

Lecture 2: Prose Fiction.

1- What is Prose Fiction?

- Prose:

Prose is the most typical form of language and it is derived from the Latin word *prosa* which literally means ‘straight-forward.’ It is like talking to someone in a straight-forward manner and not in a sing-song or poetic way. This means that anything you say or write in prose is presented in a straight-forward manner.

Words in prose are arranged in correct sentences and in a logical sequence for a meaningful understanding of the intended communication. In view of this, Samuel Taylor Coleridge insists in his definition of prose and poetry that; “*prose is —words in their best order*”

- Fiction

Fiction is derived from the Latin word *fictum* which means “created”. Fiction is a term used to denote anything, mainly stories or accounts that are not real. Can you recall the fairy tale or other stories that your mother or grandmother used to tell you about animals, monsters, or even human beings that existed in faraway countries or in the primordial times. These are fictional narratives. Fiction is therefore any form of narrative which deals, in part or in whole, with events that are not factual, but rather, are imaginary and invented by its author.

- What then is prose fiction?

It is fictional work that is presented in a narrative form.

Fiction and narrative are words that distinguish prose fiction from any other form of narrative or fictional work. For instance, drama is fiction but it is presented in dialogue and not narrative. Prose fiction as a literary genre is made up of the short story, the novella and the novel. Prose fiction tells a story and the fact that the story is not factual distinguishes it from history.

Prose fiction is an artistic work that “has a personal narrative, a hero to identify with fictional inventions, style, and suspense – in short anything that might be handled with the rather personal ventures of creativity and artistic freedom” (Kermode 23). It may exaggerate or distort facts or the story may be completely an invention of the writer. It depends on the style of the writer and or what the writer wants to achieve. The story in prose fiction is invented by the writer but is presented in a realistic manner.

It is a literary genre that presents human experience to educate and entertain the readers.

It tells a story that deals with cultural, social and political issues in the world but the characters are not real (known) human beings but bear human traits and dispositions. Although the story in prose fiction is fictitious, it contains identifiable characters, locations and incidents and these add to make the story that is presented as realistic as possible. Prose fiction is different from history which is a documentation of past realistic events.

2- Definition of the Novel

According to a critic, a novel is a novel “if it is fictional, if it is in prose, and if it is of a certain length.”²

Novel, an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting.

The term novel is a truncation of the Italian word *novella* (from the plural of Latin *novellus*, a late variant of *novus*, meaning “new”).

the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience. It attempts to assume those burdens of life that have no place in the epic poem and to see man as unheroic, unredeemed, imperfect, even absurd.

2-1- Emergence of the novel:

Let’s go back to a time when the novel really was new. Once upon a time, there weren’t any novels. There were other things that were narrative and lengthy—epics, religious or historical narratives of the tribe, prose or verse romances, nonfictional narratives like travel journals.

The rise of the novel coincides with the rise of the modern world—exploration, discovery, invention, development, oppression, industrialization, exploitation, conquest, and violence—and that’s no coincidence. It took more than movable type to make the novel possible; it took a new age.

Rightly or wrongly, there are two novels we generally think of as the “first”—and they’re seventy years apart. In 1678 someone, perhaps Madame de La Fayette, published a little novel of profound significance. Its popularity was such that people lined up at the publishers waiting, sometimes for months, for their copies. Take that, Harry Potter. The book is called *La Princesse de Clèves*, and its chief claim to fame is not as a first novel but as the first *roman d’analyse*, a novel of analysis, a book that investigates emotions and mental states, pushing well beyond the mere conveying of plot.

At the yonder end of the century, 1605 to be exact, a book came out that really set the world on its ear: Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. It’s goofy and serious, hilarious and sad, satiric and original. And it’s first. Cervantes shows everyone else what might be done

2-2- The novel in Britain

In the 18th century, a print culture was emerging there for the first time: new technologies allowed for a wider circulation of written materials, and for the transmission of this reproducible, portable, and even purchasable commodity. Furthermore, although the eighteenth century was by no means an era of universal literacy, the novel differed from earlier literary forms because it was produced outside elite systems of aristocratic patronage, subscription, and private circulation.

Critics consider Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as the first English novel.

2-3-Why the novel?

The novel matters because of its closeness to the real world; over the last three centuries, many claims for the novel’s significance have rested on exactly this sense that, among all the literary forms, the novel – for better or worse – has an especially intimate relationship to ordinary life. As the novelist Milan Kundera has recently put it: “‘Prose’: the word signifies not only a non-versified language; it also signifies the concrete, everyday, corporeal nature of life. So, to say that the novel is the art of prose is not to state the obvious; the word defines the deep sense of that art.”

Why were novels considered dangerous? novels instill intellectual frivolity, and mislead the young into believing they know how the world works. These common eighteenth-century claims help to explain what was so unusual about the novel when it first appeared in English: *its seductive proximity to the real world*.

So those books we call novels were felt to be different from the fanciful **romances** of earlier centuries, even if, somewhat confusingly, you often find the terms “romance” and “novel” used interchangeably in the eighteenth century (as in the title of Reeve’s own book, *The Progress of Romance*).

On this view, novels were distinctively dangerous because distinctively **realistic**: this new type of narrative fiction, with its complex characters, its recognizable settings, and its broadly credible sequence of events, might dupe the sequestered and susceptible into believing it a reliable guide to the world.

Q. Why do you think the novel is still popular even today?

Much of the continuing appeal of the novel lies in its collaborative nature; readers invest themselves in the characters’ stories, becoming actively involved in the creation of meaning. At the same time, they are rewarded by pleasures that are more intimate than the essentially vicarious genres of drama and film. That give-and-take between creator and audience starts in the first line, runs through the last word, and causes the novel to stay in our minds long after we close the cover.

Assignment: Define the following genres of the novel?

The social novel

Detective novel

Picaresque

Historical novel

Epistolary novel

The Bildungsroman Novel

Utopian/Dystopian Novel

Psychological Novel

Gothic Novel

Regional Novel

Romantic Novel

Political Novel

Realistic Novel

Biography/Autobiography.