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Introduction: Modelling the Novel

To see how sophisticated today’s browsers in the fiction sections of bookshops and on the internet have become, it is necessary only to look at the astonishingly fine discriminations that are made by commentators on and consumers of one single sub-genre: science fiction. Science fiction is already a specialized generic niche within the broader category of fiction, and it is often further distinguished into the broad sub-categories of science fiction and science fantasy. Then the fun really starts. A glance at the available literature will yield the following further discriminations (and the list is far from exhaustive):¹

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<th>cyberpunk</th>
<th>utopias/dystopias</th>
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<td>genre SF</td>
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<td>new wave</td>
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Such discriminations seem to be made on a ‘not exactly X, more Y’ basis, where the point of making the judgement is perhaps to show how familiar with the subject one is: how sophisticated and discriminating one can be with respect to its subject matter. There is a cultish dimension to this minute taxonomizing – almost a one-upmanship involved in being able to perceive small inflections in literary subtypes.

An annual paperback bestseller list published in *The Guardian* at the end of 2001 records that of the fictional titles listed, only around a third are given the designation ‘novel’. Novels, on this list, come in an A-class and a B-class, where category A novels are smaller sized paperbacks designed for a ‘mass market’, and B novels are larger-sized, ‘middle-to-highbrow’ publications. Jilly Cooper would be category A; Rose Tremain category B. What of the two-thirds of fictional titles not
designated ‘novel’? It seems that the reader can distinguish between a variety of generic designations: ‘thriller’ (John Grisham, Tom Clancy), distinguished from ‘mystery’, ‘adventure’ and ‘crime’ (Ian Rankin, Nicci French); ‘romance’ (successful romance writers include Danielle Steele and Charlotte Bingham); ‘saga’ (Catherine Cookson), which appears not to be the same as the ‘historical novel’, written by authors such as Bernard Cornwell. The modern reader presumably knows what to expect when s/he buys a novel under one of the above designations. At whatever point one consults such a classified bestseller list, there are also a number of nonce generic labels that would be very difficult to define, and seem to have a more ephemeral existence. Examples in 2001 included ‘city girl’, covering Bridget Jones books and titles by Robyn Sisman, Jane Green and Lisa Jewell (and its male counterpart, ‘town boy’), with another major label being ‘juvenile’, to include Harry Potter and J.R.R. Tolkien – though their readership is certainly not entirely juvenile, and the term ‘kiddult’ has also been coined to cover the transfer of books intended primarily for children to an adult readership.

To those interested in the history of the novel, some questions and observations might arise. What exactly is a ‘mass market’ novel and how is it distinguished from its middle-brow rival? Has the middle-brow/low-brow split always been perceptible? How and when did such a complicated system of labelling arise? Which of those designations are of long duration? Romance, for example, is a label that seems to have been around for a very long time. When did it first come into use and to what sort of fiction was it first applied? When did it all begin? More importantly, when did the generic category ‘novel’ first emerge into English consciousness and become recognizable to readers? Turning to an influential present-day guide, *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature* (1987), we read that ‘of several claimants to the title of our first true novel, the strongest is Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*’, which was first published in 1719. This is the conventional wisdom among literary scholars, but it ought to prompt some questions. Why is *Robinson Crusoe* the strongest claimant to being the ‘first true novel’? Why are some pieces of prose fiction published before this *not* true novels? What was there before there was a novel? A very long and important recent book on the subject, Margaret Doody’s *The True Story of the Novel* (1996), gives the minimalist definition of a novel that ‘a work is a novel if it is fictional, if it is in prose, and if it is of a certain length’ – which, if satisfactory, would entail that the first true novel must have been
written long before 1719 and certainly not by an Englishman. After all, long works of prose fiction had been produced in Europe throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by such leading writers as Rabelais (c.1484–1553) and Cervantes (1547–1616). And if we accept Doody’s argument, there are a host of ancient Greek and Roman examples, like Apollonius of Tyre, Heliodorus, Apuleius and Petronius Arbiter. If Defoe himself had been accosted on the street as ‘father of the novel’, he would, one suspects, have made off at speed, convinced that someone was trying to bring a paternity suit against him. He would certainly not have recognized himself under that description. So what is behind the Oxford History’s guidance?

The Oxford History’s hedged sponsorship of Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe reflects the influence of one of the most powerful models of the novel’s rise currently available: Ian Watt’s The Rise of the Novel. Published in 1957, Watt’s study offered a charismatic account of the development of the most popular genre of imaginative writing, with which entire generations of literary students grew up and still grow up. With its use of the ‘rise’ metaphor, Watt’s title deliberately echoes R.H. Tawney’s epoch-making sociological study, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (1926), because he argues that the conditions out of which the modern novel emerged were the same conditions that produced the Protestant religion, early capitalism and the middle class, a set of developments that have in common a new emphasis on individual experience. At the heart of Watt’s explanation for the emergence of the novel is what he calls ‘formal realism’. For Watt, the novel proper is distinguished from earlier fictional forms by narrative procedures that are designed to secure the objectives of formal realism. The modern novel encapsulates the experience of individual protagonists, particular people in particular circumstances, using original plots, as against the repetitive conventionalities of older romance traditions – such as are familiar to us from the many versions of the Arthurian legend. Of Daniel Defoe, Watt states that his ‘total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir’ is a ‘defiant assertion of the primacy of individual experience’. There is a new emphasis on the exploration of personality in relation to categories of time and space: characters are set in solidly imagined milieux and there is a concern for the effect of the past upon present and future events, as well as a minutely discriminated timescale, as the novel tries to approximate the texture of everyday happenings. Defoe’s fiction, says Watt, ‘presents us with a picture both of individual life in its larger perspective as a historical process, and in its closer view which shows the process being acted
out against the historical background of the most ephemeral thoughts and actions.\footnote{5} ‘Formal realism’, then, is a set of procedures through which the novel specifies the setting, the time, and the individuality of the events and personalities that it imagines.

The novel emerged when and where it did – in England in the early eighteenth century – argues Watt, because at that time the feudal, aristocratic elite was being challenged by a new bourgeois commercial element, whose values were those of empiricism and individualism. Individualism is the result of the economic specialization produced by a pre-capitalist economy (division of labour, breakdown of traditional communities, urbanization) and by a Protestant emphasis on the primacy of individual conscience. Political conditions were ripe for economic individualism, which requires relative liberty (such as was secured for English people after 1688 through the so-called ‘Revolution Settlement’, that bent the King’s will to that of Parliament), and a mobile and heterogeneous society, in order to flourish. Merchants, successful tradesmen and shopkeepers, manufacturers, financial brokers and urban professionals: these groups were swelling the ranks of the book-buying public and were achieving the social clout to demand that their leisure time be filled by representations of themselves in action. (Apprentices and household servants might also have become more literate, concedes Watt, and although not middle class, they might also have bought and read novels.) The literary taste of this emergent reading public was more secular and less highbrow than that of their predecessors in the seventeenth century. In Watt’s reading, the novel was supremely well fitted to supply the leisure time needs of readers who required to be entertained, for growing periods of time, with stories about individuals whom they could recognize, identify with, and profit from. Watt’s ‘triple rise’ theory – the rise of the middle class, of Protestantism and of the novel – has proved highly durable. There have, however, been challenges to it from several different quarters. Today, nearly half a century on, we might say that it is bloody but unbowed. We must now consider some of those critiques, and the alternative accounts that they have generated.

To start with, what of Watt’s controlling metaphor, the ‘rise’ of the novel? Characterized by ‘realism’ and starting with Defoe, the idea of the novel’s ‘rise’ speaks, to some, of an irresistible tide of progress – a linear, teleological historical development culminating in the triumph of nineteenth-century realist fiction as practised by George Eliot, later to be recycled in even more aesthetically pleasing form as theorized by Henry James. Whatever is inconvenient to this grand narrative – whether
it be those writers whose work doesn’t easily fit the model, or the considerable evidence of contestation and struggle, which would render the story less bland – is simply omitted. Some of the difficulties of this model are raised in one of the earliest sustained critiques of Watt, which was made by John Richetti in *Popular Fiction Before Richardson* (1969), in a chapter entitled ‘The Rise of the Novel Reconsidered’. Among Richetti’s criticisms of *The Rise of the Novel* are: that it incorporates a ‘teleological bias’, an assumption of a progressive movement from the immature origins of the novel to the ‘rise’ and ‘dominance’ of the fully formed genre; that the canon of authors upon which it focuses is ‘drastically selective’; and, importantly, that Watt possesses an over-developed sense of the middle-class’ influence upon contemporary narrative forms. As Richetti pointedly remarks: ‘It is by no means certain that the early eighteenth century can be entirely summed up in terms of the advancing practicality and incipient democratic attitudes of the middle classes.’ To some sceptical historians, the ‘middle class’ has been rising since the medieval period, and there is nothing distinctive about the early eighteenth century in its emergence. For ‘revisionist’ scholars like Jonathan Clark, by contrast, there never was any rise of the middle class in this period because, virtually until the Reform Act of 1832, England remained a rural society dominated by the aristocracy and the Established Church. To some extent, these historians argue that the term ‘class’ itself is a concept inapplicable to English society prior to the full swing of the Industrial Revolution, because it relates to the solidarity shared by wage-earning factory workers in industrial cities. ‘Class’, they argue, is a category referable to socio-economic criteria, whereas early eighteenth-century society was organized around stratifications based on status that did not map directly onto wealth. To our minds, however, there is a broadly tripartite division of English society during this period, which separates into the following groupings: first, the aristocracy and gentry, landowners with private incomes who did not work; then, the ‘middling sort’ who did work but who did not dirty their hands – commercial or industrial investors who had a stock of money or goods that they sought to improve, and whose goals were accumulation and self-improvement; and finally the ‘mechanick part of mankind’, those labourers without capital who depended on their hands for a living. Such a division is implicit in Robinson Crusoe’s account of his rebellion against his father’s counsel, at the opening of Defoe’s novel:

[My father] bid me observe it, and I should always find, that the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of
mankind: but that the middle station had the fewest disasters, and was not exposed to so many vicissitudes as the higher or lower part of mankind.8

In our view, Watt is broadly correct to say that the second tier, the ‘middling sort’, was growing in this period. To be wholly persuasive, however, an account of the middle station’s role in promoting novel-writing and novel-reading would need to be considerably more nuanced than Watt’s.

Next, there is the question of ‘formal realism’ itself. How do we evaluate Watt’s contention that what separates the writing of those novelists that he considers to be fully fledged – Defoe, Richardson and Fielding – from earlier English and French prose fictions is its greater capacity to render plausibly in language what readers experienced as ‘real life’? Here, the various challenges of literary historians and cultural critics can be divided into two broad paradigms of approach, though most participants in the discussion draw upon both: (1) is ‘formal realism’ actually the defining characteristic of the novel? (2) what are the appropriate texts and pre-texts to bring forward in arriving at the ‘true story of the novel’? An important related question is: how does the novel proper distinguish itself from the romance? Why is Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749) a novel whereas, say, Thomas Lodge’s Rosalynde (1590) – the source for Shakespeare’s As You Like It, usually termed a ‘pastoral romance’ – is not a novel? Claims to realism tend to be historically relative, and are not borne out by any criterion intrinsic to language itself. Would we say that a soap opera, for example, is ‘realistic’? What is judged realistic by one generation or community of readers might be regarded as laughably artificial by another. William Warner makes the point thus: ‘no text … once transported from the space or time of its production, and no matter how earnest its aspirations to facticity or truth, can bear a mark in its own language that verifies its relation to something outside itself’.9 In Crime and Defoe (1993), Lincoln Faller argues that the concrete particularity so celebrated by Watt as a quintessential feature of Defoe’s fiction is actually more apparent in his non-fictional writing. To Faller, Defoe’s fiction is distinguished not by its quiddities of particular experience but by the arresting complexities of the narrative point of view.10 There are qualitative assumptions at work here. Defoe is deemed to be better, because his works are more complex, than any previous prose writer, and that is why we mark him out as a pioneer. Watt himself, we might note, was very aware of the difficulties raised by arguments about ‘realism’. Commenting on his
The semantic difficulty with realism here seems to be insuperable, largely because we are all – and equally – experts on ‘reality’, and therefore feel authorized to handle its terminology in whatever way we like. As a result the present debate, or rather non-debate, about realism is essentially a form of shadow-boxing in which no blows are ever landed because the ring of reality is so large: in fact there are no ropes.  

This moves us on nicely to the broader question of the relationship between the novel and the older genre of romance, which many would say is the one most relevant to the novel’s development. To come into its own, Watt argues, the novel had to evolve out of, or cut itself free from, the romance form above all – not least because the world evoked by romance is tested to destruction by such realist assumptions as those outlined earlier. In *Factual Fictions* (1983), Lennard Davis proposes that the key difference between the romance and the novel is that the former derives from the epic tradition of Homer and Virgil – with its distant, idealized settings and characters, aristocratic focus, and lengthy, episodic looseness of structure – whereas the latter derives from history and journalism, is middle class, and is concerned with present-day actualities, usually treated in the first-person or epistolary form. For Davis, the essential task of novelistic discourse was to distinguish itself from romance on the one hand – which it did by claiming certain kinds of documentary, factual significance not assumed by romance – and from newspaper journalism on the other, which it achieved by preserving fictionality and thus evading the provisions of the 1712 Stamp Act, which rendered purveyors of false news liable to prosecution.  

Ingenious though this argument is, it is entirely possible to argue that the novel never did distinguish itself from romance in such a neat and wholesale manner. Shifting the focus from Defoe to Henry Fielding, we might well argue that Fielding’s novels are not realistic in form. The use of a self-conscious, intrusive narrator; the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), which associates the novel with the epic; the clear manipulation of narrative content through coincidence and careful management of plot information – all this gives Fielding’s writing a texture entirely different from that of Defoe, and shows it to be more indebted to older narrative forms. Neither does the content of Fielding’s novels express a clear ideological commitment to the struggling urban poor.
and bourgeois – figures like Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe, who benefit from Defoe’s special pleading. If anything, rather than promoting the rise of the middle classes, Fielding patronizes the commercial and trading sectors of society, from the elevated standpoint of the gentry.

One further consequence of this critical demarcation of the novel from the romance tradition is that by focusing on Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, critics following Watt have been embarrassed by the love-centred or ‘amatory’ fiction produced by writers such as Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood and Penelope Aubin. Some feminist-inspired critiques of Watt have advanced the argument that upholding this split between romance and novel is part of a masculinist project designed to devalue those pre-Defovian writers whose main topics were love and sexual desire. As Laurie Langbauer writes:

The sudden break between the novel and romance that Watt highlights in his argument confirms the male privilege tacit in that argument by inserting it in a key feature of formal realism: plot.13

Deborah Ross’ *The Excellence of Falsehood: Romance, Realism and Women’s Contribution to the Novel* (1991) suggests that in working this tactic – in creating the romance = trivial = female, novel = serious = male equation – Watt was recapitulating procedures adopted by male satirists and critics in the period itself.14 For Langbauer, Ross and others, the ‘true story’ of the novel can only emerge when this damaging binarism between the serious and the trivial in early fiction is removed. Both below and in Chapter 2, we will return to this problem of a gendered blind spot that has persisted into a number of the post-Wattian accounts of the ‘rise’ and ‘origins’ of the novel genre.

It was the durability of romance conventions in the characterization and structure of novels such as those of Richardson and Fielding, and Watt’s manifest refusal to see this in his single-minded promotion of formal realism, that encouraged Michael McKeon to produce his monumental study, *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987).15 Marxist in its inspiration and complex in its expression, McKeon’s book was not rapturously received in all quarters. Lennard Davis’ review, for instance, states that ‘to attempt to trace the origins of the English novel by discussing political theory from the Greeks and Romans, through medieval and Renaissance writers, and finally to Enlightenment thinkers is rather like trying to write a book on the origins of the cinema by reviewing all the theories of optics for the last 2,000 years’.16 For McKeon, however, the main problem with Watt is that he gives a
static, one-dimensional account of a very sudden ‘rise’ or emergence of the novel – now you don’t see it, now you do. By contrast, McKeon aims to provide a more dialectical view of a fluid and unstable process. It is a wild goose chase, thinks McKeon, to try to pinpoint the very first novel. Instead, McKeon describes a series of ‘dialectical engagements’ out of which the novel arose, enabling us to comprehend the ideological work that the novel was developed to perform. Underlying his thesis is the discernment of two defining ‘crises’ in the early modern period: a crisis over how it is possible to use narrative to tell the truth, and a crisis over the relationship between the external social order and internal moral values. (An example of the latter might be Moll Flanders’ confrontation with a society that is determined to make a dishonest woman of her, however morally she tries to act.) In McKeon’s analysis, the novel was developed to mediate these twin questions of truth and virtue to a community of readers for whom they had become increasingly problematic.

It is difficult in a short précis to do justice to the full complexity of McKeon’s argument, but it might be summarized as follows. As the seventeenth century progressed, romance writing – as exemplified, say, by Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1590/1593) – was discredited because of its idealism and implausibility. ‘Romance idealism’ was gradually replaced by a narrative mode of ‘naïve empiricism’ that was committed to truth-telling, as in travel books, spiritual autobiographies and scientific writings. This in turn was called into question by a mode of ‘extreme scepticism’ which challenged the truth-claims of naïve empiricism, often by calling attention to the artificiality of all writing (in a way that actually recalls aspects of romance idealism). We can detect in society itself a process of transformation and change that mirrors this generic instability of narrative. During the seventeenth century, an aristocratic ideology that places emphasis on landowning and codes of honour, considering personal merit and virtue to be a consequence of social rank (in some quarters this might be called ‘civic humanism’), begins to give way to a progressive ideology that challenges the assumption that rank always equals virtue. In this new ideology, individual worth is measured not by social rank and its associated obligations, but by enterprise, intelligence, survival instinct and the amassing of wealth. Daniel Defoe’s novels might speak to this ideology. In turn, though, this progressive view generates a backlash of conservative contempt for the circulation of money and accumulation of capital, such as we find in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and in Fielding’s hatred for dishonest land stewards, racketeers, money men and corrupt public functionaries.
Drawing this together, we might represent McKeon’s complex argument in diagrammatic form thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic instability (questions of truth)</th>
<th>Social instability (questions of virtue)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Romance idealism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aristocratic ideology</strong></td>
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<td>History/literature split in terms of fact/fiction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>↓</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Naïve empiricism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Progressive ideology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific revolution, spread of print and Reformation creates works (like Defoe’s) making new claims to realism and factuality.</td>
<td>Personal virtue more important than social rank. Money replaces land as economic criteria replace status. Business, ‘projects’, investment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extreme scepticism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conservative ideology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims to truthfulness of writers like Defoe are subjected to parody and sceptical backlash.</td>
<td>Market exchange of commodities and invisible earnings lead only to corruption. Aristocracy is debased, but the land stewards and money men are no better.</td>
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Thus McKeon tries to establish a relationship between ideological formations and literary forms, and puts the novel into a richer dialogue with a wealth of other kinds of writing than Watt had attempted to do. Significantly, McKeon’s ‘dialectical’ model also entails the idea that the category of the novel in this period cannot be reduced to the style or achievement of any one novelist alone. Rather, in this model the genre emerges in debates between different prose fictions, and the assumptions about the world to which they correlate. For McKeon, the novel exists only within the competition between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver’s Travels*, or between Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741) – oppositions that we will discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters. Is some *Crusoe–Gulliver hybrid*, then, the ‘first true novel’? If such a question seems facetious, we need at least to register the difficulty that is presented to actual readers by this idea.
that *individual* prose fictions from the early eighteenth century cannot in themselves be defined as ‘novels’.

As this focus upon dialectical relationships between Defoe and Swift, and Richardson and Fielding, might suggest, for all the critical sophistication of his study McKeon himself replicates one of the further problems in Watt’s original thesis. For isn’t McKeon’s account also a rather phallocentric one? In her pointedly titled *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986), published the year before McKeon’s study, Jane Spencer focuses attention on a host of writers – Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Penelope Aubin, Elizabeth Rowe, Eliza Haywood, Mary Davys, Catherine Trotter, and others – who were all writing fiction during the period 1690–1725, and who should perhaps have some part to play in the story. Watt’s account is of the founding fathers of the novel; were there not also founding mothers? Spencer stresses the importance not only of female writers but also of female readers in the early development of the novel. More upper- and middle-class women were joining the ranks of the consuming public, and were indeed very prominent within it. Although the legal position of the married woman had changed very little (a wife remained her husband’s chattel, without any independent property-owning rights), her former importance in both the home and the workplace was eroded as the workplace became increasingly separated from the domestic hearth and apprentices took over tasks traditionally undertaken by the wives of businessmen and tradesmen. Suburbanization, the increasing availability of luxury goods, and increasing standards of living resulted in a more decorative purpose for many women, who were required to become their husbands’ status symbols, and settled into an existence of hostessing and reading. Accompanying this change in social role was an ideological shift, whereby women began to be considered as inhabiting a separate sphere of emotional expertise. It was in the early eighteenth century that women were first constructed as custodians of moral and emotional virtue, as homemakers with a monopoly on sensitivity. Cast as experts in the domain of sensibility, finer feelings, and moral refinement, and offered a vision of themselves as discreet, soft, reserved and understanding, women were encouraged to think of themselves as queens in a domestic realm. Thus, women of suitable ambition found themselves with a subject to write about and an audience to write for. Novel-writing, Spencer suggests, ‘may be seen as the literate middle-class household’s substitute for the declining home industries which had once enabled the housewife to contribute to the support of the family’. It would be attempted by women who, while moderately well-educated,
were not educated in Greek and Latin; and the epistolary novel in particular seemed an accessible extension to forms of writing already being undertaken by such women in their leisure time.\textsuperscript{17}

The sudden rash of female creativity, then, has a sociological explanation. Nancy Armstrong’s \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel} (1987) takes this argument as far as it can go in arguing that the Wattian ‘rise’ thesis must be understood in gendered terms.\textsuperscript{18} At the very heart of the novel, she contends, are female, not male, structures of feeling. For Armstrong, conduct books, educational treatises and domestic novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries together created an ideal form of femininity based on emotional development, which replaced aristocratic conceptions of fortune and rank. To explain the vast increase in production and consumption of fiction by women, Armstrong argues that women’s domestic experience, especially with respect to sexual desire, love, courtship and marriage, promoted and was promoted by the novel. The desirable woman became the domestic goddess, sophisticated in the technology of feeling and supremely well fitted to impart values to children. In Armstrong’s account, the novel part-created and part-reflects this emergent cultural shift. And yet, as other scholars have noted, literary creation for women was from the outset a somewhat paradoxical endeavour. As Kathryn Shevelow has shown with respect to early periodical writing, it was unacceptable for women to seek literary fame through authorship: they had to relinquish at least that aspect of male ambition.\textsuperscript{19} Publication is not the most demure and passive of vocations and, from the first, there was a tension between the new ideology of femininity and the upsurge in women’s literary productivity.

Watt’s neglect of women writers, to which the above critics respond, is a subset of a larger question regarding the precursors of the novel’s development. Watt spends too little time, some have argued, considering earlier claimants: only John Bunyan – author of \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} (1678/84), the most reprinted religious allegory in modern times – is seriously entertained as a contender for the title ‘novelist’ prior to Defoe. Doesn’t this make Watt’s account not merely a phallocentric, but also a very anglocentric one? What about Cervantes, Rabelais and, if we consider the case made by Margaret Anne Doody, a host of ancient Greek and Roman writers? On this issue of which texts are to be considered as part of the prehistory of the novel, we would draw attention to J. Paul Hunter’s important account in \textit{Before Novels} (1990). The novel’s emergence from other forms of discourse has often been regarded as a process of \textit{secularization}, whereby casuistry (the application
of moral principles derived from religion to human conduct) and soteriology (the discourse surrounding the salvation of the soul) are rhetorics taken over from religious writing and privileged in the early novel, as the cornerstone of faith moved from belief to conduct, from theology to ethics. Hunter, though, considers a much wider swathe of non-imaginative writing as relevant to the process. Hunter would concur with McKeon that we can’t actually pinpoint the first novel. In Hunter’s own account, the emergence of the novel is a two-phase process. The first phase occurred in the period from the 1690s to the 1720s, culminating in Defoe’s novels and *Gulliver’s Travels*, while the second was a much more self-conscious period during the 1740s and 1750s, when writers like Richardson and Fielding actually knew that it was novels they were writing and began to theorize self-consciously about the process. For Hunter, romance, as well as religious writing, has been artificially privileged in the ancestry of the novel. Novels should be perceived distinctly against numerous forms, many of them minor and non-literary, which Hunter goes on to discuss. He covers late seventeenth-century journalism (by which he means not only newspapers but also the various broadsheets and ephemeral publications that offered ‘true accounts’, ‘strange and surprising adventures’, ‘horrid tales’, and the like); the Protestant practice of ‘Occasional Meditation’ designated ‘meletetics’ by Robert Boyle (the practice of deducing meaning out of rocks, trees, clouds, comets or strange and wonderful prodigies, such as a whale being found in the river Humber); travel books, both real and imaginary; criminal biography; conduct manuals; and an entire wealth of didactic literature, on which he places particular emphasis. Beside the diversity of the material he considers, Hunter’s most distinctive contribution is to make his case in terms of a reconstruction of contemporary reader-expectations. What was available to readers before there were novels? What developing needs did these readers have that the novel had to satisfy? Readers themselves, argues Hunter, ‘gain the power to create texts by communicating, though not necessarily consciously or directly, their needs and desires to those in a position to make books’. There is not, in his view, much crossover between the reading public for novels and that for imaginative writing in more traditional genres such as poetry. From the first, novel-reading was perceived to be a less elite, less intellectually challenging form of entertainment, which carried with it moral dangers and was capable of leading young readers off the beaten track. Novel-reading was conducted in the solitude of a reader’s own space, permitting a young reader to construct a realm of privacy both physical and imaginative,
over which the parental generation had diminished control. In his exploration of who those readers were who wanted to consume novels, Hunter finds a group of ‘ambitious, aspiring, mobile, and increasingly urban young people, both men and women’ to have been the target group for this new form of fiction.\textsuperscript{20}

To conclude this review of the ‘origins’ debate post-Watt, we single out two further accounts that approach the phenomenon from very different angles, but which both try to imagine what the process must have looked like to those immersed within it. William Warner’s \textit{Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain} (1998) is one of the most original and inspiring books about the novel to have been written in recent years. Perceiving the novel’s early development as a function of the need to satisfy new markets for forms of entertainment, to give new kinds of readers what they wanted, Warner sees the elevation of Richardson and Fielding in the 1750s not as a founding \textit{truth} about the history of the novel – as though the novel had now come of age and achieved the degree of higher seriousness and respectability that later literary historians would ask of it – but as part of a market-driven competition to come up with a successful product. In this perspective, novels of amatory intrigue such as those written by Behn, Manley and Haywood (and neglected by Watt) developed the formulaic fictions that were ‘overwritten’ with a more responsible and conventional ethical system by the later writers:

The very elements of these [amatory] novels that drew the scorn of cultural critics – their shallowness, their opportunistic seriality and shameless repetition, and their absence of compelling ethical justification – all fitted this new commodity so as to thrive on an urban print market of diverse buyers ready to pay cash for entertainment.

Notably, Warner combats the traditional literary-critical view of novels of amorous intrigue as constantly failing to be truly novelistic. Instead, he argues, these novels should be seen as ‘instigators of a new contagion of reading deemed a threat in early modern Britain’. Intriguingly, Warner does not accept the feminist case for a gendered re-visioning of Watt. Readers are not addressed, in his view, under the category of their separate genders. Rather, early novels address female and male readers alike, apprehending them as indistinguishable units within a hazily perceived ‘market’.\textsuperscript{21}

Finally in our survey, we consider a group of commentators led by Homer Obed Brown, and including Alan Downie and Robert Mayer,
who would regard even 1750 as a date too early to mark the stabilization and ‘market visibility’ of the novel genre. This trio puts enormous pressure on any straightforward sense that Defoe was the first English novelist, and teases out a number of the complexities involved in the process of canon-formation. As Mayer puts the case: ‘Defoe presented his texts to readers as works of history and only gradually and very problematically were they read into the tradition of the novel.’

In Downie’s view, it is impossible simply to ignore or to dismiss the fact that most of the early novelists that we are looking at either rejected the term ‘novel’ (along with ‘romance’) as inadequate to describe their own endeavour, or simply failed to refer to their novels as ‘novels’.

Readers of Defoe in Defoe’s own era, who did not have the benefit of clearly signed bookshops, would not have known whether his major works were fact or fiction, given that their title-pages didn’t make this clear. These readers would not even have known whether any two of the works were written by the same author, given that Defoe’s name itself didn’t appear on the title-pages. In *Institutions of the English Novel* (1997), Homer Brown asks what it is that entitles us to say that the novel has truly emerged as a cultural institution. ‘What is clear’, he writes, ‘is that the linear history of the novel as having an “origin” and “rise”, the history we have been brought up on, with its genealogies, lines of descent and influence, family resemblances, is itself a fictional narrative – a kind of novel about the novel’. In Brown’s view, we can only say that the novel is a cultural institution when it is collected and available on library bookshelves. Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s 50-volume collection of 1810, *The British Novelists*, and Sir Walter Scott’s *Ballantyne’s Novelists’ Library*, a 10-volume collection of 1821–24, alongside critical histories of the novel as a genre written at this time, are the acts of canonization that really enable us to speak of the novel as having gained cultural acceptability. For Brown, then, the eighteenth-century novel was actually stabilized at the beginning of the nineteenth century, rather than around 1750, as more conventional accounts would suggest:

What we now call ‘the novel’ didn’t appear visibly as a recognized single ‘genre’ until the early nineteenth century, when the essentially heterogeneous fictional prose narratives of the preceding century were grouped together institutionally under that name … it can with some accuracy be said that the eighteenth-century novel was invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
We will return to this question of the ‘institutional’ conditions that affected the development and cultural consolidation of the novel genre in Chapter 8 of our study.

For the moment, let us draw a line under what others think, the better to set out our own model of the novel’s emergence. If we have pointed out some of the problems with the metaphor of the ‘rise’ of the genre, what might be our own preferred analogy? We might liken the novel’s emergence to a scene from a 1950s horror movie set in Egypt, entitled, for instance, *The Curse of the Mummy’s Tomb*. There’s a pool of bubbling mud and as our clean-cut, shorts-clad Egyptologist watches in fascination, a shape slowly emerges from it, at first and for some time indistinguishable from the mud that is its element. Only very gradually are the contours of a bandaged mummy separable from the muddy amniotic fluid of its birth. And there it is, the novel. It is a thing of shreds and patches, carbon-dateable to the later seventeenth century, as Chapter 2 will contend. The mud is a kind of typographical primal soup, an amniotic fluid that includes very many ingredients: romances and various modifications of romance (popular chivalric romance, political and allegorical romance, French heroic romance); novellas; ‘picaresque’ fiction (called after the Spanish term ‘picaro’, meaning ‘rogue’), a form of fiction that takes an unscrupulous protagonist through a long series of scrapes, crimes, confidence-tricks and the like; criminal biography; spiritual autobiography; imaginary voyages; and utopias. And of course, following J. Paul Hunter, we can add to this a wealth of non-fictional material: sermons; memoirs; scandalous chronicles or secret histories; broadsheets; pamphlets; newspapers; letters; diaries; conduct manuals – in truth, it is difficult to exclude any form of printed material as being wholly irrelevant to the story. Defoe has been privileged in this story by critics considering the matter in retrospect, partly because of the sheer popularity of *Robinson Crusoe*, an early bestseller, but partly also because of the kinds of fictional work that were subsequently discerned as culturally valuable. Our account will discuss Defoe as actually a very awkward writer to choose to inaugurate the new genre. His differences with the amatory writers on the one hand, and with conservative cultural critics such as Jonathan Swift on the other, render him very difficult to place on the map of the novel. ‘The novel’, though, is not a category intrinsic to the material itself, and it is therefore open to contestation and debate. Our perception of phenomena alters depending on the vantage point that we adopt, and the ‘true story’ of the novel partly depends on when and where one chooses to begin it.
Before elaborating further on our own vantage and starting points, we need to dwell for a moment on the vexed term ‘realism’. In The Rise of the Novel, Watt provides a useful summary of what he means by the term. ‘Formal realism’, he writes, is

the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.26

Although Watt recognizes here that realism is a ‘convention’ or set of conventions, it is fair to say that he sometimes seems to forget this in seeking to define the novel genre in terms of its manner of representing the world. In his recently published The English Novel: An Introduction (2005), Terry Eagleton offers a characteristically arch account of the difficulties involved in deploying a term such as ‘realism’:

To call something ‘realist’ is to confess that it is not the real thing. False teeth can be realistic, but not the Foreign Office … [Realism] is the form which seeks to merge itself so thoroughly with the world that its status as art is suppressed. It is as though its representations have become so transparent that we stare straight through them to reality itself. The ultimate representation, so it seems, would be one which was identical with what it represented. But then, ironically, it would no longer be a representation at all. A poet whose words somehow ‘become’ apples and plums would not be a poet but a greengrocer.

For all the sceptical tone of this passage, Eagleton nevertheless accepts that realism is ‘the dominant style of the modern English novel’. If the word ‘style’ here protects him from making the mistake of confusing representation with reality, it is a line that even he finds hard to hold, as when he goes on to declare that ‘the extraordinarily radical achievement of Defoe’s novels is to tell the stark, unvarnished truth about this world, without posture or pretension’.27 Surely the term ‘truth’ here is far too unqualified? As Eagleton evidently discovered, the notion of
‘realism’ is not easily done away with in discussions of the novel. However difficult it might be to establish that Richardson’s fictions are more ‘realistic’ than, say, Eliza Haywood’s, such was certainly perceived to be the case by the majority of eighteenth-century readers. While we recognize the very considerable difficulties attaching to ‘realism’, then, we have not altogether expunged it from our vocabulary in this study.

Returning to our own model of the making of the genre: from the outset, we would emphasize that there is no single true story of the novel. If Watt tried to plant a flag in the novel and claim it for England, subsequent critics have laid bare the ideological import of his inclusions and exclusions. European precursors, especially novellas and romances written in France and Spain, and the English amatory fictions inspired by them, were in fact occluded from the beginning, as it became necessary in the eighteenth century to assert English superiority over France and emphasize a native tradition of achievement. The story that the present authors will tell is itself Anglophone in emphasis, not only for reasons of space and expertise, but because we believe that there is an important story here to be told. There are, we would argue, very good reasons for commencing our account in Britain, although we don’t leave it as late as the eighteenth century to get the story started. We agree with those who think that the female-authored early novel plays a significant part in the story, and with those who argue that market forces also do, even if we are not quite content to reduce achievements such as those of Richardson and Fielding to shrewd appraisals of what would sell.

If our textual survey is not primarily European, our theoretical underpinnings are more so. As J. Paul Hunter’s work makes evident, the novel is not a pure genre. It is a very capacious form, a generic mixture that ‘contains multitudes’ (in Whitman’s evocative phrase) of earlier kinds of writing. It took some time for that mixture to settle, so that it could be perceived as having a distinctiveness of its own. We intend to make some use here of the theoretical writing of Mikhail Bakhtin. Our deployment of his approach to the novel will assist us in putting forward the case that the novel is not only or entirely ‘made’ of prose. In our view, the novel is influenced by cultural trends so broad that they embrace even poetry and writing for the theatre: imaginative writing, that is, which is not expressed in prose. As we will argue, then, certain developments within poetry and theatre at this time are both relevant and significant to the story. Who then is Bakhtin? The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin is perhaps the most influential theorist of the novel as loose, baggy monster. His major work was done in the 1940s and 1960s, but in the Anglophone world his importance has only been
recognized more recently, partly through the translation of four magnificent essays, which were published in 1981 under the title *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin’s vantage point is the Russian novelist, Dostoevsky, who plays the role for Bakhtin that one might describe George Eliot playing for Ian Watt and the Anglo-American critical tradition. For Bakhtin, the prehistory of the novel does indeed include fiction written in ancient Greece and Rome, and he sees the emergence of the modern novel not as an eighteenth-century English phenomenon but as a characteristic cultural creation of Renaissance Europe, with Rabelais and Cervantes as the major players. Bakhtin has important ideas on the nature of the novel and on the cultural conditions in which it flourishes. He argues, for instance, that when the linguistic conditions that obtain in a society make for what he terms ‘polyglossia’, the use of several languages, then all language use becomes interestingly self-conscious. Straightforward uses of language become subject to parody and travesty, and all serious language-use generates comic doubling, which provides the corrective of laughter and criticism.

In an essay entitled ‘Epic and Novel’, the first of the four essays published as *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin offers an account of the nature and development of the novel in terms of a comparison with epic. For Bakhtin, the epic and the novel lie at opposite ends of the mimetic spectrum. Whereas epic is monologic and monoglossic, dominated by a single authoritative voice, the novel is dialogic and polyglossic, representing an orchestra of diverse discourses and giving to no one of these a position of authority over the others. Epic represents an absolute closure and impersonality: its world is untouchable, located in an unchangeable past that is called to memory but that we have no genuine capacity to inhabit. Whereas epic is ‘structured in the zone of the distanced image, a zone outside any possible contact with the present in all its openendedness’, the novel is ‘associated with the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought (holiday forms, familiar speech, profanation)’. The roots of the novel are folkloric, and all genres that permit laughter have a contribution to make to its development. Epic, by contrast, has no such contribution to make. Indeed, epic discourse takes itself so seriously that ‘it is precisely laughter that destroys the epic’, to the extent that laughter dissolves the distanced detachment upon which epic writing depends. The ‘plane of laughter’ allows us to walk disrespectfully around objects, perceiving them in undignified postures and from unorthodox vantage points, and it is the novelist’s privilege to operate in a contemporaneous, non-hierarchical relationship to the material reality that s/he represents. Bakhtin’s
polarized model of the epic and the novel also has important consequences for the way in which we respond to the individuals that these literary forms portray. With regard to characterization, Bakhtin argues that the epic hero is ‘complete’, but that he is

hopelessly ready-made … he is, furthermore, completely externalized. There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation. All his potential, all his possibilities are realized utterly in his external social position.28

For the period that we are discussing, the distinction that Bakhtin conceptualizes here between epic and novelistic characters might be illustrated in the difference between, say, the strutting, posturing, attitudinizing heroes of seventeenth-century heroic tragedies, and a Moll Flanders or a Robert Lovelace – both of whom have a sense of the self as a series of social roles, requiring different modifications of persona. Whereas the social situation of many novelistic characters remains open to determination, and is frequently very different at the end of the novel from the beginning, then, epic characters are entirely lacking in this flexible capacity for social and personal development.

Bakhtin’s own model of the historical movement from epic to novel is primarily linguistic. In the Renaissance, there was a shifting away from Latin as a master-language towards the use of different European vernaculars, creating the conditions of parody and travesty, dialogue and conversation, that help to constitute the novel. The language that is used in novels (the speech of a character or narrator, say) is represented language, that interacts with the narrator/author’s viewpoint, and a conversation is carried on between that ‘language-image’ and the arguing, eavesdropping, ridiculing, parodying function of the narrator. For Bakhtin, all novelistic language is ‘dialogic’, part of a system of intersecting languages that interanimate each other. The novel, rather like a Renaissance fairground, is thus a meeting-place for a heterogeneous collection of discourses that operate on each other and on extra-novelistic language by parody. Unlike the sealed-off, impermeable language of epic, language in the novel is in touch with the ‘reality’ of the people.

For Bakhtin, then, the novel is a comic, relativistic, socially orientated, contemporaneous and heterogeneous form. For our own purposes, Bakhtin is more suggestive than authoritative. There are many aspects of Bakhtin’s theory with which one might wish to take issue. Is the contrast between epic and the novel, in terms of dialogism, really so stark
as he contends? Some would argue that theatrical discourse must surely be more dialogic than novelistic discourse—plays, after all, have multiple voices as a basic condition of the art-form; while others would argue that the epic itself is far less monologic than Bakhtin allows. Within the novel genre, some novels might also seem to be more dialogic than others. Early first-person novels retain the authority of a single voice, and later novels often confer that authority upon a narrator. While Richardson’s novels might contain a plurality of letter-writers, they also incorporate a dominant voice, which cannot be subverted except through subversive acts of reading. Bakhtin’s idealism in celebrating the absence of any authoritative, privileged voice in the novel, and in freeing us from the austerity of the classical body, is determined in part by the repressive political circumstances in which he was formulating his theories. One can see only a limited applicability of an analysis like this to the English material that is our main concern in this study. The comic novels that Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne write in eighteenth-century Britain do certainly owe something to their Rabelaisian and Cervantic precursors, and Sterne in particular might be considered a writer of ‘dialogic’ narratives, which are not clearly dominated by a single, authoritative voice. This model works less well, though, for the more pious and didactic works of Sarah Fielding, Samuel Richardson and Frances Sheridan, where the spirit of carnivalesque parody and folksy misrule seems less apparent, and where the narrator seems anxious to hold on to authority rather than to permit the mischief of parody.

We would want to employ Bakhtin in a somewhat broader way, however. We shall be using his term ‘novelization’ to refer to a cultural process which, we will argue, took place in post-1660 England, making for the mingling and mixing of different literary modes within and between all the major genres. We would accept the conclusions of recent historical and sociological analysis, that the growth of the English book market is an aspect of the ‘commercial capitalism’ that transformed pre-industrial Britain into a consumer society in the period between the English Civil War and the mid-eighteenth century. Demand for printed materials is recognized to have been stimulated by the Civil War itself, and literacy rates, steadily rising throughout the early modern period, are thought to have been rising especially quickly, particularly amongst women, in the decades following the Restoration. In a society becoming capable of delivering a standard of living considerably above that of mere subsistence to an increasing number of its members, books were amongst the possessions that these improving
To understand the emergence of the novel, we need to look at the social and cultural conditions that made it possible. As individuals grew wealthier, they began to demand more and more from the world around them. The desire for refinement, for distinguishing oneself from those who could not afford such luxuries, and for closing the gap between oneself and those who had possessed such things effortlessly for generations, was a driving force behind the development of the novel. 

By the mid-seventeenth century, when newspapers and periodicals had become a permanent part of the publishing scene, when women began to enter the literary workplace as consumers and producers, when theatre was becoming big business, and when arguments had begun to be made about the unique status of 'wit' as a form of intellectual property, we can speak of the beginnings of a mass market for literature. Publishers were trying to locate this market with ever-greater precision and directness, writers were responding to their sense of what comprised it and trying to stimulate it, and readers were eager to participate in it.

The growth of this market, and the parallel rise in the number of professional writers who sought to make a living by satisfying it, had a profound effect on what was actually written. The generic mutations that we wish to specify to Bakhtin’s rubric of ‘novelization’ speak to altering standards of plausibility. New generations of readers, deriving from different social provenances, wanted to read new kinds of stories—not stories with remote, ramrod-stiff heroes, but stories coloured by humour and concerned with individuals whose destinies might conceivably resemble their own. As expertise in classical languages became diluted, readers would increasingly turn to translations when they wanted to access the great epics. More and more, though, these readers also wanted their own plots. The kinds of stories that Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Daniel Defoe and others wanted to tell do differ from epic stories in the ways described by Bakhtin. In the last decades of the seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth, much imaginative writing was aspiring to a new condition of narrativity, privileging the telling of relevant, domestic, and contemporaneous stories. In the theatre, the plots of comedies and tragedies began to resemble one another as the classic genres lost their distinctiveness; and the new tragicomic mixture itself became more domestic and bourgeois in scope. Even in poetry, the long-cherished conception of epic as the pinnacle of achievement was compromised as the epic increasingly came to seem like a remote and vanishing ideal. In the hands of writers such as Alexander Pope, epic is now parodied by mock-epic. In Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, for instance, the epic becomes the domestic, and the storyline resembles the kind of amorous skirmish
that is going to become the stuff of novel plots. To help exemplify the point that we are making here, consider the following extract from the third canto of Pope’s poem. In this well-known episode, the war of the sexes is played out through the symbolism of the fashionable card game, ombre:

\[\text{Belinda now, whom Thirst of Fame invites,} \\
\text{Burns to encounter two adventrous Knights,} \\
\text{At Ombre singly to decide their Doom;} \\
\text{And swells her Breast with Conquests yet to come …} \]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Behold, four Kings in Majesty rever’d,} \\
\text{With hoary Whiskers and a forky Beard;} \\
\text{And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a Flow’r,} \\
\text{Th’ expressive Emblem of their softer Pow’r;} \\
\text{Four Knaves in Garbs succinct, a trusty Band,} \\
\text{Caps on their heads, and Halberds in their hand;} \\
\text{And Particolour’d Troops, a shining Train,} \\
\text{Draw forth to Combat on the Velvet Plain.} \\
\text{The skilful Nymph reviews her Force with Care;} \\
\text{Let Spades be Trumps! she said, and Trumps they were …} \\
\text{Thus far both Armies to Belinda yield;} \\
\text{Now to the Baron Fate inclines the Field …} \\
\text{The Baron now his Diamonds pours apace;} \\
\text{Th’ embroider’d King who shows but half his Face,} \\
\text{And his refulgent Queen, with Pow’rs combin’d,} \\
\text{Of broken Troops an easie conquest find.} \\
\text{Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild Disorder seen,} \\
\text{With Throngs promiscuous strow the level Green.} \\
\text{Thus when dispers’d a routed Army runs,} \\
\text{Of Asia’s troops, and Africk’s Sable Sons,} \\
\text{With like Confusion different Nations fly,} \\
\text{Of various Habit and of various Dye,} \\
\text{The pierc’d Battalions dis-united fall,} \\
\text{In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o’erwhelms them all.} \\
\text{The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily Arts,} \\
\text{And wins (oh shameful Chance!) the Queen of Hearts …}^{30}
\end{align*}\]

Pope’s poem, first published in 1712, augmented in 1714, and revised in 1717, was written to intervene in a high-society quarrel between the
Fermor and Petre families, that was caused by Lord Petre publicly cutting off a lock of hair from the back of Arabella Fermor’s head. In the poem, Lord Petre becomes the predatory Baron, with Arabella cast as the coquette, Belinda. In literary criticism, the above extract would normally be produced as an example of mock-heroic verse, that is to say, verse that applies to contemporary situations the underlying conventions of the Greek and Roman epics. As such an analysis would suggest: by inflating the tone of a high-society spat between a young lady and gentleman from wellborn families and comparing it, through personified playing cards, to military combat as it might be described by Homer or Virgil, Pope subjects to graceful satire the essential triviality of the quarrel.

In the context of this book’s argument, however, we would wish to make a different set of points. First, the fact that mock-epic poetry came to be written at all in this period itself suggests the weakening hold of classical literature on the reading public. Mock-epic might be deployed to satirize Belinda and the Baron, and thus contemporary eighteenth-century life, but the mockery also reflects back on the epic universe itself. Society ladies and gentlemen nowadays, Pope’s poem is saying, concern themselves with fashionable trivia. One way to ridicule this is to describe genteel society in language more suitable to the warrior society depicted in the great ancient epics. However, one effect of doing so is to tarnish the dignity of the Virgilian and Homeric worlds themselves. It is just that bit harder to take *The Iliad* seriously once one has read Pope’s poem. *The Rape of the Lock* is a prime example of the process of ‘novelization’ that we are outlining; of the gradual domestication of the literary agenda. The subject matter of Pope’s poem, the erotic intrigues of the *beau monde*, will become the material of the amatory novel from the 1720s onwards, and there is much that is novelistic in Pope’s own treatment of it. Card-playing, the specific substance of Pope’s satire here, is an excellent example of a ‘novelistic’ topic, a topic that was pervasively treated across all of the literary genres. Before, during, and after Pope’s poem, card-playing and its attendant evils of gambling featured in prose tracts such as Richard Steele’s *The Christian Hero* (1701), in plays such as Susanna Centlivre’s *The Gamester* and *The Basset-Table* (1705), and in poetry such as Edward Young’s *Satire VI*, in his *Love of Fame* series (1728); and by mid-century, it becomes central to Henry Fielding’s final novel, *Amelia* (1751). Card-playing takes its place as one of a wide set of social issues that begin to fuel imaginative writing across all genres: duelling; prostitution; master/servant protocols; social rank; love-marriages as against marriages of convenience or property – and so forth. Our point here is that, in many critical
accounts, only prose forms of imaginative writing are considered to be relevant to the story of the novel’s rise. In our own view, by contrast, ‘the novel’ is characterized more by certain kinds of discourses with particular ideological agendas, than it is by specific formal features associated with genre.

What we are suggesting here is that there are cultural shifts in post-Restoration English society that relate to the emergence of the novel as a literary form, and that require a fairly broad brush to sketch in. Not only are many species of prose writing relevant to the story, but drama and poetry also have to be included in the discussion. To describe the topography of the terrain in more detail than this would require a specialist study of its own, and we are sure that the reader who has followed us thus far is impatient with ground-clearing and eager to start engaging with novels themselves. Until now, we have been summarizing various challenges to Ian Watt’s seminal account, and using Bakhtin to theorize a process of ‘novelization’ that we do not think most of Watt’s challengers have quite put their fingers on. Particular social and cultural conditions stimulated the growth of a literary market, and where there is a market there will be entrepreneurs to satisfy it. Imaginative writing designed for this literary marketplace would necessarily be different to the kind of writing that had developed to meet pre-market conditions, the literature produced for aristocratic patrons and circulation in manuscript or limited print-runs within narrow coteries. Literary artefacts having the properties of what we now call ‘novels’ were the products of the new market conditions.

So let us now give a brief overview of the position on the novel’s ‘rise’ that this book proposes to take, bearing in mind that this is only one possible way of seeing the matter. In our view, the question ‘what is the first novel?’ is the wrong question to ask. To search for a first novel is to give imaginative writing the mode of being that one attributes to an invention like the telephone. As a result, we have been saying, of deep structural changes in society, the implications of which can be studied through sociological, political and cultural analysis, imaginative literature in the post-1660 period became ‘novelized’. Imaginative writing in many modes took on a more domestic, more contemporaneous colouring. In Before Novels, J. Paul Hunter offers a checklist of features that he discerns in writing that is the product of the processes we are terming ‘novelization’. The most important of these features can be summarized thus:

1. **Contemporaneity.** Novels are stories of now, rather than of the far-away in place and time.
2. **Credibility and probability.** People and events are believable, and the laws governing fictional events are like those that govern our everyday world.

3. **Familiarity.** People are of a social rank similar to that of the majority of readers, rather than being heroes, kings and the like.

4. **Rejection of traditional plots.** Stereotypes in plots, character and naming typical of earlier, more aristocratic forms, are abandoned.

5. **Individualism, subjectivity.** There is a greater degree of self-consciousness and awareness of the processes of thought and feeling that affect individuals.

6. **Empathy and vicariousness.** Novels give the reader a sense of what it would be like to be another individual. Readers can ‘identify’ or ‘empathize’ with characters.

7. **Coherence and unity of design.** The incidents and action of the novel are drawn together by a guiding design and by a serious engagement with ideas that adds up to a presiding ‘theme’. Novels engage ideologies: systems of belief.

8. **Inclusivity, digressiveness, fragmentation.** Within the coherence described under [7], novels also digress and parenthesize, but in a way that relates to a print medium rather than to the oral patterns of earlier romance.31

This set of identifiers issues, for us, in the conclusion that there were bursts of novelistic activity initiated by Aphra Behn in the 1680s. Behn, we would argue, was the first writer to exploit the market with a fictional product that has some of the characteristics, though not all and not incontestably, that are listed here. Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Penelope Aubin and Daniel Defoe were her most prolific successors, the first publishing in a 10–15 year period at the beginning of the eighteenth century and the others in an intense burst between roughly 1719 and 1730. There is then a hiatus. Defoe dies in 1731, by which time Haywood has worked out the seam of amatory formula fiction that she began to mine in 1719 with the publication of *Love in Excess*. It is a decade before Samuel Richardson works up a pair of ‘familiar letters’ – advice on conduct for young persons – into the epoch-making *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740). *Pamela* might have remained a one-off literary phenomenon had it not been for the fact that Henry Fielding found himself with time on his hands. His career in the theatre ended prematurely as a result of the passing, in 1737, of a Stage Licensing Act that was partly designed to curtail his own satirical dramas. Objecting to the implied moral scheme of *Pamela*, infuriated
by the kind of reader and reading that this fiction seemed to posit, he worked up his parody *Shamela* (1741) and, soon afterwards, published *Joseph Andrews* (1742), which outgrew the *Shamela* satire, and which contains an important preface theorizing a new species of writing: the ‘comic Epic-Poem in Prose’. *Shamela* soon became only one single shot, if the most effective, in a controversial battle between writers dubbed ‘Pamelists’ and ‘anti-Pamelists’, the effect of which was to push imaginative fiction onto a higher plane of explicit theorization. Earlier writers had certainly written of their intentions with respect to their writing – Congreve had in the 1690s, Defoe had, and Swift had – but their main concern had been to address its basis in truth or fact. In the 1740s, Richardson and Fielding took the fictionality of fiction more for granted, and were much more concerned with the achievement of higher moral truth. When he poses as the editor rather than the composer of Pamela’s letters, Richardson’s concern is not to occlude the fiction, but to render it the more convincing.

Ian Watt, we have seen, neglected women writers in his account of the early novel. For Watt, the superiority of Defoe over Manley and Haywood lay partly in the fact that, in inventing characters such as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders and Roxana, he had interrogated the nature of the modern *subject*. Defoe had, in short, produced psychologically convincing characters, of whom it made sense to ask: why do they do what they do? What motivates them? How do we understand them? The rise of the novel was an account of the rise of modern subjectivity, carried on by Richardson and Fielding. Authors of amatory fiction had, it must have seemed to Watt, nothing to contribute to such a project. Their characters, devoid of any real personality, were simply counters to be shuffled on a narrative backgammon board created by their plots. In certain respects, our own account concurs with this line of reckoning. As we would broadly agree, the only real interest afforded by such works as Haywood’s *Love in Excess* is: ‘what happens next?’ Who will seduce whom? What duels might ensue? Who might die? Many of the amatory fictions produced by women writers at this time were simply too absorptive, and when their formulas became recognizable and tired, there was no reason to go back to them. Defoe’s texts, by contrast, could stand up to closer scrutiny; they had much to say about some of the most important aspects of contemporary cultural life. All the same, we would also argue that Watt paid insufficient attention to an imaginative recreation of the appetites of early fiction readers, and so did not conceive an adequate account of the emerging literary market. As Catherine Ingrassia observes, ‘Haywood thrived in
the open market and her rapid rate of composition suited the immediacy and topicality of her texts’. Ingrassia’s words capture both the significance and the problem of early eighteenth-century amatory writing. The strikingly immediate may be swiftly disposable; much of this writing was the entertainment of an evening. And yet, the amatory writers of the early eighteenth century were some of the canniest players in the emerging marketplace for fiction. Our next chapter will give detailed consideration to some examples of amatory fiction, and address the question of what it might have had to offer to the early modern reader. Our starting-point, though, is a work that orients itself rather differently to this fiction: William Congreve’s Incognita.
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