ORIGINS OF MODERN FICTION

Reading, Reacting, Writing: 122-127
GRENDDEL
Earliest Examples

• Oral Tradition—way to preserve the past through stories and songs, usually long, rhyming poems known as “epic” poems.

• Examples: Homer’s *Iliad and the Odyssey*; Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*; Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*, and Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*.

• In the Middle Ages, the epics were replaced by the romance, e.g. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Malory’s *Le Morte d’ Arthur*. 
PRINTING PRESS
The Novel

• The novel owes its origin to the invention of the printing press (1440).

• During the Renaissance, several precursors to the modern novel were evolving:
  – The pastoral romance
  – The character
  – The picaresque novel, e.g., Cervantes's *Don Quixote*

Daniel Defoe is generally given credit for writing the first novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).
Another early novel, Jonathon Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) is a satirical commentary on the “undesirable outcomes of science” (124).

### The Victorian Era (1837-1901)

- Reflected the era’s preoccupation with propriety and manners, e.g. Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*.
- However, the people demanded a more realistic rendering of society, one that reflected the different social strata, not just the aristocracy.
- Authors who wrote to a much more diverse and complicated society: George Eliot, Charles Dickens, The Bronte sisters, Charlotte and Emily, and writers like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley who wrote about the dangers of science and blind ambition in *Frankenstein* (1817).
FRANKENSTEIN
MOBY-DICK

Realism
Realism: 1865-1910

• Meanwhile, in the United States, the early novels were focused on the concerns of the newly formed country with its complex emerging interests.

• Examples of early novels: *The Last of the Mohicans* (J. Fenimore Cooper); *The Scarlet Letter* (N. Hawthorne); *Moby-Dick* (Melville)

• Beginning in France, realism strove to portray stories and characters in a realistic fashion. U.S. writers such as Crane, Twain, and H. James are considered to have been heavily influenced by this period.

• In the nineteenth century, writers also began to branch out and address themes of feminism, race, politics, and psychological struggles.
"SHUT YOUR EYES AND SEE"

~James Joyce

MODERNISM
Modernism and the Twentieth Century
1890-1940s

• Writers reacted negatively to the increasing complexity of the changing world and mourned the passing of the old ways (Check out Downton Abbey on PBS)

• However, WWI, urbanization, and industrialization contributed to a sense that ideas needed to be expressed in new ways and began experimenting with form and content.

• Examples of British authors who wrote in this period: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence

• The “roaring twenties” and the “Great Depression” influenced American writers to capture the culture in gritty and realistic ways.

• Some prime examples:
  – F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
  – Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*
  – William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
  – John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*
  – Richard Wright, *Native Son*
  – Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Postmodernism: 1949-1993

• Reacted to the limitations of form and meaning.
• For the writers of this period, the search for meaning in a text was more important than the meaning itself.
• With their experimental techniques, the postmodern novelists, “confronted the changing society and the future” (127).
• Notable writers: Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie, and Kurt Vonnegut
Toni Morrison

CONTEMPORARY FICTION
Contemporary Fiction

• Is a world that mirrors the diversity of its participants in terms of “form, content, themes, styles, and language” (127).

• Notable Nobel Prize Winners: Doris Lessing, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nadine Gordimer, and Toni Morrison.

• “As we continue into the twenty-first century, the only thing that remains certain about the future of the novel, and of fiction in general, is its past” (127).