

AN INTRODUCTION OF THE NARRATIVE PRESURSORS



English literature got a huge leap forward with the appearance of William Caxton and his first ever printing press. As a writer himself, his work might not hold much merit, but his translations of around 24 books brought around a turning point in literary scene thereafter. Apart from *The Canterbury Tales* and other books, Malory's *Le Morte DeArthur*, is the first English-language prose version of the Arthurian legend_written around 1470, and printed by William Caxton in 1485. It retells the adventures of the knights of the Round Table in chronological sequence from the birth of Arthur. Although, it's based on French romance style, yet it is based on the brotherhood among the knights instead of courtly love and conflicts. This and similar translations, original books of romance and valour, paved the path for prose writing in English when poetry mostly dominated the literary scene, being the most natural genre of expression since the pagan era. This was followed by lot of liturgical writing based on the Bible and translations of the holy Bible as the Queen herself and reformers of the English Church stresses on the importance of the vernacular language of the people rather than Latin, Greek, Hebrew, etc., which acted as hindrance in proper understanding of the book by ordinary people. The entire body of literature produced in this process pioneered the growth of prose writings though mostly of ecclesiastical nature. Of course, side by side, another book called Book of Martyrs by John Fox became popular as it related the sufferings of the protestant martyrs. Such books also started a tradition of historical writing providing lot of inputs about those times.

Nevertheless, in these varied writings of the preceding ages, specially the romances and long narratives about contemporary characters who behaved nobly, the seeds of English novel tradition were sowed. After lying dormant for years, it finally started appearing in the early

18th century. The word Novel is derived from the Italian word *novella*, which was used for stories in the medieval period. Over the years, it has evolved and it is now considered to mean a work of prose fiction over 50,000 words. Novels focus on character development, the study of the psyche more than plot. The period towards the end of 1700 and beginning of 1800 was significantly one of peace and prosperity with the emergence of a growing middle class with enough leisure time. A new found interest of the public in human character and its highs and lows made people maintain diaries and memoirs, write autobiographies, biographies and journals.

The pioneers among them who concerned themselves with complex, middle-class characters struggling with their morality and circumstances were Samuel Richardson and Daniel Defoe. Richardson's *Pamela* is a series of fictional letters written in 1741, and in the course of years came to be established as the first real English novel. Daniel Defoe, wrote *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), which met with fair success and remained popular. Although, the characters were not fully realized enough to be considered full-fledged novels. Apart from them, women writers like Jane Austen gave a different identity to the novel with her best early English novels of manners namely *Pride and Prejudice* (1812), and *Emma* (1816).