Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749)
What is a novel?
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“A small tale, generally of love.”

Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)
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Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)

“A long fictional prose narrative, usually filling one or more volumes and typically representing character and action with some degree of realism and complexity; a book containing such a narrative. In the 17th and 18th centuries frequently contrasted with a romance, as being shorter and having more relation to real life.”

Oxford English Dictionary
Lukács: the novel as a search for totality

“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.”

“The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life.”

Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel (1916), 56, 60
Lukács: the novel as a search for totality

“The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.”

Bakhtin: the novel’s open-endness

What are the defining features of the epic?

- Its subject is a national epic past.
- Its source is a national tradition.
- It presumes and maintains an absolute distance between the epic world and the contemporary reality of the audience.

Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” (1941)
Bakhtin: the novel’s open-endness

What are the defining features of the novel?

• Its hero isn’t “heroic” in epic sense of that word.
  • “he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious”

• Rather than the fixed, unchanging hero of the epic, the novel’s hero evolves and develops.

• It is heteroglossic – encompassing different types of speech.

• It is driven by the impulse to continue (“What will happen next?”) and the impulse to end (“How will this end?”). Spoilers!

• Epic distance is dissolved: the characters are like us. We can identify with them and so “enter” the novel.
Bakhtin: the novel’s open-endness

What are the defining features of the novel?

• The temporality of the novel is fundamentally different from that of the epic. The novel is concerned with the everyday reality of our present in all its messiness and “open-endness”.

• The hero of the novel therefore always possesses unrealized potential.

• The novel incorporates and parodies other genres – and in doing so achieves an ascendancy over them.
Bakhtin: comedy and the end of epic

“Folklore and popular-comic sources for the novel played a huge role in this process. Its first and essential step was the comic familiarization of the image of man. Laughter destroyed epic distance; it began to investigate man freely and familiarly, to turn him inside out, expose the disparity between his surface and his center, between his potential and his reality.”

Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” (1941)
The “rise” of the novel in Britain

Emergence of “amatory fiction” in late seventeenth century / early eighteenth century.

- Standard plot-line: innocent, trusting woman deceived by a rapacious man.
- Key authors: Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood.

Scholars now regard such works as novels or proto-novels.

At the time they were often called (derisively) “romances”.

**Romance**

“A fictional story in verse or prose that relates improbable adventures of idealized characters in some remote or enchanted setting; or, more generally, a tendency in fiction opposite to that of realism.” *(Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms)*

- e.g. Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96), and Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1590)
The novel as a genre in flux

Fielding regards the novel as a genre that lacks respectability and prestige. He repeatedly attacks it in Tom Jones:

- “those idle Romances which are filled with Monsters, the Productions, not of Nature, but of distempered Brains” (IV.i, p. 137)
- “a Swarm of foolish Novels, and monstrous Romances” (IX.i, p. 428)

In Book X, chapter II we even encounter someone reading Behn’s fiction:

“This young Fellow lay in Bed reading one of Mrs. Behn's Novels; for he had been instructed by a Friend, that he would find no more effectual Method of recommending himself to the Ladies than the improving his Understanding, and filling his Mind with good Literature.” (X.ii, p. 464)
The “elevation” of the novel

Enter Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding...
The "elevation" of the novel

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MDCCLXL.
The “elevation” of the novel

“I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing”
(Fielding, *Tom Jones*, II.i., p. 75)

“Through their novel-writing practice in the 1740s, as well as their polemical critical statements in support of that practice, Richardson and Fielding successfully hegemonize the novel through a series of articulatory moves that reshape what their culture takes the novel to be […] Richardson and Fielding overwrite the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood.”

Fielding and the novel

Fielding’s definition of *Tom Jones*:

- “[an] Heroic, Historical, Prosaic Poem” (IV.i, p. 138)
- “prosai-comi-epic Writing” (V.i, p. 187)

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Fielding’s preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742)

“Now, a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this: that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous; it differs in its characters, by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us.”
Fielding and the comic

Fielding’s debt to Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605-15)
Fielding and history

“But to illustrate all this by another science, in which, perhaps, we shall see the distinction more clearly and plainly: let us examine the works of a comic history-painter, with those performances which the Italians call Caricatura, where we shall find the greatest excellence of the former to consist in the exactest copy of nature.”

(Preface to Joseph Andrews)

“we do not pretend to introduce any infallible Characters into this History; where we hope nothing will be found which hath never yet been seen in human Nature.”

(Tom Jones, III.iii, p. 123)
The example of Hogarth

Bridget Allworthy

“I would attempt to draw her Picture; but that is done already by a more able Master, Mr. Hogarth himself, to whom she sat many Years ago, and hath been lately exhibited by that Gentleman in his Print of a Winter's Morning, of which she was no improper Emblem, and may be seen walking (for walk she doth in the Print) to Covent-Garden Church, with a starved Foot-boy behind carrying her Prayer-book.” (I.xi, p. 64)
The example of Hogarth

Mrs Partridge

“Whether she sat to my Friend Hogarth, or no, I will not determine; but she exactly resembled the young Woman who is pouring out her Mistress's Tea in the third Picture of the Harlot's Progress.” (II.iii, p. 78)

William Hogarth, A Harlot’s Progress, plate 3 (1732)
The example of Hogarth

Thwackum

“The Pedagogue did in Countenance very nearly resemble that Gentleman, who, in the Harlot's Progress, is seen correcting the Ladies in Bridewel.” (III.vi, p. 125)

William Hogarth, A Harlot’s Progress, plate 4 (1732)
Epic allusion in *Tom Jones*
Epic allusion in *Tom Jones*

Thus, not all the Charms of the incomparable Sophia; not all the dazzling Brightness, and languishing Softness of her Eyes; the Harmony of her Voice, and of her Person; not all her Wit, good Humour, Greatness of Mind, or Sweetness of Disposition, had been able so absolutely to conquer and enslave the Heart of poor Jones, as this little Incident of the Muff. Thus the Poet sweetly sings of Troy.

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*Captique dolis lachrymisque coacti*

*Quos neque Tydides, nec Larissæus Achilles,*

*Non anni domuere decem, non mille Carinæ.*

What Diomede, or Thetis' greater Son,
A thousand Ships, nor ten Years Siege had done,
False Tears, and fawning Words, the City won.

(V.iv, p. 200 – quoting John Dryden’s translation of *The Aeneid*)
Tom Jones as mock-epic

What is mock-epic?

A poem employing the lofty style and the conventions of epic poetry to describe a trivial or undignified series of events; thus a kind of satire that mocks its subject by treating it in an inappropriately grandiose manner, usually at some length.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*

Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock (1712-1717)*

What dire offence from am’rous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing...
Tom Jones as mock-epic

Preparing to introduce Sophia:

Hushed be every ruder Breath. May the Heathen Ruler of the Winds confine in iron Chains the boisterous Limbs of noisy Boreas, and the sharp-pointed Nose of bitter, biting Eurus. Do thou, sweet Zephyrus, rising from thy fragrant Bed, mount the western Sky, and lead on those delicious Gales, the Charms of which call forth the lovely Flora from her Chamber, perfumed with pearly Dews, when on the first of June, her Birth-day, the blooming Maid, in loose Attire, gently trips it over the verdant Mead, where every Flower rises to do her Homage, 'till the whole Field become enamelled, and Colours contend with Sweets which shall ravish her most. (IV.ii, p. 140)
Tom Jones as mock-epic

The Battle in the Churchyard (IV.viii)

“A Battle sung by the Muse in the Homerican Stile, and which none but the classical Reader can taste.” (p. 159)

“Recount, O Muse, the Names of those who fell on this fatal Day. First Jemmy Tweedle felt on his hinder Head the direful Bone … Next old Echepole, the Sowgelder, received a Blow in his Forehead from our Amazonian Heroine, and immediately fell to the Ground.” (p. 161)
Tom Jones as epic

EPIC STRUCTURE

18 books that divide neatly into 3 phases, each of six books.

1) I-VI: Tom’s early life at Paradise Hall (country)

2) VII-XII: Tom’s adventures on the road (road)

3) XIII-XVIII: Tom in London (city)
Tom Jones as epic

EPIC NARRATIVE

The first six books offer an expulsion narrative. Tom Jones enjoys his time at Paradise Hall but falls foul of the benevolent master and is banished.

“And now, having taken a Resolution to leave the Country, he began to debate with himself whither he should go. The World, as Milton phrases it, lay all before him” (VII.ii, p. 294)

The second six books will offer an Odyssey narrative.
Tom Jones as epic

Epic subject-matter

The Provision then which we have here made is no other than HUMAN NATURE ... in Human Nature, tho' here collected under one general Name, is such prodigious Variety, that a Cook will have sooner gone through all the several Species of animal and vegetable Food in the World, than an Author will be able to exhaust so extensive a Subject. (I.i, p. 36)