



Waverley [with Biographical Introduction]

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First published with great success in 1814, Scott's first novel is set in the Scotland of 1745, amidst the Jacobite uprising. Widely considered the first English historical novel, this story of self-discovery follows the young Edward Waverley, an English soldier in the Hanoverian army. He is sent to Scotland, and there he visits both the Lowlands and the Highlands. Waverley meets both lairds and chieftains, and he is soon caught up in both the Jacobite cause and in romantic feelings for the lovely daughter of Baron Bradwardine, Rose, and the passionately political Flora Mac-Ivor, sister to Chieftain Fergus. Full of beautiful description of the natural scenery of Scotland, Scott drew on his childhood memories and talent as a writer to conserve a piece of history and a way of life threatened by civil war.

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From Reader Review Waverley [with Biographical Introduction] for online ebook

Marsali Taylor says

This year I set myself the task of reading all Sir Walter's Scottish novels. It was hard going at times, but worth it ... Here's the start of my essay on them.

Was it a recognition that Waverley speaks ultimately for peace and stability, for social and political cohesion and harmony, that made the Waverley novels so popular, or was it after all the other Scott, the Scott who speaks in the lofty tones of the heroic Evan Dhu rebuking the prudential Saxons, the romantically subversive and revolutionary Scott, who in the end called forth an irresistible response?

What was it that made Scott the most important writer of his day, the appeal to the romantic in his readers, or the essential stability of his message?

Scott's invention of the 'historical novel':

I would like to start by looking at Scott's invention of the 'historical novel' which is now such an important part of every bookshop's income. The main form of novel set in history at the time was the Gothic novel, generally agreed to have started with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), subtitled 'A Gothic Story' in its second edition. It was followed by novels by Clara Reeve in the 1770s, which tried to mix the sensational elements with 18th century realism. In the 1790s, popular novels included *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), by Mrs Radcliffe. She combined the supernatural element with explanations. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) was moving towards pastiche, and Jane Austen satirised the genre in her early novel, *Northanger Abbey* (1798-9, published 1817). Whether explained away or not, the key elements of Gothic novels were suspense mingled with the supernatural. The characters were black-and-white villains or innocent heroines, the plots involved medieval castles, murders, dark stairs and gloomy housekeepers, and were often set abroad, with Italy being a favourite.

Scott also set his novels 'abroad', as Scotland was then unknown to many English readers. The Lakes had become a romantic success, following the poetry of Wordsworth and his friends (*Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1798), but the Scottish Highlands were still untravelled country, and his readers' main acquaintance with them would be through the works of Pennant (*A Journey in Scotland*, 1769) and Boswell (*The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* with Samuel Johnston (1785)). Of particular interest in the context of Waverley is Boswell's interviews with those involved in helping the escape of the 'grandson of King James II' after Culloden. The Pirate's setting of Orkney and Shetland is even further removed, being foreign territory to most Scots of Scott's day – Scott visited it with the 'Lighthouse' Stevenson brothers.

Instead of returning to the medieval past often used in Gothic romances (despite the Gothic sounding titles, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* are set in the early and mid sixteenth century; of the sixteen Scottish novels, only *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *Castle Dangerous* could be called medieval), Scott chose, in his Scottish novels, to write about recent history, using the stories he had heard: his father's tales of the Covenanters, his grandfather's stories of the '45, and his own researches. Speaking as Mr Patteson, the teacher who patronises Jedediah Cleisbotham's inn, he goes into details of his method in the opening to *Old Mortality*: 'On the part of the Presbyterians, I have consulted such moorland farmers from the western districts, as ... have been able ... to retain possession of the grazings on which their grandsires fed their flocks and herds. ... I have ... called in the supplementary aid of those modest itinerants ... we have learned to call packmen or pedlars. ... I have been enabled to qualify the narratives of *Old Mortality* and his Cameronian friends, by the reports of more than one descendant of ancient and honorable families, who ... look proudly back on the period when their ancestors fought and fell in behalf of the exiled house of Stewart. ... more than one non-

juring bishop ...have deigned ... to furnish me with information corrective of the facts which I learned from others.'

A comparison here could be with Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Unlike *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724), which were ostensibly autobiographical, but accepted as fiction, or *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Colonel Jack* (1722), which were fictionalized lives of real people, *The Journal of the Plague Year* was published as non-fiction, and accepted as such by its readers. Purporting to be written in 1665, but actually written almost sixty years later (unless it genuinely was a re-working of the journals of Defoe's uncle, Henry Foe, under whose initials it was originally published) it has to be taken as a fictional work. In 1665, Defoe was five years old. Like Scott, he has used memoirs, memories and contemporary documents to create his own version of a historical event. *Waverley* began as *Tis Fifty Years Since*, meaning that people present at the events mentioned would be at least in their seventies (as were Defoe's plague memory informants), and few would be alive by 1814, the time of publication; the Covenanting events of *Old Mortality* begin in 1679, so stories would have come from five generations earlier. This does not mean the incidents passed down in this way are completely false; the plague, the Covenanter rebellion, the '45, were stirring events which impressed themselves on those who were involved. Studies have shown how well memories can pass down an illiterate people, and the memories may well have been supported by written evidence. Scott was always interested in history, and would have been listening to stories as a child, when Culloden was only thirty years distant.

I mention the distance in time, however, to remind myself that Scott was writing novels, however much they were rooted in his historical researches. For our own generation, the sources for *Waverley* are equivalent to re-working handed-down stories of World War II, with the handicap of not being able to consult contemporary film and news-reels (newspapers would have been available to Scott), or, for *Old Mortality* and *A Legend of Montrose*, stories of the Boer War. Of the two, *Waverley* has a more particular interest to the historically-minded, given that Scott spoke directly to first-hand witnesses. *Redgauntlet* takes place some years later, and *The Antiquary* is more recent again; Scott refers to his own memories in the notes to the alarm of Napoleonic invasion.

Most of Scott's novels end with detailed notes on the 'real' source of an incident : for example, in *Waverley*, Flora is hit with a musket ball during the triumphant entry of the Prince into Edinburgh. She exclaims, '...thank God with me that the accident happened to Flora MacIvor; for had it befallen a Whig, they would have pretended that the shot was fired on purpose.' (p 358) This actually happened to Miss Nairne, 'a lady known to [the author]', who is quoted as having said the less lofty: 'Thank God that the accident happened to me, whose principles are known. Had it befallen a Whig they would have said it was done on purpose.' (Note Y, p508). Similarly, there are footnotes on Queen Mary's escape from Loch Leven and final confrontation with Moray in *The Abbot*. In later novels, the quotations which head the chapters are not necessarily genuine (*The Antiquary*, for example, or the 'Old Play' headings of *The Monastery*, which seem far too apposite to be probable), and several novels, for example *Rob Roy*, include deliberate anachronisms, pointed out by the author in a footnote.

A Legend of Montrose is a good example of how far Scott is willing to play with history. It takes as its base the incident of Drummond's head, and the slaying of Kilpont by Ardvoirlich. However, having given us to believe in Kilpont's death, as in the original, Scott keeps him alive, and unlike the original Ardvoirlich, who became a Covenanting soldier, Allan disappears, presumably murdered by the 'children of the mist'. The two separate tales are thus woven into one, linked by Campbell's missing child, Annot Lyle, giving a more orderly whole. Similarly, in *Castle Dangerous*, Sir John de Walton is kept alive in spite of the historical source (quoted at the start of the novel), to marry the Lady Augusta. In the English novels, far from being a new bride, the doomed Amy Robsart (Kenilworth) had been married to Leicester for ten years at the time of her death.

Writing in a time which was recent and known to his readers was as interesting to them as, for example, Monica Ali's account (in *Brick Lane*) of the bombing of the World Trade Centre is to us. Scott's account would be compared to the reader's own memories or family tales. The setting was attractively remote, yet

with a personal connection. It's also evident in *Waverley* how Scott wishes to focus on the hero's journey, rather than write a historical account of the '45 campaign: for example he says,

'It is not necessary to record in these pages the triumphant entrance of the Chevalier into Edinburgh after the decisive affair at Preston.' (p358)

He then recounts the musket-ball incident. Similarly, only the results of the campaign after *Waverley* has left it are given; Scott expected his readers to know the general shape of the rebellion. In *Old Mortality*, *The Black Dwarf* (set just after the Union of the Crowns in 1707), *Rob Roy* (1715) and *The Heart of Midlothian* (which opens with the Porteous Riots) he does not expect this knowledge, and so goes more into the political situation and events of the time, but the '15, for example is covered in *Rob Roy* only by a recital of events affecting the hero and his family, and he assumes reasonable reader knowledge of the story of Mary, Queen of Scots in *The Abbot*: the death of Darnley, her first husband, the subsequent marriage with Bothwell, and her defeat at Carberry by her half-brother, Moray.

Scott's realism compared to the Gothic novel, in plot and character; *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *St Ronan's Well*:

Scott's novels are as full of incident as any Gothic novel, and reality is at times stretched for a good story: the prolonged villainy of Donald Bean Lean which leads to the hero joining the rebels in *Waverley*, the kidnapping and return of Harry Bertram in *Guy Mannering*, the quite ridiculous plot against Eveline Neville in *The Antiquary*, the way nobody recognises Henry Morton when he returns at the end of *Old Mortality* (or, given the regularity with which this is used as a plot device, was it easier to forget a face in those pre-photograph days?), the excessive malevolence of Dwining, Ramorny's apothecary in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, and Rashleigh Osbaldistone in *Rob Roy*, the mysterious behaviour of 'Green Mantle' in *Redgauntlet* and, particularly, the interaction between humans and supernatural beings in Scott's least well-received Scottish novel, *The Monastery*. With the exception of this last, and of Scott's first Scottish tragedy, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, while there is often a supernatural frisson evoked by a night-time scene – for example when Jeanie Deans meets with her sister's lover at night (*The Heart of Midlothian*, Chapter XV) – the main use of the supernatural is through his gipsy women, Meg Merrilees (*Guy Mannering*) and, particularly, the Shetland wise woman Norna (*The Pirate*), who seems able to command the elements. Here, however, the level-headed hero, Mordaunt Mertoun, argues that she reads the weather signs, reacts to them, and then persuades herself she has caused the storm, and by the end of the novel she has become a normal woman. Margaret Graeme (*The Abbot*) is also of this type. Fergus and Flora MacIvor (*Waverley*) and some other Highlanders, have an element of 'the sight' about them, particularly Allan (*A Legend of Montrose*), who foresees the death of Montrose, and his own attack on Monteith (p 60, p 67), but in general the characters who seem to have extra knowledge, like Edie the King's Bedesman (*The Antiquary*), Elshie (*The Black Dwarf*), Rob Roy McGregor, Margaret Graeme's hits regarding her grandson Roland's future, or Meg Merrilees' knowledge of Harry Bertram, have aquired it through natural means.

Generally, Scott's narratives are plausible, with a bit of helpful leeway from being set in the past. He himself said (in a comment on Jane Austen) that he could do 'the big bow-wow strain' – the rollicking adventures, the chases by foot, on horse, in carriage, the battles, a breathless movement which keeps you reading. His large canvas goes from cottager to prince, and in novels like *Waverley*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *The Abbot*, *A Legend of Montrose* and *Redgauntlet*, the sovereignty of Scotland is at stake. His characters play for national issues, in contrast to the Gothic novel's individual issues, and the tension is not lessened for the reader by knowledge of the broad outcome of Mary's escape to England, Montrose's campaign, Culloden or the declining fortunes of the Bonny Prince, because there are still the fates of the individual characters to be worked out against them – indeed, our anxiety is heightened by our awareness of the real tragic end.

Scott's characters too are very far from the monochrome characters of the classic Gothic tales. Some, to be sure, are reminiscent of the Gothic: the malignant apothecary, Dwining (*The Fair Maid of Perth*), and the equally malicious Rashleigh Osbaldistone, who is the more determined to do Frank down because he has

done him a favour; the obsessed Redgauntlet, the melancholy Earl of Glenallan in his mouldering grandeur (*The Antiquary*), the smuggler Dick Hatterick (*Guy Mannering*), the dwarf Elshie (*The Black Dwarf*), Allan McAulay's visions, even the determined Covenanter John Balfour of Burley (*Old Mortality*) and the pantomime pedant Tullibardine (*Waverley*). Some of his women are rather sketchily drawn – for example, Mary Avenel of *The Monastery*, whose love of Halbert is only shared with the reader almost at the end of the book, or Annot Lyle of *A Legend of Montrose*. Most, however, are exaggerated versions of people we can believe in. Jeanie Deans' sister Effie (*The Heart of Midlothian*), for example, grew up a lively young girl in a strict household, and fell for a glamorous aristocrat who had taken to robbery. When she was sentenced for child murder, her sister walked to London to plead to the Queen, but on her release, back with her simple family, Effie quickly became bored of the rural life, and ran back to her lover – and what could be more natural, in the character Scott has drawn? Jeanie herself is equally a product of her environment, the sturdy, barely literate Cameronian's daughter who does her best to do the right thing as her simple creed understands it. Dominie Sampson (*Guy Mannering*), with his cry of 'Prodigious!', is a simpler version of Baron Tullibardine; we believe his erudition, but aren't bored by constant Latin, and his recognition of Harry Bertram is one of the moving moments of the book. Dugald Dalgetty, the dogged, pragmatic soldier of fortune, is the anti-hero who holds *A Legend of Montrose* together.

Scott's first Scottish tragedy, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, is the novel nearest to the Gothic mode. We have a dark, vengeful hero whose father has been ruined by a lawyer's cleverness, and a simple, gentle heroine whose sanity has been undermined by her malevolent mother in league with an actual witch, Dame Gourlay, who 'was tried, condemned and burned on the top of Berwick Law' [p 300]. There is the ruined castle of Wolf's Crag, where Lucy and her father spend the night. There are the dire warnings of Old Alice that their love is fated [p 190-5], the witch's prophecy at Lucy's wedding that 'her winding-sheet is up as high as her throat already' [p 319] and the family curse [p178] which is fulfilled with Ravenswood's eventual disappearance. There is the spectre of Old Alice at the well [p236], and the portrait that appears at the wedding [p 322]. However, even among this high drama, Scott insists on the reality of the tale, among the Dalrymples of Stair in the 1660s, with an introduction detailing his sources at length, and even in this essentially domestic drama there is still a political dimension, with Ruthven's relative, the Marquis of A_____ in the ascendent in the new government, Sir William Ashton descending, and Craigengelt and Bucklaw Jacobites, and the place-jostling is mirrored in the 'low' characters, the Cooper family [p142ff] and the villagers. In a strict tragic sense, Ravenswood's flaw is his pride: he feels he has set aside his own honour for Lucy, and lets that rule him in the betrothal confrontation with her mother [Chapter XXXIII] However there is reality in their characters, as they come to know each other: 'The lovers soon discovered that they differed on other and no less important topics ... Religion ... Lucy felt a secret awe of Ravenswood. His soul was of a higher, prouder character ... Ravenswood saw in Lucy a soft and flexible character, which ... seemed too susceptible of being moulded to any form by those with whom she lived. [p206-7] The gloom of *The Bride of Lammermoor* is also relieved by one of Scott's finest comic characters, Caleb Balderstone, Ravenswood's only remaining retainer, whose desperation to uphold the family honour in worldly things is a comic mirror of Ravenswood's dark broodings.

St Ronan's Well, Scott's other Scottish tragedy, written five years later, also has echoes of the Gothic. It's his most modern novel, set in the early nineteenth century, and the surprising thing about it, given that most of the novel is taken up by the various comic characters who have gathered around the watering spa, is that it is a tragedy at all, when it would have been easy to have let Clara live, recover, and be happy. As in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, we have the half-mad heroine; there is a surprising amount of duelling for so late-set a work; we have half-brothers who resemble each other so much that one takes the other's place at his wedding (not even twilight and the bride's sensibilities will excuse her not noticing); we have a dastardly plot against the rightful heir; we have the strange will enjoining an unusual marriage. The 'twinning' of low and high is evident here too: Touchwood is a distortion of Etherington's plotting against Clara, and the novel concludes that 'He often talks of his disappointments, but can never be made to understand, or at least to admit, that they were in some measure precipitated by his own talent for intrigue and manoeuvring.'

Etherington himself, in his letters to his friend, is a direct descendent of Richardson's Lovelace (Clarissa).

The romantic nature of Scott's novels: scenery and emotions:

However, to my question: was it the romantic elements of his tales that made Scott the runaway best-seller of his day, or the essential stability underlying his nostalgia for the days of high romance? Let me start by asking what Scott and his readers understood by 'romantic'. For a start, the Lakes poets wrote about the beauty of unspoiled nature, and Scott mentions this in The Monastery, when he is describing Glendale, that in the days of which he is writing, the people had not learned to consider this scenery romantic. His descriptions of the Scottish scenery emphasise this, making the countryside almost take part in the events: '... the road now suddenly emerged from the forest ground, and, winding close by the margin of the loch, afforded us a full view of its spacious mirror, which now, the breeze having totally subsided, reflected in its still magnificence the high dark heathy mountains, huge grey rocks, and shaggy banks, by which it is encircled. The hills now sunk on its margin so closely, and were so broken and precipitous, as to afford no passage except just upon the narrow line of the track which we occupied, and which was overhung

Erin Schanz says

I plodded through the whole thing. The hero is not a hero just a main character in a story where stuff keeps happening to him and has seemingly little personal character or direction. I had a tough time reading the Scottish brogue as well, might have been easier as an audio book.

Bettie? says

Re-visit is via David Tennant:

BBC Blurb: Waverley by Walter Scott Adapted by Mike Harris

A gripping tale of love, war and divided loyalties with Scotland in open rebellion against the Union with England.

It's 1745 and 21 year old Edward Waverley, a newly commissioned red-coat officer, is posted to Scotland on the eve of Bonnie Prince Charlie's violent bid for power. His father is a rising minister in the ruling Hanoverian state, but the beloved Uncle who brought him up is an old Jacobite, loyal to the exiled Stewart dynasty.

Waverley falls in love with two very different Scottish girls - the cautious, loyalist, lowlander Rose Bradwardine, and the fiery highland rebel Flora. He goes AWOL for Flora just as her brother Fergus is rallying their clan to fight for Charlie.

When Waverley is accused by his Commanding Officer of a treasonable flirtation with the enemy, he joins the uprising in a fit of pique and helps defeat an English army at the battle of Prestonpans.

When he finds out that he has caused the arrest of Uncle, he returns to London to try to clear his name.

The music is composed and performed by Ross Hughes and Esben Tjalve.

Producer: Clive Brill A Pacificus production for BBC Radio 4.

Listen here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/...>

Francis says

twas a bit o trouble

I like classics. I am not afraid of a little bit of antiquated language. I enjoy a challenge. However reading dialogue in archaic Scottish brogue, liberally seasoned with Latin and French quotes, without translations, well it twas a wee bit much – if you kin me meaning.

Then there his Waverly lad, he is also a wee bit much. A proud Englishman, who has a couple of brews with the local lads while in Scotland, reads some poetry, falls for a pretty yet serious Scottish lass, then takes up arms against the English. (Well, tis a known fact, Scottish ale being superior to English stout. So, it's not like he didn't have a good reason for his actions, not to mention the lass having long luxurious black hair and green eyes and all that.)

So anyways, the war progresses and things once again turn out badly for the Scots and our friend Waverly starts thinking that being a Brit again might be a fine thing. I mean fighting manly with your mates is a good and noble thing, but then a proper uniform, a privileged family, a nice castle, these things deserve consideration as well. (Not to mention the needs of young domestic, native, blond, blue eyed girls awaiting the attention of suitably fine handsome young gentlemen, processing castles.)

Anyway, all is forgiven ... he gets married .. he has kids (they all have blue eyes), hires ground-keepers (mostly, Scots), leaving the poor reader to wonder .. so what was he fighting for?

Laura says

Just arrived from Israel through BM.

The plot of this book tells the story of Edward Waverley and how he became involved in the famous Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.

This book is considered the first true historical novel which inspired many authors, such as Dickens, Traceray, Stevenson, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Balzac, Gogol and Tolstoy.

A classical masterpiece written by this Scottish author.

•Karen• says

Wily Walter may have been engaged on his first prose narrative, but he knew what he was doing: "I must remind my reader of the progress of a stone rolled down a hill by an idle truant boy (a pastime at which I was myself expert in my more juvenile years:) it moveth at first slowly, avoiding, by inflection, every obstacle of the least importance; but when it has attained its full impulse, and draws near the conclusion of its career, it smokes and thunders down, taking a rood at every spring, clearing hedge and ditch like a Yorkshire huntsman, and becoming most furiously rapid in its course when it is nearest to being consigned to rest for ever. Even such is the course of a narrative, like that which you are perusing; the earlier events are studiously dwelt upon, that you, kind reader, may be introduced to the character rather by narrative, than by the duller medium of direct description; but when the story draws near its close, we hurry over the circumstances, however important, which your imagination must have forestalled, and leave you to suppose those things, which it would be abusing your patience to narrate at length." (page 331). Indeed, in the second and third volumes the narrative does smoke and thunder. Once Waverley is in Scotland and in the midst of the action, the pace picks up, and when in the final volume there is the added interest of the ladies and whether Waverley will at last realise which lady holds his best interests at heart, and all the intrigue is at last uncovered, and the rebels must be punished or pardoned, well, then it takes on a spanking pace that hardly allows you to draw breath. The contrast is made all the greater by the slow, slow drag of those infamous first seven chapters. I'm not the first to bemoan their dullness, and I daresay I won't be the last.

Nor is it particularly original of me to point out that this is considered the prototype of the historical novel, especially in the use of a 'middling' character as the main protagonist, one who could enter both the higher echelons of society and yet still be at home with the ordinary foot soldier. Scott claims in his preface of 1829 that the story was put together "with so little care that I cannot boast of having sketched any distinct plan of the work.", but that claim must surely be disingenuous, as this middling character, Waverley, is involved in what can only have been seen by his sovereign as a treasonous uprising, but is exculpated and pardoned as he was duped and tricked into joining the rebels in a plot that is carefully laid down and swiftly, nay even perfunctorily explained in the last few chapters.

So with this carping how come I still give it four stars? Well, for one thing I find the portrayal of that period fascinating, to gain a glimpse of those Highland clans and their quite different culture. It must be remembered that the Highlands of Scotland really were remote in the middle of the 18th century, their loyalties were based on the structure of the clan, it was in no sense a modern society. In fact that was an interesting aspect: in our time we tend to think only in terms of ideology when taking sides in any kind of political conflict, but here the idea of personal fealty is still the strongest factor, homage given in return for favour expected. And the attitude to the ladies also shows up the demarcation between an archaic and a more modern society: Waverley's friend Vich Ian Vohr thinks nothing of deciding for his sister who she is to marry, since he is her legal guardian, whereas Waverley cannot consider taking a wife who does not give her hand freely.

A tough read, but rewarding for those interested in British history or the development of the historical novel.

Laura Leilani says

The first chapter was amusing and well written, where Scott humorously explains why he named the book as he did. However once he begins to tell the story, yee gads, everything becomes bogged down: "But the wealthy country gentlemen of England, a rank which retained, with much of ancient manners and primitive integrity, a great proportion of obstinate and unyielding prejudice, stood aloof in haughty and sullen opposition, and cast many a look of mingled regret and hope to Bois le Duc, Avignon, and Italy."

So dry, so dull, so overblown. Not my cup of tea.

Leah says

Charlie is my darling...

Young Edward Waverley has been brought up mainly by his uncle, Sir Everard Waverley, an English Tory and supporter of the Jacobite cause in the failed 1715 rebellion. When Edward reaches manhood, his absent father, a Whig and supporter of the Hanoverian government, arranges a commission for him in the Army. While Sir Everard is not keen on Edward having to swear allegiance to King George II (since in Sir Everard's eyes the true King is James III, in exile in France), he reluctantly agrees. Edward joins his regiment and is promptly posted to Dundee. After serving in a half-hearted way for a few months, Edward takes some leave and goes off to visit an old friend of his uncle, Baron Bradwardine, a staunch Jacobite. Through him, Edward becomes friends with Fergus Mac-Ivor, chieftain of the Highland Clan Mac-Ivor, and falls in love with his beautiful sister Flora. So when the 1745 rebellion begins, Edward finds himself caught between two loyalties – to the Hanoverians through his officership in the Army, and to the Jacobites through his friendships and the influence of his upbringing. The story tells the tale of the '45 Jacobite Rebellion and Edward's part in it.

The subtitle *'Tis Sixty Years Since* refers to the ostensible time of writing, 1805, sixty years after the 1745 rebellion, although the book was not published until 1814. This book is often hailed as the first historical novel in the English language. It's also often claimed as one of the most important books in English literature, which doesn't half annoy us Scots, since it's written by a Scot about Scotland. I'm willing to compromise and say it's an important book in English-language literature. This isn't as insignificant a point as it may seem – Scott was one of the earliest Scots to write fiction in English, accepting that the Scottish language and culture was being subsumed into the dominant English culture of the time. However, in this, as in many of his books, his purpose was partly to explain Scottish culture and traditions to his English readership and do away with some of their misconceptions of the Scots, especially Highlanders, as a half-savage society. Along the way, he created some romanticised misconceptions of his own that gradually became part of the prevailing view of Scotland that lasted well into the 20th century. The cultural importance of Scott in his native country is memorialised not just by the massive monument to him in Princes Street in Edinburgh, the capital city, but also in the name of that city's main railway station – Waverley Station.

How I wish, therefore, that I could unreservedly wax lyrical about the wonders of the book! Sadly, taken purely in terms of reading pleasure, it's not the greatest piece of literature in the world, for all its cultural significance. A major reason for this is simply that tastes change over time, as does language. Although Scotland was one of the most literate societies in the world at the time Scott was writing, nevertheless authors tended to be addressing their work to others like themselves who had had a classical education (pretty much the only kind available), so this is liberally sprinkled with Latin and French and allusions to classical mythology which many modern readers (including this one) will find problematic at best and incomprehensible at worst. Even the English language is in a style that reads as pretty out-dated now and of

course, there is some Scottish dialect too, not to mention the odd little bit of Gaelic. I read it in a version without footnotes, but would suggest it's one that probably needs them more than most. Not that any of this makes the plot hard to follow, but it does very much break the reading flow.

But these things probably wouldn't have bothered me had the book gripped me more. Overall, it's reasonably interesting, but very over-padded, especially the early part. For a long period there is no discernible plot, just lengthy character studies of the various people who will play a part when the story finally gets under way. Scott himself said that this was his way of allowing the characters to reveal themselves rather than simply being described, but to suit modern tastes most readers would probably want to get into the story a good deal sooner. And personally I could have happily lived without the lengthy and mediocre poetry that Scott stuffs in every so often – again a technique that would have been much more usual in his time than in ours, I think – which he uses as a way to illustrate Scottish culture and the oral storytelling tradition.

Then there are his assumptions about the pre-knowledge of his readers, probably correct at the time but not necessarily so now. He assumes that everyone knows the background to the Jacobite rebellion, the politics, the main players and the progress of the campaign. Well, yes, as it happens, I do, but I would think this could cause some problems for people who don't. What bothered me about it was that this assumption meant he left out all the bits that are exciting! We're not there when Bonnie Prince Charlie raises his standard at Glenfinnan, we don't get to fight at Culloden and we don't follow Charlie on his last romantic retreat over the sea to Skye! That anyone can make the '45 dull amazes me – it's one of the great romantic tragedies of all time!

Instead, Scott concentrates on showing the lifestyle and manners of both Highland and Lowland Scots of the period, and this he does very successfully, though with what I suspect is a decreasing degree of realism the further north he heads. There's some humour in it, and a lot – a lot! – of romance, as Edward swithers over the beautiful and fanatical Highland Flora and the sensible and adoring Lowland Rose. And his swithering between the Hanoverians and the Jacobites allows Scott to show both sides of the conflict, which he does without demonising either, in fact painting a surprisingly sympathetic portrait of the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart. But all this swithering makes Edward a hero who inspired me with a desire to bash him over the head with a metaphorical brick while screaming "Make up your mind, for goodness sake, man!" Honestly, he makes Hamlet seem decisive!

So overall I'm afraid I was a little disappointed. I've read other Scott books in the past which I've enjoyed much more than this one, and am rather sorry it's the one that people are always recommended to read, purely because of its significance rather than its intrinsic enjoyability. I can't give more than three stars for the story and writing, with an extra one for its position of importance in both English-language and Scottish literature. I shall go into hiding now in case the last of the Jacobites come after me...

www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com

Jeremy says

Please don't read Scott. There are too many books and life's too short. Even Fenimore Cooper is better, and Fenimore Cooper is fall-down terribly terrible. Garbage like this is what destroys a newcomer's interest in reading true classics like Austen and Dickens, Melville and Tolstoy. I don't care if you're a casual reader or a bibliophile or a PhD or you're trapped on a desert island with only this one book. Burn it for warmth. Scotty Boy's long overdue for decanonization.

Julianne says

Often regarded as the English language's first historical novel; and that's the only reason to read it. If you're the sort of person who loves firsts for their own sake, if you get all nostalgic and teary over the original Apple computer or "the first instance of a post-modern epic poem by a Jewish Native American" then by all means, go right ahead. Personally, I like to give new concepts some time to get perfected. In other words, early bicycles = not for me. Early motion pictures...nah, I'll hold out for the invention of Technicolor and *The Wizard of Oz*. New software...I'll wait for it to come out of beta.

Waverley reads like a novel in beta. It's full of bugs, flaws, and problems--this in addition to the fact that it's all-but-incomprehensible to modern readers who don't have the same historical or geographical or cultural reference points as *Waverley*'s first readers (most of whom, it seems *loved* the book. The only quibble Jane Austen had, apparently, was that it was too good.) To be absolutely honest, I didn't exactly finish. Unlike Waverley himself (The novel is named for its protagonist.), I really tried to roll with the punches and hang in there. But I gave up shortly after Waverley proposes to (the woman he feels to be) his ladylove, gets rejected, and then cries. Immediately. In her presence. Now I'm all for men not being afraid to show their emotions...but honestly (this is so weird to be saying about a book written in the early 1800's, the era of Napoleon and Horatio Hornblower): there is a time and a place.

Maybe I would have found more to like in the novel if I'd continued reading. Maybe some readers won't find Waverley as off-putting a character as I did. Maybe I'll still read *Ivanhoe*. Maybe.

K.M. Weiland says

Edward Waverly is an utter drip. That is all.

Bill Kerwin says

Waverley, or 'tis Sixty Years Since can be an infuriating book. Even those accustomed to the leisurely movement of 19th century prose will find its style not only wordy but also occasionally infelicitous, its plot not only meandering but also digressive. It takes at least a quarter of the book--perhaps a third--to get the plot going, and I must admit that one comic character in particular--the Baron Bradwardine, who continually spouts Latin tags, lecturing all and sundry on the minutiae of family history and heraldry--was almost enough, all by his aristocratic self, to make me abandon the book.

And yet . . . when we get to the Highlands, things start to open up. The scenery and *tableaux vivants*—from Donald Bean Lean lurking in his robber cavern, to the bonny Flora MacIvor harping and singing on a height near a highland waterfall--are thrillingly gothic, delightfully romantic; yet, as our young hero Edward Waverley—a bit of a Quixote—encounters the people of this magnificent landscape, the reader discovers—as Waverley also discovers--that even the best of them are deeply affected by politics, and that most of them are incapable of making a decision without considerable political calculation.

It is this political consciousness that makes *Waverley*--and all the Scott novels that came after--a unique contribution to the development of the form. He is commonly considered the first historical novelist because--unlike Mrs. Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis and others--he uses the past for more than exotic locales, and establishes his narratives firmly in time, with characters who exhibit contemporary manners and participate in historical events. All of this is true, although I think it could be argued that a few earlier novels--Clara Reeve's *The Old English Barron*, Godwin's *St. Leon*, and, most particularly, Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (set "eighteen years since," before Ireland's Constitution of 1782)--make good attempts in this direction. But it is Scott's profound understanding of politics--particularly Scottish politics--and his precise delineation of how those politics often inform and sometimes determine even the simplest actions, that enabled him to combine a lawyer's realism with a poet's love of atmosphere, creating from their union a distinctly new kind of novel.

Jessie says

I'm torn. I loved some parts of this book, and really strongly disliked others. I think it's a nice book if you really (really, really) love your classics. It's a lovely story, but it could have been a lot shorter, which would have possibly made it better. I'm probably stepping on a view toes here, but this is one classic you can definitely skip without feeling bad. Still decided to give 3 start, because Scott's writing is amazing. It was so good, that it constantly kept me wondering what would happen next, unfortunately, I kept thinking that until the very last page, with nothing really "happening" in the end.

Katie says

From the get-go I wasn't a fan of the titular character. I found him to be quite insufferable and Scott to be a bit of a git when it comes to narration. He loves to hear himself talk (or narrate, as it were) and it is painfully obvious that this is so. The novel seemed to drag on and on, with such a seemingly abrupt neat-and-tidy ending that it's almost out of left-field. It may be one of the earliest Bildungsroman and historical novels, but I don't fancy I shall ever be able to hear the word "Waverley" and not compulsively cringe.

Samantha Allen says

Pompous and unreadable. Do yourself a favor and read something else. Even twilight. Just. Anything.
