The Rise and Development of the English Novel

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- **Introduction**

The term 'novel' came from the Latin word 'novella', meaning 'new'. The novel emerged as a new literary form of fictional prose narrative in eighteenth-century England. Though there were many forms of fictional prose that preceded novel, such as ancient Greek and Roman novel and Italian renaissance novella, the genre of realistic novel came into being in the eighteenth century as many socio-cultural factors contributed to its rise and growth.
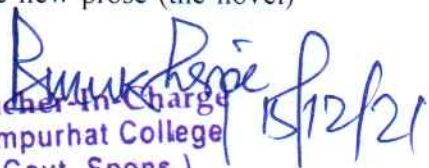
- **The Socio Cultural factors behind the Rise of the Novel:**

According to Ian Watt the rise of the novel corresponded with the rise of the middle class. He pointed out these developments behind the rise of the novel as 'the' genre of the eighteenth century:

- The rise of the middle class.
- The availability of cheap printing technology.
- Improved road condition.
- Increased literacy rate.
- Empiricism.

Ian Watt gave the theory of **'formal realism'**. According to him **empiricism** provided the philosophical background behind the rise of the novel. Empiricism gave emphasis on the individual and sensory apprehension of reality. He also stressed on the curiosity and consumerist interest that the emergent middle-class felt for commodities that were 'novel'. Hence the novel was the ideal representative genre of the middle class. The novel was the fallout of eighteenth-century culture and it mirrored the lifestyle of eighteenth-century English people.

He also talked about the novel's rejection of stereotyped plot and characters and its emphasis on originality. The writers of this new prose genre set the plot of their stories at a specific time and space as opposed to the earlier Romances. In this way the new prose (the novel)

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created an air of authenticity where it was difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction. **This emphasis on 'here' and 'now' within the form of the novel was defined by Ian Watt as 'formal realism'.** Formal realism was the exposition of empirical truth within the novel.

According to Michael McKeon (in *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740*) the novel rose out of the conflict between aristocratic ideology, progressive ideology and conservative ideology (its backlash). He points out that around the late seventeenth century in English prose there was a shift from **'romance idealism'** (traditional plot, stereotyped hero) to **'naïve empiricism'** (exact rendering of sensory experiences) to **'extreme scepticism'** (parodying both romance conventions and detailed recording of everyday experience). McKeon also suggested how certain **social instabilities** caused the **generic instability** and the problem of 'how to tell the truth' caused the rise of the novel.

Lennard Davis in *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* discussed how the novel was consolidated out of **journalism, history and other literary genres**. How it created categories of fact and fiction to slide past the prohibitions set on writing and printing by the political, religious and legal authorities.

- **Print Culture and Circulating Libraries**

<u>**Print Culture:**</u>

In the eighteenth-century the availability of cheap printing technology gave rise to the print culture. As the fallout of the print culture, literature and engraving of that period continuously raised their voices about the economic, political, social and cultural developments and thereby motivated and shaped people's outlook regarding the functioning of the state machinery through newspapers and periodical essays. Thus print culture created a vibrant public sphere where the emergent spaces and cultural transformations were debated extensively. Hogarth's engravings were also a part of this print culture. The English comic novel in the eighteenth century too arose from the same print culture that consisted of journalistic writings, history, travel narratives, amatory fiction, sermons, conduct books, letters, diaries, biographies, autobiographies, farces and fabliaux.

<u>**Circulating Libraries:**</u>

The novel encouraged new kinds of literary consumption, and then profited from them. The growth of circulating libraries in Britain is contemporary with the growth of the novel from the mid 18th century. In return for a subscription, readers would be able to borrow a certain number of volumes at one time. The surviving catalogues and advertisements for some of these libraries confirm that much of their available stock consisted of novels. By the late 18th century, even small provincial towns had circulating libraries. These were crucial, for a novel was still a luxury purchase. They also encouraged the idea that some kinds of books were not to be lodged forever on a shelf, but consumed voraciously.

Henry Fielding in his 'Preface to *Joseph Andrews*' had defined the novel as **"a comic epic poem in prose"**. In terms of its huge length and comprehensiveness the novel resembles the epic. Like the epic it is also a representative of its social/cultural milieu. But it is comic in the sense it comments on the official genres like the epic, the sermon, the romance or the legal proceedings. The novel, by using parody, strips these traditional genres out of the hallowed glory.

Mikhail Bakhtin explains this process as a dialogue between different points of view within the same text (the intention of the **author** clashes with the intentions of the **characters** or that of the **narrator**). Bakhtin calls it **'heteroglossia'** (many-languagedness): *Hetero* **(many)** + *Glossia* **(languages)**. Different languages (of religion, of law, of love, of commerce are at play in the same textual space). According to Mikhail Bakhtin **the spatio-temporal unity** of a novelistic plot is represented by the element of **chronotope**: *Chronos* **(time)** + *Topos* **(space)**. The eighteenth century realistic novel was situated <u>at a definite time and space</u> unlike the romance that has no specific time or locale. Chronotope can be best explained by the idea of <u>contemporaneity</u>.

- **Amatory Fiction: Precursor of English Novel**

The novel in the eighteenth century was developed through the amatory fiction of the early 18th C. These short tales dealt with themes of forbidden desire, masquerade, sex intrigue, lesbian attractions, love triangle and deception. The amatory heroine was portrayed as a woman of agency who was using her sexuality as a weapon to gain power over the male sex. For this sexual titillation and scandal the amatory fiction had a thriving market and was devoured by the ladies.

Examples: Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725)(the story of a woman who repeatedly masquerades herself to fool her male partner into repeated sexual adventures), Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*(1778, 1788), Delariviere Manley's *New Atlantis (1709)*. According to Defoe the three of them formed the 'female triumvirate of the novel'.

- ## Major Novelists of the 18th C.:

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731):

1719	*Robinson Crusoe* (Crusoe, Friday)	Travel Narrative, Puritan Autobiography, Colonialism, Economic Individualism (the rise of the *homo economicus*), creating an identity in society
1720	*Memoirs of a Cavalier* (Andrew Newport) *Captain Singlton*	Romantic adventure and human enterprise
1722	*Moll Flanders, A Journal of the Plague Year, Colonel Jack*	London/Newgate life, mercantile enterprise, social climbing, a tale of seduction (*Moll Flanders*)
1724	*Roxana*	Romance, prostitution and social climbing

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761): He is regarded as "the father of the English novel". All of his novels are in epistolary style.

1740	*Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*	Virtue as a conduct, the cult of sensibility, moral sentiments, a tale of social climbing, marriage & property Pamela as the author
1747-48	*Clarissa or the history of a Young Lady*	Sentimentalism, Sexual intrigue, seduction, pathos in Clarissa's death
1753-54	*Sir Charles Grandison*	Introducing the sentimental man in the novel

Henry Fielding (1707-54): Social realist, psychological realist, a master narrator of the 'picaresque' form

1741	*Shamela*	A parody of *Pamela*, hypocrisy, Shamela uses her virtue as a tool for social climbing
1742	*Joseph Andrews*	Picaresque adventures of Pamela's brother and Parson Adams, search of identity
1743	*The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*	A satirical tale of adventures of the country's most notorious criminal Jonathan Wild, Newgate Prison-life, Criminal biography
1749	*The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*	Picaresque, Tom's libido & philanthropy, Search of identity (the novel as a foundling, no definite lineage), marriage & property, allegory of Prudence and Wisdom (Sophia), growth of a life (Bildungsroman)
1751	*Amelia*	Autobiographical, mirrors his own conjugal life, domestic bliss, debtor's prison,

Laurence Sterne (1713-68):

1759-67	*Tristram Shandy*	New Style, commenting on the art of writing itself (metafiction), using new devises like a blank page to depict a beautiful woman and a black page to describe a death. Anticipates the steam-of-consciousness novel (no clear beginning or end, full of digressions, authorial interruption, a reaction against the linear narrative of Fielding), here Sterne applies Locke's theory about the association of ideas. Begins with Tristram's conception, he is born in Vol.4. Interest in the growing cult of sensibility. Tristram is the comic, sentimental hero. Fragmentary ideas are linked by time and association
1768	*A Sentimental Journey*	The narrator's journey through France and Italy. Comic and sentimental, emphasis on benevolence and charity felt by Mr. Yorick in the life around him

Other important novels of the era: *The Man of Feeling* (1771, by Henry Mackenzie, strengthened the Sentimental mode in English novel), *Evelina* 1778, an epistolary novel by Fanny Burney, the tale of a romantic and virtuous heroine).

- **Recurrent Themes:**

Identity: *The hero is portrayed often as a destitute or an orphan. Tom Jones, a foundling,* gets a parentage. Joseph Andrews, a changeling, gets a lineage, Robinson Crusoe, a cast away, gains a social standing. These plots allegorize the rise of the novelistic genre itself, its birth without a definite precursor and its journey in search of self-identity.

Marriage and Property: with the emergence of the capitalist economy, marital alliances were commercialized, The daughters of the nobility were married to the merchants for financial security and the merchants married them as a means of social climbing. Relationships were bargained (as in the 'proviso scene' of *The Way of the World*) Women were seen as consumable objects and the merchants were often married to aged widows so that they could inherit properties. Later in the century the idea of the companionate marriage evolved and the aspect of love was given priority in marital cases (as in the domestic bliss of Amelia).

London: In most of these novels London emerges as a thriving metropolis with al its sound, smells and colours through the urban entertainments like the theatres and the masquerades, clubs and coffee houses, through the crowded streets, the gloomy prisons, the dingy pubs and the seedy brothels. (*Amelia, Moll Flanders, Roderick Random*).

Entertainment and Morality: A struggle between subversive entertainment and moral idealism is evident in these novels. For example: the sexual energy of Tom Jones is restricted through his marriage with Sophia and through the foundation of a family. The adventures of Moll Flanders are constrained through her penitence, and her later enterprises.

- **The Novel as A 'Hybrid' Genre:**

The novel takes its resources from different forms of non-fictional prose like the biography, the autobiography, letters and journal, periodical essay, travel narratives and conduct books.

- **William Hogarth as a narrative painter**:

In the context of the eighteenth century novels, the name of William Hogarth (1697-1764) appears inevitably. He was a contemporary of Fielding and a social realist painter and an engraver. Through his series of narrative paintings like *A Harlot's Progress, A Rake's*
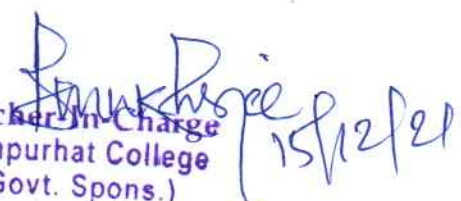
Progress, Marriage à la Mode, Industry and Idleness. Hogarth had commented on the social problems and practices of the eighteenth century urban England. Through the storylines of his sequences he tried to establish a moral. Each series contain 8-12 plates. In this way he combined the symbolism of painting with narrative sequence of the social realistic novel.

- **Development of the Genre:**

The genre of the novel that emerged through formal realism, developed through historical romances of Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen's Novel of Manners, Charles Dickens's novels about London. Dickens Portrayed the space-time of Victorian England in their respective works and like their eighteenth-century predecessors, they too combined the documentary and critical methods. Dickens's portrayal of the buzzing urbanity in the heydays of Industrial Revolution, in *Hard Times* (1854) and *Great Expectations* (1861) or, his exploration of the nineteenth-century London's subculture in *Oliver Twist* (1838) or *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), resemble the unruly city mob of Hogarth's canvas. The theme of *Bildungsroman*, so exhaustively explored in *Tom Jones*, finds an appropriate continuity in the narrative of *David Copperfield* (1849). The anarchy of the city mob of French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) resembles quite characteristically Hogarth's *Gin Lane* or the world of *Moll Flanders* and *Jonathan Wild*. The portrayal of London with its commercial excess and a parallel criticism at the loss of human values, which was the staple of eighteenth-century novels and narrative paintings, was also echoed in the novels of Dickens and the paintings of William Frith. Thomas Hardy's novels captured the lives of the English gentry caught in the transition from pastoral agrarian society into the complexities of aggressive modern *capitalism*.

At the turn of nineteenth century, about 1920s the novel gradually evolved into James Joyce's 'Kunslerroman' (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*-1916) that culminated in 'stream of consciousness' narrative technique in his *Ulysses* (1922). Like all other genres of literature the novel also underwent stylistic change during Modernist era. The narrative made a departure from a grammatical and logical structure, while depicted the free flow of individual consciousness. This **stream of consciousness** was represented by half-thoughts, impressions, dream associations and association of ideas. It is reflected in seminal works of this era such as, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

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Postmodernist Novels were large and complex, as if trying to express the reality that itself is hard to encompass (**incommensurable**). The same text of **James Joyce**'s *Ulysses* (**1922**) was interpreted two different ways by the Modernists and the Postmodernists. The Modernist perspective interpreted it as a work talking about **flux** and **chaos** posing a threat to human psyche, whereas the postmodernist perspective interpreted the same disordered narrative as **multiplicity, proliferation, open-endedness** and **hybridity**. A similar interpretation is applicable to other postmodernist narratives. Postmodernist novels are marked by a chattering **polyglossary**, a plenitude of words. These 'unordered' and the 'incommensurable' states of experience no longer posed a threat to be tamed, rather aroused a hunger for variety. It is not a traumatizing ordeal, but a promise, and an exhilarating provocation. Debunking the conventions of realism and naturalism, novels of **Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)** (*Molloy*, written in **1951** and *Murphy*, written in **1938**) **Vladimir Nabokov** (*Pale Fire*, written in **1962** and *Ada, or Ardor*, written in **1969**), **James Joyce (1882-1941)** (*Ulysses*, written in **1922** and *Finnegans Wake*, written in **1939**), **Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)** (*The Waves*, written in **1931**), **Jean Paul Satre (1905-1980)** (*La Nausée*, written in **1938**) are marked by the absence of a concrete plot, diffused episodes, minimal development of characters, repetitions, experiments with vocabulary, punctuation and syntax, variations of time sequence, alternative endings and beginnings.

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