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Deceptive Signification: Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, and Eighteenth-Century Hermit Discourse

Abstract: Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, critics have tended to treat Walter Scott's fiction disparagingly – the tacit assumption often being that it lacks formal sophistication or semantic 'depth.' Reading Scott against the grain of this reception, I argue here that *Ivanhoe* (1819/1820) commands an allusive density which complicates such verdicts. Offering a detailed analysis of both the novel's hermit figure and the cultural geography in which it appears, this essay retraces Scott's references to eighteenth-century literary, aesthetic, architectural, and horticultural discourses. Acutely aware of drawing from a codified set of readily consumable images, Scott both quotes and subverts the eighteenth-century hermit tradition. Employing an elaborately intertextual strategy to defamiliarize readerly notions of identity and signification, Scott's writing emerges as somewhat more complex than the history of his critical reception would seem to suggest.

1 Introduction

In an 1871 essay for the *Cornhill Magazine*, Leslie Stephen famously wrote that *Ivanhoe*, while still potentially "delightful reading for boys," was "no longer a work for men," that indeed the novel was an example of how Walter Scott had been "wasting his splendid talents on what we can hardly call by a loftier name than most amusing nonsense" (Stephen repr. in Hayden 1970, 453). Stephen's comments are instructive insofar as they indicate the shift in recognition that Scott and his fiction had undergone in the course of the nineteenth century.[1] By

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1 This is of course not to suggest that Stephen disapproved of Scott universally; as Virginia Woolf wrote, "of all books" her father "loved Scott's the best" (Woolf 1986–2011 vol 1, 128). What is important, rather, is that in spite of his admiration Stephen chose and was able to denounce *Ivanhoe* publicly in the 1870s, and that this constitutes the beginning of a tradition that eventually resulted in a status for Scott that Woolf herself summarized succinctly, writing in a 1924

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the time critics of Stephen's generation began to occupy key positions in the literary field, Scott's fame as 'The Author of *Waverley*,' though still something of a marketable commodity, had started to decline – with Scott himself becoming downgraded from potential poet laureate to a writer of fiction that seemed puerile at best.[2] Becoming more pronounced with the emergence and institutional codification of modernist aesthetics, this tendency has gone on to shape Scott's present-day status in the canon.[3] As Ann Rigney has pointed out in her study of Scott's "afterlives," the place *Ivanhoe* occupies in contemporary culture is not so much that of a novel about the past, but that of "a shrink-wrapped symbol of pastness itself" (Rigney 2012, 78). Though they have retained at least some of their popular appeal, Scott's novels have rarely seemed a rewarding subject to literary critics, the implicit consensus being that the texts lack formal sophistication or semantic 'depth.'[4]

Taking my cue from Harry E. Shaw's observation that Scott's novels "lend themselves to univocal readings because their complexity is unobtrusive" (Shaw 1983, 159), I suggest reading Scott's writing against the grain of this reception in order to uncover some of its underlying intricacies. Subjecting passages from *Ivanhoe* to closer scrutiny, my aim is not, however, to 'save' (or, for that matter, to establish) Scott's critical reputation, but rather to demonstrate the allusive density

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essay that "[t]here are some writers who have entirely ceased to influence others […], who are enjoyed or neglected rather than criticised and read. Among them is Scott" (Woolf 1986–2011 vol. 3, 454).

2 In William St. Clair's book-historical reading of nineteenth-century English literature, Scott emerges as a key cultural figure highly influential not only in the Romantic period but throughout the Victorian era (St. Clair 2004, 418–420; cf. also 220–221 and 715–723). Based mainly on the evidence of print runs and sales figures, St. Clair's assessment seems to me to neglect the importance of indicators of influence other than merely economic ones. While Annika Bautz concedes that towards the end of the nineteenth century Scott's "critical popularity is no longer unequivocal" (Bautz 2007, 98), she elsewhere argues like St. Clair that a quantitative analysis of Victorian editions "suggests that Scott's cultural status remained undiminished throughout the century" (Bautz 2009, 27). Both Bautz and St. Clair seem to underestimate that from the late nineteenth century onwards, commercial success and large-scale popularity begin to be imagined – within the logic of a cultural "field of restricted production" (Bourdieu 1985, 17) – as indicative of an absence rather than a presence of aesthetic 'quality' or high cultural 'impact.'

3 Günter Leypoldt has attributed the shift in Scott's position in the canon (and other similar phenomena) to an early twentieth-century "process of avant-gardization" in the course of which certain authors became associated with "triviality" and, as a result, "sank to the bottom of the aesthetic and social hierarchies" (Leypoldt 2014, 80).

4 This rhetoric was of course already used by Scott's nineteenth-century critics. Cf. for instance American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1836 comment that, though one cannot "speak of him but with cheerful respect," "[w]hat Scott has to contribute is not brought from deep places of the mind and of course cannot reach thither" (Emerson 1959, 375).

which characterizes these passages. To illustrate this I use the novel's hermit figure as the subject of a case study in intertextual response. Scott's description of the hermit and that of the hermitage setting, I suggest, is informed by and reacts to traditional eighteenth-century images of eremitic life. My main interest here lies with the relationship between the hermit figure and what one might call a 'topography of solitude,' in which eremitic landscape is invested with a set of codified meanings and thus functions, in W.J.T. Mitchell's words, as "a body of symbolic forms" that is "embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication" (Mitchell 1994, 14). Scott's strategy is to describe the setting of his hermitage in familiar eighteenth-century modes – thus evoking a discourse of sacralized space and eremitic authority – only ultimately to subvert expectations by presenting an altogether more Rabelaisian hermit. To analyze this procedure, it is necessary first to take a more general look at the hermit as a cultural figure and at the spatial logic in the framework of which it tends to appear. In Section 3, I go on to establish some eighteenth-century manifestations of hermitism relevant to *Ivanhoe*, before turning to a detailed reading of the novel in Sections 4 and 5. Given its carefully orchestrated intertextual allusions, Scott's treatment of the hermit is, I argue, not merely an instance of *Ivanhoe*'s comic mode. What emerges instead is a bathetic turn from sublime expectation to comic disappointment that entails a more serious critique of both eighteenth-century conventions and their codification into readily recognizable and consumable images.

2 Eremitic Authority and Consecrated Space

Scott's use of hermit imagery can be elucidated by contextualizing it against the background of the semantics and the cultural function of the hermit figure. Eremitic life is frequently imagined in spatial terms as a form of distancing from society. In the mental topography of Christianity, for instance, spaces of civilization are usually imagined as places of worldly rather than spiritual activity, if not condemned outright as places of sinfulness and moral corruption.[5] The conceptual imagery of hermitism thus revolves around a dichotomy between a deceitful urban space of sociality and convenience on the one hand and an uncorrupted space of solitude and austerity on the other.[6] Hermits and eremitic space become

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5 For a concise overview of the history of Christian hermitism, cf. Chadwick 1985.

6 The hermitage setting can thus to some extent be read as a pastoral space and hermits as pastoral figures. There is a certain overlap between hermit discourse and a pastoral "discourse of retreat" (Gifford 1999, 45) as well as between the hermit figure and that of the shepherd. Cf. for

interconnected insofar as the asceticism and solitariness linked to the hermit figure come to be projected onto a particular kind of landscape that then functions as a manifestation of these more abstract ideas. Through the notion of a correspondence between mental state and physical environment, the hermitage setting functions as a material signifier for a more elusive spiritual signified.

Though largely conceptualized in terms of distance from society, eremitic life nevertheless commands a social dimension since it generates a kind of prestige that works as a symbolic currency only in a social context. Withdrawal, asceticism, and contemplation are commonly seen as granting spiritual insight impossible to attain in other modes of life. They produce a kind of authority that would seem to jar with, but is in fact based on, the extra-social other-worldliness of eremitic life.[7] The value of 'eremitic capital,' in other words, resides precisely in the fact that the hermit does not (or does not seem to) take part in the symbolic economies that produce this kind of capital.[8] Hermits, then, can be seen as commanding a type of "charismatic authority" that Max Weber theorized as being based on a subject's "*extra-quotidian* qualit[ies]."[9] Similarly, the hermitage acquires an aura that is based on its fundamental otherness from social space and on its capacity to function as a setting for moments of insight.[10] Consecrated through their 'extra-ordinariness,' both hermit and hermitage carry with them a sense of sublimity and high moral tone that usually dominates their representation in literary texts.

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instance the similarity between what I call 'eremitic authority' and Leo Marx's analysis of the authority of the shepherd figure (Marx 1986, 43–44). The parallel is particularly pronounced if the term 'pastoral' is used in the critical tradition established by William Empson's classic study *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) as a concept adaptable to a large variety of contexts, independent of the literal presence of shepherd figures. An important difference emerges, however, if with Marx one conceives of pastoral space as part of a tripartite scheme of "city, countryside, and wilderness," in which the pastoral figures as a "'middle landscape,'" "a *via media* between decadence and wildness, too much and too little civilization" (Marx 1986, 58; 38). As a cultural space, the hermitage is clearly set in the wilderness, its austerity differing markedly from the Arcadian idyll of pastoral landscapes.

7 Edward S. Harwood has described this as the hermit's "circular return […] to the […] center of society's concerns and goals" (Harwood 2000, 270).

8 As Tom Licence has pointed out, English hermits were part of medieval society: As intercessors "mediat[ing] divine grace," their spiritual authority could be used to acquire patronage and material support (Licence 2011, 90) – and thus to convert symbolic (or religious) into economic capital.

9 My translations of Weber 1991, 22 (emphasis in the original).

10 Cf. Mitchell's point about landscape being "a fetishized commodity" whose social or material value results from its assumed position beyond the reach of market economies (Mitchell 1994, 15).

3 Eighteenth-Century Hermits: Literary and Ornamental

Scott uses two of the eighteenth century's most popular hermit poems as explicit intertextual points of reference: Thomas Parnell's "The Hermit" (1722) and Thomas Warton's "Inscription in a Hermitage, at Ansley-Hall in Warwickshire" (1777). Both texts are important because they use traditional hermit imagery excessively but also because they exemplify a shift towards a secularized hermit figure.[11] Featuring an angelic visitation and written largely in the allegorical mode, Parnell's poem is clearly more conventional than Warton's. Its very beginning is full of eremitic stock tropes:

> Far in a wild, unknown to publick view,
> From youth to age a rev'rend hermit grew;
> The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,
> His food the fruits, his drink the chrystal well:
> Remote from man, with God he pass'd the days,
> Pray'r all his bus'ness, all his pleasure praise. (Parnell 1722, 164)

The overall structure of Parnell's text is based on a dichotomy between this eremitic space and the social world of either excess or miserliness through which his hermit travels in the course of the poem. Warton's "Inscription," written half a century later, can hardly be described as a religious poem anymore. Warton's hermit figure sounds Thoreauvian rather than Christian:

> Beneath this stony roof reclin'd,
> I sooth to peace my pensive mind:
> And while, to shade my lowly cave,
> Embowering elms their umbrage wave;
> And while the maple dish is mine,
> The beechen cup, unstain'd with wine:
> I scorn the gay licentious croud,
> Nor heed the toys that deck the proud. (Warton 1777, 4)

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11 Soubrenie, in particular, has argued that in English poetry the figure of the hermit underwent a crucial functional shift during the seventeenth century, resulting in the eighteenth-century emergence of a secularized figure which she calls the "hermit philosopher" (Soubrenie 1995, 70; cf. also Soubrenie 1999, 222). Secularization was in fact a precondition for the eighteenth-century proliferation of the hermit figure, because it opened up the image of the hermit to be invested with more abstract and diffuse meanings (contemplation, melancholy, sentimentalism) and thus facilitated the representation and 'consumption' of the figure in secular contexts such as the English landscape garden.

Nevertheless, the authority of Warton's hermit, too, is based on his distance from society, on the authenticity of his humble life in a "sylvan cell" (Warton 1777, 4). The seemingly progressive critique of civilization which the figure embodies after all hinges on the traditional contrast between the consecrated solitary space of the hermitage and the corrupt social space of "the gay licentious croud."

Hermit imagery manifests itself not only in eighteenth-century poetry, however. As John Dixon Hunt (1976, 1–9) and Elisabeth Soubrenie (1999, 203–209) have demonstrated, it cuts across the disciplines of literature, painting, and garden design. In addition to artificial ruins, grottoes, and pagodas, several of the contemporary English landscape gardens featured 'ornamental' hermitages, which were not infrequently furnished with an 'ornamental' hermit[12] – a professional anchorite hired (and paid) to live on the grounds and contribute to an image that, like the garden's other 'follies,' was a consumable commodity conforming to the expectations raised by traditional hermit images. Osbert Sitwell summarized this arrangement in the following terms:

> Hermits were very popular just then. If you were an important person, but did not play at being an anchorite yourself, you employed a proxy, who would live in the Park. At one great house in England the accounts disclose a half-yearly payment of £300 to a hermit, who had, for this commensurate salary, to remain bearded and in a state of picturesque dirtiness for six months in the year in an artificial cave at a suitable distance from the house – just far enough (but not too far) for the fashionable house-party, with its court of subservient poets and painters, to visit, walking there in the afternoons, peering into the semi-darkness with a little thrill of wonder and excitement. (Sitwell 1924, 441–442)

As figures reduced to their picturesque outward effect, ornamental hermits were thoroughly secularized figures that became fashionable at a time when 'authentic' hermits had all but vanished. Nevertheless, the allure of the hermit as a figure representing contemplative life seems to have remained intact, in spite of the contrived character of such 'ornaments.' The popularity of the garden hermit implies that the notion of eremitic authority was still an attractive fiction in the eighteenth century. The phenomenon also demonstrates, however, that the authenticity on which this authority had formerly rested was already in the process of being gradually eroded through the invention of artificial characters and settings. Hermits and hermitages could, in other words, be evoked relatively easily through a set of well-established signifiers; in the case of the ornamental hermit, however, these signifiers had already become uncoupled from their religious or philosophical signifieds.

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12 On ornamental hermits and their contexts, cf. Harwood 2000 and, in particular, Campbell 2013.

4 The *Ivanhoe* Hermitage: Setting and Meaning

While Scott takes up some of the main tropes cultivated in the eighteenth-century hermit tradition, he ultimately undermines its very foundations. The way in which the hermitage and the hermit figure are introduced in the second chapter of the novel's second book (Scott 1998, 138–147) is modelled on eighteenth-century texts which Scott either explicitly references or to which he implicitly alludes, but it takes on a decidedly idiosyncratic form later on.[13] Scott chooses the first stanza of Parnell's "The Hermit" as the motto for the first chapter that features the hermit figure. In thus evoking, before the beginning of the chapter proper, one of the eighteenth century's most well-known texts on the subject of eremitic life, Scott creates a complex web of expectations and intertextual allusions that he intensifies in the course of the chapter.[14] Like Parnell's hermitage set "in a wild, unknown to publick view" (Parnell 1722, 164), the dwelling which Scott depicts plays on the conventional idea of withdrawal from society into wilderness as potentially offering moral and spiritual transcendence.

The description of the setting as a whole is couched in the language of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Framed in the modes of the sublime and the picturesque, it reads like a collage of readily recognizable *idées reçues*. The first impression that King Richard, after straying for some time through the forest, receives of the setting of the hermitage is one of overwhelming terror:

> [H]e soon reached an open plat of turf, on the opposite side of which a rock, rising abruptly from a gently sloping plain, offered its gray and weather-beaten front to the traveller. Ivy mantled its sides in some places, and in others oaks and holly bushes, whose roots found nourishment in the cliffs of the crag, waved over the precipice below, like the plumage of the warrior over his steel helmet, giving grace to that whose chief expression was terror. (Scott 1998, 139)

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13 In the 1830 preface to *Ivanhoe* (written for the 48-volume *Magnum Opus* edition of the Waverley novels that appeared between 1829 and 1833), Scott himself downplayed the originality of his hermit figure when he described the hermit scene as "borrowed from the stores of old romance" (Scott 1922, xxxii). He mainly seeks to authenticate his account by recourse to the scriptural authority of English literary history – an attempt that resonates with his general concern, in the novel's "Dedicatory Epistle" and elsewhere, of legitimizing the writing of historical fiction through a sense (however remote) of historical accuracy. While the motif of an encounter between "the Kyng and the Hermite" (Scott 1922, xxxiii) is a literary topos that had been well-established before Scott (cf. Frenzel 1992, 132–134), Scott's identification of a concrete source text should not lead one to underestimate the idiosyncrasies of his own version of the narrative.
14 The next chapter begins with a motto excerpted from Warton's "Inscription." As in the case of the Parnell quote, the content of the motto and that of the Scott's chapter diverge widely. Scott misquotes Warton's final line – changing the original adjective "blameless" (Warton 1777, 6) into "peaceful" (Scott 1998, 148) as a modifier of the noun "hermitage" – to emphasize this disparity.

It would have been hard for Scott's contemporary readers to miss the explicit allusions to Burkean aesthetics interwoven into this passage. Scott's emphasis on the fact that the setting's "chief expression was terror" is modelled on Burke's famous definition that "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (Burke 1958, 39; emphasis in the original). The description of "a rock, rising abruptly from a gently sloping plain" echoes Burke's theory that "[a] perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane" (Burke 1958, 72), while the "cliffs of the crag" appear to be a reference to a passage in the *Enquiry* about "rugged and broken surface[s]" and their power to evoke sentiments of sublimity (Burke 1958, 72). Framing the hermitage setting in the sublime mode, Scott rewrites a space of abundance as a space of austerity. Painting the English forest, at least initially, as an inhospitable space allows him to authenticate it as a potential setting for eremitic insight.[15]

The architectural description of the hermitage that immediately follows the above passage is another example of intertextual dialogue with eighteenth-century sources:

> At the bottom of the rock, and leaning as it were against it, was constructed a rude hut, built chiefly of the trunks of trees felled in the neighbouring forest, and secured against the weather by having its crevices stuffed with moss mingled with clay. (Scott 1998, 139)

Scott's hermitage plays on the concept of the 'primitive hut' introduced by Marc-Antoine Laugier in his 1753 *Essai sur l'architecture* and popularized in England by William Chambers and others. The "little rustic cabin" that Laugier describes in the first chapter of the *Essai* (Laugier 1756, 9–14, here 11) proved an important influence on the design of hermitages in eighteenth-century English landscape gardens (cf. Campbell 2013, 33–35). As a cultural model, the primitive hut was important not only because it authorized the forms of classical architecture by grounding them in archaic practice, but also because it was imagined as having been modelled on Adam and Eve's dwelling in paradise. Framed in the discourse of the primitive hut, Scott's hermitage simultaneously references the religious, architectural, and horticultural dimensions of the image.[16]

Having started out in the idiom of Burkean sublimity, Scott quickly turns away from the more threatening aspects of the scenery and changes the aesthetic mode of his description:

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15 For an analysis of the English forest as a cultural signifier – including its aesthetic, social, economic, as well as "silvicultural" dimensions – cf. Schama 1995, 135–184, here 165.

16 On the eighteenth-century notion of the primitive hut, cf. Rykwert 1972, esp. 43–73. Cf. also Campbell 2013, 51 on the importance of religion in the context of the eighteenth-century garden hermitage.

> At a little distance on the right hand, a fountain of the purest water trickled out of the rock, and was received in a hollow stone, which labour had formed into a rustic basin. Escaping from thence, the stream murmured down the descent by a channel which its course had long worn, and so wandered through the little plain to lose itself in the neighbouring wood. Beside this fountain were the ruins of a very small chapel, of which the roof had partly fallen in. (Scott 1998, 139–140)

The initial sense of danger conveyed by contemplating the setting from afar is subsequently smoothed and metamorphosed into an altogether more pleasant sentiment. The chapel ruin that Scott describes here establishes the scenery in the terms of another familiar eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse: the picturesque. Scott's inclusion of a collapsed building into the setting of his fictional hermitage would have resonated with contemporary readers, because ruins were fashionable parts of the visual orchestration of English landscape gardens, but also because leading aesthetic theorists a generation before Scott had expanded on the idea of the ruin as a source of picturesque effect.[17] While Scott's descriptive shift from threatening wilderness (the sublime rock formations) to a more pacifying pastoral scenery (the *locus amoenus* imagery of a "murmur[ing]" "stream") may seem somewhat sudden, the picturesque mode which he chooses is in line with the teachings of late eighteenth-century theorists. Surprising shifts were themselves seen as defining features of the logic of the picturesque, which, as Uvedale Price argued, was always "founded on [...] sudden variation" (Price 1794, 76–77). Hence, the seeming incongruity of Scott's description, too, is part of his pastiche of eighteenth-century aesthetic thought.[18]

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17 The *locus classicus* for this connection is William Gilpin's influential essay "On Picturesque Beauty" (1792), in which he suggests that, in order to produce a picturesque effect in a building, "we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin" (Gilpin 1792, 7–8; emphases in the original). As usual arguing against Gilpin and his terminologically ambiguous concept of 'picturesque beauty,' Uvedale Price, in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), differentiates the beauty of architectural perfection from the picturesque effect of architectural decay in a more thoroughly systematic fashion (Price 1794, 46). Cf. Andrews 1989, 56–61 for a discussion of Gilpin and Price on the picturesqueness of ruins and Modiano 1994 on the subject more generally. On the picturesque in eighteenth-century garden design and its relation to the discourse of painting, cf. Hunt 1992, 105–136.

18 On Scott's relation to the picturesque, cf. Allentuck 1973 and Reed 1980, 12–16. That Scott was well versed in both the aesthetic vocabulary of his day and the theory and practice of contemporary garden design can be gauged from his essay "On Ornamental Plantations and Landscape Gardening" (1828). Ostensibly a review of Sir Henry Steuart's *The Planter's Guide* (1828), Scott's text features extensive comments on theorists such as Price and Richard Payne Knight, as well as discussions of garden design from William Kent to Humphry Repton. The plan of writing a more extensive garden history to which Scott alludes in the essay (Scott 1828, 320) never materialized.

Constructed and placed according to guidelines set up by figures like Burke, Laugier, and Gilpin, Scott's hermitage is thus an eighteenth-century structure rather than an 'authentic' medieval one. That it is based, more specifically, on the model of the garden hermitage becomes particularly evident if one reads Scott's description next to Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld's treatise *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1779–1785), a standard reference work of the late eighteenth century. A champion of the English landscape garden, Hirschfeld describes the ideal setting and make-up of garden hermitages in Gilpinesque terms:

> Eine sehr günstige Lage ist es, wenn sie sich an einen Berg oder an eine Felsenwand lehnen […]. Ein ruhiges Gewässer oder eine Quelle mit leisem Gemurmel ist dem Charakter dieser Scene sehr gemäß. Man kann durch umhergepflanzte Bäume von tief herabhängenden Zweigen und dunklem Laubwerk, durch dicke Gebüsche ihre Einsamkeit verstärken und ihr Ansehen finsterer machen. […] Eine Bank, eine Ruhestelle in dem einen Winkel, ein Capellchen in dem andern [...] machen die anständige Verzierung einer Einsiedeley aus. (Hirschfeld 1779–1785 vol. 3, 103–104)

Almost all the features Hirschfeld demands from a proper garden hermitage resurface in Scott's description – from the mountainous setting and the nearby murmuring stream to the surrounding forest scenery and the "Capellchen," which Scott translates into his text as "a very small chapel" (Scott 1998, 139). If the eighteenth-century garden hermitage was, as Hirschfeld himself pointed out, a "work of imitation,"[19] Scott's hermitage appears to be quite deliberately an imitation of the second degree.

5 Scott's Hermit Figure and the Subversion of Eighteenth-Century Discourse

Scott's allusions to familiar tropes from eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, architectural writing, and landscape design serve as signifiers that create a set of expectations about the nature of the hermit dwelling in such a setting. The sublime as well as picturesque topography of the place along with the religious imagery by which it is permeated – the Edenic echoes of the "rude hut," the ruin of the chapel, the "emblem of the holy cross" formed by "[t]he stem of a young fir-tree" (Scott 1998, 139) – would lead one to expect a more or less conventional hermit. The figure that Scott presents, however, belies the clichés that have

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19 My translation of Hirschfeld 1779–1785 vol. 3, 96.

been piled up so carefully before. The mere description of the hermit's outward appearance is enough to expose him as everything but "a pious anchoret" (Scott 1998, 27):

> [His] features expressed nothing of monastic austerity, or of ascetic privations; on the contrary, it was a bold bluff countenance, with broad black eyebrows, a well-turned forehead, and cheeks as round and vermilion as those of a trumpeter, from which descended a long and curly black beard. Such a visage, joined to the brawny form of the holy man, spoke rather of sirloins and haunches, than of peas and pulse. (Scott 1998, 143)

The contrast to Parnell's figure – "[h]is food the fruits, his drink the crystal well" (Parnell 1722, 164) – could hardly be more pronounced. Giving expectations about the "austerity" and "ascetic privations" of eremitic lifestyle an explicit verbal presence, Scott's narrator only emphasizes their physical absence. Drawing from the spiritual authority of St Dunstan (Scott 1998, 143; 146), a tenth-century recluse who was among the most popular saints in England at the time in which the novel is set, Scott's hermit poses as someone who has fled worldly corruption, but he is in fact himself corrupted. It seems difficult to imagine that a dwelling inhabited by such a character should ever become a "monument to virtue" and "piety" or have the edifying, even cathartic effect that eighteenth-century theorists like Hirschfeld commonly ascribed to the contemplation of hermitage settings.[20]

Ultimately revealed to be the Friar Tuck figure of the Robin Hood tradition, Scott's hermit forms part of a pattern of disguises that is typical of the novel's method of characterization as a whole.[21] *Ivanhoe*'s carnivalesque play with characters' identities would seem to account for much of its popular reception, not least because it proves an unerringly effective ploy on both stage and screen. The case of the hermit is more significant, however, because it shows Scott engaging the full repertoire of scenic description at his disposal, ultimately to point out its artificiality. Moving from the metaphysical to the bodily, Scott's strategy in introducing the hermit follows a bathetic logic that is deliberate rather than inadvertent.[22] While the description of the hermitage setting promises transcendence and spiritual insight, the characterization of the actual hermit marks the intrusion of the trivial into a prior discourse of sublimity. Yet, although the sacralized

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20 My translations of Hirschfeld 1779–1785 vol. 3, 98.

21 For a discussion of *Ivanhoe* as a novel of disguises and its accompanying politics of identity, cf. Lincoln 2007, 69–73.

22 Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls have recently re-emphasized this important distinction, pointing out that bathos is produced not only by inexpertly engineered attempts at writing in a sublime mode, but also, more importantly, by the deliberate juxtaposition of the sublime and the trivial (Crangle and Nicholls 2010, 1–2).

scenery ultimately provides the setting for a scene of comic relief, Scott's mode should nevertheless not be read as predominantly comic. Underneath his jesting attitude lurks a critique of the discourses with which he has started out. Employing the hackneyed imagery and style of the eighteenth-century hermit tradition, Scott ultimately exposes its underlying disparity between surface and content, between character, setting, and meaning.

6 Conclusion

Creating a false hermit in a setting that has previously been authenticated by a conventional discourse, Scott subverts this very discourse by demonstrating the spiritual void that lies behind signifiers which Parnell and Warton before him had emphatically associated with eremitic transcendence. To a certain extent, Scott radicalizes a tendency that had already been latent in the concept of ornamental hermitism. Like the hermitage in the English landscape garden, *Ivanhoe*'s fictional hermitage conforms to a set of standardized features in terms of both setting and construction; like eighteenth-century landscape architects, Scott thus creates a counterfeit hermitage. Employee in one case, jolly friar in the other, the inhabitants of both spaces are everything but genuine seekers of solitude and hence lack spiritual authority. Scott's treatment of the hermit figure is more radical than the concept of ornamental hermitism, however, in that it ultimately gives up the pretence of authenticity that had given the latter its aesthetic appeal.

If one chooses to read the hermit figure as part of a pastoral "discourse of retreat" (Gifford 1999, 45), Leo Marx's distinction between "complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism" (Marx 1964, 25) is a useful tool to describe Scott's method. In the strand of reception exemplified by Leslie Stephen's late nineteenth-century critique of Scott, *Ivanhoe* would be read as an example of "sentimental pastoralism," which in Marx's words merely features "pleasing rural scenery" in an escapist framework (Marx 1964, 25). The intertextual density and subversive twists of *Ivanhoe*'s hermit passages, however, seem closer to the mode of complex pastoralism, defined by Marx as having the capability "to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture" (Marx 1964, 25). Throughout *Ivanhoe*, Scott is concerned with what lies behind appearances. In the hermit scenes, more relentlessly than in other cases of disguise, he drives home the point that signification can be deceptive, that reality and its simulation may not always be congruent. While it might seem slightly too bold to claim Scott as the clandestine originator of the concept of hyperreality, or, for that matter, to argue that *Ivanhoe* is ultimately not a historical

novel but an instance of proto-poststructuralist semiotic criticism, it is important, nevertheless, to note the complexity of Scott's use of landscape and identity as well as the degree to which he both employs and subverts literary and aesthetic discourses.

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