

**AN EXCLUSION FROM THE CLASSROOM, A GAP IN  
LITERARY KNOWLEDGE**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

P. CASEY ROBERTSON

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Approved by  
Research Advisor:

Dr. Jennifer Goodman Wollock

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## ABSTRACT

An Exclusion from the Classroom, A Gap in Literary Knowledge. (May 2015)

P. Casey Robertson  
Department of English  
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Wollock  
Department of English

Medieval literary works ranging from *Beowulf* to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* highlight various ideologies and themes—such as courtly love, chivalry, and heroism. Famous British authors such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth constructed valuable literary pieces to further cement the foundation of British Literature. These authors are monumentally presented in the classrooms; however, there is one author who is monumentally unrepresented in the classroom: Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter Scott managed to highlight the prevalent themes from the aforementioned works and authors in just a few decades. After analyzing Scott's works, I touched every literary theme that I discovered throughout my collegiate experience.

I highlighted parallels in Scott's works to find comparisons with works taught in my previous classes, finding that I could have studied these literary themes under a unique, Scottish lens. Furthermore, I discovered that I—along with my peers—was denied the study of these themes from a fresh perspective. The overall goal of my thesis is to provide: a comparison of Scott's works to works studied in the common English curriculum, an assessment on the rational

possibility of fitting his literature into literature classes, and a view of where his work stands in the eyes of the current-day academic world.

## CHAPTER I

### A MAN AND HIS LEGACY

As an English major at Texas A&M, I have had the privilege to read, analyze, and study various authors on all spectrums of a literary timeline. I read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which is an accurate depiction of chivalry and courtly love. I read *Beowulf*, which highlights themes of courage and bravery. My peers have read Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth. However, before signing up for the Glasscock undergraduate program, neither my classmates nor I had ever been familiarized Sir Walter Scott's works—though there are several literature classes with works pertaining to Scott's area of interests. Sir Walter Scott transcribed ballads, poems, and novels that embody literary elements of countless texts that I encountered throughout my academic career; to leave Sir Walter Scott in obscurity and out of the classroom is to leave students with a gap of knowledge that could have been filled with further exploration of literature.

Scott's works can be paired with each of the aforementioned examples of texts—along with a multitude of others—to provide cross-cultural comparisons. The reason his work covers so much ground is that he was able to collect several ballads through his and make improvements. However, to understand how this man was able to accomplish this feat, one must first become familiarized with his early and professional life. (Walter Scott Digital Archive).

## **Early Life**

Born on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1771 in Edinburgh, Scotland, Walter Scott was Walter Scott and Anne Rutherford's ninth child. Walter and Anne had a lot of children that died; because Scott was a fragile child, they sent him to live with his grandparents—in fear of their son's mortality—on Sandyknow Farme in Roxburghshire (30 miles outside of Edinburgh). As a child, Scott frequently spent time with his Aunt Janet—who developed her nephew's love for ballads. He was particularly interested in the border wars between Scotland and England; his fascination with his country's rich heritage grew with age. Walter Scott was enthralled by tales from his Aunt Janet about his ancestor, Great Great Great Grandfather William Scott—who was knighted by King James, but later persecuted by Cromwell for his loyalty to Charles 1<sup>st</sup>. As Sir Walter Scott grew older, he began to be fascinated by medieval ballads, such as *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* written by Bishop Thomas Percy. His interest turned into a hobby when he began collecting ballads; eventually, his hobby became a career.

## **Beginning of Career**

Walter Scott attended a Scots Law classes at Edinburgh University after his prior completion of lectures in philosophy and history. With Scott's educational background, he was able to secure a job as Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire; his duties as Sheriff-depute was similar to those of a County Judge. His job required Scott to reside in Selkirkshire seasonally, which not only gave him a steady income to support his family, but also allowed him to spend most of his time in Edinburgh where he was able to focus working on his writing career. As Walter Scott continued collecting, writing, and splicing ballads, printer and childhood friend James Ballantyne convinced him to turn his hobby into a career, and became his publisher.

Sir Walter Scott believed in the ballad was a form of art which could be molded and changed based on the interpreter. He was always loyal to the heart and soul of the ballad, and sought to trim the rough edges off of older ballads, in order to make them more aesthetically pleasing to the eye of the reader. Scott changed words, fixed the rhythm and rhymes, and fused different versions of ballads in order to create something completely new. In 1802, Sir Walter Scott came out with one of his greatest literary works: *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* is essentially several Historical and Romantic ballads; Scott was assisted by fellow ballad-collectors: John Leyden, Robert Jamieson, Robert Surtees, George Ellis, and his hero, Bishop Percy.

### **Bluebonnets Over the Border**

The first work that I analyzed from Scott was *Bluebonnets Over the Border* (Scott). In order to properly analyze this ballad, I read into each line extensively, and did outside research to make sense of every one of those lines. After decoding the lines which I was previously unable to fully understand, I realized how much of Scotland's heritage and proud traditions were found within this ballad. This Ballad is a proud representation of the several Scottish regions coming together to form a strong, unity of Scots fighting against the enemy (Renton).

In the first few lines, the ballad calls for the unity of four Scottish regions—Etrick, Teviotdale, Eskdale, and Liddesdale—to march onward to battle the English for freedom; the ballad incites an image of brave Scotsmen from all regions marching together in unity. Scottish terminology has it that blue bonnets were flat, blue caps made of wool, worn by Scottish soldiers in battle; it

is a term that can be interchangeably be used to describe the Scottish Warriors themselves. Sir Walter Scott, through imagery, is able to depict swarms of fierce bluebonnets ready to cross the border to overcome overwhelming odds. The commitment of each region of Scotsmen to win the fight is thoroughly highlighted, as there were “many a banner spread...” and “many a crest that is famous in story” that would join together to “fight for the Queen and our old Scottish glory.”

When the ballad alerts the bluebonnets to “come to the crag where the beacon is blazing, come with the buckler, the lance, and the bow,” every able-bodied Scotsman is coming together with their fellow Scotsman to take on their oppressor. The last four lines are the pinnacle of the ballad: “Stand to your arms then, and march in good order, England shall many a day, Tell of the bloody fray, When the Blue Bonnets came over the border.” Through incredible imagery, Sir Walter Scott is able to depict a swarm of Scottish troops, taking up arms, and marching in a unified effort to battle the evil English; the entire ballad leads up to this one point: the fact that when the Blue Bonnets march down across that border, there is going to be a fight that is so bloody and so epic, England will never forget. *Bluebonnets Over the Border* is a celebration of the resilience of Scotland to overcome its oppressor.

## **Ivanhoe**

*Ivanhoe* is Scott’s personal take on the notable story of Robbin Hood. The novel itself has a dark setting, with corruption as the story's foundation. The twist in Sir Walter Scott's version of Robin Hood is that it is told through the eyes of Ivanhoe, one of Robin Hood’s men. As King Richard is in Austrian jail, the lands are doomed under the rule of cruel Prince John. Consequently, hero Ivanhoe is arrested for his loyalties to Richard by Cedric of Rotherwood.



Ivanhoe is also enamored by Cedric's noble ward, Rowena; naturally, Rowena is intended to be married off to a Saxon protagonist named Athelstane. Ivanhoe defeats his enemies, and is able to marry his love; he ends up having a career under King Richard, after having accomplished many noble and heroic goals. The key-note of this novel is that Ivanhoe is a man who would tire endlessly for the women he loves; he is a representation of chivalry and heroism, and courtly love.

### **Lochinvar**

The next work I analyzed was *Lochinvar* (Scott). I took a similar approach to this analysis as I did with *Bluebonnets Over the Border*, in that I broke down every line from the ballad to find the underlying themes of chivalry, courtly love, and heroism. Lochinvar is a character who is dominant, heroic, and brave (Demulder). He is on a noble mission to save the woman he loves from being which highlights the notion of courtly love. Moreover, Lochinvar must face a wicked man in order to be with the woman he loves. The man essentially tells Lochinvar that he can either have peace or war, and that the choice is irrelevant because he has claimed the woman for himself. The ballad is a vivid representation of a man outwitting his foe to win the heart of his love.

### **Relevance to Current Class Material**

If *Lochinvar* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the classroom, students would be able to point out the differences of the ways in which the works highlight the ideas of bravery, heroism, and chivalry are represented over the course of a multi-century timeline. The differences between the characters Lochinvar and Sir Gawain are bold, yet the similarities are just as easily

deciphered; both begin the story with noble intentions and characterize the notion of courtly love. However, *Lochinvar* is seemingly one step above his foe throughout the entire poem, while Sir Gawain faces a supernatural threat in the Green Knight. By pointing out similarities and differences between the two texts, students will gain a broader perspective of the themes courtly love and chivalry.

*Ivanhoe* represents the aged-old tropes of heroism and bravery made famous by medieval texts such as *Beowulf*; it blends these tropes with later concepts of love and devotion. Furthermore, Sir Walter Scott is able to create this blend of storytelling by turning it into a spin on Robin Hood. There is not a British Literature class that can be considered complete unless it contains the figure of Robin Hood. What better way to connect literature courses than assigning a story that singlehandedly connects themes from more than one time period?

In my past British literature classes, I was required to read ballads pertaining to England's rich history; Wordwood's *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* captured the natural beauty of Britain, as well as the author's love for his country. While the imagery in this ballad is beautiful, it cannot be the only representation of British Ballads. With *Blue Bonnets Over the Border*, there is a celebration of unity between Scotsmen; there is a celebration of victory against overwhelming odds. This ballad represents an important history of Britain, and should therefore be represented in literature classes. More importantly, a vast amount of Sir Walter Scott's works cover other histories. This is what makes his presence in the classroom so important; his exclusion from the classroom subjugates students by limiting their education.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **IS THERE NO ROOM?**

The English Department at Texas A&M University takes pride in its ability to implement a cultural awareness into the instruction of over 700 students per semester. An Aggie majoring in English, while focusing on the literature track, would have an academic foundation laid over British and American Literature—although the department does extend itself to other branches of literature, such as African Studies, Latino Studies, and Asian American studies.

As a student majoring in English with a focus on rhetoric, I split time between studying various philosophers ranging from Aristotle to Foucault, and surveying Medieval and Romantic authors. As I mentioned earlier, I have neither read nor heard of Sir Walter Scott before my admittance to the Glasscock Summer Scholars Program, and my academic background is an indication that I have received a relatively similar education as any student attending any other school. This chapter features segments of various English literature courses from various schools in the state of Texas, and an assessment of how Sir Walter Scott fits into the picture. The first featured syllabus comes from a 400 level British Literature course at Texas A&M Commerce:



**ENG 472.001 (Survey of English Literature II)**  
**COURSE SYLLABUS: Spring, 2014**  
**TR, 11:00-12:15 (HL 304)**

**Course Description**

Catalogue Description: *Survey of English Literature II. Three semester hours. (2) The course covers British literature of the past two centuries, starting with the Romantics and the Victorians. The 20th century may include poets of the Great War, the Modernists, and late-century and contemporary authors. Prerequisite: Eng 1302*

ENG 472 surveys British literature from the advent of Romanticism to the present, taking into consideration the various genres in which writers were working. We will also examine pertinent literary, social, cultural, political, and philosophical movements and trends during this period. One goal of this course is to understand the ways that British writers attempted to grapple with concepts such as empire, modernity, ontology, and other guiding ideas, noting the range of ways in which these novelists, poets, dramatists, and essayists chose to give voice to these and other ideas. Students should seek to find connections between individual works and authors while also striving to identify the original contributions of these works and their authors.

**Figure 1. An average college-level English course syllabus.**

This course is an average survey course; it particularly focuses on British Literature over a span of two centuries. It appears to implement a liberal method of thinking in regards to different philosophies and sociological functions. The class will spend its time analyzing and comparing different types of authors, as well as their voices and styles in regards to the aforementioned philosophies and sociological functions. The next figure highlights this fact, as it demonstrates the students' expected outcomes.

While an essential goal of this course is for students to gain a reasonably deep and broad understanding and appreciation for British literature and culture from the Romantic period to the present day, this course has also other targets of intellectual activity. These include learning to analyze and critically evaluate various ideas, arguments, and perspectives; understanding historical factors and cultural trends as well as critical terms and concepts; and for students to continue building upon their critical thinking and writing skills.

#### Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate a broad understanding of British literature from Romanticism to the present, including cultural developments and contextual issues over the past two hundred years and developments in style and genre, as measured by a matrix-based assessment of the midterm and final exams.
2. Students will demonstrate their ability to synthesize ideas pertaining to the course as measured by a matrix-based assessment of each student's final paper.
3. Students will demonstrate their understanding of ideas pertaining to the course and ability to work effectively in small groups as measured by a matrix-based assessment of the group presentation on an assigned topic.

Global SLO: Students will be able to view themselves as engaged citizens within an interconnected and diverse world.

**Figure 2. Typical Student Learning Outcomes for English majors.**

January 14 <sup>th</sup> :	course introduction and overview
January 16 <sup>th</sup> :	introduction to Romanticism
January 21 <sup>st</sup> :	Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," "The world is too much with us," and preface to <i>Lyrical Ballads</i>
January 23 <sup>rd</sup> :	Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight," "Kubla Khan," and excerpts from <i>Biographia Literaria</i>
January 28 <sup>th</sup> :	Shelley, "Mont Blanc," "England in 1819," "Ode to the West Wind"
January 30 <sup>th</sup> :	Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and letters to George and Thomas Keats ("Negative Capability"), Richard Woodhouse ("A Poet has no Identity") and to Charles Brown (last letter)
February 4 <sup>th</sup> :	Introduction to the Victorian era; Arnold, "Dover Beach"
February 6 <sup>th</sup> :	E. B. Browning, poems from <i>Sonnets from the Portuguese</i>
February 11 <sup>th</sup> :	R. Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," "My Last Duchess"
February 13 <sup>th</sup> :	discussion: Victorian culture and literature; papers
February 18 <sup>th</sup> :	D. G. Rossetti, "Jenny"
February 20 <sup>th</sup> :	C. Rossetti, "Goblin Market"
February 25 <sup>th</sup> -27 <sup>th</sup> :	Shaw, <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i>
March 4 <sup>th</sup> :	review; 1 <sup>st</sup> paper due
March 6 <sup>th</sup> :	exam #1 (midterm)

**Figure 3. Typical timeline and assigned reading for English majors.**

The next figure shows half of the reading assignments—which pertain to Sir Walter Scott’s era—for this particular semester. The first featured author is Wordsworth. *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* is a man’s experience with revisiting his childhood; the poem centers heavily on nature. The man visits a favorite childhood location, and cannot help but be stricken by a euphoric state of nostalgia. However, the man is aware that while the natural aesthetics mystified him as a child, he can see everything it has to offer at that present time. Wordsworth’s position is that a child with innocence can experience great wonder with simple, natural beauty; as an adult, though he or she will have already lost that innocence. They still retain an equal sense of enjoyment that will last for years to come.

Natural Beauty is a key concept in *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*. However, it is a concept which is also found in Sir Walter Scott’s *Bluebonnets Over the Border*. In *Bluebonnets Over the Border*, Sir Walter Scott calls upon the Scottish Regions Ettrick, Teviotdale, Eskdale, and Liddesdale, and gives small descriptions of each region. While the natural scenery of these regions is briefly mentioned, the fact that it is mentioned at all gives credence to the claim that the fierce, Scottish warriors—Bluebonnets—all had similar feelings to the man in *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* about their respective childhood sanctuaries, and are willing to die for them. The intent of comparing the two poems is not to rule one more or less adequate, but to show that these are two different ways of showing the literary concept of love for one’s country and all of its beauty.

Another text featured on the assigned readings is Shelley’s *England in 1819*. *England in 1819* comments on the political oppression occurring in England during Shelley’s time. The poem

explains that King George is senile, the nobles are siphoning money from the state, common people are in misery, and the army is just as corrupt as the religion and laws which govern everything; Parliament is harshly criticized. Shelley concludes his poem with the inspiration of hope that a force may restore things to order, and save the state from fascism.

The corruption of the government and its officials is a concept Sir Walter Scott explored quite often. In *Ivanhoe*, the setting is in a grim England, with the corrupt Prince John ruling as usurper. Prince John is weak and spineless, yet he creates tension between the Saxons and Normans because of his hunger for power. Prince John's men are known for abusing their power for personal gain—as did the nobles in Shelley's *England in 1819*. *Ivanhoe* and *England in 1819* were written not too far apart on the timeline; Shelley wrote about the fascist state of his present-day Britain, and Sir Walter Scott wrote a spin of a classic, British legend that was grounded in the reality of another corrupt government.

Like Wordsworth, Shelley is another author whom would be beneficial to read with the compliment of Scott. Authors like Wordsworth and Shelley have multiple featured works in this class; yet Sir Walter Scott, who would add variety to the reading materials, is missing from the itinerary. This is a problem that could be solved by simply omitting one work from one author, and adding Scott. Some teachers even offer outside reading to their syllabi, and allow their students to use those sources for major term papers; Scott could easily aid a student in his or her plight to paint a complete portrait of English Literature on a term paper.

## CHAPTER III

### NOT DEAD YET

Sir Walter Scott not only sparked a literary revolution throughout the minds of his time, but has saved lives in modern times. According to a daily Glasscock Summer Scholar's Program meeting, instructed by Dr. Wollock, during the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, there were people who still are still alive today, vicariously through one of Scott's aforementioned ballads: *Bluebonnets Over the Border*. On that tragic day, with people choosing suicide over flames and molten steel, brave men and women serving for the NYFD needed to ease the minds of the terrified. In order to do so, the firefighters sang *Bluebonnets Over the Border*, along with the innocent civilians. The battle-ballad calmed their nerves long enough to make it down the treacherous staircases, and saved lives. Sir Walter Scott still manages to hold influence, in dire situations, and in the hands of individuals who have a love for literature.

Sir Walter has remained influential in places as local as Alabama—and as recently as 1997. However, there are few educators, such as educator Lewis Cobbs, chairman of the department of English in Huntsville, who are against the idea Scott's inclusion from common public school curriculums, much less his own school. In his published-online article titled *Why Don't Students at This School Read Ivanhoe Anymore?* the southern educator makes a case against the massive benefits of studying the esteemed Scottish author. Toward the end of the first paragraph, Cobbs states that:

The citation of *Ivanhoe* in a discussion of curriculum flags an attitude common among a party of educated but nonacademic adults, a rather narrow version of the



traditionalist stance in the “canon” debate: the ability to think and write with sophistication results largely from reading particular 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century British novels (Cobbs).

The ability to understand 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century British literature entails a wider sense of understanding and perspective of the world, thus proving Cobbs’ statement about thinking and writing with sophistication accurate (Cobbs). The most striking about Cobbs’ aforementioned statement is the mentioning of adults whom are educated, but working outside of the academic world. It is safe to assume that the type of educated individuals that Cobbs had in mind were English majors.

The students mentioned in Cobbs’ statement were most likely English majors, who took it upon themselves to immerse themselves into Scott’s literary masterpieces. The educated, but non-academic adults whom were familiar to Cobbs represent only a fraction of the total number of English majors in the United States; these types of students became journalists, lawyers, and authors. These are journalist, lawyers, and authors with a greater world view, and analyzing the world as they see it from a more globalized point of view. Cobbs agrees that:

“the notion that young people learn to write well by reading great authors is, of course, a fundamental premise of any sound English curriculum—and happily, in most schools students still study Shakespeare, Austen, Joyce, Woolf”(Cobbs).

Cobbs disagrees the notion that Scott is among this list of authors. Cobbs provides his own reasoning for why he perceives *Ivanhoe* to be outdated; he points to a lack of depth among the

novel's characters, and his perception that *Ivanhoe* is part of an outdated political agenda (Cobbs). However, Cobbs fails to understand that Scott's inclusion of stock characters are not an indication of poor writing, but a device which allows his audience to view these characters consubstantially within that time period.

According to the Digital Archive for Sir Walter Scott, the author has been mentioned in over 100 instances in the last decade; some are as recent as last year. For example, at the First World Congress of Scottish Literatures, hosted by the University of Glasgow in July of 2014, featured prestigious figures from various esteemed universities such as Ann Rigney of Utrecht, Margaret Kolb at Berkley, and Matthew Ocheltree of Harvard. These men and women covered certain elements of Scott's works including his contribution to world literature, translating his works into present day vernacular, and his historical background between characters such as John Galt and James Robertson (Scott Digital Archives).

There are even universities in North America that include Scott in their archives. At the 7<sup>th</sup> Biannual Conference of the International Gothic Association/13<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, which covered Deviance and Defiance and was hosted at the University of Montreal, was held only a decade ago, and featured academic figures such as Andrea Cabus of Temple, Carol Margaret Davison of Windsor, and Mike Goode of Syracuse. These individuals covered topics such as Scott's intense patriotism for Scotland, the political ramifications of that patriotism, and his romanticism of conspiracy.

Although his support is lacking in the classrooms themselves, it is the love of Scott's literature—from administrators, teachers, and professors—that keeps him alive within the academic world. Cobbs published his article in 1997. However, Scott has managed to stay alive via conferences all over the world. His inclusion in these conferences merits an incentive to at least consider reinstating his work into the curriculum; the alternative is to lose a great author's literature in the pitfalls of academic obscurity.

## CHAPTER IV

### FILL THE GAP

There are a multitude of opportunities to bring Sir Walter Scott into classroom conversations in an appropriate, thought-provoking fashion. As I mentioned previously, *Bluebonnets Over the Border* covers themes of bravery, patriotism, and revolution, all for the sake of freedom.

Bravery, patriotism, and revolution are the foundation of our nation's beginning; as a result, students ranging from middle school to college read literature covering these themes. The American Revolution is a tale of individuals from all over the original 13 colonies, fighting an empire, as one collective force; *Bluebonnets Over the Border* captures the same story, though instead of marching from Pennsylvania and Virginia, they are marching from Ettrick and Teviotdale. How beneficial could it be, if in a world literature course, they supplemented this war ballad in regards to the concept of revolution?

Moreover, it is established that there is room in the common syllabus for Sir Walter Scott. Fit him between Wordsworth and Shelley, because in essence, a short poem such as *Bluebonnets Over the Border*, or a novel such as *Ivanhoe*, covers the themes which are being addressed in just one unit of a semester. The problem is not that Scott's works are insufficient for study; the problem is that he is not studied, while at the same time, is beloved by the academic world. Ann Rigney, Margaret Kolb, and Mike Goode do not attend conferences in order to berate the works of Scott; these educators—as well as the numerous aforementioned educators—adore the legendary Scott's works for their connotations. Even Scott's harshest critiques prove their points invalid; the problems with *Ivanhoe* that Cobbs points out are not problems, but ways to further study the concept of

literature and writing—by careful cross-comparison of literary works which lack these perceived faults.

There is no denying that Sir Walter Scott offers students a unique approach to developing a bigger world view. Because he touches on several elements studied in literature classes, and offers unique twists to these concepts, his literature can serve as as a supplement to other literary works. There is no better way to understand the character of Robin Hood than to understand every version of his tale. There is no better way to understand revolution and patriotism than to study every instance in which these concepts are prevalent. Furthermore, there is no way to accurately teach a British literature course without the inclusion of one of Scotland's most prestigious authors.

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