would be safe as one of his own daughters. When Amy leaves, Varney hastens to tell his own story to the Queen. The Queen is convinced that Amy is insane as her own demeanour bears it out." (325) Varney reassures the Queen, *"It is the nature of persons in her disorder,... to be ever most inveterate in their spleen against those whom, in their better moments, they hold nearest and dearest."* (325)

Varney rushes to Leicester and gives him all the particulars of the Countess's escape. But he takes a special care to be silent concerning those practices on Amy's health which had driven her so desperate. Leicester could only suppose that she had adopted this attitude out of jealous impatience to attain the avowed state and appearance belonging to her rank. He feels offended at the levity with which his wife had flouted his strict commands and exposed him to the fury of Elizabeth. Varney advises Leicester not to reveal the truth to the Queen. Leicester expresses his desire to meet Amy. Varney has no other alternative but to follow the order. As Amy confronts Leicester, she overwhelmingly exclaims, *"Dudley Dudley! and art thou come at last?"* She rushes to her husband with the speed of lightning and clings around his neck, and ignoring the presence of Varney, *"overwhelmed him with caresses, while she bathed his face in a flood of tears, muttering, at the same time, but in broken and disjointed monosyllables, the fondest expressions which Love teaches his votaries."* (329) He receives and repays her caresses with fondness mingled with melancholy.

Amy tells Leicester *"O Dudley! I have been ill!-very ill, since we last met!-for I call not this morning's horrible vision a meeting. I have been in sickness, in grief, and in danger. But thou art come, and all is joy, and health, and safety!"* (330) But Leicester tells her to go to one of his northern castles, under the personage as *"it will be but needful, I trust, for a very few days-of Varney's wife."* (330) Amy asks her husband Leicester, *"... is it to your wife you give the dishonourable counsel to acknowledge herself the bride of another and of all men, the bride of that Varney?"* (330) Leicester considers Varney to be his true and faithful servant, trusted in his deepest secrets. Leicester believes, *"I had better lose my right hand than his service at this moment."* (330)

Amy decides that she would not go with Varney at any cost. She warns Leicester, *"May he be true to you; and that he may be true, trust him not too much or too far. But it is enough to say that I will not go with him unless by violence, nor would I acknowledge him as my husband, were all"* (331) Leicester gets irritated by her opposition because he believes that it is a temporary deception that is necessary for the safety of both. He commands her, *"If my proposal disgust you, it is yourself has brought it on both of us. There is no other remedy - you must do what your own impatient folly hath rendered necessary - I command you."* (331) Amy bravely tells Leicester that she cannot obey such commands that are injurious to her. She assertively says, *"I cannot put your commands, my lord, in balance with those of honour and conscience. I will NOT, in this instance, obey you. You may achieve your own dishonour, to which these crooked policies naturally tend, but I will do nought that can blemish mine."* (331)

Varney tells Leicester that Amy is too much prejudiced against him. But she is interested in Edmund Tressilian and so she would consent to be his companion to Lidcote Hall where she might remain in safety till the problem gets resolved. Leicester remains silent but looks eagerly on Amy with an eye of suspicion and displeasure. The Countess only says, *"Would to God I were in my father's house! When I left it, I little thought I was leaving peace of mind and honour behind me."* (331)

When Leicester looks at Amy angrily, she says, *"My lord, my lord, bend no angry brows on me; it is the truth, and it is I who speak it. I once did Tressilian wrong for your sake; I will not do him the further injustice of being silent when his honour is brought in question."* (331)

Amy suggests a solution to the problem when she says, *"Take your ill-fated wife by the hand, lead her to the footstool of Elizabeth's throne-say that in a moment of infatuation... I gave my hand to this Amy Robsart. You will then have done justice to me, my lord, and to your own honour..."* (332) Leicester is moved by Amy's arguments. He exclaims, *"I am not worthy of you, Amy... I have a bitter penance to perform, in disentangling, before sneering foes and astounded friends, all the meshes of my own deceitful policy. And the Queen-but let her take my head, as she has threatened."* (322)

He tells Amy, *"Fear not, Amy; thou shalt see Dudley bear himself worthy of his name."* Amy tells Leicester, *"Truth, my noble lord, is well painted unarmed."*(332) Leicester embraces her fervently, muffles himself as before, and leaves the place.

Leicester tells Varney, *"She has brought me to the crisis... It is now decided-she or I must PERISH."* (333) Leicester further says, *"Shame is behind me, ruin before me; I must on."* (335) Now Varney poisons the ears of Leicester against Tressilian. He tells Leicester that he has seen that *"the interview betwixt Amy and Tressilian at Cumnor Place had been longer than the few minutes to which it was in reality limited."* (336) Varney further tells Leicester that Amy resorted immediately to the apartment of Tressilian, where she remained many hours in his company. Leicester is deeply hurt and he annoyingly exclaims, *"She has dishonoured me-she would have murdered me-all ties are burst between us. She shall die the death of a traitress and adulteress, well merited both by the laws of God and man!"* (339)

Leicester takes permission from the Queen to absent himself for a few days upon matters of pressing importance. She grants it with the remark that he should return with a mind that is free from deep thoughts. Leicester decides to take vengeance

on Tressilian with his own hand. Varney advises Leicester to control his passion. Moreover he asks him to go to Elizabeth's feet and fall at her feet and confess his marriage. He must also impeach his wife and her paramour Tressilian of adultery. Leicester's passions are aroused and he says, "*Tressilian shall be my own victim.*" (346) Varney asks Leicester to, "*Let her be as if she had not been-let her pass from your memory, as unworthy of ever having held a place there...She hath deserved death-let her die!*" (346) Meanwhile Amy who is still under the effect of the dose administered on her by Varney, appears sullen and half insane. She refuses to answer interrogatories or be amenable to the authority of the doctor. She is possessed with a delirium which could be termed HYPOCHONDRIA. The Queen feels that Varney being her husband should take care of her. Amy is therefore put under the care of Varney.

The Earl of Leicester decides to meet Tressilian and settle the issue for ever. Tressilian expresses his wish to meet him in an isolated place. Leicester asks Tressilian to "*meet me in the Pleasance when the Queen has retired to her chamber.*" (352) Meanwhile Sir Richard Varney departs from the Castle with Amy. When Leicester reaches the castle, he is informed that an hour has elapsed since Sir Richard Varney had left the Castle by the postern gate with three other persons, one of whom is transported in a horse-litter. But Leicester says, "*I thought he went not till daybreak.*" (355)

Leicester asks the guard if any of his attendants remain behind. He comes to know that Michael Lambourne hastily followed Richard Varney. Leicester asks the guard to call back Lambourne as Leicester wishes to convey a message to Richard Varney. Leicester realizes that Richard Varney is *overzealous* and *overpressing*. Leicester seizes upon writing materials, and hastily traces these words: "*Varney, we have resolved to defer the matter entrusted to your care, and strictly command you to proceed no further in relation to our Countess until our further order.*" (355) Leicester commands Michael Lambourne to deliver the letter speedily and carefully into Sir Richard Varney's hands. Leicester understands his mistake and realizes that he has been fooled by his own generosity.

Tressilian and Leicester meet at Pleasance. Tressilian wants to clear the misunderstanding between him and Leicester. He tells Leicester that the marriage must be confessed before the Queen. But Leicester in a fit of anger strikes Tressilian with a sword. At first Leicester succeeds in defeating Tressilian, but soon Tressilian has a better hold on him. A boy happens to come over there and gives a letter to Leicester "*secured with a long tress of woman's hair of a beautiful light-brown colour.*" (367) After reading the letter, Leicester understands the circumstances that led Amy to fly from Cumnor Place. Leicester makes up his mind to acknowledge Amy as his wife in front of the Queen, and then going to Cumnor Place to rescue her. He says, "*No voice but Dudley's shall proclaim Dudley's infamy. To Elizabeth herself will I tell it; and then for Cumnor Place with the speed of life and death!*" (369)

Tressilian tells the Queen that Amy is the Countess of Leicester. She gets extremely angry at the falsehood practiced upon her. She extracts all the information from him regarding Amy. Leicester acknowledges his guilt fearlessly. The Queen says, "*What ho! my lords, come all and hear the news-my Lord of Leicester's stolen marriage has cost me a husband, and England a king.*" (375) Leicester seeks her permission to bring his wife Amy home. But the Queen commands that Tressilian shall go to Cumnor Place instead of Leicester along with another gentleman of the court. Tressilian chooses Walter Raleigh to go with him. The Queen orders Tressilian and Raleigh to "*the bodies of Richard Varney and the foreign Alasco, dead or alive.*" (375)

On her way to Cumnor Place, Amy realizes that Varney is "*capable of every villainy, from the blackest to the basest!*" (381) Varney threatens Amy to quickly obey his orders. Varney assures her of all safety and honour if she silently agrees to go with him. He assures her that her husband Leicester would arrive at Cumnor Palace within twenty-four hours after they reach there. On the way they meet Michael Lambourne who gets insolent with Varney. Varney shoots Lambourne and kills him.

After reaching Cumnor Place, Amy is kept in the secret of bedchamber of Forster where he keeps his

gold. The place where she is kept is cut off by a draw bridge and a trap is set up which would lead her to death. In less than two minutes, tread of a horse is heard in the courtyard, and then a whistle similar to that which was the Earl's usual signal. Amy rushes towards the courtyard to meet her supposed husband. As soon as she runs out of her chamber, the same moment trap door opens and Amy fall inside to death. "There was a rushing sound-a heavy fall-a faint groan-and all was over." (389) Varney asks, "Is the bird caught?-Is the deed done?" (389) Antony answers that "she is gone!" (389) Varney cunningly exclaims, "I dreamed not I could have mimicked the Earl's call so well." (389) Forster replies, "Oh, if there be judgment in heaven, thou hast deserved it, and wilt meet it! Thou hast destroyed her by means of her best affections-it is a seething of the kid in the mother's milk!" (389) The perpetrator of the crime, Varney consumes a small quantity of poison prepared by Alasco and dies in the morning. Forster too perishes miserably.

#### CONCLUSION

The novel concludes with the death of loving Amy who in spite of being truthful and devoted wife of Leicester meets a miserable end. She suffers throughout her life; becomes a victim of Varney's treachery and falls on the thorns of life incessantly bleeding. She is in fact entangled by three persons; the first is Tressilian for whom she had passion once, the second is the Earl of Leicester for whom she has great regard as a husband, and the third is Richard Varney who is simply a fly in the ointment. The political ambitions of male folk reign supreme in the novel and Amy is simply made a scapegoat who is forced to forgo her life to fulfill her husband's aspirations. A recurrent note of torment and misery envelops throughout the novel. Leicester realizes his mistake in the end but it turns out to be futile because before any concrete step is taken, the life force of Amy comes to a standstill. He is unable to avert the mishap and save her from the clutches of iniquitous Varney. Amy dies a painful death waiting anxiously for her husband till the last breath of her life.

Amy's character is a subtle example of a male dominated society that considers women only a tool to bring them gratification and a means to satisfy their carnal pleasures. Her miserable death is an eye opener for millions of men who take their wives only as an instrument to quench their passionate urge and while doing so, they miserably fail to accord the dignity to women they inevitably deserve.

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