‘Waverley’, Adaptation, and the University of Aberdeen Bernard C. Lloyd Collection of Scott Materials

By Alison Lumsden

As has been well documented this year *Waverley* was a huge and unparalleled success story in the history of novel publishing. As Ian Duncan has noted, *Waverley* sold more copies than all other novels put together in 1814 and it was to be republished in many editions in Scott’s lifetime as well as in numerous different collections and formats.[1] Jerome Mitchell’s studies *The Walter Scott Operas* and *More Scott Operas* reveal how frequently Scott’s work was adapted into this particularly nineteenth-century form while H. Bolton’s *Scott Dramatized* offers a similar picture in relation to theatre.[2] Murray Pittock’s *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* has shown how widely and rapidly Scott was translated and the complex processes by which transmission of his work actually occurred.[3] Most recently, Ann Rigney’s *The Afterlives of Scott* has provided us with a rich sense of just how pervasive Scott’s influence was in the nineteenth century and the mechanisms by which such influence fell into decline.[4] However, while contemporary adaptation theory acknowledges that every adaptation ‘is inevitably an interpretation of that text’[5] none of these works has fully addressed the ways in which the frequent adaptations, re-mediations and appropriations of *Waverley* influenced how it has come to be perceived in the popular imagination. While it is impossible to explore this thoroughly in an article of this length, three adaptations held in the Bernard. C. Lloyd Collection of Scott materials at the University of Aberdeen may prompt some further reflection on why the novel was so ripe for adaptation and of how such adaptations have helped shape and re-shape modern perceptions of it.

Image courtesy of the University of Aberdeen
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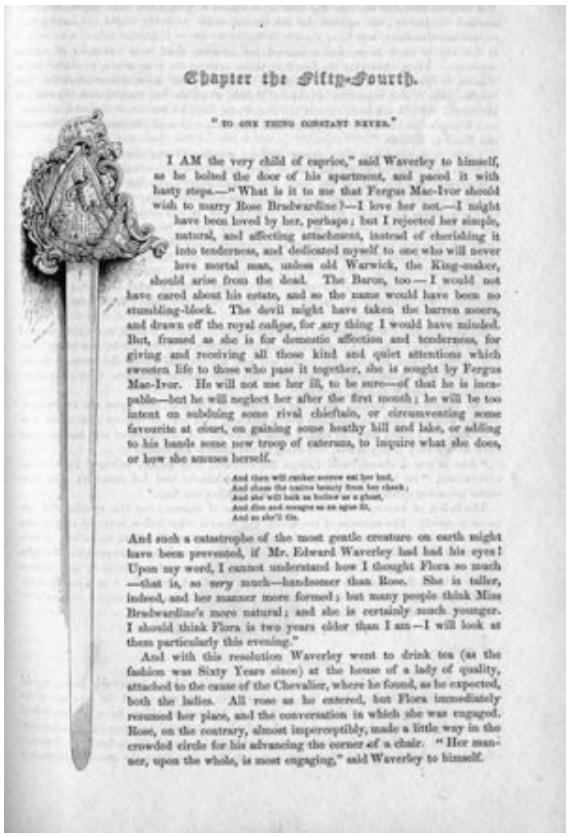

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And then will canker sorrow eat her bud,
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And such a catastrophe of the most gentle creature on earth might have been prevented, if Mr. Edward Waverley had had his eyes! Upon my word, I cannot understand how I thought Flora so much—that is, so *very* much—handsomer than Rose. She is taller, indeed, and her manner more formed; but many people think Miss Bradwardine's more natural; and she is certainly much younger. I should think Flora is two years older than I am—I will look at them particularly this evening."

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The influence of the illustrations in the Abbotsford Edition may be to send out subliminal messages, offering visual interpretations of Waverley's relationship both to the Highlands and to Jacobitism. However, a far more overt and surely more influential adaptation of Scott's work is offered by children's editions. Towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century Scott's critical currency was beginning to wane. By this point, as Ann Rigney demonstrates, Scott had been refigured as a writer for children and hand in hand with this went a corresponding rise of editions specifically designed for them. Some of these (such as the Nelson Classics Editions) offered the full original text with notes and questions clearly designed for schools. Others, however, such as the Alice F. Jackson series of Waverley Novels 'Retold for Boys and Girls' offer radically abridged and re-written versions of the texts.[13] Not surprisingly, these editions are, like the Abbotsford Edition, highly illustrated, but here the illustrations are in full colour. The Jackson edition of *Waverley* contains eight

illustrations, including one of 'five or six wild Highlanders' who happily dance within the cosy confines of a cave (p.38) and, perhaps not unexpectedly, one of Flora and Waverley by the waterfall. However, it is the text accompanying this scene which is perhaps most startling. In Scott's original the scene is highly stylised; we are reminded that Flora has constructed both landscape and event as a work of art, hinting to a discerning reader that she is also using her art to seduce an unsuspecting Waverley to the Jacobite cause. The scene is also highly ironic; the word 'Romantic' or its cognates appears repeatedly, alerting us to the fact that while Waverley may collude with an idea of it as un-problematically Romantic, a careful reader should view the scene more critically. In Alice Jackson's version all such subtlety is inevitably lost and the scene is recounted as follows:

> Tea over, Flora suggested that they should take a stroll. 'As the evening is delightful,' she said, 'Una will show you to one of my favourite haunts, and Cathleen and I will join you there.'
> Flora then spoke to one of the girls in Gaelic – the language of the Highlanders – and Una conducted Waverley out by a passage.
> They walked up the wild and bleak valley, and in a little while they reached a glen which seemed to open into a land of romance, where the rocks took a thousand peculiar and changeful forms, and where they came in sight of a beautiful waterfall.
> Flora was already standing by the waterfall, while two paces back stood Cathleen, holding a small Scottish harp.
> The sun, now sinking in the west, gave a rich tinge to all around; and Waverley thought he had never seen so lovely a figure as Flora's. (pp.52-53)

For those of us of an age to have been brought up on Enid Blyton it is hard not to re-title this version of *Waverley* 'Five go to the Jacobite Rising'. Perhaps even more than the chapbook version it is a story stripped of all Scott's complexity and subtlety. While political intrigue is not lacking from the text, as befits a children's edition it is offered in a particularly saccharine form; nothing is really at stake here and the tensions that we now recognise as so crucial to Scott's novel have more or less disappeared.

This short look at three adaptations of *Waverley* may gesture towards the reasons why perceptions of the novel persist that seem so much at odds with modern critical understanding of it and may also go some way to explain what seems at

times like an unbridgeable gap between those who *believe* that they understand *Waverley* (and often condemn it without having actually read it) and those who praise both its complexity and its ongoing relevance for a modern age. It may also suggest why Scott's work lent itself so well to adaptation for what is most interesting about these re-workings of *Waverley* is the fact that, strange though they may at times appear to a modern reader, they do not *necessarily* misinterpret it. Rather, they are in fact facilitated by the many possible meanings that reside within Scott's multi-layered and ambiguous text and the capacity for reading and re-reading which it generates; these adaptations are not 'wrong' about Scott, but they inevitably follow one of the trajectories on which his novel takes his readers while ignoring other possibilities. While recent criticism recognises that what is most stimulating about Scott is precisely the fact that such multifarious meanings co-exist within his fiction, taken singly any one of the meanings that may be contained within *Waverley*, or any other of Scott's works, is an occlusion of this complexity. All adaptation is indeed an act of interpretation but the adaptations we have explored here each offer only one interpretation. The real genius of Scott's *Waverley* is that it allows multiple, elusive and at times competing interpretations of the past and its relationship to the present to co-exist within one ground-breaking work of fiction. That perhaps, is why we are still reading it after two hundred years.As has been well documented this year *Waverley* was a huge and unparalleled success story in the history of novel publishing. As Ian Duncan has noted, *Waverley* sold more copies than all other novels put together in 1814 and it was to be republished in many editions in Scott's lifetime as well as in numerous different collections and formats.[14] Jerome Mitchell's studies *The Walter Scott Operas* and *More Scott Operas* reveal how frequently Scott's work was adapted into this particularly nineteenth-century form while H. Bolton's *Scott Dramatized* offers a similar picture in relation to theatre.[15] Murray Pittock's *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* has shown how widely and rapidly Scott was translated and the complex processes by which transmission of his work actually occurred.[16] Most recently, Ann Rigney's *The Afterlives of Scott* has provided us with a rich sense of just how pervasive Scott's influence was in the nineteenth century and the mechanisms by which such influence fell into decline.[17] However, while contemporary adaptation theory acknowledges that every adaptation 'is inevitably an interpretation of that text'[18] none of these works has fully addressed the ways

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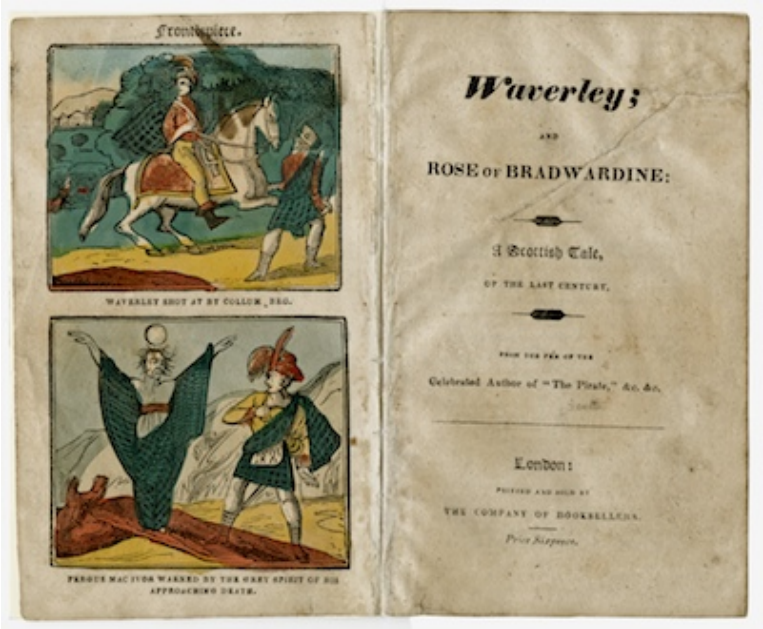

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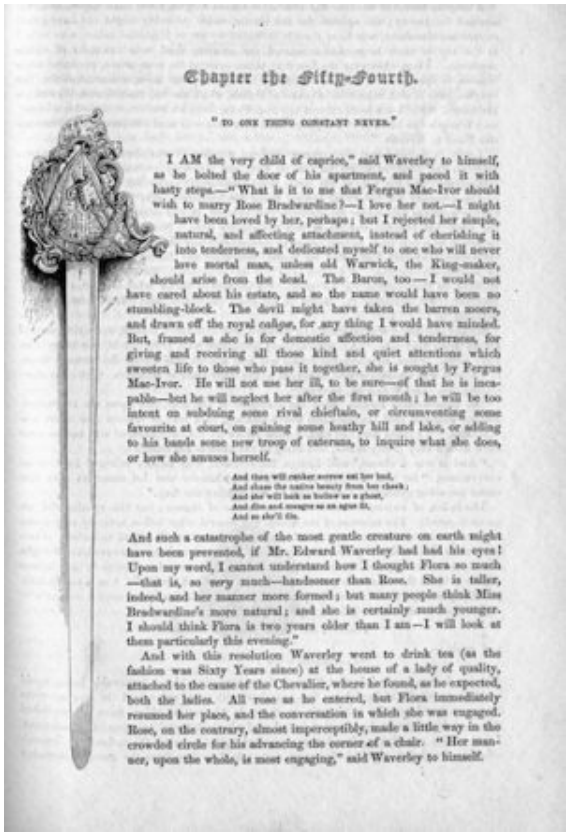

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This is, for example, evident in one dramatic engraving accompanying Chapter 24 ‘A Stag-hunt and its Consequences’. While the novel suggests an event fraught with political intrigue the image of the hunt carries none of this nuance. Chapter 47 ‘The Conflict’, which describes the Battle of Prestonpans, opens with an image of Prince Charles charging into the rising sun and closes with one of a pair of swords allegedly found on the field. Swords, this time from Culloden, feature again at the close of Chapter 62 ‘What’s to be done next’ rather oddly placed in the very chapter where Waverley has thoroughly abandoned the cause and meets Frank Stanley to receive his passport. However, the most overt and startling image of a sword appears on page 279, the opening of the chapter, that begins ‘to one thing constant never’. This is, of course, the chapter where Waverley, piqued by Fergus’s declaration that he is going to marry Rose Bradwardine, begins to examine his own conscience and decides that Rose, rather than Flora, is the woman for him. In many ways this chapter offers the first sign of Waverley’s disenchantment with Charles Edward Stuart’s enterprise and it foreshadows his inability to be ‘constant’ to the Jacobite cause just as much as his ‘caprice and folly’ in love. However, in the Abbotsford Edition the opening of the chapter is illustrated from the top to the bottom of the page with a claymore allegedly having been worn by the Prince and now, we are told, in the possession of the Duchess of Gordon; at the very moment when the novel voices scepticism towards the validity of the Jacobite cause the Abbotsford reinforces pictorially the sense that it is a thoroughly Jacobite novel. All in all such illustrations serve both to glorify war and foreground the Jacobite sympathies in the text in ways that may discomfort modern critics. Just where Scott’s sympathies lie in relation to Jacobitism has, of course, been much debated. Most recent criticism argues that Scott’s novel in fact rests on a curious tension that neither condones nor condemns the Jacobite enterprise, but the illustrations to the Abbotsford Edition of *Waverley* suggest a far more determined response than such re-evaluations allow.

The influence of the illustrations in the Abbotsford Edition may be to send out subliminal messages, offering visual interpretations of Waverley’s relationship both to the Highlands and to Jacobitism. However, a far more overt and surely more influential adaptation of Scott’s work is offered by children’s editions. Towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century Scott’s

critical currency was beginning to wane. By this point, as Ann Rigney demonstrates, Scott had been refigured as a writer for children and hand in hand with this went a corresponding rise of editions specifically designed for them. Some of these (such as the Nelson Classics Editions) offered the full original text with notes and questions clearly designed for schools. Others, however, such as the Alice F. Jackson series of Waverley Novels 'Retold for Boys and Girls' offer radically abridged and re-written versions of the texts.[26] Not surprisingly, these editions are, like the Abbotsford Edition, highly illustrated, but here the illustrations are in full colour. The Jackson edition of *Waverley* contains eight illustrations, including one of 'five or six wild Highlanders' who happily dance within the cosy confines of a cave (p.38) and, perhaps not unexpectedly, one of Flora and Waverley by the waterfall. However, it is the text accompanying this scene which is perhaps most startling. In Scott's original the scene is highly stylised; we are reminded that Flora has constructed both landscape and event as a work of art, hinting to a discerning reader that she is also using her art to seduce an unsuspecting Waverley to the Jacobite cause. The scene is also highly ironic; the word 'Romantic' or its cognates appears repeatedly, alerting us to the fact that while Waverley may collude with an idea of it as un-problematically Romantic, a careful reader should view the scene more critically. In Alice Jackson's version all such subtlety is inevitably lost and the scene is recounted as follows:

> Tea over, Flora suggested that they should take a stroll. 'As the evening is delightful,' she said, 'Una will show you to one of my favourite haunts, and Cathleen and I will join you there.'
>
> Flora then spoke to one of the girls in Gaelic – the language of the Highlanders – and Una conducted Waverley out by a passage.
>
> They walked up the wild and bleak valley, and in a little while they reached a glen which seemed to open into a land of romance, where the rocks took a thousand peculiar and changeful forms, and where they came in sight of a beautiful waterfall.
>
> Flora was already standing by the waterfall, while two paces back stood Cathleen, holding a small Scottish harp.
>
> The sun, now sinking in the west, gave a rich tinge to all around; and Waverley thought he had never seen so lovely a figure as Flora's. (pp.52-53)

For those of us of an age to have been brought up on Enid Blyton it is hard not to

re-title this version of *Waverley* 'Five go to the Jacobite Rising'. Perhaps even more than the chapbook version it is a story stripped of all Scott's complexity and subtlety. While political intrigue is not lacking from the text, as befits a children's edition it is offered in a particularly saccharine form; nothing is really at stake here and the tensions that we now recognise as so crucial to Scott's novel have more or less disappeared.

This short look at three adaptations of *Waverley* may gesture towards the reasons why perceptions of the novel persist that seem so much at odds with modern critical understanding of it and may also go some way to explain what seems at times like an unbridgeable gap between those who *believe* that they understand *Waverley* (and often condemn it without having actually read it) and those who praise both its complexity and its ongoing relevance for a modern age. It may also suggest why Scott's work lent itself so well to adaptation for what is most interesting about these re-workings of *Waverley* is the fact that, strange though they may at times appear to a modern reader, they do not *necessarily* misinterpret it. Rather, they are in fact facilitated by the many possible meanings that reside within Scott's multi-layered and ambiguous text and the capacity for reading and re-reading which it generates; these adaptations are not 'wrong' about Scott, but they inevitably follow one of the trajectories on which his novel takes his readers while ignoring other possibilities. While recent criticism recognises that what is most stimulating about Scott is precisely the fact that such multifarious meanings co-exist within his fiction, taken singly any one of the meanings that may be contained within *Waverley*, or any other of Scott's works, is an occlusion of this complexity. All adaptation is indeed an act of interpretation but the adaptations we have explored here each offer only one interpretation. The real genius of Scott's *Waverley* is that it allows multiple, elusive and at times competing interpretations of the past and its relationship to the present to co-exist within one ground-breaking work of fiction. That perhaps, is why we are still reading it after two hundred years.

(c) The Bottle Imp