



## The Heart of Midlothian

*Walter Scott*

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The Heart of Mid-Lothian, set between the two Jacobean insurrections in 1736 and during the Porteous Riots, marks the peak of its author's achievement; many consider it to be Scott's national epic.

## **The Heart of Midlothian Details**

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## From Reader Review The Heart of Midlothian for online ebook

### Kim says

"The Heart of Midlothian" is the seventh of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Novels. It was originally published in four volumes on July 25, 1818, under the title of "Tales of My Landlord", 2nd series, and the author was given as "Jedediah Cleishbotham, Schoolmaster and Parish-clerk of Ganderclough". When the book was released it was even more popular than the book right before it, "Rob Roy", I read that too, I remember nothing about it. Sitting here thinking of the book, either this one or any other Scott book you can think of, reminds me of the reason I don't read Scott's books, OK, there's a couple of reasons. The problem is, since quite a long time goes by between my reading of one of his books until the next one I've forgotten three things; what the last book of his I read was about, that I no longer read his books, and the reasons why. Then I start reading and it all comes back, the reasons why anyway, I still can't remember what "Rob Roy", "Ivanhoe", "Old Mortality" and who knows what else is about. But on to "The Heart of Midlothian".

It begins (sort of) with an introduction by the author. I never read introductions by other people, but since it was by the author I figured he probably didn't give the plot of his own book away. I'm still not sure what he gave away, the first sentence is this:

*"The author has stated, in the preface to the Chronicles of the Canongate, 1827, that he received from an anonymous correspondent an account of the incident upon which the following story is founded."*

I don't know what the preface to the Chronicles of the Canongate is that he has stated this account of this story is, but I'll take his word for it. We now move on to the letter received from Mrs. Helen Gowdie which starts like this:

*"I had taken for summer lodgings a cottage near the old Abbey of Lincluden. It had formerly been inhabited by a lady who had pleasure in embellishing cottages, which she found perhaps homely and even poor enough; mine, therefore, possessed many marks of taste and elegance unusual in this species of habitation in Scotland, where a cottage is literally what its name declares.*

*From my cottage door I had a partial view of the old Abbey before mentioned; some of the highest arches were seen over, and some through, the trees scattered along a lane which led down to the ruin, and the strange fantastic shapes of almost all those old ashes accorded wonderfully well with the building they at once shaded and ornamented.*

*"The Abbey itself from my door was almost on a level with the cottage; but on coming to the end of the lane, it was discovered to be situated on a high perpendicular bank, at the foot of which run the clear waters of the Cluden, where they hasten to join the sweeping Nith,  
'Whose distant roaring swells and fa's.'*

There isn't anything particularly wrong with this letter, I guess, as long as you like writing really, really long letters with really, really fancy wording, because it is taking her a while to get to the point and by the time she does her hand must hurt terribly. Anyway, Mrs. Gowdie tells the author about an old woman of seventy or eighty years of age who she goes to buy chickens from who's name is or was Helen Walker. When Mrs. Gowdie goes home she asks her husband about Helen Walker and he tells her that Helen had a much younger sister who had been tried for child-murder and Helen walked all the way to London to get her sister a pardon. Mrs. Gowdie doesn't get a chance to return to the cottage of Helen until the spring and she finds that in the

meantime Helen has died. So Mrs. Gowdie spends some time trying to gather together more of the story and sends the whole thing to our author.

So now that we get through all that we're ready to get on with the story, we turn the page and find a postscript. And we read this:

*"Although it would be impossible to add much to Mrs. Goldie's picturesque and most interesting account of Helen Walker, the prototype of the imaginary Jeanie Deans, the Editor may be pardoned for introducing two or three anecdotes respecting that excellent person, which he has collected from a volume entitled, Sketches from Nature, by John M'Diarmid, a gentleman who conducts an able provincial paper in the town of Dumfries."*

I'm already wishing that since it is impossible to add to the account of Helen Walker the editor wouldn't, and we could begin the story, but he didn't seem to be able to help himself so we go on to find that Helen was the daughter of a small farmer, was considered was proud and conceited, worked to support her mother when her father died, refused to lie to save her sister but walked barefoot to London for a pardon, lived and died in poverty. That's the shortened version of it anyway. Now we can begin the story, turn the page and find:

*"TO THE BEST OF PATRONS,  
A PLEASED AND INDULGENT READER*

*JEDEDIAH CLEISHBOTHAM  
WISHES HEALTH, AND INCREASE, AND CONTENTMENT."*

*Courteous Reader,*

*"If ingratitude comprehendeth every vice, surely so foul a stain worst of all beseemeth him whose life has been devoted to instructing youth in virtue and in humane letters. Therefore have I chosen, in this prolegomenon, to unload my burden of thanks at thy feet, for the favour with which thou last kindly entertained the Tales of my Landlord. Certes, if thou hast chuckled over their factious and festivous descriptions, or hadst thy mind filled with pleasure at the strange and pleasant turns of fortune which they record, verily, I have also simpered when I beheld a second storey with attics, that has arisen on the basis of my small domicile at Ganderclough, the walls having been beforehand pronounced by Deacon Barrow to be capable of enduring such an elevation.....*

*It is with this sole purpose, and disclaiming all intention of purchasing that pendicle or poffle of land called the Carlinescroft, lying adjacent to my garden, and measuring seven acres, three roods, and four perches, that I have committed to the eyes of those who thought well of the former tomes, these four additional volumes of the Tales of my Landlord. Not the less, if Peter Prayfort be minded to sell the said poffle, it is at his own choice to say so; and, peradventure, he may meet with a purchaser: unless (gentle reader) the pleasing pourtraictures of Peter Pattieson, now given unto thee in particular, and unto the public in general, shall have lost their favour in thine eyes, whereof I am no way distrustful. And so much confidence do I repose in thy continued favour, that, should thy lawful occasions call thee to the town of Ganderclough, a place frequented by most at one time or other in their lives, I will enrich thine eyes with a sight of those precious manuscripts whence thou hast derived so much delectation, thy nose with a snuff from my mull, and thy palate with a dram from my bottle of strong waters, called by the learned of Ganderclough, the Dominie's Dibble o' Drink. "*

It goes on for a while after this, but all I want to do is get to the story, if you really want to read the rest of it

and try to make heads or tails out of it, it's on gutenberg. Besides, I've just turned the page and saw "Chapter I" which was exciting, the title "Being Introductory" wasn't. It is a fine summer day and the narrator, the narrator of this introductory chapter anyway, is walking out the highway to meet the coach he is expecting anytime now. The coach overturns however, and because of this our narrator meets two young lawyers, passengers on the coach and an elderly and sickly looking man by the name of Mr. Dunover. During this chapter we find that Mr. Dunover has been in prison, the "Heart of Mid-Lothian".

*"Then the Tolbooth of Edinburgh is called the Heart of Mid-Lothian?" said I.*

*"So termed and reputed, I assure you."*

*"I think," said I, with the bashful diffidence with which a man lets slip a pun in presence of his superiors, "the metropolitan county may, in that case, be said to have a sad heart."*

*"Right as my glove, Mr. Pattieson," added Mr. Hardie; "and a close heart, and a hard heart—Keep it up, Jack."*

*"And a wicked heart, and a poor heart," answered Halkit, doing his best.*

*"And yet it may be called in some sort a strong heart, and a high heart," rejoined the advocate. "You see I can put you both out of heart."*

*"Hardie now renounced this ineffectual search, in which there was perhaps a little affectation, and told us the tale of poor Dunover's distresses, with a tone in which a degree of feeling, which he seemed ashamed of as unprofessional, mingled with his attempts at wit, and did him more honour. It was one of those tales which seem to argue a sort of ill-luck or fatality attached to the hero. A well-informed, industrious, and blameless, but poor and bashful man, had in vain essayed all the usual means by which others acquire independence, yet had never succeeded beyond the attainment of bare subsistence. During a brief gleam of hope, rather than of actual prosperity, he had added a wife and family to his cares, but the dawn was speedily overcast. Everything retrograded with him towards the verge of the miry Slough of Despond, which yawns for insolvent debtors; and after catching at each twig, and experiencing the protracted agony of feeling them one by one elude his grasp, he actually sunk into the miry pit whence he had been extricated by the professional exertions of Hardie."*

And the introductory chapter ends with this:

*"Next morning the travellers left Ganderclough. I afterwards learned from the papers that both have been since engaged in the great political cause of Bubbleburgh and Bitem, a summary case, and entitled to particular despatch; but which, it is thought, nevertheless, may outlast the duration of the parliament to which the contest refers. Mr. Halkit, as the newspapers informed me, acts as agent or solicitor; and Mr. Hardie opened for Sir Peter Plyem with singular ability, and to such good purpose, that I understand he has since had fewer play-bills and more briefs in his pocket. And both the young gentlemen deserve their good fortune; for I learned from Dunover, who called on me some weeks afterwards, and communicated the intelligence with tears in his eyes, that their interest had availed to obtain him a small office for the decent maintenance of his family; and that, after a train of constant and uninterrupted misfortune, he could trace a dawn of prosperity to his having the good fortune to be flung from the top of a mail-coach into the river Gander, in company with an advocate and a writer to the Signet. The reader will not perhaps deem himself equally obliged to the accident, since it brings upon him the following narrative, founded upon the conversation of the evening. "*

So, once again I turn the page, although I no longer really cared all that much anymore and found.....the story, finally. Now that I was actually reading the plot of the book, it was very interesting and I was enjoying myself, if you can enjoy yourself reading about people getting arrested, and hung, and riots, and child-murders and things like that. And then, suddenly it all came back to me, why I don't read Scott, it's because I have almost no idea what anyone is saying:

*"but be he ruffler or paddar, but he knows my gybe as well as the jark of e'er a queer cuffin"*

*"the bauldest of them wilken a scart o' my guse feather"*

*"pits a wheen fule sangs and idle vanities"*

*"he suld hae a lang-shankit spune that wadsup kail wi' the deil."*

Anyway, I'm now trying to decide whether to get it into my head that I don't like Scott, that it takes far too long to get to the plot for me and my head aches too much for the translating the words in my brain, or perhaps I should dig out all my Scott books and read them back to back, maybe by the end of them all I'll have gotten used to him. Maybe. I haven't mentioned hardly anything of the plot yet, and I've talked enough about this book, so here it is, it's about a sister who murders her child, or perhaps doesn't murder her child, maybe someone else did it, or maybe the child isn't dead, and another sister who likes walking barefoot, and a bunch of people who like to hang other people, oh, and there are Dukes in it, and Kings and Queens and all kinds of people. There, how's that for the plot. Go read the book, let me know what anyone in it said.

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### **Czarny Pies says**

I am giving *The Heart of the Mid-Lothian* only three stars because it disappointed me. I read it because it has been considered by many as the great masterpiece of the most influential British Writer of the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott. I found it ultimately to be a mediocre novel despite its many stellar qualities. However much we admire George Eliot and Jane Austen today, they had little impact on English literature in their time and absolutely none outside of the British Isles. Sir Walter Scott in contrast caused a revolution. It was his work that introduced romanticism to France and Italy inspiring writers Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Alessandro Manzoni. George Bizet's opera "Jolie fille de Perth" and Gaetano Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" were based on Scott novels. While Scott's influence was extraordinary, it is hard to identify a masterpiece amongst his works.

At different times however the *The Heart of the Mid-Lothian* has been proposed as the Magnum Opus of Scott. Hans Christian Anderson was one greater writer who considered it to be such and his novel *The Two Baronesses* was composed as a hommage to the Mid-Lothian. There has even been an opera based on the work; *La Prigione di Edimburgo* by Federico Ricci (1809–1877).

It is certainly worth considering the arguments of those who consider the novel to be truly great. First true to its title, the novel provides a magnificent portrayal of Scotland in the carceral age. "*The Heart of the Midlothian*" was the nickname for the prison of Edinborough (which is why in French it is called *Le prison d'Edimbourg* and in Italian *La Prigione di Edimburgo*.) Scott gives the reader fabulous descriptions of the smugglers and highwaymen who terrorized Scotland during the era as well as of the workings of the police, courts and prisons.

Victor Hugo has been greatly praised for his portraits of Parisian riots but none of them are as good as the description of a riot and a lynching found in *The Heart of the Mid-Lothian*.

The novel also has an outstanding heroine Jeanie Deans who seems to come from the pages of a Jane Austen

novel. Jeannie is honest, courageous and dignified. Her ultimate triumph belongs to her intense moral sense and determination in face of great adversity. She provides the leadership and focus in the novel. She has an earnest, right-minded husband who never understands what's going on and a family of bunglers who remind the reader of the Bennets from *Pride and Prejudice*.

The *Heart of the Mid-Lothian* also has many outstanding comic scenes. Scott provides a fabulous parody of the Reformed Presbyterian Church members (a.k.a. the Cameronians) through the pompous and ludicrous portrayal that he makes of the heroine's father. Although none are quite as well done as Jeanie Dean's father there are several other comic characters that are very well done.

Thus there is much good writing in *The Heart of the Mid-Lothian* which is undermined by several major errors. Scott addresses the issue of infanticide (of which the heroine's sister is falsely accused) which is praiseworthy but he bungles in the execution and the result is a lamentable melodrama.

The single greatest sin that Scott commits is to write interminable dialogues in a false Scottish accent that is supposed to draw the reader's attention to the fact that Jeannie and several of the other leading characters are members of the lower classes. The result is ghastly. The experience of reading the passages reminded me of listening to Harry Lauder sing "A Wee Deoch an Doris". Scott was in tune with his times. Popular Patois were considered to be attributes of authenticity and honesty. Victor Hugo wrote a great long essay in praise of urban slang ('argot') in *Les Misérables*. The problem is that it does not work. Great writers from Euripides through Shakespeare to J.K. Rowling have understood that lower class accents are only to be used for comic effect and then sparingly. Unfortunately, Scott wrote most of his dialogues in the artificial accent that he created. The reader suffers greatly to no good end.

For the forgiving reader who likes Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of the Mid-Lothian* has many excellent qualities. It is not, however, the masterpiece that some consider it to be.

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## **Valerie says**

This is the Everyman edition, and does contain the Everyman motto: "Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide, In thy most need be by thy side."

As always with classic works, edition matters. The copy I have is marked up by somebody apparently studying the book for a class. The usual warning not to read the prefatory material before reading the book applies. (Wish I'd followed it. This is the first Scott book I've read, and I really didn't need all the comparative stuff.)

There is a glossary at the end, which is not a lot of use (I can manage the Scots dialect myself, mostly. I can also construe the Latin and German to a certain degree. I need the obscure terms from the time elaborated.) There are also extensive endnotes (well indexed for once) and footnotes for shorter commentary. They're useful, if not very complete.

Warning for people who have vision problems: some of the writing is VERY small, and will strain your eyes.

As for the book itself, it's set in the reign of George II, during a period when the king (who didn't speak English) was spending time in his primary job as Elector of Hanover, and had left behind his Queen (Caroline, a common name for British queens) as regent. Scotland and England had been forcibly united before the death of Queen Anne, whose (18!) children all died before her. This union of Scotland and England has always been heavily contested (even up to the present day), but it was much more forcibly

contested after the "dead queen"'s death and the accession of the Hanoverian kings.

The story takes place around the 1730s (the lynching of Captain Porteous, (almost) the first incident in the book, was in 1736).

The 'heart of Midlothian' in the title is a prison in Edinburgh (already defunct by the time the book was written). I have to say I found this a surprise: I hadn't known that Scott had written anything so close to his own time, or set (largely) in a city. I was hesitant to start reading it: but I plowed on through, and I've gotten to the meat of the story.

The book actually begins with the author's preface, followed by the oversetting of a carriage that creates the basis for the framing narrative (I don't know if the people in the framing narrative are ever followed up on: not as far as I've gotten, anyway). The rakehell speed of 'modern' conveyances (apparently there was a period before the advent of railways when the system of stagecoaches was significantly sped up) is what causes the (soon disappearing) narrator to learn the main story.

The main story is ostensibly about a devoted sister saving her baby sister from being killed for 'child-murder'. This is obviously the main mover of the plot: but it's not the main issue, really. The reason the younger sister is arrested is because she has confessed to having given birth to a child, but the law at the time was that a woman who makes no preparations for impending childbirth is guilty of murder if the child dies or cannot be found. This meant that a great many women and girls were blamed for what was often quite ordinary infant mortality in areas that had very high infant mortality at the time.

So the main issue is rather the changes to laws that followed the union of Scotland and England. Previous laws had (it seems) been largely a matter of duels between offended parties, or of settlements by lairds and other nobility. The presence of English militias in Edinburgh is fiercely resented by the Scots, and they often resist in what are called by the English rulers 'riots'. The reason why the main story begins with the story of the lynching of Porteous is that the Scots argue that Porteous was outside his jurisdiction when he opened fire on protesters trying to cut down and bury the body of one of their own, who had robbed a tax-collector of what he felt he had been robbed of by the new taxes on trade, and who thereafter won the people's sympathy by helping his accomplice escape.

The establishment of a civilian police force in Britain was intended to prevent the sort of abuses the military policing of civilians caused. Ironically, we're now backing into another such situation, with the growing militarization of civilian police forces.

In the story, the civil rights safeguards obtained by the baronetcy in the Magna Carta are not available to ordinary people. No right to counsel, no right to trial by jury, no right to be told what you're being arrested for... Add to this a draconian legal code that decrees death for almost any offence, and you have a dangerous mixture, in which heroic measures are required even to save a young girl who is revealed to be innocent (her child is, as she claims from the beginning, not dead).

There is a great deal ('muckle', as people repeatedly say) of bigotry in this book, Some of it is decried (mostly of the religious sort). Much of it seems not to be even detectable by the author. Derogatory language is used almost automatically against those who are not of the nobility, against all women, sometimes even against Scots themselves.

In many ways this becomes most obvious when it's stood on its head. Thus the only noble in the first two hundred pages or so is not overly intelligent, not vigorous, and not very helpful except in matters where

'siller' can help. He literally can't get into town, because his horse won't go there. Not a very sterling exemplar of the 'better' classes, in other words. Not dissipated, not cruel: just not very able. Comparing him with the other characters, even the hobbyist saddler Saddletree is a heroic figure. And the true hero of the book, Jeanie Means, is a positive paragon.

But perhaps she would be a legendary hero in any story.

The moral at the end is nonsensical in context, and generally. The implication is that there's no way anybody can possibly recover from youthful indiscretions. This sort of abusive 'morality' is too typical of puritan social and religious theories. If Effie Deans had not feared her own family and community, she would have taken refuge with them, and would have been cared for by them as well as possible in those days when old midwifery was being forcibly replaced by university-trained doctors. Then she probably would not have lost her 'bairn', and would have been better able to care for him, and herself.

In many ways the worst victim in this story is the 'madwoman' Madge Wildfire. She also loses her child. She is abused by her mother. She ends up being murdered by a mob. Law enforcement officials believe that the ideal way to get information from poor witnesses is to beat it out of them. One of the leaders of the investigation into the death of Porteous casually argues that he will send the arrested 'witness' Madge Wildfire to a workhouse and have her flogged, and is only deterred by being informed that it wouldn't work.

Madge believes (or so she says) that her mother, out of social climbing motives, killed Madge's child. Madge's mother believes (or says she does) that Madge herself killed the child in a moment of mania. The possibility that the child just died of 'natural causes' never seems to be considered.

But the abuse of the mentally ill at the time is really not dealt with in the story. Madge Wildfire is crazy but not stupid. She intervenes several times to protect people she values. But who acts to protect her?

Far too many people in this story depend on the patronage of famous, noble, and rich people. I concur with the general respect for the Duke of Argyle, if, as it's said, the depiction of him in the book is accurate. He seems to have had a very good idea of when the laws have to be ameliorated. But the need for somebody as remarkable as the Duke of Argyle to intercede in the cause of mercy clearly creates a situation where most people will NOT be helped.

There's also an almost complete case of tunnel vision in this book. It's almost claustrophobic how little of the world is included in the story. Scott makes it seem as if he really had no idea of what happened in the world outside Great Britain. One character is sold as an indentured servant in Virginia, and it's made clear that this is a common practice at the time. But nobody seems to inquire as to what happened to the other victims of this practice. Only people who have a personal and/or familial interest in particular individuals even try to trace the victims of a form of back-door enslavement.

There's also casual denigration of Native Americans in Virginia which is not even analyzed. If Effie Dean's child found a home among the native peoples living in the mountains of Virginia at the time, that's probably a good thing, although he and his adopted family would probably have had serious problems in very short order. The argument that he thus effectively disappeared is an odd one: it's almost as if Scott, having decided he'd served his purpose, looked out for a way of disposing of him, and decided to consign him to a fictional place in order to make him irredeemable. Rather lazy of him, but not unknown.

Minor technical point: why should it be believed that Jeanie Deans could never be called by her personal name after she was married?

I found the footnotes and endnotes somewhat useful, and often interesting, but not necessary to understand the story. The glossary, as I've already noted, might be useful for somebody who had no knowledge of Scots dialog, and not for this book alone. But as a guide to other nonstandard language, it's not particularly useful. I wish the person who marked up my copy had researched the obscure terminology.

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### **Bettie? says**

Bettie's Books

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### **Chris says**

Most likely Scott's best work.

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### **Isil says**

je suis encore tombée sous le charme de Walter Scott avec ce Cœur du Mid-Lothian qui évoque la prison d'Édimbourg à partir de l'histoire d'Effie et Jeanie Deans. Scott est un formidable conteur avec un style vigoureux qui sait vous tenir en haleine. C'est d'autant plus méritoire que l'héroïne de ce roman, Jeanie, n'est pas particulièrement «glamour», assez quelconque, austère, puritaire. Et pourtant, Scott parvient à la rendre attachante par une sorte de second degré permanent qui le pousse à se moquer gentiment de tous ses personnages.

Ce qui me plaît le plus chez Scott, ce sont les dialogues formidables (je l'avais déjà remarqué sur le Nain Noir) et les personnages , tel Saddletree, un commerçant incompétent et passionné de droit, qui croit qu'il s'y connaît dans ce domaine et qui s'exprime en permanence dans une sorte de jargon incompréhensible. Je soupçonne d'ailleurs Dickens de s'être beaucoup inspiré de Scott dans ce domaine car lui aussi aime donner des noms ridicules à ses personnages tout aussi ridicules.

Il y a des moments totalement irrésistibles, comme celui où un personnage poursuit Jeanie, vêtu d'une robe de chambre et de pantoufles sur le dos d'un poney qualifié par Scott de «Pégase des Highlands».

Le seul bémol concerne la fin, un peu longue à mon goût. Une fois que l'intrigue est dénouée, il n'était peut-être pas nécessaire de s'attarder pendant cent pages sur le destin des personnages. On pourrait d'ailleurs trouver que le début est un peu long également mais là j'ai personnellement trouvé que le luxe de détails et de digressions était très plaisant et l'intégration de l'histoire dans un événement historique réel, l'assaut de la prison d'Édimbourg lors d'une émeute, m'a beaucoup plu. Évidemment, ceux qui préfèrent des romans courts et qui vont droit au but ont intérêt à passer leur chemin.

Bref, Le Cœur du Mid-Lothian est un roman délicieux et Scott, un vrai bon écrivain populaire.

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## Mikealynch says

bartoline saddletree is a silly name

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## Milena March says

How far would you go to save a sister's life? Would you tell a lie? How much would you sacrifice?

*The Heart of Midlothian* is a simple story which probably could have been several times shorter than it actually was; it essentially centres around a young woman called Jeanie Deans, whose half-sister is accused of child-murder and sentenced to death. Jeanie, unable to lie in a court of law to save her sister's life (a point which didn't quite sit with me, but more on that later), heads down the long road to London to try and get a pardon for her sister from the King.

As always with Scott, however, a simple story is never just that. The novel opens on the infamous Porteous Riots in Edinburgh and Scott describes a wide range of characters and events which, though at times remotely linked to Jeanie Deans and her journey, aren't necessarily related. I'll admit, the first few chapters are interesting, but once the dust settles on Edinburgh the story begins to slow down to the point where you begin to wonder what the whole book is actually, in essence, about. I admire the scope of the novel's interest. There's a thorough examination of recent history on Scott's part, and court scenes described in tediously exact detail. Yet I'd be a liar if I didn't say that by spreading himself too far, Scott created a story and a host of characters I cared very little about, detracting from the story about a young woman who treks to London to try and save her sister's life. As a reader, there is too much description and discussion of the mundane, unimportant things. Perhaps it's just me; I'm the sort of person who would have liked to read the story of Jeanie Deans' personal struggle and journey to London; every heart-wrenching, breathless, torturous step and thought that crosses her mind. To a person interested in Scottish history, however, it may just be one of the most brilliant and useful books of the period.

*The Heart of Midlothian* has no shortage of characters who are all, in some miraculous way, interconnected, even across the span of the British Isles. But my biggest problem was with the character of Jeanie Deans. Perhaps it was her religious nature. It's a difficult thing to relate to nowadays, but Jeanie Deans' entire life is shaped by her religious belief. I could understand why Scott believed that Jeanie couldn't risk lying in a court of law, even to save her sister's life (her religion taught her it was wrong) yet I couldn't help thinking that sisters (even half-sisters as Jeanie and Effie are) wouldn't stop at such things to protect each other. Many people believe Jeanie Deans' strength comes from her religious devotion. To me it made her less human. I may, of course, be blinded by my own personal beliefs when it comes to the relationships between sisters. I've always been attached to my own sister, yet this part of the novel made me think. I'm not personally religious; I don't believe in any sort of retribution, and I don't believe in 'sin'. Yet I still believe that, in principle, it's wrong to lie. But to ensure justice is carried out? To me, this was the biggest conflict of the whole novel. It was certainly the issue that influenced me the most personally. I believe that, when placed in that sort of situation, we would do anything to protect the people we love, no matter how hard they've disappointed us. Yet we see Jeanie Deans, who is faced with the possibility of saving the woman she - for all intents and purposes - raised rather like a mother. I think Scott points out that it's not as easy as we think it is; we all have some sort of moral compass that starts going haywire, especially when we're faced with a situation where we've sworn to tell the truth. And so Jeanie Deans cannot lie, and her sister is condemned to death. With this in mind I had to read her journey to London as a kind of penance; a way of eradicating the

guilt she felt as she condemned her sister to death through her own refusal to lie.

The female characters, though at times showing great strength, are on the whole unrealistic, or at least they were to my mind. Effie is punished, apparently 'justly' at the end of the novel, because although she was wholly innocent of child-murder she had still committed a 'sin' in her relationship with a man who was not her husband. It was difficult, furthermore, to sympathise with Jeanie Deans; I wanted her to succeed in London only because I wanted her sister to be freed. As for Jeanie herself, I was very much neutral towards her. I felt the most strongly, perhaps, for the madwoman Madge Wildfire, and her mother. This is a woman presented as wholly evil, and yet I couldn't help but feel sorry for the way she was treated by everyone around her. Her daughter is likewise shunned for her madness and she makes for a tragic figure throughout the novel. But Scott clearly wants us, at the end of the day, to take Jeanie Deans as a figure of admiration.

All in all, Scott took a tale which could have been both riveting and simplistic and built up the context surrounding the sisters. Though the novel is rich and detailed, through this Scott sacrifices some of the humanity of his characters, making them appear less believable and likeable. Perhaps we aren't meant to like any of the characters in this novel, not even Jeanie Deans; but to me it seems much more likely that Scott wanted us to see how nothing can ever really be taken out of its historical and political context completely. Jeanie Deans' story takes shape because of her religious, cultural and political context, without which it might have turned out very differently. It's an interesting novel; at times difficult and tedious to read, but in the end something I'm glad I had the patience to finish.

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### **Helena R-D says**

I was meaning to read this one for a long time and it didn't disappoint. It took a bit to get through the dialogue and if I didn't know the context of the religiousness, I would have been utterly annoyed, but it was well done, the whole road movie of Jeanie Deans going to get the pardon for her sister.

If I hadn't known this was based on a real life event, I'd have been quite skeptical about the situation, but it worked well.

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### **Merry says**

[Longer review to follow]

This is pretty difficult to rate - On the one hand, I'm fascinated by how much background information and historical depth Scott has managed to fit into this novel, on the other hand there's the plot which starts in a very roundabout way and ends about 80 pages before the actual novel ends...

(Just in case anyone is confused by the large jump from page 490 to done - the actual novel is around 530 pages, the rest are notes and a Scots glossary)

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## **Nate says**

i liked this a little better than ivanhoe but all the pieces don't quite come together as well as they could have. the intro was totally unnecessary and the final act with black duncan doesn't really mesh well with the rest of the novel, although it does make me want to listen to the classic countess track. after getting through all the dialog, it really makes you appreciate the linguistic argument that lowland scots should be a language separate from english. its hard to believe that a group of moralizing teetotalers speak in a fashion that most only achieve when blackout drunk

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## **Ron says**

*Sense and Sensibility* meets *Perry Mason*, "based on a true story."

Once the reader gathers enough skill to decipher the vernacular and stilted narratives and dialogue of that day, an enjoyable tale written early enough in the 19th century as to avoid the silliness of late-19th century Romanticism. The parallels to Jane Austen's work are many, especially the relationship of the wise and foolish sisters. Interestingly, Austen and Scott wrote almost simultaneously, yet his work seems more dated than hers

My first Walter Scott. Encouraged to try more.

A very good read.

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## **Ellie says**

My favorite Scott. There's a very powerful scene where the girl drags herself across an outer landscape that is a complete mirror of her inner state: the entire book is more than worth it for that one scene.

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## **Laura says**

As Effie faces execution in prison, Jeanie decides to walk to London to plead for her sister's life. Available at BBC Radio 7.

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## **Patricia says**

This was a reread. I read it first in my first year at university where it was one of the set books and it was one of the two novels I got rid of as soon as the year was finished. I can see why my seventeen year old self was impatient with the pious Jeannie Deans and her sanctimonious father but my older self is a bit more tolerant and I find their behaviours interesting rather than irritating. This edition has good introductions, appendices and notes and I made use of all of them. From the beginning I was swept into a delightful time travel experience to both the years just before the 1820s when the book was written and the 1740s when it was set.

Scott uses the historical events of the Porteus story and the walk of Margaret Walker to London to save her sister to weave a story that is exciting and romantic. But he is a man of his time. He seems to find the hypercritical bigotry of David Deans endearing rather than obnoxious and he shows some of that morality himself in his disapproval of Effie Deans and Sir George, their behaviours and their religion. And then there is the strange role of the Duke of Argyll, the rich and powerful benefactor who steps in and solves all the problems of the poor but virtuous Jeannie and her father and husband to be. Dickens liked to solve his plot problems with a rich and powerful benefactor too. But it is a lively and complicated story and Scott tells it in a way that kept my interest and a lot of it I loved, especially the Porteus story which is exciting and amazing.

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### **Cambusken says**

I thought I would read this famous book as a sort of duty - like I shall one day read Ulysses. Other reviewers will be able to explain why, but I just found it an utter delight. Basically a road movie? but with tremendously vivid portrayals of the whole of Britain in the 18th Century, lots of macabre detail, great Gothic set pieces and an immensely sympathetic central figure. I think I learned that Scott is nothing like I thought he would be like. I dreaded the proclaimed "long introduction" but found it to be a witty (at times genuinely comical) setting out of the fictitious lost manuscript that Scott uses as the basis for his tale. I doubt if anyone is fooled, but the scenes he draws in that early section of the book - the pompous schoolteacher, the capsizing of the coach, the breezy young lawyers (Scott himself?), the gathering in the inn - are all drawn with the same humour and vigour he brings to recounting the various happenings on his heroine's long journey south and back to Edinburgh. It was just great.

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### **Gordon Watson says**

A thoroughly enjoyable read. And I am ashamed to admit one that has taken me over 12 years to complete. I first started to read The Heart of Mid-Lothian in May 2006 (I know this as my book mark was an old lottery ticket), I found the language and structure quite tricky to absorb. I put the book down meaning to return to the next day. I never did, until now. What a waste, I now have so much to catch up on as I intend to read more Sir Walter Scott. I advise any one who has doubts to persevere, by the time you get to Porteous Riots you will be hooked. The characterisation is strong, the story telling excellent.

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### **Werner says**

Note, Feb. 28, 2013: On reflection, I decided that this book deserved the fifth star! I try not to be too prodigal with five star ratings; but here, I believe it's earned.

This book was on the reading list for a Univ. of Iowa correspondence course on the 19th-century British novel which I considered taking back in 1999; I never did, but by then I'd read the book and a couple of others for background reading. (I don't regret the read one bit!) For the last several months, I've tried to focus my usually rather random retrospective reviews on classics. Before I go back to the random mode (there are some specific more recent books I want to review), I'm going to wrap up this round of classics reviews with this neglected gem.

The only other book by Scott (who is, of course, the giant of Romantic period British historical fiction) that

I've read is Ivanhoe, written a year after this one. Both novels feature strong female lead characters (Jeanie here is actually the protagonist of the novel --Scott's first female protagonist, according to Wikipedia), who play active roles in the plot, face adversity with courage, determination and resourcefulness, and command our liking and respect. Jeanie may have blazed a trail in Scott's mind for Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. :-) Here, though, he sets his tale much closer to his own time, and in his native Scotland. But while the more civilized 18th century offers less scope for tournaments and swordplay, here we still have outlaws, injustice and danger to contend with; and as the above Goodreads description indicates, Jeanie will have to go the second mile to save her sister (without depending on a male to do it for her).

Effie Deans is the unwed mother of an outlaw's newborn child --a child who's now missing. To the authorities, that suggests the possibility of infanticide --and the "harsh law" mentioned in the description above was a provision of Scots law, at that time, which reversed the normal presumption of the accused's innocence, for this charge only. So to hang her, the prosecution doesn't need to prove her guilty; rather, she's expected to prove her innocence, a task that's much more difficult --especially if she can't produce the live baby. (Scott's background in the law is apparent here in the way that he handles the legal aspects.) It's worth noting, in passing, that Scott and his original readers take it for granted that the baby is a human being deserving of protection by society, not a "clump of tissues" that the mother would be justified in killing if she didn't want a child. (True, killing a baby after birth is still technically illegal, despite the "legality" of abortion; but many in the medical and legal communities argue that the distinction is an artificial superstition, and that anything that's legal before birth *should* be legal immediately after it as well. In the climate of most jurisdictions today, my impression is that a woman accused of Effie's offense wouldn't face more than a wrist slap, if that.) For Scott, on the other hand, Effie's actual innocence is crucial to the merits of the case.

Scott spins his tale in the Romantic style, with fulsome 19th-century diction; that won't be to every modern reader's taste, nor will his heavy use of Scots dialect in dialogue. For those who don't mind this, or who can get past it, though, this is a captivating storyline with well-drawn, engaging characters, which really brings its setting to life and which offers some surprises before it's over. The faith of the mostly Presbyterian characters is treated positively and respectfully (though Scott himself was an Anglican --a form of religious dissent in Scotland, where the state Kirk was and is Presbyterian). It's true that David, Jeanie's father, is portrayed at times as over-concerned with theological hair-splitting, but I'd disagree with the writer of the Wikipedia article that this rises to the level of "ridicule;" he's basically a sympathetic character, and this comes across as just a forgivable foible of his generation and personality. (I'd also disagree with Wikipedia's suggestion that the Jacobite rebellions and sentiment play any major role here; the former are mentioned in passing a couple of times, but they're mostly ignored. That theme plays much more strongly in Stevenson's Kidnapped).

Scott is definitely a writer whose work I'd like to read more of, someday! With more exposure to him, I think he'd easily become one of my favorites.

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### **Manuel Alfonseca says**

A good Walter Scott novel, loosely based on real facts. Jeanie Deans, the main character, can be considered (as C.S.Lewis remarked) one of the "perfect women" in literature. The novel slacks its pace between chapters 39 and 49, but rushes forth to a surprising ending in the last three chapters.

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## **Henry Avila says**

The title of this book comes from the nickname of the prison in Edinburgh, Scotland (real name Toolbooth) ... Midlothian, is the county, surrounding that beautiful, ancient, hilly, capital city; in 1736, there occurred a brutal riot, in which Captain John Porteous, of the local police force, an arrogant man, was lynched by an angry mob , ( a real event) the captain, had killed some townspeople, during a tumultuous disturbance earlier. A smuggler Andrew Wilson, was executed under his watch, his loyal friends, had tried to rescue the criminal, and the late Mr. Wilson, became an enormous hero, when he helped George Robertson, captured with him, escape in Church, by holding off the inattentive guards. Back then the naive authorities, thought a last visit to God's Temple, might benefit the doomed men, things have changed greatly, since then . Meanwhile Jeanie Deans, daughter of David Deans, had visited her younger sister Euphemia, (Effie) at the Toolbooth, before it was stormed. Captain Porteous, convicted of several murders, previously mentioned, was inside too, but a royal reprieve, caused the indignant people, in town to suspect that "Justice," would not be served . Effie, an unmarried woman, was found guilty of child killing, her new born son, vanished mysteriously, their widower father, a strict Christian farmer, lives just outside the historical city, is profoundly shocked, learning about Effie's scandal. His family's good reputation, is tarnished, forever, the teenager adamantly refuses, to reveal the man responsible for the baby, yet suspicion falls on the notorious fugitive , George Robertson. Time is flowing by, in a few weeks, unless something unforeseen develops, poor Effie will be no more, it's up to Jeanie, to save her little sister, but how? She feels responsible, because at the trial, Jeanie, deeply religious, could not commit perjury, which would have freed Effie, today, that doesn't bother people much... Complicating everything, is Rev.Reuben Butler, a penniless clergyman, that the older sister loves, how can she marry him, with Effie's case so well known, no respectable man would. Now brave Jeanie, has a bold idea , go to distant London, (hundreds of miles from Edinburgh) and get a royal pardon for Euphemia, traveling money will be needed, even if she has to walk most of the way, only one person she knows has it. Dumbiedikes, a rich, shy, landowner, hopelessly in love with Miss Deans, the embarrassed Jeanie, has to ask for help from this man! One of the better historical novels, from the very sophisticated, Sir Walter Scott, some say his best.

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