

# SHORTER NOVELS

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## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

EDITED BY PHILIP HENDERSON



No. 841

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# Shorter Novels: Seventeenth Century

ORNATUS & ARTESIA · OROONOKO  
THE ISLE OF PINES · INCOGNITA

EDITED BY  
PHILIP HENDERSON



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NO. 841

*EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,*

*and be thy guide,*

*In thy most need to go by thy side*

## INTRODUCTION

To anyone approaching the study of the seventeenth-century novel, it may at first seem curious that in an age of such prosaic splendour, in the century of Donne, Browne, Taylor, Milton, and Bunyan, that fiction itself, which had already become an established profession, should evidence such poverty of invention and such a falling off from the standards of the previous age. For although the novel as a form was, so to speak, only begun by such men as Sidney, Nash, Deloney, Greene and Lodge, their work had, within obvious limits, a certain perfection; and naïve in some respects as we may now consider *The Arcadia*, *The Unfortunate Traveller* or *Thomas of Reading*, these works nevertheless set up a standard of achievement that was not reached again till over a hundred years, when, indeed, it was surpassed. But when we come to consider how the reading public of this century was split up, more than ever before or since, into sharply defined and mutually antagonistic sections each with its particular prejudice, and moreover how much the writer was dependent upon those tastes and prejudices, it will be more readily understood why there failed to come into being a novel tradition of any great magnitude. This was not an age that encouraged detachment of mind, presenting an appearance as it does of a rough sea whose waves of enthusiasm and counter-enthusiasm perpetually beat against and nullify each other in conflict: its early years still echoing the Elizabethans, whose vigour had now declined into a mellifluous prettiness: and growing by the side of this dying tradition, a new spiritual order, the coming to birth of a new self-consciousness, that finally overthrew the whole fabric of the state: while at the Restoration itself, spirit wasted in a widespread profligacy that bred simply a polite and shallow cynicism.

Thus the novelist of the seventeenth century had to

contend with three sections of taste in all their varying forms: the court, the Puritan faction, and the vulgar. To the first of these Queen Henriette Maria, coming from France, had introduced the pastoral heroic romance of d'Urfé and, later, those enormous "anatomies of the amorous heart," those almost unending labyrinthine records of heroic enterprise of Gomberville, Calprenède and Scudéry. And till the Civil War, with its unpleasant reality, put an end to the imitated heroics of court gallants and their *belles*, who, under the influence of this new literature, became for the time being little Cyruses, Cleopatras, and Scipios in French wigs, Whitehall was almost converted into another Hôtel Rambouillet, the king himself, as we know from Milton's sneers, leading the way. But these works with their airs and graces could not be expected to appeal to Puritan minds, and so while some writers at once began imitating the French romances, the genius of the age went into the composition of sermons and religious tracts and allegories. The vulgar, on the other hand, still cherished the old-fashioned chivalric romances, the jest books and pamphlets and a debased form of story-book, picaresque and obscene, imported from Italy and Spain. But as all aspiring writers sought to flatter the prevalent taste at court, the history of the English novel during the greater part of the seventeenth century is a record of translation and adaption from foreign sources.

But these French books so much in favour were, in reality, by no means original, but simply a development of the old chivalrous romance of early and medieval times. And as, for many readers, Shakespeare was grown barbarous, there had to be a greater refinement of heroism and with it much eloquence and "classical" posturing. The heroes we meet in such works as the *Grand Cyrus* (1653) *Clélie* and the *Grand Scipion* are really our old friends Amadis of Gaul and Hercules of Greece brought up to date and latinised by the addition of Roman tunics and Louis XIV wigs. They are, as has been indicated, more eloquent than before, nicer and more courtly in deportment, and afford by their deeds not only the equivalent of "academies for the lover, schools of war for the

soldier, and cabinets for the statesmen," but are equally effective as "correctives of passion, and restoratives of conversation" — for so an English translator styled them. That conversation during and immediately after the Civil War needed restoring is probable; and these novels were able to divert exquisites' attention from the fact that their king was to be, or had just been, executed by providing them with such topics as to whether it was better for a lover to court his mistress in verse or prose. Wearisome elegancies of this sort were especially popular in England with Mrs. Katherine Phillips and the Duchess of Newcastle. Excess of elegant glory was the aim of both these ladies. "I dare not examine the former times for fear I should meet with such of my sex that have outdone all the glory I can aim at or hope to attain," writes her Grace. But deciding to confine her "immortal longings" to literature, she wrote *The Blazing World* and a life of her husband, whom she rates far above Julius Cæsar. She wrote at all hours, sometimes ringing the bell in the middle of the night for one of her lady secretaries "to write down her conceptions," and even forestalled posterity by crowning herself and her husband with laurels, as they are to be seen sitting in front of the fire in that engraving of 1656, "Conversation at the House of the Duchess of Newcastle." As for Mrs. Katherine Phillips, she followed at Cardigan the proper tradition of the Hôtel Rambouillet: she herself was known as "the matchless Orinda," her husband, Mr. Phillips, as "Antenor," and her friend Sir Charles Cotterel (the translator of La Calprenède's *Cassandre*, 1652) as "Poliarchus." Another translator of La Calprenède, John Phillips, was, ironically enough, a nephew of Milton; while another satellite of Orinda was Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill, afterwards Earl of Orrery and the first English author to produce an original work in the popular French tradition, his *Parthenissa* in six tomes (1654-69) with its "handsome language," enormous length, and bombastic gravity outdoing in this respect all the other English romances of its kind that followed.

Not even the Civil War corrected this heroic enthusiasm of the *précieuses*. Dorothy Osborne, writing during the

war, says she has by her six tomes of *Cléopâtre*. Later still we find Mrs. Pepys irritating her husband by recitals of long rhetorical passages—"nothing to the purpose, nor in any good manner." On one occasion, even, a quarrel in a coach arose on the subject of these books, although afterwards Pepys is anxious to make up for his, perhaps, rather hasty words by bringing home with him next day further heroical instalments. Indeed, Scudéry was considered in many quarters "the greatest wit" that ever lived, and we find even Madame de Sévigné writing of her heroes' doings: "The beauty of the sentiments, the violence of the emotions, the grandeur of the incidents, and the miraculous success of their invincible swords all that delights me like a young girl." Assuredly, the only weapon these knights could not withstand was the dart of Cupid, which, after their interminable exploits, laid them low, even as the readers themselves wished to be laid low, one and all, whether Cyrus or Alexander, Oroontades or Scipio.

Earlier in the century a reaction against these works had set in, but without much effect. Heroism seemed ineradicable. The translations of *Don Quixote* could not move it, nor the full blast of Rabelais's *Gargantua*, nor the anti-romances of Sorel and Scarron. It had to take its course, and gradually, in the dramas of Dryden, Otway and Lee it raged and fumed itself into silence. But it was not till the next century, when Defoe, Steele, and Fielding opened active warfare against it, that the heroical spirit at last took its regretful farewell of the English novel.

There were, however, other novelists of merit during the seventeenth century that owe little or nothing to the French tradition, although even they could not altogether escape its influence. They are represented in this volume and date from Emanuel Ford, who died in 1607, to William Congreve who was born in 1670 and died in 1729. Although Ford lived during the full blaze of the Elizabethan noon, his gentle and decadent spirit belongs to the evening of that period. He is a follower of Greene and Sydney with neither Greene's vigour and surprising wealth of euphuistic allusion nor Sydney's genius. His works, far more popular



in his time than any play of Shakespeare's—the thirteenth edition of *Parismus* appearing in 1649, have all the ingredients of the popular romance: lovers with every obstacle imaginable between them and their love—obstacles which disappear as the "history" unfolds itself with an uncommon adaptability—disguises, adventures in foreign lands far from the beloved, and, indeed, as Congreve puts it in his preface to *Incognita*, all "miraculous contingencies and impossible performances." As well as a licentiousness alien to Greene, Ford leavened his novels with adventurous exploits of the Amadis type, although *Ornatus and Artesia*, which we give here, owes more to the Greek tradition of Heliodorus. His mind, apart from a certain pleasing lyricism that makes itself felt now and again, was essentially commonplace, and to-day, except for a certain mild excitement that they stir in us, it is no longer possible to be much moved by the fantastically traditional motives of his characters and the unrelieved automatism of their reactions. Perhaps our chief pleasure in such a work as *Ornatus and Artesia* lies in its setting, which is so stylised, so far from reality that it carries us into a world of tapestry. Regarded as such, we can watch with amusement and pleasure the bright little figures in the design "taking ship" and sailing away to nowhere on the moveless silken waves. Boreas, in one corner, blows out his cheeks and the seas have risen in motionless fury, the little ship climbing a wave now as perpendicular as a cliff. Farther along, we see the same ship harbouring in "a grotto" whose rocks are of an impossible blue, where ferns grow and flamingoes perch. Inland, knights are galloping for ever after the wild boar through russet woods and over grass of emerald green. Graceful and remote as are these lands of Emanuel Ford, Sir Philip Sydney and Robert Greene, they grow tedious at last and, sometimes as we read, we fear they are imprisoning us like a dream in which we know we dream, but from which we cannot escape. The creatures we meet in these lands, judged by every standard of common sense, are so fantastic and yet, upon occasions, sufficiently like ourselves to shock us into an uncomfortable belief of their reality. Nevertheless, to

Bunyan they were "bad and abominable books . . . beastly romances full of ribaldry, even such as immediately tended to set all fleshly lust on fire." And that even *Ornatus and Artesia*, innocuous as it seems to us to-day, was so regarded by the graver minds of Elizabeth's time we see by its inclusion in Meres's "black list" in *Palladis Tamia*, keeping company with *Owlglass* and *Gargantua*. But when Henry Neville in *The Isle of Pines* (1668) shipwrecks us on to a newly-discovered island in "Terra Australis Incognita," although the landing of four people in the middle of a storm on the ship's "bowspright" is slightly incredible, all other circumstances are so in accordance with common sense that we cannot help believing him—at least, that is, as long as we are reading his story. Upon landing, one of the party has sufficient presence of mind to light a fire, so that they may all dry themselves—a common action that at once gives reality to the scene, but something, nevertheless, that the Elizabethans wandering in their arcadian lands of nowhere would never have dreamed of doing. For all its illusion of reality, the story has a certain fantastic air, especially when we are gravely assured that cocks and hens brought from England had, when the ship was wrecked, "by some means got to land, and bred exceedingly; so that in the future they were a great help to us"—not, of course, that such a thing would be impossible. The community, which consists of four women and one man, continues in a blissful state of nature till the man, George Pine, dies at a patriarchal age, having with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, populated the island to the remarkable extent of one thousand seven hundred and eighty-five. Neville's little book was believed all over the continent, being translated into several languages, but in his own country was treated with a certain amount of levity, as we can see by a reference to it in Dryden's *Limberham* III, i, where Pleasance says: "'Tis a likely proper fellow, and looks as he could people a new Isle of Pines." In 1674 a skit on the tale appeared in the shape of Richard Head's *Western Wonder*. The "novel" itself is a remarkable little production of considerable charm and no small originality, using as

it does many of the devices of Defoe before Defoe himself.

Twenty years later, Mrs. Behn in *Oroonoko*, also laying her scene amidst primitive innocence, foreshadows Rousseau. "Everything is well when it comes fresh from the hands of the Maker: everything degenerates in the hands of man," writes the author of *Emile*. And Mrs. Behn: "'Tis she [Nature] alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world than all the inventions of man." And later, describing the natives of Surinam: "Religion would here but destroy that tranquillity they possess by ignorance, and laws would but teach 'em to know offence of which now they have no notion." This, as M. Jusserand remarks, sounds more like the eighteenth century than the seventeenth! And more so when the author so bitingly contrasts the natural honour of the African Oroonoko with the faithlessness of white men and their "Christianity," and delivers a discourse through the mouth of her hero on the evils of slavery and the rights of man. "She carries us," says M. Jusserand, "at once beyond the times of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, and takes us among the precursors of the French Revolution." But, like all such sweeping statements, this is only partially true. For Mrs. Behn, with all her advanced sentiments and trappings of realism and inaccurate local colour, is still a pupil in the school of La Calprenède. She saw the world with an incurable romanticism and, reading, we still feel as though we are looking at a stage. Indeed, her dramatic experience that had taught her the construction of effective scenes and "curtains" contributed largely to the success of *Oroonoko*; and although there is in this novel a perceptible tightening up, a greater synthesis of time and event than in the heroic romances of her predecessors, yet the "royal slave" himself is of their school. He has the same "vast desire for glory" and gives his love Imoinda the same "thousand assurances of his lasting flame, and her eternal empire over him." Yet with Mrs. Behn we see the turn of the tide. She realised how vitiated the old romantic forms had become and wished to infuse them with life. But it was no use putting new wine into old bottles, and although

she saw the need for reality in the novel, she was unable herself to introduce it—realism, as Dr. Baker says, being something more than a seasoning of romance with facts and familiar names and places. Although Oroonoko and Imoinda scarcely convince us as human realities, yet there are scenes and events in the story itself that remain clear-cut pictures in the mind, and whether the events described are true or not, they have the earnest impress of truth. Thus *Oroonoko* accomplishes beyond all doubt that which it sets out to do—to contrast primitive innocence and natural honour with European sophistication and civilised duplicity.

By the time we come to Congreve there is a complete detachment from the romantic attitude, and in *Incognita* (1692) it is struck with a deliberate irony. With Congreve, in fact, we have nearly the manner of Fielding, lighter of course, more playful, but not essentially different. Both authors turn aside periodically to apostrophise the reader, and their mock grandiloquence in certain passages is very much the same. The most important thing about *Incognita* is not its style, the careless ease with which it is written and the absolute mastery of its handling, but that in it we come nearer than before to a more modern and whimsically ironic state of mind.

So that although George Saintsbury was justified in the assertion that "this century does not add a single work of any considerable merit to the roll of English books," it is well to bear in mind that we are indebted to these obscure forerunners of Fielding as much, and in the same way, as we are to the predecessors of Shakespeare in the drama. For they not only prepared the way technically, but in acclimatising people to look to the novel for their amusement, created a public capable of appreciating the great artist when he arrived. As to their books themselves, what is more fascinating for the student of letters, and indeed to all those interested in the development of literature, than to retrace in the company of these older journey-men of fiction the paths, and even the side-tracks, followed by the novel before it succeeded to that more perfect self-consciousness of the last century and the present time?

PHILIP HENDERSON.

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# THE MOST PLEA- SANT HISTORY

OF ORNATVS AND

ARTESIA.

---

Wherein is containd the vniust  
Raigne of THÆON King of  
PHRYGIA.

Who with his Sonne LENON intending  
ORNATVS his Death, right Heyre to the  
Crowne, was afterwards slaine by his owne  
Servants; and ORNATVS, after  
many extreame miseries  
Crowned King.

---

By Emanuel  
Joord.



---

LONDON.

Printed by B. ALSOP and T. FAVVET, dwelling in  
*Grub-street* neere the Lower-Pumpe.

1634.

EMANUEL FORD, fl. 1607

The only life we have of Ford is the history of his books, which is as follows:

*Parismus, the renowned prince of Bohemia*, 1598. Part 2, under the title of *Parismenos*, 1599. *The Most Pleasant History of Ornatus and Artesia*, 1598? *The Famous History of Montelion, Knight of Oracle*, earliest known ed., 1633. Editions of *Ornatus and Artesia*: 1607, 1634, 1650, 1669, 1683.

TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL  
BRYAN STAPLETON OF CARLETON  
IN THE COUNTY OF YORK, ESQUIRE  
CONTENT AND AFTER LIFE ETERNAL  
HAPPINESS

THIS unpolished history (Right Worshipful) wanting the ornament of eloquence, presenteth itself in his natural and self-expressing form, in well applied words, not in tedious borrowed phrases, wherein neither the lewd can find examples to suit their dispositions, the virtuous no terms to disconcert them, nor the well affected any cause of offence. Here you shall see lust tyrannizing avarice, guilty of murder, and dignity, seeking his content with usurpation, yet all subverted to virtue. Which I am bold to present unto you; not for the worth, but to express my good will, which is not unmindfull in some sort to gratify the manifold courtesies I have received of you. And although it be altogether not worth estimation, and be accounted no requital for so many good turns; yet I desire you to accept the same instead of a better, and the sum of that which my ability at this time can afford; which being but a fancy, vouchsafe to esteem, though not agreeing with your gravity, yet (as many both noble and wise in such like matters have done) to be read for recreation. As the value of the gift expresseth not the affection of the giver, nor the outward show the inward meaning: so I trust you will esteem my good will not by the worthiness hereof, but the quality of my well affected intent, which is devoted unto you in the bands of perfect good will, and shall be ready to



show itself constant in any trial you shall make thereof. And for that I know your wisdom and courtesy to be such, as that you will not misconceive me, but esteem well hereof, and my affection to you, to be expressed in the dedication. I have adventured to dedicate the same to your protection, though altogether undeserving the title of your patronage, which your further kindness shall bind me hereafter to requite with some worthier work collected by my labours.

Thus being loath to be tedious and troublesome unto you, I commit this silly present unto your gentle acceptation, and yourself to the gracious protection of the Almighty.

*Your Worships most ready  
at command,  
Emanuel Ford.*