Sir Walter Scott
(1771-1832)
Life and works

- Born in Edinburgh in 1771;
- still very young, he suffers from poliomyelitis;
- to recover from this illness he is sent to live in the rural Borders region at his grandparents' farm;
- during his stay in the countryside he learns the stories of the border, i.e. many of the tales and legends which characterize much of his work, becoming interested in the history of Scotland;
- at 15 he accompanies his father, a lawyer, on business trips and visits the Highlands;
- in 1797 he gets married and starts editing and writing poetry.
Life and works

• Between 1802 and 1805 he writes poetry:
  • in 1802 “Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border”, a collection of traditional ballads;
  • in 1805 “The lay of the last minstrel”, a collection of poems, his best work of poetry;
• soon he realizes he is better at writing fiction than poetry;
• in 1814 he writes his first work of fiction, “Waverley”, the first historical novel. It meets with a great success;
• a number of books of the same kind follow:
  • “Guy Mannering” in 1815.
  • “Old Mortality” in 1816.
  • “Rob Roy” in 1818.
  • “Ivanhoe” in 1819.
  • “Kenilworth” in 1821.
  • “The Talisman” in 1829
Scott’s popularity

• His popularity is mainly due to his ability as a story-teller;
• he has a great influence on European literature (for instance, on Manzoni’s “Promessi Sposi”) and....
• even if the plots of many of his novels are rather poor and constructed inaccurately, Scott is considered to be the father of the historical novel.
• His novels deal with:
  • Scottish history (in which he is more faithful to the historical truth)
  • English history (this type of novels are more fictional)
  • The historical periods he portrays refer to both contemporary life and the Middle Ages.
The Historical Novel

• The Novel before Scott centres around a main character.
• In Scott’s novels the focus is shifted from the central character to the forces which operate and shape the whole society.
• The protagonists of Scott’s novels are historical periods.
• He uses his heroes to express his vision of history, which is always impartial, never dogmatic;
• his heroes are called “mediocre heroes”, or “middle heroes” because they never side with extreme positions, on the contrary they prefer a “middle” position, ......
• that is the position of the majority of the people in a period of crisis.
• Scott, in fact, thinks that a middle course always emerges after the clash between extreme positions.
The Scottish Theme

• Scott revives nationalism in literature and ...
• he uses all the previous cultural production – folk tales, folk songs, ballads, poems etc – to give expression to a national identity and pride.
• He is a traditionalist who regrets Scotland’s lost independence and shows his deep attachment to the old values of the clans’ tribal system in all his works.
Main features of Scott’s fiction

1. His love for tradition, history and folklore.
2. His capacity for vivid descriptions of the Scottish scenery and way of life.
3. His ability for story-telling.
   • All these elements can easily be found in “Waverley”, particularly in the description of:
     • the Highlands landscape,
     • the clans’ life and ....
     • their brave behaviour in battle.
Scott’s influence on Manzoni

• Even if Scott was criticized by Manzoni for his:
  • fictionalised history and ....
  • his historical inaccuracies,
  • his influence is quite evident in Manzoni’s most famous literary work: “The Bethrothed” (“I Promessi sposi”) and in particular in:
    a. the choice of common people as main characters (Renzo and Lucia, in fact, are peasants).
    b. the way Manzoni deals with history, which is always described as if it were experienced by ordinary people, i.e. through the eyes of the “middle man”.

Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) poet and novelist main representative of the Italian Romanticism;

Narrative style characterized by:
1. the presence of an obtrusive, omniscient narrator;
2. a well-organized plot;
3. fluency, elegance and humour.

“The Bethrothed” (I Promessi Sposi)
Historical novel (1825-27) set in Lombardy in the XVII cent, during the rebellion of the Milanese people against the Spanish domination and in the time of the plague.

Values in “I Promessi Sposi”

• universal values
• the patriotic ideal of a national identity;
• Manzoni cannot express openly his involvement in the Italian Risorgimento and his hatred for the Hapsburg domination in northern Italy, so he uses the rebellion against the Spanish domination as a screen.