

The Rise of the English Novel

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18^t century English Novel Defined

- *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt, 1957.
- Characteristics of the Novel: Realism
 - 1) Realistic Characters; “primary criterion was truth to individual experience”; Character Names, rather than Types
 - 2) Particular circumstances rather than universal
 - a) particularized setting; Time and Place
 - b) plot that unfolds in causal manner
 - 3) Referential rather than ornamental use of language: descriptive and denotative rather than poetic

Growing, but Limited Reading Public (Watt)

- Early 18th century: 43,000 copies of newspapers sold weekly
- 1753, 120,000 newspapers weekly; increase of 300%
- Many people read the same copy; according to Addison and Steele, 20 per copy
- At most, half a million out of a population of 6 million were regular readers; 1/12.
- Three fourths of the poor could not read at all

Growth in Printing

- “In 1724: 70 presses in London
- 1757: 150-200 Presses; which matches the growth in the reading market
- Estimated growth in annual publication of new books was fourfold.
- By 1780s there were many street shop signs with words rather than just symbols

Education and Literacy

- Lower class children left school by age 6, if they attended at all
- Schools cost 2-6 penny/wk.
- Charity schools taught little 3Rs
- Bernard Mandeville, “Essays on Charity and Charity Schools,” 1728: “Reading, writing and arithmetic, are ... very pernicious to the Poor...Men who are to remain and end their days in laborious, tiresome and painful station of life, the sooner they are put upon it at first, the more patiently they’ll submit to it for ever after.”

Cost of Books

- Average salaries:
- Laborer: 10 shilling/wk
- Skilled Journeyman: 1 pound/wk
- Freeholder farmer: 1 pound/wk
- Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad*, 6 guineas (little more than 6 pounds) – Enough for a poor family to live on for a year
- Cost of a novel: more than an average workers weekly salary!
- Ballads = penny
- Pamphlets = threepence to a shilling
- Newspapers = one penny

Libraries!

- Spread of libraries occurs after 1740
- Within a decade there are 8 libraries in London
- Subscription cost: half a guinea to a guinea year
- Or, one penny a volume
- Novels were the preferred stock in libraries
- Women were the primary clients

Change in Readership and Patronage

- Rise of Manufactured goods meant more leisure for middle class women: no need to spin, weave, make bread, beer, candles and soap.
- Change in taste: Novel satisfied this demand
- No longer were writers patronized by Aristocracy: book sellers controlled the market
- Speed and volume were rewarded by booksellers
- Prose replaced verse
- Less learned readers wanted to be entertained; didn't care about classics; Wanted something NEW

Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, 1722

- Autobiographical Confession of a female thief and prostitute and worse
- Similar to criminal biographies sold at the gallows
- Born to a woman convicted of theft; abandoned her to go to America as an Indentured Servant
- In Newgate, in fear of gallows, she repents
- Journeys to America herself as a servant
- Moral Fable of Redemption

Moll And Women

- Young ladies in service and young gentlewomen readers:
- 1) One of the first female protagonists of literature who could be a “real” woman
- 2) How love and money are intertwined. The Age of Reason was also the Age of Laissez-Faire Business, and even sex and love had a price
- 3) The story of Moll is one that women knew could be their fate if they were not prudent.

William Hogarth: A Harlot's Progress



Moll in Bridewell Prison



Moll Dead at 23



Moll as a Sympathetic Character

Abandoned by her mother at a young age
Taken up as a charity case; assigned to a woman to raise

When old enough—8 years old—
she would be apprenticed to earn her keep

When her benefactor dies at 13, Moll gets
taken into a wealthy home as a maid

Highlights the vulnerability of children and
lack of formal social safety network

Moll's Seduction and First Marriage

Lover encourages her to marry his younger brother:

"to remember the long Discourse you have had with me, and the many Hours pains you have taken to perswade me to believe myself an honest Woman, that I was your Wife intentionally, though not in the eye of the World, and that it was as effectual a Marriage that had pass'd between us as if we had been publicly Wedded by the Parson of the Parish." She realizes that if she marries the younger brother, she will have been nothing but a prostitute to the elder: "If I have been perswaded to believe that I am really, and in the Essence of the Thing your Wife, shall I now give the Lye to all those Arguments, and call myself your Whore, or Mistress, which is the same thing?"

Widowhood and Remarriage

Her husband dies and leaves her with a decent inheritance, making her an eligible widow

She marries a draper who spends her money and abandons her

She pretends to be wealthy; remarries a plantation owner from America; he turns out to be her half-brother

Lesson: marriage is the way to advance herself but men and women are often untruthful in courting.

Return to England and Marriage to a Banker

Moll reflects on her life and virtue: "how much happier a Life of Virtue and Sobriety is, than that which we call a Life of Pleasure."

But one of the lessons of the novel is that a life of virtue is possible only with some means: "While I liv'd thus," Moll says, "I was really a Penitent for all my Life pass'd, I look'd back on it with Abhorrence, and might truly be said to hate my self for it."

But Moll's moral position is always temporary and based on her circumstances. She will fall away from this moral stance later and turn to a life of prostitution and theft even.

From Prosperity to Poverty Again

Her banker husband loses his money in a bad investment and dies, leaving Moll poor yet again.

She becomes a thief: Wandering at night in London she see a package: "This was the Bait," she recounts, "and the Devil who...laid the Snare, as readily prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it, 'twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the Bundle; be quick; do it this Moment."

She takes the package and then feels remorse: "Horror of...Soul" and "Terror of Mind."

Newgate Prison

Eventually she is caught stealing and sent to prison: "'tis impossible to describe the terror of my mind, when I was first brought in, and when I look'd round upon all the horrors of that dismal Place: I look'd on myself as lost, and that I had nothing to think of, but of going out of the World, and that with the utmost Infamy; the hellish Noise, the Roaring, Swearing and Clamour, the Stench and Nastiness, and all the dreadful croud of Afflicting things that I saw there; joyn'd together to make the Place seem an Emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of Entrance into it."

True Repentence?

In prison, Moll seeks a penalty of transportation to America and says she has repented: "This may be thought inconsistent in it self, and wide from the Business of this Book; Particularly, I reflect that many of those who may be pleas'd and diverted with the Relation of the wild and wicked part of my Story, may not relish this, which is really the best part of my Life, the most Advantageous to myself, and the most instructive to others; such however will I hope allow me the liberty to make my Story compleat."

New Life in America

She goes to America with her 5th husband, Jemy, also a transported convict.

She discovers her half-brother and son, Humphrey, which she conceals from Jemy.

She secretly arranges with son to get inheritance from her Mother.

She conceals from son her latest marriage.

With inheritance, her and Jemy do well and start a plantation.

Summary

- While there are other novelistic traditions, the 18th century in England saw the origins of the Realistic Novel
- Unlike the literature of France and the art of the Rococo, it showed the full range of people as they are, not idealized, universal Types
- Interest in Social Issues
- Interest in the roles and challenges of women and the poor
- Realism of the Novel reflects the Realism of the English painter Hogarth
- Indicates to us that women of the middle class in the 18th century, as women today, were concerned with issues unique to women, children, and society at large