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The Lives and Deaths of Flora Mac-Ivor and Rose Bradwardine: Romance and Reality in Sir

Walter Scott's *Waverley*

In Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, Scott engages the perennial problem of romance versus reality. Like Don Quixote, Scott's title character, Edward Waverley, reads a lot and wants to live in the romance of his books. Romance here, of course, means not romantic love, but rather the larger-than-life, the adventurous, the fantastic, the ideal. Throughout the book, Waverley "wavers" between reality and the imaginative intensity of romance. Scott depicts this wavering in a number of different ways, but one of the most interesting is by personifying romance and reality through his two principal female characters, Flora Mac-Ivor and Rose Bradwardine. Flora, with her passion, impractical political idealism, and striking Celtic beauty, represents romance, while Rose, a moderate, domestic, and peaceful character (attractive, but less exotic), represents reality. Waverley finds that he must choose between the two women, and therefore choose between visions of romance and reality. There are, of course, many factors that play into his choice, and there are many ways in which Flora and Rose personify romance and reality. These include different aspects of their lives from something so simple as their names to the locations associated with them. The key contrast can even be seen through their figurative deaths. Neither character actually dies, but Flora leaves her world and everyone she knows, because the "real" world cannot accommodate her, while Rose survives the threatened (?) death of her home and way of life, and finds her way to a safe family settlement.

The romance / realism dialectic plays across many aspects of the novel, as many critics have noted. Paul Hennelly provides a list noting that "passages, which punctuate the entire novel,

link the analogous extremes of Whig-Tory, Present-Past, England-Highlands, Reason(Realism)-Passion(Romance), and Action-Reverie into an interrelated thematic pattern“ (203). Another noted critic, Alexander Welsh, has dedicated an entire chapter in his book *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* to the “Blonde and Brunette” heroines of the novels, in this case Rose and Flora respectively. But none has focused completely on Flora and Rose in order to show how they define romance and reality as a whole. In the end, Waverley must choose Rose, must choose reality when he finds that “the romance of his life [is] ended” (Scott 283). He and Rose end up married living at Tully-Veolan, while Flora has joined a nunnery far away from Scotland. Flora’s fate shows that romance has a bright, short life, while Rose’s shows that reality lets us survive through anything and is always constant, which is what Waverley achieves with Rose.

Even at the first mentioning of the women, Scott sets them apart through their given names. Scott is very conscious of his character’s names as seen on the first page of the novel when he dedicates four sentences, almost half the page, to say how he chose “Waverley” to be the titular character’s name. W.F.H. Nicholaisen notes that “a name may become the onomastic cloak of one’s identity” (34). Indeed, the first thing a reader notices about the women is their names. Both women have flower names: “flora” is the Latin word for flower, and “rose” is well a rose. Not only is “Flora” a more *romantic* name (literally in its etymology), but it is also a more exotic name. “Rose” is a more commonplace word and name. It was originally a Germanic name; the Normans changed to fit them better, and then they brought it with them to the British Isles. Flora is the name of a Roman goddess (of flowers). It is also the “[a]nglicized form of *Fionnghuala*” (*Behind*). *Fionnghuala* comes from *Fionnuala*, which was a character in Irish mythology who, along with her four sisters, was transformed into a swan. This makes Flora’s name literally stuff of legend. “Rose,” on the other hand, is more common (*Behind*). It’s a

pleasant, domestic flower, the kind you find in the home garden. Rose's name is also more specific and grounded in the real world. When someone says, "Rose," it is that flower that people think of, but saying "flora" brings to mind many different flowers, or the general idea of flowers. "It is, however, significant that it is [Flora], bearing the semantically less specific name, who has the greater personal accomplishments" (Nicholaison 38). These accomplishments, such as Gaelic, music, and a general revolutionary spirit make her far more like a traditional heroine and therefore romantic.

In addition to names, appearance is very important to Sir Walter Scott; in almost all of the Waverley Novels the two main heroines have blonde and brown hair, and *Waverley* is no exception. The fact that "the blonde stands for the real" is easily seen in Rose (Welsh 55). Rose is described as "a very pretty girl of the Scotch cast of beauty, that is, with a profusion of hair of paley gold, and a skin like the snow of her own mountains in whiteness" (Scott 40). Flora, meanwhile, is the brunette; she has "antique and regular correctness of profile; the same dark eyes, eye-lashes, and eye-brows [as her brother the Highland chieftain]; the same clearness of complexion" (99). Welsh notes that "At every point Scott moves from physical feature to character type" (50). This means that hair color suggests what type of characteristics each heroine will have. "The proper heroine of Scott is blonde. Her role corresponds to that of the passive hero—whom, indeed, she marries at the end of the tale. She is eminently beautiful, and eminently prudent" (48-9). This is easily seen in Rose, she hovers "between bashfulness and courtesy" (Scott 41). She does not have a cause aside from domestic peace and affections, and the only thing that she is concerned about, in the beginning, are her music, her flowers, her family, and her literature. These are all things that society has said are perfect for women; indeed, Rose is "molded by society." She is "at once less deeply emotional and more civilized"

and “is [happier] company for the average man,” while “[t]he brunette is more serious, more intellectual... and can make excellent conversation when she pleases” (Welsh 51). Flora easily fits into this description. While Rose enjoys expanding her library and discussing books with Waverley, Flora only has time for her cause, the Jacobite Rebellion, and everything she does reflects this. Even when she performs poetry for Waverley, it is to convince him that there is beauty in Scotland, and to get him intoxicated with the romance of the Highlands and therefore the Highlander’s cause. She allows her “feelings to dictate to [her] reason, and seem[s] to symbolize passion itself” (48). She “sublimates all her passion into the Cause” (Hennelly 205).

Just as Rose and Flora are associated with hair color, each woman is associated with a specific location, Flora embodies the mysterious and mystifying Scottish Highlands, while Rose is closely associated with her father’s Lowland house. The first time Waverley meets Flora they appear in her drawing room, but then leave to a more appropriate area for Gaelic poetry. “In a spot about a quarter of a mile from the castle, two brooks, which formed a little river had their junction,” the narrator reports (104). Waverley notices the beauty and majesty of the small path that they are following and feels himself to be “like a knight of romance... conducted by the fair Highland damsel, his silent guide” (105). Scott is almost hitting the readers in the face with the romanticism of the place he has chosen for Flora, besides the fact that Waverley and Flora go there to read poetry. As Waverley enters the glen he is suddenly placed:

in front of a romantic water-fall.... [T]he stream was received in a large natural basin, filled to the brim with water, which... was so exquisitely clear, that, although it was of great depth, the eye could discern each pebble at the bottom. Eddying round this reservoir, the brook found its way... over a broken part of the ledge, and formed a second fall, which seemed to seek the very abyss; then wheeling out beneath, from among the

smooth dark rocks, which it had polished for ages, it wandered murmuring down the glen, forming the stream up which Waverley had just ascended (105-6).

The description continues on for a few sentences more in the same vein, even stating the word “romantic” again as if the reader had not already realized that this place is romantic.

Rose’s location is much humbler and in every way more realistic. It is simply her father’s home: Tully-Veolan. Tully-Veolan is a mansion, as befitting the Bradwardine’s aristocratic roots, but it is still primarily a home:

The house, which seemed to consist of two or three high, narrow, and steep-roofed buildings, projecting from each other at right angles, formed one side of the enclosure.... The windows were numberless ~~and~~, but very small; the roof had some non-descript kind of projections... and displayed at each frequent angle, a small turret, rather resembling a pepper box (35).

A few of the windows even have pots of flowers outside of them placed there by Rose. She is especially associated with the library and the garden. These are areas where, in his youth, Waverley spent a lot of time, showing that Rose has “kindred taste” with him (Scott 65). These areas are also found in most people’s homes, especially in the time period for the class that Waverley and Rose are in. It is commonplace and familiar, not at all exciting like in a book. Yet, “[t]he geographical center both for Waverley’s psychological and for his historical journey is Tully-Veolan.” Waverley returns to Tully-Veolan multiple times after his “flirtation” with the Highlands (Hennelly 197). He needs a break from the romanticism he finds in the Highlands—with Flora—and returns to what is realistic life—Rose. In addition to all this, once Rose and Waverley are married they inherit Tully-Veolan (and Waverley-Honour). “Property is a moral idea. It contains the

idea of obligation: it expresses what *ought* to be occupied or used by whom, and not merely the fact of occupation or use” (Welsh 65). By inheriting and owning these properties they now have real life obligations to the land itself as well as to those living on the land.

An aspect of both real life and romanticism is death; as such Flora and Rose both experience a figurative death. Flora’s is very easily seen. “[R]omanticism turns out to be the very stuff of the Jacobite rebellion” and Flora is a “model of revolutions” (Hamilton 622, 613). After her brother, Fergus, is executed for treason because of his involvement in the Jacobite Rebellion, Flora wishes nothing more than to join him in the afterlife. This can be seen when Fergus says, “Poor Flora... she could have borne her own death, but not mine” to *Waverley* (Scott 327). “[S]he discovers that a fanciful truth” the romance of the Jacobite Rebellion “has ceased to represent cultural self-fashioning: it has separated out once more into its originally incompatible categories” (Hamilton 616). There is no longer an outlet for her romantic rebellious spirit, “[s]he has intellectual passion, but no books; she has political passion, but no cause” (Welsh 52) The only option then is to die, but that option isn’t open to her. Flora has to settle for the next best thing. She says, “To me the future is useless. The kindness of my friends has secured me a retreat in the convent of the Scottish Benedictine nuns at Paris” (Scott 323). Just like *Waverley*, the “romance of [her] life was ended” and her real history could start (283), but “[h]er energies come up point-blank against reality” (Welsh 52) and “she can only experience this realism as tragedy” (Hamilton 616). Unlike *Waverley*, Flora had nothing and no one to connect her to reality, and as such figuratively died. `

Rose's symbolic death is much less apparent than Flora's; never does she join a nunnery or even wish she were dead, instead Rose's death is the death of her way of life. She has, in today's terms, a reality check. Unlike Flora, who is very much involved with the Jacobite Rebellion, Rose is more of an innocent bystander whose family supports the Jacobites. As Welsh says, "she suffers in the thick of events but seldom moves them" (48). She is living her life, reading and gardening when the English attack and destroy Tully-Veolan. While viewing the destruction of Tully-Veolan, Waverley looks to Rose's "little balcony" and finds underneath it her flowers "with which it was her pride to decorate it, and which had been hurled from the bartizan; several of her books were mingled with the broken flower-pots and other remnants" (297). She is even said to be dead by one of the servants when he tells Waverley, "Lady Rose, that sang sae sweet— A' dead and gane—dead and gane" (298). Fortunately, that is not the case and Rose has fled to the Highlands and is staying with Flora. There, unlike Flora in the nunnery, Rose begins to change herself and is in a way reborn. "Flora Mac-Ivor regards Rose as her 'pupil'" (Walsh 54-5, Scott 247). There "[t]hrough the fire of the brunette [Flora] must eventually be damped, it may burn convincingly enough to kindle something of the same ardor in the blonde" Rose (54). It is after Rose's figurative death that Waverley also realizes that he has been thinking of Rose in a more amorous way, "he often had the idea of marriage with Rose floating through his brain" (Scott 305). When Waverley next meets Rose she is "symbolically older" because of the hardships that she has gone through (Hennelly 206), and is completely and fully able to deal with real life, as is Waverley with her.

Waverley's suit of Flora and later Rose should also be taken into consideration. At first Waverley only has eyes for Flora, being a romantic he almost cannot help it. Yet it is that same romanticism that makes Flora completely uninterested in Waverley. One critic puts it bluntly: "Her refusal to marry Edward stems from an excessive romanticism" (Hamilton 622). Flora herself realizes that Waverley is really only interested in her because of the ways she personifies romanticism. She says, "To a man of less keen sensibility, and less romantic tenderness of disposition, Flora Mac-Ivor might give content, if not happiness" (Scott 135), but she urges him not to give way to fancy simply because he has "met a young woman possessed of the usual accomplishments in a sequestered and romantic situation" (Scott 139). She realizes that her romanticism would make Waverley burn out and die, probably in the rebellion, just like Fergus—or that, surviving, he would find that her devotion to an ideal would leave him feeling alone and neglected. She, instead, realizes that the more grounded-in-reality Rose would be a much better wife to Waverley than she. Flora notes that if Rose's husband "is a man of sense and virtue, she will sympathise [sic] in his sorrows, divert his fatigue, and share his pleasures" (111). With Rose, Flora realizes, Waverley will be able to survive the rebellion no matter what happens. "However, such wisdom for the Romantic is hard won and can be merited only by that very escape from the temporal world and the pursuance of the timeless Romantic quest" (Hennelly 199). Waverley begins to realize that perhaps he has made a mistake in his first battle against the English where he finds himself fighting his countrymen and is rather shocked by it. He returns to Scotland and finds "the restorative influence of Rose" (204). Eventually Waverley realizes that "Rose was probably also the author of [his] deliverance" (Scott 304). While Waverley is talking

literally, this can also be taken to mean that she delivered him from the destructive influence of excessive romanticism. Rose and Waverley go on to live fully lives, enjoying each other's company and the company of their friends, as well as England and Scotland. Readers can assume that they lived long, although quiet lives. It can also be assumed that they were able to weather any storm put in their path and did so gracefully. Waverley learned his lesson that the romance that one finds in a book should probably stay in books, and that real life is full of its own, although less fanciful, adventures, such as those of raising a family. He and Rose will always have each other no matter what. His and Rose's "real history had now commenced" (Scott 283).

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