

NOVEL

Introduction

Today, the *novel* is the most popular and influential form of literature. It is a long prose narrative, which has become the dominant literary genre because it can portray every aspect of human life: individual psychology, family relationships, social institutions, politics, history, religion, morality, and culture.

Unlike the *epic*, which celebrates heroic actions, or the *lyric*, which expresses a moment of emotion, the novel usually presents the experiences of ordinary human beings over an extended period of time.

Etymology

The word novel comes from the Italian word *novella*, meaning "*a little new thing*" or "*a new story*." The Italian term itself comes from the Latin *novellus*, meaning *new*. Originally, a novella referred to a short tale. Over time, the term novel came to denote a long prose fiction.

Definition

A novel is a relatively long work of prose fiction that presents imagined characters and events in a sustained narrative. It differs from shorter prose forms by its greater length, complexity, and detailed development of character, plot, and setting.

Essential Characteristics of the Novel

Most novels share the following characteristics.

A. Prose Narrative: Unlike the epic, the novel is normally written in prose. Although verse novels exist, they are exceptions.

B. Fictional Narrative: The events are generally imagined. Even historical novels combine historical facts with fictional characters and incidents.

C. Great Length: A novel is much longer than a short story, a novella or a tale. Its length allows the author to develop characters, plot, themes, settings, relationships, and other aspects in considerable detail.

D. Complex Plot: The novel usually contains a main plot, subplots, multiple conflicts, and gradual development. Unlike lyric poetry, the novel depends heavily upon narrative progression.

***E.* Character Development:**

Perhaps the greatest strength of the novel is its ability to portray human beings realistically. Characters change, grow, learn, or decline. Readers observe their psychological development over time.

***F.* Realistic Setting:** Most novels present detailed descriptions of places, houses, cities, landscapes, and historical periods. The setting often becomes essential to the story.

The Rise of the Novel

The novel became the dominant literary form during the eighteenth century. The emergence of the novel weakened the old classical system of fixed literary genres. It soon became one of the major literary forms alongside poetry and drama. Important early novelists include Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne. Later, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and many others transformed the genre.

Elements of the Novel

There are several important features that critics study in novels.

A. Plot: The sequence of events. The plot provides unity to the narrative.

B. Character: The persons represented in the story. Characters may be major, minor, static, or dynamic.

C. Setting: The time and place of action. Setting often influences character and theme.

D. Theme: The central ideas explored by the novel. Examples include love, justice, class, identity, freedom, and morality.

Realism in the Novel

One of the defining characteristics of the modern novel is realism. Novelists attempt to present believable characters, convincing dialogue, recognizable social situations, and ordinary daily life. Unlike romance, the realistic novel minimizes extraordinary adventures.

Major Types of Novels

There are many important subgenres of the novel.

A. Historical Novel: Combines fictional characters with historical events.

B. Gothic Novel: Features mystery, horror, ruined castles, and supernatural atmosphere.

C. Detective Novel: Centres upon crime, investigation, and logical solution.

D. Science Fiction: Explores science, technology, or future societies.

F. Novel of Sensibility: Focuses upon emotional responsiveness and refined feeling.

G. Graphic Novel: Narrative told through a combination of words and sequential art.

H. Magic Realism: Combines ordinary reality with supernatural elements presented as natural.

Novel versus Epic

<u>Epic</u>	<u>Novel</u>
Verse	Prose
Heroic figures	Ordinary people
National destiny	Individual and social life
Gods intervene	Human society dominates
Elevated style	Everyday language

The Narrator

Every novel requires a narrator. The narrator may be:

I. First Person "I": The narrator participates in the story.

II. Third Person "He", "She" or "They": The narrator stands outside the action.

III. Omniscient Narrator: Knows thoughts, feelings, past, present, and future of every character.

IV. Limited Narrator: Knows only one or a few characters closely.

Time in the Novel

Novelists freely manipulate time. They use flashbacks, memories, anticipation, and parallel narratives. Modern novels especially experiment with chronology.

Social Function of the Novel

The novel often serves as a mirror of society. It examines family life, politics, education, class, gender, religion, economics, etc. Many nineteenth-century novelists regarded fiction as a means of social criticism.

Psychological Depth

Unlike earlier heroic literature, modern novels frequently explore memory, consciousness, dreams, motivation, and inner conflict. Twentieth-century writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce transformed the novel by emphasizing consciousness rather than external action.

Modern Developments

The twentieth century greatly expanded the possibilities of the novel. New techniques include the stream of consciousness, interior monologue, multiple narrators, fragmented chronology, and unreliable narration. The novel became increasingly experimental.

Major Literary Examples

Daniel Defoe — *Robinson Crusoe*

Samuel Richardson — *Pamela*

Henry Fielding — *Tom Jones*

Jane Austen — *Pride and Prejudice*

Charles Dickens — *Great Expectations*

George Eliot — *Middlemarch*

Thomas Hardy — *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Virginia Woolf — *Mrs Dalloway*

James Joyce — *Ulysses*