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Lionel Lackey

Vainly Expected Messiahs: Christianity, Chivalry and Charity in *Ivanhoe*

Ivanhoe, Scott's account of ethnic, political, and military conflict in England after the unsuccessful Third Crusade, is closer to being a religious novel than commentators have acknowledged. Its central struggle is between the forces of superstition, bigotry, and brutality and those of enlightened justice and mercy, with the varieties of religious experience in the novel serving as a medium to convey all these attitudes.

No one claims that Scott was a theologian, his *Religious Discourses by a Layman* notwithstanding.¹ Yet the truth may be not so much that his treat-

¹Scott's little-known *Religious Discourses by a Layman* (Philadelphia, 1828) comprises two sermons which he wrote for a clergyman friend, George Huntly Gordon. John Buchan speaks of their "irreproachable orthodoxy" (Buchan, p. 315), a characterization with which I concur: In his preface Scott acknowledges that "they contain no novelty of opinion" (*Discourses* VII). Linking Judaism and Christianity, Scott stresses Christ's words from the Sermon on the Mount, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets" (p. 20), but adds the specifically Christian proviso that "The Law and the Prophets were . . . to be fulfilled, not only by the doctrines which Christ preached. . . . but by the events of his life, and by the scheme of redemption which he promulgated" (pp. 28-9). Echoing tolerant sentiments found in *Ivanhoe*, Scott says, "Alas! the gathering of the nations has already taken place, and those who were first [i.e., Jews] have become last, yet we hope will not ultimately remain last in the road of salvation" (p. 45). But, whether speaking in his own voice or creating a pious persona appropriate for Gordon, Scott is antinomian enough to admonish that "Good deeds, whether done to be seen of men, or flowing from the natural disposition of the human heart . . . , will sink to their proper level and estimation in the eyes

ment of religion in *Ivanhoe* is superficial² as that he sought to portray medieval religion (indeed he did the religion of more recent times) as itself superficial—at least in terms of the ends he thought religion should serve. Some of the characters of the novel mechanically repeat set phrases of their faith while others vaguely advert to its doctrines, seldom allowing either faith or doctrine to affect for the better their predetermined needs or chosen courses of action. Even so, if Scott shows religion in the Age of Faith to be superficial, he also shows it to be pervasive.

This combination of superficiality and pervasiveness explains in part why the enlightened hero and heroine—Ivanhoe and Rebecca³—have to resort so continually to concealment in the form of hoods, helmets, veils, and curtains. Graham McMaster, Avrom Fleishman, and John P. Farrell are among the commentators who have noted the frequency with which Scott dramatizes the need of a supportive society, an environment conducive to the safety of the nonconforming individual, which will assimilate him rather than force him into ideological fanaticism on the one hand or alienation on the other. This need, they find, is often denied by the societies in the novels.⁴

Thus it is significant that not until the end of Chapter 12, at the climax of the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, does Scott uncover for the first time the hitherto-concealed head of his title hero: "the well-formed yet sunburnt features of a young man of twenty-five . . . amidst a profusion of short fair hair."⁵ At twenty-five Ivanhoe is older than the usual Waverley protagon-

of the Divinity, which will *not* view them as an atonement for a life spent in the habitual breach of his law, and contempt for his Commandments" (p. 78). I sense a disparity between the conforming tone of these sermons and the more rationalistic tenor of the Waverley narrator.

²For allegations of Scott's lack of concern for religious issues in his medieval fiction, see Graham McMaster, *Scott and Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 179; John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (Port Washington, NY, 1967), pp. 227-8; and Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown* (New York, 1970), I, 746.

³Commentators who credit the title hero with some measure of intelligence and rationality include McMaster (p. 64) and Judith Wilt, in *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott* (Chicago, 1985), p. 41. On the other hand, Joseph Cottom, in *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge, 1985), sees Ivanhoe as "stalwart but unimaginative," "passionate and naive" (p. 153).

⁴See McMaster, especially pp. 49 and 227; Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore, 1971), pp. 44 and 57; and John P. Farrell, *Revolution as Tragedy: The Dilemma of the Moderate from Scott to Arnold* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), pp. 72 and 83.

⁵Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (New York: New American Library, 1962),

onist: mature enough to offer convincing opposition to his arch-rival, the Templar Bois-Guilbert.⁶ At forty, Bois-Guilbert shares Ivanhoe's sunburn and short hair, betokening experience and restraint, but not his concurrent and symbolic fairness. By this time in the narrative, Ivanhoe is, like Bois-Guilbert, already known as a veteran of an indecisive religious war. In that war he has won praise co-operating with the Normans, while at home he has successfully championed Saxon ethnic pride in a tourney against these self-same Normans, here seen as overlords. Perhaps because of these contrary allegiances, he has appeared thus far only with a palmer's "broad and shadowy hat" or a knight's helmet hiding both his prepossessing features and his identity—a concealment which parallels the veils of the novel's equally prepossessing and even more tolerant heroine, the Jewish Rebecca. "A neutral has a perilous part to sustain," Scott has Louis XI say in *Quentin Durward*;⁷ and so, he might have added, does a mediator who seeks to bridge (or to transcend the security of) nationalistic, ethnic, or religious fanaticism.

Scott's forest landscape which opens the book is Wordsworthian in its implied "lament" for "what man has made of man." Man's inhumanity is at once attested to in the complaints of the Saxon jester Wamba and Saxon swineherd Gurth against their Norman oppressors.⁸ The unhappy and unheralded return of Ivanhoe to his father's home parallels—as pointed out by Jerome Mitchell⁹ and Scott himself—Homer's *Odyssey*. But whereas Odysseus' return came late enough to seem the climax of a restitution favored by beneficent gods, Ivanhoe's at the opening of the novel seems only the beginning of a struggle to be won—if at all—mainly through fallible human agency.

p. 146 (Ch. 12). All further references to *Ivanhoe* are to this edition and are cited in the text. Chapter numbers have been added for the convenience of readers using other editions of Scott.

⁶Alexander Welsh, in *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New York, 1968), distinguishes between light and dark heroes and heroines in Scott; see especially p. 65. I find that Ivanhoe's blending of light hair and dark features symbolically places him between Welsh's categories.

⁷Sir Walter Scott, *Quentin Durward* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1944), p. 164.

⁸David Brown, in *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London, 1979), objects that Wamba and Gurth in this scene are complaining about Norman oppressors when the Saxon, Cedric, is the immediate source of the exploitations they mention (p. 185).

⁹Jerome Mitchell, *Scott, Chaucer, and Medieval Romance: A Study in Sir Walter Scott's Indebtedness to the Literature of the Middle Ages* (Lexington, KY, 1987), p. 129.

Ivanhoe, destined with Richard and Locksley to ease the burden of Norman tyranny against his Saxon compatriots, early appears at Cedric's home in religious habit but is not received by his own. Thus he sounds for the first time in the novel a recurrent theme later touched on by Bois-Guilbert is wooing the Jewess Rebecca: the long-desired, long-delayed coming of "your vainly-expected Messiah" (p. 241; Ch. 24). Many characters in this tale expect Messiahs in vain. Rowena holds out like Penelope against a marriage with Athelstane, hoping for deliverance by Ivanhoe. Her Messiah comes, but not the same as she knew him, for he is now modified in his love and his principles by Rebecca. Isaac the Jew fretfully tells his daughter Rebecca that he "trust[s] in the rebuilding of Zion" but expressed doubt that "the very best of Christians" will "repay a debt to a Jew" (p. 123; Ch. 10). He soon receives reimbursement from Ivanhoe, but he is destined to find no Zion in Christian England. Rebecca herself confides to Ivanhoe her hope that "the God of Jacob shall raise up for His chosen people a second Gideon, or a new Maccabeus" (p. 296; Ch. 29). Ivanhoe proves a partial Gideon, but he rescues only Rebecca, not her oppressed people. Lucas Beaumanoir, austere Grand Master of the Templars, acts as a self-appointed Messiah to his order when he vows that "I WILL purify the fabric of the Temple" (p. 360; Ch. 35). This purification dwindles to an effort to burn one innocent Jewish girl. Cedric waits for a Saxon nationalist millennium led by Athelstane the Unready. He receives at last only a climactic put-down from this comically resurrected Messiah: "Talk not to me of delivering anyone" (p. 443; Ch. 42). And Ivanhoe builds his hope on the second coming of a lionhearted king who will establish national unity and justice. But the king's gestures of reform resemble only "the course of a rapid and brilliant meteor . . . instantly swallowed up by universal darkness" (p. 426; Ch. 41). With so many failed Messiahs and so many impotent or worse-than-impotent faiths, Ivanhoe must remain helmeted and Rebecca veiled.

Except for the calmly idealistic Rebecca, the characters of *Ivanhoe* tend to pray for mercies temporal rather than divine. They adhere to that form of religion which will best provide or promise each the specific worldly commodity he craves. The tolerant Scott seems to understand and usually to forgive such motivation, but he constantly reminds his reader that human behavior and human religion are seldom totally altruistic. Despite the mildly antinomian tone of *Religious Discourses*, for the Author of *Waverley* the ideal religion stresses good works above forms, doctrines, perhaps even faith.¹⁰ Against this scale of values he tends to divide his characters and

¹⁰Duncan Forbes, in "The Rationalism of Sir Walter Scott," *Cambridge Journal*, 7 (1953) places Scott's religion among "survivals from the Age of Reason," as indicated by his emphasis on "beneficial effects on the state of society," "his concern with morality," and

their religions into the harmless, the hopeless, and the serious aspirants to perfection—always with the caveat that for a cultural relativist like Scott such classifications must also be relative.¹¹

The "harmless" believers include most of the churchmen, most of the Saxons, and the Jews other than Rebecca. Scott employs parallelism and juxtaposition in a way that shows little to choose among these professors and their professions. Thus Prior Aymer of Jorvaulx is "generous" (p. 42; Ch. 2) and "a professional peacemaker" (p. 71; Ch. 5) but also a womanizer whose eroticism confuses Old and New Testaments with Greek mythology and courtly romance in references to "St. Niobe" (p. 243; Ch. 25) and Hebrew youths who receive papal dispensations (p. 167; Ch. 15). The Clerk of Copmanhurst sings of supplying the "comfort" of "the Barefooted Friar" to willing widows (p. 184; Ch. 17) and does not know whether to endorse or lament the burning of Rebecca, wishing "she were but the least bit of a Christian" (p. 454; Ch. 43). In a war of Latin scriptural texts in Chapter 33, neither the Norman Prior nor the Saxon Clerk sounds like a model of saintliness, any more than the Jew Isaac who ironically condemns the Prior's avarice in the same chapter.

Sometimes these Christians' religious flaws go beyond the harmless, as in the not-totally-comic episode in Chapter 42 when the Monks of St. Edmund's strive to keep Athelstane dead in hopes of obtaining his stipend. Athelstane at the end is "engaged, like the country squires of our own day, in a furious war with the clergy" in retaliation (p. 462; Ch. 44), keeping the perpetrators for three days on bread and water in defiance of threatened excommunication. Scott tacitly approves this incipient act of secular humanism and subordination of church to state by a Christian who progresses from sloth and gluttony to the kind of comic "prudence" reserved for

"his anti-clericalism" (p. 21). A. N. Wilson, in *The Laird of Abbotsford: A View of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford, 1980), partly concurs that Scott is not "an 'enthusiastic' man, who has experienced the ecstasy of an evangelical conversion; [he] looks outwards, instead, to Christianity as a social force, capable of inspiring, at its best, unselfish and benevolent members of society." but, Wilson adds, "That does not make [his religion] any less deep," and "it guided and informed the profound interest he took in his fiction, in the conflicting forces of religious fanaticism and cool, reasoning common sense" (p. 93).

¹¹ Brown regards "relativism" as "a notable component of the Waverley Novels," although he applies the term to "the dubious moral value of 'progress'" (p. 202) rather than to religious attitudes as I have done. Fleishman says that to Adam Ferguson and other "scientific Whigs" who influenced Scott, "history was . . . neither the design of a deity nor the direct unfolding of an absolute, rational system, but a steady stream of tendency, good on the whole" (p. 46).

certain approved characters in the novels.¹² The "stormy people" who frequent tournaments, witch trials, and burnings¹³ exhibit not so much Christian charity as Christian zeal—a zeal which varies according to which side they think is winning or losing "like a timid cur which waits to bark till the object of his challenge has turned his back" (p. 459; Ch. 44).

The Jews, presented sympathetically as underdogs, yet do not quite live up to Scott's implied criteria of religious justice and charity.¹⁴ True, Isaac early exhibits a perceptiveness greater than that of several Christian characters, seeming to understand who and what the disguised palmer is before Cedric and Rowena do¹⁵ and supplying him with arms while he is yet Disinherited. And we are touched when, weary and anxious about Rebecca, Isaac is succored by his friend Rabbi Nathan "with that kindness which the law prescribed, and which the Jews practiced to each other" (p. 354; Ch. 35). But then there are uncharitable moments, as when in chapter 10 Isaac neglects to tip Gurth or when in Chapter 38 Nathan and he are guilty of a like omission to Higg, the Saxon workman who has risked the Templars' displeasure by conveying Rebecca's life-and-death message to her father.

It would be tempting to say that Scott has all the "hopeless" Christians or religionists self-destruct, and Francis R. Hart has called Bois-Guilbert's death by stroke as he unwillingly fights against Rebecca as "a chivalric form of old

¹²For a less flattering view of Athelstane, see Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Sven-gali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford, CA, 1969), pp. 80-81.

¹³Jerome Mitchell links the crowds in Scott's novels and poems to Chaucer's passage from "The Clerk's Tale" which I partially quoted (p. 61).

¹⁴Joseph E. Duncan, in "The Anti-Romantic in 'Ivanhoe,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 9 (1953), finds Scott's attitude toward the Jews to be one of total praise (p. 298); but Rosenberg notes some objections to the Jewish character on Scott's part (p. 74).

¹⁵Scott is rather careless in accounting for Isaac's perspicacity. Ivanhoe, when first offering to help Isaac, says, "In this dress I am vowed to poverty, nor do I change it for aught save a horse and a coat of mail" (p. 79; Ch. 6). Yet when Isaac, with apparent cunning, speaks of the supposed palmer's wish for these objects, "The Palmer started," asking "What fiend prompted that guess?" (p. 84; Ch. 6). Then again, Isaac shortly thereafter confides, "in the bosom of that Palmer's gown is hidden a knight's chain and spurs of gold. They glanced as you stooped over my bed in the morning" (p. 85; Ch. 6). Since Scott is indicating Isaac's superior understanding, whether by virtue of careful attendance to Ivanhoe's words or close observation of attire, the effect is muddled by Ivanhoe's having named his wish. Otherwise, Isaac's penetration resembles that of Bois-Guilbert, whose remarks in delivering a challenge at supper imply that he knows that the palmer is Ivanhoe.

Krook's combustion syndrome."¹⁶ Indeed Front-de-Boeuf and Ulrica perish by fire while Isaac, whom the former had planned to torture on hot coals, escapes. But the intolerant and antisocial Grand Master is allowed to retire with military dignity and a grudging compliment from King Richard. Putting historical reality before wishful thinking, Scott allows Prince John (Hardly a Christian despite his swearing "By the light of Our Lady's brow") to escape unscathed, just as Richard puts family honor before justice when he discovers John's assassination plot but punishes only the "fall guy" Fitzurse.

Front-de-Boeuf, an extreme case even for the usually compassionate Scott, is condemned to the flames as a "blasphemer and parricide" (p. 305; Ch. 30). He is parricide for killing his father, blasphemer for presuming to bespeak damnation for his fellow-inmates in the burning castle and earlier for invoking the spirit of Christianity to justify his persecution of the Jew Isaac: "I swear to thee by that which thou dost NOT believe, by the Gospel which our church teaches, and by the keys which are given to her to bind and to loose" (p. 219; Ch. 22). In the face of torture Isaac appeals to the nominal Christian in phrases foreshadowing the eighteenth-century latitudinarianism which Scott consciously or unconsciously favored: "I swear . . . by all which I believe, and by all which we believe in common," calling on "The good God of nature" to disavow such cruelty (pp. 219-220; Ch. 22). Front-de-Boeuf is depicted as being out of nature and out of society, but not quite out of religion. For though Bois-Guilbert ridicules "Front-de-Boeuf's want of faith" for which he cannot "render a reason" (p. 298; Ch. 30), the latter at death proves himself one of the demons who believe and tremble: "I have heard old men talk of prayer But I—I dare not!" (p. 301; Ch. 30).

Neither can Ulrica, his one-time paramour and accomplice, turn to Christian salvation. Despite the Gothicism of her presentation, Scott realizes this Medea-like figure with some sympathy and insight as one not so much unwilling as psychologically unable to seek Christian redemption: "We become like the fiends of hell, who may feel remorse, but never repentance" (p. 262; Ch. 27). Beset by perverse impulses of murder and self-destruction, Ulrica despairingly seeks to make the best deal she can for the hereafter, turning "to Woden, Hertha, and Zerneck, to Mista, and to Skogula, the gods of our yet unbaptized ancestors" (p. 261; Ch. 27). Yet we sense in the stoic resignation of her death-hymn an awareness that her pagan religion of revenge will be replaced by a more merciful order: "For vengeance hath but an hour; / Strong hate itself shall expire! / I also must perish!" (p. 318; Ch. 31).

¹⁶Francis R. Hart, *Scott's Novels: The Plotting of Historical Survival* (Charlottesville, 1966), p. 158.

Scott does not bestow on the one true atheist of the novel, Bois-Guilbert, either more or less disapproval than on many of his other, believing, characters. Bois-Guilbert clearly belongs to a class which Judith Wilt calls "the cynical roman, or freethinking, or atheist alternative" (Wilt, p. 178) in Scott's medieval works. Yet Rebecca, herself noble, acknowledges of her lover and persecutor that "There are noble things which cross over they powerful mind" (p. 404; Ch. 39); and at his death he receives tributes from such opponents as Ivanhoe—"he hath fought for Christendom"—and Richard—"he was a gallant knight" (p. 457; Ch. 44). A. O. J. Cockshut finds Bois-Guilbert's intelligence and articulateness unconvincing in a medieval setting: "ventriloquism or historical substitution," "words of a much later form of civilization."¹⁷ But Scott's whole point is to present the Templar—as he does the more altruistic Rebecca and Ivanhoe—as specimens intellectually ahead of their time and thus doomed to silence or annihilation.¹⁸ Though not an atheist himself, Scott treats Bois-Guilbert's skepticism as a sign of intelligence, however misdirected, as when he disparages his unreasoning cohorts De Bracy and Front-de-Boeuf: "Go to, thou art a fool . . . thy superstition is upon a level with Front-de-Boeuf's want of faith" (p. 298; Ch. 30). It is perhaps a shared capacity for reason that draws both Bois-Guilbert and Ivanhoe (otherwise implacable enemies) to a woman outside their own faith.

Scott's most harmful religionist, the ascetic Grand Master Lucas Beaumanoir, is yet endowed with "somewhat striking and noble" in physiognomy and psychology. His "long grey beard and shaggy grey eyebrows," "thin and severe features . . . marked by . . . the spiritual pride of the self-satisfied devotee" (p. 357; Ch. 35) seem to transcend centuries and religious lines. Capable of being "affected by the mien and appearance of Rebecca" even as he tries her for witchcraft, "He was not originally a cruel or even a severe man" (p. 387; Ch. 38). This idealist is employed to illustrate the (to Scott) twin dangers of Scriptural literalism and antinomianism. In an almost-amusing episode in Chapter 35, reminiscent in tone of *Old Mortality* and *The Heart of Midlothian*, Beaumanoir and his aide Conrade Mont-Fitchet read and variously interpret a letter from Prior Aymer urging Bois-Guilbert to release his prisoner Rebecca:

"Here is goodly stuff for one Christian man to write to another . . . 'We pray thee to be on thy guard in the matter of this second Witch of Endor; for we are

¹⁷A. O. J. Cockshut, *The Achievement of Walter Scott* (New York, 1969), p. 98.

¹⁸Georg Lukács, in *The Historical Novel* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1978), defends anachronisms of this sort on the grounds that they express universal truths (p. 63).

privately assured that your Grand Master, who careth not a bean for cherry cheeks and black eyes, comes from Normandy to diminish your mirth and amend your misdoings" (p. 363)

Conrade was better acquainted, perhaps by practice, with the jargon of gallantry than was his superior; and he expounded the passage which embarrassed the Grand Master to be a sort of language used by worldly men towards those whom they loved *par amours*.

"There is more in it than thou dost guess, Conrade; thy simplicity is no match for this deep abyss of wickedness." (p. 364)

Scott economically juxtaposes three varieties of religious imperfection here, realistically showing that, by virtue of its greater intensity, fundamentalism triumphs over epicurism and temporizing. At Rebecca's forthcoming trial Beaumanoir characteristically places faith over secular science and dismisses Rebecca's medical skills, however humanely employed: "it is better to be bedridden than to accept the benefit of unbelievers' medicine that thou mayest rise and walk" (p. 381; Ch. 37). And although, in the resulting ordeal by combat, Providence seems to effect Rebecca's vindication with Bois-Guilbert's collapse, Scott feels the need for temporal intervention as well with the arrival of King and Constable to halt the proceedings and establish civil over ecclesiastical law.

Among so many sounding brasses and tinkling cymbals in the novel, one searches vainly for the kind of just and humane Christian Scott would have admired; but Cedric, Rowena, King Richard, and Ivanhoe all at various times approach his ideal. The Saxons, disinherited themselves,¹⁹ show more tolerance on the whole, saying "Dog of a Jew" less often, than do the Normans. A case in point is Cedric's conciliatory "my hospitality must not be bounded by your dislikes" when receiving Isaac over the objections of his Norman guests (p. 65; Ch. 5). As with most of the other characters, Cedric's virtues—frankness, hospitality, justice—seem to thrive independent of his Christianity. He "never swore by any [saint] that was not of Saxon lineage," a "limited devotion" that suggests the tribal cult rather than the Church Universal (p. 189; Ch. 18). His ward, Rowena, shows a similar Christian ambivalence toward Jews. Just as Cedric has said of Isaac, "I constrain no man to converse or to feed with him" (p. 65; Ch. 5), so Rowena later reacts with mingled gentleness and condescension to the stranded Isaac and Rebecca: "The man is old and feeble, . . . the maiden young and beautiful . . . ; Jews though they be, we cannot as Christians leave them in this extremity." Significantly, Rebecca has in this emergency gravitated toward Rowena, "throwing back her veil" and "implor[ing] her in the great name of

¹⁹The recurring "Disinheritance" motif in *Ivanhoe* is discussed by Rosenberg (pp. 101-02).

the God whom they both worshiped" (p. 195; Ch. 19). Whether as a credit to her goodheartedness or a reflection on her naiveté, Rowena has never been jealous of the beautiful Jewess who has modified her lover's values. Her final invitation to "remain with us" and hear "the counsel of holy men [who] will wean you from your erring law" (p. 466; Ch. 44) is kindly, if insensitively, delivered—more gently than an earlier, similar offer from the Grand Master as a means of averting execution.

Chivalry rather than religious fervor seems to motivate Richard's commitment to Palestinian liberation. Although he speaks his share of oaths like "Ha! St. Edward!," "Ha! St. George!," and "By the splendour of Our Lady's brow!," his religious phrases seem less florid, less frequent than those of the other Christians. Despite the critical consensus that Richard is a Quixotic upholder of antiquated chivalry,²⁰ based on Scott's own assessment of him as "brilliant, but useless" (p. 426; Ch. 41), Richard does not come across as totally incompetent or ineffectual. A shrewd judge of character, able to make friends and inspire confidence, capable of quick and generally right decisions, he apparently aims to unite all factions under a unified system of civil justice independent of church authority. This anti-clericalism is seen in the Hemingwayan brusqueness with which he puts down the Grand Master and his arrested aides: "he arrests Malvoisin . . . by the order of Richard Plantagenet, here present" (p. 457; Ch. 44). "Be wise, Beaumanoir, and make no bootless opposition. Thy hand is in the lion's mouth" (p. 458; Ch. 44). The occasion for this crackdown is Rebecca's trial, an issue in which Richard has interested himself as soon as he has learned of it in Chapter 42. Complementing this implied respect for religious toleration is a reliance on "chivalry" or—to use a term which I prefer as meaning about the same thing but sounding more relevant for today—militarism, an emphasis which colors the form of rationalistic Christianity to which Scott evidently subscribes.

Ivanhoe, his trusted leader Richard, and Scott are all Christians committed to order and justice who believe that this cannot be achieved in an anarchic world without armed force. Joseph E. Duncan, Francis R. Hart, and Edgar Johnson are agreed that *Ivanhoe* is an exposé of the limits of chivalry / militarism; as Duncan puts it, "The novel presents a vital, colorful picture of the 'fighting time,' but it does not glorify the fighters" (Duncan, p. 294).²¹

²⁰For negative assessments of Richard, see Hart (pp. 158-160), Johnson (p. 743), and Wilt (p. 39).

²¹The attitudes of Hart and Johnson toward militarism are implicit in their views on Richard, cited earlier. Further, says Johnson, "The code of chivalry is . . . often no more than the mask of violence, rapacity, and bloodshed, and leaves unredressed more wrongs than it rights" (p. 743).

Yet in avoiding the danger of misreading it as simplistic pacifism. Scott's attitude toward the relative merits of peaceful and forceful reactions to violence and brutality can be sensed from the words of the prudent burgher Simon Glover in *The Fair Maid of Perth*: "Catharine must wed a man to whom she may say, 'Husband, spare your enemy'; not one in whose behalf she must cry, 'Generous enemy, spare my husband.'"²² Thus to Scott militarism, though not the cause for rapture some have made it, remains a hard necessity—a view toward which his thoughtful characters tend to gravitate.

This brings up the key confrontation between the wounded, impatiently helpless Ivanhoe and his nurse Rebecca during the siege of Torquilstone, when he argues for and she apparently against militarism. Joseph Cottom points out an ambivalence in Scott's handling of this scene, the result of perhaps subconscious respect for authority represented by "enchanted imprisonment, infantilization, and the feminization of men" (Cottom, p. 158), especially Ivanhoe's "indignity" in being forced to hear Rebecca's "preachments against violence and the vanity of honor" (p. 159). Countering this implied enjoyment of humiliation and subjugation, Cottom elsewhere notes that in Scott's novels "violence nostalgically appears as a surer justice" than the law and legalism Scott overtly supports (p. 179).²³ I see Scott as advocating a controlled violence in this case and elsewhere as a means of establishing law and, with it, civil and religious freedom.

Earlier in the narrative Ivanhoe seems older and wiser than most Scott heroes: Judith Wilt notes that he "is neither dead nor asleep but thinking" (Wilt, p. 37) at his first appearance in the guise of a Christian pilgrim. His thoughtful pilgrimage will take him from an initially sound (in Scott's view) position of commitment to social unity, through an added transcending of religious prejudice, toward a final synthesis of Saxon and Norman nationalism, Christian and Jewish sectarianism, militarism and pacifism. This synthesis will, however, have to remain private.

Central to reaching this synthesis will be a modification of Ivanhoe's attitude toward Jews. Alone among Cedric's guests in Chapter 5, Ivanhoe offers his seat and a dish of "seethed kid" to the Jewish scapegoat Isaac but qualifies this charity by moving away "without waiting for the Jew's thanks," ambiguously since his motive may be either to avoid contact or to join in the Templar's and Rowena's conversation (*Ivanhoe*, pp. 66-7; Ch. 5). When he

²²Sir Walter Scott, *The Fair Maid of Perth or St. Valentine's Day* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1929), p. 345.

²³Other commentators to note Scott's sometimes preference for violence over legalism include Robert C. Gordon, in *Under Which King? A Study of the Scottish Waverley Novels* (New York, 1969), p. 30; and David Brown, p. 35.

helps Isaac escape the Templar's snare the next morning, his kindness is again made equivocal by an abrupt "Blaspheme not, Jew!" and his not-entirely-admiring "smiles" as he teases the old man about his parsimony (p. 85; Ch. 6). Nursed by Rebecca, he is "too good a Catholic" to let himself notice her beauty once he knows her religion (p. 280; Ch. 28). But notice her nobility he must, when she says that her reward will be to "pray of thee to believe henceforward that a Jew may do good service to a Christian, without desiring other guerdon than the blessing of the Great Father who made both Jew and Gentile" (p. 281; Ch. 28).

There follows the confrontation referred to, the observed battle at Torquilstone serving as occasion for Ivanhoe to equate courage and militarism with Christianity:

"Thou art no Christian, Rebecca; and to thee are unknown those high feelings which swell the bosom of a noble maiden when her lover hath done some deed of emprise which sanctions his flame. Chivalry! Why, maiden, she is the nurse of pure and high affection, the stay of the oppressed, the redeemer of grievances, the curb of the power of the tyrant. Nobility were but an empty name without her, and liberty finds the bet protection in her lance and her sword." (pp. 295-6; Ch. 29)

Winnowing from this passage some of the "purple" expressions which may to the twentieth-century mind recall the Religious Right, we see a concern for values important to modern man whether liberal or conservative—human rights, protection for the underprivileged, curbs on dictatorship and vested interests—all necessitating a conscientiously employed military force, in Ivanhoe's opinion. Rebecca refutes not so much Ivanhoe's argument as the idea that Jews cannot share such sentiments:

"I am, indeed . . . sprung from a race whose courage was distinguished in the defense of their own land The sound of the trumpet wakes Judah no longer, and her despised children are now but the unresisting victims of hostile and military oppression. Well hast thou spoken, Sir Knight; until the God of Jacob shall raise up for His chosen people a second Gideon, or a new Maccabeus, it ill becometh the Jewish damsel to speak of battle or of war." (p. 296; Ch. 29)

To this dignified rejoinder Ivanhoe makes no verbal response but soon bespeaks Richard's interest in Rebecca's welfare by asking the king to rescue her from Bois-Guilbert before saving him from the conflagration. At the moment of fulfillment for his hopes regarding Rowena, he silently departs to honor the Jewish girl's call for a champion. The words in which he delivers his challenge reveal the synthesis he had by this time found:

"I am a good knight and noble, come hither to sustain with lance and sword the just and lawful quarrel of the damsel, Rebecca, daughter of Isaac of York . . . by the aid of God, of Our Lady, and of Monseigneur St. George, the good knight." (p. 454; Ch. 43)

For in most emphatically Christian terms he defends a Jew, employing medieval chivalric phrase to champion law in the modern sense, swearing by an English patron saint with a French title.

Like *Ivanhoe* and *Bois-Guilbert*, Rebecca is intellectually a convincing anachronism. Her most telling indictment of Christianity ancient and modern is made to *Bois-Guilbert*: "thy faith recommends that mercy which rather your tongues than your actions pretend" (p. 401; Ch. 39); her most telling indictment of militarism medieval and contemporary is made to *Ivanhoe*: "what is it, valiant knight, save an offering of sacrifice to a demon of vain glory, and a passing through the fire to Moloch?" (p. 295; Ch. 29). The charity Rebecca exalts above chivalry is manifested in her disinterested use of medical knowledge learned, says Isaac, from "Miriam, a sage matron of our tribe." This Miriam, often mentioned throughout the narrative, provides a significant though invisible parallel to Rebecca, a tragic martyr of non-sectarian enlightenment in an era of antinomian Christian bigotry:

"Ah, false Jew!" said the Grand Master; "was it not from that same witch Miriam, the abomination of whose enchantments have been heard of throughout every Christian land?" exclaimed the Grand Master, crossing himself. "Her body was burnt at a stake, and her ashes were scattered to the four winds; and so be it with me and mine order, if I do not as much to her pupil, and more also!" (p. 365; Ch. 35)

Thus Rebecca embodies at once the religion of deeds over creeds which Scott tacitly favors and the dangers to such a position in a climate that insists on dogma and proclamation.

It must be added that Scott's exemplar of ideal religious virtue is not exactly the pacifist that some commentators would make of her. In her "lecture" to *Ivanhoe* on the limits of militarism she makes one of those "fine distinctions" in which, according to Arnold, "truth and the highest culture greatly find their account." Her Hebrew ancestors, she says, "warred not, even while yet a nation, save at the command of the Deity, or in defending their country from oppression." Nor does she totally abjure pride in national or ethnic identity, as she soliloquizes on seeing that *Ivanhoe* is asleep: "Would to Heaven that the shedding of mine own blood, drop by drop, could redeem the captivity of Judah!" (p. 296; Ch. 29). Though Rebecca is known for kindness to all, it seems unlikely that she would give *Ivanhoe* favored status if she had been unresponsive to military courage—especially when manifested as here in generosity to one of her own people. And she trusts

"that in merry England, the hospitable, the generous, the free, where so many are ready to peril their lives for honour, there will . . . be found one to fight for justice" (p. 386; Ch. 37).

Veils, curtains and windows function as emblems for this enlightened outcast. She draws back a curtain in revealing herself as kind nurse and forbidden Jewess to her awakening and admiring patient Ivanhoe; she conceals him in a curtained litter in seeking to convey him to the safety of York; she unveils (as mentioned earlier) to Rowena in appealing for protection in the dangerous forest; she unwillingly but meekly unveils to the Templars in defending herself at her trial; and there is a last significant veil scene to be mentioned later. Windows, on the other hand, are places to which this seeker of truth and freedom is perilously drawn. It is through a window that she hopes for a quick, total escape from Bois-Guilbert's advances, and it is this appearance that will be turned against her at her trial when embellishing prosecution witnesses claim that she turned herself into a "milk-white swan" which "flitted three times round the castle" (p. 384; Ch. 37). Likewise it is through a window that she watches the battle for her, her father's, and Ivanhoe's liberation:

"You must not—you shall not!" exclaimed Ivanhoe. "Each lattice, each aperture, will be soon the mark for the archers; some random shaft—"

"It shall be welcome!" murmured Rebecca

"Rebecca—dear Rebecca!" exclaimed Ivanhoe, "this is no maiden's pastime; . . . at least, cover thyself with yonder ancient buckler, and show as little of your person at the lattice as need be."

Following with wonderful promptitude the directions of Ivanhoe, and availing herself of the protection . . . , Rebecca, with tolerable security to herself, could witness part of what was passing (p. 289; Ch. 29)

This serves as a reminder that even for a fearlessly enlightened idealist, military advisors, like Emily Dickinson's microscopes, "are prudent / In an emergency."

As a novel that pits ruthless fanaticism against humane moderation, ignorant selfishness against enlightened social responsibility, *Ivanhoe* resembles *Old Mortality* in the Scott canon. As protagonists whose survival is in doubt because their ideals are ahead of their time, those of *Ivanhoe* resemble those of both *Old Mortality* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Robert C. Gordon and David Brown have faulted the ending of *Old Mortality* for being inconsistent with the conditions of its historical period,²⁴ while Brown has

²⁴However, Gordon feels that the ending of *Old Mortality* is anachronistically troubled (pp. 65-6), whereas Brown faults Scott for making the historical circumstances in this novel more favorable for a happy ending than was justified (pp. 182-3).

elsewhere complained of the "indubitably 'escapist' air" of *Ivanhoe* (Brown, p. 209). These negatives do not apply to *Ivanhoe*, I believe, since the ending is not totally happy and since the medieval setting achieves not so much escapism as a milieu sufficiently forbidding for the unhappy ending to be all too convincing, as Cockshut (not an admirer of the medieval novels) has acknowledged, "There is no sense of escape in Scott's medievalism Scott had no desire to escape from anything" (Cockshut, p. 91). And if Jane Millgate and John P. Farrell are right in praising Scott's portrayal of Edgar of Ravenswood as a doomed moderate frustrated by the deterministic forces of an intolerant environment,²⁵ they should find something to praise in the handling of *Ivanhoe's* and Rebecca's unresolved dilemma in this novel often dismissed as "tushery." Such commentators as Farrell, Georg Lukács, and George Levine, observing Scott's failure to discuss contemporary issues, have seen his use of the past as a metaphor of his (and our) present.²⁶ Graham McMaster spells out revolutionary aspects of the time that prompted Scott to "move away from realism toward fantasy" but adds that this move need not be seen as a disadvantage, for "the more completely he faced [the] collapse of his hopes, the better novels he wrote" (McMaster, p. 149). To McMaster, Scott's fantasy is rich in mythic and surrealistic overtones conveying pessimism about a chaotic modern society, although he does not consider *Ivanhoe* one of the better examples of this style.²⁷ While largely concurring with McMaster about the pessimism and its relevance, I cannot agree with his downplaying of *Ivanhoe*.

²⁵Jane Millgate, in *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Toronto, 1984), views Edgar as tragically ahead of his time in his enlightenment (p. 182), a view shared by Farrell (p. 115). By contrast, Gordon regards Edgar as being doomed by his conservatism, not by his liberalism (p. 101). I would, of course, link *Ivanhoe* and Rebecca with Millgate's and Farrell's interpretation of Edgar rather than Gordon's.

²⁶See Farrell, p. 70; Lukács, p. 63; Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago, 1981), p. 95.

²⁷McMaster does not analyze *Ivanhoe* in detail but tends to downplay it constantly in comparison with Scott's allegedly better works, including several of the medieval novels. His view is that Scott usually employed the past effectively and metaphorically to express his fears about the present, especially revolution and absolutist ideologies: "Scott never rejected rationalist doctrines *in toto*. . . . What he came more and more to doubt was the Enlightenment belief in progress, progress in the sense that life is constantly improving in terms of individual satisfaction, not merely changing" (p. 51). These fears and doubts are what I see reflected in the conclusion of *Ivanhoe*, making it unclear to me why McMaster considers the novel inferior.

The pessimism which informs this tragi-comedy of medieval inhumanity is exemplified by, if not totally based upon, the characters' religious attitudes. In an environment alternating between irresponsible individualism (self-indulgent clergymen, opportunistic soldiers, arrogant robber barons) and rigorously repressive ideology (Beaumont's moral authoritarianism, Cedric's uncompromising nationalism), all characters go to their places of worship and swear by their preferred saints and deities—but their oaths and attendance seem to alter their courses or characters very little. Prior Aymer pursues amorous adventure; Friar Tuck hunts deer, widows, and wenches; crusaders seek worldly power; the populace obtain thrills from the pain of unbelievers; Jews aggrandize security through finance; nobles strive to despoil them on Christian principles; witch-hunting clerics hinder medical advances on theological grounds; patriotic fathers disinherit international-minded sons. The picture is not totally pessimistic: in almost every instance, what Farrell calls the "social affections"—a *summum bonum* for Scott—²⁸ surface, leading to thoughts of compassion, gestures of mercy, actions of unity and cooperation. but Scott shows these thoughts, gestures, and actions as arising across (not along) religious lines, in spite of (not inspired by) faith. In terms of Scott's implied priorities, Christians as a class are no better than Jews, Jews as a class no better than Christians; and atheism—as exemplified by Bois-Guilbert—if a defense against bigotry, is no guarantee of virtue.

Scott favors if not a humanistic religion, a humanizing one: reasonable, exalting charity and justice, not excluding self-defense. If not exactly a universalist, he strongly implies faith in an inclusive hereafter:

Rebecca, however erroneously taught to interpret the promises of Scripture to the chosen people of Heaven, did not err in supposing the present to be their hour of trial, or in trusting that the children of Zion would be one day called in with the fulness of the Gentiles. In the meanwhile, all around her showed that their present state was that of punishment and probation, and that it was their especial duty to suffer without sinning. (p. 235; Ch. 24)

Jews, Scott implies, will be admitted to that equal sky, entered not by everyone who sayeth "Lord, Lord" but by him who doeth the Father's will.

Feeling this way, Rebecca and (presumably) Ivanhoe in varying degrees seek to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. But their course is not always a safe one in twelfth-century England; and Scott, like his contemporary Blake who chronicles the martyrdom of a freethinking Little Boy Lost, implicitly asks if such things are done on Albion's shore. As a

²⁸See especially pp. 74-5 of Farrell.

Christian (though one moving, we may assume, toward a more latitudinarian creed), Ivanhoe faces less social intimidation than Rebecca, and he will be reinstated as to fief, the good graces of a mellowing father, and the hand of a Lady whose intrinsic kindness will do much to make amends for a certain limit of vision. Rebecca and her father, though, will have to hope for a safer existence under Islamic moderation in Spain than under Christian fundamentalism in England. Before she leaves, Rebecca calls on Rowena with friendly words, rich gifts, and a curiosity which under the circumstances Rowena cannot resent:

"The bridal veil hangs over thy face; deign to raise it, and let me see the features of which fame speaks so highly."

"They are scarce worthy of being looked upon," said Rowena; "but, expecting the same from my visitant, I remove the veil."

She took it off accordingly

"Lady," [Rebecca] said, "the countenance you have deigned to show me will long dwell in my remembrance. There reigns in it gentleness and goodness; and if a tinge of the world's pride or vanities may mix with an expression so lovely, how should we chide that which is of earth for bearing some colour of its original?" (pp. 465-6; Ch. 44)

Wilt, subtly analyzing this important scene, finds both heroines "uncovered" and both, in antithetic ways, "lovely and dangerous" (Wilt, pp. 47-8). But Scott, in saying that Rowena removed her veil and that both women blushed, never says that Rebecca removed hers also; thus he anticipates a scene in *The brothers Karamazov* where a "dark heroine," Grushenka, will induce a "light heroine," Katerina, to kiss her and then whimsically decline to return the kiss. Careful as well as religiously tolerant, Rebecca has long understood the importance of veils in a society that makes tolerance a vice. And Ivanhoe, who "might have risen still higher but for the premature death of the heroic Coeur-de-Lion" (*Ivanhoe*, p. 467; Ch. 44), will probably find the regime of John a bad time for universal liberty and justice. None could know better than Scott that even at the date of the Magna Carta or later, too open an enlightenment can lead to Disinheritance in many forms and can necessitate the secrecy of a helmet, the protective cover of the pilgrim's habit. If a "vainly-expected Messiah" is to bring redress, the religiously disparate hero and heroine of this realistic romance will have to live and die asking "How long?"