



# Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction

*J. Paul Hunter*

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**“By taking a close look at materials no previous twentieth-century critic has seriously investigated in literary terms?ephemeral journalism, moralistic tracts, questions-and-answer columns, ‘wonder’ narratives?Paul Hunter discovers a tangled set of roots for the early novel. His provocative argument for a new historicized understanding of the genre and its early readers brilliantly reveals unexpected affinities.” ?Patricia Meyer Spacks, Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English, University of Virginia**

What did people read *before* there were novels? Not necessarily just other “literary” works, according to this fascinating study of the beginnings of the English novel. To understand the origins of the novel as a species and to read individual novels well, we must know several pasts and traditions?even non-fictional and non-narrative traditions, even non-“artistic” and non-written pasts?that at first might seem far removed from the pleasures readers find in modern novels.

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