

## **Novel In 18 TH Century- A New Taste of Literary Climate**

**Dr. Shikha Shukla**

*Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities,  
Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Technical University, Lucknow*

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**Abstract:** 18<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as the age of prose and reason and it is remarkable for the development of new kind of taste in literary climate and the changed temperament of the people. The age was remarkable for the great social and political controversies and the growth of science and technology. This new scientific and technological growth made the sensibility of the people critical analytical and rational.

**Keywords:** Romantic extravagance, penetrative representation of life, analytical and critical temperament, tendency towards realism.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

18<sup>th</sup> century is that very period in the history of English literature where the prose, the satire and the novel got the fertile ground for their development. It is the rich flowering time of the modern novel. It is said that the drama grew as the romance of chivalry declined and the novel grew as the drama declined. Raleigh has very aptly remarked, "It was the decline of the drama during the earlier part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that made way for the novel."<sup>1</sup>

18<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as the age of prose and reason and it is remarkable for the development of new kind of literary taste and climate that changed the temperament of the people. The age was remarkable for the great social and political controversies and the growth of science and technology. This new scientific and technological growth made the sensibility of the people critical analytical and rational. It was remarkable for the social and political awakening and the circulation of literature was also increased with the spread of consciousness, education and the greater mobility of the people. There was a sizable number of reading public which demanded the exchange and the expression of the views freely and frankly and the literature was the only vehicle for the expression of the same. But at the same time it is to be noted that the new rising middle class which was educated, cultured and cultivated and was interested in reading was a very busy and practically minded class. It had very little to do with the flights of fancy play of the wits and the appreciation for the emotional outburst, romantic extravagance and the heighten of imaginative sensibility. This new class of reader, because it was practically minded therefore, it wanted to be direct, to the point and the logical expression of the thoughts and feelings.

In other words we can say the new sensibility of the age was favorable only to the logical and rational and the realistic expression of the feelings and thoughts. The new trend was much and much for the plain, direct, natural, to the point and realistic expression without indulging in the play of wit and tendency of decorative and the figurative expression was on the vein. This growing tendency towards realism was pushing the people more and more towards the more natural, livelier, more realistic but more penetrative representation of life. The analytical and critical temperament produced by industrial revolution and scientific and technological growth was demanding things more specific and they wanted literature to be more close to human life and to its problems. The rise of the novel was a result of the democratic movement. The spread of education increased the number of readers. The appearance of newspapers and magazines developed the habit of reading. New prose style and decline of drama these things made way for the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel.

Gone were the days when there was a craze for drama and the dramatic romances in 17<sup>th</sup> century. During Restoration period drama became unnatural, artificial and immoral and was taking its last breath. People were fed up with drama because drama no longer remained the vehicle of mirroring the real wishes, expectations, feelings, emotions and the thoughts of common men and it had also lost its depth and its grounding in the very human nature. During Elizabethan period the real popularity of drama was that under the influence of the Renaissance it was painting the world of fashion, human energy and insatiable ambition and spirit of adventure. The Restoration drama only became the means of catering the cheap taste of the sensuous pleasure loving courtiers and courtly circle.

By this time periodical essay had already announced its arrival on the scene and the creators of this periodical essay, Addison and Steele successfully felt the pulse of the time and they were able to perceive the

new trends developing in the taste and temperament of the people. They started writing “The coverley papers” which were published with the twin purpose of providing entertainment as well as prescribed improvements in the social, political and ethical standards of the people. They can be called the precursors of novel. They wrote in such flexible prose style and in a natural way of speaking the conversational ease and lucid narrative skill paved the way for such novelist like Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.

It was during this age such writers like Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne attempted this new branch of literature and try to put a foundation for fiction. The real beginning in the field of novel is made with **Daniel Defoe**. Though he was a journalist but he turned to fiction when he was nearly sixty and his world famous *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719. This novel is regarded as the first flower of realism. With great verisimilitude he details the adventure of Alexander Selkirk marooned on an island. The facts are purely imaginary, though Defoe’s art does not make it appear so. 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.

He interpreted the likes and interests of the emerging middle class and depicted the 18<sup>th</sup> century world. De Foe’s characters are common men and women with whom his middle-class readers could identify them. 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.

In his *Captain Singleton* (1720), he set out to show life as it is. He interpreted the likes and interests of the emerging middle class and depicted the 18<sup>th</sup> century world. De Foe’s characters are common men and women with whom his middle-class readers could identify them. 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.

**Samuel Richardson** began his career as a novelist with the publication of his “*Pamela*”, although he was a novelist but even then he was also taking the cause of improvements of civic and ethical standards of the people the main aim of Richardson behind writing the novels is to keep the young people away from the life of pomp and show and to promote the cause of religion and virtue (Saints bury). Thus he seeks to achieve by presenting the models of virtue.

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.

*Pamela* and *Clarissa* are the models of feminine virtue which sir Charles Grolinson represent the masculine virtue. It is the cause of virtue and morality that Richardson takes *prima-facie*, Dr Johnson is very much correct to point out-“he has enlarge the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at command of virtue”<sup>2</sup>

The same learned critic argues about Richardson-“if you were to read, Richardson for the story, your patience would be so much fretted that you will hang yourself. But you must read it for the sentiment and consider the story only as giving occasion to sentiment”<sup>3</sup>.

This is drawback of Richardson that they are too much sentimentalist and in them sentiments is overelaborated and intolerably kept at the length. More ever Richardson rights within the confined range as he lacks the psychological grasp of certain classes, specially the upper-class. His characters belonging to the same class are weak, artificial and unnatural.

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.

Another important novelist of this period is **Tobias Smollett** who wrote certain popular novels like *Roderick random* and *humphry clinker* etc in picaresque tradition. Picaresque novel is a union of intrigue and adventure. The novel of this tradition is full of this intrigue and adventure to which the unity is provided by the

central figure, the hero. It is because of this reason that the plots of Smollet are extremely loose in construction. More over all the novels of Smollet depict only the sea-life and in opposition to Richardson the novels of Smollet are grossly obscene. However the contribution of Smollet and to the novel is that he widened the scope of the English novel. Richardson had confined the novel within a very narrow space and it is only Smollet who "brings within the scope of the novel not only the Scotland and vales but also foreign European countries and even transatlantic scenery (saints bury).

**Jonathon 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.

**Lawrence Sterne** wrote *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. He is the first impressionist in English literature and a precursor of the stream of consciousness novelists like James Joyce. He revolted against the massive sense of proportion imposed on the novel by Fielding. An experiment of a radical and seminal kind is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), which, drawing on a tradition of learned wit from Erasmus and Rabelais to Burton and Swift, provides a brilliant comic critique of the progress of the English novel to date

**Henry Fielding** has the remarkable achievement as a novelist in 18th century. Fielding wrote when the age had brought him rich experience of life and maturity. He shows the tendency towards realism and for the first time we find greater flexibility in his character he has been bitterly criticized as the breaker of the traditional morality and his novels are severely criticized as obscene. But fielding takes the aim of awakening the social conscience against the hypocrisy he puts forward that the minor lapses in our life can be forgiven. The greatest lapses are to be found in the people who have the cover of morality and respectability. Fielding did not idealize his characters like Richardson, on the other hand he presents them with the human beings of flesh and blood.

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.

*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

In this way we note the following things in the novels of 18th century-

The novel was based on drama. Dominance of action adventure and stress on the characterization were the dramatic characteristics that shaped the novel of 18 century.

Lack of coherent plot and the psycho analysis the very characteristic of novel is absent during this period.

Loose plot construction and weak organic unity is the deplorable laps of novels of this period.

It is because that the novels of this period touch the human life at surface so they show their infancy during this period because the novel of 18 century was yet to achieve the minuteshrewd and close exploration of the human heart minded and thought.

But even then we cannot deny the fact that 18 th century is that very period in which this new branch of literature comes into fashion and real as well as sincere efforts were taking during this period to put this plants on solid footing. Thus in 18th century novel reached at its climax. Summing up the contribution of the four wheels of the novel Rickett says "Richardson has given sentimentality, Fielding humour, Smollett liveliness".<sup>4</sup>

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