

Sir Walter Scott and the Reinvention of Scottish Identity

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ABSTRACT

Following the turbulent acquisition of Scotland, the new United Kingdom struggled to arrive at a unified identity. This paper analyzes the role of the romantic works of Jane Porter and Sir Walter Scott in creating a new Scottish identity and, by extension, a new English one. Considerations include the romanticizing of historical Scottish figures such as William Wallace and Rob Roy, the use of pastoral imagery to stoke the imagination, and the appeal to cultural tradition. By linking these figures of Scottish heritage to the traditions of English kingship and political thought, Romantic Literature created a more inclusive perception of the Scots. Following the works of these two authors, Scottish heritage would move from outlawed music and regalia to an official celebrated part of the British heritage.

Keywords: Sir Walter Scott, Jane Porter, Scotland, Romanticism, Identity, George IV, Literature, Jacobite

Sir Walter Scott y la reinención de la identidad escocesa

RESUMEN

Tras la turbulenta adquisición de Escocia, el nuevo Reino Unido luchó por llegar a una identidad unificada. Este artículo analiza el papel de las obras románticas de Jane Porter y Sir Walter Scott en la creación de una nueva identidad escocesa y, por extensión, una nueva inglesa. Las consideraciones incluyen la romantización de figuras históricas escocesas como William Wallace y Rob Roy, el uso de imágenes pastorales para avivar la imaginación y el atractivo de la tradición cultural. Al vincular estas figuras de la herencia escocesa con las tradiciones de la realeza inglesa y el pensamiento político, la literatura romántica creó una percepción más inclusiva de los escoceses. Siguiendo las obras de estos dos autores, la herencia escocesa pasaría de la música y las insignias prohibidas a una

parte oficial célebre de la herencia británica.

Palabras clave: Sir Walter Scott, Jane Porter, Escocia, Romanticismo, Identidad, Jorge IV, Literatura, Jacobita

沃尔特·斯科特爵士和苏格兰认同的重新建立

摘要

通过一番动荡占领苏格兰后，新英国试图建立统一认同。本文分析了在建立一个新的苏格兰认同和进一步建立一个新英国认同一事中，简·波特和沃尔特·斯科特爵士的浪漫小说所发挥的作用。相关考量因素包括对例如威廉·华莱士和罗布·罗伊等历史苏格兰人物的浪漫化、使用田园意象激发想象、以及对文化传统的吸引力。通过将这些苏格兰遗产人物与英国亲属传统及政治思想相联系，浪漫文学创造了一个更具包容性的苏格兰人感知。按照这两位作家的作品思路发展，苏格兰遗产将从有关草莽英雄的音乐和特殊服饰转移为正式的不列颠著名遗产的一部分。

关键词：沃尔特·斯科特爵士，简·波特，苏格兰，浪漫主义，认同，乔治五世，文学，詹姆斯二世党人

Independence was only the beginning of Scotland's losses to England. Following the cessation of military hostilities, the Scottish cultural identity became the subject of censure and was eventually outlawed entirely. Centuries of warring with England ill prepared Scots for becoming English. It was not until the 19th century and the historical novels and poetry of Jane Porter and Sir Walter Scott that Scots began to reinvent their heritage to coexist peacefully with England. By romanticizing Scottish history and culture, these works of literature altered public opinion of what

it meant to be a Scot. Presenting contentious history through courtly codes of conduct and romantic heroes would bring popularity to Scotland and its heritage, allowing Sir Walter Scott to transform Scottish cultural heritage from an outlawed identity into a romantic ideal.

Although Scotland and England were formally united in 1707, it was not until after the disastrous end to the final Jacobite rebellion in 1746 that all of Scotland was forced to accept the union.¹ Fear of inciting another rebellion led King George II of England to harshly outlaw tokens of Scottish her-

itage.² Although not the key to a Scottish identity, tartans, bagpipes, and Gaelic played important outward roles in representing what set Scotland apart from their southern neighbors.³ Scotsmen keenly felt the loss of the physical representation of their heritage. Highland clans suffered the most punishment for their involvement in the rebellions; not only did they lose the right to wear tartans and speak Gaelic, but the clans were also disbanded.⁴ The most passionately loyal to the Jacobite cause were either executed, or exiled to the British colonies.⁵ This forced exodus of Scots left the nation to flounder, as subjects of the United Kingdom, without a national identity.

The rise in popularity of historical literature gave Scottish authors a platform for changing public perception of Scotland and an opportunity to invent a new identity for the nation. Through an emphasis on chivalrous codes of conduct in romantic Highland settings, authors engineered interest in Scottish traditions. The most famous and influential author of the genre of Scottish historical literature was Sir Walter Scott. Another author of the period who made an impact, certainly on the works of Scott, was Jane Porter. Friends during their childhood in Edinburgh, Scott and Porter maintained a casual acquaintance throughout their lives.⁶ Although Porter's literature has been acknowledged as the inspiration for Scott's work, very little has been written about the author herself.⁷ Enthusiasm for Scott's contribution has largely left Porter forgotten by modern historians and students of literature.⁸

Published in 1809, Porter's novel *The Scottish Chiefs* preceded Scott's first novel by several years. In the "Retrospective Introduction" to *The Scottish Chiefs*, Porter shared memories of a childhood amused by folktales of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce.⁹ Porter wrote that Wallace and Bruce were remembered for heroic deeds not by scholars, but by nursery maids and kitchen servants.¹⁰ These tales and songs, told for the entertainment of children, deeply impressed young Porter, inspiring her to recreate the awe and emotion she felt as a child for her readers.¹¹ The widows of fallen Jacobite rebels who lived around the area of Edinburgh also made a lasting impression on six year old Porter.¹² Sympathy and respect for these dignified women led Porter to write her novel's characters as she viewed the widows.¹³ *The Scottish Chiefs* portrayed a romanticized version of William Wallace's struggle against England and the underlying theme of sympathy for the noble and heroic Scotsman is carried throughout the novel.

As the hero of *The Scottish Chiefs*, William Wallace differed greatly from his historic reality. An English account written during this period of history described Wallace as, "an outcast from pity, a robber, a sacrilegious man, an incendiary and a homicide, a man more cruel than the cruelty of Herod, and more insane than the fury of Nero."¹⁴ This rather harsh description of an insane and violent Wallace may appear to be an exaggerated criticism, but it is echoed in other writings.¹⁵ The *Scalacronica* described Wallace and his men

flaying the King's Treasurer and making "girths of his skin."¹⁶ In contrast, the first introduction of Wallace in *The Scottish Chiefs* is of an honorable man who left fighting the English to spend a quiet life with his lifelong love, Marion.¹⁷ Porter's Wallace forgave enemies and wished ill will upon no man, until the murder of his beloved wife Marion forced Wallace into action against the English.¹⁸ Even in his anger and grief, Porter's Wallace remains a romantic figure of national pride, "Wallace stood on the cliff, like the newly-aroused genius of his country; his long plaid floated afar, and his glittering hair streaming on the blast, seemed to mingle with the golden fires which shot from the heavens."¹⁹ This handsome and awe-inspiring man, wearing the plaid of his people, was presented as a heavenly being sent from God to save the Scots. This literary portrait is at odds with historic representations of Wallace and yet it inspired a nation to love the idea of a Scotsman who went to war over love.

The romantic perspective was not limited to the character of William Wallace. Despite the sympathy written towards the Scottish cause of this period, not all Englishmen were portrayed as callous enemies to Scots.²⁰ Lady Marion Wallace addresses her captors as "noble Englishman,"²¹ before expressing gratitude for their generous kindness.²² The murder of Marion causes the men who witnessed the vicious act to turn on their leader, declaring him an enemy of innocents and citing their noble King Edward I as the example of gracious kindness to follow.²³ Although unable to save Lady Wallace, the English sol-

dier Grimsby revives an elderly Scottish man. "My honest Scot," said Grimsby, "trust in me. I am a man like yourself; and though a Southron, am no enemy to age and helplessness."²⁴ This comparison of men being the same, be they Scottish or English, provides an appropriate tone for Porter's audience. Diplomatically representing gallant heroes and moral figures from both nations, rather than overwhelmingly favoring one side, allowed Porter's work to remain universally appreciated.

Although Porter may be credited with starting the literary trend towards popularizing Scotland, it was Sir Walter Scott who truly refined and expanded the genre. Scott followed Porter's example throughout his poetry and novels. Common themes throughout Scott's literature which reflect Porter's influence were the romantic Highland setting, chivalry and honor demonstrated by the heroes, and the importance of traditional heritage. Unlike Porter, Scott's protagonists were English rather than Scottish. Due to that fact, Scott's work contained a more introspective political undertone that brought English readers to question their preconceived ideas about Scotland and its people. For Scots, these literary works redefined their reality with a fresh perspective, seamlessly blending the romantic past with a united future.

Scott's first novel *Waverley: Or, Tis Sixty Years Since* was published anonymously in 1814.²⁵ *Waverley* soon became the first in a series of wildly successful novels set in Scotland in and around the Jacobite rebellions.²⁶ Speculation over the identity of the author



Sir David Wilkie, (18 November, 1785 – 1 June, 1841) “George IV in Kilt.” 1829. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_IV_in_kilt,_by_Wilkie.jpg

of the series fueled book sales.²⁷ Scott did not confirm public opinion that he did in fact author the wildly popular books until 1827.²⁸ Each book within the Waverley series shares the theme of romanticism of the Scottish Highlands and clan system, and presents a portrait of Scottish traditions that should never be lost. Scott identifies Clans as an integral part of Scottish culture and therefore they play an important role within the Waverley series.

Waverley: Or, Tis Sixty Years Since tells the compelling story of Edward Waverley, an unconventional English soldier, stationed in the Scottish Highlands at the onset of the 1745 rebellion.²⁹ The poetic soul of Waverley, which echoes that of his author, finds some commonality in Scotland and with its passionate people.³⁰ Despite being an Englishman, encounters with Jacobite supporters prompt a new understanding and sympathy of their cause.³¹ Although the English and Scottish are on opposing sides of the dispute, each demonstrates nobility and honor in fighting for their beliefs.³² “If the cause I have undertaken be perilous, there would be the greater disgrace in abandoning it.”³³ In joining the Jacobite cause, even knowing it will likely fail, Edward fights to honorably preserve a way of life rather than making a political statement against the King of England.³⁴ Scott’s presentation of a moderate Scotsman’s interpretation for this revolt brings to light a different perspective for his English readers.

This theme of nobility and honor is continued in *Rob Roy*, the third book in the Waverley series, which was pub-

lished in 1817. Taking place during the 1715 Jacobite revolt, *Rob Roy* is the story of another young Englishman who leaves England and is changed by his experiences in Scotland.³⁵ Honor is displayed by both the young Englishman as well as the character of Rob Roy, a fictionalized version of a historic figure.³⁶ In this book, Scott emphasizes the significance of language as a tangible link to history through his usage of colloquial dialect when writing Scottish dialogue.³⁷

The works of Walter Scott in the period since the war had provided a new genre of historical novels deeply grounded in the real life of his own country. They had been widely successful: the vision might be of the past, but it was of a past understood with strong sympathies for different points of view and supported by the full repertoire of Scottish speech and wide historical knowledge.³⁸

Tying Scottish history with the romance of courtly behavior, Scott brought popularity to a language all but forgotten. By the 19th century when Scott wrote *Rob Roy*, the Gaelic speaking population was quickly decreasing after English encouragement of English only educations.³⁹

Scott would even build upon the earlier experience of the English themselves. His novel *Ivanhoe* details the struggle of the Crusader Wilfred of Ivanhoe, who is disowned by his staunchly Saxon father for absorbing the Norman tradition of mounted combat and following Richard II to the Cru-

sades. Language once again makes its mark on the national identity, as Scott considers the possible interactions between French and Saxon etymology in daily life,

“swine is good Saxon,” said the Jester; “but how call you the sow when she is flayed, and drawn, and quartered, and hung up by the heels, like a traitor?”

“Pork,” answered the swine-herd.

“I am very glad every fool knows that too,” said Wamba, “and pork, I think, is good Norman-French; and so when the brute lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name; but becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried to the Castle-hall to feast among the nobles.”⁴⁰

This sort of quibbling paints the English-Saxons as the one-time recipients of a similar kind of cultural conquest. The clear implication is that the Saxons and Normans eventually unified under the single identity of Englishmen. One sees hints of a possible future where the English and Scots could enjoy a similar standard of unification.

The rugged and romantic land also played a significant role in Scott's works. The Scotland of Scott's literature invited exploration, “little lonely valleys, which opening on the road from time to time, seemed to invite the traveler to explore their recesses,”⁴¹ as seen in *Rob Roy*. The scenery alternated between mysterious and inspiring, through streams and mountains and the trees

between.⁴² The theme of vivid romantic imagery is continued throughout Scott's novels and poetry, observable in *Ivanhoe*, where the beauty of the English forest is used to romanticize one of their folk heroes, Robin Hood.

“The Lady of the Lake” is perhaps the most well-known of Scott's poems. The significance of scenery played a large role within the poem, which is set around the romantic Loch Katrine,⁴³ “The summer heaven's delicious blue; So wonderous wild, the whole might seem the scenery of a fairy dream.”⁴⁴ Associating gorgeous and magical scenery with this romantic tale set in the time of King James V not only invites readers to experience a piece of living history through a place, but it also connects the time with a location of magic and wonder. The importance of Gaelic, as well as clan relationships, is emphasized in “The Lady of the Lake;” not only as a family unit that protects and provides, but as if a miniature kingdom under the ultimate authority of the King.⁴⁵ The King himself plays an important role in this poem. Initially perceived as a fearsome unknown royal figure, James V is finally revealed to have been the handsome wanderer who aided a fair maiden.⁴⁶ This theme would also be applied to the English King Richard II, revealed to the Black Knight of *Ivanhoe*. Again, Scott's usage of a romanticized version of historical figures presents links to history Scott believed should not be forgotten.

Sir Walter Scott not only dedicated his career to reinventing Scotland's image, he also gave the nation back



Frank E. Schoonover, August 19, 1877 – September 1, 1972, *Ivanhoe* illustrations.

a piece of its lost heritage.⁴⁷ The right of kingship over Scotland remained a source of tension and political conflict between Scotland and England for centuries. King Edward I of England's theft of the Scottish royal coronation tokens at Scone taught the Scots to hide royal artifacts.⁴⁸ After the 1707 Act of the Union, in which Scotland and England were united as the United Kingdom, the royal Scottish Crown Jewels, known as the Regalia were hidden.⁴⁹ In 1818, Sir Walter Scott petitioned the Prince Regent for permission to search for the lost Crown Jewels.⁵⁰ The royal approval granted, due to the Prince's appreciation for Scott's literature, led Scott to find the jewels in Edinburgh Castle where they had been hidden for over one hundred

years.⁵¹ In 1822, following his ascension to the throne of England, King George IV arrived in Edinburgh, making him the first English king to do so in over two hundred years.⁵² The visit was arranged by Scott, who ensured the King was greeted with proper Scottish pagentry.⁵³ King George IV wore a tartan for the occasion in honor of his Scottish subjects.⁵⁴ Without Scott's literary popularity and dedication to Scotland, this celebration of Scottish heritage would not have been possible.

Similar application to the theme of the good king can be found echoed throughout the English cultural identity. From the opening lines of *Beowulf* capturing the Anglo-Danish ideal of a "god cynning" to the multiple iterations of Arthur's mythical Camelot, the English demonstrated a keen sensitivity to strong governance.⁵⁵ By tying the plot of *Ivanhoe* to a fictional return of Richard the Lionheart, Scott pressed down on the English memory of his erstwhile brother Bad King John. It was this same John that led the English to pass their Magna Carta to limit the powers of the English monarchy over their subjects and frame that "to no-one will we sell or deny of delay right of justice."⁵⁶ One sees Scott's work pressing the issue from the ground up until George IV's appearance at Edinburgh completes it from the top down.

Through transforming the rebellious Scots into a passionate, romantic and courtly nation, the literary works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Porter altered public opinion of the past and allowed Scotland to embrace their culture in a

new manner. Through the literary appeal to common identity and the incorporation of multiple English characters, Scott drew a broader boundary around what it meant to be English as well. Scott's literary works and personal efforts in particular brought items of Scottish heritage back to political legitimacy after the 1822 royal visit of King George IV. Although tartans and bagpipes were banned in 1747, Scott piqued cultural interest to the level where a visit from an English king meant these formally outlawed Scottish cultural items were

legally celebrated. Porter's portrayal of Scotland was vibrant and romantic. Formerly viewed as traitors, the historic figures of William Wallace, Rob Roy, and others, were so heroically written that many modern audiences only recall the positive and fictional accounts of these men. Whether one considers the broader United Kingdom, the individual identities of the English kingdoms, or Scotland itself, Scott wrote about a country of which every one of his readers desired to be a citizen.

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Notes

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