

RISE OF THE NOVEL

As distinct from long fictional narrative prior to *Pamela* (1740), by Samuel Richardson:

1. Referential use of concrete, descriptive language.
2. Particularity of time, place, and setting.
3. Individuality of characters.
4. More showing than telling, maximizing the illusion of real life.
5. Authenticity in the portrayal of human experience--the illusion of real life--created by evoking the immediacy of thought and experience.

The above is a definition of the novel made by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* (1962). More loosely defined, the novel is any extended fictional narrative, almost always in prose, in which character is represented. In most European countries the term *roman* is used rather than *novel*, linking the *novel* with the older *romance*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a distinction was often made between the *romance*--a long tale about the long ago and far away, or the improbable--and the novel, which is bound by the facts of the actual world and the laws of probability. Hawthorne makes this distinction in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). The *novel* is usually seen to have developed from the *novella*, a term applied to long tales by French and Italian writers, such as Boccaccio, in the 14th century. Some trace the novel further back, to ancient Greece, and to the *epic*. The *novelette* is a term applied to more realistic prose fiction written after the rise of the novel in the 18th century. This distinction is of concern mainly to scholars. In common usage *novella* and *novelette* are synonymous.

THE SHORT NOVEL, NOVELLA OR NOVELETTE

1. Fictional narrative of intermediate length, shorter than a novel, longer than a short story.
2. Compact structure like the short story.
3. More development of character, theme, and action than the short story.

REASONS FOR RISE OF THE NOVEL IN BRITAIN

1. The rise of a middle-class reading public, accelerated in the early 19th century by the Industrial Revolution. Increasing numbers of people, especially women, learned to read, became able to afford books, and attained sufficient leisure to read.
2. Advances in publishing gradually lowered the prices of books.
3. The advent and spread of circulating libraries.
4. Most important, the changing world view and tastes of the middle class. The novel became a popular expression of middle-class myths and mores, and a popular form of "instructive" entertainment. The first novelists were from the middle class and wrote for the middle class.

RISE OF THE NOVEL IN THE UNITED STATES

Samuel Richardson's moralistic *Pamela* (1740) was the first novel published in the United States. Benjamin Franklin, a shrewd judge of public taste, published a reprint of it in Philadelphia in 1744. Unlike the British, however, colonial Americans were generally apathetic or puritanically hostile toward novels. From 1744 to 1789, the year of the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* by William Hill Brown,

only 56 reprints of foreign novels were needed to satisfy the demand, and few read them except the educated gentry. After 1789 novel-reading began to increase in the United States, given impetus by the increase of popular circulating libraries such as the one founded in Philadelphia by Franklin. 20 editions of Richardson's novels were published between 1789 and 1800. They were the models for most of the nearly 100 American novels published from 1789 to 1820, about one third of which were written by women.

OBSTACLES TO THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN NOVEL

1. Pioneer conditions created an almost total preoccupation with practical affairs.
2. Colonial America was very dependent upon Mother England for literature, and there was a long cultural time-lag between English practice and American imitation.
3. Until the American Revolution, there was no stimulus of an American identity and viewpoint. Even for years *after* the Revolution, people were more loyal to their own regions or states than to a national concept of America.
4. There was no widespread audience for fiction as in England, no substantial middle class. Most Americans were hardworking farmers. Even by 1790 the entire population of the United States was less than the present population of metropolitan Philadelphia--only 3% of which was urban.
5. Before 1800 there were no publishers, only printers like Franklin, who profited by reprinting popular literature from abroad. They could do that because there was no International Copyright Law in the United States, which would have compelled printers to pay royalties to authors. The lack of such a law until 1891, the year Melville died, seriously stunted the growth of American literature. For why should a printer or publisher pay an unknown American author for a book that would probably lose money, when he could steal a popular book from a famous British writer such as Sir Walter Scott and pay no royalties?
6. American mass culture was dominated until the 20th century by the Puritan spirit of pious utilitarianism and censorship, according to which, in the 18th century, novel-reading was at best a waste of time and at worst a snare of Satan. Novels were said to be lies distorting the *facts* of life, making love too romantic and decent living too boring, undermining morality, religion and even democracy. American printers and editors were reluctant to print anything that might offend readers. Magazine writers were under strict censorship. When Henry Fielding's bawdy *Tom Jones* (1749) was finally reprinted in the United States, more than forty years after it was first published in England, it was scrupulously abridged. And when the first American novelists began to publish, they were greeted with a storm of censorious abuse from clergymen, politicians and concerned Christians.

Michael Hollister (2015)