

21 Defining the nation

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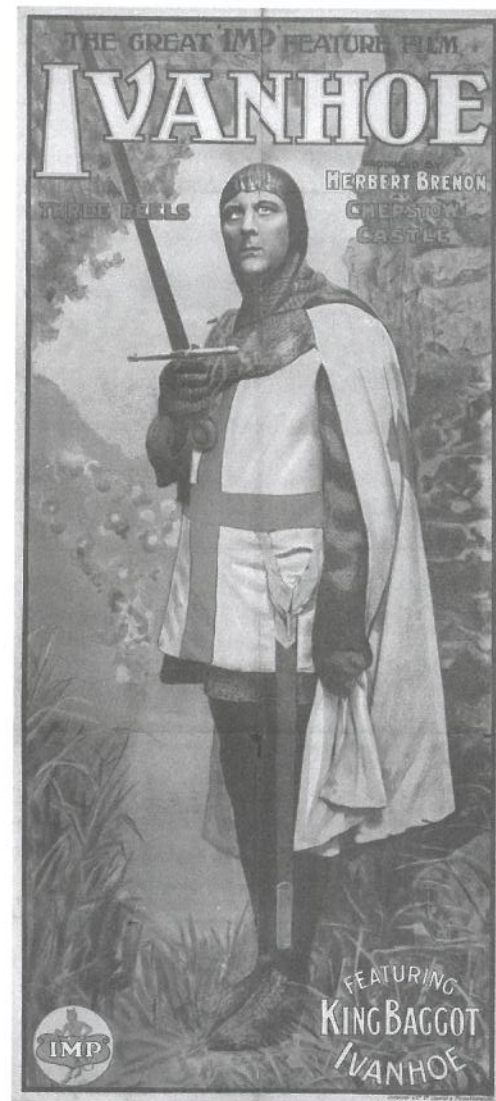


Figure 21.1 Motion picture poster for the 1913 film *Ivanhoe*, featuring actor King Baggot as Ivanhoe. London, Middlesbrough: Jordison & Co., Ltd.

The blasts of trumpets, the clashing of swords, breezing horses and bleeding knights: these phenomena abound in the historical novel* *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott.

Text: Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (1819)

Laisser aller! The trumpets sounded as he spoke – the spears of the champions were at once lowered and placed in the rests – the spurs were dashed into the flanks of the horses, and the two foremost ranks of either party rushed upon each other in full gallop, and met in the middle of the lists with a shock, the sound of which was heard at a mile's distance.

The consequences of the encounter were not instantly seen, for the dust raised by the trampling of so many darkened the air, and it was a minute ere the anxious spectators could see the fate of the encounter. When the fight became visible, half of the knights on each side were dismounted, some by dexterity of their adversary's lance, – some by the superior weight, which had broken down both horse and man, – some lay stretched on earth as if never more to rise – some had already gained their feet, and were closing hand to hand with those of the enemy who were in the same predicament – and two or three, who had received wounds by which they were disabled, were stopping their blood by their scarfs, and endeavouring to extricate themselves from the tumult. The mounted knights, whose lances had been almost all broken by the fury of the encounter, were now closely engaged with their swords, shouting war-cries, and exchanging buffets, as if honour and life depended on the issue of the combat.

The tumult was presently increased by the advance of the second rank on either side, which, acting as reserve, now rushed on to aid their companions. The followers of Brian de Bois-Guilbert shouted: "Ha! Beau-seant! Beau seant! – for the Temple – for the Temple." The opposite party shouted in answer – "Desdichado! Desdichado!" – Which watch-word they took from the motto upon their leader's shield.

The champions thus encountering each other with the utmost fury, and with alternate success, the tide of battle seemed to flow now toward the southern, now toward the northern extremity of lists, as the one or the other party prevailed. Meantime the clang of the blows, and the shouts of the combatants, mixed fearfully with the sound of the trumpets, and drowned the groans of those who fell, and lay rolling defenceless beneath the feet of the horses. The splendid armour of the combatants was now defaced with dust and blood, and gave way at every stroke of the sword and battle-axe. The gay plumage, shorn from the crests, drifted upon the breeze like snow-flakes. All that was beautiful and graceful in the martial array had disappeared, and what was now visible was only calculated to awake terror or compassion.¹

Ivanhoe, set in England during the reign of King Richard the Lionheart in the late twelfth century, was one of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century. It travelled across Europe in countless editions, translations* and adaptations*, and inspired many authors to write novels in a similar vein.

This chapter aims to show that *Ivanhoe* is illustrative of several literary trends of the first half of the nineteenth century. The most important two are Romanticism* and nationalism*. Romanticism refers to the fact that works of art often became an expression of the inner life of the individual artist and that imagination became a primary criterion in the creation of literature. Novelists and poets became highly interested in the past, ranging from medieval topics to the Enlightenment*. Nationalism points to the use of literature as an

instrument of nation-building: by evoking heroic episodes from the nation's history and by representing and inventing national heroes who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the nation's welfare, authors contributed to the rise of national sentiments in their countries. At the same time, another type of hero emerged who can, to some extent, be considered as quite the opposite type: the Byronic hero. This figure was a product of Romanticism as well, but represented feelings of loneliness and despair, which ultimately led to his downfall.

Ivanhoe: martial heroism

Ivanhoe was both the product of romantic and nationalist tendencies. In this work, the author Sir Walter Scott sketches a lively image of chivalry and courtly manners. War and knight fights played a central role in the novel, which celebrated martial heroism. Descriptions of the horrors of the battlefields were not held back, as the previously quoted fragment shows, but they only added to the sublime of warfare and the grandeur of the victors. One of the most well-known excerpts is the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche which ends in a duel between the good-hearted disinherited knight Ivanhoe, here referred to as "Desdichado", and the savagely violent Norman knight Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Ivanhoe is about to lose until a knight in black dress, later revealed to be King Richard, comes to his rescue. Ivanhoe is proclaimed the winner, and honoured with a chaplet by the Queen of the tournament, the Saxon Lady Rowena.

Ivanhoe deals with the ongoing strife between the Normans and Saxons, and their attempts to establish power over England. Ivanhoe's father, the Saxon leader Cedric, tries to arrange a marriage between the noble Athelstane of Coningsburgh and Rowena, in order to make Athelstane heir to the English throne. To avoid any further contact between Ivanhoe and his lover Rowena, Cedric has abandoned and disinherited his son, who then joins the crusade under the command of King Richard.

The narrative starts with the return of Ivanhoe from the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche. He is severely injured and treated for his wounds by Rebecca, a beautiful Jewish woman. She is impressed with Ivanhoe, but the social codes prohibit them to have any further contact. Later on, Rebecca is kidnapped by the Normans and accused of witchcraft. Bois-Guilbert, who is in love with Rebecca, has to defend the honour of the Templars against Ivanhoe, who wins the duel and saves Rebecca's life. Meanwhile, Athelstane dies in a fight against the Normans, but after his funeral he returns from death – a highly unlikely event in the novel. Athelstane withdraws his claims to the throne, which clears the way for the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena. Rebecca decides to leave the country to continue her life in Spain, under the protection of Mohammed Boabdil, the king of Grenada. This ending affirms the position of Jews as outsiders, and stands in sharp contrast with the marital happiness of Rowena and Ivanhoe.

The key motives in *Ivanhoe* are exclusion and deracination versus integration and reconciliation. Exclusion is in particular thematized in the portrayal of the Jewish characters, Rebecca and her father Isaac. On the one hand, Scott offers a very negative, stereotypical image of the Jews; especially Isaac is portrayed as an avaricious and opportunistic man. On the other hand, the caring and beautiful Rebecca is a sympathetic character, who is liberated by the hero of the story, Ivanhoe. The message of harmony and unity is embodied by Ivanhoe, who strives for justice and stands above the mutually hostile parties. It is significant that his wedding is attended by high representatives both from the Saxon and Norman sides. Consequently, Ivanhoe symbolizes the later merging of Saxon and Norman traditions into one single, united English identity.

Romanticism and medievalism

Sir Walter Scott is undoubtedly one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth century. He is not only considered to be the founding father of the historical novel, but he was also famous for his ballads*, in which he wrote about old Scottish customs and manners. He cultivated the medieval past in poems like the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), and introduced a new type of historical writing with novels such as *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward* (1823).

Scott's poems were an instant success. His historical tales, which portrayed ethnic strife, were published during the heyday of the Napoleonic wars. They appealed to a broad audience, as they propagated patriotism and loyalty in times of warfare. *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which dealt with the sixteenth-century rivalry between Scotland and England, sold 12,500 copies in two years. It was followed by *Marmion*, a tale about the armed conflict between England and Scotland in 1513, which reached a selling figure of twenty-five thousand copies in four years. An absolute record was set by *The Lady of Lake*, a tale about the armed conflict between James V and the Clan Alpine: twenty thousand copies were disseminated in only a few months.² Scott's novels were even more successful. At the start his books were mainly popular in England and Scotland, but soon they travelled all over Europe in the form of translations and adaptations. Scott's engaging way of historical storytelling, the combination of fact and fiction*, love and warfare, strife and harmony, appealed to the readers on the continent, as well. With his publications, Scott laid the foundations of two genres which would become immensely popular in the first half of the nineteenth century: narrative poetry* and the historical novel. This chapter concentrates on these two genres and their transnational* character.

Scott's work fits in a European pattern: between 1780 and 1850, the past was re-invoked in literature throughout Europe, and successful writers of that period increasingly resorted to historical topics. Literature became one of the most important gateways to history, since it made the past accessible to a broad audience: by lowering the prices, sales figures quickly went up, developing the historical novel gradually into a mass medium*. It opened up new horizons and created new historical sensations of long-forgotten worlds. The illusion of authenticity was increased by long and detailed descriptions of ancient customs, manners, clothing and natural surroundings (the so-called *couleur locale*). Some authors even used old dialects to suggest historical accuracy in speech. Nevertheless, the representation of historical characters and the nation's past was very much influenced by contemporary elements as well: present-day ideals were projected upon the main characters, and historical subject matter was often used to comment upon actual social and political issues. *Ivanhoe* could, for instance, also be interpreted as a political commentary on the demonstrations in Manchester in favour of parliamentary reform in 1819. Scott supported the interventions of the authorities, and was firmly opposed to an escalation of the conflict. He made this clear in a letter in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*, which he signed with the initials "L.T." It is not a coincidence the dedicatory epistle of *Ivanhoe* was signed by "Laurence Templeton". By using the same initials, Scott made a connection between both writings. The borders between fact and fiction, and past and present, were fluid.

The heightened interest in the past was closely linked to the rise of Romanticism in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Romantic thought was strongly influenced by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, who adhered to the idea that each

nation had its own unique culture, which was rooted in a long historical and linguistic tradition. To lay bare the roots of their national cultures, historians and philologists started searching for old manuscripts in archives* and libraries*. Their aim was to find long-forgotten medieval sources*, such as songs, old folk tales*, myths*, ballads and poems. These antiquarian explorations led to important discoveries. In Germany, manuscripts* were found of the *Nibelungenlied*, a heroic epic* from the thirteenth century. The story about the brave *Beowulf*, written in ancient English, was transcribed and published for the first time by an Icelandic scholar. In France and Spain, the original manuscripts of the *Chanson de Roland* and *El Cantar de mio Cid* were rediscovered. These medieval epics were seen as foundational texts in the nation's history and became pivotal in the construction of national self-images by intellectuals, poets and novelists.

Medievalism not only became visible in the rise of antiquarian and philological activities, but also in the literary production* of that period. New genres emerged – such as the narrative poem and the historical novel – while older genres, such as the romance*, were revitalized. From 1770 onwards, it became fashionable to write ballads and romances. One of the trendsetters was the English bishop, antiquarian and poet Thomas Percy. In 1765, he published a collection of old folk tales and legends, *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, which had a great impact on later Romantic poets. The Arthurian ballad about “The Boy and the Mantle” is illustrative for the style and form. It begins as follows:

In Carleile dwelt King Arthur,
A prince of passing might,
And there maintain'd his table round,
Beset with many a knight.
And there he kept his Christmas
With mirth and princely cheer
When lo! A strange and cauning boy
Before him did appear.³

Percy's collection of ancient ballads was an instant success, and was translated into German by Gottfried August Bürger, who was equally interested in ancient folk poetry*. It also inspired Bürger to write ballads himself, in which he tried to create an authentic medieval atmosphere. His poems were widely read in Germany, and his best-known ballad, *Lenore* (1773), was translated into French and English. Walter Scott used both Percy and Bürger as sources of inspiration. After having published a collection of ancient Scottish ballads in 1802–1803, he started writing original ballads on medieval topics. By then, however, the political climate in Europe had changed drastically.

Nationalism

In 1799, Napoleon had taken over power in France, and gradually his true ambitions to conquer the whole of Europe became evident. He managed to occupy large parts of Europe, and appointed several of his brothers on European thrones: Joseph-Napoléon was made king of Naples and Sicily (1806–1808), Louis of Holland (1806) and Jérôme of Westphalia (1807). As a reaction to the French regime, a vast corpus of extremely patriotic resistance literature* emerged. Moreover, a heightened interest in the nation's past can be witnessed, because the nation's history came to be seen as an important instrument to raise national awareness and express resistance against the French. The literary scholar Joep

Leerssen has aptly described the general spirit of that period as “political Romanticism”: many European authors were inspired by Romantic attitudes as well as political ideals.⁴

According to some critics, Scott's romances can be read as a form of resistance literature, as well.⁵ Some fragments of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake* invoked the contemporary war with France, and the celebration of heroic war deeds of medieval knights could also be seen as celebrations of the British soldiers resisting the Napoleonic regime. The admiral Horatio Nelson and the British prime minister William Pitt, who had both played key roles in the fight against Napoleon, were extensively praised in the introduction of *Marmion*, and Napoleon was referred to as “the dragon”.

In Germany, such poets as Heinrich von Kleist, Theodor Körner and Ernst Moritz Arndt joined the common cause of rebellion to Napoleonic tyranny. Kleist, for instance, published a political-historical play*, entitled *Die Hermannsschlacht* (“The battle of Hermann”, 1808), in which he called for military action against the foreign aggressors. The play was about the first king of the Germanic tribe the Cheruski, Arminius or Hermann, who won the battle against the Romans at the Teutoburg Forrest in 9 CE. This historical figure would become one of the most important symbols of German national identity during the course of the nineteenth century. He was celebrated as one of the founding fathers of the nation.

Körner incorporated his own experiences as a soldier in his patriotic songs. He died in battle against Napoleon in 1813, and left his readers a volume of *Zwölf freie deutsche Gedichte* (“Twelve free German poems”, 1813). Arndt became known for his song *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland* (“What is the German Fatherland”, 1813), in which the fatherland stretched beyond the borders of the regional states: it was the sum of states which made up Germany. The first strophe reads:

What is the German Fatherland?
Is it the land of Prussia, is it the land of Schwaben?
Is it at the Rhine, where the grapevine grows?
Is it at the Belt, where the seagull flies?
Oh no! no! no!
His fatherland must be bigger!⁶

Arndt's song, which envisions a German nation that is the sum of all regions, became very popular and functioned as an (unofficial) national anthem until approximately 1870.

Resistance literature also flourished in the Netherlands. Jan Frederik Helmers wrote one of the most nationalistic poems ever written in Dutch literature: *De Hollandsche natie* (“The Dutch Nation”, 1812). In this national epic, which comprised more than three thousand stanzas, Helmers gave an extensive overview of Dutch history. In contrast with the German poets, Helmers did not look to the medieval past for his main inspiration, but directed his attention to the “golden age” of the Dutch Republic: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Admiral Michiel de Ruyter is, for instance, honoured for his many victories in naval battles, while the poet Joost van den Vondel is celebrated for his qualities as a poet. The point Helmers tried to make was clear: there had been no greater nation than the Dutch in the past, and ultimately, this would lead to a new victory over the French. The provocative undertone did not go unnoticed by the French censors*: Helmers had to delete many passages before he received the permission to publish the poem. After Napoleon had been defeated, the original poem was published and soon became one of the classics of Dutch literature.

The cult of the great national past was a reaction to the overwhelming innovations Napoleon had imposed on the territories he had conquered. The French domination was an important driving force behind the nascent ideology of nationalism, which would culminate in the second half of the nineteenth century. Literature played an important role in cultivating national cultures. Through literature, a shared national self-image and a sense of collective togetherness were constructed, which implied the exclusion of others, especially the French. On the one hand, this type of literature was made instrumental to evoking national sentiments; on the other, the rise of genres such as historical narrative poetry, the romance and the historical novel were transnational from the start: the national past was integrated into the production of literature throughout nineteenth-century Europe, and works reached international audiences by means of translations.

The Byronic hero

Since its rediscovery as a literary genre in 1765, the medieval romance had undergone different generic transformations. At first it was mainly used to write fictitious medieval love stories, then it became a political means to express resistance against the Napoleonic regime by portraying national heroes from the past. A third type was introduced by one of the most influential poets of the early nineteenth century: George Gordon Byron. In 1812, he published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a poem which has been considered the romance *par excellence*. By the time the fourth and final canto was published in 1818, Byron had become a true literary celebrity.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is about an aristocratic young man who is unsatisfied with his current life, leaves home and starts a quest for higher ideals in an exotic Mediterranean environment. He is the modern version of the wandering medieval knight. His departure is emotional:

Adieu, adieu! my native shore
Fades o'er the waters blue;
The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,
And shrieks the wild sea-mew.
You sun that sets upon the sea
We follow in his flight;
Farewell awhile to him mand thee,
My native Land – Good Night!⁷

Harold's quest brings him to many countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Albania and Greece. Interestingly enough, the third canto, which was published in 1816, also includes a stay at the fields of Waterloo in Belgium, where Napoleon was defeated in 1815. The protagonist shivers at the thought of all the soldiers killed and mourns the loss of so many beloved ones. This episode emphasises the main difference with the medieval quest, as it entails a critique of martial heroism. Harold's travels end in Venice and Rome, where the protagonist experiences the beauty of ancient cultures.

With his narrative poems, Byron introduced a new kind of protagonist, the so-called "Byronic hero." This hero is of a pensive and melancholic nature, and tormented by unrequited love. He wanders around in search for higher ideals, revolts against social conventions and turns away from religious beliefs. Byron was admired by many for his uncompromising and unconventional verses, which were highly influenced by his

personal experiences. His eccentric personality, the many scandals and his self-chosen exile only added to this. He participated as a volunteer in the Greek insurrection against the Ottoman Empire in 1823, and died there at the age of thirty-six from a fever. As such he became the role model of the true Romantic poet, who struggled with the outer world both in real life as well as in his poems. He inspired many authors all over Europe.

At the same time, he was criticised by just as many for his immoral behaviour and the atheistic tendencies in his work. In the Netherlands, for instance, his poetry did not find a fertile soil. Only a few poets followed his style, but it was generally felt that this type of exoticism and extremism did not fit in with the dominant discourse on Dutch national character.

At first sight, the Byronic hero does not seem to fit in the wave of nationalism which spread across post-Napoleonic Europe, as he was the personification of individualism, solitude and isolation from the outer world. Nevertheless, this heroic type also functioned as the ultimate embodiment of liberty and freedom: he also represented the people's right to stand up against foreign oppression and tyranny. Byron's own participation in the Greek war of independence was the ultimate consequence of this political ideal and was, as such, an act of true (Greek) nationalism.

Every nation has its own Walter Scott

From 1820 onwards, the historical novel would become the most important medium for telling stories about the past. Walter Scott's influence on the spread and development of this genre can hardly be overestimated. In the first half of the nineteenth century his novels were translated into Danish, Swedish, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Russian, Polish, Dutch, Czech, Hungarian, Portuguese and Greek. What is more, nearly every European nation had a Walter Scott of its own. It is worth making a (selective) tour around the European nations: tracing Scott's influence automatically brings up the names of the most well-known novelists of these days. They have in common that they all wrote about their nation's past, and contributed to the rise of national thought and nationalism.

In the Scandinavian countries, for instance, Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) used elements of Scott's work in his novels *O.T.* (1836) and *De to Baronesser* ('The two baronesses', 1848). Both novels are set in Denmark, and pay ample attention to the social and historical circumstances of those days. In his diaries, he revealed that reading Scott's novels opened up new worlds for him. He also visited the monument of Walter Scott in Edinburgh and the Highlands to see some of the scenery where Scott's work was set. During his journey, he was greeted with the name "the Danish Walter Scott."

The Dutch politician and author Jacob van Lennep was soon given the name "Dutch Walter Scott". He emulated the Scottish author by writing a series of ballads about the Dutch medieval past, *Nederlandsche legenden* ('Dutch legends', 1828–1847), and also published several historical novels that were modelled after Scott's narratives. One of his most well-known novels, *De Roos van Dekama* ('The Rose of Dekama', 1836), deals with the strife between the Count of Holland and the Frisian people in the fourteenth century. It opens with a vivid description of a tournament in the city of Haarlem, a scene which was clearly based upon the passage about Ashby-de-la Zouch in *Ivanhoe*. Van Lennep was criticized for having adopted too many elements of Scott's work, and some critics even accused him of plagiarism*. Van Lennep refuted the accusations by stating that he had enriched Dutch historical literary writing by choosing typically Dutch surroundings and habits.

The other great nineteenth-century Dutch historical novelist was Anna Louisa Geertruida Toussaint. In contrast with Van Lennep, she situated her novels in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because she felt that the true awakening of the Dutch people had started with the reformation. One of her best-known novels, *Het huis Lauernesse* ('The house of Lauernesse', 1840) tells the love story of two young people who have converted to Lutheranism. The couple ends up in Wittenberg, the home of Martin Luther, where they devote the rest of their lives to their religious conviction. Several scenes are clearly inspired by *Ivanhoe*. At a certain point the female protagonist Ottelijne appears to die, but in the next chapter the narrator reassures the readers that she was only playing a trick. Another scene which can be traced back to *Ivanhoe* is the burning of Ottelijne's family castle by Catholics; it reminds one of the lunatic Ulrica, who sets the castle of Front-de-Boeuf on fire.

In Belgium, the most popular novelist was Henrik Conscience. His historical novel, *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* ('The Lion of Flanders', 1838), went back to the Battle of the Golden Spurs of 1302, which was fought between the County of Flanders and the Kingdom of France. Conscience offered a romantic account of the historical event, and included a love story between a daughter of the count of Flanders and a brave knight. The historical novel had a large impact on the Flemish national movement in the nineteenth century. Nationalists considered the Battle of the Golden Spurs, as told by Conscience, as the starting point of Flemish emancipation from the French-speaking elite*.

In France, Victor Hugo was one of the most prominent Romantic novelists who took Scott as a role model. Many elements of *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) were inspired by *Ivanhoe*. The story was set in Paris in 1482 and deals with the unrequited love of the hunchback Quasimodo for the gypsy Esmeralda. Quasimodo is an ugly outcast who is raised by the deacon Frollo. Both of them have feelings for Esmeralda, but she is enamoured with the handsome soldier Phoebus. Frollo's jealousy makes him accuse Esmeralda of witchcraft. Quasimodo tries to save her from hanging, but in the end she is captured and brought to death. Quasimodo murders the deacon and then commits suicide. Just as Scott did, Hugo used the medieval past to comment upon contemporary issues. In contrast with Scott, however, Hugo clearly sympathized with the less privileged and criticized the social inequalities of contemporary society.

In some cases, the admiration of Scott went so far that authors crossed the line of the acceptable. Such was the case with the Spanish novelist Ramón López Soler. For a long time, he was regarded as one of the great inventors of the Spanish historical novel, but his reputation changed when it became clear how much he had copied and pasted from Scott's work. His most well-known novel, *Los bandos de Castilla o el caballero del Cisne* ('The gangs of Castilla or the knight of Cisne', 1830) was, in fact, a compilation of translated fragments from *Waverley*, *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Dunward*, while many characters were exact copies of those of Scott. He also included a translation of a poem by Byron and pretended this to be an authentic Catalan song. Another Spanish follower of Scott, whose reputation is less disputable, was Francisco Navarro Villoslada (1818–1895). This author, who was often called "el Walter Scott español", published several historical novels between 1840 and 1850, but his work soon fell into oblivion. The works of Benito Pérez Galdós, who tackled more recent history in his *Episodios Nacionales* ('National episodes', 1873–1912), became canonical, however. This collection of forty-six historical novels started with the Battle of Trafalgar of 1805 and continued to the early years of the Restoration in the 1880s. His use of "average Spaniards" and the addition of characteristic fictional characters were inspired by Scott's works. The series was very successful and is generally acknowledged as an important expression of Spanish national identity in those days.

Finally, Scott's influence can also be witnessed in the Eastern European countries. Two of the greatest Russian writers, Alexander Pushkin and Lev Tolstoy, were possibly influenced by the *Waverley* novels. The former published a historical novel in 1836, *The Captain's Daughter*, which bore many traces of *Ivanhoe*. The Russian readers were taken back to the years 1773–1775, when Pugachev led a revolt during the reign of Catherine II. Against this background a love story unfolds between Pyotr and Masha. At first Pyotr does not receive his father's permission to marry her, but after having rescued her from a fortress the two are wedded.

This tour makes clear that Scott had a huge impact on the European literary landscape. His influence cannot only be traced back to the level of the plot or specific characters in works of other novelists, but he also contributed to the generic features of the nineteenth-century novel in general. In a similar manner, European writers presented their readers with vivid descriptions of the local costumes, landscapes and manners in the past while supplanting political messages about the present at the same time.

Remediation and collective memory

Although Walter Scott wrote many poems and novels, one particular work became an all-pervasive point of reference up until today: *Ivanhoe*. No other nineteenth-century novel has been disseminated so widely and reprinted, remediated and re-enacted so many times. Adaptations include theatre plays, operas, paintings, board games, children's books, comic books and computer games. A major Hollywood movie (1952) and two television series (1958, 1997) have added significantly to its popularity.

The character of the Jewish woman Rebecca especially captured the imagination of novelists, playwrights and artists. Many engravings and painters were made of the beautiful and slightly mysterious woman; for instance by Eugène Delacroix, who painted her abduction twice. Her position as an outcast and the open ending also gave rise to various interpretations. In 1832, the English sociologist and writer Harriet Martineau, for instance, took Rebecca as a role model for the cause of women:

Yes, women may choose Rebecca as representative of their capabilities: first despised, then wondered at, and involuntarily admired; tempted, made use of, then persecuted, and finally banished – not by a formal decree, but by being refused honourable occupation, and a safe abiding place. Let women not only take her for their model, but make her speak for them to society, till they have obtained the educational discipline which befits them; the rights, political and social, which are their due.⁸

For Martineau, the marginal position of Rebecca was symbolical for the subordinate position of women in general.

One of the most remarkable reactions to *Ivanhoe* was a satiric story by William Makepeace Thackeray, *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance upon Romance* (1850). Thackeray offers a sequel* to the story out of dissatisfaction with the ending. He imagines how their life continues after the wedding: *Ivanhoe* is extremely bored sitting at home, while Rowena is unable to cope with her jealousy of Rebecca. The restless knight leaves home to go fighting again but is killed on the battlefield. Rowena quickly remarries Athelstane, but later it appears that *Ivanhoe* is not dead at all. When both Athelstane and Rowena have passed away, *Ivanhoe* remarries Rebecca, who has converted to Christianity.

Thackeray mocks many elements of the original novel, such as the unlikely resurrection of Athelstane, Ivanhoe's ongoing successes as a warrior, the continuous narrative interventions and the intermittent singing of medieval ballads by the characters. Thackeray exaggerates Ivanhoe's bravery to the extreme, repeatedly mentioning the number of enemies he has killed during the fights:

The valour displayed by Ivanhoe, in all these contests, was prodigious; and the way in which he escaped from death from the discharges of mangonels, catapults, battering-rams, twenty-four pounders, boiling-oil, and other artillery, with the besieged received their enemies was remarkable . . . he would kill you off a couple of hundred of them of Chalus, whilst the strongest champions of the King's host could not finish more than their two dozen a day.⁹

Ivanhoe's heroic deeds are so many that the author gets bored by his own story:

The account of all the battles, storms, and scaladoes in which Sir Wilfrid took part, would only weary the reader, for the chopping off one heathen's head with an axe must be very like the decapitation of any other unbeliever.¹⁰

The many cartoons in the volume, which portray Ivanhoe as a saint whilst chopping off heads, reinforce the satiric character of the novel.

Thackeray's satire*, however, reaches further than Scott's novel: it can also be read as a general critique on the historical novel, which offered too many unrealistic events and offered a highly idealistic world. When Thackeray published his parody*, the historical novel had already started to decline in popularity and been replaced by a new form: the realistic novel*.

Today, the durable legacy of *Ivanhoe* probably has more to do with the recycling of the protagonist's name on a various range of objects – ranging from street names and metro stations to bicycles and walking trails – than with literacy*. Nevertheless, mentioning *Ivanhoe* immediately recalls associations with medieval England, fighting knights and bravery. As such, *Ivanhoe* still occupies a firm position in Europe's cultural memory*.

Notes

- 1 Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. with an introduction by Graham Tulloch (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 111–12.
- 2 Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120–1.
- 3 Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. 3 (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), 314.
- 4 Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History*, second edition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 105–26, 118.
- 5 Bainbridge, *British Poetry*, 120–39.
- 6 “Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?/ Ist's Preussenland, ist's Schwabenland?/ Ist's, wo am Rhein die Rebe blüht?/ Ist's, wo am Belt die Möwe zieht?/ O nein! nein! nein! /Sein Vaterland muss grösser sein!” In Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Gedichte: Vollständige Sammlung* (Berlin: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1860), 233.
- 7 Georg Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron, Including the Suppressed Poems* (Paris: A. and W. Galigani, 1831), 40.
- 8 Harriet Martineau, “The Achievements of the Genius of Scott,” *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 9.7 (1832): 457.

- 9 Mr. M.A. Titmarsh [William Makepeace Thackeray], *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance Upon Romance*, with illustrations by Richard Doyle (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 26–7.
- 10 Titmarsh, *Rebecca and Rowena*, 77.

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