Source note: The following pages are an amalgam of the articles on the English novel in the Encyclopaedia Britannica and Wikipedia.

The English novel has generally been seen as beginning with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), though John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress (*1678) and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) are also contenders, while earlier works such as Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and even the "Prologue" to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* have also been suggested. Another important early novel is *Gulliver's Travels* (1726, amended 1735), by Irish writer and clergyman Jonathan Swift, which is both a satire of human nature, as well as a parody of travellers' tales like *Robinson Crusoe*. [3] The rise of the novel as an important literary genre is generally associated with the growth of the middle class in England.

A noteworthy aspect of both the 18th- and 19th- century novel is the way the novelist directly addressed the reader. For example, the author might interrupt his or her narrative to pass judgment on a character, or pity or praise another, and inform or remind the reader of some other relevant issue.

The most important 18th-century English novelists are Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), author of the epistolary novels *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48); Henry Fielding (1707–1754), who wrote *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749); Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), who published *Tristram Shandy* in parts between 1759 and 1767; Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774), author of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766); Tobias Smollett (1721–1771), a Scottish novelist best known for his comic picaresque novels, such as *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), who influenced Charles Dickens; and Fanny Burney (1752–1840), whose novels "were enjoyed and admired by Jane Austen," and who wrote *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796).

### Defoe

Such ambitious debates on society and human nature ran parallel with the explorations of a literary form finding new popularity with a large audience, the novel. Daniel Defoe came to sustained prose fiction late in a career of quite various, often disputatious writing. The variety of interests that he had pursued in all his occasional work (much of which is not attributed to him with any certainty) left its mark on his more-lasting achievements. His distinction, though earned in other fields of writing than the polemical, is constantly underpinned by the generous range of his curiosity. Only someone of his catholic interests could have sustained, for instance, the superb *Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–27). This is a vivid county-by-county review and celebration of the state of the nation, which combines an antiquarian’s enthusiasm with a passion for trade and commercial progress. He brought the same diversity of enthusiasms into play in writing his novels. The first of these, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), an immediate success at home and on the Continent, is a unique fictional blending of the traditions of Puritan spiritual autobiography with an insistent scrutiny of the nature of man as social creature and an extraordinary ability to invent a sustaining modern myth. *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) displays enticing powers of self-projection into a situation of which Defoe can only have had experience through the narrations of others, and both *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) lure the reader into puzzling relationships with narrators the degree of whose own self-awareness is repeatedly and provocatively placed in doubt.

### Richardson

The enthusiasm prompted by Defoe’s best novels demonstrated the growing readership for innovative prose narrative. Samuel Richardson, a prosperous London printer, was the next major author to respond to the challenge. *His Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740, with a less-happy sequel in 1741), using (like all Richardson’s novels) the epistolary form, tells a story of an employer’s attempted seduction of a young servant woman, her subsequent victimization, and her eventual reward in virtuous marriage with the penitent exploiter. Its moral tone is self-consciously rigorous and proved highly controversial. It was a publishing sensation, not only selling in large numbers but also provoking parodies and imitations, attacks and eulogies. As well as being popular, it was the first such work of prose fiction to aspire to respectability, indeed moral seriousness. For contemporaries, the so-called “rise of the novel” began here. The strength of *Pamela* was its exploitation of what Richardson was to call “writing to the moment”: the capturing in the texture of her letters the fluctuations of the heroine’s consciousness as she faces her ordeal. Pamela herself is the writer of almost all the letters, and the technical limitations of the epistolary form are strongly felt, though Richardson’s ingenuity works hard to mitigate them. But Pamela’s frank speaking about the abuses of masculine and gentry power sounds the skeptical note more radically developed in Richardson’s masterpiece, *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747–48), which has a just claim to being considered the greatest of all English tragic novels. Clarissa uses multiple narrators and develops a profoundly suggestive interplay of opposed voices. At its centre is the taxing soul debate and eventually mortal combat between the aggressive, brilliantly improvisatorial libertine Lovelace and the beleaguered Clarissa, maltreated and abandoned by her family but sternly loyal to her own inner sense of probity. The tragic consummation that grows from this involves an astonishingly ruthless testing of the psychological natures of the two leading characters. Even in its own day, *Clarissa* was widely accepted as having demonstrated the potential profundity, moral or psychological, of the novel. It was admired and imitated throughout Europe. After such intensities, Richardson’s final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54), is perhaps inevitably a less ambitious, cooler work, but its blending of serious moral discussion and a comic ending ensured it an influence on his successors, especially Jane Austen.

### Fielding

Henry Fielding turned to novel writing after a successful period as a dramatist, during which his most popular work had been in burlesque forms. Sir Robert Walpole’s Licensing Act of 1737, introduced to restrict political satire on the stage, pushed Fielding to look to other genres. He also turned to journalism, of which he wrote a great deal, much of it political. His entry into prose fiction had something in common with the burlesque mode of much of his drama.

*An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), a travesty of Richardson’s *Pamela*, transforms the latter’s heroine into a predatory fortune hunter who cold-bloodedly lures her booby master into matrimony. Fielding continued his quarrel with Richardson in *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), which also uses *Pamela* as a starting point but which, developing a momentum of its own, soon outgrows any narrow parodic intent. His hostility to Richardson’s sexual ethic notwithstanding, Fielding was happy to build, with a calm and smiling sophistication, on the growing respect for the novel to which his antagonist had so substantially contributed. In *Joseph Andrews* and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), Fielding openly brought to bear upon his chosen form a battery of devices from more traditionally reputable modes (including epic poetry, painting, and the drama). This is accompanied by a flamboyant development of authorial presence. Fielding the narrator buttonholes the reader repeatedly, airs critical and ethical questions for the reader’s delectation, and urbanely discusses the artifice upon which his fiction depends. In the deeply original *Tom Jones* especially, this assists in developing a distinctive atmosphere of self-confident magnanimity and candid optimism. His fiction, however, can also cope with a darker range of experience. *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), for instance, uses a mock-heroic idiom to explore a derisive parallel between the criminal underworld and England’s political elite, and *Amelia* (1751) probes with sombre precision images of captivity and situations of taxing moral paradox.

### Smollett

Tobias Smollett had no desire to rival Fielding as a formal innovator, and today he seems the less audacious innovator. His novels consequently tend to be rather ragged assemblings of disparate incidents. But, although uneven in performance, all of them include extended passages of real force and idiosyncrasy. His freest writing is expended on grotesque portraiture in which the human is reduced to fiercely energetic automatism. Smollett can also be a stunning reporter of the contemporary scene, whether the subject be a naval battle or the gathering of the decrepit at a spa. His touch is least happy when, complying too facilely with the gathering cult of sensibility, he indulges in rote-learned displays of emotionalism and good-heartedness. His most sustainedly invigorating work can perhaps be found in *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and (an altogether more interesting encounter with the dialects of sensibility) *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771). The last was his only epistolary novel and perhaps the outstanding use of this form for comic purposes.

### Sterne

An experiment of a radical and seminal kind is Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), which, drawing on a tradition of learned wit from Erasmus and Rabelais to Burton and Swift, provides a brilliant comic critique of the progress of the English novel to date. It was published in five separate installments over the course of some eight years and has an open-endedness all its own. The part-by-part publication also enabled Sterne to manipulate public responses and even to make the reception of one volume the subject matter for satire in a later volume. The focus of attention is shifted from the fortunes of the hero himself to the nature of his family, environment, and heredity, and dealings within that family offer repeated images of human unrelatedness and disconnection. Tristram, the narrator, is isolated in his own privacy and doubts how much, if anything, he can know certainly even about himself. Sterne is explicit about the influence of Lockean psychology on his writing, and the book, fascinated with the fictive energies of the imagination, is filled with characters reinventing or mythologizing the conditions of their own lives. It also draws zestful stimulus from a concern with the limitations of language, both verbal and visual, and teases an intricate drama out of Tristram’s imagining of, and playing to, the reader’s likely responses. Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) similarly defies conventional expectations of what a travel book might be. An apparently random collection of scattered experiences, it mingles affecting vignettes with episodes in a heartier, comic mode, but coherence of imagination is secured by the delicate insistence with which Sterne ponders how the impulses of sentimental and erotic feeling are psychologically interdependent. It was a powerful influence on later, less-ironic sentimental writing. In Sterne’s wake it was common for works of fiction to include the declaration “A Sentimental Novel” on their title pages.

### Other novelists

The work of these five giants was accompanied by experiments from a number of other novelists. Sarah Fielding, for instance, Henry’s sister, wrote penetratingly and gravely about friendship in *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744, with a sequel in 1753). Charlotte Lennox in *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Richard Graves in *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) responded inventively to the influence of Miguel de Cervantes, also discernible in the writing of Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. Cervantes’s influence was much increased by a series of translations of his *Don Quixote*, including Smollett’s of 1755. This particular work of fiction had become an honorary work of English literature. John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (known as *Fanny Hill*; 1748–49) chose a more contentious path; in his charting of a young girl’s sexual initiation, he experiments with minutely detailed ways of describing the physiology of intercourse. In emphatic contrast, Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) offers an extremist and rarefied version of the sentimental hero, while Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) playfully initiated the vogue for Gothic fiction. William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) are among the more distinctive of its successors. But the most engaging and thoughtful minor novelist of the period is Fanny Burney, who was also an evocative and self-revelatory diarist and letter writer. Her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), best shows Burney’s satirical talents. Written in letters, it charts the fortunes and misfortunes of an ingenuous heroine encountering the delights and dangers of Georgian London for the first time. Of Burney’s novels, *Evelina* and *Camilla* (1796) in particular handle with independence of invention and emotional insight the theme of a young woman negotiating her first encounters with a dangerous social world.

### Romantic period

The phrase Romantic novel has several possible meanings. Here it refers to novels written during the Romantic era in literary history, which runs from the late 18th century until the beginning of the Victorian era in 1837. But to complicate matters there are novels written in the romance tradition by novelists like Walter Scott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Meredith. In addition the phrase today is mostly used to refer to the popular pulp-fiction genre that focusses on romantic love. The Romantic period is especially associated with the poets William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Byron, Percy Shelley and John Keats, though two major novelists, Jane Austen and Walter Scott, also published in the early 19th century.

Horace Walpole's 1764 novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, invented the Gothic fiction genre. The word gothic was originally used in the sense of medieval. This genre combines "the macabre, fantastic, and supernatural" and usually involves haunted castles, graveyards and various picturesque elements. Later novelist Ann Radcliffe introduced the brooding figure of the Gothic villain which developed into the Byronic hero. Her most popular and influential work, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), is frequently described as the archetypal Gothic novel. *Vathek* (1786), by William Beckford, and *The Monk* (1796), by Matthew Lewis, were further notable early works in both the Gothic and horror genres.

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), as another important Gothic novel as well as being an early example of science fiction. The vampire genre fiction began with John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819). This short story was inspired by the life of Lord Byron and his poem The Giaour. An important later work is *Varney the Vampire* (1845), where many standard vampire conventions originated: Varney has fangs, leaves two puncture wounds on the neck of his victims, and has hypnotic powers and superhuman strength. Varney was also the first example of the "sympathetic vampire", who loathes his condition but is a slave to it.

Among more minor novelists in this period Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) and Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866) are worthy of comment. Edgeworth's novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800) is "the first fully developed regional novel in English" as well as "the first true historical novel in English" and an important influence on Walter Scott. Peacock was primarily a satirist in novels such as *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829).

Jane Austen's (1775–1817) works critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the 18th century and are part of the transition to 19th-century realism. Her plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. Austen brings to light the hardships women faced, who usually did not inherit money, could not work and where their only chance in life depended on the man they married. She reveals not only the difficulties women faced in her day, but also what was expected of men and of the careers they had to follow. This she does with wit and humour and with endings where all characters, good or bad, receive exactly what they deserve. Her work brought her little personal fame and only a few positive reviews during her lifetime, but the publication in 1869 of her nephew's *A Memoir of Jane Austen* introduced her to a wider public, and by the 1940s she had become accepted as a major writer. The second half of the 20th century saw a proliferation of Austen scholarship and the emergence of a Janeite fan culture. Austen's works include *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (posthum. 1817).

The other major novelist at the beginning of the early 19th century was Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), who was not only a highly successful British novelist but "the greatest single influence on fiction in the 19th century ... [and] a European figure". Scott established the genre of the historical novel with his series of Waverley Novels, including *Waverley* (1814), *The Antiquary* (1816), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818).

### Victorian novel

It was in the Victorian era (1837–1901) that the novel became the leading literary genre in English. Another important fact is the number of women novelists who were successful in the 19th century, even though they often had to use a masculine pseudonym. At the beginning of the 19th century most novels were published in three volumes. However, monthly serialization was revived with the publication of Charles Dickens' Pickwick Papers in twenty parts between April 1836 and November 1837. Demand was high for each episode to introduce some new element, whether it was a plot twist or a new character, so as to maintain the readers' interest. Both Dickens and Thackeray frequently published this way. [17]

The 1830s and 1840s saw the rise of social novel, also known as social problem novel, that "arose out of the social and political upheavals which followed the Reform Act of 1832". [18] This was in many ways a reaction to rapid industrialization, and the social, political and economic issues associated with it, and was a means of commenting on abuses of government and industry and the suffering of the poor, who were not profiting from England's economic prosperity. [19] Stories of the working class poor were directed toward middle class to help create sympathy and promote change. An early example is Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist (1837–38).

### Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens emerged on the literary scene in the 1830s with the two novels already mentioned. Dickens wrote vividly about London life and struggles of the poor, but in a good-humoured fashion, accessible to readers of all classes. One of his most popular works to this day is A Christmas Carol (1843). In more recent years Dickens has been most admired for his later novels, such as *Dombey and Son* (1846–48), *Great Expectations* (1860–61), *Bleak House* (1852–53) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65). An early rival to Dickens was William Makepeace Thackeray, who during the Victorian period ranked second only to him, but he is now much less read and is known almost exclusively for *Vanity Fair* (1847). In that novel he satirizes whole swaths of humanity while retaining a light touch. It features his most memorable character, the engagingly roguish Becky Sharp.

The Brontë sisters were other significant novelists in the 1840s and 1850s. Their novels caused a sensation when they were first published but were subsequently accepted as classics. They had written compulsively from early childhood and were first published, at their own expense in 1846 as poets under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. The sisters returned to prose, producing a novel each the following year: Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey*. Later, Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and Charlotte's *Villette* (1853) were published. Elizabeth Gaskell was also a successful writer and first novel, *Mary Barton*, was published anonymously in 1848. Gaskell's *North and South* contrasts the lifestyle in the industrial north of England with the wealthier south. Even though her writing conforms to Victorian conventions, Gaskell usually frames her stories as critiques of contemporary attitudes: her early works focused on factory work in the Midlands. She always emphasised the role of women, with complex narratives and dynamic female characters.

Anthony Trollope's (1815–82) was one of the most successful, prolific and respected English novelists of the Victorian era. Some of his best-loved works are set in the imaginary county of Barsetshire, including *The Warden* (1855) and *Barchester Towers* (1857). He also wrote perceptive novels on political, social, and gender issues, and on other topical matters, including *The Way with Live Now* (1875). Trollope's novels portrayed the lives of the landowning and professional classes of early Victorian England.

George Eliot's (Mary Ann Evans (1819–80) first novel *Adam Bede* was published in 1859. Her works, especially *Middlemarch* (1871–72), are important examples of literary realism, and are admired for their combination of high Victorian literary detail combined with an intellectual breadth that removes them from the narrow geographic confines they often depict.

An interest in rural matters and the changing social and economic situation of the countryside is seen in the novels of *Thomas Hardy* (1840–1928). A Victorian realist, in the tradition of George Eliot, he was also influenced both in his novels and poetry by Romanticism, especially by William Wordsworth. Charles Darwin is another important influence on Thomas Hardy. Like Charles Dickens he was also highly critical of much in Victorian society, though Hardy focussed more on a declining rural society. While Hardy wrote poetry throughout his life, and regarded himself primarily as a poet, his first collection was not published until 1898, so that initially he gained fame as the author of such novels as, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). He ceased writing novels following adverse criticism of this last novel. In novels such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy attempts to create modern works in the genre of tragedy, that are modelled on the Greek drama, especially Aeschylus and Sophocles, though in prose, not poetry, a novel not drama, and with characters of low social standing, not nobility. [23] Another significant late 19th-century novelist is George Gissing (1857–1903) who published 23 novels between 1880 and 1903. His best known novel is *New Grub Street* (1891).

Important developments occurred in genre fiction in this era. Although pre-dated by John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* in 1841, the history of the modern fantasy genre is generally said to begin with George MacDonald, the influential author of *The Princess and the Goblin and Phantastes* (1858). William Morris was a popular English poet who also wrote several fantasy novels during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Wilkie Collins' epistolary novel *The Moonstone* (1868), is generally considered the first detective novel in the English language, while *The Woman in White* is regarded as one of the finest sensation novels. H. G. Wells's (1866–1946) writing career began in the 1890s with science fiction novels like *The Time Machine* (1895), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) which describes an invasion of late Victorian England by Martians, and Wells is seen, along with Frenchman Jules Verne (1828–1905), as a major figure in the development of the science fiction genre. He also wrote realistic fiction about the lower middle class in novels like Kipps (1905) and *The History of Mr Polly* (1910).