

which a single motivating doctrine generates a parable that illustrates it: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Candide*, *Rasselas*. Montesquieu's novel is one ancestor of this form, not an example of it. A better term of comparison is the modern novel of ideas, in which characters both articulate and embody different standpoints, whose conflicts detonate the action—Dostoevsky, Musil, Malraux, Sartre. Their narrative superiority is enormous, to the point where we are tempted to deny the term *novel* to any work, like *Lettres persanes*, which falls so far short of it. But a price came with the gain. The range and originality of the ideas that animate these works is less—had to be less, to shape a compelling plot—than those that the president of the Bordeaux Parlement offered so disarmingly to the public three centuries ago.

IAN DUNCAN

*Waverley*  
(Walter Scott, 1814)

“The first historical novel.” If Lukács exaggerated the claim, making Scott an author *ex nihilo*, recent critics have drawn attention to thriving prior traditions of historical fiction, gothic romance, and national tale that flowed into *Waverley*. It remains the case that Scott transformed these precursors into something new: nothing less than the novel of the nineteenth century, a genre that realizes its modernity in a discursive reckoning with history, from which it seizes—to make its own—the narrative of modernization. *Waverley* signals that renewal by telling, through its narrative of public and private histories, the tale of its own formation as the genre of modern life.

In *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, Scott established the historical novel as national genre. The title epigraph, from 2 *Henry IV*, alludes to the precedent of Shakespeare's History plays: “Under which King, Bezonian? speak, or die!” Scott follows Shakespeare to make civil war the classical setting of historical fiction: it is the fiery, bloody rift in the fabric of common life through which history and national character become visible. *Waverley* makes its topic the 1745 Jacobite rising, the last civil conflict on British soil, and the last attempt of an elder dynasty to regain its forfeited historical sway—confirming only its belatedness, its exclusion from history, and the irreversible, inexorable drive of modernization:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745,—the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs,—the abolition of the jurisdictions of the Lowland nobility and barons,—the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to mingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs, commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time. (340)

The publication of *Waverley* coincided with Bonaparte's defeat: a final settlement (or so it seemed) of the political form of modernity. At such a juncture, the novel assumes not just national but world-historical status.

Scott invested fiction with the imperial logic of Scottish Enlightenment philosophical history, which binds all human societies to a universal scheme of development, from hunting tribes through nomadic herders and farmers to a commercial modernity. The inner spring of history becomes visible, not in the difference between rival empires, dynasties, or parties, but in the difference between social and economic systems that marks the transition between developmental stages—in other words, in the difference between cultures, ways of life. Scott's hero travels north from an English estate through Lowland Scotland, with its local remnants of feudalism, up into the Highlands, the haunt of patriarchal clans. Scott installs the narrative drive of historical fiction: a movement across territories that charts a movement between cultures and epochs. And he develops, with unmatched subtlety, the main topos of this narrative, the *border*: the location of history as the site of cultural difference and transition, where identities and languages collide, mix, and exchange properties, as they define, transform, absorb, or dissolve one another.

*Waverley* claims for the novel the historical geography of uneven development, which represents the journey from the imperial core as a journey back in time. We learn that the journey itself—through the presence of the modern traveler, who carries our reading eye—is the act that converts a cultural difference into historical anteriority, as it rehearses the imperial penetration of the hinterland. We are able to see, since we are not *Waverley* but are reading him, the operation of an eye at first innocent, merely curious, not knowing itself to be the bearer of a politics. Young Edward *Waverley*, an English officer, leaves his regiment to tour the Highlands on the eve of the 1745 rising, which will end in the destruction of the clans by his own army and government legislation. Until it is too late *Waverley* fails to grasp the historical character of the Highlanders as Jacobite insurgents, already committed to a futile resistance to the regime whose arms he bears—a failure of interpretation that follows his inability to understand his own historical agency. Scott's narrative renders clearly the imperial logic that rewrites the other world as "archaic," already superseded, doomed to pass, in its very glamour and fascination for the modern reader. *Waverley's* Highland friends are executed for treason, but he survives and prospers. His survival changes the meaning of the experience he has been through. Once Jacobitism has been eradicated as a political movement, and the Highland clans dissolved as a social system, their values can be reclaimed in the form of cultural capital; empire renews itself ideologically through the absorption of primitive virtues of courage and loyalty.

A painting of *Waverley's* Highland adventure is unveiled in Scott's final

scene. The novel shows us, framed within its own representation, the modern production of the past that historians have called "the invention of tradition":

It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and *Waverley* in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a man of high genius, and had been painted on a full length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself, (whose Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Beside this painting hung the arms which *Waverley* had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was generally admired. (338)

Scott exposes the imperial production of this work of art, across the metropolitan sites of Edinburgh and London. "The whole piece" comprises *Waverley's* rebel arms, converted from the evidence of treason to trophies or souvenirs, whose function now is to authenticate the hero's mythic sojourn among an organic brotherhood. The reader should recall that no such scene ever took place in the novel. The painting offers a sentimental purification of *Waverley's* confused motives during the Jacobite campaign, as well as his uneasy relationship with Fergus Mac-Ivor, at odds with Scott's persistently ironical narration. The *ephrasis*, occupying the narrative's last page, mirrors the representation we have been reading—published in Edinburgh and London—but also invites us to think critically about that representation and its historical conditions, including the conditions of our reading. Only if we are reading badly, forgetting (like *Waverley* himself) what we have read before, can we acquiesce in its nostalgia, or mistake it for the narrative that frames it.

The historical novel secures the effect of history, as an overdetermined logic of "progress" or modernization, by synchronizing different levels of narration into a complex, unified, dialectical structure. The key homology, locking in the set, identifies a collective process of social change with an individual process of psychological, sentimental, and moral development: national history and bildungsroman mediate one other. The raw and uncertain

modernity of the United Kingdom consolidates itself upon a final conflict with the social and political forces it designates as premodern, while Waverley attains rational adulthood through a cathartic indulgence in adolescent fantasy.

Two things are notable about the protagonist of this national and historical bildungsroman. One is the effect observed by all commentators, from the first reviewers to late-twentieth-century critics: the mediocrity or blankness of Scott's hero, as he occupies a passive relation to the crisis—historical, psychosexual—that whirls around him. Lukács reads the hero's blankness as the anonymous screen of a new, middle-class historical agency: Alexander Welsh reads it as the subjective correlative of property—*itself inert*, exerting gravitational force—in the symbolic order of commercial society. Scott's narrative sustains a dissociation, often drastic, between Waverley's intention and his experience: a divorce of consciousness from historical process that (acquitting him from free assent to treason) will eventually guarantee his survival. With this dissociation of narrative agency, Scott defines the protagonist of the modern novel, from the proper, anxious bourgeois gentleman of Victorian fiction to his more chronically alienated peers in the Continental empires: the superfluous man, the man without qualities.

The other crux of this subjectivity is its dialectical formation through a quixotic indulgence and disciplinary refinement of the aesthetic faculty. *Waverley* narrates the triumph of the aesthetic, threatened by the trauma of a repressed historical knowledge but then absorbing it, in the production of a critical consciousness for modern life. At the beginning of the novel Waverley inhabits a "feminine," narcissistic sensibility that secures itself by investing the world with romantic tropes and images. As the narrative unfolds, Waverley's narcissism enjoys a rich and complex expansion, however much ironized against his ignorance of the political realities that subtend events. His imagination, not limited to the projection of romantic associations, is also acutely sensitive to certain vibrations within a local scene, because it filters out the noise of historical, political meaning.

The most rapturous of Waverley's romantic encounters comes in his audience with Flora Mac-Ivor, the clan chieftain's beautiful and accomplished sister, in a wild Highland glen. Surrounded by appropriate scenery, Flora offers Waverley her "imperfect translation" of a Gaelic song: "To speak in the poetical language of my country, the seat of the Celtic Muse is in the mist of the secret and solitary hill, and her voice in the murmur of the mountain stream. He who woos her must love the barren rock more than the fertile valley, and the solitude of the desert better than the festivity of the hall" (106-7). Flora's "poetical language," troping the historical geography of her country, encodes an invitation to join the rebel cause—her song is a Jacobite call to arms. But

the appeal to metaphor amplifies the historical irony that will negate her cause, and render her world—in every way—a barren desert. Waverley misconstrues the appeal. His aesthetic attunement to Flora's charms and to the picturesque landscape—to the tropes themselves—obliterates politics: "Indeed the wild feeling of romantic delight, with which he heard the first few notes she drew from her instrument, amounted almost to a sense of pain. He would not for worlds have quitted his place by her side; yet he almost longed for solitude, that he might decypher and examine at leisure the complication of emotions which now agitated his bosom" (107).

Waverley almost longs for solitude, but in the form of an interior space of aesthetic withdrawal and contemplation. This is, explicitly, a space of reading: presently occupied by ourselves. In fact, Waverley's "wild feeling of romantic delight" accurately predicts his destiny. As Flora later acknowledges, he belongs, not to the battlefield or the senate, but to "the quiet circle of domestic happiness" and "lettered indolence," where his chief occupation will be to "refit the old library in the most exquisite Gothic taste" (250). This invocation of the reader as teleological figure of Waverley's history—occupying the privileged horizon of a domesticity beyond "history," that is, social and political struggle—should disconcert us, as readers now, as much as it might have reassured Scott's original readers in the aftermath of the French wars.

The failure of the rising brings Waverley to a disciplinary reflection upon his experience: "[It] was in many a winter walk by the shores of Ulswater, that he acquired a more complete mastery of a spirit tamed by adversity, than his former experience had given him; and that he felt himself entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced" (283). Scott's novel, however, does not trace a progressive trajectory from "romance" to "real history." The narrative goes on to reward the chastened hero with his domestic haven; its chief ornament, the painting of Waverley's Highland adventure, commemorates the romance of his life rather than its real history. The difference falls in the melancholy recognition of defeat and loss that has intervened between the experience and its representation. That elegiac knowledge, which the reader shares, now makes the aesthetic sense fit for the inhabitation of history: in the medium of romance, through which we may imagine our relation to past and present conditions.

Scott's contribution to the history of the novel can be read in the key word *romance*, which he (more than anyone) fixed in its modern, double usage: a

subjective state of the imagination, the narrative form of premodern cultures. In *Waverley*, for the first time, the novel narrates the history of its own formation as a genre—a historicization that touches not just literary form but the function and status of fiction as an institution, a set of material forms and social practices, including our act of reading.

The romance of his life was ended; its real history had now commenced. The early chapters of *Waverley* rehearse the convention of quixotism with which the early English novel had defended its fitness to represent modern life, opposing itself to a decadent, inauthentic kind of fiction called “romance.” Young *Waverley*, secluded from the world, his education neglected, reads old romances. His reading forms his self-image and conditions his response to outward scenes: “He had now time to give himself up to the full romance of his situation” (78). *Waverley*’s involvement in the Jacobite campaign is figured as enthrallment in an Italian courtly romance by Boiardo or Ariosto, in other words, an absolutist and Catholic genre—an enthrallment demystified, for the reader, by the narrator’s running allusions to Protestant British authors. Spenserian allegory and Miltonic epic point up the historical character of the rebellion as a diabolical error, since these are the literary forms of decisive earlier stages of national history, the Reformation and Revolution. Belonging to the past, these genres are no longer historically sufficient, and *Waverley*, above all, reflects on the eighteenth-century “rise of the novel” as the national genre of modernity, secured at the very moment of the tale’s action: Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, echoed in Scott’s opening chapters, also addresses 1745 as its own historical context. We are to understand that this kind of novel, too, now represents a superseded historical stage. The anti-Scottish bigotry professed by the spokesman of Fieldingesque English values in *Waverley*, Colonel Talbot, measures the more generous range of national sympathy encompassed by the novel in which he appears. The national novel was an Irish and Scottish achievement (Scott pays homage to Maria Edgeworth) rather than an English one. Indeed, Scott himself would go on to invent a national historical romance for England, in *Ivanhoe* (1820).

That generous sympathetic range extends to a diversity of literary and linguistic forms. *Waverley* marks its advance over the eighteenth-century novel in its character as a historical romance, comprising within its discourse the historical archive of a national culture, assembled in the antiquarian projects of the late-Enlightenment romance and ballad revivals. In addition to the courtly and polite genres of literary history, Scott’s novel presents an anthology of vernacular materials: ballads, popular rhymes, and songs; “folklore,” proverbs, and regional and social dialects; and legal and professional documents. With this innovative miscellany of sources and discourses, *Waverley*

and its successors establish the nineteenth-century project of representing a complex, dynamic social world, extending in time as well as space. The representation includes an amplified, referentially saturated realism, but working alongside other mimetic styles, within the global category of “romance”: designating the modes of interpretation, thought-experiment, and fantasy encoded in historically variable narrative forms. With Scott, for the first time, the British novel claims fiction as its motive principle—rather than some other discourse of truth of which it is the didactic vessel. The historical novel subsumes history to a cognitive work peculiar to fiction, and for which philosophical authority can be found in the empiricism of David Hume. The reader of Scott’s novels is brought to recognize the imaginary, aesthetically and socially constructed character of historical reality, in the present as well as in the past. Although their author may well have wanted the recognition to bind us more closely to that reality, the novels themselves do not guarantee a particular ideological outcome, as their reception history shows us.

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PAOLO TORTONESE

*The Mysteries of Paris*  
(Eugène Sue, 1842–1843)

"But when will you stop torturing us," protests a listener, losing patience with the endless dragging out of a story that has gone on for too long. The setting is a prison. The listener is a hardened criminal called "le Squelette," the skeleton. He is sitting amid a group of convicts forming a tight circle around an equally criminal but less dangerous narrator, Pique-Vinaigre. Both men have nonliterary motivations: one is in a hurry; the other is killing time. At issue is whether to prevent or produce the conditions for a murder. But the listeners ignore these motivations and hang innocently on the words of a narrator who with lavish cruelty rivets them to a pleasure made all the greater the more ruthlessly he defers it. A pleasure that is fed by postponements, swollen by deprivation, gratified by torment. The longer you await pleasure, the more you enjoy it. Yet true pleasure does not arrive at the end of the wait, when the obstacle is cleared and the end revealed: it lies instead in the hurdles and deceptions themselves, the satiric teasing constituted by postponement, the torture of seeing the prey get away. Pique-Vinaigre, in his way, is a professional storyteller. He even makes his fellow prisoners pay and boasts of the powers of the story he is about to tell, strong enough to "break one's hearts and make your hair stand on end." Who wouldn't shell out five cents to "have his heart broken and his hair stand on end?" (8.8.1,029).<sup>1</sup>

This is how the two key elements of the *roman-feuilleton*, or serial novel, are deployed within the genre's inaugural work: in the passage from the *Mysteries of Paris* just quoted, the novel attracts interest through emotional implications and narrative rhythm, each of which is indispensable: the reader has to suffer twice, both as an empathetic participant in the character's suffering and as the victim of delaying tactics. It would seem that the

<sup>1</sup> Eugène Sue, *The Mysteries of Paris* (Chicago: M. A. Donohue Co., 1900). The name of the translator of this oft-reproduced volume (in facsimile and on the Internet) is not given.

[Translator's note: The division of the English translation into parts and chapters does not correspond to French text: the French is divided into ten parts and 159 chapters, plus epilogue; the English is divided into three parts and 108 chapters, plus epilogue. Therefore, in the citations the part and chapter numbers of the original French have been maintained, while the page numbers refer to the English translation. Where the French *roman* was translated as "romance," it has been emended to "novel." No page numbers are given for passages that were apparently not included in the published translation.]