UNIT 1: RISE OF THE NOVEL

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the history of the novel as a form
- trace the development of the novel in the 18th century
- highlight the conditions that led to the rise of the novel
- identify certain important novels and novelists of the 18th century
- explain the themes and conventions of the novels of the 18th century

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Stories are common to all fictions, including novels. The novel, however, is a new and still burgeoning literary form. Motor-cars definitely have wheels but the ox-cart, as pointed out by Walter Allen, is not its ancestor. The novel presents a total world with rocks and trees and humans. These humans interact in a given social context entrenched in values. The author's life and living, his experiences and beliefs refract the social and moral world as a prism. The men in the world he creates and offers give us his view of life and living and its future or fate. These men had been traditionally called characters and their life in the story may be looked at as 'an extended metaphor of the author's view of life'. It creates a holistic understanding in the reader on the mores and manners. The novel, in sum, is a social world created by the author. There are no encoded classical definitions or precedents.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* heralded the dawn of the European novel and its influence was crucial in the development of the English novel as a study of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* would make clear, especially on the conscious aesthetic considerations which go a long way in the determination of the shape and form of the subsequent novelistic endeavour.

1.3 RISE OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL IN THE 18th CENTURY

After reading the following section, the students will gain a considerable idea on the evolution of the novel as a major literary form tracing its beginnings and analysing the causes for its rise in the 18th century.

Ian Watt in his pioneering *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) indicates, the "realism of the novel allows a more immediate imitation of individual experience" than do other literary forms, and "this surely explains why the majority of readers in the last two hundred years have found in the novel the literary form which most closely satisfies their wishes for a close correspondence between life and art."

The English novel as we know it today was born in the eighteenth century England and there are many factors that led to its rise. Perhaps the most important social phenomenon of the age was the rapid rate at which country people were moving to the cities, especially London. It is said the population of London doubled, from around 350,000 to 700,000, between 1650 and 1750. This rapid urbanisation and the rampant growth of the city had its fair share of positives and drawbacks: there was a faster and wider dissemination of ideas and an easier access to reading material resulting in the development of a more commercial society.On the other hand, there were the problems of urban crime (existing since Renaissance England, but never so rampant), unhygienic living and housing conditions, lack of space, illness and death.

Such exciting and dangerous times were perfect for the evolution of Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), often considered the first significant English novelist and his *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the first English novel. Defoe, through his life and works, portrays perhaps all the factors that paved the

way for the emergence and popularity of the English novel. Foremost of these include a focus on the individual and a fascination for the individual's daily affairs seen clearly in Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*,1722; as well as the treatment of narrative in measured time**;** thus the novel deals with events in a more specific temporal frame than that of the heroic romance. Other elements include: the portrayal of real people in real settings, which include descriptions of everyday affairs such as eating, drinking, falling in love, feeling sad, etc. A growing sense of independence: resulted in a break from traditional ideas and beliefs, especially those received from authoritative sources. There was an emphasis on interior scenes and urban experiences and, finally, an unprecedented attention to the interests and aspirations of women.

It is in Defoe's works that we see the most significant fact about the English novel; that it is the ultimate expression of the middle class**.** No other literary genre was produced for and consumed by the rapidly expanding middle class as much as the novel.

In 1740, the increasing population of potential novel readers were chiefly interested in family life, the details of everyday living, and the problems of morality being *lived out* which only the novel could provide. Richardson's *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* in 1740 satisfied these interests, and the book was extremely popular and Ian Watt considers this an important moment in the rise of the English novel as this book powerfully made the claim for the novel to be taken seriously. Another important aspect of *Pamela* was that the narrative is carried forward through letters for the most part reiterating the importance of individuality and attention to detail in the 18th century.

The 18th century was called the Age of Reason advocating rationalism as its official philosophy, but it hardly affected the actual lives of most people and this is reflected through the content of the novels of the age. Most of the protagonists of the English novel then were either outlaws or rebels such as Moll Flanders and Clarissa Harlowe from Richardson's *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-1748). These works portray the lives of one or two central characters, further reinforcing the focus on the individual.

Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) is an important novel of the time focussing on individuality. The book is also considered the germ of the later psychological novel.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is considered the first English novel?

Q 2: What are the conditions that led to the popularity of the novel in the 18th century?

Q 3: What are some of the features of the early novel?

Thus, this shift to interiority tremendously helped the novel as a genre to grow. Besides this, the novel also depended on an easy prose style, a departure from the exalted language of the romances. The simplicity of language helped achieve that "common touch" that 18th century readers connected to. Another reason why novels and fiction sold so well in this age was the Licensing Act of 1737, aimed at the theatre, which in effect, forced Fielding to turn from drama to the novel; it also gave rise to bland theatre, thus winning a greater readership for periodicals such as *Spectator Papers* by Addison and Steele, which led to a wealth of well-written journals. Thus we see that the novel, through its characters and themes, protested against the conditions of society and yet depended on them for its existence and the concerns of previous authors (Milton for example with his spiritual concerns) were forgotten. People were more interested in how to get along, live successfully and morally, and come to terms with the rapidly changing times. For this, they sought help from the novelists rather than the philosophers or the poets. It is with these novelists, their feet planted in middle-class mores and conventions that the readers identified with.

The Castle of Otranto (1765) by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), is a significant moment in the history of the English novel as this was the first gothic novel. It was tremendously popular and marked the movement of the readers' tastes towards the more exotic, violent and passionate; anticipating the Romantic Movement.

"Another early sign of Romanticism is a different sort of novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), by Oliver Goldsmith (1728 or 1730-1774), regarded as the harbinger of the novel of sensibility, another signal of the Romantic "temperament" (Watt).

The **gothic** and the **sentimental** would go on to dominate the novel reading public of the end of the century. These later audiences liked wild settings with mysterious ruins and castles. "These "wild" settings became increasingly common in novels and were a staple feature of the Romantic novel to come." (Allen) The concept of "nature" would go on to be the primary focus of the Romantic poets, but examples of which we find in Romantic novels too, such as those of Sir Walter Scott.

"These novels of social concern illustrate an important phenomenon: The novel was beginning to occupy a position formerly held by the drama. While a few excellent satires can be found near the close of the century—such as Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (pr., pb. 1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (pr., pb. 1775) and *The School for Scandal* (pr. 1777)—generally, the burgeoning concern for human rights and social reform is to be found most fully developed in the novel, though a number of poems also reveal such concerns. In *English Literature from Dryden to Burns* (1948), Alan D. McKillop argues that the novel "entails a critical or analytical attitude toward characters represented under actual or conceivable social conditions" and that the "critical attitude is directed toward both individual character and the social situation." He suggests that the novel was coming ever closer to the real lives of its readers as the eighteenth century came to a close. Despite the excesses of the sentimental novel and the novel of terror, the central trend of prose fiction was an attempt to grasp and come to terms with the world as it had to be dealt with every day" (Eagleton).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Which novel is considered the first Gothic novel?

Fanny Burney (1752-1840) is an example in case. Her novels steeped in domestic life "contain a great deal of sensible advice—either by demonstration or by declaration—for their readers, especially young women." (Mackay) A wide readership to her books points towards women's participation in novel reading and writing and it is Burney who paved the way for perhaps the most famous female novelist of all time, Jane Austen (1775-1817).

The reason why the Industrial Revolution had greater importance among the lower and middle classes was because *individual lives* were deeply and directly affected. This fact is supremely significant in the development of the English novel, because the novel focuses solely on the inner lives of people. Whether there are "detailed delineation of the thoughts and emotions of a character" as in the novels of Samuel Richardson or "a clear demonstration of a character's motives by action" as is evident in the works of Henry Fielding, the novel is entirely dependent on individual people, both in their relationships with oneself and with the world, in understanding the meaning of the world and of life.

The nineteenth century novel often contained a varied assortment of local voices from across the socio-economic fabric whereas the eighteenth century novels were more globally engaged rather than domestically. The eighteenth century novels had characters like Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver who were world explorers, pointing towards Britain's colonial locations the New World that Britain was increasingly engaging with. Also, the nineteenth century novels had a multi-lingual collection of different and overlapping narratives whereas the eighteenth century novels in contrast were fairly slim in its range of voices as it focussed on one or two central characters reiterating its emphasis on the individual.

1.4 18th CENTURY NOVELS: A GLIMPSE

This section aims to introduce you to some representative novels of 18th century England. As a student of English Literature, you are expected to read more on these novels that have shaped the genre of the novel and has made it what it is today.

1. *Robinson Crusoe (1719)*

Robinson Crusoe was published on 25 April 1719 and is often considered one of the earliest English novels. It is didactic and epistolary and is based on the life of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish castaway who lived for four years on a Pacific island; *Robinson Crusoe* was very well received with four editions coming out in 1719 itself. The novel marks the beginning of realistic fiction as a genre and is often considered the first novel.

2. *Moll Flanders (1722)*

Moll Flanders was another novel by Daniel Defoe, first published in 1722. The original printing did not have an author, as it was an apparent autobiography. It was attributed to Defoe after his death. The novel is based partially on the life of Moll King, a London criminal whom Defoe met while visiting Newgate Prison.

3. *Gulliver's Travels (1726)*

Gulliver's Travels, or *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships* was an English prose satire which is now considered one of the greatest English novels; in a 2015 list of 100 best novels of all time, *Gulliver's Travels* is listed, as "a satirical masterpiece".

4. *Pamela (1740)*

Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded is an epistolary novel by English writer Samuel Richardson, first published in 1740. It tells the story of a 15-year-old maid named Pamela Andrews. Although a best-seller, *Pamela* was widely criticised for its "immorality" and disregard for social classes.

5. *Shamela (1741*)

An Apology for the Life of Mrs.Shamela Andrews, Shamela, as it is popularly called, is a satirical novella in the epistolary form by Henry Fielding although he denied the work was his. It was written as an attack on *Pamela*, copying its style and composition.

6. *Clarissa (1748)*

Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady is an epistolary novel by English writer Samuel Richardson, published in 1748. It tells the tragic story of a heroine whose quest for virtue is continually thwarted by her family and is regarded as one of the longest novels in the English language and as Richardson's masterpiece.

7. *Tom Jones (1749)*

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling, or simply *Tom Jones*, is a comic novel by English playwright and novelist Henry Fielding. It is both a *Bildungsroman* and a picaresque novel. It was first published on 28 February 1749 in London. W. Somerset Maugham in his 1948 book *Great Novelists and Their Novels* rated *Tom Jones* among the ten best novels of the world. This work is considered Fielding's masterpiece and was highly popular in its day.

8. *Tristram Shandy (1760-67)*

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (or *Tristram Shandy*) by Laurence Sterne was published in nine volumes, beginning in 1759 till 1767. The novel claims to be the biography of the titular character, Tristram Shandy. It is often considered the harbinger of the modern psychological novel and one of the greatest novels ever written.

9. *The Castle of Otranto (1764)*

The Castle of Otranto published in 1764 was the first ever gothic novel by Horace Walpole which marked a change in the reading tastes of the 18th century audience as it turned more towards the exotic and the extraordinary. It marked the beginning of the gothic genre which went on to dominate the novels at the end of the 18th century also influencing the likes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

10. *The Vicar of Wakefield*

The Vicar of Wakefield – subtitled *A Tale, Supposed to Be Written by Himself* – is a novel by Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) considered

the first novel of sensibility. It was one of the most popular and widely read 18th century novels among Victorians.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Briefly write on epistolary novel.

Q 6: In what way the novels of eighteenth century differed from the ones belonging to the nineteenth century?



1.5 LET US SUM UP

Thus, we have seen the varied and long lineage of the modern novel and how narratives and fiction have existed since the birth of language and how over the ages, they have evolved to form the novel as a unique genre in the 18th century. We are now acquainted with some of the important novels and novelists of the age while also gaining an insight into reasons that accounts for the growth and popularity of the genre.



1.6 FURTHER READING

1) Allen, Watter, (1991 rpt.). *The English Novel : A Short Critical History*. Penguin.

2) Eagleton, Terry. (2005). *The English Novel : An Introduction Oxford:* Blackwell Publishing.

3) Mackay, Marina. (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel*. New York : CUP.

4) Poplawski, Paul. (2008). *English Literature in Context*. Cambridge : CUP.

5) Richetti, John. (Ed.) (1996). *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth - Century Novel*. New York : CUP.

6) Sanders, Andrew. (2000). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford : OUP.

7) Watt, Ian. (2000 rpt.). *The Rise of the Novel : Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London : University of California Press.

1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

Ans to Q No 2: Perhaps the most important social phenomenon of the age was the rapid rate at which country people were moving to the cities, especially London. It is said the population of London doubled, from around 350,000 to 700,000, between 1650 and 1750. With the rapid urbanisation and the rampant growth of the city there was a faster and wider dissemination of ideas and an easier access to reading material resulting in the development of a more commercial society.

Ans to Q No 3: The ultimate expression of the middle class**,** family life, the details of everyday living, and the problems of morality being lived out, etc.

Ans to Q No 4: *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) by Horace Walpole was the first gothic novel.

Ans to Q No 5: *Clarissa* or *the History of a Young Lady* is an epistolary novel by English writer Samuel Richardson, published in 1748. It tells the tragic story of a heroine whose quest for virtue is continually thwarted by her family and is regarded as one of the longest novels in the English language and as Richardson's masterpiece.

Ans to Q No 6: The nineteenth century novel often contained a varied assortment of local voices from across the socio-economic fabric whereas the eighteenth century novels were more globally engaged rather than domestically.



1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Trace the history of the rise of English novel in the eighteenth century.

Q 2: What are the factors that contributed to the rise of the English novel?

Q 3: Give an account of the first English novel highlighting its significant features.

Q 4: Provide a glimpse into the major novels that were written during the eighteenth century. What kind of themes did these novels reflect?

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