

# The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

## Lecture 2:

### The Novel in History: A Very Short Introduction

1) The Beginnings of Modern Fiction:  
Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and some  
Basic Orientations of Meaning

2) Modes of Narration: Realism and its Margins

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#### 1) The Beginnings of Modern Fiction

*The Rise of the Novel* (Ian Watt 1957):

[Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605/15)]

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (1688)]

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722)

Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747/51)

Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743), *Tom Jones* (1749),  
*Amelia* (1752)

Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67)

## **Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)**

### **Full Title:**

The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner Who lived eight and twenty years, all alone in an un-inhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoke, having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself.

With an account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by pyrates,  
written by himself.

### **The Preface**

If ever the Story of any private Man's Adventures in the World were worth making Publick, and were acceptable when Publish'd, the Editor of this Account thinks this will be so.

The Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the Life of one Man being scarce capable of a greater Variety.

The Story is told with Modesty, with Seriousness, and with a religious Application of Events to the Uses to which wise Men always apply them (viz.) to the Instruction of others by this Example, and to justify and honour the Wisdom of Providence in all the Variety of our Circumstances, let them happen how they will.

The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it: And however thinks, because all such things are dispatch'd, that the Improvement of it, as well to the Diversion, as to the Instruction of the Reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without farther Compliment to the World, he does them a great Service in the Publication.

### **Beginning:**

I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my Mother, whose Relations were named Robinson, a very good Family in that Country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual Corruption of Words in England, we are now called, nay we call our selves, and write our Name Crusoe, and so my Companions always call'd me.

### Typical Examples of Narrator's Discourse in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*:

- "I observed in this last Part of [my father's] discourse, which was truly Prophetick, tho' I suppose my Father did not know it to be so himself; I say, I observed [...]" (p.7)
- "But I was to have another Trial for it still; and Providence, as in such cases generally it does, resolved to leave me entirely without Excuse." (p.13)
- "Any one may judge what a Condition I must be in at all this, who was but a young Sailor, and who had been in such a fright before at but a little." (p.16)
- "As for me, having some Money in my Pocket, I travelled to *London* by Land; and there, as well as on the Road, had many Struggles with my self, what course of Life I should take, and whether I should go Home, or go to Sea." (p.22)

### First-Person Narration

#### a) **Stanzel**: First-Person Narrative Situation

- explicit narrator as protagonist or witness
- continuity between level of discourse and level of story
- shifting relationship between narrating self (I) and experiencing self (I)
- perspective is limited to the narrator's individual consciousness and feelings *and* to the narrator's position in the world.

#### b) **Genette**: homodiegetic narration (fixed) internal focalization [+ increasing benefit of hindsight for narrating I]

### Daniel Defoe [empirical author]

#### ▼ (posing as editor)

#### TEXT:

Preface:

'Editor' (Daniel Defoe) > 'implied author function'

(implied author > implied reader)

#### Discourse:

Narrator (Robinson Crusoe) > Narratee(s)

#### Story:

Protagonist (Robinson Crusoe) <> other characters (Friday)

▼ ▲  
reader

### The Limits and Dynamics of First-Person Narration:

- overt homodiegetic narrator
- fixed internal focalization
- narrating self (discourse) ↔ experiencing self (story)

#### a) continuity

e.g. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722)  
*David Copperfield* (1849/50), *Jane Eyre* (1847)  
*Enduring Love* (1997)

[> the autobiography paradigm]

#### b) emphasis on experiencing self

e.g. *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747/51)  
[epistolary novels, "letters, written ... to the *Moment*"]  
*Molloy/Malone Dies/The Unnamable* (1950-52)  
[interior monologue, present tense]

#### c) emphasis on narrating self

e.g. *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67)  
*Midnight's Children* (1981)  
[digressions, metafictional tendency]

### Other First-Person Novels:

Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (1980)  
Ben Aaronovitch, *Rivers of London* series (2011 ff.)  
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)  
China Miéville, *The City and the City* (2009), *Embassytown* (2011)  
Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (2007), *Satin Island* (2015)  
Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007)  
Nicola Barker, *H(A)PPY* (2017)  
Anna Burns, *Milkman* (2018)  
Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me* (2019)  
John Lanchester, *The Wall* (2019)

> problematization (b + c = a??? > d)

**Henry Fielding**

**The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749)**

**Book I**

*Containing as much of the Birth of the Foundling as is necessary or proper to acquaint the Reader with in the Beginning of this History.*

**Chapter I**

*The Introduction to the Work, or Bill of Fare to the Feast.*

An Author ought to consider himself, not as a Gentleman who gives a private or **eleemosynary** Treat, but rather as one who keeps a public Ordinary, at which **all Persons are welcome for their Money**. In the former Case, it is well known, that the Entertainer provides what Fare he pleases; and tho' this should be very indifferent, and utterly disagreeable to the Taste of his Company, they must not find any Fault; nay, on the contrary, Good-Breeding forces them outwardly to approve and to commend whatever is set before them. Now the contrary of this happens to the Master of an Ordinary. Men who pay for what they eat, will insist on gratifying their Palates, however nice and whimsical these may prove; and if every Thing is not agreeable to their Taste, will challenge a Right to censure, to abuse, and to d-n their Dinner without Controul. [...]

**Chapter II**

*A short Description of Squire **Allworthy**, and a fuller Account of Miss **Bridget Allworthy** his Sister.*

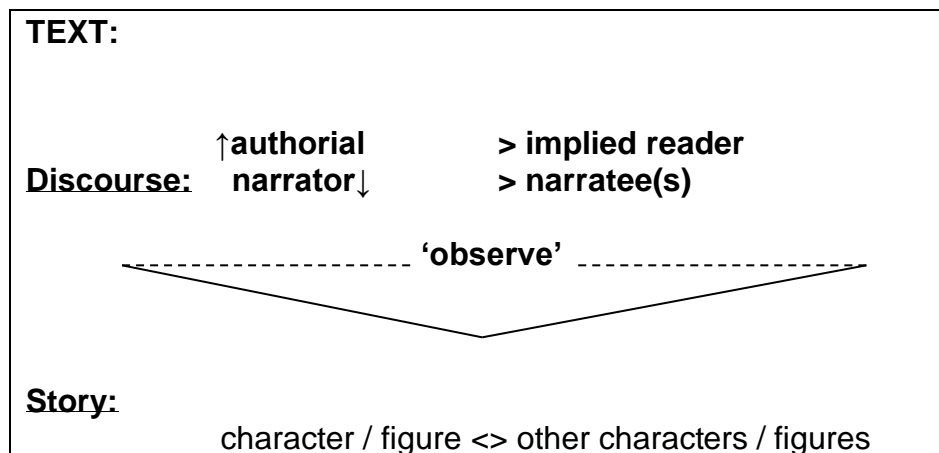
In that Part of the western Division of this Kingdom, which is commonly called Somersetshire, there lately lived (and perhaps lives still) a Gentleman whose Name was Allworthy, and who might well be called the Favourite of both Nature and Fortune; for both of these seem to have contended which should bless and enrich him most. In this Contention, Nature may seem to some to have come off victorious, as she bestowed on him many Gifts; while Fortune had only one Gift in her Power; but in pouring forth this, she was so very profuse, that others perhaps may think this single Endowment to have been more than equivalent to all the various Blessings which he enjoyed from Nature. From the former of these, he derived an agreeable Person, a sound Constitution, a solid Understanding, and a benevolent Heart; by the latter, he was decreed to the Inheritance of one of the largest Estates in the County.

### Third-Person Narration: (Stanzel: Authorial Narrative Situation)

- **heterodiegetic narrator**  
(overt/personalized ↔ covert/withdrawn)
- **combination of**
  - **external focalization** (narrator-focalizer)
  - and
  - **internal focalization** (character-focalizers)
  - ▶ **zero (= flexible) focalization**
- **omniscience/omnipresence**
- **narratorial functions:**
  1. presentation of story world
  2. direct commentary
  3. generalizing commentary
  4. reflexive functions

### Empirical Author (Henry Fielding)

▼ ('copying himself into the text')



▼ ▲  
reader

▶ the emancipation of fiction

### The Dynamics of Authorial Narration:

- **heterodiegetic narrator**
- **zero (= flexible!) focalization:**  
external focalization (narrator focalizer) frames passages of internal focalization (character focalizers)
- **story world** is observed from a 'transcendental' **discourse level**  
→ omniscience, omnipresence
- **overt/explicit/personalized <> covert/withdrawn narrators**
  - a) overt narrators can cover the full range of narratorial functions (presentation, direct, generalizing or reflexive commentary)  
**e.g.** *Tom Jones* (1749), *Vanity Fair* (1848)  
*The Satanic Verses* (1988)
  - b) withdrawal of narrator reduces the possibilities for explicit commentary until only implicit forms (ironical tone etc.) are left  
**e.g.** *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)  
*A Passage to India* (1924)  
*The Porcupine* (1992)

### Other 'Authorial' Novels:

Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000)  
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000)  
Patrick Neate, *Twelve Bar Blues* (2001)  
Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (2005)  
Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2016)

#### 'Authorial' Frame:

William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979)  
Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger* (1987)  
Adam Thorpe, *Ulverton* (1992)  
Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)  
Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

## ORIENTATIONS OF MEANING

### 1) “objective” meaning

- narrative suggests that meaning resides in the world and can be “discovered”
- key categories: probability/(the illusion of) reference
- narrative draws upon conventionalized/“naturalized” views of the world
- events seem to “speak for themselves”

### 2) subjective meaning

- narrative suggests that meaning is “constructed” by individuals
- key categories: experience/time
- subjective meaning can emerge either in accordance with “objective” orientations (> education, ‘Bildung’) or in revolt against them (> alienation, isolation)

### 3) narrative meaning / literary meaning

- narrative acknowledges that meaning is produced by plot structures and other narrative devices
- narrative devices can be supported by additional, specifically literary devices which can be either of traditional or of modern provenance
- reflexivity

## Famous Definitions of the Novel

### Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik” (1818-29, publ. 1835-38)

A novel in the modern sense of the word presupposes a world already prosaically ordered; then, on this ground and within its own sphere [...] it regains for poetry the right it had lost, so far as this is possible in view of that presupposition. Consequently, one of the commonest, and, for the novel, most appropriate, collisions is the conflict between the poetry of the heart and the opposing prose of circumstances and the accidents of external situations; this is a conflict resolved, whether comically or tragically, or alternatively it is settled either (i) when the characters originally opposed to the usual order of things learn to recognize in it what is substantive and really genuine, when they are reconciled with their circumstances and effective in them, or (ii) when the prosaic shape of what they do and achieve is stripped away, and therefore what they had before them as prose has its place taken by a reality akin and friendly to beauty and art. So far as presentation goes, the novel proper, like the epic, requires the entirety of an outlook on the world and life, the manifold materials and contents of which come into appearance within the individual event that is the centre of the whole.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 1092-1093, cf. Bode 2017, 28.



## Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (1920)

[T]he novel form is, like no other, an expression of [...] transcendental homelessness. [...] The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality. [...] Thus, the novel, in contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming. That is why, from the artistic view-point, the novel is the most hazardous genre, and why it has been described as only half an art by many who equate *having a problematic* with *being problematic*. [...] The outward form of the novel is essentially biographical. [...] In the biographical form, the unfulfillable, sentimental striving both for the immediate unity of life and for a completely rounded architecture of the system is balanced and brought to rest: it is transformed into being. [...] The contingent world and the problematic individual are realities which mutually determine one another. [...] The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel's hero's psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality.

Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*. London: Merlin, 2006 [1971]: 41, 56, 72f., 77, 78, 88, cf. Bode 2017, 29.

- ▶ **the novel as a medium of 'making sense' of the world**  
(cf. Reinfandt 1997, Bode 2011)  
enmeshed in modern politics  
(cf. Parrinder 2006)

- ▶ **"The Novel as a Distinctly Modern Genre" (Bode 2017, 26-27)**

[The novel] differs from its predecessors – the novels of classical antiquity and the romances, chivalrous or courtly, of the middle ages – through what Ian Watt calls 'formal realism'. Instead of damsels in distress, knights in shining armour and fire-spitting dragons, it has credible everyday characters. It is set, not 'elsewhere' and in some mythological time, but in a space and in a time that seems, if not identical (because it is fictional), then at least continuous with our space and our time. It replaces stock plots with original, 'once only' plots, and these plots are driven not by wonders and miracles, but by action that answers to the demands of reason and causality. It is a new genre that is decidedly of this world. We have grown so accustomed to the realist paradigm of the modern novel [...] that we tend to forget how scandalous and counter-intuitive its advent must have appeared. For it is easy to see why there should be a demand for literature that is about things that do *not* exist in the real world (giants and dwarfs, witches and magicians, the never-never-lands of mythical adventure and unrestrained eroticism, talking animals, supernatural metamorphosis, etc.), but why there should be, in the first place, a literature that reflects things that exist already is truly puzzling (and many of the early novels play entertainingly with that thin line that separates that new kind of fiction from extra-literary fact). Why duplicate reality at all?

There are two explanations for this and they go hand in hand: the emergence of the modern novel in Western Europe coincides with unprecedented social change. As change accelerates, societies develop a sense of their own historicity and there comes a point in time when the literary forms of comparatively static societies will no longer serve the dynamism of the modern age: reality outgrows forms of fiction that have no systematic place for fundamental change but rather celebrate the general, the ideal, the eternal, and such like. In turn, the modern novel celebrates the particular, the individual, the concrete and the specific – and all that is in state of becoming.

However, accelerating social change is, of course, not only experienced as chance and opportunity, but also as a potential threat. It is more difficult to make sense of things if they are changing all the time. And in steps the second explanation for why it is the modern novel, as *epic* genre, that, in its realist mode, so radically transforms the literary scene: mankind has one powerful tool for making sense of life, the universe and everything and for creating meaning, and that tool is *narrative*. Narrative transforms what might otherwise be a meaningless succession of *contingent, isolated events* into a string, a sequence of embedded events that have the *semblance of (narrative) necessity*.

(Bode 2017, 26-27)

## 2) Modes of Narration: Realism and its Margins

### The 'Naturalisation' of Authorial Narration in 19th Century Realism

Fielding died in 1754, Richardson in 1761, Smollett in 1771, and Sterne in 1768. In only four decades the English novel had made some giant steps forward. After the work of these four great writers, a relatively barren period followed. Though the stream of fiction broadened continually, nothing of intrinsic literary value was written in the form of the novel.

Peter Wagner, *A Short History of English and American Literature*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1988: 73.

- not a "crisis" but a phase of experimental exploration of the possibilities between objective and subjective orientations (sensibility/sentimental fiction, the Gothic novel)
- new synthesis achieved by Jane Austen

## Speech and Thought in Narrative (1)

### Basic possibilities:

#### 1) narrative report of speech and thought acts

- (> telling/diegetic discourse; summary)
  - She spoke at length about her future prospects.
  - She sat down and thought long and hard about the future.

#### 2) quotation of characters' speech and thought

- (> showing/mimetic discourse; scenic presentation)
  - [She said,] "At present I'm making plans for my future. It seems to me that ..."
  - [She thought,] "What will I do in the future? Oh my god, it is all so hopeless ..."

## Speech and Thought in Narrative (2)

### Additional possibility:

indirect modes of (re-)presentation

- [She said that] at that moment she was making plans for her future. It seemed to her that ...
- [She asked herself] what would she do in the future? Oh god, it was all so hopeless ...

### Markers of indirect speech and thought:

- tense shift (present tense > past tense, present perfect > past perfect, future tense > conditional ...)
- subject shift (1st person > 3rd person), shifting referential frame of place (here > there ...), time (now > then ...) and relation (this > that ...)

## Speech and Thought in Narrative (3)

DIEGETIC DISCOURSE	<>	MIMETIC DISCOURSE
(telling)		(showing)
narrator's voice	'dual voice'	character's voice
Report    –    tagged i.d.	–    free i.d.	–    tagged d.d.    –    free d.d.

- 'tagged'        = including introductory verb/clause
- free            = without introductory verb/clause
- i.d.            = indirect discourse
- d.d.            = direct discourse

Jane Austen

*Sense and Sensibility* (1811)

Volume I

Chapter I

The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. The late owner of this estate was a single man, who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his life, had a constant companion and housekeeper in his sister. But her death, which happened ten years before his own, produced a great alteration in his home; for to supply her loss, he invited and received into his house the family of his nephew Mr. Henry Dashwood, the legal inheritor of the Norland estate, and the person to whom he intended to bequeath it. In the society of his nephew and niece, and their children, the old Gentleman's days were comfortably spent. His attachment to them all increased. The constant attention of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dashwood to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from interest, but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive; [...]

The prospect of four thousand a-year, in addition to his present income, besides the remaining half of his own mother's fortune, warmed his heart and made him feel capable of generosity. - **»Yes, he would give them three thousand pounds: it would be liberal and handsome! It would be enough to make them completely easy. Three thousand pounds! he could spare so considerable a sum with little inconvenience.«** - He thought of it all day long, and for many days successively, and he did not repent.

No sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs. John Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants. No one could dispute her right to come; the house was her husband's from the moment of his father's decease; but the indelicacy of her conduct was so much the greater, and to a woman in Mrs. Dashwood's situation, with only common feelings, **must have been** highly displeasing; - but in her mind there was a sense of honour so keen, a generosity so romantic, that any offence of the kind, by whomsoever given or received, was to her a source of immoveable disgust. Mrs. John Dashwood had never been a favourite with any of her husband's family; but she had had no opportunity, till the present, of shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when [...]

## Chapter II

[...]

Mrs. John Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. **She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too, of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Miss Dashwoods, who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no relationship at all, have on his generosity to so large an amount. It was very well known that no affection was ever supposed to exist between the children of any man by different marriages; and why was he to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his money to his half sisters?**

»It was my father's last request to me,« replied her husband, »that I should assist his widow and daughters.«

»He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses, he could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child.« [...]

Jane Austen might almost be said to have provided the basic format for the later realist novel [...] She could have claimed, in a sense, to have reconciled the achievements of Fielding and Richardson and made possible a whole new kind of development in the English novel. Walter Scott's contribution was more dramatic and more quickly appreciated. He was the first to describe the forces at work in human society as a whole and to show the individual as the focal point of historical, economic and cultural forces beyond his control [...] he also managed to preserve his confidence in the possible harmony of man's experience and in his essential dignity [...] Consequently Austen and Scott must be understood to have contributed enormously to the development of the Realist novel of the mid-nineteenth century.

Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development*. London/Basingstoke 1974: 10-11.

If Fielding and Richardson provide [...] the thesis against which Mackenzie [and others] attempt an antithesis, Austen and Scott must seem to offer the grand synthesis. And implicit value judgements lurk in such an ordering of the facts.

Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels*. Chicago/London 1990: 238.

## **Realism (cf. Kohl 1977, Ermarth 1981/83/97, Beaumont 2010)**

If the 'realistic' novel is taken to mean a kind of fiction that results when the artist and his audience share the same assumptions, [...] there will, of course, be different realisms at different times and in different contexts.

John W. Loofbourow, "Realism in the Anglo-American Novel. The Pastoral Myth." In: John Halperin, ed., *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*. New York/London/Toronto 1974: 257-270, 257.

There is no doubt that the mid-Victorian novel rested on a massive confidence as to what the nature of Reality actually was [...] The most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist [...] is probably the idea that human life, whatever the particular conditions, may ultimately be seen as unified and coherent.

Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development*. London/Basingstoke 1974: x/xiii.

[R]ealism is itself intimately and authoritatively connected to the modernist position [...] [N]ineteenth century writers were already self-conscious about the nature of their medium.

George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. Chicago/London 1981: 3/4.

The classic realist text [...] was characterized by a balanced and harmonized combination of mimesis and diegesis, reported speech and reporting context, authorial speech and represented speech.

David Lodge, "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction." In: Anthony Mortimer, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to Narrative*. Tübingen 1984: 89-108, 102. (also in David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London 1990: 25-44.

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