

Walter Scott and The Historical Novel

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Part One

At one point in the little remembered early 19th century novel *Romance and Reality*, by Letitia Elizabeth Landon, several characters are discussing the merits of their favorite novelists, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen, whose novels one character praises, for “they are the truest picture of country life, whose little schemes, hopes, scandals &c. are detected with a woman’s tact, and told with a woman’s vivacity,” a comment to which another character objects, saying that although “they are amusing to a degree . . . her pen is like a pair of skates—it glides over the surface; you seek in vain for any deep insight into human thought or human feeling” (195-96). This discussion is brought to a close with the mention of Walter Scott, about whose fiction these characters are united in praise. “He is the Columbus that has discovered our America of literature,” says one, “Think not of his works themselves, but of their effects. How much he has destroyed and discovered! How much mental gold he has distributed! What a new spirit he has created! He is the Hercules who has cleared off the dragons and the giants, and the Prometheus who has bequeathed a legacy of living fire” (197).

Almost no one now would consider Austen’s novels inferior to Scott’s or speak so hyperbolically about his work. In fact, this excessive praise would seem absurd to modern readers, most of whom are unlikely to have read even one of his novels. But this praise was almost universally shared in the 19th century. Beginning in 1814 with the publication of *Waverley*, Scott was hailed as the creator of a new genre: the historical novel, through which he charted British history from 1090 to 1800 for a large and largely worshipful readership, so worshipful that he was sometimes compared *favorably* to Shakespeare (Raleigh 7). “To have been alive and literate in the nineteenth century,” writes University of California Professor Emeritus John Henry Raleigh, “was to have been affected in some way by the *Waverley* novels” (10).

In turning to the past, Scott was following the lead of the writers of the Gothic tale who often set their romances in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. But writers like Anne Radcliffe had little interest in historical precision. Set in France and Italy in the 1580s, Radcliffe’s novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ignores important events such as the French Wars of Religion, which raged from 1562 to 1598, led to the St. Bartholomew Day massacre, which lasted for several weeks and which caused the deaths of between five and 30,000 Huguenots at the hands of French Catholics. Overall, as many as 3 million people died from war, famine, and disease in the Wars of Religion (Knecht 296). Besides ignoring this essential background, the novel is riddled with anachronisms: its protagonist is encouraged to study English in order to appreciate the sublimity of English poetry, at a time when few English poems had even been published; Radcliffe refers to French opera, although it wasn’t until 1645 that the first opera—an Italian one—was staged in France, and the first French opera wouldn’t be performed until 1669, more than a century after the setting of the novel; she refers to “coffee on the table,” although coffee wasn’t introduced into France until the 1660s; she refers to a fancy dress ball where people dance cotillions, although these weren’t danced until the 18th century. You get the idea.

Besides relying on anachronistic details, Radcliffe describes the mindsets of characters anachronistically. The novel’s main character seems not a product of Renaissance France but of late 18th century England, a sentimentalist and a romantic absorbed by the sublimity of nature. As I read the novel, I had to keep reminding myself that she and the other characters were supposed to be alive in the late 1500s, not the late 1700s. Stanford University English professor Terry Castle, whom I’ve drawn from to identify Radcliffe’s

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historical errors, asserts that “the values of the sympathetic characters are wildly anachronistic for the period during which they are supposed to be living” (11, note on 677).

Unlike Radcliffe and other Gothic novelists, Scott, already a well-known poet, sought to depict the past accurately, realistically, in his first novel, *Waverley*, which was published anonymously in 1814, causing his subsequent novels to be identified as by the author of *Waverley* and causing Scott to be referred to as, among other monikers, “The Great Unknown,” “the Enchanter of the North,” “the Northern Magician,” and “the Scottish Prospero,” although many in the literary community believed Scott was the author, which he consistently denied, even writing to his brother, “A novel here, called *Waverley*, has had enormous success. . . the success which it has had, with some other circumstances, has induced people to ‘lay the [babe] at a certain door. . . You will guess for yourself how far such a report has credibility” (qtd. in Stuart Kelly 110). If perchance Scott wasn’t the author, some speculated that the Scottish William Mackenzie, author of the sentimental novel *A Man of Feeling*, might be. Scott enjoyed his anonymity, once even anonymously co-writing, with his friend William Erskine, a review of the first two novels that make up *Tales of My Landlord*, a subset of the *Waverley* novels. Scott plays with the idea of anonymous authorship: “We can,” he writes, “conceive many reasons for a writer observing this sort of mystery; not to mention that it has certainly had its effect in keeping up the interest which his works have excited” and coyly admitting that “few can wish his success more sincerely than we do” (Scott and Erskine 431). And he deprecates his own skills, describing these tales as “slightly constructed,” “slovenly indiffer[ant]” to the “probability and perspicuity of narrative,” having a “loose and incoherent style” and showing a “total want of interest . . . [in] the character of the hero” (431). But there’s more praise than criticism in this self-authored review. “The author,” he writes, “takes his seat on the bench of the historians of his time and country. . . [He is] at once a master of the great events and minutor incidents of history, and of the manner of the time he celebrates” (Scott and Erskine 467).

The first two dozen of his novels, which include *Tales of My Landlord*, are referred to as “Waverley novels” simply because Scott didn’t publicly acknowledge authorship until 1827. The first eight, which critics see as Scott’s signal achievement, focused on Scottish history, mostly of the 18th Century. Raleigh lists some of the reasons for the popularity of these novels:

their originality, their humor, the earthiness and quaintness of the Scottish dialogue, the individuality of the characters, the melodrama, the sentiment, the good spirits, the “sound” morality, the conventional love story and happy ending, the nature descriptions, the historical accounts, the thrilling battles, the intriguing mystery of the author—the splendid profusion of it all as the early *Waverleys* poured forth (10).

To Raleigh’s list I’ll add that the tremendous appeal of Scott’s novels, starting with *Waverley*, was due to his rich use of realistic details; his focus on ordinary people and their interactions with extraordinary events and well-known, real-life characters, such as Bonnie Prince Charlie and Richard the Lion-Hearted; his representation of and appreciation for regional identity; and his promotion of a coherent national identity. Chad May, former Chair of the English Department at Kansas Wesleyan University, supports this view, noting that “most Victorian readers were drawn to the continuous narrative of national development that his novels could provide” (100).

In *Waverley*, Scott tells the tale of a young English gentleman, Edward Waverley, who receives a commission in the English army and is posted to Dundee, Scotland. After visiting the estate of his father’s friend Baron Bradwardine and meeting his daughter Rose, Edward travels to the lair of the highland Chieftain Fergus, where he meets Fergus’s sister Flora. Imprisoned for desertion and then escaping thanks to the highlanders, Edward is persuaded by Flora to fight for the Scots in the Jacobite rebellion. Once the Scots are defeated, Edward receives a pardon, marries Rose, choosing a flower over Flora, and helps restore the damaged Bradwardine estate. This tidy ending, this return to order, is common in Scott’s fiction, as

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John Maynard, Professor of English Emeritus at New York University, explains: “Though Scott tells us . . . that history notoriously slays the just and the unjust, his plots tell us that gentlemen heroes are always spared, villains get theirs in the end, and picturesque characters, like *Waverley’s* father-in-law, the Baron of Bradwardine, are always restored to their lost estates and hereditary honors” (245).

Clearly, it wasn’t Scott’s plotting but his skill at immersing readers in a believable facsimile of the past that made his novels so popular. Scott’s turn to the past mirrored—and helped push forward—the development of history as a serious scholarly pursuit. Histories, particularly histories of Britain, were extremely popular, Arizona State University English professor Devoney Looser noting that “In the eighteenth century an estimated ten thousand books were published on British history alone, compared with three thousand novels” (10) and J.W. Thompson, history professor at UC Berkeley, asserting that “No other age . . . had such a voracious interest in historical literature as the eighteenth century. Everyone read and talked history” (93).

Why were histories—especially histories of Britain—so popular? This turn to history was encouraged by Enlightenment belief that the past could be understood and explained through the application of reason, almost as if history were an exact science, or as the philosopher David Hume put it: “records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions, are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects” (*Enquiry*). Another factor in the popularity of histories was belief that Britain, developing into a formidable nation on the verge of becoming an empire, demanded a history whose greatness matched the nation’s own. Just as classical Greece and Rome had had their histories preserved by writers like Herodotus and Thucydides, Livy and Tacitus, so Britain needed its own history memorably documented and preserved. Depicting the fate of an empire that began in a city on the periphery of the Mediterranean, Edward Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the first volume of which was published in 1776, likewise stimulated this demand for a national history of a burgeoning empire that began on an island in a distant corner of Europe.

Historians received plenty of encouragement, both from a reading public eager to read national histories and an elite class seeking a history that would glorify the nation and, through association, glorify themselves. And we shouldn’t overlook the propagandistic usefulness of national histories, as can be tragically seen today in Vladimir Putin’s use of Russo-nationalism to assault Ukraine or as could be seen in many 18th century histories. University of Chicago Emeritus Professor Ronald Grigor Suny gives examples of some of these propagandistic uses of history: “Enlightened and not-so-enlightened monarchs,” he writes “commissioned historians to chronicle their achievements and challenge the views of foreigners. In Russia, for example, Peter the Great appealed for a national history to counteract ‘Polish lies’; Empress Elizabeth [the daughter of Peter] . . . summoned historians to refute German scholars who described the early Slavs as ‘barbarians, resembling beasts’; Catherine [the Great] urged denunciation of the ‘falsehood . . . slander . . . and insolence’ of the ‘frivolous Frenchmen’ who wrote histories of Russia” (574). As these examples suggest, the history of history is frequently defined by nationalist rewritings of national histories.

By the 18th century, histories of Britain had moved well past earlier histories’ reliance upon myth and miracle and hagiography. According to Devoney Looser, “Historiography was changing rapidly throughout the period, moving from a memoir-based, politically volatile, or annals-saturated form . . . to one of greater scholarly, scientific, stylistic, and professional pretension, drawing on documentary remnants in an emerging print culture” (2). The writing of an accurate history of Britain, though, was fraught with difficulties. To begin with, the verities of earlier centuries could no longer be relied on in the Age of Reason. Ernst Briesach, history professor at Western Michigan University, lists those features which necessitated a new writing of history: “The impact of authority shattering humanist text criticism, the encounters with the many pagan classical works, the radical revision of the image of the world in the geographical discoveries, the shaking of church authority and of faith during the Reformation, the new philosophical and scientific views”

(199). “In contemporary histories,” writes Briesach, “the Old Testament was doubted as accurate history, direct divine intervention was relegated to rare occasions, Divine Providence was reduced to a vague concept, [and] ecclesiastical history was divorced from secular history” (199).

Yet the accurate writing of history was encumbered by the passions of contemporary politics. A highly politicized age, the 18th century saw bitter struggles between Tories and Whigs, causing historians, almost invariably, to place partisan demands above historical truth. These national histories frequently followed what has come to be known as the Whig Interpretation of History, a belief in the inevitability of Britain’s progress, a belief Scott promotes in *Waverley*. Princeton University history professor David Cannadine offers a fuller definition, identifying the commonplaces of Whig historians: “They celebrated parliamentary government, the Common Law, the Church of England, ordered progress toward democracy, and the avoidance of revolution. They took English exceptionalism for granted: it existed, it was good, and it was the historian’s task to explain it and to applaud it” (“British” 16). The Cambridge University historian Herbert Butterfield, defining Whig history as “the study of the past with direct and perpetual reference to the present” (11), explains the flaws in this approach: the historian who looks for a continuity between the present in the past will believe “he has discovered a ‘root’ or an ‘anticipation’ of [his] century, when in reality he is in a world of different connotations altogether. . . . he comes to imagine that it represents something like a line of causation. The total result of this method is to impose a certain form upon the whole historical story, and to produce a scheme of general history which is bound to converge upon the present” (12).

“Even historians less directly engaged in nationalist or state-building projects,” Ronald Grigor Suny observes, “were deeply affected by the emerging discourse of the nation that assumed without serious questioning the natural division of humanity into separate and distinct nations, the generally progressive evolution of peoples into nations, and the claim that nations had a unique right to sovereignty and political representation.” It should be said, though, that, as Suny recognizes, “even as they contributed to the constitution of the nation, national or nationalist historians were never simply or completely servants of the nation-state, but often presented critical perspectives that made politicians and patriots uncomfortable. Governments of ostensibly national states, often supportive of the efforts of national historians, were occasionally intolerant of the independence of professional historians and dismissed and punished those whose views conflicted with official policy” (582-83). The study of history as an academic discipline that relies upon independent research and the use of primary sources, and that attempts to ignore official narratives, would not become an established practice until well into the 19th century.

But the writing of more accurate histories demanded a constant struggle against the ideological needs of the nation-state, for simultaneous with the rise of professional historiography was the rise of nationalism. The conventional understanding has been that, in the words of Andrew Hadfield, “Nations are a post-Enlightenment development . . . requiring secularism, industrialization, mass communication and popular politics in order to appear” (48-9). Nationalism, on this view, arose in response to the rapid increase in urbanization; the belief that people moving from the bonds of community within rural environments to the impersonality and alienation of cities should, to maintain social cohesion, be united through a shared nationality. Given its rapid industrialization and urbanization, Britain especially faced a need to unify its populous. The loss of regional identities needed to be supplanted with a uniform national identity. In the past, the church had played this uniting role, providing a sense of communal identity. But the direct power of the church diminished when no longer the center of a community, as it had been in villages and towns; its power declined as well due to increasing secularization and to the diffusion of a single established church into multiple sects: Unitarians, Moravians, Sandemanians, Inghamites, Swedenborgians, and Methodists (E.P. Thompson 51). Thus, in Britain nationalism fulfilled the basic human need for shared identity, while simultaneously serving as a means of social control.

This need to reinforce national unity through a shared history also responded to the French Revolution, to its spread of radical politics into Britain, which was encouraged by one particular source, Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man*, published in 1791 and 1792 in response to Edmund Burke's repudiation of the Revolution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. While Burke's text sold a respectable 30,000 copies, Paine's sold perhaps as many as one million copies (Altick, *English* 70-71), leading John Adams to opine that no "man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine" (qtd. in Kates 569). One can't overestimate the impact in Britain of *The Rights of Man*, which the eminent Victorianist Richard Altick asserts "was quoted at every meeting of the 'corresponding' and 'constitutional' societies that sprang up in every English town. . . . The 'Jacobin' societies, composed of enthusiasts and the ranks of the skilled workmen who sympathized with the ideals of the French Revolution, sent scores of thousands of copies broadcast through the nation. Some provincial groups arranged for editions by local printers. Radical bookshops . . . attracted many workingmen" (*English* 71).

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson details how the French Revolution and *The Rights of Man* helped radicalize parts of the working class. (Thompson, by the way, spent a considerable portion of his life as a journalist and activist and visiting professor, having quit his professorship at the University of Warwick in 1970 in protest of its increasing commercialization, complaining, in a statement that would apply to almost every American university today, that the "dominant elements in the administration of a university had become so intimately enmeshed with the upper reaches of consumer capitalist society that they are actively twisting the purposes and procedures of the university . . . and thus threatening its integrity as a self-governing academic institution" [qtd. in Plasic]).

Under the influence of Paine and the Revolution, the working class, Thompson argues, agitated for fundamental changes to English law and governance. "The agitation of the [early] 1790s," Thompson writes, "was extraordinarily intensive and far-reaching. It altered the sub-political attitudes of the people, affected class alignments, and imitated traditions which stretch forward into the [20th] century. It was not an agitation about France, although French events both inspired and bedeviled it. It was an English agitation, of impressive dimensions, for an English democracy" (102). It's this call for change, not the Revolution, Thompson argues, that worried elites in Britain, who responded, predictably, by attempting to repress dissent and thereby violating the very constitutional rights the British establishment was arguing were central to the nation's identity: *The Rights of Man* was banned, radical pamphlets and periodicals were destroyed, booksellers were fined and jailed, working men's societies were suppressed, radicals were arrested, and Paine, indicted for seditious conspiracy, burned in effigy, and chased by angry mobs, fled to France, where, ironically (and predictably), he was arrested for treason and imprisoned for a year. Thompson presents more details about the British government's responses to radical dissent: "at this very time," he writes, "freedom of the press, of public meeting, of trade union organisation, of political organisation and of election, were either severely limited or in abeyance" (79), and "it became a treasonable offence to incite the people by speech or writing to hatred or contempt of King, Constitution or Government" (145).

In addition to cracking down on the means of dissent and arresting dissenters, the British government waged a propaganda campaign, arousing war fever against France and agitating nationalist sentiment, as a result of which, Thompson explains, "Volunteer corps were formed; . . . traditional fairs were made the occasion for military demonstrations. The Government increased subsidies to, and influence over, the newspaper press; popular anti-Jacobin sheets multiplied" (115). To further discredit working class dissent and promote war against France, Thompson asserts, the establishment promoted "sensational 'disclosures' of conspiracy in the House, and rumours of insurrectionary plots and of liaison between the [working class] societies and the French" (132). In addition, the largely working class protestors—who the historian Eric Hobsbawm identifies as "primarily an artisan or working-class phenomenon" (79)—were labelled "Jacobins," a term derived from French revolutionaries and associated with the Reign of Terror. "Its application to the early reformers," the biographer Edward Smith explains, "arose from the terrors it inspired during the first flush of the French Revolution, when the minds of the easy-going classes were disturbed at the popular

demands for Liberty and Equality” (v). Note: These terms are related only by the root “Jacob,” not by meaning. “Jacobin” refers to French revolutionaries, “Jacobite” to the followers of James II of Scotland and his descendants.

It was at this time, as English nationalism grew, that the first attempts to chart the uniqueness of English literature, to identify a canon of national literature through anthologies and literary histories and biographies, appeared, with works such as Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the English Poets*; John Bell’s 109-volume *Poets of Great Britain Complete from Chaucer to Churchill*; Thomas Warton’s *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*; Thomas Percy’s ballad collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*; George Ellis’s *Specimens of the Early English Poets* and Thomas Campbell’s 7-volume *Specimens of the British Poets; with biographical and critical notices, and An Essay on English Poetry*. Although poetry was still the most prestigious of literary forms, the novel at this time began to be collected and appraised, through works such as Anna Letitia Barbauld’s 50-volume *The British Novelists with an Essay; and Prefaces Biographical and Critical*, published in 1810; William Mudford’s 5-volume *The British Novelists: Comprising Every Work of Acknowledged Merit which is Usually Classed under the Denomination of Novels: Accompanied with Biographical Sketches of the Authors, and a Critical Preface to Each Work*, published between 1810 and 1817; and the 10-volume *Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library*, published between 1821 and 1824, edited and with biographical prefaces by Walter Scott (Armstrong 37). Published between 1777 and 1824, these texts helped shape British national identity, a linking of literature and nation that remains the prevailing structure of literature courses in high schools and colleges.

The practice of history, too, was ensnared in the interests of the nation state as history moved from the amateur pursuit of antiquarians to the professional research of academics. For all its attempts to break free from the bonds of nationalism, the study of history—in the popular and political minds—is inseparable from the development of national identity. Writes Ronald Grigor Suny,

Historians participate in the active imagination of those political communities that we call nations as they elaborate the narratives that make up national histories. As historians helped generate national consciousness and nationalism, their own discipline acquired the task of ‘discovering’ or ‘recovering’ the ‘national’ past. Thus, history as a discipline helped constitute the nation, even as the nation determined the categories in which history was written and purposes it was to serve (569).

Or as the intellectual historian and theorist Hayden White argues, national historians “tend to structure their narratives in such a way as to depict the consolidation or crystallization, out of a set of apparently dispersed events, of some integrated entity whose importance is greater than that of any of the individual entities analyzed or described” (15). The problem for the historian is that nationalism and history are often in conflict, especially when historical fact contradicts nationalist belief, as recently seen in the United States in efforts to whitewash History curricula by removing so-called “critical race theory.” For example, the public schools in Johnston County, North Carolina, now require instructors, under threat of disciplinary action or dismissal, to teach that “All people who contributed to American Society will be recognized and presented as reformists, innovators and heroes to our culture” and to ensure that “The United States foundational documents shall not be undermined” (Johnston County). And according to reports, the state of Florida, in its new history curricula, downplays the role of slavery in the nation’s founding, cites George Washington’s and Thomas Jefferson’s desire to abolish slavery without identifying them as slaveowners, and dismisses the notion of a constitutional separation of church and state (Levin).

While these are, of course, extreme examples of the politicization of the study of history, Anthony D. Smith, London School of Economics Professor Emeritus, identifies the core problem: “The past to which nationalists aspire is mythical: it exists only in the minds of nationalists and their followers, even when it is

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not cynically fabricated for present political purposes” (177). Not just history but a whole range of academic and cultural fields have been recruited to support national interests. Smith points out that nations depend upon “an academic scholarly component which . . . can also provide the whole nationalist enterprise with a legitimacy based on scholarly research. . . . Hence the proliferation of historical, philological, ethnological, socio-demographic, art-historical, musicological, and other forms of historical enquiries, and the appeal of nationalism for those engaged in such investigations” (qtd. in Newman 111).

Our current moment, fraught with division and threat, has enflamed the conflict over nationalist narrative, a moment that perhaps can help us understand the political climate of the early 19th century. In post-Enlightenment, post-Napoleon Britain, with a developing professional historiography, with an ongoing public interest in national history, with a rising nationalist sentiment accompanying the nation’s growing power, and with a need to counter French nationalism and *égalité* and to offset Britain’s economic woes and social transformations, Scott’s novels appeared, *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe* and others of Scott’s novels largely adhering to a Whiggish history that promoted the belief that the history of Britain was a history of legal and moral and political progress. Yale English professor Dwight Culler asserts that Scott “was well acquainted with the speculations of the ‘philosophic historians’ [of the 18th century] . . . [who] attempted, through philosophic analysis, to trace the origin and development of social institutions. . . . they introduced and emphasized the idea of progress” (22). Scott’s historical novels didn’t just respond to contemporary circumstances but in fact helped shape and reinforce this dominant historical belief. As Ina Ferris, professor of English at the University of Ottawa, explains, “the *Waverley* Novels help mark the transformation of historical consciousness and history writing in the post revolutionary years in Britain and the Continent” (195). In the nineteenth century,” writes University of East London History Professor Raphael Samuel, “new literary forms . . . shaped the character of historical work and the direction of historical inquiry. Sir Walter Scott, with his anti-heroic heroes, his scenes from everyday life and his play with vernacular speech would appear as one of the great architects of historical realism” (24).

In other words, such was Scott’s reach that his historical novels helped shape not just popular perceptions of history but the nature of history writing and scholarship itself, Ohio State University English Professor Clare Simmons noting, for example, that “Scott’s successful construction of a myth [in *Ivanhoe*] more powerful than the supposedly factual histories . . . had immense influence . . . on two popular histories,” Augustin Thierry’s *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans; Its Causes, and its Consequences* and Thomas Babington Macaulay’s five-volume *History of England*, which supplanted David Hume’s four-volume *History of England* as authoritative national history and cemented the Whiggish interpretation of history (90). Overall, Scott reaffirmed a conservative worldview that believed in the greatness of Great Britain. According to the Marxist theorist and literary critic Georg Lukacs, “Scott ranks among those honest Tories in England of his time who exonerate nothing in the development of capitalism, who not only see clearly, but also deeply sympathize with the unending misery of the people which the collapse of old England brings in its wake, yet who, precisely because of their conservatism, display no violent opposition to the features of the new development repudiated by them” (32-3). Culler notes that “Scott’s characters are normally spread out so as to form a spectrum, from extreme to moderate. In the evolution of his novel the future is always with the moderates” (26).

Another factor necessitating a unifying national mythology was the incorporation of Scotland in 1707 and Ireland in 1800, forming a United Kingdom. This need to unify a nation, to legitimize its militarism, to rally its citizens, to justify their sacrifices under the banner of patriotism is common during wartime, with its existential fears and us-versus-them mentality. In the 18th century, the British fought wars on the European continent, on the Indian subcontinent and in North America, including the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the Great Northern War (1717-1720,) the War of Austrian Succession (1740,) the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783), the four Anglo-Mysore wars (the first 1767-1769, the last 1798-1799), and the Anglo-French Wars (1793-1802). Eric Evans, Professor of Social History at Lancaster University, adds that “the development of national identity during the eighteenth

century was only partly a function of wartime patriotism: it also reflected growing commercial success, both home and abroad” (223). Evans goes on to explain that Britain was more unified and more aware of its own nationhood than other European nations: “Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century,” he writes, “was certainly richer and probably more self-confident and self-aware than any other nation in Europe. It was also linguistically and culturally more unified and more knowledgeable both about itself and about its political processes” (223-24).

Beyond wartime patriotism and national triumph, the demand for a national history can be generated by national trauma, which Britain had undergone in its civil war in the 16th century and, at the end of the 18th century, its loss of the American colonies, its fear of the French revolution, its repeated defeats against the armies of Napoleon, and the socially disruptive forces released through radical economic and technological change. This trauma was not limited to the British. The historian Harry Elmer Barnes offers a compelling summary of the forces that promoted nationalism: “the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the regeneration of Prussia had contributed . . . greatly to the ardent national self-consciousness in most of the European states. At this time, it was reinforced by the popular tenets of Romanticism, emphasizing the importance of national character and the imperishable ‘genius of the people’” (207).

(Before going any further, I must note that here and elsewhere I cite from Barnes’s 1938 book *The History of Historical Writing*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press. In the 1950s and 60s, Barnes wrote and supported work that downplayed and denied the Holocaust, declaring for instance that atrocity stories were a “defamation of German national character and conduct” [“Harry”]. I find such arguments, if they can even be called that, intellectually objectionable and morally repulsive, and I denounce them in the strongest possible terms. Barnes’s book on historiography was written earlier and, as far as I can tell, includes no such views.)

At the beginning of the 19th century, many Europeans saw their lives upended by war and revolution and social change. The impact of such large social forces and events on individuals and communities was painfully apparent. Undergoing traumatic change and confronting epochal historical events like the French and American revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars, people needed to contextualize, to make sense of one’s own time by understanding its antecedents and by learning from its historical analogues. The brutality of the early 19th century in Europe, according to Lukacs,

for the first time made history a mass experience. . . . During the decades between 1789 and 1814 each nation of Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries. And the quick succession of these upheavals gives them a qualitatively distinct character, it makes their historical character far more visible . . . the masses no longer have the impression of a “natural occurrence.” . . . This must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual. (23)

Reading a novel like *Waverley*, one could see this direct effect, could see how ordinary people, such as Edward Waverley, struggled through the turmoil of history, could see how, in Lukacs’ words, “certain crises in the personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis” (41).

Following the vanquishing of the once invincible Napoleon, which concluded two decades of post-revolution war against France, a triumphal United Kingdom experienced a surge of patriotic feeling. (Napoleon was sent into exile at Elba in April 1814; the first edition of *Waverley* appeared only three months later.) At the same time that Britain was experiencing a sense of triumph, however, it was undergoing a profound change through industrialization and financialization and consequent protest and economic turmoil, with the period between 1815 and 1820 witnessing what historian David Cannadine

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describes as “a protracted period of distress and unrest greater than anything that had taken place during the preceding quarter century” (*Victorious* 130). It was a time to consider the nation’s history, to understand how it had (and presumably would continue to) overcome its many crises and threats, not merely to survive but to prosper and eventually dominate.

In *Waverley*, Scott looked back to the Jacobite rebellion of the 1740s from “60 years since,” as his subtitle declares, from, in other words, a Britain newly unified and triumphant. This detailing of British history at an epochal moment, when a Scottish rebellion threatened to disunite the United Kingdom and to restore to the British throne a Catholic monarch, must have had especial resonance for a public only two generations removed from that rebellion. The idea of a rebellion, of a nation torn asunder, must have resonated with a public aware of the terrors of the French revolution. And *Waverley* likely reminded readers of the civil war and social upheaval Britain had suffered through in the 17th century. All of which augured for, in Scott’s and many others’ views, a unified nation governed by a Protestant parliamentary monarchy. One anonymous reviewer of *Waverley*, writing in 1814, made explicit these anxieties about national strife and the need for national unity:

The time which the author has chosen for the historical part of his tale is a period to which no Briton can look back without the strangest emotions and the most serious interest. It is the year 1745, the last fatal year when the blood of our countrymen was spilt on its own shores, when Briton met Briton on his native land. It has pleased Providence in his mercy to this favoured country, for a space of now nearly seventy years, to secure it not only from the invasions of foreign foes but to preserve it from the still more fearful civil commotion. By the restoration of peace to the whole European world a mighty machine of national strength is suddenly diverted from those external objects to which it has been so long and so powerfully directed. . . . If the history of those bloody days, which is embodied in this tale, shall by an early and awful warning inspire the nation with a jealous vigilance against the very first sympathies of their recurrence, we shall consider that not even the light pages of fiction have trifled in vain (Review of *Waverley* 68-69).

We see here a sense of British exceptionalism, a belief that the nation, this “mighty machine of national strength,” is favored and protected by Providence. And for this reviewer, presumably, too, for his readers and for much of the British public, *Waverley* waved the flag of union, serving as both a reminder of past civil strife and “an early and awful” warning against its renewal. Essentially, *Waverley* was about resolving national differences (while preserving Scottish cultural difference). It was about uniting the nation, as embodied in the Englishman Edward’s falling prey to the romantic allure of Scottish independence but recognizing his error and eventually marrying a Scottish girl, symbolically uniting the two nations and, in the act of repairing the damaged Bradwardine castle, healing this national rift. Thus, although celebrating Scottish culture, the Tory Scott’s novel, in the guise of historical verisimilitude, promotes a particular national history, one that fostered a United Kingdom of Great Britain. Scott expressed this view elsewhere, recognizing that Scotland had endured “ten centuries of almost ceaseless war” to defend its independence until “the wise decrees of Providence . . . [had] at length indissolubly united two nations who, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, and united in the same interests seem formed by GOD and Nature to compose one people” (*Description* 34).

The primacy of national identity in Scott’s historical fiction was noted by one reviewer of *Waverley* who described the novel as ‘a vehicle of curious accurate information upon a subject—which must at all times demand our attention—the history and manners of a very large and renowned portion of the inhabitants of these islands’ (qtd. in Ferris 83). A reviewer of a later Scott novel reinforced this premise that historical works should reinforce national unity and identity, should promote British exceptionalism: “All those who wish to stamp upon their works the fixed and permanent image of their nation,” the reviewer wrote, “must condescend [as Scott did] to become acquainted with life past and present . . . must converse with the peasant at his hearth as well as with the nobles . . . [must] learn the legend, and stories, and scraps of ancient

songs, which still linger among a curious and original people” (Review of *Quentin* 201-2). Scott himself described his goal as “embodying and reviving the traditions of [his country]” (*Ivanhoe* 15), a goal he largely achieved. According to University of California Berkeley English professor Ian Duncan, “In *Ivanhoe* Scott furnished the English with their idea of an ancestral England as effectively as had Shakespeare in his history plays” (vii).

Part Two

The novel *Ivanhoe* marked a break from Scott’s earlier work, shifting the scene from the 18th century to the 12th. Like *Waverley*, *Ivanhoe* was remarkably successful, entering popular culture in various genres and formats and spurring an interest in the medieval that had already been promoted by antiquarians and the Gothic novelists. Scott was familiar with the Gothic: *The Castle of Otranto* was his favorite book as a child, and he was friends with Matthew Lewis, author of *The Monk*. In addition to his familiarity with these texts, Scott, according to Alice Chandler, former provost of the City College of New York, incorporates many Gothic devices into his fiction: “Scott,” she writes, “was obviously aware of both aspects of the Gothic tradition, the melancholy and the terror. The writings themselves, with all their Gothic paraphernalia, show this clearly” (319).

In addition to its Gothic elements, *Ivanhoe*, like *Waverley*, ultimately reinforces a Whiggish history and a belief in a United Kingdom. Obviously, though, a novel set in 1193 couldn’t be as accurate as one set in the 18th century. For *Waverley*, Scott could draw on many recent writings, and even testimonies from people who had lived through the period or were a generation removed from it. One reviewer described Scott’s research among the local population: “he was with the hoary-headed shepherd upon the cliffs, the wrinkled sexton in the churchyard, or smoking his pipe in the hut of the aged widow, whom both time and kinsfolk had forgotten, while she . . . repeated the songs and legends of other times” (qtd. in J.H. Alexander 15).

For *Ivanhoe*, on the other hand, Scott had to rely on a hodgepodge of antiquarian histories, period sources, and literary texts. One early reviewer identifies the types of sources Scott relied on: “The old romances, the old histories, the old chronicles, the old legends, and the old ballads” (Review of *Quentin* 201). Scott was a bibliophile, the library of his home stocked with old and obscure titles which he relied upon for his historical research. J.H. Alexander, Reader Emeritus in English at the University of Aberdeen, asserts that “not many historical or literary works published before 1832 (in English at least) are absent from his shelves.” Chandler elaborates: Scott’s novels, she writes,

show, first of all, a wide knowledge of the primary sources—particularly the poems and chronicles—that had been reprinted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . . . Scott’s secondary sources also show how much his history was a product of the best of the medieval revival. In *Ivanhoe*, for example, he gives as his chief authorities: Joseph Strutt, an expert social historian for his time; Robert Henry, the best of the late-eighteenth-century medieval historians; and Sharon Turner, author of the monumental *History of the Anglo-Saxons*. So prolonged and so wide a reading of medieval materials was bound to result in mastery of the available lore. (320)

And yet, Scott had limited access to the kinds of resources later historians could draw from. Historians of his time had little interest in material culture, coins, insignias, graffiti, potshards, etc., that would become essential to later historians. Nor was there any sense of archaeology, of the careful sifting of the artifacts of daily life for what they might reveal about the past. It took generations of historians and librarians and archivists to find, assess, collect, catalog, and make available essential primary sources. According to Barnes, “England did not start any systematic collection of the sources of its national history until the beginning of the Nineteenth century” (217). The aggregating of historical documents of medieval England into “The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages,” which has become known as the Rolls Series (and which remains the central source for such historical manuscripts), wasn’t begun until

1858. And the full 258-volume collection wasn't completed until 1911. Even if these documents had been known to Scott, access to them before the advent of railroads and steamships would have been arduous and time-consuming. Scott could draw only from his own collection, from the initial research of antiquarians, from scattered regional records, and the few reliable histories of the period. In his dedicatory epistle to *Ivanhoe*, written under the pseudonym Laurence Templeton, Scott comically describes this research process and the capricious nature of early 19th century scholarship: "my materials . . . may be chiefly found in the singular Anglo-Norman MS, which Sir Arthur Wardour preserves with such jealous care in the third drawer of his oaken cabinet, scarcely allowing any one to touch it, and being himself not able to read one syllable of its contents" (22). So while one may quibble with some of the novel's inaccuracies, Scott's historicism was about the best that could be expected of a historical novel published in 1819.

Scott, of course, knew that, regardless of his research, his recreation of 12th Century Britain would be inaccurate. In his dedicatory epistle, he notes that the Scottish author, writing about more contemporary events, is "at liberty to walk over the recent field of battle, and to select for the subject . . . a body whose limbs had recently quivered with existence. . . . The English author, on the other hand, . . . can . . . only have the liberty of selecting his subject amidst the dust of antiquity, where nothing was to be found but dry, sapless, mouldering, and disjointed bones" (15). Consequently, he subtitled *Ivanhoe*, "A Romance," aligning it with the Gothic tradition and announcing the constructed nature of this history. Unlike Gothic romances, *Ivanhoe* contains nothing supernatural, neither the wondrous and terrifying supernatural of Walpole and Lewis, nor the explained supernatural of Radcliffe. It doesn't allow us to experience sublime terror or the uncanny, or to delve into psychopathologies, the hauntings and incest and doubling and sado-masochism that shadow the Gothic romance. Scott hedged his bets, offering his readers a seemingly realistic novel in the vein of *Waverley*, while acknowledging the tenuous and speculative nature of his historical romance. This reliance on romance conventions can, however, interfere with historical realism. For John Maynard, "All such tidy plot constructions place side by side historical realism and romance, mitigating the unpleasantness of seeing individual lives in a long and devaluating historical perspective by offering the reader the immediate emotional gratification of romance" (244).

Scott's historical romances set in the Middle Ages contributed to the medieval revival in Victorian Britain, in particular, an interest in the code of chivalry. Scott identified the principles of chivalry as "the general feeling of respect to the female sex . . . the rules of forbearance and decorum in society . . . the duties of speaking truth and observing courtesy . . . the general conviction and assurance that . . . none can infringe on [a man's] personal honour . . . without subjecting himself to personal responsibility" (*Essays* 124-5). All of these traits were central to conventional Victorian moral principles. For Scott, these were important values: the "tenants of chivalry," he writes, "the exalted, enthusiastic and almost sanctimonious ideas connected with its duties . . . the singular balance which its institutions offered" provided a bulwark against "the evils of the rude ages in which it arose" (*Essays* 6). Chivalric principles, in other words, offered a moral grounding for a world destabilized by change. For instance, responding to the threat posed by the French Revolution, Edmund Burke had lamented the passing of chivalry, bemoaning that "The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we behold a generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom" (490).

This sentiment continued in the 19th century via the medieval revival, endorsed by conservative members of the aristocracy—and writers such as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin—for its adherence to tradition and social hierarchy, to compliance and duty, to, in Burke's words, "submission" and "obedience" and "subordination." Behind this fanciful notion were the sweeping changes over-running British society. To a modern audience, the pace of these changes would seem quite slow. But to 19th Century Britons, for whom newness itself was new, the pace of change was unsettling. As James Secord, professor in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge, observes, "people who lived through the

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first half of the nineteenth century believed that they were witnessing unprecedented change. The consciousness of living in unique, historicized moments, which had come into being in response to the epochal events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, was extended during the 1830s and 1840s into a sense that the material basis of human life was at a pivotal junction” (25). In the midst of this disturbing flux, with its potential to disrupt traditional practices and overturn established beliefs, medievalism, it was thought, could help maintain social stability and upper-class privilege. Change could be slowed down and order maintained, at this “pivotal junction,” by turning to the past. As Rosemary Jann, Emerita Professor of Cultural Studies at George Mason University, explains,

the imaginative value of the Middle Ages lay in their contrast with the political and social disorder of the present. The antidote to those modern poison—laissez faire capitalism, Utilitarian ethics, Liberal individualism—lay in a resuscitation of medieval hierarchy, one which called on the Captains of Industry to form a new aristocracy, and the state to assume control over the economy and social welfare. For such thinkers, the spiritual health and organic order of medieval society depended upon its essentially undemocratic structure. (129)

Chivalry was also adopted by some Victorian theologians as a means of endorsing a faith more suited to the capitalist, imperialist ethos of Britain, a muscular Christianity, not effeminate and passive but masculine and assertive. “In the rapidly changing social, economic, and religious conditions of mid-Victorian Britain,” writes Norman Vance, Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Sussex, “the classless and timeless moral possibilities of true knightliness and true gentility were particularly useful to the preacher and the moralist” (17).

The absurdity that could result from this Victorian romanticizing of chivalry was apparent in 1839 when Archibald William Montgomerie, 13th Earl of Eglinton, 1st Earl of Winton, held a medieval gala costing 10,000 pounds, featuring a tournament of nobles outfitted as knights on horseback (including Charles Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, who would soon become Emperor Napoleon III), women in festive medieval garb, and a large banquet. No expenses were spared in preparations, with “armor for the knights . . . crests, horse armor and equipment, pavilions, tents, shields, banners, lances, swords, and outfits for squires and pages” (Girouard 182). The British architectural historian Mark Girouard paints the scene:

On the morning of August 28, 1839, the sun shone brightly. Half a mile below Eglinton Castle, the green-sward of the park was gay with the tents and pavilions of the 13 knights. And from every direction, by coach, by carriage, on foot or horse, poured endless streams of farmers, gentlemen, peasants, pickpockets, burghers, policemen, shepherds, lords, and ladies. At least 100,000 people came to Eglinton that day (183).

Unfortunately, the Scottish weather also turned to the Dark Ages, with torrential rains disabling the tournament and flooding the stands and resulting in comic images of mud-spattered gowns and knights wielding not lances but umbrellas. This fiasco might be read as an augury of the fate of Eglinton castle itself. Sitting on a 50,000-acre Scottish estate, built in the Gothic style at the very end of the 18th century, and featuring a hundred-foot-tall central keep and four seventy-foot-tall towers, the castle declined with the Eglinton family’s finances. By 1926, the castle was abandoned, its contents—including the 13th Earl’s suit of armor—sold, and its lead roof removed. During World War II, it was further damaged in training exercises by the British military and was finally razed to the ground in 1973. In a fitting Gothic conclusion, in 1925, while scavenging through the deserted castle, one man lifted a piece of paneling to reveal, in what had allegedly been a sealed room, a woman’s skeletal hand. The skeleton was taken away by a student doctor and never reported to authorities. Or so the story goes (“Eglinton”).

Although Scott’s stories, his historical romances, were culturally influential and popular among readers, for recent literary scholars, Scott’s fiction declined with the move from history to pseudo-history, what Ian

Duncan calls “the fatal turn in Scott’s career from a once influential historical realism (in the novels about the making of Scotland) to a tinsel-and-tushery medievalism” (Introduction viii-ix). The word “tushery,” by the way, is defined as pretentious writing filled with archaic language. As far as I could discover, it was coined by Robert Louis Stevenson and first applied to Scott’s fiction by an anonymous reviewer who, in 1907, wrote, “It is true that so many novelists, when writing of past times, should think it necessary to fill their pages with archaisms and the mouths of their characters with a jargon that is not and never was English. It is true that Scott did this, and Stevenson also in his worst novel; but the former triumphed in spite of his many faults of style, and the latter damned it in his saner mood with the name of ‘tushery’” (Review of *Parson Croft*). The Canadian writer John Buchan, 1st Baron Tweesdmuir and author of the novel *The 39 Steps*, in his 1924 biography of Scott, explained that “It is hard for us to-day to recapture the atmosphere in which *Ivanhoe* won its resounding success. To us the ‘halidoms’ and ‘gramercys’ are so much idle ‘tushery,’ but then they were fresh and captivating” (201).

The word originated with Stevenson when he was writing his Walter Scottish novel *The Black Arrow*, set during the Wars of the Roses. As he explained in a letter to the poet and critic W.E. Henley: “I turned me to . . . Tushery. . . . Ay, friend, a whole tale of tushery. And every tusher tushes me so free, that may I be tushed if the whole thing is worth a tush” [qtd. in Maxiner 316]. Henley, who as a child had had a leg amputated, may have provided Stevenson with the idea for the peg-legged pirate Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*. Henley’s daughter Margaret allegedly inspired J.M. Barrie, whom she lispily called “fwendy,” to name the heroine of *Peter Pan* “Wendy” [“William”]. And just as Stevenson created the word “tushery,” so Henley is credited, in his poem “Invictus,” with the first use of the phrase “bloody but unbowed” [“Bloodied”]).

But back to *Ivanhoe*. Its plot focuses on the titular character, Wilfred of Ivanhoe. Presumably, Scott chose to title his novel *Ivanhoe* because one called “Wilfred” wouldn’t have had quite the same heroic appeal. I’m reminded of the scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in which the questing knights encounter atop a rocky precipice a terrifying wizard exploding fireballs:

“What manner of man are you that can summon up fire without flint or tinder,” asks King Arthur.

“I... am an enchanter.

“ By what name are you known?”

“There are some who call me . . . ‘Tim!’”

Ivanhoe (or as some call him, “Wilfred” byt), a knight recently returned to England after fighting in the Third Crusade, has been disinherited by his father the Saxon Cedric because he had fought with the Norman Richard the First (i.e., Richard the Lion-Hearted) and because he had fallen in love with Cedric’s ward, Rowena, whom Cedric wished to marry off for profit. Wounded in a tournament (where he was saved by the Black Knight—Richard in disguise), Ivanhoe is nursed to health by Rebecca, the daughter of a Jewish moneylender, while they—as well as Rowena—are held captive by the Norman Maurice De Bracy, who desperately longs for Rowena. They are freed after an assault on the castle by Richard, Cedric, and Robin Hood and his merry men. Rebecca, though, continues to be held prisoner by the besotted Brian de Bois-Guilbert, is accused of being a witch by the leader of the Knights Templar, and sentenced to die. But Ivanhoe wins her freedom in a trial by combat. Faced with the anti-Semitism prevailing in Britain, the virtuous Rebecca will wander across Europe, like her people, while Ivanhoe is reunited with his father and weds Rowena.

To convey, as accurately as he could 12th century Britain and to create a Ye Olde Englishy dialect (or tushery), Scott relied on literary sources: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the

King James Bible and Robin Hood ballads. He also drew from recent historical scholarship, notably Joseph Strutt, a writer identified by a contemporary scholar as “the first professional medievalist” (Melman 578), author of *A Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England* (1799) and *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England: From the Earliest Period, Including the Rural and Domestic Recreations, May Games, Mummeries, Pageants, Processions and Pompous Spectacles* (1801). Scott also relied on Sharon Turner’s 3-volume *The History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1805).

This research, however, did not preclude historical error. Scholars have pointed to many historical inaccuracies and anachronisms, Clare Simmons, for instance, explaining that Scott says of the character Ulrica, “age, premature age, has stamped its ghastly features on [her] countenance” (278) when, according to the chronology Scott’s laid out, she would be tremendously old. Or as Simmons puts it, “since she must be nearly 150 years old, her wrinkled appearance is not entirely unexpected” (89). But the main objection to the history in *Ivanhoe* is its central conceit: that 127 years after the triumph of William the Conqueror, the Normans and Saxons retained distinct cultural identities and separate languages, with the Normans contemptuous of the Saxons’ uncivilized ways and the Saxons aggrieved at their exploitation by the Normans.

In his introduction, Scott elaborates upon these differences between “the Saxons, by whom the soil was cultivated, and the Normans, who still reigned in it as conquerors, reluctant to mix with the vanquished, or acknowledge themselves of the same stock” (5). Or as he explains in the novel, “Four generations had not sufficed to blend the hostile blood of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons, or to unite, by common language and mutual interests, two hostile races, one of which still felt the elation of triumph, while the other groaned under all the consequences of defeat” (26). For Ian Duncan, “Scott’s insistence on a colonial antagonism between Normans and Saxons a century and a quarter after the Battle of Hastings is perhaps the most notorious of the historical sins of *Ivanhoe*” (xiv). Scott says his inspiration for contrasting Norman and Saxon came from the Scottish minister and playwright and poet John Logan’s tragedy *Runnamede* in which, Scott writes, “the Saxon and Norman barons opposed to each other [enter] on different sides of the stage,” although he admits that Logan didn’t “contrast the two races in their habits and sentiments” as he does in *Ivanhoe* (5). According to Fiona Price, Professor of English Literature at the University of Chichester, Logan contrasted Normans and Saxons as a response to the American War of Independence (184). Scott’s decision to violate history by following Logan’s model and in fact enlarging these differences was to a different end. As he did in *Waverley*, Scott’s goal was to show that national disunion could be overcome and warring factions joined peacefully into one nation state.

But the conflict between Normans and Saxons has greater resonance than its precise historical referent. It suggests, alleges University of Minnesota Duluth English professor Joseph Duncan, “the conflict between an old heroic ideal and modern industrial society” (294). It is suggestive of the conflict between Scottish highlanders and the English, a more sophisticated culture from the south imposing itself on a more agrarian and traditional culture from the north. It also plays upon a mythology that developed in the 17th Century, a myth known as the “Norman yoke.” The influential historian of 17th century Britain Christopher Hill summarizes this myth:

Before 1066 the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of [Britain] lived as free and equal citizens, governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman conquest deprived them of this liberty, and established the tyranny of an alien King and landlords. But the people did not forget the rights they had lost. They fought continuously to recover them with varying success. Concessions (Magna Carta for instance) were from time to time extorted from their rulers, and always the tradition of lost Anglo-Saxon freedom was a stimulus to ever more insistent demands upon the successors of the Norman usurpers. (57)

This myth, Hill observes, served as “a rudimentary class theory of politics” (57), in which a foreign and hereditary ruling class, supported by the Church, imposed its views on and extracted wealth from a native, mostly peasant class. In other words, the Normans imposed a feudal system on what had been a more egalitarian Saxon Britain. In its remembrance of a communal past overwhelmed by force, this myth, especially during the tumultuous 17th century, both challenged the legitimacy of the monarchy, the nobility, and the church, and suggested the possibility of a more egalitarian alternative. On the other hand, conservatives were able to exploit this myth, embracing the Norman yoke theory because it legitimized established institutions of power. William’s conquest, on this reading, over-ruled whatever communal existence had gone before, replacing it with a monarchical and hereditary rule which had persisted to the present. Therefore, in the conquest of 1066 common people hadn’t acquired rights; they’d been given them—and could have them taken away—by William and subsequent English Kings and Queens and Parliaments.

This myth also supported the perception that Britain’s Anglo-Saxon heritage was rooted in a Germanic culture—a notion that “emphasized glories of England’s Anglo-Saxon and German past, the Germanic of the English language, and the common racial origin of the Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans.” “The love of liberty, a trait of the Germanic peoples,” writes Reginald Horsman, History Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, “had, according to these arguments, been transposed by the Anglo-Saxons in England into a system of free institutions” (389). Barnes elaborates: “The dogma stressed the political superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. . . . It rested primarily upon the assumption that the Teutonic invaders of England had made a clean sweep of the early Briton and Celtic inhabitants and had created an England purely Germanic in culture and almost purely Germanic in race” (218).

This interest in and appreciation for the Teutonic roots of Anglo-Saxonism was widespread among the educated classes, so much so that Thomas Jefferson considered placing on the Great Seal of the United States the mythical Germanic brothers Hengist and Horsa who were supposed, in the fifth century, to have led the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes to victory over the native Britons, thus initiating a democracy drawn from Germanic culture that American democracy was an inheritor of (Colbourne 171). These brothers are referred to at least four times in *Ivanhoe*, Scott, for instance, identifying the Saxon Athelstane as a “descendent . . . of Hengist and his hardy tribes” (227). Jefferson saw the Saxons, who sailed from the continent to establish their rule in a new land, as prefiguring American colonists’ similar history (Yorke). John Adams, in a letter to his wife Abigail, described the design of Jefferson’s seal: “Mr. Jefferson proposed the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; and on the other side, Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs from whom we claim the honor of being descended, and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed” (“Jefferson’s”). This Anglo-Saxon identity shared by the English and the Germans would become the basis for the noxious and ultimately genocidal belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon “race.”

To further appreciate *Ivanhoe*, we can move away from its medieval background and consider it within its historical context. That is, we can read the Normans as French, the Saxons as English. According to Ian Duncan, “When Scott wrote *Ivanhoe* . . . the Norman yoke was losing its usefulness for Radical polemic, largely because of the mobilization of patriotic sentiment in the recent war against revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Norman usurpers no longer typified British landlords but a French imperial military machine poised for a thoroughly modern conquest” (Introduction xiv). Much of the novel sets up a contrast between the traditional and true Saxons and the decadent and deceitful Normans in ways that suggest the conventional views of English and French, what Scott in his Introduction describes as “the vanquished distinguished by their plain, homely, blunt manners, and the free spirit infused by their ancient institutions and laws” versus “the victors [distinguished] by the high spirit of military fame, personal adventure, and whatever could distinguish them as the Flower of Chivalry” (5-6).

At one point, Scott describes “the ancient Saxon garb . . . [which] was so remote in shape and appearance from that of the [Normans]” that the Normans had a hard time not laughing “at a sight which the fashion of the day rendered ridiculous” (163). In contrast, Scott writes, “in the eye of sober judgment, the short close tunic and long mantle of the Saxons was more graceful, as well as a more convenient dress, than the garb of the Normans” whose scanty cloak was “neither fit to defend the wearer from the cold or from rain, and the only purpose of which appeared to be to display as much fur, embroidery, and jewellery work, as the ingenuity of the tailor could contrive to lay upon it” (163-64). Their religious beliefs differed as well: the Saxons “were addicted to a superstitious observance of omens.” The Normans are “better informed . . . [and] had lost most of the superstitious prejudices which their ancestors had brought from Scandinavia” (198). *Ivanhoe*’s father, Cedric, explains how Norman culture overtook Saxon, their dissolute ways corrupting Saxon simplicity: “We made these strangers our bosom friends, our confidential servants,” he recalls, “we borrowed their artists and their arts, and despised the honest simplicity and hardihood with which our brave ancestors supported themselves, and we became enervated by Norman arts long ere we fell under Norman arms. Far better was our homely diet, eaten in peace and liberty, than the luxurious dainties, the love of which hath delivered us as bondmen to the foreign conqueror” (227). William’s “Norman followers, elated by so great a victory, acknowledged no law but their own wicked pleasure, and not only despoiled the conquered Saxons of their lands and their goods, but invaded the honour of their wives and of their daughters with the most unbridled license” (246). As depicted here, the English, with their bland food and unattractive dress, are humble, unfashionable and practical, the French stylish and vain, decadent and haughty, perceptions of English and French national characters that were common during Scott’s time and which have endured remarkably unchanged into our own.

I can’t help again being reminded of a scene in the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, this one when King Arthur and his men seek information about the grail from a castle inhabited by the French. [Audio from film.] Here Monty Python mocks the moral seriousness and self-righteousness and heroic pretensions of the English; they mock as well the English perception of the French as deceitful and vulgar, national stereotypes that Scott, although with a much different tone, reinforces in *Ivanhoe*.

Scott’s sympathies with the Saxons’ pre-feudal agrarian communalism over the Normans’ caste system would seem to go against his Tory politics. But Marilyn Butler, English professor at Cambridge, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, and “one of the leading scholars of Romanticism of her generation” (Mullan), explains this seeming contradiction: “Scott’s Toryism is more a matter of old customs and general social continuity than a system based . . . on veneration for property” (109). Or to quote Georg Lukacs again, “Scott ranks among those honest Tories in England of his time who exonerate nothing in the development of capitalism, who not only see clearly, but also deeply sympathize with the unending misery of the people which the collapse of old England brings in its wake.” Such sympathies notwithstanding, Scott ultimately seeks to resolve dispute, to reconcile opposing sides. While he incorporates “much of the criticism which had been directed against feudal institutions by radicals,” writes Butler, “he also preaches compromise and reconciliation. [The Saxon] *Ivanhoe* has taken on the characteristics of a Norman knight, and clearly believes in reforming the system from within,” and the Norman king Richard “has enough of a true knight to suggest that the nation can and will rally behind him” (150).

This politics of compromise, though, is nowhere apparent in—and seems to be refuted by—an instance of politics that appears late in the novel, as an eager crowd gathers in hopes of watching Rebecca be tortured and set aflame. This scene causes Scott to speculate about the tenacity of human cruelty, writing, “the earnest desire to look on blood and death, is not peculiar to those of the dark ages.” He lists some of the ways this desire is expressed in his own time: “an execution, a bruising match, a riot,” and, he adds, “a meeting of radical reformers.” A meeting of political radicals, in Scott’s view, seems comparable to the madness of blood-seeking crowds. He closes this digression by asserting that such crowds wish to see “whether the heroes of the day are, in the heroic language of insurgent tailors, flints or dunghills” (479). Flints or dunghills? Ian Duncan cites the 1796 edition of *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* to

explain: Flints are “Journeymen tailors, who on a late occasion refused to work for the wages settled by law. Those who submitted were, by the mutineers, styled dungs, i.e., dunghills” (note page 579). Scott here alludes to the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, a gathering of 60,000 people in Manchester protesting for parliamentary reform who were attacked by saber-wielding cavalry. Here’s how David Cannadine describes it:

There was no disorder, but the magistrates lost their nerve, and sent in the local yeomanry to break up the meeting. The result was that 600 of the crowd were injured, and between eleven and seventeen people were either killed outright or later died of their injuries. The incident was soon dubbed “the Peterloo Massacre,” in satirical homage to Wellington’s battle with Napoleon, and resulted in widespread indignation. Indeed, for the rest of 1819 the radical cause became truly national for the first time, and there were riots and protests up and down the country (131).

Scott’s allusion to and mockery of this incident, which argues against his politics of reconciliation (unless his politics requires the violent suppression of those too radical to be reconciled) and which jarringly interrupts a dramatic episode in the novel suggests his susceptibility to reactionary politics. The working class’s aggressive and sometimes violent opposition to rule by a monied and hereditary elite didn’t mesh with the romanticizing of English constitutionalism that featured in contemporary histories and was the ideological root of Scott’s novel. The anomalous nature of this allusion, its breaking the spell of Scott’s historical romance, was recognized at the time by the essayist William Hazlitt: “He is indeed so besotted as to the moral of his own story,” says Hazlitt, “that he has even the blindness to go out of his way to have a fling at flints and dungs (the contemptible ingredients, as he would have us believe, of a modern rabble) at the very time when he is describing a mob of the twelfth century. . . . And it is at this moment (when the heart is kindled and bursting with indignation at the revolting abuses of self-constituted power) that Sir Walter stops the presses to have a sneer at the people” (150). John Morillo, Professor of English at North Carolina State University, and Wade Newhouse, Professor of English at Peace College in Raleigh, North Carolina, note that many critics see this passage as a “rather ham-handed way for Scott to make clear his Hanoverian-Tory political allegiances through his fear of mob violence and revolution in a post-Napoleonic Britain unsettled by Peterloo and the growing popularity of parliamentary and more radical reform” (267).

Within these changing and threatening times, Scott promotes national harmony (the inharmonious Peterloo passage notwithstanding). One way he does so is through the marriage of Rowena, ward of Ivanhoe’s father, the fiercely Saxon Cedric, and Ivanhoe, the Normanized knight and follower of the Norman Richard. Joseph Duncan explains the function of this union: “The marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena,” he writes, “is symbolically a marriage between the Normans and the Saxons. . . . Ivanhoe himself, a native Saxon but representative of the best in Norman chivalry, is a kind of symbol of a new, unified England” (298-99). Scott makes the symbolic meaning of this marriage quite clear, with opposing sides and classes peacefully united: “These distinguished nuptials,” Scott writes, “were celebrated by the attendance of the high-born Normans, as well as Saxons, joined with the universal jubilee of the lower order, that marked the marriage of two individuals as a pledge of the future peace and harmony betwixt two races” (498).

Yet many readers found the marriage of Rowena and Ivanhoe unsatisfying since she is such a flat character compared with the more deeply drawn and sympathetic Rebecca. “In the whole range of fictitious composition,” one reviewer wrote, “we hold Rebecca unsurpassed. She is in moral as well as personal beauty a matchless creature” (qtd. in Ferris 240). Thus, several 19th Century plays and operas based on *Ivanhoe*, including one by Rossini, had Ivanhoe marry Rebecca, not Rowena. In his satirical novella *Rebecca or Rowena, or Romance upon Romance*, written two years after the publication of his novel *Vanity Fair*, William Thackeray offers an opinion shared by many readers: “[I can’t ever believe that] my dear Rebecca . . . a woman, so admirable, so tender, so heroic, so beautiful could disappear altogether before such another woman as Rowena, that vapid, flaxen headed creature, who is in my humble opinion, unworthy of Ivanhoe, and unworthy of her place as heroine” (71). Thackeray extrapolates from a comment

Scott makes at the end of *Ivanhoe* in which he wonders “whether the recollection of Rebecca’s beauty and magnanimity did not recur to his mind more frequently than [Ivanhoe] might altogether have approved” (502). Thackeray begins his novella with the unhappy Ivanhoe being mocked for holding such feelings for Rebecca by his angry and jealous wife Rowena; it concludes with Rowena dead and Ivanhoe happily married to Rebecca. But Scott could not have concluded *Ivanhoe* this way, given the thematic function of the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena. As Ian Duncan explains, “Scott imposes the comic solution of the national tale, the allegory of union, upon the Gothic ancestral scenery of *Ivanhoe* to create a new historical romance of English origins” (xiii). In other words, although Scott’s marrying Ivanhoe to Rowena may have violated the emotional spirit of his novel—and thus disappointed readers—he could not have joined Ivanhoe to the Jewess Rebecca. Besides contravening historical probability, given the medieval anti-Semitism Scott depicts throughout the novel, this conclusion would go against a major goal of the novel, the reconciliation of opposing cultures, Norman and Saxon, to form a unitary Englishness.

In addition to their historicism and nationalism, Scott’s novels were marked by their realism. One couldn’t write a historical novel, after all, especially one set in the distant past, without describing that distant world, its castles and clothing, its feasts and festivals. To render the past, Scott filled his novel with historically precise details, as in this long passage from the opening pages of *Ivanhoe*:

The eldest of these men had a stern, savage, and wild aspect. His garment was of the simplest form imaginable, being a close jacket with sleeves, composed of the tanned skin of some animal, on which the hair had been originally left, but which had been worn off in so many places, that it would have been difficult to distinguish from the patches that remained, to what creature the fur had belonged. This primeval vestment reached from the throat to the knees, and served at once all the usual purposes of body-clothing; there was no wider opening at the collar, than was necessary to admit the passage of the head, from which it may be inferred, that it was put on by slipping it over the head and shoulders, in the manner of a modern shirt, or ancient hauberk. Sandals, bound with thongs made of boars’ hide, protected the feet, and a roll of thin leather was twined artificially round the legs, and, ascending above the calf, left the knees bare, like those of a Scottish Highlander. To make the jacket sit yet more close to the body, it was gathered at the middle by a broad leathern belt, secured by a brass buckle; to one side of which was attached a sort of srip, and to the other a ram’s horn, accoutred with a mouthpiece, for the purpose of blowing. In the same belt was stuck one of those long, broad, sharp-pointed, and two-edged knives, with a buck’s-horn handle, which were fabricated in the neighbourhood, and bore even at this early period the name of a Sheffield whittle. The man had no covering upon his head, which was only defended by his own thick hair, matted and twisted together, and scorched by the influence of the sun into a rusty dark-red colour, forming a contrast with the overgrown beard upon his cheeks, which was rather of a yellow or amber hue. One part of his dress only remains, but it is too remarkable to be suppressed; it was a brass ring, resembling a dog’s collar, but without any opening, and soldered fast round his neck, so loose as to form no impediment to his breathing, yet so tight as to be incapable of being removed, excepting by the use of the file. On this singular gorget was engraved, in Saxon characters, an inscription of the following purport:—“Gurth, the son of Beowulph, is the born thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood.”

Scott’s use of realistic detail in passages such as this—what the prominent Victorian scholar Richard Altick calls “his lavish particularization of the superficialities of dress, scene, and the accessories of daily living peculiar to their time” (*Presence* 5)—helped establish realism as the predominant feature of the 19th century novel. But Scott, writing before the conventions of realist fiction were established, adds detail upon detail, overwhelming the reader. “So prominent is description in Scott’s novels,” notes University of Alberta English Professor Gary Kelly, “that it displaces plot and absorbs character” (147). Nineteenth century novelists would learn to be more elliptical and selective, not listing a catalog of details, as if an abundance of

particulars could overcome the limits of literary representation, but instead painting in more discriminating strokes, selecting details to create a mood or define a character or convey a theme.

Another influential aspect of Scott's writing is his use of regional dialect, especially in the Scottish novels. Here, for instance, is a passage from *Waverley*: "I was na comparing them," quoth Evan, "nor was I speaking about his being well-favoured; but only that Mr. Waverley looks clean-made and *deliver*; and like a proper lad o' his quarters, that will not cry barley in a brulzie. And, indeed, he's gleg aneuch at the broadsword and target. I hae played wi' him mysel at Glennaquoich, and sae has Vich Ian Vohr, often of a Sunday afternoon" (223). His dialogue in *Ivanhoe* and other works set in the distant past, on the other hand, has been consistently criticized; its tushery of medieval-sounding language often comes across almost as a parody of Elizabethan discourse, as in this passage: "Pardon my freedom, noble sirs . . . but in these glades I am monarch—they are my kingdom; and these my wild subjects would reck but little of my power, were I, within my own dominions, to yield place to mortal man" (344).

His use of regional and archaic dialect, his focusing on more-or-less average protagonists struggling through moments of historical crisis, his construction of characters whose consciousness was shaped by their time and place influenced the Victorian realist novel, even when this influence is not clearly apparent. For instance, Scott's fiction seems to have little in common with the neo-Gothic novels of the Brontës, but according to Brontë biographer Juliet Barker, "Scott's influence on the Brontës was extremely marked"; "Walter Scott had always been one of Emily's passions" (318). Indeed, scholars have pointed to the many ways that *Wuthering Heights* was influenced by Scott's fiction. And Charlotte Brontë advised her friend Ellen Nussey to "read Scott alone all novels after his are worthless" (qtd. in Alexander and Smith, 444).

So influential was Scott that virtually all the major Victorian novelists wrote historical novels. However much they admired and attempted to imitate his work, Victorian novelists, by and large, were unsuccessful in these attempts. The historical novel was a literary subgenre, writes, John Maynard, "which quickly degenerated from Scott's romantic realism into mere potboiling romance" (238); most such novels were critical, if not commercial failures, whether works by unremembered authors such as Catherine Gore's *The Courtier Days of Charles II* and Albert Smith's *The Marchioness of Brinwilliers: The Poisoner of the Seventeenth Century*, or works by canonical authors such as George Eliot's *Romola*, set in 15th century Florence; William Thackeray's *La Vendee*, set during the French Revolution; Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers*, set during the Napoleonic wars; Wilkie Collins's *Antonia, or the Fall of Rome*; Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, set during the anti-Catholic "Gordon" riots of 1780; and Emily Brontë's *Shirley*, set during the Luddite uprisings of 1811-12. Dickens did, though, write a successful historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, set in London and Paris during the French revolution. And in 1889, Robert Louis Stevenson published a well-received historical novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*, set, like Scott's first novel, during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. It might be argued that the best Victorian historical novel wasn't a novel at all but was Robert Browning's book-length poem, *The Ring and the Book*, about a murder trial in 1698 Rome.

The popularity of the historical novel was not limited to the British Isles. Emily Todd, chair of the English Department at Westfield State University, Massachusetts, explains that in the U.S., "by the 1820s, several rival editions of a Scott novel would enter the marketplace simultaneously, and these multiple reprints suggest the eagerness with which publishers raced to republish Scott's novels in an effort to satisfy an unprecedented demand for fiction" (496). So popular was Scott that Mark Twain could famously connect him to the South and its code of honor, marked in *Huckleberry Finn* by the wrecked steamboat "the Walter Scott." Because of the "Sir Walter disease," Twain writes,

the world was set in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. . . . the genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century is curiously confused and

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commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization; and so you have practical, common-sense, progressive ideas, and progressive works; mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried. . . . 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; . . . 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. (416)

Whatever validity there may be to Twain's criticism, his comments are evidence of his need to deny Scott's influence, which is immediately apparent in his use of regional dialect. Additionally, *Huckleberry Finn*, as Sydney Krause, emeritus professor of English at Kent State University, compellingly documents, draws much from Scott's work, especially *Ivanhoe*, noting the "decided literary involvement of Sir Walter Scott in *Huck Finn*" and asserting that "Twain had specific as well as general aspects of Scott's work in mind" (228). Inspired by Scott, Twain also wrote historical novels such as the critical failure *Joan of Arc* and the critical success *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which can be read as a take-down of Scott's romantic visions of the age of chivalry.

American and continental European writers were inspired to write, and in fact seemed to have more success writing historical novels than British novelists, perhaps because they were more distant from Scott and thus felt less anxiety about his influence. In the United States, James Fenimore Cooper wrote his *Leatherstocking Tales*, justifying and lamenting the displacement of Native Americans and regretting the encroachment of civilization on the frontier. And Nathaniel Hawthorne explored the Puritan origins of the American self in *The Scarlet Letter*. In France, Stendahl, in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, contrasted Napoleon-era revolutionary idealism with the cynicism he experienced under bourgeois rule in the 1830s, while Victor Hugo depicted the immorality of the Catholic Church and the madness of crowds—and made a plea for the restoration of Paris's forsaken cathedral—in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. And most of Alexandre Dumas's many works are historical, ranging from 14th century France in his Valois romances to 17th century France in *The Three Musketeers* to early 19th century France in *The Count of Monte Christo*. In Italy, Alessandro Manzoni considered the nature of political power and justice in *The Betrothed*, set in Lombardy in the early 1600s. And in *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy recreated the French invasion of Russia, with remarkable realism, while pursuing many themes, including the belief that Russians should turn away from European aristocratic culture and embrace the Russian soul.

We take for granted the conventions of historical fiction—or any other literary work that depicts ordinary people living in an imagined world. But this concept was developed by Scott. As Raleigh explains, "Historically . . . imaginative prose had been allied either to comedy and had given accurate and pleasing pictures of human nature, or to tragic romance, taking place in a remote Gothic past and falsifying human nature. Scott abolished this dichotomy and put together a completely original mixture of the two previously antithetical sides. He made the great familiar, and he made the past believable" (16). His novels so fascinated because they brought the past into the present in ways that histories of the time did not. The early 19th century had no popular social historians like David McCullough or Jill Lepore or Barbara Tuchman. They had Walter Scott.

Many of the histories written in the 18th century took the form of general summaries, particularly histories of Britain; Butterfield calls such works an "abridgement of history," one that simplifies and distorts causation and removes detail and complexity. In addition, 18th century histories tended to rely on existing narratives and documents, "secondary sources' such as memoirs or later histories" (Richard Evans 15-16), rather than on primary sources discovered through original research, thereby often repeating old history in new language or through a partisan lens. As Barnes notes, "The critical advances brought about by the Rationalists were in evidence mainly in their attitude towards the general subject matter of their history.

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They were not exhibited to any comparable degree in their handling of the sources of information. . . . They used, generally with discrimination, the existing printed sources” (150).

The most successful and influential of 18th century national histories was the philosopher and fellow Scot David Hume’s *History of England*. Hume wrote in a clear and understandable prose. He established the tradition of organizing British histories by the reigns of kings and queens. He avoided the polemical nature of national histories, dismissing the idea that an Englishness associated with liberty and progress defined English history, expressing instead a skepticism about historical causality. Yet Hume’s *History* was not without its flaws, not surprising given the radical transformation of traditional historiography that was underway and the lack of a history profession to set identifiable standards and methods. Hume, like other Enlightenment historians, saw history as a narrative from which one should learn moral lessons. As Philip Hicks, professor of humanistic studies at St. Mary’s College in Indiana, explains, “To make value judgments in praise of such themes as liberty and civilization was a historian’s duty, not a breach of impartiality or a lapse of good taste” (178). As a result, Hicks writes, “Hume filled the *History* with examples of behavior and policy to be imitated or avoided. His narrative was studded with aphorisms about human nature and public policy” (178). Barnes argues that “It was the philosophy, skepticism, and insight which permeated his volumes, far more than the historical facts contained therein, which gave his history permanent value. As a record of English history it was a rather sorry exhibit, but as an illustration of a powerful mind playing over historical materials it has rarely, if ever, been surpassed” (155).

To understand the acclaim for Scott’s work, then, one need keep in mind the kinds of histories Scott’s readers were used to, intellectual works like Hume’s which dismissed as superstitious and barbaric the thousand years between the classical period and the Enlightenment, broad surveys that repeated a familiar narrative focused on the doings of kings and queens and the nobility, on military and religious and political leaders, arranged chronologically by monarch’s reign, promoting a partisan and nationalist viewpoint, what Philip Hicks describes as “a narrative of worthy deeds, polite and dignified, written to instruct the political elite with moral and political lessons” (10). Jane Austen when she was just 15 satirized the conventions of these histories in her own *History of England*. She mocks the ways these texts glorify the monarchy, writing, “Henry the 4th ascended the throne of England much to his own satisfaction” (197). She mocks these texts’ historical certainty, writing, “During [Henry V’s] reign, Lord Cobham was burnt alive, but I forget what for” (198). She mocks these texts’ partisan Whiggish history, writing, “I suppose you all know about the war between [Henry 6th] & the Duke of York who was on the right side: If you do not, you had better read some other History, for I shall not be very diffuse in this, meaning by it only to vent my Spleen against, & shew my Hatred to all those people whose parties or principles do not suit with mine” (198).

Another weakness of Hume’s history, and of 18th century historiography in general, was that it tended to downplay the difference between the past and the present, between the mentality of people living hundreds of years ago and those living today. Thus, Hume asserts,

there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages. . . . The same motives always produce the same actions: the same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit: these passions . . . have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises, which have ever been observed among mankind. Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the Greeks and Romans? Study well the temper and actions of the French and English. . . . Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations. (“Enquiry”)

For rationalist historians of the Enlightenment like Hume, explains the historian Richard Evans, “human nature was universal, unchanging, and unhistorical” (*In Defense* 13). Scott’s fiction suffers from some of the

same flaws as these histories, notably the belief in a universal human nature. “The opinions, habits of thinking, and actions, however influenced by the peculiar taste of society,” Scott writes, must be “the same in all ranks and conditions, all countries and ages.” He believes there are few differences between the human passions and thoughts of his age and the Middle Ages, concluding that “Our ancestors were not more distinct from us . . . than Jews are from Christians” (*Ivanhoe* xliii). Judith Wilt, former chair of the English Department at Boston College, aligns Scott’s fiction with what she labels “the Universal Liberal History of Western Culture,” a project, she writes, that “imagined a human communal pattern moving psychologically from the irrational toward the rational, and politically from the sacred to the economic, while the horizon of expectations widened toward the accommodation of moderate change and desire was rechanneled from glory to security” (301-02).

But this historiographic model began to change, as Evans explains: “In the Romantic era, historians came to repudiate this kind of thinking. Under the influence of writers like Walter Scott, they came to see the past as exciting because it was different. . . . The purpose of history came to be seen not as providing examples for some abstract philosophical doctrine or principle but simply a finding out about the past as something to cherish and preserve, as the only proper foundation for a true understanding and appreciation of the institutions of state and society in the present” (14). To reconcile these positions—Scott writes a universal history that flattens difference or he helps initiate a history that recognizes difference—I suggest that Scott does attempt to show the difference between eras, but he doesn’t convey how drastically different these eras are. An heir to the Enlightenment, he shows some of the irrationality of the early Middle Ages, especially its pervasive anti-Semitism. But his catalogs of details and pseudo-medieval dialogue fail to convey the utter strangeness of the Middle Ages. It was likely his tidying up of this period that led the historian Leopold von Ranke, arguably the central figure in the development of professional historiography, to turn away from Scott’s pseudo-historicism. As Hayden White explains, von Ranke “was shocked to discover not only that Scott’s pictures were largely products of fancy but that the actual life in the Middle Ages was more fascinating than any novelistic account of it could ever be” (163).

For instance, King Richard I, as depicted by Scott, is fair-minded, tolerant, and essentially rational, more a model 19th century English noble than a medieval warrior-king. Since Richard is a heroic figure central to English national identity and the whole project of English exceptionalism, Scott must turn away from the historical record. In truth, like many Christians of his era, when fighting for his faith, Richard could be ruthless in his treatment of the infidel. He believed in the glorious righteousness of the Crusades, writing that, “to serve the living God,” he and his men “have accepted the sign of the cross to defend the places of His death that have been consecrated by His precious blood and which the enemies of Christ have hitherto shamefully profaned” (qtd. in Edbury 179). In the Third Crusade, during the siege of Acre, he executed more than two thousand Muslim prisoners, an episode he describes dispassionately in a letter to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: “it had been agreed that the Holy Cross and 1,500 living prisoners would be handed over to us. . . . But the time-limit expired, and, as the pact which we had agreed was entirely made void, we quite properly had the Saracens that we had in custody—about 2,600 of them—put to death.” But, he notes, “a few of the more noble were spared” to be used as barter for certain Christian captives and to recover the Holy Cross. Such actions were accepted by Saint Bernard, who wrote, “The Christian glories in the death of a pagan . . . because thereby Christ himself is glorified” (qtd. in Gillingham 183).

Like many others of his time, Richard also believed in apocalyptic thought. On the Third Crusade, he met the theologian Joachim of Fiore, with whom he discussed the finer points of Joachim’s reading of the Book of Revelations, which suggested that the utopian Age of the Spirit would commence sometime between 1200 and 1260, after Saladin and his followers were killed through the intercession of Richard himself. But before this age could be initiated, there would be a three and half year period ruled by the Antichrist, who had been born in Rome, was currently fifteen years old, and would become Pope. Richard, however, demurred, believing instead, as John Gillingham, Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the London School of Economics and Political Science, voices it, that “Antichrist was to be born in Egypt or Antioch

and would rule the Holy Land. After his death there would be a period of sixty days during which people whom Antichrist had seduced would be given the opportunity to repent of their sins” (157). The idea that Richard believed in strange Biblical prophecies and the truth of holy relics, and that he had no qualms about slaughtering hundreds of Muslim prisoners, many of them women and children, could not be reconciled with Scott’s noble and heroic portrait of him. Nor could it fit into his recreation of 12th century England as a romantic precursor to contemporary Britain.

Although *Ivanhoe* is much more historically informed than Gothic novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, its characters’ inner lives are as rational and familiar and contemporary as Radcliffe’s characters. Scott’s presentation of character doesn’t suggest how alien the 12th century is to us or explain how this background shaped individuals. Richard, for instance, had been fighting European wars since he was 16. Yet there’s no indication in *Ivanhoe* of his having been brutalized by this experience. Scott’s romance romanticizes the past, distorting it, for the sake of his ideology, as Hazlitt recognized in the 19th Century:

Scott, in his zeal to restore the spirit of loyalty, of passive obedience and non-resistance . . . may think it a fine thing to return in imagination to the good old times, ‘when in [the region of] Auvergne alone, there were three hundred nobles whose most extraordinary actions were robbery, rape, and murder,’ when the castle of each Norman baron was a stronghold from which the lordly proprietor issued to oppress and plunder the neighboring districts, and when the Saxon peasantry were treated by their gay and gallant tyrants as a herd of loathsome swine (*Spirit* 44).

As Hazlitt suggests, more than just distorting Richard’s character, Scott unrealistically presents the behavior and psyches of medieval peasants and nobles, perhaps understandably, given that he was creating a new literary genre at a time when historians had only begun to look at primary sources and had yet to consider the Middle Ages in any depth, a time before the conventions of literary realism and psychological portraiture were established, a time that would in any case have been unreceptive to a novel true to the violent and alienating strangeness of the 12th century.

While Scott is regularly identified as the creator of the historical novel, this form predated *Waverley*. Explains Yale University Professor of English Katie Trumpener, “most of the conceptual innovations currently attributed to Scott were in 1814 already fully established commonplaces of the British novel” (685). And of the French novel: for instance, in 1677, Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne (better known as Madame de La Fayette) published her novel *The Princess of Clèves*, about which Wikipedia tells us, “The action takes place between October 1558 and November 1559 primarily at the royal court of Henry II of France. . . . The novel recreates that era with remarkable precision. Nearly every character—though not the heroine—is a historical figure. Events and intrigues unfold with great faithfulness to the documentary record, and the novel is generally regarded as one of the first examples of historical fiction” (“La Princesse”). On a side note, in 2008, French president Nicolas Sarkozy complained about the requirement that French students read and prospective civil servants be familiar with the *The Princess of Clèves*:

“At a meeting in Lyon in 2006,” writes Elisabeth Zerofsky in *The New Yorker*,

“Sarkozy declared that ‘either a sadist or an idiot’ had included it on the cultural-knowledge exam required to become a public functionary, which applies to lower-level positions, like postal workers. ‘I don’t know if it happens to you often that you ask a counter clerk what she thought of *The Princess of Clèves*,’ he smirked. In another address in 2009, Sarkozy argued that when considering candidates for public positions, community service should trump an ability to recite *The Princess of Clèves*. He reflected for a moment, then added what has become a notorious Sarkozyism: ‘I’ve suffered greatly by her.’”

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As a result, in 2009 university students staged public readings in Paris, and sales of the novel doubled. Zerofsky speculates that “Had Sarkozy chosen to go after Racine or Molière, the country might practically have shut down.”

The Princess of Clèves was first translated into English in 1678 with further translations appearing in 1720 and 1777. According to Arizona State University English professor Mildred Greene, The only 19th century English translation, published in 1891, followed “the nineteenth century tendency to romanticize sexual attraction to love” (504); likewise, “the princess’s tendency to suppress her own sexuality and to feel extraordinary guilt . . . is intensified in the Victorian translation” (506); while “the most striking changes . . . are those which reveal woman’s inability to question the emotional validity of her marriage” (510). For many Victorians, the very term “French novel” referred to a book that, especially in its attitudes toward sexuality, even in this case one that had been published in the 17th century, was morally vexing.

It’s likely that Scott, a voracious reader, knew of *The Princess of Clèves*. He certainly knew of versions of the historical novel that predated *Waverley*. Anne Stevens, Associate Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, identifies 85 historical novels published in Britain between 1762 and 1813. Among the more prominent of these novelists was the philosopher William Godwin, husband of Mary Wollstonecraft, father of Mary Shelley, and author of *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*. Another important precursor was Maria Edgeworth, author of *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800 but set in 1782, and whose depiction of a distinct Irish culture influenced Scott’s depiction of Scottish culture, an influence he acknowledges in the preface to *Waverley*. Ina Ferris argues that Scott’s historical novels gained such acclaim, in part, because they presented a masculine-centered narrative, as opposed to a domestic, sentimental, and female one, such as Edgeworth’s: “*Waverley* reading offered a compelling alternative,” Ferris observes, “both to female reading and to feminine writing. In particular, in this period of conservative reaction, evangelical revival, and the domestic-didactic novel, *Waverley* and its successors licensed a nostalgic male-inflected romance of history” (91).

“Novel reading was disapproved of in Britain from the seventeenth century at least, but never more so than in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,” explains Gary Kelly, English professor at the University of Alberta, “Not until the huge commercial success of, and substantial critical acclaim for, the novels of . . . Walter Scott, did the tide of disapproval begin to slacken” (183). Because his novels were large in scope, focused on prominent political issues and national concerns, were shaped by historical scholarship (and included footnotes), they were, unlike other novels of the period, deemed worth reading and analyzing.¹ Scott took a literary form that was little regarded—having fallen from the critical favor shown Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson to the critical disdain shown sentimental and Gothic (and mostly female-authored) novels for being lightweight and unserious, morally and intellectually corrupting and designed for the consumption of women—and elevated it to a major art form. Writes UC-Davis Emeritus English professor John Hayden, “Scott singlehandedly revived the reputation of the novel and showed that novel-writing could be a lucrative profession” (3).

And yet Scott’s reputation and readership have declined precipitously. By the end of the 19th century, critics had begun to see Scott’s novels as “trivial, nostalgic boy’s adventures, origins of a tradition that descended to the underground of the popular press,” rather than ascending to the heights of literary achievement (McMaster 1). The 21-year-old Henry James compared Scott to “a strong and kind elder brother,” saying, “he is identical with the ideal fireside chronicler. And thoroughly to enjoy him, we must again become as credulous as children” (qtd. in Hertford 3). Books by Walter Scott, Stuart Kelly observes, “were a staple of school-prize givings,” leading to a popular young person’s edition, *Tales from the Waverley Novels for*

¹ In using footnotes, Scott was following the example set by Edward Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Unlike most historians of his time, Gibbon systematically cited his sources. *The Decline and Fall*, in fact, includes almost 8000 content and source notes (Nippel 399), which comprise nearly one quarter of the book’s text.

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Children (304). E.M. Forster, writing 63 years after James, likewise found Scott simple and unsophisticated: “He is seen to have a trivial mind,” Forster writes, “He cannot construct. He has neither artistic detachment nor passions. . . . he only has a temperate heart and gentlemanly feelings, and an intelligent affection for the countryside: and this is not basis enough for great novels” (30-31). The ground-breaking peer of Shakespeare was, in the 20th century, reduced to the writer of boys’ adventure tales, a view literally cemented in the 1920s in the Children’s Department in the Los Angeles Public Library, in the form of faux wooden beams and murals depicting scenes from *Ivanhoe* (Johnston).

But we shouldn’t stay in the Children’s Department. For however much his reputation and readership have declined, however much his fiction is perceived as old-fashioned and juvenile, Scott holds an important place in the history of the novel, through the development of a new literary form, through his precise realism, through his use of regional dialects, through his depiction of everyday people in troubled historical circumstances, and through the role his work played in gaining critical respect for the novel. His work also did much to create the romantic vision of Scotland that prevails today. And he contributed significantly to the Victorian preoccupation with the Middle Ages, in art, architecture, design, and literature, one scholar calling *Ivanhoe* “the textbook of nineteenth century British medievalism” (Clare Simmons qtd. in Wagner and Parker 162). However much his fiction has been culturally marginalized, whenever one opens the pages of a 19th century novel, one is reading a book that would have been much different without Walter Scott or might not have been written at all.

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