



# Central University of Kashmir

Nowgam, Srinagar, J&K- 190015

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**MEG C-103**

**English Novel: Defoe to Dickens**

## Unit I

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Contributor's Name: Mr. Mohd Ali Shabbir

Email: ali.ladakh@gmail.com

Contact: 9469287717

Designation: Assistant Professor

## Unit I

**ENGLISH NOVEL: DEFOE TO DICKENS****Introduction**

What do you understand by the word **novel**?

Derived from *Italian Novella*, which means a tale, a piece of news and now applied to a wide variety of writings whose only common attribute is that they are extended pieces of prose fiction ( writings that is not poetry). But the word extended begs a number of questions.

Question on length of the novel??

- The length of novel varies greatly and there has been much debate on how long a novel is or should be, but it would probably be agreed that, in contemporary practice a novel will be b/w 60-70 thousand words and say 200,000.

The actual term Novel has had a variety of meanings and implications at different stages. From roughly the 16th to the 18th century its meaning tended to derive from the *Italian novella* and the Spanish novella and the term often used in a plural sense denoted short stories or tales of the kind one finds in G.Boccaccio's ( Italian author, poet) *Decameron* (1349-51)- *characters, incidents and plot*.

➤ *Henry James- an American born writer: regarded as one of the key figures of the 19th century literary realism says: What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?*

No other literary form has proved so pliable and adaptable to a seemingly endless variety of topics and themes. Examples

- *Epistolary novel*: expressed or written in the form of letters.

-The sentimental novel, the novel of sensation, the campus novel, the Gothic novel ( both horror and romance) e.g. *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

Until the 14th century most of the literature of entertainment (novel is usually intended as an entertainment) was confined to narrative verse, particularly the epic and the romance. Verse narrative has been supplanted by the prose narrative by the end of the 17th century. Spain was ahead of the rest of Europe in the development of the novel form. The greatest of all Spanish novels is *Cervantes's Don Quixote* (1605-1615), which

satirized chivalry and the number of the earlier novels. After the death of Cervantes (1616) the Spanish novel having begun so promisingly went into decline until the 19th century

In the 17th century there is still no more major advance in prose narrative and the novel in form except for Madame Lafayette's *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678), a landmark in the history of novel. (French writer, France's first historical novel and one of the earliest novels in literature).

### **Novel in England**

In England, at the end of the 16th century the novel was in infancy. From the closing years of the century came two imp. Works in the evolution of the extended narrative prose:

- *J. Lyly's Euphues in two parts 1578-1580 and*
- *Sir Philip Sidney's pastoral romance Arcadia (1590)*

Minor works of note in England were *Mrs Aphra Behn's Oroonoko* (1688), *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) : both of them can be regarded as allegorical novel. Early in the 18th century William Congreve published *Incognita or Love and Duty Reconciled* (1713). He called it a novel and his agreeable preface gives us his conception of what a novel is.

First he speaks of romances, which were generally composed of constant love and invincible courage of the kings, heroes and queens, extraordinary things that happen in romances. But novel he declares are of more familiar nature, come near us and represent us, intrigues us in practice, delights us with accidents and odd events. Romances give more wonder and novels more delight. Soon after this Daniel Defoe published his story of adventure *Robinson Crusoe*, from now on the novel comes of age and within another seventy years is a major and matured form.

- *Moll Flanders* (a sociological novel and *A Journal of Plague Year* (1722) : a reconstruction and thus a piece of historical fiction.

#### ➤ ***Please Remember!!***

*Tales of Genji* (10th century) by *Murasaki Shikibu*, *Arabian Nights* (10th century-embryonic stage, collected in 14-16th C and introduced in Europe in early 18th century), *Boccaccio's Decameron* : These were all short stories but are extremely important because

*they were in prose, and because in their method of narration and in their creation and development of characters they are forerunners of the modern novel.*

### **The rise of the novel**

One of the most powerful and enduring account of the origins of the novel in English is Ian Watt's influential study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt argues that the English novel came into being in the 18th century and that D. Defoe, Samuel Richardson and to a lesser extent Henry Fielding were the significant innovators. According to Watt, Defoe and Richardson crafted prose narratives which absorbed **'the general temper of philosophical realism'**.

➤ **Philosophical Realism:** *was constituted principally in the empirical philosophy of John Locke, the 17th C philosopher who held the view that the associations and ideas that enable thought and the discovery of truth are apprehended by the individual's sense, a philosophical position known as empiricism (experiments and experiences as the basis of your ideas/reason).*

According to Watt this theory had a profound impact on the writing of prose narrative. Archaic narrative types such as romance with their elaborate diction, distant past setting and fantastic happenings were abandoned in favour of story which were set in the present or the recent past, and were more spontaneous and inventive in the way that they represented, was in plain prose, the practical and plausible situations and individuals confronted in their everyday lives. The expanding print culture served a growing reading public which was generated by changing social structure. Watt's thesis has a sociological dimension: **individual narratives linked to rise of economic individualism.**

- Daniel Defoe is a crucial figure in that, his narrative forge links b/w the individualist ethics of Protestant theologies and the forms of competitive individualist, economic activity which came increasingly to structure in everyday life. It is in this sense that Watt's presents Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a founding moment in the rise of the novel. Defoe's narrative in which the narrator recalls his God guided struggle to bring the island on which he has been shipwrecked under his mastery, appealed to a growing commercial middle class, for whom Crusoe's battle with his circumstances constituted an exotic refraction of their own struggle with a new, competitive capitalist world.

Such narratives made individual perception of a material world their organising principle.

\* *First person narrative* was a feature of Defoe's *R.Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* and it is Richardson's choice in *Pamela*.

For Watt, narration which emphasises perception, the everyday world perceived and the psychological movements of minds in the act of making sense of the world are the basis of what he describes as '**realism of presentation**'.

- Realism in presentation is thus the cornerstone of the Watt's construction of a tradition of narrative which initiates and propels '*the rise of the novel*.' He calls this **formal realism**, which acknowledges the formal, conventional nature of a new way of mediating a middle-class world view, founded on the primacy of the individual.

Perhaps it is most appropriate to say that novel has come into being from multiple points of origins: **culturally, linguistically, geographically, historically**.

## **Culture and Novel**

Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>1</sup> argues that the novel has a long cross- cultural history, his account of the 19th century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky explains features of his narratives by tracking them to antiquity and their origins in a very different cultural setting. Bakhtin argued that the novel developed in antiquity in an epoch of intense struggle amongst numerous and heterogeneous religious and philosophical schools and movements, when disputes were over ultimate questions of world view had become and everyday mass phenomenon among all strata of the population.

Selden L.Whitcomb's *The Study of Novel*, published in 1906 when the author was an associate professor of English Literature at the university of Kansas, addressed the first generation of students to study the novel as an academic exercise. Whitcomb's approach was historicist in the sense that saw the development of the novel running parallel to reflecting the grand historical progress of civilisation.

*"Every great movements in the history of fiction, though modified by race and nationality, is one phase of a general cultural episode in modern civilisation".*

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<sup>1</sup> A Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician ,scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics and philosophy of language. (1875-1975)

-Whitcomb links novel to modernity, a process of change and transformation, a progressive movement, linking novel to great constructs as civilisation, the race, the nation and the culture.

➤ **Attention!!**

**Culture** is a complex word with a wide semantic range (carrying different meanings).

- Whitcomb supposes that the progress of civilisation is reflected in novels when taken together, constitute a major *cultural episode* in that process.

- This was because the novel for him reflected cultural *life in general*. For Whitcomb culture shaped the specificities of race and nation, and the mimetic capabilities of the novel.

**'...gives one a more extensive picture of social culture than any other form of art'.**

In making this claim he brought culture and society together in a way which was characteristic of the 19th century thought. Societies were conceived as historically developing organisms, made up of varied yet independent social classes and groupings.

➤ **Culture** distinguished these societies, distinctive pattern of culture by which such societies lived, a whole way of life (the term here embracing knowledge, beliefs, laws, morals and accounts).

- Not only could the novel reflect culture, it was formed from the expressive essence of culture. Whitcomb noted that the novels '*medium of expression, language.....must always suggest some special types of cultural life*'. (e.g. V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe).

Novels relationship to culture which is implicit in Whitcomb's project: culture as a learned study of selected and valued objects which promote the moral and intellectual growth of an individual reader in **self-culture**.

Novels such as *Richardson's Pamela* and *Bronte's Jane Eyre* told powerful stories about individuals which were expected to enrich their readers morally.

Whitcomb finds some difficulty in installing the novel in general as a general and self-improving object of study. Whitcomb recognises the novels quasi-disreputable past during which it had, been vilified as trivial or downright harmful to processes of self-culture.

➤ E.g. Novels are classified as fictions or made up stories.

Certain Protestant theologies are distrustful of imitations and images, novels were anathema (a thing or idea which you hate) to some religious sects, especially during the 19th century, because it is opposite of what you always believed.

However, the same religious sects subscribed to the benefits of self-culture, through approval forms of reading. If novels were rejected than biographies and auto biographies, non fictional narratives about real exemplary individuals lives were considered to be suitable.

- Another example of the novel perceived harmfulness was articulated supposedly in defence of women readers of novels in the 19th century, whose '*weaker minds*' were deemed in the general discourse of biological and psychological science, they were more prone to damage under the influence of sensationally shocking narratives.

➤ **Novel** = judge = discourse of theology/ gendered science and psychology.

Thus, novels in England have been, since the 18th century at least, important participants in the field of culture, absorbing discourses into their narratives intertexts which rehearse and seek to resolve conflicts over contested values and meanings. For Whitcomb, the development of novel in the history coincided with periods of conflict:

*" the novel has flourished most in the periods of complex social life, when antagonistic currents of thoughts were meeting, giving rise to social, ethical and aesthetic problems".*  
(pg.160)

➤ **Remember!!**

For Whitcomb novels are: reflection of social change and conflict whereas for the critics in present novels are active participants in shaping and negotiating these cultural conflicts, they are sources of power in their own right.

### **Gender and the rise of the novel**

To what extent have critics recognised gendered discourses in their re-construction of the early modern cultural conflicts from which the novel emerged? For the most part,

their role has been investigated by feminist critics. An important strand of feminist literary criticism aims to recover for women a central place in literary history and to construct a tradition which challenges a male dominated canon. Feminist critic *Nancy Armstrong*<sup>2</sup> in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987) argues that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* 'does not inaugurate the tradition of the novel as we know it', for the novel as we know it is preoccupied with relationships b/w men and women. Whilst they are durable, desert island stories have not proved to be as reproducible as stories about sexual desire. Defoe's narratives are generally heterogeneous, drawing variously upon the scientific travel journal, the criminal biography, and the confessional narratives of the penitent. His texts are also framed by complex editorial statements which position these narratives ambiguously between 'real' histories and fiction. Romantic novels about men, women and sexual desire had to be told again and again in different ways, according to Armstrong, because they were at the root of an English political settlement which 'was accomplished largely through cultural hegemony'. Armstrong talks about the rise of the novel as a cultural institution with important political consequences. In other words, novel emerged out of a variety of narrative and non-narrative sources to become a cultural institution which absorbed and transformed the dangerous conflicts of society and political into the microcosmic domestic world, the social and political conflicts being rewritten along lines of gender division. For Armstrong, the fact that *Pamela* by Richardson is about a servant girl who marries a gentleman whose initial aim is her sexual conquest- a low born expert in the domestic arts who converts a high born gentleman from libertinism to romantic love and domestic responsibility-----makes it politically charged. Armstrong argues that representation of the domestic woman had come, by the early eighteenth century, to exercise a considerable degree of power: the domestic woman and the space of the household were seemingly above the social conflicts generated by the religious and political controversies which had dominated the seventeenth century. Female subjectivities was fashioned from reading positions, which were inscribed in certain texts and discourses. Armstrong proposes that novel reader was created as a subject whilst reading a novel. She asks us to see novel reading as a practice which developed in history, and out of variety of sources which had political implications. Her

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<sup>2</sup> Is a scholar, critic and professor of English at Duke University

argument asks us to think about why some reading positions have become more powerful than others in their capacity of forming and sustaining subjectivities.

## **The Life and Strange Surprising Adventure of Robinson Crusoe (1719)**

***Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)***

### **Introduction**

Defoe is considered one of the founders of the English novel along with Samuel Richardson and to some extent Henry Fielding.

Perceived the use of the new method of *imaginative expression*.

He was an extremely political man - *The True Born Englishman*- a satirical pamphlet in favour of King William II from Holland. *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* (1702) is a sardonic masterpiece (humorous but critical) , imprisoned and fined.

For an author who was engaged with success in political and religious controversy to turn his hand to tales of adventure was to the eighteenth century way of thinking- a sign of social and intellectual decay. The class to which Defoe addressed his Crusoe was the class that read *Mist's Journal*- included the small shopkeepers and artisan, the footmen, soldiers, sailors and the publicans.

It is a story about a man called Robinson Crusoe, of York who lived Eight and twenty years in an un-inhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river Oroonoke, having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself. Defoe's prose depiction of a shipwrecked sailor was based on the true adventure of Alexander Selkirk, a pirate who deliberately stranded himself on a remote un-inhabited island called Juan Fernandez ( now known as R. Crusoe island) off the coast of Chile. The novel rewards analysis as many things- *an exotic adventure story; a study of solitary consciousness; a parable of sin, atonement, and redemption; a myth of economic individualism, a displaced or encoded autobiography; an allegory of political defeat, prophecy of imperial expansion.*

- To read R.Crusoe is to be compelled to face up to all sorts of physical problems that civilised man has long since forgotten. It is in some sense to retrace the history of human race. A self-made man.

- Sort of a moral allegory (representing the idea that Englishman is better than Portuguese and Spaniards). Undoubtedly, the appeal of the Robinson Crusoe lies to a great extent in the hero's situation, the indomitable courage of the hero of the novel. Defoe's chief fault is lack of discrimination in incidents, he will leave nothing to the imagination, his passion for details is excessive. Defoe produces the illusion of reality in a fictitious narrative.
- Extreme vividness, he has an unconscious eye for scenery. His sea captains, merchants and highwayman are generally alive.
- This imaginary fictional prose has been constantly accepted as authentic history.

#### OTHER GREAT WORKS OF DEFOE:

- ***Moll Flanders (1722) and Roxana (1724)***: have a unique value as human documents and records of contemporary life, famous classics.

Defoe's influence on the evolution of the English novel was enormous and many consider him as the first true novelist. He was master of plain prose and powerful narrative, with a journalistic curiosity and love of realistic details. His fiction reveals love of travel, adventure, piracy which subsequently became the stock material of many books.

*e.g. Gulliver's Travel by Jonathan Swift. (1726)*

#### **Political scenario in England at the end of the seventeenth century:**

The Catholic King James II of England was thrown out of office by the anti-Catholic establishments in 1689, a Protestant double monarchy was put on the throne:

-James daughter Mary II, her Dutch husband William II of Orange.

Defoe supported William II, through his writing: *The True Born Englishman*; arguing that it is reasonable to have a king from Holland.

- **Critics views about Defoe's Robinson Crusoe:**

**Charles Lamb** (English essayist) : "found the story altogether to homely, fitted for the kitchen than the drawing room."

- **Charles Dickens:** " an utter want of tenderness and sentiment in the account of Friday's death."  
 -only great novel which excited neither tears nor laughter.  
 - lack of psychological interest.
- **Alexander Pope** (1742): The first part of R.C is very good. Defoe wrote a vast many things, and none bad, though none excellent. There is something good in all he has written.
- **S.T.Coleridge** (Crusoe as a Representative of Humanity) : Crusoe himself is merely a representative of humanity in general, neither his intellectual nor his moral qualities let him above the middle degree of mankind, he is a universal character.
- **Wordsworth:** Extraordinary energy and resource of the hero under his difficult circumstances.

**But,** Defoe chose to tell his story in his own way. He does not pretend to describe emotions; he is content to relate facts.

### **The story of Crusoe is in three volumes:**

- The Life and Surprising Adventure of R.Crusoe.
- The Further Surprising Adventure of R.Crusoe.
- The Serious Reflections of Life of R.Crusoe.

### **Important aspects and themes in Robinson Crusoe**

#### **Economics/ Dignity of labour**

Robinson Crusoe's experiences are favourite themes with political economists, few wants he has to satisfy and his different modes of human labor, his prayers are a source of pleasure to him.

**Karl Marx:** calls Crusoe a true born Briton (keeps a set of books, production and consumption, utilitarian)

For Marx, man and his universe are the products of work. Marx's political idea was designed with the idea that human labour under changed conditions could undo the

contemporary estrangements of most men from their labour and recreates a society where all economic activities would increase each individual's moral stature.

Samuel Smiles (Scottish reformer) was also trying to persuade us that hard work even in the present state society is the key to all. All these and many others -educationalists, moralists, social and political reformers, economic theorists seem to base themselves upon a dogma or belief which finds its supreme narrative realisation on Crusoe's island.

***A man as capable of redemption only through untiring labour, or through economic pursuits.***

For all the ailments of men and his society, Defoe confidently prescribes the therapy of work/labor. The dignity of labor is the central creed of the religion of capitalism. In this religion Marx figures as the arch-schismatic

( strong disagreement with an organisation especially religion which divides people into groups). In Moore's Utopia (1516) hours of work are limited to six hours, and all surplus production are redistributed in the form of extra holidays. For Crusoe, hard work seems to be a condition of life itself and we notice that the arrival of Friday is not a increased leisure, but for expanded production. Labour is both the most valuable form of human activity (modern view). Defoe embodies in the same story two historically associated aspirations of the ***middle class/ bourgeois class*** with whom he and his hero have long and justly identified. In the seventeenth century a middle industrious middle class had come to existence, able to read and anxious to read not only about the love of princes and princesses, but about themselves and the details of their humdrum lives. Therefore, prose had fitted itself to express the facts of life rather than the poetry.

As we read Robinson Crusoe, we forget that isolation can be painful or boring. Instead, they rejoice to find that isolation can be the beginning of a new realisation of the potentialities of the *individual (radical individualism<sup>3</sup>)*. Crusoe is not actually a primitive or a proletarian or even a professional man, but a capitalist. He owns, freehold, an estate which is rich, though unimproved. It is not a desert island in the geographical sense, it is merely barren of owners or competitors.

Speculative reward of ***adventurer's capitalism*** to the uneventful though regular, increment which are typical of the modern economic order, and after Crusoe leaves the island he again succumbs to the lure of the foreign trade which at that time gave the highest and quickest returns on capital.

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<sup>3</sup> moral worth of the individual, Rousseau- author of Emile(1762)

On the desolate island, Crusoe shows the diligence combined with accurate planning and stocktaking which is so important in modern economic organization. Crusoe's island of despair which is actually a utopia though of a new and particular kind. Crusoe, in fact has been stranded in the utopia of the Protestant ethic. On Crusoe's island, unremitting toil is obligatory; there and only there it is instinct with both moral and calculable personal reward. Crusoe is an economic man, a strict utilitarian and a capitalist.

In *Emile* (1762), Rousseau hailed it as 'a complete treatise on natural education', a fable of development that could teach to perfection the place of humanity in nature.

- The hero, alone on his island, deprived of all the assistance from his fellows, and nevertheless able to look after himself is obviously a figure that enthral readers of all ages. The book's consequent entertainment value lies in its moral and philosophical teachings.

### **The Providence Tradition/ Spiritual Biography**

-J.Paul Hunter (The Reluctant Pilgrim,1966)

The providence literature reflects the pattern of Christian experience central to the Puritan<sup>4</sup> myth. Defoe had himself written in the providence tradition and had showed himself familiar with its ideas and conventions: "*to preserve the remembrance of divine vengeance*". In the storm: Defoe interprets a spectacular storm as a judgement upon the sins of England, he uses a similar theme in the *Journal of the Plague Year*, also related to Providence tradition.

. Meanings are given to stories of physical and spiritual castaways in the Providence tradition. Unlike, the travel tradition, the providence tradition focuses upon the strange and surprising aspects of these events and interprets them within a religious and philosophical framework which invests them with important meanings.

R.Crusoe is not adequately defined as a providence book any more than a youth guide, but in its way of interpreting events according to a thematic scheme and its organising pattern, R.Crusoe relies upon providence tradition literature in a manner which Defoe

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<sup>4</sup> a member of a Protestant group of Christians in England(16th-17th C) who wanted to worship God in a simple way.

could expect his contemporaries to recognize. The imagination which gave birth to Robinson Crusoe and which generated a new set of possibilities in prose fiction was steeped in the theological moral tradition and was trained in the habitual patterns of the Puritan mind.

Defoe follows the way of *spiritual biography* in depicting adventures which are at most dramatic and specifically related to the basic pattern of his subject's life, and Defoe does tell us of Crusoe's early life insofar as it is related to the pattern which emerges later in his life.

### **Back to Nature**

She is only the giver of drought and water, man must be reduced to a struggling, life-preserving animal, and God is like a magistrate. Each adventure of ours is a pursuit of information upon these cardinal points of perspective: **God, Man, Nature**.

Robinson thinks of God, *'sometimes it would expostulate with myself, why providence should thus completely ruin its creatures...'*

Mean < **middle state** > great

Nature covers the many and varied forms of primitivism, of revulsion from the contemporary complexities of civilization into a simpler and more natural order. The most desolate island cannot retain its natural order whenever the white man brings his rational technology, there can only be manmade order, and the jungle itself must succumb to the irresistible teleology<sup>5</sup> of capitalism.

Crusoe seems to have become a kind of **culture hero** representing all three of these related but not wholly congruent ideas.

### Conclusion

Robinson Crusoe presents a monitory image of the ultimate consequences of absolute individualism. But this tendency, like all extreme tendencies, soon provoked a reaction. As soon as man's aloneness was forced on the attention of mankind, the close and complex nature of the individual dependence on society, which had been taken for granted until it was challenged by individualism, began to receive much more detailed analysis. Man's essentially social nature, for instance, became one of the main topics of

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<sup>5</sup> A theory that events and developments are meant to achieve a purpose and happen because of that.

the eighteenth-century philosopher. Defoe's story is perhaps not a novel in the usual sense since it deals a little with personal relations. But it is appropriate that the tradition of the novel should begin with a work that annihilated the relationships of the traditional social order, and thus drew attention to the opportunity and the need of building up a network of personal relationships on a new and conscious pattern; the terms of the problem of the novel and of modern thought alike were established when the old order of moral and social relationships was shipwrecked, with Robinson Crusoe, by the rising tide of individualism.

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Suggested readings

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