

HS-431 Reading Fiction

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1 COURSE DESCRIPTION-SEGMENT I

There are numerous descriptions and claims made about fiction. This segment of the course does not propose to survey and evaluate them exhaustively. However, while reading selected works of fiction, we will have occasion to turn our attention to the changing nature, forms, functions and affordances of fiction.

In this segment of the course we will:

- Briefly examine the invention of fiction, the history of the (English) novel and its literary ancestors
- Sample prose narratives of varying kinds— flash fiction, short story, novel, graphic fiction
- Explore different ways of interpreting and analyzing works of fiction

2 The Invention of Novel

2.1 The "English Novel": Origins and "Ancestors"

2.1.1 Epics/Bardic Storytelling/Myths

The predecessors of "Novel" and "Fiction". Check out [Epic of Gilgamesh](#), [Odysseus](#). These stories are somewhat eternal, set in a time long long ago, in a place(Galaxy) far far away. Characters are often ideal(follow the tropes) and often follow black and white morality and the story is somewhat didactic. As the storytellers travelled from place to place, the tales changed shape as the storyteller incorporated elements to adapt to the locals.

2.1.2 Dramas

The dramas/plays prevailed before the form of the novel emerged.

2.1.3 Romances

The knights in shining armor, the dragon which needs to be slayed, exotic lands, princes and princesses.

2.1.4 Oriental Tale

kathas, *kissas*, [The Canterbury Tales](#).

2.1.5 Periodical Essays

A certain way to talk about things/events/characters after the emergence of print.

2.1.6 Proposition-1

Fiction is a narrative contract

2.2 Early (almost) Novels

Early texts where the **narrative contract** has almost formed.

2.2.1 Don Quixote

[Don Quixote](#) is a reader of romances, so he chases after romances. He is a 'knight' who does idiotic and comedic acts in a Chaplinesque way and gets in trouble every now and then. Sir Cervantes explicitly suggests that the 'romances' are repetitive, boring and no longer relevant. A different kind of narrative needs to be made.

2.2.2 The Pilgrim's Progress

"The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come" is a 'story' which contains a dream narrative. It's a story of a pilgrim's search for salvation. It resonates with older pieces of storytelling, but not quite fiction. One can say it's a certain kind of [allegory](#).

The character of the pilgrim is "individualised" which is reflected in his struggles being specific to himself or the 17th century. The story contains a sense of history by being relevant for its time and not 'times eternal'.

2.2.3 Oroonoko: or the Royal Slave

Written as a play, [Oroonoko](#) is the 'true' history of a royal slave. Set in *Surinam*, it's a tale about slavery and the tragic love story of the Prince who is referred by the title as 'the Royal Slave'. The setting and the theme of slavery makes this work distinct from the Predecessor of Novels

2.2.4 The Arabian Nights

Amassed massive popularity in the early 18th century and was printed as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (1706-1721). To call it 'entertainment' and not see it as a didactic text or history indicate that a new narrative contract is being formed.

2.3 Why the Novel?

It is suggested that Fiction emerges with the print revolution. The print revolution took roots in the 15th century and it is believed that a century later, fiction as a form emerged. Print revolution triggered growth of literacy, innovations in language and style. The marketplace evolved like the 'Grub Street' where one could buy inexpensive books.

The "Middle Class" emerged during this age and many proto novels had main characters who belonged to this "Middle Class". Individualism evolved in this age and so did the concept of 'leisure' and 'entertainment'

2.3.1 Proposition-2

The novel as a **re-telling**

2.3.2 Proposition-3

Literary "ancestors" **co-extant** with the novel.

2.3.3 Proposition-4

The novel as a form that responds to the **contemporary**

2.4 The Early English Novels

2.4.1 Robinson Crusoe(1719), Moll Flanders(1722)

Both were written by Daniel Defoe. Robinson Crusoe as a character did not follow archetypes and was highly individualised. The work is a piece of its time with elements like maritime travel, colonialism, adventures, etc. 'Moll Flanders' begins with the author's foreword that he met Moll Flanders and is **re-telling** the story.

These characters were new set in an unfamiliar plot structure. The stories tell the lives of these characters but are not considered an auto-biography but instead fiction.