



LUND UNIVERSITY

Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

Centre for Languages and Literature

English Studies

Focusing on the heroines in the novels *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company*: Peripheral but important

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ENGK03

Degree project in English Literature

Fall 2025

Centre for Languages and Literature

Lund University

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Abstract

It is now well established that there is a reciprocal relationship between the content of literature and societal norms. Within feminist criticism, this has been highlighted as problematic, as women are often not portrayed fairly. In this essay, I will examine the relationship between literature and society by comparing the 19th-century Medieval novels *Ivanhoe* (1819) by Sir Walter Scott and *The White Company* (1891) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In relation to the former work, there is everything from general academic discussions about its chivalric, political content to a certain focus on its female characters, while the latter publication has received less attention. What makes this thesis novel is that it explicitly focuses on the heroines in these two historical novels and analyzes them through the concept of gender roles and the terms constraint versus mobility, from the field of New Historicism. This essay therefore offers a new reading of the heroines Rebecca and Rowena in *Ivanhoe* and contributes to a new discussion of *The White Company* in relation to its female protagonist, Lady Maude.

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Introduction

Female representation in literature has and continues to be a topic of discussion for feminist criticism, and by extension, for New Historicism. What feminist criticism, for example, does is discuss the problematic relationship between women's unfair characterization in literature and contemporary norms (Humm 7). From a New Historicist perspective, Stephen Greenblatt maintains that there is a reciprocal relationship between literature and societies, and that they influence each other equally ("Culture" 227). Discussions about the mutual relationship mentioned above can be found directly related to historical novels within the 19th century, such as *Ivanhoe* (1819) by Sir Walter Scott. There is existing criticism that covers everything from general discussions of femininity by Florica Bodiștean to those directly related to specific female characters by Judith Lewin.

The purpose of this thesis is to continue to demonstrate the mutual relationship between literature and the society in which it was created. This will be done through Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company* (1891) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Whereas there is a substantial amount of research on Scott's novel, Doyle's historical novel, is not very well explored. It should also be added that the majority of what is highlighted in these two novels is their theme of chivalry, as that is what Scott and Doyle write about. The female characters have a peripheral role, even though they deserve more critical attention. To some extent, I will expand on what has already been discussed and will add my own perspective as I, which will become clear later, do not always agree with how others have discussed these very same heroines. As there is little material in relation to *The White Company*, this means that any new insights into this work are innovative. The same applies to comparing these two works from two different periods in the 19th century. One reason for this could be that Doyle was both inspired by and considered himself to be following in Scott's footsteps within the same genre (Wilson 22). It is therefore worth investigating whether there is a connection, regarding continuity and change, between how these two authors portray their female characters in relation to the ideal of women of their time. To achieve this, I will focus solely on the three most prominent female protagonists in Scott's and Doyle's novels, based on the concept of gender roles: Rebecca, Rowena, and Lady Maude. In addition, insights from the field of New Historicism, through the terms "constraint" and "mobility" will also be used. Together, these concepts will answer the question: How should one understand the peripheral yet important heroines in *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company*?

I will argue that Scott's and Doyle's historical novels reflect and reinforce different contemporary 18-19th century perspectives on women in society, revealing how historical fiction can mediate societal norms in their portrayal of female characters. To achieve this task, this thesis will be divided into a background section where an overview of previous research in relation to both novels and their authors will be presented, together with a definition and a delimitation of the two chosen concepts. Then a discussion with an analysis of three female characters will be provided. Lastly, a summary and comparative section will be presented, discussing the identified differences and similarities between the selected heroines from the two different novels.

Background and Concepts

In the following pages, I will present some background information about both Scott and Doyle to contextualize their work. This is followed by an account of what has previously been academically said about *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company*. Then, a description of the concepts mentioned in the introduction will be described, but above all what I focus on within these in relation to my own analysis.

Scott and the historical novel

It is not surprising that Scott wrote a book focused on the Middle Ages, given what the society around him looked like. Even with all modern changes in British society, the interest in medieval customs and themes persisted. What the late 18th-century writers did in their own works can be seen as an attempt to glorify people whom they simultaneously saw as less developed but still noble (Chandler 316, 319). Young Scott himself had been introduced to the subject of Medievalism. Not only was Scotland, where he was born and raised, still, to a certain degree, on a local level governed by feudal practices, but there was also a cultural heritage visible from earlier times in history (Chandler 316-317).

Given the overall interest in the Middle Ages, Scott's interest in history was not unique. However, it may seem surprising that not more writers had attempted to incorporate it into literary works. Scott's way of actively incorporating the subject into his novel writing was groundbreaking (Brown 199-200). He is famously credited with founding the genre of historical fiction, actively depicting historical processes and their effects on people's lives. Brown would describe this as him being "the first to invest human history with a novelistic authenticity" (Brown 194). In other words, the final product has become a functional alternative

to the main “History” in allowing overlooked aspects from the past to be represented in literature.

His art form was admittedly not flawless, which Scott himself acknowledged (Brown 174). His innovative literary style yielded a mixed response. Ann Rigney (16, 32) notes that both the literature of Scott and the genre of historical fiction frequently encountered intellectual and academic criticism, which exposed its flaws and contended that it was destined for failure. On the other hand, Scott enjoyed general success with the public. *Ivanhoe* sold in the thousands when it was first published and continued to do so thereafter as interest in it spread and was used by a wide readership (Worth 67). The following section will focus on the academic response to this novel in the last two centuries.

Ivanhoe within academic discussion

Set in 12th-century England, Sir Wilfred of Ivanhoe returns from the Crusades to reclaim his inheritance and pursue his love, Lady Rowena, only to find himself caught amid Saxon-Norman tensions and the plight of the Jewish community, represented by Rebecca.

Regarding the heroines in *Ivanhoe*, there is research referring to them, even though the primary focus is on other topics. Rebecca and Rowena are used to varying degrees to understanding other subjects or questions. Chris Worth, for example, examines Ivanhoe’s ideological seriousness and its part in creating what he calls a “synthetic” English nationhood (64). The Jewess Rebecca is then used to show challenges surrounding the idea of a united nation, as she exemplifies people who are not assimilable in this vision (Worth 74). Another study worth mentioning is by Michael Ragussis, on Scott’s interest in European national versus Jewish identity. To a degree, his article resembles the discussion by Worth, but Ragussis has more depth, analyzing the power-struggle in maintaining and transforming certain cultural identities (182, 195). Above all, Ragussis asserts that the heroines in *Ivanhoe* both have vital roles in building nations and preserving cultures (193). Gary Dyer’s study is also worth mentioning. He compares Scott’s novel and James Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and the patterns within these two romantic fictions. To some extent, he analyzes the female characters in these works but mainly illustrates the issues and challenges with the ideology of chivalry and its effectiveness (Dyer 340-341).

There is also previous research that primarily examines the female characters in Scott’s novel and their function in it. Bodiştean has examined femininity in relation to chivalry. Regarding this theme of femininity, Bodiştean does not apply any clear theoretical concept, but

she does compare the two heroines and the roles they fill in the narrative and their respective characteristics, such as Rebecca's involuntary sensuality. This researcher maintains that the female protagonists in *Ivanhoe* often fulfill different stereotypes. These observations are ambivalent since they do not land in which of the heroines would be the "ideal" prototype of a woman, especially considering how Scott portrays them in his own work (Bodiştean 46-49). What Bodiştean does, like Dyer, although with a more intense focus on the roles of women in *Ivanhoe*, is to problematize the ideal of chivalry (51-52).

Rachel Schulkins discusses nationalism, like Ragussis and Worth, but her main concern is exploring Rebecca the Jewess. The thesis that Schulkins pursues is that there is a long tradition of portraying the stereotypical Jewess as a sex object. A tradition that Scott, from her point of view, actively relays, contrary to the idealistic stereotypes of female modesty and virtue in Western society (Schulkins, par. 1, 4-6). In this way, Rowena becomes the ideal type, which is important to national solidarity and identity. In contrast, Rebecca the Jewess, does not fit into this picture and the degrading illustration of her, rather cements the image of her and similar characters as aspersions (Schulkins, par. 14, 18-20). Rebecca becomes something of the "Other", in other words, the opposite of the constructed "ideal". Judith Lewin, on the other hand, makes a unique comparison between Scott's character Rebecca and the historical American Rebecca Gratz. Some believe that the former was inspired by the character and life choices of the latter. In any case, there are indications that the real Rebecca was influenced by the fictional character (Lewin 178, 200-201). Lewin's discussion is twofold. On the one hand, she interprets Scott as creating an exemplary female character. On the other hand, Lewin admits that this character can also be seen as the exotic Jewish stereotype due to her clothing in the story, which is a somewhat anachronistic element inserted by Scott. Rebecca's clothing in the novel's 11th-century setting is historically inaccurate, depicting the fashion for women in 1819 Britain rather than medieval dress. This reflects a broader pattern among Jews who had begun to dress like the majority society, a tendency that developed during the emancipation of British Jews, a topic I will return to later in the discussion (Lewin 179-181, 188). After this discussion surrounding *Ivanhoe*, it is time for an account of Doyle and his connection to medieval historical fiction.

Scott's legacy continues with Doyle

Set during the Hundred Years' War, *The White Company* follows young Alleyne Edricson, who abandons life in a monastery to experience the world outside. During his adventures, he

falls in love with the noblewoman Lady Maude and enlists in the notorious mercenary “White Company”, led by the knight Sir Nigel Loring, during the conflict in France and Spain.

Even in the late 19th century, there was interest in medieval themes. To some extent, Victorian society wanted to incorporate romanticized ideals from that time, such as chivalry, into their contemporary ideals about how, for example, men should behave (Wilson 26). This was realized by none other than the Scottish writer Arthur Conan Doyle, who is best known for his *Sherlock Holmes* stories (Orel 89). Like Scott, Doyle grew up in a family where he was introduced to this bygone era from an early age. Through his mother, among others, he grew up with stories of medieval chivalry, which later influenced his own literature (Orel 87). *The White Company*, which is central to this thesis, has not been discussed to any great extent from an academic point of view. But it should be added that this novel did not go unnoticed when it was published. It is said to have been a popular work that appealed to readers of all ages. The author James Payn is said to have gone so far as to claim that this work was the best historical novel since Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (Orel 97-98).

Scott and Doyle may have been active at different times in the same decade, but the former writer had a significant influence on the latter. Given that various researchers have placed different emphasis on this impact, the question becomes in what ways Doyle was influenced. As stated in the introduction, some argue that Doyle intended to follow in Scott’s footsteps by attempting to write in the same genre (Wilson 22). Others certainly point out that Doyle shared several approaches with his predecessor, from intensively researching to making their works authentic, to utilizing similar writing techniques. From the same perspective, it is important to highlight that the latter author neither wanted to slavishly follow nor be seen as the “new” Scott (Orel 91-94). This could be interpreted as Doyle having too much respect for Scott and his earlier work in the century. While Scott and Doyle did not live at the same time, the evidence from these sources suggests a connection in both authors’ similar approaches to historical fiction. Furthermore, there are other scholars that assert that Doyle actively looked up to Scott and sought to measure himself against Scott’s literary ability (Simmons 543). It is, therefore, reasonable to compare their literature with this connection in mind.

Previous research related to *The White Company*

In relation to the small amount of research that does treat Doyle’s *The White Company*, some do so in connection to Britain’s imperialism at the turn of the century. Alan Richards, for example, attempts to show that the novel fits the sentiments of the era and the notion of

Britain's destiny of world dominance and that it is a call by Doyle for the reunion of the English-speaking races (14). Overall, Richard's discussion is not based on the novel as much as the contemporary societal context. The only real reference to the plot is the last segment of the book, in which a hopeful description of Britain's children's loyalty when called upon in need is given (Richards 15). Kenneth Wilson also connects the novel to contemporary Victorian society and the era of imperialism. This can be illustrated by two examples from his discussion. Between 1883 and 1918, Britain's economic and military advantage led to an expansion of its territories outside Europe. This is reflected in Doyle's 1891 fiction, where the characters' overseas adventures mirror Britain's imperial growth (Wilson 22, 29). Furthermore, Wilson illustrates how Doyle attempts to portray the protagonist, Alleyne, according to Victorian middle-class ideals of manhood and chivalry. In short, he argues that Doyle's way of connecting the past and modern Britain, albeit in a glorifying way, is precisely what made *The White Company* popular at the time (Wilson 27, 40).

If some draw parallels between the late 19th century and Doyle's historical novel, others analyze this work and its content in depth. Harold Orel, whose text has been frequently cited earlier in this essay, does this to some extent. What he primarily does in one of his texts is to examine the extensive research behind the novel published in 1891, alongside Doyle's own relation to historical fiction (Orel 90-92). Although Orel does not analyze the plot of the story in depth, he does provide a very brief description of the (male) characters in the novel, and a few thematic elements are present, such as humor (99-101). One of the few who analyzes Doyle's *The White Company* in depth is Antonio Pérez. In short, his article is a comparative analysis between this novel and the prequel to this story: *Sir Nigel* (1906), in which the psychological character development of Sir Nigel Loring, at different periods of the Hundred Years' War, is in focus (Pérez 195, 198).¹ Several times in his article, Pérez suggests that contrary to Doyle's vision and portrayal of his characters as ideals of masculinity and patriotism, Nigel's character rather resembles madness from a modern viewpoint (202, 210). In this critical analysis, Pérez does make a very brief reference to the female heroines in *The White Company* to show that, in relation to this male character, they do not question his insane lifestyle and show respect for his patriarchal authority (204). This makes Pérez the only one to mention the heroines in Doyle's novel, even if he basically renders their importance as

¹ The prequel to *The White Company* was published 15 years after the original novel. One possible reason for this long interval is that Doyle often had to focus on his Sherlock Holmes fiction (Wilson).

peripheral in the story. Before proceeding to examine the two chosen novels, it is necessary to define and describe the concepts used in this analysis.

Gender roles

In the introduction, it was mentioned that one of the many aims of feminist criticism is to explore female characterization in literature and its relation to the contemporary societal context. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, there has been a long tradition of male authors constructing women in certain ways in written sources. These depictions do not adequately or fully correspond to reality (Humm 37-39). Similarly, Cynthia Wolff highlights that literature reflects contemporary social attitudes and further reinforces them, much like a vicious circle (205-207). To process this relationship, Lois Tyson suggests tools and useful entry points for analyzing women's presence in literature. Questions that she suggests using and that are highly relevant for this thesis are: "How are women portrayed? How do these portrayals relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novel was written or is set?" (Tyson 114). In other words, this method helps critics focus on identifying gender roles based on prevailing societal norms.

Before delving into the specific gender roles that are of relevance for the analysis of Scott and Doyle's novels, this concept should be defined more clearly. Deborah Rhode uses stereotypes to describe the phenomenon and believes that, despite minor variations throughout history, they have remained the same. These stereotypes are largely about characteristics, traits, qualities, tasks, or expectations associated with each gender (Rhode 73).

To comment on the heroines in *Ivanhoe*, one must understand prevailing gender stereotypes in 18th-century Britain. The reason I chose to connect Scott's novel with this century is that he lived a significant portion of his life between 1771 and 1832 (Hutton 1, 170). Consequently, he likely grew up with and was influenced by the gender norms of that era. After all, he was 48 years old when *Ivanhoe* was published. During this time, there was an emphasis on how men and women had different areas of responsibility in life. According to common belief, women belonged to the domestic sphere, with their "essential" qualities of benevolence, warmth, tenderness, and various sensibilities (Tosh 332; Harrington 33-34, 42). In fact, women were educated from a young age to embrace and develop these virtues. By the end of the century, this domestic ideology, primarily associated with the middle class, would become the standard for women in society at large (Harrington 43, 45). Others who have explored this era have also identified chastity, along with other virtues such as piety, meekness, and modesty, as

characteristics that were seen as feminine (Ylivuori 78). These gender roles are mentioned by Schulkins as prevalent when Scott was an active writer, together with virtues such as delicacy, obedience, and passivity (par. 6-7).

Similarly to the previous paragraph, it is necessary to explain gender roles in the late 19th-century to analyze *The White Company*. Compared to Scott, who I argue was shaped by the societal norms of the 18th-century, I believe that Doyle was more profoundly shaped by the 19th-century. He was born in 1859 during the Victorian era and lived until 1930 (Carter and McRae 125; Wilson). He was therefore more likely accustomed to “newer” female stereotypes in contrast to Scott. During the time this novel was published, society was characterized by a similarly conservative view of women as in Scott’s time. The ideal feminine traits that ultimately lead to expected motherhood were envisioned as domesticity, submissiveness, purity, and piety. Queen Victoria, for example, was seen as a personification of many of these ideals (Rehman and Hussein 46; Yildirim 46). Regarding domesticity, this could be interpreted as the same soft ideals that were also treated as feminine a century earlier, a continuity of stereotypical female character traits. It should be noted that this was a time of societal changes. It was indeed a patriarchal society, but with increasing industrialization, women’s opportunities opened up and with the suffrage movement, resistance to their oppressed role in society (Rehman and Hussain 51, Yildirim 47-48). During the late 19th century, the phenomenon of the “New Woman” also developed, which some associated with new ideals such as independence, self-reliance and resistance to old norms (Qureishi 1525). However, these changes were not entirely effective in breaking traditional beliefs about gender stereotypes, which were defended by many within conservative ranks (Das 8; Rehman and Hussain 52). Having thus defined what gender roles will guide the analysis, it is time to define New Historicism.

New Historicism

The movement, focused on practical criticism and analysis that would become known as “New Historicism” was developed during the 1980s in North America (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2; Greenblatt, “Stephen J. Greenblatt: b. 1943” 2027). One of the main goals for new historicists according to one of its advocates, Stephen Greenblatt (*Culture* 227-228), is to examine the reciprocal relationship of influence between literature and the context in which it was created. Expressed differently, the focus is to investigate the “historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (Greenblatt, “Stephen J. Greenblatt: b. 1943” 2038).

The concept of New Historicism that I will apply in this thesis, together with gender roles, is connected to Greenblatt's discussion about culture. He uses this term to demonstrate the relationship between historical context and literature. Above all, Greenblatt explains that culture, as an ideological system, functions as a control. Either one submits to the norms that exist therein and is accepted, or one opposes them and suffers the consequences (*Culture* 225-226). Another way to explain this is that literature conforms to societal norms, where culture acts as a "constraint". Or the very same work challenges societal values, pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in the form of "mobility", indicating that culture is prone to certain movements of what is acceptable even if unwillingly (Greenblatt and Payne 13-15).

This connection between constraint and mobility can be applied in a similar way to genre conventions, that is, the patterns that a reader expects in literary work. These are also products of different social energies and cultural norms, while also reinforcing them. At the same time, just like mobility and its counterpart in general, there is rarely a static relationship between them. Greenblatt believes that the best writers know exactly how to improvise and exploit these structures to make minor adjustments continuously (Greenblatt and Payne 13-15). Scott found himself caught between two different genre conventions, so to speak, when he tried to combine the imaginary with the realistic (Rigney 20). Rigney believes that while Scott tried his best to relate to both genres, even he had to bend the rules a bit. He actively used three strategies: first, "Selection" which involved choosing which historical figures to include and exclude; second, "Transformation", which meant transferring certain ascribed character traits between historical actors; and third, "Supplementation" as Scott had no problem attributing fictional traits to real people, or vice versa. In Scott's case, his skillful way of maneuvering and combining different conventions seemed to be a recipe for success regardless of the criticism he received by the intellectuals who saw the historically shaped literary genre as imperfect (Rigney 22-23, 126). By the time Doyle published *The White Company*, British society had developed, and the historical novel as a literary form. Doyle, however, must have had similar difficulties in relation to the various constraints of the genre. As has been seen earlier, he did relate to them, but on the other hand, he could also be flexible in certain respects (Orel 91-92). Whether these authors, through this new genre, are mobile in terms of gender roles remains to be seen in the discussion section below.

Discussion

What follows is an analysis of the female protagonists in Scott's and Doyle's novels. First Rowena and Rebecca from *Ivanhoe* will be examined, and then Lady Maude from *The White Company*. The approach is the same: I will use the same number of examples from each novel and identify which previously listed gender roles the female characters fulfill from the 18th and 19th-centuries. Finally, these heroines are compared in relation to gender roles and the concept of New Historicism.

The case of Rowena

The way Saxon noblewoman Rowena is portrayed at the beginning of the novel corresponds to contemporary feminine stereotypes. This is the case in a spontaneous small feast and its aftermath in Rowena's home at Rotherwood. Her beauty is described in detail and catches the attention of several male characters, including the antagonist Knight Templar Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Yet she does take careful measures together with her guardian the Saxon noble Cedric to appear modest and chaste, to counteract this undesired attention (Scott 80-81). The fact that she even feels obliged to do this to a knight of such a religious order does say something about each of these individuals' moral characters. Or rather, it indicates the fact that Scott wants to convey that Rowena is a virtuous character from an early age. Furthermore, during the feast, the men present discuss chivalry. The protagonist's name "Ivanhoe" is discussed, and she asserts this man's honor, to Cedric's annoyance, as he silences her (Scott 92-93). The relationship between Cedric and his disinherited son will not be discussed in this essay, but it is interesting that Rowena is limited in discussions where she aims to assert herself. She does get the chance, though, to privately discuss the topic of Ivanhoe, the man she loves and whose return she hopes for with a pilgrim (Ivanhoe in disguise). But the benevolence of her character in this context does not contradict anything mentioned earlier (Scott 98-100). At least in this part, she is a modest character who can be interpreted as submissive.

The great tournament at the town of Ashby is another event in *Ivanhoe* where Rowena exhibits some of the stereotypical feminine traits mentioned in the previous paragraph. Initially, her name appears in the context where Prince John and his court compare her and Rebecca's beauty. Among other things, they try to decide who should be "Queen of Love and Beauty" at the tournament. This is an honor that Sir Maurice de Bracy suggests should be awarded by the foremost of the knights in the games (Scott 124, 130-132). A disguised Ivanhoe emerges victorious during the first day's competitions and awards the title to Rowena, to the

dissatisfaction of some and the delight of others (Scott 153-154). Schulkins wrongly claims that her beauty is not really judged by the public when it clearly is, in the novel (par. 18). One would think that such an honor would make a person proud or vain, but how does the heroine react? She acts completely unaffected, waiting for her guardian to act and place the symbolic crown awarded to her by the victor (Scott 154-155). No matter how one looks at it, this falls into the stereotypical category of passivity. She lets others act for her in the situation instead of being the one driving the narrative forward. Furthermore, with dignity, she fulfills her elevated role throughout the remainder of the tournament. At the same time, she enacts another stereotypical female characteristic: she becomes very emotional when *Ivanhoe's* identity is revealed. The author also has Prince John remark on this behavior and, at the same time, praise it (Scott 194-195, 198). One way to interpret this is that Scott implemented the sensitive "female trait" within Rowena's character.

A central event in *Ivanhoe* is the captivity and rescue of many of the protagonists from Sir Reginald Front de Boeuf's castle, Torquilstone, where the depiction of Rowena can be interpreted in several ways. The reason for the captivity is that De Bracy and Bois-Guilbert are trying to force her to marry the former and have brought the group to their ally's fortification (Scott 225). On the one hand, Rowena is openly defiant towards de Bracy and displays great courage in resisting his attempts to persuade her to become his wife. On the other hand, when she is faced with the threat that her loved one's life is in danger based on her further decision, Rowena's tough facade breaks down. According to Scott, she then shows her true self, which can be summarized as delicate or tender (308-313). Whether De Bracy had gone through with his threats is never known, but what is clear is that he is at least embarrassed by his own behavior, especially after she breaks down in inconsolable despair (Scott 313-314). In the aftermath of her liberation, through King Richard I and the outlaw Robin Hood, she exhibits meekness while forgiving de Bracy, simultaneously holding him responsible for his foolishness (Scott 444). These descriptions of the heroine fall largely within the framework of some of the female gender roles that Schulkins and Harrington, for example, linked to Scott's contemporaries. At the same time, it is possible to read her resistance as a breaking of patterns, reflecting strength and integrity within Rowena. To a certain extent, this contradicts the idea that she would be completely passive or submissive. Her loss of courage rather reflects a realism in Scott's fiction, as many in Rowena's unjust situation would have acted similarly.

In the case of Cedric's plot to marry Rowena to the Saxon nobleman Athelstane of Coningsburgh, she does deviate from certain gender stereotypes whenever this theme is mentioned in *Ivanhoe*. As Ragussis has proposed, various factions attempt to exploit Rowena

in a power struggle. Prince John encourages de Bracy to pursue her to eradicate the royal Saxon bloodline while Cedric seeks to secure it (195). Rowena is a descendant of King Alfred, while Athelstane is also a descendant of the last Saxon monarchs of England (Scott 259, 125). Ironically, even though he is her guardian, Cedric cannot force or persuade her to agree to his vision. Scott describes the situation as follows:

Rowena's will had been in almost all cases a law to his household [...] Rowena was, by her previous education, disposed both to resist and to resent any attempt to control her affections, or dispose of her hand contrary to her inclinations, and to assert her independence in a case in which even those females who have been trained up to obedience and subjection, are not infrequently apt to dispute the authority of guardians and parents. (Scott 260)

In other words, what Scott says is that she is not passive and is trained not to adhere to submission or blind obedience. As discussed earlier, this is not always the case. For example, Scott believes, in relation to her actions in captivity at Torquilstone, that she is essentially a “weak” person. At the same time, the author ultimately ensures she regains her independent stance, ultimately triumphs and gets her way despite all the pressure. Cedric agrees to let her marry Ivanhoe (Ragussis 195; Scott 637-639). If anything, this shows that Rowena is a complex person. Despite following many stereotypical patterns, Scott seems to mix groundbreaking patterns into her character. Turning now to Rebecca, the question is whether the same applies to her.

Rebecca in a new light

As indicated previously, Rebecca is also kidnapped to Torquilstone, where her character portrayal, to some extent, in regard to early 19th century gender stereotypes, is ambivalent. In the previous research section, it was noted that some scholars, such as Schulkins, consider her character an immodest and exotic opposite of Rowena. It is certainly true that Rebecca's beauty often attracts attention, as in the case of Bois-Guilbert (Scott 285). But there is so much in the portrayal of her character that suggests that she, like Rowena, de facto meets the criteria for the female ideals of the time the novel was published. Additionally, it is possible to analyze the Jewess through what Ylivuori highlights as the gender role of chastity. Not only does Rebecca try to offer payment for the safety of herself and her father, Isaac, but she even threatens to commit suicide if her captors try to defile her virtue (Scott 322, 325-327). If she was to somehow contrast the stereotypes imposed on her gender, it is the refusal to subject herself to

patriarchal power in the situation that is trying to force itself on her. In addition, one could discuss this sequence in relation to the notion of “passivity”. Her behavior is certainly more reactive than proactive. On the other hand, since she must actively defend her honor, one can speak of her actions by reclaiming her agency and ability to influence her circumstances.

In connection with the same event discussed in the previous paragraph, there is reason to argue that the heroine illustrates even more of the values attributed to women listed by Harrington and Ylivouri. To begin with, Rebecca is the one who acts when Ivanhoe is seriously injured at the tournament at Ashby and persuades her father to help him (Scott 375-376). This can be seen as a further example of her being an active character who moves the plot forward. She then, with her deep knowledge of medicine, undertakes care for him even long after they have been captured in a manner that largely resembles warmth and tenderness (Scott 377-381, 391). If one briefly disregards the idea that she would represent some kind of sensual woman in the story she actually resembles the ideal of what contemporary readers would have seen as essential attributes suitable for the domestic sphere. It is impossible to miss Rebecca’s tendency to appear sensitive and, at the same time, meek when the castle is attacked by those who wish to free the prisoners within. Ivanhoe has her describe the entire ordeal, a task she at times openly does with displeasure (Scott 399-402). She begins to argue with Ivanhoe over the ideal of winning glory in battle and asks the question “What remains to you as the prize of all the blood you have spilled—of all the travail and pain you have endured—of all the tears which your deeds have caused, when death hath broken the strong man’s spear, and overtaken the speed of his war-horse?” (Scott 403). She explicitly distances herself from violence and the misery it creates, thereby showing her humbler attitude in life. At the same time, she is rejected by Ivanhoe on this subject and instead of standing firm in her position, she is forced to retreat into silence (Scott 404-405). This is another example of how the heroines in *Ivanhoe* are often forced into submission or objection.

Rebecca goes from one captivity to another with the Templars at their castle Templestowe, abducted by Bois-Guilbert, where she once again demonstrates a collection of different feminine stereotypes. In short, she is accused of witchcraft, of having supposedly seduced her captor, performing the art of healing, and is to stand trial for all of this. Without going into the details of this tribunal, it is impossible to describe Rebecca’s behavior throughout it, other than benevolent and modest. She claims her innocence and treats her accusers with reverence, even if it is in vain (Scott 524-528). Not only do the Templars demand her to confess her “crimes” and repent, but also to convert to Christianity. With respect for her own religion and faith in God’s help, she demands a trial by combat to prove the righteousness of her cause

(Scott 529-532). The gender role of “piety” that Ylivuori listed as a feminine virtue during the 18th-century has not really been mentioned in relation to Scott’s novel, but Rebecca’s devout religious behavior can be seen in the light of this trait. Bois-Guilbert offers to help her on more than one occasion to escape with him, though as a lover rather than anything else, but even in the face of a cruel death, she maintains her chastity (Scott 551-552, 624-625). Dyer maintains that a woman’s resolution or fortitude in Scott’s novel is not enough to save them (353-354). On the other hand, it should be added that Scott has nevertheless tried to portray a character who upholds feminine ideals with integrity, regardless of whether her life is in danger.

In the last encounter between Rowena and Rebecca, at the end of *Ivanhoe*, the characterization of the latter figure is ambivalent in relation to traditional gender roles. At this meeting between them, Rebecca announces that she and her father are leaving for the safer Iberian Peninsula due to oppression in England. Rowena suggests, among other things, that conversion to Christianity would solve the problem (Scott 641-643). But to this offer, Rebecca replies that “I may not change the faith of my fathers like a garment unsuited to the climate in which I seek to dwell” (Scott 643). She knows that her faith is not accepted by society, but it means too much to her to be abandoned. She also announces that she does not intend to marry in her life, but as she puts it, dedicate her life to “works of kindness to men, tending the sick, feeding the hungry, and relieving the distressed” (Scott 643-644). First, Rebecca’s choice to leave the country may be Scott’s historical reference to 1290 and the expulsion of the Jews from England, as Ragussis has suggested (203). Considering this, her actions contrast with the stereotypical notions of passivity or subjection. She, together with her father, makes an active choice to master their lives and their future. Second, the same could be said of her decision not to reject her faith. Simultaneously, it also follows stereotypical traits such as piety, modesty, and meekness. It has been mentioned above that she is a very religious character, and this only confirms this observation. Third, many of his contemporary readers were angered that Rebecca was not paired with the hero, Ivanhoe. Some even created intertexts in which the heroine converts and marries Ivanhoe (Lewin 181; Ragussis 205). In some terms, this attitude does diminish her integrity. Given the contemporary focus on women’s ultimate role in the home, it may seem odd for Scott to depart from this ideal. At the same time, he allows her to dedicate her life to exercising many of the nurturing or emotional qualities associated with women. In other words, Rebecca like Rowena, is a multifaceted character. So far, the discussion has focused on Scott’s female protagonists. The following part will discuss the female protagonist in Doyle’s novel.

Lady Maude's ambivalent nature

The introduction of the noblewoman Lady Maude's character in the novel generally does not give the impression of conforming to Victorian society's ideal of women. It is true that Doyle has the protagonist Alleyne to save her from his more vicious elder brother, Simon, the Socman of Minstead, who is forcing himself on her (Doyle 88-89, 92). What the incident does is confirm Wilson's (38) claim that Doyle's historical fiction reproduces ideas about masculinity. This can be exemplified by Maude questioning his manhood if he does not help her (Doyle 91). But beyond this initial interaction, what do we really learn about Maude? She openly expresses contempt for the domestic duties her mother tries to pressure her into learning and admits having problems obeying her parents overall (Doyle 94-97). Furthermore, the heroine tends to express her opinions, no matter how crude or unbridled they may be. Alleyne remarks on this in astonishment by saying: "To hear such words from your lips is as though I heard an angel of grace preaching the devil's own creed" (Doyle 97). This can be interpreted as Doyle implicitly expecting a woman to be humbler and delicate in her manners. But very little in her initial behavior falls within the framework of female gender roles, particularly linked to submissiveness, especially given her independent attitude.

When it comes to understanding Maude's development at her home Twynham Castle, it is one in which her character gradually falls into stereotypical gender patterns. She continues to show the tendencies highlighted in the previous paragraph. She is not afraid to show her independence towards others (Doyle 126-127). Her father, Sir Nigel Loring, even tells her that "it is more hard for me to gain obedience from you than from ten score drunken archers who followed me to Guienne" (Doyle 129). The description cements Maude's character as one who refuses to accept subjection. However, this pattern is altered when Alleyne, given his scholarly background, is asked to teach the young ladies at the castle. Maude's behavior can only be described as childishly rebellious and emotionally immature. But through her teacher's patience, even she learns to be submissive (Doyle 131, 137-139). The question is whether this can be interpreted as Doyle's outlook on gender roles. Even the unruliest female could be molded, in accordance with the ideals that the public believed they should fulfill. During her final time at Twynham Castle, she maintains this submissive behavior, along with increased sensitivity and meekness. She is still critical of the domestic duties she is forced to perform. But overall, there is no trace of her earlier rebellious or independent nature (Doyle 140-145).

If one looks at different protagonists' ways of describing Maude's character, which is absent for large parts of the story it will both help confirm some aspects mentioned

before and simultaneously highlight that this heroine is difficult to interpret. Even before Alleyne's teaching has made its mark on Maude, her mother, Lady Mary Loring, discusses her independent daughter's lifestyle and attitude with her husband, which poses a danger to the future where she is expected to take command of the domestic sphere (Doyle 110). This indicates that Maude initially does not follow the stereotypical role of the time. Just as Victorian women were expected to acquire domestic qualities, Maude is expected to master them as well, if one interprets what her mother implicitly implies. Later in France, where Alleyne is involved in one of the many campaigns during the Hundred Years' War, he often reflects on the woman he has fallen in love with. He maintains that "she is so sweet, so dainty, and of so noble a spirit, that I fear me that I shall never be worthy of her" (Doyle 268). His reference to this soft personality may perhaps be a reference to Maude's personality development at Twynham Castle, where she becomes more submissive. So far, this confirms what I have shown in the two previous paragraphs. But even though Alleyne believes she has truly changed, Nigel Loring, later, claims that she is still the strong and independent character she has always been. For example, when the father learns that this young man of lower birth loves his daughter, he recognizes that she can make her own decisions and that no one can stop her from acting according to her own judgment (Doyle 385). In other words, Maude is an enigma. It is almost as if Doyle cannot decide whether this peripheral protagonist should be understood through the contemporary Victorian ideal of women or not.

Despite what was discussed in the previous paragraph, it is easier to see how the author allows the heroine to fall into patterns of traditional gender roles, at the end of the novel. Alleyne is back from the campaign in France and Spain, where the mercenary White Company suffered substantial losses, and their commander, Nigel, has gone missing. Upon his arrival in England, the main character learns that Maude plans to enter a nunnery. It turns out that rumors of Alleyne's supposed demise have reached her, and out of grief, she forsakes everything (Doyle 408-409). On the one hand, this action is somewhat illogical as she is Sir Nigel's sole heir, responsible for the family's future lands and carrying on the family name (Doyle 385). Technically, she would have been expected to be married off to a nobleman through her mother's authority. On the other hand, this action highlights Victorian emphasis on piety to some extent, as it shows that religion is important to her. However, in this case, it intersects with the ideal of future domesticity. In addition, it also highlights "purity." Either she dedicates her life to the man she intends to marry, or celibacy will suffice, which is not the case for her, as Alleyne retrieves her from this fate just in time. Doyle does not expand their relationship in detail, more than describing their modest wedding and indicating that they had a happy

marriage (Doyle 412-414). How this is supposed to be interpreted is unclear because it just leads to speculation in the end. Based on the previous soothing effect the character Alleyne has on the heroine, it would be safe to assume that in the end she does become somewhat of a submissive wife and learns to adapt to the roles expected of her gender.

The three heroines compared

Whether early or late 19th century, the women in the selected novels *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company* largely relate to the female stereotypes present at the time of publication. In relation to the various characteristics researchers in modern times have identified for the 18th-19th centuries, it turns out that Rowena's character exhibits most of these. The same also applies to Rebecca, who exemplifies even more contemporary gender roles if examined more closely. Therefore, Schulkin's observations about the portrayal of the female characters in *Ivanhoe*, become peculiar when she suggests that Scott contrasts Rowena's exemplary femininity with Rebecca's form of foreign female behavior. Schulkins suggests that the Jewish character's sensuality would outweigh the contemporary female idealistic traits the author had given her (par. 2, 5). On the contrary, one could say that this is an undeserved assessment. If one's attention is firmly fixed on Rebecca's personality, rather than defining her character by her beauty, she is not really that different from Rowena. As for Maude, she distinguishes herself as somewhat unique compared to Scott's heroines. A common thread running through Scott's work is that his female protagonists, to varying degrees, continuously embody contemporary feminine ideals. This is not the case for Maude, who is shaped to and eventually progresses into the late 19th-century stereotypes. Most likely, it is Doyle's vision in the end, that she is the Victorian ideal of a woman. In this way, both authors are similar in that they can be interpreted as conveying their respective societies' views of women.

The interpretation of the heroines is by no means self-evident, though, and it has been possible to find patterns where all three do not normatively adhere to the expectations imposed on their gender. Rowena is probably the one who seems to do this the least, in that case. Rebecca, in contrast, is something in between, depending on how one chooses to examine her actions. Scott often places her in situations where she is forced to fight for her cause, such as her faith and resist subjection. Because she is a multifaceted character, it will ultimately be a question of assessment; that is, which traits weigh the most: those that break the norms or those that relate to them. Lady Maude is probably one of these female characters who seem most prone to breaking with contemporary gender roles, at least initially. That is, until Doyle

gradually lets her fall back into these. Maude is the most rebellious, however, and she most clearly wishes not to be forced into the role expected of her.

Given that the female characters in both novels overall adhere to different contemporary gender roles, it is possible to see both *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company* in the light of Greenblatt's notion of constraint. Regardless of whether this adherence to gender roles was deliberate, it is not particularly surprising. As Orel (94) has pointed out, both Scott and Doyle were conservative men. Although this conservatism took different forms, they were both politically and socially committed to traditional ways of life (Worth 64; Wilson 24). This would mean that their literature is regulated by and at the same time maintains the culture of society. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that, especially in Scott's case, this is a dilemma regarding Rebecca. Certainly, during a time (18th-19th centuries) when Jewish opportunities were expanding in British society, those who belonged to the middle class came to embrace similar ideals about women as the rest of British society, while simultaneously adhering to their own religion. This applied to the same conservative view of women's role in life (Tananbaum). It is unlikely that Scott had any deeper knowledge of Judaism or its adherents' religious praxis. This is evident in his portrayal of the Jewish woman in *Ivanhoe*, which would not have been realistic for the Ashkenaz medieval culture of the time. For example, Rebecca would probably have already been married. The fact that she chooses to remain single for the rest of her life was not desirable either, considering that the woman was expected to get married and have children (Baumgarten). To Scott's credit, he once again does not follow the readers' wishes and at least lets Rebecca be true to her beliefs. However, if viewing culture as a constraint, one should be aware whether the author has related to the views of the majority of society.

Regarding the term "mobility" and New Historicism, it is uncertain whether this applies to the portrayal of Rowena, Rebecca, and Maude. Given the various evidence that these three fulfill so many of their contemporary gender roles, it is difficult to say that the authors are challenging what was culturally acceptable at the time. Undoubtedly, there are patterns among the female protagonists that, due to their multifaceted characters, can be interpreted as innovative elements. Then, in this case, the question becomes whether the improvisation that Greenblatt believes characterizes the relationship between a cultural vision of total control versus the pressure to somehow give in to certain changes over time (Greenblatt and Payne 14). Given their conservatism, it is unlikely that either Scott or Doyle consciously pushed for such a change. But unknowingly, challenging tendencies have crept into all of the discussed heroines. A case in point is Maude, who, to some extent, was the one who really showed potential to be such an example of "mobility" with her initial independent attitude.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to demonstrate the mutual relationship between literature and societies' cultural frameworks. Above all, the focus has been on examining two pieces of literature from different parts of the 19th century and how the view of women was depicted in these examples of historical fiction. The choice of primary sources for analysis has been the novels *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company*, and a comparison between their female protagonists. The aim has been to answer the question of how one should understand these peripheral characters. The position that I have maintained is that they both reflect and reinforce their respective contemporary societal norms. As a tool to demonstrate these connections and demonstrate the accuracy of this statement, the concept of gender roles and perspectives from New Historicism has been used. Specifically, it examines the 18th-century female stereotypes that influenced Scott and late 19th-century's gender roles that shaped Doyle's work, using the framework of constraint and mobility.

In summary, the thesis has shown that there are similarities between the two chosen historical fictions. Scott and Doyle, in their separate attempts to depict chivalry during the medieval era, show resembling patterns in how they have implemented feminine gender stereotypes therein. Between the characters Rebecca, Rowena, and Lady Maude, there are varying degrees of how they fulfill the feminine stereotypes existing between the 18th and 19th-centuries. But by and large, it is possible to connect the depiction of these fictional characters to many of the ideals expected of women in Britain during the time the novels were produced. The analysis in this thesis shows, in relation to previous research, that it is still possible to reinterpret literature and characters that do not agree with the perspectives of others. This especially applies to the Jewish heroine Rebecca and the illustration of her, even though this might be seen as problematic. Furthermore, the discussion in this thesis shows that Doyle and Scott should primarily be understood as people of their time who conformed to their culture in terms of containment. That is, by not deviating much from societal norms, in their portrayal of female characters, they cannot generally be said to enable any mobility of them.

With all that said, there are things that could have been done differently in this essay to create more depth. Instead of comparing two different authors within the same genre, during different time periods. It would have been possible to compare different historical novels by Scott or Doyle with the same focus on gender. In the future, Doyle's historical fiction ought to receive more attention, especially to determine if he succeeds in carrying on the legacy

of his role model, Scott. However, the advantage of this thesis is that the often-peripheral characters, that is, the women in both *Ivanhoe* and *The White Company*, are given a very central role. This essay's assessment of these protagonists is new in relation to previous research, especially in the comparison of gender roles. Finally, it is possible to do a different analysis. One might use more quantitative methods or define the concept even more to make a more detailed analysis.

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