

## “The Enchantments of Waverley”: Walter Scott and Children’s Reading in Nineteenth-Century America

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But the one of all writers who held supreme sway over the child was Walter Scott. One cannot resist a feeling of pity for those who have not grown up under his magic power and for the young people of to-day, who have no time to discover his charm.

—Martha Bockee Flint, 1899

LOOKING back from 1871—the year of Walter Scott’s centenary—the euphoni-ously named Zadel Barnes Buddington (grandmother of Djuna Barnes) profiled the “Bard of Abbotsford” in a long retrospective for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. Buddington began with an intimate history of her own relationship with Scott as a young reader—“The Enchantments of Waverley, as Felt by a Child”—but in many ways she was speaking for multiple generations of young Americans. For all its personal specificity, her description of her first encounter with the works of

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## THE BARD OF ABBOTSFORD.



FIGURE 1 Illustration for Zadel Barnes Buddington, “The Bard of Abbotsford,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 43 (1871), 511.

Scott serves as something of a universal origin story for the New World’s youthful and bookish across the nineteenth century. Buddington began by transporting her readers “back twenty years to a midsummer morning passed in a favorite room.” It is 1851, and she is ten years old. One side of the room is covered with “books from floor to ceiling.” More than a little precocious, little Zadel has already sampled a lot of what these shelves have to offer—“something of Plutarch,” Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), a peep at Thomas Paine and George Sand and many others. But on this particular morning, Buddington is about to make a new discovery. She kneels down before “a mysterious row of volumes sheathed in thick brown paper.” Though they appear to be “unpromising chrysalides,” Buddington selects Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), curls up in a window-seat, and the “enchantments of Waverley” begin.<sup>1</sup> An accompanying illustration highlights the profound significance of this moment, after which life is never quite the same again (see Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Zadel B[arnes] Buddington, “The Bard of Abbotsford,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 43 (1871), 511.

For Buddington, the “influence” of Scott’s books—“the purity, astuteness, and simplicity in the crude conceptions of a child’s mind”—“foreshadow[ed] unerringly the nature, if not the degree, of all later understandings” (“The Bard of Abbotsford,” p. 514). In short, this and other encounters with Scott fundamentally shaped Buddington’s conception of literature, life, and the world.

As Patricia Cairn has argued, this very image—a child reading for pleasure in a picturesque window-seat—was a vital and oft-repeated “visual trope of reading” in the nineteenth century, deeply redolent of the shifting relationship between children and books in this crucial period.<sup>2</sup> The experience that Buddington describes was paradigmatic of the move from mere “schoolhouse literacy” to the emergence of a new breed of reading child: “an autonomous and yet protected and domestic child-with-books” (Crain, *Reading Children*, p. 3). It is a vision that yokes “a model of romantic reading” to “a romantic figure of childhood—absorbed and absorbing, immersed, self-forgetting” (Crain, *Reading Children*, p. 4). What has previously gone unacknowledged is how central the work of Walter Scott was to that process for many child readers; Buddington’s tableau was replicated in American homes across the nineteenth century. As one reader put it in 1899, looking back across the century, Scott “held supreme sway over the child.”<sup>3</sup> This is an aspect of both American literary history and children’s reading culture that critics have essentially ignored. Of course, as Fiona Robertson has outlined, “Scott has always loomed as an important figure in American literary history. . . . His example shaped an entire school of thought.”<sup>4</sup> Elisa Tamarkin, too, has placed Scott within a wider culture of Anglophilia in the antebellum years, and has traced his nuanced significance for the abolition

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Crain, *Reading Children: Literacy, Property, and the Dilemmas of Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Bockee Flint, “What One Child in a Lone Household Read,” *New York Times: Saturday Review of Books and Art*, 7 January 1899, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Fiona Robertson, “Walter Scott and the American Historical Novel,” in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 5: The American Novel to 1870*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Leland S. Person (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), p. 108.

movement.<sup>5</sup> But, as I explore in this article, Scott's place in the literary lives of children, his role in intimately shaping multiple generations of young American readers, and his centrality in the ongoing discussions surrounding what exactly they should be reading have attracted relatively scant attention.

Across the Atlantic in Britain, in the standard accounts of Scott's literary reputation, it was in the closing decades of the nineteenth century that the Wizard of the North was relocated to the nursery—a distinct moment of literary segregation. In 1874, Leslie Stephen famously pronounced that Scott had “descended from the library to the schoolroom,” describing *Ivanhoe*, an emblematic text in Scott's relationship with young readers, as “no longer a work for men, but it still is, or still ought to be, delightful reading for boys.”<sup>6</sup> Bruce Beiderwell and Anita Hemphill have explored the ways in which *Ivanhoe* particularly took on a “new identity” for “late Victorian and Edwardian readers” as a book for children—a process that they see being accompanied by a concomitant diminishment of “adult respect.”<sup>7</sup> In Nicola Watson's words, by the 1860s *Ivanhoe* was felt to be “important . . . to the promotion of proper values for both boys and girls.”<sup>8</sup> While those judgments also hold partly true for Scott's young readers in America, they only tell part of the story, and such binaries were much less distinct. In the United States, Scott was a crucial figure in the development and regulation of children's reading from the early decades of the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth in ways that shifted but never lessened in their significance. Much earlier than accounts of British trends suggest, American children were drawn to his books as, in a climate where the novel was still held in suspicion, cultural gatekeepers sanctioned Scott's work as a pathway into

<sup>5</sup> See Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1874), pp. 246, 245.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Beiderwell and Anita Hemphill McCormick, “The Making and Unmaking of a Children's Classic: The Case of Scott's *Ivanhoe*,” in *Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham, Md.: The Children's Literature Association and The Scarecrow Press, 2005), p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Nicola J. Watson, “Afterlives,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), p. 150.

the world of pleasure reading even during his lifetime. After the American Civil War, children were increasingly directed toward Scott's works, as those nostalgic arbiters of children's literary culture who had grown up with Scott in the antebellum years attempted to control and shape the reading habitats of new generations who seemed in danger of drifting away from the enchantments of *Waverley*. As T. J. Jackson Lears recognized in *No Place of Grace* (1981), Scott had a "resurgent reputation" in America as the century came to a close—indeed, he was positioned by some commentators as "the potential savior of American character and society" in ways that were closely connected to his relationship with young readers.<sup>9</sup>

In some ways the relative neglect of this rich subject is unsurprising. As Kathleen McDowell has highlighted, "we know very little about the historical reading experience of children."<sup>10</sup> In this article, therefore, I respond to that prompt by documenting Scott's shifting place in the relationship between children and reading in nineteenth-century America, in ways that speak to the bigger questions of how and what young readers actually read across this period. Beginning with the experiences of the first generation of readers to grow up with Scott in the antebellum years (including many writers and editors who would go on to shape children's reading in the decades to come), I examine the ways that Scott was framed within the discussions that took place around the anxious issue of what young Americans should read. Thereafter, I explore Scott's shifting place in that continuing debate in the years after the Civil War. In particular, I examine the vicissitudes of Scott's position in the burgeoning magazines and periodicals aimed at children and the parents who were in charge of their reading materials, seeking, where I can, to locate children's own articulation of their reading experiences.



<sup>9</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981, 1994), pp. 106, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers, 1890–1930," *Book History*, 12 (2009), 240.

In 1824, a correspondent to *The Ladies' Garland*, published out of Harpers Ferry, Virginia, testified to the strange new power that Scott's novels held over his entire family. First, they captivated his wife: "The butter did not come—the soap did not come—the wheel stood still—the fire went out—there was neither sewing, spinning, nor knitting." Their Parson "warn[ed] against the corrupting influence of novel reading"—but after borrowing the first volume to assess its potential damage to readers, he swiftly requested the second. And so, this book-beleaguered *paterfamilias* gave in to the local epidemic: "I directly perceived that the perusal of the book must go through my family as strait as the small pox." Gathering his household together, he made his three sons read to the assembled company; his eldest proved particularly adept, coming "very near the style of an actor." "To make short of a long story," he concludes, "my family have turned heroes, and heroines, and speak Scotch quite broad."<sup>11</sup> Though played for laughs, versions of this stunned account of Scott's viral effects on early-American reading habits, young and old, were replayed in households across the nation. Scott breached barricades to fiction that other authors had failed to capture, with significant implications for young Americans.

As Karen Sánchez-Eppler has outlined, "American children's books remained decidedly dour and didactic long after the literary market for adults had embraced the novel as the most desirable and best-selling literary form." Children's literature, relatively speaking, remained characterized by "pedagogical moral seriousness."<sup>12</sup> Jeanette Leonard Gilder—influential woman of letters, not least as the editor of *The Critic*—gave a typical account of what passed for her childhood library as late as the 1850s: "There were Franklin's 'Autobiography' and the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Plutarch's 'Lives' and 'Ivanhoe,' Miss Edgeworth's 'Moral Tales' and Goldsmith's 'Animated Nature,' the Swiss 'Family Robinson' and 'Peter

<sup>11</sup> [Anon.], "The Waverly Novels," *The Ladies' Garland*, 1 (16 October 1824), 144.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 9, 7.

Simple,' a volume of Infantry Tactics, and my Bible."<sup>13</sup> Taking his place among the old chestnuts that had passed for children's scavenged literary entertainment in the preceding decades, Scott therefore became a liberating figure for children seeking reading pleasure. While he hardly displaced a fondness for John Bunyan and others, Scott indelibly altered the reading lives of the young for good. At a time when there was still a paucity of literary culture designed specifically for them, and when the novel in particular was still held in scant regard, Scott was implicitly and explicitly endorsed by the adults around them. An essay on "The Reading of Young Ladies" directly expressed this tension in 1836: "Too much time is spent on novels, few of which are calculated to instruct or to improve. The writings of Scott and some others may be an exception. But generally, they are trash and chaff."<sup>14</sup>

The epitome of this Scott effect can be found in Lyman Beecher's household and, in particular, in his significance for a young Harriet Beecher Stowe. "Such a thing as a novel," Stowe recalled of her early childhood, "was not to be found in our house." Novel reading was felt to be "an evil." Despairing for reading matter, Stowe "used to search though father's library, meeting only the same grim sentinels—Bell's Sermons, Bogue's Essays, Bonnet's Inquiry, Toplady on Predestination, Horsley's Tracts."<sup>15</sup> But then, Scott arrived. According to Catherine Beecher, he was one of the authors brought into the home by their maternal uncle Samuel Foote (himself "a sort of hero of romance" to his young relations): "Whenever [Foote] came to Litchfield he brought a stock of new books, which he and Aunt Mary read aloud. This was the time when Scott, Byron, Moore, and that great galaxy of contemporary writers were issuing their works at intervals of only a few months."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jeannette L. Gilder, *The Autobiography of a Tomboy* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901), p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> [Anon.], "The Reading of Young Ladies," *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, 3 (1836), 91.

<sup>15</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, letter to Charles Beecher, no date, quoted in Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), I, 526.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine E. Beecher, letter to Charles Beecher, no date, quoted in *Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman Beecher*, I, 222.

Unexpectedly, Lyman was an enthusiastic convert to Scott's work, declaring, according to Harriet: "I have always disapproved of novels as trash, but in these is real genius and real culture, and you may read them." She continues: "And we did read them; for in one summer we went through *Ivanhoe* seven times, and were both of us able to recite many of its scenes, from beginning to end, verbatim" (Stowe, undated letter to Charles Beecher, p. 526).

The potency of these memories echoed throughout Stowe's writings. In *Poganuc People* (1878), for example, Stowe looked back to her own childhood to describe the intensity with which Scott's works characterized the childhoods of her generation:

Never in this day—generation of jaded and sated literary appetite—will any one know the fresh and eager joy, the vivid sensation of delight with which a poem like "The Lady of the Lake," a novel like "Ivanhoe," was received in lonely mountain towns by a people eager for a new mental excitement. The young folks called the rocks and glens and rivers of their romantic region by names borrowed from Scott; they clambered among the crags of Benvenue and sailed on the bosom of Loch Katrine.<sup>17</sup>

In an early essay for the *New York Evangelist* in 1842, "Literary Epidemics.—No. 1," Stowe revealed more reasons why, for many, Scott earned a unique acceptance as an author suitable for the young despite the periodic vogue for other popular writers. When it came to Scott, Stowe declared, "for once, the public acclamation was right in its designation."<sup>18</sup> Scott's ability to create "fairy worlds" that nonetheless held enough "dignity" and "information" to make them suitable company for a wide variety of readers changed the cultural landscape. In Stowe's resonant phrase, "all ancient landmarks were removed": "The grave and weighty, the sensible and judicious—people who thought their novel reading days were long past, did not hesitate to turn to those of Scott, and young and old, clergy and

<sup>17</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Poganuc People: Their Loves and Lives* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1878), p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Literary Epidemics.—No. 1," *New-York Evangelist*, 13 (1842), 120.



flock, all read together” (“Literary Epidemics,” p. 120). The same could not be said, at least in Stowe’s judgment, for the other writers who captured the public imagination at this moment. Lord Byron, she admitted, had a reign that “was, if possible, more universal, binding, and absolute.” But Stowe was adamant that this was a passing fad that had caused real harm: “The evil influence, however, exerted by Byron on the minds of the young and sensitive, is not to be lightly estimated; and it is our opinion, founded on a knowledge of facts, that many of the best constituted minds, both of men and women, have been fatally and irreparably injured by him” (“Literary Epidemics,” p. 120). If anything, she had even sterner opprobrium for the works of Edward Bulwer Lytton, another favorite for American readers:

Now we really do not think that there ever has been a greater insult on the decency and moral sense of society, than these same sweetly worded, extremely lofty, passionate, philosophical, refined vindications of vice and abomination, published by a young Sir Edward Bulwer. A young and ardent man or woman, who should read them all through, and sympathise with the tone of feeling, would be about as much injured as any supposable combination of fictitious influence could injure. (Stowe, “Literary Epidemics,” p. 120)

Even Frederick Marryat—marked out mainly, in Stowe’s judgment, by his “inferiority”—was still not “a desirable writer to put into the hands of young people.” In such company, Scott was a paragon. And if some of the faithful might still have maintained that a novel inevitably gave readers “a mistaken view” of some historical details, Stowe rhetorically concluded, “comparing Scott with the mass” of his fellow authors, “if he is to be rejected as injurious, which of them shall be read?” (“Literary Epidemics,” p. 120).

Stowe’s intense experiences of the “new mental excitement” that Scott generated among her contemporaries, and her desire to evangelize his works more widely, were clearly part of a wider movement in American culture. As early as 1831, even before his death, Scott was being positioned as a suitable companion for American children. In her pioneering

parenting manual *The Mother's Book* (1831), Lydia Maria Child devoted significant attention to the reading habits of the young. Child, too, remained a little suspicious of novels and their capacity to develop “an exclusive and injurious taste for fiction.”<sup>19</sup> Yet she also cautioned parents “that the worst possible thing that can be done is to prohibit them entirely,” and advocated for the importance of developing “a real love of reading” (Child, *The Mother's Book*, pp. 90, 86). In her own youth, Child had escaped from the dry reading matter of her family's limited library by accessing the printed material that her older brother Convers managed to procure: “When I came home from school, I always hurried to his bed-room, and threw myself down among his piles of books. . . . I devoured everything that came in my way.”<sup>20</sup> Scott was one of their shared passions. In an 1819 letter to Convers, then studying at Harvard, Child praised Scott's “originality” and the “pathos and grandeur . . . the wild dignity” of his heroines—something that was much more appealing than the “gentleness, modesty, and timidity” demonstrated by most fictional heroines. She also admitted that Scott's novels left her “almost tempted to leave sober history, and repair to these Scottish novels for instruction, as well as amusement.”<sup>21</sup> In turn, Child recommended Scott to the mothers of America. Playing down the potentially subversive appeal of his heroines that had sparked her imagination as a girl, she stressed to them the ways that Scott's work seemed to combine the ideals of education and entertainment. Noting the benefits of “historical works of fiction” for readers from “fourteen years of age to twenty,” Child highlighted that—like William Shakespeare—“Sir Walter Scott has furnished a novel for almost all the interesting reigns in English History” (*The Mother's Book*, p. 94). Perhaps sensing some resistance on the part of her readers about these works, Child was

<sup>19</sup> [Lydia Maria] Child, *The Mother's Book* (Boston: Carter, Hendee and Babcock, 1831), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Lydia Maria Child, letter to John Weiss, 15 April 1863, in *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817–1880*, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1982), p. 426.

<sup>21</sup> Lydia Maria Child, letter to Convers Francis, 3 February 1819, in *Letters of Lydia Maria Child* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), pp. 2–3.

quick to reassure them: “Their influence is never in opposition to good; and to a thinking mind they afford abundant food for reflection, as well as an inexhaustible fund of amusement” (*The Mother’s Book*, p. 94). Scott featured frequently in her list of recommended books.<sup>22</sup>

Child was hardly the only source of official sanction for Scott for youthful Americans. While Beiderwell and McCormick note that “*Ivanhoe* moved into the classroom comparatively late in America” (“The Making and Unmaking of a Children’s Classic,” p. 171), Scott was clearly a fixture there even in the early nineteenth century. Eliza Robbins’s selection of *Poetry for Schools* (1828) waxed lyrical, informing its young readers that “it is a happy circumstance for us of the nineteenth century, that we live in the age of the author of *Waverley*”; “Wherever English is read, there the poems and the novels of the immortal Northern Minstrel are known; and from every region where they are known, the tribute of praise and admiration is offered to him.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, multiple editions of John Pierpoint’s *The American First Class Book; or, Exercises in Reading and Recitation*, from 1823 onward, presented school children with extracts from *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1817).<sup>24</sup> Periodicals also validated Scott as an appropriate choice of reading matter for young minds. In 1846, *Merry’s Museum* profiled Scott, including an illustration of the author alongside his famous dogs (see Figure 2).<sup>25</sup> In 1848, *Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book* gave an approving review to Lea and Blanchard’s two-volume edition of *Readings for the Young, from the Works of Sir Walter Scott*: “The editor has done his work well. It is a book that may be safely put into the hands of the young, and will afford

<sup>22</sup> See Child, *The Mother’s Book*, pp. 104–8.

<sup>23</sup> [Eliza Robbins], *Poetry for Schools; Designed for Reading and Recitation. The Whole Selected from the Best Poets in the English Language* (New York: White, Gallagher and White, 1828), pp. 165, 166.

<sup>24</sup> See John Pierpoint, *The American First Class Book; or, Exercises in Reading and Recitation: Selected Principally from Modern Authors of England and America; and Designed for the Use of the Highest Class in Publick and Private Schools* (Boston: William B. Fowle, 1823).

<sup>25</sup> See [Anon.], “Sir Walter Scott,” *Merry’s Museum*, 12 (1846), 165–66.

## SIR WALTER SCOTT.



Sir Walter Scott.

FIGURE 2 Illustration for “Sir Walter Scott,” *Merry’s Museum*, 12 (1846), 165.

them both amusement and instruction.”<sup>26</sup> Scott himself was even used as an exemplar of the reading practices that were developing in this era. In 1841, *Parley’s Magazine* instructed its young audience:

<sup>26</sup> [Anon.], “Editors’ Book Table,” *Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book*, 36 (1848), 58.

Happy are those children whose parents have a good library, or who are able to procure a suitable one for them. . . . It has generally been the case that those who in later life have contributed by their writings to enrich literature were, in childhood, remarkable for the eager pleasure they took in reading. Sir Walter Scott used to devour books.<sup>27</sup>

As Edward Everett Hale (born in 1822) put it, surveying the literary landscape of his own youth in the 1830s and 1840s, “Scott . . . reigned supreme.”<sup>28</sup> Those who had encountered Scott’s works in their own youth at the time of their first publication, associating his work with their own experience of childhood, now communicated that passion to their children. Scott’s work sat at the heart of literate domesticity, bridging generations. Though arguably atypical, a glimpse at family life in antebellum Concord, Massachusetts, vividly reveals this pattern. In 1820, Nathaniel Hawthorne, age sixteen, had written to his sister updating her about his recent literary pleasures: “I shall read the Abbot by the Author of Waverly as soon as I can hire it. I have read all Scott’s Novels except that. I wish I had not, that I might have the pleasure of reading them again.”<sup>29</sup> Decades later, he did just that. Hawthorne’s son, Julian, vividly remembered the moment in his childhood when his father was sent a new complete edition of Scott’s works by Ticknor and Fields: “beginning at the beginning, [Hawthorne] read all those admirable romances to his children and wife. There was no conceivable entertainment which they would not have postponed in favor of this presentation of Scott through the medium of Hawthorne.”<sup>30</sup>

The Emersons had the same multigenerational experience with Scott. In a speech to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1871, an event marking Scott’s centenary, Ralph Waldo

<sup>27</sup> [Anon.], “The Childhood of Jane Taylor,” *Parley’s Magazine*, 9 (1841), 295.

<sup>28</sup> Edward E. Hale, *A New England Boyhood* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1893), p. 231.

<sup>29</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne, 31 October 1820, in his *The Letters, 1813–1843*, ed. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson, vol. 15 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1984), p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A Biography*, 3d ed., 2 vols. (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1885), II, 269.

Emerson recalled: "I can well remember as far back as when *The Lord of the Isles* was first republished in Boston, in 1815,—my own and my school-fellows' joy in the book."<sup>31</sup> In his own poetry, Emerson celebrated Scott as "the delight of generous boys."<sup>32</sup> After Emerson's death, his son Edward declared: "Mr. Emerson's children can testify how with regard to Scott he always was ready to become a boy again." As they walked in Walden woods, Emerson would recite Scott from memory: "With special affection . . . he would croon the lines from 'The Dying Bard.'" Emerson's "boyish love" for *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) was also kindled:

the bleak mile of road between Walden woods and home would  
often call out from him

"The way was long, the wind was cold,  
The minstrel was infirm and old," etc.<sup>33</sup>

Down the road, Abba Alcott was also entertaining her children with similar literary fare. Louisa May Alcott recorded in her diary in January 1845: "Did my lessons, and in the P. M. mother read 'Kenilworth' to us while we sewed. It is splendid!" A few days later, another Scott novel kept the Alcott girls distracted: "Read the 'Heart of Mid-Lothian,' and had a very happy day."<sup>34</sup> Years later, in 1861, Anna Alcott testified to the profound and lasting significance of these moments:

I distinctly remember years ago, when I was about 9 yrs old . . .  
mother coming from town one day brought home three novels.  
The first except Edgeworth's that we had never seen. The Pirate,  
Kenilworth, & The Abbot, three of Scotts best, upon which Lu +  
I fed, & never rested till they were done when we wished for

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Walter Scott" (1871), in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume XI*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1878, 1906), p. 463.

<sup>32</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "May-Day," in his *May-Day and Other Pieces* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Waldo Emerson, "Notes," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume XI*, pp. 635, 636.

<sup>34</sup> Louisa May Alcott, quoted in *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters and Journals*, ed. Ednah D. Cheney (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1889), pp. 40, 42.

more, & the taste then awakened has never yet been satisfied & to read is our highest delight.<sup>35</sup>

In Anna's memory, then, Scott was no less than the Alcott girls' entry point into the world of literature—a graduation from Maria Edgeworth's didactic children's stories. And even more significant for the trajectory of Scott's relationship to young readers in the years to come, Louisa paid her own tribute to this moment, and to her sister, in *Little Women* (1868): "Meg went back to toast her feet, and read 'Ivanhoe.'"<sup>36</sup> Acculturating juvenile audiences to the literary pleasures of Scott, both implicitly and explicitly, would be a significant mission for those, like Alcott, who wrote for America's children in the final decades of the nineteenth century.



The years of the Civil War and their aftermath were transformative for American children's literature. Through those changes, Scott abided, put to use by a variety of factions—all of whom had themselves been raised as readers of Scott—for a variety of purposes. Across the Atlantic, British commentators were often quick to assign Scott a place in the past with apparently little anxiety. Writing in *The Strand Magazine* in 1894, Frances H. Low—having surveyed the youthful reading habits of a wealth of eminent Victorians—did offer up a sigh that Scott, a prime favorite of previous generations, seemed to be losing his hold on young Britons:

we can no longer cherish the belief that Scott retains his hold over youth. Here and there a boy reads "Ivanhoe," and more rarely still "The Talisman"; but of all that long gallery of beloved figures enshrined in our memories . . . these boys and girls know nothing.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Anna (Alcott) Pratt, *Diary 1860–1861*. February 18th 1861. Alcott family additional papers, 1707–1904 (inclusive), 1821–1888 (bulk). MS Am 1130.14 (6). Houghton Library, Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>36</sup> Louisa M. Alcott, *Little Women, or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868), p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Frances H. Low, "Favourite Books of Childhood," *The Strand Magazine*, 8 (1894), 136.

Low's countryman Andrew Lang, in his column in *Longman's Magazine*, did not disagree with her prognosis, but he was even more untroubled by young Britons' enthusiasm for more contemporary fare—"Kingston and Ballantyne and cheap magazines," even the work of his American friend Mark Twain—over the likes of Scott, since in his estimation "boys read what they find handy" and "only one boy in a hundred cares for reading" in any generation.<sup>38</sup> In turn, British magazines for children were more likely to use Scott as a biographical exemplar than to focus on his works for young readers—like *The Boys' Own Paper* in 1897, who complimented Scott's "healthy active mind" and his "great talents" while also censuring the moments when he was "careless and extravagant, and perhaps reckless of health."<sup>39</sup>

American commentators, however, were apparently far more anxious to foster and maintain a fascination for Scott in the youth of America. Children's periodicals across this period were littered with references to Scott and admonitions—sometimes hectoring, sometimes cajoling, always nostalgic—to read his work. Moreover, in the peculiarly America culture war that developed around the Dime Novel, Scott became a brickbat for both sides of the debate. Young Americans themselves, buffeted by all of these interventions, seem to have retained an affection and fascination for Scott's novels that was sustained through the Gilded Age, evidenced by their own contributions to children's magazines. Looking back from 1934, Henry Seidel Canby remembered, "Scott and the near-Scotts and the school-of-Scotts were such real determinants of inner life for readers brought up in the eighties and nineties that no one will ever understand the America of that day without reading and pondering upon . . . 'Ivanhoe.'"<sup>40</sup>

An 1868 advertisement for a new illustrated edition of the Waverley novels released by Ticknor and Fields pointed the way when it posed some significant questions to parents:

<sup>38</sup> A[ndrew] Lang, "At the Sign of the Ship," *Longman's Magazine*, 24 (1894), 657.

<sup>39</sup> F. B. Sandford, "Some Stories of Sir Walter Scott," *The Boys' Own Paper*, 18 September 1897, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Seidel Canby, *The Age of Confidence: Life in the Nineties* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934), pp. 191–92.



With this rich library before us, we are inclined to ask the question, "Will *our* coming boys and girls read novels?" Shall they be allowed to partake of that forbidden fruit which our fathers and mothers hid from us? . . . Remembering the great truths contained in these writings, the vast amount of useful knowledge concerning people, countries, nations; the many good and wise teachings inculcated, may we not hope that the youthful mind may be allowed to revel in the productions of writers who, like Sir Walter Scott, create beautiful and romantic structures on the strong foundations of historic truths?<sup>41</sup>

Despite that hint of an antiliterary prejudice that still lingered in American life, most commentators answered those questions with enthusiastic affirmations of the beneficial effect that Scott could have on young Americans.

Horace Scudder set the tone in the "Books for Young People" column that he launched in the inaugural issue of the *Riverside Magazine for Young People* in 1867, the avowed purpose of which was to "remind parents of books which we may think have grown a little old-fashioned, but which have the freshness of young life about them." This in itself was a reaction to Scudder's sense that "children have too much reading nowadays"; "What shall we give our children to read? is the constant cry of anxious parents, as they stand in despair before the counters in the bookstores."<sup>42</sup> One signal answer to that question was, of course, Scott. In 1868, Scudder opened his October issue with a long profile of Scott that positioned him as "the most celebrated story-teller of modern times"; "The world will never cease owing a debt of gratitude to one who has cheered it with so many pure and noble tales, and given it, besides, his own hearty, whole-souled, Christian life."<sup>43</sup> He then devoted that month's "Books for Young People" to Scott's novels and poems. It was "plain," Scudder began, that Scott had "lost the hold which he once had on novel readers. . . . and it is scarcely to

<sup>41</sup> [Anon.], "Literary Notices," *Our Boys and Girls*, 4 (5 September 1868), following p. 576.

<sup>42</sup> [Horace Scudder], "Books for Young People," *The Riverside Magazine for Young People*, 1 (1867), pp. 45, 43, 44.

<sup>43</sup> [Horace Scudder], "Sir Walter Scott," *The Riverside Magazine for Young People*, 2 (1868), p. 433.

be expected that there will be any grand re-installment of Scott sixty years hence." Yet young readers were "preservers of good books," Scudder argued, and it was to their hands that "we look for a sure preservation of the best of his works. . . . They will keep *Ivanhoe*, and *Waverley*, and *Marmion* from a decent death in solemn libraries." Indeed, "weeded out" and "comfortably established on the youngster's shelf. . . . he is good. . . . for unnumbered generations." Yet these readers had to be caught at the right moment: "the time for reading and enjoying Scott begins with the restless, romantic time of boys and girls, when you begin to feel uneasy at the taste they show for sensational, ephemeral literature." Scudder advised: "Give them Scott; it may not preserve them from all the poor stuff afloat, but it will be something stout for them to hold by now, and a capital memory to cherish."<sup>44</sup>

The same use of Scott as a bulwark against "sensational, ephemeral literature" can be found in the writing of Charlotte Yonge. Though Yonge was a hugely popular British novelist, she addressed a young audience on both sides of the Atlantic (indeed, in *Little Women*, Meg discovers Jo "eating apples and crying over the 'Heir of Redcliffe'"—one of Yonge's most famous works [Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 39]). Scott had played a major part in Yonge's own literary upbringing. In her autobiography, Yonge remembered that her mother was "exceedingly fond of Scott, and always reckoned the first reading of *Waverley* as an era in her life." In turn, "Scott above all" was Yonge's own "prime literary affection": "I think I was allowed a chapter a day of the *Waverley* novels, provided I first read twenty pages of Goldsmith's *Rome* or some equally solid book."<sup>45</sup> From the 1860s onward, Yonge then recommended Scott to a new generation—particularly young Americans. In 1864, she began her *A Book of Golden Deeds*, a book specifically aimed at children, with a warning. Acknowledging that "We all of us enjoy a story of battle and adventure," Yonge cautioned that such tastes "may be no better than a love of reading about murders in the

<sup>44</sup> [Horace Scudder], "Books for Young People: Scott's Novels and Poems," *The Riverside Magazine for Young People*, 2 (1868), 477–78.

<sup>45</sup> Charlotte Yonge, "Autobiography," in *Charlotte Mary Yonge: Her Life and Letters*, ed. [Christabel] Coleridge (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), pp. 33, 111–13.

newspaper, just for the sake of a sort of startled sensation.”<sup>46</sup> Scott was a safeguard against such temptations. Writing for American children’s magazine *The Youth’s Companion* in 1884, Yonge told her readers “a story of [her] younger days.” Her account of a previous generation’s youthful reading contained within it both a typical critique of contemporary audiences and a lament for contemporary childhoods:

In those days, both boys and girls cared a good deal more for romance and poetry than you do now. There was no getting them up for examinations, so they were all pure play-work. Boys were not obliged to learn anything but Latin and Greek; and so those who *had* brains liked to spend them on all the external world of knights and tournaments, chivalry and romance. Sir Walter Scott, whose works some of you young ones look on as a sort of lesson-book, was our most intense delight. We could repeat all the more spirited parts of “Marmion,” the “Lay” and the “Lady,” and almost knew the tournament in “Ivanhoe” by heart.<sup>47</sup>

To further encourage those readers to follow in her footsteps, Yonge wrote the foreword to an 1886 edition of *Ivanhoe* released by the American publisher Ginn—the first edition explicitly marketed toward a youthful audience—declaring it “the chief and first favorite of young people, among all Scott’s works . . . the first introduction to the gorgeous world of chivalry.”<sup>48</sup>

Pioneering American children’s librarian Caroline M. Hewins also testified to Scott’s influence in her own memoir of childhood reading, while paying tacit acknowledgment to the ways in which Scott saturated antebellum print culture even beyond editions of his own works:

<sup>46</sup> [Charlotte Yonge], *A Book of Golden Deeds: Of All Times and All Lands* (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1865), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Charlotte M. Yonge, “The Gauntlet,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 57 (6 March 1884), 93.

<sup>48</sup> Charlotte M. Yonge, “Introduction,” in [Walter Scott], *Scott’s Ivanhoe: A Romance* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1886), p. v. See also Beiderwell and McCormick, “The Making and Unmaking of a Children’s Classic,” p. 172.

At this time a new edition of the Waverley Novels was coming out, two volumes a month, and I remember the growth of the collection in the bookcase. I was told that I might read the stories—an empty form, for I used to read everything that interested me without regard to permission. At first the long, uneventful opening to “Waverley” did not look attractive; but an extract from the end, the execution of Fergus MacIvor, that I found in the American First Class Book, led me to read the whole. I was drawn to “Ivanhoe” by a picture in one of the old Annuals. . . .

After the spell was once upon me, I read every one of the novels, some of them many times over before I was fifteen.<sup>49</sup>

Thus shaped by Scott as a child, Hewins went on to include Scott’s work in her own influential reading guides for young Americans, starting with *Books for the Young* in 1882. As late as 1915, for example, Hewins still listed four Scott titles on her list of “Fifty must-haves,” which includes books generally agreed upon by libraries for purchase: *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth* (1821), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *The Talisman* (1825).<sup>50</sup>

The likes of Scudder, Yonge, and Hewins were hardly alone in promoting Scott to these ends. Other prominent voices writing in a variety of American magazines for children positioned him as a solid and respectable choice of reading. In 1865, still a devoted champion, Harriet Beecher Stowe profiled “Sir Walter Scott and His Dogs” for *Our Young Folks*.<sup>51</sup> In 1870, *Our Boys and Girls* reprinted “an address to the graduating class of the Lincoln Grammar School, Boston” by Francis H. Underwood on “The Pleasures and Uses of Reading,” in which he warned the young “against giving too much time to reading fiction”—but still maintained “that every scholar should read Scott.”<sup>52</sup> In 1877, Donald Grant Mitchell reminisced in *St. Nicholas* magazine about his “first reading of Scott’s story of ‘Ivanhoe,’” and

<sup>49</sup> Caroline M. Hewins, *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 112.

<sup>50</sup> Caroline M. Hewins, *Books for Boys and Girls: A Selected List*, 3d ed. (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1915), pp. 16, 18.

<sup>51</sup> See Harriet Beecher Stowe, “Sir Walter Scott and His Dogs,” *Our Young Folks: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls*, 1 (1865), 722–26.

<sup>52</sup> Francis H. Underwood, “The Pleasures and Uses of Reading,” rpt. in *Our Boys and Girls*, 8 (10 December 1870), 794.

used that memory to mount a defense against “the young people of our day” who “complain that they can’t like the long talks and the long descriptions, and that Scott’s books are too slow for them. Well, well!”<sup>53</sup> In 1881, *St. Nicholas* also published an extract from *Ivanhoe* in its “Treasure-Box of Literature,” assuming its readership’s familiarity with Scott, “for what reading boy or girl does not know something about the author of ‘Ivanhoe,’ and ‘Kenilworth,’ . . . and all the rest of that delightful list?”<sup>54</sup> In 1882, it gave significant space to a lushly illustrated account of “A Visit to the Home of Sir Walter Scott.”<sup>55</sup> That same year, in *Wide Awake*, Amanda B. Harris wrote a long tribute to Scott as part of the “Pleasant Authors for Young Folks” series, in which she also laced her own nostalgia for her childhood engagements with his books:

Once in a while I take up one of the Waverley novels, and with a remembrance of those long summer afternoons and those long winter evenings when I read them for the first time, I turn the leaves and catch the familiar names; and then I think that some day I will read them all again. But the full delight of that early reading cannot come back. There can be only one *first* time. Happy young girl or boy who has them all before you! I envy you.<sup>56</sup>

Even at the end of the century, this trend was still in evidence. In 1895, Rev. Washington Gladden, a prominent leader of the Social Gospel movement in America, pondered the “Gravest of Questions” for the *Pennsylvania School Journal*: “What do our boys and girls read?” Lamenting “the mental and moral decay” evinced by some “victims of the reading habit” (by which he meant the propensity of the young to “read surreptitiously great numbers of injurious books”), Gladden praised the actions that the Columbus School Board had taken “to cultivate a taste for good reading” by requiring pupils to engage with

<sup>53</sup> Donald G. Mitchell, “Ivanhoe,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 4 (1877), 448.

<sup>54</sup> [Anon.], “The St. Nicholas Treasure-Box of Literature,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 8 (1881), 480.

<sup>55</sup> See Mrs. P. L. Collins, “A Visit to the Home of Sir Walter Scott,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 9 (1882), 774–80.

<sup>56</sup> Amanda B. Harris, “Little Biographies.—Pleasant Authors for Young Folks: Sir Walter Scott,” *Wide Awake: C.Y.F.R.U. Supplement*, October 1882, p. 12.

“some small but choice book of literary merit.” Scott was one of the recommended authors. “If [pupils] can be taught . . . to find pleasure in the sound manliness of Scott,” Gladden hoped, “many of them may be saved from the mental debauchery which tempts them from the news-stands.”<sup>57</sup>

Yet that binary was not as clear as the likes of Gladden asserted. While most commentators positioned Scott as a barrier between young readers and the dime novels found on newsstands, others saw a clear genetic connection between Scott and the cheap American literature of adventure that proliferated in the last decades of the nineteenth century. During the Civil War, just as the dime novel was developing momentum in American culture, a writer for the *North American Review* surveyed the nascent field and began with an anecdote that established a juxtaposition between Scott and this new development:

A young friend of ours was recently suffering from that most harassing of complaints, *convalescence*, of which the remedy consists in copious draughts of amusement, prescribed by the patient. Literature was imperatively called for, and administered in the shape of Sir Walter Scott’s novels. These did very well for a day or two,—when, the convalescence running into satiety of the most malignant type, a new remedy was demanded, and the *clamor de profundis* arose. “I wish I had a *Dime Novel*.”<sup>58</sup>

At first glance, this might seem like a clear statement of generational change: a young reader tires of the old amusements of Scott and turns to the new thrills of the dime novel—precisely the kind of perilous moment that the likes of Gladden feared. This was the line of attack taken by *Puck* magazine in 1882. Rehearsing the reading habits of a previous generation of boys (“We read Walter Scott . . . and we were well satisfied—happier over those dear pages than we often are now over volumes of deeper thought”), they lambasted the “little devils” who now turned from Scott and the “healthy taste in literature”

<sup>57</sup> Washington Gladden, “Gravest of Questions: What Do Our Boys and Girls Read?,” *Pennsylvania School Journal*, 44 (December 1895), 246, 249.

<sup>58</sup> [Anon.], rev. of *Beadle’s Dime Books*, *North American Review*, 99 (1864) 303.

promulgated by respectable children's magazines for the "blood-and-thunder" of the dime novel.<sup>59</sup>

Yet there was a clear line of connection between literature and dime novels, and this was a lineage that was stressed by supporters of the dime novel and its relations. When the *New-York Daily Tribune* launched an attack on "Dime Novel Work" and its "evil" effects in 1884, prolific dime author Frederick Whittaker responded with a spirited defense, claiming that "the dime novel is now the only representative of purely American literature that exists on its own merits alone."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Whittaker made it clear that their subject matter was not only "wholesome" but also followed in auspicious steps: "Some are stories of adventure by land and sea; others of working-men's life; others are founded on history, like those of Scott" ("Dime Novels," p. 8). That same theme was taken up by the members of the Authors Club, founded in 1882, as recalled by George Cary Eggleston in his 1910 literary memoir *Recollections of a Varied Life*. In a discussion about the literary merits of the medium, Edwin Booth and John Hay both emerged as partisans of "an entirely innocent and a very necessary form of literature." Hay in particular stepped forward in their defense, framing the dime novel, like Whittaker, in relation to Scott:

"The dime novel," Mr. Hay said, "is only a rude form of the story of adventure. If Scott's novels had been sufficiently condensed to be sold at the price, they would have been dime novels of the most successful sort. Your boy wants thrill, heroics, tall talk, and deeds of derring-do, and these are what the dime novelist gives him in abundance, and even in lavish superabundance. I remember that the favorite book of my own boyhood was J. B. Jones's 'Wild Western Scenes.' His 'Sneak' was to me a hero of romance with whom Ivanhoe could in no way compare."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> [Anon.], "Cartoons and Comments," *Puck*, 11 (1882), 246.

<sup>60</sup> See [Anon.], "Dime Novel Work," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 10 March 1884, p. 4; and Frederick Whittaker, "Dime Novels: A Defence by a Writer of Them," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 16 March 1884, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> George Cary Eggleston, *Recollections of a Varied Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1910), p. 275.

Indeed, to make that lineage clear, the young hero of Jones's popular antebellum frontier adventure novel even spends some time reading Scott.<sup>62</sup> And if it seems like Hay's youthful dismissal of *Ivanhoe* was indicative of an underlying disdain for Scott, Hay struck a very different tone in 1897 when he was the American representative at the unveiling of a bust of Scott that was installed in Westminster Abbey. In his speech, Hay crystallized the special relationship between Scott and young Americans: "I doubt if anywhere [Scott's] writings have had a more loving welcome than in America. The books a boy reads are those most ardently admired and longest remembered; and America reveled in Scott when the country was young"; and "His magic still has power to charm all wholesome and candid souls."<sup>63</sup>

If the pages of children's magazines are any indication, this was not necessarily hyperbole. Kathleen McDowell has highlighted the fact that the "evidence of child readers" is missing in most histories of children's literature ("Toward a History of Children as Readers," p. 240). But the letters pages and readers' polls of children's magazines in this period provide snapshots of a youthful audience that was engaged with Scott's work. Of course, this is hardly objective testimony. As McDowell notes, such evidence "will always need to be read in tension with the activities of adults"; "What children liked and what they claimed to like sometimes differed. Adults judged children's reading choices, and children's awareness of these judgments appears in subtle differences in children's responses" ("Toward a History of Children as Readers," pp. 261, 251). This evidence is also profoundly colored by what Janet Gray and Melissa Fowler have described as the "feats of social engineering" that these magazines represented—their "mission" to "cultivate" their "young readers as future members of the middle class, guiding their development, fostering their

<sup>62</sup> See J. B. Jones, *Wild Western Scenes: A Narrative of Adventures in the Western Wilderness, Wherein the Exploits of Daniel Boone, the Great American Pioneer, Are Particularly Described*. . . , revised ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> John Hay, *Speech of John Hay at the Unveiling of the Bust of Sir Walter Scott in Westminster Abbey, May 21, 1897* (London: John Lane, 1897), pp. 7, 12.



values, and ministering to their prosperity.”<sup>64</sup> With all those provisos, children themselves still seem to have enthusiastically responded to Scott’s work.

As a weekly magazine, *Harper’s Young People* had a particularly active letters page, and many of its late-nineteenth-century correspondents were eager to demonstrate their engagement with Scott. For example, a child named Edna wrote to *Harper’s Young People* from Brooklyn: “At present I am interested in Scott’s works, and am reading *Pevevil of the Peak*.” The editorial response commended her taste: “I like your choice of books, Edna. You cannot do better than read HARPER’S YOUNG PEOPLE, serials and all, and then read Scott.”<sup>65</sup> Ellen wrote from Long Island: “My favorite authors are Sir Walter Scott, Miss Alcott, and I have not decided which others.”<sup>66</sup> “W. M.” from Lincolnville “out on the prairie” announced: “I have read a good many novels. Sir Walter Scott’s and Dickens’s are my favorites.”<sup>67</sup> Mary from Nashville, who was “quite fond of reading,” had consumed “nearly all of Sir Walter Scott’s novels.”<sup>68</sup> Eight-year-old Sidney from New Hampshire enjoyed Scott with his mother: “Mamma has read me *Ivanhoe*, *Woodstock*, *The Talisman* . . . ; she skips what I don’t understand.”<sup>69</sup> Another correspondent described his European travels: “I had the pleasure of visiting Sir Walter Scott’s house at Abbotsford, and as I have read some of his works, you may be sure I was interested in my visit there.”<sup>70</sup>

Other journals also provided column space to young fans, a number of whom emphasized this transatlantic quality of Scott fandom. In 1888, “Alan A.”—born in Scotland but living in Memphis, Tennessee—wrote to *St. Nicholas* about his own intense Scott fandom:

<sup>64</sup> Janet Gray and Melissa Fowler, “‘Hints Dropped Here and There’: Constructing Exclusion in *St. Nicholas*, Volume I,” in *Enterprising Youth: Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children’s Literature*, ed. Monika Elbert (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 10 (1889), 439.

<sup>66</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 7 (1886), 755.

<sup>67</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 6 (1885), 591.

<sup>68</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 10 (1888), 143.

<sup>69</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 10 (1889), 694.

<sup>70</sup> [Anon.], “Our Post-Office Box,” *Harper’s Young People*, 6 (1885), 766.

We went to Scotland and England last year, and I enjoyed visiting the ruins of castles and the places Sir Walter Scott tells about. I have read all his books, but I liked *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy* best. I have a little Scotch collie that I brought home with me, and his name is "Ivanhoe." I also have a large Newfoundland dog named "Rob Roy," and he is a true outlaw in nature, for he is never at home, and he prefers to get his dinner at some neighbor's rather than at home.<sup>71</sup>

Elsie, a "little American girl who is living in England," wrote to *Wide Awake* in 1889, noting that she had managed to "convert" her "mother into liking Walter Scott. . . . now she feels great admiration for him and wants to read all his works. We are now reading *The Talisman* together."<sup>72</sup>

Readers' polls—a popular feature of Gilded Age periodicals—also give us vivid snapshots of Scott's importance in the reading habits of young Americans. In 1890, *The Congregationalist* polled its readers under twenty years of age about their favorite books, and of the 709 readers who responded to the twelve-and-over class, 279 selected *Ivanhoe*, which ranked sixth overall, following *Little Women*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* (1880), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), and Alcott's *Little Men* (1871).<sup>73</sup> It was a telling list. Stowe and Alcott had grown up with Scott at the center of their reading lives. So too had Burnett and Wallace. In her memoir, Burnett remembered—like Zadel Barnes Buddington—discovering the *Waverley* novels in her family's bookcase: "Novels were stories! . . . And all the rest were like it! Why, one might read *forever!*"<sup>74</sup> Interviewed in 1898, Wallace was asked about his favorite novelist and novel: he chose "at once" Sir Walter Scott and *Ivanhoe*.<sup>75</sup> Scott's influence, then, was traceable even in those books that achieved more immediate popularity with young American readers.

<sup>71</sup> [Anon.], "The Letter-Box," *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 15 (1888), 957.

<sup>72</sup> [Anon.], "The Wide Awake Post-Office," *Wide Awake*, 29 (1889), no pages.

<sup>73</sup> See [Anon.], "Books for Young Readers," *The Book Buyer: A Summary of Foreign and American Literature*, 7 (1890–91), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> [Anon.], "General Lew Wallace," *Our Day*, 17 (1898), 60.

In 1899, *St. Nicholas* launched a competition in which it asked its readers to submit a list “of twenty-five books for young readers from ten to sixteen years of age.”<sup>76</sup> This prompt elicited over five thousand responses. Despite the fact that the chosen winners inevitably reflect the prejudices of the “Committee of Award” appointed by *St. Nicholas*, it is still telling that the first-prize winner—compiled by Mary Mead Hedge of Passaic, New Jersey—listed Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward* as the first two choices on her list (see Figure 3). Indeed, each of the five runners-up—from Alice Learned Bunner of New London, Connecticut, to Martha D. Stringham of Berkeley, California—included at least *Ivanhoe* on their lists, while a number also included a second or third selection from Scott.<sup>77</sup> That four of these list makers were young girls is also evidence of the fact that despite the ways that Scott, and particularly *Ivanhoe*, was being pushed toward boys, it seems that he retained a cross-gender appeal. Given the overwhelming number of responses generated by *St. Nicholas* readers, the magazine took a few months to sort through all of the submitted lists in order to compile “a library of one hundred chosen books for children’s permanent reading.” Scott appeared in a section of “Standard Books,” represented by his poems as well as *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, *Quentin Durward*, and *The Abbot* (1820).<sup>78</sup> At least among a select portion of the particular readerships of these publications, then, Scott retained an apparently profound place in the reading of young Americans, even at the beginning of the twentieth century.



Looking back from the end of the nineteenth century, various correspondents to the *New York Times* reminisced about their antebellum childhood reading in

<sup>76</sup> [Anon.], “Books and Reading for Young Folk: A Prize Competition,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 26 (1899), 520.

<sup>77</sup> See The Committee of Award, “Lists by the Prize-Winners,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 26 (1899), 786–88.

<sup>78</sup> [Anon.], “Books and Reading: The List of One Hundred Books,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 27 (1900), 444, 445.

## FIRST-PRIZE LIST, MARY MEAD HEDGE.

1. Ivanhoe, Scott.
2. Quentin Durward, Scott.
3. Pathfinder, Cooper.
4. Last of the Mohicans, Cooper.
5. Jungle Books, Kipling.
6. Westward Ho!, Kingsley.
7. Arabian Nights.
8. The Rose and the Ring, Thackeray.
9. Wonder Book, Hawthorne.
10. A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens.
11. Christmas Stories, Dickens.
12. Poems of Longfellow.
13. Works of Shakspeare.
14. Treasure Island, Stevenson.
15. Child's Garden of Verses, Stevenson.
16. Tom Brown at Rugby, Hughes.
17. Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan.
18. Sketch Book, Irving.
19. The Man without a Country, Hale.
20. Robinson Crusoe, Defoe.
21. Gulliver's Travels, Swift.
22. Alice in Wonderland, Carroll.
23. Uncle Remus, Harris.
24. Jackanapes, Ewing.
25. Wild Animals I have Known, Thompson.

*Substitutes.*

2. Lady of the Lake, Scott.
3. The Caged Lion, Yonge.
6. Water Babies, Kingsley.
9. Rudder Grange, Stockton.
10. Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, Holmes.
15. King of the Golden River, Ruskin.
19. Lays of Ancient Rome, Macaulay.
24. Little Women, Alcott.
25. Fairy Tales, Andersen.

FIGURE 3 "First-Prize List, Mary Mead Hedge," in "Lists by the Prize-Winners," *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, 26 (1899), 786.

a series of essays published throughout 1898 and 1899. Virtually all of these writers mentioned Scott in some capacity. Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood asserted, "Walter Scott was the basis

of my education.”<sup>79</sup> For Martha Bockee Flint, Scott “held supreme sway” (“What One Child in a Lone Household Read,” p. 12). Cicero Willis Harris recalled finding in her “grandfather’s library, after his death . . . ‘Ivanhoe,’ and one volume of ‘Woodstock,’” and asserted that from then on “Scott continued [her] prime choice.”<sup>80</sup> These correspondents spoke for repeated generations of Americans for whom Scott, despite the vicissitudes of his popularity and significance, remained the basis of their education in literature—and the world. That remarkable continuity was clearly not sustained in the twentieth century, though Scott’s relationship to young readers does seem to have lingered longer in America than in Britain. It certainly feels symbolically resonant that the name of the eponymous heroine of Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, published in 1903, is explicitly “taken out of Ivanhoe”; Scott’s literary progeny, at least, would continue to engage young readers.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, while Beiderwell and McCormick note the absence of British editions of *Ivanhoe* intended for school use after 1918, American school editions were still being produced in 1924, and an account of *Children’s Interests in Reading* from 1926 still had cause to make multiple references to *Ivanhoe*.<sup>82</sup> But regardless of how long Scott clung on to youthful American readers in the twentieth century, it is clear that his impact on children and their relationship to books across the nineteenth century was profound. Scott was a *lingua franca* for literate young Americans from the 1820s to the 1890s, a constant backdrop to all other literary pursuits, and if his meaning inevitably shifted across those decades, his importance remained profound in ways that still need to be reckoned with.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, “Books I Best Remember,” *New York Times: Saturday Review of Books and Arts*, 22 October 1898, p. 702.

<sup>80</sup> Cicero Willis Harris, “Early Favorites That are Favorites Still,” *New York Times: Saturday Review of Books and Art*, 7 January 1899, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1903), p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> See Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe; Abridged for Use in Junior High School Grades*, ed. Elizabeth Hope Gordon and Hattie L. Hawley (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924); and Arthur Melville Jordan, *Children’s Interests in Reading* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1926).

Documenting and exploring his status as an unacknowledged legislator of children's reading in the decades when American children's literature developed its distinctive voice—and as a direct influence on its most important practitioners—opens up important spaces of illumination in the still obscure reading lives of young Americans during this period.

Perhaps our sense of Scott's centrality to American children's reading lives in this period has been obfuscated, or at least distorted, by his appearance in one particular children's book. Twain's inclusion of the wreck of the steamboat *Walter Scott* in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) as a symbol for the ruined and ruinous ideologies of the South—alongside his other attacks on Scott's work and legacy—has overshadowed the rich and multiple meanings of Scott's work for young readers across the nineteenth century. Yet ultimately, Twain's apparently vexed textual relationship with Scott only serves to highlight the degree to which Scott's works were still a living part of children's literary culture during the period. And even this familiar story is not as simple as it seems. When Twain was shaping his own eminently respectable children's book *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) (itself a historical novel that clearly drew on Scott's example), he compiled fifty-five pages of notes to help build his vision of Tudor England. The author that he leaned on most heavily during this research was Scott, transcribing vocabulary lists and costume descriptions from *Kenilworth*, *Quentin Durward*, *Ivanhoe*, and *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822).<sup>83</sup> It was also the same Mark Twain who, as a new father in 1873, went to pains to secure a certain set of volumes: "Our books have come," he excitedly announced in a letter to his mother-in-law, "—a rare thing we have been on the track of for ten days—got it at last—the famous 'Abbotsford Edition' of Scott's works."<sup>84</sup> Just like multiple generations of young

<sup>83</sup> See Lin Salamo, introduction, in Mark Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper*, ed. Victor Fischer, Lin Salamo, and Mary Jane Jones, vol. 6 of *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979), pp. 19–20.

<sup>84</sup> Mark Twain, letter to Olivia Lewis Langdon, 2 and 6 August 1873, in *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 5: 1872–1873*, ed. Lin Salamo and Harriet Elinor Smith (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1997), p. 428.

American readers, even Mark Twain's daughters would grow up in a house where Walter Scott's books were enshrined at the heart of their family's library.

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Ruys Smith, "The Enchantments of Waverley': Walter Scott and Children's Reading in Nineteenth-Century America" (pp. 145-175)

While the deep popularity and widespread presence of the works of Walter Scott in the cultural life of nineteenth-century America have long been acknowledged, one group of his admirers has been relatively neglected. The literary lives and reading habits of American children from this era remain obscure, and their influential, ongoing relationship with the Wizard of the North both before and after the Civil War has received almost no attention. This article therefore explores the vital, persistent, and shifting role that Scott played in the lives of literate young Americans. In the antebellum years, the enchantments of Waverley reshaped the literary landscape for children as Scott's novels received parental approbation as legitimate sources of textual entertainment and historical instruction. After the Civil War, the generation of Americans who had grown up reading Scott in turn used their own position as cultural gatekeepers to try and kindle a love for his work among a new generation tempted by fresh literary sensations. The overlooked responses of young readers themselves are documented where possible here through correspondence, diaries, memoirs, and, particularly, the vibrant letters pages of children's magazines.

**Keywords:** Walter Scott; children's literature; children's magazines; children's reading; Transatlantic literature