
UIDLC

# ENG 211
## Forms of Literature I: Prose Fiction

Course Manual

Ayobami Kehinde

# Forms of Literature I: Prose Fiction

## ENG211

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
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**Vice-Chancellor's Message**

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.

Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

## Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for "Liberty and Development" for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

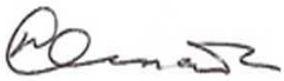
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre's provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.



Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

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# Table of Contents

# About this course manual

Forms of Literature I: Prose FictionENG211 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centreare structured in the same way, as outlined below.

## How this course manual is structured

### The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

### The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

# Your comments

After completing Forms of Literature I: Prose Fiction we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

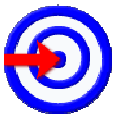
Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

# Course Overview

## Welcome to Forms of Literature I: Prose FictionENG211

In this course, we shall explore the main kinds of prose fiction, paying particular attention to the novel, novella and short story as sub-genres, their basic themes and main features and conventions. We shall also examine several kinds of prose fiction – short story, novel and tale– focusing on the personal and social dimensions of narrative. Emphasis will be on the development of a critical vocabulary for discussing such aspects of fiction as the role of the narrator, irony, point of view, plot, character, romance and realism. The major aim of the course is to acquaint you with the distinguishing features of prose fiction, its nature, forms, and basic elements. It also aims to introduce you to the basic skills in analysing a prose fiction text. Thus, through this course, you should be familiar with the basic knowledge in dissecting short stories, novellas and novels.

## Course outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of Forms of Literature I: Prose FictionENG211 you will be able to:

- distinguish between non-fictional prose and fictional prose;
- classify prose fiction according to length, themes and issues;
- discuss the origin, growth and development of the novel, with emphasis on major writers, thematic preoccupations, innovations and the like;
- highlight and discuss the elements of prose fiction;
- list and discuss the major conventions in prose fiction;
- discuss the thematic preoccupations of any given prose fiction text; and
- point out the style and techniques of any given prose text.

# Timeframe

**How long?**

This is a 15 week course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

# How to be successful in this course

As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

We recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web. A few suggested links are:

- http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/resources/studyskill.pdf

  This is a resource of the UIDLC pilot course module. You will find sections on building study skills, time scheduling, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and memory skills ("remembering").
- http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter_march13_how_to_self_study.html

  This site provides how to master self-studying, with bias to emerging technologies.
- http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php

  Another "How to study" web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing ("hands-on" learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to www.google.com and type "self-study basics", "self-study tips", "self-study skills" or similar phrases.

# Need help?


**Help**

As earlier noted, this course manual complements and supplements ENG211at UI Mobile Class as an online course.

You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

**Distance Learning Centre (DLC)**
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55
(Student Support Officers)
Email: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

**Head Office**
Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose, Ibadan.

**Information Centre**
20 Awolowo Road, Bodija,
Ibadan.

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please send mail to webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng

# Academic Support


**Help**

A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at onlineacademicsupport@dlc.ui.edu.ng

# Activities

**Activities**

This manual features "Activities," which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. When completing these activities, you will demonstrate your understanding of basic material (by answering questions) before you learn more advanced concepts. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is correct.

# Assessments

**Assessments**

There are three basic forms of assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs), and tutor marked assessment (TMAs). This manual is essentially filled with ITQs and SAQs. Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual. You will receive your TMAs as part of online class activities at the UI Mobile Class. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2 weeks expected duration.
Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

# Bibliography

**Reading**

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

# Getting around this course manual

## Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to "signpost" a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  Activity |  Assessment |  Assignment |  Case study |
|  Discussion |  Group Activity |   Help |  Outcomes |
|  Note |  Reflection |  Reading |  Study skills |
|  Summary |   Terminology |  Time |  Tip |

# Study Session 1

# Distinguishing Features of Non-Fictional Prose

## Introduction

There are two categoriesof prose literature: non-fictional prose and fictional prose. This Study Session will focus on non-fictional prose. Specifically, we will examine features of non-fictional prose and its types.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1.1 *discuss* autobiography and *differentiate* it from fake autobiography
1.2 *contrast* autobiography and memoir
1.3 *define* biography and give examples

**Categories of Prose Literature**

Prose literature can be categorized into two: non-fictional prose and fictional prose. Non-fictional prose is the branch of literature comprising narratives dealing with facts and reality, such as biography, history, and the essay (opposed to fiction and distinguished from poetry and drama). In other words, non-fictional prose refers to narratives which are factual or true; it deals with an account of real life or event. Examples of non-fictional prose include autobiography and biography.

## 1.1 Autobiography

**Autobiography**A true story a person writes about his or her own life

**Autobiography** is the story of a person's life written by him- or herself. It embraces a number of forms including memoirs, diaries, and letters, but the form proper usually involves the interaction of character and external events over a substantial span of a person's life.

Autobiographical works are by nature subjective. The inability—or unwillingness—of the author to accurately recall memories has in certain cases resulted in misleading or incorrect information. Some sociologists and psychologists have noted that autobiography offers the author the ability to recreate history. Victims and opponents of totalitarian regimes have been able to present striking critiques of these regimes through autobiographical accounts of their oppression. Among the more

renowned of such works are the writings of Primo Levi, one of many personal accounts of the Shoah. Similarly, there are many works detailing atrocities and malevolence of Communist regimes (for instance, Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope against Hope*).

**Hint**

Stories presented in autobiographies are largely manoeuvrable, though true. They involve a recreation of history.

Until recent years, few people, without some genuine claim to fame, wrote or published autobiographies for the general public. With the critical and commercial success in the United States of such memoirs as *Angela's Ashes* and *The Color of Water*, however, more and more people have been encouraged to try their hands at this genre. This trend has also encouraged fake autobiographies, particularly those associated with '*misery lit*,' where the writer has allegedly suffered from being a part of a dysfunctional family, or from social problems, or political repression. A notorious recent example is *Fragments* (1995) by 'BinjaminWilkomirski'(Bruno Grosjean).

The term "fictional autobiography" has been coined to define novels about a fictional character written as though the character were writing their own biography, of which Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is an early example. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is another such classic, and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is a well-known modern example of fictional autobiography. Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is yet another example of the fictional autobiography, as noted on the front page of the original version. The term may also apply to works of fiction purporting to be autobiographies of real characters, for instance, Robert Nye's *Memoirs of Lord Byron*. Examples also include Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom;* OlaudahEquaino's*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of OlaudahEquiano, or GustavusVassa the African*, and *Awo: An Autobiography of Chief ObafemiAwolowo.*

**Note**

There are fake autobiographies, in which the author writes a fictional story but makes it appear as if the major character is writing his/her own story.

# 1.2 Memoir

**Memoir**A true story in which the writer gives detailed accounts of his/her participation in an event or accounts of a section of his/her life.

A **memoir** is slightly different in character from an autobiography. While an autobiography typically focuses on the "life and times" of the writer, a memoir has a narrower, more intimate focus on his or her own memories, feelings and emotions. A memoir is a form of autobiography that subordinates the author's personal life to the public events in which he or she has participated. In some cases, as in Simon de Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, the public 'event' is the representative character of the life- in de Beauvoir's case, the degree to which the early life typified the upbringing of a young girl in her time. More usually, the form serves as a vehicle for a personal account of specific public events. An example

is *Present at the Creation,* the memoirs of Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State during the establishment of the United Nations and the conduct of the Korean War. Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood, Isara: A Voyage Around Essay, You Must Set Forth at Dawn* and *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* are examples of memoir.

Memoirs have often been written by politicians or military leaders as a way to record and publish an account of their public exploits. One early example is that of Leonor López de Córdoba (1362–1420) who wrote what is supposed to be the first autobiography in Spanish. The English Civil War (1642–1651) provoked a number of examples of this genre, including works by Sir Edmund Ludlow and Sir John Reresby. French examples from the same period include the memoirs of Cardinal de Retz (1614–1679) and the Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755).

Tip

An autobiography presents a person's whole life story while a memoir presents just sections of a person's life. Autobiography is broad while memoir is narrow.

# 1.3 Biography

**Biography**A true story a person writes about another person's life.

A **biography** is a detailed description or account of someone's life. More than a list of basic facts (education, work, relationships, and death), biography also portrays the subject's experience of those events. Unlike a profile or curriculum vitae (résumé), a biography presents the subject's life story, highlighting various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of experience, and may include an analysis of the subject's personality. Biographical works are usually non-fiction, but fiction can also be used to portray a person's life. One in-depth form of biographical coverage is called legacy writing. Biographical works in diverse media—from literature to film—form the genre known as biography. Akin Omoboriowo's*Awoism: Select Themes on the Complex Ideology of Chief ObafemiAwolowo*is an example of biography. Vincent Carretta's*Equiano, the African: The Biography of a Self Made-Man* is also a biography.

## Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the major types of non-fictional prose: autobiography, memoir and biography; we also highlighted their fundamental features. We noted that autobiography is a true story a person writes about his or her own life, that memoir is a true story in which the writer gives detailed accounts of his/her participation in an event or accounts of a section of his/her life and that biography is a true

story a person writes about another person's life.

# Bibliography

Reading

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# Study Session 2

# Features and Functions of Prose Fiction

## Introduction

Prose fiction has some features which distinguish it from other genres of literature. It also has some functions which make it a quintessential genre of literature. In the main, it is a narrative work that deals with events that are imaginative, rather than factual. It is moment-by-moment narration of events that are not verifiable. Among its numerous functions are teaching morals, entertainment, cultural propagation, and the like. In this Study Session, we will highlight, discuss and exemplify some of the fundamental features and functions of prose fiction

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
2.1 *explain* the concept of prose fiction.
2.2*highlight* the features of prose fiction and illustrate with apt textual samples.
2.3 *discuss* the functions of prose fiction.

## 2.1 Explaining Prose Fiction

**Fiction** a story about imaginary people and lives.

Prose fiction is the form of any narrative or informative work that deals, in part or in whole, with information or events that are not factual, but rather, imaginary — that is, invented by the author. Although **fiction** describes a major branch of literary work, it may also refer to theatrical, cinematic or musical work. Fiction contrasts with non-fiction, which deals exclusively with factual (or at least, assumed factual) events, descriptions, observations, and the like, (such as biographies, autobiographies, and histories).

Fiction also refers to narrated stories that are drawn from the imagination or are an imaginative reworking of actual experiences. Incidents and details in a work of fiction can originate in fact, history, or everyday life, but the characters and events as a whole are primarily invented, or altered, in the author's imagination. Imaginative fiction (like movies) varies widely in type, from fast-paced adventures that focus on action to stories that examine characters and ideas in depth; they can be told at great length (novels or epics) or more briefly (novellas or short stories).

As a prose-fictional work, a short story is a relatively brief fictional narrative in prose that often focuses on the essential aspects of a character (instead of showing character development over time, the way a novel

can) and on a single event or episode – often a life-changing circumstance. It is characterized by careful, deliberate craftsmanship (in handling of plot, characterization, and point of view). Short stories may explore the complexities of life and people; they lead us to interact imaginatively with significant human issues; they offer us an opportunity to expand our understanding of ourselves, others, and the multiple cultures we find ourselves living with and within. Writers of short stories are widely respected by other writers, scholars, and general readers for the way they handle the techniques of fiction, for their insights into people, their values, their experiences, and their cultures.

What are your own stories? What books and movies do you love? What television shows do you follow? The stories that you own, that you love, may incline toward realism, or science fiction, or romance – each of us is different, with individual tastes. Almost all of us however, are drawn towards stories of some sort. What is it about stories that draw you into their world, which makes you not want to put the book down or miss the time the show is on, or want to rent the DVD a third and fourth time? We know that what we are reading or watching is not factual. These are made-up characters doing imaginary things. Yet we become deeply involved or interested in their lives. We begin to think about the characters as if they are real, and we care about what happens to them. Why do we begin to sympathize deeply with a grieving mother or delight in the achievements of a college sophomore, neither of whom actually exists? The answer to these questions must start with the impressive power of imagination — with the way our imaginations respond to the imaginative creations of excellent writers.

A story, considered broadly, is any account of a related series of events in sequential order, usually chronological order (the order in which they happened). Stories did not start out as something to be read: long before people read stories or watched them being acted out in plays, they listened to stories being told or sung. From ancient times, people gathered around fires in the evening for warmth and safety, they told stories to each other. Although we no longer need campfires for warmth and protection, the storytelling tradition of 'stories around the campfire' continues wherever people gather for companionship. Generation after generation of children around the world have said to parents, "Tell me a story."

Story, in this broad sense, includes events that are true or made up – an account of the invading of Normandy in World War II, the planning for the prom during your junior year in high school, or the landing of three-headed cyborgs in an Iowa cornfield (one or two African examples?). The account can be narrated (told by a storyteller) or dramatized (acted out in drama). It can be told in prose or verse.

## 2.2 Functions of Fiction


What is the value of reading stories?

Most important, perhaps, is the way fiction can take us outside of ourselves and through our imaginations enable us to enter other lives, other selves, other places and cultures, other feelings and experiences. All of us live limited lives. We want to see more, expand our range of experiences, and meet people whose lives are different from our own. That's why many people like to travel, and why many students want to go away to college. A story enables us, without leaving our chairs, to escape our boundaries and broaden our understanding and vision.

Author and literary critic C. S. Lewis explains the appeal of a story this way; "We seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. . . . We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own" (*AnExperiment* in *Criticism* [Cambridge University Press, 1961], p. 137). Fiction can do that. A story can mirror our own world, take us to a world that is not part of our daily experience, or create a world entirely new to us. To read fiction is to enter a place where you both disappear and find yourself – a place where, when you put the book down and look up, you feel even more yourself than you did before reading.

You have likely heard someone say, "Fiction? I don't read fiction. I want to read what's true." Fiction is not fact. It may contain facts, but it is still fiction. A literary scholar and a historian who were on a panel together were asked the difference between the two disciplines. The historian spoke about how important it was to get the facts correct in his work. The literary scholar then replied, "Yes. You deal with facts. I deal with truth." What was the literary scholar implying? Not that the historian wasn't searching for the truth within the facts, but that fiction is the embodiment of truth, at times factual truth, but always — if it is a fine work of fiction — the kind of truth that exists within, around, or beyond fact. This is a different kind of truth, the kind of truth that needs story to contain it, the truth of what it is like to live the facts, the kind of truth that exists and comes to life through what the writer 'makes up'.

In considering the purposes which works of fiction are supposed to fulfil, it will be of interest and value to note what some of the more prominent writers have said with regard to their reasons for practising the art. The more selfishly personal motives may be passed over quickly. Money and fame have been desired and welcomed by most authors, as by most men, but they help us little to an understanding of the purpose of literature. Yet there are some who have written with neither of these in view, like Jane Austen, who died leaving a considerable part of her work unpublished, and apparently without having sought to publish it. Since the motives of men are more usually complex than simple, it is a safe assumption that even those who have frankly written for a living, or who have acknowledged the lure of ambition, have had other things in view as well, and have not found profit or honour incompatible with deeper and more altruistic aims.

Let us review the functions of prose fiction according to some scholars.

**Functions According to Richardson**

Of these, the most commonly claimed is the moral improvement of the reader. No one has been more explicit about this than Richardson, whose preface to *Pamela* is characteristic enough to quote at length:

" If to divert and entertain, and at the same time to instruct and improve the minds of the youth of both sexes; If to inculcate religion and morality in so easy and agreeable a manner as shall render them equally delightful and profitable;

If to set forth, in the most exemplary lights, the parental, the filial, and the social duties;If to paint vice in its proper colours, to make it deservedly odious; and to set virtue in its own amiable light, and to make it look lovely;

If to draw characters with justness and to support them distinctly;If to effect all these good ends in so probable, so natural, so lively, a manner, as shall engage the passions of every sensible reader,and attach their regard to the story;

If these be laudable or worthy recommendations, the editor of the following letters ventures to assert that all these ends are obtained here, together.

In a similar vein, his *Clarissa Harlowe* is 'proposed as an exemplar to her sex', and is made as perfect as is 'consistent with human frailty'; her faults being put in chiefly lest there should be 'nothing for the Divine grace and a purified state to do'.

**Functions According to Fielding**

Fielding, though less verbose, is no less explicit. He claims for *Tom Jones* that "to recommend goodness and innocence hath been my sincere endeavour in this history," and that he has "endeavoured to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices." Of *Amelia*, he says: "The following book is sincerely designed to promote the cause of virtue." The frequent satirical tone of Thackeray, as well as the nature of his analysis of human motive, testifies to his sharing Fielding's desire to drive men out of their follies and vices by ridicule and contempt.

**Functions According to Dickens**

Dickens characteristically combines the improvement of the individual with the reform of institutions. Of *Martin Chuzzlewit* he says: "My main object in this story was to exhibit in a variety of aspects the commonest of all the vices; to show how selfishness propagates itself, and to what a grim giant it may grow from small beginnings." Again, "I have taken every possible opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor."

**2.2.4 Functions According to Scott**

Scott's confession, "I write for general amusement," sounds more than humble. Yet he frequently repeats it. He hopes 'to relieve anxiety of mind', 'to unwrinkle a brow bent with the furrows of daily toil'. At times, he approaches the moral aim of his more serious brethren: 'to fill the place of bad thoughts and suggest better'; 'to induce an idler to study the history of his country'.

## Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we listed and discussed some of the fundamental features of prose fiction. We established the fact that it is a narrated art that is imaginative. That is, it is moment-by-moment narration of events that are not verifiable. Wehave also concluded that prose fiction performs some functions which include the teaching morals, entertainment, cultural propagation, language teaching, historical function, ethical function, and such like.

# Bibliography

**Reading**

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# Study Session 3

# Classification of Prose Fiction

## Introduction

Prose fiction can be classified into four major types, according to the length of discourse. These are: Flash Fiction, Short Story, Novelette/Novella and Novel. While flash fiction is the shortest form of prose fiction, the novel is the longest. In this Study Session, we will explore the four forms of prose fiction.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
3.1 *discuss* the forms of flash-fiction
3.2 *highlight* the basic features of short story
3.3 *discuss* the term novella
3.4 *differentiate* short story from novella

## 3.1 Flash Fiction

**Flash fiction** The shortest form of prose fiction.

Other names for **flash fiction** include sudden fiction, micro-fiction, micro-story, 'short short', postcard fiction, prosetry and 'short' short story, though distinctions are sometimes drawn between some of these terms; for example, sometimes one-thousand words are considered the cut-off between 'flash fiction' and the slightly longer short story 'sudden fiction'.

The term "flash fiction" may have originated from a 1992 anthology of that title. As the editors say in their introduction, their definition of a 'flash fiction' is a story that would fit on two facing pages of a typical digest-sized literary magazine. Flash fiction has roots going back to Aesop's Fables, and practitioners have included Saadi of Shiraz (The Gulistan), BolesławPrus, Anton Chekhov, O. Henry, Franz Kafka, H.P. Lovecraft, Yasunari Kawabata, Ernest Hemingway, Julio Cortázar, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Fredric Brown and Lydia Davis. New life has been brought to flash fiction by the Internet, with its demand for short, concise works. e-zines and hypertext literary spaces offer writers a ready market for flash-fiction works. However, flash fiction is also published by many print magazines. Markets specializing in flash fiction include Smoke Long Quarterly, Flash Fiction Online, and Vestal Review. The 365 Tomorrows project has published a new piece of flash fiction daily since 2005. The Micro Award, created in 2007, is the first award dedicated solely for flash fiction.

One type of flash fiction is the short story with an exact word count. Examples include 55 Fiction, the Drabble and the 69er. Nano-fictions are complete stories, with at least one character and a discernible plot, exactly fifty-five words long. A Drabble is a story of exactly one hundred words, excluding titles, and a 69er is a story of exactly sixty-nine words, again excluding the title. The 69er was a regular feature of the Canadian literary magazine NFG, which featured a section of such stories in each issue. Short story writer Bruce Holland Rogers has written "369" stories which consist of an overall title, then three thematically related 69ers, each with its own title. Writer Mark Budman has written a novel-in-flashes. Author Katie Farris has written a short-short sequence, "BOYSGIRLS," in which individual short-shorts also form a larger narrative. Also, Bob Thurber's "Paperboy: A Dysfunctional Novel" utilizes a series of interwoven 'micro-chapters' to tell its story. Aesop's Fables can retrospectively be regarded as an early example of flash fiction.

## 3.2 Short Story

**Short story** is longer than a flash fiction and shorter than a novella.

A **short story** is a work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component parts, the types, and the various narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short story as well. It differs, for example, from the anecdote — the simple and unelaborated narration of a single incident — in that it organizes the action, thought and interactions of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot, which has a beginning and develops through a middle to sort of denouement at the end. As in the novel, the plot form may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric; the story is presented to us from one of the many available 'points of view', and it may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism, or naturalism (Abrams 1981: 176).

Madden (2008) describes the short story as a fictional work depicting one character's inner conflict or conflict with others, usually having one thematic focus. Short stories generally produce a single, focused emotional and intellectual response in the reader. Novels, by contrast, usually depict conflicts among many characters developed through a variety of episodes, stimulating a complexity of responses in the reader. The short story form ranges from 'short shorts', which run in length from a sentence to four pages, to novellas that can easily be 100 pages long and exhibit characteristics of both the short story and the novel. Because some works straddle the definitional lines of these three forms of fiction—short story, novella and novel—the terms should be regarded as approximate rather than absolute.

The short story has traditionally featured predictable plot formulas, stock characters and conflicts, and superficial treatment of themes. A short story is a work of fiction that is usually written in prose, often in narrative format. This format tends to be more pointed than longer works of fiction, such as novellas (in the 20th and 21st century sense) and novels. Short story definitions based on length differ somewhat, even among professional writers, in part because of the fragmentation of the medium into genres. Since the short story format includes a wide range of genres

and styles, the actual length is determined by the individual author's preference (or the story's actual needs in terms of creative trajectory or story arc) and the submission guidelines relevant to the story's actual market. Guidelines vary greatly among publishers.

Many short story writers define their work through a combination of creative, personal expression and artistic integrity. They attempt to resist categorization by genre as well as definition by numbers, finding such approaches limiting and counter-intuitive to artistic form and reasoning. As a result, definitions of the short story based on length splinter even more when the writing process is taken into consideration. Authors such as Charles Dickens, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Nathaniel Hawthorne, Virginia Woolf, BolesławPrus, Dino Buzzati, Rudyard Kipling, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, P. G. Wodehouse, H. P. Lovecraft and Ernest Hemingway were highly accomplished writers of both short stories and novels.

Short stories have their roots in oral story-telling traditions and the prose anecdote, a swiftly sketched situation that quickly comes to its point. With the rise of the comparatively realistic novel, the short story evolved as a miniature version, with some of its first perfectly independent examples in the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann. Other 19th-century writers well known for their short stories include Nikolai Gogol, Guy de Maupassant, and BolesławPrus. Some authors are known almost entirely for their short stories, either by choice (they wrote nothing else) or by critical regard (short-story writing is thought of as a challenging art). An example is Jorge Luis Borges, who won American fame with "The Garden of Forking Paths", published in the August 1948 Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Another example is O. Henry (author of "Gift of the Magi"), for whom the O. Henry Award is named. American examples include Flannery O'Connor, John Cheever, and Raymond Carver.

Short stories have often been adapted for half-hour and hour radio dramas, as on NBC Presents: Short Story (1951–52). The art of storytelling is doubtlessly older than record of civilization. Even the so-called modern short story, which was the latest of the major literary types to evolve, has an ancient lineage. Perhaps the oldest and most direct ancestor of the short story is the anecdote and illustrative story, straight to the point. The ancient parable and fable, starkly brief narrative used to enforce some moral or spiritual truth, anticipate the severe brevity and unity of some short stories written today. Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually a short story focuses on one incident; has a single plot, a single setting, and a small number of characters; and covers a short period of time.

In longer forms of fiction, stories tend to contain certain core elements of dramatic structure: exposition (the introduction of setting, situation and main characters); complication (the event that introduces the conflict); rising action, crisis (the decisive moment for the protagonist and his commitment to a course of action); climax (the point of highest interest in terms of the conflict and the point with the most action); resolution (the point when the conflict is resolved); and moral.

Owing to their length, short stories may or may not follow this pattern. Some do not follow patterns at all. For example, modern short stories

only occasionally have an exposition. More typical, though, is an abrupt beginning, with the story starting in the middle of the action (in medias res). As with longer stories, plots of short stories also have a climax, crisis, or turning point. The endings of many short stories however, are abrupt and open and may or may not have a moral or practical lesson. As with any art forms, the exact characteristics of a short story will vary by creator. When short stories intend to convey a specific ethical or moral perspective, they fall into a more specific sub-category called parables (or fables). This specific kind of short story has been used by spiritual and religious leaders worldwide to inspire, enlighten, and educate their followers.

Determining what exactly separates a short story from longer fictional formats is problematic. A classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting, a point most notably made in Edgar Allan Poe's essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846). Other definitions place the maximum word count at anywhere from 7,000 to 9,000 words. As a point of reference for the science fiction genre writer, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America defines short story length in its Nebula Awards for science fiction submission guidelines as having a word count of less than 7,500. In contemporary usage, the term short story most often refers to a work of fiction no longer than 20,000 words and no shorter than one thousand (1,000). Stories with less than 1,000 words are sometimes referred to as 'short short stories', or 'flash fiction'.

Short stories date back to oral story-telling traditions which originally produced epics such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Oral narratives were often told in the form of rhyming or rhythmic verse, often including recurring sections or, in the case of Homer, Homeric epithets. Such stylistic devices often acted as mnemonics for easier recall, rendition and adaptation of the story. Short sections of verse might focus on individual narratives that could be told at one sitting. The overall arc of the tale would emerge only through the telling of multiple such sections. Fables, succinct tales with an explicit 'moral', were said by the Greek historian Herodotus to have been invented in the 6th century BCE by a Greek slave named Aesop, though other times and nationalities have also been given for him. These ancient fables are today known as Aesop's Fables.

The other ancient form of short story, the anecdote, was popular under the Roman Empire. Anecdotes functioned as a sort of parable, a brief realistic narrative that embodies a point. Many surviving Roman anecdotes were collected in the 13th or 14th century as the GestaRomanorum. Anecdotes remained popular in Europe well into the 18th century, when the fictional anecdotal letters of Sir Roger de Coverley were published. In Europe, the oral story-telling tradition began to develop into written stories in the early 14th century, most notably with Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron. Both of these books are composed of individual short stories (which range from farce or humorous anecdotes to well-crafted literary fictions) set within a larger narrative story (a frame story), although the frame tale device was not adopted by all writers. At the end of the 16th century, some of the most popular short stories in Europe were the darkly

tragic "novella" of Matteo Bandello (especially in their French translation).

**Hint**

Short story is not less than 1,000 words and not more than 20, 000 words. Flash fiction is not more than 1, 000 words.

# 3.3 Novella

**Novella** This is a mini novel.

A novella (also called a short novel or novelette) is a written, fictional, prose narrative usually longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. The English word "novella" is derived from the Italian word "novella", feminine of "novello" which means 'new'. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Nebula Awards for science fiction define the novella as having a word count between 17,500 and 40,000. Other definitions start as low as 10,000 words and run as high as 70,000 words. The novella is a common literary genre in several European languages. Famous English language novellas include John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, George Orwell's Animal Farm, Anthony Burgess's A Clockwork Orange, Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Sailor, Truman Capote's Breakfast at Tiffany's, Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, H.G. Wells' The Time Machine, Philip Roth's Goodbye, Columbus, Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Jack Kerouac's The Subterraneans and Stephen King's Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption.

Structurally, a novella has generally fewer conflicts than a novel, yet more complicated ones than a short story. The conflicts also have more time to develop than in short stories. They have endings that are located at the brink of change. Unlike novels, they are not divided into chapters, and are often intended to be read at a single sitting, as the short story, although white space is often used to divide the sections. They maintain, therefore, a single effect.

The novella is generally not as formally experimental as the long story and the novel can be, and it usually lacks the subplots, the multiple points of view, and the generic adaptability that are common in the novel. It is most often concerned with personal and emotional development rather than with the larger social sphere. The novella generally retains something of the unity of impression that is a hallmark of the short story, but it also contains more highly developed characterization and more luxuriant description. The idea of serialized novellas dates back to the One Thousand and One Nights, also known as the Arabian Nights, from around the 10th century. The novella as a literary genre later began developing in the early Renaissance literary work of the Italians and the French — principally, by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), author of The Decameron (1353) — one hundred novelle told by ten people: seven women and three men, fleeing the Black Death by escaping from Florence to the Fiesole hills in 1348; and also by the French Queen, Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), [aka Marguerite de Valois, et. al,

author of Heptaméron (1559)—seventy-two original French tales (structured like The Decameron).

Not until the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries did writers fashion the novella into a literary genre structured by precepts and rules. Contemporaneously, the Germans were the most active writers of the Novella (German: "Novelle"; plural: "Novellen"). For the German writer, a novella is a fictional narrative of indeterminate length—a few pages to hundreds—restricted to a single, suspenseful event, situation, or conflict leading to an unexpected turning point (Wendepunkt), provoking a logical, but surprising end; Novellen tend to contain a concrete symbol, which is the narration's steady point. They are still famous now. This etymological distinction avoids confusion of the literatures and the forms, with the novel being the more important, established fictional form. The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig's (1881–1942) Die Schachnovelle (1942) (literally, "The Chess Novella", but translated in 1944 as The Royal Game) is an example of a title naming its genre. The novella is a fictional prose work that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. As a result of this, the novella shares the features of the short story and the novel. William and Holman define the novella as a short compact, broadly realistic tale. This they suggest gained popularity in the medieval period with Boccaccio's Decameron.

Tip

The novella is a fictional prose work that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. As a result of this, the novella shares the features of the short story and the novel.

**Distinguishing the Short Story and the Novella**

Although length is the obvious distinguishing feature which separates the novel from the short story and the novella, it is by no means the only one. The short story is normally read at one sitting – Edgar Allan Poe in fact suggested that this was a necessary feature of the short story. This makes the reading of a short story less reflective and more concentrated an experience; we rarely stop several times for prolonged thought in the middle of reading a short story. The short story typically limits itself to a brief span of time, and rather than showing its characters developing and maturing will show them at some revealing moment of crisis – whether internal or external. Short stories rarely have complex plots; again the focus is upon a particular episode or situation rather than a chain of events.

Thus, much of the skill of the short story writer has to be devoted to making characters appear three-dimensional in spite of the fact that we see them only for a very short period of time. In addition, care has to be taken to render atmosphere and situation convincingly. Very often, the short story writer will use something akin to shock tactics to make the reader think and respond: an unexpected ending, a dramatic unveiling, and a surprising twist of plot.

The *novella* is usually rather longer than a short story, and although it may be read at a single sitting, it most probably is usually not. Joseph Conrad's *Heard of Darkness* (first book publication 1902) can be seen as a classic novella, and any reader of this work will probably understand that the terms 'novel' and 'short story' seem somehow inappropriate to describe it. The novella has flourished far more in Germany than elsewhere, and theories of the novella are often considerate with particular reference to the German novella tradition. This apart, it does seem to be the case that the novella often has a dominant symbol or complex of symbols at its heart, and that it is this rather than the complexity of its plot that gives the novella its depth and significance.

The actual story of *Heart of Darkness* could be summarized in a few lines; whatever we read this work for, it is not for complexity of plot development. Instead, we need to pay attention to Conrad's use of symbol and image in the work, to the complexities of narrative technique (the 'tale within a tale'), and to the texture of the prose. The novella is dominated by the 'inner narrator', Marlow's, fascination with, and search for, the mysterious figure of Kurtz. Early on in the story, Marlow comes across a painting that Kurtz has executed:

> Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre - almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister.

We see here, (think, how a work lacking a complicated plot can be given a complex unity through the use of other means). The picture is one of a number of symbolic 'moments' in the work which draw various threads together in a masterly way. We note a relationship between the blindfolded woman carrying a lighted torch and those Europeans (including Kurtz) who have claimed that they are bringing light to Africa but who are actually 'going at it blind', either self – deceived or dishonestly plundering. We are reminded of Kurtz's fiancée – 'the Intended' – who we meet at the end of the tale and who is as blind metaphorically as the painted woman is literally. The references to light and blackness link up with a repetitive pattern of black — white images in the work which have an intricate relationship to sets of moral judgements indicated by Conrad in indirect ways.

The short-story and novella writer, in other words, does not just produce truncated novels. These different fictional genres require a different use of the resources of the writer of prose, and they should not be read or judged in the way that we read or judge a 500-page novel.

# 3.4 Novel

**Novel** A long work of prose fiction, containing a variety of characters and a complex plot.

A **novel** is a book of long narrative in literary prose. The genre has historical roots both in the fields of the medieval and early modern romance and in the tradition of the novella. The latter supplied the present generic term in the late 18th century. Further definition of the genre is historically difficult. The construction of the narrative, the plot, the way reality is created in the works of fiction, the fascination of the character study, and the use of language are usually discussed to show a novel's artistic merits. Most of these requirements were introduced in the 16th

and 17th centuries in order to give fiction a justification outside the field of factual history. The individualism of the presentation makes the personal memoir and the autobiography the two closest relatives among the genres of modern histories.

The term novel is now applied to a great variety of writings that have in common only the attribute of being extended works of prose fiction. As an extended narrative, the novel is distinguished from the short story and from the work of middle length called the novella/novelette; its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained and subtle exploration of character than do the shorter, more concentrated, modes (Abrams 1981: 119).

A novel is a fictional prose work with a relatively long and often complex plot, usually divided into chapters, in which the story traditionally develops through the thoughts and actions of its characters. The novel is often described as a long work of written fiction. Most novels involve many characters and tell a complex story by placing the characters in a number of different situations. According to William and Holman: 1996, the term novel is used in its broadest sense to designate any extended fictional narrative almost always in prose. In practice, however, its use is customarily restricted to narrative in which the representation of character occurs either in a static condition or in the process of development as the result of events or actions.

Because novels are long — generally two hundred pages or more with twenty thousand words or more—novelists can tell more richly detailed tales than can authors of briefer literary forms such as the short story. Many readers consider the novel the most flexible type of literature, and thus the one with the most possibilities. For example, writers can produce novels that have the tension of a drama, the scope of an epic poem, the type of commentary found in an essay, and the imagery and rhythm of a lyric poem. Over the centuries, writers have continually experimented with the novel form, and it has constantly evolved in new directions.

The word novel came into use during the Renaissance (14th century to 17th century), when Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio applied the term novella to the short prose narratives in his Il Decamerone (1353; Ten Day's Work). When his tales were translated, the term novel passed into the English language. The word 'novella' is now used in English to refer to short novels. In most European countries, the word roman is used rather than novel, thus linking the novel with the older romance, of which, in a sense, the novel is an extension. The conflict between the imaginative recreation of experience implied in roman and the realistic representation of the soiled world of common people implied in novel has been present in the form from its beginning, and it accounted for a distinction often made in the 18th and 19th centuries between the romance and the novel, in which the romance was the tale of the long ago, the far away, or the imaginatively improbable; whereas, the novel was bound by the facts of the actual world and the laws of probability.

The 19th century saw the flowering of the English novel as an instrument portraying middle-class society. Jane Austen produced novels of manners, and Scott created the historical novel and carried it to a high

point in the first quarter of the century. The great Victorian novelists – Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope ─ created vast fictional worlds loaded with an abundance of social types and arranged in intricate melodramatic plots. In Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, the last half of the century found writers, who, in differing degrees, applied some of the tenets of Naturalism.

Writers have pushed traditional literary boundaries so that the characteristics of many types of literature overlap, but looking at certain differences between novels and other literary forms can give readers a basic guide to the novel's distinctive traits.

Like the short story, the novel tells a story, but unlike the short story, it presents more than an episode. In a novel, the writer has the freedom to develop plot, characters, and theme slowly. The novelist can also surround the main plot with subplots that flesh out the tale. Unlike short stories, most novels have numerous shifts in time, place, and focus of interest. Like epic poetry, the novel may celebrate grand designs or great events, but unlike epic poetry it also may pay attention to details of everyday life, such as people's daily tasks and social obligations.

The actual term 'novel' has had a variety of meanings and implications at different stages. From roughly the 16th and 18th centuries, its meaning tended to derive from the Italian world '*novella'*, meaning 'a little new thing', 'tale', or 'a piece of news'. Now however, it is generally applied to a wide variety of writings whose only common attribute is that they are extended pieces of prose fiction. This assertion was made in J.A. Cuddon's*A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories* (1977). For a more factual and technical definition of 'the novel', we can turn to M.H. Abram *A glossary of Literary Terms* (1981). He opines:

> As an extended narrative, the novel is distinguished from the short story and from the work of middle length called the novelette; its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained and subtle explanation of character than do the shorter, more concentrated, modes (119).

Thus, Abrams distinguishes among the novel, the short story, and the novelette. He highlights some of the distinguishing features of the novel. The thrust of our subsequent discussion, therefore, centres on the diachronic survey of the development of the novel from its evolution to the present age.

## 3.4.1A Diachronic Survey of the Origin and Growth of the Novel

In this section, we will survey the origin and growth of the novel from the late 17th century to the present age. The exploration will, among many other things, focus on the major characteristic features, technical innovations, thematic thrusts and writers that have dominated and succeeding periods.

### The Early 'Picaro' Stage

The novel as we know it today has evolved from the early forms of literature, most especially the epic and the folk-tradition of different

**Picaresque** A novel about the adventures of an indigent character who sometimes lives on cunning.

peoples – Chinese, Indians, Arabs, the Greeks and the Romans. Also, in the list of these pre-texts to the novel are legends, myths, folktales and history of the several regions of the world. Therefore, some slight precedent forms of the novel have been identified by literary historians. Among these forms are the 'roman' and **picaresque** (picaro) narratives. In the 14th century, collections of 'roman', some serious, some scandalous were greatly in vogue. The best known of these collections, according to Walter Allen in *The English Novel* (1954), is Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The next important predecessor of the novel was the picaresque narrative, which emerged in 16th century Spain. David Crystal (1981) in his *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* however, sees the most popular instance of picaresque narrative as *Gil Blass* (1715); this was written by the French man, Algin Lesage. Picaresque was a derivative of 'Picaro' a Spanish word for 'rogue', and the subject of such narrative is basically the escapades of an "insouciant rascal who lives by his wits, and shows little if any alternation of character through the long succession of his adventures" (Holman, C.H. 1980: 110). A good example of picaresque is Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605).

From the foregoing preview, one can vehemently assert that the early novel was a celebration and idealization of adventures and man's relationship with God. Invariably, the focus was on the *author's class in the society*, the Aristocratic class. In fact, the absolute origins of the genre (novel) are obscure. But we can claim that the development of prose fiction seems to have attained a measure of certain stability in the *seventeenth century in Europe*. Although in the early 17th Century, there was still no major advance in prose narrative and the novel form, we could still find Mme de Lafayette's *La Princes de Cleves* (1678). E. Fourd's*Ornatus and Artesia* (1634), Mrs.AphraBehn's*Oroonoko (The Royal Slave)* (1634) and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).
In France, there was also D'Urte's pastoral romance, L'Astree (1607–26), which set a vogue satirized by Sorel in *La Berger Extravagant* (1627–8). Other 17th century novels are Trimakhio's*Satyricon* and Bunyan's *The Life and Death of Mr.Badman* (1680). It should be emphasized that Bunyan had an unerring sense of and appetite for the real. To the making of *The Pilgrim's Progress* went a lifetime of passionate observation of men and women. This is even more clearly apparent in *The Life and Death of Mr.Badman*. Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Life and Death* is a moral tract; its purpose is to describe the life and death of the ungodly, and of their travel from this world to hell. Unlike *Pilgrim's Progress* however, *The Life and Death* is not an allegory; rather it is a familiar dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Attention on the subject of their neighbour Mr.Badman.
Although the form of the early novels is clumsy, it is carried by the raciness and the absolute fidelity of the dialogue so that the impression Mr.Badman makes on high godly neighbours could hardly come through more strongly. Mrs AphraBehn's*Oroonoko* represents the first appearance of the idea of the noble savage. Walter Allen (1954) has also interpreted it as the fore-runner of all anti-imperialist or anti-colonial literature. *Oroonoko* was, in fact, a running adaptation of romance. It is replete with loves and inconvincible courage of heroes, heroines, kings and queens, mortals of the first rank and the like. It is a novel ornamented with lofty language, miraculous contingences and impossible

performances. Surprisingly, by the late 17th century and especially the early 18th century, something radical happened to the novel. The writers at this time (*Congreve, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne,* etc) jettisoned writing the texts that celebrated aristocracy. The emphasis was shifted to the masses (low life). The concentration was then on the ordinary folk, the common man, the 'plebeians', who hold no office. In fact, the emphasis was shifted from the subjects of honour, high class value, valour and greatness to the low life people.

The sudden change of focus was not fortuitous; rather, it was a result of many factors. Literature, like most art forms, has always been seen as performing a delectic/entertainment role in society. Thus, the focus was changed to suit the new variety of audience. The novel was then designed to suit the audience who needed fun and entertainment.

## Effects of Industrial Revolution

Also, the great geographical discovery and the industrial revolution as well as the activities associated with them, had a telling effect on European society. There was socio-economic mobility, in terms of greater wealth and greater urbanization (population density). This consequently encouraged a new life and a greater taste for entertainment in a wider variety. Also, wealth ceased to be concentrated in the hands of the nobility ─ the aristocrats. On the contrary, a new middle class emerged. This new class had economic power, in terms of either controlling the merchandise aspect of the economy or the industrial section. Thus, the 'nobles' or 'aristocrats' were no more economically powerful; and the society became democratic – there was power-sharing.

Another factor for the radical change in the outlook of the novel in the eighteenth century was the growth in education. The great discovery and the industrial revolution afforded the middle class the opportunities of awareness. This also encouraged social mobility. The lower class could then hold positions in government affairs. Also, education was extended to women who were mostly 'housewives' that depended on their husbands' wealth. They only attended social functions; so they had a lot of time for entertainment.

Actually, this type of audience encouraged the emergence of the new type of writing known as 'The Novel'. Therefore, we can claim that 'the novel' really emerged in the second decade of the eighteenth century.

Apart from the factors highlighted above, some other relevant factors also influenced the emergence of the novel. The boost in industrialization and inventions also encouraged the development of the novel. For instance, formerly, there were no publishing facilities. But with the development of typography, people could then create long narratives.

Again, the existence of public libraries influenced the emergence of the novel. People who could not afford private copies of the texts were able to read as many as they could in the public libraries.

Therefore, a new class of readers, as a matter of necessity, suggested a new form of the novel. There were radical changes in characterization, situations, settings and ideas. The thematic thrusts of the age were those of the problems of existence, class prejudices, economic constraints on life and other things that had direct bearings on people's lives.

Thus, in 1713, Congreve published *Incognita* (or *Love and Duty Reconciled*) but it was the publication of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 that marked the emergence of the novel. In 1722, he published *Moll Flanders*. From then on, the novel came of age and within another seventy years became a more mature form. In 1740, Samuel Richardson published the first novel of character – *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded)*. In 1748, he published *Clarissa Harlowe*. In 1742, Henry Fielding published *Joseph Andrews*, a critical romance. Two of his other novels are *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743) and *The History of Tom Jones* (1749). Tobias Smollett published *The Adventures of Rodrick Random* (1748) and *The Expedition of HumphryClinke* (1771); Laurence Sterne (1713–68) published *TristramShandy*(1760–67) and *A Sentimental Journey* and Mrs. Clara Reeve published *The Champion of Virtue* (1777). Other prominent writers of the period were Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Johnston and Robert Bage.

It should be stressed that the period was noted for picaresque novels (for example Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*). The novels are mostly sequence of episodes held together largely because they happened to one person. Also, the credit for having written the first English "novel of character" is nearly unanimously given to Samuel Richardson for his *Pamela* or *Virtue Rewarded* (1740). The period was also noted for epistolary novels; for example, Richardson's *ClarisaHarlowe*. The narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is one of the earliest examples of the Gothic novels. Other examples are William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786); Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Gregory's *The Monk* (1797). A very early instance of the propaganda novel is Robert Bage's*Harmspring or Man as He is Not* (1796). Also, Williams Godwin's *Caleb* is one of the earliest forms of the novels of pursuit.

**Dominant Novelists**

In the 19th century, significant changes that gave rise to new directions happened to the novel. The novel was not a static enterprise; there was an allowance for sensibilities. Thus, a lot had happened to the novel. In the early years of the century, two figures dominated English fiction: Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Scott was the greatest single influence on fiction in the century, and he was infinitely more famous than Jane Austen. Scott established the historical novel. He published *Waverley* (1814); *Guy Mannering* (1815); *Old Morality* (1816); *The Antiquary* (1816); *Rob Ray* (1817); *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818); *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819); *Ivanhoe* (1819); *Kenilworth* (1821), etc. Jane Austen was less prolific. Her major works are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811); *Pride and Prejudice* (1813); *Emma* (1815) and *Persuasion* (1818).

Some of the 'minor' novelists at the beginning of the period were John Galtz (1779-1839); Michael Scott (1789 – 1835); Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866); James Hogg; etc. Some early 19th century Irish writers were The Banim Brothers**,** Gerald Griffin, William Garleton, Samuel Lover, Charles Lever, etc.

The early Victorian period i.e. the middle years of the nineteenth century, witnessed the most astonishingly prolific output of fiction, especially from Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollop and William Thackeray. Other important novelists of this era were Benjamin Disreali, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Reade, Charles Kingsley, Samuel Butler, George Meredith, etc.

Among the major novelists of the latter part of the Victorian age were George Eliot, Meredith George and Thomas Hardy. Others were WilkieColdins, R.L. Stevenson and George Gissing.

Some notable 19th century, Russian novelists include Dumans Pere, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Gencharov and Leo (Lev) Tolstoy. Among the 19th century French novelists were Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Uvysmans, Anstole France and Honore Balzac.

The notable 19th century German novelists were Goethe, Wilhelm MeistersLehrjahre, Holderlin, Clemens and Brentano, Jean Paul, Hoffmann, Kleist, Ludwig Armim and Theodor Fontane.

After falling into desuetude in the 17th century, the Spanish novel was revived with some splendor in the 19th century. The dominating figures were Perez Galdo, Pereda, Alarcon and VincenteBlasco.

In America, the dominating figures were James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William D. Howell, Mark Twain and Henry James.

The twentieth century is, in fact, a prolific period for the novel. Among the pre-eminent novelists of the period are Arnold Benet, Graham Greene, Joyce Cary, E.M. Forster, Elizabeth Bowen, H.G. Wells and Joseph Conrad. Some of the twentieth century Canadian novelists are Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood and Mordecai Richler.

Also, writers with particular interpretative agendas require representational conventions; for example, in representing personal and social life under a system of apartheid, Nadine Gordimer, William Cloete, Alan Paton, and J.M Coetzee published many novels in South Africa. Majority of them preferred the 'journalistic' approach to the novel.

Among the West African novelists are Chinua Achebe, AyiKweiArmah, Kofi Awoonor, Festus Iyayi, SembeneOusmane, Mongo Beti and Wole Soyinka. The novels of these writers portray the excesses of the new black rulers of Africa, those who took up the reins of power at the exit of the colonialists, corruption in high places, social ills, such as prostitution and bribery, and the exploitation of the masses of the people by a select few.

East Africa can boast of many great novelists, the most prominent being NgugiwaThiong'o, MejaMwangi, Grace Ogot, Charles Mangua, Peter Palyango and Leonard Kibera. The East African novelists have become recorders of the social turbulence which they see around them.Among the 20th century American novelists are Ellen Glasgow, Upton Sinclair, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, James Cozzens, Richard Wright, and Thornton Wilder.

The notable 20th century French novelists are Andre Gide, Albert Camus and Julien Greco. Notable 20th century German novelists included Thomas Mann, Hans Fallada and Heinrich Boll. Again, some significant Italian novelists in the century are Pirandello, Mario Soldati and Natalia Ginzbirg. Furthermore, some modern Spanish novelists are Roman del Valle, PioBaroja and Camilo Jose Cela. Few modern Czech novelists are Franz Kafka, Capek and Hasek.

Among the reputable modern polish novelists are Ignacy Stanislaw Witkiewics, WitoldGombrowicz: TaduszKonwicki and Czeslaw Milosz. Some modern Hungarian novelists are JozsefLengyel and Laszlu Nemeth.

Moreover, among the modern Latin American novelists are Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Louis Sorges and Carol Fuentes. Modern Russian novelists include Maxim Gorki, Mikhail Bulgakov, Adrei Bely, M. Agegev and Nikolai Ostrovsky. And some modern Japanese novelists are Mori Ogai, NatsumeSoseki, ShimazakiToson, Nagai Kafu, CasunariKawabate.

## Dominant Themes and Traditions

During the Victorian period, the novel centred on current social, economic and intellectual problems – for example, the industrial revolution and its effects on the economic and social structure, rapid urbanization and the deterioration of rural England; massive poverty; growing class tensions; and pressures toward political and social reform; and the impact on philosophy and religious fundamentation of the theory of evolution. Thus, the period was that of conventions; there was conformity to those conventions. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), Scott's *Rob. Roy* (1817), Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Austen's *Waverley* are best examples of Victorian novels.

Also, the Victorian period was noted for the establishment of the historical novel; for instance, Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). It was also an age of the detective story; for instance Wilkie Collins' *Amavale*(1866). And the epic novel flourished in this period; for instance, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (18765 – 72) and *Anna Karenina* (1875 – 6).

The nineteenth century also witnessed a literary movement referred to as 'Realism'. This began with Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America. Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction: the romance is said to present life as we would have it. The realist is deliberately selective in his material and prefers the average, the commonplace, and the everyday over the rarer aspects of the contemporary scene. George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*(1874), Balzac's *Le Pere*; and Howells' *The Undiscovered Country* (1878) are some of the best examples of the realistic novels. Again, Huysman was commonly connected with the 19th century theories of aestheticism and the doctrine of art-for-art's sake. His *Arebours* (1884) and *Las Bas* corroborate this assertion. Anatole France is also renowned for the innovative use of irony and wit in his *L'Etui de nacrei*(1892).

The 20th century (modern age) novel reflects the rapid changes in the human nature. These changes are due to the influence of urbanization, greater wealth, education, social mobility, new form of entertainment, technological development and the far-reaching liberations for the individuality. There is freedom of experimentation; there is also new spirit of liberation and freedom. No wonder, Elizabeth Deeds Earmarth in her essay 'Contemporary Fiction' (1990) believes that any reader entering into the world of the novel will find an exhilarating lack of agreement among novelists. The idea of well-plotted novel is being interrogated. The plot now reflects the disorderliness in the Twentieth Century. John Orr (1990) in his article 'The Modernist Novel in the Twentieth Century', highlights the characteristic features of the twentieth-century novel:

> The concept of 'modernist' novel cues us in to the changing relationship of society and literary form in the twentieth century, to anomic and anonymous city life, to greater freedom and fragmentation, to a felt loss of community (619).

Thus, the period witnessed a lot of writers revolting against traditional literary norms. For instance, Joyce and Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that "would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it within a literary work to a lost order that was based on the

religion and myths of the cultural past" (Abrams, 109). Realism is a notable technical innovation of this period. For instance, Upton Sinclair's *Jungle* (1906); and Eric Maria Ramargue's*All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) reflect the twentieth century, which heralds the origins of all wrongs in the human will, and set on a programme of diagnosis and reform. The modernist and realist novels thematize pessimism, determinism, frustration, anger and corruption.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon of avant-garde (a military metaphor: "advance guard"), that is, a small, self conscious group and authors who undertake to make it new (cf. Abrams, 1981; Crystal, 1981 and Fowler, 1990). Avant-garde writers represent themselves as 'alienated' from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy – Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegan's Wake* are the best examples of avant-garde novels.

Among the most outstanding technical innovations of the 20th-century novel is the introduction of the stream of consciousness technique by Dorothy Richardson in her *Pilgrimage.* James Joyce also made a preponderant use of the method in *Ulysses.* In *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce pushed the stream of consciousness to its probable limits, and also experimented with language to a point where he seemed likely to transcend the limits of his medium. In fact, after Joyce, the novel was never quite the same again. His influence has been profound, and, as one of the greatest innovators, he has had many imitators, such as Fard Ford.

The essential point which needs to be made ultimately is that the novel has developed in form and ideology. Since the late 17th century to the present age, the novel has witnessed some technical innovations, shifts in thematic thrusts and rapid appearance of new writers.

## 3.4.2Types of Novel

This Study Session will discuss the classification of novel. We will also identify and discuss some of the types of the novel. For convenience in analyzing the forms of the novel, critics often place them in categories that encompass years of historical development.

### The Picaresque Novel

It is a form of novel that recounts the adventures of a picaro (Spanish for 'rogue'). It usually exhibits an episodic structure, in which the picaro moves from one situation to another. It generally satirizes the characters or societies it depicts. In this respect, the picaresque embodies a reaction to the social/cultural conflicts that arose in Spain (and the rest of Western Europe) as it shifted from a feudal to a monarchical society in the 16th century. Among other disruptions, the change created a class of vagabonds or beggars. The picaresque gave voice to this class, offering an outsider's view of society. Not only did the picaresque contribute significantly to the early development of the novel, it has had a continued life as a minor form in modern literature. Examples of the modern picaresque include such distinguished works as Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man*; Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth;* Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man;* Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March;* Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* Kingsley Anis'*Lucky Jim*, and Thomas Mann's *The Adventures of Felix Krull, Confidence Man.*

## The Historical Novel

This is a type of fiction in which a significant historical event or era serves as a backdrop to a story that may include fictional or historical characters, or a mix of both. A historical novel is fictional but has real [historical] spatial and temporal settings.Most historical novels conform fairly closely to the conventions of Romance rather than realism, although there have been exceptions to this rule, notably in Tolstoy's *War and Peace.*

The father of the historical novel is Sir Walter Scott, whose novels focus on Scottish history. His American counterpart, James Fenimore Cooper, whose*Leatherstocking Tales* won him worldwide fame, was the progenitor of the Western. Other 19th century masters of the form were Victor Hugo (*Notre Dame de Paris*) and Alexandre Dumas (*The Three Musketeers*).

In the 20th century, the popularity of historical fiction continues to be strong, as exemplified by Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, but a number of historical novels have made a larger demand on their reader's attention. Among these are two novels that penetrate the heart of the institution of slavery, William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

## The Regional Novel

It involves an especial focus of attention on the life of a particular, well-defined geographical region. Traditionally, the region in question is *rural* (not urban). A regional novelist, often, writes a number of books, all involving the same territory of place. Examples are Thomas Hardy's "Wessex" and William Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha country". Both of these 'regions' are closely modeled on particular areas of England and United States of America respectively.

## The Satirical Novel

It can be traced back to antiquity (that is, the tradition of satire which is independent of the novel). It attacks alleged vices and stupidities – either of individuals or of whole communities or groups. Its tools include ridicule, absurdity, exaggeration, mimicry and contempt. The concern is to draw reader's attention to what the novelist is attacking rather than creating characters, situations or events. It should be noted however, that not all novels that include distinctively satirical vein in their treatment of various characters are satirical. For example, war and the military can be diminished by making them appear ridiculous and vain. The satire must be unremitting and consistent.

## The Bildungsroman

This is otherwise known asErziehungsroman (Novel of Formation or Education). It is a German term for a type of novel that focuses on the development of a character moving from childhood to maturity. Sometimes known as the *coming of age* novel, the form usually charts a movement from innocence to knowledge. Prominent examples include Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,

Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, ChimamandaAdichie's*Purple Hibiscus*, and Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando.* The writer's interest is on depicting the close relationship between early influences and later character development. Its emergence can be traced to the late 18th and 19th Centuries interest in the young – the popular theme of 'the Child is Father to the Man'.

### Roman À Clef (Novel with a Key)

This is a French term for a novel in which actual, sometimes well-known people or institutions are presented with fictional names. Often associated with satire, the *roman a clef* is a frequent feature of satirical novels, such as Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved Ones*, a merciless look at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles, and Mary McCarthy's *The Oasis,* a satirical view of the New York Intellectuals. In more recent years, the form has been a regular feature in popular fiction, as in the novels of Jacqueline Susann. D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* are also good examples of the roman a clef.

### The Roman À Thèse / Tendenzroman (Thesis Novel)

This is a French term for a novel that advocates a specific position on a social or moral question. It is frequently used interchangeably with the term Protest Novel. Examples include John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath,* an indictment of the treatment of migrant labourers in the 1930s, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* a protest against the inhumanity of Soviet concentration camps. It has a thesis or argument underlying it. It seeks to encourage social reform or the correction of a particular abuse or wrong. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* are also examples of the *roman athese.*

### The Roman Noir / Gothic Novel

This is a type of fiction that employs mystery, terror or horror, suspense, and the supernatural for the simple purpose of scaring the wits out of its readers. The traditional setting, beginning with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto,* is a medieval, hence 'Gothic') castle, replete with secret passages, torchlit dungeons, and an occasional bat. The traditional plot, as in Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* involves a beautiful heroine beset by dark shadows, strange noises, and a candle that keeps blowing out. These early gothic novels aimed at instilling terror. Later examples of the form, such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk,* moved beyond terror to horror, invoking demons, ghosts, and other supernatural paraphernalia in gory and subliminally erotic detail.

The form maintained its popularity from the 1760s to the 1780s. During that time, it was imitated throughout Europe, influencing and being influenced by the age of Romanticism. Satirized by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, the form eventually fell out of favour, only to resurface in the 20th century as the Horror Fiction or Horror Film. One particularly memorable example of the form, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* is also regarded as an early progenitor of Science Fiction.

The fundamental features of Gothic fiction include the following:

- Predilection for the *wild*, the *uncanny*, the horrific (going back to the elements of the medieval period)
- Stock characters
- Situations and settings that still survive in the modern horror film, including glooming medieval settings, ancient castles with secret rooms and passages ruled over by a sinister nobleman tortured by a guilty secret, and a strongly supernatural element.

### The Roman-Fleuve

This is a series of sequence of novels which can be read and appreciated individually but which deal with recurring characters and/or common events, and form a sequence or complement one another. Examples include Balzac's *La ComedieHumaine*; Thomas Mann's tetralogy *Joseph and his Brothers*; John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* and Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

It is closely related to the so called saga novel – a series of novels about a large family each of which concentrates upon different branches of the family or different events in which it is implicated.

### Roman Feuilleton

A novel that is published in instalments in abridged form by a daily newspaper. It was common in the 19th century. In English newspapers, the term "feuilleton" instead came to refer to an instalment of a serial story printed in one part of a newspaper. The genre of the feuilleton in its French sense was eventually included in English newspapers, but was not referred to as a feuilleton.

### Science Fiction

This is a type of fiction based on future possibilities, derived from scientific discoveries. Chief among these have been interstellar travel, closely followed by stories dealing with the aftermath of nuclear war and environmental disasters, altered states of consciousness, extraterrestrial visitors to earth, and artificial intelligence. These and many other scenarios have contributed to the international popularity of the genre, both in its printed form and as dramatized on film and television.

The acknowledged forerunner of sci fi or Sf, as it is commonly, is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* in which a man-made monster suggests the possibility of scientific discovery going too far, taking on a God-like power that leads to disaster. The motif has always played a prominent role in science fiction. Another important precursor of the genre was Julie Verne, whose*Voyage to the Center of the Erath* and *Around the World in Eighty Days* introduced the theme of exploration through scientific technology.

But the true father of science fiction was H.G Wells, a trained scientist and an accomplished realistic novelist. Wells combined these skills in *The Time Machine,* with its depiction of travel through time; *The War of the Worlds,* the prototype of alien invasion fiction; and *The First Men on the Moon,* a prophecy fulfilled some 60 years later. Wells referred to these fictions as "scientific romances". The term Science Fiction was popularized in America by Hugo Gernsback, the editor of *Amazing Stories,* the first magazine devoted to science fiction. From its humble

origins as a form of Pulp Fiction in the 1920s, the genre gained increasing prestige with the contributions of writers such as Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) and C.S Lewis (*Out of the Silent Planet*).

Following World War II and the development of nuclear weapons, science fiction began to sound less like fantasy and more like realism, a fact that contributed to its great popularity. The Russian and American space programmes, along with the appearance of a number of gifted and skilled writers, only intensified the appeal. Among these writers were Arthur Clarke (*Childhood's End*), Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*), Robert Heinlein (*Starship Troopers*), Frank Herbert (*Dune),* Ursula K Le Guin(*The Left Hand of Darkness*), and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse Five*).

Recent innovations in the genre include Octavia Butler's *Kindred* , in which a 20th-century American black woman time travels back to the 1830s where she lives as a free black in a slave state, and William Gibson's *Necromancer,* which introduces cyberspace into the world of science fiction.

Among the features of science fiction are the following:

- Settings involving interplanetary travel;
- Advanced technology;
- Typically set in the future;
- Settings and events are often conceivable but not actual;

### Epistolary Novel

An epistolary novel is a novel written as a series of documents. The usual form is letters, although diary entries, newspaper clippings and other documents are sometimes used. Recently, electronic "documents" such as recordings and radio, blogs, and e-mails have also come into use. The word *epistolary* is derived through Latin from the Greek word πιστολή*epistolē*, meaning a letter. The epistolary form can add greater realism to a story, because it mimics the workings of real life. It is thus able to demonstrate differing points of view without recourse to the device of an omniscient narrator. Examples include Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter,* John Barth's *Letters* and Richardson's *ClarisaHarlowe.*

### The Nouveau Roman (New Novel)

This is a term referring to a post-World War II French literary movement designed to question the assumptions underpinning traditional Realism. Adherents of the New Novel argue the view that a novel should be lifelike and that its plot should unfold in a linear, sequential fashion. The emphasis in the new novel is on technical experimentation, self-consciousness, and the profound 'suspicion' that human experience is finally unknowable. This refusal to make any authorial claims of knowledge forces the reader to participate in the creation of the text's meaning by filling in the blanks of the story. In this respect, the new novel anticipated those developments in contemporary literature and criticism associated with Postmodernism.

Among the practitioners of the new novel, the best known are Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Jealousy),* Nathaniel Sarraute (*The Age of Suspicion),* and Robert Pinget (*Le Libera).*

### Meta-Fiction

This is fiction that calls attention to its own fictionality. The classic example is Laurence Sterne's *TristramShandy,* in which the narrator berates his reader at one point for failing to pick up on a clue that he had planted in a previous chapter. A prominent feature of Postmodernism, forms of metafiction appear in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire;* John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse;* Donald Barthelme's *Snow White;* Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler,* and A.S Byatt's*Possession.*

Literally, meta-fiction means fiction about fiction. It is the novel or short story which deliberately breaks fictive illusions and comments directly upon its own fictive nature on the process of composition. Its English father figures include Laurence Sterne's *TristramShandy*; and John Fowles's*The French Lieutenant's Woman.*

### Faction

The term comes from the American author, Truman Capote. It is a portmanteau word: FACT + FICTION (A blend of fact and fiction). Novelistic techniques are used to bring actual historical events to life for the reader. It is a work that is on the borderline between Fact and Fiction. It is concerned primarily with a real event or person, but using imagined detail to increase readability and verisimilitude.

### The Novel of Character

The emphasis in the novel of character is much on character development. Also, the focus is on representation, not on exciting episodes or unity of plot or structure. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is a good example.

### The Novel of Manners

This is a type of novel in which the social conventions of a given society- its speech, habits, and values- play significant roles. The main focus of the form is summarized in the title of Anthony Trollope's novel of manners *The Way We Live* Now. As a novelist of manners, Trollope followed in the tradition of Jane Austen, Honore de Balzac, and William Makepeace Thackeray.

The American version of the form is best exemplified in the novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton. The relatively stable societies depicted in their novels however, seem to be a thing of the past, with the result that the novel of manners appears to have been neglected in favour of questions of morality or even, metaphysical problems. According to Tom Wolfe, the task of depicting 'the way we live now' has fallen to the New Journalism, and to the novels growing out of that development such as Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *A Man in Full.*

In *The New American Novel of Manners,* Jerome Klinkowitz has argued that the form has been revived with an emphasis on the semiotics of contemporary life in the novels of Dan Wakefield (*Going All* the Way),

Richard Yates (*Disturbing the Peace),* and Thomas McGuane (*Nobody's Angel*).

### The Novel of Incident

The novel of incident centres on episodic actions (occurring in unrelated episodes). Incidents are fore-grounded, while plots and characters remain subordinated. It has loose, episodic and inorganic plot structure. Emphasis is placed on thrilling incidents. There is no sustained suspense. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is a good example of the novel of incident. In this novel, there are many autonomous incidents in a non-chronological order.

### Novel of Ideas

This is a novel in which the focus is less on character and action than on philosophical questions that are debated and discussed at length. Although most novels contain abstract ideas in one form or another, in the 'novel of ideas', they play a central role. Such novels, when they successfully integrate characters and narrative action along with ideas, can ascend to the highest level of fiction, as in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain.*

When the ideas overwhelm the story, however, novels of ideas can appear tendentious and thesis-ridden, reflected in the French term for such novels, *roman a these (*novel with a thesis).

### Novel of Sensibility/Sentimental Novel

The novel of sensibility relies on the reactions of characters to actions and events in a highly sentimental way. The emotional response goes beyond the limit of reason. Its originators are Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Virtue Rewarded* (1740). Other examples include Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* and Laurence Sterne *TristranShandy.*

### The Detective Fiction

This is a type of fiction in which a crime or series of crimes is solved by a detective, either an amateur or a professional, and, if the latter, either a policeman or a 'private eye' (private investigator). The basic formula (upon which an infinite number of variations may be spun) consists of a murder or disappearance that leads to additional murders; a cluster of baffling clues that invites the reader to match wits with the detective; a number of plausible suspects; a detective who employs rigorous logic and creative intuition in solving the crime; a sidekick, spouse, servant, or, in the case of the private eye, secretary to provide comic relief.

The earliest example of the genre is thought to be Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* The most celebrated of all fictional detectives is undoubtedly A. Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes,* who made his first appearance in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet.* Notable among the immediate descendants of *Sherlock Holmes* is G.K. Chesterton's *Father Brown (The Innocence of Father Brown*) who added a theological dimension to the form.In the 20th century, the detective story took two distinctive paths. The American form features the private eye figure pioneered by Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Hammett's Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon)* and Chandler's Philip Marlowe (*The Big*

*Sleep*) established a distinctively American hero: the hardboiled private detective, a cool, skeptical-bordering-on-cynical veteran of life who holds fast to a private code of honour despite the temptations of money and love.

Since World War II, the major development in detective fiction has been the shift to the police precinct. In response to the demand for more realism, authors have explored the world of the working police officer in a format known as the 'police procedural'. In the main, the detective novel is one in which a crime (usually but not necessary a murder) is solved by a detective. The detective assembles and interprets logical palpable evidence that is known as clues. Initially, the solution is concealed from the reader, but finally it is revealed through successful investigations of the detective. Usually, the identity of the perpetrator is unknown.

### The Mystery Fiction

If the basic ingredients of the detective fiction are varied or absent, the resultant fiction is 'the mystery fiction'. There is usually a crime or a mysterious circumstance that requires an investigation; there may be no clues for the detective to work on.

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we have explored the forms of prose fiction, according to length. In the main, we concluded that there are four forms of prose fiction: flash fiction, short story, novelette/novella and novel. We established the fact that while flash fiction is the shortest form of prose fiction, the novel is the longest. We exemplified each of the forms of prose fiction with textual illustrations.

We also traced the history of the development of the novel from the late 17th century to the present age. The exploration has, among many other things, focused on the major characteristic features, technical innovations, thematic thrusts and writers that have dominated at succeeding periods.

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# Study Session4

# Conventions in Prose Fiction

## Introduction

By convention, we mean the methods or techniques which a prose writer employs. These methods and approaches used by prose fiction writers are many. They include satire, allegory, epistolary, utopianism, dystopianism, fable, social realism and socialist realism. In this Study Session, we will explore these conventions, bringing out their features and basic tenets.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
4.1 *critique* the conventions employed in selected prose texts.
4.2 *write* a prose text having any of the conventions.
4.3 *contrast* the fundamental tenets of the conventions.

## 4.1 Satire

**Satire** A fictional work which uses humour and exaggeration to ridicule a societal trend

**Satire** is one of the commonest conventions of prose fiction. It is the literary method characterized by the writer's critical attitude toward his or her subject matter. As a form, it is used to correct human vice and folly. It casts aspersions on what its subjects are doing with the aim of redeeming it. Humour and exaggeration are preponderant in most satires. Critics have identified two forms of satire: direct and the indirect satire. Whereas in the formal or direct satire, the satiric voice uses the first person, indirect satire occurs when characters make themselves ridiculous. In Africa, an example of satirical novel is Ferdinand Oyono's T*he Old Man and the Medal*. The novel lampoons the colonialists as well as their stooges like the old man.

## 4.2 Allegory

**Direct democracy**a story with a secondary meaning

**Allegory** is another convention of prose fiction which has also been called extended metaphor. Objects, actions, places and people in allegorical fictions are given meanings which lie outside the story itself. It is often confused with fable. Whereas fable is essentially animal stories that teach morals, allegory is more. Two main kinds are identified. First is the historical and political allegory which leans on historical facts and personalities. An example of historical and political allegory is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The other form is the allegory of ideas in which characters represent abstract, religious or philosophical ideas as we have

in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*.

## 4.3 Romance

As a convention, romance developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Originally known as tales of heroism and chivalry rendered in verse, it has fantastic qualities; the storyline is often situated in an unrealistic world like the land of the spirits, dead or animals. Experiences in the story are unrealistic and exaggerated. Impossible things are also made to happen. Examples include: Ben Okri's*The Famished Road, Songs at Enchantment*, and Soyinka's *The Forest of A Thousand Daemons*.

## 4.4 Fable

**Fable**Moral tales featuring animal and other non-human characters

A **fable** is a succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, that features animals, mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities), and that illustrates a moral lesson (a 'moral'), which may at the end be expressed explicitly in a pithy maxim. A fable differs from a parable in that the latter excludes animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as actors that assume speech and other powers of humankind. Usage has not always been so clearly distinguished. In the King James Version of the New Testament, 'μύθος' ('mythos') was rendered by the translators as 'fable' in First and Second Timothy, in Titus and in First Peter. The word 'fable' comes from the Latin 'fabula' (a 'story'), itself derived from 'fari' ('to speak') with the -ula suffix that signifies 'little': hence, a 'little story'. Though in its original sense, 'fable' denotes a brief, succinct story that is meant to impart a moral lesson, in a pejorative sense, a 'fable' may be a deliberately invented or falsified account of an event or circumstance. Similarly, a non-authorial person who, wittingly or not, tells 'tall tales', may be termed a 'confabulator'. An author of fables is termed a 'fabulist', and the word 'fabulous', strictly speaking, "pertains to a fable or fables". In recent decades, however, 'fabulous' has come frequently to be used in the quite different meaning of 'excellent' or 'outstanding'.

Modern researchers agree that the fable is one of the most enduring forms of folk literature, spread abroad, more by oral transmission than by literary anthologies. Fables can be found in the literature of almost every country. Several parallel animal fables in Sumerian and Akkadian are among those that Erich Ebeling introduced to modern Western readers; there are comparable fables from Egypt's Middle Kingdom, and Hebrew fables such as the "king of trees" in Book of Judges 9:8-15 and "the thistle and the cedar tree" in II Kings 14:9.

The varying corpus denoted Aesopica or Aesop's Fables includes most of the best-known western fables, which are attributed to the legendary Aesop, supposed to have been a slave in ancient Greece around 550 BCE. When Babrius set down fables from the Aesopica in verse for a Hellenistic Prince 'Alexander', he expressly stated at the head of Book II that this type of 'myth' that Aesop had introduced to the 'sons of the Hellenes' had been an invention of 'Syrians' from the time of 'Ninos' (personifying Nineveh to Greeks) and Belos ('ruler'). Epicharmus of Kos

and Phormis are reported as having been among the first to invent comic fables. Many familiar fables of Aesop include ‘The Crow and the Pitcher’, ‘The Tortoise and the Hare’ and ‘The Lion and the Mouse’. In ancient Greek and Roman education, the fable was the first of the progymnasmata--training exercises in prose composition and public speaking — wherein students would be asked to learn fables, expand upon them, invent their own, and finally use them as persuasive examples in longer forensic or deliberative speeches. The need of instructors to teach, and students to learn, a wide range of fables as material for their declamations resulted in their being gathered together in collections, like those of Aesop.

Hundreds of fables were composed in ancient India during the first millennium BC, often as stories within frame stories. These included Vishnu Sarma'sPanchatantra, the Hitopadesha, Vikram and The Vampire, and Syntipas' Seven Wise Masters, which were collections of fables that were later influential throughout the Old World. Ben E. Perry (compiler of the "Perry Index" of Aesop's fables) has argued controversially that some of the Buddhist Jataka tales and some of the fables in the Panchatantra may have been influenced by similar Greek and Near Eastern ones. Earlier Indian epics such as Vyasa's Mahabharata and Valmiki's Ramayana also contained fables within the main story, often as side stories or back-story. The most famous fables from the Middle East were the One Thousand and One Nights, also known as the Arabian Nights.

Fables had a further long tradition through the Middle Ages, and became part of European high literature. During the 17th century, the French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695) saw the soul of the fable in the moral — a rule of behaviour. Starting with the Aesopian pattern, La Fontaine set out to satirize the court, the church, the rising bourgeoisie, indeed the entire human scene of his time. La Fontaine's model was subsequently emulated by England's John Gay (1685–1732);http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable - cite_note-10 Poland's IgnacyKrasicki (1735–1801); Italy's Lorenzo Pignotti (1739–1812), and Giovanni Gherardo de Rossi (1754–1827); Serbia's DositejObradović (1742–1811); Spain's Félix María de Samaniego (1745–1801) and Tomás de Iriarte y Oropesa (1750–1791); France's Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian (1755–94); and Russia's Ivan Krylov (1769–1844).

In modern times, while the fable has been trivialized in children's books, it has also been fully adapted to modern adult literature. Felix Salten's Bambi (1923) is a Bildungsroman — a story of a protagonist's coming-of-age — cast in the form of a fable. James Thurber used the ancient fable style in his books Fables for Our Time (1940) and Further Fables for Our Time (1956), and in his stories ‘The Princess and the Tin Box’ in The Beast in Me and Other Animals (1948) and ‘The Last Clock: A Fable for the Time, Such As It Is, of Man’ in Lanterns and Lances (1961). Władysław Reymont's The Revolt (1922), a metaphor for the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, described a revolt by animals that take over their farm in order to introduce ‘equality’. George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945) similarly satirizes Stalinist Communism in particular, and totalitarianism in general, in the guise of animal fable.

# 4.5 Socialist Realism

**Socialist realism**A work of art which focuses on and celebrates the poor. It is a tool meant to promote socialism and communism.

**Socialist Realism** is a style of realistic art which was developed in the Soviet Union and became a dominant style in other communist countries. Socialist Realism is a teleologically-oriented style having its purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism. Although related, it should not be confused with social realism, a type of art that realistically depicts subjects of social concern. Unlike social realism, socialist realism often glorifies the roles of the poor.

In conjunction with the Socialist Classical style of architecture, Socialist Realism was the officially approved type of art in the Soviet Union for nearly sixty years. All material goods and means of production belonged to the community as a whole; this included means of producing art, which were also seen as powerful propaganda tools. During the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks established an institution called Proletkult (the Proletarian Cultural and Enlightenment Organizations) which sought to put all arts into the service of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, Russian and Soviet artists embraced a wide variety of art forms under the auspices of Proletkult. Revolutionary politics and radical non-traditional art forms were seen as complementary. In art, Constructivism flourished. In poetry, the non-traditional and the avant-garde were often praised. This, however, was rejected by some members of the Communist party, who did not appreciate modern styles such as Impressionism and Cubism, since these movements existed before the revolution and were thus associated with ‘decadent bourgeois art’. Socialist Realism was, to some extent, a reaction against the adoption of these ‘decadent’ styles. It was thought that the non-representative forms of art were not understood by the proletariat and could therefore not be used by the state for propaganda. Alexander Bogdanov argued that the radical reformation of society to Communist principles meant little if any bourgeois art would prove useful; some of his more radical followers advocated the destruction of libraries and museums. Lenin rejected this philosophy, and deplored the rejection of beautiful because it was old, and explicitly described art as needing to call on its heritage: "Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner, and bureaucratic society." Modern art styles appeared to refuse to draw upon this heritage, thus clashing with the long realist tradition in Russia and rendering the art scene complex. Even in Lenin's time, a cultural bureaucracy began to restrain art to fit propaganda purposes.

Socialist Realism became state policy in 1932 when Soviet leader Joseph Stalin promulgated the decree on ‘the reconstruction of literary and art organizations’. Accordingly, the Moscow and Leningrad Union of Artists was established in 1932, which brought the history of post-revolutionary art to a close. The epoch of Soviet art began. In Leningrad, well-known artist and art teacher KuzmaPetrov-Vodkin was elected the first president of the Union of Artists. This choice laid down the foundation of the

lasting development of the Leningrad Union of Artists and Academy of Arts as a unified creative body. In 1931–2, the early emphasis on the 'little man' and the anonymous laboring masses gave way to the 'hero of labor', derived from the people but set apart by the scale of his deeds. Writers were explicitly enjoined to develop 'heroization'. This reflected a call for romantic art, which reflected the ideal rather than the realistic. Furthermore, it should show one clear and unambiguous meaning.

The Union of Soviet Writers was founded to control the output of authors, and the new policy was rubber-stamped at the Congress of Socialist Writers in 1934. It was enforced ruthlessly in all spheres of artistic endeavour. Artists who strayed from the official line were severely punished. Form and content were often limited, with erotic, religious, abstract, surrealist and expressionist art being forbidden. Formal experiments, including internal dialogue, stream of consciousness, nonsense, free-form association and cut-up were also disallowed. This was either because they were 'decadent', unintelligible to the proletariat or counter-revolutionary. In response to the 1934 Congress in Russia, the most important American writers of the left gathered in the First American Writers Congress of 26–27 April 1935 in Chicago, at the meetings which were supported by Stalin. Waldo David Frank was its first president.

The restrictions were relaxed somewhat after Stalin's death in 1953, but the state still kept a tight rein on personal artistic expression. This caused many artists to choose to go into exile, for example the Odessa Group from the city of that name. Independent-minded artists that remained continued to feel the hostility of the state. In 1974, for instance, a show of unofficial art in a field near Moscow was broken up, and the artworks destroyed with a water cannon and bulldozers. Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost and perestroika facilitated an explosion of interest in alternative art styles in the late 1980s, but socialist realism remained in limited force as the official state art style until as late as 1991. It was not until after the fall of the Soviet Union, that artists were finally freed from state censorship.

## 5.6 Social Realism

Tip

Social realism should not be confused with Socialist Realism.

- Social realism mirrors stark realities of life, life as it is as opposed to how we want it to be. It portrays the suffering of the masses.
- Socialist realism, on the other hand, portrays not just the struggles of the masses but also their triumph. The former portrays the masses as helpless while the latter portrays them as triumphant.

This is an artistic movement, expressed in the visual and other realist arts, which depicts social and racial injustice, economic hardship, through unvarnished pictures of life's struggles; often depicting working class activities as heroic. The movement is a style of painting in which the scenes depicted typically convey a message of social or political protest

edged with satire. This is not to be confused with Socialist Realism, the official USSR art form that was institutionalized by Joseph Stalin in 1934 and later allied Communist parties worldwide. Grant Wood, American Gothic, 1930. American Gothic has become a widely known (and often parodied) icon of social realism.

Social Realism became an important art movement during the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930s. As an American artistic movement, it is closely related to American scene painting and to Regionalism. American Social Realism includes the works of such artists as those from the Ashcan School including Edward Hopper, and Thomas Hart Benton, Will Barnet, Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, Paul Meltsner, Romare Bearden, Rafael Soyer, Isaac Soyer, Moses Soyer, Reginald Marsh, John Steuart Curry, Arnold Blanch, Aaron Douglas, Grant Wood, Horace Pippin, Walt Kuhn, Isabel Bishop, Paul Cadmus, Doris Lee, Philip Evergood, Mitchell Siporin, Robert Gwathmey, Adolf Dehn, Harry Sternberg, Louis Lozowick, William Gropper, Philip Guston, Jack Levine, Ralph Ward Stackpole, John Augustus Walker and others. It also extends to the art of photography as exemplified by the works of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Lewis Hine, Edward Steichen, Gordon Parks, Arthur Rothstein, Marion Post Wolcott, Doris Ulmann, Berenice Abbott, Aaron Siskind, Russell Lee, Ben Shahn (as a photographer) and Manuel Rivera-Ortiz among several others.

In Mexico, the painter Frida Kahlo is associated with the social realism movement. Also, in Mexico was the Mexican muralist movement that took place primarily in the 1920s and 1930s; and was an inspiration to many artists north of the border and an important component of the social realism movement. The Mexican muralist movement is characterized by its political undertones, the majority of which are of a Marxist nature, and the social and political situation of post-revolutionary Mexico. Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Rufino Tamayo are the best known proponents of the movement. Santiago Martínez Delgado, Jorge González Camarena, Roberto Montenegro, Federico Cantú Garza, and Jean Charlot, as well as several other artists participated in the movement.

The term also dates on a broader scale to the Realist movement in French art during the mid-19th century. Social Realism in the 20th century refers back to the works of the French artist Gustave Courbet and in particular to the implications of his 19th-century paintings A Burial at Ornans and The Stone Breakers, which scandalized French salon-goers of 1850, and is seen as an international phenomenon also traced back to European Realism and the works of Honoré Daumier and Jean-François Millet. The Social Realist style fell-out of fashion in the 1960s but is still influential in thinking and the art of today.

Many artists who subscribed to Social Realism were painters with socialist (but not necessarily Marxist) political views. The movement therefore has some commonalities with the Socialist Realism used in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, but the two are not identical - Social Realism is not an official art, and allows space for subjectivity. In certain contexts, Socialist Realism has been described as a specific branch of Social Realism.

**Social Realism has been summarized as follows:**

Social Realism developed as a reaction against idealism and the exaggerated ego encouraged by Romanticism. Consequences of the Industrial Revolution became apparent; urban centres grew, slums proliferated on a new scale contrasting with the display of wealth of the upper classes. With a new sense of social consciousness, the Social Realists pledged to 'fight the beautiful art', any style which appealed to the eye or emotions. They focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working-class people, particularly the poor. They recorded what they saw (as it existed) in a dispassionate manner. The public was outraged by Social Realism, in part, because they didn't know how to look at it or what to do with it (George Shi, University of Fine Arts, Valencia).

From that important trend of Realism in France, came the development of Socialist Realism, which was to dominate Soviet culture and artistic expression for over 60 years. Socialist Realism, representing socialist ideologies, was an art movement that represented social and political contemporary life in the 1930s, from a left-wing standpoint. It depicted subjects of social concern; the proletariat struggle - hardships of everyday life that the working class had to put up with, and heroically emphasized the values of the loyal communist workers. Social Realism was critical of the social environment that caused the conditions pictured, and denounced the 'evil' Tsarist period. IlyaRepin, a famous Social Realist, said that his art work was aimed "to criticize all the monstrosities of our vile society" of the Tsarist period. The Ideology behind Social Realism by depicting the heroism of the working class was to promote and spark revolutionary actions and to spread the image of optimism and the importance of productiveness. Keeping people optimistic meant creating a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism, which would prove very important in the struggle to produce a successful socialist nation. The Unions Newspaper, the LiteraturnayaGazeta, described Social Realism as "the representation of the proletarian revolution". During Joseph Stalin's reign it was most important to use socialist Realism as a form of propaganda in posters, as it kept people optimistic and encourage greater productive effort, a necessity in his aim of developing Russia into an industrialised nation.

Vladimir Lenin believed that art should belong to the people and should stand on the side of the proletariat, "Art should be based on their feelings, thoughts and demands, and should grow along with them", said Lenin. He believed that all soviet art forms should "expose crimes of capitalism and praise socialism...created to inspire readers and viewers to stand up for the revolution". After the revolution of 1917, leaders of the newly formed communist party were encouraging experimentation of different art types. Lenin believed that the style of art the USSR should endorse would have to be easy to understand (ruling out abstract art such as suprematism and constructivism) in relating to the masses of illiterate people of Russia. A wide ranging debate on Art took place, the main disagreement was between those who believed in "Proletarian Art" which should have no connections with past art coming out of bourgeois

society, and those (most vociferously Trotsky) who believed that Art in a society dominated by working class values had to absorb all the lessons of bourgeois Art before it could move forward at all.

The taking of power by Stalin's faction had its corollary in the establishment of an official art: on 23 April 1932, headed by Stalin, an organisation formed by the central committee of the Communist Party developed the Union of Soviet Writers. This organisation endorsed the newly designated ideology of social realism.

By 1934 all other independent art groups were abolished, making it nearly impossible for someone not involved in the Union of Soviet Writers to get work published. Any literary piece or painting that did not endorse the ideology of social realism was censored and/or banned. This new art movement, introduced under Joseph Stalin, was one of the most practical and durable artistic approaches of the 20th century; with the communist revolution came also a cultural revolution. It also gave Stalin and his Communist Party greater control over Soviet culture; restricting people from expressing alternative geopolitical ideologies that differed to those represented in Socialist Realism. The decline of Social Realism came with fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In summary, realism is a very important method of fictional construction employed by prose fiction writers. In the opinion of Ian watts, it is fidelity to actuality. It attempts a truthful and faithful representation of human experience in prose narratives. It developed in the nineteenth century France with Balzac and others. In contemporary times, realism is categorized into two major tempers: social realism and socialist realism. Social realism simply mirrors social and historical realities. It does not proffer any solution to human miseries; it does not see a change in human society, and it works as a historical tract. Nothing revolutionary is in it. Its most potent weapon is a mirror. Examples of social realist novels, especially in Africa, include Mega Mwangi's Kill Me Quick and Going Down River Road.

The socialist realist novel refracts the social, political and historical realities of the society. Its instrument is concave. It is revolutionary. It leans on Marxist tenets and envisions changes through revolution.

# 4.7 Utopian and Dystopian Fiction

**Utopia** A ideal or perfect society or world.

The **utopia** and its offshoot, the dystopia, are genres of literature that explore social and political structures. Utopian fiction is the creation of an ideal world, or utopia, as the setting for a novel. **Dystopian** fiction is the opposite: creation of a nightmare world, or dystopia. Many novels combine both, often as a metaphor for the different directions humanity can take in its choices, ending up with one of two possible futures. Both utopias and dystopias are commonly found in science fiction and other speculative fiction genres, and arguably are by definition a type of speculative fiction. More than 400 utopian works were published prior to the year 1900 in the English language alone, with more than a thousand others during the twentieth century.

The word utopia was first used in this context by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work Utopia. The word utopia resembles both the Greek words "no place", "outopos", and "good place", "eutopos". In his book, which was written in Latin, More sets out a vision of an ideal society. As the title suggests, the work presents an ambiguous and ironic projection of the ideal state. The whimsical nature of the text can be confirmed by the narrator of Utopia's second book, Raphael Hythloday. The Greek root of Hythloday suggests an 'expert in nonsense'. An earlier example of a Utopian work from classical antiquity is Plato's The Republic, in which he outlines what he sees as the ideal society and its political system. Later examples can be seen in Samuel Johnson's The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia and Samuel Butler's Erewhon, which nearly spells 'nowhere' backwards. This, like much of the utopian literature, can be seen as utopian satire which is most notable in the inversion of illness and crime which Butler portrays, with punishment for the former and treatment for the latter.

Dystopia is defined as a society characterized by poverty, squalor, or oppression. Most authors of dystopian fiction explore at least one reason why things are that way. Dystopias usually extrapolate elements of contemporary society and are read by many as political warnings. Many purported utopias reveal a dystopian character by suppressing justice, freedom and happiness. Samuel Butler's Erewhon can be seen as a dystopia because of the way sick people are punished as criminals while thieves are cured in hospitals, which the inhabitants of Erewhon see as natural and right, that is, utopian (as mocked in Voltaire's Candide.) Aldous Huxley's novel Brave New World is a more subtle and more threatening dystopia because he projected into the year 2540 industrial and social changes he perceived in 1931, leading to a fascist hierarchy of society, industrially successful by exploiting a slave class conditioned and drugged to obey and enjoy their servitude. George Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopian novel about a coercive and impoverished totalitarian society, conditioning its population through propaganda rather than drugs. Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale describes a future North America governed by strict religious rules which only the privileged dare defy.

Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels is sometimes linked with utopian (and dystopian) literature, because it shares the general preoccupation with ideas of the good (and bad) society. Of the countries Lemuel Gulliver visits, only the Country of the Houyhnhnms approaches a utopia; most of the others have significant dystopian aspects. Many works combine elements of both utopias and dystopias. Typically, an observer from our world will journey to another place or time and see one society the author considers ideal, and another representing the worst possible outcome. The point is usually that the choices we make now may lead to a better or worse potential future world. Ursula K. Le Guin's Always Coming Home fulfils this model, as does Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time. In Starhawk's The Fifth Sacred Thing, there is no time-travelling observer, but her ideal society is invaded by a neighbouring power embodying evil repression. In Aldous Huxley's Island, in many ways a counterpoint to his better-known Brave New World, the fusion of the best parts of Buddhist philosophy and Western technology is threatened by the

'invasion' of oil companies. In another literary model, the imagined society journeys between elements of utopia and dystopia over the course of the novel or film. At the beginning of The Giver by Lois Lowry, the world is described as a utopia, but as the book progresses, the world's dystopian aspects are revealed.

## 4.7.1EcotopianFiction

This is where the author posits either a utopian or dystopian world revolving around environmental conservation or destruction. Ernest Callenbach'sEcotopia is an important 20th century example of this genre, as is the California trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson. Robinson has also edited an anthology of short ecotopian fiction, called Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias. The novel The Bridge (1973) by D. Keith Mano presents a world dominated by a global environmental fascism, where the government ultimately promotes the extinction of the human race by enforced mass suicide, so as to 'save' the environment. Other examples include the Uplift Series by David Brin wherein ecotopian value systems and their implications are explored in a fictional galactic society.

## 4.7.2 Feminist Utopias

Another important subgenre is feminist utopias and the overlapping category of feminist science fiction. Writer Sally Miller Gearhart calls this sort of fiction political: it contrasts the present world with an idealized society, criticizes contemporary values and conditions, sees men or masculine systems as the major cause of social and political problems (for instance, war), and presents women as equal or superior to men, having ownership over their reproductive functions. A common solution to gender oppression or social ills in feminist utopian fiction is to remove men, either showing isolated all-female societies as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, or societies where men have died out or been replaced, as in Joanna Russ's A Few Things I Know About Whileaway, where "the poisonous binary gender" has died off. Marge Piercy's novel Woman on the Edge of Time keeps human biology, but removes pregnancy and childbirth from the gender equation by resorting to artificial wombs, while allowing both women and men the nurturing experience of breastfeeding.

Utopias have explored the ramification of gender being either a societal construct or a hard-wired imperative. In Mary Gentle's Golden Witchbreed, gender is not chosen until maturity, and gender has no bearing on social roles. In contrast, Doris Lessing's The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five (1980) suggests that men's and women's values are inherent to the sexes and cannot be changed, making a compromise between them essential. In My Own Utopia (1961) by Elizabeth Mann Borghese, gender exists but is dependent upon age rather than sex — genderless children mature into women, some of whom eventually become men.

Utopian single-gender worlds or single-sex societies have long been one of the primary ways to explore implications of gender and gender-differences. In speculative fiction, female-only worlds have been imagined to come about by the action of disease that wipes out men,

along with the development of a technological or mystical method that allows parthenogenetic reproduction. The resulting society is often shown to be utopian by feminist writers. Many influential feminist utopias of this sort were written in the 1970s; the most often studied examples include Joanna Russ's The Female Man, Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World and Motherlines, and Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time. Utopias imagined by male authors have generally included equality between sexes, rather than separation. Such worlds have been portrayed most often by lesbian or feminist authors; their use of female-only worlds allows the exploration of female independence and freedom from patriarchy. The societies may not necessarily be lesbian or sexual at all — Herland (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a famous early example of a sexless society. Charlene Ball writes in Women's Studies Encyclopedia that use of speculative fiction to explore gender roles has been more common in the United States than in Europe and elsewhere.

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we have dwelt on the major conventions of prose fiction. By conventions, we mean the approaches or methods employed in narrating the prose text. We concluded that among the widely employed conventions in prose texts are satire, allegory, fable, utopian, dystopian, social realism and socialist realism. We drew illustrations from prose texts across the globe.

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# Study Session5

# Elements of Prose Fiction

## Introduction

As stated by Janet Evanovich, "effective writing requires an understanding of the fundamental elements of storytelling, such as point of view, dialogue, and setting." (Evanovich 2006:39). The debate continues as to the number and composition of the fundamental elements of fiction.In this Study Session, we will examine some of the fundamental elements of fiction, bringing out their nature, tenets, functions and types.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

5.1 *highlight* the elements of prose fiction.
5.2 d*iscuss* the features, types and functions of the major elements of fiction.
5.3 *identify* the elements employed in any prose text
5.4 *critique* the elements employed in any prose text
5.5 *differentiate* between story and plot, between subject matter and theme.
5.6 *discuss* the forms, tenets and functions of setting, atmosphere, point of view and techniques as elements of fiction.
5.7 *critique* the employment of these elements in a given fictional text

## 5.1 Story

**Story**Any narrative or tale recounting series of events. A story is a raw material waiting to be processed by plot

In everyday sense, a **story** is any narrative or tale recounting series of events. In modern narratology, however, the term refers more specifically to the sequence of imagined events that we reconstruct from the actual arrangement of a narrative or dramatic plot. In this modern distinction between story and plot derived from Russian formalism and its opposed terms fabula and sjuzet, the story is the full sequence of events as we assume them to have occurred in their likely order, duration and frequency, while the plot is a particular selection and re-ordering of these. Thus, the story is an abstractly conceived raw material of events which we reconstruct from the finished arrangement of the plot: it includes events preceding and otherwise omitted from the perceived action, and its sequence will differ from that of the plot if the action begins in medias res or otherwise involves an anachrony.

## 5.2 Subject Matter

**Subject Matter**Synoptic

A **subject matter** is the major highlight of a work of art. In identifying it, one must recognize the topic stages in the development of the plot. In arriving at the subject matter of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for instance,

highlight of a literary work.

one must consider the various stages which attract important topics of discussion in Henchard's (the protagonist's) life. These will include: the sale of his wife, his wandering about looking for job, the rise to the position of Mayor, reunification with his wife, his contact with Farfrae to manage Henchard's business, secret love affairs with Lucetta, revelation of how he sold his wife and eventual loss of exalted position of Mayor, his bankruptcy and eventual death. The plot in this novel is one that focuses on effect of actions on character development (plot of character). Thus, the discussion of the character of Henchard will help in arriving at the subject matter. The subject matter will then come in form of a summary of these crucial topic stages.

## 5.3 Theme

**Theme**The main idea in a literary work.

Theme is sometimes used interchangeably with motif, but the term is more usually applied to an abstract claim, or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, that an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and made persuasive to the reader. For instance, Richard Wright states explicitly the theme of racism and the will of the blacks to survive in a divided society in *Black Boy*. Some critics claim that all non-trivial works of literature, including lyric poems, involve an implicit conceptual theme which is embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery.

## 5.4 Plot

**Plot**Order of events in a literary work

This is the pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected and arranged both to emphasize relationships — usually of cause and effect between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience, such as surprise or suspense. Plot and character are interdependent critical concepts as Henry James has said, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"

There are a great variety of plot forms. For example, some plots are designed to achieve tragic effects, and others to achieve the effects of comedy, romance or satire. The chief character in a work, upon whom our interest centres, is called the protagonist; and if he is pitted against an important opponent, that character is called an antagonist. Henchard is the protagonist, while Farfrae is the antagonist in Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and the relation between them is one of conflict. In addition to conflict between individuals, there may be conflict of a protagonist against fate, or against the circumstances that stand between him and a goal he has set himself, and in some work, the conflict is between opposite desires or values in a character's own mind.

If a character sets up a scheme which depends for its success on the ignorance or gullibility of the person or persons against whom it is directed, it is called an intrigue. As a plot progresses, it arouses expectations in the audience or reader about the future course of events and how characters will respond to events. An anxious uncertainty about what is going to happen, especially to those characters whose qualities

are such that we have established a bond of sympathy with them, is known as suspense. If what in fact happens violates our expectations, it is called surprise. The interplay of suspense and surprise is a prime source of the vitality of a traditional plot.

A plot has a unity of action if it is perceived by the reader as a single, complete and ordered structure of actions directed toward the intended effect, in which none of the component parts or incidents is unnecessary — all the parts are so closely connected that the transposition or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoint and dislocate the whole.

## 5.4.1 Types of Plot

There are two main types of plots: The organic and the episodic.

### Organic Plot

An organic plot is one that shows close relationship between the episodes. In addition, these episodes maintain good cause and effect relationship. It is one in which the actions are well united in a way that they cannot be separated. It has a beginning, middle and end which are so well linked that they become inseparable. Any attempt to remove any part will disorganize the flow of events. Besides, cause and effect of events are seen in the work. The parts of this kind of plot function like an organism whose parts are inseparable.

### Episodic Plot

An episodic plot is one in which there are two or more series of incidents. The episodes here succeed each other without any logical arrangement and without complication or close relationship. The parts of the story are separable as there is no unity of events. Each event stands on its own without necessarily affecting the flow of events in other parts of the story. The metrical romance and the picaresque novels are said to have episodic structure. This is because the events that occur in them have little causal relationship. Such plots have little or no central plot.

Note

- The organic plot contains events or episodes which are so tightly knit that none can be removed or displaced without impairing the story.
- The episodic plot contains events or episodes which are so separable that each can stand on its own as a short story; an episode can be removed with the work not impaired.

## 5.4.2 Subplot

**Sub plot** Secondary plot or subordinate plot or minor plot which runs through a piece of fiction.

Subplot can be referred to as secondary plot or subordinate plot or minor plot which runs through a piece of fiction. Usually, it has direct relationship to the main plot and contributes to its interest and struggle. Some writers create three or four subplots. This situation arises when too many characters are introduced into the narration. Their relationship to the main character normally shades off into many subordinate subplots. When this happens, such plots become episodic in nature.

## 5.4.3 Story and Plot: A Contrast

Indeed, the first thing to consider in reading fiction is plot. Plot, in a sense, is the way events are selected and arranged in a narrative work to present them most effectively to the reader. Comparing plot with story can clarify that. Story is the straightforward account of everything that happens, in the order it happens. Story provides the materials (the events, the characters, and the outcome) with which a plot is constructed. As a story is converted to a plot, some things are left out (ones that are not essential for the effect and emphasis desires); things are sometimes rearranged (the story may start in the middle or at the end instead of at the beginning), and causal connections between key events are brought out. The interest in plot is not just in what happens but why it happens and in the implications or results of what happens: What does it all 'mean'? What does it 'say' to us? Another way to put it is that plot provides the structure of a story, that is, the arrangement of material in it, the ordering of its parts, the design used to draw out and convey its significance.

Aristotle, in one of the earliest works on imaginative writing, said a plot must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Those terms have been used as the basis for the way readers talk about plot ever since. *Beginning*, *middle*, and *end* other terminologies such as *suspense* and *conflict* grew out of analyses of drama, which focus on action and suspense. These terms, transferred successfully to the novel, also centred on action, and to the early short story. However, they are less applicable to some modern fiction, especially short stories, which focus often on inner struggles without much physical action or external conflict.

Tip

Story is the raw material while plot is the refiner.

## 5.4.4 Parts of the Plot

### Beginning

A plot usually starts at a point that relates directly and significantly to the series of events being recorded: DagobertoGilb's*Love in L.A.* starts with Jake in his car caught in a traffic jam. Earlier events in his day are not included: what time he got up, whether he had breakfast, where he is going. These details may be important in Jake's larger life, but because they are not relevant to his encounter with Mariana, they do not concern readers. For fiction writers, decisions about what to leave out are as important as what to include.

Equally important is the arrangement of the events that follow the opening. *Love in L.A.* is told in *chronological order*, the order in which the events occur. But that may not always be the case for works of fiction. Sometimes, the first events in the related sequence, though necessary to the story, are not the best place to start. The most interesting

or exciting or important events occur later. Readers become more quickly and deeply involved when the plot starts at an engaging point well into the story and fills in the background events later as needed. In fact, for thousands of years, this has been a common way for storytellers to proceed – the Latin phrase *in mediasres* (meaning "into the middle of things") is used to describe it. The background events are usually filled in through a flashback (in which events prior to the beginning of a story or play are presented as an inserted narrative or a scene, perhaps with a character remembering earlier times) or through exposition (a non-dramatized explanation, often a speech by a character or the narrator, explaining things that occurred before the initial action of a story or play). *Love in L.A.* could have begun in the middle, with Jake's car bumping Mariana's, and then gone back to explain what Jake was daydreaming about instead of paying attention to his driving; and if Gilb had wanted to emphasize the accident instead of Jake's character, that probably would have been a better way to start.

**Middle**

Of course, a story must have a middle – something has to come between the beginning and the end. But what goes into the middle? Can't a writer just lay out what happens the way it happens? Or course, but often that is not the best way to hold a reader's interest. Remember, plot involves the arrangement of the action whereby the story builds on the beginning and lead us to the ending – that requires particular techniques for increasing intensity and holding the reader's interest.

Identifying a conflict is a helpful way to 'get into' a story, when you want to look at the story's complexity more closely and discuss why the conflict is one worth thinking about.

To hold readers' interest, the middle of a plot often creates some degree of suspense, some uncertainty and concern about how things will turn out, who did what, what the effects on the characters or events will be, or when disaster will fall or rescue will occur. The word suspense might be too strong for *Love in L.A.* (As it is for much modern fiction), but we are curious, at least, to find out if Jake can get away with all that he's trying to.

The beginning and middle of a story often contain fore-shadowings, anticipations of things that will happen later. For example, when the mother in Julia Alvarez's *Daughter of Invention* says: "When I make a million, I'll buy you your very own typewriter.' (I'd been nagging my mother for one just like the one father had bought her to do his order forms at home)," it foreshadows the ending where her father gives her 'a brand new electric typewriter. . . even better than the one I'd been begging to get like my mother's'. *Repetitions* are also often included to draw our attention to especially important aspects of the story. The repeated references to the mother's inventions, from the title on, set up the key invention later, when mother and daughter together invent a speech to replace the one the father tore up.

The middle of a plot holds its readers' attention by building, becoming more complex and more intense (sometimes referred to as rising action or complication), until it reaches a crisis of some sort, the climax, the thing

the suspense builds toward. This terminology grew out of action-based plots, where the most intense moment is the peak of the physical conflict. The climax of a sci-fi action movie might come when, just before the gelatin-coated cyborg sends an earth-freezing probe into the centre of the planet, the kungfu master heroine shoots a laser into the monster's ultra-sensitive fifth eye and saves the world. In a story focusing on inner conflict, by contrast, the climax might be a moment of inner realization - the point at which the main character realizes that gambling is destroying his family and decides to go into rehab, which turns his life around.

Epiphany describes a moment when a character experiences a sudden moment of illumination or revelation, especially as the result of perceiving a commonplace object in a new way or through a new context. Esperanza in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* might be said to have experienced an epiphany when the nun points to her third-floor apartment and says "You live *there*?" Suddenly she realizes how other people regard her house, what the house says about her and her family, how much she needs to have 'a real house' to improve her sense of self-worth and identity.

Picking out a climax is not the same as understanding a work of fiction, nor is it a definite feature all readers identify in the same way. There can be differences of opinion about what a story's climax is or even about whether a given story has one. If *Love in L.A.* has a climax, it might well come in the next-to-last paragraph when Jake seems not only to have avoided responsibility for the accident but also to have won Mariana's interest in him: 'Her hand felt so warm and soft he felt like he'd been kissed'.

A literary work cannot (and should not) include everything that happens during the series of events it is relating – reading or hearing everything would get pretty boring. But what things are omitted? Whatever is not significant to the action typically is left out. For example, if characters are ordinary people, they need to eat or get some sleep, but except where these activities are crucial to the overall story, they are omitted. Since lots of unimportant things are left out, you usually can assume that anything that is included is significant. You can be confident that almost everything in the work is there for a reason – every detail, maybe even every word. Excellent authors are very careful and deliberate in selecting what to include, presenting only those things that contribute something to the overall effect of the story.

Because an author cannot include everything, stories inevitably leave gaps; places where things are omitted or not filled in. As active readers, we need to use our imaginations to fill any significant gaps, supplying information or explanations the story does not spell out. Some gaps are insignificant and appear only to avoid cluttering the story with irrelevant detail. For example, we are not told the circumstances under which the family in *Daughter of Invention* left the Dominican Republic. Even though we may wonder about why or how they went, that is not important to what the story is about. Other gaps, deliberate or unintentional, are important.

Authors often create gaps intentionally (sometimes withholding information in early parts of a story that will be supplied later) as a way

of getting readers actively involved. Mystery and detective stories always create gaps (who did it? why?) as part of the structure. Part of the enjoyment of reading stories is reaching with our imaginations for what is omitted, seeking to supply missing details or connecting links, anticipating what may be ahead, and revising our earlier anticipations in light of what we find out later. In a milder way; as we read about the mother's ideas in *Daughter of Invention*, we begin anticipating that this emphasis on inventions is leading to something. We begin wondering what, maybe trying to guess: Does she manage to come up with a crazily sane possibility that makes the family rich? In the end, we find that we were right. There was a last important invention, but inventing a speech was nothing that we could have predicted.

In some cases, gaps are unintentional but they are significant nonetheless. That women or servants fill invisible roles in a story might suggest a male-centred or an economically privileged outlook respectively. Such an outlook is part of the whole meaning of the story, even if it never occurs to the author that it is. What the author does not think about is part of her or his idea framework, as much as what she or he consciously does think about.

Gaps also can indicate what is 'meaningful but not important' – what the story recognizes as potentially meaningful, but is not interested in. if a story about the difficulties a pair of lovers encounter in their relationship ends before their marriage takes place, the gap indicates that their married life is not significant to the story; its interest is in their solving the difficulties they encounter in getting together. Gaps, on the other hands, can be used to signal what is very important, often putting even more emphasis on a detail or bit of information by having the reader supply it, even suggesting perhaps that the very process of working to fill the gap is crucial to the effect. *The Red Convertible*, for example, says a lot about the Vietnam War by saying very little about it.

At the heart of that pattern of action usually is some kind of conflict**,** some struggle or confrontation between opposing characters or a character and opposing forces. Usually, at least one side of the struggle involves the main character. The range of possible opposing forces is large, but ordinarily they fall into three broad categories.

**Physical Conflict**

One basic kind of conflict occurs as a physical struggle or confrontation between a character or group of characters and another character or group of characters; the showdown between a sheriff's posse and a gang of outlaws in an old Western, for example, or a fistfight between two rivals at a high school room. Physical conflict can also involve humans struggling against nature; a group of sailors, perhaps led by a courageous captain, attempting to survive a fierce storm. *Love in L.A.* has no physical conflict, but it is easy to imagine how the events could have turned into a road rage story with physical conflict at its centre.

**Social Conflict**

A further type of conflict involves differences regarding personal or societal relationships or values. This is a common motif in modern fiction. Examples could include a teenager challenging her or his parents, the differing gender outlooks a man and a woman might bring to the same

situation, or an activist confronting a social injustice. Part of the conflict in *Love in L.A.* is the way Jake's lifestyle runs counter to societal norms: society expects drivers to have insurance and accept responsibility for any damage they cause to other people's property; it requires people to carry their driver's licenses and have accurate license plates on their cars. The story gives you as reader the options of identifying with Jake and enjoying the way he flaunts his defiance of societal expectations, or dismissing him as irresponsible, or perhaps feeling caught between accepting Jake's laid-back charm and rejecting what he does as illegal and immoral.

**Internal or Psychological Conflict**

Another variety of conflict deals with struggle within a character, as she or he wrestles with competing moral claims or a difficult decision. This has always been a central issue for literature. Numerous stories show characters engaged in such inner struggles. Inner conflict often appears at crucial moments in a person's life: facing the moment of death like the grandmother does in Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*; an identity crisis when a crucial event forces a person to a new or deeper sense of self-knowledge or self-awareness, often a moment of maturation like Myop's in Alice Walker's *The Flowers*; a belief crisis when something causes a person to re-examine the foundation of what she or he puts faith or trust in, as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*; a values crisis when something forces a person to decide how to make a moral or ethical decision, such as Mokopi's in Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures*, or sometimes to decide whether to adhere to standards she or he has held on to – or should have adhered to – in the past. Equally important is a lack of inner conflict: One of the most revealing things about Jake in *Love in L.A.* is his lack of internal struggle, despite doing some things that would trouble most readers' consciences at least somewhat.

## Ending

A story must end, of course – it cannot go on forever. But it also cannot just stop. The difference between just stopping and an effective ending is that the latter gives a sense of wholeness and leaves you satisfied, or satisfyingly unsatisfied, as a reader or listener. One of the big differences between fiction and real life is that life carries on after reaching a 'big event', while the series of events in a fictional plot reaches a terminal point, the conflicts around which it was shaped are resolved (or shown to be irresolvable), and the story ends.

The French term denouement is often used in discussing the ending of a story. It literally means 'unknotting', the untying of the threads that are tangled and knotted, the solution of the mysteries, the explanation of the secrets and misunderstandings. An ending, in addition to unknotting tangles, often ties up the loose ends, leaving us with a sense of finality or a momentary stay against ordinary chaos. That does not mean that everything turns out happily – some stories have unresolved, unhappy endings. But it does mean that the questions and problems we have been involved with, if not solved or even resolved, at least are adequately accounted for. We know all that we need to know to comprehend and

reflect on the story as a whole. The last paragraph of "Love in L.A.' has a feeling of finality – the lives of Jake and Mariana do not end, but nothing that follows is relevant to the story of their encounter under the Alvarado Street overpass (though an active reader will imagine Mariana's pained and disappointed reaction, and her father's furious reaction, when they find out that all the information Jake gave her was false – and that may form an important part of how we feel about Jake's actions|). Jake and Mariana have a personal encounter that could have touched Jake and made a difference in his life, but the last sentence shows that it did not. The end takes us back to the beginning and the daydreams he prefers over reality.

When we meet such people in literature, we want to know what they are like, what makes them tick, how they deal with the situations and relationships they encounter. Characterization refers to the methods and techniques an author uses to represent people and to enable us to know and relate to them. As we read a work of fiction, we understand characters more fully and accurately if we pay attention to the means by which we attain our knowledge, to the kind of techniques through which they are brought to life in the story.

## 5.5 Character

**Characters**The beings or things on whom the story is about or who perform the actions constituting the story

This is the act of creating appropriate characters both human and non-human to act out the events of a plot structure. A broad distinction is frequently made between alternative methods for 'characterizing' the persons in a narrative ─ showing and telling. In 'showing' (also called the dramatic method), the author merely presents his characters talking and acting and leaves the reader to infer what motives and dispositions lie behind what they say and do. In 'telling', the author himself intervenes authoritatively in order to describe, and often to evaluate, the motives and dispositional qualities of his characters. For example, in the fine opening chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen shows us Mr. and Mrs.Bennet as they talk to each other about the young man who has just rented Netherfield Park, then tells us about him, and so confirms and extends the interferences and judgements that the reader has begun to make from what he has been shown:

> Mr.Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic honour, reverse, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper.

It has been common to consider 'telling' a violation of artistry especially since the theory and practice of Flaubert and Henry James and to recommend only the technique of 'showing' characters; the author, it is often said, should efface himself in order to write 'objectively', 'impersonally' or 'dramatically'. Some judgments, however, glorify a modern kind of artistic limitation which is suited to particular kinds of novelistic effects, and decry a supplementary method of characterization,

which — all the great novelists, until recently, have employed to produce masterpieces.

## 5.5.1 Means of Characterization

**Characterization** depiction of characters

Here are some of the most important means of characterization to pay attention to. They can appear individually or in a variety of combinations.

### Telling

In the most direct way of characterization, we are simply told — what the characters are like, all at once as they are first introduced or bit by bit as they reappear in the story. That is the case for some aspects of Connie's character in Joyce Carol Oates' *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, especially aspects that would be difficult, or would take a lot of space, to demonstrate: "Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home". Even the narrator's choice of words can be a way of telling something about a character.

### Showing

What a character is like can come out through the character's actions, which may be presented without interpretative comment, leaving the reader to conclude what a character is like from what she or he does. What Jake, in *Love in L.A.*, does in response to hitting Mariana's car shows the kind of person he is; words the narrator selects may suggest some reservations about Jake as a person, but the narrator does not explicitly evaluate his behaviour. In many cases, showing is combined with telling, often with differing weights of emphasis. Only telling what a character is like is often less effective than showing what the character is like through her or his actions, or through a combination of telling and showing.

### Saying

What a character is like can be brought out by having other characters say things about her or him. It is important, however, to keep in mind that how we take what the characters say depends, of course, on how those characters relate to the main characters: What is said may need to be taken with a grain of salt because of a bias for or against the character A great deal can also be revealed about a character by what she or he says; dialogue (conversation between characters) is an important characterization technique.

### Entering a Character's Mind

What a character is like can be revealed through her or his thoughts and feelings. The author takes us into a character's mind using techniques such as a partially or wholly omniscient narrator (the way the narrator shows us what goes on in Jake's mind through his daydreams, his thoughts, and things he observes), stream of consciousness, or interior monologue.

### Naming

In some cases, the names an author gives to characters reveal aspects of what they are like. Henry Fielding, one of the first English novelists,

names one of his characters Squire Allworthy to reveal how admirable he is in every respect. In other cases, Fielding uses an allusion to the Bible in naming a character: Parson Abraham Adams, for example, is a man of great faith (like the biblical Abraham), but is also a person as innocent and trusting as the Adam of Genesis 2-3. In many cases, however, names are simply names, and yet they invariably somehow sound right think of *David Copperfield* or *Huckleberry Finn*).

After you know what the characters are like, you will want to know why they do the things they do, why they make the kinds of decisions and choices they do. This important aspect of characterization is ***motivation***, the reasons, explanations, or justifications behind a character's behaviour. Motivation in fiction usually grows out of a sense of what a character deeply wants or desires, and how that leads the character to react in a specific situation.

A great deal is revealed about characters also by the way they handle situations -specially difficult, problematic, or tragic situations or relationships. For characters to be plausible, they must be consistent in the way they deal with circumstances. If they respond to a situation one way at one time and differently at another, there should be clear reasons for the difference (their inconsistency must be understandable and believable).

## 5.5.2 Types of Characterization

Our understanding and appreciation of characters in a story are enhanced when we are alert to the varying degrees of a character's complexity and importance. Here are some of the ways those varying degrees are indicated.

### Round/Flat

The novelist E.M. Forster uses the terms flat and round to illustrate differences in complexity. Round characters are complex and sometimes even challenging to understand. We are offered many sides and facets of their lives and personalities, leading us sometimes to need to reconcile what seem to be incompatible ideas or behaviours. Round characters often are dynamic, shown as changing and growing because of what happens to them. They also can be static, not shown as changing, though they may be described in such rich detail that we have a clear sense of how they would, or will, change, even though we do not see it happening. We are shown enough about Connie in *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*for her character to be rounded out; the story shows her changing, at least in the sense of having to confront a totally new area of experience.

### Flat Characters

These are generally developed less fully than round, or dynamic, characters. Usually, they are static and are represented through one or two main features or aspects. Unlike round characters, they can often be summed up in a sentence or two. If these one or two traits are developed in considerable detail, the characters may be very interesting and enjoyable to read about. But we cannot come to know them as thoroughly and in as much depth as characters that are depicted with more

complexity or developed more fully and shown to be changing and growing throughout the story. Jake and Mariana in *Love in L.A.* are flat characters – a thoroughgoing amoral and a rather gullible innocent. That is all they need to be and all that could be expected in such a short story.

### Major/Minor

Most major characters in a story are round characters, while minor characters are usually flat. Minor characters are at times stock characters; stereotypes easily recognized by readers or audiences from their frequent uses, such as the absent-minded professor, the evil stepmother, the nerdy computer geek, or the smart but quiet detective or police sergeant. Use of flat characters is not necessarily 'bad' writing. Some excellent fiction writers create central characters that are flat but are described in such rich detail that they come to life fully and in an enjoyable way. There is not time in most short stories to develop more than one character in a rounded way, perhaps not even one. Even in a novel, the reader might find it too much to handle if every character were rounded out fully.

## 5.5.3Protagonist/Antagonist

The terms protagonist and antagonist are often used to define relationships between characters. The protagonist is the central character in a work (the older term hero seems less useful because the central character does not have to be 'heroic'). The antagonist is the character, force, or collected forces opposed to the protagonist that give rise to the central conflict of the characters, including work ─ the rival, opponent, or enemy of the protagonist (the older term villain works less well because the antagonist is not always evil and is not always a person).

The character originated with characters (latter part of 3BC) of the Greek writer Theophrastus. Characters are the persons presented in a narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with moral and dispositional qualities that are expressed in what they say — dialogue and by what they do — action. The grounds in a character's temperament and moral nature of his speech and action constitute his motivation. A character may remain essentially 'stable' or unchanged in his outlook and dispositions, from the beginning to the end of a work (Micawber in *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens or he may undergo a radical change, either through a gradual development or as the result of an extreme crisis (Pip in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectation*). Whether a character remains stable or changes, the reader of a traditional, realistic work requires 'consistency' — the character should not suddenly break off and act in a way not plausibly grounded in his temperament as we have already come to know it.

In Aspects of the Novel (1927), E.M.Foster introduced popular new terms for an old distinction in discriminating between flat and round characters. A flat character (also known as type or 'two-dimensional') Foster says, is built around 'a single idea or quality' and is presented without much individualizing detail and can therefore be fairly adequately described in a single phrase or sentence. A round character is complex in temperament and motivation and is represented with subtle particularity; thus, he is as difficult to describe with any adequacy as a person in real life, and like most people, he is capable of surprising us.

### 5.5.4Eponymous Character

**Eponymous character** The character whose name is the title of the literary work

Eponymous, name□giving: a term applied to a real or fictitious person after whom a place, thing, institution, meal, or book is named. He/she is the character whose name is used as the title of a story. Thus, Anna Karenina is called the eponymous heroine of Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. Other examples include: Oliver Twist in Dickens' *Oliver Twist;*Efuru in Flora Nwapa's*Efuru;* Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* The term is often extended beyond its strict sense to describe a character who is referred to indirectly (that is, not by name) in the title of a work: thus Michael Henchard is called the eponymous character of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. An *eponym* is a name transferred from a person to a place or thing, either in its original form or as adapted (e.g. Bolivar or Bolivia).

## 5.6 Setting

**Setting**Place where and time when the actions in a literary work took place

The **setting** of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of an episode or scene within a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place. The setting of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is Dublin, June 16, 1904, and its opening episode is set in the Martello Tower overlooking Dublin Bay. The physical setting in the works of writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner is an important element in generating the atmosphere of a work. The Greek term opsis (scene or spectacle) is now occasionally used to denote the visible or picturable setting in any work of literature, including a lyric poem.

The historical or temporal setting is used in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, as all the events are dated with the day, periods in days and years of occurrence.

### 5.6.1 Setting as Place

Basic to a story's context is place, or locale–the physical environment. We need to know the locale in a broad sense: Where does the action take place? What country? What city or regions of that country? We also need to know it in a specific, narrower sense: What kind of place – building, countryside, school, or street? What specific building, rural area, school, or street? The physical setting of a work of fiction – whether a street, a house, a farm, or a prison camp – can be presented through vibrant, specific details, or it can be sketched broadly with a few, quick strokes. The setting of Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* is indicated in the first paragraph: the broad setting – eastern Spain, about a third of the way from Barcelona to Madrid – and the specific setting –a hot day at a rural train station, a junction where two lines meet in the middle of nowhere.

The description of a setting often evokes its significance, what it conveys and suggests. Reflect, for example, on the significance of the principal

setting in Louise Erdrich's*The Red Convertible* being a reservation. Ask yourself how the story would be different if Lyman and Henry lived in Chicago. Think about the locale of *Hills Like White Elephants*, how by creating a sense of isolation, the story focuses us on the two people and their problem, There are other people in the bar, but we see no one else except the waitress – the other people are just there, like the chairs and tables. The location includes only a railway junction: No town or city is indicated, which increases the sense of isolation. There is no community to support or affect them in what they face or decide (especially in what Jig faces and must decide) – just two individuals, making an individual decision as if it affects no one but themselves (at least that's how the man views it). Using a train station as locale also creates a sense of transience–no roots, no home, no ties. And placing the story at a junction suggests that the characters are facing a decision about the direction in which they should go.

## 5.6.2 Setting as Time

Setting also includes the time in which the events occur, time in all its dimensions: the century, the year, the season, the day, the hour, maybe even the exact second. In some cases, a specific time is not indicated: The events are universal and could as well have occurred a minute or a millennium ago. Often, however, a specific or approximate time is either assumed (the time seems the same as when the story was written or published) or indicated – perhaps by giving a date in the story, by mentioning historical events that were going on at the time of the story, or by describing the way people talk, act, or dress. In those cases, the specific time may be significant and knowing something about that time period may help you understand what is going on or the significance of what occurs. That may require asking questions and then doing some investigating – in an encyclopaedia, or on the Internet, or through more specialized books, depending on the time period involved and the way the story uses its setting.

The action in *Hills Like White Elephants* is probably contemporaneous with when it was written, in the mid-1920s. To decide if that time setting is significant to the story, ask what was going on at that time, what was significant or noteworthy. You might check a time line of world or European historical events. You'll notice that the story takes place less than ten years after the end of World War 1(1914 – 1918). To gain the full impact of the story's setting in time, you might need to do some reading about the war and its aftermath (an encyclopaedia entry on the war probably would suffice). The war caused immense loss of life, physical suffering, and psychological and emotional damage from trench warfare and use of nerve gas. It is estimated that millions of military personnel died (a high percentage of a whole generation's young men), along with 10 million civilians. Although the corresponding numbers in World War II were much greater, at the time the number of deaths and amount of devastation were unprecedented, it was called the Great War with good reason.

You would also need to learn something about the social changes that took place during and after the war. An encyclopaedia or Internet article(s) probably would cover the years after as well as during the war.

The war shattered the optimistic outlook held by much of the population in Western Europe and the United States. After the war ended, many people reacted by deciding to enjoy life fully in the present, since the war showed that life can end so quickly, and by rejecting older values (including prevailing sexual mores) and traditional roles (especially for women). The war led to changes in gender roles: With young men away in the military, young women had to work in factories instead of in homes, schools or offices. Having seen large cities and other countries, young people found it difficult to return to the sheltered, conservative communities in which they grew up. Many of them wanted to travel and to live in more cosmopolitan locations. A large number writers, artists, and socialites – Ernest Hemingway among them – moved from the United States to Europe.

### 5.6.3 Setting as Cultural Context

Setting also involves the social circumstances of the time and place. Here too, active reading may require some extra reading or research. Beyond the historical events at the time, try to find what attitudes people held about what was going on. What social and political problems were people facing? How were people below the poverty line treated, and what was the attitude of the economically secure? What kinds of social change were occurring? Such social and cultural contexts are closely related to the kind of historical events we discussed above – actually, all aspects of setting are interrelated and inseparable. So, for example, to understand *The Red Convertible* fully, it helps to know something about the Vietnam War and attitudes toward it. Notice also how it involves transplanting a young Native American from his familiar, traditional culture to a strikingly different military culture and then to a strange foreign culture.

Like *The Red Convertible*, *Hills Like White Elephants* involves cultural transplantation: an American writer, Ernest Hemingway, living in Paris, writing in English (thus mainly for an American audience), about an American travelling in Spain (a conservative, predominantly Catholic country) with a companion (to whom he does not seem to be married) in an unspecified country. The fact that he is called 'the American' suggests that Jig is not American; she apparently is not from Spain since she converses with the waitress (we are supposed to assume the man is talking to the waitress in Spanish, even though his words and hers are written in English). Such details economically and efficiently convey a mixture of cultures and values, as well as a cosmopolitan outlook.

## 5.7 Atmosphere

**Atmosphere** Pervading mood in a literary work.

**Atmosphere** is an alternative term for mood or ambience. It is the tonality pervading a literary work, which fosters in the reader expectations as to the course of events, whether happy or (more commonly) disastrous. Thomas Hardy in *The Return of the Native* makes Edgon Heath an immense and brooding presence which reduces to pettiness and futility the human struggle for happiness for which it is the

setting.

## 5.8Point of View

The way a story is narrated is part of its point of view, the approach used in presenting the events of the story. Point of view usually includes a person and a perspective. Consideration of point of view starts with listening to who is telling the story: Is it being told in first person or third person (or, rarely, in second person)? Is the narrator given a name, or is the narrator an unnamed, unidentified voice relating what happens from above or outside the events? You cannot always identify a specific person as the narrator, but you usually can discern the narrator's relation to the action. Does the narrator participate in the action as a major or minor character, or does she or he observe the action, looking on from the outside?

Listening for the complexity of point of view continues with paying attention to the perspective from which the story is told. The narrator inevitably relates the story from a certain vantage point. To get the most from a story, it is important to determine what that vantage point is. Think of it in terms of camera angle in cinema: The camera can pull back and let you see everything, showing the scene from the outside ("objectively"), or it can seem to enter the mind of a particular character and show you only what that character sees and the way she or he sees it ("subjectively"). The film can show us one side of the events by focusing on one character or group of characters, or it can show two or more sides of the events by focusing alternately between characters or groups. Thus, a cops-and-robbers film shown from the perspective of the robbers, looks very different from one presented from the perspective of the cops. And some films take advantage of that by moving back and forth between the two. Point of view matters a lot.

The same is true in fiction. You can be told everything from both outside and inside the characters and events so that you know all that happens and the reasons why. Or you can hear everything from the outside but nothing from the inside, so you have to deduce the why (the characters' motivations) for yourself. You can hear about only what one character experiences and know only as much as she or he knows. Or you can be told things from different perspectives as the story progresses, sometimes switching back and forth. (This happens more often in longer works such as novels; with some exceptions, short stories do not have enough room for a lot of switching). Each perspective has its own rewards and makes its own demands on the reader. Thus, for example, when a story is presented from the perspective of one character, as an active reader you should consider what that story would sound like from the perspective of other characters. Doing so gives you a deeper understanding of the character through whose eyes you are seeing the events as well as, in many cases, of the events themselves.

In fiction, the perspective of time also needs your consideration. Unlike film, which usually shows events as they are occurring, narrative necessarily relates events after they happened (a narrative in present tense would need to use the techniques of a play-by-play announcer at a sports

event, but even here the announcer is describing not what is happening but what just did happen). As you read actively, therefore, you need to ask if the narrator is looking back to past events. If so, are they recent events or events from the distant past? Can you tell how long ago? Does it matter how much time has passed? Does the narrator tell things differently now from the way she or he saw them earlier?

In describing and discussing point of view, you always need to include both a person and a perspective. It is not enough to say a story uses a third-person point of view. You need to add the perspective from which the third-person narrative is being presented, in as much precise detail as possible. *The House on Mango Street*, for example, uses a first-person limited point of view, told from the perspective of the young girl Esperanza. Hereunder are several possible combinations of point of view and perspective a story can employ.

## 5.8.1First-Person Omniscient

Stories using an *I* or *We* are told from a first-person point of view. In rare instances, a first-person narrator is almost omniscient, or all knowing. A story narrated by a god, for example, might be first-person omniscient (though the author of such a story might find it more interesting to depict a god who is limited in knowledge or power). Or a story could have a first-person narrator who talks to all the people involved and learns everything about the events in the story - both what happened and why – and thus is able to describe them from an all-knowing perspective. As readers, then, we listen for a reliable account of what happened and what the people involved are like.

## 5.8.2 First-Person Limited

Ordinarily, however, a first-person point of view is limited to what the narrator observes, or is told, and is able to understand, like Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*. She knows what the family's dream house would be like, and she knows their present house falls far short of their dreams, but she does not understand, until the day the nun sees her playing out front, what the house they live in says about their social situation, and she does not realize the kind of economic realities her family is up against. In many cases, a first-person narrator is very knowledgeable about what has happened and why, often because the events happen either to the narrator or in the narrator's presence. For that selfsame reason of being closely involved however, the narrator's knowledge and understanding may be limited. The narrator knows what happened to herself (or himself) or to some other characters, but may not know all that is happening to others related to the events. The narrator may not understand now, or did not understand then, why things happened as they did. She or he may not understand things about her- or himself. Often, the narrator is looking back at things that happened much earlier, which she or he did not understand fully at the time but comes to grasp more fully later.

Two specific variations on first-person limited perspectives should be noted. First is the use of a naive narrator, a narrator too young or too inexperienced to understand fully the implications of what she or he is

talking about. In such cases, active reading is even more important than usual, as the reader – who understands more than the narrator – must fill in implications the narrator cannot grasp. Such is the case in *The House on Mango Street*: Much of the power of the story comes from our ability to understand the reasons behind Esperanza's pains and disappointments, even though she is not fully aware of them.

The other variation involves the use of a narrator who is not completely trustworthy. If the narrator tells her or his story accurately and honestly (as far as we can tell), the story has a reliable narrator. We can believe or rely on what she or he says. But in some cases, we may suspect that a narrator is not telling the whole truth or is distorting some things, perhaps deliberately, to make them look better or unintentionally because they are too painful to face. The narrator may not have the mental capacity to provide a coherent account of events, or she or he may have prejudices (against a race or class or against a particular individual in the story) that the reader perceives even though the narrator is unaware of them. The narrator may want to make her- or himself look better: the narrator in Gish Jen's *Who's Irish?*does just that. In all these cases, the narrator is unreliable: We cannot trust everything she or he says. Here, active reading is even more essential because you must try to determine what you can take straightforwardly and where you need to raise questions and make allowances for or corrections in what you are being told.

## 5.8.3 Third-Person Omniscient

With an all-knowing, or omniscient, point of view, the narrator seems very much like the author, knowing everything that happens and why it happens (though not necessarily telling everything she or he knows), able to see into the minds and hearts of all the characters. But this can be a risky technique, because the characters can seem mere puppets. For an example of where it is handled well, look at Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat* in which things are shown sometimes from the perspective of Delia Jones, sometimes from that of the men sitting in front of the village store, and sometimes from that of Sykes, the husband who abuses Delia. At some points, we are able to look into Delia's consciousness ("A great terror took hold of her"), and at times into that of her husband ("Inside, Sykes heard nothing until he knocked a pot lid off the stove while trying to reach the match safe in the dark").

## 5.8.4 Third-Person Objective

A third-person objective point of view differs in a crucial way from that of third-person omniscient. The narrator does not look into the mind of any of the characters or explain why any of the characters do what they do. The narrator describes events only from the outside, leaving it to the reader to draw conclusions from the details and dialogue provided. The invisible narrator in Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* , for example, simply describes where two characters are and what they do, and relates what they say to each other, never looking into their thoughts or commenting on or explaining what is going on between them.

## 5.8.5 Third-Person Limited

Third-person limited uses a narrator who is omniscient in some areas or to some extent, but is not completely all knowing. Such a narrator is described as having limited omniscience. Typically, the narrator knows everything about one character, including her or his thoughts and motivations (omniscient), and tells the story from that character's perspective while not being able to see into the minds or feelings of other characters (limited). *The Man to Send Rain Clouds* by Leslie Marmon Silko, for example, is told from Leon's perspective ─ we follow where he goes, see what he sees, and at times enter his mind ("[The priest's] voice was distant, and Leon thought that his blue eyes looked tired"); but we do not enter the priest's mind – we are aware of his inner struggle and misgivings only through what Leon sees (the priest's weariness, his hesitation) and what Leon hears him say. Much of DagobertoGilb's*Love in L.A.* seems objective, with the narrator just reporting action and dialogue. But other parts show that the story is told from Jake's perspective and uses a limited omniscient point of view. Thus, the narrator frequently describes what Jake is seeing, thinking, and feeling, but never what Mariana sees, thinks, or feels.

A widely used variant on the third-person limited point of view is a centre of consciousness perspective. In it, the narrator relates the story in the third person but does so through what is thought, felt, seen, and experienced by one of the characters. We are shown only what that character is conscious of; we are not given external, objective views, the way a perspective limited in other ways can. The character may be the central character or a minor character, an observer or a participant, but only that character's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are shown. However, an author usually mixes some third-person limited external narration with centre of consciousness, moving back and forth between them, as for example in *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* The first two sentences of the opening paragraph are external, objective statements of fact, and such statements are interspersed throughout the story. In the third sentence, we enter Connie's consciousness and hear what she thinks about her mother and how and why her mother treats her as she does. Much of the rest of the story comes through Connie's consciousness.

> Her name was Connie. She was fifteen and she had a quick, nervous giggling habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors or checking other people's faces to make sure her own was all right. Her mother, who noticed everything and knew everything and who hadn't much reason any longer to look at her own face, always scolded Connie about it. (p. 75)

# 5.9 Stream of Consciousness

**Stream of Consciousness**
The direct presentation of the continuous flow of a character's thought without authorial intrusion

A story, or parts of a story, can be told by conveying the continuous flow of what passes through the mind (consciousness) of a character. This includes sense perceptions, thoughts, memories, and feelings – the total sense of awareness and the mental and emotional response to it. This approach is referred to as stream of consciousness. It should not be confused with the approach described just above: A stream of consciousness story can use a stream of consciousness approach, but it does not need to. Usually, to capture the fact that much mental activity is nonverbal, stream of consciousness adopts a special style of writing. Often, it does not use ordinary punctuation or complete sentences (after all, we do not always think in complete sentences), is associative rather than logical, and seems disjointed and haphazard. It is an unstructured, even at times chaotic, flow of random sense perceptions, mental pictures, sounds, thoughts, and details – an attempt to represent pre-rational mental activity before the mind orders it into a coherent form or shape.

Realizing that an author has selected these seemingly random thoughts and perceptions, an active reader must make connections between them and find a meaning the character is usually unaware of. Here, for example, is a stream of consciousness passage from James Joyce's novel Ulysses (1922), as the main character Leopold Bloom strolls through Dublin, with his mind absorbing impressions and connecting them to random thoughts and memories: "Pineapple rock, lemon plant, butter scotch. A sugar-sticky girl shoveling scoopfuls of creams for a Christian brother.Some school great.Bad for their tummies.Lozenge and comfit manufacturer to His Majesty the King.God. Save. Our.Sitting on his throne, sucking red jujubes white."

A technique often used in presenting stream of consciousness is interior monologue. A monologue in drama is an extended, uninterrupted speech by a single speaker; an interior monologue is such a speech occurring within a character's mind. It is the representation of unspoken mental activity – thoughts, impressions, and memories – as if directly overheard by the reader without being selected and organized by a narrator. It can be the associative, disjointed, non-logical, non-grammatical flow of stream of consciousness. Or it can be a more logical, grammatical flow of thoughts and memories moving through a person's mind, as if being spoken to an external listener (the way we rehearse in our minds what we plan to say to someone later, but digress along the way, following things we are reminded of before getting back to the topic at hand).

In Tillie Olsen's *I Stand Here Ironing* for example, the narrator, while doing her ironing, runs through her mind what she would like to say, but probably never will, to the school counsellor or social worker who asks her to come in to talk about her daughter, who the counsellor feels is in need of help:

"You think because I am her mother I have a key, or that in some way you could use me as a key? She has lived for nineteen years. There is all that life that has happened outside of me, beyond me".

This whole story is an interior monologue. A story or novel, however, can be presented partly through interior monologue or stream of consciousness and partly through another point of view.

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we identified and discussed some of the elements of prose fiction: story, subject matter, theme, plot, character and characterization. We convincingly argued that effective writing requires an understanding of the fundamental elements of storytelling. We also concluded that debate continues as to the number and composition of the fundamental elements of fiction.In the main, we have been able to examine some of the fundamental elements of fiction, bringing out their nature, tenets, functions and types.

This Study Session has been a continuation of our discussion on elements of prose fiction. We examined other major elements of fiction, including diction, setting, atmosphere and point of view. We also endeavoured to highlight the basic functions, types, and tenets of these elements. We drew apt textual illustrations from short stories, novelette/novellas, and novels.

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# Study Session6

# Symbolism in Prose Fiction

## Introduction

Works of literature not only help us see things in fresh and meaningful ways, they also can lead us to see deeply into and beyond things through the use of symbols. This Study Session will discuss the employment of symbols in prose fiction.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
6.1 *show* how symbols could be recognized in a literary work
6.2 *highlight* and discuss the types of symbol employed in prose fiction
6.3 *point out* symbols in any prose text
6.4 *critique* the employment of symbols in any given prose text
6.5 *write* a prose fictional text involving symbols

## 6.1 Recognizing Symbols

**Symbols**An object, a character or an action which stands for itself and another thing

Even though almost anything can take on symbolic significance, not every object, character, or act in a literary work should be labelled a **symbol**. Symbols draw their power from standing out, and they don't stand out if we call everything a symbol. A prudent way to proceed is to assume that objects, characters, and actions are just themselves and are not meant to be taken as symbols unless a further sense of meaning forces itself on us. If you miss something others regard as a symbol, do not worry. Symbols add to a work's meaning, but a work usually does not depend on your recognizing them. It is better to miss a symbolic meaning than to impose one and reduce a work to a sting of abstractions.

How, then, do you recognize a symbol? The key signal is prominence. Objects that are mentioned repeatedly, described in detail, or appear in noticeable or strategic positions (at the beginning or end, in the title, at a crucial moment, in the climactic lines) may point toward a meaning beyond themselves. The red convertible in Louise Erdrich's story certainly meets all these criteria. Signals, however, are not always structural. Another signal can be a sense of weightiness or significance. Sometimes, you may notice that an image, character, or action differs

from others, that it is beginning to embody an idea related to an area of major concern in the work. In such a case, it might be a symbol.

Be careful, however, not to undermine the use of concrete details by dismissing their crucial part in the work because you see them as symbols. Their literal role always comes first. A symbol is first an image, and its representation of an actual thing plays a key role in a work even if it also becomes a symbol. The quilts in *Everyday Use* come to symbolize the Johnson family's culture and heritage, but first and foremost they are actual quilts. At the end of the story, the narrator gives Maggie coverings she can put on a bed, not some abstract 'heritage' (though the bed coverings carry that sense of heritage with them). To separate the symbolic meaning from the literal diminishes the richness of both. The warmth of the Johnsons' heritage comes alive in the warmth provided by the quilts. Be careful also not to turn an abstraction into a symbol. A rose can be a symbol of love, but love (an abstraction) can never be a symbol of something else. And be sure that the symbolic meaning seems plausible. Its connection to the image, character, or action must seem likely and convincing within the context of the story. To claim that the red convertible is a symbol of Lyman's Marxist leanings (since red was associated with communism during the Cold War) seems totally far-fetched and implausible.

Symbols appear in several overlapping varieties. Think of some things you keep – a toy, a hat, a photo, a souvenir – that for you carry personal meanings although for others suggest nothing more than what they are. These private symbols are objects that hold a special meaning for you because of certain experiences or people. Since it is difficult, if not impossible, to convey their meanings to another person, private symbols ordinarily are not used in literary works. Several types of symbols, however, are important for literature.

Tip

To identify a symbol, look for prominence; look for objects that are mentioned repeatedly, described in detail, or appear in noticeable or strategic positions.

# 6.2 Types of Symbol

## 6.2.1 Literary Symbols

A literary symbol is an object, character, or action that is both part of the literal story in a literary work – it can be seen, touched, smelled, heard, tasted, encountered, or experienced by people in the story, poem, or play – and a suggestion of abstract meanings beyond itself. The red convertible is a real object in Erdrich's story: Lyman and Henry buy a real car, fix it up, and drive around in it. Beyond being an object the brothers own however, the car also represents their friendship and the bond they share. It suggests carefreeness, spontaneity, and freedom (think

of the difference if the car was a tan mini-van); perhaps it even reflects Henry's life and soul. When Lyman rolls the car into the river, the red convertible becomes part of a symbolic act. He is not just getting rid of the car; he is giving it to Henry, evidence of his love for and deep connection with his brother.

The distant hills in *Hills Like White Elephants* are actual objects in the story, visible to the characters, and are prominent: included in the title and discussed several times in the story. They seem to convey a sense of longing for that which is distant and unattainable, "all the things you've waited so long for," as Jig puts it. Note that meanings in the first sentence of the previous paragraph are plural. Symbols usually convey a cluster of possible meanings; they are rich, suggestive, and evocative. Knowledgeable readers do not reduce them to a single, definite meaning. The verb *suggest* may be safer to use than the verb *symbolize* because it conveys better the sense of a symbol's openness, inclusivity, and plurality.

## 6.2.2 Conventional and Traditional Symbols

Symbols often derive their meanings from the context of the literary work itself. Red convertibles have a certain cultural status in society – they are sexy. But they do not carry the particular symbolic meanings that are relied on in Erdrich's story. The car in *The Red Convertible* develops its meanings from its specific associations with Lyman and Henry and their situation. It is a 'story-specific' symbol, one that receives its significance from the work and may not have the same significance outside of that work. If you see a red convertible on the street, it may remind you of this story and its symbolic significance in the story, but it will not suggest the same significance for someone who has not read the story.

In contrast are conventional and traditional symbols. These do have significance outside literary works and can carry that significance into a work. Conventional symbols are objects like a national flag, a dove, a Star of David; they are objects that can be seen and touched, but they also have associations and meanings particular groups have consciously agreed to assign to them. Traditional symbols are objects that over years or even centuries have had certain meanings become attached to them in a culture, or in many cultures. The rose, to use that example again, an object that is beautiful and fragile, has, by tradition, in many cultures, become a symbol of love, but the cultures did not deliberately decide to attach that significance to the rose.

Tip

Some symbols depend on the context within which they are used while some have traditional meaning. Those in the latter category are conventional or traditional symbols..

Conventional and traditional symbols bring into a literary work the clusters of meaning they already possess outside the work. For us to respond to them according to usual the expectations depends on our

having (or our learning about) the shared background and experiences they depend on. No white elephants appear in the setting of Hemingway's story. They are the imaginative half of a simile. The title itself should make us begin asking in what ways hills are like white elephants. We should start with the physical, with the hills as images: In the story, Jig is looking at the line of hills, white in the sun, and says "They look like white elephants". She surely is talking about physical appearance. The hills are rounded and lumpy (not with sharp peaks and points), so they look sort of, a little bit, like the bodies of elephants. Jig says later, "They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the colouring of their skin through the trees", but by then most readers probably have a visual image of their shape as well.

If that was the only time the phrase was used in the story, it would simply be a part of the description of the seeing. But it is repeated three times, as well as being the title phrase. Dwelling on it this way suggests there is more to it than an imaginative description of setting. And if Jig had said only that the hills are like elephants, the phrase probably would not get beyond the physical. But she says they are like white elephants. That takes us further, probably requiring us to explore what white elephants are. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definitions for *white elephant* (all current when Hemingway was writing):

> A rare albino variety of elephant which is highly venerated in some Asian countries. B. *fig* A burdensome or costly possession (from the story that the kings of Siam were accustomed to make a present of one of these animals to courtiers who had rendered themselves obnoxious, in order to ruin the recipient by the cost of its maintenance). Also, an object, scheme, etc, considered to be without use or value.

White elephants have taken on traditional symbolic significance in Eastern cultures and, to some extent, Western societies. Some of that traditional symbolic significance is carried into *Hills Like White Elephants* through the repeated references to, and resulting prominence of, white elephants in the story. The story implies that Jig, unlike the man, has seen white elephants:

> "They look like white elephants", she said.
>
> "I've never seen one", the man drank his beer.
>
> "No, you wouldn't have"

If she has, she probably knows that they are both rare and venerated and (figuratively) a burdensome or useless possession. Their conversation goes from "all the things you've waited so long for" to "white elephants" to the operation: the "simple operation" that is "not really an operation at all". It's left to the reader to decide what the operation is. It might well be an abortion (see if that fits the way they talk about it). In that case, her use of *white elephants* suggests a contrast (whether she intends the application or not) between pregnancy and new life as a highly valued treasure on the one hand, and as a burden or an object without value on the other. In addition, the story implies that if Jig stays pregnant, the man may soon think of her as a burdensome and unwanted possession.

## 6.2.3 Archetypal Symbols

**Archetypal symbols**
symbols, character types, and plot lines that trace back to original models or patterns, especially in early myths, folktales, fairy tales, and religious writings

A special type of traditional symbol is an **archetypal symbol**. Archetypes are original models or patterns from which later things are made: the first automobile that was constructed is the archetype of all later models. *Literary archetypes* are symbols, character types, and plot lines that trace back to original models or patterns, especially in early myths, folktales, fairy tales, and religious writings. They are used again and again in literature until they come to carry a wide, nearly universal significance and thus move most readers at a very deep emotional level.

Here, is a list of some archetypal symbols – a small sampling of all those that could be listed – to illustrate what you can look for:

- A meal or feast as a symbol of harmony and union
- A garden or park as a type of paradise
- The country as a place of natural beauty, freedom, or innocence, in contrast to a city as a place of artificiality and corruption, or of order and community
- A forest as natural beauty, or as a scary place where one can be lost
- A spring or fountain as a symbol of purity and fertility
- The sea as a source of life, or as a symbol of danger, leading to death
- A desert or wilderness as a symbol of barrenness, emptiness
- A river as boundary between worlds, thus as death; sometimes as fertility and source of life
- Cycles of nature–the phases of the day (dawn, noon, sunset, and night) and the seasons (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) – suggesting the cycles of human life (birth and youth, adulthood, old age, and death)

Character types can also take on symbolic significance. Among archetypal characters used through the centuries are the heroes, the villain, the witch, the wanderer, the benevolent ruler, the tyrant, the trickster, the siren, the angel, the keeper of wisdom. And narrative motifs can carry archetypal significance. Examples used throughout literature and now rich with symbolic implications include creation stories, salvation stories, and tales of temptation.

Among the most frequently used symbolic motifs, especially in longer stories and poems, is the archetype of the journey, which throughout the centuries has suggested growth or achievement or maturing, especially through experience and education. Because, in that sense, all of us are on a journey, stories, poems, and plays involving journeys are often especially meaningful and include some of the world's best-known literary works. The car as a symbol in *The Red Convertible* suggests that Lyman and Henry are on such a journey of growth and experience, with Henry's experience in Vietnam, though implied rather described, forming a crucial part of journey. The railway brings a similar significance into "Hills Like White Elephants," as the wanderings across Europe undertaken by Jig and the American (their luggage is covered with labels

"from all the hotels where they had spent nights") can echo the directionless journey or wandering that is shaping their lives.

## Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we established that works of literature not only help us see things in fresh and meaningful ways but can also lead us to see deeply into and beyond things through the use of symbols. We defined a symbol as something that represents both itself and something else. We concluded that in prose fiction, a symbol is usually an object, although it is sometimes a character or an action. A symbol's characteristics usually relate closely to the abstractions it represents. We identified some types of symbols and their examples. These symbols include literary symbols, conventional symbols, traditional symbols, and archetypal symbols. We also examined the employment of symbols in selected prose fiction texts.

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# Study Session7

# Style, Tone and Irony in Prose Fiction

## Introduction

Among the elements which make up a prose fiction text are style, tone and irony. In fact, they are effective weapons in the hands of a fiction writer to pass his messages across and make his/her story vivid, convincing, credible, comprehensive, didactic and entertaining. In this Study Session, we will dwell on the features, types, functions and employment of style, tone and irony in prose fiction.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

7.1 *analyse* the style employed in a prose fiction.
7.2 *point out* the tone of any prose fiction.
7.3 *critique* the employment of irony in any prose fiction.

## 7.1 Style

**Style** How a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says or writes

Style is the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse. It is how a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says. The style of a work or writing may be analyzed in terms of its diction or choice of words, its sentence structure and syntax, the density and types of its figurative language, the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds and other formal features, and its rhetorical aims and devices.

In traditional theories of Rhetoric, styles were classified into three main levels: the high (or grand), the middle (or mean), and the low (or base, or plain) style. The doctrine of Decorum required that the level of style in a work be appropriate to the speaker, the occasion and the dignity of its literary genre.

Northrop Frye introduced a variant of this long-persisting theory of stylistic levels in literature by making a basic differentiation between the demotic style (which is modelled on the language, rhythms, and the associations of ordinary speech) and the hieratic style (which employs a variety of formal elaborations that separate the literary language from ordinary speech). Frye then proceeded to distinguish a high, middle and low level in each of these classes.

**Paratactic style** Members within a sentence or a sequence of complete sentences are put one after

Another distinction made with increasing frequency in discussing prose style is that between parataxis and hypostasis. A **paratactic style** is one in which the members within a sentence or else a sequence of complete sentences, are put one after the other without any expression of their

the other with or without the use of 'and'.

**Hypotactic style**
Relations within the sentence or between sentences are established through the use of appropriate connectives.

connection or relations except (at most) the noncommittal connective 'and'. Hemingway's style is characteristically paratactic. The members in this sentence from *The Sun also Rises* are joined merely by 'and': "It was dim and dark and the pillars went high up and there were people praying, and it smelt of incense, and there were some wonderful big buildings". A **hypotactic style** is one in which the temporal, logical and syntactic relations between members and sentences are expressed by words such as ('when', 'then', 'because', 'therefore') or by phrases (such as 'in order to', 'as a result') or by the use of subordinate phrases and clauses.

The way things are said, their style and tone, matters a lot. The way things are phrased and expressed can affect the meaning words convey (some people can talk their way out of anything, right?), and the tone of voice can decidedly alter the message. "Nice shirt!" can mean you love it or you hate it, depending on whether you say it enthusiastically about a friend's birthday present or mutter bitterly about a ragged T-shirt with an offensive slogan on the back. The same is true for a work of fiction. A work's style is important because it is interesting and enjoyable to read a distinctive style of writing, and because style helps shape tone, the 'tone of voice' that affects how we take what is being said–whether what the narrator and characters say should be taken straightforwardly, or with a grain of salt, or the opposite way from which it is stated. This study session focuses on some of the key elements that contribute to style and tone – and on the specific tone of irony – to help you be more alert to subtleties of fine writing as you listen to or read a work of literature.

As you read a prose text the first time, you'll probably focus more on what's happening and why, then, on the way it's said. Most readers listen more intently for style on a second reading. So, read it a second time, paying close attention to the way things are phrased and expressed – to word choice, for example (listening for the sounds of words as well as determining their meaning), and to the way sentences are constructed. Think about whether the style seems to you appropriate and effective in conveying what happens to the central character and the feelings she experiences, for example, on hearing that her husband has died.

In everyday speech, style is used in at least two important ways: "that's a stylish suit" (it's attentive to the elements that are contemporary, 'in', attractive, effective) and: "that's their style of doing things" (their distinctive way or approach). Both uses apply when discussing literature, and they usually are closely related. Style, when applied to writing, is the manner in which a writer uses words, constructs sentences, incorporates non-literal expressions, and handles rhythm, timing, and tone, all resulting in the effectiveness and individuality of a writer's work.

## 7.1.1 Style as Effectiveness of Expression

If your teacher asks you to discuss the style of a work, she or he wants you to describe how or explain why the words, sentences, and imaginative comparisons are effective in terms of what is being created: Is it done 'with style', that is, with proper care and in ways appropriate to the content and purpose of the work? Such a question requires that you listen actively and attentively for at least three features: words, sentences, and imaginative comparisons.

Effectiveness always depends on appropriateness to a specific context. In expository writing, that means the appropriateness of the style to the writing's purpose: a formal style for a business letter or a research paper, an informal style for a personal letter or an essay describing your first day at college. In fiction, the style in the narrative passages must be appropriate to the narrator, and in dialogue it must fit the characters and the contexts in which they appear. A work of fiction usually has multiple styles, one for the narrative portions and different styles for the thoughts or words of different characters.

## 7.1.2 Word Choice/Diction

Central to style is an author's diction. Dictionin a narrow sense means word choice, but in a broader sense it refers to the overall character of language used in writing or speech and includes *vocabulary* (choice of words) and *syntax* (arrangement of words, their ordering, grouping, and placement within phrases, clauses, and sentences).

A writer can employ any of several types of diction, and the kind that predominates defines one aspect of a work's style. The words selected by a published author, or by you as a student writer, affect the way the work articulates the subject as well as the sound, rhythm, and feel of the writing. For instance, the formal diction in Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour* seems to fit the strong, reserved character of Mrs. Mallard and the tight, careful plotting that sets up the surprise ending.

Here are some other types of diction, though such a list can never be complete and exhaustive.

1. **Simple Words:**"When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral" (William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*) – except for the names, all the words are everyday words, as is the language the narrator uses for objective description: "She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl". The diction in the first sentence of Alice Walker's *Everyday Use* is similar: "I will wait for her in the yard which Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon".
2. **Complex Words:** "But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the*august* names of that neighbourhood" (*A Rose for* Emily). When the narrator – obviously educated and formal – wants to convey an attitude towards something carefully and precisely, he turns to words derived from French or Latin, rather than to the simpler Anglo equivalents: New people and modern ways don't edge in, they encroach (trespass) where they don't belong; they don't just wipe away the worthy names, they obliterate (destroy violently) names that were august (awe-inspiring, deserving reverence and respect). Here is more such diction from later in the story: "With the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and moccasins and she carried a little suitcase" (Louise Erdrich's The Red Convertible). Lyman's words describing Susy fit his usual emphasis on the down-to-earth when describing how things are. He relates the facts, rarely trying to provide abstract theories or

explanations to explain them. Similarly, "the hard clay is swept clean grooves" (Everyday Use).

3. **Abstract Words:** "You just don't understand … your heritage … make something of yourself … a new day" (Everyday Use). Dee's vague, empty parting words of advice help bring out the irony that it is she, not her mother or sister, who needs deeper understanding. Likewise, "on the rare occasions when something opens within, and the music enters, what we mainly hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocations" (James Baldwin's Sonny's Blues).
4. **Colloquialisms (informal, conversational expressions):** "Don'tchaknow it's Sunday all day?" (Where Are You Going, Where Have YouBeen?). The slurred syllables are characteristic of speech, not written prose; the casual way Arnold Friend expresses himself helps us know more of what his character is like. Two other examples are "I'm an openmindedkinda guy" (Love in L.A.), and "I ain't learning nothing in school" (Sonny's Blues).
5. **Slang:** "A sweet broad soft-looking can". Most of us wouldn't use the word can in a school paper, but it fits perfectly the breezy "with it" personality Sammy wants to project. Another example is the narrator's use of a slang term for heroin in Sonny's Blues: "the first time Sonny had ever had horse."
6. **Dignified, sophisticated terminology:** "A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all" (A Rose for Emily) —the words convey the polite, formal, old-fashioned way the mayor and Miss Emily treat each other in what is a very delicate situation.
7. **Technical terms:** "The milk in it clabber [thickly curdled and sour] by now" (Everyday Use) —the word is precise and informs us that the churn whose top Dee takes away as a keepsake is one still being used in the household. Also, "behind jalousies [a window, shade, or door of horizontal slats of glass, wood, or metal that can be adjusted for regulating air or light] closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon" (A Rose for Emily ).

# 7.2 Tone

This is a very vague critical term usually designating the mood or atmosphere of a work. However, in some restricted uses, it refers to the author's attitude to the reader (For instance, formal, intimate, pompous) or to the subject-matter (for example, ironic, light, solemn, satiric, sentimental).

**Tone** Authors attitude towards the subject matter

When you listen to a story, it's important to pay attention to its **tone**, the 'tone of voice' it projects, the attitude or 'stance' it takes toward the characters and actions. Tone is a significant aspect of style and of communication generally: It can add to, modify, or even invert the meaning of the words expressed. If someone says "please close the door behind you," it makes a big difference if the words are spoken as a simple reminder or as an angry demand. Either way, the tone adds a lot that the

words themselves don't say. In the former case, tone conveys respect, acceptance, and confidence; in the latter, rebuke, rejection, separation. Tone in a literary work similarly gets in, around, and behind the words to indicate the attitude the work takes toward the characters, setting, subject, or issues, or the attitude a character evinces toward an issue, situation, setting, or another character.

When we talk, our own tone is conveyed by the inflections in our voice. For a writer, spoken inflections, obviously, are not available, so tone must usually be indicated through style: word choice, ways of phrasing, and kinds of comparisons; all can convey an attitude toward what is being described or discussed. Recall the way *The Story of an Hour* describes the beauty of the spring day and then compares Mrs. Mallard's sense of release and freedom to a living thing, "creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the colour that filled the air" and forcing itself on her. The nature of the comparison, words such as 'possess her' and 'striving to beat it back', and her powerlessness to stop the approach of 'this thing' create momentarily an ominous and threatening tone. That turns to relief when Mrs. Mallard accepts it willingly, and the fact that she has had this sense of freedom and release thrust on her unsought evokes sympathy for her, even though we might generally be unsympathetic toward a wife who feels relief at her spouse's death. A story can convey a wide variety of attitudes toward characters and events.

## 7.3 Irony

**Irony** A way of expression in which the writer or speaker creates a discrepancy between the real and the obvious

One of the more complex tones is **irony**, a way of expression in which the writer or speaker creates a discrepancy or incongruity between what is (reality) and what seems to be (appearance). Dealing with irony requires active reading because the words don't mean what they literally say. There, the reader has to be active in recognizing and processing the difference between what is said and what is meant. Irony appears in a variety of forms. The sections that follow describe the most important types of irony and indicate what to listen for to discern each type.

### 7.3.1 Verbal Irony

**Verbal Irony** Here, what is said or written is the opposite of what is meant

In **verbal irony**, what is said is the opposite of what is meant ("Beautiful day!" when the weather is miserable). The name Arnold Friend, in *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*is an example for Arnold is anything but a friend to Connie. You need to recognize the incongruity between the name and the person. Verbal irony requires listening signals that what is said is not to be taken in a straightforward way – exaggerated and contradictory word choice, for example, or the sheer absurdity of what is said (it can't be straightforwardly true), or the cutting tone with which a word or phrase seems intended to be spoken. A specific form of verbal irony, sarcasm, is an especially direct, harsh, and cutting form ("ho, these eggs are fine. I prefer them black and fused to the plate"). The

narrator's put-down of Sonny's friend: "And how about you? You're pretty goddamn smart, I bet", is sarcastic. If we miss such signals, we risk misreading the work.

## 7.3.2 Dramatic Irony

**Dramatic irony** A situation whereby a character lives in a fool's paradise because he/she does not yet know something already known by the reader or the audience.

**Dramatic irony** arises when a character says or does something that the reader or audience realizes has a meaning opposite to what the character intends. To detect dramatic irony, watch for occasions when characters don't realize the full implications of what they are saying or of what happens to them, and when you see more about it than they do. A famous example is the Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex, in which an oracle informs Oedipus that he will murder his father and marry his mother. As the story proceeds and we learn that Oedipus has indeed killed a man and has married a woman considerably older than him, we begin to realize before he and the other characters do that what the oracle declared is true. Much later, the power of the play comes from our growing horror as we watch Oedipus and his mother grasp what we already know, and our awareness that we can do nothing to change the outcome. Similarly, the last line of *The Story an Hour* depends on dramatic irony: We know that Mrs. Mallard wasn't killed by joy at seeing her husband alive and well, but died from shock and disappointment instead. Also, be alert for the possibility of dramatic irony when a work of fiction uses an unreliable narrator, in cases where you are aware of more than the narrator is or the characters are.

## 7.3.3 Situational Irony

**Situational irony** When what is realized is not what is hoped for

In situational irony, a result or situation turns out very differently from what was expected or hoped for. To notice situational irony, look for reversals –when something turns around from what it used to be, or what was expected, or what was desired. In many cases, such a reversal has ironic implications. In *Everyday Use*, as Dee insists on being given the quilts her mother and grandmother made, Mama recalls how she had "offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style". Irony arises out of the change in Dee's attitude toward her heritage. And it's ironic when Dee accuses Mama of not appreciating her heritage when the situation has made it clear that it's Dee who lacks such understanding. Unlike dramatic irony, in situational irony the reader does not necessarily know more than the characters and may be as surprised by what happens as the characters are. That is the case with the unexpected double situational ironies in *The Story of an Hour*. First, the 'something' coming towards Mrs. Mallard, for which she waits fearfully, is not the sense of overwhelming loss and grief we expect her to feel; her reaction to the situation turns out to be the opposite. Second, the few moments in which Mrs. Mallard does experience a desire for life and an expectation of happiness end up being the result of a clerical error and, instead of the wonderful future she glimpsed, lead to her death.

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we identified style, tone and irony as some of the elements that make up a prose fiction text. We also argued that they are effective weapons in the hands of a fiction writer to pass his/her messages across and make his/her story vivid, convincing, credible, comprehensive, didactic and entertaining. We also dwelt on the features, types, and functions of style, tone and irony in prose fiction. We drew illuminative examples from prose texts to illustrate the place of style, tone and irony in prose fiction.

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# Study Session8

# Textual Analysis of a Short Story Matter and Manner in Chinua Achebe's 'The Madman '

## Introduction

In Study Session Three, we discussed the features of short story as a sub-genre of prose fiction. In this Study Session, we will exemplify the basic tenets of short story with Chinua Achebe's The Madman. The Study Session will dwell on the biography of the author, the context of his story, its thematic preoccupations, techniques and elements.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

8.1 *discuss* the thematic preoccupations of Chinua Achebe's literary works.
8.2 *assess* the techniques employed in the story
8.3 *sketch* the plot structure of the story
8.4 *comment* on the elements of the story
8.5 *critique* the story from the perspectives of its contents and form

## 8.1 About the Author: Chinua Achebe

***Things Fall Apart*Achebe's first novel, published in 1958**

Chinua Achebe is an Igbo Nigerian novelist and author of *Things Fall Apart,* famous for writing unsentimentally about the effects of Western colonialism on Igbo society. Born on November 16, 1930, in Ogidi, Nigeria, Chinua Achebe is a prominent Igbo (Ibo) novelist acclaimed for his unsentimental depictions of the social and psychological disorientation accompanying the imposition of Western customs and values upon traditional African society. His particular concern was with emergent Africa at its moments of crisis; his novels range in subject matter from the first contact of an African village with the white man to the educated African's attempt to create a firm moral order out of the changing values in a large city.Educated in English at the University of Ibadan, Achebe taught for a short time before joining the staff of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in Lagos, where he served as Director of External Broadcasting during 1961–66. In 1967, he co-founded a publishing company at Enugu with the poet Christopher Okigbo, who died shortly thereafter in the Nigerian civil war. In 1969, Achebe toured

the United States with his fellow writers Gabriel Okara and Cyprian Ekwensi, lecturing at universities. Upon his return to Nigeria, he was appointed Research Fellow at the University of Nigeria and became professor of English, a position he held from 1976 until 1981 (Professor emeritus from 1985). He was a Director (from 1970) of two Nigerian publishing outfits, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. and Nwankwo-Ifejika Ltd. After an automobile accident in Nigeria in 1990 that left him partially paralyzed, he moved to the United States, where he taught at Bard College in New York. In 2009, Achebe left Bard to join the faculty of Brown University in Providence, R.I.

## 8.2 Subject Matter of *the Madman*

Nwibe, with three other hefty men, whips the madman out of a hut which the mad man uses as his resting place when the market women are no longer in the sheds. He also alights from a lorry on another occasion and gives the mad man the beating of his life, claiming to be correcting him not to walk in the middle of the highway. He is also claimed to order his children to stone the madman and make remarks about his (the madman's) nakedness.

On a particular market day, Nwibe rises early to visit his farm beyond the stream to do some work before going to the market for merriment- taking palm-wine with his peers. After Nwibe had finished the work, he decides to wash off the sweat of work as usual. As he is taking his bath, the earlier mentioned madman who is on his way to the market comes to the stream to drink some water.

The madman on seeing Nwibe quickly recognizes him as his oppressor and decides to teach Nwibe the lesson of his life. Nwibe who is backing the mad man hears laughter and turns quickly. Seeing the madman, he threatens to whip him, but before he could make a movement, the madman takes his cloth and puts it on. He shouts at the mad man to drop the cloth, but it is too late. Out of anger, Nwibe starts to chase the mad man who has headed towards the highway. Unconscious of his nakedness, he starts running after the madman, shouting and cursing him. Nwibe who could not meet up with the madman who had become practically lost among the much denser crowds continues his search towards the market. Nwibe is sighted in his nudity by his kinsmen; they try in vain to stop him from entering the market believing that a madman that enters the market can never be cured of his madness. Nwibe is caught at the middle of the market and is taken to two different medicine men by his relatives. The first medicine man refuses to take care of him, telling them that Nwibe cannot be cured of his madness because he has entered the market. The second medicine man attempts to treat him with the aim of getting money from them. Unknown to his relatives, Nwibe comes to his senses, and they believe that the medicine man has cured his madness. Two years later, Nwibe makes fresh proposal for joining the community of titled men in his town. However, Ozo men put aside the issue and treat another issue.

*The Madman* is a story that satirizes the folly of some men who, in their comfort and success in life, do not remember to pity and be merciful to

the less fortunate people in their societies. It presents us with the tale of Nwibe, a man of high standing in Ogbu town, whose status continues to soar until the nemesis of his past maltreatment of a madman catches up with him. There is a tragic reversal of status as people take a naked Nwibe, running towards the market place, for a fresh madman. He does not only miss the opportunity of joining the highly respected Ozo title society to which he had applied, but also loses his hitherto high esteem among family members and the whole community, since they all see him as having, at least, experienced madness.

The story is preoccupied with post-independence realities in Nigeria. In the story, Achebe reveals some of the happenings in Nigeria; he uses the story to portray the oppression that was happening at a time the rich chastised, looked down on and belittled the underprivileged in the society. It is a tragic story which dwells on the problem of man's inhumanity to man in post-independence Nigeria.

Tip

The Madman is about a sane man who runs mad chasing, naked, a madman to recover his clothes which the madman had stolen while he [the sane man] bathed.

## 8.2.1Themes

**Hint**

'The Madman' has a theme of retribution.

The major theme of the story is retribution. It is revealed through the story that people will reap whatever they sow. Nwibe is a wealthy man of high standing, who is even still rising. The madman, on the other side, has little value in the society. Mad people have no honour in society, and people who have experienced madness before are barred from holding certain exalted positions. Nwibe has an encounter with the madman, and instead of being considerate and kind, he jumps down from his mammy wagon and beats him up. He is generously repaid when the madman meets him naked in the stream. He packs Nwibe's cloths and makes him (Nwibe) pursue him without having any cloth on. Before Nwibe could appraise the situation, he finds himself in the market place, with the outlook of a mad man. This is a *coup de grace* as Nwibe descends from exalted status in the society to share the fate of common people, such as mad men.

Another theme of the story is the side effects of polygamy. The evil of polygamy is brought to light by the happenings in Nwibe's household. Nwibe is a polygamist who has two wives. Mgboye, the senior wife, is a "woman of peace who rarely demanded the respect due to her from the other". Udenkwo, the second wife, is unruly and quarrelsome. When Nwibe thinks of changing his wives' thatch roofs, the fear of Udenkwo setting the compound on fire keeps him from doing Mgboye's hut right away. The home is also full of rancour as the wives often quarrel on minor issues.

## 8.2.2 Character/ Characterization

The major characters in the story include Nwibe, Mgboye, the madman and Udenkwo.

**Nwibe**

He is the tragic hero of the story. He is wealthy, noble and of high standing in the society. He seeks admission into the honoured hierarchy of Ozo title holders. However, his tragic flaw is his lack of self control and human feeling, especially for the destitute. He angrily descends on the madman when the latter s not well composed on the road. He allowed his lack of self control to blind him to nakedly chase a madman to the market on a market day, when he could have used wisdom to appeal to, or appease the madman when he was about to pick his (Nwibe's) clothes. If persuasion had failed, Nwibe could have patiently stayed in the stream before finding his way home when darkness falls. He was not taken serious whenever he pointed at the real madman as the mad one. As a result, he lost his high esteem in the society, and was forever disqualified from becoming an Ozo title holder.

**Mgboye**

She is the first wife of Nwibe. She is a woman of peace who is not accorded the respect due to her from the other; rather, she suffers series of provoking statements from her co-wife, Udenkwo, who is a woman of trouble and is ready to make trouble with anybody who crosses her path.

**The Madman**

Mad people are arguably the least recognized people in some societies. This madman, though unimportant in his society, destroys an important man. The madness reduces Nwibe from a noble man, first to a madman, and later to an ex-madman. The madman is a comic character used by Achebe to buttress the point that everybody in any society is important, and if not well treated, could decide the fate of the so-called important people.

## 8.2.3Setting

The story is set in a traditional Igbo society. It is a society that is governed by traditional beliefs and practices. The traditional family set-up is also depicted in the story. Nwibe is a polygamist, married to two wives, with the attendant trouble associated with polygamy.

The role of the traditional medicine men is brought to light. The traditional belief that a mad person cannot be totally cured destroys Nwibe's chance of ever-rising again to honour and acceptability among the Ozo titled men. The physical setting of the story is the town of Ogbu, a rural area.

## 8.2.4 Narrative Devices

The following are some of the devices used for effective narration.

### Suspense

Suspense is used as a technique to arouse the interest of the reader and sustain their concentration. This is employed when the madman keeps on watching Nwibe, while that latter is naked in the stream.

### Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is used judiciously. There is a premonition of madness on Page 2, where Nwibe angrily scolds: “if Udenkwo is crazy, must everybody else go crazy with her?” This is even extended by Udenkwo who replies her husband: “Udenkwo is always mad, but those who are sane let...?”

### Setting for Special Effect

In this story, setting is used for special effect. For instance, market and river have special effect upon the action and fate of Nwibe, the protagonist of the story.

### Coincidence

Coincidence is used to develop the plot. Some uncommon occurrences happen by chance. It is a coincidence that the time Nwibe bathes in the stream, the same time the madman is thirsty and goes to the same stream. Nwibe decides to wash off his sweat at the stream and at the same time the mad man is also thirsty and also goes to the same stream to drink water. The two men from Nwibe’s village also get to the entrance of the market when Nwibe also gets there in nakedness. Another coincidence is the occurrence of the incident on a market-day when many people can easily see and publicize the news about Nwibe’s seeming madness. This is used to quicken the downfall of Nwibe and propel the plot.

### Role Reversal

Nwibe who had earlier been a sensible man later turns to play the role of a madman, and the lunatic becomes a sane man towards the end of the story. This is used by the author for didactic effect: No condition is permanent.

### African Traditions

Achebe's own literary language is Standard English blended with Pidgin, Igbo vocabulary, proverbs, images and speech patterns. An example of his skills as a storyteller is in this story, a richly layered narrative, in which the social customs of the Ibo-speaking people are strongly present. Nwibe, an honored member of a distant town Ogbu, plans to go to the market, where he has once chased a madman out of his hut and sent his children to throw stones at him. As he washes by the river, the madman snatches his clothes. Nwibe runs naked after him, shouting stop the madman. The thief with the clothes disappears in the crowd, and Nwibe is taken to a medicine-man, but he has lost his social position. "For how could a man be the same again of whom witnesses from all the lands of Olu and Igbo have once reported that they saw today a fine, hefty man in his prime, stark naked, tearing through the crowds to answer the call of the market-place. Such a man is marked forever."

It is a superstition in Africa that when a madman enters into the market, he becomes incurable. This is confirmed by the two men who try to prevent Nwibe from entering into the market with his madness. The first medicine man also confirms it through his refusal to treat Nwibe. The setting of the story is a traditional Igbo society; a common feature of African traditional society is the prominence of superstitious beliefs. This can be found in the story. For example, a lunatic is considered irrevocably mad the moment he or she steps into the market square.

### Satire

The story criticizes and mocks certain ills in the society with a view to proffering solutions. Indeed, the story exposes the attitude of most people to those who are regarded as the dregs of the society. Mockery is used to show the foolishness of this attitude through Nwibe's folly and resultant fall from grace to grass. He is regarded by his society as 'a man of high standing'. This makes him harass the madman at any and every opportunity. He is, however, punished and ridiculed when the madman catches him naked and packs his clothes. His threats of whipping the madman do not work as the madman flees with Nwibe's clothes.

### Wise Sayings/Proverbs

Proverbs and wise sayings are used in the story. Udenkwo makes use of a proverb in the last sentence on Page 2. The second medicine man also says: "No one folds his arms because the condition of his child is beyond hope".

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we exemplified the basic tenets of short story using Chinua Achebe's The Madman as illustration. We dwelt on the biography of the author (Chinua Achebe), the context of the story, its thematic preoccupations, techniques and elements. We argued that in *The Madman*, Achebe dwells on the themes of man's inhumanity to man, vengeance/retribution and the evil effects of polygamy. We also identified and illustrated some of the formal properties of the story, including suspense, coincidence, role reversal, satire, superstition, proverbs and foreshadowing. It is also concluded that Achebe uses the story to teach some morals: patience, tolerance, kindness, and maturity.

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# Study Session9

# Themes and Techniques in Michael Anthony's 'The Year in San Fernando '

## Introduction

In Study Session Three, we dwelt on the basic tenets of novella. We concluded that it is a prose fiction longer than a short story, but shorter than a novel. In this Study Session, we will illustrate the tenets of novella with Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando.*

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

9.1 *write* a biography of Michael Anthony.
9.2 *highlight* and assess the thematic preoccupations of Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando.*
9.3 *critique* the techniques and elements of the novella.
9.4 *describe* the nexus between the matter and the manner of the novella.

## 9.1 About the Author: Michael Anthony

Michael Anthony was born in Mayaro in 1930. He attended Mayaro Roman Catholic School, and from 1941 to 1942 spent a year at a school in San Fernando. This turned out to be the inspiration for his novel *The Year in San Fernando.* By 1944, young Anthony won a bursary to attend the San Fernando Technical School. Two years after, he began an internship at Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd. (also known as Texaco Inc). He trained as a moulder and worked in the iron foundry until he left for England. Anthony wrote some light verses for the Trinidad Guardian. He also wrote stories for the Barbadian literary magazine B.I.M. In 1954, he left for England. There, he worked in factories, but he also found time for his literary pursuits contributing to 'Caribbean Voices', a literary feature of BBC's 'Calling the Caribbean'. Unfortunately, Anthony and many other young authors were left stranded when this programme was taken off the air.Later, Anthony responded to an advertisement by Hutchinson's Publishing Company calling for young writers to submit stories. Publishers advised Michael Anthony to attempt a full-length novel. In 1963, Anthony published *The Games Were Coming* which was printed by Andre Deutsch. *The Year in San Fernando* was published a couple years after the first novel.

At one time, Anthony worked in the United Kingdom, and then from 1970 to 1988, in Trinidad and Tobago. He was closely associated with the National Cultural Council started by the late Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams in 1971, and supervised by the late anthropologist Dr. J.D. Elder.In 1979, Anthony was presented with the Trinidad and Tobago's Humming Bird Gold Medal for his contributions. Thus far, Anthony has over twenty-five publications, which include short stories, novels and historical books on Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2003, Anthony was conferred an honorary doctorate by the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine for his contribution to literature in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.

**Michael Anthony's Works**

**Novels:**

*The Games Were Coming* - London, Deutsch, 1963

*The Year in San Fernando* - London, Deutsch, 1965

*Green Days by the River* - London, Deutsch, 1967

*Streets of Conflict* - London, 1976

*All That Glitters* - London, Deutsch, 1981

*Bright Road to El Dorado* - Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, Nelson, 1982

*The Becket Factor* - London, Collins, 1990

*In the Heat of the Day* - Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996

*High Tide of Intrigue* – Heinemann, 2001

**Short Stories:**

*Sandra Street and other stories* - London, Heinemann Secondary Readers, 1973

*Cricket in the Road* - London, Deutsch, 1973

*Folk Tales and Fantasies* - Port-of-Spain, Columbus, 1976

*The Chieftain's Carnival and Other Stories* - London, Longman, 1993

He has contributed to many anthologies and journals including: *Caribbean Prose*; *Island Voices-Stories from the Caribbean; Response; The Sun's Eyes; West Indian Narrative; BIM; The Bajan*.

**General:**

*Glimpses of Trinidad and Tobago: with a glance at the West Indies* - Port of Spain, Columbus Publishers, 1974

*Profile Trinidad: A Historical Survey from the Discovery to 1900* - London, Macmillan, 1975

*Editor, with Andrew Carr, David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago* -London, Deutsch, 1975

*Folk Tales and Fantasies* - Port of Spain: Columbus Publishers, 1976

*The Making of Port-of-Spain 1757-1939* - Port-of-Spain, Key Caribbean, 1978

*First in Trinidad* - Port-of-Spain, Circle Press, 1985

*Heroes of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* - Port-of-Spain, Circle Press, 1986

*The History of Aviation in Trinidad and Tobago 1913-1962* - Port-of-Spain, Paria, 1987

*A Better and Brighter Day* - Port-of-Spain, Circle Press, 1987

*Towns and Villages of Trinidad and Tobago* - Port-of-Spain, Circle Press, 1988

*Parade of the Carnivals of Trinidad 1839-1989* - Port-of-Spain, Circle Press, 1989

*The Golden Quest: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus* - London, Macmillan Caribbean, 1992

*Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago* - Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 1997

**Awards:**

*The Arts Council of Great Britain 1967 Fellowship*

*T&T's Hummingbird Gold Medal* – 1979

# 9.2 Critique of "The Year in San Fernando"

## 9.2.1 Subject Matter and Thematic Preoccupations

The text, *The Year in San Fernando* by Michael Anthony, is a novella. This is informed by its volume and content. It is intermediate between the novel and short story. *The Year in San Fernando* is a semi-autobiographical text containing the personal childhood experiences of Anthony's life. It tells an analytical story of a twelve-year-old boy named Francis who by fate travels to San Fernando from Mayaro to become a servant-companion to Mrs.Chandles. His mother laconically initiates the move, but her son (Francis), helpless as he is, is unable to reject the idea, though he tries to decline with the thought that his other siblings have been looking forward to getting such an opportunity so that it may serve as an escape route out of the impoverished condition of the family after the death of their father.

Therefore, twelve-year-old Francis gets a chance to go for a year to San Fernando to work as a servant-companion to old Mrs. Chandler, but he has never seen a town before or been away from the warmth of his family. The novella dwells on the experiences of a young boy who has to take care of an old lady. The old lady's son was involved with two ladies in two different towns. In fact, the story is about Francis's adventures in San Fernando. San Fernando is one of Trinidad's major cities; it is quite hilly and is located on the islands of the south-western coast.

The travel is somewhat tedious for the first-timer in the city because he has never left Mayaro for the city in his life. Having reached San Fernando, Romaine Street where Mr.Chandles gigantic, unparallel, imposing building is located, he meets hard biting surprises as to the reception of the Chandles in San Fernando. He is treated as a second class

citizen at San Fernando to the degree that he never ceases thinking about his village communalistic life which is converse to the city life in San Fernando.

During his stay, his mother (Ma) takes pain to see the well-being of her transplanted son in San Fernando as a result of the letter he sends. She is warmly received by Mrs.Chandles, but the situation of her son displeases her; even she bursts into tears as she cannot hold her emotion. The young boy (Francis) grows with the different experiences he is exposed to in San Fernando. There, he responds to pressure of 'manness' in man as he is entangled in love with Julia (an older lady). He acquires marketing skills as he is tutored by Brinneta before she leaves. He has a raw deal with the hidden life of the Chandles which the outside world is not familiar with, especially his own biological mother (Ma). He is exposed to different seasons in San Fernando (Rain season, Dry and Indian Summer). He learns much about what his teacher at village (Mayaro) has taught him about Mountain Naparaima, climatic situations of San Fernando, various people that market their goods in their market, and the like.

Francis' family is stuck in poverty in the village of Mayaro, while the Chandles family exudes opulence and wealth in every sense of the word for Mr.Chandles wallows in an aura of aristocracy. Francis mother is merely a poor office worker, whose meagre pay hardly sustains a family of four children. It is in a bid to strive to better the lot of his family that the poor Francis moves over to the town of San Fernando, but ironically, he could not cope with the atmosphere of aristocracy and extreme wealth that he sees himself in. This is partly due to the problem of social stratification in the society.

Despite so much wealth, tension and tug of war reign supreme in the entire household of the Chandles. Mrs.Chandles and her two children, Edwin and Chandles, are always at loggerheads. The whole scenario makes Francis sick, and he concludes that no such thing would happen in his own family despite his poor background. Therefore, in spite of the opulence and refinement of the Chandles, they have no peace of mind. One had expected that wealth would bring in peace, but rather dissatisfaction, war of attrition and disunity become the order of the day especially on weekends when Mr.Chandles comes back from the forestry office. Wealth is not peace.

Essentially, the novel mirrors the contrast in the lives of the two families, one poor, and the other rich. All that glitters is not gold.

Tip

*The Year in San Fernando* portrays a contrast between two families, one poor but peaceful, the other rich but turbulent..

## 9.2.2Techniques

There are various techniques that the author employs to make his narrative real to his readers. The techniques include the following:

### The Use of Minute Details/Vividness

The author, Michael Anthony, makes use of this method of narration in which he paints with clarity all incidents in the novella. Far from displaying a lack of form, the novella is remarkable for a nearly classical observance of the unities. One action (what happens to the boy), one place (the town of San Fernando — he leaves Mayaro after the first chapter), and one time (the year). Francis' physical world is clearly defined — the Chandles' house placed at a particular distance from the house (the market, the wharf, and so on), and persons and objects (the girl Julia and Mt Naparaima) seen on journeys to and from the house. Within this physical framed world, Francis' behaviour is given pattern by a number of routines in which the same way as social conventions do in real life, going to the market, sweeping the house, watering the plants, and rubbing Mrs.Chandles' legs with Sacrool, 'the Indian Sacred Oil, or looking at the growing cane and the cane fire in the distant fields, sitting still in the hideaway among the concrete pillars of the tall house, listening to the sounds — passing traffic, distant music, voices upstairs and thinking of the things and people in his life. For instance:

1. The author paints the vivid picture of the tall building in San Fernando. Now the tall strange building towered high above the streets and under their overhanging verandas the pavement teemed with people. There were bright coloured lights, flashing on and off, and some flashed things were in the world.
2. The power of description of the author is dexterously displayed in the text as he paints the magnificence of Mr.Chandles' building.
3. The falling of rain alternating with the sun.
4. The description of the major streets, such as Coffee streets, Romaine Street, Cascade Street, Celesta Street, De Berrio Street, and Keat's Street in San Fernando and their spectacular characteristics.

### The Use of Stream of Consciousness

The author often times reveals his psychological make up in guise of Francis in the text. Francis' psychological posture is really monitored through the use of stream of consciousness. He (Francis) will plunge into reminiscences of the past events in such a fashion that narration is rendered in his explanation of the events in the text. For example:

1. "And now slowly, my thought shifted to the big house in San Fernando. I wished I had some idea of what it looked like. This was really a huge, great building traffic. As I turned my head to take in again the vastness of the Forestry Office, my heart almost leaped to my mouth. Just on the other side of the tiger-wire was Mr.Chandles" (pg. 6). Here the narrator is seen traversed in the valley of imagination, and this is made manifest to the reader through interior monologue.

2. "And when Balgobin came to mind we were often with him at the river. Sometimes he would chase us around to throw us into the deep part but if he shipped and fell, we would all get hold of him and throw him in. He was amazing in the river. He stayed so long underneath sometimes you'd thoughthe'd drowned" (pg. 10).

   The narrator, Francis, usually travels in the space of his memory throughout the novella. The memory of riverside experience or excitement with his village peers lingers, and he remembers the dexterity of Balgobin in swimming and his swimming skill in the water.
3. "How many Pepsi Cola signs were in the world?" The thought came to my head. That sign was one of the first things I had noticed at Rio-Chario. There was one even at Mayaro. In my jaded mind I thought of that girl thinking Pepsi Cola all over the world" (pg. 10).
4. "Then my thoughts went to Mr.Chandles just as to see him about the house would have made me feel less desolate. He was my only link between Mayaro and this foreign world. He had become so different" (pg. 15).

Many more thoughts make routes in Francis' mind as a result of his experience. The experience he has makes his psychological posture to suffer, and this subsequently provokes various thoughts in him, and by this, he intimates his readers with the goings-on in his inner self.

The text' *The Year in San Fernando* is more of psychology than history in the sense that the author aptly educates the readers about the effect of harrowing experiences on man's personality. It is obvious in the text that what Francis goes through shapes his attitude and thinking about life, and, consequently, it will affect his personality in his future life as stipulated by Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic and Psychosexual Theory.

More is known about Francis through the author's searchlight on Francis' psyche. Francis reminisces and imagines most time, and the author (Anthony) usually fixes up his readers by informing his narrator's psychology.

### The Use of Symbols

The author cleverly employs the use of symbols in his work, that is, there are incidents that stand to depict something different in the mind of the reader. These are analyzed below:

1. The fracas that erupts on Easter Thursday between Mr.Chandles and Mrs.Chandles seems to be symbolic. From Holy Thursday, Francis, like Jesus Christ, suffers his passion, but on Easter day, the day of Christ's resurrection, there is general happiness.
2. Mrs.Princet's visit is a balm. She is a pleasure woman with humane touch. Her comportment is a contrast to Mrs.Chandles' whose behaviour she modifies all through her stay in the big house (pp 70—71). Her arrival into the Chandles' house brings a sort of unusual relief to Francis whose is seen as a second class citizen in the family.

3. The cat-and-dove-birds tangle in the passage is symbolic. Life must be taken carefully in order not to lose one's life or advantage of another.
4. Throughout the text, the rains are the symbol of life, while the dry season symbolizes aridity and death. Water symbolizes strength and freshness, whereas dryness portends destruction and hopelessness. This is evident in Mrs.Chandles' situation in the text; she feels alright with advent of rains, but loses brightness and vitality when dry season appears.
5. The manner by which rains fell and stopped is a symbol of the incessant quarrel between Mrs.Chandles and her son. At the moment when there are no more big quarrels in the house in any way does not however suggest that the struggle for the house is over. We are told thus; 'In a way it had seemed there was calm in the dispute with Mr.Chandles, but really there was no calm' (p.120).
6. The luxuriance of the sweet broom weed is symbolic of evil which easily sprouts whether or not it is catered for goodness, like previous flowers do not flourish easily.
7. The alteration between rain and dryness seems to be a reflection of disagreement and harmony in Chandles' house. According to the narrator, 'usually the sky had been overcast and there had always been the feeling that the bright spell would not last. And indeed it hadn't (p.14).
8. The never-drying sweet broom weed which pushes up so high again and again among the flowers is a symbol of the never-ending misunderstanding in Chandles' house where there are both beauty and wealth.

### Story within a Story

The author exposes Francis' fantasies, his day dreams, as his subconscious mind repaints in his dreams the journey back home with his idealized lover (Julia) who charges him not to entertain love game now but to face his studies squarely. He plunges into another form of fantasy as he finds himself being winked at from the coffin carrying Mrs.Chandles' lifeless body. His last terminus of fantasy gives him a pill of guilt as conscience pricks him of Edwin's one dollar which he fails to return. His conscience seems to have convicted him over the matter, which is why everybody seems to be running to hold him.

### The Use of Irony

1. There is a great irony used when Francis admits he doesn't like Marva, whereas her husband-to-be, Mr.Chandles, informs him that 'you two (Marva and Francis) should do well.
2. It seems to be ironic that San Fernando which Ma thinks will be fair haven for her son turns a land of slavery. This is like biblical Jacob and his children when they migrate to Egypt with dancing and mirth, not knowing that the land will later turn into their land of suffering and bitter slavery. This is the experience to share, one believes, when Francis reaches home. It will be a great surprise to both Ma and her other children who did not have the opportunity to see life in the city.

3. It is an irony of life to Francis himself to have witnessed constant domestic feuds in Chandles' house which makes him to have a reminiscence of his family at the village which lacks the luxury of the Chandles' house, but where family members still live in harmony and love.
4. It is ironic that despite all the refinement and economic power of Mr.Chandles, he couldn't make a good relationship with his mother to the extent that oftentimes the mother questions the importance of education given to him and calls him 'an educated pig'.
5. It sounds ironic that Mrs.Chandles' sons (Mr.Chandles and Edwin) cannot get along well with each other. They hardly greet each other when Edwin comes to pay his mother a visit. Though they are two, they cannot make good friends. Ma's children are four (Sil, Anna, Felix and Francis); they relate well; even Francis asks of their well being when in San Fernando, and he (Francis) is happy to re-unite with them when leaving San Fernando for the village.
6. It is metaphorically ironic that 'one man's sauce is another man's poison'. Dry season that brings relief to Ma in the village heralds trouble for Mrs.Chandles in the city.

### Foil Characters

1. Mrs.Chandles and Ma are two worlds apart. Ma can relate well with her children, but Mrs.Chandles cannot.
2. Mrs.Princet's disposition about life is different from Mrs.Chandles'. The latter's and former's relationship with Francis contrasts them with each other.
3. Mr.Chandles and Edwin are two different entities. The former is portrayed as aggressive and insolent to his mother, while the latter makes a good relationship with his mother.
4. Mr.Soames is stem, but Mr. Langley is a teacher who encourages his pupils.

### The Use of Contrast

The author contrasts the following:

1. Francis and the Chandles
2. Mayaro and San Fernando
3. Francis' family and the Chandles
4. Rainy season and Dry season
5. Planting season and crop season (harvest).

## 9.2.3Style

Following are the styles employed for effective narration

### Point-of-View

The story in *The Year in San Fernando* is presented in the first-person narrative style. This means the author uses one of the characters, in this case, Francis, to tell the story.The novel is crafted with poetic prose. Again, simplicity of language runs through all the pages. This makes it easy for an average reader to comprehend the story without much hassle.

Take this for example: "I wish I had some idea of what it looked like. I wondered it was as fine a building as this Forestry Office here. This was really a huge, great building. Terrific…. he smiled with me".

Conversely virtually every dialogue is rendered in a sort of pidgin English. Example: "You is the little boy?" (pg. 21) "You is a man! (pg 21) "Yes, I call you. How you like San Fernando?" "What sort of work you does do here?"

### The Use of Kid Narrator

Francis is twelve years old when he leaves Mayaro, and he is seen throughout the story as the narrator. The author adopts this with a view to exploring the coming transition of the Caribbean societies in the 1950s - their period of independence - and to reflect the newness of the independence. Francis is a tool to experiment this as he grows or passes from being a child to another stage of development in his passage from Mayaro to San Fernando. It shows the passage of a boy, Francis, from childhood to adolescence.

### Social Realism

The novella relies on the convention of Social Realism as it is preoccupied with societal problems. This kind of prose fiction collects its materials from archival data base.

### Bildungsroman

The novella is a bildungsroman; that is, a text of education. It depicts the growth of Francis from childhood to adolescence, from passivity to activity, from innocence to knowledge, immaturity to maturity, from sexual passivity to sexual alertness.

## Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we carried out an analysis of Michael Anthony's novella titled *The Year in San Fernando.* We contextualized the analysis by beginning with the biography of the author. We commented on the thematic preoccupations of the novella, including love, excursion, child abuse, filial conflict, alienation and the like. We also examined the techniques employed in the novella, and its elements. The novella was also critiqued by commenting critically on the nexus between its content and form.

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# Study Session 10

# Matter and Manner in Richard Wrigth's Black Boy

## Introduction

In Study Session Three, we will discuss the basic tenets, forms, types and functions of the novel. We are embarking on an analysis of a paradigmatic African American novel with a view to identifying its thematic preoccupations, technical features, elements and enduring strengths. We will also attempt a critique of the matter and manner of the novel.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

10.1 *identify* and discuss the thematic preoccupations of Richard Wright's *Black Boy.*
10.2 *analyse* the techniques of the novel.
10.3 *discuss* the adroit blend of matter and manner in the novel.

## 10.1 About the Author: Richard Wright

Richard Wright, the grandson of slaves, was born in Natchez, Mississippi, on 4th September, 1908. His father deserted the family in 1914, and when Richard was ten years old, his mother had a paralytic stroke. The family was extremely poor, and after a brief formal education, he was forced to seek employment in order to support his mother. He later wrote: "The bleakness of the future affected my will to study. What had I learned so far that would help me to make a living? Nothing. I could be a porter like my father before me, but what else? And the problem of living as a Negro was cold and hard"

Wright worked in a series of menial jobs in Memphis. He wanted to continue his education by using the local library, but Jim Crow laws prevented this. Wright solved the problem by forging notes to pretend he was collecting the books for a white man. During this period, he was particularly impressed by the work of H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis.

After passing a civil service examination, Wright finds work as a post office clerk. After the Wall Street Crash and the beginning of the Depression, Wright lost his job. For a period, he found employment with

the Negro Burial Society, but that came to an end in 1931, and he was forced to go on relief. After several temporary jobs, the relief office found him work with the Federal Writers' Project. This enabled him to publish his short story, 'Superstition', in the magazine, *Abbott's Monthly*.

In 1932, Wright began attending meetings of the literary group, the John Reed Club. He later wrote:

> The revolutionary words leaped from the page and struck me with tremendous force. My attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. It seemed to me that here at last, in the realm of revolutionary expression, Negro experience could find a home, a functioning value and role.

He met several Marxists at the club, and later that year joined the American Communist Party. His poems, short-stories and essays were accepted by various left-wing journals, including the *New Masses*, *Left Front* and International Literature. His poem, Between the World and Me, and a short story, 'Big Boy Leaves Homes', are both based on the lynching of a black man that he had witnessed when he was a child.

In May 1937, Wright moved to New York where he became Harlem editor of the Daily Worker and a new literary quarterly, New Challenge. The following year, *Uncle Tom's Children*, a collection of short stories about racism in the United States, was published. In 1940, *Bright and Morning Star* was published, and Wright announced that all royalties would be used to help to pay the appeal costs of Earl Browder, the general secretary of the American Communist Party, who had been sentenced to four years in prison for misusing a passport.

Wright's novel, *Native Son*, was accepted by the publishers, Harper, in 1940. The Book of the Month Club selected the novel as its March selection, therefore ensuring large sales and publicity. Over a quarter of a million copies were sold within four weeks, making it the fastest selling Harper novel in twenty years.

Irving Howe argued: "The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies. In all its crudeness, melodrama, and claustrophobia of vision, Richard Wright's novel brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture."

By 1944, Wright felt that the American Communist Party was almost as oppressive as capitalism. He left the party and published an article in the Atlantic Monthly, entitled 'The God That Failed'. He remained a Marxist, but as he pointed out in his article, "I wanted to be a communist, but my kind of communist". He added: "I knew in my heart that I should never be able to feel and that simple sharpness about life, should never again express such passionate hope, should never again make so total a commitment of faith."

Wright's powerful autobiography, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* was published in 1945. After the Second World War, hostility towards writers with left-wing views increased, and in 1947, he moved to Paris. He told a friend that "any black man remaining in the United States after the age of thirty-five was bound to kill, be killed, or go insane." In Paris, he joined a group of black writers and artists that included James Baldwin, Chester Himes and Ollie Harrington.

Wright's work inspired a generation of black writers. Eldridge Cleaver wrote in Soul on Ice (1968): "Of all black American novelists, and indeed of all American novelists of any hue, Richard Wright reigns supreme for all profound political, economic, and social reference."

Wright's final novel, *The Long Dream* was published in 1958. Richard Wright died of a heart attack in Paris on 28th November, 1960. There had been no history of heart trouble, and rumours circulated that he had been murdered. Wright was himself concerned about the possibility of being killed since being investigated by Joseph McCarthy in 1953. Just before his death, Wright had received several mysterious phone calls from people with fictitious names.

# 10.2 Analysis of *Black Boy*

## 10.2.1 Subject Matter

*Black Boy* focuses on the life and history of an international American writer, Richard Wright. He gives a chronological narration of formative years — starting with his accidental setting of his family house on fire at the age of six years. It also dwells on his fighting with others for autonomy. He fights injustice at home, in church and even in school.

It is also seen in the text the ordeal of being black in a world dominated by southern whites. By this, he is able to narrate experience of poverty, isolation, ruthlessness, racial discrimination or segregation, torture, brutality, violence and death. As they denied the identity of Black in America, it is a short of Binary-Dichotomy. The text is written as a quest for the liberation of the mind and the human spirit. He uses the book to liberate himself and his society. It is a work of condemnation of mind.

*Black Boy* is the tragic and harrowing autobiographical story of a young 'Negro', Richard, growing up in a difficult and treacherous world dominated and controlled by the whites. And such wickedness and treachery is visited upon, not only the author, but all the struggles of the blacks to accommodate themselves to constant injustice and humiliations while maintaining a modicum of personal dignity. The whole scenario shows a savage physical assault on the blacks' complicities in their oppression. No doubt that the blacks suffered disproportionately under the exploitative social system, yet the success story of their triumph against all odds is what makes the story what it is. The book has a theme of exploitation and defeat, as well as triumph at the end.

There is also the theme of 'racism' in the text, because a black boy gets the sole purpose of survival, to make enough money to be where he could be himself. Wright grew up in the deep dirty south, the Jim Crow South

of the early twentieth century. From an early age, Richard Wright was aware of two races, the black and the white. Yet, he never understood the relationship between the two races. This ignorance got him into trouble many times. When in Memphis, Wright reluctantly assumed the role that the society dictated for him, the role of a black boy. As a young teenager, he says, "I dreamed of going North and writing books and novels. The North symbolized to me all that I had not felt and seen" (p.186).

In the text, Wright admits that his goal was not to go to the North, but to escape the South. He believed that the North was a harbour for the racial prejudices and injustices that characterized the South. His ultimate and all-consuming goal was to reach the North. To achieve this, he betrayed his moral beliefs, doing things and falling victim to powers and beliefs that he said he never would: such as the sins his grandmother talked about for the first time in his life.

The story is in the convention of socialist realism; this is because Richard Wright mirrors the evils in the society and suggests the possible solutions to them. The story is semi-autobiographical because the reader encounters some of the historical facts of the author, and the author makes use of the first person narrative techniques. It therefore shows that the author tells his own story.

Tip

*Black Boy* is about racism and the dehumanization of African-Americans in the Southern States, illustrated through the life of Richard Wright.

## 10.2.2The Manner

The story is a faction that combines fact and fiction together. This is a text of protest in the sense that it condemns the problem of racism in America.

This protest literature which aims at condemning racism and perpetual enslavement of the blacks is narrated in simple, straight and direct diction. The story is not sensational, but couched in a language that mirrors the unpredictable background and attitude of the author. Even the title of the book 'black boy' which though is simple, gives us an image of colour prejudices of the white man against African-Americans.

There is the use of archetypal character. Richard represents African Americans and all the oppressed people. He shows the suffering of black people through his own life because suffering is an integral part of his life. The black is tortured by the white, and they are not given the same consideration in terms of social, economic, political and educational opportunities. Richard, as a member of the black race, suffers a lot of discrimination in America, and later he summons the courage to fight against the dehumanization before he finally gains freedom. The illnesses which attack our main protagonist here in the novel, that is, Richard, is symbolic of the poverty, penury, colour discrimination and social

degradation of African Americans as a whole, who reside forcefully more or less in the southern states of America. Life in the south is uncertain, that not even the author is sure of the next moment, as he puts, in the novel: "Before dawn we were rolling away". This statement images the precarious picture of the entire African Americans in the face of the whites' segregation.

Being a notable writer on racism, it is expected that the use of details and imageries, would help bring home the message contained therein; thus their house 'looked black and hostile', while the absence of flowers in the city makes the whole place look 'dead', and the entire household were all cramped in a bedroom and a kitchen. It is the impression created in our minds' eyes by the use of details in the novel that makes us realize the plight of African Americans.

The story is narrated in the first-person point of view. Throughout the story, it is a narrator who narrates and uses the pronoun 'I' or 'We'. This point of view makes the story authentic. However, its limitations are obvious because the narrator can only present actions in which he participated in or which he was told of; in the later case, he mentions his source. Consequently, the story revolves around the narrator, Richard.

A historical/biblical allusion is made in the novel to the wandering children of Israel in the wilderness; how they journeyed to the world unknown, the Promised Land, only as a measure of faith, but not knowing the next fate that awaits them. The condition of African Americans, as depicted in the text is similar to that of the villains and slaves in history, as reported by Mallock and Pallock (historians), thus, "when they go to bed on Sunday night, they do not know what Monday's work will be; it may be threshing, it may be ditching, they do not know". This was the lot and plight of African Americans.

## 10.2.3 Major Characters

The following are the major characters in *Black Boy*.

**Richard Wright**

The narrator.*Black Boy* deals with his childhood and young adulthood. He is an extremely intelligent African American boy coming of age in the South in the early 1900's. The brutality and ignorance that he sees between Blacks and Whites influences his views on race relations. He considers racism and its ills to be American problems, and believes that American politics must change if society is going to change. He joins the Communist party because he thinks it, of any political body, most taps into 'the hunger' of humankind: what people want out of life. He finds ignorance and violence within the party as well, but remains hopeful.

**Ella Wright**

Richard Wright's mother. She is a dark figure in Wright's life, administering extreme beatings when he gets into childhood trouble, guilt-tripping him into attending church, and refusing to answer any questions about their past or current environment. For a curious child, she is a stifling presence. After suffering a stroke, she is bedridden. She

remains with Wright throughout the book, moving from apartment to apartment and gradually becoming more understanding of his life.

**Granny**

Granny, who sometimes lives with the family, is Richard's mother to an extreme. She beats him casually, and berates him, telling him he is full of sin. A Seventh Day Adventist, she is a ridiculous and frustrating figure when she bans books from the house and forbids Richard to get a job on Saturday Sabbath, even though they are starving.

**Father**

Wright's father, though he does not appear much in the book, is an important figure in his development. He is first seen as the lawmaker, and Wright is terrified of him. After he abandons his family to live with another woman, Wright finds him a pathetic example of a man who responded to the struggle of being black by drinking and womanizing. Wright views his father as something he does not ever want to become.

**Aunt Addie**

Aunt Addie is just one of the many characters who tries to discipline Wright. His aunt but also his teacher in Sunday school, she too beats him indiscriminately when his attitude offends her. Finally, though, he lashes out against her for good, threatening to kill her if she hits him once more. This showdown plays a big part in the family's gradual decision that Wright is a lost cause. By the time he has moved out of the house, he is considered by many family members to be a lost soul.

## 10.2.4 Minor Characters

The following are the major characters in *Black Boy*.

**Griggs**

A classmate of Wright's. He tries to show Wright how to get along with white people so that he won't make them angry. He is an intelligent boy who differs from Wright in that he is willing to play the role designed for him by whites: laugh and be cheerful in public, but hate whites passionately behind their backs. He explains to Wright that what whites most want is deference: they want to be shown that blacks know they are white.

**Shorty**

A black man who works with Wright in a hotel. He, like Griggs, is intelligent and yet totally submissive to whites. He is more than willing to 'act the clown.' He claims to hate racist whites but will never leave the south, because, he says, he is too lazy. Unlike Wright, who wants to make his living as a man, Shorty is happy to take any opportunity he can get. When he wants a quarter for lunch, he invites a white man to kick him for it, saying, 'My ass is tough and quarters is scarce.'

**Mr. Olin**

One of the white men Wright works with at an optician's shop in Memphis. As a joke, Olin tells Wright that Harrison, one of the other black boys at the shop, is angry at him and is waiting with a knife for

him. Olin gives Wright a knife, and meanwhile tells Harrison the same story and also gives him a knife, hoping that they will kill each other. When Wright finds out about the plan, he realizes how brutal and scheming white men can be, and cannot trust them for years to come.

**Mr. Hoffman**
A Jewish man who owns the Chicago store where Wright works as a porter. Although he and his wife are not racist, Wright does not trust their motives and expects them to beat or dismiss him at any time. They are the first genuinely nice white people he has met, and he is frightened of them. Also, he feels guilty about the anti-Semitic views he had as an ignorant child in the south.

**Ross**
A young black Communist who is put on trial for vague offences like 'counter-revolutionary activity.' Wright uses him as the subject of a character sketch, trying to hit on why Ross became a Communist. Essentially, he is trying to gain an intimate understanding of Ross' character. However, the other Communists are very suspicious of this, and eventually Ross is afraid to be interviewed: there are rumors that Wright is a policeman. Disgusted, Wright realizes that many Communists are so skeptical that they don't know who their friends are.

**Buddy Nealson**
A Communist leader who Wright sees as close-minded and ignorant. He directs other Communists to terrorize Wright, threatening him off jobs and inviting him to rallies just so they can reject him again. He represents the many other Communists who act brotherly but who are merely serving their own political interests.

# Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we examined the content and form of an African-American novel, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. We dwelt on the biography of the novelist, with a view to identifying the instances of nexus between the writer's life and the story. It is discovered that the novel is quasi-autobiographical. We also investigated the techniques employed in the novel. Also, we examined the interface of matter and manner in the novel. We observed that in this novel, there is an adroit blend of matter and manner.

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# Study Session 11

# Themes and Techniques in Doreen Baingana's Tropical Fish

## Introduction

In this study session, we will dwell on the thematic preoccupations and techniques employed in Doreen Baingana's *Tropical Fish.* We intend to examine the themes and techniques of the short stories and establish their interface.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

11.1 *discuss* the themes of Doreen Baingana's *Tropical Fish.*
11.2 *critique* the techniques employed in the novel.
11.3 *analyse* the interface of the themes and techniques in the novel.

## 11.1 Author's Background

Doreen Baingana is a Ugandan-born citizen, whose early years were spent in Uganda. She had her law degree from Makerere University, Kampala, but bagged her Master's degree in Fine Art at the University of Maryland.

Like other African writers, her book *Tropical Fish* is based on the problems common to African countries. This work of art is centred on the tyrannical reign of President Idi Amin and its negative effects on Ugandan citizens. This is part of the things that influenced Doreen Baingana.

Doreeen Baingana has to her credit the Washington Independent Writers Fiction prize; she was also nominated for the CAINE prize in African writing, and she received an Artist grant from the District of Columbia Commission of Arts and Humanities. She is also the winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for best first book in the African region, among others. She is also known as a poet.

# 11.2 Analysis of Baingana's Tropical Fish

## 11.2.1 Subject Matter

In her fictional debut, Doreen Baingana follows the experiences of a Ugandan girl as she navigates the uncertain terrain of adolescence. *Tropical Fish* depicts the reality of life for Christine Mugisha and her family during Idi Amin's dictatorship.

The eight chapters are told from the point of view of Christine's two elder sisters, Patti, a born again Christian who finds herself staving at her boarding school, and Rosa, a free spirit who tries to magically seduce one of her teachers. But the protagonist of *Tropical Fish* is Christine, whom we accompany from her first wobbly steps in high heels, to her encounters with the first world conveniences and alienation of America, to her return home, Uganda.

As the Mugishas cope with Uganda's collapsing infrastructure, they also contend with the existential pangs of family cohesion, sex and relationships, among others. Anyone dipping into Baingana's incandescent, widely acclaimed novel will enjoy an immersion in the world of this talented youngster.

*Tropical Fish* is a collection of linked stories about the coming of age of three Ugandian sisters, Christine, Patti and Rosa. More than that, it is about a range of things that face the modern African women who grow up in our era with an idea of developing herself through education. It touches religious influence in Africa, boarding school life in missionary schools, first love, superstition, inevitably AIDS, love across the colour with a sugar daddy syndrome, the sense of alienation that comes with migrating to another country (USA) and that of displacement after coming back home.

*Tropical Fish* has a strong biographical element about it, in a sense that it uses Doreen Baingana's experiences as a starting place before spiralling away to explore its themes. The act of creation is never an entirely isolated thing of imagination alone. The three girls learn in different ways that our lives teach us who we are, and that our characters are usually the vehicles to our destinations.

Christine, the youngest, is about the assertion of pride and identity and the use of narration as a process of arrival. The quiet Patti is a soul in crisis, choosing to bury herself in the lap of God with iron serenity when things do not go her way. She sings herself into significance in her diaries, wearing a dress of desperation. The feisty Rosa is about sexual liberation and dare-devil attitude of not wishing to be part of the righteous who die of boredom in heaven. Despite her excesses, that sometimes can be cloyingly vapid, she is the most fun to be in company of. Things in her world go bump in the night. She is also about turning insults to strengths. What the girls have in common is the stultification they feel about their lives in Entebbe, Uganda.

The strength of *Tropical Fish* is the manner by which it manages to make the experiences of the three girls a metaphor for an African contemporary

experience. The problems of women liberation, hybridisation, 'ghettorization', and reconciling the old with the new are masterfully tackled through the experiences of these three women. Doreen Baingana in the book manages to make fresh the language of contemporary clichés. She is elegiac in her tone, and things happen to her character with an inevitability of dreams.

The language of *Tropical Fish* aspires to the condition of literature, which is a fresh thing in our age of journalistic writing. There is an energetic brilliance about the book you feel would have gone even further had the author taken sometimes to develop her ideas in a slower pace and depth. One can see that most of the stories were written for American leading literary journals, hence lacking percolation, the development of depth. The problem with those journals is the manner by which they do not tolerate divergence from the consensus. They have fixed ideas about form, structure and language. Consequently, events are sometimes left hanging and unexplained because the author had run out of space for the specified word count of the journals.

The stories in the book cross-connect as moving vignettes and autobiography of at least the mind. It was pertinent that they chose to name the book after one of the strongest stories, 'Tropical Fish', which is also the most rounded off and enjoyable. The story has virtues of high literature, weight and lightness. The entire book, for that matter, is a magnificent raconteur of modern Scheherazadean inexhaustibility and inventiveness of a mind fully alive to its surroundings.

Tip

*Tropical Fish* is about how the characters—biological sisters—fare under the dictatorial regime of Ugandan Idi Amin and how they negotiate modernity and growth into maturity.

## 11.2.2 Themes

The thematic preoccupations of *Tropical Fish* include the following:

### Family Cohesion

The family is the basic unit of any society, and decision of guidance into growth is made possible by a closely-knit family. Taata (the father), Mama, Patti, Rosa and Christine are presented as living in an African society where love and concern for others are present. Progress is of interest to every member of the family. This can be seen in the words of Mama herself when she desires to have more time with Taata: 'I'm doing everything on my own, everything, while you run around with your friends … I can't do everything, I can't!'

Also, the family bond is exemplified when Mama reluctantly agrees to allow Christine, though under-aged, to go for a party by insisting on her close watch by Patti, her older sister. During Christine's absence, the mother wants her to come home in due time, and she warns her not to

forget her origin. She praises Patti for being with her, in some of her letters to Christine while living abroad. 'Almost all of Mama's letters praise Patti for one thing or another. "At least Patti is here keeping me company, she wrote" ('Questions of Home', Page 148).

### African Society and Promiscuity

It should be noted here that in an ideal African society, the virtues and cultures of the people are upheld. Any digression from this can create unwanted effects or results.Christine tries to mature against time, and Rosa wants adventures. This leads both of them into different sexual escapades vividly described in the novel. Christine meets Nicholas at a party. Nicholas gives an appointment to her, but he fails to keep his word. Rosa writes a note to David to show the existing relationship between them and how they fall out of favour from each other. Each of them is willing to take the blame for the failure of the relationship.

Promiscuity is seen in the chapter titled 'A thank you note': 'Do you ask yourself over and over again why Nassuna slept with Kizza when she knew he had slept with Mary, whose former boyfriend, Yonah, once had a sugar mummy? (82).At Makerere University, Christine meets Peter, an exporter of fish, through Zac and establishes a relationship, which spells out another round of sex and ultimately an unwanted pregnancy in chapter six.

### Diseases

The scourge of HIV/AIDS is a major concern in this novel as Rosa discusses the plight of those infected with HIV, herself inclusive. She describes how pale and thin people are as carriers of the disease. It is revealed that Mary, Rosa's friend, dies of the disease: "Mary was not like that; she chose to turn away from life. I went to see her just before she died. Would you believe she was more beautiful than ever before? As thin as a stick, her cheekbones jutting out like two knives…" (85). "… Yes, I have AIDS. Let's turn around and face it" (88).

### Betrayal of Trust

David betrays Rosa by having an affair with Nassuna, a friend of Rosa. Rosa pays him back in his own coin by sleeping with Kizza. They betray each other's trust. This is a reflection of the political realities of most African post-colonies, where the rulers keep on betraying the trust put in them by the masses.

### Superstition

A typical African village or settlement has its own taboos, morals, customs and norms. This theme occurs at different scenes in the stories. Christine, while looking at her grandparent's photo, reveals thus: "I covered my giggle with my hand because even though I knew one shouldn't laugh at the dead, especially at your relatives, who are looking out for you…" ('Green stones,' 17).

As a reflection of her superstitious belief, Nassuna says that the continuous rubbing of a safety pin and intense look into a male counterpart will get a boy excited about a girl who does this. Christine performs this superstitious experiment on the Literature teacher, and the

result is positive. When Christine returns from Los Angeles, she decides to work at Uganda High Commission. It becomes another experience for her on superstition.

### Maladministration

Copious references are made to Idi Amin, a notorious ruler of Uganda who committed several offences and propagated evils in the country between 1971 and 1979. This confirms the popular assertion that *Tropical Fish* is socially realistic. It chronicles some of the socio-historical realities of Uganda.

### Poverty

In the second chapter of the novel, Patti narrates her experiences in the boarding school. There is lack of enough money to cater for her needs after her father's death. She talks about how she runs earnestly for the meal which does not satisfy her hunger, going to bed and have the worms in her stomach churns. Her mum cannot even come for visiting. Mama is not able to meet up with all the children's need in school. Patti is not able to reject the bad food she is being served at the dinning like other rich men's daughters do: "When I got back with tea, I decided, in desperation, to shame myself. Please Lynette, can you give me just one spoon of sugar".

### Nationality

This theme cannot be over-emphasized in the course of the story. It is evident in Christine's stay in Los Angeles. Christine discovers that the people who are from different parts of Africa call themselves Africans. This influences her because she now refers to herself as coming from Africa, instead of from Uganda.

The spirit of nationality brings about the spirit of oneness in the Ugandan citizens in America; that is, they come together once in a while to ask one another questions that pertain to when they plan to go home, and they rub minds together showing what they really miss about home.

The theme of Nationality also manifests when the Ugandan President, Nunino, delivers a speech on the need for the Ugandans to return home at the American Association Meeting in Washington. This speech is largely responsible for Christine's returning home to serve her nation.

Light feather is a girl who presents a poem to an audience in Los Angeles. She encourages Christine to write a poem about her nationality. Although she has no interest in her nationality before, Christine develops interest in it and writes her own poem.

### Spirituality

This is evident in Patti's life right from her teenage-hood to adulthood; she exhibits this trait by loving everybody just as the scripture has instructed. In the second chapter, she narrates her testimony of how she cried, having criticized others of their bad behaviour. She feels it is not right, and during the prayer meeting, she cries, and after the meeting, she feels she has been eased of all guilt. In the last chapter, she works as a Christian Administrator for a Christian organization for the disabled in Kampala: "I prayed today for my family to come and see me. They

didn't, but I am trying to understand that my plans are not the Lord's" (36).

### Morality Decadence

We actually see in the novel that the colourful and beautiful necklaces that are bought by Taata for his wife later become dull and inelegant; the emptiness of Taata and his wife's room indicates that nothing stays for life; everything in life is ephemeral. Rosa's death pictures the mortality of man and even life. Despite life's pleasure, goodness and comfort, the cold hands of death reach out to Nassuna and Mary. They die of AIDS.

### Reversal of Destiny

Africans believe in the meaning attached to a name given to a child and its effects on the destiny of the child, but in T*ropical Fish*, reverse is the case as derived in the name, Christine. 'Christine' who has Christ in her name and is supposed to keep the religious faith and laws turns out to neglect divine laws and behaves without caution. 'Patti' whose name sounds so social and perhaps traditional is discovered to be religious and with a strong faith in God. This is ironical.

### Fantasy

Although she is young, Christine imagines herself being in the world of an adult through the exploration of her parents' room and uses of her mother's necklace. She also refers to herself as a Princess from under the sea'. All these are portrayed in the first chapter of the novel.

## 11.2.3 Narrative Techniques in Doreen Baingana's *Tropical Fish*

### Point of View

Point of view is used to create credibility in the story. The point of view employed in the text is the first person limited. As seen in the first chapter, "Green Stone", the narrator refers to her childhood memories, thereby using the personal pronoun 'I and We'. Although she is actively involved in the narration, she is not all-knowing: "I was once a child, growing up in Entebbe" (the first sentence of the opening chapter). The first person limited point of view is also seen in Chapter VII, Page 126: "That whole week, I am unsettled inside. All my ways of thinking are rearranging themselves in my head".

The text also employs the first person limited point of view where the narrator does not know everything in each of the character's mind but uses the information given by the characters in narrating the story. This is seen in Chapter II of the text, "Hunger", a narration about 'Patti' in boarding school. Nobody, except her, would have been able to account for this story because it is her personal affair, but the first person point of view is used. Patti in this chapter tells us of her story in the boarding school; how she had to contend with the hunger she encountered. She thus represents children in the boarding house whose parents do not have enough to sustain, especially the single parent: "Now mama has to dig in the evening after work and on weekend. She plants beans, maize, doh-doh anything to save money" (34).

### Symbolism

The story is divided, symbolically, into eight titled chapters. Each chapter is entitled symbolically according to its thematic preoccupation. For instance, the first chapter is entitled 'Green Stones.' Here, 'green stones' represent the materialistic life of some men who like to satisfy their wives with all sorts of jewelries, but are less concerned with the affairs in their homes, as represented by Taata. Also, it shows how women are more responsible than men in home affairs, as portrayed by Mama. It also portrays the vanity of everything in life.

Tropical Fish symbolizes the three Mugisha sisters as they grow up against the backdrop of Uganda in the 1980s. Rosa, the eldest one, is adventurous and sexually precocious; Patti, the elder one, is a born-again Christian, and Christine, the youngest one, takes her first wobbly steps in high heels and later encounters alienation amidst the material wealth of America, before her final return home.

### Flash Back

With the aid of flash back, events are narrated from the past, brought back to the present, in order to make the events come alive. A good example in the text is Christine's meeting with Nicholas who gives her the first kiss on page 39. How they met and the outcomes of their meeting are taken back to the past, with the teenager worrying about what to do since no elderly one was available to correct her:

> So there was Christine the next morning daydreaming in bed, and panicking too. It was already eleven, but staying in bed was about the only way to be alone in the shared room. What would she wear? Should she put on lipstick again? (46).

Also, Rosa's thank-you note to David is a good example of flash back. The narrator tells of what he had done in the past leading to the present situation she is. The narration is done in an epistolary form, narrating the eventual death of Rosa in her prime due to HIV/AIDS.

## 11.2.4 Diction/Style

The style deployed by the author is easy, simple and understandable by any reader. However, the use of metaphors by the author encapsulates and reemphasizes the persisting challenge faced by people everywhere as they face the same human struggle to understand themselves, their world and their place in it. The word, 'hunger', as seen in Patti's perspective, reveals a period of severe deprivation at the exclusive boarding school, 'Gayaba', because of food shortages. Hence, the students had to eat black tea, dried bread and rotting vegetables. Thus Patti's hunger made her beg from the Minister's daughter (Linette) who in turn made her serve her tea; thus, making the experiences of the three girls a metaphor for an African contemporary experience. Moreover, the controlling alcoholic father, Taata, is a replica of autocratic punitive political regime.

## 11.2.5 Tone

Elegiac tone is used in the text. Although one is conversant with the happenings in the text, one becomes mesmerized by the descriptive quality of the tone and language.

## 11.2.6 Setting

In her fiction debut, Doreen Baingana follows a Ugandan girl as she navigates the uncertain terrain of adolescence. Set mostly in pastoral Entebbe with stops in the cities Kampala and Los Angeles, *Tropical Fish* depicts the reality of life for Christine Mugisha and her family after Idi Amin's dictatorship.

Therefore, the spatial setting is the lush beauty of Uganda, particularly in 'Entebbe', and its temporal background is the aftermath of Idi Amin's dictatorship. It also takes place in America where Christine stayed for some years. There is also the vivid description of the physical landscape.

## 11.2.7 Allusions

There is the use of Biblical allusions in the text, which reveals the religious aspect of the story. For instance, the second story which is titled 'hunger' is symbolic, and it symbolizes the condition Jesus found himself after being tempted by Satan and started feeling hungry in the wilderness, as represented by Patti who is out of her home and finds herself in a boarding school which is linked to 'purgatory' or 'prison':

> Oh, God I pray for something good today instead of all this suffering, "You promised to fill our cups to overflowing, told us to "bring your vessels not a few". Amen!

Other Biblical allusions in the text include the following:

- "Oh I wish I could eat her leftovers" (This relates the story of the rich man and Lazarus).

- "No! No! My father in heaven fills me. He satisfies my every need. Yes, Lord I do believe" (This reveals the belief of King David in God as sung in one of his songs called, "Psalms" (Chapter II, pg. 30).

- "I'm sorry, Lord Jesus" (page 31). "No, that's silly. And evil. Forgive me, Father". Historical allusion is also portrayed in the text through recourse to 'Shaka Zulu,' a man of humble origin who fought and killed everybody and became king.

# Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, we attempted a critical analysis of Doreen Baingana's*Tropical Fish.* We identified the thematic preoccupations and techniques of the novel. We also critiqued the appropriateness or otherwise of the narrative techniques of the novel. We observed that there is an adroit blend of content and form in the novel. We concluded that Doreen Baingana's novel is a masterpiece.

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# Study Session 12

# Content and Forming in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

## Introduction

In this Study Session, we will carry out a critical analysis of the content and form of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's*Purple Hibiscus.* We will explore the ideological thrusts of the novelist and establish her place in the literary firmament of postcolonial fiction. We will also examine the appropriateness and relevance of the techniques employed in the novel.

### Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
12.1 *discuss* the thematic preoccupations of Chimamanda Adichie's Purple.
12.2 *discuss* the techniques employed in the novel.

## 12.1 About the Author: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on 15 September 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria, the fifth of six children to Igbo parents, Grace Ifeoma and James NwoyeAdichie. While the family's ancestral hometown is Abba in Anambra State, Chimamanda grew up in Nsukka, in the house formerly occupied by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Chimamanda's father, who is now retired, worked at the University of Nigeria, located in Nsukka. He was Nigeria's first professor of Statistics, and later became Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. Her mother was the first female registrar at the same institution.

Chimamanda completed her secondary education at the University's school, receiving several academic prizes. She went on to study Medicine and Pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the University's Catholic medical students. At the age of nineteen, Chimamanda left for the United States. She gained a scholarship to study Communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia for two years, and she went on to pursue a degree in communication and Political Science at Eastern Connecticut State University. While in Connecticut, she stayed with her sister, Ijeoma, who runs a medical practice close to the university.

Chimamanda graduated summa cum laude from Eastern in 2001, and then completed a Master's degree in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. It is during her senior year at Eastern that she started working on her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, which was released in October 2003. The book has received wide critical acclaim: it was shortlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize (2004), and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005).

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (also the title of one of her short stories), is set before and during the Biafran War. It was published in August 2006 in the United Kingdom and in September 2006 in the United States. Like *Purple Hibiscus*, it has also been released in Nigeria.

Chimamanda was a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University during the 2005-2006 academic year, and earned an M.A in African Studies from Yale University in 2008. Her collection of short stories, *The Thing around Your Neck*, was published in 2009. Chimamanda says her next major literary project will focus on the Nigerian immigrant experience in the United States.

Chimamanda is now married and divides her time between Nigeria, where she regularly teaches writing workshops, and the United States. She has recently been awarded a 2011-2012 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

# 12.2 Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

## 12.2.1 The Plot Structure of the Novel

*Purple Hibiscus*is a novel set in postcolonial Nigeria, a country beset by political instability and economic difficulties. The central character is KambiliAchike, fifteen for much of the period covered by the novel, a member of a wealthy family dominated by her devoutly Catholic father, Eugene. Eugene is both a religious zealot and a violent figure in the Achike household, subjecting his wife Beatrice, Kambili herself, and her brother Jaja to beatings and psychological cruelty. The story is told through Kambili's eyes and is essentially about the disintegration of her family unit and her struggle to grow to maturity. A key period is the time Kambili and her brother spend at the house of her father's sister, Ifeoma, and her three children. This household offers a marked contrast to what Kambili and Jaja are used to. Though Catholic, it practises a completely different form of Catholicism, making for a happy, liberal place that encourages its members to speak their minds. In this nurturing environment, both Kambili and Jaja become more open, more able to voice their own opinions. Importantly, also, while at Aunty Ifeoma's, Kambili falls in love with a young priest, Father Amadi, which awakens her sense of her own sexuality. Ultimately, a critical mass is reached in terms of the lives of Kambili, Jaja and the existence of their family as it once was. Unable to cope with Eugene's continual violence, Beatrice

poisons him. Jaja takes the blame for the crime and ends up in prison. In the meantime, Aunty Ifeoma and her family go to America to live after she is unfairly dismissed from her job as Professor at the University of Nigeria. The novel ends almost three years after these events, on a cautiously optimistic note. Kambili has become a young woman of eighteen, more confident than before, while her brother Jaja is about to be released from prison, hardened but not broken by his experience there. Their mother, Beatrice, having deteriorated psychologically to a great degree, shows small signs of improvement. In essence, a better future is possible for them all, though exactly what it might involve is an open question.

## 12.2.2 Subject Matter

Fifteen-year-old Kambili's world is circumscribed by the high walls and frangipani trees of her family compound. Her wealthy Catholic father, under whose shadow Kambili lives, while generous and politically active in the community, is repressive and fanatically religious at home.

When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili's father sends her and her brother away to stay with their aunt, a University professor, whose house is noisy and full of laughter. There, Kambili and her brother discover a life and love beyond the confines of their father's authority. The visit will lift the silence from their world and, in time, give rise to devotion and defiance that are reveal in profound and unexpected ways. The novel therefore thematizes the promise of freedom; the blurred lines between childhood and adulthood; between love and hatred, and between the old gods and the new.

## 12.2.2 Themes

The theme has to do with whatthe story as a whole is about. The ideas or concepts conveyed by the story which are not raised by the author but generated by the reader from the work of art. The following are the themes deduced from the text:

### Extremism and Fanaticism

This is exhibited by Eugene who takes his religion and practically everything about life to the extreme, Eugene believes that to have a complete faith, one has to be religious and at the same time he {Eugene} looks at the atheist or those who do not share the same faith as his as being worthless, not worthy of associating with; In fact, they are people who will definitely end up in hell This theme occurs in most of the scenes in the novel. For instance, Eugene prays and asks God to forgive those who have tried to thwart His will after a dinner. In another scene, we also find Kambili reading James, Chapter five, in preparation for her talk during the family time. Again, Eugene accuses his children of living, sleeping and dining with a heathen (their Grandfather -Papa Nnukwu). Indeed, when Eugene and his family visit the village, we are made to understand that Kambili and Jaja are to stay for just fifteen minutes when they visit their Grandfather, and they are forbidden to eat there. As a religious fanatic, Eugene promises to give his father a new house and car with a driver on the condition that the old man converts

to Christianity. Eugene proves to be perfect all the times, but in his perfection, all we can see is imperfection.

### Fear

The theme of fear is demonstrated byKambili and Jaja throughout the novel. The story is replete with the aura of fear, as a result of the dictatorial and tyrannical tendencies of their father, Eugene. Restrictions by their father affect their social life and interaction with their colleagues and their cousins: Amaka, Obiora and Chima. They always consider what their father will do or say when he hears them doing something. This causes a kind of limitation for them, and they, especially Kambili, find it difficult to participate in activities. She finds it difficult to interact freely with her classmates. Even when the children visit their Aunt, and the news of their sick grandfather makes their Aunty to travel to Enugu to bring him down to Nsukka, Kambili and Jaja are scared of maintaining a good rapport with their grandfather. Another instance of this theme of fear is found on pages 175 and 176 where Kambili replies "NO" when asked if she could play basketball or volleyball. This shows that they (Kambili and Jaja) are not socially and emotionally developed as a result of their background.

Eugene on the other hand also demonstrates fear over his children. He is scared of having children that are morally bankrupt and ungodly. He does not allow his children to have social rapport especially with the so-called 'heathens (those who do not believe in or see Christianity as he does). This makes him to be very strict with his children, and he limits their level of interaction with the outside world.

As for Beatrice, fear is evident in her subtle nature and carriage: how she avoids any clash or argument with Eugene and how she persuades her children to do whatever their father says, how she chooses her words to conform to what her husband expects, and so on.

### Subjugation

This can also be termed the theme of living by schedules, rules and order. Eugene rules the lives of his children with iron hand. He does not give them any breathing space or liberty to do what they like, like every other child. He thinks, by this subjugation, he is giving his children the best training. For instance, he prepares a time table for both of them for their daily living. They know what to do at any specific moment; when to go for dinner, lunch or breakfast; when to observe their siesta; when to wash their school uniforms; when to read newspapers; to mention but a few. As a result, they end up living a monotonous life. Their father runs their lives apart from his normal duty as the head of the family, making decisions for every member of the family, including their mother (Beatrice), determining what goes on and what happens next, and even to the extent of controlling their thoughts and speech.

### Generosity

Generosity happens to be the strongest virtue in Eugene and his wife they are very generous to people. Eugene helps his church, especially in donation; he feeds people; his wife also hosts the 'sisters' at home and gives them food. They are generous in giving, especially to their church

members and the community. On pg 54, (last paragraph), he gives the hawkers some money even though he does not buy things from all of them. The fact that he receives a title as Omeliora (meaning one who does for his community) strongly attests to his generosity, and on pg 55, he gives out 10 notes to the little children who came to welcome him to the village and tells them to show the money to their parents.

### Military Dictatorship and Maladministration of Nigerian Leaders

As a result of incompetence and corruption of the civilians, the Nigerian soldiers take laws into their own hands and hijack the administrative roles. Invariably, this leads to unstable administration. The freedoms of people are limited, especially the freedoms of expression and of the press. Anyone who dares to go beyond the military cannot go unpunished. This is why *Standard Newspaper* is the only media outfit that is still bold enough to serve as the conscience of the society. However, due to his defiance, the editor of the newspaper falls into the bad record of the military authority, and eventually in a bid and determination to uphold the truth, the fearless editor Ade Coker is murdered with a parcel bomb allegedly sent to him by the military head of state. This is a reference to the death of Dele Giwa, the erstwhile editor of *Newswatch*through a parcel bomb.

### Dissonant Family Relationship

There is a sharp difference in the relationship that exists in Eugene's family and what obtains in Aunty Ifeoma's family. Kambili and Jaja observe this difference when they visit their Aunty in Nsukka. Their world expands, becomes louder, and more promising. They are plunged into a world where children and adults say what they think without fear, and everyone can laugh, argue, question and challenge each other openly. Kambili who can barely speak intheir home at Enugu, who does not know the sound of her own laughter, now begins to discover her own voice, her ability to laugh and make others laugh.

Also, as regards the family relationship within the Christian fold, there is a disparity between what Father Benedict allows his congregation to do and what Father Amadi permits in his own assembly. For instance, Father Amadi allows his congregation to sing Ibo native songs, and he also joins them in singing, whereas Father Benedict neither sings nor allows the congregation to sing their Ibo native praise songs to God.

There are other minor themes, such as hard work (as seen in Kambili and Jaja who take their studies serous); religious conflict (between Christians and the adherents of other religions); inferiority complex; struggle for existence (for instance, Aunty Ifeoma's tireless efforts to keep her family together after her husband's death); death (for instance, Ade Coker and Papa Nnukwu), and the like.

## 12.2.3 Narrative Techniques

Narrative techniques are methods by which a story is told. We shall examine the following narrative techniques employed in the novel:

1. Point of view
2. Irony
3. Suspense
4. Flashback
5. Foreshadowing/Pre-figuring
6. Symbolism
7. Characters/Characterization

**Point of View**

It is an indubitable fact that the first person point of view is employed in the novel.In fact, the use of first person pronouns 'I' and 'we' pervades the novel. On Page 39, the last paragraph: "We went upstairs to change, Jaja and Mama and I". These two pronouns are used continuously by the narrator, Kambili throughout the novel.

However, the narrator's knowledge about other characters is limited, which means the point of view is first person limited because she does not have access to their minds; she could only tell the readers what she sees and witnesses of the other characters in the novel. She cannot tell the thoughts and motives of their hearts. Kambili cannot show the readers the secret in the hearts of Aunty Ifeoma and her children. For instance, on page 286, the second to the last paragraph, she says:

> Aunty Ifeoma had narrowed her annoyed- I was not sure if it was because the woman was asking for the dress or because she had brought up America.

Kambili is so limited that she virtually makes no comment on issues like corruption in government and public offices, political oppression and subjugation, poverty and extreme economic disparity, national brain drain, love and celibacy, religious fanaticism and religious tolerance, and family relationship. She only leaves the readers to interpret the situations or allow them understand from the judgment of Jaja, Beatrice Achike, Obiora, Amaka, even youngest Chioma, Aunty Ifeoma, Father Amadi, as well as Papa-Nnukwu. Nevertheless, one could still sense Kambili's sympathies with other characters. This could be seen on Page 18, the second to the last paragraph, where she sympathizes with her mother, Beatrice: "I meant to say 1 am sorry papa broke your figurines but the words that came out were, "I'm sorry your figurines broke, mama".

We can also say that Kambili is limited in her viewpoint because she lacks the spiritual understanding which is possessed by her father; that is why she does not condemn her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, who is a traditionalist. Despite Eugene's despicable behaviour, Kambili also does not dislike him; she still longs for his tender embrace before and after his death.

There is also the stream of consciousness of the narrator. Despite the fact that Kambili is a character that is not bold due to her up-bringing, the reader can still understand her character by her thoughts, self perceptions, memories, feelings, even the total sense of awareness and mental or emotional responses. She has a lot to say, but it is always in her thought;, she is too afraid to utter utterances due to the way she is brought, up by her father. She and Jaja communicate with stolen glances at each other.

### Irony

This is a literary term that is common to the three genres of literature. It is used to create a discrepancy or incongruity (uneven or surprise) between what is (reality) and what seems to be (appearance).

We have situational irony in the novel. While Eugene is dying gradually, the reader thinks that he is ill, even Kambili also thinks he is very ill because of the spots on his face. This could be seen on pages 256-257:

> I did not notice the rashes on his face until I came close to hug him. They were like tiny pimples, each with whitish pus the tips, and they covered the whole of his face, even his eyelids. His face looked swollen, oily, and discoloured.

But it is when he dies that the reader gets to know that he had been poisoned; this is revealed through the autopsy that is carried out on him, and it is Beatrice, Eugene's wife, who was the one poisoning him slowly every day, as she confesses to her children that she started putting the poison in his tea before she left for Nsukka: “I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka, Sisi get it for me;her uncle is a powerful witch doctor”.

Other instances of irony in the text include the following:

- Eugene supports political freedom yet limits the freedom of his family so harshly.
- Ade acknowledges his publisher, Eugene, as a “man of integrity, the bravest man I know.”
- He agrees to publish on NwankitiOgechi rather than run the story on Big Oga.

### Suspense

A good example of suspense is seen in the novel when Eugene dies suddenly in his office in the factory. The readers long to know or discover the reason behind his death. However, the reason behind Eugene's death is not revealed until an autopsy is carried out on his corpse.

It is after the result of the autopsy which shows that Eugene was poisoned that the reader gains an insight into the cause of his death; this is further buttressed by his wife’s confession that she was the one who deliberately poisoned her husband: “"They did an autopsy", she said, "They have found the poison in your father's body".

### Flashback

This means an act of giving a reference to what has happened before in a literary work. This technique is explored in the novel. The story starts through a flashback. It commences with a flash back into the origin of the conflict in the family of Eugene. Kambili starts the narration from where things started falling apart in the family. She then moves back intime to show the reader all that preceded and precipitated the clash, the present.

It is thus observed that while the first three parts of the novel are written in the past tense, the last part, which focuses on the present time, is written in the simple present tense. Kambili grows in the narration from

about fourteen to around eighteen years old, which means that the novel isa Bildungsroman.

### Foreshadowing/ Prefiguring

This is the presentation of details, characters, or incidents in a narrative in such a way that later events are prepared for (or "shadowed forth"). In Purple *Hibiscus*, there are four parts; the first part tells the reader what to expect in the other parts. There is a sign of what later happens in the story, and also the cause of the conflict in the family of and the society as a whole.

### Symbolism

In this novel, the significant symbol is the Purple Hibiscus in Aunty Ifeoma's garden which is also the title of the story. As the narrator says:

> Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rear, fragrant with the under-ones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do.

Due to the treatment which Kambili and Jajagetfrom their biological father, Eugene, in which not even their mother can interfere when they are being punished for not doing things perfectly, even right at their adolescent age. Each time Kambili and Jaja do anything by mistake or not, their father does not have mercy on them; he punishes them heavily.

Therefore, when they visit Ifeoma and her children and see how they relate with each other, and the children are not scolded for everything they do, they are surprised. The purple hibiscus is a rare species that makes Jaja, who is allegorically one of the masses of the country (Nigeria) under a dictator, wants to be free from his father's maltreatment, freedom to play with friends, to make decisions for himself, and not being drawn schedules for and so on.

Another significant symbol is the 'startling red hibiscus' which signifies the suffering, agony, bondage and restriction that Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili receive from Eugene, their father.

Also, one of the last sentences in the novel is symbolic: "the new rains will come down soon". This symbolizes a new dawn of happiness and freedom. In the climactic conclusion of the novel, the characters split out of their shells and change in surprising, if not shocking ways. The entropy and rebellion that has been fuelling throughout the book ignites in a fatal spark, and the rule of empire burns down.

## 12.2.4 Characters/Characterization

### Kambili

KambiliAchike is the central character in *Purple Hibiscus* and also the narrator of the story. She is an intelligent, observant, religious young woman, aged fifteen for much of the novel. At the same time, Kambili is shy and inhibited, at least until she has spent an extended amount of time

away from her family home at the house of Aunty Ifeoma and her family. Kambili is the younger of Eugene and Beatrice Achike's two children. She does not like the living environment under her father after she gets used to the freedom of Nsukka.

**Chukwuka "Jaja" Achike**

ChukwukaAchike, nicknamed "Jaja" by his family, is an intelligent young man about two years his sister's elder. For most of the novel, in the same way as the rest of his family, he is dominated by his father, although ultimately he displays more overt defiance than them, especially by not going to communion on Palm Sunday and causing a massive family scene as a consequence. He takes the blame for his mother's crime and spends almost three years in prison before obtaining an amnesty. Through this time, his personality has hardened but not been broken.

**Eugene (Papa)**

Eugene Achike is Kambili's father. He is a wealthy businessman and very strict Catholic who dominates his family for much of the novel by imposing a harsh religious regime in the family home. Indeed, for much of the novel he controls almost every aspect of his family's life, including imposing a schedule upon the lives of Kambili and her brother Jaja so that every minute of the day is mapped out for them. While on the one hand Eugene is an important man in his society and donates considerable amounts of money to needy individuals and worthy causes; he is prone to outbreaks of violence within the family house, subjecting his wife Beatrice and the two children to severe physical punishment.

**Beatrice (Mama)**

Beatrice, mother and wife in the Achike family, is a quiet, maternal figure for much of the novel, presenting a softer, warmer presence in the home in contrast to the often tyrannical presence of Eugene. Passive is another term applicable to her, at least for a great deal of the book. During the course of the novel, Beatrice suffers two miscarriages after severe beatings from Eugene. It is insinuated that she stays with Eugene partially out of gratitude for his unwillingness to marry another woman after she could only have two children. Ultimately, however, Beatrice cannot cope with Eugene's behaviour and poisons him. Her son, Jaja, takes the blame for the crime and she is a shattered wreck after this point. At the conclusion of the novel, however, with Jaja's impending release from prison, there are some indications that her condition will improve.

**.Aunty Ifeoma**

Aunty Ifeoma is Eugene's sister, a tall, striking, intelligent woman who works as a Professor at the University of Nigeria. She is highly capable in many aspects of her life, displaying determination and resourcefulness in bringing up her children without a husband. Though financially struggling, she creates a much happier environment for her children than does her brother Eugene for his family. She was married to Ifediora, who was a professor with her, until his death.

**Amaka**

Amaka is Ifeoma and Ifediora's only daughter. She is Kambili's age mate, around fifteen, and originally does not like Kambili, believing her to be a snob, and jealous of Kambili's supposedly lavish lifestyle. After a few weeks of getting to know each other, and after Kambili's beating, the two become close friends.

**Obiora**

Obiora is the second oldest of Ifeoma and Ifediora's three children, at around age fourteen. He wears glasses, and is very good at Mathematics. He is reserved, yet often speaks up when he feels someone is wrong, as is seen when he contradicts Chiaku.

**Chima**

Chima is the youngest of Ifeoma and Ifediora's three children. Not much is known about this character, apart from the fact that he looks up to Obiora.

**Father Amadi**

Father Amadi is a young attractive priest in the circle of Aunty Ifeoma and her family. Being youthful, indigenous and well-versed in contemporary life, he could be described as a 'new generation' priest, as opposed to white European priests in the country such as Eugene's pastor, Father Benedict. When Kambili falls in love with Father Amadi, he shows considerable thoughtfulness and honour in the sensitive way he makes it clear to her that, because he is devoted to the church, he will never be able to become her partner. But he loves her; yet he dare not be serious with her because of his profession.

**Papa-Nnukwu**

Papa-Nnukwu is both father and grandfather in the Achike family, being Eugene and Ifeoma's father. He is a kind, loving man rooted in the traditional non-Christian beliefs of his indigenous culture, presenting a marked contrast, in particular, to his son Eugene's adherence to European religion and lifestyle.

**Father Benedict**

Father Benedict is St. Agnes' white priest. He has been in Enugu for seven years. Being a strict colonial product, Benedict feels strong resistance to the Igbo language, and prefers to lead his services in Latin and in English. He is a strong supporter of Papa's charity work.

**Ade Coker**

Ade Coker is the lead editor of Papa's newspaper, *The Standard*. He is also the author of rebellious works, which ultimately leads to his death. He speaks out commonly against the current Nigerian government. He was killed by a package bomb in his house. He is survived by his wife, Yewande, their young daughter, and their baby.


Note

Adichie creates a masterful work with *Purple Hibiscus,* a work that is carefully planted, lovingly tended and brilliantly bloomed. She satisfies her readers with a messy ending, not one that is too tidy or conclusive, where at the end our characters must undoubtedly face a new set of hardships and hurdles, like life.

# Study Session Summary


Summary

In this Study Session, we analysed ChimamandaNgoziAdichie's*Purple Hibiscus*, paying particular attention to the novel's background, context, thematic preoccupations, techniques, and basic elements. We concluded that in the novel, Adichie dwells on topical issues like religious fanaticism, family disintegration, protest, oppression, and solidarity. We also established that in the novel, Adichie makes use of apt techniques, including symbolism, flashback, kid narrator, suspense, pre-figuring, irony and allusions. We concluded that in the text, there is an adroit blend of content and form.

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