

Novel

Introduction

Novel, in modern literary usage, is a sustained work of prose fiction a volume or more in length. It is distinguished from the short story and the fictional sketch, which are necessarily brief. Although the novel has a place in the literatures of all nations, this article concentrates on the evolution of the novel in England, France, Russia and the former Soviet Union, and the United States. Nonetheless, changes in technology in the 20th century have made the literature of different cultures widely available. The international readership claimed by such authors as Africa's Chinua Achebe, India's R. K. Narayan, Japan's Yukio Mishima, and Latin America's Jorge Luis Borges indicates the variety of novels available to an ever-widening audience.

Forerunners of the Novel

The term *novel* is derived from *novella*, Italian for a compact, realistic, often ribald prose tale popular in the Renaissance and best exemplified by the stories in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1348–53). The novel can, therefore, be considered a work of imagination that is grounded in reality. On the other hand, during the Middle Ages a popular literary form was the romance, a type of tale that describes the adventures, both natural and supernatural, of such figures of legend as the Trojan heroes, Alexander the Great, and King Arthur and his knights. Thus, the modern novel is rooted in two traditions, the mimetic and the fantastic, or the realistic and the romantic.

Indeed, the conflict between romantic dreams and harsh reality has been the theme of many great novels and the historical development of the novel continually reflects this dual tradition. Among the genre's precursors Petronius's *Satyricon* (1st century A.D.) presents a vivid portrait of life in Nero's Rome while satirizing the corruption there, whereas the *Metamorphoses* (2d century A.D.) of Lucius Apuleius describes the fantastic adventures of a young man who is transformed into an ass; *Daphnis and Chloë* (3d century A.D.), attributed to Longus, is a love story about a goatherd and a shepherdess, while the *Thousand and One Nights* (10th–11th cent.) is a collection of stories that often tell of magic or supernatural happenings; and *Tale of Genji* (11th century), by Lady Murasaki, depicts Japanese court life, whereas *Amadis of Gaul* (13th or 14th century) recounts the fabulous exploits of a knight who is a model of chivalry.

Early European Novels

The realistic and romantic tendencies converge in Cervantes's *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615), which describes the adventures of an aging country gentleman who, inspired by chivalric romances, sets out to do good in an ugly world. A brilliant, humanistic study of illusion and reality, *Don Quixote* is considered by many critics to be the most important single progenitor of the novel.

Of lesser magnitude but lasting influence is *The Princess of Cleves* (1678), by Mme de La Fayette; a forerunner of the psychological novel, it presents believable characters in conflict and criticizes shifting social and moral values. Also important is Alain René Le Sage's *Gil Blas* (1715–35), a picaresque [Span. *picaro* = rogue, knave] tale of a young man who passes rapidly from one job to another, commenting as he goes on the idiosyncrasies of his masters and on the world at large. This story, episodic and held together by a single character, became the model for a generation of English writers who first produced what has come to be recognized as the modern novel.

Several 18th-century novels, each essentially realistic, has at one time or another been designated the first novel in English. Daniel Defoe is famous for *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a detailed and convincingly realistic account, based on a real event, of the successful efforts of an island castaway to survive. Also in this realistic tradition is Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* (1722), which relates the picaresque adventures of a good-natured harlot and thief. Samuel Richardson extended the influence of the form over its middle-class audience with his epistolary novels: *Pamela* (1740), about the rewards of virtue, and *Clarissa* (1747–48), about the evils of a fall from virtue. Meant to offer instruction in letter writing as well as in moral conduct, these works emphasize character rather than action. Both of these elements are present in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). This novel was the first to present a full portrait of ordinary English life, including a none-too-perfect but likable hero. In addition, the work includes critical comments by the author on the nature of the novel.

Against the mainstream represented by the foregoing novels, with their emphasis on external reality, stands Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–67), a rambling nine-volume novel replete with blank pages, digressions, chapters in reverse order, and unconventional punctuation. All of these literary features combine to reveal an internal, psychological reality based on John Locke's theory of the association of ideas. The psychological reality explored by Sterne would resurface as a fictional preoccupation early in the 20th cent.

The Nineteenth Century

The novel became the dominant form of Western literature in the 19th cent., which produced many works that are considered milestones in the development of the form.

The English Novel

In Britain, Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), about the 1745 Jacobite uprising in support of Charles Edward Stuart, inaugurated the historical novel. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), contemplating and satirizing life among a small group of country gentry in Regency England, initiated the highly structured and polished novel of manners. A variant with a wider scope is William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), which dissects and satirizes London society.

The serialization of novels in various periodicals brought the form an ever-expanding audience. Particularly popular were the works of Charles Dickens, including *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *David Copperfield* (1850). Readers were drawn by Dickens's sympathetic, melodramatic, and humorous delineation of a world peopled with characters of all social classes, and by his condemnation of various social abuses. Further portraits of English society appear in Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire novels, which scrutinize clerical life in a small, rural town, and George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72), which treat the lives of ordinary people in provincial towns with humanity and a strong moral sense. George Meredith's *Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) and *The Egoist* (1879) are analytical tragicomedies set in high social circles. The conflict between man and nature is stressed in Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native* (1878) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891).

Although the great English novels of the 19th century were predominantly realistic, novels of fantasy and romance formed a literary undercurrent. Early in the century Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) explores a tale of horror. Later, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) each present imaginative, passionate visions of human love. Robert Louis Stevenson revived the adventure tale and the horror story in *Treasure Island* (1883) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). At the beginning of the 20th cent., horror and adventure were combined in the novels of Joseph Conrad, notably *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902), both works achieving high levels of stylistic and psychological sophistication.

The French and Russian Novels

Major 19th-century French writers also produced novels in the romantic and realistic traditions. Romance can be found in Alexandre Dumas's *Three Musketeers* (1844) and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1844), both of which are melodramatic and swashbuckling, terrifying and poignant. Honoré de Balzac's *Human Comedy* (1829–47), on the other hand, is a series of novels that offer a realistic, if cynical, panorama of life in Paris and the provinces.

Stendhal mixes realism with romance in *The Red and the Black* (1831) and *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). Both works are psychological studies in which characters confront reality by behaving melodramatically. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) is perhaps the first novel in which the author was primarily concerned about his work as a literary form and consciously distances himself from his characters. The result is a carefully crafted study of a banal love tragedy in which the heroine, like Don Quixote, cannot reconcile her romantic dreams with ordinary reality.

In the 19th century Russian novelists quickly gained world reputations for their powerful statements of human and cosmic problems. If Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–69) is a God-centered novel, Feodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) can be considered a God-haunted one.

The American Novel

American novels in the 19th century were explicitly referred to as romances. James Fenimore Cooper's historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)—the latter two heavily allegorical and containing supernatural elements—properly belong in this category. In the last decades of the century, however, a shift toward realism occurred. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1883), a revival of the picaresque novel, is romantic in its Mississippi River setting but realistic in its satirical attack on religious hypocrisy and racial persecution.

By the end of the century Henry James had brought his moral vision and powers of psychological observation to the novel in numerous works, including *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), and *The Ambassadors* (1903). These novels are not only masterpieces of realism but also—in their carefully crafted form, experimental point of view, and superb style—supreme examples of the novel as a literary genre. A lesser figure, William Dean Howells, realistically portrayed a marriage and divorce in *A Modern Instance* (1882) and the newly rich classes in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885).

The English Novel

World War I and its attendant disillusionment with 19th-century values radically altered the nature of the novel. In search of greater freedom of expression English writers like E. M. Forster in *Howard's End* (1910), D. H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers* (1913), and James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922) described more explicitly than ever before the conflict between human intellect and human sexuality. Joyce, along with Dorothy Richardson in *Pilgrimage* (1915–38) and Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), carried Freud's discovery of the unconscious into art by attempting to portray human thought and emotion through the stream of consciousness technique. Like Sterne these writers were concerned with inner rather than outer reality.

The American Novel

In the United States the profound post war dislocation of values is evident in such novels as *The Great Gatsby* (1925), by F. Scott Fitzgerald, about a romantic bootlegger whose version of the American dream of success is shattered by a corrupt reality; *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), by Ernest Hemingway, concerning a group of disillusioned expatriates in Europe who find meaning only in immediate physical experience; and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), by William Faulkner, about the disintegration of a once-proud Southern family. An even more profound dislocation than that came after World War I occurred in the years following World War II. To many American novelists the atrocities of the Nazi regime, the spectre of the atom bomb, the tensions of the Cold War, the horrors of the war in Vietnam, the assassinations and riots of the 1960s, and the political corruption of the 1970s and 80s rendered the so-called reality of earlier literature terrifyingly unreal, bringing about a switch toward the fantastic. Novelists such as John Hawkes, William Burroughs, and Kurt Vonnegut wrote darkly surreal fantasies, while Philip Roth and Norman Mailer produced brutal satires of American life and Joyce Carol Oates wrote fictive studies of violence in America.

The French Novel

The greatest masterpiece of the 20th-century novel in France is widely acknowledged to be Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27), a monumental work in seven parts that is at once an inquiry into the meaning of experience, a study of the development of an artist, and a detailed portrait of life within a particular segment of French society. Also important are Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) and Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), both fictional explications of existentialism. In the late 1950s there appeared in France the so-

called new novel, in which traditional elements such as plot, characterization, and rational ordering of time and space are abandoned and replaced by flashbacks, slow motion, magnification of objects, and a scenario format, all of which produce a mutant—the novel influenced by films. New novelists include Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, and Nathalie Sarraute.

The Russian Novel

After 1917 Russian Revolution, much of the country's literature reflected Marxist ideology. Maxim Gorky was the leading exponent of social realism. In 1933, Ivan Bunin became the first Russian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel in the Soviet Union either avoided offending the Communist party or, by reflecting a dissenting outlook, avoided publication in the USSR. Mikhail Sholokhov's epic series about the Don Cossacks, including *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1934), met the first qualification; Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* (1957), about life in Russia from 1903 to 1929, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* (1968) and *First Circle* (1968), both realistic, powerful accounts of life under Stalin's regime, met the second and were published outside the Soviet Union.

Types of Novels

For convenience in analysing the forms of the novel, critics often place them in categories that encompass years of historical development. An early and prevalent type was the picaresque novel, in which the protagonist, a social underdog, has a series of episodic adventures in which he sees much of the world around him and comments satirically upon it. Modern variations of this type include, in addition to those already mentioned, Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and Thornton Wilder's *Theophilus North* (1973). Notable examples of the epistolary novel, which is made up of letters from various protagonists, are *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782), by Pierre Laclos, a study in depravity made all the more devastating because the characters' evil is revealed obliquely through their correspondence, and *The Documents in the Case* (1930), by Dorothy L. Sayers, in which a crime and its solution are revealed through letters.

The historical novel embraces not only the event-filled romances of Scott, Cooper, and Kenneth Roberts, but also works that strive to convey the essence of life in a certain time and place, such as Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920–22), about life in medieval Norway, and Mary Renault's *Mask of Apollo* (1966), set in ancient Greece. Closely related to the historical novel is the social novel, which presents a panoramic picture of an entire age.

Balzac's *Human Comedy* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* became models for those that followed, including *U.S.A.* (1937), by John Dos Passos.

The naturalistic novel studies the effect of heredity and environment on human beings. Emile Zola's series, *The Rougon-Macquarts* (1871–93), influenced Arnold Bennett's novels of the "Five Towns," which treat life in the potteries in the English midlands; other novels that can be called naturalistic are *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1918), by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, and *An American Tragedy* (1925), by Theodore Dreiser. A derivative of the social novel is the regional novel, which delineates the life of people in a particular place—focusing on customs and speech—to demonstrate how environment influences its inhabitants. Notable examples of this genre are Hardy's "Wessex novels" and William Faulkner's novels set in Yoknapatawpha County. The novels of Ignazio Silone, notably *Bread and Wine* (1936), are both social and regional—in a small Italian village Silone reveals a microcosm of Mussolini's Italy.

Further classifications include novels of the soil—stark stories of people living close to the earth like Ole Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927); novels of the sea such as Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* (1840); and novels of the air like Antoine de St. Exupéry's *Night Flight* (1931). Novels that treat themes of creation, judgment, and redemption are often called metaphysical novels; famous examples include Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), Georges Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1936), and Graham Greene's *Heart of the Matter* (1948).

The German *Bildungsroman* [formation novel], *Erziehungsroman* [education novel], and *Künstlerroman* [artist novel] make useful distinctions among works like Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (1924), Colette's *Claudine* series (1900–1903), and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) respectively. Taken together, they can be called novels of initiation. So can Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, but because of its extensive analysis of the minds and hearts of a large cast of characters it can also be placed with such disparate works as *Demian* (1919), by Herman Hesse, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), by J. D. Salinger, and *Thousand Cranes* (tr. 1956), by Yasunari Kawabata, in the ranks of the psychological novel.

The tradition of the novel of manners, with its emphasis on the conventions of a particular group of people in a particular time and place, persists in such works as Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence* (1920), John O'Hara's *Butterfield 8* (1935), and John Updike's *Couples* (1967). Although classification of novels can be helpful in indicating the

breadth and diversity of the form, the great novel transcends such categorization, existing as a complete, many-faceted world in itself.

Points of View

Critics have also classified the numerous experiments at reader manipulation carried on by novelists who relate their stories from different points of view. The omniscient point of view is that of the all-knowing author who is also the narrator. Thus Fielding's voice is heard in *Tom Jones* as is that of Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Point of view can be limited in a variety of ways. Indeed, much of the development of the novel in the 20th cent. has involved such limitation. And as the importance of point of view has increased, the importance of plot has in many instances been diminished.

In *The Golden Bowl* (1904), James used a narrator-observer who filters the events and emotional climate of the story for the reader, but whose own knowledge of other characters' motives and of the outcome of events is restricted. Since he talks about others, he uses the third person. For *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust created a narrator-participant who analyses the lifelong development of his own intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic faculties in the first person. In *Ulysses*, Joyce composed interior monologues for his characters, which ran simultaneously with their ordinary conversation with other people. Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* is told from the point of view, successively, of an idiot, a neurotic, and an egoist. Later, the French new novelists like Butor in *The Modification* (1957) experimented with the second-person narrative, which creates a deliberate, unexpected yet not unpleasant tension for the reader who wonders to whom the narrator's remarks are addressed.

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