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**M.A. English**

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**Semester II**

**Course**

**VII**

**BRITISH NOVEL**

**BLOCK**

**I**

**The Rise of the British Novel**



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# BRITISH NOVEL

## BLOCK I

### The Rise of the British Novel

#### Contents

Introduction to the block	i
Unit 1	
Introduction to the Rise of the Novel	1
Unit 2	
Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>	16
Unit 3	
Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	32
Unit 4	
Henry Fielding, <i>Joseph Andrews</i>	48
Unit 5	
Jonathan Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	65

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

This block deals with the emergence of the British novel during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unit 1 of this block serves as a general introduction. It discusses the socio-economic backgrounds to the rise of the novel in Britain, as well as the literary precedents for the phenomenon. The unit also gives you an overview of the types of novels written during the period. This will help you understand and appreciate the novels which are discussed in the rest of the block. Units 2 to 5 discuss four early representative novels in English, namely Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. When we take up a novel, we begin with a brief section on the novelist, give you a plot-summary and information on characters, and then discuss the major themes as well as the formal aspects of the novel. We also provide you some important critical opinions on the works concerned.

The activities and discussions in each unit will help you reflect on selected aspects of the novels. After reading the units carefully, we hope you will also be able to come up with interpretations of your own. We would like to advise you to acquire copies of the novels discussed and read them along with the units.

## **Unit 1**

### **Introduction to the Rise of the Novel**

#### **Contents**

1.0 Objectives	2
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 The New Literacy	2
1.3 The Prose Narratives	4
1.4 From Romance to Literary Realism	5
1.4.1 The Romance and the Allegory	5
1.4.2 The Realist Novel	7
1.5 Ideology and the Novel	8
1.5.1 The Novel and Gender	8
1.5.2 The Novel and Social Structure	10
1.5.3 The Novel and Individualism	10
1.6 Forms of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century Novel	11
1.6.1 Fictional Biography and Autobiography	11
1.6.2 The Epistolary Novel	12
1.6.3 The Picaresque Novel	12
1.6.4 The Social Satire Novel	13
1.6.5 The Experimental Novel	13
1.6.6 The Sentimental Novel	14
1.6.7 The Gothic Novel	15
1.7 Summing up	15
1.8 References and Suggested Reading	15

# Unit I

## The Rise of the British Novel

### 1.0 Objectives

This Unit serves as an introduction to, and a preparation for, the rest of this Block. Here, we discuss the contexts in which the novel as a literary form was born in Britain. We examine the novel's relationship with the society around it and the social issues it dealt with. We conclude with a brief description of the types of the novel in the Augustan Age.

### 1.1 Introduction

There is no fixed category called the '18<sup>th</sup> century novel'. This is so because prose narratives of the period 1700-1800 show a variety of forms and styles. Traditionally, the novel has been traced to Daniel Defoe's realist narratives of the early decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But prose narratives dealing with fictional worlds, heroes and heroines, adventures, historical and other events existed for several decades before Defoe and had created a readership for prose itself. The realist novel grew out of these forms, as well as other contexts.

The term 'novel' was originally used to refer to a short tale of romantic love and intrigues. In 1692 William Congreve's preface to his novel *Incognita* declared that the novel was a chronicle of **everyday and ordinary life**. It is this shift – from a story of romance and courtly love to one of ordinary life – that is the chief moment in the rise of the novel. The term most commonly used in the titles of the novels was 'history', suggesting an emphasis on the chronicle (history) of the everyday life of ordinary folks.

### 1.2 The New Literacy

One of the most influential accounts of the rise of the English novel has been Ian Watt's (1957). Watt proposed that three events occur more or less simultaneously in English literary history: the rise of the middle class, the rise and expansion of literacy and the rise of the novel (This is often called the 'triple rise' thesis). Watt suggested a socio-economic basis for the rise of the novel. The novel, he suggested, showed middle-class values and habits and therefore appealed to the new literates.

However, this thesis is not entirely accurate. Besides the middle class, clerks, tradesmen, women and domestic servants also read fiction. That is, the new literacy was not exclusive to the middle class. In fact, one of the most astonishing things about the novel was its readership across the social strata – from the upper classes who read for pleasure to the people who were teaching themselves to read.

Recent studies of the literacy of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century – the period generally characterized as the age of the novel – shows an amazing shift:

- the number of literate Britons doubled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as compared to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century;
- by 1750 at least 60% of adult men and 40% of women could read and write.

This new readership was also substantially different from earlier ages, and demanded other kinds of writing (or literature). Unlike poetry, the novel did not demand a great deal of prior knowledge or special skills. The new readership preferred the novel for this particular reason, and thus drove the demand for the novel as a form. What this means is that novel-reading was no longer an upper-class phenomenon or privilege. This popularity is evidenced by statistics: between 1660 and 1800, there were over a thousand works of epistolary fiction alone.

Advances in printing in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries made written texts cheaper. This had a drastic effect. Reading, which was once the privilege of the upper classes, was now possible to a larger population because books and pamphlets became cheaper to produce and, therefore, to buy. A market for printed materials was opened up. In the earlier era, nobles and upper-class people developed the patronage system, paying authors to write. This meant that the author wrote at the mercy of the patron. But with the opening up of the market he or she was free to write – the books were bought by more people and he/she made money independent of the patron. This was a revolution in literary production.

The bookseller was an important element in the rise of the novel. The link between the author, the bookseller and the reader was an important business and literary development in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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### **ACTIVITY A**

1. What were the major changes in literacy patterns in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What were the developments that helped increase readership in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?

### **DISCUSSION**

1. The number of literate Britons doubled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as compared to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and by 1750 at least 60% of adult men and 40% of women could read and write. The new readership preferred the novel form.
  2. Advances in printing in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries made written texts cheaper. The author did not require a patron and was free to write. The bookseller also contributed to the rise of the novel.
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### 1.3 The Prose Narratives

The Restoration period was characterized by a wide variety of prose styles and forms. Essays, for example, could be philosophical, personal or political. They dealt with a wide variety of subjects – gardening, the environment, personal love affairs, politics and courtesy (or manners). Genres included prose epistle, dialogue, pamphlet and the essay. Restoration prose was direct and free of bombast or ornamentalism – the emphasis was on direct conveying of information. Science writing, in respected journals and newspapers, was also a distinct form of prose writing. Histories of places, kings and dynasties were published and were popular. Gilbert Burnet published *Memoirs of the Lives and Actions of James and William, Dukes of Hamilton* (1677) and *History of the Reformation of the Church in England* (1679). William Temple produced essays on gardening, health and religion. The political philosophers John Locke and Thomas Hobbes wrote influential and controversial philosophical and political tracts.

The diary, made famous by Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn (whose *Sylva*, 1664, is one of the most significant environmental documents of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and one of the first to suggest active reforestation), was another well-known form. Logical argument and sound commonsense were preferred over florid and erudite prose. Scholars like Thomas Sprat prescribed methods of writing and speech, recommending ‘positive expressions’, ‘clear senses’, ‘native senses’ and a ‘mathematical plainness’.

Prose reached a wider audience due to the circulation of several periodicals and magazines. Journals and periodicals increased in number especially after the lapse of the Licencing Act in 1695. The Licencing Act had regulated the setting up of printers’ shops; all printed matter was examined and censorship was severe. The newspapers were political tools, and the major parties had their own ‘voice’ in papers like *Flying-Post* (Whig, 1695-1731) and *Post-Boy* (Tory, 1695-1736). Sir Roger L’Estrange’s *Observer* (1681-87) aimed to explain and explicate the complex political issues of the day through a staged dialogue between the ‘observer’ and a party ideologue or functionary. Ned Ward’s *London Spy* (1698-1700) was an interesting periodical that sought to expose England’s tourist spots, low life and prisons.

The essays of Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* were also influential and provided a new form of writing for the common people.

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#### ACTIVITY B

1. How did the prose writers reach a wider audience?
2. What were the main forms of prose writings in this period?



## DISCUSSION

1. Periodicals and magazines enabled writers to reach larger audiences.
  2. The essay form was very popular. The essay could be philosophical, personal or political. Essays also dealt with subjects like gardening, the environment, love affairs and courtesy. Genres included prose epistle, dialogue, pamphlet and the essay. Science writing in respected journals and newspapers became a popular form. Histories of places, kings and dynasties were published. The political philosophers John Locke and Thomas Hobbes wrote influential and controversial philosophical and political tracts.
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### 1.4 From Romance to Literary Realism

The novel set itself apart essentially from the Romance. Though the novel also began by chronicling love affairs and intrigues (that often led to marriage), it quickly moved on to a wholly different

- setting (everyday life),
- set of characters (ordinary people),
- focus (the individual) and
- style (realism)

#### 1.4.1 The Romance and the Allegory

A Romance is a tale of chivalry, courage, love and danger in which the hero passes through various trials and obstacles before attaining the heroine, his beloved. The obstacles involve a testing of his virtue, where the hero's faith enables him to win the battle against evil and resist temptation.

During the Elizabethan age a number of Romances were available in England – many of which were translated from the French and Spanish. In fact, England had its share of Romances in its early works as well. Old and Middle English texts such as *Beowulf* (8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century) and *Brut* (12<sup>th</sup> century) introduced the themes that start the *romance* tradition in English: themes of courage, personal valour, fidelity, 'goodness', morality, personal pride, faith, the quest and evil. *Beowulf*, the epic poem, presents the first 'hero' in English literature. *Brut*, one of the first texts traceable to a particular author (identified simply as 'Layamon'), is a saga of the Dark Ages, starting with the Romans (5<sup>th</sup> century AD) and bringing it up to the time of the Britons and the Arthurian legends. Layamon adapted tales from earlier texts in Celtic and French languages and the Homeric works. *Brut* is also the first sustained attempt to provide a *national* history of 'Britain'. *Brut* sets the tone for much of what follows in Early Middle English literature (The Middle English period is generally taken to mean the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>).

Philip Sidney produced the English romance *Arcadia* in 1590. Of the French Romances the most popular ones included La Calprenède's *Cassandra* (1652, 1667, 1703) and *Cleopatra* (1652-59). These romances provided material for heroic plays. English works by John Reynolds (*Flower of Fidelitie*, 1650), John Crowne's *Pandion and Amphigenia* (1665) and Roger Boyle's *Parthenissa* (1654-69, 1676) are examples of English adaptations of such romances. Richard Head and Francis Kirkman produced some fictitious biographies of so-called rogues. Many Romances also functioned as allegories. (An allegory is a literary form where the poem/image has one surface level of meaning but when read closely, reveals something more. It is used to deliver a message to the attentive reader.) John Bunyan published *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678. This Christian allegory was a major success. Here the story of one individual named Christian becomes the story of all true Christians. It served as a model of pious life for all.

Then Aphra Behn published *Oroonoko* (1688), the story of an African prince who becomes a slave. This mix of travel writing, romance and historical fiction was sensational and highly dramatic, and its prose narrative catapulted it into the category of 'popular'. Aphra Behn became one of the first major women writers to make profits from her writing.

The Romance used character types and stock figures (such as the rake) and situations. The epistolary mode was very common, and many of the works served as allegories. But the incidents involving gods, angels and demons were rather improbable, and the settings, unfamiliar to most readers. That is, the events of the Romance took place in a world that was far **removed** from the one inhabited by its readers. It was this absence of the familiar that the novel tackled, thus creating a new form.

The European Romance was primarily the product of the feudal age, characterized, among other things, by knight-errantry and chivalric ideals. With the decline of feudalism and its values, the literary form that enshrined these values also declined. The transition is evident in Miguel de Cervantes's classic *Don Quixote* (whose first volume appeared in Spanish in 1605 and the second in 1615). *Don Quixote* was an anti-romance. In the figure of the don, Cervantes parodied the obsolete values of the knightly age. Don Quixote declares:

I have set injuries and insults straight, righted wrongs, punished arrogance, conquered giants, and trampled on monsters.

These ironic words mark a turning point in the history of literature. With its new world view, *Don Quixote* is often considered a proto-novel. The 'knight' mistakes sheep for soldiers, inns for castles, windmill-sails for threatening giants, and the barber's shaving basin for Mambrino's helmet. But the reader of Cervantes can discern the value of such everyday things beneath the knight's illusory notions of grandeur. These are specimens of an ordinary life, which is the true subject-matter of the novel.

## ACTIVITY C

What are the features of the English Romance?

## DISCUSSION

It frequently included incidents involving gods, angels and demons. The themes were of courage, personal valour, fidelity, 'goodness', morality, personal pride, faith, the quest and evil. It was a tale of chivalry, courage, love and danger.

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### 1.4.2 The Realist Novel

By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the sensational form was out of favour. The man responsible for this was Daniel Defoe, whose *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), written in the realist mode, revolutionized English prose. Along with Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, and followed by Oliver Goldsmith and Tobias Smollett, Defoe created the English realist tradition.

The novelist by the time of Defoe was, according to Clive Probyn, aiming to create a larger readership from within literates. This meant targeting a new kind of audience such as working class and women readers. The second aim was to differentiate this kind of writing – the novel – from other, already existing forms like the diary or the travelogue. In other words, the novelists from Defoe's time created a readership by producing a particular kind of prose narrative – the realist novel – which appealed to them. What we see is the dual emphasis in the novel: **form** (a realist prose writing) and **content** (not only adventure and romance but many other themes).

In opposition to the clearly escapist Romance, the realist novel offered the reader various options. These options in fact created the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel's popularity. We can think of these varieties as follows: adventure (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719; Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726), sentimentality (Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 1771), fun and chaos (Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 1759-67), experiments with form (Sterne again, but also the epistolary novel), feminine sensibility (Richardson, *Pamela*, 1740), class and social structures (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 1749; Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 1722; and *Jonathan Wild*, 1743).

To put it differently, the novel shifted focus away from Romance to **everyday life**, exploring the city, the parish and the countryside. Pickpockets, con artists, maids, beggars, policemen, all people the landscape of the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel, and not only kings, queens, heiresses and gods (as was the case of the Romance). The Romance dealt with an ideal world, the novel dealt with a believable one. The Romance delivered the 'truth' through exaggerated settings and larger-than-life characters who embodied types like 'virtuous woman' or 'courageous hero'. The novel sought to deliver the truth through realist narratives and believable, everyday situations.

The novel in Defoe, Fielding and others also offered **specificity** – of setting, dialogue, places, atmosphere and incidents. The descriptions were those of London streets or the countryside that the readers could recognize and believe. The specificity generated an authenticity about the place. The term frequently used to refer to such believable descriptions that the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel popularized is therefore ‘verisimilitude’ – a startling similarity to life as we see and experience it due to the presence of particularities. This ‘realism’ made the novel an entirely new form.

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## ACTIVITY D

What are the key elements of the realist novel?

## DISCUSSION

The realist novel focused on everyday life. Characters included not kings and queens, but pickpockets, maids, beggars and policemen. The novel dealt with a believable world. The novel sought to deliver the truth through realist narratives and credible, everyday situations.

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## 1.5 Ideology and the Novel

Novels were also meant to instruct and educate. The periodical essay, as we have noted in the case of Addison and Steele, hoped to teach manners, etiquette and other useful social skills to their readers. The aim was to serve as a form of instruction to the new readers of the working classes, and the women.

The novels served a larger purpose – they helped create particular views of the genders, classes, individuals and societies. This makes the novel an **ideological tool**. (**‘Ideology’** is the system of commonly accepted beliefs and ideas, usually unconscious, but circulating in media forms like advertisements, novels, films, and which help maintain particular relationships of power – such as those between classes or genders.)

### 1.5.1 The Novel and Gender

The women writers’ contribution to the rise of the novel has only recently been acknowledged. Watt saw Defoe as the originator of the form, and ignored authors like Aphra Behn who experimented with style and conventions in her *Oroonoko* (1688) and the epistolary tale, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1683). Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719) went into four editions in the first four years – something Watt ignores.

What is significant is that the period 1690-1800 shows a remarkable increase in the number of women writers. In the case of women, in particular, novels projected certain images of home, family and what was called ‘feminine sensibility’. Such novels hoped to make the new readers – women of the working classes – aware that certain duties and qualities were expected and desirable in a woman. Such novels therefore glorified so-called ‘feminine’ virtues like sentimentality, care, responsibility and sacrifice as ideal. When we look at Samuel Richardson’s fiction, we see this kind of novel. The heroine in Richardson, Pamela, was rewarded for being virtuous, sacrificing, humble and passive. Women were seldom shown as desiring property or independence, or expressing their sexuality.

‘Domestic fiction’, as novels about marriage and families came to be called (especially during the period between 1830 and 1860, but whose roots lie in the fiction of Richardson and the works of Fanny Burney, in *Evelina*, 1778) instructed and showed women how to behave, to value passivity and to privilege virtue. They represented women as passive and men as those in charge. They painted women as irrational, weak and ineffective, and the men as rational, firm and capable. They restricted the women to the family and the home. ‘Domestic fiction’ was used to ensure that the new class of readers – the women – would not become aggressive, seeking new worlds and experiences. They, therefore, served as very useful educational devices.

Janet Todd (1986) suggests that the heroines in Richardson were actually fictional models of the feminine (emotionalism, passivity, sympathy). Women writers also adopted this strategy, and increased their readership. Both male and female authors naturalized gender inequality: the son was linked to ownership and property while the daughter was aligned with maternity, domesticity and the family. That is, the son and daughter had to choose between these different ‘realms’ (home and the public space respectively). The issue of correct choices that almost every realist novel of the period discusses had a social function – of asking its youngsters to choose ‘correctly’ and well.

Nancy Armstrong (1987) has argued that many of these ‘domestic’ novels also offered new views of women and their identity. Women authors and many women characters were keen to show a feminine control over the household and family. That is, rather than being mere passive subjects who were always catering to male dominance and power, these women characters were powerful within particular domains: the home and family. Armstrong thus argues a case for the rise of a new kind of heroine for the middle-class woman to **emulate and idolize**. These characters were not simply passive victims or rebellious women. They cleverly and strategically used their feminine qualities and abilities – sentiment, thrift, bodies and sexualities – to achieve a measure of power and control. In other words, women characters in Richardson, and later in Jane Austen and the Brontës, were offering role models to 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century middle-class women readers.

## ACTIVITY E

What were the ‘models’ of femininity that the women authors created?

## DISCUSSION

Women writers created models of emotional, passive and kind women with their characters. But some of them also showed strong women in control of their households.

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### 1.5.2 The Novel and Social Structure

In terms of ideology, the novel also did something new. For the first time, the novel, especially in Fielding, Richardson and Swift, examined the sexual, economic and social condition of the times. Class consciousness, views and opinions on sexuality and social inequalities troubled the novelists.

For instance, the ‘foundling’ novel, dealing with children orphaned or lost, explored the problem of abandoned, shelterless children. Fielding is the master of this genre, since almost all his novels deal with such children in an indifferent society. Novels explored the link between individual and society, the individual drive to establish a self and identity, and the social conditions under which this drive was either possible or hindered. Thus Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones both find their identities constantly undermined not because of their individual personalities but because of existing social conditions that almost entirely rely on their class affiliations.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century novels’ attention to detail, everyday life, social conditions and their overall emphasis on the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized ensures that they play a major role in giving us a sense of the age. Contemporary critics have therefore argued that the novel can be used as a source of **social and cultural history** (Paul Hunter 1998).

### 1.5.3 The Novel and Individualism

Another important shift the novel made was to move away from the world of gods and heroes to the individual. The novel promoted the ideology of individualism. The novel is the literary genre that first explored, in detail, the individual’s consciousness, growth and sentiment.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when philosophers like Rene Descartes, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes were exploring the psychology of the human mind, we see the emergence of a new object of study: the individual. Further, it was the individual’s perception of and response to social structure, reality and issues that were considered crucial.

From a different context, the rise and expansion of capitalism laid emphasis on individual enterprise, courage and ability. The individual who went out and conquered territories, set up new domains for rule and in general showed himself capable was rewarded. It was the individual's responsibility to grab opportunity. This kind of context also encouraged the emergence of the novel as a genre that studied the individual's life, capabilities and sensibilities. Here again we see the novel fulfil an ideological function: it treated the individual as the centre of the world, the individual as the object of study. It laid the onus on the individual and showed how (in novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Jones*), the protagonist triumphs because of the abilities within himself.

---

## **ACTIVITY F**

What were the qualities of the individual that the novel promoted?

## **DISCUSSION**

The novel idolized the individual who explored and conquered new territories. It treated the individual as the centre of the world, the individual as the object of study. It laid the onus on the individual and highlighted his triumphs.

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## **1.6 Forms of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Novel**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century novel, as noted above, took several forms. Many of these forms remained highly influential and certainly persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for instance, Alice Walker's famous novel, *The Color Purple*, 1982, adopted the epistolary form).

### **1.6.1 Fictional Biography and Autobiography**

The fictional biography form was a novel that chronicled the thoughts, conflicts, sentiments and everyday experiences of ordinary men and women. The form was called by various names: 'romances', 'adventures', 'tales', 'lives', 'memoirs', 'expeditions', 'fortunes and misfortunes'. Finally, the term that came to be most commonly associated with the form was 'novel'.

The form was invented by Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*. It pretends to be the biography of a man wrecked on an island. As such it gives us a history of this man and his contexts. We see this also in Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*.

In other cases the form was of fictional autobiography - e.g. *Gulliver's Travels* and *Tristram Shandy*, where the character narrates the story of her/his own life.

### 1.6.2 The Epistolary Novel

Made famous by Richardson in *Pamela*, the epistolary novel was a series of letters written by the protagonist. The form helped the novelist do several things. On the one hand, it helped reveal the protagonist's state of mind, emotional conditions and consciousness. It was therefore 'intimate', in the sense that it explored the sentiments and thoughts of the hero or heroine. Throughout *Pamela*, we are aware of what the heroine exactly feels, believes, is worried about and is pleased by. This is so because her letters reveal her personality, feelings and consciousness.

On the other hand, it also helps focalize incidents through the protagonist. Rather than the external (or 'third-person') style of story-telling, where events are narrated by somebody outside the story, we have events being narrated by somebody who is actually involved in them.

### 1.6.3 The Picaresque Novel

The 'picaro' (a Spanish word meaning 'rogue') was a loveable rogue seen most commonly in Spanish romances. He survived by sheer courage, quick wits and an extraordinary amount of cunning. The picaro fooled people and made his way in the world. He was a vagabond, a form of 'low life', a mix of thief, petty criminal, wronged man and yet loveable.

The picaresque novel also mapped the growth of the young vagabond into a man. The experiences of life teaches the young boy many things, and eventually he learns the ways of the world. (here there are parallels with the novel of growth, or *Bildungsroman*.)

Daniel Defoe in *Moll Flanders* created a **female picaro** – a roguish, ruthless woman who with her cunning overcomes several obstacles in life. She is partly a criminal and partly a wronged woman.

Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett in their novels like *Joseph Andrews* and *Roderick Random* also used the picaresque novel as a model. The picaresque novel was useful to chronicle low life and the city or country's criminal classes and other elements. It helped the novelist move away from heroes and gods to petty lives and wickednesses.

---

## ACTIVITY G

What are the key features of the picaresque novel?



## DISCUSSION

The picaresque novel had a loveable rogue as hero. It mapped the growth of the young vagabond into a man. It chronicled low life and the city or country's criminal classes and other elements. It helped the novelist move away from heroes and gods to petty lives and wickednesses.

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### 1.6.4 The Social Satire Novel

The social satire novel was primarily the domain of Henry Fielding and Jonathan Swift. The aim in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* (Fielding) and *The Tale of the Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift) was to mock social conventions.

Fielding and Swift sought to reveal the hypocrisies beneath the virtuous exterior of the upper classes, the greed of the lower classes and the struggle for power between humans. They saw 'virtue' as a device used by groups (or classes) of people to control others. Thus Fielding mocked Richardson's view in *Pamela* that the virtuous woman would always triumph. Instead, Fielding drew the picture of a woman (Shamela, in the novel of that title) who pretended to be virtuous when necessary but was cunningly trying to seduce her master.

Fielding and Swift depicted the culture's wicked ways – the neglect of the poor, and the unjust laws, the inequalities in society and the exploitation of women and children. The use of wit and humour in satire helped make the social criticism more indirect.

### 1.6.5 The Experimental Novel

Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) was one of the most radical experiments in the novel form. Sterne used every available device to break the form, style and conventions of the novel.

This novel does not move in a linear fashion – from day to day or from cause to effect. The novel is digressive, moving randomly across moments and events, often leaving us confused. The idea is to show how life is always random, chaotic and impossible to order.

This novel also inaugurated a technique – eventually known as '**stream-of-consciousness**'. The novel presents us Tristram's thoughts as they occur. This also means a chaotic narrative because thoughts are rarely ordered or sequential. We get the thoughts as they **happen**, not as they **ought to**.

The novel was also one of the first to try a technique called '**self-reflexivity**'. Here Tristram thinks about how best to tell us his story. Now, the telling of the story is itself the novel. In other words, Tristram is reflecting, within the novel, on

the art of novel-writing and story-telling. This is an example of the self-reflexive novel which talks about how the novel came to be written. (We see this form in several cases in 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction, notably in John Fowles, Graham Swift, Donald Barthelme and others.)

Sterne also used other innovations. There were songs, blank pages, obituary columns, nasty jokes and drawings in the work. All of this disrupted the traditional structure of the novel.

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## ACTIVITY H

How is Sterne's novel different from the other 18<sup>th</sup> century novels?

## DISCUSSION

Sterne's novel does not move in a linear fashion – from day to day or from cause to effect. The novel moves randomly across moments and events. The novel also presents us Tristram's thoughts as they occur. The novel was also one of the first to try a technique called 'self-reflexivity', about how best to tell us the story. There were songs, blank pages, obituary columns, nasty jokes and drawings in the work. All of this disrupted the traditional structure of the novel.

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### 1.6.6 The Sentimental Novel

Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and *The Man of the World* (1773) were '**novels of sentiment**'. Harley, Mackenzie's hero in the former novel, is the sentimental man, affected by melancholia, loneliness and unhappy love. An excess of benevolence and suffering permeates the tale. A sequel to this unrealistic tale written in a very self-conscious, formal style was *The Man of the World* (1773). This lapsed from sentimentality into melodrama.

Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* was a sentimental romance, but with a touch of irony. The emphasis in these novels is on human feeling: compassion, charity and love.

Human follies (especially in Goldsmith) are dealt with so that we see them with sympathy rather than contempt. We have heroes and heroines who react strongly – we might say excessively – to situations – fainting, anger, sacrifice.

Tears, self-sacrifice, terror, benevolence are all available in large quantities here. The sentimental novel sought to explore the human emotions in all their manifestations and forms. This helped the novelist build a portrait of humanity itself in its various moods, reactions and behaviour, from cruelty to sympathy, affection to anger. In order to do so, it often employed extreme situations where

human sentiments would peak. An instance of the sentimental mode is the scene in *Joseph Andrews* when, naked and cold in the winter night, the hero seeks to enter the stagecoach and the passengers inside object.

### **1.6.7 The Gothic Novel**

The Gothic novel may have derived from the sentimental novel. Like the sentimental novel, the Gothic is interested in human emotions, desires and anxieties. However, unlike the sentimental novel, the focus in Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley (in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century) was the darker side of human nature.

The Gothic novel is a tale of terror, of dark and forbidden desires, of strong passions (anger, hatred). It works with the underside of human character. It contains improbable events (and here it departs from the realism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel), castles and labyrinths, villains, and non-human creatures. The personalities are all extreme – the helpless maiden, the cruel father and the incestuous uncle. If the sentimental novel saw sensitivity as a major fragment of the human consciousness/personality, the Gothic saw strong desires and emotions as the dominant one.

## **1.7 Summing up**

In this Unit, we have looked at the factors behind the rise of the novel form in English. We also noticed its emergence from earlier genres like the romance and the allegory. We then listed various types of novels that were written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the next four units we shall discuss, in detail, four representative novels of the century.

## **1.8 References and Suggested Reading**

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