

Student Essay on The Development of the Novel

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Essay

A novel may be defined as a work of narrative fiction, usually in prose. The novel came into being in Britain in the 18th C. These are some of the factors which are said to have influenced its development:

i) Journalism: Early journalism aimed to record the facts of daily living, paying attention to detail, easy readability and immediacy of interest.

ii) Parallel art forms: Biography, diaries and personal memoirs were very fashionable in the 18th C.

iii) Letter writing: Letters were composed with care and at length.

iv) Travel literature: With the growth of overseas trade, books such as *New Voyage Round the World* were widely read.

v) The Restoration Comedies of Manners: Between 1660 and 1710 elegant comic plays were performed with characters drawn mainly from the London aristocracy. Plots contained love intrigues.

vi) The picaresque convention: This convention was a form of prose fiction dealing with the adventures of rogues, dishonest people who were fond of playing tricks.

vii) The mock romance of knight errantry (such as *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, 1605-1615, by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes) where, in comic vein, wandering knights try to put injustices to right.

Puritanism: This had always encouraged: When Christianity lost some of its spiritual and emotional force, practical principles began to dominate religious thought. Writers were expected to inform, to be 'useful' and to urge moral behaviour. Puritans followed the voice of God. The spirit of Puritanism encouraged the development of the 'spiritual autobiography', such as John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. The Puritans opposed the theatre, not only because it put on works of fiction, which they equated with lies.

ii) The rise of the middle class: The movement had begun in Chaucer's time but the big increase in the 17th c, as the interests of gentry in the countryside and the money-making middle classes in the towns grew closer together, provided a new and large reading public. As a result: education was available to more people; there was greater individualism - a belief that one must earn a living by one's own efforts; a growing desire to be opened up to new worlds outside one's immediate existence; there was a belief that human destiny was uncertain.



Scientific philosophy: after the Restoration period the attention was focused on the social destiny of the individual. One reason for the development of the novel was the desire to understand the huge social changes of the time.