

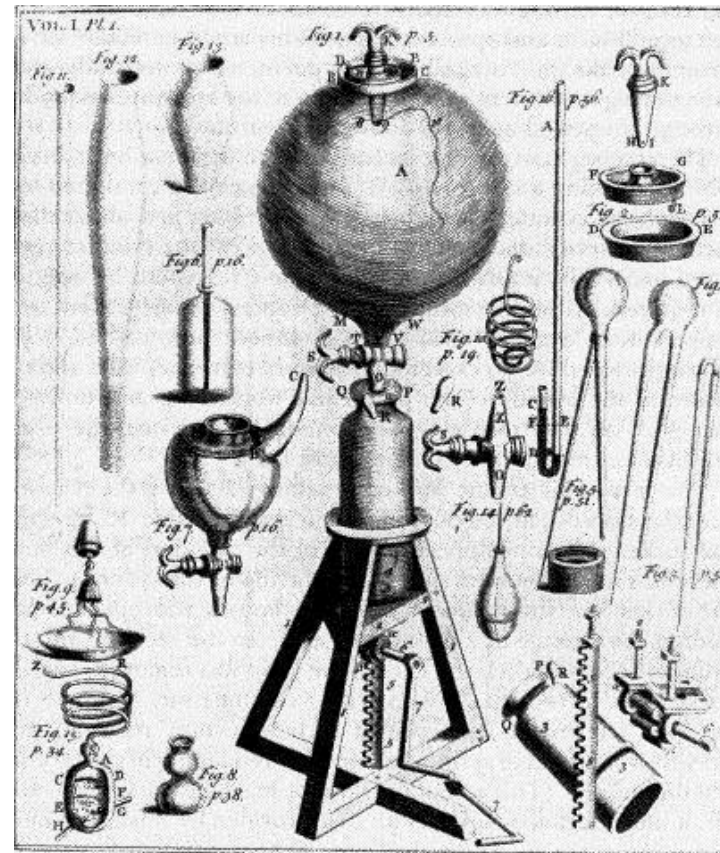
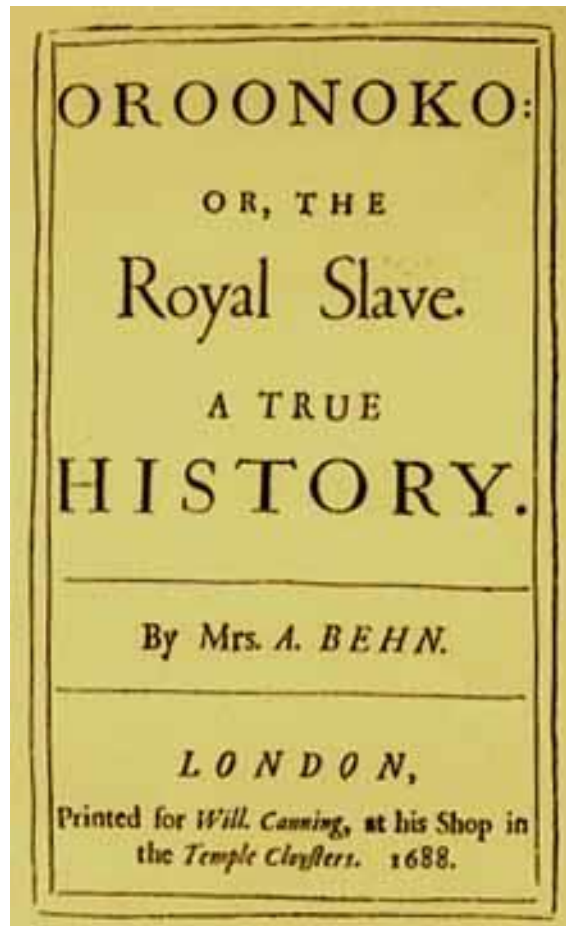
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Empiricism and the Novel



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Novels and experiments: two C17 technologies for making truth



Antecedents of the modern novel

- Romances
- Travel writing
- *Belles lettres*

After that I had accomplisshed and fynisshed dyuers
hystories as wel of contemplacyon as of other hyste-
ryal and worldly actes of grete conqueure & pry-
nces / And also certeyn bookes of ensamples and doctrine /
Many noble and dyuers gentylmen of thys royaume of Eng-
lond camen and demaunded me many and oft tymes / wherfor
that I haue not to make & enpynce the noble hystorie of the
saynt geal / and of the moost renomedy crysten kyngz / fyrst
and chiefe of the thre laste crysten and worthy kyngz Arthur /
whiche ought mooste to be remembred amonge vs englyssh
men tofore al other crysten kynges / For it is nowherly knowen
thouogh the vniuersal world / that there been is worthy & the
best that euer were / That is to wete thre paynyms / thre ielbes
and thre crysten men / As for the paynyms they were tofore the
Incarnacyon of Cryst / whiche were named / the fyrst Hector
of Troy / of whome thystorie is comen tothe in salace and in
prouse / The second / Alysander the grete / & the thyrde / Julius
Cesar Emperour of Rome of whome thystories ben wel kno-
und had / And as for the thre ielbes whiche also were tofore
the Incarnacyon of our lord of whome the fyrst was Duc Jos-
ue whiche brought the chyldren of Israhel in to the lande of
bylde / The second Dauid kyng of Iherusalem / & the thyrde
Judas Machabeus of these thre the byble retereth al thre no-
ble hystories & actes / And sythe the sayd Incarnacyon haue
ben thre noble crysten men stalked and admyted / thouogh the
vniuersal world in to the nombre of the ielbe & worthy / of
whome was fyrst the noble Arthur / whos noble actes I pur-
pose to wyte in thys present booke here folowynge / The second
was Charlemayn or Charles the grete / of whome thystorie is
had in many places tothe in frensch and englyssh / and the
thyrde and last was Godfrey of bolyne / of whos actes & lye
I made a booke into the excellent prynce and kyng of noble me-
mory kyng Edwarde the fourth / the sayd noble gentylmen
Instantly requyred me to enpynce thystorie of the sayd noble
kyng and conqueur kyng Arthur / and of his knyghtes
wyth thystorie of the saynt geal / and of the deith and endynge
of the sayd Arthur / Affremynge that I ouzt rather to enpynce
his actes and noble feates / than of godfrey of bolyne / or
if

First page of William Caxton's edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485)

Aphra Behn on trustworthiness



Picture from
<http://commons.wikimedia.org>

I do not pretend, in giving you the history of this Royal Slave, to entertain my reader with adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at the poet's pleasure; nor in relating the truth, design to adorn it with any accidents but such as arrived in earnest to him: and it shall come simply into the world, recommended by its own proper merits and natural intrigues; there being enough of reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention. I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself.

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)

The Royal Society and the birth of empiricism



Thomas Sprat,
*History of the Royal
Society* (1667)

Picture from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

Common features of the modern novel and modern science

- Used to work through questions of what counted as truth
- Self-conscious rejection of previous traditions
- Embrace of vernacular language and suspicion of rhetoric
- All about private judgement, guaranteed by personal trustworthiness
- Truth based upon – and negotiated in conjunction with – a sort of gentlemanly code

Empiricism in the C20



Pictures from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>



Karl Popper (1902-93): science vs. ideology

Things to take away from this session

1. Knowing what empiricism is (trust in observation, some distrust of words)
2. Understanding that empiricism is not an absolute or self-evident epistemology but a response to historically contingent problems (C17 and C20)
3. Being ready to spot examples of empiricism in literature and to figure out, historically, what it means in that context and why it is there