



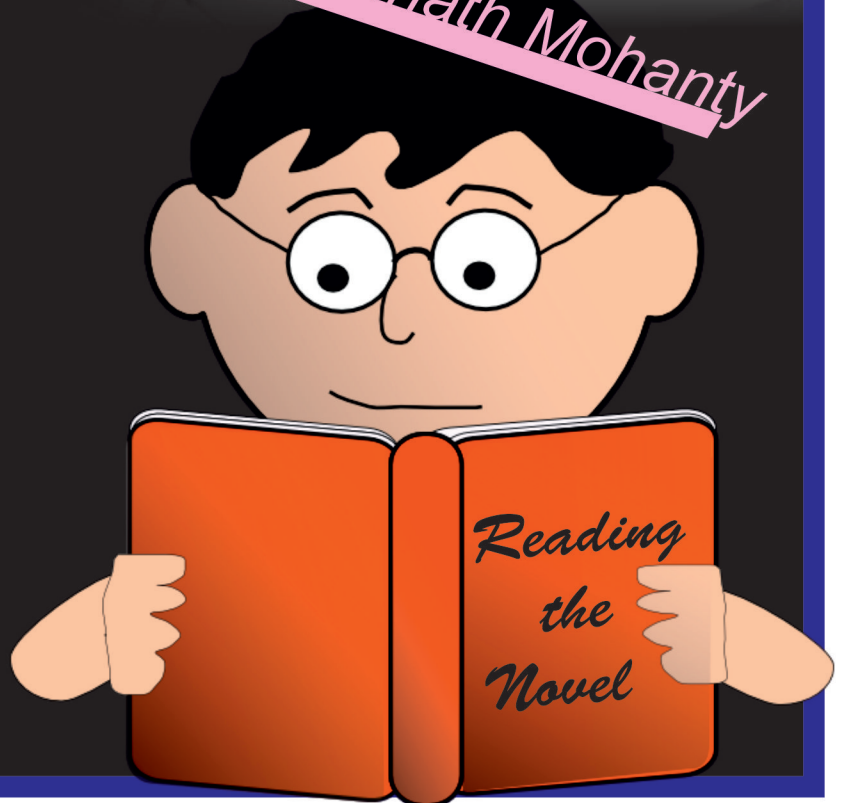
**THINGS FALL APART**

By

Chinua Achebe

**THE AWAKENING**  
By  
Kate Chopin

**PARAJA**  
By  
Gopinath Mohanty



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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

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In this day and age, it is but obvious that more and more people watch television, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hot Star, films, DVDs and Blue Rays in their spare time and consequently, spend less time reading novels. In keeping with this lifestyle trend, some critics of the novel proclaimed its death a long time ago. But going by the number of novels published each year, in fact, in most national newspapers we are sure to find a section dedicated to recent publications in both fiction as well as non-fiction every week; hence, we are made to realise that the novel is far from dead. On the contrary, the novel as a genre appears to have flourished in all parts of the globe. In recent times some of the most exciting and prize-winning novels have emerged from countries other than the original home of the novel/fiction i.e., England. Look for instance at **Arundhati Roy's** *God of Small Things* or **Chitra Banerjee Divakuruni's** *Mistress of Spices* or **Kiran Desai's** *The Inheritance of Loss*, the Polish novelist and activist **Olga Tokarczuk's** *Flights*, or the Austrian author **Peter Handke's** *The Fruit Thief*.

A large number of prestigious prizes have also helped in bringing considerable visibility to the novel. For example, the announcement of the *Booker Prize* is awaited with bated breath in Britain, the Commonwealth Countries, South Africa, Ireland, and Pakistan as novelists from these countries are eligible for the prize. In the United States of America, the *Pulitzer Prize* for fiction enjoys a similar status. Here at home in India, we have the *Sahitya Akademi Awards* that bring public attention to some of the finest writings of the year. This brief introduction to the novel in a sense helps locate the course on Reading the Novel that we are about to begin. In this course, we have selected three novels for you. Let us look at the arrangement of the blocks in this 6 credit course.

Block I: The Novel: An Introduction

Block II: **Kate Chopin:** *The Awakening*

Block III: **Gopinath Mohanty:** *Paraja*

Block IV: **Chinua Achebe:** *Things Fall Apart*

In Block I, we give you a general introduction to the novel as a literary genre, discussing its various aspects and giving you broad guidelines on how to really read the novel perceptively. We also talk about the various trends in novel writing and examine briefly the new areas that the novel has moved to. We even look at what the future might hold for the novel. The next three blocks are **Self Learning Materials (SLMs)** to the three novels in your course, prepared by experts from all over the country, especially for you our learners, who deserve quality education at their door step. In each of the blocks we introduce you to the author, give you the relevant background information and discuss the particular novel under study at considerable length.

You may notice that the novels in your course do not belong to any particular age, or geographical location or even culture. *The Awakening* by **Kate Chopin** is an American Novel written in 1899, while **Gopinath Mohanty's** *Paraja* is an Indian novel written originally in Odia and published in 1945, later translated into English and published in 1989. *Things Fall Apart* by **Chinua Achebe** is a novel from Nigeria and much more recent (1958). In this short 6 credit course we have tried to give you a feel of different types of novels cutting across borders both culturally as well as chronologically.



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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

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In this first block we will give you a basic introduction to what a novel is.

In Unit 1 we'll look at the novel as a literary genre, we'll try and define it and look at why the novel emerged when it did and the various types of novels.

In Unit 2, we'll look at the first three aspects of the novel – 1) plot, 2) characterisation, and 3) narrative modes.

In Unit 3, we shall examine the next three aspects of the novel – 4) style, 5) time and place, and 6) themes and also look at some of the aspects of the novel that are inter-related. Having looked at the different aspects of the novel, we'll also look at the various ways in which novels may be, and are read. This we hope will help you to acquire and improve certain skills necessary for reading a novel both critically and intelligently.

Having done this, in Unit 4, we look at the novel in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So, we begin with the novel in the post-modern world, and then go on to looking at the novel in contemporary times, we also give you a brief understanding of the postcolonial novel and we end with a discussion on the future of the novel.



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# UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

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## Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Defining a Novel
- 1.3 Origins and Rise of the Novel
- 1.4 Types of the Novel
- 1.5 Literary Trends in 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Century England
  - 1.5.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age
  - 1.5.2 Other Prominent Novelists of the Age
  - 1.5.3 Literary Trends in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England
  - 1.5.4 Prominent Novelists of the Age
- 1.6 Literary Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries
  - 1.6.1 The 1990s
  - 1.6.2 The 21<sup>st</sup> Century
  - 1.6.3 The Man Booker Prize in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 Hints to Check Your Progress

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objective of this unit is to define a novel. We will also trace its origins and look at its development through the last three centuries very briefly. Once you finish going through this unit you should be in a position to define a novel, to trace its origin, and development and to be able to distinguish the different types of novels.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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The literary term ‘novel’ may be applicable to a great variety of prose writing particularly in this day and age. The ‘novel’ as a genre is not easy to define, due to its being an extremely open and flexible form. Not only this, the ‘novel’ also evades definition just as other literary terms do. However, since we are going to be talking about the novel and studying various types of novels in this course, we would still need to define a novel.

The novel is largely a creation of the west though there have been critics who have tried to locate it in the ancient writings of Egypt and the writings from the middle ages in Japan. The truth however, is that the novel as we know it today emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England. Let us now try and work at defining a novel in the next section.

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## 1.2 DEFINING A NOVEL

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**Edward Morgan Foster** (1879 - 1970) in his critical work *Aspects of the Novel* published in 1928 states that a novel should have a minimum length of about 50,000 words. Anything in prose that is shorter than 50,000 words would be a *novella* or a short novel. A novel would therefore, need to be longer than a long short story. We may also say that a novel should be longer than a folktale, a fable, or a short story. This definition that we have worked out however, is merely a comprehensive definition of the term ‘novel’ and would not be applicable to each and every type of novel.

A novel has a story to tell but all stories do not usually develop into novels. The origins of the novel may be traced to the ancient epic and the medieval romance traditions.

### Check Your Progress 1

*Write in your own words, briefly, after reading the preceding section carefully. Try not to refer to the earlier sections while writing these answers.*

- 1) Why is it difficult to define a novel? Give three reasons.

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- 2) Having said that it is difficult to define a novel can you, still provide a working definition of the term ‘novel’?

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- 3) Is your working definition of the novel applicable to each and every type of novel? If not, then why do we still need such a definition?

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### 1.3 ORIGINS AND RISE OF THE NOVEL

Of the two ancestors of the novel - the epic is the older form. An epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of brave warriors and heroes who are 'larger than life'. The epic poem has a heroic story to narrate and incorporates within it the myth, the legend, folk tales as well as history. Epic poems deal with the history of a country/a clan. In the western tradition there are two types of epics -

- a) Primary
- b) Secondary/Literary

Primary epics by and large belong to the oral tradition whereas secondary or literary epics belong to the written form of literature. **Homer's** *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf* and *Gilgamesh* are important examples of the primary epic, while **Virgil's** *Aeneid* and **Milton's** *Paradise Lost* are fine illustrations of the literary epic. In India we have the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as **Kalidasa's** *Abhijnana Shakuntala* and *Meghdootam*, which are counted among the classics of world literatures. The epic tradition has come down to us in a very unique manner. For instance, in the last hundred years or so, cinema has been the favoured media for narratives on an epic scale. Novels such as, **Herman Melville's** *Moby Dick* (1851), **Tolstoy's** *War and Peace* (1865 - 72), *Anna Karenina* (1875 - 76) and **James Joyce's** *Finnegans Wake* (1939) have all been made into films.

Now, let us look at the second source of the modern novel - the romance. The romance was a literary form that was popular in medieval times. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century a romance was an adventure story usually of love or chivalry, and it was written in verse. It must be remembered that the romance is primarily a European form, and about characters that live in a courtly world. The word romance itself is suggestive of the elements of fantasy, improbability and extravaganza, as well as love, adventure and the marvelous and it was written in verse. However, over time it came to be written in prose. During medieval times there were three cycles -

- a) The matter of Britain that dealt with the stories of the *Legend of King Arthur* and his Knights of the Round Table.
- b) The matter of Greece and Rome that told the stories of *Alexander the Great*, the *Trojan wars* and the *House of Thebes*.
- c) The matter of France that narrated the tales of the bravery and chivalry of *King Charlemagne* and his Knights.

We have tried to define both the *Epic* and *Romances*, as they are the forefathers of the novel. Interestingly, the novel owes its name to the Italian word *novella* meaning a tale or a piece of news. The novel is called *roman* and is derived from the word romance. But before I conclude, let me also tell you that yet another important predecessor of the novel was the picaresque narrative that originated in Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Most of you may be aware of the novel *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* by **Henry Fielding**. This 18<sup>th</sup> century novel is written in the picaresque tradition with a '*picaro*' or rogue for a hero/protagonist and the novel deals with his

escapades. So essentially what I am trying to tell you is that the novel had three predecessors:

- a) The Epic
- b) The Romance and
- c) The Picaresque Narrative

A novel therefore, may be defined as a long story written and printed in book form, and dealing with imaginary people and situations, while creating an illusion of reality.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) State whether the following statements are True or False:

- a) Primary Epics belong to the written tradition. 

T	F
---	---
- b) *Odyssey* is an example of a Secondary Epic. 

T	F
---	---
- c) Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. 

T	F
---	---
- d) A Romance is a literary form of ancient times. 

T	F
---	---
- e) A ‘pizaro’ is a rogue hero. 

T	F
---	---

The novel was born in the west, primarily in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but its development took place largely in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Critics have tried to trace its origins to ancient Egypt, or even medieval Japan but the novel as a genre, was a creation of the west. Some critics like **Walter Raleigh** have even stated that:

*With the works of Richardson and Fielding the career of the novel may be said to have begun.*

*(The English Novel, Walter Raleigh, pp. 180)*

This brings me to the next important point. Why did the novel flourish in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England? There were several reasons for that and let me tell you about them very quickly.

The industrial revolution had taken place in England and the rest of Europe. This meant that people had more leisure that could be dedicated to reading and writing. Moreover, industrialisation led to tremendous improvement in printing technology, as a result of which more books/novels could be printed and that too easily. Then book clubs and circulating libraries were gaining popularity as well. The other important reasons for the rise and development of the novel in 18<sup>th</sup> century England was the changing socio-political and socio-cultural milieu. The old system of patronage was gradually coming to an end. And writers did not need to look towards the feudal lords for patronage. They could now turn to the readers/public for support. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was a century of relative peace and prosperity in England and England emerged as an international power with the strongest navy in the world. An economically powerful and dominant middle class began to emerge along with a steady increase in population. Literacy too saw a sharp rise.

Having given the various reasons behind the development of the novel in 18<sup>th</sup> century England let me now tell you about the different types of novels that were and are still being written in the next section.

### Check Your Progress 3

Answer the following questions in your own words.

- 1) When was the novel born in England? Did its development take place in the same century or in the next?

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- 2) What in your opinion was the reason for the emergence of the novel in England? Answer briefly in point form.

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## 1.4 TYPES OF THE NOVEL

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In this section, we shall take a look at the different types of novels. Critics down the ages have tried to classify novels into various types. If we are to enumerate all types of novels it may not be a useful endeavour as no rigid classification is possible as the same novel may belong to more than one type. However, we do need typologies for the simple reason that they are convenient as they provide us with easy labels that help us in knowing what to anticipate in a particular novel. Thus, in this section we try and give some shape to a variety of novels by classifying them on the basis of:

- 1) The **extra-disciplinary field** they are close to such as sociological novels, psychological novels, political novels, historical novels, religious novels, and science fiction.
- 2) Their subject matter such as **utopian novels**, crime novels, detective fiction, and **bildungsroman**.
- 3) Their literary style/structure/technique such as **epistolary novels**, realistic novels, naturalistic novels, **stream-of-consciousness novels**, psychological novels or the novel of character.
- 4) The particular emotions that they evoke such as romantic novels, sentimental novels, or the escape novels.



- 5) The particular class interests that they evoke such as **bourgeois** novels, or the **proletarian** novels.
- 6) The geographical areas that they highlight such as **Westerns**, **local colour novels**, or the novels of the soil.
- 7) The geographical areas from which the novelists hail such as **Indo-Anglian** novels, **Commonwealth** novels, and **African** novels.

*(The Novel: An Introduction, 1997, Dr A K Raina and Dr Rana Nayar, IGNOU, Block 1, p. 9)*

Apart from this there are other classifications as well. Let me begin by telling you about the **Novel of Incident** - good illustrations of this type of novel are the novels of **Daniel Defoe**, novels such as, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). Both these novels are of the picaresque narrative type as the structure of these novels is episodic rather than organised plot form, and both novels also have very convincing central protagonists. The next type under discussion is the **Novel of Character** that may also be known as the **Psychological Novel**. The focus in such a novel is the protagonist's motives, on what s/he does or how s/he will turn out as a person. A good example is **Samuel Richardson's** *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740).

*Pamela* may also be considered as an **Epistolary Novel** in which the narrative is communicated to us through letters. This type of novel is also to be found in more recent times such as, in **Alice Walker's** *The Color Purple*. Then we have the **Realistic Novel** that is characterised largely by its fictional effect of realism. In such novels, the characters are often complex and they operate within developed social structures while interacting with a large number of characters.

The exponents of such realistic novels were Defoe, Fielding, **Jane Austen**, **George Eliot** and **Henry James** amongst others. From the writings of people such as, Jane Austen emerges the **Novel of Manners** - or a novel that focuses on the customs, conversation, and ways of thinking and valuing of a particular social class. The Bildungsroman and **Erziehungroman** or the **Novel of Formation** or **Novel of Education** (*M H Abrahams, p. 193*), is yet another type of novel. The main theme of such types of novel is the development of the main character's/ the protagonist's mind and character through the narrative. **Charlotte Bronte's** *Jane Eyre* (1847) and George Eliot's *the Mill on the Floss* (1860) or even **J D Salinger's** *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) are examples of such types of novels.

Then there are other novels such as, **Harriet Beecher Stowe's** *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or **John Steinbecks'** *the Grapes of Wrath*; these are examples of the **Social Novel**. If we have read either of these novels we will find that such novels are influenced by the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the age in which these novels were written.

**Sir Walter Scott's** novel such as, *Ivanhoe* (1819) and **Charles Dickens's** *A Tale of Two Cities* are examples of the **Historical Novel**. As is obvious from the term - historical novel, these novels deal with not only the characters but also the socio-political settings of a real historical age.

There are many different types of novels - for instance **Documentary Fiction**, **Non Fiction Novel**, **Regional Novel**, **Involuted Novel**, **Anti Novel**,

**Nouveauroman** (the new novel); **Magic Realism; Metafiction and Fabulation** to name just a few, but for our purpose, the types we have dealt with in some detail are sufficient.

In the next section we shall look at the literary trends in Eighteenth century England.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Do we need to classify novels at all? Give a well thought out answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Match the following:

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) Daniel Defoe        | a) Uncle Tom's Cabin          |
| b) Psychological Novel | b) Novel of Formation         |
| c) Jane Austen         | c) Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded |
| d) Bildungsroman       | d) Sense and Sensibility      |
| e) Social Novels       | e) Moll Flanders              |

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## 1.5 LITERARY TRENDS IN 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ENGLAND

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Eighteenth Century England was the age of transition as **Edward Albert** puts it in his *History of English Literature*. This was the age when two distinct strands of influence were at work simultaneously. The first of these twin strands was the adherence, the allegiance or even the denying of the old order of classicism. The second strand was that of Romanticism. Romanticism meant a return to real nature and a new look at the human's position and role in the midst of the natural world. It also meant a new way of looking at the poor and the oppressed and a drastic change in diction. Writers were now aiming for simplicity and sincerity in their words.

They were turning to the legends and the myths of old for their inspiration. With such a trend in place, it became important for writers to revive ancient literary forms such as the ballad and as yet, there was also a general sense of inquiry and keen interest that began to create an entirely new spirit of thinking. Writers also began turning to history for their stories and in general there was sympathy and freshness in the writings of the period.

### 1.5.1 Prominent Novelists of the Age

Samuel Richardson (1689-1776) is one of the prominent novelists of this period. He was over fifty, when *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* was published in 1740. This novel is in the form of a series of letters/an epistolary novel. His next major novel was *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-48).

Henry Fielding's (1707-54) novel *Joseph Andrews* appeared in 1742. Fielding does away with the epistolary novel and creates a new and powerful novel that carries the reader away with "his broad and vivacious humour; the genial and half contemptuous insight into human nature" (Edward Albert, p. 258). His greatest novel however was *Tom Jones* (1749). Realism is the hallmark of Fielding's novels.

### 1.5.2 Other Prominent Novelists of the Age

- a) **Tobias Smollette** (1721-71): *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748);
- b) **Laurence Sterne** (1713-68): *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent* (1760);
- c) **Horace Walpole** (1717-97): *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

### 1.5.3 Literary Trends in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England

This period saw the actual flowering of Romanticism in all its abundance. As far as the novel was concerned the historical and the domestic novels were established very firmly by Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. It was however, a more fruitful period for poetry and produced great poets such as, **William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley** and **Lord Byron**.

### 1.5.4 Prominent Novelists of the Age

- a) **Sir Walter Scott** (1771-32): *Guy Mannering* (1815); *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818);
- b) **Jane Austen** (1775-17): *Pride and Prejudice* (1798-97); *Sense and Sensibility* (1797-98);
- c) **William Makepeace Thackeray** (1811-63): *Vanity Fair* (1847-48); *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852);
- d) **Charles Dickens** (1812-70): *Sketches by Boz* (1836); *A Tale of two Cities* (1859);
- e) **George Eliot** (1819-80): *Adam Bede* (1859); *Middlemarch, a Study of Provincial Life* (1871-72);
- f) **Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928): *Desperate Remedies* (1871); *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874);

### Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Fill in the Blanks:
  - a) Samuel Richardson wrote ..... in 1740.
  - b) ..... wrote *Tom Jones*.
  - c) The Nineteenth Century saw the establishment of the ..... Novel and the Domestic Novel.
  - d) ....., Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ....., Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron were prominent nineteenth century poets.
  - e) Jane Austen wrote .....and *Prejudice and Sense* and .....

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## 1.6 LITERARY TRENDS IN THE 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURIES

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In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the American or the European tradition of the novel form was largely divided by two major literary movements/ trends – Modernism and Postmodernism or the period of the Modernist literature (1900 - 40) and the Postmodern literature period (1960 – 90), more or less clearly divided by the World War II years (1939- 45). The other literary trend that was in between the two larger movements of this century was the contemporary period/ contemporary literature which was largely literature written after 1960. The point to remember here is that these literary movements also affected, influenced and included literature from Africa, Australia and Asia as well. The advance in technology in this century also meant that the production of books became cheaper which in turn lead to a prominent rise in the production of what is called popular literature and trivial literature. We have talked about popular literature at length in the BA English Honours Course BEGC 106, so if any of you wish to read more on popular literature do read through the material uploaded on egyankosh. We also know that there came to a divide between what was known as “high literature” and “popular literature” in the last century. We are aware that the distinctions are not really absolute, and that there are interesting genres in popular literature that could fit in both categories – such as, crime and detective and science fiction. For instance, there are several awards instituted and given these days for these two genres – crime and detective fiction and science fiction - the *Nebula Award* (1965 onwards), the *British Fantasy Award* (since 1971) and the *Mythopoeic Awards* (1971).

### 1.6.1 The 1990s

The 1990s saw the rise of multiculturalism and new media/ alternate media, and these trends were to continue till well into the 2000 – 2010s. As a result of these trends, in the music scene, we saw movements like “grunge”, “rave” and “hip hop” gather momentum globally. The opening of capitalist markets, liberalisation, the breaking down of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War, the introduction of new media, the dissolution of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the dot-com bubble (1997–2000), all these factors combined and ushered in a new era in literary production. A large number of former colonies gained their independence - countries such as, Namibia (from South Africa 1990), Walvis Bay, (retained by South Africa, joined Namibia in 1994), Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia, the Slovak Republic became independent from the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (Czechoslovakia), Eritrea from Ethiopia (1993), Palau from the United Nations Trusteeship Council, the United Kingdom handed over sovereignty of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (1 July 1997), East Timor from Indonesia (1999), Portugal handed over the sovereignty of Macau to the People’s Republic of China (1999), the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan broke away from the USSR. While all this was happening politically, around the globe, in literature, **J K Rowling’s** *Harry Potter* series (that debuted in 1997), was hugely popular, **John Grisham** was by far the bestselling author in the United States, with over 60 million copies sold of novels such as *The Pelican Brief*, *The Client*, and *The Firm*. **Stephen**

**King, Danielle Steel, Michael Crichton, and Tom Clancy**, as well as **R L Stine** with the Goosebumps series were extremely popular.

Some of the well known literary writers and books of this decade were **John McGahern** (*Amongst Women*); **W G Sebald** (*Vertigo*); **Raphael Patai** (*The Hebrew Goddess*); **Terry Pratchett** and **Neil Gaiman** (*Good Omens*); and **Robert Jordan** (*The Eye of the World*); to name just a few.

### 1.6.2 The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the current century that will end on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2099. It is the first century of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium. The first two decades of this century have been marked by the rise of globalisation, Third World consumerism, global concern over terrorism, an increase in private enterprise, negative effects of global warming, the rising sea levels, Arab Spring (2010), civil wars, the overthrowing of various governments, the United States of America as the only global superpower, and with the People's Republic of China contending for the post of 'emerging superpower'. This century has also seen almost 49.3% (2017), of the global population living in various forms of democratic countries; the expansion of the European Union (EU), with a common currency called the Euro; the withdrawing from the EU by the United Kingdom and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (2020).

### 1.6.3 The Man Booker Prize in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

2000: Margaret Atwood (*The Blind Assassin*); 2001: Peter Carey (*The True History of the Kelly Gang*); 2002: Yann Martel (*Life of Pi*); 2003: D B C Pierre (*Vernon God Little*); 2004: Alan Hollinghurst (*The Line of Beauty*); 2005: John Banville (*The Sea*); 2006: Kiran Desai (*The Inheritance of Loss*); 2007: Anne Enright (*The Gathering*); 2008: Aravind Adiga (*The White Tiger*); 2009: Hilary Mantel (*The Wolf Hall*); 2010: Howard Jacobson (*The Finkler Question*); 2011: Julian Barnes (*The Sense of An Ending*); 2012: Hilary Mantel (*Bring Up the Bodies*); 2013: Eleanor Catton: (*The Luminaries*); 2014: Richard Flanagan: (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*); 2015: Marlon James (*A Brief History of Seven Killings*); 2016: Paul Beatty (*The Sellout*); 2017: George Saunders (*Lincoln in the Bardo*); 2018: Anna Burns (*Milkman*); 2019: Margaret Atwood (*The Testament*); and Bernadine Evaristo (*Girl, Woman, Other*). The award of literary prizes such as *the Man Booker*, one of the highest awards for Literature indicates how importance is accorded to novel writing globally.

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have defined the novel as a genre, looked at the origins of the novel and its rise as a literary genre in eighteenth century England. We have also examined the different types of novels and summarised the chief literary trends of the eighteenth, and nineteenth century England; as well as novel writing in the twentieth and the first two decades of the twenty- first century. Apart from that we have mentioned the prominent novelists of the ages. Having read this unit carefully we expect you to be able to define a novel, to be able to recognise the novel as a genre and to be able to identify various types of novel.

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## 1.8 GLOSSARY

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- Alexander the Great** : (336-323 BC) was an ancient Greek King of Macedonia. He was one of the most successful military commanders in history, and was undefeated in battle. By the time of his death, he had conquered most of the world known to the ancient Greeks and had travelled as far as India, particularly the Indus area. His exploits are the stuff of legends and folklore and the subject of many romances.
- Charlemagne** : or Charles the Great; or Charles I of France and of the Holy Roman Empire (742/747 - 28 January 814) was King of the Franks from 768 to his death. His rule is also associated with the Carolingian Renaissance, a revival of art, religion, and culture through the medium of the Catholic Church. His foreign conquests and internal reforms, helped define both Western Europe and the middle ages. Today he is not only regarded as the founding father of both French and German monarchies, but as the father of Europe: his empire united most of Western Europe for the first time since the Romans, and the Carolingian renaissance encouraged the formation of a common European identity (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*).
- Fable** : a fictitious story meant to teach a moral lesson; the characters in fables are usually talking animals.
- Folk tale** : the large body of oral literature belonging to a tribe, or nation, or ethnic group.
- House of Thebes** : Thebes was a city in Greece, situated to the north of the Cithaeron range, which divided Boeotia from Attica, and on the southern edge of the Boeotian plain. It played an important role in the fabric of Greek myth, as the site of the stories of Cadmus, Oedipus, Dionysus and others. In ancient times, Thebes was the largest city of the region of Boeotia and was the leader of the Boeotian confederacy. It was a major rival of ancient Athens, and sided with the Persians during the 480 BC invasion of Xerxes. Thebes was a major force in Greek history, and was the most dominant city- state at the time of the Macedonian conquest of Greece. During the Byzantine period, the city was famous for its silks. (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*).
- King Arthur** : King Arthur is believed to be a prominent English leader in Britain's legendary history, and the hero of many medieval tales and chronicles. He is said to have



taken the mantle of a ruler over Britain and defended his land against Saxon invaders following the withdrawal of Rome. The stories of King Arthur include numerous elements of both the legend as well as folklore tradition, while some historians doubt his very existence. The legend that was to become King Arthur was largely developed as a result of the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but it needs to be remembered that there were already a large number of Welsh as well as Breton stories and poems about King Arthur, way before *Geoffrey of Monmouth* ever wrote his *Historia Regum Britanniae/History of the Kings of Britain* (from *Wikipaedia the free encyclopadeia*).

**Legend**

: a story handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis, although not verifiable, all such stories belonging to a particular group of people are also known as legends.

**Memoir**

: a biography or biographical sketch, usually one written by someone who knew the subject well, an autobiography, especially one that is objective and anecdotal in emphasis rather than inward and subjective.

**Medieval**

: characteristic of or congestive of the middle Ages.

**Myth**

: a traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but securing usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man or the customer, institutions, religious sites, etc., of a people.

**Narrative(s)**

: of having the nature of, narration, in story form; a story; account.

**Patronage**

: the function or status of a patron; support, encouragement, sponsorship, etc given by a patron, goodwill, famous, courtesy etc., shown to people considered inferior; condescension

**Travelogue**

: a lecture on travels, usually accompanied by the showing of pictures both still and moving or on slides.

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## 1.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1)
  - i) Literary genres are difficult to define.
  - ii) The Novel is a very flexible form.
  - iii) The novel has a very open form.



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## UNIT 2 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL-I

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Plot
  - 2.2.1 Types of Plot
- 2.3 Character and Characterisation
  - 2.3.1 Types of Characters
  - 2.3.2 Characterisation
  - 2.3.3 Methods of Characterisation
- 2.4 Narrative Modes
  - 2.4.1 Types of Narrative Modes
  - 2.4.2 Third person Narrative Mode
  - 2.4.3 First Person Narrative Mode
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Hints to Check Your Progress

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit will look at the various aspects of the novel largely as understood by E M Forster in his 1924 work, *Aspects of the Novel*. After going through this unit you will come to know about three important aspects of the novel form. These three aspects that will be covered in this unit are:

- Plot
- Character/ Characterisation and
- Narrative Mode

This will help you in identifying, defining and classifying these varied critical concepts that are necessary for a better understanding of the novel. It will also aid you in reading the different novels.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit, we looked at the novel as a literary genre and we also realised, after reading the unit that reading a novel is not that simple. It is not just about the story line but rather developing a perspective on the fine nuances that a novelist tries to make in his/her work. We also looked at the definition of a novel and found that defining a novel is again, not as easy as we thought it to be. We then traced the beginnings of the novel as a *genre* and looked at the reasons behind the rise of the novel in eighteenth century England.

In this unit, we will be looking at three aspects of the novel that are crucial for a better reading and understanding of it. This unit is designed to help you perfect your skills and to equip you better for an intelligent reading of the novel as students of Literature. Here, we shall be talking about the concept of plot, character

and characterisation and narrative mode, while we deal with the other aspects of the novel in the third unit. Essentially saying any literary work would have two components - a) form and b) content. Form would imply the “**how**” of a literary genre while content would mean “**what**” a piece of literature has to say. These two components are very crucial to anyone who wishes to study any form of literature - be it the novel, poetry, prose or even drama. While we all know that a relationship exists between these two components and that these two components are inextricably linked together, opinion varies on the nature of the relationship between the two. However, we do know that the relationship between form and content cannot really be ignored if we are to develop critical skills in reading novels. It would be helpful to keep in mind our definition of the novel in Unit 1 when we are faced with this crisis of whether form or content is or is not important. For instance, if a novel is defined as a long prose narrative / a long story written in prose, then it goes without saying that anything written has some sort of shape, which implies form. The novel is anyway a written form and the novelist would therefore, be very careful about the way in which she/he presents his/her matter. Moreover, the novelists would also have undergone rigorous writing and re-writing through the process of creating the novel, so in the case of the novel at least we might safely say that the form does have an important role to play and that we could also approach the novel via the form that encloses the content or the message of the novelist or even the ‘what’ she/ he has to convey.

But when we say something like this we do not mean to say that the novel can be approached only through the form or that the form is more important than the content. And for us to be able to understand form in all its dimensions, it is important that we are able to not only recognise but also be able to describe what the identifying markers of these categories are. That is what we intend to do in this unit and in the next section when we shall be talking about Plot.

### Check Your Progress 1

Read the questions given below and answer in your own words.

- 1) What do you understand by the term aspects of the novel?

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- 2) What are the two main components of any literary work? Define each one of them.

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3) Is there a relationship between content and form?

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4) Is it advisable for us to approach a novel through the form rather than the content? If yes, why? Give reasons.

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## 2.2 PLOT

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The chief elements that comprise a novel according to **Henry Hudson** are, “Plot, characters, dialogue, time and place of action, style, and a stated or implied philosophy of life”. Taking off from this point of intervention we really need to understand that the term plot as we know it today was mentioned for the first time by the Greek philosopher **Aristotle** in his famous work the *Poetics* in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. He used the term plot as one of the important constituents of a great tragedy as he was essentially talking about the dramatic form - tragedy. But his definition is equally applicable to the novel as a genre as well. He defines a plot as a, “combination of the incidents, events, situations and actions in a story”. And another point that needs to be kept in mind is that Aristotle never differentiated or drew any distinction between ‘plot’ and ‘story’. Edward Morgan Forster a much later writer and critic in his work *Aspects of the Novel*, draws a distinction between a plot and a story. In Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel*, he defines a story as a “narrative of events arranged in their time- sequence” (p. 87). He then goes on to say that a “plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.” Here, the keyword to remember is “Causality”. He cites the oft quoted example ... “The King died, and then the Queen died” - as an instance of a story, and cites another example - “The King died, and then the Queen died of grief too” as plot. This has been quoted here to explain the difference that Forster tries to make between what he perceives as story and what he terms plot. He is quick to point out that even though in both instances, the “time- sequence is preserved” it is the acute “sense of causality” that actually overshadows it. Forster’s emphasis therefore, is on causality as making the crucial difference between a story and a plot. Notice for instance even how we speak. We hear people saying very often, “She/he told me the story of his/her life.” Or, “a plot was hatched to kidnap the child and demand a ransom”. Even for us listeners (in this case), the second statement is definitely more intriguing and will catch our attention straight away, rather than the first one. Forster also looks

upon plot as something organised, logically arranged, sequenced even unfolding one after the other in prose or verse or a narrative. He goes as far as to say that the plot “is the novel in its logical, intellectual aspect; it requires mystery, but the mysteries are solved later on.” (p. 95).

Going back to Aristotle’s definition of what he termed plot we need to keep in mind that he never really maintained a distinction between a plot and a story. However, there are critics who claim that a line has to be drawn between a story, a plot and an incident. Having looked at Forster’s example wherein he makes clear the difference between plot and story I don’t think it is necessary for us to look at it again. We would however need to make a distinction between ‘story’, ‘plot’ and ‘incident’. An incident may be looked upon as a single episode or an event. Aristotle had in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE defined the concept of plot as including both action as well as unity. Aristotle’s definition is important because it has been adapted, adopted and critics down the ages have emphasised upon different aspects of it.

Let us take a quick look at what some critics have had to say about plot. **Vladimir Propp** (1859- 1970) argues that narratives and drama, “possess a particular construction which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it,” (*The Columbian Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, Eds., Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, Columbian University Press: New York, 1995, p. 231). Now let’s look at **Henry James** (1843-1916) for instance, was of the opinion that “the representation of life/ mimesis is the essence of plot and the distinction between plot and story is superfluous. We already know Forster’s views on plot from our detailed discussion. However, modern critics and readers of the novel today look at a story as what happens within the framework of a narrative or a drama and at plot as the way in which the events are presented.

In short, plot may be looked at as the sequencing or logical ordering of separate events in a narrative that is selected by the novelist him/herself in such a manner as to convey his/her message and to hold the attention of the reader and to sustain his/her interest. It is the plot that serves as the broad framework within which the theme of the novel, the author’s message, the characters/ people in the novel or story play their part. A plot should also be good and skillfully put together and there should be no gaps or inconsistencies. There should be a sense of balance and proportion.

All said and done Aristotle’s definition of plot has served not also as a guide to novelists in the past but also given rise to many challenges to the way the novel is looked at and the manner in which plot has now come to be, in the last three centuries.

*Kindly Note: The manner in which you relate or recall the events of a novel could be very different from the manner in which the author/ novelist would like you to remember or read the novel.*

### 2.2.1 Types of Plots

Having said so much about the plot by way of definition and analysis, it is but obvious that there may be more than one way of ordering/ sequencing arranging a plot. For instance, the way in which you might approach a novel or even



remember it may not be in keeping with the manner in which the novelists shape his/ her novel or wants his/ her novel to be read or even understood. Hence, it is clear that we may need to look at the different types of plots. One way of doing that would be by looking at what Hudson called the (a) Loose plot and the (b) Organic plot. Hudson makes a distinction between loose plot and organic plot. In the case of loosely constructed plot the story is composed of a number of detached incidents with very little necessary or logical connection among themselves. And the unity of the narrative depends not on the machinery of the action but on the person or hero, who is the only binding factor. The examples he gives of such loosely constructed plots are *Robinson Crusoe* by **Daniel Defoe**, *Vanity Fair* by **William Makepeace Thackeray** and *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens.

When separate incidents are neatly dovetailed and not treated episodically and form the integral components of a definite plot - pattern then it is an example of an Organic Plot according to Hudson. The entire plan of the novel in this case, has to be in place - the story, the characters, the events and even the manner in which the novelist would like to combine or converge to bring about the catastrophe.

Aristotle made a distinction between simple plot and complex plot. He said that a simple plot is largely episodic in nature while a complex plot involves both a reversal of fortune or *peripetia* and recognition. Now if we remember in Unit 1 when we discussed the picaresque novel we said that it is based on a series of episodes loosely connected so this definition that Aristotle gave creates problems for us in a sense. Moreover, the reversal of fortune and recognition may also not exist in every novel and that is also problematic. We must bear in mind that Aristotle was talking about the Greek tragedy and not really about the novel as a genre.

Hudson also made a distinction between a simple plot and a complex plot as one in which only a single story is told and the other as one in which multiple stories work hand-in-hand to bring about a single unified whole. For instance, Hudson compares the two stories of *Amelia Sedley* and *Becky Sharp* in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and says that these are not amalgamated properly whereas he says in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* all the three threads of *Esther Summerson's* story, the story of *Lady DeLock's* sin and the story of the great *Chancery Suit by Jarndyce V Jarndyce* are interwoven skillfully together.

Another opinion is expressed by the American author **Nathaniel Hawthorne** a 19<sup>th</sup> Century novelist and author of *The Scarlet Letter*. He identifies four types of plots: tragic, comic, satiric or romantic depending upon the Subject matter/ content of the novel. Now, we had said earlier that a novel should or could be approached through its form and not content and this definition also creates problems in the sense that it leaves out other types of novels such as, the psychological novel, the political novel, the historical novel, crime thrillers among others.

So, it is essential that we remember that all classifications/ typologies of either novels or plots have a limited degree of relevance and one rule does not apply to all. The reason we have discussed plot and the various types of plot in detail here in this unit is to give you a broad idea of the different types of novels and plots and to help you understand how the construction of the plot varies from one novel to another. While it is also important for us to know about these

classifications in order to have a good understanding of the novel, it is not recommended that these classifications be extended in a strict manner to your reading of the different novels both in this course and outside the course.

*Kindly Note: It is important that you focus only on how the plot has been assembled together or constructed and not on what type of plot it is or could be.*

Since we have said so much about plot and the different types of plots we would need to do a review exercise quickly next.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) How does Aristotle define plot? Does his definition hold true for the novel as well?

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- 2) How would you define plot?

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- 3) Is it important to make a distinction between plot and story? What is the nature of difference between the two?

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- 4) Why and how do we identify different types of plots? Are there any limitations involved in such classifications?

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- 5) Does knowledge about the plot and the different types of plot help in our reading the novel?

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## 2.3 CHARACTER AND CHARACTERISATION

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Having examined the plot as the first aspect of the novel, let us now turn our attention to character and characterisation the second important aspect of the novel that we will be dealing with in this unit. Character very simply put would mean a figure in any literary piece of work. Characters could be, both human as well as non- human entities such as animals or even inanimate entities - that however, have been personified by the author/ novelist. The word character also connotes a sense of morality. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century England and France, the term character used to mean or refer to a literary genre. As far back as the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century and early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE, the term characters were used and it meant a genre in which a character type, rather than a truly individual being/ character was sketched in a brief work written in prose or verse.

Having begun with the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE let us now look at what other critics have to say and at what character (s) has meant down the ages. A character may also be a *persona* in a novel/ a drama/ a poem who has been endowed with physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist in such a way as to ensure that we as readers come to look upon them as real. For a character to be good, the novelist would have to present him/her in a very convincing, plausible and consistent manner and his/her attitude should not appear to be self-contradictory. If at all such self - contradictions arise then it is crucial for us to look at and analyse why this has happened or what the novelist wanted us to understand from this. Some novelists could make the character stand out by exaggerating his or her physical demeanour while others may depict their characters subtly. If the physical demeanour is exaggerated then the character could emerge like a cartoon or in a very incongruous manner. In which case, she or he would not be a character but a caricature. Dickens has numerous caricatures in his novels.

Just as we drew a distinction between the types of plots, we can do a similar exercise as far as characters are concerned and this, we shall do keeping in mind what Forster had to say about Flat and Round Characters.

### 2.3.1 Types of Characters

There are several ways of classifying characters but ultimately it boils down to Forster’s classification of Flat and Round characters that are easily and readily distinguishable and identifiable. Let us deal with flat characters first.

Flat Characters are usually built around a single idea or quality. They are often presented rather cursorily in a single phrase or sentence and so are not sketched

beyond a mere outline. They derive from a sense of collective identity from the type or group (social or literary) to which she/ he belongs. So, words, deeds and attitudes are dismissed as quirks of the class. And finally, flat characters are two-dimensional and so do not undergo change in the course of a novel.

Round characters on the other hand are a combination of several ideas or qualities. They are sketched in detail rather painstakingly and may require an extensive treatment. They do not derive from any group. They have a distinct sense of personal identity and are often responsible for their words, deeds and attitudes. And lastly, round characters are three-dimensional and have the power to surprise us through an unexpected (though not totally improbable) act of transformation.

Sr No	FLAT CHARACTERS	Sr No	ROUND CHARACTERS
1)	Flat Characters are usually built around a single idea or quality.	1)	Round characters on the other hand are a combination of several ideas or qualities.
2)	They are often presented rather cursorily in a single phrase or sentence and so are not sketched beyond a mere outline.	2)	They are sketched in detail, painstakingly and may require an extensive treatment.
3)	They derive from a sense of collective identity from the type or group (social or literary) to which she/ he belongs. So, words, deeds and attitudes are dismissed as quirks of the class.	3)	They do not derive from any group. They have a distinct sense personal identity and are often responsible for their words, deeds and attitudes.
4)	Flat characters are two-dimensional and so do not undergo change in the course of a novel.	4)	Round characters are three-dimensional and have the power to surprise us through an unexpected (though not totally improbable) act of transformation.

### 2.3.2 Characterisation

The reason why we are dealing with characterisation at length here is because characterisation is also inextricably linked to both character as well as plot. For a work of literature to be credible to its readers, the readers need to be convinced by the characters that are portrayed by the novelist in the novel and the characters should also be such that the reader can actually visualise them. The author could then either comment directly or indirectly on the characters, in which case, she/ he would be employing direct characterisation or she/ he could use indirect characterisation. In the first instance, the author would be telling readers about the characters, while in the second instance she/ he would be showing the readers what the character is really like. For an author to create a successful works of fiction, she/ he would need to make the plot convincing, the characters should be

such that the readers can identify them/ oppose them or relate to them and the motivation to believe in the character should be compelling. To take the definition of character a little further, we feel the need to point out that with most post structuralists critics and postmodern novelists - the character is supposed to be dead. In other words, they have “announced” the death of the character. For instance, the French theorists **Roland Barthes** in *S/Z* declare that “what is” obsolescent in the contemporary novel “is the character; what can no longer be written in the Proper Name.” The character therefore, is now no longer discussed as a real person but as a literary construct.

What has to be remembered is that character and characterisation while being interrelated critical concepts are not synonymous. The term character generally refers to a person (not necessarily an individual), characterisation is a study of the different methods that a novelist may use to present a whole range of characters in a logically arranged manner. The choice of characters or methods of presenting them is entirely up to the novelists who may have a vision for them and is often guided by certain factors. Factors such as:

- a) His / her choice of the narrative/ story and the way in which she/he wishes to develop it.
- b) The ideal/ ideas she/ he seek to represent through the characters.
- c) His/her individual attitude to the ideas she/ he seeks to present through different characters in the novel.

The novelist once again has the choice of combination, meaning she/ he can choose to combine these factors in any way she/ he finds suitable to his/ her story/ narrative. But she/ he usually keeps in mind the following questions while deciding on the combination of factors to be arranged. These questions could be related to:

- a) How much importance should be given to which character and how?
- b) How should the characters be made to interact with each other, and why?
- c) How and why should the characters be grouped together into different categories, viz. character/ caricature, individual/types, major/minor?

*Kindly Note: Characterisation is essentially an art, a matter of conscious, judicious and discriminating use of certain strategies needed for the process of selection, grouping and presentation of different characters in a novel.*

### **2.3.3 Methods of Characterisation**

The manner in which or the technique employed by the novelist as far as characterisation is concerned varies from novel to novel and from novelist to novelist. However, for the sake of a broad classification, we can make two important categories, i.e., *Narrative* and *Dramatic* methods of characterisation. In the narrative method, the quality or trait of the character is described, narrated, evaluated or commented upon by the novelist. The novelist also offers the final assessment of a character’s motives, attitudes or behavioural oddities. In the dramatic method, the quality or trait of the character is shown or revealed through his/her words, and actions in a series of dramatic situations. The reader is also allowed to draw his/her own conclusions about the character’s motives, and attitudes.

Sr No	Narrative Method	Sr No	Dramatic Method
1)	The quality or trait of the character is described, narrated, evaluated or commented upon by the novelist.	1)	The quality or trait of the character shown or revealed through his/her words, and actions in a series of dramatic situations.
2)	The novelist also offers the final assessment of a character's motives, attitudes or behavioural oddities.	2)	The reader is also allowed his/ her own conclusions about the character's motives, and attitudes.

When you read the different novels prescribed for you, you will realise that the novelist often uses both the methods in a novel and one method is not sacrificed in the interest of the other. What we are trying to really tell you is that all said and done, these two methods of characterisation are not really mutually exclusive but rather they are complementary to each other.

When you need to figure out either characters or the method characterisation, it might be helpful for you to keep in mind the following questions:

- i) What does the character say or do, and why?
- ii) What do the other characters in the novel say about him/her and why?
- iii) What does a novelist have to say about a character and why?
- iv) Which category does a character belong to, and why?

(The categories could be: major/ minor, individual/type). Before we move on to the next aspect of the novel that we wish to cover in this Unit, let us stop for a while and reflect on what we have done so far.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Define the term 'character'?

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- 2) Why is it important for a character to be consistent? Give reasons.

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3) What is the difference between a character and a caricature?

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4) Identify the two main types of characters. Compare and contrast the two.

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5) How is the term character different from characterisation? What factors if any, determine characterisation?

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6) What are the different methods of characterisation known to a novelist? Point out the main difference between the two important ones.

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7) Do you think the information given in Section 2.3 will help you in your reading of a novel? If so, how?

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## 2.4 NARRATIVE MODES

Before we begin talking about what narrative mode means or does, we need to understand the meaning of the term narrative *per se*. Some people might say that narrative is just another, more sophisticated word for what is ordinarily known as a ‘story’. This however, is a misconception that needs examining. A story is something that is merely told. Whereas, a narrative is not only the story but also how the story is told and in what manner it is told. In other words, a story is merely a component of the narrative whereas a narrative includes something more. But at the same time, a narrative is not the plot. Just as the story is but one component of the narrative, so too is a narrative just one of the several methods of giving shape to a plot. Narrative therefore, is an important strategy available to the novelist with the aid of which she/he can create, describe or comment upon either the situations or characters or both. The study of the narrative modes can be of immense help in different ways such as,

- i) It can help you to understand how a novel is different from other genres such as a poem or a drama,
- ii) It can also help you to distinguish between different types of novels and to an extent, help you to understand the basic nature of these differences as well.

This would probably make more sense to you when you read about narrative methods in the next subsection.

### 2.4.1 Types of Narrative Modes

Novelists have, over a period of time developed a large variety of modes/ strategies to present a story. Considering the fact that the novel has been around since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the scope for locating newer narrative methods has been immense. Generally, a novelist uses only one specific narrative mode suited to what she/he want to narrate and how she/ he wishes to do so. Sometimes, a novelist could use a combination of several narrative modes simultaneously in a work of fiction though, as you may discover, this is done only in some cases. The following types of narrative modes/methods are well known:

- 1) Third Person Narrative
- 2) First Person Narrative

### 2.4.2 Third Person Narrative Mode

In this narrative mode, the narrator is someone who is located outside the story and who refers to all the characters in the story by name or as ‘she’ or ‘he’. **Chinua Achebe’s** *Things Fall Apart* that we will be studying in Block 4 is a fine example of this type of narrative mode. Let’s take a look at the opening lines of the novel *Things Fall Apart*:

*Okonkwo was well-known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalmze the Cat...*

In this case, you realise that the narrator is a know-all in the sense that he knows everything that needs to be known about the characters as well as the situations.

He may appear to be god-like in the sense that he knows more about the characters than the characters themselves. He has an unchallenged monarchical presence in the novel as he surveys all. He has complete hold over and access to the character's thoughts, feelings, emotions, motives, speech and even actions. Whenever a third-person enjoys this privileged, almost sovereign status, we say, that the narrator is omniscient and that the narrative mode is the *third person omniscient mode*.

However, when the third person omniscient narrator chooses to focus on the thoughts, feelings or experiences of a single character or a limited number of characters within a story, then, we identify it as *third person limited narrative mode*. In such instances, a novelist seeks to impose certain limitations upon him/her self so as to be able to present all situations / characters through the eyes/perspective of a character she / he sympathises with the most. In your study of the different novels, you are not really likely to come across anything that can help you understand as to how this mode functions. However, at a later stage, if you do get to read the novels of Henry James in particular, you would be able to appreciate the *third person limited narrative mode* much better.

### 2.4.3 First Person Narrative Mode

Very often, a novelist creates a character/ *persona* in the first - person and attempts to view other characters / situations through his/her eyes. When such a mode of narration is used in a sustained manner through a novel, we may say that it is an instance of the first person narrative mode. Sometimes the use of the first person narrative mode may mislead us to think that the narrator is the same as the author or at best, an *alter ego* of the author. While in certain cases, especially in an autobiographical novel, the narrator/ author distinction may ultimately disappear, but it does not always happen in this manner. It would be wrong to say, then, that a novelist uses the first person narrator as a pretext for giving a fictional account of his/her life or drawing upon his/her personal experiences. In fact, even in an autobiographical novel, the facts/events/ situations are fictionalised to such an extent that the distance between the narrator and the author increases considerably. To give you some idea of how this mode of narration works, here is an example from **Charles Dickens'**

*David Copperfield:*

*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on Friday, at twelve o'clock at night....*

**Charles Dickens** has made use of the first person narrative mode, the first person mode certainly imposes more limitations. Since it perceives characters/ situations from the standpoint of a single character and not an omniscient narrator, it does offer a circumscribed view of whatever a novel may describe. However, it is generally preferred for the following reasons:

- i) It lends a degree of authenticity to the narrative as the reader gets a feeling that she/he is listening to the story straight from the horse's mouth.
- ii) It lends a sense of immediacy to the narrative and therefore makes for a greater involvement on the part of the reader.

**Check Your Progress 4**

1) What is the meaning of the word 'narrative'? How is it different from a story and a plot?

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2) Give a comprehensive definition of the term narrative mode. What are some of the advantages of studying the narrative mode of a novel?

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3) Identify the two main types of narrative modes. Make a detailed assessment of the merits and demerits of each of them.

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4) If you have to write a novel which narrative mode would you opt for and why?

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## 2.5 LET US SUM UP

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Speaking very broadly any literary work may be said to have two major components - form and content. When studying novels it is always more helpful to study or look at the content of the novel from its form or from the point of view of having analysed the form. The form of a novel can in turn be examined with the aid of the several aspects of the novel such as the three we covered in this unit- plot, character and characterisation and narrative mode. It is also important that we are able to not only define but also understand what each of these aspects are and what they do or do not do in a literary work if you wish to have a sound understanding of the novel. Plot is the overall arrangement of characters, situations and events, in a novel and is different from the story that is simply the manner in which we like to remember the happenings in the novel. Character refers to a person with certain moral, physical and psychological attributes while characterisation is the use of various strategies available to the novelist for the purpose of presenting the character. Narratives modes, the third aspect we covered in this unit, is the different ways of narrating the sequence of events that unfold in a novel, or presenting the characters or action. By using different narrative modes, an author is able to sustain the interest of the readers in the narrative and is also able to emphasise the different points of view presented in the novel.

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## 2.6 GLOSSARY

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<b>alter ego</b>	:	the other self; an intimate friend
<b>circumscribe</b>	:	lay down limits of, confine, restrict circumscribe:
<b>constituent</b>	:	component, part of something bigger
<b>demeanour</b>	:	bearing, outward behaviour
<b>fictional mode</b>	:	method of narrating a story
<b>narrative</b>	:	tale or story told in a particular manner
<b>persona</b>	:	aspect of personality meant to be shown to others
<b>per se</b>	:	by itself; considered alone and not in connection with other things
<b>picaresque</b>	:	a type of story dealing with the adventures and travels of a character who is a sort of a good - hearted rogue
<b>strategy</b>	:	art or skill of doing something

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## 2.7 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read Section 2.1 and then write your answer.
- 2) Form and content. Form is the 'how' while content is the 'what' of a literary work.

- 3) Yes. Read Section 2.1, however, the nature of the relationship is debatable.
- 4) Yes, read, understand. Reflect and then answer.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) A combination of the incidents, events, situations and actions in a story.
- 2) Think about it carefully and then answer.
- 3) Section 2.2 has the answer.
- 4) In Sections 2.2, 2.2.1 lie the answer.
- 5) Yes, it does - it gives a broad idea of the different types of novels and plots and the manner in which the plot is constructed.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Human and non- human, personae in a literary work endowed with some physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist.
- 2) For the character to be plausible and true to life.
- 3) While a character is endowed with physical, moral and psychological attributes by the novelist, a caricature is a character in whom certain traits are exaggerated to the extent that it makes him/her appear incongruous.
- 4) Refer to Section 2.3.1
- 5) While character refers to a person or a non-human, or an inanimate entity, characterisation is a study of the methods that a novelist uses in order to present characters.
- 6) Refer to Section 2.3.3
- 7) Here you might need to pause and think about your answer.

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Refer to 2.4
- 2) Narrative mode is a novelist's method by which she/ he can create, describe or comment upon situations and or characters. A study of the narrative mode can help us to understand how a novel is different from poetry or drama as well as to differentiate between different types of novels.
- 3) Refer to Section 2.4
- 4) You'll have to really think before you answer this one.

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## UNIT 3 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL II

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Style
- 3.3 Time and Place
- 3.4 Themes
- 3.5 New Areas of Novel Writing
- 3.6 Novels of the Diaspora
- 3.7 Third World Novels
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Hints to Check Your Progress

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we shall be looking at the other three aspects of the novel. These will include the aspects of style, time and place and themes. We have already discussed as to why we need to study the aspects of the novel carefully so we will not go into it here. Suffice it to say that these aspects of the novel that are taken up for discussion in this unit will help us understand the novel better. After looking closely at these aspects of the novel we will then turn to the new areas of novel writing, at the novels of the third world, and the novels of the diaspora.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 1 and 2 we were introduced to the novel as a literary genre and we also learnt that reading a novel is not as simple as merely reading and following the story line. It involves our mental abilities and makes us draw on all the critical knowledge we have in our possession to really appreciate or even express an opinion about a novel. What we are trying to say is that, reading a novel is a very specialised activity, an activity that makes us use a whole new set of vocabulary (words such as plot, character, characterisation, narrative, narrative modes, critical, criticism, critique), knowledge and understanding of different genres, and aspects of the novel. It also means that we need to be able to make fine distinctions and be well acquainted with the text/ novel and the novelist before we get around to talking about the novel. You must know what a novel is, the different types of novels that are there since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the different types of novels being written in modern times, the various aspects of the novel and how these aspects ought to be studied. Putting it in another way, what we are really trying to tell you is that, studying a novel or reading the novel as the title of this course suggests is, in effect the ability to study the various aspects of the novel, hence, the focus on the aspects of the novel.

Studying the different aspects of the novel will help you in several ways:

- 1) You would know what to expect when you read a novel.
- 2) You will be in a position to read the novel intelligently and offer an informed opinion on it by developing the necessary critical skills and efficiency.

The earlier unit, Unit 2 and this Unit, have been prepared with the idea of helping you acquire the necessary critical skills and or improving (that is, assuming you already possess these skills) upon them, in order to read a novel intelligently. In this unit, we shall be talking about the three other aspects of the novel - style, time and place and themes, as well as looking at the new areas of novel writing, third world novels and the novel of the diaspora as these are newer trends in the area of the novel. Broadly speaking, every known literary work, the novel included, could be said to have two components: form and content. Simply put, content as mentioned in the earlier unit refers to 'what' a poem or a novel says and form refers to 'how' the poem or the novel says whatever it does. These two questions related to the 'what' and the 'how' of a literary work is, of paramount importance to anyone who wishes to unlock the mysteries of the work. Everyone recognises that there is a very close relationship between the two aspects though opinion on the nature of the relationship differs. But we have discussed this to some extent in Unit 2. In this unit, we shall begin with examining style as another aspect of the novel.

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## 3.2 STYLE

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It is commonplace to say that all literary artists, novelists included, have to work within the available range of a specific language. A good novelist always strives to enrich the language she/ he decides to work with. What really distinguishes a good novelist from an indifferent one to some extent is the way in which language is either used or handled. In a manner of speaking, language is the ultimate material available to a novelist's or writer. Style is essentially an aspect of language and is largely reflected in a novelist's ability to turn language into an effective and imaginative vehicle for the purpose of narration and or, communication of his/ her ideas. Since each novelist is likely to use language differently or in his/her own unique manner, the writing style of one novelist would obviously vary from that of the other. Style is a distinctive signature of a novelist, an expression of his/ her creative genius almost in the same manner in which your selection of a particular dress may be said to carry an imprint of your imagination or lack of it or reflect your personality. We would like to suggest that in view of a large variety of styles available, no classification is either possible or desirable.

If we are to study style more closely, it would refer to the way in which a literary work is written and the devices/ techniques or tools an author/ novelist uses or has at his/ her disposal to express his/her opinion or message or thoughts. The manner in which the message and the choice of words, diction, he/she uses to present it gives rise to the aspect of style. Style therefore, is particular to a writer/ author/ novelist in this case and often it is the distinguishing factor that separates him/ her from the other writers/ authors/ novelists. Added to the use of words, language and the manner of presentation is also, the individual's personal idiosyncrasies and quirks that obviously impact the writer and hence, also contribute to his/her style of writing. Even though we have tried to define and explain what style is or does, we must remember that style too is a literary term and by rule is difficult to identity, define and analyse as well as extremely elusive too.

We can also look at style from various points of view. For instance, we could look at style from the point of view of creating an effect. If we do so, we as critics would need to focus our discussion on the diction, imagery and rhetorical



devices that are used by a particular novelist. If we look at style from the point of view of whether or not it belongs to a certain literary age or movement or even when we talk about different authors, then we would need to identify and analyse only those aspects of a given work that reflects the general style in question. For instance, we could consider a work to be belonging to the Augustan age, or the Victorian age; or we could say a work is “ornate”, “Coleridgean”, “transparent”, formal, low, high Renaissance, alliterative, Jamesian” etc.. (Murfin and Ray, p. 385)

Style could also be divided into three major categories: the high/grand, the middle/mean, and the low/base/plain. **Northrop Frye** invented a new distinction of style that he based on whether a literary work makes use of “expression and rhythms of ordinary speech or, instead makes use of formal devices and elaborates in order to differentiate its language from the quotidian”. He termed these two distinctions – the *demotic* and the *hieratic*. But at the same time, he also identified a high, middle, and low level in each of these two classifications. Then there is the decorous style which implies that the language conforms to the speakers, or the subject matter as well as the readers, or simply put what it really means is that the language is in keeping with the literary genre in which it is written, the socio-economic class of those who are using it in the novel (in this case), and the socio-political/ socio-cultural context in which it is being used as well as the occasion for which it is being used. Decorum was an actual convention of writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that dictated that the style of a work should “match” or be consistent with all the aspects of the work.

When examining style, we could also look at whether the sentences of a novel or any literary work are predominantly periodic/ loose (non periodic). A periodic sentence according to **Murfin and Ray**, “is not grammatically complete until its very end. Typically, several dependent clauses and parallel constructions precede the final independent clause in a periodic sentence, so the meaning of the sentence cannot be ascertained until the entire sentence has been read”. They then explain non periodic or loose sentences as, “typically contain (ing) a number of independent clauses joined only by coordinating conjunctions such as and or but” (p. 386). Periodic sentences appear to be more formal and the style that emerges as a result of using these types of sentences is said to be an elevated style whereas, in comparison the loose sentences or the non periodic sentences appear to be more informal and therefore conversational or base. We could go on explaining style through use of such terms but that might merely serve to confuse you and that would mean defeating our purpose of study. So, we will not go into details here at this point. Suffice it to say that there are various ways of creating style and stylistic devices are used by novelists to create their own particular and distinguishing style and critics too have various looking at style and they have done so down the ages.

That being so ... you may wonder how you could possibly gain some understanding of a particular novelist’s style or his/ her creative use of language? Experts will suggest different ways of analysing the language that you may not find at all useful at this stage. For this reason, we suggest that you base your impressions of a particular novelist’s style on your ability to answer the following questions:

- 1) Does a novelist use the language in a manner familiar to you or does she/he strive for novelty, richness or creativity?

- 2) Does this creative use of language lie in his/her use of words, diction or his/her sentence/ structure or all of them?
- 3) Can you identify some of the recurrent images and symbols in the novel? If so, make a list of each of them.
- 4) Do images and symbols make his/her language 'obtuse' or transparent?

*(Remember: Overuse of images and symbols will make the language rich and allusive, sometimes obtuse; while discriminating use of both will make for transparency)*

- 5) Does she/he use a simple style or a complex one?

*(The answer to this question will depend upon how you answer the other four).*

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How would you like to define the term style?

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- 2) Why is it not possible to offer a neat classification of different styles?

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- 3) How can one assess the style of a particular novel? Can you suggest any method for it, other than the one outlined in section 3.2?

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### 3.3 TIME AND PLACE

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The notion of time and place is derived from the classical notions of the *unities* most often ascribed to Aristotle. Aristotle however, dealt only with the unity of action in some detail when he was talking about tragedy. Whenever we discuss

Aristotle, we need to remember that Aristotle always talked about drama/ tragedy and not about the novel. It is a different matter that we have chosen to adapt many of his insights on tragedy to other literary genres such as the novel. He also talks about the unity of time in the fictive form. However, the classical unities of time, place and action have been attributed to Aristotle and the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian and French critics expanded upon these unities.

Therefore, 17<sup>th</sup> century French Drama, particularly that of **Molière** and **Racine** were very strict observers of these unities and very regular. In sharp contrast are the English dramatists who wrote for the Jacobean stage. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century however, even English dramatists had begun evaluating their own work according to the rules of the classical unities. Thus, we had a highly irregular **Shakespeare** who did not adhere to any of these rules or strictures and the conservative and regular **Jonson** who followed the rules of the classical unities very strictly. Till **Victor Hugo's** play *Hernani* (1844) was staged, the classical unities were very influential in dramatic criticism. This play created quite a stir at its debut because it violated the rules of classicism. It must be remembered that Greek and Latin drama were very strict in the form and their stage presented a single place throughout the action, while the plot narrated the events of a single day and the action too took place on a single day.

The action of a novel, like that of any other human activity, has to be located in 'time' as well as 'place', if it has to make any sense to us. Both 'time' and 'place' as represented in a novel are, more often than not, imaginary and not real categories. It is so because a novelist always likes to exercise his/ her prerogative of adding an element of fiction to whatever she/ he may choose to describe or narrate. As a matter of fact, this tendency towards the fictionalisation of time/ place categories as also the characters, situations or actions is what makes a work of fiction different from a historian's work on the one hand and a journalistic report on the other. Even when a novelist chooses to describe an actual or historical time/place category, as she/ may often do, she presents it in a manner that it appears strange or unfamiliar. Sometimes she or he may describe the real or known time/ place in such a manner that it might appear far removed from the way we may have either experienced, seen, heard or read about it. This is not to suggest that a novelist cannot or does not ever use time/place categories without fictionalising them. She/ he may often do so, and whenever she/ he does it the novel may either become historical in nature or take on the shape of reportage.

Since a novel presents action on a fairly broad scale, a number of 'time sequences' and 'locations' often come into play. It needs to be pointed out here that the action of a novel can move either in a linear fashion or in a disjunction manner. It is said to move in a linear fashion when the chronology of events is consistently maintained in the act of narration and there is an onward movement from one place to another. Linear action follows the alphabetic order and if the action starts (in terms of both time and place) at say point A, it moves towards points B, C, and D... and ultimately Z.

**Charles Dickens** *David Copperfield* is a good example of what we mean by linear movement of action. On the other hand, disjunctive action comes into play when the chronology of events is carefully and systematically disturbed for the purposes of narration and there is a movement back and forth in both time and place. It often happens when a novelist either uses flashback techniques or makes a character reconstruct events in a random fashion. In this case, the action

may start at point H, revert to point A and move toward B, C, D...G before it jumps forward to P... and so on. Such disruptions in time and place make the action disjunctive and this is often deliberately and consciously done by the novelist with the explicit purpose of attracting the reader's attention through new ways of narrating or describing. The disjunctive mode is often associated with most of the 20th century novels.

To help you out with your reading of different novels, we suggest that you keep the following questions in mind:

- i) When does the action begin and when does it end?
- ii) Do you find any disruptions in the time sequence of the novel? If so, how many? Identify all such disruptions and if possible, account for them as well.
- iii) Identify the total time sequence presented in a novel. Prepare a chart so as to show how it moves from one point to another.
- iv) Where does the novel begin and where does the novel end?
- v) Which are the different places mentioned in the novel? Identify them.
- vi) Prepare a comprehensive list of all the places named in the novel. While doing so, keep the following order in mind: Country, town, parish, village, home, etc.
- vii) If possible, associate different characters with different places and different time sequences as well.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) What are the two planes on which the action of a novel moves?  
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- 2) Does a novelist always use time and place categories in a realistic manner?  
 If not, why?  
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- 3) What are the different ways in which time and place categories can be used in a novel? Identify, define and classify them.

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- 4) Why is it important to know about a novelists specific use of time and place categories? How can one glean such information from a novel?

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### 3.4 THEMES

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So far, we have restricted our discussion to what we call the ‘form’ of a novel, its various manifestations or critical concepts/ strategies with the help of which the ‘form’ can be comprehended fully. You would perhaps recall our earlier suggestions made in Section 2.1 to the effect that the content of a novel should preferably be mediated through its form. This is as much as to say that if you are able to put these critical strategies to an optimum and effective use, you may be able to decipher the ‘content’ as well. This brings us to a point where it becomes necessary to explain what we really mean by the term ‘content’. In its broad sense, content would refer to the themes or ideas that run through the fabric of the novel.

Themes arise from the interplay of the various aspects of the novel such as, the plot/ setting, character, sometimes the element of conflict and the aspect of tone (under style). If we were to analyse the meaning of theme very simplistically we could say that the theme of a piece of fiction/ novel is its views about life and about how people behave. The theme of a novel particularly these days is rarely didactic/ moralistic. In fact, most of the time, it is not even presented directly. We locate the theme with the help of the characters, the action and the setting of the novel. In short what we really do is to try and figure out or work out the themes ourselves. The novelist merely communicates his/ her message to the reader and it is up to the reader or us to decipher what the theme is. However, it is important to point out here that every idea a novel may seek to present does not necessarily develop into its theme. An idea becomes a theme only when it recurs through a novel in such a way as to demonstrate a novelist’s preoccupation with it. A novelist often reveals his/ her concern or preoccupation with a theme or a set of themes in several different ways, some of which are as follows:

- i) Indirectly through the medium of character/ characters, as a character is widely held to be the chief vehicle of an idea or ideas in a novel.
- ii) Indirectly through certain patterns of imagery and symbolism that run through a novel.
- iii) Indirectly through key words or phrases that find a recurrent expression in a novel.
- iv) Directly through authorial comments that lie interspersed in a novel, where a novelist takes the liberty to comment on either the characters or situations or both.
- v) Through the title.
- vi) Through allusions that are made throughout the novel
- vii) Through details and particulars in the novel and the greater meaning that those details could contain.

This by itself would make clear to you how closely interrelated and interdependent both 'form' and 'content' are. In your search for different themes of a novel you may focus specifically on this particular aspect of a novel.

*Remember: theme, plot and the structure of the novels are interrelated and all help to inform and reflect back on each other. Moreover, the theme does not always tell us everything about the novel, and that it is simply one of the aspects of the novel.*

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What is the meaning of the term 'content'?

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- 2) What is the main difference between an idea and a theme?

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3) In what different ways does a novelist usually reveal the theme of a novel?

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4) What kind of relationship exists between ‘content’ and ‘form’ and why?

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### 3.5 NEW AREAS OF NOVEL WRITING

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At the onset of the twentieth century, Western fiction grew modern and shed many images such as Victorian, realistic, and its image of what **Malcom Bradbury** calls “the great instrument of social representation”. It found a place for itself when paradigms were shifting, along with expectations, desires and imagination. At the end of the twentieth century different forms of the novel had taken centre stage. By the time we entered the new millennium the novel as a genre saw striking changes. A large number of writers who had contributed tremendously to post war British fiction had died. Novelists such as, **Graham Greene** (died in 1991), **William Golding** and **Anthony Burgess** (1993), **Kingsley Amis** (1995), **Iris Murdoch** (1999) and **Penelope Fitzgerald** in 2000, **Arthur C Clarke** in March, 2008. The millennium offered great cultural excitement and impetus to new writers. But what was also happening is that some essential notions of the novel and its Britishness were rapidly dissolving and getting lost and the stage was now set for writers from other cultures such as from Scotland, Ireland and India to name just a few.

Moreover, the changes also occurred in writing that began to emerge from different perspectives both on myth as well as reality and we saw fiction/ novels from America, Australia, South America, Caribbean, India, Africa, Ireland and other postcolonial countries. By mid - twentieth century most of the former British colonies had regained their independence from Britain. These former colonies were to be renamed Commonwealth countries and later postcolonial countries and a vast body of writing emerged from these countries. The novel these days has taken on a vast “variety of voices, forms and manners”, and is randomly open “to all styles, all attitudes, all kinds of performances, along with equal randomness of judgment about what is serious, worthwhile, valuable, authoritative” (**Malcolm Bradbury**, p. 521).

The most striking feature of the novel today is its sheer plurality, its diversity and mixed origins. Bradbury finds the novel in the millennium dealing with

history and the novelist's relationship with the past and he gives the example of **A S Byatt's** Booker novel *Possession: A Romance*. Other writers who were interested in the relationship between history and the fable include: **Penelope Fitzgerald** (*Innocence*, 1986, *The Blue Flower* (1995)), **Kazuo Ishiguro** (*The Unconsoled*, 1995), **Tibor Fischer** (*Under the Frog*, 1992, *The Collector Collector*, 1997). But all said and done, fiction or the novel is at its richest in the millennium. There are certain themes that recur through novels, (and the list is the one prepared by Bradbury):

*apocalyptic cities, gender wars, gay and lesbian relations, marital collapse, feminist self- discovery, football fever, serial killers, child abuse, New age consciousness, laddish girls and girlish lads.* (p. 539)

He also says that social comedy has replaced hard satire and that “dark horrors have replaced familiar lives”, that, “serious literary fiction in under profound pressure from the commercial”, and “Grand Narratives are giving way to more plural and playful themes”. Before we conclude it needs to be mentioned that the novel still survives, it proliferates and penetrates. It has seen many deaths but it seems to be thriving and expanding its boundaries, cultures and horizons. In the next section we shall talk about the novel of the diaspora.

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### 3.6 NOVELS OF THE DIASPORA

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The word diaspora come from an ancient Greek word “ meaning “a scattering or sowing of seed” and it now refers to the entire process of forcing people or ethnic populations away from their own homelands, the dispersal of these people, and the ensuing developments in their culture including literature. The current usage of the word diaspora comes from the Hebrew Bible to refer to the population of Jews exiled from Judea in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, and from Jerusalem in ADE 136 by the Roman Empire. The term was assimilated from Greek into English in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. As an academic field, diaspora studies has been established and is related to the wider modern meaning of the usage ‘diaspora’.

The literature that developed as a result of the movement of people from their homelands to other countries for whatever reasons – be they economic, social, political, is what is known as diaspora writing or literature of the diaspora. Much of the writings tend to deal with as **H C Narang** puts it, with “the myths and legends, rites and rituals, songs and dances, faith and belief, philosophy and pragmatism, memory and amnesia, success and failures, and tears and smiles - In short, the lived experience of not one but two communities”. Let us look at third world novels briefly in the next section.

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### 3.7 THIRD WORLD NOVELS

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In a politico-economic sense the term ‘third world’ implies all the nations that were (and are still) generally considered to be underdeveloped economically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term arose during the Cold War to refer to nations that did not belong to the First and Second Worlds. It was used for countries either still developing or under-developed, especially in Latin America, Africa, Oceania and Asia. The term third world also has a reference to the Third Estate, the



commoners of France during the French Revolution, as they were opposed to the clergy and the nobility who comprised the First Estate and the Second Estate.

The political birth of the term third world strictly speaking took place at the Bandung Conference (1955). The third world is culturally and economically diverse and includes the petroleum-rich countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, etc. and the new industrial countries such as, India, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Brazil, Mexico etc. and poor countries such as Haiti, Chad, Afghanistan, etc.

The literature that has emerged from these countries is what is popularly known as third world literature. However, these days the term third world is not really politically correct, hence, a more umbrella term such as literature from the margins is used to refer to these writings. In some cases, the term used is also new literatures or sometimes known as postcolonial literatures, if the writings happen to be from former colonies. Some of the good examples of Third World Novels and Novelists are: **Sembene Ousmane** (*God's Bit of Wood*), **Chinua Achebe** (*Things Fall Apart*), which we will be studying, **Ngugi Wa Thiong'O** (*Petals of Blood*), **Gabriel Garcia Marquez** (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), **Salman Rushdie** (*Midnight's Children*), **Nawal El Saadawi** (*Women at Point Zero*), **Earl Lovelace** (*The Wine of Astonishment*), **Mario Vargas Llosa** (*The Real Life Of Alejandro Mayta*), **V S Naipaul** (*A House for Mr Biswas*), and **Isabel Allende** (*Of Love and Shadows*), to name just a few.

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have covered the three other aspects of the novel - style, time and place and theme, as well as looked briefly at the definition of and implication of terms such as third world novels or new writings or even diaspora novels. You need to remember that this unit is only an introductory unit and the purpose behind this unit has been to expose you to new areas and terms in the study of the novel. In Unit 4 we will be examining the future of the novel.

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### 3.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Style is the unique way in which each novelist uses language to narrate the story or communicate his/her ideas.
- 2) As each individual writer has his/her own specific style, it is not possible to classify such a diverse range of available or possible styles.
- 3) Think before you write your response.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The novel moves through time and is set in a particular place.
- 2) Refer to Section 3.3.
- 3) Time can be used either in a linear fashion or it can be made backwards and forwards in a disjunctive manner.
- 4) Refer to Section 3.3.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The themes/ ideas found in a novel constitute its content.
- 2) An idea is not necessarily the theme of the novel. An idea becomes a theme when it recurs through a novel, demonstrating the novelist's preoccupation with it.
- 3) Refer to 3.4.
- 4) For purposes of analysis, it is necessary to speak of 'form' and 'content' as separate categories. But as we know they are inseparable.



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## UNIT 4 FUTURE OF THE NOVEL

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Novel in the Twentieth Century
- 4.3 The Novel in the Post-Modern World
- 4.4 The Novel in the Present Age
- 4.5 The Postcolonial Novel
- 4.6 The Future of the Novel
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Hints to Check Your Progress
- 4.9 Suggested Readings and References

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we discuss the novel from its origins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present times as well as the possible trends in the future. This unit will also look at the novel under various socio-political conditions such as postmodernism and the present context as well.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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The novel originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe and soon became the most popular literary form. How soon? Well, in a span of a few decades, it started evolving in different directions, covering areas of life that had hitherto been left untouched in creative writing - poetry, drama, long or short comments and analyses in prose, for instance. One prominent stream of fiction writing, took up contemporary manners and morals as its central concern and aimed to educate the vast majority of readers in what is now known as proper behaviour. This trend of fiction let the reader know all that was expected of him/ her in one's environment and how one was to circumvent obstacles if they emerged on one's path towards happiness, fulfillment, salvation, or what you like. Thus, the novel worked as a sort of class-room where the novelist assumed the role of a teacher and taught the reader through various methods - discussion, mimicry, representation of characters along lines of wrong and faulty conduct - and compelling her/him to reconsider one's 'normal' (socially acceptable) approach to issues. Of course, the necessary precondition of this writing was that it had to be interesting or the readers would share the fate of audiences listening to a preacher from the pulpit. This could be called pleasure combined with purpose. Such an educative role made the novel extremely appealing to vast audiences hungry to know and learn about life. The best example of such fiction-writing was **Henry Fielding** in England.

Around the same time as **Fielding** wrote (in the eighteenth century) his morally educative novels, one sees a totally different kind of novel writing by **Richardson** who presented not the social life or the ethical tendencies of a time but went into the workings of the human mind. The psychological dimension in **Richardson's**

writing is indeed fascinating. **Richardson**'s characters think and feel delicately, they remain uncertain, and at the edge of thought and do not know which direction to take to see their dreams fulfilled. **Richardson**'s novels are about self-knowing as the character's mind is made to explore his/her own motivations. How to relate with an unknown person? What could be the pitfalls in the growth of a relationship? What drives an individual to come out of oneself – one's sense of fear or a desire to fulfill oneself in spite of the dangers 'involved'? **Richardson** dealt with these questions with great subtlety. A substantial part of the appeal in **Richardson**'s writing lay in the characters he chose for depiction in his novels. They were women, young and curious, in which males of the day took keen interest and expressed a desire to relate to them. The apprehension of seduction always lurked behind the attempt that the males in question made. Also note that the new woman of the eighteenth century had to be treated differently from her counterpart in the earlier centuries. She was middle class with a sensitivity about her selfhood, about the role she would be playing under pressure from others or somewhat independently.

Isn't this to mean that both **Fielding** and **Richardson** catered to the cultural requirement of the day in their different ways " the former telling the curious reader what to adopt and what to shun and the latter letting the reader into the unknown recesses of the minds of the new men and women that had emerged in an altogether new England. This England, needless to say, was marked by the onward progressive march of the native merchants and traders. What is suggested is that the novel as a literary form at the time met the demands of the social environment and shaped the minds of the people even as it allowed those people to influence its workings.

As the nineteenth century saw the novel in Europe strongly and courageously depicting scenes of socio-historical movements, it entered problematic areas of life such as the desirability of retaining or changing the existing power structures. This happened particularly in French and Russian fiction. The two gradually became highly realistic in their treatment of vital social themes. American fiction, too, documented changes taking place in the existing social environment amidst violence and wars. Both in Europe and America, the novel registered important happenings of the day. The names of Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, the **Bronte sisters**, **George Eliot**, **Thackeray**, **Thomas Hardy**, etc. come to mind, who through their peculiar fictional strategies laid bare the clashes and antagonisms of the time. Issues and questions of helplessness, anguish, tragedy, defeat, moral self questioning, heroic struggles of individual characters with entrenched interests, etc. are scattered all over nineteenth century fiction. These denote the practice of novel writing by writers to engage with a real world that unfolded before them in its complexity and mystery. At the same time, we come across in the fiction of the nineteenth century a gradual occurrence of marginalisation of the literary endeavour. Particularly, as **Georg Lukacs** has argued in his significant discussion of the novel in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, the novel could be seen moving in the direction of crisis and keeping its head above water with a great deal of difficulty. Thus, we see that in a little less than two hundred years the novel as a literary form had come to confront hurdles that had become increasingly difficult to cross. The question naturally arose: What would happen to the novel in the twentieth, or to be more precise, what was the future of the novel in the next (twentieth) century? Interestingly, we meet this question today in more or less the same form as then. Thereafter, with

the calendar changing and the twentieth century coming to an end, we would also need to look at what happens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Write a brief account of the developments in the novel as a genre from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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**4.2 THE NOVEL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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The twentieth century bore witness to the emergence of varied perspectives in the field of learning. There were new views, responses and attitudes formulated by different states, combinations of countries big and small, and within them by groups, classes and individuals. The latter were active in their intellectual or other pursuits to block or augment the march of sections that they supported or opposed. The twentieth century world was a truly divided house “ the more so as it had become united along politics and ideologies. Since 1917, there had been two blocs, the capitalist imperialist bloc on the one side and the socialist bloc on the other. Even as late as the 1990s, the ‘unipolar’ world we lived in, had contending interests with the small socialist countries as they rose against the mighty imperialist political formations. The tumultuous period we lived through saw small Russian states moving gradually back to the socialist ideology and a rising public outcry all over the world against the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. This has a connection with literature in general and the novel in particular. Historical conditions shape literary trends and forms and are in turn shaped by them in a significant manner. That is how we relate literature to life.

What are these historical conditions that we refer to in our discussion about the present topic? Firstly, the twentieth century has seen two world wars: secondly, there has been intensive socio-economic exploitation of nations in the form of colonisation; thirdly, the age has also witnessed de-colonisation and the independence of colonies long buried under the weight of oppression; fourthly, there has been a cut-throat competition and clash of ideologies which are evident in the Cold War period of the nineteen fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties, and finally the world emerges as a unipolar world with the dominance of America. Let us look at the novel in the postmodern world next.

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**4.3 THE NOVEL IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD**

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Broadly, this historical development constitutes the life of the twentieth century and forms a backdrop to the formulation of multiple opinions. In which area of life does such a making of multiple opinions happen? Obviously, the political-ideological area where forces, developments, formations of all kinds manifest

themselves, asserting as they do, weakly or strongly, their ways of life, identities and attitudes. Mark that ‘multiplicity’ is the watchword in this ‘postcolonial-postmodern’ world of ours. We hear in this world that all established forms of life, nay, all established ways of thoughts and feeling as well as aspirations have become redundant and that humankind cannot go any further from here. According to this new and quite powerful argument, things are going to become worse from here on, since, non-human aspects of technology and commerce have decisively taken over existence. There have been prophets of doom such as the American theorist **Fukoyama** who boldly predict the end of history. The argument is interesting since inherent in it is the belief that ‘history’ is a relatively new phenomenon, call it five or at the most ten thousand years old, before which humankind lived irrationally, anarchically, savage-like. The technological developments of today are thus, going to reduce humans to the level of non-thinking, non-feeling automata “ the humans from now on would lose conscious control over their lives and only follow commands from a superior, all-powerful agency that is unapproachable to the faculty of human reason"

On the other side of this complex phenomenon of predictions, claims and counterclaims, I have in mind the serious disagreements of those who think that technology is bound to obey human commands of reason since technology is an extension of human power and also that governments, associations and such other formations of collectivity only reflect the power of human beings to improve the scope of freedom, happiness and fulfillment. Thus, there are claims and counterclaims. At the end of the twentieth century and now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, what could be the role of literature in general and the novel in particular? More, what could be the future of the novel, and more assertively, does it indeed have a future?

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) What were the developments in the novel in the last century? Give a summarised answer.

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**4.4 THE NOVEL IN THE PRESENT AGE**

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The answer to these questions is inherent in the above discussion and all important aspects of this query have been broadly touched. There are examples galore in the twentieth century which has witnessed large scale experimentation in the novel. Its range was widened in the twentieth century to include the psychological symbolical, impressionistic and such other representations of life within the body of the novel. In the nineteen forties and fifties, for instance, a writer like **Samuel Beckett** confronted drama and fiction writing with the question of meaning in social and human existence. He called literary writing (drama in particular) the writing of the absurd. Thus, it is that we write only to tell ourselves or find that

meaning does not reside in the social sphere. This is how the argument goes with the literary representation of the post-World War II period. The nineteen fifties and sixties were without doubt the years of disillusionment and despair. The novels of **Beckett**, (that were written a few years earlier), became subjects of discussion in the post World War II period and brought out the inefficacy of novel writing in the twentieth century.

Think also of the writer **Vladimir Nabokov** for whom the novel form served the purpose of negating the established parameters of novel writing and made the novel form in this context a vehicle of expressing anarchic human tendencies. The nineteen fifties and sixties were a background to this phenomenon. **Nabokov's** highly controversial novel *Lolita* challenged everything existing in the contemporary ideological sphere, the writer lashing out at the oppressive moral structures of the family and parentage. For **Nabokov**, these structures had an important psychological dimension where a different kind of human being, raw and undifferentiated, lived. Conversely, however, *Lolita* became a highly moralist comment on the way things were unfolding in the twentieth century world. **Nabokov** also devised a new method of creating blank spaces within a crowd of descriptions where nothing related to anything and the representation only became a challenge to the meaning seeking reader.

Of course, things didn't stop here. The nineteen seventies and eighties saw a totally different kind of fiction writing, from a centre that had hitherto remained only a point of margin, away from where the determining forces of the day operated. What I mean by the centre here is the position of the discerning author who situates herself/ himself away from the dominant power. To be still more explicit, the fiction writing of these decades ceased to be Europe-centric because of which a clear rupture occurred in novel writing, in fact, with the entire tradition of the European-American fiction. Generally speaking, this phenomenon is associated with postcolonial and postmodern writing.

Since, we see the novel as essentially preoccupied with subtler aspects of feelings and emotions, we realise that a view of certain life-processes prevalent today would be highly useful. There emerges, in the midst of poverty and squalor, for instance, a peculiar kind of resistance with the victims of the dominant order gaining awareness of their situation gradually. What is suggested is that no social situation is simplistic and uni-dimensional where oppression is taken to be an unchanging fatefulness. In things that promote others and those that block certain ones runs a thread. It may be weak at places but contains in it the possibility of becoming strong. The certainty of an ongoing development in society preserves humans in hostile surroundings. Indeed, these life-processes are what are reflected in literature. In literature, we find the representation of the current system at work and the various approaches to life from various positions intertwine to finally become one with the evolving structures. It is not only the English or the French writings that constitute literature in the twentieth century, but there has been substantial contribution in the field of literature by writers from all over the world. There has been extensive works written by the former colonised. Let's take this up in some detail next.

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## 4.5 THE POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

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In this sense, what we get in the twentieth century is something new and extremely significant in the history of literature. The age was a witness to the democratisation

of literature. This is precisely why the twentieth century was to become a significant moment in the development of literary sensibility. The tyranny of the few (nations/ men), as it were, was undone in the latter half of the twentieth century by the assertion of the many (Nations/ Men) in the area of expression. Writing has become a world-wide possession after the independence of the colonised nations. There are writings from Latin America, Africa, South Africa, Australia, India and so on, expressing their pains and sufferings as well as points of view and their 'reality'.

Ours is a world of great upheavals and disturbances. Here is where we find views and thoughts being shaped. Latin America and Africa were the crucibles in which new ways of literary response were being forged. These countries and places had either already become independent or were moving towards that end. Writing thus, became, with independence, more accessible and open, to the whole world. Freedom in expression was one of the biggest achievements of the age. There was a whole range of interpretations of thought-processes in the twentieth century. This in a way made the world much more democratic in approach. The people of this new world would either be treated as equals or they would perish. However, there were also some problems and difficulties specific to the field of literary writing. It would indeed be useful to have a look at them and consider the 'necessities,' call them compulsions if you like, they create for the writer. This is more so in the case of the contemporary writer/ novelist surrounded as s/ he is by innumerable factors of living. I have indicated this in the previous parts of this discussion.

It should be stressed that a longer span of time in which a literary tendency can be placed should be carefully observed in critical discussion. What I have in mind at this point is that the first decade of the twentieth century had a 'past' that could hardly point towards the modernist trend in fiction writing. But the trend definitely came, as all of us know. Not only did the emphases change in literature but the related perspectives and attitudes shifted decisively towards mystery, uncertainty, unknowability, etc. There seemed to be no future at the time for the kind of writing **Dickens** or **George Eliot** had pursued in the period immediately preceding these years. But a sort of flowering of new creativity did occur in fiction. And yet, there remains a vital link of a writing trend with its immediate past. Here, we have followed this general process of understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the early twentieth century novel contained in it a great deal of the practice under the genre in question. From Fielding and Richardson through Austen, the Bronte sisters, Dickens, George Eliot and Hardy the novel form manifested numerous experiments, changes in strategies, etc. One particular change for us to consider was that around nineteen hundred this literary form began showing signs of separation, if not isolation, from the life in the midst of which it got shaped. This trend has continued ever since then till the nineteen seventies and eighties and may still carry on for reasons that are specifically historical and political. Also to be kept in mind is the fact that these reasons have not deterred the novel from performing its literary-cultural function. This point becomes relevant to our present discussion involving the future of the novel. Shall we not call this the success of the genre, its enduring importance and gritty nature? We get a clue to the overall issue of this Unit from the fact that challenges and difficulties posed by ideological-cultural circumstances only makes the fiction of the period more valuable with respect to the grasping of contemporary reality.



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## 4.6 THE FUTURE OF THE NOVEL

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Do we visualise in the case of the novel the same kind of decisive break with its past at the dawn of the twenty-first century as seen in the beginning of the twentieth century? We observe that a deep current moves today against the novel. It is sought to be replaced by 'popular fiction' on the one side and journalistic writing on the other. Both exploit the sense of suspense and curiosity around ordinary questions of interest. Still further, the sociological aspect of the novel - it was called a documentary form since it adhered to the common details of existence and sought to capture the warp and weft of life in their immediate surroundings. The sociological novel in our context has been made redundant by long descriptions of cultural and social life in historical writings.

In the very first decade of the twenty-first century, however, what has been witnessed is an anti-novel current. This means that the twenty-first century seems in some ways to be departing from the literary traditions followed in the last three centuries. The new opinion gives weight to direct statement and a first-person analysis of trends. According to this opinion, the thinker/ philosopher/ writer should express only that which one perceives in the given environment since that makes more sense than an 'artistic' visualisation of a phenomenon. A number of arguments can be marshaled in support of this view that we can consider in brief here. For instance, the form of the novel is seen as a passive form of expression by the writers of the new age - the expression says and does not say anything. The author may not take responsibility for what one has written under the pretext of offering an imagined, not an actual reality.

**V S Naipaul**, the famous novelist of the post World War II era, had said that the new millennium calls for a kind of writing that deals with things head on, without softening their edges. Facts are, what Naipaul had come to pin his hopes on in the changed scenario marked by experiment, innovations and descriptive shufflings. As we observe the phenomenon, we also notice that 'the common reader' (**Virginia Woolf's** term, a novelist herself) is more interested today in pop fiction that helps one to kill time and take care of boredom. Pop fiction leaves no trace of the 'effect' of the work after another novel has been read. It is possible that in a cumulative way, pop fiction bolsters biases and prejudices, racial or national, but the individual work of pop fiction does little in terms of helping the reader re-look and examine one's stock responses. Contrast this with the fact that the so-called serious novel is a subject for serious consideration by a specialist reader and interpreter who engages with the task of decoding the hidden meaning or message, if any, in the work of fiction.

Deconstruction, the reigning doctrine of the contemporary period, has blurred distinctions between fiction and non-fiction as well as between the said and not-said. Compare this with 'novel proper' with its eighteenth or nineteenth century counterpart that brought about changes in people's responses and attitudes. There seems no scope today for a Fielding, **Balzac**, **Tolstoy** or a Hawthorne novel to hold a mirror up to the reality of our times. Thus, it is believed that the form of the novel has become seriously deficient in the twenty-first century. Under such general apprehensions and misgivings, Naipaul had announced the death of fiction.

Do we agree with all this and stop assigning importance to the novel? Do we accept the argument that the novel form has outlived its utility and is thus, to be replaced by a straightforward expression of thoughts, feelings and emotions as happens, for instance, in a travelogue, biography/ autobiography, long short essay, a series of firsthand accounts of happenings, etc? To state in another way, is responsible journalism the answer to novel writing?

We notice here that the argument about novel writing has shifted from offering a narrative to the reader to telling her/him directly what the author wishes to convey about one's world. In this, there seems to be an over-emphasis on performing a socio-political role on the individual author's part - there seems to be an unseemly haste to leave a mark on the community of readers that are ready to be convinced by the author's offering of opinion or advice. For such a role, literature already has the essay form. In fact, the essay form and the novel form emerged almost simultaneously in nineteenth century Europe, particularly England. Still more, the novel initially combined the essay and the narrative in such a manner that it became a virtual 'class room' for the reader, a literary institution to make available to the audience fresh views, norms and responses juxtaposed with one another as well as with the entrenched ones in the minds of the audience. It is only later that novels were seen as drifting away from views, pronouncements and analyses and focusing exclusively on the experiential aspects of life. Indeed, the novel form has gone through a host of phases and stages to finally reach the situation we confront today.

But what we see as 'the situation' is only half the story. If, the crisis of the novel form is so acutely visible in the literature of western Europe and America, the same is not the case with the rest of the world. It would be interesting to compare the modernist crisis in the European novel to the emergence of the novel form in the languages of the many colonies at the time when they resisted the imperialist political pressures through nationalist struggles. **Tagore** (*Bangla*) and **Premchand** (*Hindi*) in India could hardly be accused of writing crisis novels in which the humans stood marginalised and indifferent in a capitalist world, victims of a fate over which they had no control. **Lu Hsun** used fiction and nonfiction equally well to promote the interests of social change in China in the first half of the twentieth century. The Russian novelist **Mikhail Sholokhov** truly underscored the dynamic nature of human behaviour, the gritty character of Russia's men and women against all odds in the wake of World War II. The Latin American novel seems perhaps the strongest answer to the charge of the novel form having outlived its utility. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, the so called postcolonial novel (Rushdie, **Coetzee**, **Mistry**, **Amitav Ghosh**) has made its mark as an uncompromising intervention in a complex world of conflicting discourses and identities. These and other novels may not answer questions to the satisfaction of readers, but they do confront us with difficult issues. Examples abound.

Precisely, it is this tension in our world caused by the clash of interests that brings along a space for analysis and self-reflexivity - we as sensitive citizens wish to see the factors that work behind the tension in question and exert our mind to that ends at the same time we turn towards our own role in the larger happenings of the day. After all, it is our collective opinions and attitudes that finally decide the fate of our social environment. Isn't it interesting that the already existing centres of power know the potentialities of such collective opinions and

spare no efforts themselves to execute what **Noam Chomsky**, one of the greatest libertarians in our midst today has called the “manufacture of consent?” Our tension-ridden world presents before the writer of the novel as for the ordinary citizen the challenge of seeing through this game of “manufacture of consent,” being played in crude and subtle ways. What we have noted as the endeavour of postcolonial fiction writing is one example of this challenge. Rushdie, Coetzee and others constantly remind us that the modern reader and observer has remained under attack since World War II which (the attack) has its roots in the interests of the *status quo* - let things remain as they are or the perilously balanced world will fall like the proverbial nine pins. I am not suggesting that the postcolonial writer shows clear commitment to shaking up the present scenario and letting the reader know things as they actually stand. Far from it! What I say is that this writing trend in the novel form reflects the crisis of the modern ideological-political arrangement and makes a space for the justice-seeking egalitarian interests to comprehend and be active in. The novel of today can perform this fascinating talk. Whether it does better to the state of affairs or not is a separate question and should be addressed at another level. The important aspect is that this clash of perspectives gives an opportunity to the observer for retrospection and enquiry into the present literary form.

Indeed, this way of thinking is a break from the traditional literary form. As always, the novel form has to resort to experimentation and innovation in a big way so as to meet the requirements of the audience to who’s vital interest it has remained committed since its origin. It may provide in future a different way of approaching and interpreting life. At an abstract level, it can be said that a form may gradually weaken and disappear if the spirit that keeps it alive remains no more active to sustain it. In this sense, a rejection of one form or genre includes a building up of a different set of preferences and conditions for a new form in writing. This in a way provides freedom to those who wish to explore unknown territories in writing. In this way, the theoretical attempt to reject the novel in the twenty-first century may be seen as an act of approaching literature and life in a different fashion. Nevertheless, these are questions that cannot be answered straight away (which the century itself will answer in due course of time) but they are significant questions which must be raised even before this new genre is adopted and fiction is rejected.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Does the novel have a future at all in the present century?

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## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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At the end, let us quickly go over a few related things. Firstly, facts, straightforward views and responses in themselves may not be adequate enough to present the true face of life and conditions surrounding us. If we look back in time, fiction performed the role of taking into account not merely incidents and events but also situations that project life in its complexity. Thus, the idea of realism central to fiction could also be interrogated keeping in view the demands of the twenty-first century world.

Secondly, conditions and situations in their stark form could take us away from what we call an objective view. The traditional novel form may take us so close to the happenings of life, (this has happened in the naturalist novel of the nineteenth century), that we are unable to grasp the forces at work beneath the surface. For us to make sense of the problems confronting us, the novel form has to effect 'alienation' from our surroundings that we consider developments with wakefulness and detachment. This forces us to examine our own approach to the novel under which we expect it to 'tell' us about ourselves. It may also turn out that more important than the act of 'telling' in the novel is to 'de-stabilise' our complacent selves. The novel in the present form doesn't appear to be sufficiently equipped to do it for us. Hence, the outcry against the novel form!

Thirdly, fiction in the twentieth century has been multi-cultural and multi-lingual, particularly in the postcolonial period. This was a major shift in the paradigm. Fiction writing is no more a privilege of the western world. We have with us a major body of third world writing in the second half of the twentieth century. It is important to understand these two kinds of fiction to make an intelligent guess with regard to the future of the novel.

Within 20<sup>th</sup> century writing, a major concern has been nationalism. The idea of nationhood emerged strongly in the middle of the century. Such nationalist struggles have brought in their wake social identities of a different kind - rather restricted and narrow as compared with the broad human identity. In the formation of such identities, religious faiths, cults, rituals, whole cultural notions of peculiar celebratory activities have been emphasised to demarcate one community from other. Whereas there is a demand to modernise minds and attitudes, there is the counter-demand to preserve ethnicities and specific ways of life. All this gets subsumed under what we call nationalism with every country or nation voicing its concerns independently of other countries. Since the concept of nationalism has worked effectively against the forces of colonisation and liberated communities and nations in a number of cases, we call a stop at the present time to the use of terms such as the colonising or the 'colonised' nations - that is what the word 'postcolonial' has come to clearly suggest.

With the advent of new theories in the last few decades of the twentieth century, there has been a strong tide of instability in the realm of fiction. This instability has come mainly with theories of post-structuralism and deconstruction. This seems to have shaken the strong political ideologies such as, those of national assertion and anti-imperialist bias, newly found by the former colonies. The writers confronting this phenomenon seem baffled by a number of conflicting ideas submerged in their texts which were earlier considered to be under their conscious control. The large number of theories existing, about fiction, has resulted in a

sort of anarchy where one can get away with anything one wish to say about a literary work. Since everything can be questioned in this historical phase of ours, even ideas of freedom and independence are presented as suspect, questioned as they are by the new crop of theorists. In this scenario, not just words or phrases but gaps, pauses and silences are interpreted for their roles in projecting or hiding a supposed 'truth'. This is accompanied by the newly emerged view that the author is dead and the text is everything. Many a time, the conclusion is reached that every reader constructs his/her own text, suggesting in this way that perhaps even the text is dead. How far it is from the bleak future of the novel is a point we are compelled to consider.

Finally, fiction of late seems to have had a definite role to play with respect to focusing upon women's issues - whether it is the question of ills and evils of patriarchy or the cultural-ideological pressures that the modern social set-ups bring to bear on women. In many a case, such an attack on women's freedom and dignity has been captured as cutting across geographical, racial and political boundaries. Theoretically speaking, the concept of 'racial' boundary could be considered dubious and untenable, but in the case of women's suppression, it has existed since times immemorial and is therefore 'real'. It is recognised on a large scale that women are persecuted simply because they are women and not that they are wrong, unjust or violate social norms. There is an in-built feeling of inadequacy in women for reasons of long-term suppression in history. Not only does the morale of women remain low, their very responses, social and even linguistic, show signs of self-created guilt and inferiority. It is heartening to see that in a greater part of the second half of the twentieth century, women's writing, particularly their fiction and semi-autobiographical prose pieces, has infused a new sense of purpose and urgency into the literature of our time. Thus, whereas the novel as an overall genre and form has entered new problematic areas defying comprehension, the women's part of fiction writing has unraveled hitherto, unknown aspects of the suppressed self. Add to this the tendency among a host of women novelists of the contemporary period to those significant political issues have been chosen for depiction as a rare case of committed literary intervention. Important examples of this are the writings of **Maria Campbell**, **Nadine Gordimer**, **Margaret Atwood**, etc. who in their different ways have underlined the need to oppose audacious male behaviour vis-à-vis women. Nor have these women writers fought shy of naming ideological and political centres of power. Their engagement sometimes goes deep enough to assert the importance of people's mobilisation against oppressive state structures. This is a far cry from the highly vague and uncertain fictional representations of most European writers, invariably white males.

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## 4.8 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

Read Section 4.1 carefully before writing your answer.

### Check Your Progress 2

Read Section 4.3 and then frame an answer

### Check Your Progress 3

Read Sections 4.5 and 4.6 before writing out your answer.

## 4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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