novel, nearly always an extended fictional prose narrative, although some novels are very short, some are non-fictional, some have been written in verse, and some do not even tell a story. Such exceptions help to indicate that the novel as a literary genre is itself exceptional: it disregards the constraints that govern other literary forms, and acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject-matter. Thriving on this openness and flexibility, the novel has become the most important literary genre of the modern age, superseding the epic, the romance, and other narrative forms. Novels can be distinguished from short stories and novellas by their greater length, which permits fuller, subtler development of characters and themes. (Confusingly, it is a shorter form of tale, the Italian novella, that gives the novel its name in English.) There is no established minimum length for a novel, but it is normally at least long enough to justify its publication in an independent volume, unlike the short story. The novel differs from the prose romance in that a greater degree of realism is expected of it, and that it tends to describe a recognizable secular social world, often in a sceptical and prosaic manner inappropriate to the marvels of romance. The novel has frequently incorporated the structures and languages of non-fictional prose forms (history, autobiography, journalism, travel writing), even to the point where the non-fictional element outweighs the fictional. It is normally expected of a novel that it should have at least one character, and preferably several characters shown in processes of change and social relationship; a plot, or some arrangement of narrated events, is another normal requirement. Special subgenres of the novel have grown up around particular kinds of character (the Künstlerroman, the spy novel), setting (the historical novel, the campus novel), and plot (the detective novel); while other kinds of novel are distinguished either by their structure (the epistolary novel, the picaresque novel) or by special emphases on character (the Bildungsroman) or ideas (the roman à thèse). Although some ancient prose narratives like Petronius’ Satyricon (1st century CE) can be called novels, and although some significant forerunners of the novel—including François Rabelais’s Gargantua (1534)—appeared in the 16th century, it is the publication in Spain of the first part of Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quixote de la Mancha in 1605 that is most widely accepted as announcing the arrival of the true novel. In France the inaugural landmark was Madame de Lafayette’s La Princesse de Clèves (1678), while in England Daniel Defoe is regarded as the founder of the English novel with his Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Moll Flanders (1722). The novel achieved its predominance in the 19th century, when Charles Dickens and other writers found a huge audience through serial publication, and when the conventions of realism were consolidated. In the 20th century a division became more pronounced between the popular forms of novel and the various experiments of modernism and postmodernism—from the stream of consciousness to the anti-novel; but repeated reports of the ‘death of the novel’ have been greatly exaggerated. adjective: novelistic.