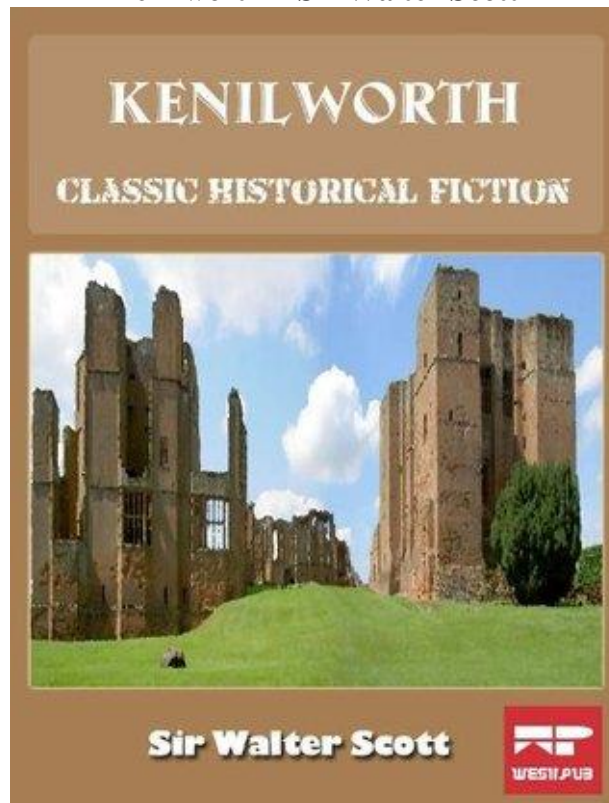


## Kenilworth – Sir Walter Scott



### Introduction:

*Kenilworth* is a historical novel by Sir Walter Scott, first published in 1821. Sir **Walter Scott (1771 - 1832) was a Scottish historical novelist**, playwright and poet. Many of his works remain classics of both English-language literature and of Scottish literature. He has been called the father of historical novel in England. In his works there is a more serious and responsible approach towards history. He blended facts and fiction, history and romance. His novel *Kenilworth* is also a beautiful blend of history and romance.

### As a historical romance:

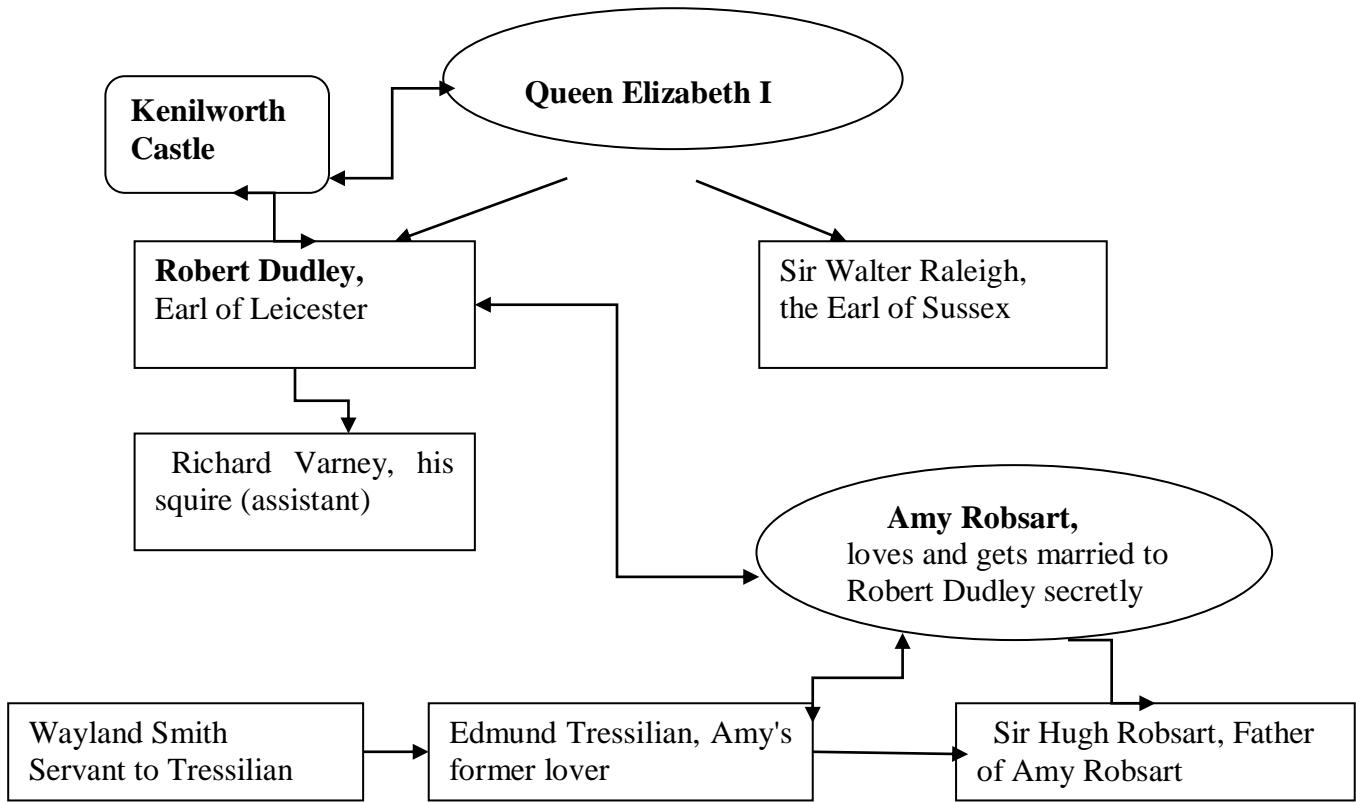
*Kenilworth* is a historical novel, because it deals with historical events and characters. It is set against a historical background. The time of the plot is 1575. The locale is England. The time is that of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The characters bear historical names. Here we have an excellent picture of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester. The main events are also distilled from history. Above all the spirit of Elizabeth's age is exhibited most artistically and realistically. On the basis of these facts, *Kenilworth* is categorized as a historical novel.

It is a romance also. In action and in the treatment of events and characters, it follows the models of romances. Even its setting and background also imitates the models of romances. Thus it is a blend of history and romance. The beginning of the novel has a romantic colouring. There is a remarkable element of suspense in the entire novel.

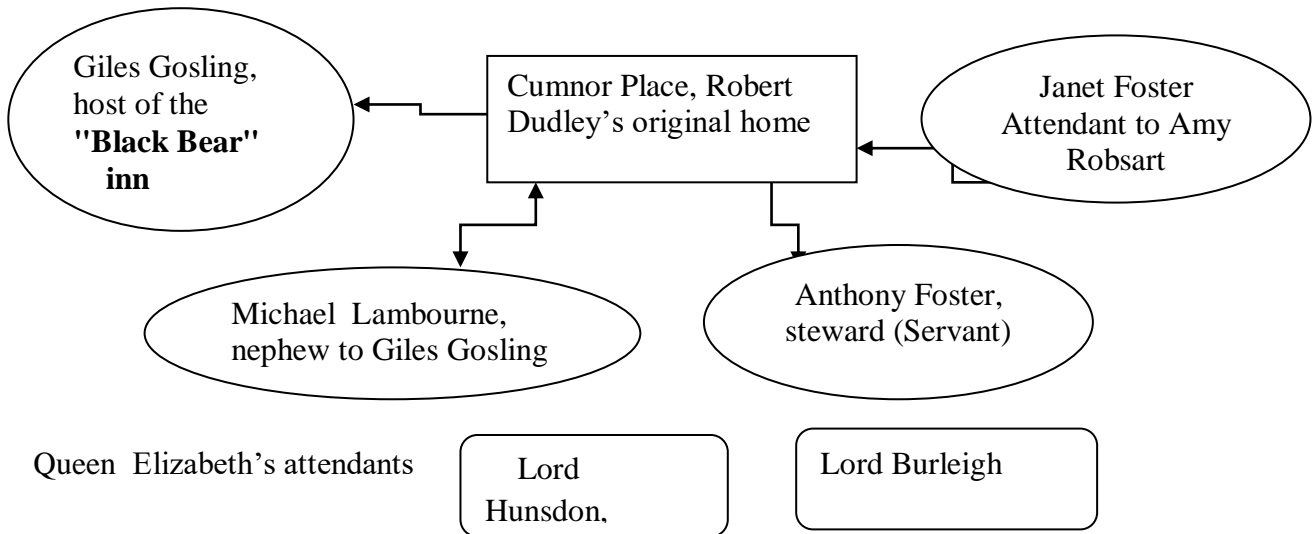
**Time and Setting:** The period of the novel is set in 1575, and centers on the secret marriage of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Amy Robsart, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart.

**The Characters :**

**Major Characters**



**Minor Characters**



**Plot :** During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Leicester, the Queen's favorite, secretly marries Amy Rosbart to avoid the Queen's wrath and keeps her isolated from society. She is discovered by on

old lover, who believes that she is the mistress of Varney, a villainous ally of Leicester, and tries to convince her to run away. When she refuses, he goes to the Queen with his story.

Varney saves Leicester by claiming that Amy is his wife. When the Queen orders that Amy be brought to the court at Kenilworth, Amy, refusing to appear as Varney's wife, runs off, goes to Kenilworth on her own and tries to persuade Leicester to tell the truth and brave the anger of Elizabeth.

But Varney, pretending to help Leicester, convinces the Queen that Amy is mad, and he is told to take her home and care for her. He also manages to plant doubts in the mind of Leicester about Amy's relation with her former lover. Before Leicester can learn the truth, Varney murders Amy. In the end Leicester confesses to the Queen who eventually forgives him.

**Detailed Synopsis:** The story opens in an inn located in a village called Cumnor, Oxfordshire. A young traveller, Tressilian, is secretly looking for a woman, Miss Amy Robsart, to whom he is betrothed. He overhears a story about a beautiful woman secluded in a house in the neighbourhood, Cumnor Place, and there he finds his betrothed living there as a prisoner, but she refuses to escape with him. The heroine Amy Robsart enters into a secret marriage with the Earl of Leicester, rejecting her fiancé, Edmund Tressilian, a Cornish gentleman. Leicester was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, and he feels obliged to conceal his marriage in order to maintain his position at court. Having fled her father's house, Amy is therefore kept a virtual prisoner in Cumnor Place, an old country house. Tressilian believes that Amy has been abducted by Leicester's Master of the Horse, Varney, whom Leicester has used as a mask for his own amorous intrigues.

With the backing of Amy's distraught father, Sir Hugh, Tressilian accuses Varney before the Queen of unlawful seduction. In order to protect his patron, Varney swears that Amy is his wife. Not altogether convinced, the Queen orders Varney to produce Amy in that capacity during the projected revels at Leicester's castle of Kenilworth. When Amy indignantly refuses to play this role, Varney has poisons administered, which will provoke a mild illness and thus excuse her absence. Amy, though, thwarts Varney's plan with the assistance of Tressilian's page Wayland Smith and makes her way to Kenilworth. Here, before she can make her husband aware of her presence, she comes face to face with the Queen and appeals for her aid against Varney. As she cannot bring herself to declare her marriage to Leicester against her husband's wishes, the Queen thinks her mad and consigns her, eventually, to Varney's care.

Varney, who sees in Amy an obstacle to his own ambition, persuades his patron that she is having an affair with Tressilian, and the jealous Leicester orders him to put her to death. Varney leaves Kenilworth with Amy in order to carry out the murder at Cumnor Place. A messenger sent to countermand the order, when Leicester has second thoughts, is brutally killed. Back at Kenilworth, Tressilian, who is ignorant of Amy's fate, makes a personal appeal to Leicester. Incensed, Leicester challenges him to a duel and is on the point of killing him, when the arrival of a delayed letter from Amy convinces him that Varney's accusations are false. Leicester confesses her marriage to Elizabeth who dispatches Tressilian to Cumnor Place to rescue Amy. He arrives at the moment that Varney has engineered her death through a fall. Varney is arrested and poisons himself in his prison cell; the heart-broken Tressilian enlists on the Virginia expedition and dies an early death; Leicester regains his privileged position at court after a brief period of disgrace.

**Themes :** *Kenilworth* is a novel of selfishness versus selflessness and ambition versus love. Amy and the Earl both struggle internally with selfishness and love, while Varney and Tressilian each typify the extremes of the two qualities. Perhaps the finest point of this work is its

characterization. The Earl is shown as an ambition-driven man who will stoop to deceit and almost anything else in order to attain his goals, but with one saving grace—he loves Amy, and in the end gives up his pride and ambition to confess their marriage. Amy Robsart is a pretty, spoiled child whose tragic circumstances teach her maturity and determination, although such lessons come too late to save her. Tressilian is the serious, steadfast lover of Amy, and continues to try to save her from herself throughout the book and finally dies of a broken heart. Varney is the chief villain of the work. His greed and ambition know no bounds. It is he that pushes the Earl beyond what he would normally do to secure power, and it is he that finally murders Amy Robsart.

Thus Scott's *Kenilworth* is a hybrid. It is a history and romance both. The novelist has turned this novel into a historical romance by blending fact and fiction. His romanticism is coloured by a strong realistic sense. When this novel deals with lowly life, it is realistic. But the prevailing mood of the novel is romantic with historical bias. It is a beautiful blend of history and romance.

**Character Sketches : Edmund Tressilian :** He is an impoverished young gentleman, a friend of the earl of Sussex and an unsuccessful suitor for Amy Robsart's hand. Generous, intelligent and honorable, he seeks to free Amy from Richard Varney, whom he believes to be her paramour. When Amy, secretly the wife of the earl of Leicester, refuses to leave Cumnor Place, he tries to put his case before Queen Elizabeth. Supported by Amy's father and Sussex, he nonetheless makes a poor showing because of Varney's cleverness and his own desire to protect Amy. Accused later of cuckolding the earl of Leicester, Tressilian is forced to duel with the earl but is saved by the timely intervention of two friends. He clears himself before the queen, though too late to save Amy from Varney's treachery.

**Robert Dudley :** Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester and master of Kenilworth Castle. Rivalled only by Sussex in Elizabeth's esteem, he has the advantage of appealing to her femininity. Knowing his marriage to Amy would spoil his chance for advancement, he keeps her at Cumnor Place under Varney's supervision. Basically noble, he is also quite gullible. When he tries to tell Elizabeth of his marriage, Varney convinces him Amy has been unfaithful. In a rage, he orders Varney to kill her and fights a duel with Tressilian. On learning the truth, he reveals his marriage and tries in vain to save Amy. He suffers the loss of his wife and temporary court disfavor.

**Amy Robsart :** Amy Robsart, Leicester's unfortunate wife. Deeply in love with him, she wants recognition as his lawful wife but hesitates to ruin his life at court. Imprisoned at Cumnor Place, she escapes with Tressilian's servant, Wayland Smith, to Kenilworth after Varney gives her a mild dose of poison. There, she tries to see her husband and reveal her true identity, but she is deemed insane by Queen Elizabeth. Through Varney's scheme, she is sent back to Cumnor Place and tricked into falling to her death.

### **Question:**

#### ***Kenilworth* as a historical Romance:**

Sir Walter Scott, the great novelist of Scotland has been called the **father of historical novel** in England. In his works a more serious and responsible approach towards history is seen, He blended facts and fiction, history and romance. His novel *Kenilworth* is also a beautiful blend of history and romance.

*Kenilworth* is a historical novel because it deals with historical events and characters. It is set against a historical background. The time of the plot is 1575. The locale is England. The time is that of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The characters bear historical names. The novel portrays an excellent picture of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester. The main events are also distilled from history. Above all the spirit of Elizabeth's age is exhibited most artistically and realistically. On the basis of these facts, *Kenilworth* is categorised as a historical novel.

Though there are historical reflections in this novel, there are a number of historical inaccuracies also. The fact is that Scott always treated history with perfect disregard of inconvenient facts and dates. The entire story is not factual. He has changed the order of events which never occurred at all. The conclusion of *Kenilworth* is also mysterious. It is completely different from the historical records. In short, this novel is not a pure history.

In action and in the treatment of events and characters, it follows the models of romances. Even its setting and background also imitates the models of romances. Thus it is a blend of history and romance.

*Kenilworth* contains convention of romances. The plot revolves around various concepts such as love, hate, intrigue, duels, fighting and violence. The story gains its momentum at the hand of romance. The romantic pathos occupies an important place in the novel. It can be seen in Amy's episode. The novel begins with romantic secrecy. A lover goes out for the search of his beloved.

Scott's description of the various places has also romantic grandeur. His main scenes take place at the spots of considerable interests. These places are Cumnor place, Black Bear Inn, Kenilworth castle and Say's court. These places have been beautifully presented. The castle of Kenilworth has been coated with heavy description. It has an ample porch. The wizards and buskins can be seen there. Thus Scott's *Kenilworth* is a blend of history and romance