The Past is Now and the Now is Past: A Postmodern Analysis of Cultural Dominance in Ivanhoe and The Fair Maid of Perth

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In the early part of the nineteenth century, early Victorians considered connecting history with present events frivolous and illogical. Their heads still brimming with Enlightenment ideas, Victorians believed that humankind possessed absolute control over its own destiny, and, therefore, historical influences would have no part in forging mankind's future. Thus, for most Victorian writers, a "living" past did not exist; history was essentially dead. A good historical novel for these individuals therefore featured vivid, true-to-life details resulting more in an ethnology than in a work of literature. Consequently, one can clearly predict the mixed feelings nineteenth century critics had of Sir Walter Scott's unique portrayal of history, particularly visible in Ivanhoe and The Fair Maid of Perth.

Set in the twelfth century in southwest England, Ivanhoe explores the nature of the Norman/Saxon relationship in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. Through setting, characterization and theme, Scott depicts a world fragmented by concerns that reverberate into the nineteenth century, such as class, ethnic struggle, deceit and religious fanaticism. This novel also exhibits anachronistic traits typical of postmodernism. Each of the characters, for example, deals with social issues typical of the twelfth century, yet possess mannerisms more appropriate to the fourteenth or even the nineteenth, century.

Similarly, The Fair Maid of Perth, set in late fourteenth century Scotland, deals with the interrelationship between the middle class of lower Scotland, the aristocracy in Edinburgh, and the ancient highland clans. In this novel, Scott explores the nature of social class and stratification. Like Ivanhoe, this novel bears anachronistic elements: any of the characters could feel quite at home if he or she were pulled from the novel and inserted into nineteenth century life.

Sir Walter Scott therefore took the "extreme" risk of breathing life into history. He gave the past the connection and relevance to the present historians and writers take for granted in postmodern times. In Ivanhoe and The Fair Maid of Perth, Scott's portrayal of history illustrates the significance of the past to the present day through his deliberate use of cultural, sociological and technological anachronism and vivid description of setting. However, his unorthodox perspective frequently comes under fire by literary critics of his time:

> ". . . the general impression of [Scott's] inferiority is unmistakable, and its causes are clear. Scott was tired, and he was writing much too fast. Although a learned man in his own way, he did not know enough to recreate the earlier centuries" (Cockshut 312).

Here, Cockshut's condescending disparagement of Scott reveals a heightened concern with historical accuracy, shrugging off any suggestion that Scott's anachronistic approach may be thematic: "If the past is presented as the present in disguise, we get the costume novel, and this is probably the commonest kind of failure in the tradition of historical fiction (312). Not even a hint of creative, abstract thought exists here, exemplifying his critical thinking process: conservative, tightly logical and methodical *ad nauseam*. This nineteenth century critic reduces the historical novel to a simple mathematical formula: If "A" (a historical novel) contains elements of "B" (the present), when the work should strictly adhere to the formula "A" represents, than A is in fact C, a mere costume novel. Nuances, not welcome in this equation, would deviate from the established formula. Cockshut, repelled by the literary naturalism implicit in Scott's novels, takes a condescending attitude toward Scott's brand of medievalism: Scott " . . . [writes] for a public ready to be entertained and bewitched by an unreal middle age, a public that . . .

was now ready to adopt different misconceptions and to be deceived in new ways" (312). Yet, Scott's anachronistic references do not mark him as an inferior "costume" writer any more than Shakespeare's own use of similar temporal incongruencies in plays such as Hamlet or Othello condemn him to mediocrity. Such an approach neither deceives nor misleads its audience in any way as Cockshut suggests; the work simply demands that readers relate the significance of what they read to their own time and their own lives. Scientific methodology should have no place here. Nonetheless, another nineteenth century "literary" critic challenges Scott with the sword of myopia clearly brandished: "[f]rom Sir Walter Scott we learned history. And yet, is this history? All these pictures of a distant age are false. Costumes, scenery, externals alone are exact; actions, speech, sentiments, all the rest is civilized, embellished, arranged in modern guise" (Taine 283). One cannot consider history a science, as history is highly interpretive. Historical accounts, often written by the "conquerors," give a one-sided and therefore misleading representation. History books offer only part of the macrocosmic puzzle. Who, therefore, truly has the authority or the ability to differentiate between "true" and "false" histories?

In the modernist age, the competent writer/scholar was an individual who could expose the essence of Truth, an undertaking obviously impossible for human beings with agendas and biases. The modernist, therefore, was the scientist, and he believed he could methodically uncover the truth, however myopic and slanted that truth may have been. Modernism, qualified as a means of scientific and philosophic thought, originated in the Renaissance, but came into full bloom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thomas Docherty explains modernism quite well in his book, After Theory:

Postmodernism/Postmarxism: "The project of modernity formulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic" (2). Toward the end of the fourteenth century, individuals began "evolving" from the medieval worldview, placing faith in the budding sciences and on the growth and adaptability of humanity. Simply put, modernism bred overbearing hubris, arrogance and smugness in humankind, the likes of which had never been seen before. This smugness led to a dangerous disassociation with the past in favor of creating a clean slate for the future. As part of this disassociation, children of the Renaissance turned away from the more abstract, placing less credibility in anything which could have traces of medieval-style thought, such as "blind" faith, fatalism or predestination. Modernism also values that which one can directly see or calculate, placing less credibility in concepts of a figurative, speculative or abstract nature. Cockshut and Taine, working in this mindset, attack Scott for his apparent failure as a historical novelist, attributing that failure to a lack of any apparent direction or logic, as modernism focuses on the concrete and the definable in literature and the arts, dismissing the illogical or the highly subjective as non-academic or not otherwise important.

Modernism, then, addresses the collective need for intellectual evolution from an inherently medieval, non-logical state fueled by emotion to its antithesis, the world of science and reason. More in tune with the spirit of the Renaissance, the modern perspective emphasizes the cerebral while downplaying the imagination. In the infancy of Modernism, fourteenth and fifteenth century people began seeing themselves as fully realized human beings capable of creating their own fate regardless of where they came

from socio-economically. Control over one's life became particularly important, and the notion of clearly defined order, introduced by the Great Chain of Being, became the hub around which the world revolved. Beyond this order, individuals believed, lay nothing but Chaos. Thus, the formerly medieval belief in predestination became particularly distasteful, and, from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, modernists disassociated themselves as much as possible from the idea of fatalism or naturalism.

In the 1970s, however, historical theory had moved full circle. The modernist perspective gave way to a postmodern view, recognizing historical events as self-repeating, popping up in different manifestations across time and space. This concept, hereafter referred to as "temporal holism," deserves further explanation before proceeding. According to Conrad Phillip Kottak's introductory anthropology text, Cultural Anthropology, holism is defined as "[interest] in the whole of the human condition: past, present and future; biology, society, language and culture" (506). The use of the term "holism" alone cannot truly convey the theoretical basis of this analysis, so the term "temporal holism," taking a step beyond "holism," will refer to Scott's ideology. Temporal holism recognizes that the past is as much intertwined with the present as language is with culture. Moreover, a society, not limited to the present, exists in past-time as well. For example, consider the wooded area described in the setting of Ivanhoe:

> "The remains of the extensive wood are still to be seen at the noble seats of Wentworth, of Warncliff Park, and around Rotherham. Here, haunted of yore the fabulous dragon of Wantless; here were fought many battles during the civil wars of the roses; and here also flourished gallant outlaws, whose deeds have been rendered so popular in English song" (Ivanhoe 25).

A temporally holistic writer, like Scott, removes from a given place any connection to one time period. The place described above exists both outside of time and independent of it. When one reads this passage, one can almost hear the sounds of battle echoing from the wars of the roses into today. One may even envision in his mind a ghostly image of an English outlaw, perhaps even Robin Hood himself, going about his exploits, bow in hand, quiver on his back. A temporally holistic work would introduce the entire time continuum all in one plane, which explains the historic significance and meaning of that place. In his novels, as demonstrated by the quote, Scott repeatedly describes any given place not only in terms of its physical description at the time of the novel, but also in terms of its significance throughout time. Scott, not only temporally holistic in his dealings with setting, works with this form of holism throughout his novels. His plots, themes, characterization and setting all exist at multiple times and places instead of just one. Recognizing the universality of history this way, Scott, despite living in the modernist nineteenth century, is a postmodern writer.

Postmodernism places its theoretical emphasis on abstract and subjective qualities: the non-linear. In literature, this philosophy explains why contemporary literary critics incorporate history, along with other academic disciplines in their search for thematic significance. History, now subject to individual interpretation, clearly reflects the meaning of the present and brings into question the malleability of the future. In a sense, one can look at postmodernism as a neo-medievalist philosophy because postmodernism embraces many of the qualities of medievalism, such as predestination and fatalism. Thus, Scott, while writing over a century before postmodernism would spring up in academia, nonetheless explores postmodern ideas in Ivanhoe and The Fair

Maid of Perth. By setting Ivanhoe in a time period infested with Norman/Saxon rivalry, he explores cultural dominance and imperialism; issues that reverberate even to this day. Similarly, The Fair Maid of Perth explores a world in which feudalism finds itself crumbling before a rising, three-tiered society in which the dominant upper class fights a hopeless battle with a highly skilled, rising bourgeoisie. Thus, Scott uses history not as a one-sided recreation of history, but rather, he examines the historical threads that bind humanity together across time.

Stephen Kendrick's book, Interpreting the Past, Understanding the Present explains the importance of using history as an aid in analyzing contemporary sociological issues rather than as an artifact to re-create the past: "We, as users of histories, are told that we should not use histories in order to discover an accurate reconstruction of the past, or allow us to better predict the future. Rather, we should use them as knowledges which address some aspect of the present" (40). Like a Yin-Yang, the past contains an identifiable element of the present, and in the present, an element of the past. Consequently, any given time and place has meaning which reaches beyond its single, temporal reference. Scott's description of the first scene in Ivanhoe suggests this temporal holism. In this scene, cited earlier, Scott brings to the forefront lush imagery from past ages blending and coexisting at the same time, thus suggesting the cyclical nature of history itself. Far from merely filling up white space with fancy, irrelevant details, Scott illustrates here the interrelationship between the past and its progeny, the present.

The setting in The Fair Maid of Perth also demonstrates this interrelationship:

> "The county has also been the scene of many remarkable exploits and

events, some of historical importance, others interesting to the poet and romancer, though recorded in popular tradition alone. It was in the vales that the Saxons of the plain and the Gael of the mountains had many a desperate and bloody encounter, in which it was frequently impossible to decide the palm of victory between the mailed chivalry of the low country and the plaided clans whom they opposed. Perth, so eminent for the beauty of its situation, is a place of great antiquity; and old tradition assigns to the town the importance of a Roman foundation" (2).

This scene, merging past and present, wrestles with the validity of history books, obviously frowned upon by early Victorian contemporaries like Cockshut. Because of the close ties between medievalism and postmodernism, Scott's treatment of medieval history closely mirrors actual postmodern thinking. In order to understand these ideas, one must also comprehend the historical influences behind them; specifically, the impact of the Romantic age on historical interpretation

From the Enlightenment up until the mid 1800s, Europe had experienced more cultural, technological and socioeconomic change than the continent had seen in hundreds of years. By the time the Industrial Revolution had taken hold, the Romantic era was in full swing, complete with sympathies and nostalgia for a simpler past in which humankind was ruled by its irrational, impulsive and creative side. These romantic artists and writers, drawing a sharp contrast between the contemporary capitalistic society and the feudal, paternal past utilized artistic license in creating sociological satire in abstract, formerly unheard-of ways, which often directly clashed with the more conservative Rationalists. However, as the historical novel, the product of these medievalists (or neo-conservatives) gained in popularity, people began viewing history in conjunction with sociological progress rather than as a simple conflict between civilization and savagery:

> "Progress is no longer seen as an essentially unhistorical struggle between humanist reason and feudal-absolutist unreason. According the new

> interpretation, the reasonableness of human progress develops ever increasingly out of the inner conflict of social forces in history itself; according to this interpretation, history itself is the bearer and realizer of human progress" (Lukács 27).

Because these early nineteenth century neo-conservatives no longer viewed human progress in terms of Rationalism, they could turn to the Middle Ages as an era from which they could learn about human nature. Human progress, these neo-conservatives realized, hinges completely on social forces in history. These forces act as temporal currents, influencing human development throughout time and space as society repeats the same social vices over and over again. The Middle Ages represents an especially significant focal point because the seeds of the Industrial Revolution and its ills began taking root at this time. Consequently, distinctions between social classes solidified, and the power struggles between cultures intensified. Thus, cultural dominance became a common theme in the novels of these neo-conservatives, Scott in particular. Not surprisingly then, the exploration of class struggles often employ the Middle Ages as a temporal medium:

> "A return to the middle ages thus became a way of reorganizing man into a closely knit and organic social structure that could engage his emotions and loyalties with a wealth of traditions and customs . . . medievalism was [also] very much a part of the desire to give man a sense of social and political belonging, so it was also an attempt, in the decline of any transcendental order, to naturalize man in the universe and make him feel related to it" (Chandler 5, 7).

Scott, therefore, rather than writing mediocre costume drama as many of his contemporaries would suggest, criticizes his own society by reminding his readers of an age before the world fell from grace and historically tracing that process. Scott exposes his own society's ills: infested with a rising middle class so bound to the myth of upward

mobility that nobody had a set role in society. As Marx would note in the 1840s, individuals in a capitalist culture constantly yearn for more money and prestige. In a quest in which a person never feels content with what he has, prosperity cannot be the ultimate prize; the individual feels demeaned and base, with no sense of connection or identity.

Many modernist historians bristle at Ivanhoe because the twelfth century novel includes fourteenth century anachronistic references as well as the so-called "Victorianization" of characters. For example, Ivanhoe's mild manner would perhaps suit a Victorian gentleman more than a half-civilized nobleman of the twelfth century. The plate armor he wears and the broadsword he fights with in battle were not in use until the fourteenth century. Because of these anachronisms, some critics of Scott's time dismiss his ability as a writer. Cockshut remarks "... Scott's medieval novels were not meant very seriously. For what, after all, can be the serious point of a medieval novel without distinctive medieval features, but full of the detailed pretence of being medieval?" (315). However, Scott's apparent failure as a writer actually manifests itself in a way of interpreting history unique to postmodern times. In The New Historicism, H. Aram Veeser describes the process by which contemporary historians view the past, which Scott mirrors in Ivanhoe:

> "By discarding what they view as mono-logic and myopic historiography, by demonstrating that social and cultural events co-mingle messily, by rigorously exposing the innumerable trade-offs, the competing bids and exchanges of culture, New Historicists can make a valid claim to have established new ways of studying history and a new awareness of how history and culture define each other" (xiii).

Ivanhoe serves as a symbol of history's essence, for he transcends time. While a Saxon

warrior, Ivanhoe's gentle demeanor also gives him the profile of a sophisticated Victorian man. Additionally, his adherence to chivalry's values suggests the persona of a fourteenth century knight. Ivanhoe, possessing these conflicting personas as part of his character, reflects the culture from which he comes: laden with ethnic and class struggle. Though such a cultural and temporal unification, one can see three different cultures and three different time periods complimenting on and hinging on one another, making up a single cultural identity. This complimentary relationship also exists in Cedric:

> "[H]e was of a frank but hasty and choleric temper. He was not above the middle stature, but broad-shouldered, long armed and powerfully made, like one accustomed to endure the fatigue of war or of the chase; his face was broad, with large, blue eyes, open and frank features, fine teeth, and a well formed head altogether expressive of that sort of good humor which often lodges with a sudden and hasty temper. His long yellow hair was equally divided on the top of his head and upon his brow, and combed down on each side to the length of his shoulders; it had but little tendency to gray, although Cedric was approaching his 60th year" (48-9).

One could easily envision Cedric as a disgruntled factory worker of the nineteenth century, looking fondly on an age before the exploitation of his people. Additionally, his hair cannot gray, symbolizing the universality of cultural oppression: the Cedrics of the world will never disappear. In his conversation with the Prior and the Templar, he brings up the past repeatedly, expressing a desire and longing for his culture's former glory. However, at the same time, he sees chivalry as many people do today: hypocritical, overly utopian and superficial. Cedric, the stoic Saxon dignitary, the fourteenth century pragmatist, and the nineteenth century proletariat "lives" both before the age of chivalry and beyond the time of its fall. He exists independent of time, as does the Templar:

> "The companion of the [prior] was a man past forty, thin, strong, tall, muscular; an athletic figure, which long fatigue and constant exercise seemed to have left none of the softer part of the human form, having

> reduced the whole to brawn, bones and sinews, which had sustained a thousand toils and were ready to dare a thousand more . . . his keen, piercing, dark eyes told in every glance a history of difficulties subdued, and dangers dared" (35, 36).

Here, the Templar's eyes represent a temporal mirror, reflecting the many stories of his life: his eyes reflect battles fought and trauma sustained. The knight implicitly challenges others to look upon him, and thus, into history itself. Like a postmodern work of art, his characterization suggests a present carefully implicit in a myriad of images across time, symbolized by the history conveyed in the knight's "piercing" eyes. The Templar's characterization also suggests a cyclical repetition of history, events and issues that reverberate throughout time. In Ivanhoe, this historical cycle, manifesting itself as a mirror, reflects issues of the twelfth century with that of the fourteenth, which in turn reverberate into the nineteenth century.

While Scott sets Ivanhoe in the twelfth century, he recognizes the historical parallels between the Norman/Saxon conflict and the class struggles of the fourteenth century. For this reason, he intertwines the two centuries in his work, creating an almost invisible seam. While twelfth century society dealt with the remnants of the cultural clash between the dominating Normans and the subordinate Saxons, individuals of the fourteenth century found themselves in a similar situation: a dominating feudal aristocracy competing futilely with a rising middle class. In the clergy, the Church fought to uphold her virtues amidst a priesthood corrupt with earthly pleasures, and wealth accumulated from the selling of indulgences. These corrupt clergy members "dominated" over the ideals the Church stood for. The Prior embodies both of these worlds. His position of dominance in the twelfth century resides in his aristocratic

Norman heritage, which compliments his fourteenth century position as a pleasure-seeking cleric:

> "Yet so loose were the ideas of the times respecting the conduct of the clergy, whether secular or regular, that the Prior Alymer maintained a fair character in the neighborhood of his abbey. His free and jovial temper, and the readiness with which he granted absolution from all ordinary delinquencies, rendered him a favorite among the nobility and principle gentry, to several of whom he was allied by birth, being of a distinguished Norman family. The ladies in particular, were not disposed to scan too nicely the morals of a man who was a professed admirer of their sex . . . " (Ivanhoe 38).

Also note his physical description, indicative of the extravagancies of the fourteenth century priesthood.

> "He was obviously an ecclesiastic of high rank; his dress was that of a Cistercian monk, but composed of materials much finer than those which the rule of that order admitted. His mantle and hood were of the best Flanders cloth, and fell in ample, and not ungraceful folds, around a handsome, though somewhat corpulent person" (34).

Scott illustrates the interconnection of history with these characters: one social problem may easily be cut and pasted into any time period. While the contexts of the problems plaguing the two centuries are not identical, the core of the problems, social oppression, is present in both cases. Because of the universality of oppression, Scott easily welds the centuries together in Ivanhoe as he does in The Fair Maid of Perth.

The Fair Maid of Perth explores cultural dominance in a manner much more cyclical than in Ivanhoe. With the exception of Catherine who, like Rebecca, serves as the unflappable voice of reason, the major characters are both oppressors and victims of oppression themselves. Each character, locked in this cycle, suffers from the dominating behavior of one group and transfers that oppression to another. Simon the glovemaker, a poignant symbol of the self-reliant, rising middle class nonetheless suffers subtle abuse

from the remnants of an aristocratic upper class led by the young Duke of Rothsay:

> "... when the steel caps, berrets, and plumes of squires, archers and men at arms began to be seen among the throng, the wearers of these warlike distinctions were more rude in their demeanour than the quiet citizens. More than once . . . from chance, or perhaps from an assumption of superior importance, such an individual took the wall of Simon in passing" (The Fair Maid of Perth 10).

Angry at his master's treatment by the nobleman, Conachar's warrior code motivates him to protect the glover's honor. Simon rebukes him, insisting he walk a middle path instead. However, by criticizing Conachar's behavior this way, Simon suppresses, albeit unconsciously, the ancient warrior class of highland Scots which, like Cedric's culture, predates chivalry: " . . . what have we to do with honor? said Simon Glover. If thou wouldst remain in my service, thou must think of honesty, and leave honor to the swaggering fools who wear steel at their heels and iron on their shoulders" (10). Simon criticizes the Highland way of life, condemning battles fought for honor and glory. Consequently, he forces Conachar into conforming to his own cultural values. Thus, the more advanced culture squelches Conachar's noble, ancient roots, as the Norman culture oppresses Cedric's people. However, Simon also condemns the more modern institution of chivalry. By doing so, he downplays the importance of the aristocracy, a social class that actually moves full circle into the same low socioeconomic status the highlanders assume by the late fourteenth century. This repetition of history suggests a Marxist cycle: the aristocracy, after having oppressed the common man for centuries, eventually crumbles, making room for the skilled, rising middle class. In the fourteenth century, the uneducated and somewhat lazy aristocracy cannot compete with the skilled bourgeoisie, and as a result, begins sliding to the status of Marx's proletariat: unlearned, unskilled,

forced into manual labor for low pay, and therefore, unimportant and easily oppressed.

This cycle, clearly visible in the interaction between the smith and Conachar, reveals uncanny parallels to Marx's own vision. Living by his phallic sword, Henry Smith, representing the rising bourgeoisie, nearly kills the highlander, a member of a culture quickly vanishing into the mists of time. "Had this been in another place, young gallows-bird," Henry says, after Conachar spills liquor on him, "I had stowed the lugs out of thy head, as I have done to some of thy clan before thee" (25). This grisly image, obviously more of an attack upon Conachar's culture rather than the man himself, illustrates the level of oppression wrapped around him like a shroud. "Never shall you live to make that boast again!" Conachar yells, springing onto the smith with a knife (25). However, through Henry's exhibition of superior strength and socioeconomic status, Conachar, symbolizing both an ancient, outdated culture and the declining chivalric class, finds himself again subdued by the more powerful, rising bourgeoisie:

> "Conachar felt himself at once in the absolute power of the formidable antagonist whom he had provoked; he became deadly pale as he had been moment before glowing red and stood mute with shame and fear, until, relieving him from his powerful hold, the smith quietly said, 'It is well for thee that thou canst not make me angry; thou art but a boy and I, a grown man, ought not to have provoked thee. But let this be a warning" (25-6).

Conachar and Henry, in their individual roles, symbolize the past and the present respectively. In a postmodern sense, the past must harmoniously coexist with the present; society does itself a dangerous disservice if the two remain in conflict. A culture cannot really "progress" because people doom themselves into repeating history's mistakes. Henry for example, while having the status of a honest, hardworking burgher, commits the same savagery and baseness he attributes to the "churlish" highlanders.

Thus, whatever civilized and progressive actions he takes in life matters little. Nobody understands this effect in the novel better than Catherine.

Perhaps the most temporally holistic character of all in the novel, Catherine's unique perception gives her a purely objective focal point with no apparent temporal "baggage:"

> " 'I will grant you, my father, that [Henry] is one of the best-hearted men that draws breath within its walls; that he would walk a hundred yards out of his way rather than step upon a worm; that he would be as loth, in wantonness, to kill a spider as if he were a kinsman to King Robert . . . I will grant you also that the poor never pass the house of the wealthy armourer but they are relieved with food and alms. But what avails all this, when his sword makes as many starving orphans and mourning widows as his purse relieves?' " (28-9).

Catherine, Simon's beloved daughter, cannot become a casualty of the times because she lives independently of society's constraints, as does her counterpart Rebecca in Ivanhoe. Those around her, Simon in particular, cannot appreciate the value of her words because he remains bound to the times, engulfed in the repetitive cycle of history. With these characters, Scott criticizes the myopia of his own society, in its reluctance to recognize historical implications on the present as well as its mistrust of temporally holistic literary works.

Ivanhoe's setting, especially notable in terms of postmodern representation, explores cultural dominance across time and space. This section will deal with Scott's own explanation of his elaborate description of scene:

> "This state of things I have thought it necessary to premise for the information of the general reader, who might be apt to forget, that, although no great historical events such as a war or insurrection, mark the existence of the Anglo-Saxons as a separate people subsequent to the rein of William the second; yet the great national distinctions betwixt them and their conquerors, the recollection of what they had formally been, and to

> what they were now reduced, continued, down to the rein of Edward the third, to keep open the wounds which the conquest had inflicted, and to maintain a line of separation betwixt the descendents of the victor Normans and the vanquished Saxons"(Ivanhoe 27).

Scott obviously places huge emphasis on setting, as he describes in vivid detail the characters' surroundings, almost to the point where the reader can envision himself/herself a time traveler in a medieval world:

> "The sun was setting upon one of the rich grassy glades of that forest, which we have mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. Hundreds of broad-headed, short-stemmed, wide-branched oaks, which had witnessed perhaps the stately march of the Roman soldierly, flung their gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious green sward; in some places they were intermingled with beeches, hollies, and copsewood of various descriptions, so closely as totally to intercept the level beams of the sinking sun; in others they receded from each other, forming delights to lose itself, while imagination considers them as the paths to yet wider scenes of sylvan solitude. Here the red rays of the sun shot a broken and discoloured light, that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees, and there they illuminated in brilliant patches the portions of turf to which they made their way" (28).

Here, we see a continuous cycle of oppression and submission. The image of the Roman regime imposing on a sylvan utopia suggests the very origins of England's conquests while the "broken" rays of the setting sun, red in color, symbolizes England's myriad of wars for dominance over the centuries, and symbolizing both in the twelfth century and the nineteenth century the gradual decline of the glory of merry England. However, the symbolism Scott works with in setting transcends linear notions of time and reveals a world in which the past and present interact with and define each other.

The conflict between the Normans and the Saxons represents a universal battle of a dominating class over a subordinated class. In modern times, remnants of the Norman Conquest still exist in the subtle tension between the English and the French. In the

nineteenth century, the Napoleonic wars reflected, through the myriad of military occupations, the conquest of William the second. The English, to some degree, still regard the French as flamboyant and "prissy," and the French view the English as stiff and cold. In America, remaining tension between the North and the South reaches its talons back to the Civil War era. In Ivanhoe, Scott uses the Norman Conquest as a mere template, illustrating that history invariably repeats itself, across cultures and across time. In most cases, the dominating culture moves on, but the conquered culture never forgets the injustices: the anger and resentment cascade down through the generations. Because the conquered culture cannot forget, the society remains trapped in that subordinate state, stagnant. The Saxons, for example, remained in their low social status until resentment gave way to acceptance, at which point intermarriage between the two races created the unified race of Anglo-Normans who share a common English identity today. However, lingering memories in the collective unconscious of all Englishmen contribute to the shaky relationship between the English and even Anglo-Americans, and the French. Such attitudes therefore not only span temporal space, but physical space as well. The Napoleonic wars of Scott's time also brought to the forefront the old prejudices and attitudes introduced by the conquering Normans eight hundred years prior. Once again, a French culture threatened "merry old England" and conquered as much territory as possible, replacing distant cultures with French government and culture, in some grandiose "humane" attempt to civilize the world. These wars no doubt triggered some of Scott's intensive retrospection into past histories and were responsible for his non-linear treatment of scene.

While Scott's approach to setting in The Fair Maid of Perth mirrors that of

Ivanhoe, the former work shows more political sophistication. Scott's unique approach to history therefore stands out in this novel all the more clearer:

> "From the same advantage of situation, [Perth] presents a variety of the most pleasing character. Its lakes, woods, and mountains may vie in beauty with any that the Highland tour exhibits; and while Perthshire contains, amidst this romantic scenery, and in some places in connexion with it, many fertile and habitable tracts, which may vie with the richness of merry England herself. The county has also been the scene of many remarkable exploits and events, some of historical importance, others interesting to the poet and romancer, though recorded in popular tradition alone. It was in these vales that the Saxons of the plain and the Gael of the mountains had many a desperate and bloody encounter, in which it was frequently impossible to decide the palm of victory between the mailed chivalry of the low country and the plaided clans whom they opposed" (The Fair Maid of Perth 2).

As an element of foreshadowing, Scott connects Perthshire with senseless bloodshed: the same lands that were once the ancestral battle grounds of the highlanders and the lowland Scots remain the site of their altercations in a fourteenth century now populated by a rising bourgeoisie. Opposing highland clans, with an invitation from the aristocracy, engage in a gladiator-like display of barbarism in which they slaughter each other over a clan feud for the amusement of the more "genteel" upper class, consisting of King Robert's court.

Scott illustrates that, as in the case with Perth, the essence of human society never really changes; elements of culture merely pass through different "disguises." For example, while a fourteenth century burgher believed that breaking into an individual's home and murdering him was unethical and dishonorable, that fact did not prevent him from getting into an altercation with the same individual on the street and running him through with a sword. In the same way, a group of highlandmen engaged in a clan-war may seem savage and base to the chivalry of the time. However, placing those same

individuals in a sports arena and watching them hack each other to death under "controlled" conditions proves acceptable to the burghers and aristocratic spectators, and even morbidly exhilarating. Today, in the twenty first century, many hockey fans relish the fights more than the game itself. The cycles therefore never end; society can experience no progress toward a "higher" civilization of the kind early Victorians admired. Chandler deals with this "cycle" of history by mentioning the danger in humankind's passage into the future without any kind of reconciliation with the past: "Both the Scottish and the medieval novels consistently reject violence and lawlessness – both the violence of those who have remained too far in the past and the lawlessness of those who are moving too recklessly toward the future" (A Dream of Order 31-2). The aristocracy, aching for power, prestige and change, hover over King Robert like carnivorous buzzards waiting for just the right opportunity to swoop down and advance their own selfish needs. Obviously, this level of opportunism destroys the bond between King and subject, ultimately leading to a total breakdown of order, especially in the highland tournament, full of the violence and recklessness that Chandler suggests. The microcosm of the court therefore mirrors the microcosm of the town: the hardworking, organized ways of the town foreshadow the final breakdown of the feudal system. However, the breakdown of the feudal system also foreshadows the eventual corruption and disorder of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century, keeping with the notion of temporal continuity. While a modernist would qualify this cycle as a pattern of progress and decline, the cycle of history simply exists, taking humankind on an eternal roller coaster ride that neither guarantees progress nor promises any utopian end in sight.

As was touched upon earlier, the many changes going on in Scott's time

influenced his subject matter heavily. In 1819, Scott wrote Ivanhoe, and in 1828 The Fair Maid of Perth. The former novel explores in particular, negative historical patterns associated with war. Writing in the midst of the Nepoleonic wars, Scott realized two important things. First, while the archetypal quest for conquest and glory still burned utopian visions in the minds of his contemporaries, Scott recognized that the soldiers' desire for honor and glory ultimately proves futile because the only the death and destruction of war and conquest linger through time. In Ivanhoe, Rebecca serves as the spokesperson for this: "Glory? [Said] Rebecca; 'alas, is the rusted mail which hangs as a hatchment over the champion's dim and moldering tomb – is the defaced sculpture of the inscription which the ignorant monk can hardly read to the enquiring pilgrim . . . (316). Second, Scott realized that the conquests of France, despite all of Napolean's lofty ideals, differed little from the barbarisms of the Norman occupation during the Conquest, or the oppression of natives during the British occupation of India in the nineteenth century. Therefore, in Scott's mind, such deeds of "progress" make little sense because no progress is actually made: the violence simply repeats itself. Catherine hits the proverbial nail on the head when she says of Henry, "His days are days of battle, and, doubtless, he acts them over [and over] again in his dreams" (28). The microcosm of the human mind, then, also mirrors the macrocosm.

However, putting all this pessimism aside, Scott foresees one escape from the repetitive cycle of history: a retreat to feudal simplicity:

> "Let us thank God and the good saints that we are in a peaceful rank of life, below the notice of those whose high birth, and yet higher pride, lead them to glory in their bloody works of cruelty, which haughty and lordly men term deeds of chivalry. Your wisdom will allow that it would be absurd in us to prank ourselves in their dainty plumes and splendid

> garments; why, then, should we imitate their full-blown vices? Why should be assume their hard-hearted pride and relentless cruelty, to which murder is not only a sport, but a subject of vainglorious triumph? Let those whose rank claims as its right such bloody homage take pride and pleasure in it; we, who have no share in the sacrifice, may better pity the sufferings of the victim. Let us thank our lowliness, since it secures us from temptation" (The Fair Maid of Perth 30).

Here, Catherine points out the negative effects of chivalry on the "culture" of the aristocracy, suggesting that the court should be allowed to destroy itself through its vices while the townspeople enjoy a life of peaceful simplicity. Of utmost importance is Catherine's final line, which reflects the belief held both in the nineteenth century and today that one loses one's innocence when one moves from the rural area to the city. On a macrocosmic scale, as contemporary society has moved farther from its rural, medieval past and entered first the industrial and now the post-industrial age, society lost its innocence. Ironically, however, with all the gains in education and technology, Western society has also lost the old-fashioned wisdom that Catherine possesses which exempts her from that repetitive cycle. Catherine, not burdened with the worries and stresses of contemporary life, has the opportunity to pause and contemplate. Catherine possesses what Socrates would call "a questioned life." As all Romantic writers would concur, however, whatever remnants we have left of that "questioned life" is rapidly fading from the earth.

One may reduce these novels to merely the genre of romantic fiction. Indeed, many of Scott's time also call these novels costume dramas. However, whatever category one may choose to place these works in, one must realize that both of these novels illustrate the repetitive nature of history, and contemporary critics have done these works great disservice by leaving them in the dark collecting dust since the 1960s.

However, some may have issues with the assertion that Ivanhoe and The Fair Maid of Perth exemplify postmodernism. Critics may claim that a technically modernist individual like Scott cannot possibly "foresee" a change in historical perspective that was took place over a century into the future. However, as a closing note, this thesis will not only reiterate that these novels anticipate postmodernism, but will also suggest that the novels ARE postmodern. "Postmodernism does not produce," argues Thomas Docherty in After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism. The postmodern work of art does not actually exist, is not produced as a product or object in the conventional essentialist sense of the word . . ." (15). Literary works then, not created with the deliberate intention of being postmodern, need not necessarily belong to any particular time period. Therefore, one need not fear comparing "apples" to "oranges" Furthermore, "the postmodern work typically transgresses all sorts of institutional or conventional bonds or boundaries . . . " (16). In other words, the postmodern work is temporally holistic. In this sense, novels written in a style considered blatantly controversial in their day, such as Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, may also fall within the realm of postmodernism. In Ivanhoe and The Fair Maid of Perth, Scott presents historical fiction in a manner never tried by any of his contemporaries. Hopefully in the future, new generations of postmodern critics will give Scott the attention he lacked during his lifetime.

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