

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Module No # 01
Lecture No # 01
The Nineteenth Century Novel

Hello and welcome to this course on the nineteenth century novel. In this session I would offer a brief overview of some of the major concerns of the 18th century novel so that we get a good idea of how these concerns get carried on onto the 19th century novel too.

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The Novel

“I am a man and alive. For this reason I am a novelist. And, being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog....Only in the novel are all things given full play.”

D.H. Lawrence, *Why the Novel Matters* (1936)

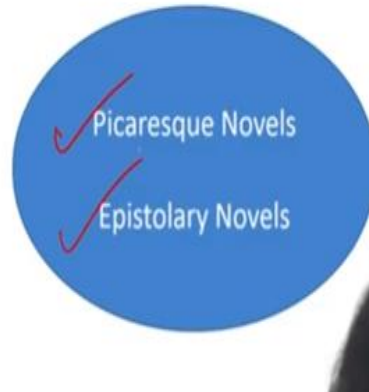
So let's begin with how the novel is perceived by some of the major practitioners of the genre. So here we have a quotation by D. H. Lawrence, and this excerpt has been taken from his essay “Why The Novel Matters” published in 1936. So he says, “I am a man and alive. For this reason I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive but never get the whole hog... Only in the novel are all things given play.”

So the last idea in this excerpt is very interesting in that he believes that various domains of human life and human society get full play in the narrative of fiction more than in any other professions such as the philosopher or the poet.

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18th Century Novels

- Henry Fielding
- Tobias Smollett, Daniel Defoe
- Laurence Sterne
- Samuel Richardson



So the 18th century novels. Here I have a list of some of the major fiction writers of that period beginning with Henry Fielding here in this list, Tobias Smollett, Daniel Defoe, Laurence Sterne, Samuel Richardson. So all these writers practiced their hand at writing the novel in the mode of the picaresque or the epistolary. So these two are narrative modes in which the writing adopts a particular way of relating a story.

So in the picaresque we get a central character travelling quite a bit and narrating the experiences that he or she has come across in his journeys. In terms of the epistolary novels we have the novel in the form of letter. So through letters, we get a sense what is the significant event about which the novel is.

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Daniel Defoe

- Father of the English Novel
- *Robinson Crusoe*



"Simultaneously
creates his text and
his bourgeoisie life"

So let us begin with Daniel Defoe. He is considered the father of the English novel and Robinson Crusoe is the major work by which Defoe is well known to this day. So what is exciting about Robinson Crusoe is the fact that critics perceive that Crusoe simultaneously creates his texts as well as his bourgeoisie life. In other words, Crusoe writes or keeps a record of his life on the island as well as he recreates his entire bourgeoisie middle class life on that particular island.

So two things are happening simultaneously. A kind of record is being created as well as the life itself is being created once again.

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Robinson Crusoe (1719)

- 'my Story is a whole Collection of Wonders'
- "amazement at his fortunes" and "God's guidance of his life"
- The Bible, Nature and introspection of the errors of his past.

So Robinson Crusoe published in 1719 is a story of a whole collection of wonders. So it is a narrative that describes wonderful fantastical events that happened to Crusoe on that particular island, and Crusoe is amazed at his fortunes and God's guidance of his life. So he is both having an adventure, as well as being guided by God in that particular adventure. And the Bible, nature, and the notion of introspection of Crusoe about his past are some of the key concerns of this particular novel.

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Robinson Crusoe

- "a fictional account of one individual's experiences."
- "singular and new". *novel*
- "an ordinary individual, even if his ordeals were extraordinary".
- "great emphasis on his inner life, though understood mostly in spiritual terms."

So more about Crusoe in that we have a fictional account of one individual's experiences in this particular narration. It is both singular and new. It is very unique and it is very very novel and that is an exciting element of this genre. And it is about an ordinary individual, it is not about an extraordinary character, not about a celebrity, whereas it is about an ordinary individual, even though his ordeals, his adventures may be extraordinary or fantastic. And as we can see that in this novel there is a great emphasis on his inner life though those inner life and its preoccupations can be understood mostly in spiritual terms.

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Robinson Crusoe

- “manner of its narration, it asked the reader to believe in its ‘probability’.”
- “the most common word for what made a narrative believable”.
- “[t]he story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events’.

Further interesting aspects of Robinson Crusoe is in relation to the way it is narrated, the manner of its narration. In fact it asked the reader to believe in its probability. These things are quite likely to happen, it is very very probable and it invites the reader to follow that kind of adventure. And probability is a very interesting word because in those days it was the most common word for what made a narrative believable.

So what is probable is in fact what it is believable, and in fact the title page claims that the story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with religious application of events. And this is very very important because the writer claims that the novel is in tune with the world of spirituality, with the world of religion, therefore there is nothing untoward or immoral is associated with this particular fiction.

So modesty, seriousness, the quality of being very very sombre, the tone of being sombre, of being grave in relation to the set of thoughts as well as the spiritual elements are crucial to how a novel is being received in those days.

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Novel?

- “The preface to *Robinson Crusoe* has many words for the narrative – ‘Story’, ‘Adventures’, ‘Account’, ‘Life’, ‘History’, ‘Fact’ – but none of them is that word ‘novel’ ”

So, let us consider the term “novel”. In fact in the preface to *Robinson Crusoe* there are several words for the narrative such as story, adventures, account, life, history, fact; but none of that set of words is the word novel. So, the word novel itself is a unique term that is that is kind of evolving in that period. Novel is something to do with novelty, something that is new and unique.

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Samuel Richardson

- 1740
- Servant girl’s resistance to her master’s sexual advances
- Best seller
- Claim to seriousness
- Morally respectable genre



Other major writers of this particular genre are Samuel Richardson and Fielding, and Tobias Smollett, but we will look at Samuel Richardson here for a minute. His work *Pamela* was published in 1740, and it talks about a servant girl's resistance to her master's advances of

seduction, and it was best seller in those days. And it also like Robinson Crusoe made a claim to being very very serious narrative, serious fiction, and again, once again, there is this claim that this is a morally respectable genre that middle class readers, respectable readers can have access to and gain something useful for their personal lives too.

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Samuel Richardson

- Epistolary novel
- Pamela, the heroine
- Letters are the novel's plot
- Transforms the nature of the prospective villain



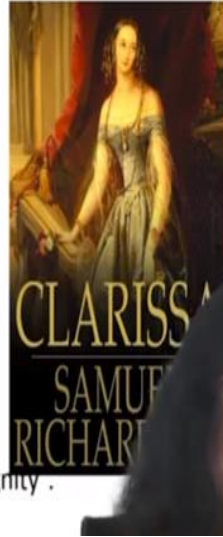
Epistolary fiction is the mode in which this novel Pamela was written by Samuel Richardson and its figures is Pamela and and as I mentioned before, letters are the way through which the readers understand the novel's plot. And what is exciting about this novel is the fact that the heroine Pamela, the central female character, transforms the nature of the prospective villain through her measures, through her attitudes and behaviors and faith.

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Samuel Richardson

- Clarrisa

- “psychological complexity” and “tragic ambitions”
- “not a minor genre”, “great literature”.
- “Even Fielding admired it”.
- “achieved respectability, perhaps even literary dignity”.



Clarissa is another very significant novel written by Samuel Richardson and it has, according to several critics, psychological complexity and tragic ambitions. And for the first time we realize that the novel is not just a minor genre, but it is evolving into what could be termed as great literature. And in fact even Fielding admired this particular work Clarissa by Richardson. Slowly we see that the novel genre is achieving respectability, perhaps even literary dignity.

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Laurence Sterne

- Tristram Shandy (1759-1760)
- Literary novel
- “Celebrity author”
- Autobiographical and fictional narrator

And Sterne is another important practitioner of fiction in the 18th century. He is well known for his Tristram Shandy and once again the novel is gaining this epithet of being very literary, and Sterne becomes a celebrity author in relation to this particular work. And we can also see that there are autobiographical as well as fictional elements in this particular novel.

In fact, the narrator of that novel has both these elements. The elements of the autobiographical as well as the fictional.

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Henry Fielding

- "Tom Jones, 1749
- Big success
- Inspiration for Victorian novelists



Henry Fielding's Tom Jones was again a massive hit. It was a big success and it was published in 1749. And Tom Jones is a significant landmark novel in the history of the genre because it was a big inspiration for Victorian novelists. And this is the title page we have for this novel Tom Jones.

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Henry Fielding

- protagonists who travel the roads of England,
- encountering characters from every class
- a journey through contemporary society was highly influential,
- Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random* and *Humphry Clinker*.

Again the mode with which Tom Jones was written is the picaresque, and as I mentioned a short while ago, a picaresque novel has protagonists who travelled the roads of England and they encounter characters from every class. And in fact it is a journey through contemporary society. And this journey was very very attractive and it was very very influential in the sense that it was picked up by later novelists such as Charles Dickens.

And we also have Tobias Smollett's Roderick Random and Humphry Clinker written in this kind of mode, the picaresque.

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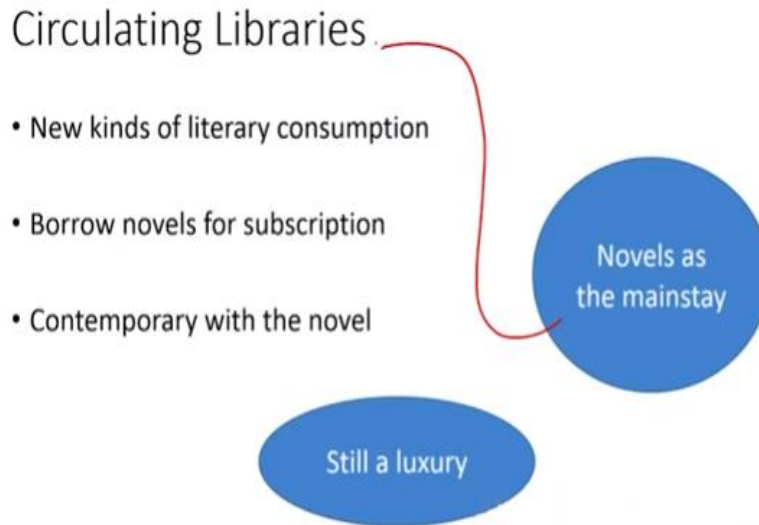
Novel

- Commercial product
- New entrepreneurs: booksellers
- “an expanding genteel readership with money”

time

So the novel was beginning to be a commercial product. It was a commodity that could be sold at the market and it made a lot of money for the publishers. And for the first time we also get a new professional category, a new bunch of entrepreneurs, who were the book sellers. And the book sellers as I said made a lot of money because there was an expanding reading public, and this reading public consisted of genteel readers, genteel readers most probably referring to the middle class readers who were very literate. So and they also had the money and the time to spend on reading.

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Circulating libraries is another major phenomenon that has evolved in that particular period in the 18th Century. So this is a new kind of literary consumption, that is, reading, reading books borrowed from the library is a new phenomenon, and the readers began to borrow novels for subscription from circulating libraries and the growth of the circulating libraries is in tandem with the growth of the Novel genre.

We can see that the novels are the mainstay in these circulating libraries, in other words, the circulating libraries stocked novels primarily. So the readers preferred to read novels primarily, but reading, buying books is still a luxury for majority of the population which is why libraries became very popular and there are references to libraries in some of the fiction that was written in the day as well as in some of the plays. For example *The Rivals* by Sheridan is a play which contains a heroine who frequently resorts to the circulating libraries.

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Book Reviews

- *The Monthly Review*, 1749
- Novel reviews (Staple fare)
- Warned readers of the dangers of novel reading
- Young woman as typical reader

Okay, book reviews is another major phenomenon in the magazines. So book reviews began to be published in the Monthly Review which came out in 1749, the reviews of novels became a major news item, major item in these magazines, so it was a staple fare. And we also need to remember that in juxtaposition with this massive attraction that the novels had in relation to the booksellers and the circulating libraries, we also had a section from the society, from the 18th century society, which warned readers of the dangers of novel reading; especially the warnings were targeted at young women because they were seen as the typical category of readers. So they did not want women to be corrupted by the events, the stories, that were that were being played out in these fiction.

So while the novel was becoming very very popular both as a pastime, as a luxury commodity, as well as a part of the phenomenon of the circulating libraries, there was this contrary idea that the novels were possibly corrupting influences and were especially bad for young women.

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Novel

- 1770s increasingly respectable
- Frances Burney, *Evelina* (1778)
- young woman's "entrance into the world"

"morally
impeccable";
"satirical"

Jane Aust
was a f



But, despite all the warnings and the cautionary tales from, you know, from a certain section of the 18th century society, from the 1770s the novel was becoming increasingly respectable. In fact Frances Burney's *Evelina* published in 1778 talks about a young woman's entrance into the world and it did that in relation to the idea of the story being morally impeccable as well as being very satirical of some of the negative impulses in the society.

And Jane Austen was a big fan of Frances Burney's *Evelina*. So the novel constantly swam against the current, against the current which was looking at it in a very very critical angle. So it was kind of emerging as the winner as time progressed as the 18th century blended into the 19th century. So thank you for listening to this section of the lecture I will catch up with you in the

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