

WALTER SCOTT: THE PIONEER OF HISTORICAL FICTION

O'rozboyeva Guljahon Gulmirza qizi

Chirchik State Pedagogical University, Faculty of Tourism, Department of Foreign Language and Literature (English), Bachelor degree student

Nasiba Komil qizi Jumaeva

[*nasibajumayeva1@gmail.com*](mailto:nasibajumayeva1@gmail.com)

Chirchik State Pedagogical University, English teacher, Supervisor

Annotation. *This article delves into the pivotal role of Sir Walter Scott as a trailblazer in the historical novel genre in English literature. It provides an in-depth analysis of Scott's literary techniques, narrative style, and thematic explorations that shaped the foundation of historical fiction. The article critically evaluates Scott's impact on subsequent writers and the enduring legacy of his contributions to the genre.*

Keywords: *Walter Scott, historical fiction, English literature, genre, influence, novels, poem*

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of literature, few names resonate as profoundly as that of Sir Walter Scott, often hailed as the pioneer of historical fiction. His writings, characterized by vivid historical settings, colorful characters, and gripping narratives, revolutionized the genre and left an indelible mark on the literary landscape. Through his works, Scott transported readers to bygone eras, weaving tales that combined meticulous research with imaginative storytelling. This article

explores the enduring legacy of Walter Scott, his impact on the development of historical fiction, and his lasting influence on subsequent generations of writers.

FINDINGS

Sir Walter Scott, 1st Baronet FRSE FSAScot, was a Scottish novelist, poet and historian. Many of his works remain classics of European and Scottish literature, notably the novels *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, *Waverley*, *Old Mortality*, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, along with the narrative poems *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. He had a major impact on European and American literature. As an advocate, judge, and legal administrator by profession, he combined writing and editing with his daily work as Clerk of Session and Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire. He was prominent in Edinburgh's Tory establishment, active in the Highland Society, long time a president of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a vice president of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. His knowledge of history and literary facility equipped him to establish the historical novel genre as an exemplar of European Romanticism. He became a baronet of Abbotsford in the County of Roxburgh, Scotland, on 22 April 1820; the title became extinct upon his son's death in 1847. Scott was prompted to take up a literary career by enthusiasm in Edinburgh in the 1790s for modern German literature. Recalling the period in 1827, Scott said that he "was German-mad." In 1796, he produced English versions of two poems by Gottfried August Bürger, *Der wilde Jäger* and *Lenore*, published as *The Chase*, and *William and Helen*. Scott responded to the German interest at the time in national identity, folk culture and medieval literature, which linked with his own developing passion for traditional balladry. A favourite book since childhood had been Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. During the 1790s he would search in manuscript collections and on Border "raids" for ballads from oral performance. With help from John Leyden, he produced a two-volume *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in 1802, containing 48 traditional ballads and two imitations apiece by Leyden and himself. Of the 48 traditionals, 26 were published for the

first time. An enlarged edition appeared in three volumes the following year. With many of the ballads, Scott fused different versions into more coherent texts, a practice he later repudiated. The *Minstrelsy* was the first and most important of a series of editorial projects over the next two decades, including the medieval romance *Sir Tristrem* which Scott attributed to Thomas the Rhymer in 1804, the works of John Dryden 18 vols, in 1808, and the works of Jonathan Swift. Between 1805 and 1817 Scott produced five long, six-canto narrative poems, four shorter independently published poems, and many small metrical pieces. Scott was by far the most popular poet of the time until Lord Byron published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812 and followed them up with his exotic oriental verse narratives. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in medieval romance form, grew out of Scott's plan to include a long original poem of his own in the second edition of the *Minstrelsy*: it was to be "a sort of Romance of Border Chivalry & enchantment". He owed the distinctive irregular accent in four-beat metre to Coleridge's *Christabel*, which he had heard recited by John Stoddart. It was not to be published until 1816, Scott was able to draw on his unrivalled familiarity with Border history and legend acquired from oral and written sources beginning in his childhood to present an energetic and highly coloured picture of 16th-century Scotland, which both captivated the general public and with its voluminous notes also addressed itself to the antiquarian student. The poem has a strong moral theme, as human pride is placed in the context of the last judgment with the introduction of a version of the "Dies irae" at the end. The work was an immediate success with almost all the reviewers and with readers in general, going through five editions in one year. The most celebrated lines are the ones that open the final stanza:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,

Who never to himself hath said,

This is my own, my native land!

Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,

As home his footsteps he hath turned,
From wandering on a foreign strand!—
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell.

Three years after *The Lay* Scott published *Marmion* telling a story of corrupt passions leading up as a disastrous climax to the Battle of Flodden in 1513. The main innovation involves prefacing each of the six cantos with an epistle from the author to a friend: William Stewart Rose, The Rev. John Marriot, William Erskine, James Skene, George Ellis, and Richard Heber: the epistles develop themes of moral positives and special delights imparted by art. In an unprecedented move, the publisher Archibald Constable purchased the copyright of the poem for a thousand guineas at the beginning of 1807, when only the first had been completed. Constable's faith was justified by the sales: the three editions published in 1808 sold 8,000 copies. The verse of *Marmion* is less striking than that of *The Lay*, with the epistles in iambic tetrameters and the narrative in tetrameters with frequent trimeters. The reception by the reviewers was less favourable than that accorded *The Lay*: style and plot were both found faulty, the epistles did not link up with the narrative, there was too much antiquarian pedantry, and *Marmion's* character was immoral. The most familiar lines in the poem sum up one of its main themes: "O what a tangled web we weave, When first we practice to deceive". In 1825, a UK-wide banking crisis resulted in the collapse of the Ballantyne printing business, of which Scott was the only partner with a financial interest. Its debts of £130,000 (equivalent to £11,400,000 in 2021) caused his very public ruin. Rather than declare himself bankrupt or accept any financial support from his many supporters and admirers including the King himself, he placed his house and income in a trust belonging to his creditors and set out to write his way out of debt. To add to his burdens, his wife Charlotte died in 1826. Despite these events or because of them, Scott kept up his prodigious output. Between 1826 and 1832 he produced six novels, two short stories and two

plays, eleven works or volumes of non-fiction, and a journal, along with several unfinished works. The non-fiction included the *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* in 1827, two volumes of the *History of Scotland* in 1829 and 1830, and four instalments of the series entitled *Tales of a Grandfather – Being Stories Taken From Scottish History*, written one per year over the period 1828–1831, among several others. Finally, Scott had recently been inspired by the diaries of Samuel Pepys and Lord Byron, and he began keeping a journal over the period, which, however, would not be published until 1890, as *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*. By then Scott's health was failing, and on 29 October 1831, in a vain search for improvement, he set off on a voyage to Malta and Naples on board HMS *Barham*, a frigate put at his disposal by the Admiralty. He was welcomed and celebrated wherever he went. On his journey home he boarded the steamboat *Prins Frederik* going from Cologne to Rotterdam. While on board he had a final stroke near Emmerich. After local treatment, a steamboat took him to the steamship *Batavier*, which left for England on 12 June. By pure coincidence, Mary Martha Sherwood was also on board. She would later write about this encounter. After he was landed in England, Scott was transported back to die at Abbotsford on 21 September 1832. He was 61.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Walter Scott's pioneering contributions to historical fiction have left an indelible mark on literature. Through his vivid storytelling, meticulous research, and nuanced characterizations, Scott transformed the genre, elevating it from mere entertainment to a respected form of literary expression. His ability to weave historical events with compelling narratives paved the way for future writers, shaping the trajectory of historical fiction for generations to come. Scott's impact extends beyond his novels; he sparked a renewed interest in history and culture, inspiring readers to engage with the past in new and meaningful ways. Today, his legacy continues to resonate, reminding us of the enduring power of storytelling and the profound influence of imagination on our

understanding of history. Walter Scott remains a true pioneer whose influence reverberates throughout the literary world.

REFERENCES

1. "Famous Fellows". Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Retrieved 18 January 2019.
2. The Letters of Sir Walter Scott: 1826–1828, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London, 1936), p. 331: Scott to Mrs Hughes.
3. Hewitt, David (2004) "Scott, Sir Walter (1771–1832)", Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/24928
4. The Letters of Sir Walter Scott: 1787–1807, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London, 1932), 166 (Scott to Anna Seward, 30 November 1802).
5. Walter Scott, 2018. *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*, ed. Ainsley McIntosh. Edinburgh. pp. 292–93. ISBN 978-1717020321
6. McKinstry, Sam; Fletcher, Marie (2002). "The Personal Account Books of Sir Walter Scott". *The Accounting Historians Journal*. 29 (2): 59–89. doi:10.2308/0148-4184.29.2.59. JSTOR 40698269.