

"When Knighthood Was in Flower": *Ivanhoe* in Austerity Britain

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Introduction

On 17 June 1952, *Today's Cinema*, one of the British cinema trade papers, sported a lavish two-page picture collage from a gala premiere at the Empire, Leicester Square. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh was the most distinguished guest among the dignitaries of the British film culture and industry, who also included Anna Neagle, Herbert Wilcox, Sir Michael and Lady Balcon, and Michael Wilding. There were also several men in chain-mail and tunics mingling with the guests, for this was the premiere of *Ivanhoe* (1952), an adventure film based on Sir Walter Scott's romantic novel. And not just a premiere, but the *world* premiere (*Today's Cinema*, 17 June 1952: 10-1). Why was the film, which has been -- and still is -- easily thought of as thoroughly American, given such a distinctly British send-off?

Previous discussions of the 1952 film version of *Ivanhoe* have concentrated on its American context, reading the film as an anti-McCarthyite allegory. However, due to structural changes in Hollywood and in the general film culture, *Ivanhoe* was not a traditional, typical Hollywood product, but an international hybrid, an Anglo-American film. This calls for an examination of the film in terms of its Britishness and its release in Britain. The examination of contemporary press material will show how *Ivanhoe*, a so-called "runaway production" from a Hollywood studio, created a considerable connection with mainstream British audiences through its representations of English cultural heritage and national identity, making it one of the biggest hits of the year (*Kine Weekly*, 18 December 1952: 9; Steinberg, 1981: 435; Harper and Porter, 2003: 119).

I propose that *Ivanhoe* can be seen as articulating two important trends in early 1950s Britain. As several commentators have claimed, various discourses within British culture, whose influence lasted well into the 1950s, espoused conservatism, backward-looking historical escapism, and traditional ways of constructing national identity. While *Ivanhoe* can be seen as benefiting from and endorsing these discourses, its glamorous visual style and stars also resonated with the approaching end of austerity and rationing, and the nascent consumer culture -- another well-documented trend (for both trends, see e.g. Gardiner, 1999; Cooper, 1963; Hopkins, 1963; Phillips, 1963). In what follows, I will first link *Ivanhoe* to Hollywood's internationalisation and show how this context brings the film to Britain and British issues. After that, the story and some of the central features of previous research on the film will be outlined, followed by a formal analysis of the film. The film's British promotion and press reception, the key parts of my argument, will then be dealt with more extensively.

Ivanhoe and Hollywood's Internationalisation

Previous research on *Ivanhoe* has regarded it as an American film, which reflects American society, and has by these defaults examined it only in an American context. However, unlike other period films, such as *Kim* (1950) and *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Ivanhoe* was not a traditional, purely Hollywoodian production. In this section I will show that *Ivanhoe* was an early example of an emerging trend towards the internationalisation of Hollywood, and it was less American than a hybrid, Anglo-American co-production. This is the crucial industrial foundation for understanding the film's strong British content and the ways in which it was received by British critics and audiences.

The late 1940s and the 1950s were turbulent times for Hollywood, and many old certainties, including the nationality or the national identity of the films it produced, became increasingly blurred and compromised. A number of changes in Western culture and film-going brought on a period of difficult transition. For instance, following the Paramount decrees of 1948, which divested the major studios from their exhibition circuits and effectively ended the era of the vertically integrated studios, Hollywood majors, already hit by shrinking admissions and increasing competition from television and other leisure activities, had to start to prepare for a future with less certain exhibition circumstances. The studios started to scale back their production, which led exhibitors to complain about the product shortage. In Britain the shortage became acute from 1954 onwards and since it narrowed the choice of the potential audience, it lessened the appeal of cinema and thus accentuated the admission backslide (Krämer, 2005: 19-21; Finler, 2003: 364-6; Guback, 1985: 477).

At the same time, however, the foreign and especially British markets were contracting more slowly than Hollywood's domestic market, a factor which increased their relative importance, and made them even more lucrative business territories (*Kine Weekly*, 26 December 1957: 3; Spraos, 1962: 37-43, 89; Krämer, 2000: 197-9). As a result, after World War II, as Kerry Segrave points out, "more Hollywood product was shot in foreign lands than in the past. During the 1950s and 1960s most U.S. overseas financial participation centred in the U.K., Italy and France, in that order" (Segrave, 1997: 192, 287-9).

These "runaway productions", especially those made in Britain, provided one form of adjustment for the majors. By producing nominally British films they could exploit quota regulations and be eligible for the British Government subsidy, the so-called Eady Levy. Labour in Britain was also cheaper than in Hollywood and thus the majors steadily increased their financial commitment in Britain and became more and more involved in the British film industry. During the 1960s, this trend gained ever more momentum, emphasising the international nature of many productions, and making the definitions between "British" and "American" film and national cinemas all the more blurred (Guback, 1985: 478-9; Dickinson and Street, 1985: 238). In terms of content, "given that most Hollywood A-pictures were dependent upon overseas revenues for the bulk of their profits", as James Chapman notes, "it was in Hollywood's interest to make films that would appeal to British audiences, which would naturally include films with British subjects and locations" (Chapman, 2005: 168-9).

Already in 1952 *Ivanhoe* exemplified many of these trends. It was one of the pioneering runaway productions and a precedent to many massive roadshow spectacles of the late 1950s and 1960s, which had a similar international composition. MGM's UK subsidiary, MGM-British, had branched out into British quality production already in the late 1930s with *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), *The Citadel* (1938) and *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939) and revived the strategy in the changed conditions of the post-war era with *Edward, My Son* (1949) and *Conspirator* (1949) (see: Glancy, 1999: 70-71, 74-81). Although badly hit by declining

attendances in the late 1940s, MGM did find some success with its American productions of *The Forsyte Saga* (1949), *King Solomon's Mines* (1950) and *Kim* (1950) and, given the box-office feats of Disney's *Treasure Island* (1950), Warner's *Captain Horatio Hornblower RN* (1951) and Fox's *The Mudlark* (1950), all made in Britain, it was a natural step for MGM to start re-establishing itself on the British scene with a forceful and prestigious period film programme (Finler, 2003: 153).

With Dickens, Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Kipling and C. S. Forester already well exploited by the industry, MGM turned to Sir Walter Scott, whose work had not been adapted in a major way since two versions of *Ivanhoe* made in 1913 (Harty, 1999: 428). In addition, the studio could utilise existing plans that had been made for *Ivanhoe* during the 1930s, when the project was first put forward. Three years in preparation and costing \$3,842,000 (*Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952: xi; Harper and Porter, 2003: 119), *Ivanhoe* (1952) was to be the herald and the flagship of a new era for MGM and Britain. In a special *Kine Weekly* "Preview of *Ivanhoe*", Sam Eckman Jr., Chairman and Managing Director of MGM-British, argued that:

From the production [of *Ivanhoe*] itself [...] both the British film industry and British industry in general will benefit considerably and in a steadily-mounting degree. I make that comparatively large claim for the simple reason that, with 'Ivanhoe,' MGM has embarked upon a British production policy which is going to ensure a large and steady flow of the company's top stars, producers, directors and authors to keep Boreham Wood studios humming with great activity (Quoted in *Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952: iii).

Ivanhoe inaugurated a new period of MGM "runaways" in England, which was sustained with other large productions such as *The Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and *The Adventures of Quentin Durward* (1955). Although directed and produced by Americans, *Ivanhoe* had an international, mainly British cast and crew. The director (Richard Thorpe), the producer (Pandro S. Berman) and the leading stars (Robert Taylor, Joan Fontaine) were American -- and most of them teamed up again for *Knights of the Round Table* and *The Adventures of Quentin Durward*.

The large supporting cast and the key crew members of *Ivanhoe* were veterans of British film industry, however. These included leading experts in their fields, such as cinematographer Freddie Young, art director Alfred Junge and costume designer Roger Furse. The film was also shot in Britain, on location at Doune Castle, Scotland and at Elstree studios. The film's hybrid nature was further exposed in its promotion and critical reception, and the way in which different papers labelled it as an American or Anglo-American production, or considered it a British film, will be analysed below. First, I will examine which stylistic, narrative and ideological aspects became dominant in the treatment of the story, and how these aspects might have helped heighten the film's British ambience.

Spectacle and Monarchy in *Ivanhoe*

The 1952 film version of Walter Scott's novel begins with the knight Ivanhoe (Robert Taylor) searching for King Richard (Norman Wooland), who has been captured in Austria while returning from the Crusades. Ivanhoe learns that the king is alive and that his brother Prince John (Guy Rolfe), along with "certain Norman knights", has usurped the throne. He travels back to England, to his father Cedric's (Finlay Currie) Saxon court, to persuade people to pay the ransom for Richard's release. Although Cedric hates Normans, he continues to disown Ivanhoe for his earlier crusading folly, but his ward, Lady Rowena (Joan Fontaine) still loves

the knight. Ivanhoe vows to fight John and the Normans in a joust at Ashby, and manages to finance his armour and Richard's ransom with the help of a Jew, Isaac (Felix Aylmer), and his beautiful daughter Rebecca (Elizabeth Taylor). With Wamba the court jester (Emlyn Williams) as his squire he defies John and defeats de Bracy, Bois-Guilbert (George Sanders) and the other Norman contestants, but is also seriously wounded. Rebecca takes care of him and falls in love, which she knows must remain unrequited. Meanwhile, John wants to find him, and failing that, imprisons Isaac, Cedric, Rowena and Rebecca in a Norman stronghold. Ivanhoe joins a band of outlaws led by Robin of Locksley and besieges the castle, but tries first to negotiate with Bois-Guilbert. Ivanhoe is promptly captured and while he is prepared for torture, the Normans make futile advances on Rowena and Rebecca. Eventually, Locksley's troops start the attack on the castle, while Ivanhoe leads the prisoners to freedom. In the ensuing battle Wamba and most of the Normans die, except Bois-Guilbert, who manages to escape with Rebecca. A ransom for Richard is ready to be delivered, but Rebecca has to be saved too: in John's mock trial she is convicted as a Jewish witch and sentenced to be burned. Ivanhoe challenges the decision and demands a trial by combat. John appoints Bois-Guilbert as the court's champion and, in the final battle, Ivanhoe slays him. While Bois-Guilbert lies dying and reiterates his love for Rebecca, King Richard returns with the crusaders and John surrenders. The crowd cheers and Ivanhoe is reunited with Rowena.

How has the research dealt with this story in the past? Walter Srebnick and John M. Lenihan (Srebnick, 1999; Lenihan, 1992) have produced interesting and well-researched readings of *Ivanhoe*, which both stress the importance of a certain ideology in the film. In their opinion, the film and especially the dishonest trial to which Prince John submits Rebecca, is an anti-McCarthyite parable in period disguise. This kind of reading is compelling, but in terms of the film's reception it seems that it can be applied only to a minor section of the film's global audiences, that is, to (American) people with some knowledge of or connections with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the McCarthyist trials of the late 1940s and early 1950s. What Srebnick and Lenihan have proved beyond doubt is that US domestic politics, HUAC and the blacklist were a *de facto* part of the film's production at a certain, relatively early, script-writing stage, when blacklisted writers, such as Waldo Salt and Margaret Roberts, were involved with the text. There also seem to be grounds for believing that this ideological baggage might have formed an allegorical subtext for the film, which was, however (as they themselves admit) too obscure even for the American film critics (Srebnick, 1999: 48; Lenihan, 1992: 52).

In what follows, my approach to *Ivanhoe* will differ from Srebnick's and Lenihan's in two respects. Firstly, the focus is on the film's overt and explicit aspects, which include the recurring and dominant stylistic, narrative and ideological features of *Ivanhoe*'s cinematic form. Secondly, the film will be examined through detailed references to its British reception context. That is to say, I will relate the findings of the formal analysis to the film's British promotion and finally analyse them in the light of the contemporary reaction: what the British papers said about the film.

Right from the first scenes, in which Ivanhoe learns that Richard is captive and is instantly "programmed" to avenge him and restore him to the throne, the restoration of monarchy becomes the narrative motor of the film. Monarchist ideology, identified in Richard and his envoy Ivanhoe continues throughout the film. For instance, in a weighty, explicitly metaphorical scene Ivanhoe strikes away Wamba's iron collar, after which the jester kneels and says: "I wish that the whole of England could feel as strange as I do." Ivanhoe replies: "And so they shall when Richard's the king again." At this point, Wamba becomes associated

with "the people of England", an entity already alluded to by Richard in the beginning, and whose well-being is now tied to the King's. The peasant-serfs, the film suggests, have a world to win, if they trust monarchist knights to lose their chains for them. This motif is reprised in similarly explicit fashion at the end of the film. "Before me", says the newly-returned Richard, "kneels a nation divided. Rise as one man and that one for England!" He is seen in the middle of a cheering crowd, the heart of the proverbial nation. A cut to *Ivanhoe* and Rowena shows the agents who brought about this outcome, which is then conceptualised by cutting to the heraldic image of the Lion and the Unicorn.

As already noted, anti-Semitism and its eventual condemnation form another conspicuously stated ideological thread of the story. Although it is not as central to the narrative as Richard's return, in the end, it is Isaac's money that pays the King's ransom. Otherwise, the attitudes that Isaac and Rebecca trigger in the characters around them serve to further distinguish the antagonists (the anti-Semites) from the protagonists (the tolerant ones).

Of the key stylistic devices, spectacle, or the grandeur that is in part narratively redundant, is the most prominent. In three scenes -- the joust, the siege, and the duel -- huge purpose-built sets and props, *plein air* photography, swift camera movement, hundreds of extras and professional stuntmen work in unison to create a spectacle that, as we shall see, matches the promises made in the promotional material (see: *Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952: xi-xv; *Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book). Narratively, they serve to inspire rebellion (the joust), to weaken the tyranny and force it to the last, unpopular attempt at containment (the siege), and to close the threads of the story with a total victory (the duel). In terms of social representations, these scenes show the ordinary people as the *de facto* masses, in full or long shots and in short takes, in which they become uniform collectives of brown and grey. Otherwise, the film is dominated by the nobility, who take up the majority of screen time and hold active, executive agency throughout the narrative.

The spacious, diffusely lit outdoors, spectacular scenery, *plein air* photography, and a topography of castles, halls and forts, are firmly laid down during the first twenty minutes of the film, and become recurring spatial features in *Ivanhoe*. Consequently, the higher echelon individuals dominate the narrative. Although individual, personal causation is a cinematic (Hollywood) commonplace (see: Bordwell et al, [1985] 1996: 12-8), the film chooses to emphasise these elements. The individuality of the upper-class protagonists is enhanced by the style of cutting, shot size and lighting. Because of the relatively high number of main characters, the various scenes involving discussion employ quick-paced reverse field cutting between the disputants, who, unlike the "masses", are shown in medium shots or medium close ups. Stylistically, the pace of the cutting allows the film to flow smoothly and at times almost kinetically: with an average shot length of 7 seconds, *Ivanhoe* is well below the Hollywood average of the time (around 9 to 10 seconds) (Salt, 1983: 302-7, 321-3). Furthermore, in many scenes coloured soft key lights and sharply pointed fill lights create a patched, sfumato luminescence, which resembles torch or candle light and produces handsome, mellow skin tones, particularly in Rowena's chamber and during Rebecca's soliloquy. The upshot of these devices is that while the nobility is elegantly depicted it is also cinematically pigeonholed and judged solely by personal, rather than socio-historical criteria.

To summarise: firstly, a legitimate and benevolent monarchy, embodied in Richard and proselytised by *Ivanhoe*, is depicted as propitious both to individuals and to the English nation. Secondly, according to *Ivanhoe*, patriotism towards one's king and country, and a striving for national unity should override any other loyalties, including romantic and kinship

relations. Thirdly, intolerance towards ethnic or religious minorities is directly associated with selfishness, cynicism, arrogance and manipulation. Finally, the English Middle Ages come across as a dualistic age: injustice and intolerance are rife, but on the other hand agile and determined action by the individuals within the nobility endowed with beauty and style can restore law and order. How were these stylistic and ideological features framed by the film's marketing?

***Ivanhoe's* Promotion**

How was *Ivanhoe's* thematic, formal and stylistic package marketed? What kind of associations and interpretations might its stylistic and formal features have supported and given rise to in the film's 1952 reception context? Press books and advertisements in the trade press are key resources for understanding how *Ivanhoe* might have been received in 1952. How the film was pitched to the press and to exhibitors reveals some of the ideological features that were to surface, in one form or another, in the film's reception, especially those of conservative idealism and romantic glamour. All in all, I argue that these features can be grouped under two types of Medievalism as identified by Umberto Eco: the Romantic and the Barbaric. (Eco, 1986: 69)

There were at least two different press books issued to accompany *Ivanhoe's* release. The "Medium" [\[1\]](#) Press Book for *Ivanhoe*, which was aimed at the American market, stated its agenda in no uncertain terms, featuring a page-sized article entitled "Medieval Jousts of 'Ivanhoe' Far Cry from Today's Atomic Warfare". It was one of several items in the press book focusing on the research carried out to "explore and verify every detail of Britain's 'golden age of chivalry.'" Despite the self-conscious inverted commas, this activates one of Eco's categories, a deeply romantic and escapist view of the Middle Ages (*Ivanhoe*, Medium Press Book 1952; Eco, 1986: 69-70), one that invites the spectator to forget the troubles of modernity, and to indulge in a more innocent era.

Although less explicit in its rhetoric, the Small Press Book designed for the British publicity evoked very similar themes. In this version as well the Middle Ages and its glamour and love interest dominated the publicity visuals. In posters, images of the "valiant Saxon knight and roving troubadour" Ivanhoe, "raven-haired" Rebecca and the "beautiful" Rowena form compositions that suggests a triangular love scheme situated in the wider frame of a romantically rendered Middle Ages. Furthermore, the British "[n]ational newspaper advertising with coverage likely to exceed the hundred millions mark" was designed "to highlight Elizabeth Taylor" (*Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952: ix).

There were clear differences between the press books, however. To begin with, the statement that "MGM's British-made" *Ivanhoe* was "filmed entirely in this country" is repeated in different forms no less than fifteen times in the British press book, while blurbs from the press containing similar claims are quoted in the publicity visuals -- a ploy that gives away the film's hybrid national status. Moreover, although the film was associated with and compared to MGM's other adventurous and spectacular films, such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1950), *Quo Vadis?* (1951) [\[2\]](#) and *Scaramouche* (1952) (see: *Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book 1952) and while a knight on horseback and a castle feature in some of the posters, surprisingly little is made visually of the "blaze of unsurpassed pageantry, colour and spectacle" of the film (*Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book 1952). Robert Taylor is shown swashbuckling on the covers of *Kine Weekly*, and with a sword drawn in the advertising imagery, but the main emphasis of the publicity is on romance and the formulaic depiction of

the nobility. Contrast this with the American press book, which sported flaming castles and a picture gallery introducing the "great characters from the throbbing pages of the world-famed romantic novel" (*Ivanhoe*, Medium Press Book), including the villains, such as Prince John and Bois-Guilbert, and the difference is noticeable. In particular, the visual publicity in Britain depicted the triangular love story as the main interest of the film and contained it exclusively within the aristocracy.

The text of the press books, however, are much more varied. Bringing together several central themes of *Ivanhoe*'s publicity, the Small Press Book (1952) explains how

SIR WALTER SCOTT'S 'IVANHOE' COMES TO THE SCREEN TO MATCH THE GLORY OF THE COLOSSAL "QUO VADIS" [...] Brought to life with consummate artistry and breathtaking scope against the medieval pageantry, rich costumes and spectacular settings of the England of the twelfth century, when knighthood was in flower, here is a story of chivalry and romance, battle and intrigue (*Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book 1952, emphasis in the original).

At least four themes can be identified in this passage. Firstly, the film's literary pedigree is paraded in the same way as in the credit sequence of the film. The sequence depicts the Lion and the Unicorn of the Royal Arms holding a shield bearing the three lions of the Plantagenets, upon which is super-imposed the words "Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*." Secondly, the film's size and authority is emphasised by comparing it to the smash hit epic *Quo Vadis*? Thirdly, a variety of themes are brought out in order to establish the appeal of the film for diverse audiences. Fourthly, the sheer scale and attraction of everything from spectacular settings to rich costumes is flaunted much more explicitly than in the visual publicity. This point deserves a closer look since it was elsewhere in the publicity connected to the struggle for historical authenticity and for the exposition of the darker, Barbaric side of British medieval life.

The claim that producer Pandro S. Berman had ordered in-depth research into the dress, armoury and manners of the period was repeatedly foregrounded in the film's promotion (see: *Ivanhoe*, Small and Medium Press Books (both 1952); *Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952: xi-xiv). Together with the literary heritage of Scott, whose novels were famous for their minute historical detail, these claims of authenticity and historical accuracy sought to boost the film's plea for uniqueness, authority and cultural respectability.

The confidence with which the claims were put forward was most evident in *A Teaching Guide*, compiled by MGM and the American *Scholastic Teacher Magazine*, which was attached to *Ivanhoe*'s Medium Press Book 1952 and intended for use in history and English classes in conjunction with *Ivanhoe*. In addition to stars and the story synopsis, the *Guide* discussed life in medieval Britain, the feudalism and the unjust trial of Rebecca, and conjured up a past which was distinctly different from the Romantic one. This *Guide* was made to promote *Ivanhoe* to American schools, and was in all likelihood not used in England. A similar "school exploitation" idea was, however, offered to the British exhibitors in the form of "a special broadside with 12 illustrations stressing the historical value of the film." It was available for exhibitors and teachers only by mail order (*Ivanhoe* Small Press Book 1952), but its inclusion in the publicity material nevertheless supports the general idea that fictional films could pass for lessons in factual history -- just as Scott could base the historicity of his novel on an imaginary Wardour manuscript (Scott, 2000: 12, 89, 179, 396-7). Some

educators also endorsed this stance and turned it into action: during the autumn and winter of 1952-3 at Falkirk, 5,078 children from twenty-two schools attended special performances of *Ivanhoe* arranged by the co-operation of a local theatre and the school headmasters (KW, 19 February 1953: 38). This suggests that the familiar generic divide between costume drama and historical film, was, as far as contemporary promoters, commentators, and even teachers were concerned, blurred enough to be easily crossed (cf. Quinn, 2000: 23-8, 110-3).

In terms of ideology, the "'Ivanhoe' period" was cast solely in terms of "young medieval aristocrats" who could rise to knighthood through meritorious action. In other words, even in the midst of claims to authenticity, a conservative and monoclass view of the past was made to pass as British history. This history, in turn, was sold to the press and audiences through a diverse promotional strategy, in which visuals focused on the love story, and the text on spectacle, and which evoked both a negative and a positive view of medieval Britain. *Ivanhoe* was thus seen as rich enough to cater for all the desires implicated by these elements (see: Altman, 1999: 127): it was a romance, an adventure, and even something of a historical film. And, as far as the British promotional campaign was concerned, it was almost a British film.

***Ivanhoe* and its British Reception**

The critical reception of *Ivanhoe* in Britain exhibits four recurring tendencies in support of my argument. First of all, the nationality of the production was repeatedly commented on and disagreed about. As I will show, all the sources quoted below, heterogeneous as they may be, have one thing in common: the thematic importance of *Ivanhoe* as *British* history and its putative *Britishness* as a production, both features which feed into the film's contemporaneity. This can be seen in the way in which three themes and motifs sustained by the narrative were particularly emphasised. The gently ironic rendition of British national identity, the centrality of the monarchy and the anachronisms of fashion come across as the main themes that link *Ivanhoe* to early 1950s Britain. The first two tendencies courted discourses characterised by conservative values, while the fashion allusions built upon the emerging notions of affluence and consumerism.

The British trade papers were extremely enthusiastic about the film. *To-Day's Cinema* wrote that the film had "magnificent production qualities probably unmatched by any British film to date" and that it was a "stupendous achievement in British film production, representing stand-out entertainment for every shade of taste and an unquestioned box-office triumph" (*To-day's Cinema*, 5 June 1952)^[3]. As with other trade reviews, this review emphasises the film's Britishness. Since the reviewers of the trade papers were writing primarily for British exhibitors, they might have wanted to draw extra attention to *Ivanhoe's* Britishness, which meant that theatres could count it as a domestic quota film (Street and Dickinson, 1985: 195-8).

At the same time, there is little acknowledgement of stereotypically American values or characteristics; instead, they are downplayed when mentioned. This could be cautiously read as an instance of national pride, especially when this kind of discourse was repeated in fan magazines, which had no incentive to sell nationalities. For example, *The Picture Show* emphasised the Britishness of the cast and eschewed America altogether in its review (14 June 1952:2). *What's On in London* repeated these notions in a caption beside a still from the film, pointing the reader to "Joan Fontaine between the two Taylors -- mail-clad Robert [...] and English-rose Elizabeth [...] -- during the jousting sequence from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's

British-made Technicolored excursion into Sir Walter Scott's history of Ivanhoe" (*What's On in London*, 13 June 1952).

British newspapers presented a more mixed picture. Some of the papers identified *Ivanhoe* as American, which was seen as a mildly negative attribute (see: *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1952; *Manchester Guardian* 14 June 1952; *Picture Post*, 21 June 1952; *The Observer*, 15 June 1952). It is worth noting, however, that this view was limited to the quality papers and magazines, whose bias at the time was usually *a priori* against mass culture in general and America in particular (Ellis, 1996: 71, 86-8). The majority of the papers, especially the populars with the widest circulations, used hybrid terms, such as Anglo-American or Anglo-Hollywood, in their discussion of the film, which confirm and perceptively encapsulate the film's ambivalent national identity (*News of the World*, 15 June 1952; *Daily Mirror*, 13 June 1952; *Daily Mail*, 13 June 1952. See also *Daily Herald*, 13 June 1952).

Ivanhoe's representation of the British national past got an enthusiastic but slightly ironic treatment from the press. According to *Picturegoer*, "King Richard makes a dramatic entry, John slinks away in bafflement, loud cheers from one and all, and our rough island story lurches on" (*Picturegoer*, 14 June 1952: 10), while the *Daily Express*'s David Lewin thought

[i]t may be Ivanhokum, but I don't care. Robert Taylor, as Wilfred of Ivanhoe, that noble knight, rides around England killing off the nasty Normans and raising the ransom to bring back King Richard [...] 'Ivanhoe' has speed, action and fun. It is the biggest film to come out of a British studio and looks like it (*Daily Express*, 13 June 1952).

In the same vein *Star* stated that "Merrie MGM-England lives again in *Ivanhoe*" (*Star*, 13 June 1952), and the *Daily Mail* quipped about the restoration of "Richard the M.G.M.-Lion-Hearted" (*Daily Mail*, 13 June 1952). The irony in these passages did not, however, totally corrupt or deconstruct the reception of the British national past in *Ivanhoe*, which remained highly ambiguous. While the *Sunday Pictorial* described the film's depiction of the past as "hysteria" rather than history (15 June 1952), Margaret Hinxman of the fan magazine *Picturegoer* thought it too serious in its "hush-voiced, tip-toeing respect for the dignity, if not exactly the letter, of a literary classic" (*Picturegoer*, 6 September 1952). She was in turn countered by two readers of the same magazine:

Margaret Hinxman's remarks about *Ivanhoe* were unjustified ('Taking 'Ivanhoe' Seriously' *Picturegoer* Sept 6). All period films surely need not be spectacular, laugh-making romps. Sir Walter Scott's novel was solemn and the filmmakers should be praised for keeping close to its intended theme.

'Medieval goings-on' were meant to be taken seriously. It must have been highly unpleasant to have been a Saxon during a Norman invasion. (*Picturegoer*, 11 October 1952: 3).

The national past thus constructed and evoked on many occasions flashes of personal nostalgia. Reviewers reminisced about their schooldays and readings of Walter Scott's novel - a rhetorical strategy, which might have elicited a similar, nostalgic framework for the film's reception (*The Times*, 13 June 1952: 8; *Daily Telegraph*, 16 June 1952; *Daily Worker*, 14 June 1952; *Picturegoer*, 8 September 1952: 9; *Listener*, 20 August 1951). Reviewers also compared the novel and the film, and, while implying the greater authority of the literary

work, tended to excuse the film's "failings" on the grounds of Scott's own, explicit disclaimers about *Ivanhoe*'s historical veracity (*Daily Mirror*, 13 June 1952; *Evening News*, 12 June 1952; *Daily Mail*, 13 June 1952. See also Scott, 2000: 8-12). The review in *What's On in London* captured all these features:

As a boy Sir Walter Scott's stirring romance of Olde England, with its brilliant mixture of fact and fiction, was one of my favourite books: I read it so often I practically got to know it by heart! It always seemed to me to be the real picture of the period and the film has succeeded beyond all expectations in bringing that story, and that feeling of authenticity to the screen. Obviously the book has been streamlined for the occasion; such was unavoidable if the film was not to beat *G.W.T.W.* for endurance stakes (*What's On in London*, 20 June 1952).

"The feeling of the period in English history" (*The Times*, 13 June 1952) thus conceived, was, as the press book had exhorted, one that evoked a happier era than the present, an era "when knighthood was in flower" and that provided a potential cue for both escape and nostalgia for the general audiences of *Ivanhoe*.

On the basis of this evidence it can be said that, in 1952, the national content and the spectacular style of *Ivanhoe* was interpreted as eliciting different kinds of British national identities. Some quality papers used the film to define Britishness as something totally separate from the film, but the majority of the critical reception seemed to opt for either a *detente* view of Anglo-Americanism or outright affirmation of the film's Britishness and its depiction of the national past.

In the climate of 1952, the film's promotion seemed to bank on an assumption about the weariness and fears of audiences living in a less noble and chivalric age, and implied that the film would provide an escape to a more uplifting era. For critical audiences in austerity Britain, this general invitation took particular national forms: on many occasions the film was proudly appropriated as British, it was thought to be about British history, and it was received as something refreshing, as something lost, regained or revisited, and as something to which to escape.

The state of the nation and its people could easily have elicited these kind of desires. For example, in May 1952, in the midst of continuing food rationing and the Korean War (see: *The Times*, 9 June 1952; 12 June 1952; 2 July 1952, 9 August 1952), Anthony Eden addressed the Conservative Party conference, and said that fighting austerity and repairing the national economy "was going to be hard to do." However, "all round the country our people are in good heart and if we preserve our unity, courage, and determination, under the brilliant leadership of Mr. Churchill, we will see this thing through" (Quoted in *The Times*, 21 May 1952). *Ivanhoe* struck a chord with these sentiments in the guise of historical pageantry and adventure, while also providing an escape from the present hardships.

Was there a focal point around which the issues of nationality might have gravitated? The second theme redundantly present in the film narrative was the monarchy and its connection, even equation with a cause of national unity and nation building. The emergence of some of these trends in the reviews already noted above was encouraged and bolstered by the culture that surrounded the film and its critics. In the film theatres where *Ivanhoe* was shown, the monarchy was visible not only through newsreels, the gala premieres and Royal Film Performances. In 1952, there was a wealth of newsreels about the late King and the ascension of Elizabeth and all the rituals these events and the upcoming coronation implied. Just a week

before *Ivanhoe*'s premiere, The Queen celebrated with aplomb her first birthday "in office" in several ceremonies (*The Times*, 6 June 1952). During the film's summer performance, The Queen also toured the country in a highly public fashion, keeping the monarchy conspicuously on the agenda, just as in *Ivanhoe* (see: *The Times*, 1952: June-July issues).

As Harry Hopkins noted, the royal, upper-class story sold well alongside the official egalitarianism, democracy and utilitarianism (Hopkins, 1963: 283-303; Chapman, 2002: 84-5; Cannadine, 1989: 152-5). Thus, by equating the King with the nation, *Ivanhoe*'s royalist discourse provided a powerful and highly visible prologue to the upcoming coronation, and the "New Elizabethan" era. With the film's bias towards the aristocracy, the depiction and celebration of an enlightened autocrat give the film, and its national discourse, a decisively conservative tone.

The British press, which, according to the film magazine *Sequence*, failed to report any HUAC activities (*Sequence*, Summer 1950: 1), did not mention either the hearings, the Committee, McCarthy or anti-Semitism in its reception of *Ivanhoe*. As the film's third main "contemporary component," noticeable allure was attached to the romance and the glamour of the nobility seen in the film. As already noted, national newspaper advertising was designed "to highlight Elizabeth Taylor with prominent credits to *Ivanhoe*," while the star also appeared in "an extensive press advertising campaign" by Max Factor cosmetics (*Kine Weekly*, 12 June 1952; *Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book 1952).

Despite the claims of authenticity, the small press book made lots of suggestions about the film's potential as a fashion trendsetter with minstrel hats and the "Rowena look" (*Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book), and it seems that some of the scenes were composed and lit specifically to endorse not only the romance but also the luxurious tastes and exotic attire and make-up of the main characters. The coloured, sfumato light works to this effect in Rowena's chamber, and in Isaac's house during Rebecca's love soliloquy. In the middle of the trial scene, a close up of Rebecca's face reproduces a classic glamour shot complete with a soft and diffuse key light glimmering in her pupils, and a faint fill light at the back, which creates a halo around her head.

In 1952 this kind of glamorous style was familiar from the pages of *Picturegoer*, *Picture Show* and *Picture Post*. In these magazines, models and Hollywood stars advertised, among other things, soap such as Knights Castile and Lux, which was also an *Ivanhoe* product tie-in featuring both Taylor and Fontaine (*Ivanhoe*, Small Press Book. See also *Picture Show* and *Picturegoer* back covers for 1951, 1952 and 1953). Only five years before there had been a serious soap shortage, which sent advertisers on a nostalgia trip to pre-war days. As soap was de-rationed less than two years before the premiere of *Ivanhoe* (Phillips, 1963: 133-4; Cooper, 1963: 53; Gardiner, 1999: 33, 72), it offers a striking example of Britain's slow emergence from austerity, prolonged by the expenditures of the Korean war.

Less than a month before the premiere, after an unpopular "cutting of £150m. worth of food imports", Prime Minister Churchill acknowledged that "the country was beset in many ways". He said that his Government "must have time [...] These situations cannot be repaired except by years. Give us a few years – three or four years – of steady, resolute, faithful government, caring nothing for class or narrow interests but seeking only to enable the British nation to make the best of itself" (Quoted in *The Times*, 21 May 1952: 3). The war had ended seven years ago, but the lives of the urban working class, which formed two thirds of the British population and of cinema audiences, were still characterised by coal smoke, smog, and low

quality or bomb-damaged housing with outside toilets and shared bath water (see: Gardiner, 1999: 24-7; Inwood, 1998: 838-9; Chambers, 1986: 23-4). Interviewees in Jackie Stacey's study on the spectatorship of Hollywood cinema in the 1940s and post-war Britain strikingly convey these conditions and the mood they evoke; for these interviewees, cinema was about

Escapism -- from the everyday world -- into magical make believe where good always (nearly) prevailed [...] America at that time to me (as a child and a teenager) might as well have been on another planet -- and I enjoyed seeing the country, the house interiors, the beautiful women and their hairstyles and clothes

For a few hours it [cinema] made you forget about the war in the 1940s and after the war the drabness of everything in post war Britain

Like so many others, my life in the 1940s was pretty drab. We lived in a London flat. No electricity, no bath, no luxuries like refrigerators, telephones or cars, and of course no t.v. All we had to brighten up our lives were the radio and the cinema (Quoted in Stacey, 1994: 118, 94, 95 respectively).

Despite its medieval settings, *Ivanhoe*, with its richly clad and photographed stars, catered for the demand for this kind of escapist pleasures. Many everyday goods, not to mention new luxuries, such as most fashion items, were still unavailable or hardly within the spending power of the average, that is, working-class cinemagoer (Stacey, 1994: 204). Wearing "the latest 20th-century Saxon styles" (*Daily Express*, 13 June 1952), "Joan Fontaine as Lady Rowena, in maize and tender blue; Elizabeth Taylor as the Jewess Rebecca, in heavy mascara and a wimple" (*The Observer*, 15 June 1952) provided the best ersatz for consumption, as well as fantasies and models of emulation for the less well-off female audiences.

Conclusion

From the late 1940s onwards Hollywood had to find novel ways to fight the general fall in admissions, and to deal with the anti-trust legislation. One answer was provided by runaway productions, especially in Britain. Along with Disney's *The Treasure Island*, MGM's *Ivanhoe* was one of the pioneering films to be produced in this fashion. The growing importance of the international market was noted by selecting pre-sold properties that tapped into the British popular cultural heritage in the form of the source novel and in the form of well-known British actors and landscapes: although the American market was still of primary importance, *Ivanhoe* and films like it were also made with British audiences in mind.

Certain features of British culture and history were emphasised in the film itself. The monarchy, the discourse of loyal patriotism, the glamour of the aristocracy, the spectacular display of old buildings, customs and landscapes were among the main attractions and ideologies of *Ivanhoe*. They were duly endorsed by the press book, which, by counting on the austere living conditions and the Cold War anxieties of its audiences, pitched the film as well-made escapism, able to cater for all tastes from romance to history. These themes were picked up by the press, but not in a total, unaltered form. The film was appropriated as British, its depiction of the British past was accepted in an amused, delighted fashion, with monarchism forming the conservative core of its national discourse, whether ironic or not. These resonated not only with the calls for national unity by the Conservatives, but also with the extensive homage and attention paid to the regal affairs during 1952-3. In addition to

escapism, *Ivanhoe* could be seen as portraying the continuity of these institutions, the values, customs, and the heritage they embody, and as a one of the connecting links between medieval Britain and the United Kingdom of the early 1950s. If these values were something the critics of the quality papers could accept, it was the anachronisms of fashion presented by the stars, which could also engage the larger audiences: luxurious styles of photography and glamorous stars could alleviate the experience of living in contemporary Britain. Thus, as an Anglo-American production *Ivanhoe* could offer both the pleasures of the nostalgically cast British past as well as a promise of future affluence, of glamour that would be more widely available than in austerity Britain.

All in all, the Anglo-American characteristics of *Ivanhoe* reflect the national identity as a discourse that is malleable, rich and prone to internal contradictions. The film and its cyclical siblings such as *The Knights of the Round Table* and *The Adventures of Quentin Durward* suggest that in the 1950s that identity had a concrete trans-atlantic dimension. Thus, the analysis of *Ivanhoe* and its peers throw light on the American contingent in the cinematic make-up of Britishness and show how intertwined the two are. Filmic British history and identity are not matters restricted to British products.

In particular, it reveals the importance of British subject matter, stars, locations and audiences to Hollywood studios in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. Many of the films with these characteristics had huge budgets and were planned as annual flagship films on which the much of the box-office hopes were resting. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as reflecting the prestigious qualities of Britishness in the eyes of Hollywood, while on the other hand it tells of the growing need for internationalisation and for ways of finding and attracting new markets at the time of more rapidly declining American audiences. It seems that Hollywood's old love-affair with Britain (see: Glancy, 1999) was blossoming again.

Furthermore, the great success in Britain of *Ivanhoe*'s mixture of American aesthetics and British production values and their British re-appropriation by the press indicate that there is a need for re-evaluation of internationally produced films. Some of these films, such as *Ivanhoe*, which have previously been analysed mostly from an exclusively American or a Cold War perspective, can take on totally different and localised meanings revealed through the detailed study of the reception contexts outside the US. So, even if *Ivanhoe* was hardly a *bona fide* British-made film, it certainly exploited and became a part of the processes that constantly re-defined British identity.

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Notes

[1] The BFI National Library's collection usually makes the distinction between the Medium and Small press books according to their physical size. It is not clear whether both press books were utilised in Britain; their existence in the BFI collections would seem to indicate so. In any case, they do give information about the ways in which the producers and marketers wanted to frame the film and are therefore valid evidence.

[2] Like *Ivanhoe*, *Quo Vadis?* has been interpreted as a Cold War text. (See e.g. Winkler, 2005).

[3] As a rule, the BFI press clippings files do not give page numbers for the clippings, which is why I have put only dates in my references.

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