Sir Walter Scott

IVANHOE

A ROMANCE

Now fitted the halter, now traversed the cart,
And often took leave, but seem'd loth to depart!

PRIOR

With a New Foreword by
REGINA MARLER
and an Afterword by
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FOREWORD

But thou, my friend, canst fitly tell,
(For few have read romance so well,)
How still the legendary lay
O'er poet's bosom holds its sway;
How on the ancient minstrel strain
Time lays his palsied hand in vain;
And how our hearts at doughty deeds,
By warriors wrought in steely weeds,
Still throb for fear and pity's sake.

—Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*,
introduction to Canto the First

SOMETIME after the magnificent Hollywood film of *Ivanhoe* (1952) but before the trustees of Abbotsford, the baronial mansion Sir Walter Scott built for himself on the river Tweed, began to auction off Scott family odds and ends in 2006 to meet expenses for a new roof, the reading public's heart stopped throbbing "for fear and pity's sake" at the great deeds of chivalry. The gilt has worn off the heraldic crest. The last minstrel has sung. How a classic novel can be read in a new age, when literary tastes and cultural politics have changed, is a problem that Scott, with his canny commercial sensibilities, would have relished. As the introduction and dedicatory epistle to *Ivanhoe* make plain, he constantly wondered how best to appeal to his vast audience. Scott was acutely aware of the risks of either boring his readers with overfamiliar material, on the one hand, or disappointing them by varying the beloved Scottish settings and characters of his earlier novels; it was business instinct as much as love of the Middle Ages that led him to write *Ivanhoe*.

Even Scott would agree that he and his medievalism had a long, profitable run. After a pampered boyhood on his grandfather's farm on the Scottish border and a youth spent collecting Lowland legends, ballads, and anecdotes, he became the best-known and bestselling poet of nineteenth-century Britain. Walking the streets of London or Edinburgh during Scott's lifetime, you could have heard

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passersby helplessly reciting bits of *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* in their hypnotic four-beat lines.

Scott's writings struck readers "with an electric shock of delight," as one critic of his day put it—not only his ingenuity in blending history and fiction, but his realism, the graphic force of his descriptions, the engaging versification of his poetry, the novelty of his settings in the Scottish novels, and his sympathy for minor characters, often from the humble classes, whom he allowed a range of emotion rarely seen in fiction of that period. He made novel reading and novel writing respectable, and not only a pastime for overemotional ladies. For most of his century, Scott was ranked with Shakespeare. Lord Byron made it a habit to read Scott for an hour each day, and Thomas Hardy once defended *The Iliad* as "almost in the *Marmion* league."

Of course, Scott intended to beguile his readers. He wrote for fame and not, at first, for money. A few years after completing his law studies in Edinburgh, he had been appointed sheriff-deputy of the County of Selkirk, which brought a comfortable living. The light workload also gave him leisure to compile material for his first book, the three-volume anthology *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3), a collection of old verse that Scott freely improved on and completed wherever the manuscript sources or remembered scraps of song fell short. The original poetry that followed, beginning with *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), was wildly successful, tapping into the growing antiquarian movement and a new interest in regional differences—an aspect of the nationalist fervor in Britain that followed the Napoleonic wars.

But in 1814, when he had just bought the land on which he would build Abbotsford, his business partnership with the publisher James Ballantyne landed him in financial trouble. He wrote *Waverley* (1814) to dig himself out of the mess, and conquered even more readers. Although it was published anonymously, the Scottish dialect, themes, and setting of this first novel, which takes place during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, made his authorship an open secret. "Walter Scott has no business to write novels," complained Jane Austen to her niece in September 1814, "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

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people's mouths. I do not like him, and do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it—but fear I must."

By the time his medieval romances like *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Quentin Durward* (1823) began to appear, Scott had no rival among British writers. *Ivanhoe* sold out its first edition of ten thousand copies within two weeks; within a year, it inspired six plays, and eventually some fifty operas. Pirated editions flooded the book market in America, and French and German translations spread across Europe.

Despite his immense success, Scott overextended himself financially once again. The commercial crisis of 1826 brought down not only Ballantyne but another of Scott's secret business concerns (in Scott's day, a gentleman did not engage in trade), this time with his publisher John Constable, and he spent the rest of his life driving his pen over paper, struggling to pay off his debts. Worry and overwork contributed to his death in 1832 after a series of strokes.

The extent of his posthumous fame can be judged in part by the size and magnificence of the Gothic-styled Scott monument in Edinburgh and by the 1846 opening of Waverley Station (now Edinburgh Waverley), Britain's largest rail station outside of London. Even when his literary star began to fade, his personal charm, the sense of his goodness and benevolence, sustained his reputation. "No work in our literature places us in communication with a manlier or more lovable nature," wrote the Victorian critic Sir Leslie Stephen, the father of Virginia Woolf.* Stephen read all of Scott's novels aloud to his children and, when he had finished, picked up *Waverley* and started over again. Woolf's diaries are full of affectionate, admiring remarks on Scott.†

Inevitably, reaction set in. Mark Twain blamed Scott's novels for the South's entry into the Civil War, for the sense of offended honor that spurred Southern gentlemen to a hopeless defense of a slave-based economy and "tradition." The

*From an essay first published in the *Cornhill* magazine.

†From 15 February 1922: "The masterly Scott has me by the hair once more. *Old Mortality* [1816]. I'm in the middle; & have to put up with some dull sermons; but I doubt that he can be dull, because everything is so much in keeping—even his old monochromatic landscape painting, done in smooth washes of sepia & burnt siena." Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two: 1920–1924* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), page 164.

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concept of Southern chivalry had its roots in Scott, Twain argued. As he famously blasted him in *Life on the Mississippi*:

> It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a Major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. . . . Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.

Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) was his satire of Scott's medieval novels, and when his characters exclaim "Great Scott!" he hoped the spit landed in Scott's eye.*

The Gothic revival—the nostalgia for things medieval that began around 1750 in England and lingered through the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1910s—eventually gave way to modernism and the disillusion of two world wars. "No one reads Scott anymore," V. S. Pritchett lamented of his boyhood favorite in 1946. By the end of the twentieth century, Scott's novels were so neglected that an English newspaper critic could dismiss them as "yearning for some golden age of bloody chivalry."

This kind of flippant disregard often signals that a revival is due, and in fact the Edinburgh Edition of Scott's novels, the first collected edition of Scott in a hundred years, began to be published about the same time. But we should look more closely at Scott's treatment of chivalry in *Ivanhoe*, since this has drawn so much fire—or so many spears and long swords, in this case.

From early childhood, Scott steeped himself in history with a zeal that suggests deep anxiety about his own moment. This was how he was able to make the past feel so

*Another blow to Scott's reputation came in E. M. Forster's 1927 series of lectures at Cambridge, *Aspects of the Novel*, when he announced that Scott had "a trivial mind and a heavy style." Forster savaged Scott's narrative technique by paraphrasing one of his most-admired novels, *The Antiquary*, unpacking the author's "simple devices" like a bag of laundry and flashing each item in turn to show how worn and tawdry it really was.

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vivid in his novels, and his characters not fundamentally different from his readers: Scott could convincingly imagine himself in earlier times. Clearly, certain themes and settings stirred his sense of romance—as well as that of his early readers—and, as a popular writer, he kept revisiting successful elements. But his aims went beyond entertainment or historic revivalism. *Ivanhoe* was not a sales pitch for chivalry. The novel's early readers may have surrendered to the costumes and props in a way that we no longer can, but they didn't entirely miss the characterization of the sneering Brian de Bois-Guilbert, the Knight Templar, or Ivanhoe's criticism of King Richard for abandoning his people to oppressors while he galloped off to free the Holy Land. Scott sowed *Ivanhoe* with the seeds of his discontent with chivalry.

The year before he started the novel, he explored some of his ideas in an "Essay on Chivalry" for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1818. "In every age and country valour is held in esteem," he argued, "and the more rude the period and the place, the greater respect is paid to boldness of enterprise and success in battle." But only in the institution of chivalry did military valor combine with religious devotion and romantic love. The love of freedom—both his own and others—generosity, gallantry, loyalty, and an unblemished reputation were also essential principles to the knight. These are the values that the wounded Ivanhoe tries to explain to Rebecca at Torquilstone, while Saxon arrows pelt the tower walls.

"But as, in actual practice," Scott admitted, "every institution becomes deteriorated and degraded, we have too much occasion to remark, that the devotion of the knights often degenerated into superstition,—their love into licentiousness,—their spirit of loyalty or of freedom into tyranny and turmoil,—their generosity and gallantry into harebrained madness and absurdity." The Knights Templar in his novel clearly exemplify these degraded qualities, while the generosity and gallantry that motivate Ivanhoe to stand as Rebecca's champion at her trial for witchcraft provide Scott's moment of misty-eyed reverie, of imagining chivalry at its best.

But it's impossible to talk about *Ivanhoe* in the twenty-first century without mentioning its most glaring flaw: the

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depiction of Isaac of York. Instantly recognizable as a stock character of European drama and literature, Isaac is the stereotypical moneygrubbing Jew, an easy laugh (or hiss), the Shylock of Sherwood Forest. Yet his daughter, Rebecca, however idealized, is one of Scott's finest heroines. We know from the early plays based on *Ivanhoe* and from Thackeray's antiromantic parody, *Rebecca and Rowena* (1859), that what nineteenth-century readers wanted is for the fiery Rebecca—rather than the milk-and-honey Rowena—to end up with Ivanhoe. Tellingly, in the Thackeray novel and elsewhere, Rebecca converts to Christianity to make this possible.

How could the man who slapped Isaac of York onto the page also invent Rebecca* and devise a plot that exposes and condemns the bigotry, cruelty, and religious persecution of Europe in the Middle Ages?† Isaac is like a black stone sinking through Scott's good intentions and dragging the novel with it. Perhaps Scott felt that a negative portrayal of one Jew would balance his glowing portrayal of another—resulting in something like realism—or perhaps he held up the sterling Rebecca to better elicit our sympathies for a degenerate race typified, for him, by Isaac. In any case, if we consider Rebecca as the moral center of the novel—and the character that presents Scott's own views—how are we to handle the clownish caricature of Isaac?

We know that Scott experienced Jews as profoundly other. In July of 1817, two years before composing *Ivanhoe*, he expressed reservations about a new novel by Maria Edgeworth with a purportedly Jewish heroine (who turns out, to Scott's relief, not to be Jewish). He wrote to a friend, "Jews will always be to me Jews. One does not naturally and easily combine with their habits and pursuits any great liberality of principle, though certainly it may, and I believe does, exist in many individual instances." Scott was generalizing, yet recognized this and qualified it. Then he added: "They are money-makers and money-brokers by profession, and it is a trade which narrows the mind."

*She is only partly an invention, since the beautiful, downtrodden Jewess is also a recognizable type from earlier literature and drama.
†The Jews would eventually be violently expelled from England in 1290 and not return for four hundred years.

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Scott knew why Jews had traditionally been moneylenders (Christianity's now-forgotten strictures on charging interest for loans, combined with laws barring Jews from almost any other profession), and it's not unreasonable to imagine that after writing this letter, his mind began to work on the unfairness of this rationale for suspicion and distaste of a persecuted people. Eventually, the conflict must have become intolerable to him, because despite Isaac of York, *Ivanhoe* is the most powerful critique of anti-Semitism to emerge in British literature before the late nineteenth century.

Scott's fellow writers were also caught between the old prejudices and the new sensitivity to the Jews' plight. One of the few other Jewish characters in nineteenth-century literature, Fagin in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), is an archetypal Jewish villain, a hideous old thief who recruits children to steal for him. Dickens initially shrugged off the suggestion of anti-Semitism by remarking, "That class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew." Later in life, after befriending a Jewish banker and his wife who had bought one of his London homes, Dickens substantially revised Fagin, making him a more sympathetic character and not so often bluntly referred to as "the Jew."

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Although Jews began to mix socially and professionally with European gentiles in the late eighteenth century, they did not gain equal rights in Great Britain until 1856. Prejudice was ingrained. Scott's contemporary Charles Lamb, often considered "the most lovable man" in English letters, wrote in his 1821 essay, "Imperfect Sympathies," that he had "in the abstract, no disrespect for Jews. They are a piece of stubborn antiquity." But he would not want to really know any of them.

> Centuries of injury, contempt, and hate, on the one side,—of cloaked revenge, dissimulation, and hate, on the other, between our and their fathers, must and ought to affect the blood of the children. I cannot believe it can run clear and kindly yet; or that a few fine words, such as candour, liberality, the light of a nineteenth century, can close up the breaches of so deadly a disunion. A Hebrew is nowhere congenial to me.

This seems less than lovable, in retrospect, but none of Lamb's readers rushed to enlighten him.

Scott labored hard to avoid anachronism in his novels, and we have to return the favor in not tossing *Ivanhoe* across the room at the mention of Isaac's relentless bargaining or the "blubber lips" of the Knight Templar's Saracen slaves. Interestingly, the postwar Hollywood adaptation of *Ivanhoe* softened the depiction of Isaac and accorded him a dignity and gravity that better support Scott's basic message of tolerance. Later adaptations have taken their cue from this performance.

Many of Scott's gifts translate perfectly over the past two centuries—his loose and rapid style, his compassion, his masterful scene construction, his sheer confidence in introducing hundreds of characters and borrowing from any literary style at hand, whether Gothic or classical or romantic, and his feeling for the relationship between the past and the present. He portrayed the past as an active, shaping force in the present: rich but also heavy with tradition. His characters are sometimes mired in cultural memory, like his defiant thane Cedric, who clings to the impossible dream of a Saxon Revival, and sometimes, like Rebecca, so forward thinking that they barely belong in the novel.

A Tory and a proud landowner, Scott believed in the rule of an elite. Like his contemporaries Burke and Wordsworth, he grew up in the shadow of the French Revolution, terrified of radicals and mob rule.* But he also believed in the dignity of ordinary people and the poor, which was as easily threatened by the industrial revolution as by the abuses of feudalism. In *Ivanhoe*, only Cedric keeps up the struggle between an idyllic Saxon past and the harsh new Norman oppression. The other Saxons and their Norman king are looking for reconciliation—a peaceful future with a unified people. This reflects Scott's own pragmatism, his attraction to the middle way. Thomas Carlyle complained that Scott had no great cause, but he actually advanced a consistent moral and political message, evident in *Ivanhoe* as in all his

*The Peterloo Massacre of protesting workers in Manchester took place in August 1819, when Scott was almost finished with *Ivanhoe*, and he fully supported the government's suppression of the activists.

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work: the importance of compromise, kindness, loyalty, and not much movement in the ranks.

As careful as he tried to be with details of architecture, costume, and weaponry, Scott did make free with history. His Richard I, for example, is a figure of fantasy. The real Richard attempted to overthrow his father, the Angevin king Henry II, spoke almost no English, and spent only six months of his ten-year reign in England. These months were spent bleeding the country dry for one of his Crusades, and he once said he would sell London if he could. His military successes made him a legendary figure, but he barely lifted a royal finger to suppress a massacre of Jews that followed his coronation in London in 1189 and seems to have routinely raped and discarded women. If I led a life like King Richard's, I'd pray for a Walter Scott to polish up my armor for posterity.

In his 1946 appreciation, V. S. Pritchett praised Scott's humanity and his scholarly attention to detail: "the very pedantry of it is pedantry washed down by the rough wine of life. Everything is carried off with the authority of a robust and educated style, the style of a man fit to understand, master and govern, a man endlessly fair and excitingly patient in his taste for human nature." Reading *Ivanhoe* now, we still relish its suspense and its clashes of personality and culture. We can appreciate it more deeply if we remember Scott's enormous influence on the development of Western literature. His rough wine runs through the veins of almost every major writer for a century and a half after him, and to know him better is to know them better: even—Great Scott!—Mark Twain.

—Regina Marler

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This edition of *Ivanhoe* reproduces the complete text of the Dryburgh edition as published by Adam and Charles Black, Ltd., London, in 1904. That edition was collated with Scott's own annotated set of the Waverley Novels in the possession of the publishers, and many inaccuracies were then corrected.

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INTRODUCTION

THE Author of the Waverley Novels had hitherto proceeded in an unabated course of popularity, and might, in his peculiar district of literature, have been termed *l'enfant gâté* of success. It was plain, however, that frequent publication must finally wear out the public favour, unless some mode could be devised to give an appearance of novelty to subsequent productions. Scottish manners, Scottish dialect, and Scottish characters of note, being those with which the Author was most intimately and familiarly acquainted, were the groundwork upon which he had hitherto relied for giving effect to his narrative. It was, however, obvious that this kind of interest must in the end occasion a degree of sameness and repetition, if exclusively resorted to, and that the reader was likely at length to adopt the language of Edwin, in Parnell's *Tale*:

> 'Reverse the spell,' he cries,
> 'And let it fairly now suffice,
> The gambol has been shown.'

Nothing can be more dangerous for the fame of a professor of the fine arts than to permit (if he can possibly prevent it) the character of a mannerist to be attached to him, or that he should be supposed capable of success only in a particular and limited style. The public are, in general, very ready to adopt the opinion that he who has pleased them in one peculiar mode of composition is, by means of that very talent, rendered incapable of venturing upon other subjects. The effect of this disinclination, on the part of the public, towards the artificers of their pleasures, when they attempt to enlarge their means of amusing, may be seen in the censures usually passed by vulgar criticism upon actors or artists who venture to change the character of their efforts, that, in so doing, they may enlarge the scale of their art.

There is some justice in this opinion, as there always is in such as attain general currency. It may often happen on the stage that an actor, by possessing in a pre-eminent degree the external qualities necessary to give effect to comedy,

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