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Rising and the pioneers of English novels

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Abstract

Comparing with other literary genres such as Poetry and Drama, Novel is very much new to English literature. This genre of writing started with the eighteenth century but greatly flourished in English literature after mid eighteenth century with the advancement of writers like Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne which generally considered as leading figures of English novels. This paper deals with the contributions of these masters in the development of this new literary genre known as 'Novel' and why they famously known as "Four wheels of English novels".

Keywords: Novel, eighteenth century, samuel richardson, henry fielding, tobias smollett and laurence sterne

Introduction

The English novel, destined to become most popular and prolific of all English literary forms, first fully emerged in the eighteenth century ^[1]. In the eighteenth century the years after the forties witnessed a wonderful efflorescence of a new literary genre (novel) which was soon to establish itself for all times to come as the dominant English literary form ^[2]. One of the chief reasons for the flourishing of this new genre was that in eighteenth century the spread of education and the appearance of newspapers and magazines led to an immense increase in the number of readers ^[3]. The decline of drama in the eighteenth century was also partly responsible for the rise and the ascendancy of the novel. The poetry of the age too—except for the brilliant example of Pope's work—was in a stage of decadence. It was then natural that from ashes of the drama should rise the Phoenix-like shape of a new literary genre. This new genre was 'The Novel' ^[4].

The term "Novel" is applied to a great variety of writings that have in common only the attribute of being extended works of fiction written in prose. As an extended narrative, the novel is distinguished from the short story and from the work of middle length called the novelette; its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot, ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of characters and motives than do the shorter, more concentration modes ^[5]. Although, including the seventeenth century character (a brief sketch of a typical personality or way of life) and Madame de La Fayette's psychologically complex study of character, *La Princesse de Cleves* 1678—what is recognizably the novel as we now think of it appeared in England in the early eighteenth century ^[6]. But it is safe to say that, until the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740, no true novel had appeared in any literature. By true novel it means simply a work of fiction which relates the story of plain human life, under stress of emotions, which depends for its truth to nature ^[7]. According to Bradbury, the novel "is a complex structure by virtue of

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¹ David Daiches; *A critical history of English literature Vol- 2nd*; supernova publishers; 700.

² Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 299.

³ William J. Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 345.

⁴ Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 300.

⁵ MH Abrams and GG Harpham; *A glossary of literary terms*; Cengage learning publishers; 10th edition; 252.

⁶ MH Abrams and GG Harpham; *A glossary of literary terms*; Cengage learning publishers; 10th edition; 253.

⁷ William J Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 344.

its scale, prose-character and matter.” This, he concedes, does not yield a structural typology but ‘still, if there is no necessary structure, almost any fictional structure must necessarily consist of certain things-Primarily a chain of Interlinked events, unified persuasive discourse and by those Materials in life which transliterated as discourse, take on for the author the character of interconnectedness^[8]. Before Richardson's *Pamela*, in 1719, Daniel Defoe wrote ‘*Robinson Crusoe*’ and in 1722, ‘*Moll Flanders*’. Both of these are still Picaresque in type in the sense that their structure in episodic rather than in the organised form of a plot while *Moll* is herself a colourful female version of old picaro-” twelve years a whore, five times a wife, twelve years a thief, eight years a transported felon in Virginia” as the title page resoundingly informs us^[9]. Whether Defoe was “properly” a novelist is a matter of definition of terms. Defoe’s interest in character was minimal and the novel only grew up when it learned to combine Defoe’s sense of the complexities of human personality and of the tensions between private moral and public social forces between morality and gentility with the novels of Samuel Richardson we first find this combination^[10]. Thus, to Richardson belongs the credit of writing the first Modern Novel.

Between 1740 and 1800, hundreds of novels of all kinds were written. However, the real “masters” Of the novel in the eighteenth century were four namely- Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne^[11]. Which are generally known as “four wheels of English Novel”. The rest of them were extremely inferior to them. Oliver Elton maintains, “The work of the four masters stands high, but the foothills are low”^[12]. These masters have their own unique style and technique with many different feature in their plot making.

The very first name that comes in the series of Leaders of Novelists is Samuel Richardson. Richardson’s works are largely the reflection of the man himself, and, inspite of their faults and limitation, are of immense importance in the development of the novel^[13]. Richardson was a prosperous London printer, who discovered his talent as a novelist at the age of fifty-one when he was in the process of compiling a volume of letters designed to serve as models for humble people not sufficiently educated to be able to write easily and confidently on those occasions when letters might be called for^[14]. This practice afterward stood him in good stead. He was over fifty years old before he printed a novel of his own called ‘*Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*’^[15]. It was in the Epistolary manner i.e. the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters^[16]. In this novel, Richardson narrated the career of a rustic lady’s maid who guards her

honour against the advances of her dissolute master who in the end marries her and is reformed. ‘*Pamela*’ was followed by ‘*Clarissa Harlowe*’ (1747-48) in eight volumes. It was again of the epistolary kind. Richardson third and the last novel was ‘*Sir Charles Grandison*’ (1754). The hero is a model Christian gentleman very scrupulous in his love affairs^[17].

Notwithstanding his tedious moralising, Richardson in these three books gave something entirely new to the literary world and the world appreciated gift^[18]. Richardson’s greatest ability lies in characterization. His psychological insight into human motives and feelings, and particularly his understanding of the feminine heart, has seldom been surpassed since his day. Part of Richardson’s importance in the history of the novel lies in his introduction of characters of the lower-middle classes, whom he portrayed with great accuracy^[19].

The second great master in the history of the English novel is Henry Fielding. Fielding was the greatest of this new group of novel writers and one of the most artistic that English literature has produced^[20]. Sir Edmund Gosse comments “Richardson the first English novelist” and Fielding, “the greatest of English novelist”^[21]. Like Richardson, Fielding had a genius for sounding the emotions of human heart, but his methods are different. Richardson pores over human weaknesses with puckered brow and with may a sigh; Fielding looks, laughs, and passes on. He doesn’t seek to analyse or over-refine; and so his characters possess a breath, humanity and attraction denied to Richardson’s. Even a sneaking rogue like Blifil in *Tom Jones* has a Shakespearean roundness of contour that keeps him from being quite revolting^[22].

Fielding’s first novel, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), was inspired by the success of *Pamela*, and began as a Burlesque- “an incongruous imitation”, that is it imitates the manner (the form and style) or else the subject matter of a series literary work or literary genre, but makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between manner and matter^[23], of false sentimentality and the conversational virtues of Richardson’s heroine^[24]. Fielding’s later novels are *Jonathan Wild*, the story of a rogue, which suggests Defoe’s narrative; *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), his best work; and *Amelia* (1751); the story of a good wife in content with an unworthy husband^[25]. Fielding’s moral code is thus no profounder than Richardson’s though later readers have found it the more attractive^[26].

Along with Richardson and Fielding, Tobias Smollett is generally included among the masters of eighteenth century novel^[27]. Tobias Smollett was content to work in the

⁸ David Lodge; *The novelist at the crossroads*; Routledge and Kegan Paul London; 56.

⁹ MH Abrams and GG Harpham; *A glossary of literary terms*; Cengage learning publishers; 10th edition; 253.

¹⁰ David Daiches; *A critical history of English literature Vol- 2nd*; supernova publishers; 701.

¹¹ Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 301.

¹² Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 301.

¹³ Edward Albert; *History of English literature*; Oxford University press; 5th edition, 244.

¹⁴ David Daiches; *A critical history of English literature Vol- 2nd*; supernova publishers; 702.

¹⁵ Edward Albert; *History of English literature*; Oxford University press; 5th edition, 224.

¹⁶ MH Abrams and GG Harpham; *A glossary of literary terms*; Cengage learning publishers; 10th edition; 254.

¹⁷ Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 301.

¹⁸ William J Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 353.

¹⁹ Edward Albert; *History of English literature*; Oxford University press; 5th edition, 225.

²⁰ William J Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 353.

²¹ Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 301.

²² Edward Albert; *History of English literature*; Oxford University press; 5th edition, 277.

²³ MH Abrams and GG Harpham; *A glossary of literary terms*; Cengage learning publishers; 10th edition; 37.

²⁴ William J Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 353-354.

²⁵ William J Long; *English literature*; Maple press; 354.

²⁶ David Daiches; *A critical history of English literature Vol- 2nd*; supernova publishers; 717.

²⁷ Dr. T Singh; *A history of English literature*; student store publishers; 19th edition; 303.

picaresque tradition in a typical story concerns the escapades of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits and shows little if any alternation of character through a long succession of adventures ^[28] and he takes a hero through a series of violent, brawling adventures on land and sea in the course of which he could render with vigorous realism aspects the social life of his time ^[29] for example his three best known works are Roderick Random(1748); Peregrine Pickle (1751) and Humphrey Clinker present a series of adventures related by the hero; brutal directness the worst of his experiences at sea and recounting the mild adventure of a Welsh family in a journey through England and Scotland, respectively ^[30].

Smollett, however brings variety into his novels by endless shifting of the scenes, which cover many portion of the globe by his wide knowledge and acute perception of local manners and customs and by his use of a plain and vigorous narrative style. His characters, especially his female characters, are crudely managed, but his naval man comprising Commodore Trunnion, Lieutenant Hatchway and Boatswain pipes, form a quite a considerable gallery of figure ^[31]. Englishman novelists to introduced the naval type ^[32].

The last and the fourth wheel in the group of “four wheels of English Novelist” is Laurence Sterne. Laurence Sterne (1713-1768) was an although more original figure ^[33]. His two novels ‘The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy’ and ‘A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy’ are unique in English literature, they are made up of Sterne’s peculiar blend of pathos and humour and though the pathos is sometimes overdone to the point of becoming offensively sentimental the humour is subtle and intellectual and constantly surprises by the unusual form in which it is found ^[34]. His ‘Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy’ was published in the nine volumes between 1759-1767, revealed a wholly new concept of form in fiction ^[35]. Hudson described it as "the strange work of a very strange man" If this work can be called a novel it is one of its own kind, without predecessors and without successors ^[36]. Sterne's characters are minutely delineated with a striking appreciation of the value of gesture and expression as guides to personality. There is little story in these works but they are written in a delicate, digressive style admirably suited to their subject matter ^[37].

Thus the Eighteenth century is known in the history of the English literature particularly for the birth and development of the novel. In this century the novel threw into insignificance all other literary form and become the

dominant form to continue as such for hundreds of years. The work of this foursome- Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, is of the monumental significance, particularly because they were not only first novelist but also the best. No doubt the seeds of the novel were already there in the English literary soil but they burgeoned only with the arrival of these master ^[38].

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³⁶ Dr. T Singh; A history of English literature; student store publishers; 19th edition; 303.

³⁷ Edward Albert; History of English literature; Oxford University press; 5th edition, 281.

³⁸ Dr. T Singh; A history of English literature; student store publishers; 19th edition; 305.