

THE THEORY OF THE NOVEL AND INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH NOVEL

THE DEFINITION OF THE TERM

Novel is an extended work of prose fiction containing characters, action and a more or less complex plot.

THE FORERUNNERS OF NOVEL

A long narrative poem concerning the achievements of;

epic: heroic persons or warriors of history or tradition.

romance: medieval adventure stories in verse and prose. Scene and incidents are remote from everyday life.

drama: any work in prose or verse in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action and is represented with accompanying gesture, costume and scenery as in real life.

tales/novella: a short prose tale which was popular in Italy in the medieval period. Novellas were concerned mainly with the events of city life. One of the best examples is the *Decameron* by Boccaccio.

THE TERMS “NOVEL” AND THE “ROMAN”

In England, at the end of the 16th Century, two important works contributed to the evolution of the extended prose narrative. They are John Lyly's *Euphues* and Sir Philip Sidney's pastoral romance *Arcadia*.

In the 17th Century, there is no major advance in the novel form. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* can be taken as a kind of allegorical novel. The novel established itself as a distinct literary type in England with the works of Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*), Samuel Richardson (*Pamela*, *Virtue Rewarded*, *Clarissa*) in the 18th Century.

1. James Fenimore Cooper → *The Pioneers*
2. Herman Melville → *Moby Dick*

The term “novel” is derived from the Italian “novella,” a short compact (concise) tale usually about city life in the medieval period represented by the tales in the *Decameron*.

The “roman,” which is the term for “novel” in many languages, was derived from “romance.” In some ways, novel developed from medieval romances which were first written in verse and then in prose. As the prose tale developed and gained importance, verse narrative became gradually less popular.

EPIC (HEROIC POEM)

A long narrative poem concerning the achievements of heroic persons or warriors of history or tradition. It is a long narrative poem written in an elevated style. Epics share a group of common characteristics:

1. The hero is a figure of great stature, and of national and international importance.
2. The setting is vast in scope, covering nations, the whole world or the universe.
3. The action consists of deeds of great valour or requiring super-human courage.
4. Supernatural forces, such as gods, angels, and demons are frequently involved in the action.
5. An elevated style is used.

Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are well-known early epics. Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are the literary epics.

ROMANCE

Two meanings of the term may be distinguished:

1. A medieval adventure story, usually in verse, of some hero of chivalry or of love.
2. Prose tale with scene and incidents remote from everyday life.

Characteristics of romances:

1. The characters are of great stature or national or international importance.
2. Time and place are not limited.
3. The action consists of deeds of great valour or requiring super-human courage. It is remote from everyday life.
4. It involves elements of fantasy, improbability and the marvellous.
5. Courtly love which is idealistic love is contained in the romances.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a romance produced in England in the 14th Century. Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* was written in prose in the Renaissance period.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which was written in the 17th Century is an anti-romance. It makes fun of the conventions of chivalry and contrasting them with the realities of ordinary life.

"NOVEL" AS A NEW GENRE

- A. Realism
- B. The rise of the middle-class
- C. Sentimentalism and individualism

A. THE IMPACT AND INFLUENCE OF REALISM

1. According to Scholastic Realists of the Middle Ages, it is universals, classes or abstractions that are the true realities, not the particular, concrete objects of sense-perception.
2. Modern realism begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses. It has its origins in Descartes and Locke in the 17th Century but it received its full formulation by Thomas Reid in the middle of the 18th Century.
3. The general temper of realism has been
 - a. Critical
 - b. Anti-traditional
 - c. Innovating
4. According to realism, truth is particular, that is, truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses.
5. The method of realism is the study of particulars of experience by the individual who should be free from past assumptions, conventions and traditional beliefs such as legends, myths and religion.
6. So the discovery of the truth was a wholly individual matter independent of tradition, religion and conventions of the past thought.
7. Previous literary genres like epics and romances took their plots from traditional and national stories such as legends, fables, myths or even Biblical stories or history.
8. And the merits of the author's treatment of such plots were judged according to the literary decorum (appropriateness of action, thought, language and character) derived from the accepted mode of the genre.
9. Novel placed importance on individual experience which is always new for that particular individual. Therefore, novel rejected traditional plots.
10. So, unlike Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton or the Greek and Roman writers or the writers of epic and romances who took their plots from mythology, history, romances and legend, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding took their plots from ordinary life, everyday life.
11. The plot in the novel was quite different from that of the previous literary genres: it had to be acted by particular people in particular circumstances at particular time instead of general human types who act at a very vast setting in unlimited time.
12. Therefore, unlike the classical preference for the general and universal, we have, in the novel, particularization of character which was achieved by naming a character in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life.
13. They were given proper names for they are the verbal expressions of the particular identity of each individual person, but not of his character so that they can be regarded as particular individuals.
14. In previous works, the names were taken either from history or legends or they were type names representing the character's dominant characteristics that made him a type. For example, in *Everyman*, which is an allegoric work, the characters do not have individual psychologies but are incarnations of abstract ideas and may bear such names as God, Death, Fellowship, Knowledge, Beauty, Good Deeds, and Strength.
15. Both Locke and Hume argued and emphasized the importance of our memories and past thoughts on the constitution of ourselves and characters. They believed the idea that past is the cause of present.

16. Locke argued that ideas became general by separating from them the circumstances of time and place. So they become particular, only when they are placed at a particular time and place.
17. In the same way, the characters of the novel can only be individualized if they are set in a background of particularized time and place.
18. The novel's plot is also distinguished from most previous function by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: instead of the disguises and coincidences of the previous works, we have a logical, causal connection operating through time.
19. The novel in general has interested itself much more than any other literary form in the development of its characters in the course of time.
20. Space is as important as time. For the individual, the particular case is defined in space and time. Place was traditionally almost general and vague as time in tragedy, comedy and romance.
21. Since the aim of the novel was to render real account of the actual experiences of individuals, it was necessary to change the figurative and elevated style of the epics and romances.
22. Therefore, the early novelists like Defoe and Richardson used a plain language close to everyday language instead of the decorated style of the previous writers.
23. As is seen, the novel reflects a picture of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places.
24. The narrative method the novel embodies may be called its formal realism: For the plain language they used had one aim: the correspondence of words to think instead of the artificial and exaggerated descriptions and rhetoric for the sake of beauty.
25. It can be said that the novel was the authentic report of human experience.

THE INFLUENCE OF MIDDLE CLASS

1. The emergence of the middle-class was also one of the main reasons which lies behind the sudden rise of the novel in the 18th Century.
2. The novel became so popular because unlike "romance" or its "courtly descendants" which rendered the attitudes of the aristocrats, it reflected the life of the middle-class, in other words, the life of the ordinary people.
3. Both Defoe and Richardson belonged to the middle-class and expressed in their works middle-class interests and attitudes. Hence people were happy to read about their own lives.
4. The middle-classes of the towns who first came into existence in the 16th Century became rich through trade, they became gradually more important in the reading public and
5. at the same time, literature began to view trade, commerce and industry with favour.
6. So the novel brought about two conditions:
 - a. The society must value every individual irrespective of social status or personal capacity.
 - b. Likewise, literature should consider every individual irrespective of his social status and personal capacity as its proper subject.
7. Therefore, the novel was not esteemed, was not regarded and valued highly by most of the writers of the age. The main reason was that it was written for uneducated people and mostly for women.

THE IMPACTS OF SENTIMENTALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

Before the birth of the novel, in the 18th Century, we have a type of comedy called “sentimental comedy,” which is also known as the drama of sensibility, which came as a reaction against the immortality of Restoration Drama. It arose because a rising middle class enjoyed the kind of drama in which the virtues of individual’s private life are exhibited as well as the distresses rather than the frailty of mankind in general.

The hero or heroine has a capacity not only for feeling sorry for himself or herself but also for other people, too, which is utterly a personal experience, an individual matter. There was an emphasis on the individual’s private life in these plays. In other words, there were individual’s emotions and griefs. Later, it gave way to sentimentalism in poetry and novel which is associated with extreme grief yet false or superficial emotion to arouse tears and pity on the reader.

A BRIEF PANORAMA OF THE AGE

The age is called The Age of Reason

The Age of Enlightenment

The Neo-Classical Age

1. The 17th and the 18th centuries were the periods when the basis of modern natural science was established.
2. Scientific thinking proved that visible facts were the only realities to be discovered; and the only way of discovering them was “empiricism” which relied solely on observation and experiment.
3. Empiricism, the philosophy of Locke, Berkeley and Hume was the philosophy of experience, experiment and observation.
4. Scientific thinking encouraged the tendency of dissociating God and religion from the day-to-day functioning of the world.
5. Yet, neither God nor religion were rejected but the supernatural and the miraculous were no longer believed in.
6. Scientific discoveries which reflected the universal and immutable laws of nature such as Newton’s law of gravitation or Boyle’s law of the behaviour of gases seemed to support obviously that a divine intelligence created and directs the universe.
7. In other words, the new religion which deduced the existence of God from the laws of nature and the structure of the universe, from the whole creation came into existence and it is called Deism.
8. The human mind, for Deists, was equally valued because it was human mind that discovered these immutable laws of nature and proved the existence of God.
9. Yet, neither God nor religion was rejected, in other words, this belief was based on close observations of natural order but the supernatural or the miraculous were no longer believed in.
10. For the Deists, God did not more than design and start the universe: but he never interfered with its running. The point is that, the Deists no longer believed in miracles or the divinity of Christ or divine justice.

11. This brought a very different view of the place of man in the universe. The original sin, the miraculous structure of the universe (the great-chain-of-being), the goodness and the need of suffering in this life to merit salvation in the next world, all these were shattered.
12. Men wanted to be happy, on this earth, which means enough good food and drink, comfortable lodging, agreeable sex life and a pleasant family life and so on.
13. So, the emphasis shifted from religious to secular truth. Hence the concept of reality was based on visible consequences.
14. However, it was still general and static because of the belief that general natural laws will be true for all men, all times and everywhere.
15. It was believed that the truth of human nature lay not in idiosyncrasies (oddities, peculiarities) but in common humanity. Human nature is even the same. And the general natural laws were applicable to solutions of the problems of state, family and society.
16. However, modern realism claimed that the discovery of truth was an individual process and achieved through the senses, which had its basis in Descartes and Locke.
17. Descartes' greatness was that the pursuit of truth is conceived of a wholly individual matter, independent of tradition and past thought.
18. Both Descartes and Locke rejected universals and emphasized particulars that is individual experience.
19. According to Locke, experience could be achieved through the combination of mental and visible realities. In other words,
 - a. sensation
 - b. reflection (introspection)of the workings of the mind are the ways to achieve particular experience.
20. Thus, for Locke, all the facts we know and the ideas we have in our mind come through senses.
21. Yet, they provide truth only if they conform to an outside reality.
22. So, as is seen, Modern Realism, especially Locke with his stress upon sensation brought the concept of private individual experience.
23. Individual experience was also a means to build complex and general ideas.
24. Observing many particular objects with certain characteristics in common or of a certain class an abstract or general idea of the characteristic or the class could be formed.
25. Therefore, even general truths were reached through individual experience free from any traditional or religious thinking.
26. In other words, facts which we deal with are to be discovered through the combination of introspection and empirical observation and experience, which means the inner and outer realities are combined.
27. They are interactive. Although the goal was the determination of outer reality, they were never treated separately. Because inner reality was dependant on outer reality.
28. Therefore, this way of thinking led to the belief in particular truth depending on individual observation.
29. Now, even the permanent features of human nature had to be adapted to various aspects of contemporary everyday life.
30. And since the aim was to reflect human nature and experience in all its aspects, the classical tragedies, epic and romance which reflect the lives of the aristocrats could not reflect human nature and experience completely.
31. The novel is a realistic prose fiction in which individual experience is reflected through its characters.

32. The word “realistic” indicated relevance to real life as opposed to “romance” which indicates an imaginary world of escapism and wishful thinking and unrealistic stories of beautiful women and gallant men.
33. Arnold Kettle defines the form as “a realistic prose fiction, complete in itself and of a certain length.”
34. The form deals with the actual problems and values of real life.
35. Time was particularized in novel because it became an important factor in human relationships. It was something that changed men. The characters change in the course of time because they experience different relationships and they usually suffer.
36. In previous ages, stories were timeless or it was not important because
37. those works reflected the general, unchanging moral values and universals.
38. The medieval romance, epic and allegory and their descendants in the 16th and the 17th centuries reflect life as a battle between good and evil.
39. They are full of didactic and moral elements in which characters are types or concepts who are either entirely black or white and far removed from the complexity of human behaviour.
40. Truth in such a world is general and moral, even religious; but in the world of the novel, truth is based on perceivable externals which are grasped through individual experience.
41. Therefore, truth is dependent upon visible facts and personal reactions of the individual toward them.
42. Thus, an individual’s inner life is his subjective reactions to his outer life, which means a continuous interaction between one’s inner and outer lives. This attitude is reflected in the works of the novelists such as Defoe, Richardson and Austen.
43. Defoe’s works were the recordings of actual experiences. For example, *Robinson Crusoe* was a realistic picture of the situation of the lonely, middle-class man including his psychological moods, his despair, his hopes and his practical attitude.
44. In Samuel Richardson’s works, the private life of his characters is rendered through epistolary method. Both, their domestic and private experience are presented. We enter inside their minds as well as inside their houses.

EPIC THEORY AND THE NOVEL

Critics are divided into two groups about the birth of the novel as a genre: for the second group, novel is essentially a continuation of a very old tradition, viz. epic and romance. Such critics argue that novel is a manifestation of the spirit of epic under the impact of a modern concept of reality.