



TRANSFORMATION OF LUST INTO CHIVALRY – ROWENA’S STIRRING EXPERIENCE IN SCOTT’S IVANHOE

Dr. DARSHA JANI

Associate Professor and Head, Department of English
Municipal Arts & UB Science College, Mehsana (North Gujarat)



Dr DARSHA JANI

Article Info:

Article Received: 18/10/2013

Revised on: 22/11/2013

Accepted: 24/11/2013

ABSTRACT

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the innovator and trendsetter of the Historical novel is regarded as the Father of the Regional and Historical novel in English literature. He hailed from Scotland and wrote about the glories of Scotland and England in his novels. He imparted to the historical novel, a concrete shape and design. He was discontented with the grotesque themes and creaking artifices of the Novel of Terror that his contemporaries practiced during the period as such themes brought novel reading into disrepute. He endeavoured to set the novel on its feet again and made it more persuasive and creditable.

Scott's novel Ivanhoe (1820) focuses on the events that ensued about a hundred years after the Battle of Hastings that established the rule of the Normans over the Saxons in England. The period chosen by Scott is the Middle Ages and of Crusades, the period of the reign of King Richard I (1157-1199). A striking contrast between the Saxons by whom the soil is cultivated and the Normans who reign as conquerors is explicitly observed throughout the novel. The novel incorporates historical events like Richard's escape from England, Prince John's rebellion and the heroic effort by Richard to regain his position. The present paper concentrates on the valiant efforts of Rowena, the Saxon beauty who through her enticing personality and eloquent speech transforms her Norman admirer Maurice de Bracy's lust and violent bearing into chivalrous attitude towards her.

Key words: Norman, Saxon, crusade, Palestine, antiquity, Issac of York and Jew

Sir Walter Scott, the pioneer of the Historical novel in English was highly fascinated by the glory of the past; legends and stories of the bygone days; the description of the castles and citadels; depiction of the beauty of brooks and rivers; tales of kings and queens and everything that was associated with antiquity. Regarding his contribution to the Historical novel, Una Pope-Hennessy remarks,

“Sir Walter Scott occupies a highly important niche in our temple of literature, for, as prime architect of the popular historical romance, he initiated a new era in story-telling ... For him the past, often by virtue of some chance revelation or contact, ceased to be the past, and became in his consciousness as immediate as the present. From inanimate things, he involuntarily drew life, passion,

romantic visions, the actual vibration of events. For him dry bones re-assembled themselves and became clothed in flesh and rubble reconstituted itself into settings for pageantry. Automatically in him the past was re-born, re-animated, re-realized, and ceased in any dry-as-dust sense to be history.” (Goodman 208)

His historical novels changed attitudes towards the past, he made the world aware of Scotland, and his novels struck the reader with their epic quality. Through his splendid imagination and inherent interest in the romantic past, he inculcated in the contemporary, a new curiosity and concern for the historical events and structures which consequently lent a new configuration to the

Historical novel. In the pages of his novels, the past grew again in radiant colours.

Scott's most celebrated novel *Ivanhoe* (1819) is set in 1194 when King Richard of England returns from the Third Crusade to reclaim his kingdom from his brother John, who usurps much of Richard's power during his long absence in the Holy Land. The brave and venerable King Richard becomes prisoner while fighting the Crusades abroad. In his absence, the nobles make their weaker neighbours tenants and Richard's brother John oversees it all in his attempt to take the throne. The Saxon noble Cedric, the father of *Ivanhoe* and a strong supporter of Saxon heritage and rights, disinherits his son *Ivanhoe* since he falls in love with his ward, Lady Rowena. Cedric hopes to marry Rowena to Athelstane of Coningsburgh, a Saxon in order to form a powerful Saxon alliance. *Ivanhoe*'s love for Rowena, however threatens these plans leading Cedric to disinherit him. *Ivanhoe* joins the Third Crusade and fighting on the side of Richard in the Holy Land, wins the King's favour. The novel begins with *Ivanhoe*'s return to England where Prince John was plotting to depose his brother Richard who was taken captive in Austria on his way home from the Crusades.

On his way to a great tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, *Ivanhoe* visits his father's house disguised as a pilgrim. Here he saves the life of Issac, a rich Jew of York, by warning him of a planned ambush. At Ashby, *Ivanhoe* with the help of the King who had returned to England in disguise vanquishes all of King John's supporters including his great personal enemy, the Templar Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert and the brutal baron Front-de-Boeuf. He is seen as the masked victor at a tournament. But he is wounded in the tournament and nursed back to health by Issac's daughter Rebecca. Rebecca is a practicing healer, and she takes good care of him. She falls in love with him but resists her urges.

Bois-Guilbert and Front-de-Boeuf then assist a mercenary leader Maurice de Bracy in a plan to abduct Rowena. Her travelling party which includes Cedric, Athelstane, Issac, Rebecca and the still-recovering *Ivanhoe* is attacked and all are led

captive to Front-de-Boeuf's Castle of Torquilstone. Lady Rowena is a figure of enchanting beauty and love. Cedric, the Saxon is not his real father but a guardian and a distant relation of her. But he loves Rowena like a daughter. Describing the appearance of Rowena, Scott remarks,

"... she is tall and walks with a queenly grace. Her complexion is exquisitely fair and her clear blue eyes ... Her profuse hair, of a colour betwixt brown and flaxen, was arranged in a fanciful and graceful manner in numerous ringlets... These locks were braided with gems, and, being worn at full length, intimated the noble birth and free-born condition of the maiden." (pp 43-44)

When the Templar Bois Guilbert and Prior Aymer had earlier visited Cedric's place, Cedric had paid a great respect to them in spite of they being Normans. He had offered them a huge feast consisting of various kinds of dishes and wine. He observed that when Bois Guilbert, the Templar's eyes fell on Rowena, his eyes brightened at the sight of her beauty and he (the Templar) "*kept his eyes riveted on the Saxon beauty*". (42)

When the Knight Templar passionately looks at Rowena clad in a dress of sea-green silk, she draws with dignity the veil around her face, as intimation that the freedom of his glance is disagreeable. Cedric minutely observes the situation and angrily warns the Templar "*the cheeks of our Saxon maidens have seen too little of the sun to enable them to bear the fixed glance of a crusader*." (44) The Templar asks forgiveness from Rowena. The Prior then offers Cedric to join them for the tournament but Cedric expresses his wish of going with Athelstane of Coningsburgh with whom he wants Rowena should marry. But Rowena's heart craves for Cedric's only son, Wilfred of *Ivanhoe* whom Cedric had driven away from home since he loved Rowena. *Ivanhoe* being in Palestine, Rowena is eager to know the latest news from Palestine. She is eager to know when *Ivanhoe* would return to his native country.

On the occasion of the Ashby tournament when the Homeless Knight (*Ivanhoe*) is declared the

Victor and Prince John orders the knight to name the lady who will reign the next day as the Queen of Beauty and Love, the Knight chooses Rowena. Many of the Norman ladies get angry at the choice of a Saxon maiden. The crowd gets wild with joy and shouts, "Long live the Lady Rowena, the chosen and lawful Queen of Love and of Beauty... Long live the Saxon Princess! Long live the race of the immortal Alfred!" (90) The next morning, every seat at the tournament is filled. Lady Rowena comes with her father but Athelstane is not seen. Even though Athelstane was a Saxon prince, he decides to fight on the side of the Norman Knight Bois- Guilbert. This is because he wants to take revenge on the Homeless Knight who had dared to choose Rowena as the Queen of Beauty and of Love with whom Cedric had promised his own marriage.

When Prince John sees Lady Rowena, he alights from his horse and commands "---Ladies, attend your Queen, as you wish in your turn to be distinguished by like honours." (110) Soon Rowena is surrounded by the fairest and most distinguished ladies. All strive to obtain places as near as possible to their temporary sovereign. Rowena's beauty outshines the beauty of all those present there. The crowd cheers and claps. The herald calls for silence and reads the rules of that day's tournament. The trumpets sound again and the tournament begins. Prince John then inquires about Lady Rowena. To this Prior Aymer replies, "A Saxon heiress of large possessions ... a rose of loveliness, and a jewel of wealth; the fairest among a thousand, a bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of camphire." (119) To this Prince John says, "We shall cheer her sorrows, and amend her blood, by wedding her to a Norman." (119) Prince John puts a proposal to De Bracy to marry Rowena. He happily accepts the proposal as he is captivated by the mesmerizing beauty of Rowena. He therefore plans to win her heart by planning an attack on her by his accomplices and then saving her so that he can and impress her by his valorous deed.

As Rowena was travelling with her guardian Cedric, Issac of York begged Cedric to travel with him till he and his party were out of forest. Then Rebecca, Issac's daughter knelt before Rowena and

begged for pity to travel with her. She asked not for herself or for her father but for the sick friend Ivanhoe. Rowena was touched by Rebecca's plea. She went up to her father and prayed, "The man is old and feeble, the maiden young and beautiful, their friend sick and in peril of his life---Jews though they be, we cannot as Christians leave them in this extremity." (p. 161)

Cedric agreed to this. The party set off again. The path became narrower and the travellers had to ride one behind another. They came to marshy ground and began to "descend into a dingle, traversed by a brook whose banks were broken, swampy, and overgrown with dwarf willows." (161) Half of the party had crossed the brook when they were attacked by the assailants. Cedric and his party were easily captured. Wamba was the only one who succeeded in escaping. Wamba informed Gurth that Cedric and Rowena had been taken prisoners by the outlaws who had carried them off. They decided to chase the outlaws. All that night De Bracy and Bois-Guilbert, with their prisoners rode towards Torquilstone Castle. At dawn, Bois-Guilbert asked De Bracy to leave them "in order to prepare the second part of thy mystery." (171) But De Bracy told him that he had changed his mind. He says, "There will I appear before the Lady Rowena in mine own shape, and trust that she will set down to the vehemence of my passion the violence of which I have been guilty." (171) They soon reach the castle. Rowena and Rebecca are taken and locked in separate rooms whereas Issac of York is thrown into the deepest dungeon. It was about at noon, when De Bracy for whose advantage the expedition had been first planned, appears before Lady Rowena to put his views before her.

De Bracy bows deeply to Rowena and asks her to take a seat. But Rowena declines saying, "If I be in the presence of my jailor, Sir Knight---it best becomes his prisoner to remain standing till she learns her doom." (187) To this De Bracy replies, "You are in presence of your captive, not your jailor; and it is from your fair eyes that De Bracy must receive that doom which you fondly expect from him." (188) Rowena coldly answers that she does

not know him and asks him the reason why she has been brought here. De Bracy replies,

“That I am unknown to you is indeed my misfortune; yet let me hope that De Bracy's name has not been always unspoken, when minstrels or heralds have praised deeds of chivalry, whether in the lists or in the battle-field.” (188) To this Rowena annoyingly answers,

“...more suiting for their mouths than for thine own... and tell me which of them shall record in song... the memorable conquest of this night, a conquest obtained over an old man, followed by a few timid hinds; and its booty, an unfortunate maiden, transported against her will to the castle of a robber?” (188)

De Bracy gets angry at the failure of his flowery speech. He tells her in plain words, “... thou shalt never leave this castle, or thou shalt leave it as Maurice de Bracy's wife...dream not, that Richard Coeur de Lion will ever resume his throne, far less that Wilfred of Ivanhoe, his minion, will ever lead thee to his footstool... Know, lady that this rival is in my power.”(189)

Rowena is astonished to know that the wounded Ivanhoe is also in the castle and his life is too in danger. She looks at De Bracy but finds no mercy on his face. She wildly looks around her and raises her hands to heaven, and bursts into a passion of uncontrolled vexation and sorrow. De Bracy is aghast to see Rowena in this state of mind. He feels helpless as he is unable to resist the sight of Rowena crying pathetically. He is highly moved to find tears in the beautiful eyes of Rowena. His heart transforms completely and he vows not to cause any detriment to her self- respect. His reckless behavior vanishes and his attitude reveals the aroma of chivalry. His erroneous imagination perishes forever and his wild passions transform into nobility and magnanimity.

Suddenly the sound of a trumpet is heard and De Bracy hurries away from there. On the other hand, the Black Knight, Gurth, Wamba and Locksley join hands and decide to rescue Cedric, Ivanhoe, Rowena and Rebecca, The fierce battle begin. The

western tower starts burning fiercely, but the fire had not spread to the other parts of the castle. The air gets filled with shouts, cries and groans. The ground becomes slippery with blood. Cedric and Gurth rush through the castle in search of Rowena. They find her just when she had given up all hope. The fire soon spreads through the castle. Soon flames start bursting from all the towers. The outlaws stand at a safe distance, watching the fire. The castle of the Normans falls. Rowena is saved and Ivanhoe is also rescued.

The novel ends with the marriage of Lady Rowena with Ivanhoe who distinguishes himself in the service of Richard and is graced with further royal marks. The portrayal of Rowena as a young, beautiful, fearless and tactful woman who valiantly resists the wild passion of Maurice de Bracy and who in spite of being alone in the castle of Front de Beouf, does not deter from her motive and refuses to surrender to Bracy's advancements, is what touches the heart of the reader. Her invigorating courage and self-confidence dissolves the wild and heightened passion of De Bracy and she emerges blemishless out of such a challenging situation. Rowena's audaciousness imparts a dynamic stature to the novel and ascertains the singularity of Scott as a great historical novelist.

WORKS CITED

- Scott, Walter. *Ivanhoe*. London: Penguin Books, 2000. Print
- Goodman, W. R. *A History of English Literature*, Vol. 2, Delhi: Doaba House, 1994. Print