

Waverley (novel)

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Waverley is an 1814 historical novel by Sir Walter Scott. Initially published anonymously in 1814 as Scott's first venture into prose fiction, *Waverley* is often regarded as the first historical novel. It became so popular that Scott's later novels were advertised as being "by the author of *Waverley*". His series of works on similar themes written during the same period have become collectively known as the "Waverley Novels".

In 1815, Scott was given the honour of dining with George, Prince Regent, who wanted to meet "the author of *Waverley*". It is thought that at this meeting Scott persuaded George that as a Stuart prince he could claim to be a Jacobite Highland Chieftain, a claim that would be dramatised when George became King and visited Scotland.^[1]

Waverley Abbey is noted by English Heritage to be Sir Walter Scott's inspiration for this novel.^[2] However, this was probably not the case.^[3]

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Plot introduction

Waverley is set during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, which sought to restore the Stuart dynasty in the person of Charles Edward Stuart (or 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'). It relates the story of a young dreamer and English soldier, Edward Waverley, who was sent to Scotland in 1745. He journeys North from his aristocratic family home, Waverley-Honour, in the south of England first to the Scottish Lowlands and the home of family friend Baron Bradwardine, then into the Highlands and the heart of the 1745 Jacobite uprising and aftermath.

Waverley



Illustration to 1893 edition, by J. Pettie.

Author	Sir Walter Scott
Country	United Kingdom
Language	English, Lowland Scots, some Scottish Gaelic and French
Series	Waverley Novels
Genre(s)	Historical novel
Publisher	Archibald Constable
Publication date	1814
Followed by	<i>Guy Mannering</i>

Plot summary

The English eponymous protagonist, Edward Waverley, has been brought up in the family home by his uncle, Sir Everard Waverley, who maintains the family Tory and Jacobite sympathies, while Edward's Whig father works for the Hanoverian government in nearby London. Edward Waverley is given a commission in the Hanoverian army and is posted to Dundee, then promptly takes leave to visit Baron Bradwardine, a Jacobite friend of his uncle, and meets the Baron's lovely daughter Rose.

When wild Highlanders visit the Baron's castle Waverley is intrigued and goes to the mountain lair of Clan Mac-Ivor, meeting the Chieftain Fergus and his sister Flora who turn out to be active Jacobites preparing for the '45 Rising. Waverley has overstayed his leave and is accused of desertion and treason, then arrested. Highlanders rescue him from his escort and take him to the Jacobite stronghold at Doune castle then on to Holyrood Palace where he meets Bonnie Prince Charlie himself. Encouraged by the beautiful Flora Mac-Ivor, Waverley goes over to the Jacobites and takes part in the Battle of Prestonpans, where he saves the life of a colonel who turns out to be a close friend of his uncle. Thus he escapes retribution and marries the Baron's daughter, Rose Bradwardine (symbolically choosing the moderate, family-oriented Rose over the romantic, politically motivated Flora).

Characters

- The Clan *Mac-Ivor* (or *MacIvor*, *M'Ivor*)
- Chieftain *Fergus Mac-Ivor*
- *Flora Mac-Ivor*, sister of Fergus
- *Sir Everard Waverley*
- *Edward Waverley*, protagonist
- *Baron Bradwardine*
- *Rose Bradwardine*, daughter of the Baron
- *Bonnie Prince Charlie*

Major themes

Scott's work shows the influence of the 18th century Enlightenment. He believed every human was basically decent regardless of class, religion, politics, or ancestry. Tolerance is a major theme in his historical works. The *Waverley Novels* express his belief in the need for social progress that does not reject the traditions of the past. He was the first novelist to portray peasant characters sympathetically and realistically, and was equally just to merchants, soldiers, and even kings.^[4]

The Romanticist inquiry into the distinctive natures of different things is considered to explain why particular mental orientations or crucial turns of thought in the literature of the period are frequently marked by some kind of "species" identification. Probably the most dramatic example occurs in *Frankenstein*, when the title character -- after wavering between opposed truth-possibilities in a manner that recalls Scott's Edward Waverley -- finally finds himself (literally) in identification with his own species.^[5]

As this might suggest, the author, A. Welsh, then goes on to suggest that Scott exhibits similar preoccupations within his own novels.

The heroines of the *Waverley* series of novels have been divided into two types: the blonde and the brunette,

along the lines of fairness and darkness that marks Shakespearean drama, but in a much more moderate form.^[6] It is said that:

"The proper heroine of Scott is a blonde. Her role corresponds to that of the passive hero - whom, indeed, she marries at the end. She is eminently beautiful, and eminently prudent. Like the passive hero, she suffers in the thick of events but seldom moves them. The several dark heroines, no less beautiful, are less restrained from the pressure of their own feelings...They allow their feelings to dictate to their reason, and seem to symbolize passion itself."^[6]

This is evident in *Waverley*. Rose is eminently marriageable; Flora is eminently passionate. However, we should also note that Welsh is, first, establishing a typology which in part is age-old, but also reinforced throughout the *Waverley Novels*; second, that Scott, or his narrators, allow the female characters thoughts, feelings and passions which are often ignored or unacknowledged by the heroes, such as *Waverley*.

A different interpretation of character is provided by Merryn Williams.^[7] Recognising the passivity of the hero, she argues that Scott's women were thoroughly acceptable to the Victorians. They are - usually - morally stronger than men, but they do not defy them, and their self-sacrifice 'to even the appearance of duty' has no limits. Thus, Flora will defy *Waverley* but not Fergus to any significant extent, and has some room to manoeuvre, even though limited, only after the latter's death.

Allusions/references to other works

- The division in the *Waverley* family had been caused by the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century. Fear of civil war is ever-present in *Waverley* not just as subject matter or historical reality, but a primal fear as deep in Scott as in Shakespeare as manifested by various allusions throughout the novel and by direct references to *Henry V* and *Henry VI* in chapter 71.^[8]
- Edward *Waverley* is like Don Quixote in that his worldview is the result of his reading, an unstructured education consisting of much curious, though ill-arranged and miscellaneous information.^[9] Although Scott himself notes in his instructions to his readers that:

From the minuteness with which I have traced *Waverley's* pursuits, and the bias which they unavoidably communicated to his imagination, the reader may perhaps anticipate, in the following tale, an imitation of Cervantes. But he will do my prudence injustice in the supposition. My intention is not to follow the steps of that inimitable author, in describing such total perversion of intellect as misconstrues the objects actually presented to the senses, but that more common aberration from sound judgment, which apprehends occurrences indeed in their reality, but communicates to them a tincture of its own romantic tone and coloring.

Literary significance & criticism

Upon publication, *Waverley* was an astonishing success, the first edition of one thousand copies sold out within two days of publication, and by November a fourth edition was at the presses. The critics too were warm in their praise, particularly Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* who extolled its truth to nature, fidelity to 'actual experience', force of characterization, and vivid description. Some reviewers, though, notably John Wilson Croker for the *Quarterly Review*, expressed reservations about the propriety of mixing history and romance.^[10]

Despite Scott's efforts to preserve his anonymity, almost every reviewer guessed that *Waverley* was his work. Many readers too recognized his hand. One, Jane Austen, wrote: "Walter Scott has no business to write novels,

especially good ones. -- It is not fair. He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths.-- I do not like him, and do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it -- but fear I must".^[11]

The opening five chapters are often thought to be dour and uninteresting, an impression in part due to Scott's own comments on them at the end of chapter five. However, John Buchan thought the novel a 'riot of fun and eccentricity',^[12] seemingly a minority opinion. Scott does, however, attempt to be comic, or at least to follow the conventions of the picaresque novel. The comments on the relay of information via Dyers Weekly Letter, the self-explanatory name of the lawyer, Clippurse, Sir Everard's desire and courting of the youngest sister, Lady Emily, all point in this direction.^[8]

In Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, Goethe lauded *Waverley* as "the best novel by Sir Walter Scott," and he asserted that Scott "has never written anything to surpass, or even equal, that first published novel." He regarded Scott as a genius and as one of the greatest writers of English of his time, along with Lord Byron and Thomas Moore. Discussing Scott's talent as a writer, Goethe stated, "You will find everywhere in Walter Scott a remarkable security and thoroughness in his delineation, which proceeds from his comprehensive knowledge of the real world, obtained by lifelong studies and observations, and a daily discussion of the most important relations."^[13]

E. M. Forster is renowned as one of Scott's fiercest and unkindest critics.^[14] His critique has received fierce opposition from Scott scholars, who believe his attack is a symptom of his ignorance, perhaps of literature, but more certainly of all things Scottish. This hostility reaches academic circles, as is made evident by Alan Massie's lecture *The Appeal of Scott to the Practising Novel*, the inaugural lecture at the 1991 Scott conference. Defence of Scott subsumes a defence of a national culture against the attacks of Englishness. Others have, however, suggested that this misrepresents Forster's case.^[8]

Georg Lukács has been responsible for re-establishing Scott as a serious novelist.^[15] Lukács is most adamant in his belief that *Waverley* is the first major historical novel of modern times. This is clear from the distinction he draws between the eighteenth-century novel of manners, where social realities are described with little attention to diachronic change, and the eruption of history in the lives of communities, as occurs in historical novels. Furthermore, that *Waverley* marks an important watershed is firmly stated in Lukács' opening sentence, that "The historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the time of Napoleon's collapse."

Allusions/references from other works

There are no overt allusions to Scott and his work in Mary Shelley's *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, but the novel is indebted to him both for its conception and its style. The thesis that Shelley resorted to Scott when writing *Perkin Warbeck* is supported by a letter she sent to the Scottish novelist on 25 May 1829, in which she asked him for any information on any works or manuscripts he may know on the historical Perkin Warbeck.^[16]

Allusions/references to actual history, geography and current science

- *Waverley* is set during the Jacobite rising of 1745, which sought to restore the Stuart dynasty in the person of Charles Edward Stuart (or 'Bonnie Prince Charlie').
- The opening paragraph of chapter viii is frequently considered one of the major attempts at describing the specifically Scottish landscape in some detail.^[8]
- The description of Adullam as the resort of "every one that was in distress," or "in debt," or "discontented," has often been humorously alluded to, notably by Sir Walter Scott, who puts the

expression into the mouth of the Baron of Bradwardine in *Waverley*, chap. lvii.^[17]

- The character of "Fergus Mac-Ivor" in *Waverley* was drawn from the flamboyant Chieftain Alexander Ranaldson MacDonell of Glengarry. During the King's visit to Scotland, Glengarry made several dramatic unplanned intrusions on the pageantry.^[1]

Miscellany

Waverley Station in Edinburgh takes its name from the novel, as does the Waverley Line between Edinburgh and Carlisle, and the paddle steamer *Waverley*. The Scott Monument is near the station. Waverly Place in Greenwich Village, New York City, was named for the novel in 1833, a year after Scott's death, though the name was misspelled.^[18] Both Waverly, Nebraska and Waverly, Tioga County, New York are similarly misspelled tributes to the novels.

The proposition *Scott is the author of Waverley* is one of the examples whose meaning Bertrand Russell studied in his paper "On Denoting".^[19]

See also

- Doune castle

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Notes

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18. ^ "Waverly Place", *The Street Book*, Henry Moscow.
19. ^ Russell, B. 1905. *On Denoting*.

External links

- Online Edition at eBooks@Adelaide (http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/s/scott_walter/waverley/)
- *Waverley* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/5998>) at Project Gutenberg
- The Waverley Novels. Old and Sold Antiques Digest. (Originally Published 1912). (<http://www.oldandsold.com/articles28/books-4.shtml>)

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