

FOREWORD

The Waverley Novels were the publishing sensation of their time. Between 1814 and 1831 Walter Scott completed twenty-three works of fiction, five of which combine two or more tales. They constitute a body of immensely varied and original work. The periods in which they are set range from the eleventh century to the nineteenth, their locales from Byzantium to Shetland; and their most startling feature may be Scott's repeated reconsideration of the nature of history.

The overall title 'The Waverley Novels' was adopted for the final collected edition published between 1829 and 1833, but it masks their artistic and intellectual diversity. The Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels has resisted the implications of the collective name by basing its texts upon the first editions. It has sought to recover as much as possible of what Scott himself wrote. It has shown through its annotation that he is one of the most erudite and diversely inter-textual of writers, but one who embeds his knowledge without strain in narrative and in speech. It has discovered through its glossaries that he has a quite extraordinary command of dialectal, period, and technical language. It has analysed the genesis and composition of each novel to reveal an architectonic shaping of his narratives which belies his self-representation as a writer who planned nothing. Above all the EEWN has aimed to allow a new readership to read and enjoy one of the world's supreme story-tellers.

These final volumes of the EEWN present in freshly edited form the Introductions and notes Scott wrote for the collected Waverley Novels of 1829–33. In this material he confronts his own achievement as a novelist as he explores the inspiration and the sources of his narratives. Bringing the Introductions and the notes together allows readers of Scott to appreciate for the first time his astonishing re-imagining of his own fiction. What he gives us is often not explanation but another narrative which has only a tangential relationship to the material he is illustrating. His procedures re-iterate what may well be his greatest insight—that the ways of constructing an understanding of life and history are without number, and that none represents 'the truth'.

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