

Sir Walter Scott

The name Sir Walter Scott (1771 - 1832) reminds most of us of his popular novel *Ivanhoe*, made into a movie in 1952. Scott already had many of his characters, motifs and novels in mind when, in 1814, he wrote *Waverly*, the novel that launched his gigantic writing career. It's set in the mid 18th century when Scotland is caught up in the Jacobite Rebellion. The protagonist, Edward Waverly, wanders about the wind-swept Scottish Highlands meeting Byronic characters and entering into promising episodes until something ignoble intrudes. In one scene, for example, a cannonball interrupts his quixotic meditations; in another, the death of his former commander causes internal soul-searching with disturbing insight. At first Waverly seems dazzled by his back-country experience, but by the story's end he's a realistic individual for whom the conflict between romance and reality is a moral issue.

Scott wrote anonymously at first, penning highly adventurous epics and novels that blend poignant romance with good manners. They tell of the passion, bravery and loyalty of England's past, and transport Great Britain into the Victorian Age (which eventually yields to the era of Science & Rationalism when his tales begin to sound a bit slack).

His stories interweave the realistic with the fanciful, the old with the new. They argue for peace and stability; for social and political cohesion. The Victorians--who could be a bit rough on their women and children--are admired today because they pressed on to the end with a stiff upper lip. And they devoured Scott's novels with an enthusiasm we can scarcely imagine. They saw Scott as a symbol of their idealistic age; ironically, he was a staunch conservative. Romanticism is a passionate, isolated, anarchic creed. Scott distrusted emotional fervor, was suspect of individualism, and detested social revolution. Bottom line: Scott was a (Scottish) border resident who transformed England's legends and exploits into daring tales that still fascinate us.

-Essay by Bill Lounsbury

KRL has the books referenced in this essay.

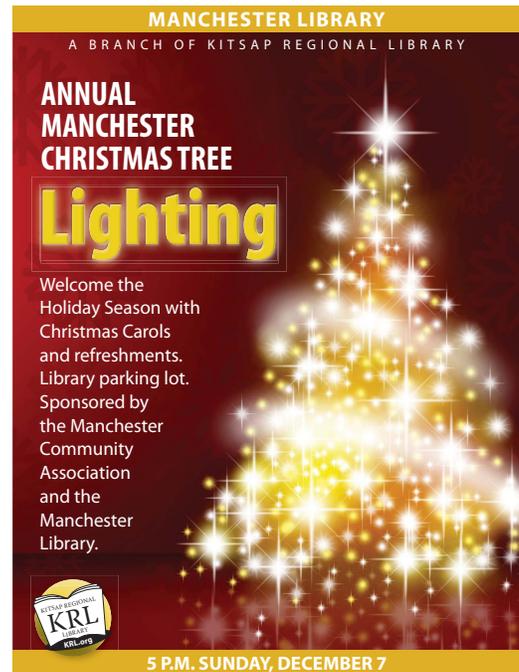
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