

## Historical Novel

The novel which is based on characters and events from history are called historical novels. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines historical novels as –

‘ a historical novel has, as its setting, a usually significant period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic details and fidelity to historical fact.

The work may deal with actual historical characters or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters. The historical novel is based on history but its intention is not to provide the historical facts but to entertain the readers. Historical novel is not a record of historical events. They portray imaginative incidents just to glorify or idealize history.

Historical novels began in and popularized in the nineteenth century. A British writer Walter Scott is the pioneer of the genre. The genre is also experimented by Leo Tolstoy (*War and Peace* (1869)) , Charles Dickens (*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)) , etc to entertain and acquaint readers with prominent historical personalities, their life and achievements.

Sir Walter Scott is regarded as the first to write historical novels. He is the first fiction writer who saw history not as a convenient frame to stage a narrative but as a distinct social and cultural setting. His novels that portray Scottish history in *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1817) focus upon a middling character who sits at the intersection of various social groups in order to explore the development of society through conflict. His novels created a passion for the historical novel among readers. His main achievement was to get people to realize that history is not just a list of political and religious events but the product of human decisions. His other prominent novel *Ivanhoe* portrays the life middle ages. Victor Hugo's romantic historical novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) depicts 19<sup>th</sup> century life. Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* broadly focuses on Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. American author James Fennimore Cooper, French author Balzac popularized the genre in later centuries.

### Characteristics of historical novel:

- 1 A historical event is at the centre of the novel.
2. Setting of the novel comprises of a remarkable period in the past.
3. Depiction of social, cultural, and political situations
4. Portrayal of facts and fiction