

**Mohammed Kheidher University of Biskra**  
**Faculty of letters & Foreign Languages**  
**Department of English Language and Literature**

**Class: L1**

**Module: Literary Text**

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**2<sup>nd</sup> semester**

**Lecture Five: The English Novel (part one)**

**Tutorial Outcomes**

By the end of this tutorial, students will be able to:

- Define the novel as a literary genre and trace its historical evolution.
- Identify the key factors that contributed to the rise of the novel in the 18th century.
- Discuss the characteristics of early novels and their representation of real-life characters and plots.

**Prerequisites**

Before delving into the English novel, please consider the following questions:

- What are the key differences between a novel and other forms of narrative literature, such as short stories or romances?
- How did the social and cultural changes of the 18th century influence the development of the novel?
- Who were some of the early pioneers of the novel, and what innovations did they bring to the genre?

**Terminology Used in This Tutorial**

- **Genre:** A category of artistic composition, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.
- **Narrative:** A spoken or written account of connected events; a story.
- **Prose:** Written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure.

**Introduction**

The novel, as a distinct literary genre, has evolved significantly over time. While the term "novel" once referred to short stories like those in Boccaccio's Decameron, it has come

to denote a more complex and lengthy fictitious prose narrative that portrays characters and actions representative of real life. Although it is now the most widely read literary genre, the novel is relatively new, with its rise occurring primarily in the 18th century.

### **1. Historical Background of the Novel**

Initially, until the 17th century, the word "Novel" described short stories akin to those written by Boccaccio in his Decameron (1313-1375). By 1700, its definition evolved, as described in The Oxford Dictionary, to a "fictitious prose narrative of substantial length in which characters and actions are representative of real-life and are portrayed in a plot of a certain complexity." Modern novels are longer, more realistic, and more intricate than the Italian novellas of Boccaccio's time. By the 18th century, novel reading had become a popular pastime, especially among upper-class women, offering an escape into satisfying dreams.

### **2. Novel Defined**

Defining the novel precisely is challenging due to its varied structures and purposes throughout its development. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines the novel as "a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity." This definition emphasizes 'prose,' denoting everyday language without poetic rhythm.

The length of a novel distinguishes it from short stories, although some shorter novels are termed 'novellas'. The word "novel" is derived from the Latin "Novellus," the Italian "novella," and the French "Nouvelle," all meaning "a small new thing." Boccaccio popularized novella collections with his Decameron in the 14th century. By the 18th century, the term "novel" evolved to mean "prose narrative of considerable length."

### **3. Rise of the Novel**

Literary critics generally consider the 18th century as the period in which the novel was born and developed. Writers of the 18th century, building on the works of predecessors such as Bunyan, Chaucer, Malory, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, experimented and established the novel as a distinct literary form. A rise in literacy, the Industrial Revolution, the growth of the middle class, and the establishment of libraries created favorable conditions for the novel's rise.

In this new literary form, stories shifted from romance to realistic portrayals of middle-class pragmatism and morality. Alexander Pope's dictum, "The proper study of mankind is man," influenced the study of human character. 18th-century novels explored human characters, with novelists creating realistic characters, unlike the giants and superhuman figures in romances.

#### **4. Factors that Influenced the Rise of the Novel**

Several factors contributed to the rise of the novel:

- **Industrial Revolution:** The development of industries provided people with more leisure time, which they used for reading novels.
- **Printing Press:** The printing press made books more affordable, expanding readership beyond the aristocracy to those with lower salaries.
- **Availability of Newspapers and Magazines:** Increased reading habits led people to read novels, some of which were serialized in magazines. The Industrial Revolution facilitated the rise of the middle class, who sought reading material about their everyday experiences, encouraging authors like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding to write realistic prose fiction.
- **Decline of Romance and Drama:** Romances, once popular among the aristocracy, lost readership due to their unrealistic and uninteresting stories. Theaters were closed during Cromwell's rule in the 17th century, reducing the appeal of drama.
- **Rise of the Middle Class:** The Industrial Revolution led to a larger, wealthier middle class, who sought literature suited to their tastes. Women readers increased as high-status women engaged in reading.
- **Mobile Libraries:** Mobile libraries provided easy access to books, particularly benefiting women by delivering books to homes.

#### **Practice**

Discuss how the rise of the middle class in the 18th century influenced the themes and characters in early English novels.

#### **References**

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