Life and works

Sir Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh in 1771 and was educated there. Since he suffered from poliomyelitis as a child, he was sent to his grandfather’s farm on the Scottish border. This experience proved extremely important in his life since he started to collect folktales about the Jacobite rising of 1745.

In 1792 he graduated in Law at Edinburgh University and in 1802-03 he published a political periodical heard during his trips in the border country, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. In The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), a romantic poem, there was much more originality, but the collection of the tales suffered from immediate success to the public. After that, Scott wrote other narratives in verse, among which The Lady of the Lake (1810), celebrating Scottish life during the Middle Ages, and Rokeby (1813).

About one year later, he felt that his poetical vein was exhausted and overshadowed by the growing fame of Byron; so he began writing prose, making a name for himself, greater than the one he had reached in poetry, as 'the creator of the history of the world' (→ 4.8). His first novel, Waverley, was set during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. It appeared anonymously in 1814 and was an immediate success, starting the vogue for the historical novel. He then wrote Rob Roy (1817), The Bride of Lammermoor (1819), which gave Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) inspiration for his opera Lucia di Lammermoor, Ivanhoe (1819) set in the 12th century when Richard the Lion-Heart returned from the Holy Land, and Quentin Durward (1823).

In spite of his success as a novelist, Scott had to work with great speed to pay off his debts after the bankruptcy of his own publishing house. His writing skills, energies and profound knowledge also enabled him to contribute to a political periodical, The Quarterly Review (1809). He died in 1832.

A Romantic writer

Scott had a passion for political and religious intrigues and described the whole of a community at a given moment, showing heroic characters battling against great odds. It is this characteristic, together with his interest in mingling historical events with mystery and the marvellous, which makes him a Romantic writer. However, his Romanticism is not that of the great Romantic poets: he does not have their sensibility or their cult of wild nature. Nor does he illustrate the horror or the grotesque of the Gothic novels, but he mixes the elements of mystery with a little humour and a touch of the picturesque.

Scott and Manzoni

Scott’s works have been compared to those of Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873). However, Manzoni portrayed the characters of ordinary people with greater precision and psychological insight; his aim was to create a national consciousness and his works had a higher degree of historical accuracy.

On the other hand, Scott wanted to celebrate the glorious past of his country and to express regret for the values of heroism and loyalty, which seemed to be lost in a world dominated by economic laws.

Characters

Scott did not only create fictional characters: in fact, his minor characters are real kings and princes. Moreover, he altered great historical events setting them in poetical environments and because of this he was accused of historical anachronism. However, the historical method he introduced allowed him to paint unforgettable portraits of remote times and people.

Style

Scott adopted the third-person omniscient narrator exploiting the techniques of flashbacks and time shifts to follow the adventures connected with different sets of characters. He used a great deal of descriptions of settings and characters, introducing his personal comments about them. He also pretended to possess documents proving the truthfulness of his narrative and giving authority to his words.

Scott’s interest in the past is confirmed by his stylistic devices: references to the Scottish language and his simple and immediate prose, similar to that used in old legends and romances.
Key idea
Most of his novels follow a pattern which has been called the ‘journey’: a traveller, for instance Waverley or Ivanhoe, moves from a safe situation inside an ethnic group, comes into contact with another ethnic group and shares their life for a time. In the end he will return from where he came with a different experience of life which will enable him to mediate between two rival groups.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

2 ANSWER the following questions about Walter Scott’s novels.

1 What makes Walter Scott a Romantic writer?
2 How does he differ from the Romantic poets?
3 What are the main differences between Walter Scott and Alessandro Manzoni?
4 What characters can be found in Scott’s novels?
5 What are the most important stylistic features of his novels?
6 What pattern do most of them follow?

Waverley
Sir Walter Scott
(1814)

Plot and Setting

Waverley is set in the period of Jacobite uprisings: it starts in the late summer of 1744 and ends several months after the battle of Culloden (1746), where the Jacobites were defeated and their cause was virtually destroyed. When Scott wrote this novel, Jacobitism had ceased to be a political force, but he pointed out in the ‘Postscript’ to Waverley that: ‘There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone such a complete change as this kingdom of Scotland’. By 1814 in both the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland patterns of life had been changed, both by measures of Government and by the gradual infiltration of ideas and wealth from the South. In his novel Scott aimed at recreating the past ways of life, both of Highland chief and Lowland landowner, showing them as they put up a final struggle against the forces of Hanoverian Britain. Waverley starts with the account of the education of a young man from an English Jacobite aristocratic family, Edward Waverley. He is an avid reader and dreams of romantic love and war. In the house of Sir Everard Waverley, Edward’s uncle, politics are a matter of long-standing conviction, but are rarely examined. Waverley’s father has decided to move with the times in favour of advancement in the Hanoverian Government and he obtains for his son a commission in the Hanoverian army of King George II (1727-1760); so Waverley is sent to Scotland to join his regiment.

In Scotland he visits a Jacobite family friend, whose daughter, Rose, falls in love with him. However, Edward’s attention is attracted by the charming Flora. Flora’s brother is the Jacobite chieftain Fergus Mac-Ivor, but Edward’s visits to Fergus are wholly unwise and it is not long before Edward is arrested. Fortunately he is rescued by Flora and joins the Jacobite side. During a battle he saves an English officer from certain death and for this act of bravery he is pardoned for his involvement in the Jacobite cause. His friends are not so lucky: Fergus is executed and Flora takes refuge in a convent. Edward goes back to Rose and the two are happily married.
Waverley and the wounded man

In this extract Waverley on his way to battle hears the dying groans of a man who turns out to be his former sergeant, Houghton. He goes to his aid, but he is called impatiently by Fergus Mac-Ivor, the Jacobite chieftain who is fighting on the side of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, who intends to defeat the Hanoverian King George II and reclaim the English throne for the Stuarts.

Waverley walked forward out of the line to satisfy his curiosity, and soon observed five or six of the troopers, who, covered with dust, had galloped in to announce that the enemy were in full march westward along the coast. Passing still a little farther on, he was struck with a groan which issued from a hovel, — he approached the spot, and heard a voice, in the provincial English of his native country, which endeavoured, though frequently interrupted by pain, to repeat the Lord’s Prayer. The voice of distress always found a ready answer in our hero’s bosom. He entered the hovel, which seemed to be intended for what is called, in the pastoral counties of Scotland, a smearing-house; and in its obscurity Edward could only at first discern a sort of red bundle, for those who had stripped the wounded man of his arms, and part of his clothes, had left him the dragoon-cloak in which he was enveloped.

‘For the sake of God,’ said the wounded man, as he heard Waverley’s step, ‘give me a single drop of water!’

‘You shall have it,’ answered Waverley, at the same time raising him in his arms, bearing him to the door of the hut, and giving him some drink from his flask.

‘I should know that voice,’ answered the man; but looking on Edward’s dress with a bewildered look, — ‘no, this is not the young squire.’

This was the common phrase by which Edward was distinguished on the estate of Waverley-Honour, and the sound now thrilled to his heart with the thousand recollections which the well-known accents of his native country had already contributed to awaken. ‘Houghton!’ he said, gazing on the ghastly features which death was fast disfiguring, ‘can this be you?’

‘I never thought to hear an English voice again,’ said the wounded man; ‘they left me to live or die here as I could, when they found I could say nothing about the strength of the regiment. But, O! squire, how could you stay from us so long, and let us be tempted by that fiend of the pit, Ruffen; — we would have followed you through flood and fire, to be sure.

‘Ruffen! I assure you, Houghton, you have been vilely imposed upon.’

‘I often thought so,’ said Houghton, ‘though they shewed15 us your very seal16; and so Tims was shot, and I was reduced to the ranks17.’

‘Do not exhaust your strength in speaking,’ said Edward, ‘I will get you a surgeon presently.’

He saw Mac-Ivor approaching, who was now returning from headquarters, where he had attended a council of war, and hastened to meet him. ‘Brave news!’ shouted the Chief; ‘we shall be at it in less than two hours. The Prince has put himself at the head of the advance; and, as he drew his sword, called out, “My friends, I have thrown away the scabbard”18. Come Waverley, we move instantly.’
READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words and phrases with their Italian meaning.

1 dolore ................................................
2 cuore .............................................
3 sorpreso ...........................................
4 in marcia ........................................
5 si affrettò .........................................
6 immediatamente ..............................
7 gemito, lamento ..............................
8 possidente .......................................  
9 avvolto ...........................................

2 READ the text again and do the following activities.

1 Focus on the narrator.
   1 Is he first-person or third-person?
   2 From whose point of view are the events narrated? Tick as appropriate.
      □ Edward’s.
      □ Fergus’s.
      □ The wounded man’s.
      □ Other: ________________

2 Scott is regarded as the founder of the historical novel.
   1 How much of the factual information in the extract is historical?
   2 Look for those elements which convey a sense of historical verisimilitude. Collect your data in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenery</th>
<th>Customs</th>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>Social rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3 Focus on the main characters, Edward and Fergus Mac-Ivor. How are they introduced? Tick as appropriate.
   □ Through their own thoughts.
   □ Through the other characters’ thoughts.
   □ Through the narrator’s words.
   □ Through the other characters’ words.

4 Underline all the words uttered by the wounded man.
   1 How does the narrator bring the wounded man’s humanity to life?
   2 What are the key expressions referring to the political cause?
   3 What do they highlight?

5 Consider the extract as a whole and decide what the writer’s main aim is. Tick as appropriate.
   □ To describe a battlefield.
   □ To provide a critique of the conflict between Hanoverian and Jacobite.
   □ To underline the qualities of the protagonist.
   □ To show that the traditional notions of honour have no meaning in a world that has changed.
### 3 COMPLETE the summary of the text with the words and phrases from the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brave news</th>
<th>behaviour</th>
<th>pity</th>
<th>provincial English</th>
<th>drop of water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>regiment</td>
<td>wounded man</td>
<td>struck</td>
<td>young squire</td>
<td>soldiers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Waverley saw five or six (1) ____________ who announced that the enemy was marching westwards towards the coast. All of a sudden a groan from a hut (2) ____________ Waverley. He soon entered since he heard a voice in the (3) ____________ of his native country. He could see a (4) ____________ enveloped in a dragoon-cloak in the dark. He was lying on the earth asking for a single (5) ____________ . Waverley showed his (6) ____________ by raising the man in his arms, bearing him to the door of the hut and giving him some water from his flask. The wounded man was surprised since he recognised Edward as his (7) ____________ dressed in the Jacobite armour and Waverley understood the wounded man was his sergeant Houghton, who had been left there since he could no longer help his (8) ____________ . He soon complained about Edward’s (9) ____________ since he had left his country and fellows long ago. In the end Fergus Mac-Ivor shouted (10) ____________ because he had heard that Prince Charles Edward Stuart had put himself at the head of the advance.

### 4 LIST a few aspects which show that *Waverley* is different from the 18th-century novel.

### 5 REFER to 4.6 and state the difference between Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic novelists.