



## Popular Fiction Development and Characteristics

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The term "Popular Fiction" has several uses and interpretations. The word "popular" is applied to something that is widespread and well-liked by many people. It is also used to distinguish high and popular culture, to describe a culture made by the people for themselves, to mean the mass media imposed on people by commercial interest. What is initially understood from this is that popular fiction is a novel, which is well-liked and read by large number of people and sold out with enormous quantity. (Characteristics of Popular Fiction)

It is generally assumed that the late prose romances which flourished during the medieval ages have become something like popular literature when they were reshaped in the modern time akin to the remix of songs which are a craze with the youth today. Classics of yore become popular as a TV play or a radio drama or a serial, e.g., the musical version of *Oliver Twist*. (Humm, Stigant, Widdowson, 8)

These prose romances became popular during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, perhaps, because they were issued in more numerous and cheaper editions. Their availability at very low price in the market made their delivery to the wide circle of the community possible. The adventure of *Valentine and Orson*, of *Helyas Knight*, of the *Swan and Guy of Warwick*, which were originally meant for feudal aristocracy, had, by the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, become the reading material for commoners including children. The later transformed versions of the prose romances remained alien to popular literature in terms of their style and content. At same time we can see the rise popular prose fiction which was not only read by broad sections of the population but was also a reflection of their actual ways of living and speaking in the real world.

It is necessary to go back to the preachers' warning tales including *fabliaux* to trace the development of such genuinely popular narrative in the sixteenth century.

(Schlauch, 82-119). *Fabliau* was a humorous tale popular in medieval France and flourished in England during the fourteenth century. The conventional verse form of the *fabliau* was the eight-syllable couplet.

The major feature of the *fabliaux* was that they mixed humour with satire. They dealt realistically with middle class or lower class characters and they aimed to delight the general audience. Their favourite theme was the cuckolding of stupid husband. Chaucer, who wrote one of the greatest serious short stories in verse, also wrote the best *fabliaux*, the hilarious *Miller's Tale*. These homiletic anecdotes and tales were originally recorded in Latin but, according to the requirements of the time, these tales were translated into English so that they can be used directly. This translation made them popular among general public as they were available in English now.

Then in the fifteenth century, we can find number of *exempla* (82-119) collections rendered into English, especially the internationally well-known *Gesta Romanorum*. This new English versions of *Gesta Romanorum* were marked by emission of more frivolous tales which had been included in the Latin *Gesta*. The Language of the English *Gesta* was formal and syntactically firm on the whole, rather than colloquially loose. Other collections of the fifteenth century *exempla* are even less promising for the development of popular prose fiction. The alphabetical narration gives dry summaries of tales and uses simple sentences not worked out for full rhetorical effect.

*Exemplum* was a moralized tale. Just as modern preachers often make use of illustrations anecdotes and incidents, both historical and legendary, to point morals or illustrate doctrines. *Exempla* are highly artificial and incredible to modern reader. These "examples" seem to have appealed strongly to medieval congregations due to their concreteness narratives and human interest as well their moral implications.

We have to switch over to the collections of *jests and anecdotes* (82-119) for the origins of narrative popular writing in prose. These were widely disseminated in the sixteenth century. These volumes began initially as a continuation to medieval *exempla* having morals attached but they soon broke away from the older tradition and became a self-sufficient form of secular entertainment. These stories became popular and artistic in themselves in no time.

These *jest* books in the sixteenth century became curious social phenomenon. In contrast to the *exempla*, these anecdotes are non- ecclesiastical and only incidentally instructive. They are sometimes satirical but their ultimate aim is to entertain the masses for its own sake. The rise of these popular *jest* books was widely greeted by the contemporary readers including the merchant class of the time.

At least parts of the English *jest* books, like others include items ranging from the simplest to more sophisticated type, which approaches the structure of a *novella*: were found copied from one collection to another. The humour provided by *jest* books

are based on 'witty' reply rather than crude or vulgar one. The linguistic foundations of the humour rest on the incongruous literal understanding of current metaphysical expressions. The primitive sources of humour are clearly visible in later sixteenth century jest books such as *Mary Tales*, *Willie Questions*, and *Quicken Answers*, *Meries tales of Skelton*, *Skeggisin 's Jests*, *The Sack Full of News* and many more.

*Jests* and popular *fabliaux*, though briefly and boldly told, often contained the essentials of a plot which could be expanded into a more ambitious literary form. However, by the addition of dialogue and description, at times with jocular commentary through another familiar plot, could be transformed into a new type which we may call the anti-romantic. It differs from similarly expanded literary *fabliaux*.

These minor forms of anonymous popular narrative developing out of the *exempla* and *fabliaux* continued to be cultivated and samples of these were gathered into collections. Some of these tended to cluster around comic heroes, rogues and jester. They were beginning to evolve into a form already suggestive of works ranging from *Lazarillo de Tonnes* to Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. This proved to be vital for the future of popular fiction which was to emerge as one of the dominant forms of literature in the post modern era with many writers working in the field.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the writers and readers of popular fiction are increase demographically as compare to previous centuries. With the coming of online markets the unprecedented increase in the selling of popular fiction or genre fiction can be noticed. Due to online selling of books, thousands of online reviews are available now a day on the same book. Study of thousands of readers' reviews on bestselling fiction on various online market places suggests that bestselling fictions:

- Covers broad variety of interdisciplinary topics of public interest
- Makes little use of technical language or jargons
- Represents an instructive or traditional, rather than highly reflective philosophy of life at times
- Stresses chiefly on incidents and adventure or simple intrigue
- Consists of wit, irony and sense of humour
- Describe things that people will use in their day to day lives
- Provides information on place, person and politics
- Presents complex issues in a simple and engaging manner
- Focus on a single idea and provide entertainment
- Writes what makes you happy and feel good
- Gives surprises with the power of creativity
- Writes that elevates with its heroism, justice, beauty and horror
- Creates social and gender base multicultural fusion

- Creates pictures with the words which excites
- Provides a kind of escapist entertainment to its readers from the mundane reality.
- Characterization is usually flat in a work of popular fiction.

These characteristics are also reasons for the popularity popular fiction

**References:**

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