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Robin Pounders
Ouachita Baptist University

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FIFTEEN ENGLISH NOVELS:
An Annotated Bibliography

Honors Project
Robin Ponders

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Although novels hold a secure, unquestioned place in twentieth century culture, they have not always claimed such a position. The novel, as everything else, had to have its beginning sometime, and, for this genre, that 'sometime' was the eighteenth century.

Called for by a greater literacy rate and the increasing leisure time of a society which fostered few forms of public entertainment, the novel began as an experiment. It was conceived in the minds of imaginative artists, was tested on paper, then evaluated and revised. Variables were constantly being brought into play, modified, or enlarged, while 'tried and true' became a watchword for early novelists. Elaboration, (often exhaustive) of details, broad satire of the times, and very true or very wicked religious men characterized the early novels. Other elements commonly encountered in the fledgling state of this genre were: wonderfully happy endings, unrealistically pat and neat; the contrast of a sober life with the life of frivolity and affectation often indulged in by the youth; 'women of the world', men-chasers, who often rule their men; preoccupation of the older generation with property, social position and education, mundane matters that don't seriously bother the young; the severe contrast of the nobility and extreme poverty, of the unloved orphans with the secure uppercrust kids, and of a quiet provincial life with the wickedness of the city.

About a century after these first novels were molded, George Eliot shared top honors with Dickens as the novelists of the day. Much progress can be seen in the form of the work, as Eliot lends her imaginative

insight and background experience to studies of individuals' relationships to other individuals, family, and provincial society. Two of her works are briefly reviewed in this paper.

Four early-twentieth century novels are finally included. These works, John Galsworthy's art, show a drastic improvement in ease of style and sophistication of form. All the novels included in this summarization deal with life in the English provinces, even though the pictures that they present are quite varied, due to the span of three centuries. These two common denominators, nationality and provinciality, were the factors used to determine what works would be included in this paper, and provide a thematic ground for comparison, in addition to an actual study of the development of this genre, the novel.

Moll Flanders

Daniel Defoe

Moll Flanders, first published in 1722, is an ambitious and intricate story. The complete original title was The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders, who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continued variety, for threescore years, besides her childhood, was twelve years a Whore, five times a Wife (thereof once to her own brother), twelve years a Thief, eight years a transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew rich, lived honest, and died a penitent. The title is extremely true to the story, even down to the order of Moll's various occupations, Very convincingly written, Defoe has the reader almost believing that a babe was actually born of a criminal mother, raised by a well-to-do compassionate family (though seduced by their eldest son), and thereafter resorted to all types of low life for a living (and also for entertainment), ending her days finally again believing in the values and type of life that she had been brought up to honor. Painstaking detail, typical of Defoe's personality, is included throughout the story, which, especially considering the time in which it was written and published, is remarkable.

Amelia

Henry Fielding

Amelia, Henry Fielding's last novel, is the tale of the poor, weak-principled William Booth, and his love, the beautiful and virtuous Amelia, who having been wronged by her sister, is also penniless. His poverty, punctuated by gambling and prison, and her beauty get the young couple in many scrapes and involved with shady characters of every description. There is a good bit of comment on the social evils of the time, both of a public and of a private nature. The interpersonal relationships become so involved, confused and misunderstood that it is a wonder that the whole mess is finally straightened out in the end, an end which emphasizes that goodness will prevail, that true friends do last, and that peace and happiness are the forever-after companions of them who qualify by keeping their virtue through the trials of life. The characterization is outstanding.

Joseph Andrews

Henry Fielding

It was a common practice in Fielding's day (as it is today in a more subtle fashion) for authors to hit on devices that they liked and use them in several novels. Fielding was no exception, for many of the techniques, deceptions, and methods seen in Tom Jones were first used by him in Joseph Andrews. In this novel, the title figure is first seen as a man of twenty-one in the service of Lady Booby. Having been employed by Squire Booby's household, he is retained as a footman after his master's death. He remains until Lady Booby, angered by his rebuttals of her advances, kicks him out. (He is the sister of the virtuous Pamela Andrews [now Pamela Booby, having married the squire's son] heroine of Richardson's novel, and his virtue is partially due to simply being the possessor of a family trait, but also partially due to the fact that he already has a sweetheart, an illiterate servant girl named Fanny.)

After leaving Lady Booby's, at which abode he was also pursued by Mrs. Slipslop, the maid, Joseph is beaten, robbed, and stripped by muggers on the road. Thanks to a carriage passing by he is saved, for they take him to an inn, where, recuperating, he runs into the parson from his home town, Pastor Adams. From this point on, the two run a whacky obstacle course of circumstances including forgetting their horse, picking up Mrs. Slipslop, picking up Fanny, losing Mrs. Slipslop, running into sundry fights and debts and extricating themselves, and appearing before a court on false charges. After their problems on the journey, they meet a charming couple, the Wilsons, staying with them a while and having a lovely time.

Finally the group makes it safely home, where Joseph and Fanny plan to be married. Everyone tries to stop the wedding, even to the point of having the couple thrown into jail. One objection to the match is that

Fanny is not of as high a social class as the lowly Joseph. This objection is shot to pieces, however, when it comes out that Fanny is really Pamela's sister, while Joseph is the son of the wonderful Wilsons. Everyone satisfied, Joseph and Fanny are married, their troubles over forever.

This book rambles on from one incident to the next, but it does have wonderful characterization, and the view of a cross-segment of the English society and culture is very good.

Tom Jones

Henry Fielding

Tom Jones is the most acclaimed writing of a much acclaimed writer, Henry Fielding. It follows the rogue-hero pattern, and is set on the country estate of Squire Allworthy, and his sister, Bridget. The Squire, returning from a trip to London, finds an infant upon his bed. Not being able to establish the identity of the baby, the Squire figures out whose it might be, decides that this conjecture is fact, and so dismisses his sister's maid as the culprit. He also brings disgrace on the village schoolmaster, assuming that he is the father, and the two of them leave town, though not together. Shortly after this, Bridget is married to Captain Blifil, and the hasty result of this union is another baby, a boy, that they call simply 'Blifil'. The Captain dies during the child's infancy, and so the Squire raises the foundling and his nephew together, the only difference in their education and opportunities being that Blifil is the acknowledged heir of the Squire. Tom, the foundling, is a lively boy and his antics, along with the subtle and malicious rumors and insinuations that Blifil spreads to everyone about the other boy, soon bring him to disfavor with most everyone. This is not true, however, ^{with} Mr. Western, who is the father of Tom's love Sophia, ^{but he} can't conceive of marrying Sophia off to a man with no fortune or property, Tom's hopes are dashed and, discouraged, he sets off to seek his fortune. A long narrative of his adventures, amorous and otherwise, is interjected at this point, and the novel has its resolution in London when Tom is found to be another son of the Squire's sister. Upon revelation of this fact, Mr. Western withdraws his objection to Tom and Sophia's marriage. Blifil is revealed the villain for defaming Tom's

character, and bliss reigns once more.

Humor is used very effectively throughout the book. While pointing out the follies and foibles of mankind, Fielding suggests that much can be overcome with laughter.

Humphrey Clinker

Tobias Smollett

Humphrey Clinker, Smollett's last and most fun work, is written in the form of letters which are themselves ascribed to the eccentric squire Matthew Bramble's family party as they are traveling through England and Scotland. This party consists of Bramble; his sister, Tabitha, a middle-aged spinster with her sights set on marriage; her servant, Winifred Jenkins; his young niece and nephew, Lydia and Jerry Melford; and one Humphrey Clinker, a ragged redneck picked up along the way, who turns out to be very loyal and enterprising. Through the travels and adventures that they become involved in are revealed the customs and manners of the personality of each of the people involved. The story-line itself encompasses Miss Tabitha's marriage to an odd Scottish soldier; Lydia's love-affair with a handsome actor who is really a gentleman; and the arrest of Humphrey on a false charge. The narrative is capped off with the discovery that Humphrey is actually the natural son of Matthew Bramble, Humphrey's marriage to Winifred, and the everlasting happiness of all concerned. I found this book quite humorous, and felt that the form was a clever one which Smollett carried off smoothly and with a lot of polish.

Peregrine Pickle

Tobias Smollett

Peregrine Pickle, a novel in which Smollett traces the life of the title character from birth through the maturing process into adulthood, is written in the same general manner as his other works. Born into a mother-dominated family, Peregrine is hated and rejected from birth and grows into a mischievous, problematic boy. Sent off to a mediocre school, he petitions his uncle, the oath-throwing, kindly former sea captain, Commodore Hawser Trunnion, to remove him. Impressed by the boy's independence, his uncle complies, and subsequently sends Peregrine to some of the best schools in England, and then finances his travels on the continent. Peregrine becomes involved in many amorous adventures with women of all ages and stations, from the penniless Emily Gauntlet, to the well-to-do Lady Vane, whose memoirs appear in the book. Inevitable repercussions follow these adventures, so Peregrine gets a taste of prison, a cuckolded husband's wrath, and an uncle's indignation. After the death of his uncle, Peregrine starts to settle down, but due to poor judgement and bad business sense, the inheritance he received is soon gone, and he ends up in debtor's prison. He is saved when his father dies intestate, at which point he makes a settlement on his mother, marries Emily (who likewise has acquired an inheritance), and takes up the life of a country squire. Besides the sketch of Lady Vane, Smollett also pictured Lord Lyttleton, Fielding, and Akenside in this book. There is also a lot of satire on the folly of the age, especially on the political and social fields.

Roderick Random

Tobias Smollett

The first important novel of Smollett, Roderick Random, is basically valued as a picture of life on a British warship, and is also considered Smollett's purest work so far as style and description go. The story moves quite quickly and is often funny, but sometimes becomes gross and repulsive. It is narrated by its 'hero', a basically selfish, motherless, penniless lad who has been deserted by his father, is hated by his grandfather, and finally is befriended by his uncle, a naval officer, Lt. Tom Bowling. Quitting school, Roderick and an old chum of his, Strap, go to London to seek their fortunes, where they are the victims and propagators of many pranks and adventures. The hero trains as a surgeon's mate and sees duty on the man-of-war, 'Thunder', where he is very ill-treated and ridiculed. Returning to England, Roderick's adventures continue and include falling in love with Narcissa. That affair is just beginning to get under way full swing when he is kidnapped by smugglers and finds himself in France, where he locates his uncle. After a brief term of service as a French soldier, Strap and Roderick get back together and decide that they'll set up Roderick as a wealthy gentleman, Strap acting as valet, so that he could marry some rich socialite, whereupon they plan to split the loot.

As he is not very successful in this ploy, however, he falls back on his previous training and signs as a ship's surgeon on a ship commanded by his uncle. During the voyage, they encounter Don Roderigo, a wealthy trader who turns out to be Roderick's father. Again returning to England, this time with the promise of an inheritance from both his father and his uncle, Roderick marries Narcissa, Strap marries her servant, and as in most books

of this period, once the marriages are accomplished, well-being settles softly over the earth, n'er to be disturbed. For this book, Smollett depended heavily on his own experience as a ship's surgeon, and is said to have actually been involved in many of the adventures that Roderick gets involved in. Though I had other favorites among the author's works, I think that this book is representative, written in Smollett's easy, flowing style, and, over all, enjoyable.

Sentimental Journey

Laurence Sterne

Sentimental Journey, a novel of Laurence Sterne's, is a combination of autobiography, travelogue of sorts, and fiction to loosely tie the two together. It concerns one Count Yorick who sets out on a journey through France and Italy simply to collect sentimental experiences. (The book actually deals only with the experiences in France, as Sterne died of tuberculosis before writing the Italian section.) It involves the hiring and adventures of La Fleur, a young French servant with a great eye for the ladies, equipment that Yorick himself was not lacking. The two of them get into all kinds of messes, all very mild, and the main value of the book is considered to be that it further defined the term 'novel' in a time when there was still room to do this. It was very well recieved; obviously the readers were more accustomed to pablum than we are.

Tristram Shandy

Laurence Sterne

Tristram Shandy, a book by Laurence Sterne which has been billed as one of the most humorous books ever written, is really a delight to read. Tristram narrates the story, beginning with an account of his earliest years. From this point, the novel wanders randomly from point to point, including few concrete incidents, but a lot of insight on some of the characters. (Tristram, however, is not one of them.) The reader becomes well acquainted with Tristram's father, a garrulous, paradoxical character who contradicts himself continuously, but seeks to back his points up with a great show of learning; his Uncle Toby, a gentle, peace-loving ex-soldier who, an embarrassingly positioned wound (which is the catalyst of many red-faced incidents), and who now spends his time in strategy and maneuvering on the miniature battlefield in his backyard; and the uncle's servant, Corporal Trim, who also greatly delights in the mock military exhibitions on this smallscale, mock military battlefield. In the course of the book, Dr. Slop, the local medical quack; Mr. Yorick, the parson; and Widow Wadman, Uncle Toby's would-be wife, are brought in and each adds a special dimension of unpredictability and humor to the story. There are examples of Sterne's imagination and wit on every page, and the book itself is a tribute to the inventiveness of the human mind. In addition, it is the first truly psychological novel in English literature, a fact which only enhances the achievement of Tristram Shandy.

Adam Bede

George Eliot

When Mary Ann Evans' aunt, Elizabeth Evans, told her niece of a prison confession of a young girl that she had visited, little did the aunt think that Mary Ann would turn the tale into a powerfully written novel that would demonstrate the author's quality as a novelist. The story, Adam Bede, concerns a young carpenter (Adam) who lives in the village of Hayslope, and is the pride of family and friends, even managing a close relationship with the wealthy young squire, Captain Arthur Donnithorne. Adam is in love with Hetty Sorrell, niece of a farmer in the area, Martin Poyser, but Hetty, an impractical, soft, feminine type, is more attracted to the social position that she would acquire as Donnithorne's wife. This attraction on her part is easily manipulated by the young squire, who seduces her and then leaves town with his regiment. Hetty, heartbroken, consents to marry Adam. The town is excited about the upcoming match, but Hetty spoils it all when, discovering that she is pregnant, she sets out to find Donnithorne. Unable to locate him, however, she has her baby, but abandons the child in the course of her wanderings. This fact which, when discovered, earns her a prison term, then deportation. She dies without ever returning home.

Adam, meanwhile, has fallen in love with Dinah Morris, a young, strong-willed Methodist preacher that Adam's gentle brother, Seth, had loved all along. However, the attraction is mutual, Seth loosens his hold and these two, cut of very like material, have an open road in front of them.

George Eliot had done a great job on scenery description in the quiet

pastoral village, and her characterization is also very good. Clear pictures, especially of Dinah and Hetty, are the result of very careful work and a good bit of talent.

Middlemarch

George Eliot

It is generally agreed that Middlemarch and Adam Bede are George Eliot's two best novels. Both are set in the English countryside and in both the characterization is superb. Middlemarch is the name of the town in which dwell the Brooke sisters, Dorothea and Celia, with their bachelor uncle. Dorothea is of a very serious frame of mind in contrast to her sister, and chooses the elderly scholar, Edward Casaubon, over the young squire, Sir James Chettam. After their marriage she finds him very stern and unsympathetic, but remains true to him. In spite of her faithfulness, his jealous mind links with his young nephew, Will Ladislaw, to the point that he attaches a codicil to his will stipulating that if Dorothea marries Ladislaw, she will get none of his money. Casaubon dies; eventually Dorothea and Ladislaw do marry, deciding that their love is worth the forfeit of the money.

Parallel with this story is the story of Tertius Lydgate, a young doctor with great ambitions, and his unhappy marriage to the beautiful Rosamond Vincy, whose spendthrift ways ruin his hopes. This bears out Eliot's feeling that ideals cannot adapt successfully to an imperfect social order.

Forsyte Saga

John Galsworthy

John Galsworthy's three principal works, combined, a progressing and interwoven social chronicle centering around the Forsyte family, are known collectively as The Forsyte Saga. These three books, The Man of Property, In Chancery, and To Let, will be treated here as a trilogy by simply carrying the storyline along uninterruptedly throughout the summary. A basic knowledge of the main characters as well as an understanding of their position in the family is necessary to follow the story, so the characters are:

- 1). Soames Forsyte, the 'man of property' whose main interest is the acquisition and domination of all people and things around him;
- 2). Irene, his beautiful wife, who refuses 'to be dominated as he would wish and, in fact, grows to hate him because of this;
- 3). Old Jolyon Forsyte, Soames' uncle who is one of the 'old Forsytes', who are still the backbone of the family even though they're no longer the most active ones;
- 4). Young Jolyon, his son, who has cut himself off from his family by running away with a governess, whom he married on the death of his wife.
- 5). June, Young Jolyon's daughter by his first marriage, who is living with her grandfather;
- 6). Phillip Bosinney, an innovative young architect who is engaged to June;
- 7). Annette, the French girl that Soames marries (after Irene has left him) in order to have an heir;
- 8). Fleur, their daughter;
- 9). John, the result of the union of Irene (after her divorce from Soames) and Young Jolyon (after he is widowed).

The story begins with the introduction of the family at a party in honor of June and her fiancée, Phillip Bosinney, and it is brought out that everything concerning one family member concerns the whole family. Then, since she is spending so much time with Phillip, her grandfather, Old Jolyon, with whom she lives, becomes very lonely and turns to his son,

Young Jolyon, whom he has not been close to for years. The family gossips really play that up, as they do the problems that Soames and Irene are having. Before their wedding, Irene extracted a promise from Soames that she could be released from the contract if the marriage failed. When she reminds him of this, Soames tries to placate her in every way, even to buying her an estate on Robin Hill and hiring June's finace to build a large country house there. So begins a string of arguments between Soames and Phillip over design and price and style, all of which Bosinney wins, until the house is finished and Soames sues him for exceeding his estimates. During the building of the house, Bosinney and Irene have fallen in love, and on the day of the trial (which is decided in Soames' favor) Irene leaves Soames for Bosinney who, that afternoon, had been run over and killed. Having no place to go since the architect was dead, Irene returns to Soames, but leaves him permanently.

June persuades her grandfather to buy the estate on Robin Hill. Irene, set up modestly as a music teacher, visits there several years later. She meets Old Jolyon there, and the two become great friends until his death

Meanwhile, Soames is still intent on money and an heir and, realizing that he can't have Irene, turns his attentions to a French girl, Annette, who promptly gets pregnant. It is a dangerous birth, and Soames, given the choice, decides that if only one can live, it will be the baby. Both pull through, and the girl is named Fleur. Irene, hounded by Soames before and during his courtship of Annette, turns to Young Jolyon, now a widower, for comfort. They fall in love, are married, and have a son, Jon.

Many years later, Jon and Fleur fall in love. Fleur, who has found out the details, tries to get Jon to marry her quickly, but Young Jolyon intervenes, telling Jon of their relatedness. Young Jolyon dies soon after this, and Jon, to get away, goes to America, where his mother joins him. Soames is left with an unfaithful wife, a miserable daughter, and the realization that the glory of the Forsytes (as well as his own glory) has passed, and the knowledge that he is old and alone.

All three works, and several other less important ones concerning the family, are brilliantly woven together. They are well-written, move smoothly, and are really intriguing to follow.

A Modern Comedy

John Galsworthy

One of the less important books mentioned at the end of the summary of The Forsyte Saga is A Modern Comedy. It is composed of three long sections and two interludes. The three long sections were originally published as separate novels, and pick up where the trilogy left off.

The story begins with Soames having business problems, culminating in his resignation from the board of the company. His daughter, Fleur, has married Michael Mont, a publisher with whom she is not in love, after her rejection by Jon Forsyte. Their marriage vacillates between being mediocre and bad, but they do have a son, Christopher. (Meanwhile Jon, in America, has married a Southern girl, Anne Wilmot.) When Michael decides to enter Parliament, Fleur starts entertaining extensively, both as an asset to her husband's career, and as a diversion for herself. She runs into troubles on the social front that cause her to be snubbed by the few friends that could put up with her selfishness in the first place.

At this point, Fleur and Soames, both unhappy, decide to tour the world. Michael joins them as business permits, and while the three are in America, they unknowingly stay at the same hotel where Irene and Jon are staying. Soames makes sure that no encounters occur then, but Jon and Fleur do meet later in London. After a brief resumption of that affair, Jon backs out and takes off again for America.

Soames grows less content as he grows older, but one consolation that he has is his art collection. One night, awakened by smoke, he realizes that his gallery is on fire. He saves as many paintings as he

can by tossing them out of the window, but has to get out himself before he can save all of them. When outside, he sees that Fleur is purposely standing in the spot where a heavily framed picture is about to fall. Running to save her, he takes the blow himself and dies from it. Fleur is made more miserable by this incident, but it causes her to re-evaluate her life, with the result that she promises Michael her faithfulness for the rest of their lives. This is as powerfully written as Galsworthy's other works, and it fits in well so far as character development and social development go.