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SIR WALTER SCOTT

IVANHOE



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SIR WALTER SCOTT

*Ivanhoe*



*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*

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## INTRODUCTION

THE popularity of *Ivanhoe* in the early months of 1820 moved one Scots reviewer to gloat over his countryman's success:

With a charm far beyond the power of *Michael Scott*, he has already made Scotland his own to its remotest isles; but now, with one mighty cast, he has brought England within the pale of his genius; and, with her interesting people, established her, too, a province of his empire. . . . In his first foreign enterprise, he is as much at home as he ever was in his native land; and, from what he has already done, he has in store, we have no doubt, much of wonder for our neighbours of the South that he should know more about them than they know about themselves; till, with Faulconbridge, they exclaim,

'How easy doth he take all England up!'

or, with Richard,

'As were our England in reversion his,  
And he our subjects' next degree in hope!'

The reviewer astutely reads the historical theme of *Ivanhoe*, the Norman conquest, as an allegory of its author's ambitions. Like a literary version of the Conqueror, Scott has achieved the most effective Scottish invasion of England since the Union, and reversed the relations between imperial centre and province. Unlike earlier, much-resented invasions (by a Jacobite army in 1745, by ambitious Scots infesting British government and the professions) this one succeeds because it represents a cultural rather than a political or economic colonization. The next hundred years would fully justify the reviewer's prediction. In *Ivanhoe* Scott furnished the English with their idea of an ancestral England as effectively as had Shakespeare in his history plays.

Scott well knew the risks and rewards of presuming to make 'the traditions and manners of Old England' his own. Both the

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, 3 (Feb. 1820), 163-4. The quotations are adapted from *King John*, iv. iii and *Richard II*, i. iv. Michael Scott, 13th-cent. scholar and supposed warlock, haunts Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805).

'Dedicatory Epistle' to the first edition and the 1830 'Introduction' brood upon this border-crossing. Although most of his readers had surely always been English, Scott's literary reputation was built on Scottish ground; an earlier venture into Yorkshire (*Rokeby*, 1813) had accompanied the decline of his pre-eminence as a poet. Now, at the height of new fortune as an anonymous novelist, Scott wanted a bold stroke to win fresh readers in a market he feared was becoming glutted with the Scottish historical novels he had done so much to popularize in the five years since *Waverley* (1814). As he worked on the new romance in the summer and autumn of 1819, recovering from a near-fatal illness, he grew confident that it would be something 'uncommon', and his printer and publisher, James Ballantyne and Archibald Constable, caught the excitement.<sup>2</sup> After delays occasioned by over-extension at the printers and a difficulty with the paper supply, *Ivanhoe* finally appeared on 18 December. The first edition of 8,000 copies sold out early in the new year, despite the high price of thirty shillings for the three handsomely produced post-octavo volumes; by the end of 1820 the Ballantynes were printing a third edition, and at least five different theatrical versions had opened in London throughout the year. In the words of Scott's biographer, 'the publication of *Ivanhoe* marks the most brilliant epoch in Scott's history as the literary favourite of his contemporaries. With the novel which he next put forth, the immediate sale of these works began gradually to decline.'<sup>3</sup>

As it turned out, *Ivanhoe* marked the crux of Scott's reputation more problematically than Lockhart could have foreseen. The most popular novel of one of the best loved of British authors throughout the nineteenth century, in the twentieth it has come to represent the decay of an unfashionable literary monument. Today its dwindling popularity can no longer outweigh the neglect or disdain of professional readers. According to the standard modern criticism, *Ivanhoe* executes the fatal turn in Scott's career from a once influential historical realism (in the

<sup>2</sup> See *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (12 vols., 1932; hereafter *Letters*), v. 402, vi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1 vol. edn., 1896), ch. 46.

novels about the making of modern Scotland) to a tinsel-and-tushery medievalism. Apologists for *Ivanhoe* have had to fall back on the schoolmasterly philistinism that once seemed requisite for the appreciation of Scott, exhorting us with a dreary heartiness not to think but to enjoy the book as an 'adventure story'.

The first step in Scott's descent 'from the library to the school-room' (Leslie Stephen), *Ivanhoe* flourished for a century and a half in the fertile loam of popular culture, where its influence continues to be felt; less now through literal renditions in other media (if Arthur Sullivan's 1891 opera gathers dust in the archives, the 1953 movie with Robert Taylor and Elizabeth Taylor retains some of its gleam), than in spin-offs of its characters and settings and events. Above all *Ivanhoe* revived the ancient folk careers of Robin Hood and Richard the Lionheart, both played in my childhood by the aptly named Richard Greene, although the embers of Robin Hood's appeal may recently have been stamped out by Kevin Costner. *Ivanhoe*'s more insidious influence, according to the authorities, may well be found in the popular grasp of twelfth-century history. The strictures of Edward Augustus Freeman, Regius Professor at Oxford, upon Scott's howlers (the supposed Saxon provenance of Coningsburgh Castle, the cocktail of pagan demons invoked by Ulrica, a host of discrepancies about names and dates) might seem irrelevant to the concerns of a romance, but they were provoked by the readiness of fellow historians such as Augustin Thierry to mistake that romance for real history.<sup>4</sup>

It is probably safe to say, though, that the career of *Ivanhoe* as childhood reading or school text has by now run its course. Faster, lighter technologies of narration have made Scott's seem sluggish and encumbered, altogether too literary. The historical dissertations and costume descriptions, the pastiche dialogue with its registers of melodramatic declamation and facetious banter, all no doubt bore the juvenile reader now. To be sure,

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest in England* (6 vols., 1867-79), v. 839. On *Ivanhoe* and historiography, see Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (1990), 87-112; Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverley Novels* (1991), 195-236.

once Scott's narrative takes off (by the Ashby tournament) all is fleet and glittering. The heaviness of the preliminaries has much to do with the author's labour in putting together a new kind of fiction, even if its very success—its triumphant saturation of the popular imagination—would seem eventually to have exhausted it. But the generation that has forgotten *Ivanhoe* is well placed to rediscover Scott's dashing *rifacimento* of national history and popular culture. We may even enjoy the pseudo-antiquarian clutter, as we recognize an ancestor of the archival comedy of Umberto Eco. The literariness of the enterprise, the brilliance of Scott's play with stock figures and situations, has caught us up again.

While the first reviewers of *Ivanhoe* acknowledged its charm and excitement, many also expressed a disquiet over something inauthentic, not just an inaccuracy of historical detail but the settlement of the Author of *Waverley* in a sub-literary neighbourhood—with the suspicion that this, not the mansion of a respectable historicism, had been his address all along.<sup>5</sup> *Ivanhoe: A Romance*. It was the first time Scott had actually given one of his novels that label. The 'Dedicatory Epistle' that prefaces the tale, the most carefully poised and detailed yet of Scott's theoretical statements about his art, uses the terms 'modern antique romance' and (in a rather disparaging architectural analogy) 'modern Gothic'. Specifically, the rubric points us back to the late-eighteenth-century Gothic romance of Ann Radcliffe, 'Monk' Lewis, and Horace Walpole, whose pseudo-antiquarian 'goblin tale' Scott mentions in the 'Epistle'. *Ivanhoe* rehearses the Gothic novel's medieval setting, its scenery of castles and monasteries, and its stock figures of despotic barons, corrupt and fanatical prelates, and persecuted maidens. The example of the Gothic novel had been crucial for Scott, but where his Scottish novels had absorbed Gothic elements into a larger scheme of historical romance, *Ivanhoe* appears to mark a ceremonial return to Gothic: a re-Gothicization of historical fiction. In this *Ivanhoe* rides a wave of neo- and retro-Gothic experiments, including

<sup>5</sup> e.g. [Francis Jeffrey], *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (Jan. 1820): its shift 'from the reign of nature and reality, to that of fancy and romance' makes *Ivanhoe* 'a fantastical pageant' rather than a novel (7–8); *Eclectic Review*, 13 (1820): 'no other impression is left on the mind, than that of a pageant or a masquerade' (528).



some notably powerful and original inventions, that swept British fiction in the decade after Waterloo: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), and Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) are only the most famous. *Ivanhoe* differs from all of these in its relative lack of concern with terror, psychopathology, the supernatural, and the uncanny. Indeed, where they Gothicize modern life, *Ivanhoe* enlightens the Gothic past. Ghosts, demons, and enchanters are almost shockingly absent from their natural habitat here in the forests and castles of the Middle Ages. 'Will future ages believe that such stupid bigotry ever existed!' exclaims Brian de Bois-Guilbert of the charges brought against Rebecca for witchcraft, and for once we sense that his judgement coincides with the author's.

The English setting is *Ivanhoe*'s other striking departure from mainstream Gothic convention. Scott's novel unfolds not upon the foreign political and religious territory of Renaissance Italy or Spain, but in England itself—an England invaded and colonized by foreign warlords. With this move, Scott brings into historical daylight the secret, scandalous national theme of Gothic. Its feudal and Catholic despotisms were reassuringly alien, set in another place and period; yet at the same time they were part of our own ancestral past, and their traces might yet linger in the recesses of modern life, in the private relations of sexuality and the family. Gothic thus came to signify a contradiction at the heart of the late-eighteenth-century ideological formation—in Benedict Anderson's influential phrase, the 'imagined community'<sup>6</sup>—of a British national culture. On the one hand the classical view, traditionally dominant, saw Gothic as an alien, barbaric darkness, the enemy of civilization; on the other, a new, romantic and nationalist revaluation of Gothic claimed it as the figure of an authentic, native, Northern and Germanic cultural origin.<sup>7</sup> Gothic identified a divided and contaminated national heritage, our own and not our own.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

<sup>7</sup> See Samuel Klinger, *The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (1952); Gary Kelly, 'Social Conflict, Nation and Empire: from Gothicism to Romantic Orientalism', *Ariel*, 20 (1989), 2, 3–18.

At a more refined stage, the question of Gothic informed the antiquarian controversy about the origins of romance which agitated the main literary-historical sources of *Ivanhoe*. Scott's precursors in the archaeology of native literature, romance revival editors such as Bishop Percy, Joseph Ritson, and George Ellis, disputed whether romance—our vernacular narrative tradition, the imaginative stock of Chaucer and Spenser and Shakespeare—came from the Norse scalds, or from the Celtic bards, or even (in an unsettling, diabolic reversal of Biblical origins) from an Oriental strain of marvellous fabulation, caught from the Saracen enemy confronted in the Crusades. Scott himself, following Ritson, accepted a verdict of mixed origins, a contaminated genealogy: it was impossible to disentangle a single source for our cultural traditions. He thus participates in an intellectual movement of the late Enlightenment that celebrated, rather than deplored, the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous formation of Britain out of Celtic, Phoenician, and Roman elements as well as Saxon and Norman, Latin and Germanic and Romance.<sup>8</sup>

*Ivanhoe* explores a crucial, transitional moment of this debated cultural historiography, between the last of the great alien invasions (Norman upon Saxon, or Romance upon Gothic) and the compound formation of a national identity represented linguistically by the appearance of English. *Ivanhoe* is set in about 1193–4: 'we may fairly infer', writes one of Scott's authorities, 'that the Saxon language and literature began to be mixed with the Norman about 1180; and that in 1216 the change may be considered as complete'.<sup>9</sup> Scott exemplifies this account of English origins in the rich miscellany of his literary sources for *Ivanhoe* (the Robin Hood ballads and popular romances, Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare), in addition to representing

<sup>8</sup> Ritson summarizes the debate, rather fiercely, in his 'Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy', prefaced to *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (sic) (1802), vol. i. pp. xix–xxxii. He concludes: 'After all, it seems highly probable that the origin of romance, in every age or country, is to be sought in the different systems of superstition which have, from time to time, prevail'd, whether pagan or Christian.' For a modern view of this question, see Howard Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (1993), 477–571.

<sup>9</sup> George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Poetry* (4th edn., 1811), i. 76.

an England inhabited by a hotchpotch of clans and societies and castes: Saxon serfs and gentry, Norman barons, monks, outlaws, Jews, and Templars. The Druidical remains that decorate the opening scene, and the reference to a Roman army, remind us that the Saxons too were *conquistadores*, and far from first in the series. And now England is open to horizons more exotic than Germany or France: Crusaders return from the East bearing cultural influences ranging from Provençal troubadour ballads and the cult of Courtly Love to the sinister Oriental despotism of the Templar, with his black slaves and his design of world domination. Even the critical presence of the Jews in *Ivanhoe* recalls the scholarly argument about a Hebraic origin of ancient British culture, in obedience to orthodox sacred history. This picture of the mixed nation works to dispel Gothic anxieties of genealogical contamination by bringing them out into the open. Everyone is an alien, no one is a 'native', in time all blend into one greater Englishness. The narrator duly reports the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena 'as a pledge of the future peace and harmony betwixt the two races, which, since that period, have been so completely mingled, that the distinction has become wholly invisible' (Chapter XLIV). Scott's readers would have recognized such a solution. It solemnizes the end of *Waverley*, when the wedding of hero and heroine symbolizes the cultural as well as genealogical union of Scotland and England into a single British nation; Scott had adapted the device from the Anglo-Irish 'National Tale' of Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth.<sup>10</sup> Ostensibly, then, 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.

The historical setting of *Ivanhoe* also makes explicit the political theme of Gothic, which underlies the literary and philological arguments about cultural origins. The French Revolution had inflamed debates about the character of the English constitution in a domestic history consisting largely of invasions, usurpations, and revolutions. A mainly radical tradition located the origins of English liberty, parliamentary assembly, and common law in a

<sup>10</sup> See Katie Trumpener, 'National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of *Waverley*, 1806-1830', *ELH* 60 (1993), 685-731.

primitive Saxon constitution, derived from those virtuous ancestors described by Tacitus in the *Germania*,<sup>11</sup> but curtailed under the Norman conquest and the imposition of feudalism. Hence the so-called 'Norman yoke' thesis of British history, which interpreted a persistence of the Conquest in the ongoing oppression of the English people by a usurping ruling class, and in the reproduction of 'Gothic' (i.e. Norman) power relations within domestic social structures. (The enclosure movement, for example, represented a revival of the Norman forest laws.) When Scott wrote *Ivanhoe*, however, the Norman yoke was losing its usefulness for Radical polemic, largely because of the mobilization of patriotic sentiment in the recent wars against revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Norman usurpers no longer typified British landlords but a French imperial military machine poised for a thoroughly modern conquest.<sup>12</sup>

Scott was perhaps the most influential author in the cultural formation of a modern British nationalism that occupies this period, and in *Ivanhoe* he undertakes a conservative capture of the radical myth of the Norman yoke. The novel seeks out rather than avoids the theme: 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*, and Scott has been blamed for relying on a third-rate play (Logan's *Runnemed*) for so material a point. The last stages of composition of *Ivanhoe* coincided with an escalation of Radical reform agitation and government repression, the most violent event of which was the 'Peterloo massacre' of August 1819, when cavalry troops attacked a Manchester crowd. Scott supported the most draconian measures of

<sup>11</sup> Translations of Tacitus appeared in 1777 (by John Aikin) and 1793 (by Arthur Murphy).

<sup>12</sup> See Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', in *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (1962), 50–122, esp. 94–109; Asa Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', in *Collected Essays* (1985), i. 215–35. On nationalism, see Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1720–1830* (1987); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (1992). On the somewhat different valency of these themes in Scottish historiography see Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689–c.1830* (1993).

government (he praised the judicious conduct of the Manchester officials), wrote a series of anti-Radical pamphlets (*The Visionary*, December 1819), and started organizing a loyalist militia in his district of the Borders. Fearful of 'a bloody and remorseless struggle between property and the populace' as the year drew to its close, he argued for the need to build a popular cultural resistance to Radical ideology.<sup>13</sup>

In so far as *Ivanhoe* participates in this political climate—and its composition is largely anterior to the crisis—it is more relaxed and generous than the fierce prognostications to be found in Scott's correspondence. 'Thematically his most contemporary novel to date', as Marilyn Butler has argued, *Ivanhoe* represents a politically divided (rather than organically harmonious) medieval England in order to draw the dynamics of compromise.<sup>14</sup> The characters find refuge from Norman tyranny in the greenwood, where the folk meet their king on terms of primitive simplicity. If Robin Hood's forest commonwealth is a type of that 'beautiful system invented first in the woods' (in the words of Montesquieu's commentary on Tacitus<sup>15</sup>), it appears to be a primitive monarchy, as in the hunting society of Scottish Enlightenment anthropology, rather than a republic; the outlaws are ready to swear fealty to a true English king when they recognize one among them. The vassal Wamba sings a subversive ditty about the 'Norman yoke', and at the same time is eager to give his life for his Saxon overlord. The detailed description of the two serfs in the opening pages, with Scott's notorious invention of the metal collar, insists on a Saxon yoke that preceded the Norman one in the domestic social order. 'The milder and more free spirit of the Saxon constitution' (Chapter I) consists after all in an 'organic' reciprocity of obligations and a familiar intimacy between the castes—not in any freedom from distinction and hierarchy. So Carlyle understood, when he took over Scott's serf's collar for the emblem of a kinder servitude than the intangible and inhuman bondage of the cash

<sup>13</sup> *Letters*, v. 486 (12 Sept. 1819).

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1780-1830* (1982), 149-50.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), trans. Thomas Nugent (1750), bk. 11, ch. 6.

nexus.<sup>16</sup> Other figures of slavery appear in the text, as we shall see. Gurth's celebrated linguistic critique, meanwhile (the Saxon names of domestic animals denote the peasant's labour in tending them, the Norman names denote the landlord's consumption of them), serves to divert a problem of class difference (workers and owners) into one of ethnic and cultural difference (Saxons and Normans), more easily resolved in an evolutionary blending. But, as contemporary reviewers were quick to notice, the critique retains its Radical charge.<sup>17</sup> The compound entity of modern English encodes the distinction between those who produce and those who consume, and the reader is left to decide how far it is open or closed in social practice. *Ivanhoe* remains a novel in which a popular uprising storms the castle of aristocratic tyrants, clergymen are all ruffians or hypocrites, and the only virtuous piety is professed by Jews.<sup>18</sup> Scott co-opts Radical themes, but he does not simply erase them, and they remain active in the text, open to application in different situations. *Ivanhoe* might have inspired Disraeli's Young England Toryism, the Oxford Movement of Pusey and Newman, and Victorian cults of chivalry, but it was also Ho Chi Minh's favourite reading in another greenwood.<sup>19</sup>

The symbolic topography of national origins in *Ivanhoe* ident-

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843).

<sup>17</sup> e.g. *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, 3 (Feb. 1820), 168. While at work on *Ivanhoe* Scott asked John Ballantyne to send him Horne Tooke's philological treatise *The Diversions of Purley*: 'I must take care my Saxon characters speak proper language not unintelligible but not modern. They are rebels moreover and Horne Tooke is a good pilot in either character' (*Letters*, v. 426). Tooke's argument concerning the origins of language in the verb does not seem to have helped Scott with *Ivanhoe*, however.

<sup>18</sup> Some contemporaries complained about this: 'Timothy Touchstone', *A Letter to the Author of Waverley, Ivanhoe, &c. &c. &c., on the Moral Tendency of those Popular Works* (1820), argues that Scott's mockery of clergymen and the upper classes can only assist 'the principles of BLASPHEMY, TREASON, and REBELLION' (54); while *A Letter, containing some remarks on the tendency and influence of the Waverley Novels on Society, from a Clergyman of the Church of England to a Younger Brother* (1832) finds in sorrow that Scott's works are 'directly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel' (9).

<sup>19</sup> See Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981); and A. N. Wilson, *The Laird of Abbotsford: A View of Sir Walter Scott* (1980), 146–50; for Ho Chi Minh, a news item from *The Times*, 18 June 1991, reproduced in *The Scott Newsletter*, 20 (1992), 4.

ifies the feudal and religious institutions of Norman rule with the dungeons of Gothic fiction. The primeval forest surrounds the strongholds of Torquilstone and Templestowe, and neutralizes their sinister energy. Liminal spaces of ceremonial combat frame the action: they are at once closed, regulated by Gothic power, and open to the providential arrival of the knight-errant from the woods. These woods turn the *banditti* of Gothic romance (congruent with Gothic force even in Godwin's Radical updating of the genre, *Caleb Williams*) into freedom fighters and merry men. The opening sentence of *Ivanhoe* identifies the greenwood with the cultural ensemble Scott calls 'merry England'. Scott's main sources for this festive definition of national character are an antiquarian construction of popular culture, and Shakespearian comedy. The great forest of *Ivanhoe* represents both an ancestral common economy, violated by the Norman forest laws (notwithstanding that the author, as Sherriff-Depute of Selkirkshire, had sentenced many a poacher), and a common culture of the kinds of traditional feasts and games recorded by the antiquarian Joseph Strutt. This popular valency condenses in the figure of Robin Hood, the wood-sprite of folklore turned counter-cultural hero, celebrated in traditions of protest ballads and ancient festivals such as May games and mummers' plays.<sup>20</sup>

Although Robin Hood had been the subject of a recent antiquarian revival (in Joseph Ritson's edition of the ballads), Scott took his artistic cue from a speech in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

They say [the Duke] is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world. (I. i. 111)

*Ivanhoe* creatively imitates the greenwood of Shakespearian comedy, which provides not only a refuge to the virtuous and legitimate characters exiled from a tyrant's court, but a festive

<sup>20</sup> In a recent critical history of the tradition, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (1994), Stephen Knight argues that Robin Hood was 'in the air' when Scott was writing *Ivanhoe*, adducing treatments by John Keats and Thomas Love Peacock (*Maid Marian*, 1822), among others.

space of freedom in disguise and role-playing. Here, not so much underground as on holiday, the true nation abides, and kings and subjects discover themselves and one another in the play of primitive social forms and relations. King Richard observes the manners of his Anglo-Saxon subjects, and even learns their ballads, so that he can make the promise he will henceforth be truly a king of the English people rather than a Norman potentate. While the disguised king and knight-errant traverse this realm, its monarch is Robin Hood, who of all the figures in *Ivanhoe* is the one most completely absorbed by his mask. He is accordingly so businesslike, even impersonal, that he may disappoint readers expecting a more swashbuckling characterization.

The mythic dimension of the greenwood in *Ivanhoe* has been vividly described by Judith Wilt, in one of the few compelling recent accounts of the novel.<sup>21</sup> It remains to be noted that it presents an emphatically cultural solution to the political inequities of class and race that lacerate the novel's body politic. The strategy that will later be called 'passing', based on a performative understanding of identity as a set of forms that can be imitated and enacted, initiates a long-term healing of the wounds of conquest by cultural absorption and assimilation. King Richard learns how to play with his Saxon subjects, much as *Ivanhoe* has learnt the conventions of Norman chivalry. By this *Ivanhoe* sets himself apart from the rigid traditionalism of his father, which looks by comparison reactionary and futile. At the same time, the greenwood setting represents a natural, rather than political, matrix for the generation of a culture residing in the decorum of everyday life, a community's habits and courtesies and recreations, rather than in laws and institutions. Commerce succeeds conquest as Norman and Saxon blend by everyday usage and intercourse—by dealing with one another—into the larger, compound entity of English, the medium we are even now reading. The linguistic analogy is crucial because it fixes the culturalism of Scott's scheme. For Scott, let us remember, English was a foreign dialect, the language of imperial administration and literature rather than of daily speech. The famous synthetic style of *Ivanhoe* brings this condition home to

<sup>21</sup> Judith Wilt, *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott* (1985), 37–48.



the English reader. Concocted from the literary ingredients of a national culture—Chaucer, Shakespeare, the English Bible—Scott's style nevertheless makes the English reader a stranger in his or her own language. An English reader, in other words, inhabits 'English' no more naturally than does (for instance) a Scot. Yet, as we read on—as we play the game—we grow used to it; it becomes 'second nature'.<sup>22</sup>

The performance of English in which we join as readers of *Ivanhoe* establishes a national identity that is not simply cultural, but imperial and colonial. *Ivanhoe* and Richard have acquired their culture-crossing skills on the Crusades, in the confrontation with an alien empire at the limits of Christendom. That rash, disastrous, but glamorous adventure provides an explicitly imperialist frame for the domestic history of conquest in which all subjects are strangers in relation to their place and origins, all are disinherited, all occupy a colonial subjectivity. The converse of this alienation is the proposition so neatly put in that Scott-soaked epitome of popular history, *1066 and All That*: 'The Norman Conquest was a Good Thing, as from this time onwards England stopped being conquered and thus was able to become top nation.'<sup>23</sup> The colonial origins of modern England, the mixing and tempering of its stock by foreign conquest, have produced its modern world-imperial fitness. The multiple valencies of a heterogeneous English equip it to absorb any cultural element.

If this imperial nationalism becomes more explicit in later, Victorian formulations (including Darwinian natural history), it works here as the solution to a specifically Scottish national predicament. I began by quoting a contemporary review of *Ivanhoe* that recognized in Scott's enterprise a Scottish conquest

<sup>22</sup> Scott's model of culture is in some respects close to the political aesthetic of Edmund Burke; for a discussion of these themes in a contemporary context, see James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (1984). On the language of *Ivanhoe* see Graham Tulloch, *The Language of Walter Scott* (1980), chs. 3 and 4; and C. R. Vanden Bossche, 'Culture and Economy in *Ivanhoe*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 42 (1987), 46–72.

<sup>23</sup> W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (1930), 17. Compare Scott's 'Essay on Romance': 'England, so often conquered, yet fated to receive an accession of strength from each new subjugation' (*Miscellaneous Prose Works* (1834), vi. 203).