

# WALTER SCOTT

## LIFE (1771 - 1832)

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh in August 1771. As a child he was stricken by polio, his health was very delicate and he couldn't attend school regularly. When his health improved, he attended Edinburgh High School, then studied law and worked in his father office. However Scott's real passion was the history of the area between Edinburgh and the English border, known as the Border Country. He began his literary activity as a poet but his poetry was overshadowed by the work of Byron. Scott decided to start a new literary career as a novelist, beginning with the anonymous publication of *Waverly* in 1814 and writing about thirty novels before his death. Scott's interest in the past also led him to write novels set in remoter historical periods. Of these, *Ivanhoe* set in the reign of Richard I is the most famous. In 1820 he was created Baronet and in 1827 he acknowledged authorship of *Waverly* novels. He died in 1832.

## ACHIEVEMENT

When Scott published *Waverly* in 1814, the novel took a giant step forward. Scott uses his historical knowledge and his vivid imagination to do something new: create a sense of place, local culture and traditions and show how these were shaped by historical events. Never before had a novelist so successfully described an entire national culture with its traditions, economy, political divisions. In a sense, Scott invented both the historical and the regional novel at a single stroke.

## HISTORICAL NOVEL

Between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new genre of fiction appeared, the Historical Novel. The creator of this new fictional form was **Walter Scott**, whose novels revived the history, customs and manners of his native country.

The great events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars produced or increased the interest of common people in the history of their country, and made them realize the consequences of wars and rebellions on the normal course of their individual lives. Scott's heroes are not, in fact, great figures of history, but persons of the middle English nobility. In his realistic descriptions of past events Scott is already beyond Romanticism, in a further development of the realistic tradition of the Age of Enlightenment. It's true that his novels remain aloof from the extremes of Gothicism or Romanticism, but Scott is **romantic** in his love of past ages, of the humble people of his country, with the manners and simple customs, as well as in the description of "incidents of romance" and historical events, which sees in their reciprocal interdependence.

Historical novels were written in this period throughout Europe: in France by Alfred de Vigny and above all, Victor Hugo. In Italy we must remember that Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* owes much to Scott, as Manzoni himself recognized. He found in 17<sup>th</sup> century Lombardy the real frame for the historical events, but he enlivened his masterpiece with his deeply religious and moral vision of the world.

**MANZONI VS SCOTT.** In Italy, Manzoni himself admitted his debt to Scott. In fact in his *Promessi Sposi* the hero and the heroine are unknown people and not the great protagonists of the historical events. Manzoni also did research into papers and documents of the past. But he was more faithful to real story, and possessed a deep psychological insight unknown to Scott, as well as a great aspiration towards morality, justice and faith, higher than Scott's more down-to-earth ideals.