



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

WALTER SCOTT

*Waverley*



SIR WALTER SCOTT

# WAVERLEY

EDITED WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY  
ANDREW HOOK

PENGUIN BOOKS

## PENGUIN BOOKS

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## CONTENTS

Sir Walter Scott	7
Introduction	9
Note on the Text	29
WAVERLEY	33
Scott's Notes	495
Additional Material Included in the 1829 Edition	
<i>Advertisement to the 1829 Edition</i>	517
<i>General Preface, 1829</i>	519
<i>Appendices to General Preface</i>	534
<i>Preface to the Third Edition, October 1814</i>	563
<i>Introduction, 1829</i>	567
<i>Author's Dedication – Abbotsford, 1829</i>	571
Editor's Notes	572
Textual Emendations	601
Glossary	605



## WAVERLEY

SIR WALTER SCOTT was born in Edinburgh in 1771 and educated at Edinburgh High School and University. He was called to the bar in 1792. Having developed an early interest in the old Border tales and ballads, he spent much of his free time exploring the Border country. In 1796 he published, anonymously, a translation of Bürger's 'Lenore' and 'Der Wilde Jäger'. Within a year after being rejected by the woman with whom he was passionately in love, Scott married someone else. From 1799 until his death he was Sheriff of Selkirkshire, and from 1806 to 1830 held another well-paid office as a Clerk to the Court of Session. In 1802-3 his three volumes of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* appeared; and in 1805 his first considerable original work, the romantic poem, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel'. In 1809 he entered into partnership with John Ballantyne in a bookselling business, and in 1811 purchased Abbotsford on the Tweed, a reflection of his expensive ambition to live as a landed magnate. In 1813 Scott refused the offer of the laureateship, recommending Southey for the honour instead. Eclipsed by Byron as a popular poet, Scott turned his attention to the novel as a means of giving reign to his talents. The novels – initially anonymous – start with *Waverley* and include *Rob Roy*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Pirate*, *Peveril of the Peak*, *Redgauntlet* and *Castle Dangerous*. Scott was created a baronet in 1820 and avowed the authorship of the novels in 1827. In 1825, James Ballantyne & Co. were involved in a bankruptcy. Scott shouldered the whole burden himself and spent the close of his life working at an extraordinary pace to repay his creditors, who were eventually paid in full by the posthumous sale of his copyrights. He died in 1832.

ANDREW HOOK is Bradley Professor of English literature in the University of Glasgow. He has also edited (with the late Judith Hook) Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* for the Penguin Classics, and is the author of *Scotland and America, 1750-1835*; *American Literature in Context 1865-1900*; and *Scott Fitzgerald*. His edited work also includes the *History of Scottish Literature, 1660-1800*.





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## SIR WALTER SCOTT

WALTER SCOTT was born in Edinburgh on 15 August 1771. His father, a strict Calvinist with a special interest in church history, was a Writer to the Signet, i.e. a solicitor. His mother, the daughter of a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University, less austere in her attitudes than her husband, had an interest in poetry. Scott's early life was passed mainly in Edinburgh and at Sandy Knowe in Roxburghshire. In the period 1779-83 he attended the famous Edinburgh High School; afterwards, from 1783-6, he took classes at Edinburgh University. In 1786 he began an irksome apprenticeship in his father's office, and in 1789 he began to read for the Scottish Bar, to which, after another three years at Edinburgh University, he was duly called in 1792. Subsequently, despite his literary triumphs, he never entirely gave up the legal profession. He became Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire in 1799, and he remained Clerk of the Court of Session in Edinburgh from 1806 to within a year or two of his death.

Scott's private life went less smoothly than his professional one. While still a baby he suffered a severe illness which left him lame for the rest of his life. In 1785 he again fell seriously ill and only recovered after a protracted convalescence. In 1792 he fell in love with Williamina Belsches, daughter of a Scots baronet. His suit was unsuccessful, and the affair was brought to a close by Miss Belsches's marriage in 1796. In 1797 Scott married Margaret Charlotte Carpenter, or Carpentier, the daughter of a French refugee.

Scott's earliest literary efforts were translations of German poems and plays; a translation of a work by Goethe was the first publication to appear under his own name. His first major work, however, reflected his interest in a literary tradition nearer at hand: the collection of popular ballads called the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3). From this point on Scott's literary

career was fantastically full and varied. He edited an amazing variety of literary works, including the works of Dryden and Swift; contributed regularly to periodicals; and, beginning with *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in 1805, wrote the series of long, narrative poems that swiftly brought him fame and fortune. In 1814 *Waverley* appeared and soon it and its successors pushed that fame and fortune to still greater heights. The first nine novels drew on Scottish settings and on recent Scottish history, but after the appearance of *Ivanhoe* in 1819, Scott turned increasingly for his subject-matter to England and Europe of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

For most of his life Scott was accepted as an outstanding luminary of the literary establishment. In 1813 he declined the offer of the Poet Laureateship. In 1818 he accepted a baronetcy. He stage-managed George IV's kilted state-visit to Edinburgh in 1822 and was himself lionized in Paris in 1826. In 1830 he declined the offer of a state pension and a Privy Counsellorship, and during his prolonged final illness he sailed to the Mediterranean aboard a naval frigate.

Since 1804 Scott had maintained a Border home at Ashestiel in Selkirkshire. In 1811 he bought Abbotsford, rebuilding the house and later adding substantially to the estate. These land investments were expensive and not entirely judicious. Since 1805 Scott's finances had been deeply involved with the printing firm of James Ballantyne with whom he had entered secretly into partnership. In 1813 the company got into financial difficulties and was helped out by the publishing house of Archibald Constable. But in 1826 disaster struck with the financial collapse of both the companies of Ballantyne and Constable. Scott's fortune was swallowed up in the crash and for the rest of his life he struggled heroically to earn enough by his writings to redeem the losses of his creditors, who were finally paid in full from the proceeds of the sale of his copyrights after his death in September 1832.

## INTRODUCTION

WAVERLEY, published in 1814, may not be the best novel of the nineteenth century; but it may well be the most significant. The first of Scott's novels, its success engendered the rest. And Scott's novels made an impact upon the reading public and literary culture of Europe and America unequalled by any literary phenomenon before or since. *Waverley* and the novels which followed it were devoured by the readership of their day with an enthusiasm and excitement which are scarcely comprehensible today. For every category of reader – high-born and low-born, rich and poor, town-dweller and countryman, the literary critic and the common reader, statesman and student – Scott's appeal was irresistible. From Land's End to John O'Groats, from Maine to Florida, from France to Italy, to Germany, to Russia and the rest of Europe, everyone who could read read Scott. In his own lifetime Scott was rocketed to a position of unrivalled greatness and fame. With Napoleon safely caged on St Helena, whose name was more widely known than Scott's? Fast ships waited to race the text of his latest novel across the Atlantic to the eager printing-presses of America; translators vied with each other in the capitals of Europe to produce a version of the same novel; in Britain the number of copies of novels by Scott issued by the presses in his own lifetime is to be counted in millions. The fantastic scale of the Scott phenomenon is something we have to recognize, even if we find it hard to understand. A sober American scholar has said it all in a single phrase: the success of the *Waverley* Novels 'was indescribably sensational.'\*

That *Waverley* was the springboard of Scott's success as a novelist is one evident aspect of its significance. Another is that Scott's first novel established a new literary genre. The historical

\* Ernest Bembaum, *Guide Through the Romantic Movement*, New York, 1949, p 138.

novel properly speaking did not exist before Scott wrote *Waverley*. After *Waverley* it quickly became one of the most common and popular modes of the novel. A new interest in the past, in the customs and manners and personalities of ages remote from the civilized present, was a striking characteristic of the romantic movement in Europe generally; but before Scott no one had successfully combined that interest with narrative fiction in prose. Scott's example, however, was the green light for the historical novel. As George Saintsbury put it: 'In a few years the whole of Europe was greedily reading historical novels, and a very considerable part of the literary population of Europe was busily writing them.' That 'literary population' came to include some of the greatest names in the history of the novel: Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton and Robert Louis Stevenson in Britain; Hugo, Dumas, Mérimée, de Vigny, and Balzac in France; Manzoni in Italy; Gogol and Tolstoy in Russia; Hauff and Freytag in Germany; Jokai in Hungary. All of these, and of course there was a multitude of others including James Fenimore Cooper, 'the American Scott', followed the trail that Scott was blazing with *Waverley*. No doubt historical fiction would have emerged in the end had Scott never written a word; but that it emerged when and how it did was due in the largest measure to his towering example.

Scott's example had a further significance. The triumph of *Waverley* and its successors did much to ensure that the novel should become the dominant literary form of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Scott's triumph became a triumph for the form he wrote in. The novel gained a new authority and prestige, and even more important perhaps, a new masculinity. After Scott the novel was no longer in danger of becoming the preserve of the woman writer and the woman reader. Instead it became the appropriate form for writers' richest and deepest imaginative explorations of human experience.

The significance of *Waverley* is then international, cosmopolitan, and enduring. But it would be wrong, finally, to neglect its significance in a narrower frame: *Waverley* in the context of Scott's own country – Scotland. Here too no single work has had a greater impact. Scottish culture was deeply and permanently

marked by *Waverley* and its successors. *Waverley* represents the beginning of the final stage of a process, a process with its roots deep in the eighteenth century, by which Scotland came increasingly to be identified at a variety of levels as an archetypal land of romance. After Scott, Scotland's heroic and bloody history, its wild, sublime, and pastoral landscapes, its folk and peasant culture and song, its loyal and valorous people, came to be seen as the literal confirmation of major elements in the ideology of romanticism. *Waverley* and the subsequent novels did not create such notions; but they undoubtedly authenticated them. Elsewhere in Europe *Waverley* and its successors did much to inspire and keep alive dreams of romantic nationalism. At home in Scotland they provided the finishing touches to Scotland's new romantic national identity.

## II

To suggest that *Waverley* confirmed Scotland's romantic identity; that it conferred a new prestige on the novel form; that it became the primary model for the new genre of historical fiction; that it was responsible for bringing Scott to a position of unrivalled eminence, reputation, and fame – is to suggest a great deal. So much in fact that one might wonder why, if *Waverley* is really quite so significant, such assertions need to be made at all? Why are these 'truths' not self-evident? The answer to such objections lies in the catastrophic decline in Scott's reputation which began towards the end of the nineteenth century and which to a degree is still with us. I have suggested that in his own lifetime and for many decades after everyone read Scott. In the more recent past no one did. As the anonymous author of the *Waverley Novels* Scott was frequently called the Great Unknown; in more recent times he has been the Great Unread. If few reputations have climbed as high as Scott's, equally few have plummeted so low. How did it happen that the Scott whose only peer was Shakespeare himself, the Scott who, in Wordsworth's phrase, 'was the whole world's darling', came to be remembered only as the author of an interminable

series of Waverley Novels each one more dreary and unreadable than the last?

The short answer is that Scott fell with his age. The reaction against the nineteenth century, against Victorianism, and, more specifically, against nineteenth-century romanticism, became in one of its aspects a reaction against Scott. Identified with the period that had idolized him, Scott almost disappeared from sight when that period came under hostile scrutiny. Compare the fate of Jane Austen. As the reputation of her great contemporary declined so hers climbed: the minor woman novelist of Scott's own day became the literary giant, while Scott's own glamour faded and tarnished. More usefully still the comparison helps us to see what were taken to be the central critical weaknesses in the Waverley Novels. Where Jane Austen is strong, Scott is weak: her careful sense of form and structure against his slack and slow-moving narrative procedures; her superb control of the complexities of tone against his pedestrian heavy-footedness; her profoundly ironic vision of human nature and human society against his complacent conventionality of attitude; her flexibility of language and style against his stilted, formal rhetoric. Now Scott's deficiencies as a novelist are undoubtedly substantial: substantial enough to make it inevitable that there should have been a descent from his former high eminence. But the wholesale disparagement of Scott, characteristic of the last two generations at least, has had little to do even with such loosely formulated criticisms as those above. The case is a simpler one. Scott is dismissed unread because he is not serious – a mere entertainer. An innumerable tribe of modern writers provide better entertainment in shorter compass, so Scott is set aside.

Of course even if the charge that Scott was not a serious artist were true, the historical significance of *Waverley* which I have outlined above would remain unchanged. But in no sense whatsoever is it accurate to suggest that *Waverley's* significance is exclusively historical. *Waverley* is an immensely readable novel, significant in its own right as a complex, serious and illuminating work of art. That one can say as much in 1971, Scott's bicentenary year, is an index of the gradual process of

reassessment and revaluation now going on in the critical study of Scott. The bicentenary, indeed, has been celebrated with considerable fanfare; the kinds of academic sideshow reserved for those we call our major authors have been taking place. What this indicates is that Scott's reputation is once again on the move. New interest is being taken; new studies are being produced; once again attention is being paid. Most important of all the Waverley Novels are being read, at least in some quarters, with proper care and attention. The results of these readings are fascinating. Not that there is any question of a restoration of Scott's old reputation, a return, let us say, to the view of Scott which predominated exactly one hundred years ago at the time of the celebrations to mark the first centenary of his birth. In 1871 Scott was lauded because above all else he was 'out and away the King of the Romantics'. The Victorians revered Scott as a great romantic writer; he was hailed as the father-figure, the herald and chief exponent of the whole European romantic movement in its British context. The Wizard of the North was above all the greatest luminary of the Romantic Age in English letters.

The claims filed on Scott's behalf in 1971 are of a quite different nature. Scott, it is now argued, is at best a reluctant romantic. The Waverley Novels, whatever nineteenth-century readers may have wished to believe, are far from being expressions of an uninhibited romanticism. In their form and style, in the characters of their heroes, in their author's attitude towards the events and types of behaviour he describes, Scott's novels clearly reveal a strong revulsion from major elements in the romantic ideology. Romanticism is a passionate, enthusiastic, revolutionary, individualistic creed: Scott is intellectually distrustful of emotional fervour of any kind, is suspicious of extreme forms of individualism, and is positively hostile to social revolution. Where romanticism is liberal, forward-looking, politically progressive, Scott is by nature and conviction deeply conservative. Romanticism's interest in the bizarre and exotic, even the sensational aspects of human nature and behaviour, is not shared by Scott. Indeed he was much concerned that his novels should not be seen as catering to the public's taste for