**Dr.BELMERABET Fatiha**

**LECTURE FIVE:**

**The English Novel (Part One)**

**11.1. Historical Background of the Novel**

Until the 17TH the word ‘Novel’ meant a short story of the kind written and collected by the Italian author Boccaccio (1313-1375) in his “Decameron.” By about 1700, it earned a context which The Oxford Dictionary describes as a fictitious prose narrative of substantial length in which characters and actions are representative of real-life and are portrayed in a plot of a certain complexity. Strictly speaking, a Novel as we understand it today is a story longer, more true to life, and more complex than the Italian ‘novella’ as composed by Boccaccio and others.

The novel is now far and wide most read of all literary genres, it may be surprising because it is somewhat new. Indeed, it was not until the eighteenth century that people started to read and compose the sort of a literary work that is called “Novel.” By about 1770, interests in reading novels had become a fashion- almost an ‘obsession’ for the women of the upper classes. The novel had turned out to be an access into the realm of satisfying dreams.

**11.2. Novel Defined**

It is difficult to give a truly intelligible definition to the novel given its fluctuating structures and goals all through its progress. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary introduces the novel as “a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity” (cited in Rees 1973, p. 106). Therefore, it is stated that a novel is a portion of prose fiction of an important length. this definition emphasizes the term ‘prose’ signifying the familiar or everyday spoken form of language lacking the occurrence of poetic rhythmic arrangement. Nevertheless, there are a small number of novels written in verse as well, such as Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* and Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegi*. The other side of the description is associated with the length that is displayed in all most all novels to distinguish its exclusive feature as a type in regards to the short story that is another genre. The lengths of some novels are comparable to the length of short stories and for this reason, a term such as ‘novella’ is frequently employed for shorter novels. The word novel is regarded to be derived from the Latin word *Novellus*, Italian word *novella* (which meant a small new thing), and French word *Nouvelle*. It was Boccaccio who first used the term *novella Storia* (a short tale in prose) when he once tried composing prose. Boccaccio made popular the fashion of collections of novellas with his collection of ten short stories entitled *Decameron* in the 14th century. Still, the sense of the word novel intended the sort of short stories composed by Boccaccio until the 17th century. Eventually, amid the rise in the expansion of novels in the 18th century the implication of the word novel changed from a short tale in prose to ‘prose narrative of considerable length’ as defined by The Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

**11.3. Rise of the Novel**

The mass of literary critics qualifies the 18th century as the epoch of the novel’s birth and successive development. With satisfactory literary predecessors like Bunyan, Chaucer, Malory, Cervantes, Boccaccio, and several other writers of the previous centuries, the 18thcentury writers benefited the chance to more experiment and create the novel as a literary type. A noticeable rise in literacy rate, the industrial revolution, the rise of the middle class, and the eagerness for libraries created positive situations for the rise of the novel. In the new form of literature namely the ‘novel’, the construct of the story withdrew from the romance and endeavor to likely depict the pragmatism and morality of the middle-class people. Alexander Pope’s dictum, “The proper study of mankind is men” influenced the interest of the people to study human character. Thus 18th-century novels explored human characters with the novelist creating real-life characters in their novels unlike giants, dragons, and superhuman characters in the romances.

**11.4. Factors that Influenced the Rise of the Novel**

* **Industrial revolution**

It is one of the chief reasons that helped to the rise of the novel through the development of industries. With the new equipment the work could be achieved rapidly and people could have time for relaxation and entertainment during which people preferred reading novels.

* **Printing press**

It was obtainable to manufacture several copies at a cheaper price. Even people with low salaries could afford themselves books unlike in the past when only aristocrats were the reading community.

* **The availability of newspapers and magazines**

It increased the tendency of reading which finally led people to read novels. The publication of some novels in magazines increased the access to novels in addition to the booking form. Hasan confirms that the industrial revolution: “paved the way to the rise of the middle-class people” (2015, p. 2) who enhanced the claim of reading resources for, they had an abundance of leisure time. Further, they had desires to read about “their everyday experiences” (Hasan, 2015, p. 2) which encouraged authors like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding to write prose fiction portraying real-life experiences.

* **The decline of romance and drama**

Before romances were appropriate to be read by the privileged aristocratic or noble families, it could not maintain the readership. The simple people were uninterested in romances because; they had no desire of any sort to them. In addition to that, the stories were getting older and unrealistic then they were no longer exciting to the people. The settings in which the stories in the romances took place were also unrealistic.

* **Decline of drama**

It was also one reason that helped the rise of the novel. During the rule of Cromwell in the 17th century, theatres (the most entertaining popular settings during the Elizabethan era) were forbidden and closed. Additionally, the novel could attain a larger audience, unlike theatre which could attain only a restricted audience.

* **Rise of the middle class**

It is one of the results of the industrial revolution was the rise of the middle-class. People became more progressively wealthy and even poor people of lower status were able to raise their status. The middle-class people started imitating the traditional landed gentry demanding books to read. Besides the amelioration of the living standard, many people obtained education and became able to read. Women readers increased with greater leisure time with the rise of the middle-class and it was a fashion for high-status women to remain engaged in reading literature. The middle-class people looked for literature which suited to their temper and taste.

* **Mobile libraries**

The innovation of mobile libraries made the increase in reading public easy. Reading was encouraged by providing easy access to books since books were delivered to the homes if people are members in the mobile library. It was very beneficial mostly for women. Even though the industrial revolution caused the decline in romance and drama, the rise of the middle class and mobile libraries played a paramount role in the rise of the novel. Finally, four authors precisely Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne took the novel to “the highest point of glory” (Roy, 2016, p. 8).