

The Rise of the Novel (I)

Defoe, Richardson, Fielding

The Novel = the Genre of the Bourgeoisie

- A stable government, a growing empire, material prosperity, individualism.
- Rise of the Middle Class: **the new man «the bourgeois»** seeks profits all over the world → wealthy merchant class controls trades.
- The Middle Class encourages the development of the Industrial Revolution
- The novel is the literary genre of the rising bourgeoisie → shows its values. Novelists and reading public share the same interests and values.
- **Hegel**: the novel is the **epic** of a **prosaic middle-class** world

Romance vs Novel

- **Congreve**, in the Preface of *Incognita* (1691, “novel”), writes:

Romances talk about Kings and Queens, heroes, miraculous events, magic and impossible enterprises told in an elevated language.

Novels are close to readers: they might tell of unusual/curious events but these belong to **our world** → **verisimilitude**.

The Lesson of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*

- *Don Quixote* is an example for English novelists: it shows how the world of the romance was in conflict with the real world.
- Story of a knight who still believes in chivalric values and travels around with his servant in search of noble deeds to fight for. His enemies = windmills. His lady, symbol of courtly love = a vulgar peasant woman. Don Quixote appears ridiculous because he sees ghosts of a past that does not exist any longer. He has read too many romances.

The Realist Novel

- **Author** and **public** share the **same world**
- It tells of common life in **ordinary speech**
- Stories are invented (**fiction**), but could be true, they are realistic:
- In Defoe's frontispiece of *Robinson Crusoe*, the author pretends his protagonist is real: "This is the story of... **written by the protagonist himself**"; Richardson says he is the editor of Pamela's letters, the heroine of his epistolary novel.
- Use of **first person narrator** in the first novels

Original Frontispiece



THE
L I F E
AND
STRANGE SURPRIZING
ADVENTURES

OF
ROBINSON CRUSOE,
Of *TORK*, MARINER:

Who lived Eight and Twenty Years,
all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the
Coast of *AMERICA*, near the Mouth of
the Great River of *OROONOQUE*;

Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, where-
in all the Men perished but himself.

WITH
An Account how he was at last as strangely deli-
ver'd by *PYRATES*.

Written by Himself.

L O N D O N:
Printed for *W. TAYLOR* at the *Ship* in *Pater-Noster-*
Row. *MDCCLXIX.*

Reading Public

- The stories of novels promote the values of the Middle Class → **exemplary stories but also entertaining.**
- Puritan values in the first novels: Defoe and Richardson
- A novel was generally in 3 volumes and was expensive. → circulating libraries
- Men had little time for reading, but women (upper-middle class ones and their maids) did have time.

Mikhail Bakhtin (critic)

- *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), includes 4 essays on the novel written in the 1940s; the first one is entitled Epic and Novel.
- “The novel is a contemporary form constantly renewing itself in response to the transformations taking place in the modern world: **a genre in becoming** and therefore **always incomplete**”.

Ian Watt (critic)

- *The Rise of the Novel* (1957): underlines the connection between rise of the novel and rise of the middle class → they reflect the same **economic and psychological individualism**. Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders (and also Richardson's Pamela) show this.
- **Defoe** and **Richardson** belong to the Middle Class → Puritan values
- **Fielding** is from a higher class, Justice of the peace, playwright → different view and style.

Daniel Defoe 1660-1731

- A lot of jobs before becoming a novelist in 1719: merchant, well-travelled, works for a politician to gather information (agent), journalist, writes many treatises and pamphlets.
- Dissenters = dissented from the Anglican Church = Protestants → *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, pamphlet (ironically promoting the suppression of anybody who dissented)

Defoe and the Ethos of Capitalism

- He promotes the values of the Middle Class and the ethos of capitalism, both in his essays and novels → absolute value given to competition and merit, to enterprising spirit; right of the people to rebel against an unjust ruler and overthrow hierarchy and privilege, to recreate a new order (with merchants' values at its heart)
- He said : “The man is not rich because he is honest, is honest because he is rich” (Puritan way → poverty is a sin)

Robinson Crusoe (1719)

- The quintessential *Homo Economicus*, defined entirely by his properties.
- He removes everything he can from the ship before it sinks → inventories of his possessions, lists of objects he owns . He is what he owns.
- A “true” story → inspired by Scotsman Alexander Selkirk .
- Robinson’s autobiography refers to a genre in Protestant literature: **the biographical account serving as a lesson and a warning.**

Language

- Language of journalism and preachers → appealing to a public of merchants and craftsmen. Idiom of the people, liveliness of spoken language, concreteness of speech the choice of words that potential readers want to read. This is a long way from the language of romance.

Robinson's «civilisation»

- He recreates his world on the island, the conditions he recognises as civilisation. He has some **capital** (what he has saved from the shipwreck), his **enterprising** spirit
→ epitome of the Middle Class.
- Religious overtones. Robinson has rebelled against paternal authority. He has been punished, but God has also offered him the chance of salvation. A trial he must undergo.
- Determination, discipline, courage lead him to success
→ he not only survives but thrives. He goes back home as a rich and honourable man

Themes

- 28 years on a desert island. 12 years in solitude but he remains unchanged. No psychological insight.
- Encounter with an indigenous man, that Robinson rescues from his cannibal enemies and names Friday
- Postcolonial view of the novel
- Imperialism

A Middle-class Hero

- The desert island is a perfect place to show his qualities and demonstrate that he deserved to be saved by God's Providence.
- Robinson organizes a «primitive» empire → he becomes the prototype of the British colonizer: his stay is not a return to nature but a chance to exploit and dominate nature.
- The life Robinson creates on the island is not an alternative to the English one but an exaltation of 18th century England and its ideals of mobility, material productiveness and individualism.

The Description of Friday

- “He was a comely (attraente) handsome fellow, perfectly well made; with straight strong limbs, not too large; tall and well shaped, and, as I reckon, about twenty-six years of age. He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly (scontroso) aspect; but seemed to have something very manly in his face, and yet **he had all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance** too, especially when he smiled. **His hair was long and black, not curled like wool**; his forehead very high and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. **The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny (bruno)**; and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the Brasilians, and Virginians, and other natives of America are; but of a bright kind of dun (opaco) olive colour. [...] **His nose was small not flat like the negroes [...]**”

Naming

- “He came running to me, laying himself down upon the ground , with all possible signs of a humble thankful disposition, [...]. At last **he lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head**, as he had done before; and after this, **made all the signs of subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable**, to let me know how he would serve me as long as he lived.” [...]
- “**I made him know his name should be Friday**, which was the day I saved his life. I called him so for the memory of the time. I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my name; I likewise taught him to say yes and no, and to know the meaning of them [...].”

Importance of naming

- Naming = creating
- *Genesis*, 1
- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.
- Baptism

Genesis 1.26-28

- Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, **so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,**[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
- So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and **subdue** it: and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Moll Flanders (1722)

- **Picaresque novel.** (From Spanish «pícaro», briccone, furfante. First *novela* of this kind: *Lazarillo de Tormes*, by an anonymous author 1554). It is an autobiographical account of the life and adventures of a person of the lower classes, generally an orphan, in a hostile world.
- It is also influenced by the Elizabethan lowlife tale. The *Unfortunate Traveller* by Thomas Nashe (1594).
- In England it turned into the adventures «on the road» of a character (parts of Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrew*).

Moll Flanders' Frontispiece

- “The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, & c. Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore* Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Years a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Years a Thief, Eight Years a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums.” *score = a group of 20

Robinson vs Moll

- Robinson shows what a brave shipwrecked bourgeois can do on a desert island. But what can a poor girl do in a metropolis, in the bourgeois world where money is the measure of everything?
- Moll = a woman **constrained** by **necessity** to a life of crime and sinfulness. She becomes a thief and a prostitute but concludes with freedom and prosperity. Implausible plot but enormous **commercial success** of the book. Her **final repentance** works in her favour.

Robinson vs Moll

- Moll rejects emotional experience seen in Puritan terms as an impediment to the rational accumulation of **capital** and the social definition (status) that this implies.
- In a way, **Moll is Crusoe's female counterpart**: like Crusoe's, her reflections have an economic basis and are carried on in strict logical sequences. Rudimentary psychology.

Social mobility

- **Richardson** deals with it in a different way. **Pamela** marries her aristocratic master.
- Moll uses all she has (her beauty and her body) to survive. She uses her body as a labourer uses his arms. It is all she has, her **capital** (as for Robinson the remains of the shipwreck).
- Defoe believed in the principle of **male and female equality** → Moll's behaviour enables her not to become the permanent property of a man.

Moll = Robinson's female counterpart?

- She has many of the traits that are regarded as middle class: she is obsessed with gentility and keeping up appearances, she is characterized by restless individualism, she regards poverty as a sin, she prefers theft to being poor.
- Her main aims are self-assertion and material benefit.
- She wonders why Providence can have been so kind to her, then leaves “the reader to improve these thoughts”. Robinson, too, asked himself a similar question and then said “the ways of Providence are inscrutable”.

Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress (1724)

- She does not start from the same miserable condition as Moll. Married to a rich gentleman who loses his fortune and deserts her. She becomes a prostitute from necessity but then continues to practice her profession even when she is not in need any longer.
- No faith in gentlemanly behaviour or generosity: she understands she has to provide for herself. She even refuses to marry a rich nobleman not to lose her financial independence. She does not want to become a man's property.