

WALTER SCOTT • *IVANHOE*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WALTER SCOTT

Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish novelist born in Edinburgh in 1771. He studied Law and became a solicitor like his father, and, despite his subsequent literary success, he never gave up the legal profession. Although left lame by a childhood illness, he devoted much of his leisure time to the exploration of the **Border country** and in reading old Border tales and ballads. The combination of these two interests led him to his initial success.

In 1797 he published a translation of German plays and poems anonymously, but five years later he published a collection of popular ballads under his own name.

Later, he published nine novels based on Scottish history anonymously, but then, with *Ivanhoe*, in 1819, he turned to England and Europe and the Middle Ages for his subject matters.

For most of his life, Scott was accepted as an outstanding member of the literary establishment. He died in 1832.



Walter Scott

Border country: *an area along the border between England and Scotland.*

ABOUT THE NOVEL

IVANHOE

Ivanhoe (1819) remains one of the most popular of Scott's novels. When it first appeared, it was received throughout England more favourably than all other Scott's novels. The story begins four generations after the Norman conquest of England, while the tensions between the Saxons and the Normans are at a peak. To make things worse, King Richard has been captured on his way back from the Crusades and imprisoned in Austria.

A brave and noble knight, Ivanhoe, returns from the Crusades to claim Rowena, an Anglo-Saxon princess, to be his bride. Before long, he gets involved in the struggle between Prince John and his brother, Richard the Lionheart, who has returned incognito and obtained the aid of Robin Hood and his band of men to win back the throne of England.

After a series of fights and tournaments, there is finally peace between the Normans and the Saxons, and Ivanhoe will go on to serve heroically under King Richard for many years.



THE TEXT

SAXON FARMERS AND NORMAN MEAT EATERS

In this passage Sir Cedric's jester, Wamba, is talking to a swineherd, Gurth.

"Why, how call you those **grunting** brutes running about on their four legs?" demanded Wamba.

"Swine, fool – swine", said the herd; "every fool knows that."

"And swine is good Saxon", said the **jester**; "but how call you the **sow** when she is **flayed**, and drawn, and quartered, and hung up by the **heels**, like a traitor?"

"Pork," answered the **swineherd**.

"I am very glad every fool knows that too," said Wamba, "and pork, I think, is good Norman-French; and so when the brute lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name; but becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried to the castle hall to feast among the nobles. What dost thou think of this, friend Gurth, ha?"

"It is but too true doctrine, friend Wamba, however it got into thy fool's **pate**."

"**Nay**, I can tell you more" said Wamba in the same tone. "There is old **Alderman** Ox continues to hold his Saxon epithet while he is under the charge of **serfs** and bondsmen such as thou, but becomes Beef, a fiery French gallant, when he arrives before the worshipful jaws that are destined to consume him. Mynherr Calf, too, becomes Monsieur de Veau in the like manner: he is Saxon when he requires **tendance**, and takes a

Norman name when he becomes matter of enjoyment."

"By Saint Dunstan," answered Gurth, "thou speakest but sad truths; little is left to us by the air we breathe, and that appears to have been reserved with much hesitation, solely for the purpose of enabling us to endure the tasks they lay upon our shoulders. The finest and the fattest is for their board; the loveliest is for their couch; the best and bravest supply their foreign masters with soldiers, and whiten distant lands with their bones, leaving few here who have either will or the power to protect the unfortunate Saxon. God's blessing on our Master Cedric, he hath done the work of a man in standing in the gap; but Reginald Front-de-Boeuf is coming down to this country in person, and we shall soon see how little Cedric's trouble will avail him. Here, here," he exclaimed again, raising his voice. "So ho! So ho! Well done, Fangs! Thou hast them all before three now, and bring'st them on bravely, lad."

alderman: *conte, nobile*
flayed: *scuoiato*
to grunt: *grugnire*
heel: *zampa posteriore*
jester: *giullare, buffone di corte*
nay: *no*
pate: *testa*
serf: *servo della gleba*
sow: *scrofa*
swineherd: *guardiano di porci*
tendance (attendance): *cure, assistenza*

COMPREHENSION

1 What are Wamba and Gurth talking about?

- They are comparing the Saxon language with the Norman one.
- They are talking about aristocrats that live in the area.
- They are discussing the Norman words for meat.

2 Complete the table with reference to the text.

Saxon words	Norman-French words
Swine - sow	
Ox	
Calf	

3 What do the Saxon words identify? And the Norman ones? Why?

Language	Word field/Category	Reason
Saxon		
Norman-French		

4 What happens to the word *sheep* of Saxon origin? Use a dictionary if you are not sure.

ANALYSIS

5 What is the tone of the passage? Tick all that is relevant and explain why.

- Sarcastic
 Sad
 Funny
 Serious

6 Although both Wamba and Gurth speak English well, there is a grammar mistake which is repeated twice. Find it in the text.

7 The text was written in the early 19th century. Find examples of words and/or structures that are no longer used.

Are there words that help you identify the period in which the story is set?

DISCUSSION

8 What happens in your language? Do people use the same word for both the farm animal and its meat?



Robert Taylor (Ivanhoe), Joan Fontaine (Rowena) and Liz Taylor (Rebecca) in the 1952 film adaptation