

**THE BIRTH OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL AND THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN PROSE STYLE**

*Navoi State University*

*Faculty of Languages*

*Student: Nurmatova Aziza*

*Scientific Adviser: Umurzakova Aziza*

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu anotatsiya XVIII asrda ingliz romanining paydo bo'lishi va zamonaviy proza uslubining shakllanishi haqida qisqacha ma'lumot beradi. Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson va Genri Filding kabi yozuvchilarning realizm, psixologizm va syujet qurilishiga qo'shgan hissasi yoritiladi. Prozaning sodda va ravonlashuvi zamonaviy adabiyotning shakllanishiga asos bo'lgani ta'kidlanadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** ingliz romani, zamonaviy proza, XVIII asr, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding.

**Аннотация:** Аннотация посвящена возникновению английского романа в XVIII веке и формированию современного прозаического стиля. Кратко рассматривается вклад Даниэля Дефо, Сэмюэла Ричардсона и Генри Филдинга, которые развивали реализм, психологизм и сюжетную структуру. Отмечается, что упрощение языка и приближение его к разговорной речи стали основой современной литературы.

**Ключевые слова:** английский роман, современная проза, XVIII век, Дефо, Ричардсон, Филдинг.

**Annotation:** This annotation discusses the emergence of the English novel in the 18th century and its role in shaping modern prose style. It briefly highlights the contributions of early novelists such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, who introduced realism, psychological depth, and narrative

*structure. The development of more natural and clear language in prose helped establish the foundation of contemporary English literature.*

**Keywords:** *English novel, modern prose style, 18th century, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding.*

This paper is intended for undergraduate students, especially those studying English and Literature, who may need to explore the historical development of the novel in general or eighteenth-century fiction in particular. Its purpose is to offer an overview of how the novel emerged as a literary genre and gradually gained prominence. The discussion begins with early forms of narrative that preceded the novel, establishing the background for its rise. It then traces the origins of the novel back to the world's earliest literary works—the epics—and continues with an examination of medieval romances, which eventually contributed to the formation of the modern novel. The paper also outlines early novelistic forms such as the picaresque and epistolary novels, which served as the foundation for later developments. The final section provides a brief summary of the various types of novels that evolved after the eighteenth century.

Though English novel as a literary genre gained popularity in the eighteenth century, its beginning can be traced back to 612 BC when world's oldest literature Epic of Gilgamesh, was written. Homer, who lived in 700 or 800 BC, was the first notable poet or a literary pioneer who wrote the famous Greek epics, The Iliad and The Odyssey. He established the tradition of epic which had particular structure and subject matter. In 900 BC Roman poet Virgil produced epic poems Beowulf and Aeneid with the latter becoming a model for John Milton (1608- 74) to write his Paradise Lost. The epics were narrative verses telling stories of human encounters with monsters and accounts of accomplishments of heroic deeds in battles.

After the epics came a new form of literature called the romances originating in France in the 12th century. It was also popularly known as chivalric romance or medieval romance (having flourished in the medieval times or medieval

age between 1000 AD to 1450 AD). The scholars deviated from the tradition of epic by choosing subjects such as bravery, honour, adventure and courtly love with unique features of using magic, spells and enchantments in the romances to arouse curiosities and interests in the readers. According to Abrams, (1995) "Romances were first written in verse, but later in prose as well" (p.22). One of the notable English romance is Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* written in prose (in about 1470) which accounted the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

The popularity of the romances remained in vogue till 1600 when a new literary style in the form of burlesque came to existence. The writers wanted to mock and bring fun out of serious literary matter. For instance Cervantes made fun of the medieval romances by writing the famous *Don Quixote* (1605). Unlike the original romances in which the knights fought with giants and dragons to save damsels in distress, his knight (*Don Quixote*) fights with windmills which he sees as giants bringing laughter to the readers. Alongside the burlesques literary style came the picaresque tale which was already in fashion in Spanish literature since the anonymous publication of *Lazarillo de Tolmes* (1554). The word picaresque was derived from Spanish word 'picaro' meaning a rogue. In a picaresque tale, the main character is a rogue or rascal who goes on an adventure and leads his life by his wits. The element of adventure of the picaro influenced later novelist such as Mark Twain and Saul Bellow who wrote *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Augie March* respectively.

In 1688, a short prose work titled *Oroonoko*, or the History of the Royal Slave written by female author Aphra Behn (1640-89) was published. Behn was influenced by the quest of knights in chivalric romances in which a knight goes in pursuit of his ladylove overcoming dangers and the difficulties. *Oroonoko*, a prince goes on a visiting mission of his deceased army general's daughter Imoinda following which they fall in love. However, soon he meets with hurdles planned by his king who blocks his marriage. The story was constructed in a form of biography following a linear plot. Behn contributed towards depicting the truth of life and the book was an "attack on what she (perceived) as the moral distant colonial problem

of human slavery, degradation and suffering” (Sanders, 1994, p.269).

According to The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, novel is “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” (cited in Rees, 1973, p.106). Another definition by an anonymous author states that a novel is “a piece of prose fiction of a reasonable length”. Both the definitions highlight the word ‘prose’ meaning the common or ordinary spoken form of language without the presence of poetic rhythmic structure. However, there are a few novels written in verse as well, such as Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* and Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegi*. The other aspect of the definition is related to the length. The first definition points out ‘considerable length’ and second definition states ‘reasonable length’ to distinguish the novel’s unique feature as a genre vis a vis genre of short story. The lengths of some novels are similar to the length of short stories and hence a term such as ‘novella’ is often used for shorter novels.

The word novel is considered to have been derived from the latin word *novellus*, Italian word *novella* (which meant a little new thing) and French word *novelle*. It was Boccaccio who first used the term *novella storia* (short tale in prose) when he first experimented writing prose. Boccaccio popularized the vogue of collections of novella with his collection of ten short stories titled *Decameron* in fourteenth century. However, the meaning of the word novel meant the kind of short stories written and collected by Boccaccio until the 17th century. With the rise in the development of novels in the 18th century the meaning of the word novel underwent change from short tale in prose to ‘prose narrative of considerable length’ as stated by The Shorter Oxford Dictionary. Thus with understanding of the definition of novel, it is relevant to discuss what factors or situations provided opportunities for the rise of the novel in the 18th century.

Majority of the literary critics attribute 18th century as the time period in which novel took its birth, subsequent growth and development. With adequate literary predecessors such as Bunyan, Behn, Chaucer, Malory, Cervantes, Boccaccio and numerous other writers of the 17th century, the 18th century writers

availed opportunities to further experiment and produce novel as a literary genre. Further the increase in literacy rate, industrial revolution, rise in the middle class and coming up of libraries created favourable situations for the rise of the novel. In the new form of literature namely the 'novel' the construct of the story departed from the romance and attempted at verisimilitude depicting the pragmatism and morality of the middle class people. Alexander Pope's dictum, "The proper study of mankind is men" influenced the interest of the people to study human character. Thus 18th century novels explored human characters with the novelist creating real life characters in their novels unlike giants, dragons and super human characters in the romances

One of the major factors that contributed to the rise of the novel is the development in industries. With machinery work could be done faster and people could get more time for rest and leisure time during which people resorted to reading novels. Printing press were available for production of multiple copies at cheaper rate. Even low income people could afford to buy and read books unlike in the past when only aristocrats were the reading public. Besides variety of reading materials such as newspapers, novels and magazines were made easily available due to printing press. The newspapers and magazines helped develop the habit of reading which ultimately led people to start reading novels. Some of the novels were also published in magazines increasing the access to novels besides the book form. According to Hasan (2015), the industrial revolution "paved the way to the rise of the middle class people" (para.2) who created demand in the reading materials for they had plenty of leisure time. With manual work being done by machines, people could get a lot of free time for reading. Further they had desires to read about "their everyday experiences" (Hasan, para.2) which prompted authors such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding to write prose fictions depicting real life experiences.

Since romances were mainly suitable to be read by elite, aristocratic or noble families, it could not sustain the readership. The common people got bored with romances for they had no relevance of any sort to them. In addition, the stories

themselves being centuries old were no longer of interest to the people. The settings in which the stories in the romances took place were also unrealistic. Therefore, romances as a literary genre started to decline. People started to take interest in the contemporary issues. Unlike romances, the novels were written in first person (making it appear 'more personal and recent') with ordinary characters that the readers could relate with. Decline of drama was also one factor that promoted the rise of the novel. In the 17th century, during the rule of Cromwell, theatres (which were so popular during the Elizabethan times) were banned (Shah, n.d). Moreover, novel could reach vast audience when theatre could reach only to a limited audience. When drama came back with the restoration age, it could not establish its essence since novels got well established then.

The writers of the 18th century brought out realism. The novels were instruments to explore and represent the reality of the society. The authors used verisimilitude with books imitating the real life of the people. The use of first-person narrative technique created the element of realism. Further, unlike the romances, characters in the novels were ordinary men and women with settings familiar to the readers. In addition, the focus of the protagonist was given on middle class people. The purpose of the novel was mainly to promote virtuous character in people just as Richardson did. Some authors such as Swift and Smollett used satire and allegory to point out the vices in the society. The pioneer novelists contributed unique aspect of novel; Fielding popularized epic novels, Richardson with epistolary and sentimental novel, Defoe with realistic novel, Swift with satirical and philosophical novel and Sterne with experimental novel.

**Conclusion:** To understand and get the overview of the rise of the novel in 18th century, one needs to trace back to the origin as well as look ahead or even beyond the 18th century. This is because of the fact that the readers are already in the 21st century. It becomes necessary to get overall understanding of how the development of novels started and evolved in the process to reach the present form. However, due to the extensive nature of the topic, many notable authors and novels despite being important are being left out. Therefore, it is important that one take

the ideas from this paper and explore further to enrich one's understanding of the development and rise of English novels.

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