

**Immodest Otherness: Nationalism and the Exotic Jewess in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe***

By [Rachel Schulkins](#), University of Liverpool

<1> The character of the Jewess as a sexual object is part of the long tradition of Jewish stereotypes. Whereas during the nineteenth century the Jewish male character was almost always associated with money and greed, the Jewish female was associated with an alluring, and at times even corrupting, sexuality. Livia E. Bitton's study showcases that this nineteenth-century association of the Jewess with sex and sensuality was part of an established literary convention in European culture. From Lope de Vega's Spanish Raquel and Jean Racine's French Bérénice in the seventeenth century, to Tobias Smollett's coquettish Emilia in eighteenth-century English literature, the Jewess was conceived as a sex object. The literary convention of the erotic Jewess was most probably influenced by William Shakespeare's Jessica and Christopher Marlowe's Abigail, by historical figures like the Jewess of Toledo also known as Raquel la Ferosa (Rachel the fair), and well-known biblical characters such as Abishag the Shunamite, Sulamith of the vineyard and Queen Bathsheba (see Bitton 63-8).<sup>(1)</sup> Nadia Valman argues, however, that even though the Jewess was part of the literature, she was a marginal figure and it was only from the beginning of the nineteenth century that her figure became a "literary preoccupation" (2). Indeed, the figure of the enticing Jewess is easily traceable in the writings of Maria Edgeworth, Sir Walter Scott, Benjamin Disraeli, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope and many others. For example, the Jewess Rebecca Loth, in Anthony Trollope's *Nina Balatka*, is depicted in direct contrast to Nina Balatka's reserved Christian beauty. Rebecca is described as a woman 'somewhat hard withal, with a repellent beauty that seemed to disdain while it courted admiration' (83). The disparity between the sexy Jewess and the plain Christian beauty is clearly an extension to Sir Walter Scott's female heroines in *Ivanhoe*.

<2> Valman's study of the Jewess in Victorian literature carefully shows the lasting influence of *Ivanhoe* on the representation of Jewish female characters in nineteenth-century British literature. According to Valman, despite her prominent sexuality, the Jewess Rebecca symbolized the "capability of the Jews for enlightenment and self-transformation" (7). Valman's reading of Rebecca is rooted in Ragussis' conversionist reading of the novel, where he maintains that Rebecca's heroism and loyalty to her clan serves to highlight Scott's "critique of conversion" (Ragussis 95). Valman expands this argument by suggestion that despite her refusal

to convert, Rebecca's actions mark a figurative conversion to Christian morality and serve as a model for later Jewesses in conversionist literature.<sup>(2)</sup> Valman may be right in assessing Rebecca's character, but her reading of the Jewess in the contexts of the novel and of 1819 Britain is one-dimensional and fails to consider Scott's literary efforts in constructing the Jewess. Valman only considers Rebecca's personality as indicators of the Jewess's social potential, but one cannot ignore the fact that the Jewess's physicality signifies a disturbing presence that leans more towards social dread than social promise. While Rebecca's morality may refer to the possibility of the Jews' social inclusion, her distinct sexuality undercuts that very possibility. In actuality the Jewess's body, unlike the male's, carries no permanent markers of Jewishness. However, the literary convention of the sexy Jewess was adopted to substitute that physical want. It is through the sexualization of the Jewess that Scott exposes the unmarked body of the Jewish female and argues for its social exclusion. Scott cements Rebecca's eroticism on established markers of Jewish physiognomy, such as dark skin, dark eyes and black hair. Scott deliberately aligns Rebecca's Jewishness with her erotic appeal to mark her physicality as particularly Jewish. Even though, as Valman argues, Scott constructs Rebecca's morality in accordance with Christian morality, the rendering of her physicality as distinctly sexual and as markedly Jewish refutes the argument for Jewish social admittance and/or transformation. In many ways, the character of the sexy Jewess was conceived to reinforce the notion that the Jews are a corrupt race, enslaved to their desires and thus morally inferior to the host nation. But, there is another reason behind the sexualization of the Jewish female in *Ivanhoe*. It is the argument of this article that Scott's configuration of the erotic Jewess is deeply embedded in the social-national effort to exalt English femininity over foreign models of female behavior.

<3> For over ten years after its publication, readers chose to read Scott's Jewess as the heroine of *Ivanhoe* rather than Rowena, whom the protagonist eventually marries. In response, Scott in the 1830 edition of the novel included a preface in which he addresses and even chastises his "fair readers" for misreading the story's resolution. Scott writes that

the character of the fair Jewess found so much favour in the eyes of some fair readers, that the writer was censured, because, when arranging the fates of the characters of the drama, he had not assigned the hand of Wilfred to Rebecca, rather than the less interesting Rowena. But, not to mention that the prejudices of the age rendered such an union almost impossible, the author may, in passing, observe, that he thinks a character of a highly virtuous and lofty stamp, is degraded rather than exalted by an attempt to reward virtue with temporal prosperity. Such is not the recompense which Providence has deemed worthy of suffering merit, and it is a dangerous and fatal doctrine to teach young persons, the most common readers of romance, that rectitude of conduct and of principle are either naturally allied with, or adequately rewarded, by the gratification of

our passions, or attainment of our wishes. In a word, if a virtuous and self-denied character is dismissed with temporal wealth, greatness, rank, or the indulgence of such a rashly formed or ill assorted passion as that of Rebecca for Ivanhoe, the reader will be apt to say, verily Virtue has had its reward. But a glance on the great picture of life will show, that the duties of self-denial, and the sacrifice of passion to principle, are seldom thus remunerated; and that the internal consciousness of their high-minded discharge of duty, produces on their own reflections a more adequate recompense, in the form of that peace which the world cannot give or take away (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 544-45).<sup>(3)</sup>

Scott dismisses any objections to the novel's conclusion and rebukes his female readers for choosing fun and gratification over reality and guidance. He further explains his reasons for refusing the marriage of Rebecca and Ivanhoe as historically improbable and morally objectionable. What is interesting in this section is Scott's choice to describe Rebecca's love for Ivanhoe as "a rashly formed or ill assorted passion." Rebecca's character, which in the quoted passage initially stands for ethical values such as simplicity, virtue and rectitude, is immediately tainted with Scott's reference to her "ill-assorted passion." Scott's allusion to Rebecca's misplaced desires substitutes her image of purity with that of a sexual character. Considering Scott's wording, it is clear he estimated a union between Ivanhoe and a Jew as undesirable and ill-suited, particularly in a novel that details the forming of Britain's national identity, in an effort to strengthen nationalist sentiments in its nineteenth-century readers.<sup>(4)</sup> Ultimately, as the ending implies, it is the union between Ivanhoe and Rowena that helps forge a national cohesion between the Normans and the Saxons. If Ivanhoe would have married the exotic Jewess instead, not only the union between the separate factions in the land would not have been possible, but as the narrative implies the country would have deteriorated into social and moral anarchy.

<4> Scott deliberately constructs Rebecca as Rowena's counterpart, placing the Jewess's sexiness against the chastity of the female descendent of the Saxon Kings of England. Both characters are part of a long line of contrasting heroines detectable in Scott's novels, from Rose Bradwardine and Flora Mac-Ivor in *Waverley* (1814), Effie and Jeannie Deans in *The Heart Midlothian* (1818), Minna and Brenda Troil in *The Pirate* (1822), to Alice and Fenella in *Pevekil of the Peak* (1823). Alexander Welsh rightly remarks that Scott always presents his heroines as either the fair blonde or the dark-enticing brunette. He further comments that amongst the two, it is the fair female, who is "the proper heroine of Scott" (Welsh 71). Welsh explains that the fair heroine's "role corresponds to that of the passive hero – whom, indeed, she marries at the end. She is eminently beautiful, and eminently prudent. Like the passive hero, she suffers in the thick of events but seldom moves them. The several dark heroines, no less beautiful, are less restrained ... They allow their feelings to dictate to their reason, and seem to symbolize passion itself" (Welsh 71). The brunette, according to Welsh, is "more direct in her relationship

with others, and hence more accessible or intimate” than her chaste rival (73). “To her ultimate distress,” Welsh writes, “[she] has that quality of availability” (73). The division between the chaste, fair heroine and the sexy brunette is however more than a simple typology to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving. The division between the female characters stands as a reference to Scott’s approbation of early-nineteenth-century notions of femininity. Scott adopts the clichéd convention of the fair and dark heroines as a literary strategy to define that which is acceptable and that which is morally undesirable in the constitution of Britain’s countrywomen. Accordingly, whereas the fair maid celebrates the virtues of British femininity, the dark heroine functions as its rejected and censored counterpart. This literary tendency is clearly noticeable in *Ivanhoe*, where Scott uses the discourse presented in didactic literature to reject Rebecca’s enticing figure and formulate his political commentary regarding the Jews’ position in British society. As I will show, whereas Rowena’s fair beauty becomes the ultimate symbol of English purity, justice, truth and virginity, Rebecca’s darkness is associated with sex, sin and immorality. For Scott, like many of his contemporaries, Jewishness is estranged from Christianity and fails to share its religious and moral spirit. It is rather perceived as a religion of money and greed, which inflames material and sexual desires, whilst contaminating the moral foundation of the nation. In our discussion, this spirit of corruption manifests itself in the greedy character of the Jew-male, Isaac of York, or alternatively in the figure of the sexy Jewess, his daughter. Accordingly, as with the image of the shylockian Jew, the compound identity of the Jewess as sexual functions to reveal the limit of tolerance towards that which cannot be understood, tamed and assimilated, and which consequently will always remain a threat. One can explain the demarcation between the fair and dark heroines by employing Jean-Paul Sartre’s analysis in *Anti-Semite and Jew* of the nationalist’s perception of his body against that of the other. Sartre argues that the nationalist aspires to adore his physicality and thus attributes to it ideal values such as grace, nobility, vivacity and modesty in order “to express the aristocracy of the body” (120). However, these ideals are deprived of the Jew, who is refused these values by the anti-Semite to establish ethnic superiority. Even though the term “anti-Semite” with reference to Scott might be too harsh, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Sartre’s perception of the function of the body in the discourse of national identity and otherness echoes throughout Scott’s configuration of the Jewess. It is through the visual configuration of the body that Scott conceives the Jewess and her place in the social formation of his narrative. Scott’s authority burdens the Jewess with visual signifiers, which though empty of actual meaning, allocate a cultural context, which helps define her otherness. The connection between language and representation has already been established in Frantz Fanon’s study, where Fanon displays the power of visual conceptions of the body in defining racial and national difference. It is through ideological definitions of the self and the nation that one learns to mark and establish difference or familiarity with the other. This recognition is expressed through a representational language, which while defining

the self and its socio-cultural surroundings acknowledges or excludes the other. Looking at the representation of the Jewess in Scott's novel it becomes clear that the portrayal of the Jewess as a sexual symbol establishes and reinforces national parameters of inclusion and exclusion. It is through the signifying body that Scott defines the female-other and allows or refuses her admission to society.

<5> The Jews in *Ivanhoe* are indeed presented as part of a social reality; s/he is familiar and visible. Nevertheless, the other's visibility is subjected to a western gaze, which loads on the other's physical existence markers that function as a visual grammar. Though empty of actual meaning, this visual grammar provides a syntax that defines the other and his/her physical existence. The body thus become a field of symbolic values, pre-inscribed by the observing eye or the writing hand. Within this framework, the erotic body of the female-other is a body given and constructed to embody a certain meaning or contain a certain symbolism, even though it does not necessarily correspond to her individual or cultural identity. With regards to *Ivanhoe*, the Jewess's sexuality is not only inscribed in and through her relation to early-nineteenth-century notions of Englishness and female behavior, but is rather presented insofar as to help define the "future" Englishwoman, establish her moral superiority and right for ascendance as the new mother of the New Israel. In *Ivanhoe*, the racial economy in the representation of the sexy-Jewess is predicated on a binary model of sexuality/asexuality. Scott deliberately positions the identity of the sexy Jewess against the notions of respectability and femininity presented to the public readers in the conduct books and domestic literature of the early nineteenth century. For that purpose, we find that even though the Jewess assumes some of the values that define English femininity, she is at the same time constructed against these very principles. Though Scott portrays Rebecca as charitable and self-sacrificial, the acute rendering of her sensuality sets her apart from the aspired ideal of English femininity, advocated during Scott's time.

<6> During the early nineteenth century, Britain continued to uphold the feminine values of respectability that emerged in the previous period. English femininity was defined as a model of exemplary domesticity, denoting Christian morality, modesty and passivity. This image of the female, outlined in the works of Lord Halifax, Dr John Gregory and Hester Chapone in the eighteenth century, was reinforced in the didactic literature of the following age. Writers such as Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Hamilton, Miss S. Hatfield, Thomas Broadhurst and Ann Taylor in the early nineteenth century, helped to underpin and advocate this idealized image of placid femininity. Hamilton in her 1802 *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, for example, associates an Englishwoman with softness of manners, "dignity, modesty, gentleness and purity" (Morris 4: 342). Miss Hatfield, a popular didactic writer at the time, concurs with Hamilton's conception that it is "the delicacy of modesty ... [which is] so beautiful in a female character" (Morris 5: 11). William Cobbett clearly outlines this perception

of femininity in *Advice to Young Men* (1829), where he lists in a descending order the virtues a man should seek in a future wife.<sup>(5)</sup> The first on Cobbett's list is female modesty whereas the least important attribute is that of female beauty, in-between are mentioned other qualities such as sobriety, industry and frugality. For Cobbett, it is the submissive and subdued body, a body empty of any signs of sexual femininity, which is the most desired. What seems to stand behind Cobbett's notion of the ideal wife is not only a re-configuration of female behavior but also a reconceptualization of the female body. Cobbett, conceives an image of femininity devoid of passions and desires. The image celebrated is rather of a woman lacking clear visible signs of a physical and sexual presence.

<7> Cobbett was not alone and his work simply echoes the general sentiments of the period. The works of Lawrence Stone, Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong give us a strong idea of the ideals of femininity that fed bourgeois ideology throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Without reiterating existing scholarship, it would suffice to say that early-nineteenth-century didactic literature almost unequivocally adopted the conservative model of the modest woman, who was expected to conduct herself according to strict moral principles. Virtuous femininity was defined around notions of modesty, delicacy, obedience and chastity. As Armstrong notes, towards the turn of the century numerous literary publications offered a feminine ideal, founded on the conservative notion of the pious, moral and asexual woman (4). This notion is further reinforced by Pam Morris, who in her general introduction to the six volume collection of the didactic literature published between 1770 and 1830 writes that "all the conduct book writers" in her collection subscribed "to stereotypical womanly virtues of delicacy, modesty and affectionate sensibility" (1: xxix). Poovey's argument further suggests that this notion of femininity was so well-absorbed into the social fabric that by the first decade of the nineteenth century women were perceived more as spiritual presences, conveying exemplary virtue, than as physical beings (14).

<8> Within this cultural framework, it seems that a strong and direct link was formed between morality and the female body. More so, we find that in an effort to elevate Englishwomen, sexuality and the sexualized body were regulated to the other and the foreign to the extent that the female-other was repeatedly presented as uncultured, erotic and licentious. The attitude towards Frenchwomen is a case in point. After the French Revolution and more so after the war with France commenced in 1793, many writers chose to define Frenchwomen as sexually immoral. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, believed Frenchwomen to be frivolous and excessively sensual. Miss Hatfield feared their "personal indelicacy, frivolous, if not dangerous conversation, and levity of manners" (Morris 5: 89). Lucy Aikin in 1810 refers to Frenchwomen as the "dames of gay seductive France" (Morris 5: 244). As Colley argues, many in Britain after 1789 purposely saw Frenchwomen as sexually improper due to political polemics, which aimed to reject the foreign whilst elevating the domestic (252). Even the image of French liberty,

Marianne, was depicted in Rowlandson's *The Contrast* as espousing unnatural femininity with her half-exposed body in comparison to Britannia's dignified and placid nature. More than once, bare-breasted Marianne was associated with Medusa and her head of snakes. This association of Marianne's body and sexuality with snakes only reinforced Rowlandson's definition of her sexuality as treacherous. Marianne's snake-like figure indirectly alluded to the snake's biblical association with sin and the devil, thus marking her sexual body as unwelcoming and threatening (Major 254-55). This national philosophy towards the French did not fail to encompass other nationalities and cultures. For example, Tobias Smollett pronounces the Italian women as the most "haughty, insolent, capricious and revengeful females on the face of the earth" (17: 238). The Spanish woman is characterized by her violent sensations and immersion in the "pleasures of sense" (Anonymous, *British Critic* 23: 418). William Lempriere perceives Moorish women as nothing other than sexual creatures "educated with no other view than for the sensual purposes of their master, or husband" (794).

<9> The tendency to view the other as a creature of impulse was further extended towards the minority groups residing within the borders of Britain. In her study *Madam Britannia*, Emma Major argues that women who chose to follow Methodism over Anglican-Protestantism "were generally depicted as either far from respectable ... or simply mad" (142-43). Public conception itself was that "Methodism was a threat to female virtue" (Major 143). It is this menace to female character and its association with female depravity, which rendered Methodism as spiritually lacking in comparison to Anglicanism. The public formulation of the religiously other or foreign national as sexual, registered that particular outside the borders of Englishness and thus socially and culturally undeserving. In a country where female modesty was linked with the spiritual and moral nourishment of the nation, where female virtue was perceived as the pillar of civilization, sexuality and even more so female sexuality was seen as a sign of social decay. As one writer remarks, it is women's "sympathies, sensibility, intelligence and modesty" that gives "to civilized society its brightest lustre" (Anonymous, *The Female Preceptor* 3: 352-53), while the opposite leads to nothing but cultural barbarity. But this perception itself is rooted in a sense of British superiority, which ridicules the other's ways of being, demonizes and declares it as inferior and irrational. It is for this reason that the body of the female-other, especially with regards to the French and the Methodist, is presented as seductive and corruptive. The sexualized image of Marianne and the licentiousness associated with Methodism were intently set for the purpose of national elevation and for excluding those who failed to embrace Britain's Anglican national identity. Accordingly, the erotic body of the female other is a body deliberately formulated against the national foundations of English femininity and feminine patriotism and thus undeserving of inclusion.

<10> It is within this contextual understanding of the female body and of English feminine patriotism that I wish to consider Scott's reasons for sexing-up Rebecca. From her first appearance in the novel, Rebecca's body is marked as a foreign commodity:

Her form was exquisitely symmetrical, and was shown to advantage by a sort of Eastern dress, which she wore according to the fashion of the females of her nation. Her turban of yellow silk suited well with the darkness of her complexion. The brilliancy of her eyes, the superb arch of her eyebrows, her well-formed aquiline nose, her teeth as white as pearl, and the profusion of her sable tresses, which, each arranged in its own little spiral of twisted curls, fell down upon as much of a lovely neck and bosom as a simarre of the richest Persian silk, exhibiting flowers in their natural colours embossed upon a purple ground, permitted to be visible—all these constituted a combination of loveliness, which yielded not to the most beautiful of the maidens who surrounded her. It is true, that of the golden and pearl-studded clasps, which closed her vest from the throat to the waist, the three uppermost were left unfastened on account of the heat, which something enlarged the prospect to which we allude. A diamond necklace, with pendants of inestimable value, were by this means also made more conspicuous. The feather of an ostrich, fastened in her turban by an agraffe set with brilliants, was another distinction of the beautiful Jewess, scoffed and sneered at by the proud dames who sat above her, but secretly envied by those who affected to deride them. (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 82-3).<sup>(6)</sup>

Rebecca's body is clearly marked by her exoticism and Jewishness. Scott, in the passage, deliberately sets Rebecca apart from the Norman and Saxon dames attending the tournament, in order to attest her distinguishable character and foreign status in the nation. Following "the fashion of the females of her nation" (Scott, *Ivanhoe*. 82), Rebecca adorns her body in eastern grab. From the yellow turban, to the arrangement of her tresses and even the ostrich feather in her hair, Rebecca is doubly marked both as a Jew and as a foreign easterner.<sup>(7)</sup> Even in her subsequent appearances in the novel, Rebecca is described as "richly dressed in Jewish fashion" (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 199), decking her body in "outlandish" (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 245) attire. We need to keep in mind that during Scott's time there was no apparent difference in fashion between the Jews and English (Endelman 35). Not only that but as the study of C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington reveals, the turban was a popular evening headgear amongst the fashionable ladies of Britain and not limited to Jews (364). Even if we place the novel in its historical context (1194), we cannot ignore the fact that no such differences between Jews and English existed at the time, as it was only 1218 that Jews were decreed to wear a particular dress. But the distinguished mark enforced on the Anglo-Jewish community in the thirteenth century was not yellow but rather a white band with the symbol of the two law tablets given to Moses on the mount of Sinai (Tulloch 520, n. 47.31-33 & 71.41-43).

<11> In that case, we must wonder why Scott insists that the yellow turban was particular to Rebecca and to “the females of her nation” (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 82).<sup>(8)</sup> One possible assumption is that Scott relied on other historical accounts, which falsely referenced the yellow cap as a legal requirement of Jews in the Anglo-Norman period.<sup>(9)</sup> Another explanation is offered by Judith Lewin, who argues for a connection between Rebecca’s outfit and the dress code forced on Jewish women in Renaissance Italy. Lewin proposes that Scott, who was greatly influenced by William Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, broadened his historical configuration of the Jew to include the history of the Jews in greater Europe, and particularly that of Italian Jews during Shakespeare’s Venice (34-5).<sup>(10)</sup> By employing Diane Owen Hughes’ extensive study concerning Italian dress laws pertaining to Jews during the Renaissance period, Lewin argues that Rebecca’s yellow turban is not simply a marker for her Jewish origin but also a sign for impure sexuality. Building her argument on Hughes’ study, Lewin links Rebecca’s yellow turban and even pendant with sixteenth century prostitution, remarking that within the context of Renaissance Italy Rebecca’s dress serves to reinforce her image of promiscuity. Though Lewin’s placement of Rebecca in the context of Shakespeare’s Italy adds an interesting dimension to our understanding of the Jewess, Lewin fails to determine whether Scott consciously chose to dress Rebecca as a sixteenth-century Italian prostitute or whether he was even aware of the historical facts concerning Jews in that period. What we can take from Lewin’s argument is the uncontested belief that Rebecca’s attire points to an obvious tension in the narrative between Rebecca’s purity and concupiscence.

<12> The association of the female Jewish-other with tainted sexuality is apparent in Scott’s choice to link Rebecca’s body with money and property. On reading Scott’s description of Rebecca, his admiration of her beauty is undeniable. Nevertheless, Scott cannot help but criticize Rebecca’s material appearance. Scott deliberately chooses to define Rebecca’s beauty in economic terms, employing words such as *brilliancy*, *richest*, *golden*, *diamond* and *inestimable value*. As Elizabeth Fay argues, Rebecca is not only presented as “the *nouveau riche* whose taste is overdone” but she serves as a human placard, advertising her father’s wealth and setting herself up to become an “object of avaricious and sexual desire” (231, n. 3). Scott clearly associates Rebecca’s physicality with her father’s usurious profession, as it is her father’s wealth that helps enhance Rebecca’s physical appearance. Rebecca’s sexuality is directly linked with her father’s trafficking and financial exploitation and thus becomes a physical reminder to the Jews’ greed and commercial dealings. Relating her beauty with her father’s usury, serves as a warning against her alluring, yet dangerous presence. What Scott’s description of Rebecca’s sexy and rich attire seems to imply is that, as with Jewish usury, the exotic, sensual Jewess cannot receive social recognition due to her corrupting principle and consequently must be denounced and relegated to the margins of society.<sup>(11)</sup>

<13> Though *Ivanhoe* is partially set to distance the Jew from the ravenous figure of Shylock, Scott's rendering of Rebecca and her father reveals his ambiguous stance regarding the Jewish question. Though Scott alludes to the persecution suffered by Jews during the time of the novel, he does not fail to emphasize the Jews' "passive courage inspired by [their] love of gain" (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 69). Even though Scott's attempts at humanizing the Jew are irrefutable, the stereotype of the cowardly, miser Jew is detectable in the figure of Isaac of York. Isaac is mostly portrayed as a comic and cowardly figure, who dreads losing his fortune. The character of Isaac of York is a slightly improved version of Ebenezer Cruickshanks, a Jewish innkeeper appearing in Scott's 1814 *Waverley*, who places his greed above social and national loyalty. Scott clearly cannot abandon the accepted cultural image of the money driven Jew. Even in *Ivanhoe*, Scott finds refuge in traditional Jewish stereotypes, referring to Isaac's "aquiline nose" and his "piercing black eyes" (*Ivanhoe* 50). Scott focuses on these signs of physiognomy, which he deems peculiar to the Jewish people, to reveal the Jews' ugliness and inferiority (Page 11). Judith W. Page rightly observes that the "anxiety of the narrative voice in *Ivanhoe*" is amplified when we consider Scott's personal writing, where he continuously refers to Jews as "money-makers," "London Shylocks," "stock-jobbing Jews" and "pickpockets" (13-14). For example, in a letter to Joanna Baillie, Scott writes that "one does not naturally or easily combine with [the Jews'] habits and pursuits any great liberality of principle although certainly it may and I believe does exist in many individual instances. They are money-makers and money-brokers by profession and it is a trade which narrows the mind" (Scott, *Letters* 4: 478).<sup>(12)</sup> Furthermore, in his diary Scott observes that "after all, it is hard that the vagabond stock-jobbing Jews should, for their purposes, make such a shake of credit as now exists in London, and menace the credit of men trading on sure funds like Hurst and Robinson. It is just like a set of pickpockets, who raise a mob, in which honest folks are knocked down and plundered, that they may pillage safely in the midst of the confusion they have excited" (Lockhart 329). Page rightly notes that "Scott's personal writings amply demonstrate that his suspicions about Jews were related to his own financial woes" (13), yet I do not wish to dwell here on the psychological complexities that impelled Scott to project his own financial adventures and greed onto Jews. What is clear, however, is that the image of the Jew populating Scott's mind's eye is that of Shylock. Ultimately, the image that surfaces from Scott's private correspondence is of the Jew as a social vampire sucking the city dry for his pound of flesh.

<14> This contempt for the Jew's financial dealings and moral degeneracy is transmuted onto the Jewess's eroticized body and communicated via her provocative attire. Edgar Rosenberg comments that while Jewish men had been all along an object of hate, the Jewess "became an object of lust" (34). Page further observes that whereas the Jewish male was associated with physical ugliness, excess, questionable commercial relationships and a broken language, the Jewish woman was presented as mysterious and exotic (10). The image of the erotic Jewess was never intended to inspire sympathy, but was rather presented as another form of aspersion.

Through her exotic and rich attire, Scott depicts Rebecca as a woman on display. The undercurrent that runs throughout Scott's initial description of Rebecca is the unspoken accusation that she consciously parades her beauty and splendor for male admiration. Rebecca is presented as a woman who knowingly picked her eastern dress to emphasize her symmetrical form, deliberately leaving her clasps undone to enhance the prospect of her sensual beauty, which ultimately compromises her moral character.

<15> The connection between Rebecca's attire and moral fallibility becomes clearer when we consider the arguments raised against indecent dress during Scott's time. In 1802, John Bowles observes that a woman who consciously "makes an improper display of her person, may become an object of transient desire, but forfeits all title to respect" (13). He continues and remarks that the admiration for such a woman is mingled with contempt and espouses the realization that she is unfit "for the sacred duties of conjugal life" (*Remarks* 13). Two years prior to the publication of his *Remarks on Modern Female Manners*, Bowles associates "indecent modes of dress – or rather undress" with the dress of prostitutes and with moral bankruptcy (*Reflections* 72). He adamantly argues that "indecent modes of dress ... must [inevitably] prove an inexhaustible source of prostitution and debauchery" (*Remarks* 11-12). Dean Walter Blake Kirwan, in his 1814 *Sermons*, voices similar sentiments, viewing provocative dress as enervating and depraving social values. Even the fashionable guide *The Mirror of the Graces*, dedicated in its entirety to instruct its female readers in modest dress and to shun indecent and elaborate fashion, calls a woman who knowingly displays her charms, a "vain coquet" who deserves the contempt of her female and male friends (Anonymous 132). Hannah More, in her popular *Strictures*, names the "unchaste costume, the impure style of dress and that indelicate statue-like exhibition of the female figure" as an "instrument of corruption and decay" (1: 85-86). More continues her argument, stating that unchaste costume excites the "imagination, and the imagination thus excited, and no longer under the government of strict principle becomes the most dangerous stimulant of the passions; promotes a too keen relish for pleasure, teaching how to multiply its sources and inventing new pernicious modes of artificial gratification" (1: 86). The criticism against provocative dress and public manifestation of female sexuality emerged from the unequivocal belief that it would degenerate the nation and society into a state of unprincipled barbaric existence governed by passion alone. More and her peers strongly believed that uncontrollable appetites and loose morals, when encouraged and nourished, would revert back the English nation from its state of civilisation to a state of savagery. This belief stemmed from the power allocated to female modesty to tame the violent nature of man, during a period when women were perceived as the moral guardians of the nation.

<16> As Anne K. Mellor claims, many writers during the Romantic period embraced Hannah More's view of women as nourishing the moral and spiritual foundation of Britain (31). The

Englishwoman patriot was seen as the moral guide of the nation. It was her role as a domestic matron to soothe the temper of her husband, quench unlicensed desires in the hearts of her children and direct both husband and child in the virtuous path of Christian morality. The didactic writer Thomas Broadhurst argues that “a well-cultivated [woman possesses] a peculiar influence in society; and, by a sort of magic power, imparts to every feature of the moral character an indescribable charm ... bestowing graces, even upon those to whom nature has denied them” (Morris 5: 384). Broadhurst was joined by the likes of Jane West and Miss Hatfield, whose works on female conduct were extremely popular at the time. Miss Hatfield and West, amongst others, believed that the Englishwoman has the power to refine and polish the manners and tastes of society, and further the country’s advances in the art of civilization.<sup>(13)</sup> This power however was inexorably dependent upon female conduct. Reynald Morryson expounds that because “modesty is [the] native grace” of women “they must immediately inspire humility and gentleness in others; as they are accustomed to diffidence, they teach the blessing of liberality and a charitable judgment; their sympathy must add a charm to benevolence; and their cheerfulness, which never exceeds decorum, is the assurance of innocent pleasures, and the shame of all that is intemperate” (531). Morryson, like his contemporaries, associates social and cultural elevation with female chastity. It is through the cleanliness of the female body that her moral essence was judged and valued in social and national terms. If modesty thus allocated women a social power for improvement, female indecency and profligate fashion undermined that very power. Unchaste dress was deemed as inflaming passions over morals, indulging sexual appetites over refined temperance and thus directly responsible for the moral degeneracy of the nation.

<17> Within this context, Rebecca’s extravagant clothing renders the corrupting principles embedded in her Jewishness. Her presence is an immediate social threat that must be excoriated. From her initial introduction into the narrative, Rebecca’s beauty is marked as enticing and arousing illicit passions. The moment we encounter Rebecca, we are told she captured the eye of King John. Overcome by lust, the King wishes to appoint her as the queen of beauty and of love, ignoring Rebecca’s inferior social position as a Jew. This political scandal is ultimately avoided due to the council of the King’s advisory board, who diligently warn King John that by choosing a Jewess over a Christian beauty, he will be alienating the Saxons and the Normans. In this respect, Rebecca’s beauty and elaborate dress are bewitching, causing King John to overlook his national duties for the sake of selfish gratification. King John himself comments that “yonder Jewess must be the very model of that perfection whose charms drove frantic the wisest king that ever lived” (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 83). The narrative clearly marks Rebecca’s attractiveness as a dangerous political instigator that has the power to undermine national unity. Furthermore, it is Rebecca’s beauty that leads Brian de Bois-Guilbert to forsake his commitments as a Templar. Captivated by her charms, Brian de Bois-Guilbert seems simply to react to Rebecca’s good looks, deemed as the active agent in his infatuation and ultimate

demise (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 294). Even though the Templar's character is presented as dubious throughout, the narrative tone does not absolve Rebecca from guilt. Rather, King John and Brian de Bois-Guilbert come across as passive observers, unexpectedly transfixed by the foreign beauty. The narrative renders their actions as a response to something beyond themselves, thus leaving Rebecca's extravagant dress and alluring beauty to carry the blame for exciting the dormant passions in her Christian admirers.

<18> Ultimately, it is these corrupting powers, which render Rebecca as unsuitable to become the wife of Ivanhoe. Unlike Rebecca, Rowena is shielded from public inspections of her beauty. Her presence is rather one of modest repose, while Rebecca's sexuality is marked as inflaming unlicensed desires. Rebecca's presence nourishes passions, whereas Rowena's character possesses the power to tame the violence of her male surroundings. While Rowena successfully manages to persuade De Bracy to reconsider his plans of abduction, Rebecca's powers of persuasion fail, which eventually leads to the violent encounter between Ivanhoe and Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Cedric himself comments that "indeed [Rowena's] nobler and more generous soul may yet awaken the better nature which is torpid within [her future husband]" (Scott, *Ivanhoe* 222). Even though Rebecca's actions and moral compass are identical to that of her female counterpart, it is the perception of her body and of her physical existence, which mars her suitability to become Ivanhoe's life companion. Though both female figures are occasionally confused with one another in the novel, it is the choice of attire and public appearance, which set them apart. Self-display is deliberately dissociated with the respectable Rowena, but is rather imposed on the figure of the Jewess. It is the sexuality ascribed to the Jewish female body, which exposes her potential as the polluter of society. In the end, this is the difference between the fair and dark heroines in Scott's novel. Whereas Rowena has the power to tame the barbaric tendencies of the nation, Rebecca seems only to inflame them further.

<19> In *Ivanhoe*, female sexuality is described as primitive and barbaric through its mere association with the ancient race of the Jews, whereas modesty and introverted femininity are part of the national future Scott envisions. It can even be argued that female sexuality functions as an extension to the notion of the Jews as degenerate people. This notion of female sexuality being a hindrance to national progress has already been explored in Scott's first novel, *Waverley* (1814). Set during the Jacobite rising of 1745, *Waverley*, as with Scott's subsequent novels, comes to advocate notions of cultural inclusion. However, as in *Ivanhoe*, Scott sets the parameters of inclusion on notions of adaptability and progressive thinking, which he renders through the sexualized body of the female. As in *Ivanhoe*, we have the main protagonist torn between two female figures, the diffident Rose Bradwardine and the enchanting Flora Mac-Ivor. It is *Waverley's* marriage to Rose, which eventually allows for the social and political unity Scott predicts in the novel between highlanders and English, Tory

Jacobites and Hanoverian Whigs. This union, however, would not have been possible if Waverley would have married the enticing Flora. Scott links Flora's sexuality with the passion she has for her clan. Flora's exoticism and attractiveness are associated with her separatist social position. She is referred to as the, "wild beauty" and "fair enchantress" whose passion and loyalty to the highlanders enthralled Waverley and entices his romantic fantasies (Scott, *Waverley* 183). It is Flora's passionate commitment to her people and her unwillingness to forsake her heritage, which is the obstacle to the marriage and even to the possible union between the Scottish highlanders and the English. Consequently, it is not surprising that Scott chooses to rid the novel of Flora by sending her to a French convent, a literary solution that not only removes a romantic obstacle but also tames Flora's passionate character. As in *Ivanhoe*, the hero of Scott's first novel discovers that a suitable wife is one "destitute of the devoted enthusiasm of loyalty" (Scott, *Waverley* 400). Waverley comes to acknowledge Rose's shy refinement, whose "very soul is in home, and in the discharge of all those quiet virtues of which home is the centre" (Scott, *Waverley* 189). Rose is presented as the feminine ideal of domesticity, centering her existence on that of her husband. Scott himself notes in the text that Rose's husband "will be to her ... the object of all her care, solicitude and affection. She will see nothing, and connect herself with nothing but by him and through him" (Scott, *Waverley* 189). As with Rowena, it is Rose's subdued and passionless persona, rendered through her plain and unattractive body, which makes her a suitable wife.

<20> Scott clearly embraces the idea of the passionless domestic woman and her importance to national solidarity and identity. Furthermore, Rowena's character in *Ivanhoe* does not simply embody the notion regarding the domestic woman and domestic patriotism during Scott's age, but she helps cement British femininity in the nation's history, presenting the notion as a long-lasting national stereotype. In many ways, it is Rowena and Rose's lack of sexuality that allows for the national union envisioned in each of Scott's novels. Anne McClintock argues that "within patriarchal narratives, to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting male insemination of history, language and reason" (30). Within this framework, the passionless body of the female is simply a vessel for masculine conceptions of cultural and national identity. If female virginity thus allows the masculine insemination of identity, female sexuality ultimately represents its challenge. Standing for the opposite of passive virginity, female sexuality relates to an active body that knowingly and persistently defines itself in the face of adversary. As in the case of Rebecca and Flora Mac-Ivor, female sexuality is directly linked with the women's unyielding loyalty to their clans over national interest. Their sexual bodies are filled to the brim with a sense of self and belonging, and consequently unavailable for male approbation.<sup>(14)</sup> It is the female character's proclamation of identity, clearly marked on her body and via her enticing sexuality, which removes her from the male protagonist's reach. In both *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, female sexuality alludes to an earlier period in historical and social development. In *Waverley*, it is associated with the dying culture

of the highlanders and the passing notions of romance, whereas in *Ivanhoe* it is linked with the ancient children of Abraham. Regardless, in both novels female sexuality is rendered as natural and primitive rather than social and progressive. Female sexuality is, for Scott, a social hindrance and a threat to progress. In *Ivanhoe*, the erotic woman appears as transgressing the propriety of decorum, her body functioning not only as a symbol of a bygone age but also as the marker of social and economic transitions which pose a threat to the moral and sexual economy of the state. By tying Rebecca's body with impurity, commerce and violence, the Jewess's sexuality becomes a sign of the moral and economic bankruptcy that would befall England with the Jews admittance to society. Rebecca's bewitching beauty is for the hero a test and an obstacle he must overcome to guarantee the unity and safety of the forming English nation. Consequently, Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* represents an overflowing sexuality that must be abated and refused for the sake of national unity. As Fay argues Scott's medieval novel offers a fictional reaffirmation and formulation of Englishness at the expense of Jews and Jewish identity (217).<sup>(15)</sup> In the narrative formulation of Englishness, the self-exile of Isaac and Rebecca becomes a necessity to reconcile Scott's anxiety "over national identity and disruptive desire" (Fay 217).

#### Endnotes

(1)The image of the Jewess was not simply one of the eroticized other but she was also perceived as lacking piety and honor, as repressed and debased by the Jewish law (Valman 93; Ragussis 38-39).<sup>(^)</sup>

(2)The argument is reinforced in Michael Scrivener's latest study, *Jewish Representation in British Literature 1780-1840: After Shylock* (2011). Scrivener brings together Ragussis and Valman's views of Rebecca asserting that Rebecca's loyalty and Christian morality ultimately render her as a hybrid character, a "mediating figure" who successfully binds "together the Jewish and Christian worlds" (126).<sup>(^)</sup>

(3)It is worth noting that Scott's injunctions about Rebecca versus Rowena were ignored as William Thackeray's *Rebecca and Rowena* (1850) suggests, along with the numerous stage adaptations that followed the novel's publication.<sup>(^)</sup>

(4)For further discussion concerning Scott's nationalist's efforts in *Ivanhoe* consult Ragussis 89-129.<sup>(^)</sup>

(5)Though published in 1829, much of the groundwork for Cobbett's work had already appeared in the *Monthly Religious Tracks* between 1820 and 1821, which was later renamed *Cobbett's Monthly Sermons* (See Natrass 188).<sup>(^)</sup>

(6) Quotes from *Ivanhoe* are taken from A. N. Wilson's edition of the text, published by Penguin Books in 1984. (▲)

(7) The ostrich was a clear sign of the east. Matthew Dubourg (1819) notes that the ostrich was known for originating in the deserts of Africa and the pursuit of the ostrich was considered "one of the exercises in which the Arabs display the greatest art" (10); Also see under "Camelus: Black Ostrich" in Rees' 1819 *Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature* (vol. 34). In volume 36 of Rees' *Cyclopaedia*, a turban is defined as "the head-dress of most of the Eastern and Mahometan nations". To learn how the east influenced western dress throughout the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and particularly how the turban evolved into an iconic symbol of the east, consult Charlotte Jirousek's study. (▲)

(8) In chapter 5, describes Isaac wearing "a high square yellow cap of a peculiar fashion, assign to his nation to distinguish them from Christians" (50). (▲)

(9) Sharon Turner was only of three historical texts from which Scott got his medieval information. Scott himself claims in the Dedicatory Epistle to the novel that other than Turner he relied heavily on the historical accounts of Robert Henry and Joseph Strutt. It is probably from Henry or Strutt that Scott received the inaccurate impression that Anglo-Jews were ordered to wear a yellow cap (Tulloch 498). For example, in *The History of Great Britain*, Henry (1805) comments that under Anglo-Norman rule the Jews were forced to wear yellow caps to "distinguish them from other people" (6: 357). A similar argument is presented by Strutt (1842) in his *Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England*, where he remarks that the Jews during the Anglo-Norman period "were obliged to wear square caps, of a yellow colour, for distinction-sake" (1: 94). Both these writers refer to Charles Du Cange's *Glossarium Mediase*, which was published earlier in the eighteenth century. However, as Tulloch remarks, Du Cange clearly states that the yellow cap was an identifiable marker only in Poland, a fact both Strutt and Henry fail to observe (520, n. 47.31-33). (▲)

(10) This assumption is supported by the fact that Scott was fluent in Italian and was an avid reader of Italian poetry and history (Sutherland 28). (▲)

(11) By rendering Rebecca as an object of desire, tainted with impure sexuality and adorned with her father's material wealth, Scott seems to establish a subtle link between the Jews' usury and another social parasite in nineteenth-century Regency society, i.e. the prostitute. This is not to say that Scott deliberately attempts to portray Rebecca as a public woman, but he does seem to associate her with a woman on display. This connection becomes more plausible when we consider that Jews were indeed associated with the ills of prostitution. In a pamphlet published to promote the conversion of Jews to Christianity, the writer supposes that over four-hundred Jewish women "are the victims of ignorance and vice, wandering about the streets of

London to gain a precarious and miserable livelihood by the wages of prostitution” (London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews 32). Furthermore, Patrick Colquhoun (1806), while listing those who idly live on the income and labor of others, lists the Jews and prostitutes of London amongst those who falsely tempt passers-by with goods and pleasures (41). Thus, in the public eye, both the Jew and even the Jewess were associated with the prostitute and perceived as a social and financial leech, crawling the streets of London only to exploit the innocent and vulnerable.(^)

(12)In a separate letter to Archibald Constable [24 Aug 1813], Scott comments that “if your London Shylock wants a pound of flesh, it will fall to James B’s lot to find it, for my proposed noble surely never had an ounce, and John B. as little, and I have dwindled sadly under these tiritts and frights” (*Letters* 3: 327).(^)

(13)In *Letters to a Young Lady*, Jane West (1806) notes that women possess “so much influence that if they were uniformly to exert it in the manner which the times require, we might produce a most happy change in the morals of the people” (2: 484). Hatfield claims that “it is an indisputable truth, that the art of refining and polishing the manners and taste of society, is exclusively possessed by the fair-sex: and that the further any country advances in, and becomes distinguished for, civilization of sentiment and elegance of manner, the more the prevalence of female influence is discovered amongst them” (Morris 5: 29). Lucy Aikin’s 1810 *Epistles to Women* further serves to strengthen this perception of women as the social custodians of moral virtue. The notion is best summarized by Mrs. William Parks’ argument that whereas “the world corrupts; home should refine” (Morris 6: 298).(^)

(14)It is worth noting that Rebecca’s sexuality strongly overlaps with other Oriental stereotypes of female eroticism, whose sexuality was perceived as a threat to western bourgeois ideologies of domesticity and an object for future potential subjugation. In *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture: A Reconsideration*, Piya Pal-Lapinski argues that the female’s exotic and sexualized body destabilizes “constructions of domesticity, imperialism, and nationalism” (128). The sexual female fails to submit to male authority and to restrict herself to the domestic domain. Consequently, her presence is perceived as undermining gender hierarchies, disrupting cultural and racial identities. Within this context it is worth noting that Rebecca, in more than one instance, assumes the heroic domain allocated to her male counterparts rather than the domestic sphere of virtuous passivity.(^)

(15)In her reading of Grace Aguilar’s *The Vale of Cedars* (1850), Fay finds a national model and a worthy retort to that offered by Scott. Fay suggests that Aguilar deliberately works against Scott’s *Ivanhoe* by rejecting the image of the sexual Jewess and moving away from his definitions of national identity. Aguilar rather presents the argument that national character is not determined by religious beliefs. Marie defies Scott’s Rebecca in the sense that her

Jewishness is not inscribed on her body. In name, manner and appearance, Marie is the same as the other females in the novels. It is only in the privacy of her home, that Marie's Jewishness can be noted. Unlike Rebecca, there is no binary between body and spirit, but rather Marie's exterior communicates her spiritual purity. What was thus argued against Rebecca and that which denied Rebecca her status as an Englishwoman, is here subverted. The fact that a noble Englishman falls in love with Marie shows she is worthy to be an Englishwoman. It is rather Marie who refuses to assume the title as it will cost her, her heritage. Contrary to the message that can be traced in *Ivanhoe*, *The Vale of Cedars* clearly rejects assimilation as self-negation. ([△](#))

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