

# Perceptions of the 18th Century Novel in Ian Watt's Book, The Rise of The Novel

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## Perceptions of the 18th Century Novel in Ian Watt's Book, The Rise of The Novel

The eighteenth century novel was one that changed the way novels were written in many different ways. In reading Ian Watt's book, "The Rise of The Novel," quite a few things were brought to my attention concerning the [eighteenth](#) century novel; not only in how it was written and what went into it, but how readers perceived it. This essay will look into Ian [Watt](#)'s perceptions on the eighteenth century novel and how it changed from previous literature.

Coming out of the Renaissance and Jacobean ages, the novel was characterized by "realism", with the term "novel" not really being used until the end of the eighteenth century. This realism was not defined like we would define realism today (defined by Webster as an interest or concern for the actual or real), but instead is grounded in the position that "truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses." (12) Instead of conforming to traditional practice (such as the classical and renaissance epic based on history and [fables](#)), the novel focused more on the individual where "the pursuit of truth is

conceived of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought." (13) By rejecting traditional plots the novel distinguished itself out from any other previous form of literature, making individual experience the replacement for collective tradition.

Many other things apart from plot were changed for the novel to fully show this new take on reality. Now the plot was acted out by "particular people in particular circumstances" (15) rather than, as in the past, by general people against a pre-determined background by appropriate literary convention. The nove...

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...hough much of the literature was religious oriented, there was a great surge towards secular reading by the public of which the booksellers became largely responsible as they sought to increase their pay.

The eighteenth century was definitely a time of massive change for literature. Not only had the way of writing been drastically altered, but the amount of reading done by the public altered as well, bringing about a resurgence of reading, not only in the upper classes, but also in the all the classes. Though lacking in some areas, plot not being least, the novel revolutionized the eighteenth century and brought about a new way of thinking. By today's standards, it might not seem like much was done, but in the history of things, the eighteenth century novel is probably one of the biggest things to ever happen to the progression of literature throughout the years.

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