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Conclusion

Fiction's Afterlives: Character Migration and Reading Memory

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Résumés

English Français

The migration of characters across literary and paraliterary texts is quite routinely discussed in theories of intertextuality, in postmodernist poetics, and in the critical discourse surrounding transmedia. This paper, conversely, looks at characters who fail to effect any migration and who fall away from reading memory (both individual and collective). Drawing in particular on the fortunes of Walter Scott and his different literary posterities, and with reference also to related points that emerge in the work of poets from Wordsworth to Alice Oswald and novelists from Henry James to Howard Jacobson, it reflects on the relevance of a concern with literary character in an age dominated by talk about avatars and digital platforms. Reference is also made to relevant criticism in the work of critics like Jerome McGann, Catherine Belsey, and others, in an effort to bring together questions concerning reading memory, literary character, and fictions' afterlives.

La migration des personnages à travers les textes littéraires et paralittéraires est très fréquemment abordée par les théories de l'intertextualité, par la poétique postmoderne et le discours critique sur la transmédiabilité. À l'inverse, cet article considère les personnages qui n'ont pas réussi leur migration et qui disparaissent de la mémoire - collective et individuelle - des lecteurs. S'inspirant plus particulièrement du sort de Walter Scott et de ses diverses postérités littéraires, et en se référant également à des questions du même ordre qui émergent des œuvres de poètes et de romanciers allant de Wordsworth à Alice Oswald et de Henry James à Howard Jacobson, il s'interroge sur la pertinence de cette préoccupation pour le personnage littéraire à une époque où dominent les discussions sur les avatars et les plateformes numériques. Il fait également référence aux théories critiques connexes dans les écrits de Jerome McGann, Catherine Belsey, et autres, dans un souci de regrouper les questions touchant à la mémoire de lecture, aux personnages littéraires, et à la survie de la fiction.



Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Walter Scott, personnages littéraires, migration des personnages, mémoire de lecture, survie de la fiction, Alice Oswald

Keywords: Walter Scott, literary characters, character migration, reading memory, fiction's afterlives, Alice Oswald

Texte intégral

Are you sure we can revive Candide?

Mark Ravenhill, *Candide*

1 The purpose of this article is to draw attention not to the migration of characters across literary and paraliterary texts and contexts but to their *non*-migration. The starting point is Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820): more precisely, my childhood experience of reading this novel in its abridged form. In recognition of the unorthodoxy of this starting point, two remarks are necessary. Firstly, abridgement is already one important conveyance by which literary characters migrate. The transposition of literary figures from their fixity in classic texts to the freedoms taken with their worlds and their actions in adaptations for children is quite probably the first form of character migration encountered in our reading lives. This leads to my second remark, concerning the fact that in what follows there may seem to be inordinate reliance on personal experience and anecdote. If I refer to the impact of abridgements on my own reading life it is because reflection on the migration of literary characters would be disingenuous, in my view, to keep up the contrivance of modes of critique disaffiliated from the enchantment that the act of reading can exert upon the mind. The migration of literary characters from the original texts to abridgements and other forms of adaptation is a testament to their impact on the imagination and to their power to propel this enchantment to other contexts and toward different readerships. In the face of this, for the interpretative response to that to react in line with the ethics of impersonal criticism instituted by T.S. Eliot and many other critics since seems to be an inappropriate framing of the issues. Indeed, the very fact that the notion of character is being brought back here, when the more credible talk in literary criticism has long proceeded in the direction of *actants* or subjectivity (to name just two alternative conceptions), is telling. If anything, it corresponds well with the study in other contexts of identification with avatars and of immersivity in storyworlds, about which more will be said later.

2 To take this more personal line is not to fall into what W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley long ago called "the affective fallacy." There is no intention here to indulge "confusion between the poem and its *results*" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 31), or to take as a calibrating rod anything like "the report of some readers" of "vivid images, intense feelings, or heightened consciousness": not least because the view does remain viable that "in criticism there would seem to be not much room for synaesthesia or the touchy little attitudes of which it is composed" (45). That said, any inquiry into character migration must surely, at some stage, pause to dwell on how it is that literary characters—these textual constructs that appear to have a preternatural capacity to people imaginations—can prompt, across their various transpositions, the prolonged sympathies, antipathies, and (dis)equilibrated "appetencies" (Richards *passim*) that they do. For instance, the reflexes of the imagination that criticism can end up disciplining invite us, if we are aficionados of detective fiction in books and television, to follow and compare the fortunes of Conan Doyle's hero in 21st-century settings, as in *Elementary* and in *Sherlock*, or to watch *Endeavour* in order to return to the youth of Colin Dexter's (and ITV's) Inspector Morse. There is an uncomplicated pleasure there which literary criticism and theory might be embarrassed to address. An unembarrassed literary criticism, however, could be a very fine thing. Q. D. Leavis intuited this long ago in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (the third chapter of that book, "Author and Reader," is direct on the question of character). Virginia Woolf had the

same intuition across *The Common Reader*, not least in the title essay in that work (1–2). Within commentary on literature it is useful to know when it might be called for to be true to this intuition. This is just as much a matter for fine discernment as judging when it might be better to write in the mode of the critical *essay* rather than the critical *paper*. Both forms of discernment may, in fact, be opportune when speaking about character migration.

3 Hence, anecdotally and without excessive embarrassment, to *Ivanhoe*. In my childhood, Scott's title came up for me in many exchanges of banter involving my first name, but it also meant that abridgements and fuller editions of the novel were thrust upon my young attentions. This made for an early initiation into how literary characters can maintain some valence of coherence across their diverse migrations. It was also a good way to learn the lesson that some migrations will be more appealing than others. *Ivanhoe*, Rowena, Rebecca, Cedric the Saxon, Isaac the Jew, and Boris de Bois-Guilbert were vivid and reinvigorated in some retellings, but leaden and misconceived in other abridgements. Across these encounters my favourite remained the *Ivanhoe* issue in the *Classics Illustrated* series. The series, which interestingly has been relaunched recently, featured comics based on narratives by such authors as Scott himself, Dumas, Dickens, Twain, Hugo, Stevenson, Verne, Wells, and others. To many an amenable childhood mind, it made for an initiation into literature's compulsions. However disciplined the reactions to literature's compulsions later become, enduring effects can emerge from the fascination of such retellings. The effects are prompted by a sentiment that is utterly unassuming yet deeply challenging to analysis, assuming analysis cares for it at all: wonder. Despite formulations by figures like Wolfgang Iser (1978) about the act of reading or Elizabeth Freund (1987) about the return of the reader, literary criticism remains ambivalent about wonder, or about what is designated by the synonymous words and phrases that might be ventured instead: *magic*, *absorption*, *engrossment*, *being lost to the world*, *losing oneself in a book*, *finding oneself in a book*. There are catchier alternatives for such terms now, with a critical cachet of their own: *immersivity*, *immediacy*, *hypermediacy*, even *hyperimmediacy*. But what remains common across these different designations is that they are embedded in the beguilement exerted by fiction and by fictional characters. And it must be admitted that the practice of literary criticism has an extraordinary tendency to assume regard and even love for fictional worlds and the characters inhabiting those worlds without doing very much with that assumption. For even if one were to suppress the suspicion voiced by one major contemporary novelist about "mismusing" in literary criticism (Kundera 140)—and hence about ambivalence over 'wonder' as envisaged above—it is evident that any assumption within criticism of regard for fictional worlds and characters does not associate itself with a disposition to bring this attachment very much to the fore or render it an object of study. Unexamined wonder is something literary critics may value privately but are shy to share. It seems unprofessional and non-academic to factor it into critical inquiry. That would be, as literary criticism seems to think, a little too self-revealing and unironic.

4 Consequently critical orthodoxy will be nonplussed by critical commentary open to recollections of finding *Ivanhoe*'s depictions of jousting enthralling and by a consequent interest in the pageantry and armoury of medieval tournaments, or by the willingness to follow adaptations of Scott's novel in cinema, television, and other media, or by the amused recording of references within popular culture and beyond to Scott's novel (it is curious to see, for instance, how many hotels around the world bear the name of Scott's hero). In effect, however, it is all a practical exemplification of how character migration exerts such outcomes too. If that is so, is it seemly to mention that within three days of leaving the conference that prompted this article I chanced upon a pub in the town of Honfleur called *Ivanhoe*? (It was closed.) Is it seemlier to mention that a day later I happened upon Jerome McGann's *The Scholar's Art* (2006), which devotes a sizeable section to a "game space," both conjectural and actual, called *Ivanhoe*? Here is McGann on that game space:

[Y]ou start by imagining what it looks like to play or implement a session of IVANHOE, with or without a digital environment. A group of people, two at a minimum, agree to collaborate on thinking about how to reimagine a particular work, say *Ivanhoe*. The agreement is that each person will try to reshape the given work so that it is understood or seen in a new way. The reshaping process in IVANHOE is immediate, practical, and performative. That's to say, the interpreters intervene in the textual field and alter the document(s) by adding, reordering, or deleting text, and by marking patterns of relation that these interventions generate. The interpretive moves are meant to expose meaningful features of the textual field that were unapparent in its original documentary state. Interpreters will also look for ways that their interventions might use or fold in with the interpretive moves of others working with the collaborative session of IVANHOE. (158)

- 5 Both examples—the *Ivanhoe* pub and “digital IVANHOE” (158)—provide evidence of text and character migration. But there will be little doubt about which of the two is likelier to be accorded critical consequence (though the question on which is likelier to exert the greater popular appeal allows more competitiveness). In any case, keeping an audit of these very diverse penetrations of character migration does not make for solid critical practice. By contrast, it is critically acceptable to note that Scott's novel was itself based on preceding allographies within the cultural imaginary of knight errantry, so that it is imbued with the same motivation that led to diverse representations of medievalism in Malory, Spenser, Cervantes, and pre-Raphaelitism (to name just a few of the relevant intertextual contexts). Similarly, it is not incongruous to note that *Ivanhoe* would have evolved from the same kind of assiduous reading that Scott put toward his ‘Essay on Chivalry’: for recording the reading life of an author is a more decorous critical exercise than reminiscences on a critic's own reading life. Certainly, what Scott's “Essay on Chivalry” and indeed his “Essay on Romance” (1834) demonstrate is that character migration can occur across literature not only when retelling, adaptation, or remediation are attempted, but also when an author's imagination is fired by the figures encountered in his reading to engender, in turn, characters that refract that reading and the galleries of *dramatis personae* encountered therein. Encountering these two essays of Scott is, indeed, a revelation, for not only does he emerge as a remarkably fine and erudite critical commentator—appreciably more so than is usually suspected—but it becomes evident that his own fictional way with chivalric romance transposed a creative impetus: one derived—*migrated*, one could say—from living in the pages of authors he grew to know discerningly well. A short list of some of the authors he speaks about there could include Tacitus, Robert de Brunne (Robert Mannyng), Jean de Joinville, Froissart, Chaucer, Ascham, Brantôme (Pierre de Bourdeille), François de la Noue, Jonson, Milton, Fletcher, Cervantes, Thomas Percy, Johnson, Claude Fauchet, Joseph Ritson, and Byron (among many others). The list suffices to attest to Scott's fascination with chivalry and romance, even if it does not even start to indicate the capaciousness of his reading in these genres, the sharpness of his observations, or his immersion in English and French authors who—the examples in the above list partially excepted—appear very arcanelly antiquarian now: “Pasquier, Du Tillet, Le Gendre...” (*Essays on Chivalry, Romance and the Drama* 98). Against the wealth of antiquarian knowledge evident in these essays it can almost seem that novels like *Ivanhoe* or *The Talisman* represent a falling away of his critical imagination to the fancy of latter-day minstrelsy. In contrast, a novel like *The Antiquary* (1816) or *Old Mortality* (1816) or indeed the *Reliquiae Trotcosienses* (2004)—a posthumously published text that is, fascinatingly, both a catalogue of his antiquarian collections and also a fictional text satirizing the antiquarian spirit—is more keyed, if in an ironizing manner, to the intellectual spirit that drives the *Essays on Chivalry, Romance & the Drama*.
- 6 A proper appraisal of that side to Scott's work would however require a different paper. Here, in further indulgence of anecdote, it may move the argument more purposively to return to *Ivanhoe* to note that in Scott's narrative this name—*Ivanhoe*—properly designates an ancient Saxon seat rather than the protagonist of the novel, who is in fact called, rather less heroically, Wilfred. As a child I realized with disdain that

many adults purporting to discuss the novel overlooked this. That seemed quite shocking at the time, when I understood less than I do now about different degrees of imperviousness to storyworlds. For the truth of the matter is this: already then, nobody was reading Scott. Scott's novel may have been vivid for me but it was sterile for others. That I was reading it at all occurred because of the odd predeterminism channelled through my first name, and because of the singular effects and capacities exerted through character migration in abridgements and adaptations. Hence, the happening upon literature on the basis of what abridgements of *Ivanhoe* instigated—that is, the finding of a character already vividly enough alive in a child's imagination but also vibrant in cinematic and TV adaptations—was a very personal trajectory based on a character who in fact had not really migrated very lastingly for others or within culture more broadly. In this respect it is ironic that the legend inscribed on the shield of Wilfred of Ivanhoe—let's call him that—is *Desdichado*. In the novel this is inaccurately glossed as “Disinherited” rather than as the more exact “unhappy” or “benighted,” making it possible for the armorial bearing on the hero's shield to feature an uprooted tree: in fact, there are not nearly as many uprootings of the character or as much transplantation and grafting into other work and media as one might expect (one significant exception being Gérard de Nerval's 1853 poem, “El Desdichado”). And when the transplantation does happen, some key characters in the novel do not migrate well at all or do not even feature: notably Ulrica, *Ivanhoe*'s own madwoman in the attic (or, in this case, in the castle keep), who is kept entirely absent, for instance, from the 1952 Hollywood production of *Ivanhoe* directed by Richard Thorpe.

7 Ivanhoe and the dramatis personae around him, then, are characters who do not migrate lastingly. With the possible exception of the character of Locksley, who helps to boost the legend of Robin Hood in the nineteenth century, as Stephen Knight points out (110ff.), the resonances of the book do not extend to anything that we might call a migrated cast. The fandom phenomenon, it is safe to say, is unattached to *Ivanhoe* now, though its prefiguration in Scott's own time would have responded differently. It is improbable that schools anywhere in the world today would prescribe *Ivanhoe* as a set text. That would make the teaching of literature, which is always fraught, harder still. And yet, in another sense, it is astounding that it should be so. In one-page information about the respective author included at the end of every *Classics Illustrated* comic—it can be noted in passing that this was a very worthy series, nurtured on the spirit that made the teaching of a “Great Books” course a staple of the US college system before that tradition itself went the way of *Ivanhoe*—the fact that readerships Europewide would tingle at the news of a new novel by Scott was explained in this curious way: “Scott was a sensation, not only in America, but all over Europe. It was said that in Berlin, Germany everyone went to bed with *Waverley* under the pillow and read *Rob Roy* while sipping the morning chocolate” (*Ivanhoe, Classics Illustrated* [n. pag]). For it is a fact that Scott catalysed the European novel. It is impossible to think of Manzoni without his influence, for instance. William Hazlitt, writing of Scott in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), acknowledged Scott's resonance for his contemporaries. For the purposes of the theme of this collection of essays it is particularly interesting that Hazlitt remarked that Scott himself must have found it “amusing” to see that “everyone stands forward to applaud [...] eager to extol his favourite characters louder, to understand them better, than everybody else [...] opposing character to character, striving to surpass each other in the extravagance of their encomiums” (125–126). Appreciatively, however, he adds: “[Scott's] Novels are like the betrothed of our hearts, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and we are jealous that any one should be as much delighted or as thoroughly acquainted with their beauty as ourselves” (126). More particularly of interest to reflections on character is Hazlitt's respect for Scott's abilities in “conjur[ing] up the actual people he has to deal with, or as much as he could get of them, in ‘their habits as they lived,’” such that Scott “has conversed with the living and the dead, and let them tell their story their own way” (133). The consequence is that “perfect representations of human character or fanciful belief come thronging back upon our imaginations” (134): primed, one could say, for character migration. Hazlitt, unconvinced by Scott's poetry,

is in no doubt about the fiction: “His works are almost like a new edition of human nature” (137). Scott’s characters live, Hazlitt reports, because the invention to be found in his brand of historical fiction—a writing that retains resonances today, since Hilary Mantel has twice been laurelled with the Booker Prize for her recreation of the Tudor age and of the character of Thomas Cromwell especially—demonstrates that “facts are better than fiction, that there is no romance like the romance of real life, and that, if we can but arrive at what men feel, do, and say in striking and singular situations, the result will be ‘more lively, audible, and full of vent’” (133) Consequently, for Hazlitt, Scott “is a writer reconciling all the diversities of human nature to the reader. He [...] treats of the strength or infirmity of the human mind, of the virtues or vices of the human breast, as they are to be blended in the whole race of mankind” (138).

8 One reads this today with some bemusement. Reflections on character in literature do not lead, by natural and unforced ways, to Scott. Yet in discoursing on historiographic metafiction in our time and the migration of characters from history to various artefacts and creations, it is easy to overlook that it is on Scott’s breakthroughs and his migrating of characters from the historical contexts in which he encountered or (re)imagined them that much of literature’s subsequent and revisioning chronicling is based. Paul Harvey, the first editor of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, had full and loving entries to the works of Scott, with the space devoted to each novel being quite of a length with the space afforded to each play of Shakespeare (the entry for *The Talisman*, for instance, is almost as long as that for *Macbeth*). That changed by the time Margaret Drabble, who admits “a judicious and tactful pruning of entries for the many works of Sir Walter Scott,” came to edit the *Companion* (Drabble vii). Yet it is true that even now, something of Scott’s impact on other writers survives. He appears in strange places, as does *Ivanhoe*. In 1994, for instance, Allan Massie puts Scott in his novel *The Ragged Lion*, while in 2006, a work by Christopher Volger recreates Boris de Bois-Guilbert and Rebecca in a manga universe: more than a century and a half, then, after William Thackeray wrote his spoof *Rebecca and Rowena* (1850), which includes such splendid chapter titles as “St George for England,” “Ivanhoe to the Rescue,” “Ivanhoe Redivivus” and “Ivanhoe the Widower.” Bernard A. Drew, in his delightful *Literary Afterlife: The Posthumous Continuations of 325 Authors’ Fictional Characters*, cites also a novel by Simon Hawke, *The Ivanhoe Gambit*, for the *Ivanhoe* entry (57–58). But these are scant reappearances for someone whom even Hazlitt was already damning with faint praise as he was sizing up the spirit of his age, which Scott had done so much to bring into being. Hazlitt had in fact begun his comments on Scott with the description “the lord of the ascendant”; ominously, he added the words “for the time being” (123). He echoes this later, saying that Scott “secured the admiration of the public with the probable reversion of immortality,” for Hazlitt, like many of his contemporaries, was disquieted by how prolific Scott was: “He writes as fast as [his public] can read” and “he is always in the public eye” (137). Hazlitt does add that “[Scott] does not write himself down” and “we do not tire of him” (137), but the damaging implication has been conveyed. These are not attributes that easily make for immortality: especially for someone whom Hazlitt was not above acknowledging as “a *Modern Antique*” (128; emphasis in the original).

9 It is at this stage that it is worth noting that six years after Hazlitt was writing these words, Scott, the author, himself became himself a character of a work of literature. The context is poetry, which bears its own migrations of characters and authors, just as much as the novel, film, TV, games, or the other current multimodal affordances. In 1831, Wordsworth visited Scott at Abbotsford just after Benjamin William Crombie prepared a lithograph of the novelist, in which Scott looks rather strained. Scott had suffered a stroke and was to leave his seat in Abbotsford in the hope of a restorative time in Naples. Wordsworth captures the moment, migrating the novelist (and poet)—the very one who had moved entire casts of characters from history and antiquarianism—to a sonnet that is both poignant and noble about the prospect of greatness and eminence receding from sight:

A trouble, not of clouds, or weeping rain,
 Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light
 Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height:
 Spirits of Power, assembled there, complain
 For kindred Power departing from their sight;
 While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
 Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
 Lift up your hearts, ye Mourners! for the might
 Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes;
 Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue
 Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows,
 Follow this wondrous Potentate. Be true,
 Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
 Wafting your Charge to soft Parthenope!

10 Scott did return to Abbotsford but died there a year later. The entire episode with Wordsworth and Scott is powerfully documented in Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (2011). Certainly, Scott's centrality to literary and cultural memory must have seemed impregnable at the time. It is, however, by no means secure now. Even in Scottish universities, it is mostly electively that he is studied. Elsewhere, it does not appear that he features significantly in undergraduate curricula for the novel. In the bookshops of Hay-on-Wye complete sets of Scott's novels can be found quite easily, a sign of his impact's dereliction rather than of its desirability. There is something quite affecting in seeing characters and authors who had lit up the readerly imagination of an entire continent recede so irrecoverably from view and urgency. In any study attending to successfully migrated characters and to remediated works, some thought for those figures consigned to stasis and mustiness is therefore appropriate.

11 The following exercise may bring home what is at stake in that. In his reflections on Scott, Hazlitt wrote a passage that was well-known in its time and which rhapsodically celebrated Scott's characters, their migration to the consciousness of his age, and their fixity in the age's spirit. To read the passage now is to carry out an exercise testing the enduring effects of the imprint of characters upon the transhistorical readerly imaginary and thence, perhaps, to character migration. The quotation is necessarily long:

There is (first and foremost, because the earliest of our acquaintance) the Baron of Bradwardine, stately, kind-hearted, whimsical, pedantic: and Flora MacIvor (whom even we forgive for her **Jacobitism**), the fierce Vich Ian Vohr, and Evan Dhu, constant in death, and Davie Gellatly roasting his eggs or turning his rhymes with restless volubility, and the two stag-hounds that met Waverley, as fine as ever Titian painted, or Paul Veronese. Then there is old Balfour of Burley, brandishing his sword and his Bible with fire-eyed fury, trying a fall with the insolent, gigantic Bothwell at the 'Change-house, and vanquishing him at the noble battle of Loudon-hill; there is Bothwell himself, drawn to the life: proud, cruel, selfish, profligate, but with the love-letters of the gentle Agnes (written thirty years before) and his verses to her memory found in his pocket after his death. In the same volume of *Old Mortality* is that lone figure, like a figure in Scripture, of the woman sitting on the stone at the turning to the mountain, to warn Burley that there is a lion in his path; and the fawning Claverhouse, beautiful as a panther, smooth-looking, blood-spotted; and the fanatics, Macbriar and Mucklewrath, crazed with zeal and sufferings; and the inflexible Morton and the faithful Edith, who refused to 'give her hand to another while her heart was with her lover in the deep and dead sea.'

And in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* we have Effie Deans (that sweet, faded flower) and Jeanie, her more than sister, and old David Deans, the patriarch of St. Leonard's Crags, and Butler, and Dumbiedikes, eloquent in his silence, and Mr. Bartoline Saddle-tree and his prudent helpmate, and Porteous swinging in the wind, and Madge Wildfire, full of finery and madness, and her ghastly mother. Again, there is Meg Merrilies, standing on her rock, stretched on her bier with 'her head to the east,' and Dirk Hatterick (equal to Shakespear's Master Barnardine), and Glossin, the soul of an attorney, and Dandie Dinmont, with his terrier-pack and his pony Dumple, and the fiery Colonel Mannerling, and the modish old

counsellor Pleydell, and Dominie Sampson? and Rob Roy (like the eagle in his eyry), and Baillie Nicol Jarvie, and the inimitable Major Galbraith, and Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and Die Vernon, the best of secret-keepers. And in the Antiquary, the ingenious and abstruse Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck, and the old beadsman Edie Ochiltree, and that preternatural figure of old Edith Elspeith, a living shadow, in whom the lamp of life had been long extinguished, had it not been fed by remorse and 'thick-coming' recollections; and that striking picture of the effects of feudal tyranny and fiendish pride, the unhappy Earl of Glenallan; and the Black Dwarf and his friend Habbie of the Heughfoot (the cheerful hunter), and his cousin Grace Armstrong, fresh and laughing like the morning; and the Children of the Mist, and the baying of the blood-hound that tracks their steps at a distance (the hollow echoes are in our ears now), and Amy and her hapless love, and the villain Varnev, and the deep voice of George of Douglas-and the immovable Balafre, and Master Oliver the Barber in *Quentin Durward* – and the quaint hurnour of the *Fortunes of Nigel*, and the comic spirit of *Peveiril of the Peak* – and the fine old English romance of *Ivanhoe*. (vol. 11, 63-64)

12 By the time the reference to *Ivanhoe* is reached, today's most avid readers, counting how many of the forty or so characters in the passage they recognize, are probably struggling to go beyond double figures. Five to eight is a more typical tally. The interval spent reading the inventory of these supposedly timeless characters of Scott, as Hazlitt saw it, brings to an all too temporary awareness literary creations who will never again be encountered in one's reading life. Resurrected here, they recede again, never to be part of the galleries of migrated characters. Yet alongside this stark truth is that fact that these were characters who seemed immortal to Hazlitt's readerships. There were readers in Scott's time whose imagination was peopled by these figures. In what qualifies as the fandom of the time, these characters were excitedly discussed and their fortunes pored over and remembered. It could not too fancifully be asked: where do characters, such characters, go when they fall from view? What happens when the resonating characters of the past become unrecognized? Are such characters forever dead, or is some form of revival conceivable?

13 Contemporary poetry affords the context for one answer to that question. In *Memorial* (2012), the poet Alice Oswald provides a response to this kind of questioning. Characters who die can go, in her work, to an "oral cemetery" (2): that is, if they are fortunate and *are* remembered. *Memorial* contains portraits of 214 people, or rather characters, who bear such names as Ophelstes, Agastrophus, and Puraichmes in reflection of their prior presence in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Oswald has written a poem peopled by the characters in Homer we had forgotten: the names of the fallen, the dead, who are easily overlooked in an unfocused reading of the epics but who she herself has commemorated in a poem of significant violence *and* sensitiveness, shot through with an inclusive ethics that goes beyond the pieties of difference invoked in contemporary literary criticism. Oswald is clear-minded about the fact that literary characters are forgotten in just the same way that living characters in our lives can be forgotten. This stanza, with the delicate effects that play on leaves' pertinence to a "postprint" age (Hayles and Jenkins *passim*), but with leaves understood also as a trope to capture death and its depredations, is a good example of that:

Like leaves who could write a history of leaves
 The wind blows their ghosts to the ground
 And the spring breathes new leaf into the woods
 Thousands of names thousands of leaves
 When you remember them remember this
 Dead bodies are their lineage
 Which matter no more than the leaves. (Oswald 73)

14 Oswald's instruction to memory is that paradoxical thing: an injunction on how to remember those we have already forgotten and who beget only more forgotten dead, all mattering only as much as decaying leaves. Her foreword describes *Memorial* as "a bipolar poem made of similes and short biographies of soldiers": a "vocative poem" which speaks "directly to the dead" in "an attempt to remember people's names and

lives without the use of writing” (1–2). A song, then, of the dead, for the dead, seeking to speak with the dead: in the form of a “Greek lament [...] with memories and similes laid side by side: an antiphonal account of man in his world” (2). And it is Hector, whom everyone does remember, and who in the poem is described through a projective anachronism that does not, of itself, guarantee second life—“Like a man rushing in leaving his motorbike running”—who brings up the last of these characters:

And Hector died like everyone else
 He was in charge of the Trojans
 But a spear found out the little patch of white
 Between his collarbone and his throat
 Just exactly where a man’s soul sits
 Waiting for the mouth to open
 He always knew it would happen. (71-72)

- 15 Hector, much migrated to other works of art before this, lives again and dies again here: just the same yet differently, brought to a shudder of inaction that contrasts with the leaping beginning of the poem, when

Protesilaus
 A focused man who hurried to darkness
 [...]
 [...] died in mid-air jumping to be first ashore
 [...]
 Podarcus his altogether less impressive brother
 Took over command but that was long ago
 He’s been in the black earth now for thousands of years. (13)

- 16 With Oswald’s *Memorial*, Protesilaus and his brother and many of the other dead men in Homer—his *textmates*, so to speak—jump back out of the black earth, only to die again and remain figured in an inexorable passage to oblivion. And even so, they only come back *if we in fact read the poem*. This simple fact bears emphasis. Those forgotten characters in an immemorial poem, the *Iliad*, who are unmigrated to any work: who would bring them forth to literature or popular culture when one could have Hector and Achilles instead? They return in Oswald’s poetry, if only to have their receding recorded, their oblivion registered. Even then, however, this is not the whole story. It does not tell of the fact that to witness Oswald reading this poem in conference or in public, with all her body tight with the physicality of memory as she speaks it out in its entirety without the book to hand, is to witness the acceptance of a demand of the ethics of recall. Characters in an Oswald performance migrate to a space that is paratextual and paramediatic, atypical yet present to the mind in its immateriality. The mind is thereby able to possess it, seize it, linger in it, so that the listener become aware—as with *Memorial*—of the pathos and poignancy of characters who may go unremembered even after the intensity of such an encounter.

- 17 Can one, therefore, mourn for literary characters? It has happened: Dickens’ readers wept on the departure of Little Nell in the *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), as George Eliot did while writing the pages of Maggie Tulliver’s death. But what Oswald is doing is different. She seeks to commemorate and keep alive the depopulated spaces, once teeming in the imaginary, that Eco speaks of in *On Literature* (2005). This critical passage about the migrations of literary characters bears, in important ways, upon textual mortality as well as textual immortality, and is worth quoting in full:

Characters migrate. We can make statements about literary characters because what happens to them is recorded in a text, and a text is like a musical score. It is true that Anna Karenina commits suicide in the same sense that it is true that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is in C minor (and not in F major, like the Sixth) and begins with G, G, G, E Flat. But certain literary characters—not all of them by any means—leave the text that gave birth to them and migrate to a zone in the universe we find very difficult to delimit. Narrative characters migrate, when they are lucky, from text to text, and it is not that those who do not migrate are ontologically

different from their more fortunate brethren; it is just that they have not had the luck to do so, and we do not encounter them again. (8)

18 There are various issues to note here. The provocation prompted by the suggestion that Anna Karenina's ontology is quite the same as the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony will need to be ignored. It would need a longer space than this essay affords to address the relevant points concerning how that might intersect with reflections by Kant, Meinong, Brentano, Quine, Kripke, Nagel, and others on fiction as "untruth" and "conceptual abstraction" (Cohn 2), and on non-being, reference, and the unreality of fictions (Crittenden *passim*). Instead I am interested here in that little phrase—"not all of them by any means"—as it becomes a reference to characters who do not migrate and who are not remembered, not encountered again, some of whom Oswald is trying to memorialize in her poem. For intertextual relations with other texts about the forgotten are what suggest themselves here. The tenderness rendered in Oswald's commemoration to the vitality of Protesilaus that is no more and that never detained readers, in any case, for more than a few moments of their reading lives (more closely focused as those lives tend to be on the accounts of the more illustrious textmates: Hector, Achilles, Odysseus) is another instance of what is experienced by the character of Stransom in Henry James's short story "The Altar of the Dead" (1895). Stransom, it is reported, had "a mortal dislike ... to lean anniversaries" (James 450). The problem there is that Stransom mourns with pathological comprehensiveness, building an altar in a dilapidated chapel within a cemetery that he prepares in order that he may commemorate all his dead: with one exception, the one figure he will not mourn and who is not by the fact of his singularity the only feature that provides the dramatic action in this most odd and yet most vital of James's tales about death and haunting. Stransom's pathology arises from a uxoria that extends beyond his wife's death and is unrelieved by any Orphic opportunity. Gradually, however, he does light a candle for *all* his dead at his altar, commemorating everyone with the following result:

What those who passed or lingered saw was simply the most resplendent of the altars called suddenly into vivid usefulness, with a quiet elderly man, for whom it evidently had a fascination, often seated there in a maze or a doze; but half the satisfaction of the spot for this mysterious and fitful worshipper was that he found the years of his life there, and the ties, the affections, the struggles, the submissions, the conquests, if there had been such, a record of that adventurous journey in which the beginnings and the endings of human relations are the lettered mile-stones. (459)

19 This attempt at total memory has a morbidity to it that Oswald's poem does not have, but it prompts the realisation that what the experience in *Memorial* poeticizes is the pragmatic yet pathos-washed fact that, *pace* Stransom, it is simply not possible to remember everybody, in fiction as in life. There is always a process of editing in the memory's capacity to commemorate. In the same way that life ebbs and lives die, fictional characters are let go. Released from their immediacy before the claims of the vast casts and galleries encountered in our reading, only some of whom migrate in the way Eco alludes to, the vast majority of characters do not come back to impact upon reading memory and the life of the imagination. Oswald's poem seeks to turn this truth—involving a cast of many dozens, all suddenly alive once more in the moment of their recollected *death*—briefly on its head.

20 Meanwhile, Stransom himself migrates. He reappears not as himself but as a figure inspired by his character, in Francois Truffaut's powerful film *La chambre verte* (1978). In the film Truffaut himself plays the part of the protagonist even as in real life he was battling an incipient cancer: thereby further permeating with indefiniteness and boundary transgression that delicate delimiting of the zone between fiction, reality, (dis)identification, truth, and unreality that Eco speaks of. Of course, there are many other characters, not to say literary authors, who are migrated across that enigmatic zone in contemporary fictions and metafiction, and across historiographic, intertextual, and interdiegetic narrative contexts. For instance: Shakespeare appears in

Anthony Burgess's *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964) and Keats in the same author's *Abba Abba* (1977). Peter Ackroyd has transplanted Milton, Chatterton, Shelley, and Wilde, among others, across his various novels. Beryl Bainbridge did the same with Johnson and Mrs Thrale in *According to Queeney* (2001), and there are various other examples readily thought of in the work of Hilary Mantel, Lawrence Norfolk, Julian Barnes, A. S. Byatt, Gilbert Adair, Alasdair Gray, Colm Tóibín, David Lodge, and many others. Jesus Christ, too, is himself migrated from Scripture onto many fictive pages in our time: consider Jim Crace's *Quarantine* (1997), or thereafter Naomi Alderman's *The Liars' Gospel* (2012) and Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary* (2012). And in some of these works it is the minor characters who are migrated, in that strange motivation to emancipation that drives Oswald's *Memorial* and similarly allows Tom Stoppard to centrally place Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, so indistinct and so easily mistaken for each other in *Hamlet* and indeed in Stoppard's own ironic retelling, in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966).

21 But something else needs to be said. The issue of whether to worry about remembering and recalling literary characters, whether major or minor, in this way, and what it is that the effort is more broadly symptomatic of, is important because it is cautionary about not taking fiction too seriously, not investing too much in its vividness and its larger-than-life immediacies. This may be the place to recall the beguilements worked by fiction and the dangers they can induce when characters migrate to a place lodged too firmly in our mind: from Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), for instance, to Peter Jackson's 1994 movie *Heavenly Creatures*, about the true story of Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker whose fantasy life, entrenched in literature, is so enthralling that they resort to murder when adults seek to breach it. This, perhaps, represents the sinister counterpart to the more appealing image of the Brontës losing themselves in the fantasies of their juvenilia, involving Glass Town and Angria and Gondal. And before that there was Cervantes and don Quixote, providing as timeless a warning as any about the dangers of believing that characters and the spirit of the world from which they migrate are re-creatable. There is, too, the strangely sinister haunting and numinousness represented in "Dickens' Dream" (1875), a well-known unfinished painting by R. W. Buss in which Dickens's characters congregate upon his sleeping mind, in prefiguration of what can happen when, following Pirandello, six or more characters go off in search of an author (a trope that would become irrepressible in postmodern literature and culture, from Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) to cinematic treatments as different as those provided by *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), and *Stranger than Fiction* (2006)).

22 It bears re-emphasis, however: the topic of this paper is not those characters who leap off the page or walk off the screen, taking on a diegetic facticity that dramatizes the effect of character migration in a staged immediacy. For all of these characters who live vitally, transtextually, transmedially, there are others who fall totally from view. The example of the elderly Wordsworth eyeing the elderly Scott and intuiting that he was regarding the death not only of a man he admired but also of a distinct literary reputation—perhaps he had a glimmer that the tradition of literary fiction Scott represented was already turning precarious—brings home that there are hugely influential fictional trends, quite possibly lionized in their day, to which meaningful survival is denied. In this regard, Buss's portrait of Dickens can be read in the key of apprehensiveness that the characters Dickens created would die with him and that they would not continue to be read in literature. Even with an author like Dickens this is now partially the case, the recent anniversary events notwithstanding. How many currently read or reread *The Pickwick Papers*, even if Mr Pickwick's portly amiability or the idiosyncrasies of the redoubtable Sam Weller are at least dimly familiar? Characters, novels, authors can all have migration, readaptation, second lives escape them, and knowing what will last and what will not is not straightforward. For every author and character rediscovered there are countless others who recede more completely from view every day. Harrison Ainsworth, for instance, was read almost as widely as Dickens, and yet nobody turns to him in our time, while Smollett or Trollope, to cite two rather

different examples, attract specialist loyalties that precisely by their assiduously partisan (not to say evangelizing) and compensatory energies prove the point that there are huge and significant swathes of fiction with tenuous claims to afterlives. To build on an idea by Gérard Genette (1997), there are fictions that will have exercised individual minds and sometimes even continent-wide readerships with singular intensities, but which can sink almost without trace, never to lend foundation to palimpsestic reinscription. Their texts, let alone their paratexts, fall away from scrutiny. In this respect the elatedness but also the despondency one can feel in a well-stocked second hand bookshop are telling. A second hand bookshop is a repository for books that may have been generously released for subsequent readers to discover, but that with at least equal probability might have been remaindered—that deathly word—or discarded as the reader moved on to other work or, say, registered the importance of a house clearance. In that guise, the shop is a reminder that beyond pulp—in all the meanings of this word—fiction needs places where it can retire, or die, with dignity if the prospect of rediscovery is dim or only kindled by the solitary browser's triumphant seizing upon a rare find that, by its very rarity and its dustiness as it is retrieved, suggests quite how precarious the afterlife of fiction can be. Never mind, then, prospects of characters migrating: for every transmediated character or narrative there are numerous others that stay mustily put, with no sense communicated that they must survive.

- 23 Recent fiction provides a good example of this. In Howard Jacobson's *Zoo Time* (2012) the narrator recounts being stopped by the police after he has stolen a book in Oxfam. He reports:

“As for calling it stealing, I didn't think the word was accurate since I was the author of the book I was supposed to have stolen.
 “What word would you use, sir?” the younger of the two policemen asked me.
 [...]
 “Release,” I said. “I would say that I have *released* my book.” (6)

- 24 The narrator, who just happens to be called Guy Ableman, explains further, in a reflection that bears out the point about second hand bookshops:

Look: I bear Oxfam no grudge. I would have done the same in the highly unlikely event of my finding a book of mine for sale second-hand in Morrisons. It's a principle thing. It makes no appreciable difference to my income where I turn up torn and dog-eared. But there has to be a solidarity of the fallen. The book as prestigious object and source of wisdom—'Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide' and all that—is dying. Resuscitation is probably futile, but the last rites can at least be given with dignity. It matters where and with whom we end our days, Officer.' (7)

- 25 The entire scene is played for comedic effect. But it is not difficult to detect the underlying earnestness. The last two sentences are allowed to be equally applicable to fictional as well as to living characters. In the midst of all this is an elegy to the book and, more particularly, to *literary fiction* (the narrator had earlier used this term “with heavy irony” (6)). The afterlives of fiction—Scott's, Dickens's, literature's entire—are what is contemplated when taking in the prospect of characters *and authors* obliterated from reading memories. Guy Ableman casts a worried reflection on this across various exchanges, calling attention to “the black hole known as back list” (25), reporting on somebody he meets that “She had no feeling for fiction but who does any more?” (24), and giving expression to authors' fears that they might go the way of Scott: “No one had readers. But every writer takes the loss of readers personally. Those are *your* readers who have gone missing” (25). The idea is again played for comedic and yet dark effect, as follows:

Nor did I think I was wholly to blame for the crisis in publishing, the devaluation of the book as object, the disappearance of the word as the book's medium, library closures, Oxfam, Amazon, ebooks, iPads, Oprah, apps, Richard and Judy, Facebook, Formspring, Yelp, three-for-two, the graphic novel, Kindle, vampirism [...] (28)

26 Guy Ableman understands that the non-survival of literary texts and the non-migration of characters is entirely possible. To this he adds the idea that literary fiction is precarious, for the very institutionality of the book and what it represents is not endlessly reproducible across the decades that beckon present-day reading trajectories and reading lives. It might be instructive to conduct a brief and simple enough thought-experiment: within contemporary literary fiction, who are the characters (and authors) who will not go the way of Scott's (or of Scott himself)?

27 The question may well be asked. It bears more broadly on the fate of literary fiction and of literature entire. Just under 20 years ago John Sutherland published *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?: Puzzles in 19th-Century Fiction* (1996). In a reflection with evident resonances for any contemplation of the viabilities of character migration and the impact of the fictional upon the imaginary, he wrote:

Personally I have always thought 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' a perfectly good question. I am also curious how old Hamlet is, what subjects he studied at the University of Wittenberg, and what grades he got from his teachers there. *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?* explores that forbidden territory, *the hors texte*—or more precisely, that implied and ambiguous world which lies on the other side of the words on the page. (1996: ix)

28 John Mullan's book, *What Matters in Jane Austen?* (2012) is cast in this same mould, and Sutherland himself wrote a second volume to return to questions he asked in the first, such as "How much English blood did Waverley spill?" and "Effie Deans's phantom pregnancy" (Sutherland 1997). Scott, happily, is resurrected in these chapters on *Waverley* (1814) and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), alongside the other questions posed of other nineteenth-century fiction. Yet this only confirms that barely twenty years later it is difficult to think of a book like that coming out now and having the success it did. It is enough to throw into relief the broader question of the afterlives of fiction itself, rather than just those of the afterlives of Scott, Dickens, Guy Ableman, or whoever.

29 On this matter, Catherine Belsey's *A Future for Criticism*, a 2011 study still fresh in the memory of the future it presaged, offers wise observations. Belsey pointedly focuses not on literature, but on fiction. "This is not a book about literature," she says in her Preface (xi). Her purpose is to show how "Current criticism [...] neglects the pleasures of fiction" (xiii). Interestingly, this draws the circle fully back to the beginning of this essay paper, and to the point about the cramping of wonder that criticism can institute. Belsey is eloquent about criticism's dereliction of the duty that arises there:

Busy devoting our reading skills to worthy social causes, we have failed to give an account of the motives for reading in the first place. My complaint is not that we don't experience pleasure but that we don't analyse it—or, on the rare occasions when we do, we too readily revert to the old Kantian vocabulary that allies pleasure with judgement and virtue. [...] If fiction were not so pleasurable, however, its representation of the social issues that concern us [...] would matter much less than it does. Fiction both yields insights and exerts influences to the degree that it engages the desire of readers and audiences. (2011: xiii-xiv)

30 This helps in understanding why readers are compelled to follow migrated characters in their afterlives beyond the pages that first gave them being. But the wonder that lies in the object of critical scrutiny here is not just that which comes from literature. Belsey intuits that we must take our fiction where we find it: not just in the literary fiction that Guy Ableman sees receding but in other contemporary spaces for fiction of our time. McGann, taking *Ivanhoe* and its entire fictional universe to digital spaces, would have understood:

IVANHOE is thus a proposal for reading and thinking critically about textual fields, especially traditional works of literature and culture, in the historical context of the late twentieth century, when such works found themselves in collision with born-digital textualities. The volatile convergence of these two semiotic machineries has made possible a new set of parameters for studying and using

expressive forms, paper-based as well as digital. IVANHOE is not, however, a new “theory” of textuality. It is a practical mechanism—a kind of laboratory—for experimenting with these ideas and refining our understanding of them, and of their relevance to the general inquiry they have set us on. (159)

31 There is scope for characters’ afterlives even in such a “practical mechanism” or “laboratory”: perhaps particularly so. The “general inquiry,” off *Ivanhoe*, which this paper connects with is an attempt to understand the afterlives of fictional characters and of fiction itself in the specificities of hypermediated contemporaneity, where the book is just one aspect of the multimodal and transmediating worlds occupied by migrating and non-migrating characters, and where literary fiction provides just one dimension to that. The larger project speaks of character and the aesthetic illusion, as Werner Wolf and others explore it, in the age of the avatar and hyperimmediacy. If the compulsion is to go multimodal it is because it is not possible, in the end, to base a strategy for the future on Scott and the dimmed wonder he represents, even if it is right that we should not forget him. Hazlitt himself, in all his admiration of Scott, realized this. Scott, he said, is “*laudator temporis acti*, prophesier of things past. The old world is to him a crowded map; the new one a dull, hateful blank. He dotes on all well-authenticated superstitions; he shudders at the thought of innovation” (123) One might therefore conclude that there is no programme there to take forward. That may be so. Decency, dignity, and commemoration are nevertheless owed to the past, even if the rituals cannot be Stransom’s and the power not Oswald’s. If, in the process and to connect with the epigraph from Mark Ravenhill’s play, we feel that it might just be possible to “revive Candide,” to have Voltaire’s protagonist but other literary characters too migrate to a present they can resonantly traverse, then there remains scope for wonder to move transhistorically and transtextually.

32 In keeping with that, and to return to the personal, I realized, even as I started researching affinities between the durability of the concept of character and the immediacy of the age of the avatar, that before doing anything with the latter it was appropriate to return to the theory of character. Redoing one’s homework to return to what it is that one thought one knew is always instructive. So is rereading the relevant and authoritative works of literary criticism on this subject that, like Scott’s characters, can be too easily allowed to slip from notice: among them, Baruch Hochman’s *Character in Literature* (1985). There are works of criticism, in other words, that bear resurrecting quite as much as works of literature. As we ponder the afterlives of fiction it does seem somehow quite appropriate to excavate—this verb is in the subtitle to Oswald’s *Memorial*, which reads ‘An Excavation of the *Iliad*’—overlooked gems from criticism that worry a little less about subjectivity or avatars and a little more about character. Character, in other words, bears rehabilitating: in literature *and* criticism. This is true both when speaking of character with a migrating potential and of character without that potential. It is particularly true if claims on “ethical pan-fictionalism” (Crittenden 174), now even more insistent in the time of multimodality than when Crittenden used this phrase, are to achieve any authenticity. The rehabilitation of character will not by itself secure the afterlives of fiction, and it would be delusive not to foresee that criticism’s agendas are likelier to overlook it, but it is hard not to think that all our readings pasts, presents, and futures might seem better—more “wondrous,” one might say—if it happens.

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