

‘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.

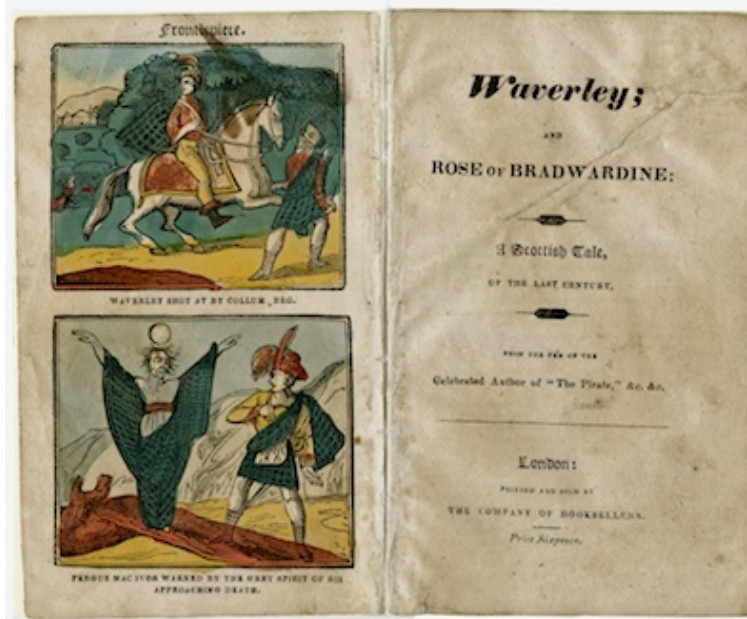


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Bernard C. Lloyd Collection of Scott Materials

The frequency with which editions of the *Waverley* novels reappeared in Scott's lifetime is testament to both his popularity and to the shrewdness of Constable, and later Cadell, in repackaging them for different audiences. However, while 'official versions' of his novels appeared throughout Scott's lifetime and beyond, unofficial versions were simultaneously appearing in the form of chapbooks. These short versions of the novels consist of around forty pages, frequently feature lurid illustrations and sold for 6d (around a fiftieth of the price of the first edition of *Waverley*). With Scott's later novels such chapbook versions often appeared within months of the publication of the original novel (the chapbook of *Guy Mannering* for example appears in 1816, *Ivanhoe* in 1821 and *Peeveril of the Peak* in 1823) the *Waverley* chapbook held at Aberdeen has a date of 1822.⁶ A similar pattern can also be found with other adaptations of *Waverley*; as H. Philip Bolton notes, the first dramatic adaptation of *Waverley* appeared in 1823⁷ while here was no operatic version of it until the late nineteenth century.⁸ Interestingly the chapbook also bears the line 'From the celebrated author of "The Pirate" &c, &c' in its title page indicating that it was by virtue of the popularity of the later *Waverley* novels that this version of Scott's first work of fiction was adapted.

This delay between novel and adaptation meant that by the time the chapbook was published the story of *Waverley* must have been well established and aspects of how it is interpreted here may shed light on how Scott's work was perceived in

1822. While the writer manages to pack a lot of the original plot into forty small format pages, many scenes considered crucial by modern criticism are absent. The scene by the waterfall where Flora seduces Waverley to the cause is completely missing and there is no description at all of Waverley entering the Highlands. Both these episodes are now recognised as containing complex and coded messages allowing multifarious readings of the text, but they are absent here. Similarly, the iconic painting with which the novel ends, and which has caused so much critical controversy in recent readings of the novel, is also missing so that the text ends with an unproblematic image of resolution; the baron's 'cup of joy ...[was] indeed filled to the brim' (p.40). As its title 'Waverley and Rose Bradwardine: A Scottish Tale, of the Last Century' suggests, this adaptation is essentially one of the growing love affair between Rose and Waverley. Flora states from the outset that Waverley is not the man for her and encourages Rose to show off her 'amiable qualities and talents' in Waverley's presence (p.14). Rose is invited to visit the Mac-Ivor household during Waverley's residence there, 'a summons which she obeyed with alacrity' (p.14). As a consequence the chapbook is less an account of Scotland's complex engagement with Jacobitism than a straightforward love story in which Rose grows in maturity until she becomes a suitable wife for the hero. One notable scene is, however, included and facilitates the chapbook's frontispiece. Both after the skirmish near Derby and again towards the end of the narrative Fergus tells Waverley that he has seen the 'grey spirit' and this incident is pictured in a particularly vivid and lurid illustration.

The 1822 chapbook offers an early example of the ways in which the process of adaptation of Scott's work can allow the plot to be faithfully rendered (most aspects of the story are maintained) while simultaneously stripping the text of all the complexity and nuance that is so valued by criticism today. Nevertheless, teaching these chapbook versions of Scott's work proves fruitful; confronted with them students frequently argue in favour of Scott's one-thousand-plus-page triple-deckers, revealing that, for modern readers at least, meaning in Scott resides not in the skeleton of the story contained in these short versions (the larger structures identified by Lukacs as quintessential to them) but in what Franco Moretti describes as the 'filler' by which nineteenth century fiction in fact operates.

Illustration is also a key feature of a second re-imagining of *Waverley*, that offered

by the Abbotsford Edition, published shortly after Scott's death in 1842-7.⁹ Richard Hill has argued that the shift from the book as "literature" to the book as "commodity" began as early as the 1820s but that it was fully embraced by Robert Cadell in the Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley Novels.¹⁰ If this is the case, however, the Abbotsford Edition is surely the culmination of this process. Published in large octavo format, the Abbotsford edition of two thousand copies is in twelve volumes and contains over two thousand engravings, some of which were specially commissioned from artists such as Wilkie, Landseer, Allan and Nasmyth. As the name implies many of these illustrations are taken from objects at Abbotsford, and the notice to the edition states:

Fancy and ingenuity have already been largely employed on subjects drawn from these Works. The aim on the present occasion is to give them whatever additional interest may be derived from the representation of what was actually in the contemplation and memory of the Author when he composed them. (p.4)

It also claims a kind of posthumous authority stating that the engravings and embellishments are such as 'had the Author himself now been alive, his personal tastes and resources would most probably have induced him to place before students of antiquity and lovers of art' (p.3).

Ann Rigney notes a long standing 'interconnectedness between [Scott's] writing and his house' that culminates in the Abbotsford edition¹¹ and indeed in *Reliquiae Trotcosienses* Scott himself draws a connection between story-telling and his antiquarian collections, noting that he cannot resist constructing narratives around them.¹² However, the Abbotsford Edition presents a rather more simplistic correlation between objects and narrative than any Scott allows in *Reliquiae* and often objects are used with little or no relation to historical accuracy. *Waverley* contains five engravings on steel and around one hundred and twenty on wood and in spite of claims that the most accurate objects have been sought out for illustration many of these are curiously anachronistic; for example, when Waverley is taken to the Castle of Doune the chapter closes with an engraving of a set of spurs from Bannockburn and when the party meet in Edinburgh events are accompanied by an illustration of Charles Edward's sporran attached to a belt from the time of the Knights Templar. In the light of the illustrations offered here it is perhaps not surprising that Scott has been seen as having a rather hap-hazard approach to historical detail. However, recent

criticism and scholarly reconstruction have suggested that Scott is far more precise in his treatment of the past than formerly acknowledged and it is uncertain that he would have endorsed this edition as whole-heartedly as its editors suggest. More significantly, even if we leave historical inaccuracies aside the illustrations in the Abbotsford Edition of *Waverley* are problematic since they also put a particular interpretation on the text which is potentially at odds with the complexities that we now understand to be at play within it.

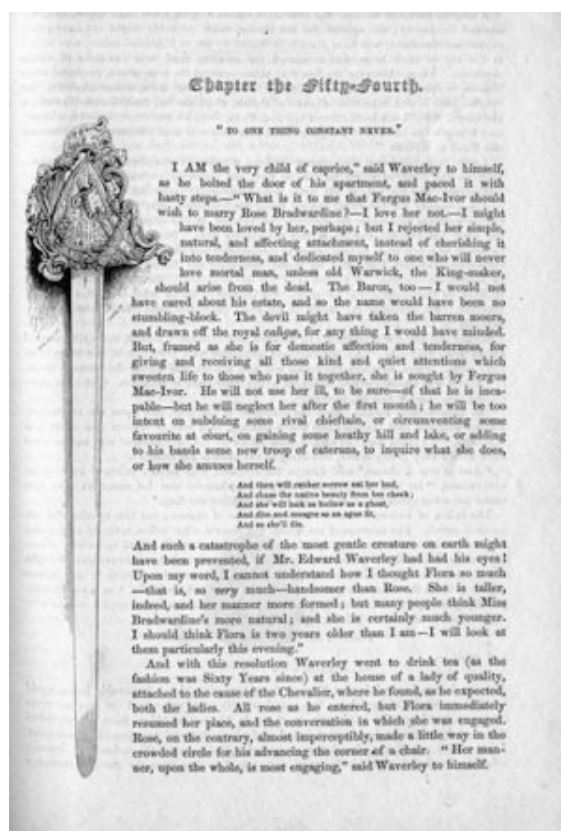


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This is, for example, evident in one dramatic engraving accompanying Chapter 24 'A Stag-hunt and its Consequences'. While the novel suggests an event fraught with political intrigue the image of the hunt carries none of this nuance. Chapter 47 'The 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.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.

(c) *The Bottle Imp*