

A HISTORICAL NOVEL AS A LITERARY GENRE

Atamurodova F.T.

PhD , associate professor Karshi Economics and Pedagogy University

Omonova O. U.

Master Degree Student, Karshi Economics and Pedagogy University

Abstract: The historical novel is a literary genre that transports readers to different historical periods, offering vivid and imaginative retellings of past events through fictional characters. Unlike traditional historical accounts, these novels integrate real historical events with compelling narratives, making history more accessible and engaging. The genre emerged in the early 19th century, with Sir Walter Scott credited for its popularization. Historical novels emphasize authenticity in setting, dialogue, and cultural nuances, often incorporating interactions between fictional and real historical figures. By blending history with storytelling, the genre provides insight into political, social, and personal experiences across time.

Keywords: historical novel, literary genre, Sir Walter Scott, fiction and history, cultural authenticity, narrative techniques, historical representation, storytelling, social themes, literary analysis.

The term "historical novel" might seem straightforward, but its origin adds a fascinating layer to its meaning. Coined in the early 19th century, this genre emerged as a response to a growing interest in both history and fiction. Sir Walter Scott, a Scottish novelist, is often credited with popularizing the term through his works, such as *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*. Scott's innovative blend of real historical events with fictional narratives laid the foundation for what we now recognize as the historical novel.

A historical novel is a literary genre that transports readers to different periods of history, offering a vivid and imaginative retelling of events through the lens of fictional characters. Unlike traditional historical accounts, these novels weave a compelling narrative around real historical events, bringing history to life in a captivating and accessible manner.

The hallmark of a historical novel lies in its ability to seamlessly integrate accurate historical details with a captivating story. Authors in this genre meticulously research the time periods they explore, ensuring authenticity in setting, dialogue, and cultural nuances.

The characters, while fictional, often interact with real historical figures, adding depth and complexity to the narrative. Additionally, historical novels strive to capture the essence of the past, allowing readers to not only learn about historical events but also to emotionally connect with the characters experiencing them.

Historical novels encompass a wide array of themes, reflecting the diversity of human experiences across different time periods. Themes may include love and betrayal, political intrigue, social upheaval, and personal growth. These universal themes intertwined with historical contexts resonate with readers on both an emotional and intellectual level. The genre allows us to explore not only the grand sweep of historical events but also the intimate stories of individuals living through them.

To truly grasp the essence of the historical novel, exploring exemplary works is essential. Some notable examples include:

- *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott (1819): One of the early classics of the historical novel genre, *Ivanhoe* is set in 12th-century England and explores themes of chivalry, honor, and the clash between Saxons and Normans.

- *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell (1855): Offering a glimpse into the industrial landscape of 19th-century England, Gaskell's novel delves into the social and economic tensions of the time.

- *The Pillars of the Earth* by Ken Follett: Set in 12th-century England, this novel intricately weaves together the lives of various characters against the backdrop of the construction of a cathedral.

In the history of the novel, the historical novel was a breakthrough genre. Until its arrival in the early nineteenth century, political and cultural elites had dismissed the novel as immature and childish, as “mere fiction.” Educators warned that readers would form dangerous illusions about reality by reading novels. The popular success of sentimental novels contributed to a perception of the novel as a primarily female genre. Literary activities by gentry-elites were limited to “respectable” literary forms such as the heroic verse epic, historical writing, the stage tragedy, the essay, or satirical prose forms in which the “Quixotism” of naïve novel readers could be exposed to ridicule. These authors were not yet professional writers but gentleman-amateurs who often did not sign their work by name in order to avoid the suspicion of writing for fame. The historical novel eventually changed all that: by shifting its subject to the serious matter of history, the novel gained cultural respectability and successfully countered charges of frivolous irrelevancy; by depicting a cross-section of classes, social groups, and regional characters, the novel redefined itself as a medium of national representation; by skillfully mixing historical references, sketches of local customs and manners, scenes of adventure, family sagas, as well as love stories in which national and personal fate coincided, the historical novel generated a new reading public that comprised both sexes more evenly and broke down the gender division in readership; finally, by focusing on grand topics such as revolutionary wars or key conflicts in a nation's history, the novel could be elevated to the rank of a modern epic that depicted the formation of a nation and captured the soul of its people.

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