

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Module No # 02
Lecture No # 01A
The Nineteenth Century Novel (Continued 1)

Hello and welcome back. In this lecture on the 19th century novel, I will discuss some of the major novels as well as some of the major concerns of the novels.

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The English Novel

- The novel: short stories/novellas
- Illicit/forbidden "Romantic entanglements"
- Delarivière Manley and Eliza Haywood
- Defoe's last novel *Roxana*, the fictional memoir of a Restoration courtesan

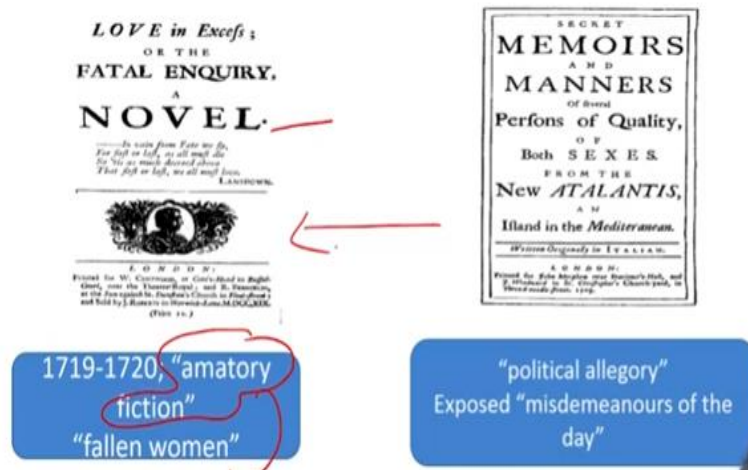


So the English novel previously used to be a collection of short stories or it used to be about extended short stories which we call the novellas. And much of it was autobiographical writing too, and the major subject matter of such fiction used to be illicit or forbidden romantic entanglements. So illicit sexuality was a major preoccupation of the novel content. And we have two set of female writers, Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, who kind of wrote fiction that touched on all these aspects such as forbidden romantic, you know, stuff and much of it was autobiographical.

But in Defoe's last novel *Roxana*, it was also about the fictional memoir of a restoration courtesan. So the idea that fiction is associated with illicit sexuality is continued in many of the literary novels including Defoe's *Roxana*, which as I said is about the narratives of a restoration courtesan or prostitute.

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Haywood and Manley



So the two famous works of Haywood and Manley are shown here. One is titled “Love in Excess or the Fatal Inquiry”, which again, the genre is mentioned in block letters as a novel. And this is amatory fiction, fiction that is to do with sex and romance, and it is about a fallen woman, fallen woman is a reference to prostitutes or women who have had illicit sexuality, you know, as part of their lives. And the other one is by Manley, which is “Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality of Both Sexes from the New Atlantis an Island in the Mediterranean.” So this work, contrary to this one, is about politics. It is a political allegory and it exposed the misdemeanors of the day in relation to the public affairs. So, while the novel is about autobiographical narratives, while it is about illicit sexuality, it is also about political affairs. So these are some of the major concerns that we can see popping out from the narratives, from the fictional narratives of the day.

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Novel

- 18th Century; romance; adventure
- How did one live?
- Not precisely a conduct book.



So the 18th century novel had romance, it had adventure, and it also asked this question - how did one live. Though it is not precisely a conduct book, the novel did discuss some of the ways in which one could live adequately, satisfactorily, and also in conjunction with the precepts laid down by the Bible, by the spiritual textbooks and by the spiritual advisors of the day.

And further, the novel was seen as enlarging one's lives. That was a major function of the novel of the period. It expanded the ways into which people could live. And the other major function that the novel offered was safe access into other class positions. Even though the reader is middle class, and is reading in his or her living room, that reader is allowed safe passage into the lifestyles of other class positions which are either above that reader or beneath the reader's class position. So that kind of interesting and significant function was offered by the novel.

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The English Novel

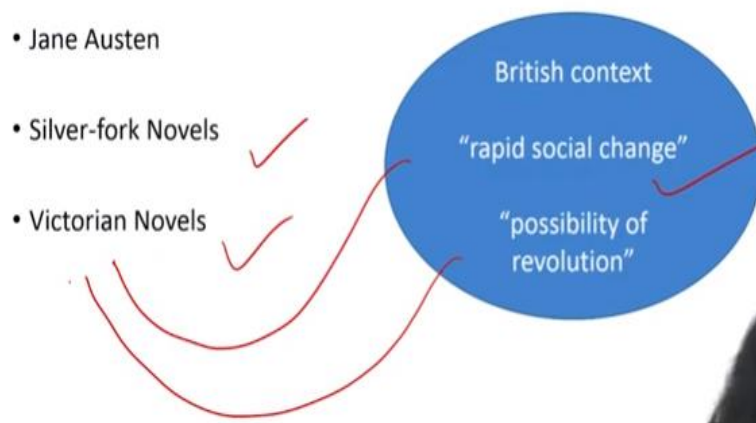


The other themes of the English novel are bourgeois themes in that it was about class, as I said a brief while ago, it was about industry, industry in the sense it was about hard work. The work ethic that was becoming very very important to the middle classes, which was raising in society presents its influence through the dint of hard work. And it was also about social advancement, how one could climb the ladders of the class, the classes in society.

And how one could also exploit social systems that were in place in that day. So these are some of the major concerns of the English novel of that period: class, professionalism or hard work, social climbing, the idea of social climbing, and you know, working the system in your favor.

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The 19th -Century Novel




The 19th century novel has these significant modes, literary modes such as the silver-folk novels, the Victorian novels and other sub-genres such as sensation fiction and gothic fiction which continued to be, you know, written in a minor way in that period. So Jane Austen is important figure in early 19th century, and though Jane Austen didn't capture the rapid social change that was kind of sweeping across British society, the other fictions such as the Victorian fiction did capture that rapid rise of industrialization and the consequent impact of industrialization on the society. In Jane Austen we do see changes, but in a very very subtle way, whereas in Victorian fiction we see it in a very obvious way, for example in the works of Charles Dickens we see different kinds of important factors that were kind of making, you know, radical changes in the lives of the people.

So rapid social change is something that the novels captured in their pages and the possibility of revolution hitting Britain was also kind of addressed in a marginal way by writers such as Dickens, for instance, A Tale of Two Cities which we will read for the course does a touch on that possibility in an indirect way by looking at the French Revolution. So in terms of the British context, the writers did take into account the social changes that were happening across society.

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Silver-fork Novels

- "Popular subgenre"
 - "novel of fashionable highlife"
 - Benjamin Disraeli, the Countess of Blessington, Catherine Gore, Edward Bulwer-Lytton
 - "aristocratic high society" "packagedfor the middling classes"
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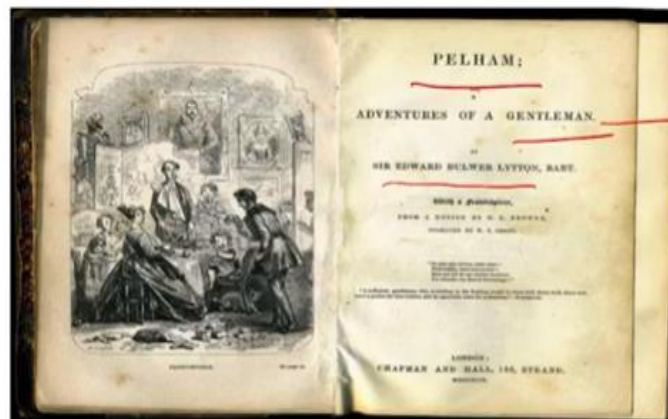
Silver-fork fiction is a popular subgenre of the period and it was a novel of fashionable high life. It captured the upper class society's preoccupations, concerns, and their routines, and they were popular in the 1820's and 1830's. Benjamin Disraeli, the Countess of Blessington, Catherine

Gore, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, are some of the writers who wrote this kind of fiction, silver fork fiction of the upper class society.

So in other words, one of the major functions or concerns of silver-folk genre is to package aristocratic high society for the benefit of the middle classes who kind of devoured these narratives about these people from the high society, so that they could somehow adopt some of the aspects of high society. For instance in with regard to dress you know clothing, outfits and the way the high society had their own unique etiquette and others, other things like that.

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Silver fork fiction



So this is the title page of one of the novels which can be categorized as silver folk fiction and this is Pelham or the Adventures of a Gentleman and to be precise, and the gentlemen of the upper class society or aristocratic society and this was written by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton who was also part of that class in British society.

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Sliver fork fiction



"novels as
guides to
fashionable
living"

So again, representation of the high life, and silver fork fiction dealt with such ladies and gentlemen. And as I mentioned before, these novels acted as guides to fashionable living for the middle classes and lower middle classes who could somehow, in their own ways imitate some of the aspects of the high life.

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Agenda of Silver fork Novels

- "tantalizing glimpses into highlife"
- "exposed its downsides"
- "ridiculed bourgeois hangers-on"
- "integration of middle-class characters and ideals"
- "into early-19th-century politics of aristocratic reform"

Influenced
Thackeray's
Vanity Fair

So what is the agenda of the silver fork novels? The silver fork novels offered tantalizing, attractive glimpses into the high life, into aristocratic society. However while it did offer attractive glimpses it also exposed some of its downsides, the negative sides to high society. While it did that it also did something else which was to ridicule, mock the bourgeois hangers-on who tried to kind of climb into that particular high society.

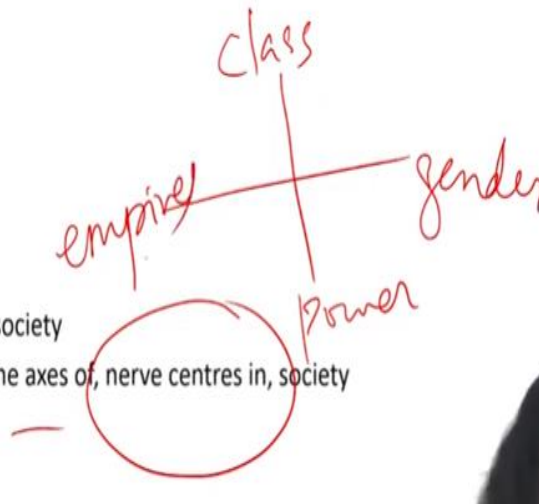
So it also ridiculed people who tried to imitate or enter this particular class. So it was doing a combination of things. It made the society very attractive but it also exposed its, you know, negatives or down sides and it also ridiculed people who tried to enter that particular society. Vanities, Vanity Fair, Thackeray's Vanity Fair was massively influenced by, was influenced by silver fork fiction. In fact it can be seen as a mockery of the aristocratic society.

And what it tried to do was to integrate middle class characters and ideals into aristocratic high society. That was one of the major functions of silver fork fiction. So it was trying to reform aristocratic high society by bringing into it some of the admirable qualities of middle class society and in other words, it also tried to extend this kind of reformation into 19th century politics itself. So aristocracy was being reformed through the middle class values. So these are some of the interesting aspects of silver fork fiction.

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Vanity Fair

- Spaciousness
- Panorama
- Depth
- Psychological grasp
- Description of the society
- Understanding of the axes of, nerve centres in, society



Vanity Fair by Thackeray is a major novel in the 19th century. And what are some of the major features of this novel? It had spaciousness, this novel was capacious, it had a huge cast of characters, the landscape was vast, the narrative landscape was vast. It did offer a panoramic view of 19th century society. While it did that, while panoramic picture was offered, the novel also offered depth in terms of the profundity with which some of the major issues were discussed and through that fictional rendering of society in Vanity Fair.

And there was also a massive psychological grasp on the part of the author in his delineation of several characters and events that unfolded in Vanity Fair. So while the society was neatly described in all its complexities, the author was also profoundly aware of the nerve centers in society. Thackeray knew about the axes around which the society function, the society function around the axis of class, its function around the axis of power, and gender and Empire, all these axes were kind of subtly captured in Vanity Fair.

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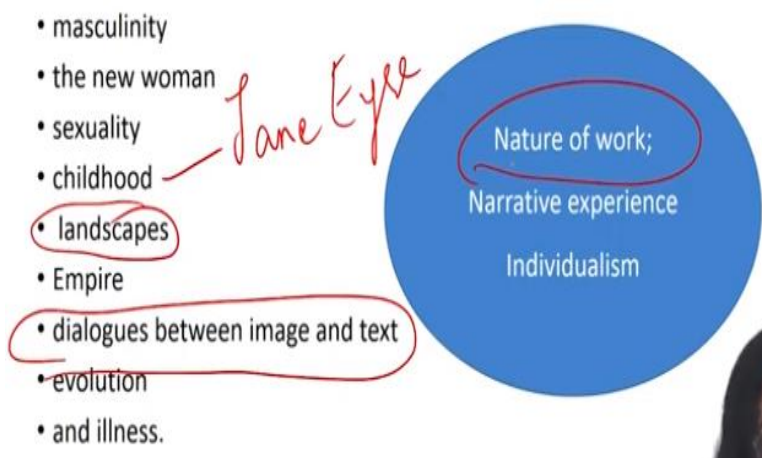
Various Modes/Sub-genres

- "social realism", — Gaskell
- "sensationalism", — W. Collins
- "historical fiction"
- "fantasy"

Now let us look at some of the various modes or sub-genres that are associated with the 19th century novel which are social realism, sensationalism, historical fiction, fantasy. So these are some of the major sub-genres of the novel and we have writers who kind of wrote in relations to the these modes. In terms of sensationalism we have Wilkie Collins and in terms of social realism we have Gaskell other figures.

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Concerns



Let us kind of take a quick look back at other major issues that I have discussed in relation to the themes or the concerns of the 19th century novel. So one is masculinity. Masculinity is a major concern or issue that is discussed in the 19th century novel. The figure of the new woman also comes up in the novels of the late 19th century, sexuality as I mentioned has been a consistent theme of the novel genre, you know, from the from its early days. And again childhood is also a dominant concern of Victorian 19th century novel. And immediately when we think of the idea of childhood we go back to novels such as Jane Eyre. If you look at Jane Eyre, the novel begins with Jane as a small child and then it captures her development into a young woman and you know, other stages are discussed, but childhood is a major preoccupation of Jane Eyre the novel. And we also see an interest in the way landscapes are portrayed, discussed, narrated, in fiction. So Elizabeth Gaskell immediately comes to mind. We also think about Jane Austen's countryside, the presence of the countryside in Austen's fiction, and Empire also becomes a dominant theme in the works of Wilkie Collins and other writers.

You know late 19th century we think of Kipling and other writers. And this next concern that I have put down on the slide here is is about this dialogue that happens, the conversation that happens between image and text. And we need to remember that in the 19th century, we had novels being published in the form of serials in weekly editions of newspapers and as parts in monthly editions, and then all these were collected and published in volume forms at the, you know, once the novel is finished, and images did play a major role in attracting readership.

So the text is also illustrated. The major events in the text is also illustrated by the images and there is a constant ideological interplay between image and text in many of the 19th century novels. In fact when we read A Tale of the Two Cities for this course I will show you consistently the different images that illustrated different parts of the text and how these images captured, or how these images differed from the representations in the novel, the textual representations in the novel.

So again the other concern is evolution, you know how human beings evolved and illness also becomes a major concern. In terms of illness we have Wilkie Collins' fiction discussing this subject matter in great depth. And further aspects that get importance in the 19th century fiction is the nature of work, what is ideal work, also what are the professions that are important for the middle classes and these are discussed. And narrative experience, how do we narrate experience in fiction, and again individualism, you know, what is individualism and all these concerns can be part of our interpretations of the 19th century novel.

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Vanity Fair (1848)

- Who inherits? — *RHC*
- "Time melts"; "floating into the past"
- Historical novel
- 19th century novel impossible to replicate



In Vanity Fair the question that becomes very very important is who inherits the property. In fact this questions can be asked of any 19th century novel, who gets the money at the end of the day. So this becomes, as I said, one of the major concerns of the Victorian novel or the 19th century novel, who gets the money at the end or where does money go, from whom to whom, and again the novel seems to be conscious of time melting, time passing.

Vanity Fair is extremely consciously of this, you know, feature and we can almost sense the way in which time floats away into the past. It is usually seen as a typical 19th century novel. It is also historical novel, something that we need to remember. And various critics also suggest that you know the 19th century novel is impossible to replicate because it is too panoramic, it is too profound and its canvas is too vast. These are some things that is impossible to recapture today.

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Victorian Novel

- Hidden power structures
- Society under stress
- People unable to rely
- "Authority; Narrator knowledgeable; pre-emptive; fixes your forward imaginings"

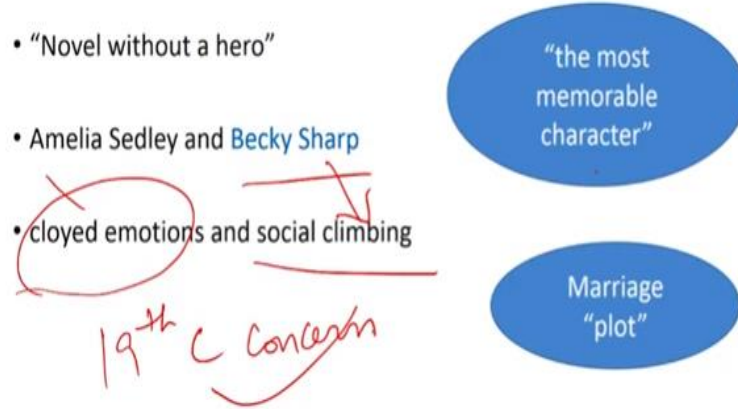


So again, the Victorian novel talks about hidden powers structures. You know, when we read a Victorian novel very closely, we can analyze and we can probe as to what are the important powers structures in society and which get reflected in the fiction. And we can also see that the Victorian novel captures a society which is under stress. There is rapid industrialization, the society is changing, the class structures are sort of undergoing a big shake, and then there is colonialism and Empire building that is happening across the globe, and you know these are affecting human minds.

In fact people are unable to rely, they are unable to find certainties in the world outside them. Therefore in such a context, the narrator figure in 19th century fiction becomes very very interesting because the narrator becomes the source of authority and the narrator is very knowledgeable. In fact too knowledgeable and too authoritative in some cases, because the narrator is, tries to be pre-emptive, the narrator tries to set our minds in a particular way, the narrator fixes our forward imaginings, the narrator tells us what to think. So the downside to a very authoritative narrator is also there in 19th century fiction.

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Vanity Fair



Vanity Fair is also very interesting in relation to this idea that it is a novel without a hero. In fact the heroine is the most important figure in the novel, Becky Sharp. Becky Sharp is the hero. If you want to have the hero, she is the hero who kind of dominates the plot. Even though we have another female protagonist Amelia Sedley, it is Becky Sharp who is the masterful character in the entire novel, she is the most memorable character in fact. And we can see in Amelia Sedley cloved emotions which again is a major element of 19th century fiction, and social climbing in relation to Becky Sharp which again is a major 19th century concern. And marriage plot is a major plot character of the Victorian or the 19th century fiction. So domestic aspects or domesticity, romance and marriage become key elements of 19th century fiction and through this plotting, through this type of plot, other issues are discussed by the author. Other issues being political affairs, social affairs are discussed through the marriage plot.

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Object of the *Vanity Fair*

- "to indicate, in cheerful terms, that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people "desperately wicked" and all eager after vanities....I want to leave everybody dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story—we ought all to be with our own and all other stories. Good God don't I see (in that maybe cracked and warped looking glass in which I am always looking) my own weaknesses wickednesses lusts follies shortcomings?.... We must lift up our voices about these and howl to a congregation of fools: so much at least has been my endeavour."

So what is the object of the *Vanity Fair*? I would like to conclude this lecture session with this quotation which is very very significant. The object of *Vanity Fair* is this. To indicate in cheerful terms that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people desperately wicked and all eager after vanities. I want to leave everybody dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story. We ought all to be with the own and all other stories. Good God don't I see in that maybe cracked and warped looking glass in which I am always looking my own weaknesses wickednesses, lusts, follies, shortcomings. We must lift up our voices about these and howl to a congregation of fools so much as at least has been my endeavor. So this is the narrator talking to the readers, and he says that I want to tell the readers how bad they are, you know, and what kind of weaknesses and wickedness and lusts and follies which are a part of their lives.

And he says that we should look at us in the mirror of the fiction. So *vanity fair* itself becomes a mirror at which readers can look at and their see their own, you know, follies and characteristics reflected back to them. So this is what he wants to do. And he says that I want to leave everybody dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story because that is how the life is, nobody is satisfied, nobody is happy at the end of the day, or at the end of the one's life. And he wants to tell the people about all their vanities after which everybody runs, and he wants to tell the readers how foolish and selfish they are.

For the most part, for the most part, he does not say it is entirely, but for the most part we are abominably foolish, embarrassingly foolish and selfish and wicked, desperately wicked, we are

dreadfully wicked. So Vanity Fair's objectives are these which Thackeray wants to offer to the reader. So we can see that very clearly 19th century fiction has an agenda to fulfill which is this.

To somehow offer some kind of message to the readers, it wants to do that. So under 19th century fiction, if you look at it as a category, we have you know the sub-genre of sensationalism, you know social realism, we have the Gothic mode, we have the fantasy, we have the you know the books that focus on children, and so we have conduct literature and other stuff. So we have all these various narratives, but the dominant mode or the dominant agenda of these writings is that there is some kind of message for the readers within that narrative.

So Vanity Fair very obviously states that through the voice of the narrator here. Thank you for

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