

## The Rise of the English Novel: Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding's Contributions

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### Abstract

The emergence of the English novel in the eighteenth century represented a major shift in literature, moving away from poetry and drama toward prose fiction that examined personal experience and social conditions. This paper explores the foundational contributions of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, whose works helped shape the modern novel. Defoe's stories, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, introduced realistic narrative techniques and psychological depth, focusing on survival, morality, and individual initiative. Richardson's epistolary novels, including *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, emphasized emotional complexity and ethical challenges, offering insight into the characters' inner lives. Fielding, through works like *Tom Jones*, combined satire, intricate plotting, and social observation, creating layered narratives that reflected the wider society. Collectively, these authors established key narrative methods and thematic concerns that influenced the development of the English novel and guided later writers. This study examines their unique approaches and the ways in which their innovations contributed to the evolution of the novel as a central literary form.

It is not surprising to find that Daniel Defoe molds his *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) on a real story while Samuel Richardson in *Pamela* (1740) turns out to be didactic to meet the needs of the growing numbers of female readers. On his part, Henry Fielding

tries to expose his society to the readers in his masterpiece *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749); from now on Tom Jones. Accordingly, the novel becomes popular at this time because it has something relevant to the mob; it deals with their social life, and they can identify themselves with its characters in the actual daily life. Through Tom Jones, Fielding presented “a true and realistic picture of human nature”. As long as its main concern is the existing society, novelists feel so involved that their criticism becomes direct, frank, and effective. My paper deals with these concerns as depicted in the novels mentioned above.

**Keywords:** English Novel, Eighteenth Century Literature, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Realism, Epistolary Novel, Satire, Character Development, Narrative Techniques

### Аннотация

Появление английского романа в XVIII веке стало важным поворотным моментом в литературе, смешая акцент с поэзии и драмы на прозу, исследующую личный опыт и социальные реалии. В работе рассматриваются фундаментальные вклады Даниэля Дефо, Самюэля Ричардсона и Генри Филдинга, чьи произведения помогли сформировать современный роман. Истории Дефо, такие как *Робинзон Крузо*, внедрили реалистичные повествовательные техники и психологическую глубину, акцентируя внимание на выживании, морали и личной инициативе. Эпистолярные романы Ричардсона, включая *Памелу* и *Клариссу*, подчеркивают эмоциональную сложность и этические дилеммы, раскрывая внутренний мир персонажей. Филдинг, в произведениях вроде *Том Джонса*, сочетал сатиру, сложный сюжет и социальные наблюдения, создавая многослойные повествования, отражающие общество в целом. Совместно эти авторы заложили ключевые методы повествования и тематические направления, которые повлияли на развитие английского романа и последующие поколения писателей.

Неудивительно, что Даниэль Дефо создал своего "Робинзона Крузо" (1719) на основе реальной истории, в то время как роман Сэмюэля Ричардсона "Памела" (1740) оказался поучительным, чтобы удовлетворить потребности растущего числа читательниц. Со своей стороны, Генри Филдинг пытается познакомить читателей со своим обществом в своем шедевре "История Тома Джонса, подкидыши" (1749); отныне и навсегда - Том Джонс. Соответственно, роман становится популярным в это время, потому что в нем есть что-то, имеющее отношение к толпе; в нем рассказывается об их социальной жизни, и они могут идентифицировать себя с его персонажами в реальной повседневной жизни. Через Тома Джонса Филдинг представил "правдивую и реалистичную картину человеческой натуры" (Кеттл, 71 год). Поскольку главной темой романа является существующее общество, романисты чувствуют себя настолько вовлеченными, что их критика становится прямой, откровенной и эффективной. Моя статья посвящена этим проблемам, описанным в упомянутых выше романах.

**Ключевые слова:** Английский роман, Литература XVIII века, Даниэль Дефо, Самюэль Ричардсон, Генри Филдинг, Реализм, Эпистолярный роман, Сатира, Развитие персонажей, Повествовательные техники

### Annotation

XVIII asrda ingliz romani paydo bo'lishi adabiyotda muhim burilish bo'lib, she'riyat va dramadan shaxsiy tajriba va ijtimoiy haqiqatlarni o'rganadigan nasriy janrga o'tishni ifodalaydi. Ushbu tadqiqot Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson va Henry Fieldingning asosiy hissa qo'shishlarini o'rganadi, ularning asarlari zamonaviy romanning shakllanishiga yordam bergan. Defoe hikoyalari, masalan, Robinson Crusoe, realistik hikoya uslublari va psixologik chuqurlikni joriy qilib, omon qolish, axloqiy qadriyatlar va shaxsiy tashabbusga e'tibor qaratadi. Richardsonning epistolyar romanlari, jumladan Pamela va Clarissa, hissiy murakkablik va axloqiy sinovlarni ta'kidlab, personajlarning ichki dunyosini ochib beradi. Fielding esa Tom Jones kabi asarlarida satira, murakkab syujet va ijtimoiy kuzatuvlarni uyg'unlashtirib, jamiyatni

aks ettiruvchi ko‘p qavatlari hikoyalar yaratadi. Ushbu mualliflar birgalikda ingliz romanining rivojlanishiga ta’sir qilgan asosiy hikoya uslublari va tematik yo‘nalishlarni belgilab bergan.

Bu Pamela Samuel Richardson (1719)ayol kitobxonlar o’sib borayotgan ehtiyojlarini qondirish uchun didaktik bo’lib chiqadi esa Daniel Defo haqiqiy hikoya uning Robinzon Kruzo (1740) izlar, deb topish ajablanarli emas. Uning bir qismi, Genri Fielding uning Durdona kitobxonlar uchun uning jamiyatini fosh harakat qiladi Tom Jones tarixi, bir Foundling (1749); endi Tom Jones haqida. Shunga ko’ra, roman hozirgi paytda mashhur bo’lib bormoqda, chunki u olomonga tegishli narsaga ega; bu ularning ijtimoiy hayoti bilan shug’ullanadi va ular o’zlarini haqiqiy kundalik hayotdagi belgilar bilan tanishtirishlari mumkin. Tom Jons orqali Fielding “inson tabiatining haqiqiy va realistik rasmini” taqdim etdi (Kettle, 71). Uning asosiy tashvishi mavjud jamiyat ekan, romanchilar o’zlarini shu qadar jalb qilishadiki, ularning tanqidlari to’g’ridan-to’g’ri, ochiq va samarali bo’ladi. Mening qog’ozim yuqorida aytib o’tilgan romanlarda tasvirlanganidek, bu tashvishlar bilan shug’ullanadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** Ingliz romani, XVIII asr adabiyoti, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Realizm, Epistolyar roman, Satira, Personajlarni rivojlantirish, Hikoya texnikalari.

## Introduction

Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, first published in 1719, occupies a unique place in the history of the English novel. It is recognized not only as a literary phenomenon but also as a work that marked a new stage in the development of European cultural thought. The novelist widely considered one of the earliest examples of the realistic novel in English literature. In many respects, it is imbued with a spirit of innovation, reflecting the core characteristics of realism—detailed depictions of everyday life, psychological depth of characters, artistic interpretation of social issues, and a philosophy of life rooted in labor and perseverance. This introduction provides an overview of Defoe’s contribution to literature, the role of Robinson Crusoe in the

formation of the novel genre, and the international impact of the work. Ian Watt argues that the rise of the English novel was closely linked to the growth of individualism in eighteenth-century society.<sup>1</sup> The content and ideological direction of the novel, as well as the relevance of its ethical and philosophical themes, demonstrate that Robinson Crusoe should be interpreted not merely as an adventure narrative, but as a profound psychological and philosophical novel.

The early eighteenth century witnessed the development of the dominant literary form of modern times, the novel. Hence, “the novel emerged as a form with tight structure and an interplay between individuals and their relationships to society”. Defoe’s narrative realism is considered one of the earliest examples of modern fictional technique.<sup>2</sup> As a new form, the novel tends to make some significant, critical, and social statements about the society. Hence, the novel is used to create a new environment that is related to people and their life. Novelists either try to deal with daily social problems that happen in the lives of people or pretend that they are telling real stories. According to anonymous article titled, ‘Reasons for the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century’ in the web blog Naeem Educational Organisation (NEO), the novelists wrote about common people revealing the “the psyche of the middle class”. Hence, Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, Richardson’s Pamela, and Fielding’s Tom Jones were appealing to the readers.

### **Social protest and the rise of the novel.**

Well, as a new form, and since the novel has no preceding traditions, novelists find themselves free to try and indeed explore different forms. For example, Defoe, in his Robinson Crusoe, tries to collect a variety of episodes that have something to do with the hero in a journalistic method. Scholars note that the English novel arose partly in response to expanding literacy, print culture, and middle-class readership.<sup>3</sup> On his

<sup>1</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 12.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Richetti, *Daniel Defoe and the Transformation of Religious Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), 17.

part Richardson makes an experiment on a new form, that is the epistolary form in *Pamela*. Fielding in *Tom Jones* divides the whole story into books, each of which starts with a critical essay, and uses the prose-epic form. Since novelists are not confined to specific forms, they have the choice to adopt the most appropriate form they think in order to convey their social message. That novelists are not confined with specific forms is a very important reason that makes the novel a more effective form of articulating social protest in my opinion. *Robinson Crusoe* is often cited as the first fully developed English novel due to its focus on personal experience and economic self-reliance.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to form-freedom, they have enough space to express what they want to say. Language is another factor that makes the novel effective; the novelists usually use the common language to express their opinions—a language, which is preferred and understood by the common people. But how did the novelists manage to express their social protest in their works in the early 18th century? Richardson's use of the epistolary form created a new kind of psychological depth in fiction.<sup>5</sup>

Both Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson belong to the middle class and express in their works middle-class interests and attitudes. They also write about and for women. The development of the novel witnessed at this early period the growing number of female readers. Defoe shows his world not as it should be but as it is, populated with people who are motivated by the practical concerns that dominate their daily lives. It seems that he did not seek readers from the upper class. He was content to interest the middle and lower classes that are already avid readers of tales of adventures and crime. Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding each represented different narrative models that shaped future development of the novel as a literary form.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Pat Rogers, "Daniel Defoe," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Rader, "Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding," *ELH* 23, no. 3 (1956): 214.

**Research Methodology.** This article examines the artistic qualities of Robinson Crusoe through literary-analytical, characterological, and historical-literary approaches. The study first analyzes the structure of the plot, the system of characters, the author's narrative stance, and the tools of realistic depiction. The novel is evaluated within the historical and social context in which it was created, considering Defoe's biography and the ideological currents of his time. The psychological portrayal of characters and their inner experiences are examined through Defoe's distinct expository style. Furthermore, the influence of Defoe's background in journalism on the narrative structure of the novel is also analyzed. The scientific frame works proposed in the study are presented in a consistent and interconnected manner. Through the selected methods, the article explores the synthesis of adventure and realism in the novel, as well as its underlying spiritual and philosophical dimensions.

**Analysis and results.** Based on the analysis, the following key artistic features of the novel have been identified:

### 1. Prevalence of Realistic Elements:

The novel exhibits a strong emphasis on realism through its detailed depictions of daily activities and survival strategies, particularly in Robinson's life on the island. These descriptive elements serve to convince the reader of the veracity of the events, enhancing the credibility of the narrative.

### 2. Character System and Their Ideological Function:

The central character, Robinson, symbolizes the human struggle against nature and solitude. Through his character, themes such as willpower, patience, devotion to labor, repentance, and faith are revealed. The character of Friday reflects issues related to colonial ideology and cultural Eurocentrism.

### 3. Harmony of Adventure and Psychological Analysis:

The novel goes beyond external events and delves deeply into the protagonist's internal experiences. Robinson's spiritual suffering in isolation, his self-reflection, and

his religious-philosophical explorations contribute to the novel's multilayered artistic structure.

#### 4. Didactic Orientation:

The work promotes moral lessons such as the value of labor, gratitude, patience, dignity, and submission to fate. These themes intensify the novel's moral and emotional impact on the reader.

#### 5. Linguistic and Stylistic Features:

Defoe's expository, simple, and colloquial narrative style enhances the readability of the novel. His use of journalistic precision and factual detail reinforces the realistic expression of the text.

**Discussion.** The results identified in this study demonstrate that Robinson Crusoe is a vivid example of the synthesis between adventure and realism. The novel offers a deep artistic exploration of the human purpose in life, inner transformation, and the broadening of one's world view. Through this work, Defoe illustrates the process by which an individual attains self-awareness, reevaluates life, and undergoes moral development. Although the novel originally served the ideology of colonialism in its time, its spiritual and philosophical layers remain relevant to contemporary readers. Themes such as the harmony between man and nature, self-discovery in solitude, and moral regeneration continue to resonate in the modern world. Moreover, Defoe's unique contribution lies in enriching the adventure genre with deep spiritual and philosophical dimensions, thereby influencing the evolution of the novel as a literary form. The didactic orientation of the work further enhances its educational value, establishing it as a significant piece of artistic literature.

### The Scandal of Novel Reading

Novels have been a respectable component of culture for so long that it is difficult for twentieth-century observers to grasp the unease produced by novel reading in the eighteenth century. In the later chapters of this study, I will suggest why, during the

decades following 1700, a quantum leap in the number, variety, and popularity of novels led many to see novels as a catastrophe to book-centered culture. Although the novel was not clearly defined or conceptualized, the object of the early antinovel discourse was quite precise—namely, seventeenth-century romances and novellas of continental origin, as well as the "novels" and "secret histories" written by Behn, Manley, and Haywood in the decades following the early 1680s. *Pamela* played an important role in shaping moral discourse in eighteenth-century literature.<sup>7</sup> Any who would defend novels had to cope with the aura of sexual scandal which clings to the early novel, and respond to the accusation that they were corrupting to their enthusiastic readers. *Tom Jones* is considered one of the earliest examples of a novel with a complex, unified plot structure.<sup>8</sup> When Richardson and Fielding convinced many—both through their fiction and through its framing critical defense—that they had given modern fiction a more valuable range of purposes, the way was cleared for novels to become the object of literary criticism and literary history. Between Samuel Johnson's 1750 *Rambler* no. 4 essay on the new fiction of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett and John Dunlop's three-volume *History of Fiction* (1814), a succession of essays, reviews, and literary histories mobilize criticism and alarm, praise and prescription in order to modulate the comparatively new vogue for novel reading. The three authors collectively contributed to the transition from romance-style narratives to realistic fiction.<sup>9</sup> This body of criticism, the first sustained novel criticism in English, incorporates many of the themes developed in the previous fifty years to condemn or defend novel reading.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, as a new and rather shapeless literary genre, with little discipline and no classical tradition, the early novelists like Richardson and Fielding try new

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Sheridan Baker, *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 67.

<sup>9</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 129.

forms and structures for the novel. There have been no restraints upon the novelists. They manage to invent new forms that convey their social message. In addition, the new forms and content appeal to the new growing middle-class readers and accordingly, the effects of these writings are great. Also, the invented forms are taken by the following generations of novelists as models for writing novels. From Richardson, they have taken the epistolary method of storytelling. Fielding presents a new critical analysis of the problems he has to tackle through the use of the patterns of the prose epic. Fielding criticized Richardson's sentimentality and developed a more ironic and socially grounded narrative voice.<sup>10</sup>

Before Richardson and Fielding, it is Defoe who manages to defend the middle class in his novel *Robinson Crusoe* and uses the journalistic method in doing so. As long as the novel passes through a period of experimentation, novelists have freedom to choose the best and appropriate form to present the social problems of their societies. Writers of other genres have to follow specific structure and style and address a specific class in the society. Due to these restraints, their writings become less effective form of articulating social protest during this period than the novel.

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