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Exploring the Lineage of Modern Novel as a Transformative Genre Making: A Comparative Textual Analysis of Fielding's Tom Jones and Nashe's The Unfortunate Traveller.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical and literary development of the novel as a genre by tracing its transformation from early precursors to its modern form, while limiting its scope to a comparative case study of two picaresque novels from distinct historical periods: Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Nashe's text represents an early experimental phase in English picaresque fiction, whereas Fielding's work signifies a more mature and systematic culmination of the same tradition. Using textual analysis, the study focuses on narrative technique, specifically plot construction, characterization, and the role of the narrator, to establish a conceptual link between the two texts. The findings indicate that despite differences in style, historical context, and representation, both works collectively demonstrate the transformation of narrative practice that enabled the emergence of the novel as a distinct literary form. This continuity underscores the gradual evolution of novelistic tradition across centuries and suggests that modern novels represent transformed iterations of their precursors. The study further opens avenues for future research into comparative narrative techniques across periods highlighting broader continuities in novel-writing traditions.

Keywords: Literary evolution; Early modern novel; Textual analysis; Genre making.

Introduction

There is a huge debate on the origins of Novel as genre, according to Margaret Anne Doody "novel has a continuous history of about two thousand years," (1) in her book 'the True story of the Novel' she says it laid its roots back in Greek Literature, may be around the golden era of Alexander the great or somewhere after Aristotle or in between the two. (xviii). Similarly, Gerd Bayer records in his work 'Novel Horizons the genre making of Restoration fiction.'

"Throughout the nineteenth century, there were histories of the English novel that reached back beyond the eighteenth century, to Elizabethan prose, to Chaucer, to the prose fiction of the Hellenistic world, and to European developments in the early modern age." (25) Yet English asserts that Medieval romances and collections of ballads, especially those concerned with the legends of King Arthur, were the

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germinal sources of the modern novel.

Truly asserted by Margaret Anne Doody that "The Novel replaces the Romance as Reason replaces Superstition, and as the Model -T Ford replaces the horse and carriage." (Ibid, 3) She further argues that there is no distinction between Romance and Novel, romance according to her "has been used to describe a mood or mode rather than a genre". It is the Anglo Saxon tradition rather which put extraordinary emphasis on realism as the sole standard for being a novel (ibid, 15) on one hand romances are distinguished by English as a lively, picturesque, rambling in a story designed to convey literary pleasure to the reader, on the other Novels should meet the requirements of realism. Margaret contends to call all prose fiction as Novels only "I shall call all the works I am dealing with "novels," as that is the term we feel most positively about, and the word "novel" is an encouraging word, describing something inviting to a reader. I am employing few and simple criteria of classification. A work is a novel if it is fictional, if it is in prose, and if it is of a certain length." (Ibid, 16) Like Doody, Fuchs also observes the close link between two traditions, as the novel emerging from romance. (Fuchs, 40) In addition, different critics have claimed that narrative fiction around seventeen century was embedded with realistic depiction of society and its socio-political issues found the representation in novel of its time. (Ibid, 41) However, the Restoration novel "was clearly marked by its heterogeneity, in terms of both its formal and its thematic content". (Bayer 145)

The rise of English Novel can be traced from the rise of prose romance in Elizabethan age, Lyly's Euphues and Arcadia by Sydney are prime examples of this. These prose romances were characterized by rudimentary characterization, loosely integrated plots, overly fantastical prose styles, and excessive moralizing. Next step is the appearance of Picaresque novel in the last decades of sixteenth century. Having Spanish origin, the novel took its name from the Spanish word *picaro* which means 'rogue' hence the incidents and episodes in the novel were connected through the adventures of the hero-the rogue. Cervantes's 'Don Quixote' in Spanish and LeSage's Gil Blas in French are the well-known examples of this mode of writing. The picaresque novel in England began early, with "The unfortunate traveller or the life of Jack Wilson" by Thomas Nashe. Then "The English Rogue" by Richard head is another of this type. These were crude, vigorous, gross, and scandalous yet witty and energetic.

By the end of Seventeenth century Aphra Behn's "Orinooko, The Royal Slave" with its power of description, plot, characterization, and dialogue laid the new foundations in the development of Novel. Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" is another step ahead with smooth plot, variety of characters, descriptive narrative and simple yet dramatic dialogue. Daniel Defoe with his publication of "Robinson Crusoe" marked the culmination of English fiction in seventeenth century.

At the beginning of Eighteenth-century Addison and Steele though essayists yet their essays in "The Spectator" and "The Coverly Papers" showed the level of characterization and delicate humor which matches to none but the genre of novel. Professor George Saintsbury referred Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Richardson, and Fielding as the "four wheels of the wain" of 18th century English Novel due to their contribution to English novel.

Richardson remained the sole creator of the Novel of Sentiment, however in the

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hands of Sterne sentimental novel reached the extreme limits of its principle. On the contrary Fielding who is also called as father of English novel marked the rise of new school of fiction. He created the Novel of Realism and perfected the satiric Novel of Manners. It was Fielding who gave to the English novel a new conception of unity, breadth, and depth which was not to be discerned in any of his predecessors with "Tom Jones" as his masterpiece. .

The gradual development of novel as genre from its origin in ancient times till the restoration age shows significant changes in form and content and at the same time it exhibits a definite connection and transformation of the entire genre making. Even after restoration, the novel as genre did not cease to progress nor did it loose the connection from its lineage, gradual development in form and content thus remained intact. For instance, Fielding's realism continued in 19th century novel, depiction of social class, its conflicts and struggles, moral earnestness, effects of industrialization and detailed characterization marked the novels of Jane Austen' "Pride and Prejudice", Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre", George Eliot's "Middlemarch" and Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment". Further, in early 20th century the themes of disillusionment, chaos and inner consciousness reflected the plight of society and people in the aftermath of World War I. It was also a face of realism, which novelists of the time used as a vehicle in their own way. The significant works of this era were "Ulysses" by James Joyce, "Mrs. Dalloway" by Virginia Woolf, "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and "The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka. Late 20th century saw the use of unconventional techniques in Novel like the role of unreliable narrators, ironical tone, harsh cultural critique, and breakaway from traditional story telling in novel. To cite examples Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude", "Beloved" by Toni Morrison, and Joseph Heller's "Catch-22" are few masterpieces.

While exploring the lineage of modern novel, this study sees the striking similarities and the continuation of tradition of novel as genre making in the works of few contemporary novelists like Martin Amis (1949 -2023) still known for his crushing satire of London society like Fielding's realistic portrait of 18th century London exposing foibles and follies. As a modern social comedian, David Lodge (1935-2025) followed the footsteps of Fielding in his depiction of picaresque elements and use of wit and irony. The living legend Zadie Smith (1975-present) recalls 18th century novels specially Fielding, in her depiction of social class their hypocrisy, and superficial behavior. Her characterization reminds us of Henry Fielding's art of characterization in Tom Jones.

The detailed lineage of novel as genre from its origins to the contemporary form yields the significant evidence that modern novel is the transformed face of its precursors, yet the present study limits its scope to only two novels as a case study. The novels are selected from two distinct periods of time, Thomas Nashe's "The Unfortunate Traveller" and Fielding's "Tom Jones", both are picaresque novels. The Unfortunate Traveller is the precursor in picaresque genre of England and Tom Jones culminates in the perfection of the same. The present study aims to establish the link between the texts through comparative textual analysis by focusing specifically on the narrative techniques used including plot, characterization, and the role of narrator. The essay concludes that while both the works differ in writing style, historical context and their presentation of the content, their treatment of plot,

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characterization and narration collectively illustrates the transformation of narrative practice that enables the novel to emerge as a distinct literary form. This study opens the doors of further inquiry into the other techniques and features of novel by comparing different works from diverse periods.

Textual Analysis of Henry Fielding's Tom Jones

Narration is the basic difference between a drama and a novel, the narrative technique of novel makes it unique among others, it also informs the author's intent and handling of the subject. According to EM Forster novel is a flexible form of art. It is the narration besides the character construct which makes Novel a flexible genre. Novel due to its flexibility in time and space and range of characterization demonstrate a larger picture of life therefore Novelist has a bigger margin to portray a realistic picture gallery of certain era.

Tom Jones truly reserves the claim of first English novel due to its complex structure, authorial voice, realistic characterization, its rich English prose and above all the realistic panoramic picture of 18th century English society.

Unified and Progressive Plot Structure

"What a master of composition Fielding was: Upon my word, I think the Oedipus Tyrannus the Alchemist and Tom Jones, the three most perfect plots ever planned." (Coleridge, 1835, 171)

Many critics regarded Tom Jones as one of the most well-crafted novels in English History. Tom jones plot is mostly linear alongside few nonlinear digressions. The novel is divided into eighteen books; each book is further divided into chapters. The opening chapter of each book delivers authorial tone. The novel has authorial voice in narration, "An author ought to consider himself, not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their money." (Book I, Chapter i), who informs the reader about what is coming next and accompany him in understanding the events while commenting on the events and the actions. "If I have been an entertaining Companion to thee," the narrator comments at the end of the novel, "I promise thee it is what I have desired." (Book XVIII, chapter i).

Although, plot runs with a series of linear events from the birth of Tom to his childhood then to his banishment, which follows his lively journey leading to London and finally Tom's recognition of his real self. However, it also includes episodes of retrospection like in Book I chapter iii Tom is found as an infant in Allworthy's bed, in Book XVIII Chapters vii and vi the real identity of Tom and Mrs. Waters as Jenny Jones have been revealed respectively whereas the secret marriage of Bridge Allworthy was disclosed in Book I, chapter xii. "She hath married a gentleman, though perhaps not quite her equal in fortune; ..."

Being a masterpiece in Picaresque Genre, the plot of Tom jones exhibits vivid elements of picaresque novel like in Book VIII chapters x to xv Tom's encountered with Man of the Hill during his journey from Somerset to London also in Book XI, chap iii to vii the rambling narrative of Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Alongside the technique of parallel plots has also been skillfully used by Fielding, for instance Sophia's confinement, moral deceitfulness of Blifil and continuous disgrace of Tom are just few examples.

The ending of novel, Book XVIII not only offers the resolution of past mysteries but also confirms succinct and controlled narrative pattern brilliantly exhibited by

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Henry Fielding. "It is impossible to conceive a more tender or moving scene than the meeting between the uncle and nephew…. The first agonies of joy which were felt on both sides are indeed beyond my power to describe: I shall not therefore attempt it" (chapter x)

In addition, Fielding introduced a unique and different concept of Morality in the novel other than 18th century traditional morality, i.e., *good nature*. There is no inquiry that fielding feels more eager and competent to manage than the question, what constitutes the essential property of a good man? Fielding has developed pairs of characters which indicate sharp contrast between them and emphasize his moral view and *good nature*. Though this may not be intentional yet, it plays a vital role in asserting Fielding's unique view of morality. While talking about Tom Jones Fielding described him as a boy of "strong passions" and had "little command over them." (Book III, Chapter iv) "Henceforward he saw every appearance of virtue in the youth through the magnifying end, and viewed all his faults with the glass inverted, so that they became scarce perceptible"((Book III, Chapter vii) While about Blifil - the counterpart of Tom Jones narrator says "Master Blifil was generally called a sneaking rascal, a poor-spirited wretch, with other epithets of the like kind" (Book III, Chapter v). Similarly describing the character of Sophia Western Fielding contended to say, "we intend to introduce our reader with this charming young creature," "nor was this beautiful frame disgraced by an inhabitant unworthy of it." (Book IV, Chapter ii). This is how Fielding continuously asserts his moral view of the world through the attributes of characters in the novel. Conclusively, the form the novel took in England for more than a hundred years had its origin in Fielding and in this respect Smollett, Scott, Dicken, Thackeray, and Meredith all wrote in his shadow.

The Art of Narration

"Fielding was as superb a craftsman in his own way as Henry James" (Walter Allen, 1954, 73)

Fielding's Tom Jones is known for its outstanding use of omniscient third person narration, this technique allows the novelist to deep dive into the minds of his characters and let the readers provide opportunity to become intimate with the characters. The technique is somehow like soliloquy in Drama; the dramatist also uses soliloquy to let his characters speak out their thoughts without informing the other characters but the audience. In Tom Jones, the narrator describes the moral character of Allworthy (Book I, chapter ii) and reveals the hypocrisy of Blifil with full psychological insight and accuracy. "Blifil was, in reality, not without ambition; but it was an ambition carefully concealed." (Book III, Chapter iv) "Blifil was indeed endowed with a disposition so cruel, that he could take delight in the misfortunes of others." (Book IV, chapter iii)

Also, Henry Fielding sometimes directly converses with the reader through narration which lets the reader judge the actions of characters thereby engaging readers in the novel and reinforcing novelist's control over the understanding of the text by the reader. Fielding's narration is many folded ranging from an intimate friend who is all knowing about his characters to judging them, in book XIV Chapter i Fielding discuss the need of writer to know life and have other knowledge before writing a novel, he asserts "To say the truth, I require no more than that a man should have some little knowledge of the subject on which he treats,… and,

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indeed, without this, all the other learning in the world will stand him in little stead." Which implies his characters are taken from life and that knowledge is sufficient for the novelist to know. In addition, Fielding shows his sense of satire and irony while portraying few characters like Deborah Wilkins "Whenever Mrs. Deborah had occasion to exert any extraordinary condescension to Mrs. Bridget, and by that means had a little soured her natural disposition, it was usual with her to walk forth among these people, in order to refine her temper, by venting, and, as it were, purging off all ill humours; on which account she was by no means a welcome visitant to say the truth, she was universally dreaded and hated by them all."(Book I, chapter vi)

Fielding exhibits full control over his characters, events, and actions and even his reader's interpretation "We have mentioned these two, as examples only of the task which may be imposed on readers of the lowest class. Much higher and harder exercises of judgment and penetration may reasonably be expected from the upper graduates in criticism." (Book III, chapter i) Hence narration in Fielding's hand has become a powerful tool which entertains, engages and wilholds the reader throughout the journey. "As we are sensible that much the greatest part of our readers are very eminently possessed of this quality, we have left them a space of twelve years to exert it in; and shall now bring forth our heroe, at about fourteen years of age, not questioning that many have been long impatient to be introduced to his acquaintance." (ibid)

Finally, Fielding himself assumes control of the narrative, interpreting and commenting in his own person wherever he chooses to do so, and establishing the convention of the omniscient author who enters into the mind and thoughts of all his characters which has remained dominant in the English novel clear down the present day.

Themes as Socio-Moral Reflections of His Age

Fielding removed the novel from the world of romance and planted it firmly on the earth by making it an instrument of social criticism he brought a healthy moral vision which made it possible to make the novel wide.

The narrator in Tom Jones also reflects and informs his reader on themes of novel like the theme of appearance versus reality was emphasized by these lines "I know he hath been guilty of faults; but there is great goodness of heart at the bottom" (Book XVIII, Chapter ix). Fielding puts forward the necessity of "goodness of heart" as against cold chastity which is often accompanied by hypocrisy of all kinds. It is peopled by hypocrites from various sections of society. "It is not enough that your designs, nay, that your actions, are intrinsically good; you must take care they shall appear so. If your inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair outside also." (ibid)

Similarly, the narrator exposes the hypocrisy of 18th century society, their false standards and codes of conduct even the religious people are not saved from this false morality "I shall beg leave to obviate some misconstructions into which the zeal of some few readers may lead them; for I would not willingly give offence to any, especially to men who are warm in the cause of virtue or religion." Characters like Thwackum, Blifil and Square have become narrator's targets. "On the contrary, it is with a view to their service that I have taken upon me to record the lives and actions of two of their false and pretended champions. A treacherous friend is the most

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dangerous enemy; and I will say boldly, that both religion and virtue have received more real discredit from hypocrites than the wittiest profligates or infidels could ever cast upon them: nay, farther, as these two, in their purity, are rightly called the bands of civil society, and are indeed the greatest of blessings; so when poisoned and corrupted with fraud, pretence, and affectation, they have become the worst of civil curses, and have enabled men to perpetrate the most cruel mischiefs to their own species" (Book III, Chapter iv)

Finally, Fielding as narrator took the role of moral educator who guides his reader, controls judgement and interpretation of the reader "I declare, that to recommend goodness and innocence hath been my sincere endeavour in this history." (Dedication to *Tom Jones*, addressed to George Lyttleton, ESQ)

Textual Analysis of Thomas Nashe's The unfortunate traveller

Episodic Form and Structural Discontinuity

If asked what Nashe 'says', we should have to say, Nothing. He tells no story, puts no thought, takes no attitude (C.S Lewis)

Thomas Nashe's The Unfortunate Traveller (1594) dates from a time when the English novel was not yet firmly established in its core principles and when its narrative structure reflects exactly this sense of transition. Instead of presenting the unified and linear temporal flow, Nashe presents a narrative held together by mobility and improvisation. Jack Wilton's travails are a series of episodes loosely linked. Nashe sets his protagonist in scenes which happen like isolated units, i.e. Wilton at the English camp, Wilton fooling the court pages, Wilton fleeing to Wittenberg, Wilton arriving in Italy, Wilton witnessing executions and massacres. Each episode ends abruptly and gives way to a new social context, demonstrating a flexible and structurally discontinuous structure which turns out to be almost pamphlet-like. As Jack Wilton reflects "From the Campe at Turney I posted to Wittenberg. . . neuer long continued in one stay" (p.4), and later "There began my miseries afresh . . . trust to the wide world" (p.9) which strengthens the episodic isolation. The fragmented structure though is true to the picaresque nature but Nashe's version is quite different from Spanish models like Lazarillo de Tormes or Guzman de Alfarache. Where the classical picaresque employs episodicity to set the stage for an attack on social hypocrisy by taking the stable perspective of a rogue narrator, Nashe multiplies the tonal and generic registers of each episode. Funny moments quickly turn into religious arguments, or violent scenes or dangerous situations. The plot does not feel like a clear satire from beginning to end, but rather scattered and chaotic making it hard to envision as one connected whole.

In The Unfortunate Traveller, the lack of a stable plot also reflects the lack of stability in early modern Europe, where the constantly shifting political alliances, religious strife and social violence meant that there was no real sense of order. When Jack witnesses the brutal execution of the Italian scholar (in the Cutwolfe episode), the narrative leaves comic travel writing behind and becomes chaotic and unpredictable, in the same manner that Europe itself was fractured by war, religious upheaval and hegemonic structures. Likewise, his earlier journey through the camp of Henry the Eighth also already reveals confusion rather than control as trickery, violence and shifting loyalties take the place of structure or purpose. The fragmented journey of the novel therefore becomes a metaphor for Europe where there was no government or ideology to offer lasting stability. Nashe made a kind of form in

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which coherence is not possible, and survival is not certain but is based on movement.

Narrative voice and Early Modern Interiorities

Jack Wilton's narrative voice is the dominant piece in Nashe's piece. Unlike the later eighteenth century narrators who balance interiority with social observation (e.g. Defoe's Moll or Richardson's heroines), Jack is a performative and theatrically unstable narrator. His identity changes depending on circumstances notably his role as court jester, con artist, pilgrim, lover and moral commentator. These shifts are expressed in the varying tone of his narration ion. This instability is manifested when he is saying, "I can play the knaue with any man, and shape my selfe to all companies" (Nashe 1594), and his final claim "I will amend all . . . though none will beleeueme" (p.63) speaks to the repentance of performance.

Instead of offering one definite identity, Wilton's character is built through shifting tones - sometimes ironic and distant, sometimes bold and confident, sometimes morally reflective, clever, or openly afraid. These changes in voice make it difficult for the reader to make a decision about how much of his story is reliable or truthful. This instability engenders a kind of unreliability of narrative that, although not formal theorized in Nashe's time, ultimately becomes a major characteristic of the modern novel. In this sense, Nashe does not employ inconsistency as a weakness in the storytelling, but rather as an early experiment in showing a character's inner viewpoint and subjective experience.

Wilton's voice also helps the story to transition from different kinds of writing. He varies his tone according to what is going on: in the court scenes he is witty and playful, on the battlefield becomes serious and moralizing, in Italy dwells on shocking or grotesque events, with such characters as Heraclide or Diamante he employs the style of romance. Just as he moves freely across the borders of Europe, he also moves easily between genres. The voice of Wilton also influences the presentation of conversations. Often, he repeats what people say, or puts it in his own words, blurring the distinction between direct speech and the narrator's explanation. This mix of voices is an early example of what what later novels would refer to as free indirect discourse. One obvious example can be found when he describes conversations from his point of view: "Heraclide said he would go to the city; I told him I feared it would be ill for his estate, and he laughed at my counsel, as if I were a fool" (Nashe 1594). Here, Wilton does not report speech per se, but rather through his interpretation of it, combining narration and commentary. This strategy blurs the line between direct speech and authorial voice in a way that foreshadows some of the later novelistic techniques, such as free indirect discourse. By mediating the story in this manner, Nashe highlights the fact that the narrator is not merely a passive observer of events but an active agent in the creation of events and genres.

Representation of Early Modern Crisis

Violence is not just a thematic feature of The Unfortunate Traveller, it is a structural force, propelling the narrative and putting strain on its formal boundaries. The brutality that runs throughout the text - executions, atrocities on the battlefield, sexualized threat, Cutwolfe's spectacle of revenge - act as a narrative engine, pushing Jack Wilton from one episode and geographic location to another. Each change of setting is triggered by the encounter with physical danger, and this indicates that violence is the means by which movement and change take place in the story (Nashe

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1594, 177-231). In this way, violence not only shapes what is said but the architecture of the narrative, which is to say that there is a kind of rhythm of rupture. Violence drives the direction of narrative: "All Italie was an anatomy of slaughter . . . I amidst the ruines ran for my life" (p.44), resulting in spectacle: "His body was quartered before mine eies. (p.52).

Nashe's attention to the material body takes this dynamic much further. He lives up to physical frailty: wounds, dismemberment, humiliation, and visceral effects of living in a Europe characterized by war and political instability. This fascination with the body is consistent with the early modern discourses on embodiment and mortality, but Nashe turns the horror of the body into a formal experiment. The overwhelming physicality of the scenes raises the question of the adequacy of prose to the task of depicting extremity; and the consequent rhetorical excess - hyperbole, insatiable amplification, grotesque metaphor - points to a struggle between representation and the unrepresentable. Such crises of representation played a formative part in the development of later techniques of the novel.

The portrayal of violence also represents a more general early modern crisis of meaning. Wilton crosses a continent of religious strife, authoritarian retribution, and uncertainty of morals. Instead of offering moral clarity, the story plunges the reader into a world where institutions - courts, armies, clergy, and universities - exercise their power by force and display. This crisis environment increases the instability of the narrative voice, exaggerates the grotesque register of the prose, and increases the episodic form. Violence is therefore an index of social disorder and an artistic challenge, provoking Nashe to consider the role of prose fiction in registering trauma, cruelty and human vulnerability in a sustained narrative. In doing this, the text anticipates the novel's eventual ability to deal with the psychological and social ramifications of crisis.

Comparison of Two Works

Experimentation in Narrative Form

Nashe and Fielding engage with narrative form in fundamentally different ways that are, however, historically complementary, especially in how they address the issues of structure, narrative voice and genre. In The Unfortunate Traveller, Nashe creates a story that defies teleological development and classical plot coherence. The text develops as an episodic itinerary, based on geographical movement rather than causal progression, as Jack Wilton moves from Henry's military campaign in France to the courts and cities of Italy. This movement is not pitched in terms of growth or moral development but perpetual displacement so that plot is subservient to spectacle. Narrative continuity is maintained through movement rather than purpose, and lack of a uniting resolution is a challenge to Aristotelian expectations of beginning, middle and end. This formal instability reflects the political, religious and cultural disorder of late Tudor Europe, and assigns the text to the experiences of a perinatal experiment in narrative fragmentation, important as figuring future metafictionalities.

By contrast, Tom Jones is the type of architecture that implies architectural intentionality and formal control. Fielding structures the narrative in eighteen books, each prefaced by a chapter which explicitly considers narrative practice, genre and readership. This structural self-consciousness is not social decor but pedagogical: Fielding educates his readers in how to read the novel even as he constructs it. The

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narrative progresses in terms of causal logic, well-patterned concealments and revelations, and a final movement towards closure in terms of recognition and marriage. Where Nashe's episodic form poses the problem of narrative coherence, Fielding's design consolidates and institutionalizes it and turns experimentation into a replicable model for the novel.

These divergent formal strategies are supported by contrasting strategies of narrative voice and authority. Nashe uses a first person narrator whose reliability is constantly undermined. Jack Wilton is a rogue figure whose narration is performative, inconsistent, and morally ambiguous which destabilizes any stable interpretive framework. He acts at once as agent and spectacle, observer and participant, and so undermines the authority of the narrator from within. The reader is denied epistemological certainty and narration comes to be an experiment in distrust rather than guidance. Although not accompanied by the psychological depth that later unreliable narrators can have, Nashe's technique nonetheless foreshadows such modern narratological concerns as the relative fragility of narrative truth.

Fielding on the other hand claims narrative authority through an intrusive omniscient narrator who openly comments on the mechanics of storytelling, critiques contemporary literary practices and evaluates moral and aesthetic principles. Such meta narrative interventions serve to foreground the constructed nature of the text, but they appear to lead to a stabilization rather than a disruption of text-interpretation. By making the process of narration visible, Fielding makes the narrator a credible and authoritative guide. A trust is won not by a masking of artifice but by its rationalization and narrative experimentation thus acts to reinforce rather than interrogate novelistic authority too.

Generic hybridity only accentuates this contrast. Both texts are based on various genres, but they do so to opposing ends. Nashe's hybridity is centrifugal: satire, travel writing, romance, and writing of atrocity clash with no synthesized content, resulting in a form that cannot be easily contained by genre. This overload heightens the text's instability and accords the text's form with the volatility of its content. The hybridity that Fielding had, by contrast, was centripetal. Satire, comedy, moral philosophy, and social observation are brought in to form a coherent system that can represent a whole social world. Fielding does not give up hybridity but puts it into discipline, transforming experimental mixture into narrative order. In this sense, Nashe hybridizes in order to destabilize narrative form, whilst Fielding hybridizes in order to organize and codify narrative form marking a decisive shift in the evolution of the English novel.

Experimentation in Narrative Content

In The Unfortunate Traveller narrative experimentation at the level of content is most apparent in the representation of society as fundamentally incoherent and resistant to synthesis. Nashe portrays a world of religious violence, political intrigue, war and judicial cruelty, but these elements are given no sustained interpretive framing or moral explanation. The narrative describes events as spectacles rather than as parts of an intelligible social order, putting the text in the company of early modern forms of reportage, satire and travel writing rather than sociological narration. Society does not operate as a system but as a series of disconnected encounters and is what critical accounts of Renaissance prose fiction have called a crisis of ideological coherence in the aftermath of Reformation conflict and

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continental instability. Nashe does not provide any explanatory model for social relations; instead, the text works as an enactment of their collapse. In this sense, the narrative experiments with content, in the privilege it gives to witnessing and not to interpretation, to registering social disintegration but not to attempting to reconcile or theorize it.

Fielding's Tom Jones comes to social representation from the other direction, experimenting not by fragmentation but by comprehensiveness. The novel has aspirations to portray society as a connected whole, including class hierarchies, property relations, legal systems, familial structures, and the moral economies of rural and urban life which are in marked contrast. Fielding's method of narrative has the flavor of Enlightenment-inflected assumptions with regard to the intelligibility of society: that society can be categorized and narrated as a coherent structure. The experimental dimension is the ambition to experiment to discover whether the novel can sustain such totality - whether prose fiction can be a medium that is able to comprehend social complexity without falling into the chaos of disorder. Unlike Nashe's rejection of synthesis, Fielding's narrative is an active constructor of a synthesis, and the novel is thus in the position of being a form where social reality can be made legible.

These different approaches to social representation are reinforced by each author's approach to violence, morality and narrative ethics. In Nashe's text, violence is everywhere and often gratuitous; it seems a condition of existence rather than a narrative problem that must be solved. Scenes of torture, execution and political brutality occur with no redemptive context and with no lingering moral discussion, having the effect of disturbing expected didactic closure. Such refusal to moralize goes with early modern satirical traditions that point out corruption with excess rather than instruction. Nashe's experimentation here is in resisting the moral economies that are typically used in association with the form of the narrative; violence does not catalyze ethical understanding but, rather, highlights the instability of moral judgment itself.

Fielding, by contrast, integrates conflict within a very clear moral framework. Although Tom Jones contains duels, seductions and antagonisms of social order, these are narratively meaningful rather than gratuitous. Conflict is a mechanism used to test character, social norms and to ultimately reinforce ethical lessons. Fielding's experimentation lies in reconciling entertainment and moral philosophy and showing that entertainment and instruction do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. The drawing of disorder to a sense of ethical resolution in the parts of classical and neoclassical theories of comedy helps to reinforce the ability of the novel for moral pedagogy.

Differences in characterization also serve to throw further light on the contrasting modes of narrative experimentation. Nashe's characters are relatively speaking episodic presences whose importance is defined by circumstance rather than psychological depth. They come and go, appear and perform contributing to the text's stress on rhetorical display and immediacy of experience. Characterization is, however, still externalized in line with early prose traditions in which personality is built by action and language as opposed to interior reflection. Nashe's experimentation is therefore in subordinating character development to narrative volatility.

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Fielding, on the other hand, promotes a system of characterization that looks forward to psychological realism. Characters like Tom, Sophia Western, Allworthy, and Blifil are characterised by recognisable motivations, ethical dispositions and internal conflicts. Their actions make sense in a moral and psychological context that calls for reader judgment and identification. This focus on interiority is a response to an emerging belief, theorized widely in studies of the eighteenth-century novel, that narrative meaning was the result of the interplay between individual consciousness and social structure. Fielding experiments - making character interiority a central organizing principle of narrative coherence and not a secondary embellishment of the narrative.

Taken together, The Unfortunate Traveller and Tom Jones mark different but related steps in the development of the form of the novel. Nashe's text is a break, revealing the boundaries of inherited narrative conventions and bringing disorder, instability, and experiential excess to the forefront. Fielding's novel works like a process of consolidation, taking the earlier experimental impulses and turning them into a structured and authoritative form that can sustain a social representation, moral evaluation and psychological depth. Despite their difference, both works have a very basic ambition in common: to question the ability of prose narrative to mediate human experience. Where Nashe emphasizes chaos and discontinuity, Fielding emphasizes design and coherence; where Nashe resists closure, Fielding constructs it; and where Nashe destabilizes the authority of narrative, Fielding creates it. Their convergence is not a matter of positive correspondence in their formalities, but rather a combination of commitment to the task of reframing what narrative prose shall withdraw or accomplish within its momentary normative environment. A holistic summary of the comparison is given below in table 1.

Criterion	**The Unfortunate Traveller**	**Tom Jones**	**Outcome**
Structure	Episodic, chaotic, non-teleological	Architectured, planned, cohesive	Evolution from fragmentation to formal design
Narrative Voice	Unreliable first-person	Omniscient, intrusive narrator	From subjective instability to narrative authority
Genre Strategy	Hybrid without synthesis	Hybrid with structural coherence	Genre experimentation becomes institutionalized
Social Representation	Disorder, crisis, dislocation	Social system mapped and interpreted	Transition to realist social vision
Function of Experimentation	To disrupt	To consolidate and define	Experiment → Prototype → Canonical model

Source: Authors' own interpretation

Conclusion

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The foregoing analysis shows that The Unfortunate Traveller and Tom Jones occupy key positions in the evolution of the English novel from romance and early forms of prose fiction to a consolidated form of realism. The works of Nashe and Fielding represent turning points in the process of a gradual reconfigurement of narrative form and content, especially in the genre of the picaresque that mediates between romance, satire and the emerging novel. Viewed together, these texts confirm the establishment of English novel as a tranformative procedure rather than a replacement, in which romance, picaresque, satire and early prose fiction are reworked rather than discarded. The Unfortunate Traveller plays the role of precursor, where Nashe experimented with prose at a time when the novel was still emerging, showing both the possibilities and challenges of storytelling. Fielding later took these experimental ideas and shaped them into a stable, recognizable novel form by the mid eighteenth century. The comparison thus reinforces the central argument that the English novel emerges through the transformation and reworking of existing genres rather than their displacement

At the same time, there are certain limitations to the study. Most notably, it limits its analysis to two texts, which while representative of evolution, are not completely able to capture the complexity of the development of the novel. A much larger corpus would provide the opportunity to map subtler transitions between gradual and competing narrative models. Despite these limitations, the study offers a focused and historically grounded comparison that clarifies how narrative experimentation in form and content functions as a driving force in the transformation of prose fiction. It opens avenues for further research into intermediary texts, alternative narrative traditions, and cross-cultural influences, reinforcing the view that the English novel emerges not as a sudden innovation but as the outcome of sustained formal negotiation across centuries.

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