

# Features and Elements of the Novel

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2nd Lecture

# WHAT IS A NOVEL? (NOVEL PATTERNS)

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- **A novel** is a long narrative, normally in prose, which describes fictional characters and events, usually in the form of a sequential story.
- **The genre** has also been described as possessing "a continuous and comprehensive history of about two thousand years". This view sees the novel's origins in Classical Greece and Rome, medieval, early modern romance, and the tradition of the **novella**.
- **The novella** is an Italian word used to describe short stories, supplied the present generic English term in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Ian Watt, however, in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) suggests that the novel first came into being in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

# WHAT IS A NOVEL (NOVEL PATTERNS)?

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- The **romance** is a closely related long prose narrative.
- **Walter Scott** defined the romance and the novel
- **The romance** it as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous (great) and uncommon incidents", whereas in **the novel** "the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society".
- However, many romances, including the historical romances of Scott, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, are also frequently called novels, and Scott describes romance as a "kindred term". Romance, as defined here, should not be confused with the genre fiction love romance or romance novel.

# THE FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

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## *1. A Fictional Narrative*

- Functionality is most commonly cited as distinguishing novels from historiography. However, this can be a problematic criterion. Throughout the early modern period authors of historical narratives would often include inventions rooted in traditional beliefs in order to embellish (beautify) a passage of text or add credibility to an opinion.
- Historians would also invent and compose speeches for didactic (educational) purposes. Novels can, on the other hand, depict (describe) the social, political and personal realities of a place and period with clarity and detail not found in works of history.

# THE FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

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## 2. *Literary Prose*

- While prose rather than verse became the standard of the modern novel, the ancestors of the modern European novel include verse epics in the Romance language of southern France.
- Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fictional narratives in verse, such as Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1824), Alexander Pushkin's *Yevgeniy Onegin* (1833), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), competed with prose novels. Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), composed of 590 stanzas, is a more recent example of the verse novel.



# THE FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

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## **3. Content: *Intimate (Warm) Experience***

- Both in 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan and 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe, prose fiction created intimate reading situations.
- A new world of Individualistic fashion, personal views, intimate feelings, secret anxieties, "conduct" and "gallantry" spread with novels and the associated prose-romance.

# THE FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

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## 4. *Length*

- The novel is today the longest genre of narrative prose fiction, followed by the novella, short story, and flash fiction. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century critics saw the romance as of epic length and the novel as its short rival. A precise definition of the differences in length between these types of fiction, is, however, not possible. The requirement of length has been traditionally connected with the notion that a novel should encompass the totality of life.

# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## I. Setting

- The background in which the story takes place. There are several aspects to setting:
  - (a) Place:** This is the geographical location of the story. Since novels are lengthy, the story may move from one place to another. When asked to describe the setting, you may give the general geographical location (e.g., in a novel which takes place in numerous locations around Italy, you may mention only the country) or you may describe several specific locations.
  - (b) Time:** First, this refers to the period of history, if the story is set in the past. If the story could happen now or at some recent unspecified time, we say that it is "contemporary." If it is a science fiction story, it may be set in the future. When describing setting, be as specific as the author is. Novels usually span (take place over) a much longer period of time than short stories, so you may need to say that a novel's setting in time is from 1937 to 1956. When describing the setting of a portion of the novel, you may be able to specify the season, month, and even time of day.
  - (c) Climate/Weather:** This is an aspect of setting which is often forgotten, but it can be important to the novel. If the story begins in the midst of a hurricane, it is significant to the story.
  - (d) Lifestyle:** This refers to the daily life of the characters. If a story takes place in a particular historical period, the lifestyle of the characters (e.g., whether they are poor farmers or residents of the court) is part of the setting.



# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## **2. Atmosphere**

- The mood or feeling of the story, the emotional quality that the story gives to the reader. This is usually evoked by the setting and, like the setting, may change throughout the novel. You may say that a novel opens with a mysterious atmosphere, a gloomy atmosphere, a light, carefree atmosphere, etc.

# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## **3. *Characters***

- The people, animal, robots, etc., who take part in the action of the story.

# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## 4. *Conflict*

- The struggle between opposing forces in the story. Conflict provides interest and suspense. There are various types of conflict, which can usually be categorized as one of the following:
  - (a) a character struggling against nature.
  - (b) a struggle between two or more characters
  - (c) a struggle between the main character and some aspect of society
  - (d) a struggle of opposing forces within one character.
- The reader usually follows the actions of one main character throughout the novel; this character is referred to as the **protagonist**. The force with which the protagonist is in conflict is called the **antagonist**. In the case of the fourth type of conflict listed, the antagonist would be another internal force within the protagonist, e.g., self-doubt.

# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## **5. Plot**

- The storyline; the ordered arrangement of incidents in a story. Plot arises out of the conflict in the story, which builds to a climax.

# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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## 6. Theme

- The central idea in the story or novel. It can usually be expressed in a short statement about human nature, life, or the universe.



# THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

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- The following is a summary of these major elements:
  - Setting is the "where" and "when" of the story or novel.
  - Characters are the "who."
  - Conflict is the "what." (What is the problem?)
  - Plot is the "how." (How is the conflict developed and resolved?)
  - Theme is the "why." (The author's message and one of the reasons why the author wrote the story or novel.)