**[The 18th century novel:De foe-Swift-Richardson-Fielding-Sterne](http://rosariomariocapalbo.wordpress.com/2014/01/16/the-18th-century-novelde-foe-swift-richardson-fielding-sterne/)**

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THE FLOURISHING OF THE NOVEL

Modern novel began to develop during the 18th century.  The term *novel* derives from the Latin ‘novus’ and from the Italian ‘novella’. It was in opposition to the term ‘romance’, referring to a chivalric story in verse. It was used to refer to a prose fiction which was new because it told stories about recent events. There were many causes which brought to the **development of the** ***Novel***:  expansion of the reading public, growth of a new middle class, different position of women, economic reasons. People, who were richer than before, could afford buying books and women had more time for reading because, after the industrial revolution, they had much free time at home: they could buy in shops the products which before were handmade in the houses. Publishing became a profitable business thanks to the spread of literacy and of reading as a form of entertainment among the wealthy middle class. The professional writers began to appear. They did not have rich patrons but earned their living by writing essays and books. This new situation, together with the creation of the ***circulating libraries***which borrowed books in return of a small subscription fee, increased the numbers of readers. Yet the number of those who could afford buying books was very small and there was still widespread illiteracy. The masses gained a low salary and books were still very expensive to buy.   There was no real public education system yet.  Poor children had little opportunities to study since they were used as industrial labourers and a huge number of people could neither read nor write.

The 18th century novel was labelled as ***realistic novel:****the* characters were real people with ordinary names and surnames; they were described in their daily routines; the settings were    real geographical places and the contents were taken from real stories.Unlike the early Augustans, the novelists liked to write about ordinary people acting in real-life situations. The novelists tried to meet their middle-class readers who wanted to read about ordinary people because they enjoyed seeing themselves as protagonists of the stories. They were the ones who bought the books and consequently the authors’ point of view was the same as the readers’ one.

The most important novelists of the time were: Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne. Some of them devoted to writing because, as an effect of the ***Test Act*** *of 1673,* beingRoman Catholics or Dissenters, they were forbidden to hold any important position in society and chose to become novelists or journalists.

**DANIEL DE FOE** is considered the pioneer of the modern novel and the first novelist in the English literature as well as the first journalist (his *The Review* is considered the first newspaper). He interpreted the likes and interests of the emerging middle class and depicted the 18th century world.  De Foe’s **characters** are common men and women with whom his middle-class readers could identify themselves. All characters of his novel narrate their individual struggles for survival in a difficult world, from Moll  Flanders, a prostitute, thief and incestuous wife to Robinson Crusoe, Colonel Jack, Captain Singleton and Roxana.

 His novel *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*is regarded as **the first English novel.** The novel is a **true realistic novel**: it is based on the real story of a Scotch sailor, Alexander Selkirk, who had lived alone for four years on the Isle of Juan Fernandez in the Pacific after a shipwreck. The story is told in the first person singular in the form of a diary.

*Robinson Crusoe* is the first narrative in which the character is not a hero, but an average man. De Foe went on with the puritan ideas that had survived even after the collapsing of the Puritan Republic of the Commonwealth. Robinson, a shipwrecked merchant who remained on a desert island for about 28 years, is considered the true puritan man: he showed industry, colonizing spirit, courage and initiative and was seen by the readers as the personification of their own qualities: practical-minded, resourceful, religious.  He organized his life on the island and succeeded through  hard labour in surviving in a difficult situation exploiting all what the place offered.  Further , he not only made the native man Friday to accept him as master but also   made him use   his language and    converted him to Christianity .  Many critics charged this novel with being an imperialistic novel because it contained an affirmation of capitalism and saw man as an economic animal. Robinson was considered by those critics as the first capitalist hero in English literature, because he looked at everything in economic terms: produced more than he needed,   kept from the ship a lot of things,   expanded his power on the whole island and eventually became rich.  They pointed out that when Robinson managed to go on board the ship which had been carried within a reaching distance, he also kept some money which, of course, was of no use on a desert island.

**JONATHAN SWIFT**  was the greatest satirist of his age. Using irony and satire he tried to change his own society and   attacked it at all levels. Together with **Alexander Pope** and others, he established the ***Scriblerus Club***, an association of witty writers who satirized their contemporaries. People of his own time failed to see the irony and, sometime, they cried shame. An Anglican priest, he was appointed Dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, where    he was buried.   A Latin epigraph he had composed himself  was placed over his tomb: “ The body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Sacred Theology, Dean of this Cathedral Church is buried here where fierce indignation can no more lacerate his heart…”.

Swift is remembered for his   *Gulliver’s Travels* , a novel that, like *Robinson Crusoe*, is nowadays regarded as a book for children and as an anticipation of the modern fantasy novel. Actually the book was intended to be a bitter satire of his own country.Swift himself wrote to Pope that it “was intended to vex the world rather than divert it”. The novel satirizes the follies and the vices of politicians and scholars and is a very serious comment on politics, on learning and on all Mankind.  It shows Swift’s bad opinion on people. He is very intolerant of people in general and once he wrote to Pope: “ I heartily hate and detest that animal called man”. He maintains that man is not a reasonable animal but an animal endowed with reason, which he is not always able to use in the right way. Gulliver’s Travels tells the various imaginary voyages of Lemuel Gulliver, a surgeon on a ship, to various strange lands where he meets several man-like creatures. The philosophical basis  of the whole novel is in the contrast between **rationality and animality**. In the first book he is shipwrecked near **Lilliput** where he meets a race of tiny people, only six inches tall, and he is a giant among them. Rationality is represented by the Lilliputians with their organized society and their deep knowledge of mathematical science in contrast with Gulliver described as a big body. In book 2 the situation is reversed: he is in **Brobdingnag**, the land of giants   and he is a dwarf among them. The giants embody animality while Gulliver rationality. In the third book he visits the flying island of **Laputa** inhabited by scientists   concerned with abstract ideas. He visits the University of Lagado where he meets the “ *projectors*”, who work on new scientific odd plans:take sunbeams out of cucumbers,  melt ice into gunpowder,   melt ice into gunpowder and so on. They are presented in a decadent way: badly dressed, long hair and beard, very dirty, and even as beggars. Animality is seen in the scientists while rationality is seen in man. In the last book he is in the land of the **Houyhnhnms** , intelligent horses that can talk. They are perfectly rational and virtuous. They have man-like slaves, the **Yahoos**, who are bestial, irrational and vicious. Gulliver himself is seen by the Houyhnhnms as a Yahoo. In these various countries Gulliver explains to the inhabitants about life in Europe and in particular in England. What Gulliver says is how things should be , not how they are, and so his words become an ironical attack on what he is describing. In the first book he **attacks the English Government** and the hypocrisies of the party system.  **Catholic Religion** is ironically attacked, too. Swift comments the dispute over whether an egg should be broken, to be eaten, at the big end or at the little end: “ all true believers shall break their eggs at the most convenient end”.  In the second book he attacks the **judicial and the political system** in Britain aiming at stressing the hypocrisy and corruption practised in the **Institutions**. In the third book  there is an attack on **science** and on members of the Royal Society while in the fourth and last he **attacks man**. When he comes home after his rescue, he cannot accept the human race any longer. The human beings appear to him  like the Yahoos and he goes to live in a stable with the company of horses.

Swift was not insensible to the **sufferings of the Irish** and he was indignant at their exploitation by the British Government. The Irish lived on bad condition. He   wrote and published a work in defence of Ireland: *Modest Proposal from Preventing the Children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or the country*. It was a new **attack** **against the English**.  Using satire, he explained, that the misery of the starving Irish could be easily relieved by selling their children to the rich as food. There was also another benefit for the Irish: it should have solved the problem of overpopulation of Ireland, too. It was of course a provocation but at the times some foreign readers took it as an actual and serious one and there was quite a scandal

SAMUEL RICHARDSON: He is considered the inventor of the ***epistolary novel*** and the father of the novel of sentimental analysis. He introduced psychological studies of the characters, especially women. He started his career as a novelist quite late in his life when  some booksellers asked him to help the uneducated in their correspondence writing a sequence of letters   dealing with everyday subjects. Among these letters were to be included some to instruct pretty servant-girl to protect their virtue. He liked this idea also because, when he was at school, he used to be the adviser of girls who wanted to correspond with their sweethearts.  He decided to make a novel from the letters, and wrote *Pamela, or virtue Rewarded*. He chose an actual case  he had heard of, in which a virtuous 15-year-old  maidservant, who worked in a rich household, had resisted her master’s advances.

The story is told through a series of letters from Pamela Andrews to her parents and their answers   to her. She asked for advice to defend herself from her master, Mr B, who wanted to seduce her . Published in November 1740, the novel had an instant success and it was followed by a second edition in February 1741, a third in March and even a fourth in May. As we can see, Pamela originated from the realistic moral problem for many young girls  who worked as maids: how to resist the advances of their rich masters. Pamela celebrates the middle-class **value of chastity** before marriage in opposition to the lasciviousness of the aristocracy. The theme of the persecuted maiden attracted many readers. The readers divided into “Pamelists”, who were for Pamela, and “Anti-Pamelists”, who criticized her. **Pamelists** maintained that she was a poor and simple girl who tried to keep herself honest and chaste. **Anti-Pamelists** ,  instead, maintained that her behaviour was not guided by purity but by utilitarianism: she was a cunning girl, who used her virtue to climb the social ladder and she provoked her master to make him marry her. In the 18th century  many people thought that **virginity** was not a value for a poor girl to defend and  that it was her duty as a servant to please her master.  Not all women considered chastity and honesty virtues to be defended. For instance Moll Flanders, the heroine created by De Foe uses her beauty and her seductive charm to improve the conditions of her miserable life. *Pamela* is considered the **first best-seller** in English Literature. It had got a happy ending, she married Mr B., and it pleased the readers, women above all, helping its success. *Clarissa Harlowe*, his second epistolary novel, is considered Richardson’s masterpiece. It deals with a woman who tries to escape from a combined marriage to a man she does not like. She finds refuge at a nobleman’s who seduces and rapes her. Clarissa refuses to marry him and eventually lives as an outcast condemned by society.

Richardson’s success in his own age is mostly due to the subject matter of his novels, and to the technique of narration he used. As far as the former, that is the theme of  women who defend their virtues from the advances of a powerful man, it  appealed to a vast audience, above all women who constituted the larger part of the reading public. The other element was the suspense created by   the technique that Richardson used. He himself defined it as “**writing to the moment**”. This technique is a bit similar to the one used in modern soap operas: each letter dealing with the present has got elements whose consequences will happen in the next letter thus letting the reader wait.

HENRY FIELDING: He was the first English novelist to introduce the **burlesque element** in the novel. He defined his novels as  “*comic epic poem in prose*.  The mock epic  is a parody of the epic  because it treats trivial things as if they had great importance. The protagonist is involved in a series of apparently dangerous  adventures. Fielding was different from De Foe and Richardson. He belonged to the aristocracy  and unlike them, he did not believe in sexual chastity above all other virtues. The aristocracy regarded uninhibited sexuality with indulgence and considered other virtues as courage, generosity and loyalty above it. His first novel, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* is to be considered as a reaction against the hypocrisy of the time as well as a reaction to Richardson’s *Pamela*. Fielding wanted to ridicule the Puritan view of morality. The *Shamela* in the title is a pun on the words of “shame” and Pamela. In his second  novel, *Joseph Andrews*, he   wanted at first to parody Richardson’s *Pamela* but he put aside this idea and wrote a story based on the life and adventures of Joseph, Pamela’s brother. The situation is reversed and we have a young man who works at a lady’s that wants to seduce him after her husband’s death. Joseph, who is chaste and virtuous, refuses her advances.

*Tom Jones* ,his best novel,  is a picture of the life of the lower and upper classes of the 18th century society. Fielding depicts with humour and irony human weaknesses and stresses his tolerant attitude towards them. Tom is an unheroic character and has all the limits of the ordinary man. Fielding’s novels are considered **picaresque** in style, written in imitation of Cervantes  (Picaresque novels come from Spain and  deal with the adventures of a rascal of low social class; they are usually humorous, full of action  and excitement).

LAURENCE STERNE: In his own time, Sterne was considered an **anti-novelist** because he did not follow the canons of the realistic novel. He is the closest novelists to the modern ones of all eighteenth century novelists. His novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was written in instalments in nine volumes between 1759 and 1767. It  does not respect  the 18th century canons of the realistic novel. It is unconventional and very difficult to summarize. It recalls the stream of consciousness technique of Joyce and Woolf: it has no plot, no time scheme; it is full of the author’s interventions, digressions, comments, asides, long quotations, and many unusual devices  and eccentric typographical characteristics as black pages ( to mourn a friend’s death),marbled pages, white pages, asterisks, arabesques, a little hand with printed finger to direct the reader’s attention to a point   . When a digression takes places, the author shifts from the main theme of the novel to other topics which are not related with what the character is going to do or say. The time of the story is interrupted to be resumed at the end of the digression. The temporal dimension is non-existent and **clock time** is abandoned for psychological time. The digressions allowed Sterne to tell events of the past or of the future in whatever order he pleased. The story is told in the first person singular by the main character, Tristram Shandy who remembers particular events of his past and present life. It starts with a flashback: we meet Tristram in the first volume as an adult but his birth happens in the third volume . We may suppose that Sterne was influenced by **John Locke’s** theory of the **Association of Ideas**. Tristram himself  defined Locke’s Essays as “ a history book….of what passes in a man’s own mind”. Sterne made a distinction between time of the clock, that is the chronological time, and time of the mind. Organizing his plot, the author goes backwards and forwards in time, thus disrupting the chronological order. He anticipated **Bergson**’s theory of the time, “**la Durée**”. Bergson thought that each individual lives moments and experiences that cannot be measured in fixed periods of time since the mind has its own time different from the conventional one of the external world.