

Burning Castles in Sherwood Forest: The Construction  
and Destruction of Political Ideology in Scott, Peacock,  
and Conan Doyle

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## Introduction

In *The Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti states that late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels provided a means of envisioning nation-states in the midst of political turmoil. This effect is especially noticeable in historical novels, which tend to take place in border regions: areas where opposing forces clash together. Georg Lukács develops a similar point in *The Historical Novel*, arguing that works of historical fiction seek out “middle grounds” between conflicting groups. Critics such as Stephanie L. Barczewski assert that nineteenth-century medievalism was an integral part of this nation-building movement. Medievalism, the resurrection of the Middle Ages through paintings, architecture, literature, and other media, was an effective way to affirm common national values and heroes; in the British Isles, it served to distinguish the British people from their neighbors across the channel. Lukács argues that historical novels recreate history by resurrecting famous historical figures, resulting in narratives which affirm established societies and nation-building. These characters, such as the noble King Richard the Lionheart, recalled a glorious past which, though not devoid of challenges, confirmed an unbroken march of history. The stability of modern nations was thus presumed to originate in an attractive, stable medieval past.

When one considers the spaces which authors of medievalist fictions construct, however, they do not operate as stably as one might expect. Spaces such as forests and castles are just as crucial as historical characters in recreating the Middle Ages; medievalist authors reconstruct them through vivid, prosy descriptions which Stephen Bann terms “historical series,” a concept I will revisit in later chapters. These spaces are also inevitably ideological: castle spaces tend to signify conservative values, while forests are more closely associated with progressivism.

*Ivanhoe*, *Maid Marian*, and *The White Company* all involve spaces which initially appear to be ideological. In these three medievalist texts, however, spaces consistently subvert the ideologies attached to them. Castles are burned down or besieged, and forests cannot be portrayed without incorporating the terminology of castles or cathedrals (analogies which compromise progressive values). Such moments of spatial destruction or threat also compromise the historical series which the texts appear to have constructed, thus resulting in fictive medieval worlds that are much less ideologically stable than critics tend to believe.

For this study, I have chosen to concentrate on three historical novels from the nineteenth-century that are set in the medieval period: *Ivanhoe*, by Walter Scott; *Maid Marian*, a reworking of the Robin Hood legend by Thomas Love Peacock; and *The White Company*, by Arthur Conan Doyle, the story of a young Englishman who goes to seek military adventure in France with the famous (and fictitious) White Company during the Hundred Years War. As realistic novels, all three seek to transport the reader into a medieval world that is true to historical “life.” In addition, all three – as novels – provide a powerful forum for their authors to depict warring factions of society (Saxons and Normans, nobles and outlaws, etc) coming together harmoniously, a theme that is integral to modern theories of medievalism which emphasize nationalism and nation-building.

In an exploration of imagery in medievalist historical fictions, I will focus my analysis around two popular, imagistic settings which, together, encompass both angles of the political debates about this form of fiction: the forest and the castle. These two spaces figure prominently in the three works under consideration in this project. In *Ivanhoe* and *Maid Marian*, Sherwood Forest provides a refuge for the heroes as they combat the tyranny of Prince John, while, in *The White Company*, the heroes spend a large amount of time in forests and natural spaces as they

travel across Europe on their journey of war. All three novels feature strong castle sequences as well; interestingly enough, all include powerful images of castles besieged, burning, and destroyed. The following pages provide a general summary of the range and reach of British medievalism: how and why it originated, the many different forms it took, and, crucially, the different ideologies bound up in portrayals and “mobilizations” of the medieval past. I will also, however, question these established ways of thinking about medievalism, providing examples from the three main primary texts of this project.

## Chapter One

### A Primer on Nineteenth-Century Medievalism: King Arthur and Robin Hood

Many historians and literary critics agree that medievalism was born of an obsession with history that arose in Europe shortly after the French Revolution, a direct result of Napoleon's experiments in empire. As the armies of France stormed across the continent, they brought with them both a new era of warfare and a new era of historical thinking. In his famous study *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács describes a post-revolutionary rise of interest in history: "It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a *mass experience*, and moreover on a European scale" (20). He draws a distinction between the total war waged by Napoleon's troops and the comparatively dainty wars waged in previous centuries, which – according to Lukács – typically revolved around the maneuvers of small, private armies carried out in the middle of nowhere, isolated from civilian populations: "Not for nothing did Frederick II of Prussia declare that war should be waged in such a manner that the civilian population simply would not notice it" (20). Now, however, the average European simply could not avoid the tides of history breaking all around him<sup>1</sup>.

The impulse to look back, to explore a previous era through poetry and song and art, was certainly not unknown before the beginning of the nineteenth-century. But as the kingdoms of Europe fell to Napoleon's empire, resurrecting the glory days became, first a habit, and then a fixation. Old heroes lived again: "The apotheosis of King Arthur and Robin Hood was directly linked to the unique political, social, and cultural conditions produced by the French Revolution

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Lukacs' envisioning of "mass history" – historical experiences shared by millions of people – and his situating of that mass history in the post-revolutionary period is not quite historically sound. The Thirty Years War in the seventeenth-century, for example, was a pan-European affair and resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians, most especially in the German states.

and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars,” writes Stephanie L. Barczewski, explaining the onset of nineteenth-century medievalism and, with it, the popularity of figures such as Robin Hood and King Arthur (44).

Critics and historians generally believe that the appearance of medievalism at this specific time was closely linked to the building of nation states as Napoleon’s empire grew and subsequently collapsed. No European king since Charlemagne had controlled such a vast territory spanning so many diverse groups of people. The imposition of French rule in the German states, for example, resulted in the fall of the Holy Roman Empire and prompted German self-actualization in a way that nothing ever had before. In order to define themselves as “nations,” developing states frequently turned to history as a way to construct a specifically national pedigree. Even in England, which had been a unified state since William the Conqueror sailed the Channel in 1066, citizens felt that impulse to invoke history in order to solidify a sense of “Britishness” in the face of Napoleon. After all, though England had existed since the eleventh-century, Britannia had not. The union with Scotland was only centuries old; therefore, a turn to history (and mythology) was necessary in order to open the border that had once been sundered by Hadrian’s Wall (Barczewski 3-4).

Barczewski alleges that the rising sense of a “British” and not only “English” identity was largely due to “Britain’s success in constructing a ‘history’ for itself over the course of the nineteenth century, a period in which the selective mobilization of the past acted to overcome the tensions caused in the present by the tempestuous relationship among the nation’s constituent communities” (48). Stories such as the King Arthur and Robin Hood legends helped to articulate distinctly “British” virtues for the first time. King Arthur and his noble Knights of the Round Table were paragons of honor and fortitude. Tales of the outlaw Robin Hood and the Merry

Men, meanwhile, invoked the famous British love of freedom and personal liberty, the roots of which had first been sown in the Magna Carta. The British regarded this love of individual rights as something unique about their nation, especially in comparison to France: “The concept of freedom was an integral part of eighteenth-century British patriotism, for it provided yet another way for Britons to define themselves against their enemies, in particular the French, who were perceived as slaves to a tyrannical and absolutist regime” (Barczewski 31). Such eighteenth-century patriotism spilled over into the nineteenth-century, as Britons emphatically distanced themselves from not only the outrages of the Bourbons, but the Reign of Terror.

In addition to affirming national histories and virtues, however, medievalism also provided a forum for critique, as modern society was compared to its distant ancestor for good or for ill. John Ruskin’s bold invocation of the medieval – one of the most influential of these invocations in the nineteenth-century – is a perfect example of the Middle Ages employed as a critical reaction against contemporary culture. His comparison of modern England to ancient Greece would once have been considered highly flattering, but, under Ruskin’s medievalist aesthetics, it is far more a critique than a compliment. The Greeks, with their endless pursuit of perfection in art and architecture, created - according to Ruskin – a society in which men were intellectual slaves. To Ruskin and the bevy of medievalists who followed in his wake, the modern workman at his factory loom, producing mechanically perfect consumer goods, was just as much a slave as the Egyptian workers who built the pyramids under the whips of overseers: “Alas! if read rightly, these perfectnesses are signs of a slavery in our England...It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling” (Ruskin 1500-1).



Ruskin's appeal to the past, both the classical and medieval periods, functions to contemplate and, furthermore, to criticize the modern era.

Critics today affirm Ruskin's use of the Middle Ages as a vehicle of critique.

"Medievalism is persistently comparative...Although it may generalize the Middle Ages, it particularizes the present, making the reader aware of the specific conditions of his or her historical moment," writes Clare Simmons (12). The early nineteenth-century certainly provided a historical moment that demanded a heightened awareness. The rise of steam power and subsequent Industrial Revolution were irrevocably changing the British economy, as factory machines churned out hundreds of thousands of bolts of cotton cloth and transformed the face of British labor. And, in the years before Waterloo, the strength of Napoleon's armies caused many Englishmen and women to fear that a French invasion of their island was imminent.

British medievalists generally fell into two categories, both of them with political connotations. To a certain degree, this is only to be expected, as medievalism relied heavily on a strong degree of historical fictiveness. Though Perry Anderson limits his remarks to novels in his article "From Progress to Catastrophe," his assessment of the ideological background to historical imaginings holds true for a broader consideration of medievalism: "Within the huge multiverse of prose fiction the historical novel has, by all accounts, been the most consistently political." As far as conservatives were concerned, the medieval past provided a way to articulate their discomforts with the rapidly changing social and economic landscape in the wake of the French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, and Industrial Revolution. Medievalism served as a medium to reminisce about a simpler, feudalistic era when all was relatively stable (at least, in their imaginations). There were also, however, more subversive ways of viewing and utilizing medievalism. One classically liberal method of thinking emphasized the supposed happiness of

peasants in the Middle Ages as opposed to the misery of nineteenth-century British factory-workers, thus offering a social critique of contemporary Britain through the vehicle of the medieval past. Alternatively, the Middle Ages were sometimes invoked in order to emphasize a progressive march of history stretching from the Conquest to the present day. These ideological angles are encoded, either boldly or subtly, in popular, nineteenth-century medievalist media, including architecture, poems, and novels.

### **The Middle Ages as Fad: Robin Hood and King Arthur at the Races**

It may seem strange to feel the pulse of a country at its racecourses, yet English tracks in the latter half of the nineteenth-century served as an excellent indicator of the national mood. During the 1860s, spectators at Ascot and Cheltenham cheered as steeds with names such as “King Arthur,” “Guinevere,” “Maid Marian,” “Robin Hood,” and “Friar Tuck” thundered to glory (Barczewski 53). This invocation of Britain’s most famous old legends in equine sport indicates the degree to which the Middle Ages had captivated ordinary citizens. The nineteenth-century saw the rise of the “medieval” - the word itself was not coined until 1827, derived from the Latin *medium aevum*, meaning “middle age.” This new, sedately archaic term for what was once considered a time of darkness demonstrates a new impulse in British culture to venerate the Middle Ages (Simmons 2).

An obsession with the medieval extended into many facets of British life during the nineteenth-century, crossing class and social boundaries. In addition to their equine incarnations, for example, King Arthur and his knights and Robin Hood and the Merry Men made frequent appearances at costume parties and fancy-dress balls (Barczewski 54). This passion for impersonating medieval characters compelled a group of aristocrats in 1839 to actually stage a

medieval joust at Eglinton. Noblemen in full suits of armor teetered about, hardly able to bear the weight of the costumes – the joust itself was rained out in a freak thunderstorm, causing many of the “ladies” to retreat to their carriages and the “knights” to resort to umbrellas to protect their elaborate gear. This unique form of medieval homage was, of course, strictly limited to the upper classes; participants spanned the gentry of several countries, and included such illustrious figures as Prince Louis Napoleon, the Marquess of Londonderry, and the Marquess of Waterford.

Medievalism left physical traces upon the British landscape as gothic revival architecture sprang up around the country, championed by writers such as John Ruskin, who skillfully managed to transform the building techniques used in Catholic cathedrals of the Middle Ages into something representative of “northernness” and, consequently, Protestantism. Ruskin’s famous essay “The Stones of Venice,” for example, glorifies the crudeness of “gothic” architecture and artwork from the Middle Ages as a way to construct a new aesthetic standard centered around individual freedom of thought (a protest against the increasing mechanization of the Industrial Revolution): “[The northern, medieval builder] smites an uncouth animation out of the rocks which he has torn from among the moss of the moorland, and heaves into the darkened air the pile of iron buttress and rugged wall, instinct with work of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea” (1498). The dirt, the disease, and the ignorance which the modern world largely associates with the Middle Ages were, in the nineteenth-century, transformed into something heroic, innovative, and boldly defiant – a stark contrast to the sleek, columned beauty of the classical period and classical revivals in the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

The gothic style was originally closely associated with ecclesiastical and domestic buildings. Tennyson once extolled the virtues of gothicism by stating that “It is like blank verse;

it will suit the humblest cottage and the grandest cathedral” (Tennyson, quoted on Bright 50). In 1818, the Church Building Act designated one million pounds for the construction of new churches. 214 were built; 174 were Gothic (Bright 6). And, as the case of the window sashes demonstrates, it was also incorporated into homes – not only mansions, such as Horace Walpole’s famed gothic masterpiece Strawberry Hill or Sir Walter Scott’s Abbotsford, but more humble ones. As Charles Dellheim relates in *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England*, the gothic was finally used to adorn railway stations, warehouses, department stores, and banks. His description of a stroll through London in the late Victorian period demonstrates the degree to which the gothic had overrun the city:

“Proceeding north along Ironmonger’s Lane one would pass by No. 19 Basinghall Street, a Tuscan gothic building with a glass front...en route to the original medieval Guildhall, where J. Durham’s Gothic drinking fountain (1886) stood. Returning to Poultry and heading east one would pass by No. 81 Cornhill, a Venetian Gothic front on the way to Bishopsgate. There one might inspect a Gothic fire station by George Vuillamy (1885).”  
(Dellheim 9)

The popularization of gothicism ultimately repulsed one of its earliest proponents, John Ruskin. The “Gothic banks and grocers, Gothic lodging-houses and insurance companies, Gothic everything, from a town hall down to a slum public house” came, in his eyes, to cheapen the Gothic style (Clark, quoted on Chapman 65).

It is important to consider the role of Catholicism in both the medieval worlds constructed through fiction and the medieval worlds which nineteenth-century Englishmen attempted to reproduce on their very landscape. Catholicism was a fraught issue in England during this period: it drew the ire of staunch Protestants such as Ruskin, who associated it with

intellectual slavery in *The Stones of Venice*, one of his principal works that figured strongly in the broader Gothic revival. As Chapman describes it, “Ruskin could combine his veneration for Gothic buildings with a hysterical contempt for the religion which inspired them” (61). For others, however, Catholicism was a mystical forbidden fruit, rich in the ornamentation and symbolism which revivalists loved.

### **King Arthur: Conservative Champion?**

King Arthur, the mythical Celtic chieftain turned courtly hero turned national savior, was a favorite subject of poets and painters. Drawing from the canon of Arthurian legend largely set down in Sir Thomas Malory’s 1470 text *Le Morte d’Arthur* (Barczewski 16), Alfred Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* was one of the most famous poetic works to depict the “once and future king,” who was even popularly believed to be, not dead, but awaiting a day to return to his people. In the *Idylls*, Tennyson flavors Arthur’s supposed death with the hope of resurrection: “He passes to be King among the dead/ And after healing of his grievous wound/ He comes again” (449-451). Such a statement forces readers to exit the dreamy world of the poem and to reflect on their own day and age. In addition, idealization of this noble king often encodes a more conservative ideological angle; the Arthurian legends, with their emphasis on honor, nobility, and a feudalistic social order provided values that were attractive to conservative medievalists.

The legend of Arthur returning to Britain had been a part of British folklore for centuries (Barczewski 38), but enjoyed a powerful resurgence during the nineteenth-century, perpetuated by popular figures such as Elizabeth Gaskell. In an 1838 letter to a friend, the author boldly applied the Arthurian legend to a cavern by Alderly Edge, which, in 1805, had been described in an anonymous letter to the *Manchester Mail* as containing a vast sleeping army. In Gaskell’s

letter, the army takes on an Arthurian connotation: “If you were on Alderley Edge...could I not point out to you the very entrance to the cave where King Arthur and his knights lie sleeping in their golden armour till the day when England’s peril shall summon them to her rescue?”

(Barczewski 58-59). During the nineteenth-century, national military heroes such as the Duke of Wellington, fresh from his Napoleonic victories, were sometimes viewed as incarnations of Arthur himself (39). At this time of pan-European nation-building, the glory days of old were readily stowed in hillsides, ready to validate the current state of British affairs.

Such validation of the nationalistic present through the medium of the past is best exemplified through Edward Bulwer Lytton’s rendition of Arthur’s death in his poem *King Arthur*, published in 1849. In the poem, Arthur is granted the power to choose from three alternate visions of the future presented by the Lady of the Lake. Arthur promptly rejects a vision of himself sleeping peacefully among rose bushes, as well as a vision of sitting on a splendid throne while the people of Britain starve. Instead, he selflessly chooses a vision of himself lying dead on a battlefield, a martyr for the sake of Britain’s future, which Bulwer Lytton situates in Queen Victoria’s reign and the rise of the British Empire. As Bulwer Lytton describes it:

Mild, like all strength, sits Crowned Liberty,  
Wearing the aspect of a youthful Queen:  
And far outstretch’d ‘long the unmeasured sea  
Rests the vast shadow of her throne; serene

Clearly, the Arthurian legend (and, consequently, medievalism) is employed in this case to justify and exalt the present day – to present the current state of the British Empire as the result of mythical prophecy.

The use of the Middle Ages to reject radicalism in the wake of the Reign of Terror was a frequent move of conservative thinkers such as Edmund Burke, who disliked rapid social change

and preferred very gradual, continuous progress. In the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, for example, Burke appeals boldly to English medieval history: “From the Magna Carta to the Declaration of Right, it had been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity” (Burke, quoted on Barczewski 33). Though conservatives were not the only ones to appeal to an inherently British love of liberty, Burke and his cohort also referenced the Middle Ages as a way to demonstrate the longevity of Britain and to suggest that the new order in France could not endure. In fact, as Georg Lukács points out, many members of the bourgeoisie were uncomfortable with the idea of rapid social change, even those who were not necessarily opposed to the ideology which led to the French Revolution. “The important bourgeois humanists of this period find themselves in a paradoxical situation: while they comprehend the necessity of revolutions in the past...nevertheless they interpret future development in terms of a henceforth peaceful evolution,” writes Lukács (28). A more conservative mindset, therefore, was fairly widespread at this period.

This more conservative turn in thought was, in many ways, affirmed by the Restoration in France and the return of apparent stability – the resurrection of a monarchical line that went back for centuries. This desire to return everything to the way it was before was largely a turn to history (Lukács 24). And, as Barczewski relates, the Middle Ages were an ideal stylistic home for conservatives; the classical revival of the earlier eighteenth-century had become inextricably linked with the revolution in France. The medieval period, by contrast, enabled Europeans to, as Lukács describes it, “eradicate from history the greatest historical events of the epoch” (24). The Middle Ages offered something the British suitably ancient, northern, and Protestant. Arthur, as

the epitome of chivalry, honor, and nobility, is the perfect symbol for this conservative angle of medievalism and its manifestation in nineteenth-century medievalist culture.

*The White Company* is a text with – on the surface level, at least – a powerful conservative political arc. Alleyne Edricson bravely defends Merry England abroad before returning home to marry his lover and achieve a prominent social standing. The narrator relates that he earns a place at court, is awarded the Garter, and passes time in the company of Richard II and Edward IV over the course of what is undoubtedly a long and joyful life. Though Alleyne mingles easily with men of different social classes during his adventures with the Company, the end of the novel sees these other characters happily settled in manners befitting their inherent social statuses. Hordle John, erstwhile monk and poor woodsman, earns five thousand crowns overseas, “[takes] unto himself a village maid” and becomes the wealthiest franklin in the district, while the clever bowman Aylward forges a new path in life as a tavern keeper. The text awards these two characters wealth and material comforts, but preserves a sharp distinction between them and the noble Alleyne, who is rubbing shoulders with kings while they hold wrestling and shooting contests at Aylward’s tavern.

The last few sentences of the novel are an injunction to the sons of Britannia to follow in the bold footsteps of their medieval forefathers, should their country ever be at need (a shrewdly prophetic message, given the imminent onset of the first World War): “The sky may darken, and the clouds may gather, and again the day may come when Britain may have sore need of her children, on whatever shore they may be found. Shall they not muster at her call?” (Conan Doyle 403). This nationalistic call to arms is a standard conservative move and, in this instance, an extremely powerful one, given its position at the end of the text.



## **Robin Hood, Progressive Outlaw?**

Amongst progressives and radicals, however, Robin Hood was a far more popular hero than Arthur. The image of a heroic outlaw trying to narrow the gap of wealth between rich and poor and fighting for liberty against the tyrannical rule of Prince John and his cronies highlighted causes attractive to progressives. Tales of Robin Hood and his campaigns for freedom – the image of the bowman in Lincoln green facing down the might of Normandy – powerfully helped to mold British nationalism during the nineteenth-century. The physical space of Sherwood Forest itself plays a crucial role in these tales, providing the outlaws with a verdant hideaway and, in many ways, fostering their efforts to create an alternative social order. In addition, as nineteenth-century society grew increasingly mechanized and mercantile, some were inspired to look nostalgically backwards to a simpler era before mechanical looms and Spinning Jennys, in which the production of goods took place in the home.

Though Georg Lukács primarily regarded historical fictions as vehicles for a conservative vision of social progress, he also strongly recognized the radical potential of medievalism, viewing it as a Marxist reaction against capitalism itself: “The inhumanity of capitalism, the chaos of competition, the destruction of the small by the big, the debasement of culture by the transformation of all things into commodities – all this is contrasted...with the social idyll of the Middle Ages, seen as a period of peaceful co-operation among all classes” (23). Similarly, Clare Simmons regards medievalism as a protest against class boundaries in the midst of a century which saw a continuous leveling in social classes: “In the romantic era, popular medievalism uses the Middle Ages as a way to challenge class structures rather than to justify them” (6). She points to the 1832 Reform Act, which greatly extended the right to vote, as an example. Though suffrage was still pitifully limited by modern standards – excluding women and the majority of

men – the Reform Act marked a strong leap forward and, according to Simmons, greatly influenced medieval, historicist thought.

“Radical” medievalists were some of the foremost social activists of the day. Socialists such as William Morris sought to create healthy, harmonious communities for lower-class workers that were intended to emulate the supposedly idyllic living conditions which laboring peasants had enjoyed in medieval times. In describing a workers’ community at Bourneville, for example, Marcus Waithe draws clear parallels between medievalism and social activism: “Whilst questions of productivity are rarely far away from conceptions of worker health and happiness, the spirit of the scheme invoked the vernacular preferences of late-Victorian medievalism, with a corresponding concern to relieve poverty and provide a healthy environment” (183). When more progressive medievalists used the past to analyze the present, then, their responses were generally far more critical than affirmative.

Thomas Love Peacock’s short novel *Maid Marian* employs the Robin Hood legends to advance a more progressive agenda within the text. Published in 1822, several years after *Ivanhoe*, the text was originally derided as an imitation of its medievalist forebear – the two novels, after all, share a cast of characters. Peacock, however, wrote the majority of the novel in 1818, a year before the publication of Scott’s famous romance. In a letter to Percy Shelley during the course of the novel’s composition, he described his project thus: as “a comic romance, which I shall make the vehicle of much oblique satire on all the oppressions that are done under the sun” (Peacock 7). Perhaps Peacock believed that his satire would be disguised somewhat if it was directed at the Middle Ages instead of the nineteenth-century. Even so, however, the novel’s biting attitude is difficult to ignore, and there is something strangely contemporary about Robin Hood’s retreat to Sherwood Forest, where he becomes the president of a constitutional,

democratic society. Robin Hood and his Merry Men do not wait for their new forest nation to develop gradually; instead, it is born of a radical break with mainstream culture. Though the novel's tone is largely comical, the progressive ideologies at work within it are impossible to ignore.

### **Novel Complications**

Much critical attention has been given to medievalist texts such as Ruskin's: works of prose non-fiction, or else poems such as the *Idylls of the King*. Inga Bryden acknowledges that this is certainly a trend in Arthurian studies: "Critical literature dealing with the Arthurian Revival has so far tended to focus on Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and on the work produced by the pre-Raphaelite artists and poets" (6). Prose fiction texts have received comparatively less attention, with individual works such as *Ivanhoe* receiving a large portion of such notice. A turn to these prose narratives, however, formed a critical part of the nation-building process that resulted in nineteenth-century medievalism. As Barczewski describes it, "In recent years scholars have increasingly come to argue that national consciousness comes into being through narratives that erase contradictions, defuse paradoxes, and fill in discursive gaps" (45). Though "epic" poems such as Tennyson's *Idylls* were largely narrative stories told through verse, the rise of the realistic, historical novel as described by Lukács nevertheless provided an outlet for such national narratives that other artistic forms could not, generating a more open forum for character development and plot action.

Any discussion of popular and novelistic medievalism in the nineteenth-century would be incomplete without *Ivanhoe*. Walter Scott's text is one of the foremost medievalist novels –it influenced not only works of art and literature, but also the entire medievalist movement as a

whole. His novels were wildly popular: *Ivanhoe*, the 1819 tale of Saxons and Normans sold ten thousand copies within the first two weeks of its publication – the entire amount of books that had been printed by the publisher (Worth 67). It tells the story of Wilfred of Ivanhoe, a young Saxon knight who has been disinherited by his father, Cedric, for daring to join the Crusades of Richard the Lion-heart, a Norman king. Over the course of his adventures in the text, Ivanhoe – among other things - participates in several jousts, gets injured, is cared for by the lovely Jewish maiden Rebecca, narrowly escapes from a burning castle in the midst of a climactic battle between Normans and Saxons, risks his life to save Rebecca from being burned at the stake, and finally marries Rowena, a Saxon princess, at the close of the text, a move which helps to bring the feuding Norman and Saxon factions together. During the course of his journey, he interacts with many notable figures from English history and legend, including the villainous Prince John as well as Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

As Lukács makes plain, historical novels à la the works of Sir Walter Scott were first and foremost realistic novels, ostensibly committed to depicting the Middle Ages as accurately as possible. It is true that Scott happily admitted to blurring the lines between fact and fiction at several points in his text. For example, in the “dedicatory epistle” to *Ivanhoe*, Scott actually provides a disclaimer for the historical errors within the text: “It may be that I have introduced little which can positively be termed modern; but, on the other hand, it is extremely probable that I may have confused the manners of two or three centuries” (xxviii). Nevertheless, the mode of this novel’s narration – as well as of *Maid Marian* and *The White Company*, may be best described as realistic. Lukács situates the rise of the historical novel itself firmly within this developing narrative style: “Scott’s historical novel is the direct continuation of the great realistic

social novel of the eighteenth-century,” he writes, detailing some of Scott’s contributions to the history of novel itself, such as a stronger use of dialogue (30).

In order to “realistically” develop the Middle Ages, however, authors such as Scott had to make use of powerful imagery, effectively painting pictures for their readers with words. A second reviewer from *Blackwoods* magazine was clearly entranced by the atmosphere of the text: “Every line in the picture is true to the life – every thing in the words, in the gestures...speaks of times of energetic volition – uncontrolled action – disturbance – tumult...It seems as if the atmosphere around them were all alive with the breath of trumpets, and the neighing of chargers, and the echo of war-cries” (Anon. 263). Though there are clear politics to the images that Scott – and other medievalist writers – chose to portray, these ideologies are sometimes subtly questioned within medievalist texts. The “radical” figure of Robin Hood, for example, is, in certain respects, less progressive than one might expect. In many versions of the legend, he is depicted as a nobleman-turned-outlaw, bearing a genteel pedigree. “Although an outlaw, Robin Hood is at ease among the high-born and displays manners appropriate to a gentleman...Is he the angry leader of discontented peasants or a displaced gentleman indulging in a bit of harmless sport?” (Barczewski 19). Indeed, Peacock’s incarnation of Robin Hood is of this ilk: he begins the narrative as Robert Fitz-Ooth, Earl of Locksley and Huntingdon, before fleeing to Sherwood Forest in order to evade arrest for poaching the king’s deer, where he founds an alternate society. Robert’s bold defiance of the authorities suggests progressive and even radical inclinations, but one might also argue that, far from behaving radically, he actually is more closely akin to the conservative vision of the lord “protecting the weak from the strong.”

It is somewhat more difficult to perform a radical reading of King Arthur and his knights. However, as Simmons points out (and as Tennyson and Bulwer Lytton have already

demonstrated) there was a growing interest throughout the nineteenth-century in depicting scenes of King Arthur's death (5). Though the character of the great King remains a bastion of feudalism, the fact that his death – and, with it, the end of the glittering, stable, mythological society he had built – was a popular choice for poets, painters, and writers indicates that there was some degree of discomfort or uncertainty regarding the fate of Britain. Though uncertainty is not necessarily a progressive trait over a conservative one, it is nevertheless true that fantasizing about the end of a fabled, feudalistic age does not demonstrate empathy with the values of the age.

*Ivanhoe* presents an excellent example of a text in which the common political ideologies attached to medievalism are at once upheld and questioned. In critical circles, Scott and his texts are often characterized as politically conservative. It is easy to uphold this viewpoint by pointing to certain moments in the text which indeed appear to favor a more conservative ideology. When Richard the Lionheart reveals his true identity to the Robin Hood and the Merry Men, for example, “the yeomen at once kneeled down before him, and at the same time tendered their allegiance, and implored pardon for their offences” (Scott 500). Though an outlaw, this Robin Hood does not seem to be a radical, submitting to his king and once and therefore upholding established, feudalistic social structures. However, the ending of the novel would be very dissatisfying for anyone expecting an affirmation of the fledgling English nation: the text immediately supplies a qualifier to the unity inspired by Wilfred and Rowena's marriage by mentioning that, in truth, the tension between Saxons and Normans was not wholly resolved until the reign of Edward III many years later, when the English language was finally spoken in the king's court.

Conan Doyle's *The White Company*, though largely an adventure tale which affirms a heroic British past, is also haunted by a specter of disunity. At one point in the narrative, the unabashedly villainous "Socman of Minstead" (a rather bizarrely titled noble) attacks the neighboring estate of Twynham Castle: "This evil man gathered around him all outlaws, villeins, and masterless men... Then coming forth from the woods, they laid siege to the castle, and for two days they girt us in and shot hard against us, with such numbers as were a marvel to see" (404). Though the Socman is swiftly killed two days into the battle and all is returned to harmony, his actions are unsettling, calling into question the interior strength of the English nation even as it goes to war abroad. Clearly, as *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company* demonstrate, it would be too great a generalization to describe nineteenth-century medievalism as an incessant affirmation of united nation-states.

If the ideological divide between medievalists can best be represented as a dichotomy between the mythical figures of King Arthur and Robin Hood, and if such ideologies were deeply related to issues of nineteenth-century nation-building, then it is productive to consider the fictive spaces that formed integral parts of the imagined medievalist nation: Arthur's Camelot and Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest. If the figures who inhabit such legendary spaces have strong political connotations, then it follows that Camelot and Sherwood Forest are also politically oriented, with Camelot functioning as a conservative symbol and Sherwood Forest as a progressive one. More broadly still, it implies that broader applications of castle and forest imagery – whether of Camelot and Sherwood or otherwise – are also deeply ideological. In the following chapters, I will discuss the ways in which castles and forests function as ideological symbols in the novels under consideration here. I will also, however, highlight instances in which these spatial symbols subvert the ideologies that they should inherently convey.

## Chapter Two

### Castles

It is clear, from a broad consideration of primary texts and critical studies, that historical novels provided a way for nineteenth-century Europeans to define and envision nation-states both new and old. Georg Lukács goes a step further and identifies this historically fictive method of nation-building as generally conservative, due to the apparent preference for gradual progress as opposed to sudden, radical change. In *The Historical Novel*, he highlights Walter Scott specifically as a famous example of this style of composition; according to Lukács, Scott's preference for constructing lackluster main characters who must respond to and bridge the gaps between dynamic, oppositional historical figures indicates a deeper vision regarding the appropriate development of the nation-state. As Lukács describes it, "Paradoxically, Scott's greatness is closely linked with his often narrow conservatism. He seeks the 'middle way' between the extremes....The hero of a Scott novel is always a more or less mediocre, average English gentleman" (32). Ultimately, the hero's general blandness provides a canvas for the stronger personalities of the historical characters surrounding him to clash, come together, and finally blend.

Lukács' broader assessment of Scott as a conservative is a fairly common one in critical circles. In *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature*, for example, Kevin Morris identifies him as a follower of Burke, possessed of a "Burkean, conservative notion that civilized man in orderly society must divest himself of 'the first fundamental right of uncovenanted man...to judge for himself and to assert his own cause'" (Morris 135). This view seems to depend just as much on consideration of Scott the man as on Scott the author; his



aristocratic background, combined with his construction of a majestic “baronial pile” at Abbotsford (Bann 94) and ultimate knighthood, cause him to appear well rooted in an established social order and unlikely to support any radical changes.

Just as the construction of Abbotsford causes Scott to appear more conservative, the appearance of castles in medievalist texts frequently function as an emblem of a more conservative ideology, due to their association with royalty, nobility, and a feudal social structure. In this novelistic forum, then, ideology is inextricably linked to imaginative space – and, later, carried forward into “real life” through the physical buildings of the Gothic revival. This ideology, however, is compromised in all three novels under consideration here through vivid, imagistic scenes of castle destruction – what I will term “the history effect” in an adaptation of Bann’s theory. Such destruction is only to be expected in *Maid Marian*, due to the satirical and progressive nature of the novel. It is also a crucial aspect of the plot in *Ivanhoe*, as the castle belongs to the Norman enemies of the protagonists – though, in a complicated twist, it is the image of this castle which best represents the coming union between Normans and Saxons in England. The castle destruction is even less easy to explain in *The White Company*, the most conservative text of the three texts, especially as the protagonists of the novel are forced to flee its burning ruins in a dramatic scene. Castles, then, are not the stable vehicles of conservative ideology that they might initially seem, and call into question the efficacy of the castle space as a symbol of nation building.

### **Torquilstone and Coningsburgh**

In *Ivanhoe*, Scott carefully constructs a scenario in which two powerful, opposing groups – the Normans and the Saxons – reach a sort of unity due to the efforts of a single character,

Wilfred of Ivanhoe, who is carefully able to balance on the neutral ground between the two. Wilfred is – as Lukács points out – a rather dull hero. His dialogue mostly consists of chivalric platitudes. For example: “I am a good knight and noble, come hither to sustain with lance and sword the just and lawful quarrel of this damsel, Rebecca, daughter of Isaac of York; to uphold the doom pronounced against her to be false and truthless, and to defy Sir Brian de Bois-Gilbert as a traitor” (Scott 437). Though often culturally imagined as a gallant knight in shining armor, his efforts with “lance and sword” are largely portrayed as ineffective within the text. During his two forays in the lists over the course of the novel, he is badly wounded in the first and wins the second by luck - divinely ordained or otherwise - when his opponent falls dead of a heart attack. At the end of the narrative, however, he is rewarded by marriage to Rowena, a beautiful Saxon princess, in a grand wedding that brings together Saxons and Normans alike. This new union between the two rival groups ultimately results in the nation of England: “For as the two nations mixed in society and formed intermarriages with each other, the Normans abated their scorn, and the Saxons were refined from their rusticity” (Scott 556).

In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács describes this pursuit of a “middle way” and unity as a specific characteristic of Scott’s novels and, more broadly, of historical novels as a genre: “Scott’s heroes...have an entirely opposite function. It is their task to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel...into contact with one another...a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another” (Lukács 36). It would be all too easy to look no further than the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena, as well as the growing cohesion between Normans and Saxons which marks the end of the novel. These moments appear to support the broader conclusions propounded by Barczewski and others: that historicism, and medievalism specifically, provided a

forum in which to imaginatively investigate the processes of nation-building, and to affirm the pedigrees of existing nations such as Britain.

However, when considering the depiction of the fledgling English nation in *Ivanhoe*, it is very important to remember the actual closing scene of the book, in which Rebecca, a beautiful Jewish woman who both rescues Ivanhoe and is rescued by him at various points in the novel, states that she and her people are fleeing England, cast out of the country by anti-Semitic laws. “The people of England are a fierce race, quarreling ever with their neighbours or among themselves, and ready to plunge the sword into the bowels of each other. Such is no safe abode for the children of my people” (Scott 557). Kenneth Sroka points to this scene and others like it in order to demonstrate that the resolution of the novel actually offers no resolution at all: “In a very realistic way, the ending of *Ivanhoe* exposes the belief that social evils lie only in particular villainous individuals... We see instead that the seeds of internal confusion... intolerance, hypocrisy, and irresponsibility, reside in the society of the book as a whole” (654). This is not the positive depiction of unity which one would expect to find in a genre of literature that has gained a powerful critical reputation for building nations.

Clearly, then, the figurative marriage between Normans and Saxons occasioned by the literal marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena is not as sound as readers might hope. Indeed, it is critical to keep in mind that Ivanhoe and Rowena are not adequate symbols of this national union: Wilfred is of purely Saxon blood, son of the fiery Saxon lord Cedric. Though he has been temporarily disowned by his father for joining Norman King Richard the Lion-heart on crusade, his experiences still have not transformed him into a Norman. This challenges Lukács’ assertion that the resurrection of historical persons is integral to the agenda of nation-building at work in the novel: “In Scott’s life-work we meet with the most important personalities of English and

even of French history: Richard Coeur de Lion, Louis XI, Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, Cromwell, etc....For [Scott] the great historical personality is the representative of an important and significant movement embracing large sections of people” (38). Though Scott’s incarnation of King Richard the Lionheart provides Wilfred with a means of learning from and understanding the Norman faction, Wilfred still remains a Saxon – and, therefore, cannot adequately serve as the Norman component of the cross-cultural marriage.

Persons within the novel, then, do not offer the image of unity – unity through conservative progress – that Lukács suggests. This occurs despite the best efforts of the persons involved; the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rebecca is a bold attempt, but ultimately falls flat in practice. In order to find the roots of the disunity which haunts the characters in this text, it is helpful to consider spaces within the novel, specifically the castle spaces which the heroes must alternately escape from or navigate. Castles are crucial ingredients in medievalism, resurrecting the past just as effectively as recreated historical persons. Stephen Bann’s discussion of the “reality effect” and “historical series” provides a useful framework for exploring how authors specifically constructed castle spaces, and may help to explain how these fictitious spaces at once affirm conservative ideologies while simultaneously breaking them down.

In *The Clothing of Clio*, Bann points out that, in nineteenth-century historical paintings, small detail were often included in order to demonstrate the historical veracity of the depiction. Bann designates these details “the reality effect,” borrowing from Barthes’ “effet de réel,” and points to Michelet’s description of Charlotte Corday’s imprisonment and execution for an example: “‘After an hour and a half, someone knocked softly at a little door behind her’. Judged in the context of Charlotte Corday’s brief respite from execution...this ‘little door’ has no special narrative function: it simply assures us of the ‘reality’ of the process which is being re-enacted”

(Bann 57).<sup>2</sup> In the context of historical fictions, then, such minor details are meant to signify not only the “reality” of what is taking place – someone knocking on a door - but, also, the historical specificity of the events – someone knocking on a door at a specific moment in the past. The aim is ultimately to transport the audience to the intended historical period. A more apt name for this phenomenon would thus be “the history effect,” and, indeed, Bann employs the term “historical series” to describe a long sequence of such effects: “In other words, we require...the insertion of the [reality] effect within a *historical series*. We require the persistence of the effect, or at least its non-contradiction; and that implies the persistence of a discourse in which such an effect can echo and reverberate” (Bann 58). Bann makes this statement in a broader discussion of visual artwork, but one can immediately see its relevance to historically fictive writing. Clearly, nineteenth-century realism, combined with the general European passion for history resulted in a mode of history-writing that was highly attentive to the backdrops against which historical events took place.

However, despite the attention to historical accuracy which the historical series would imply, Bann also points out that nineteenth-century history-writing is essentially figurative (6). Though authors became increasingly concerned with facts, they nevertheless could not escape the use of vivid, imagistic language in order to accurately recreate vanished ages. To make this point, Bann quotes nineteenth-century critic Alfred Nettement’s assessment of a sample of history-writing: “These memoirs will give eternal life to the period and the country which are painted in them with such lively colors and such natural strokes that you think you can see the people breathing....This is Nature seized in the act, this is truth told without reticence, without circumlocution, without ornamentation” (Nettement, quoted on Bright 22). In these few

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, this project was inspired by an encounter with a reality effect in *The White Company*. Conan Doyle’s care to note that the floor in the Abbot of Beaulieu’s study was “rush-strewn” (12) seemed too important of a detail to ignore.

sentences, *Nettement* both praises the writing for its candid devotion to truth and, paradoxically, exults in the aesthetically pleasing mode of narration. Bann goes on to discuss situations in which such artistically brilliant narrating actually worked against the plain “truth” of what was being narrated. One may readily apply this observation to a discussion of ideological spaces in medievalist fictions: attempts to vividly set the historical scene via the depiction of spaces often compromise the ideologies that the spaces in question should otherwise convey.

### **Conservative Castles**

As a symbol, castles have ideological connotations that were very attractive to conservative medievalists. They are seats of authority, bastions of a feudalistic system, monuments to a glorious past. One powerfully conservative aspect of the King Arthur stories, for example, is their orientation around the fictive castle community of Camelot. As Barczewski relates, “What better medieval model than King Arthur’s Camelot, a community led by a noble elite dedicated to protecting the weak from the strong?” (62). When King Arthur and his knights were resurrected in medievalist poetry, Camelot was necessarily resurrected, too. In Tennyson’s famous “The Lady of Shalott,” for example, each stanza contains a reference to Camelot (which is conveniently rhymed over and over again with “Shalott”). The castle clearly functions as a locus point of civilization and stability, attracting a variety of characters: “Sometimes a troop of damsels glad/ An abbot on an ambling pad/ Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad/ Or long-hair’d page in crimson clad/ Goes by to tower’d Camelot” (Tennyson 55-59). Functioning as a bastion of social – and feudalistic - stability, it is the castle image of Camelot which attracted conservatives to medievalism and formed a strong part of their medieval imaginings.

The concept of the castle as conservative is notably upheld in Peacock's *Maid Marian*. As a more progressive text emphasizing the construction of an alternative civilization in the forest, it depicts castle spaces unfavorably - they function largely as regions of confinement for the heroes and heroine. Prior to becoming Maid Marian of Sherwood Forest, for example, Matilda Fitzwater is contemptuous of her home in Arlingford Castle. "Why, father," said Matilda, "if you coop me up here in this odious castle, I shall pine and die like a lonely swan in on a pool" (Peacock 45). She and her father then engage in a dialogue which both illustrates the capacity of the castle for imprisonment as well as opportunities to thwart it:

"But I will lock you in an upper chamber," said the baron.

"But I will shred the tapestry," said Matilda, "and let myself down."

"But I will lock you in a turret," said the baron, "where you shall only see light through a loophole."

"But through that loophole," said Matilda, "will I take my flight." (Peacock 48)

Small wonder, then, that Arlingford is ultimately placed under siege by the army of Prince John, who is determined to obtain Matilda Fitzwater as a bride. The narrator refrains from providing any physical description of the castle until the moments of battle, when the castle may be depicted as under threat: "On one side, the crimson light quivered by its own agitation on the waveless moat, and on the bastions and buttresses of the castle, and their shadows lay in massy blackness on the illuminated walls" (Peacock 95). In fact, this general portrayal of the castle as a threatening space – a space that is ultimately besieged and torn down, resulting in the flight of the main characters to the surrounding forests – is generally in keeping with the text's tendency towards ideological progressivism. The castle, as the home of Baron Fitzwater and the

figurative home of feudalism and inherited rights, is replaced by an alternative, woodland civilization.

This is not a surprising statement, considering the broader project of *Maid Marian*, a text which generally satirizes established social structures such as the church and government. At the very beginning of the novel, for example, the narrator cannot resist poking fun at Catholic monks: “The abbey of Rubygill stood in a picturesque valley, at a little distance from the western boundary of Sherwood Forest, in a spot which seemed adapted by nature to be the retreat of monastic mortification, being on the banks of a fine trout stream, and in the midst of woodland coverts, abounding with excellent game” (Peacock 15). This irreverent tone is applied to traditional authority figures throughout the novel, in a bantering style of narration. The witty, larger-than-life nature of this text sometimes makes it difficult to determine what to take seriously; the powerful image of the castle under siege reminds the reader that there is a deeper ideology at stake. By destroying the castle of Arlingford and forcing a transfer between two spatial realms, Peacock is able to demonstrate a more progressive agenda behind the text.

*Ivanhoe*, then - as a text written by a presumed conservative - should be rife in castle sequences which affirm conservative ideologies and, more specifically, affirm a more conservative approach to nation-building. Indeed, the different castles within this text spatially represent the two groups, Saxons and Normans, whose struggles ultimately result in the nation of England, as critics such as Lukács and Moretti have discussed. Scott constructs two chief castles in this text: Coningsburgh, the home of the Saxon noble Athelstane, descendant of kings; and Torquilstone, a Norman castle which is destroyed through siege and fire. In addition, there is also Rotherwood, the home of Cedric the Saxon and the rightful home of Wilfred of Ivanhoe. Rotherwood is not as majestic a castle as Coningsburgh or Torquilstone, described alternately as



a “hall” or a “mansion,” but it is important for consideration in this study due to its portrayal of domestic Saxon interiors. Other castles also appear within the novel, but these three buildings provide the clearest examples of the ideologies – and destruction thereof – which I am discussing here.

The text initially appears to draw clear distinctions between Saxon castle spaces and Norman castle spaces, using extensive descriptions that Bann would certainly designate as historical series. During the first depiction of Saxon Rotherwood, for example, the narrator cannot resist comparing it to the castles that were being constructed across England by the Normans: Cedric’s home is “a low irregular building, containing several court-yards or enclosures, extending over a considerable space of ground, and which...differed entirely from the tall, turreted, and castellated buildings in which the Norman nobility resided, and which had become the universal style of architecture throughout England” (Scott 44). Saxon castles and stately homes, then, are roundly depicted as more primitive and crude. On the interior, Saxon homes made an attempt at beauty, but failed greatly in terms of the personal comfort of the inhabitants. Rowena’s chambers at Rotherwood are furnished with silver candelabras and elaborate embroidered tapestries, but are not at all an inviting space: “Yet let not modern beauty envy the magnificence of a Saxon princess. The walls of the apartment were so ill finished and so full of crevices, that the rich hangings shook in the night blast...Magnificence there was, with some rude attempt at taste; but of comfort there was little, and, being unknown, it was unmissed” (Scott 68). Clearly, Scott does not attempt to sugar-coat the crudeness of medieval constructions in a powerful use of the historical series.

In these passages, one sees the historical series used as a vehicle for conveying an overarching perspective; namely, that Saxon architecture and culture are cruder than those of

their Norman rivals. Though Coningsburgh Castle is a much larger building than Rotherwood, it is depicted as equally primitive but on a grander scale, described as a “rude yet stately building” (Scott 413). Readers encounter it near the end of the novel, when King Richard, no longer in disguise, visits the Saxon stronghold for the presumed funeral of its owner, Athelstane (who alarms everyone when he bursts into the party alive). The castle mainly consists of a single large tower with supporting buttresses: “The wall is of immense thickness, and is propped or defended by six huge external buttresses which project from the circle... These massive buttresses are solid when they arise from the foundation... but are hollowed out towards the top, and terminate in a sort of turrets communicating with the interior of the keep itself” (Scott 413). Richard and his retinue climb to the uppermost chamber in the castle, where they convene with Cedric and other Saxon lords around a large oak table. Though the specific shape of this table is not specified, it is easy to visualize it as round, as the room containing it is located in the top of a tower. The presence of this round table immediately suggests something Arthurian, the signifier of feudal stability.

The appearance of the castle up to this point is consistent with the sort of conservative image which one might expect from Scott. It is an ancient structure, rooted in the deep histories of the Saxon nobility and thus connected to feudal hierarchies. The shadings of Camelot brought about by the large oak table are another infusion of conservative ideology. The image of the Saxon lords which Scott provides next, however, subverts the traditional, medieval conservatism of his scene: “Their grey locks and long full beards... gave the appearance of a band of ancient worshippers of Woden, recalled to life to mourn over their decayed national glory (416). This is hardly the picture of successful knights errant plotting their next glorious adventure. The general

dejection of this scene, complete with strong pagan overtones and the bitter taste of failed nationalism, complicates the reading of this castle space as an inherently conservative one.

If Rotherwood and Coningsburgh provide quintessential samples of “Saxon spaces,” then Torquilstone Castle provides the best examples in the text of a Norman space. It is the home of the Norman lord Front-de-Boeuf, a noble of great power; during a major plot arc of the text, the main protagonists – including Ivanhoe, Cedric, Rebecca, and Rowena – are captured by the Normans and imprisoned within it. Though it is not as large a building as Coningsburgh, it is of a more intricate construction: “It was a fortress of no great size, consisting of a donjon, or large and high square tower, surrounded by buildings of inferior height...Front-de-Boeuf, whose character placed him often at feud with his enemies, had made considerable additions to the strength of his castle, by building towers upon the outward wall” (Scott 199). When one compares this with “low, irregular” Rotherwood and the single great tower of Coningsburgh, Norman spaces, then, are immediately distinguished from Saxon spaces as more complex and intricate – more advanced in their construction.

A glance inside this structure reveals that Norman interior spaces were also more sophisticated than their Saxon counterparts. During their imprisonment in the castle, Cedric and Athelstane are confined within a great hall which appears to be a quintessential example of Norman architecture: in this grand room, the “vaulted roof was supported by lighter and more elegant pillars, and fitted up with that higher degree of ornament, which the Normans had already introduced into architecture” (Scott 201). Norman castles, as Scott relates in his appendixes to the text, were possessed of “stern and Gothic graces” – they are not crude or barbaric. The Norman sense of interior decorating initially appears to be somewhat more on a par with that of the Saxons; when Rowena is imprisoned within Torquilstone, she is escorted to

the chamber of Front-de-Boeuf's deceased wife, a room which has been "fitted up with some rude attempts at ornament and magnificence," where "The tapestry hung down from the walls in many places, and in others was tarnished and faded under the effects of the sun, or tattered and decayed by age" (Scott 213-214). This room is clearly not an inviting one; however, its disarray is ascribed to neglect in the wake of Lady Front-de-Boeuf's death, not to its inherent nature as "Norman." Furthermore, there is no mention of freezing drafts due to the improper construction of the walls – an uncomfortable feature of Rowena's home chamber at Rotherwood. Though it is not beautiful or comfortable, it is still somewhat more sophisticated than its equivalent in a Saxon manor.

Torquilstone Castle, for all intents and purposes, appears to be a Norman edifice. The castle is controlled by the French at the time of the siege, and they have stamped it strongly with their own mark, if the gothic ornaments in the great hall are of any indication. The castle's history, however, challenges this simple picture of its identity: Torquilstone was originally a Saxon edifice, taken over by the Normans after the Conquest. Its architecture, then, is not purely French - instead, it blends the styles of the two groups that became modern Britain. As the prisoners are conducted into the castle, for example, they note the Saxon history behind the building: "they were compelled to follow to a large room, which, rising on clumsy Saxon pillars, resembled those refectories and chapter houses which may be still seen in the most ancient part of our most ancient monasteries" (Scott 200). This supposedly Norman castle of the enemy, then, is also an architectural relative of the prisoners within it. Cedric, during his confinement in the great hall, remembers his father's stories of the Saxon lords who had once gathered there: "it was in this very hall that my father feasted with Torquil Wolfgang, when he entertained the valiant and unfortunate Harold...The envoy of Tosti was admitted, when this ample room could

scarce contain the crowd of noble Saxon leaders” (Scott 201). The castle forges a spatial bridge between the two peoples who have inhabited it. Additionally, the historical series, or history effect, produced by this image would seem to convey an ideology of unity between Norman and Saxon.

Indeed, to take this idea a step further, Torquilstone Castle figures as a symbol of the English nation itself. The union of Saxon and Norman architecture is analogous to the union of Norman and Saxon blood that comprises the English people. The narrator alludes strongly to this intermingling of “races” at the conclusion of the novel, which positions the marriage of Wilfred and the Rowena as the symbol of a new era of cooperation between Saxons and Normans, due to Wilfred’s service with Richard Coeur de Lion: “these distinguished nuptials...marked the marriage of two individuals as a pledge of the future peace and harmony betwixt two races, which, since that period, have been so completely mingled, that the distinction has become wholly invisible” (Scott 445-446).

It is unusual for this text, which is so deeply concerned with the theme of early English nation building, to wreak destruction upon a physical edifice that represents the mingling of the two peoples. One could argue that razing of this castle was occasioned by a fighting force which saw Saxon yeomen such as Robin Hood fighting under the direction of Richard, a Norman king, thus demonstrating a new unity overthrowing the old tyrannies. This analysis wavers, however, when one considers that Richard is disguised as an anonymous “Black Knight” during the majority of this conflict, only recognized when he rescues Wilfred from the burning castle. Throughout the text, it is easy to forget that he is Norman by birth. In a comical scene, for example, he carouses with Friar Tuck in good Saxon fashion, using the classic Germanic term “Drink hael!” as he quaffs a flagon of ale (Scott 169). His cooperation with Robin Hood and

Company, therefore, does not figure as the sort of pan-English alliance which one might expect and hope for.

In addition, the fire is set, not by the siege party, but by Ulrica, an old Saxon woman. When the Norman lords won the castle from her people, she was imprisoned within it as their slave and concubine. It is her supreme act of revenge, and the scene of the castle's burning is inextricably mingled with her suicide: "The towering flames had now surmounted every obstruction, and rose to the evening skies one huge and burning beacon....The maniac figure of the Saxon Ulrica was for a long time visible on the lofty stand she had chosen....At length, with a terrific crash, the whole turret gave way, and she perished in the flames" (Scott 305). Torquilstone is not destroyed from without, by an allied force of Normans and Saxons, but from within: by an abused Saxon woman in an act of despair. As she dies, she shouts a violent Saxon war song, an action that is far more polarizing than uniting: "All must perish/ The race of Hengist is gone/ The name of Horsa is no more/ Shrink not then from your doom, sons of the sword!" (Scott 305). In this scene, and through this image, the coming union between Normans and Saxon is constructed as something deadly.

One also sees, in this moment, how the history effect results in a loss of objectivity for the sake of vivid, figurative language. This depiction of castle destruction attempts to be historically accurate; the description of the turrets collapsing reflects a consideration for period architecture. However, the vivid, figurative language used to thrillingly set the scene – the image of the tower as a "burning beacon," the "maniac figure" of the Saxon crone burning to death – compromises and even destroys the image of Norman-Saxon unity that is integral to the castle's construction. Spaces, then, help to articulate the uncertainties found in certain aspects of this novel, such as the faux Norman-Saxon marriage between Ivanhoe and Rowena. They also

challenge the idea that this text provides a way to think about successful nation-building. Additionally, the theme of the burning castle will survive Scott's text as well as the ensuing Gothic Revival, resurfacing again near the end of the century.

### **Building Castles in Britannia**

How might one fit a window sash to a pointed window? This question may seem trite, but it seriously troubled Victorians seeking to reproduce the architecture of medieval England in a nineteenth-century world equipped with a host of modern conveniences – not least among them the efficient, seventeenth-century window sash. Art critic John Ruskin was moved to suggest a solution to this difficulty: “There is not the smallest necessity, because the arch is pointed, that the aperture should be so. The work of the arch is to sustain the building above; when this is done securely, the pointed head of it may be filled in any way we choose” (Ruskin, quoted on Bright 50). That window sashes and pointed arches should have occasioned such real debate demonstrates the degree to which a need to reproduce the medieval past – to *accurately* reproduce the medieval past – had come to dominate nineteenth-century architectural practices.

The nineteenth-century saw castles springing up across the English landscape once again as the Gothic Revival took hold. This architectural movement sought to recreate the past through the construction of buildings with arches, buttresses, gargoyles, and other ornamentations drawn from medieval cathedrals and fortresses. Nineteenth-century and modern critics alike largely ascribe the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival to the popularity of works such as *Ivanhoe*. Indeed, in *Cities Built to Music*, Michael Bright demonstrates that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors perceived a strong connection between the fictive buildings constructed by Scott and the mania for gothic buildings which arose in England: “Eastlake,

William Morris, and Clark believe that the groundwork for the revival was laid by poets and novelists...Scott it was, more than anyone else, who reversed the neoclassical prejudice against the Middle Ages as a rude and barbarous era” (Bright 7). Additionally, in *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature*, Kevin Morris suggests that Scott’s apparent championship of Catholicism in his canon of works – especially in *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* – influenced the Tractarians, a High-Church Anglican group that arose in the middle of the century. The Tractarians were favorable to Catholicism, the religion whose medieval stylings were persistently replicated through the Gothic Revival.

The fictive castle spaces which Scott so painstakingly constructed in *Ivanhoe* – and which, if critics are to be believed, so profoundly influenced British architecture in the nineteenth-century – were indeed largely drawn from the ruins of medieval castles that Scott had observed and visited. As he relates in his note to chapter XLI, a real Castle of Coningsburgh prompted the creation of Athelstane’s home. Scott meditates on this castle at length in the notes, identifying it as an ancient Saxon keep, a relic of King Alfred’s time in the years before the Conquest. He describes it by quoting extensively from Gough’s *Edition of Camden’s Britannia*. This is no lofty architectural masterpiece: “The great tower...forms a complete circle, twenty-one feet in diameter, the walls fourteen feet thick. The ascent into the tower is by an exceeding deep flight of steep steps, four and half feet wide, on the south side leading to a low doorway, over which is a circular arch crossed by a great transom stone” (Gough, quoted on Scott 458) Its primitive construction and Germanic-sounding name are the chief basis for its Saxon identification; Scott states that it is distinct from the Norman castles, with “all their stern and Gothic graces” (458).



It is possible, then, to draw an unbroken line between the ruins of the historical Coningsburgh Castle to the fictive Coningsburgh depicted in *Ivanhoe* to, finally, the gothic churches, homes, and public buildings which dominated nineteenth-century England. The full story, however, is a bit more complicated: Scott and Gough were incorrect in their assessment of Coningsburgh Castle as inherently Saxon (and, consequently, English, as opposed to the French Normans). Modern historians firmly identify this stronghold as Norman: “Conisbrough Castle,” as it is now called, was actually constructed after the Conquest, most likely in 1070. The rude, simplistic, Saxon tower dates to approximately 1180 – centuries after Hengist and other Saxon heroes ruled the land. Furthermore, once this castle is understood to be Norman, it contradicts Scott’s assessment of Norman architecture as “gracefully Gothic.” Apart from a few curved windows – curved, not even pointed and arched – the remnants of the castle look like nothing more than straight walls of stone.

According to Bright, a zeal for historical accuracy was a crucial aspect of nineteenth-century medievalism and, consequently, of the Gothic revival. Artists, authors, and architects alike were keenly attentive to historical detail, repulsed by anachronism – as Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick stated in 1836, “an anachronism in an historical painting is as offensive to the eye of taste as is an imperfect metaphor or a defective verse to the ear” (Meyrick, quoted on Bright 39). Bright situates this passion for accuracy within the broader infiltration of precise science into the largely historical fields of paleontology and archaeology (40). Stephen Bann corroborates Bright’s depiction of the nineteenth-century passion for history, analyzing in *The Clothing of Clio* an obsession with “fact” which came to dominate historiography, replacing the more figurative and artistically licentious styles of previous centuries.

Bright states that Scott's works contributed greatly to the general quest for accuracy in the medievalist and Gothic revivalist movements: "In literature Walter Scott based descriptions on actual buildings and insisted upon the historical accuracy of his novels in prefaces and notes" (39). This is a bold claim to make, and one with a strong bearing on the vision of the Gothic revival which Bright is attempting to construct – especially because Bright accords Scott a high place of honor as one of the chief originators of the movement. It is certainly true that Scott meticulously researched his subject matter and was committed to presenting an accurate vision of the Middle Ages, but he also was not above a little artistic license regarding the era he sought to portray. As Graham Tulloch points out, some of the strongest criticism directed towards *Ivanhoe* was concerned with the prominent historical anachronisms, which Scott himself did not hesitate to admit to in the dedicatory epistle (166). "It may be that I have introduced little which can positively be termed modern; but, on the other hand, it is extremely probable that I may have confused the manners of two or three centuries," wrote Scott (xxviii).

Scott's honest allegation that this is so diminishes the starkly antiquarian vision of him and his work which critics such as Bright favor. In addition, it firmly establishes the fictiveness of the medieval and Gothic revivals as a whole, as architects and artists sought to "accurately" recreate a world that was initially resurrected through the imaginative medium of literature. If Scott is the seminal medievalist, as Bright and others suggest, there was a cultural awareness that his medieval landscape was not entirely true to fact. According to Graham Tulloch, nineteenth-century critics were sometimes harsh in their assessments of the novel due to certain obvious historical or factual inaccuracies, even despite the disclaimer offered in the dedicatory epistle. "Scott was regularly criticized in the nineteenth century for...chronological conflagrations,

especially with regard to his portrayal of Cedric as living a fully Anglo-Saxon lifestyle in the late twelfth century” (Tulloch 166).

This brief discussion of Coningsburgh Castle in the context of nineteenth-century Gothic architecture affirms a point made by Susan Bernstein in her work *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger*: the “Gothic Revival” was just as much the creation of a new style as it was the resurrection of an old one; medieval gothic builders did not perceive their work as part of a unified genre – they simply built in the way they had been taught (Bernstein 45). Consequently, nineteenth-century revivalist buildings are often more gothic than the medieval originals. A commonly-cited example of this is Strawberry Hill, the home of Horace Walpole, eighteenth-century politician and author of *The Castle of Otranto*, which many consider to be the original gothic novel. Strawberry Hill was created by essentially cutting and splicing famous medieval or antiquated forms of ornamentation and construction from various buildings and compiling them together into one. The parlor fireplace, for example, was fashioned after a tomb in Westminster Abbey (Bernstein 46). Walpole’s mansion marked the first instance of a hyper-medieval building style which bloomed in England over the course of the nineteenth-century.

### ***The White Company: Late Victorian Gothic***

A century’s worth of gothic revivalism intervened between the publication of *Ivanhoe* in 1820 and the publication of Conan Doyle’s *The White Company* in 1891, yet the two texts are very similar in many aspects. Clearly, the model created by Scott – and articulated by Lukács – was highly popular and effective. Like *Ivanhoe*, *The White Company* features a main protagonist

whose presence is often overshadowed by those of the surrounding characters. Alleyne Edricson is twenty years old and of a quiet, reflective demeanor – a temperament no doubt related to his upbringing in Beaulieu Abbey, with only the monks for company. He is, like Wilfred, of Saxon descent, an identity that is still of cultural significance even during the Hundred Years War, when the novel takes place: “His father could trace his pure Saxon lineage back to that Godfrey Malf who had held the manors of Bisterne and of Minstead at the time when the Norman first set mailed foot upon English soil” (Conan Doyle 33). He is the heir to Minstead, an old Saxon estate, and must navigate tensions that arise between his brother – Minstead’s current proprietor – and his neighbors. *The White Company* also invokes history by resurrecting prominent historical figures, including Edward the Black Prince. The novel as a whole appears on the surface to favor a conservative vision of nationhood and nation-building: Britannia is affirmed through her struggles overseas, and each of the characters is awarded a suitable place within the social order that follows. Like Wilfred, Alleyne Edricson ends the novel with marriage, taking for his wife Lady Maude Loring, the daughter of Sir Nigel, captain of the White Company.

Just as one might have supposed, then, that the castle spaces in *Ivanhoe* would affirm a more conservative approach to nationhood and nation-building, a similar hypothesis may be launched at *The White Company*. Unlike Scott, who was one of the first authors to decide how the Middle Ages should be envisioned from a nineteenth-century vantage point, Conan Doyle wrote his text with a strong sense of how the Middle Ages should look and feel, due to the wealth of medievalist buildings, paintings, poems, and novels at his finger-tips. Thus, the sense of a historical series in connection with castle interiors is even stronger in this text than it is in both *Ivanhoe* and *Maid Marian*. The Gothic Revival provides a framework for thinking about Conan Doyle’s novel, in addition to the castle spaces depicted within it.

Conan Doyle, frequently described as a conservative, may well have been expected to present grand, suitably feudalistic castles in his medievalist novel, especially in the wake of an architectural revival which valued heavy, elaborate ornamentation. A keen researcher, however, he created castle spaces that were far cruder than the elaborate ornamentation of the Gothic Revival may have led one to expect, owing more to the depictions of castles in novels such as *Maid Marian* and *Ivanhoe* than to revivalist buildings. As the heroes enter Twynham Castle, home of the famous Sir Nigel Loring, for example, the narrator paints a rather stern picture of the edifice. Acknowledging that Twynham had been created as a stronghold and not as a palace, the narrator describes it thus: “Black was the mouth of Twynham Castle, though a pair of torches, burning at the further end of the gateway, cast a red glare over the outer bailey...they had scarce set foot upon the causeway ere a hoarse blare burst from a bugle” (Conan Doyle 113). Twynham, as the narrator points out, was not designed to be beautiful or architecturally magnificent, but to function as a fortress. Consequently, it is surrounded by high walls, “with at the corner a bare-faced keep, gaunt and windowless” (Conan Doyle 114). Though this text is set several hundred years after the events of *Ivanhoe* – and written many decades later – the exterior chief English castle represented within it still echoes some of the crudeness and primitiveness of Coningsburgh.

On the inside, however, Twynham is rich in comforts, in a far cry from the alternately drafty, decaying, or confining spaces depicted in Scott’s text or in *Maid Marian*. Conan Doyle envisions these comforts as quintessentially medieval:

“In the great stone fireplace a log fire was spurting and cracking...Above was a wreath-work of blazonry, extending up to the carved and corniced oaken roof...The walls were hung all round with the most elaborate and brightly-colored tapestry...The floor was of

polished tiles, with a square of red and black diapered Flemish carpet in the center; and many settees, cushions, folding chairs, and carved bancals littered all over it” (Conan Doyle 118).

The atmosphere in this room is “bright and lightsome,” in a sharp contrast to the red glare cast by the torches outside. This space is comfortable and homely; it is easy for the reader to imagine himself or herself sinking into a cushion and relaxing in the warm glow of the fire. In an extensive historical series, the text throws detail after detail at the reader to ensure that the scene is set.

It is easy to see why Twynham is portrayed much more comfortably in *The White Company* than Arlingford in *Maid Marian*. As the rightful home of the rightful lord, it is a homely, inviting space – it does not function as a prison for those who dwell within it. Additionally, a century of associating the fictively medieval styles of the Gothic Revival with, not only churches and public buildings, but dwelling spaces, most likely added to the sense of a comfortable medieval, which sharply distinguishes Twynham from any of the castles in *Ivanhoe*. Conan Doyle’s depiction of the castle interior bears clear marks of a medieval vision that has been conveniently molded to suit the niceties and expectations of the Victorian period. The castle room which Alleyne enters, for example, is “littered” with settees, folding chairs, and cushions. The Victorian concept of “settee” was vastly different from the “settle,” its medieval equivalent. Diehl and Donnelly describe the medieval settle as a simple piece of furniture consisting of a bench with a back and arms: they were a “convenient, but not too comfortable, place for visitors to sit” (144). The Victorian settee, by contrast, was an upholstered piece similar to a modern loveseat. The fact that Conan Doyle inserts the settee into a room that would undoubtedly have been furnished with nothing of the kind, coupled with the somewhat

archetypal imagery of a crackling log fire, suggests a powerful association between interior comfort and the Middle Ages.

In addition to Twynham, Conan Doyle constructs another castle within the text which is deeply connected to the theme of English nationhood. Paradoxically, it is in France: Castle Villefranche, home of Sir Tristram de Rochefort, who provides the chief members of the White Company with a feast and a night's lodging. Like Twynham, it does not possess "Gothic graces"; instead, on the outside, it is "harsh and stern as its master. A broad moat, a high outer wall turreted at the corners, with a great black keep towering above all" (Conan Doyle 290). The interior, however, presents a more comfortable image of peaceful, feudalistic bliss. The members of the White Company are greeted with a feast almost as soon as they arrive, and they sit down to eat in a great hall which should satisfy any staunch medievalist's expectations: "The great fire crackled in the grate, the hooded hawks slept upon their perches, the rough deer-hounds with expectant eyes crouched upon the tiled floor; close at the elbows of the guests stood the dapper little lilac-coated pages" (Conan Doyle 291). One observes, in this prolonged history effect, abundant symbols of aristocracy which would have resonated with a more conservative audience, affirming the image of this castle as ideologically conservative.

In addition, this hall at Villefranche becomes closely linked to England and her national future. The wife of de Rochefort, Lady Tiphaine, is an amateur prophetess, and she favors the guests with a demonstration of her skills after their dinner. When Sir Nigel asks her to tell him the future of England, she responds with a prophecy which clearly predicts the nation's destiny as a leader in global exploration and an imperial empire:

Whence come they, these peoples, these lordly nations, these mighty countries which rise up before me?...They call them many names, and they rule them this way or that, but they

are all English, for I can hear the voices of the people. On I go, and onward over seas where man hath never sailed, and I see a great land under new stars and a stranger sky, and still the land is England. Where have her children not gone? What have they not done? Her banner is planted on ice. Her banner is scorched in the sun.

(Conan Doyle 300).

Clearly, the hall of Villefranche – and, by extension, the entire castle – function as a point of origin for this deeply nationalistic vision. Initially, this is consistent with the idea that castles are spaces which endorse the idea of nation-building via conservative means.

However, just as in *Ivanhoe*, this castle symbol of the nation is gravely threatened. As the main characters sleep off their luxurious feast, a troop of “Brushwood Men,” or lawless miscreants, invade Villefranche, wreaking havoc upon the building and murdering everyone in their path. Alleyne and his friends are alerted to the attack, for example, when the body of a squire suspended from a rope dashes against the window of their bedchamber, after being flung from the storey above. The text depicts these villains more as animals than as people: “there stood a group of fierce, wild creatures, bare-armed and bare-legged, gaunt, unshaven, with deep-set murderous eyes and wild-beast faces. With their flashing teeth, their bristling hair, their mad leapings and screamings, they seemed...more like fiends from the pit than men of flesh and blood” (Conan Doyle 307). This image of the uncontrollable wild men unleashed upon the castle compromises the feudalistic stability and plenty which Villefranche had projected during the feast.

These scenes depict the 1358 Revolt of the Jacquerie, a violent French peasant rebellion. The wild men sing songs celebrating “Jacques Bonhomme,” and, in another moment, are depicted as “howling and dancing peasants, their fierce faces upturned, their clenched hands



waving, all drunk with bloodshed and with vengeance” (Conan Doyle 319). The destructive progress of the wild men through Villefranche may be read as anarchy defeating stability - anarchy bearing distinctive overtones of mob violence and the Reign of Terror. The specter of the French Revolution rears its head as the Brushwood Men set the building ablaze. Sir Nigel, Alleyne, and their friends are chased to the high tower of the castle keep, where they desperately defend themselves while the castle burns: “Beneath and around them blazed the huge fire, roaring and crackling on every side of the bailey, and even as they looked the two corner turrets fell in with a deafening crash, and the whole castle was but a shapeless mass, spouting flames and smoke from every window and embrasure” (Conan Doyle 318). Though the valiant soldiers are ultimately rescued by the entire White Company, which comes pouring out of the surrounding forest and disperses the company of “howling peasants,” the castle – the symbol – has not been nearly as fortunate. The text makes no mistake about its fate; it is left “a blackened and blood-stained ruin” (324).

This powerful image of the abused, dismembered castle compromises its efficacy as a symbol of powerful nationhood, ultimately challenging the nationalistic message of the text as a whole. Though Alleyne returns to Twynham Castle to marry his sweetheart and become a Knight of the Garter, it is this image which lingers with readers. When coupled with the burning of Torquilstone, the razing of Villefranche serves to reinforce a broader conclusion regarding the appearances of castles in medievalist fictions: the vivid, figurative language used to depict the destruction of these majestic buildings ultimately subverts the conservative ideologies which they should inherently convey. Instead of functioning as stable emblems of civilization, castles are destroyed and threatened.

## Chapter Three

### Forests

It might initially seem innocuous that, in *The White Company*, the Brushwood Men who torch Villefranche emerge from the surrounding woodlands. At a surface level, one might appreciate it only for the ominous, suspenseful turn it lends to the plot. Certainly, the appearance of the Men from the depths of the woods is one of the most gloomily thrilling scenes in the novel: “he [Alleyne] saw of a sudden a man steal forth from the wood into the open clearing....Ninety-and-seven Alleyne counted of these dark figures flitting across the line of the moonlight....Out of the one wood and into the other they passed...until the black bristle of trees had swallowed up the last of them” (Conan Doyle 304).

A turn to history, however, reveals that forests have much deeper connotations that are powerfully at work in this scene. It is not surprising that the enemies of the conservative, stable castle should arise from the forests, long associated with wild men, outlaws, and radicals. Forests, by the nineteenth-century, had acquired progressive and even radical connotations, widely regarded as spaces in which one could escape the boundaries of civilization and explore alternatives to normative society. Furthermore, the sense that forests were uncivilized or outside of civilization made them popular locations to depict conflict between competing factions: they provided a neutral space to explore the struggles which led to nationhood. Moretti, in his assertion that historical novels generally take place on the peripheries of civilization as opposed to in the epicenters, specifically points to forests as a choice background for such texts: “Unlike sentimental novels, historical novels are usually located in the proximity of major national barriers: forests...hardly accessible coastlines...wide expanses of territory...and especially

mountains” (34). When one combines the progressively-oriented history of forests with the theories of Moretti and Lukács, then, woodlands emerge as the progressive counterpart to the castle in the medievalist framework of nation-building. However, as an examination of our three texts will reveal, they, like castles, are unreliable vehicles of this ideology.

*Ivanhoe*, *Maid Marian*, and *The White Company* provide excellent forest sequences for this sort of analysis. Extensive portions of *Ivanhoe*, for example, take place in forests; indeed, it forms a primary back-drop of the action in the novel. The mysterious “Black Knight” – later revealed to be King Richard the Lion-heart in disguise – finds himself lost in extensive woods in Derbyshire, where he encounters Friar Tuck and, later, Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men. A large number of the novel’s protagonists, including Wilfred of Ivanhoe and Rebecca, are captured in the forest by soldiers of the evil Norman lord Front-de-Boeuf and taken to Torquilstone Castle. The forest – which readers soon come to know as the Sherwood Forest of legends – provides the principal characters with a space to strategize and negotiate. As the outlaws and King Richard come together to rescue England from Prince John, for example, the majority of their planning takes place in the woodlands: on the day of their meeting, “The daylight had dawned upon the glades of the oak forest. The green boughs glittered with all their pearls of dew. The hind led her fawn from the covert of high fern to the more open walks of the greenwood” (Scott 306). The text prompts readers to lend its forests extra consideration due to the great number of climactic scenes which take place within them.

Because *Ivanhoe* and *Maid Marian* are both concerned with the same forest and an almost identical cast of characters, it is productive to consider the similarities and differences between these two novels. The use of Sherwood Forest as an escape for the outlaws is repeated in *Maid Marian*. In Scott’s text, it is evident that Robin Hood and the Merry Men employ the

forest as an alternative to mainstream civilization. Peacock's novel also explores this theme, but in much greater detail than is found in *Ivanhoe*. In his text, the woods function more obviously as a retreat from or alternative to civilization. Crucially, this text depicts the transition from castle to forest, thus emphasizing the escapist role played by woodlands. Even before she becomes Maid Marian of Sherwood Forest, Matilda Fitzwater is a devoted huntress, more comfortable in sylvan surroundings than in her father's castle – a fact which leads to domestic tensions, especially after Robert her fiancé turns to outlawry: “Well, father,’ added Matilda, ‘I must go to the woods.’ ‘Must you?’ said the baron; ‘I say you must not’” (Peacock 48). Ironically, both the baron and his daughter will be forced into the forest before the novel is over, where they will become participants in Robin Hood's new society.

Unlike in *Ivanhoe*, where the true King ultimately emerges from the woods to take his place on the throne of England, the “king” in *Maid Marian* presides solely over Sherwood Forest. Peacock's iterations of Robin Hood and the Merry Men appear to be much more deeply concerned with founding an alternative civilization than their counterparts in Scott's text. *Maid Marian* offers entire chapters in which the new outlaws discuss their core values and democratically construct a constitution – the forest thus appears to house a functioning democracy in the midst of medieval, feudalistic England.

In *The White Company*, forests mainly function as backdrops to the adventures of the protagonist, Alleyne Edricson, who must journey through woods at multiple points in the novel: first, as he travels from Beaulieu Abbey to his ancestral home at Minstead, and then as he proceeds from England to the Continent during his service with the White Company. The woods, then, are transitory spaces, and not the locations of more permanent dwellings such as the outlaw camps in *Ivanhoe* and *Maid Marian*. For example, “It was no easy or light thing to

journey through this great forest, which was some twenty miles from east to west” (100), or “For two hours they marched through forest and marsh-land, along the left bank of the river Aveyron” (328). These two sentences closely associate forests with travel instead of habitation, and indeed the majority of the novel is set on the road; Alleyne and his companions pass through many different forests in England and on the continent.

### **A Brief History of Literary Forests**

Through their depictions of forests, Scott, Peacock, and Conan Doyle are all tapping into one of the most ancient images to captivate the human imagination. In the epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest surviving work of written literature, Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu journey to Cedar Mountain in order to slay Humbaba, the monster who guards it, and to then cut down the cedars as a trophy. Humbaba is fearsome, but the forest he inhabits is lush and beautiful: “Across the face of the mountain the Cedar brought forth luxurious foliage/ its shade was good, extremely pleasant/ The thornbushes were matted together, the woods were a thicket...among the Cedars...the boxwood” (Tablet V). This gentle, sylvan scene soon becomes the backdrop for a grim battle between Humbaba and his heroic assailants. When it is over, the two friends turn their wrath upon the forest; as Enkidu exclaims to his companion, “My friend, we have cut down the towering Cedar whose top scrapes the sky” (Tablet V). Writes Robert Pogue Harrison, “What interests us about the epic above all is the fact that the first antagonist of Gilgamesh is the forest...Why? What is it exactly that inspires Gilgamesh to undertake this journey and deforest Cedar Mountain?” (14) Gilgamesh’s need to destroy the cedars, even despite their beauty, reflects the dualistic views of the forest that will surface again and again in literature and

folklore. Forests are lovely spaces, but also may conceal hidden threats – even gigantic demons such as Humbaba.

Corinne J. Saunders characterizes forest imagery in literature as archetypal, with roots stretching back to Biblical times and beyond, if Gilgamesh is any indication. Harrison agrees, elaborating on the many ancient myths such as Gilgamesh which involve travel through deep woods. Forests, after all, are spaces in which vision is obstructed by tree boughs – it is difficult to see long distances, making them ideal places for dangers or other unexpected persons or events to surprise the hero or heroine. It is not surprising, then, that forests are usually associated with a quest motif – the young romantic hero inevitably strikes out into a forested landscape in order to seek adventure.

However, forests are also far more than a symbol: as Saunders describes it, “While the forest functions as a recurring literary topos with great symbolic power, it is also a ‘real’ landscape” (xi). The mythical or legendary forests which the fictive heroes of the ages explored have obvious counterparts in the waking world, counterparts which happened to be valuable economic resources and, often, required human management. Forests and deforestation have been an issue for human civilizations for much longer than most ecologically-minded inhabitants of the 21<sup>st</sup> century imagine. Indeed, Plato wrote extensively of deforestation in the fourth century B.C., looking back to earlier days when the country surrounding Athens had been rich with trees, before the Athenian navy required timber for its exploits. “But in the primitive state of the country, its mountains were high hills covered with soil...and there was abundance of wood in the mountains. Of this last the traces still remain” (Critas 3.75). Borrowing a phrase from Homer’s poetry, Harrison comments, rather poetically, “Forests became fleets, sinking to the bottom of the wine-dark sea” (55). Forest imagery, then, with its ancient roots in both myth and

in history, is thus specially equipped to maneuver the path between imagination and reality which forms such a prominent theme in almost all studies of historical fictions.

In medieval England, one may see a literal inspiration for the fictive trees which blossomed in the pages of medieval manuscripts such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but the forests were not nearly as extensive as medieval poets and authors made them out to be. In ancient times, it truly was a woodland country, with the majority of the landscape covered by wildwood, or dense forest. By 1086, however – a few centuries before the events in *Ivanhoe* are supposed to have taken place - only fifteen percent of the country was forested, and less densely than it had been in previous years. In *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, Saunders speculates that deforestation had begun earlier in England than on continental Europe due to Roman colonization. She points out that the relatively small patches of woodland in medieval Britain provide a stark contrast to the vast acres of verdure which dominate medieval romances (2). As she describes it, “In the later Middle Ages, romance writers looked back to a time immediately preceding their own, largely mythical in England, in which this forest landscape was almost boundless” (10). Jeffrey Theis goes even further and suggests that this medieval imagining of ancient woodlands was even factually incorrect, stating that Neolithic and Bronze Age Britons had already begun to manipulate the woods which surrounded them, transforming most of the “wildwood” into tamer “woodlands.”

It is important to remember that there was a crucial difference between the “woodlands” of the Middle Ages and the “wildwoods” of pagan times: chiefly, woodlands were privately owned, with discernible boundaries. Interestingly enough, according to the 1086 Domesday Book, these woods were measured according the number of pigs they could nourish, thus indicating the degree to which agriculture and animal husbandry had come to dominate attitudes

towards woodlands. By the 1890s, the years of Conan Doyle's writing, only approximately one third of the medieval woodlands remained. As Theis describes it, "Thus, while the wildwood might appear often in the literary imagination, it was largely extinct by the early modern period" (9). The attitudes towards woodlands in the Middle Ages were, unsurprisingly, very different from those held by nineteenth-century Romantic and post-Romantic authors such as Scott, Peacock, and Conan Doyle. Monarchs in England and on the European continent generally viewed their woods as breeding ground for creatures that might be chased and hunted, such as deer and foxes. Lower aristocrats and peasants, however, regarded the woods as critical locations for economic resources such as timber.

It is also important to note that the terminology of woodlands was not always as fluid as it is today. The word "forest" is derived from the Latin word "foris," meaning simply "outside" (Saunders 1). Modern persons generally regard the terms "forest" and "wood" as synonyms, but, in the Middle Ages, forest was "a legal term for land reserved for the royal hunt. This area often was wooded, but it usually included open areas and even towns and villages" (Theis 11). The king's right to hunt on any public land when it pleased him was a monarchical perk which Saunders traces from ancient Rome to Germania, where it undoubtedly would have influenced the Saxon tribes who migrated to England (Saunders 5). Thus, though "Sherwood Forest" is the home of an antiauthoritarian rebel, it is not exactly the independent free space which one would expect, belonging to the monarch whom Robin and Company are persistently trying to thwart. Indeed, woodlands were often the cause of great legal strife between the monarch and his subjects, as kings confiscated land for their royal forests haphazardly and thus removed it from the use of their subjects (Theis 12). The nobles who wrote the Magna Carta even added clauses in order to limit the king's right to continually afforest land.



However, though reforms such as those enacted through the Magna Carta and the subsequent Forest Charter – which stripped away recent afforestations from the crown and restored forest holdings to the boundaries that had existed in the early years of Norman rule – returned a degree of control over the forests to aristocrats and private persons, “they also mitigated severe punishments for forest law offenses, such as losing one’s life or limb for destroying vert or venison” (Theis 12). It is important to keep in mind the draconian penalties of these laws when evaluating characters such as Robin Hood (in all of his incarnations). The outlaw, though often portrayed as a carefree Merry Man, is continually running the risk of extremely harsh consequences. Interestingly, however, though Robin Hood uses Sherwood Forest as a home base for his exploits, it is the only option open to him under medieval English law. As Saunders points out, the laws in place during the Middle Ages essentially forced criminals and wrongdoers to seek shelter in the woods: “The legal process of outlawry...removed the individual from any protection of the law, thus stripping him of his birthright...the outlaw ‘had no more rights than a hunted beast’” (3). Thus, the decision of those such as the apparently fictitious Robin Hood to seek shelter in the woodlands was not entirely made out of a desire to be avant-garde. The woods, far from being a location of choice, were essentially the only place legally exiled persons could inhabit.

The depictions of Sherwood Forest as a refuge for outlaws and activists perpetuated by Peacock and Conan Doyle may be related to migrations *back* to the forest during the early modern period. Anglo-Saxon peasants had begun to make their homes in the forests as early as 755, thus beginning a pattern of selective deforestation in order to clear spaces for their homes. As Saunders describes it, “Such a duality renders comprehensible the frequent appearance of clearings and inhabitants within the forest of medieval romance” (4-5). This system of woodland

habitation was reinforced centuries later; as cities began to boom during the early modern period, a sizable amount of laborers and workers fought against the tides pouring into places such as London and instead made their way into the forests which had nurtured their distant ancestors. “Forest societies blended an older Robin Hood-like, antiauthoritarian tenor with newer economic and ideological concerns...Not only a site of alternative agricultural practices, forest regions also hosted new industries and varied lucrative employments” (Theis 13). A variety of cottage industries sprang up in forest regions, including glass-works, lace-making, stocking-knitting, and weaving. Crucially, though the peasant laborers who set up shop with royal forest boundaries never possessed legal rights to the benefits they enjoyed, such as timber and grazing space for livestock, they took them anyway, perhaps hoping to evade detection for as long as possible and to entrench themselves so deeply within the forests that removal would be difficult.

Paradoxically, as Theis points out, the irritating royal forest restrictions actually played a crucial role in establishing large areas of woodland ripe for the taking in the early modern period: “While the rest of England mercilessly hacked away at much of its remaining woods, the sylvan character of royal forests abided both as a material resource as well as a tangible marker of the past...it served as a perpetual reminder to local residents...of what they considered the tyranny of centralized power” (12). Though the Robin Hood narratives under examination in this study take place before the early modern period, the time which Theis considers in his study, the nineteenth-century authors who depicted Robin Hood were drawing from a cultural understanding of forests and woodlands which encompassed centuries of British history.

In addition to legal outlaws, however, the forests were also a natural refuge for civilization’s outcasts. They provided homes for hermits, lepers, and those who just didn’t quite

fit into general society. As Harrison rather mysteriously describes it, “One could not remain human in the forest; one could only rise above or sink below the human level” (61). Presumably, he means that the forests provided an ideal location for those who wished to engage in bestial or sub-human behavior, or, alternatively, wished to perfect themselves through rigorous spiritual practices, such as religious hermits. Additionally, forests were the haunts of all manner of pagan creatures: “Age-old demons, fairies, and nature spirits continued to haunt the conservative woodlands, whose protective shadows allowed popular memory to preserve and perpetuate cultural continuities with the pagan past” (Harrison 62). One recalls, again, the image of the Green Knight emerging from the forest to challenge the court of King Arthur, green from head to toe and with a branch of holly in his hand. Critics generally agree that one interpretation for this cryptic image is that of a nature-worshipping, pagan past which refuses to be quelled by Christian civilization. Though the Green Knight is often also read as a Christ-figure – and, indeed, both interpretations are valid – the role of the forest and pagan symbolism in this image cannot be ignored.

This interplay between real forests and imaginary forests may be readily observed in the long poems and lays of the Middle Ages, which undoubtedly influenced the medievalists of the nineteenth-century. Famous poetic romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Sir Orfeo* all contain well-known forest sequences, generally involving a hero on a quest – much like Gilgamesh and Humbaba on their journey to Cedar Mountain thousands of years earlier. Forests are also a common back-drop to many of the tales in the Arthurian canon. The abundance of forest images and narrative sequences in medieval poetry and in the King Arthur and Robin Hood stories helped to perpetuate the nineteenth-century idea that forests

formed a crucial part of the medieval setting – regardless of how limited in size those forests may have been during the Middle Ages.

The popularity of forests as a literary backdrop survived the Middle Ages and remained prevalent through the Renaissance and into the early modern period. In *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England*, for example, Jeffrey Theis examines the many forest landscapes which appear in the works of Shakespeare and in other famous literary texts, such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (7). Forest imagery and forest law became especially salient topics during the English Civil War, when different sides appropriated the woods for their own purposes. Supporters of King Charles were readily able to adopt the forests as a special emblem: "The long tradition in which the oak symbolized monarchical strength and the forest materialized royal power...made it an especially potent symbol for royalist writers during the period" (Theis 213). Anti-monarchists such as Andrew Marvell were hard-pressed to dissociate forests from their distinctly royal connotations. Nevertheless, the woods retained a strongly symbolic power in the minds of English writers and thinkers.

During the Enlightenment, attitudes towards forests underwent a shift as Europeans continued to turn away from the folk beliefs and superstitions of the past. The forest was no longer dark, ominous, and impenetrable – now, it could be successfully navigated through an application of human reason and logic. Rene Descartes' use of a forest analogy to convey his beliefs regarding truth and morality demonstrates the degree to which the forest has been transformed: "In this [his quest for truth] I would imitate the travelers who, finding themselves lost in a forest, ought not to wander this way or that...but ought always walk as straight in a line as they can in one direction and not change course for feeble reasons" (Descartes, quoted on Harrison 110). Instead of regarding the woods as the dwelling place of elves and sprites,

Enlightenment thinkers such as Le Roy took a more biological and practical view, choosing to view the forests simply as collections of trees which must be maintained. Le Roy, the author of the entry for *foret* in Diderot's *Encyclopedie*, had this to say about forests: "Our oaks no longer professor oracles, and we no longer ask of them the sacred mistletoe; we must replace this cult by care" (quoted on Harrison 115). As Harrison relates, Le Roy's primary concern is "forest management" – preventing the waste of valuable timber.

Rationally-driven, utilitarian beliefs such as Le Roy's characterized Enlightenment attitudes towards the forests went on to influence nineteenth-century medievalists as they sought to resurrect the Middle Ages. Just as medieval writers of romance associated the forests with a mystical, fantastic period in the ancient past, it appears that nineteenth-century authors such as Scott, Peacock, and Conan Doyle performed a similar leap, this time linking the forests back to the Middle Ages themselves. It would be highly reductive to ascribe medievalist interest in the forests to a single source, but one should not underestimate the prevalence of forest imagery, not simply as a reaction against encroaching civilization and industrialization, but against the demystification of the forests themselves. Though Le Roy championed the idea of the navigable, tameable forest, medievalists wished to explore the forests as they had once been: mysterious, with abundant possibilities for adventure. In their quests to resurrect the imaginative potential of the Middle Ages, it was clearly necessary for medievalists to resurrect the forests as well.

### **The Forest as a Progressive Vehicle**

The historical association of forests with outlaws and anarchical figures such as Robin Hood allows one to read them through a distinctly progressive lens. In each of the three texts under consideration, forest scenes carry strong progressive connotations, regardless of the

authorial intent governing the text. In the *White Company*, for example, a mob of that is closely linked in appearance to the mobs of the French Revolution emerges from the forest. The forest, in this context, has radical connotations, which the ostensibly conservative author of the text would be motivated to put down. However, putting this momentous textual incident aside, there are numerous other, smaller moments which support the idea that forest imagery is inherently progressive. Additionally, just as Harrison describes “wild men” as lurking in the forest, Alleyne encounters two jugglers on the edge of the woods who certainly strike him as out of the ordinary. His first instinct, upon sighting the two men as they practice their jugglers’ tricks – standing on their heads, capering, somersaulting – is to assume that they are the victims of demonic possession. His distress is not lost on the two entertainers: “‘Hast never seen tumblers before?’ asked the elder, a black-browed swarthy man...’Why shrink from us, as though we were the spawn of the Evil One?’” (Conan Doyle 30). These performers challenge the ideas of normalcy which Alleyne had learned in his monastic home: an institution with powerfully conservative connotations. This is a progressive move for the text to make, and it is strongly connected to the forest setting.

The progressive connotations of the forests in *Ivanhoe* are even easier to detect. The employment of the Robin Hood legends and the necessary resurrection of Sherwood Forest connect the woodlands in this novel to a radical boldness to defy the constrictions of society. Other moments which occur within the forest emphasize its connection to progressive ideology. In one scene, for example, Gurth, the slave of Cedric the Saxon, is awarded his freedom under the boughs of Sherwood Forest after assisting his master during the siege of Torquilstone: “No longer a serf, but a freeman and a landholder, Gurth sprung to his feet... ‘A smith and a file,’ he cried, ‘to do away the collar from the neck of a freeman!’” (Scott 309). Though the text almost

immediately subverts this progressive moment by pointing out that Wamba, Cedric's jester, remains a slave because he is "not suited for freedom," there is still a strong connection between the giving of freedom and the forest setting in which it takes place.

The text which employs the most progressive depiction of the forest is Peacock's *Maid Marian*. It presents Robin Hood and his Merry Men as democratic civilization-builders, who hold a meeting in Sherwood Forest to craft the constitution of their new society. Instead of employing feudalistic or aristocratic terms to describe the different offices of their government, for example, Robin Hood is described as the president, Will Scarlet as the vice-president, and Little John as the secretary. The document the Merry Men produce hinges strongly upon the principle of "equity," which is shown to govern them in all of their actions. For example, the first section of the "Article of Equity" states the following: "The balance of power among the people being very much deranged, by one having too much and another nothing, we hereby resolve ourselves into a congress or court of equity, to restore as far as in us lies the said natural balance of power, by taking from all who have too much...and giving to those who have nothing" (Peacock 112). The democratic ideals which clearly govern the construction of this constitution, in addition to the fact that the outlaws have actually produced a constitution to articulate their laws, suggests the forest as a key site in this more progressive vision of nation-building.

### **The Forest as Historical Series**

As a literary image, forests carry with them the weight of thousands of years of fascination and contemplation. I wish to explore the forests in *Ivanhoe*, *Maid Marian*, and *The White Company*, however, in greater detail – to consider the imagery and language with which

they are constructed, paying close attention to the specific conceits and images used to create settings that suitably resurrect the Middle Ages. One could argue that a simple consideration of the subject matter of these novels – knights, tournaments, and outlawry – is sufficient in order to reconstruct the medieval period. After all, a novel with a plot such as that of *Ivanhoe* lays a clear claim to the medieval past.

However, it is important not to overlook more minor details such as the seemingly superfluous, often prosy depictions of medieval forests which these texts contain. A reviewer of *Ivanhoe* from *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* demonstrates that a primary attraction of the novel was the medieval landscape, focusing in particular on Scott's description of the ancient, untouched medieval forest: "Hundreds of broad short-stemmed oaks, which had witnessed, perhaps, the stately march of the Roman soldiery, flung their broad gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious green sward" (Scott 6). The reviewer's commentary upon this scene suggests that part of the pleasure of this medieval fiction was simply to *look* at it, to treat it as a piece of visual artwork. "What a scene for the painter the author has here described: Nasymth or Wilson, perhaps, alone could do justice to it on canvas" (Anon. 2). Scott's word paintings were highly effective at drawing readers into the novel.

The meticulous depictions of sylvan landscapes in these texts function as historical series, inspired by centuries of English forest lore. Just as reality effects were critical in history-writing and historical painting – both of which were specifically charged with depicting history "as it happened" – the history effect is critical for historically-fictive texts as a means of transporting the reader into an alternate eon, signified by the presence of certain details and images.

Take, for example, the first paragraph of *Ivanhoe*: "In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended in ancient times a large forest,



covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster” (Scott 1). The paragraph which follows this sentence establishes a comparison between the past and present, and invokes a powerful sense of that history which Scott is attempting to portray: “The remains of this extensive wood are still to be seen at the noble seats of Wentworth, of Warncliffe Park...Here haunted of yore the fabulous Dragon of Wantley, here were fought many of the most desperate battles during the Civil Wars...and here also flourished in ancient times those bands of gallant outlaws” (1). Scott endeavors to portray this forest as something ancient, as yet untapped by mercantile civilization, depicting “beeches, holly, and copsewood of various descriptions” clustered thickly together in many places, so as to create a dim and dappled light. He adds a circle of Druidical stones looming in a state of disarray on a hillside, a testimony to the old pagan Britons who had wandered the forest paths long before the invasion of the Saxons. It is nearly silent, except for the sound of a small brook breaking against a Druid stone that had fallen from its place on the hillside – vandalized by either men or time – and come to rest in the midst of the otherwise quiet stream.

This is the forest scene available to the medieval inhabitants of the text; for his nineteenth-century readers, Scott adds additional layers of history, situating his forest in a tangible location between two contemporary towns, and alludes to major historical – the Wars of the Roses – that have taken place since the fictional events in the text. He arranges his own narrative on a historical continuum stretching from the days of the Druid to the nineteenth-century, thus adding to the historical veracity of his own text. The image of the forest, the eternal forest, holds centuries of history, carefully mingling the fictional with the factual. Just as the forest is dim, with a “broken and discoloured light, that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees” (17), Scott’s envisioning of history is hazy, a mixture of

truth and imaginative fancy. He has compiled it piece-meal, just as, in life, he readily appropriated various fragments of antiquity from the ruins of Melrose Abbey and wove them into the construction of his own estate at Abbotsford.<sup>3</sup>

In compiling this historical series at the beginning of *Ivanhoe*, Scott mostly limits himself to describing details which any nineteenth-century reader of his text might observe, should he or she visit the remains of this medieval forest at Wentworth or Warncliffe Park. He thus creates a series of reality effects primarily by relying upon details which could be proved as real.

An exception to this, however, is the circle of stones left on the hill by the ancients. They are a striking set piece. This particular cluster of stones is also undeniably fictional – if there really were a “Druidical” ring in the forest, Scott, with his passion for endnotes, would certainly have noted it.<sup>4</sup> This ring, then, does not attempt to demonstrate that the forest scene is real; rather, it has been appropriated in order to demonstrate that the scene is historical. The appropriation of a seemingly unrelated Druidical stone circle is akin to practice of transference which Bann discusses in his description of Scott’s home at Abbotsford – a building comprised of an array of objects taken from a ruined abbey. These objects captured the attention of Washington Irving on his visit to Scott; the American author remarked specifically on “a most quaint and antique, either of red stone, or painted red, which hit my fancy” (Bann 101). As Bann relates, an object such as the little stone lion or the druidical circle in the forest “is presumably to be incorporated in some part of the new structure...But it could equally well form the central motif in a poetic romance” (102). Scott has appropriated the symbol of an even more ancient era, and added it to his medieval construction, using it as a vehicle for further imaginative contemplation in the face of history.

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<sup>3</sup> See Washington Irving’s discussion of his visit to Walter Scott, as related in Bann’s *The Clothing of Clio*.

<sup>4</sup> A search for stone rings in the vicinity of Doncaster also did not unearth any results.

Conan Doyle's text also portrays the forest with a large degree of historical awareness. Though the historical overtones are not as explicit as in Scott's text – there are no references, for instance, to ruins from an earlier time – the Victorian author's forest engages themes that challenge the very clinical, supposedly enlightened definition of *foret* produced by Monsieur Le Roy. In *The White Company*, the hero Alleyne Edricson strikes out into the forest alone after being made to depart from Beaulieu Abbey for one year in order to experience the external world before committing to life as a monk. Like the forest in *Ivanhoe*, it is depicted as peaceful and verdant, rich in wildlife. We observe once again the dimness of light, the faint sounds of water: “The sun shining slantwise through the trees threw delicate traceries across the road, with bars of golden light between...The still summer air was heavy with the resinous smell of the great forest. Here and there a tawny brook prattled out from among the underwood and lost itself again in the ferns and brambles upon the further side” (Conan Doyle 20-1). Alleyne observes a variety of creatures as he passes along the road, among them a sow, a stoat, and a wild cat. The inclusion of these creatures, and the fact that each creature is different, suggests that Conan Doyle is, for lack of a better analogy, going down a check-list of essential forest components and ticking off components which he deems necessary.

### **Tree Boughs Made of Buttresses in Sherwood Forest**

An integral part of the Robin Hood legend is the rejection of civilization for the forest, of castles for homes made from the boughs of trees. Peacock's *Maid Marian* embraces this theme of rustic wish-fulfillment; in several critical places, characters allude to the forest with terminology better suited for depicting traditional, man-made dwellings. For example, in one passage, Marian and Robin (at this point Matilda Fitzwater and Robert Fitz-Ooth) are described

as natural lovers due to their mutual interest in the forest: “Had either been less sylvan, the other might have been more saintly; but they will now never hear matins but those of the lark, nor reverence vaunted aisle but that of the greenwood canopy” (Peacock 35). One will note the prevalence of religious imagery in this sentence: “matins” are morning prayers chanted by monks, and “vaunted aisle” can only refer to the long aisle of a church or cathedral.

Friar Tuck’s discussion of Robert and Matilda’s love for the forest is one of many instances in the text in which natural spaces are depicted through the medium of manmade spaces and architecture. Later, for example, after Matilda and her father have been forced to retreat to the forest after the destruction of their castle, they are welcomed by Robert (Robin) and his band of outlaws. Friar Tuck once again expounds upon the properties of their new home: “This goodly grove is our palace: the oak and the beech are its colonnade and its canopy: the sun and the moon and the stars are its everlasting lamps: the grass, and the daisy, and the primrose, and the violet are its many-coloured floor of green, white, yellow, and blue” (Peacock 102). In reading this sentence, one is confronted with two competing images super-imposed together: the image of a lush forest, but also the image of a regal medieval castle. I would even venture to suggest that, of the two images, the forest image is the foundational one – the castle appears as a hazy specter, hovering over it perhaps through a case of double-exposure. One observes an employment of the history effect in the list of details the narrator provides, but, also, a strange disruption. The sudden appearance of the castle in the midst of the forest draws the reader’s eyes, so to speak, away from the trees and flowers. By permitting a rival symbol to enter the forest sanctuary via imagistic language, the history effect has compromised the progressive ideologies of the woodlands.

This does not occur once in *Maid Maria* but several times. Later in the same conversation, the newly-christened Maid Marian herself perpetuates this method of viewing the forest: “Thick walls, dreary galleries, and tapestried chambers, were indifferent to me while I could leave them at pleasure, but have ever been hateful to me since they held me by force. May I never again have roof but the blue sky, nor canopy but the green leaves, nor barrier but the forest bounds” (Peacock 106). It is important to notice, in these two examples, that forest spaces are compared to manmade spaces through strong analogies, not simile. Friar Tuck does not say that the grove is *like* a palace, or that the oak and beech are *like* colonnades; instead, the analogy is far more powerful in constructing visual images of the spaces. It is as though the narrator has buttressed the branches of the imaginary trees with stone supports – a strange thing to do in a space that is attempting to establish itself as an ideological rival to the castle.

When one considers the political arc of *Maid Marian* again with this spatial disruption in mind, it suggests additional ways in which the progressive ideologies of the text fall short. Though Robin Hood and his band of outlaws manage to create a democratic society complete with constitution within the boundaries of Sherwood Forest, their authority – does not extend beyond the trees. If Robin Hood were to declare himself president of England at large, he and his men would be swiftly executed by the greater authority of Prince John. When he does venture outside of the forest to work mischief and right wrongs, he must do so in disguise. For example, when he and the Merry Men rescue a young woman from being married off to an old knight against her will, they disguise themselves as musicians in order to infiltrate the wedding: “Robin put on his harper’s cloak, while Little John painted his eyebrows and cheeks, tipped his nose with red, and tied him on a comely beard. Marian confessed...she should not have known

her own true Robin” (Peacock 123). In this moment, the president of Sherwood Forest clearly performs a good deed, but he does not successfully transform his broader national culture.

This phenomenon is not limited to Peacock’s text; indeed, one observes it at an interesting moment in *The White Company* as well. As Alleyne Edricson journeys through the woods on his way to the familial estate at Minstead, he is struck by the beauty of the trees which surround him: “The path which the young clerk had now to follow lay through a magnificent forest of the very heaviest timber, where the giant bowls of oak and of beech formed long aisles in every direction, shooting up their huge branches to build the majestic arches of Nature’s own cathedral” (Conan Doyle 83). Once again, we see a misplaced building set against the backdrop of the forest.

There may be a simple explanation for the use of these analogies. In the nineteenth-century, critics perceived connections between soaring Gothic revival architecture and the natural world. Whereas before, in the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, natural and interior spaces had been regarded as primarily at odds with one another, Romantic thinkers and critics chose to infuse the language used in describing physical buildings with natural analogies. Bright describes this practice as deriving from a cultural belief which held that the original “Gothic” architecture of the Middle Ages<sup>5</sup> was directly inspired by the lofty trees in the dense forests of northern Europe. Forest analogies were frequently employed when describing the characteristics of physical buildings. This might account for the specific references to cathedrals in Conan Doyle’s passage, which appear to be made in passing. The appearance of the cathedral in *The White Company*, however, is used somewhat differently than the palace and church references in Peacock’s text. In *Maid Marian*, the juxtaposition between forest and constructed

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<sup>5</sup> I use quotations because the medieval architects did not identify their work as gothic

building is made much more frequently and deliberately – as though the use of the history effect in the construction of this progressive medieval forest demands it.

The boundaries between forests and civilization – and the competing ideologies attached to each – are also blended in *Ivanhoe*. There is less a prevalence of constructing natural spaces through terminology more closely suited to physical constructions; rather, in this novel, the boundaries are usually crossed through an artistic arrangement of characters. In many scenes, for example, knights – including King Richard the Lionheart in disguise as a lone “Black Knight – take shelter under the branches of oak trees, deriving comfort from them in the midst of uncomfortable or even threatening environments. Additionally, at one point, an oak tree provides King Richard with the space to host a meal for those in his retinue: “Beneath a huge oak-tree the sylvan repast was hastily prepared for the King of England, surrounded by men outlaws to his government, but who now formed his court and guard. As the flagon went round, the foresters soon lost their awe for the presence of Majesty” (Scott 409). The humble oak tree, in this moment, is functioning as a banquet hall for the ultimate representative of conservative society – the king himself. In this moment, the forest – typically the scene of outlaws and mischief - becomes something almost too conventionally appropriate. Indeed, one could argue that this is in keeping with Scott’s general tendencies as a writer; Lukács, remember, describes him as “narrowly conservative” (32), and – though the supposed conservative politics of the novel have been called into question - it is still easy to see how he might be invested in “civilizing” the wild forest and the outlaws within it.

The overshadowing castle imagery in *Maid Marian*, however, is less easy to explain. The ideology of the text encourages the rejection of mainstream society (symbolized by Matilda’s escape from Arlingford Castle) for a democratic civilization in the forest. It is strange,

then, that the text plants a symbol of mainstream society within the democratic, woodland space. This is an instance in which, once again, figurative language meant to make the history effect more vivid – this time, by articulating the specifics of the forest – operates against the ideologies that the space should inherently convey. The infiltration of the castle into the forest compromises the unique integrity of the forest as an alternative to conservative society and an emblem of progressive nation-building.



## Conclusion

The depiction of spaces in nineteenth-century medievalist fictions is a nuanced matter. Due to their historical and sometimes legendary connotations, forests and castles are able to signify the presence of progressive or conservative ideologies, but also manage to subvert these ideologies through the figurative, imagistic language used to construct and destruct them. Castles, beacons of conservatism, are destroyed by fire; forests, symbols of progressivism, nevertheless are infiltrated by super-imposed images of castle or cathedral structures. In these moments, it is possible to fully observe the instability of medievalist, spatial images. Though castles and forests provide authors such as Scott, Peacock, and Conan Doyle with textual backdrops that are instantly recognized as historical, they break down as vehicles of political ideology.

When these ideologies are implicated in broader questions of nineteenth-century nation-imagining and nation-building, the figurative ripples emanating from the collapsed castles and twisted forests touch at the heart of the identity crisis that afflicted European peoples in the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire. The Middle Ages are often critically held to be a safe, stable space for nineteenth-century Europeans to explore nationalistic fantasies. However, if the medieval spaces which convey progressive or conservative visions of nation-building waver or crumble, then the Middle Ages also quake. Though progressive and conservative authors alike exulted in escaping the industrial and ever-changing nineteenth-century through the creation of stable medieval worlds teeming with “rivers, castles, forests, abbeys, monks, maids, kings and banditti” (Peacock 7), these worlds were paradoxically destabilized through the sequences of history effects used to recreate them.

Medievalism may have been ideologically motivated, but these ideologies fail in fictive practice. Torquilstone and Villefranche, symbols of a united and powerful Britain, are burned down, compromising the conservative visions of the nation which they might be expected to uphold. Meanwhile, in the midst of Peacock's Sherwood Forest – the refuge of a new, democratic society – the history effects employed as the outlaws vividly describe their surroundings use the language of castles and cathedrals, thus allowing symbols of mainstream, feudalistic civilization to infiltrate their pristine, alternative world.

It is clear that the history effect, depending as it does on details conveyed through illuminative language, makes it possible for vivid spatial images to inadvertently challenge the ideologies they should convey. However, though medieval spaces and, consequently, the history effect fail as vehicles of ideology, they succeed powerfully as vehicles of pleasure for readers. One has only to consider a review of *Ivanhoe* to observe the delight which historical transport occasioned: “It is as if the veil of ages had been, in truth, swept back, and we ourselves had been...living, breathing, and moving in the days of Coeur de Lion!...Every line in the picture is true to life” (263). The particular ideologies of this reader in conjunction with nation building may very well have been strong, but they are clearly irrelevant in this moment of ecstasy. This history effect has transported him *there*. For him, that is all that matters.

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