



## Lecture 02

### Fiction

#### I. Narration

To put it simply, narrative or narration is telling of a life event or a story with a beginning, middle, and an end. While films and dramas can be considered as a form of narrative, fiction only relies on words to communicate with the reader. In fiction, narrations tell stories of imaginary persons, communities, and events, as it functions - to some extent - as a **mimetic medium** that imitates human speech, actions, and thoughts.

#### II. The History of the English Novel

The novel is a fictional narrative text written in prose. Unlike the other forms of literature, the novel is considered a lengthy story with more than one character and various settings. Like literature, the novel went through different changes throughout the history. The novel as a genre dates back only to the 18th century. Before this date stories were orally narrated or scripted in a verse form. Critics argue that the novel is originated in the Greek epics that tell stories of heroic quests and imaginative creatures like Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (c.8th century B.C).

##### 1. The Old English Era (Anglo-Saxon Period)

Literary texts, especially that of prose, were written in **Latin** during the Anglo-Saxon period. However, with the coming of King Alfred (9th century), he encouraged the translation of texts from Latin to Old English—mainly to the vernacular—to improve the state of learning among his people. The literary prose of this period was mostly didactic and informative, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* that provides historical accounts from King Alfred's reign until three centuries after his death. In the 10th and 11th centuries, prose writing turned to focus more on law and religion. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, translated by Aethelwold, bishop of Winchester, is one of the key works that set the foundation to the English law. His pupil, Aelfric, wrote *Catholic Homilies* and *Lives of Saints* narrating the church's

history and doctrine. Aelfric was also interested in language and Latin grammar which resulted in his homilies that provided translations from Latin grammar into English and a manual on how to teach Latin.

🔔 Note: Perhaps the only work that is considered as fiction during the Old English period is *Beowulf*. Written in verse by an unknown poet around the 8th century, the poetic narration of the adventures of Beowulf is one of the most important poems of Old English and the first European poem written in a vernacular language.

## 2. The Middle Era

The Middle Ages started with the **Norman Conquest** of the British Isles in 1066. Bringing with them French language, the literary scene in England became dominated by three languages: Latin, French, and English. Despite the continuous translations from Latin to English, French and Latin remained the most used languages, especially that they were used by both the ruling and religious classes. In the Midlands, however, Old English continued to be used in prose writing, mainly in works directed towards women. In the 13th century, works like *Ancrene Riwe (Rule for anchoresses)* that teach women how to dress and behave became popular. Although these texts were religious, they are praised for their rich figurative language and its creative style.

Despite the political unrest of the 14th century (the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses), religious conflicts, and the Black Death (1347-1351), literature and linguistics continued to flourish. By mid-14th century, prose started to be used—quite slowly—in fiction. **Geoffrey Chaucer's** *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387-1400) is considered a narrative poetry as the text contains stories written in both verse and prose and develops a clear description of characters, a complete plot, and a story based on real events. Besides Chaucer who used English in his writings, John Wycliffe managed to translate the **Bible** from Latin to English for the first time which opened the way for English to be used in religious prose. With the turn of the 15th century, prose written in English became a respectable medium, especially with the introduction of printing by **William Caxton** in 1476. For instance, the very well-known Thomas Malory's accounts of the rise and fall of King Arthur in *The Death of Arthur (Le Morte D'Arthur)* was among the first works to be printed and published by Caxton in 1485.

### 3. The Renaissance

The Renaissance era saw the shift of Europe from Medieval Age to modernity, which brought with it numerous political, religious, and social changes. During the first half of the 16th century, Medieval beliefs demolished in front of new developments in science, religion, and humanism that calls for education. Even though the Renaissance period covers three eras in England; the Elizabethan Age, the Jacobean (Stuarts) Age, and the Commonwealth Period, literature flourished the most during the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603). During this period, England was compared to the rest of Europe, as a result, the **Tudor House** that ruled the country from 1485 until 1603 aspired to form a new educated class of officials. To achieve this goal, the schooling system relied on classic literature from Latin and Greek cultures, which explains the used techniques such as sonnets and epic writings in Elizabethan literature. This reliance on other European languages confused the writers of this period on whether to use coined (new and created) words or direct translations from Latin in their works. Literary works of this period were mostly in the form of pamphlets and treatise instead of fiction as in Richard Hakluyt's (1589). In fiction, the writings *Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* of John Lyly, particularly his *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) is filled with rhetorical expressions that makes it closer to the play than prose. Nevertheless, fiction writing during the Elizabethan age was more focused on style and vivid vocabulary instead of narrative economy.

While literature was revived under the Tudor's rule, the social state was filled with tensions. The first signs of religious conflicts started to surface with the continued demands for the reformation of the English church. The rise of **Puritanism** (a religious movement) impacted the early Stuart prose writings. Puritans believed that writing should be used for religious purposes instead of entertainment. The simplicity of the Puritan style was taken by scientists who wanted to write their thoughts without the need to use figurative language. This shift in writing led to the inclusion of philosophical debates in prose writings, as in *Essays* (1597) by **Francis Bacon**, in which he criticises various public and private issues from different points, therefore the emergence of the critical essay writing form.

### 4. The Restoration Period

The term Restoration refers to the period of going back to royal reign in England after it fell under the Commonwealth rule led by Oliver Cromwell between 1649 and 1660. Writings of this period reacted to the fall of Puritanism and its religious beliefs. In *Paradise Lost* (1667), for example, **John Milton** uses the images of heaven and hell, God and Satan to describe the failure of the religious revolution in

England. In contrast to Milton's verse writing, **John Bunyan** chose prose to write a religious allegory in *The Pilgrims Progress* (1678). In his work, Bunyan provides a vivid description of the characters, constructive dialogues, and a clear plot that became the base of the modern novel in the following century. Although religious writing dominated the scene during the Restoration period as a reaction to the fall of Puritanism, philosophical works, such as **John Locke's**, chronicles and diaries started to take shape as well through their discussion of history, politics, and different interests from a personal point of view.

### 5. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Prose writing in the 18th century was characterised with the development of the essay. Writing for newspapers and then magazines allowed writers to focus on real life problems instead of fiction. The social awareness that political writings created among the writers of this period set the foundation to what is going to be known as the **modern novel**.

**Daniel Defoe** is one of these writers who started as a journalist and then moved to narrative. Defoe's developed writing came in a time of forming Great Britain and its colonial expansion. This background is clear in his novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), an autobiographical text that is considered to be the first modern English novel. In addition to the use of the first-person narrative, in the process of writing this literary work, Defoe relied on travelling journals and historical accounts that make the work an early representation of **realism**. Defoe's focus on the troubling social changes of that period and questioning the relationship between man and society opened the way for other writers to develop their creativity in prose narrative. Another writer who formed the modern novel during the 18th century is Samuel Richardson with his novel *Pamela* (1740).

### 6. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the last few years of the 18th century and the beginnings of the 19th century, the novel as a literary genre went through various developments. The French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Industrial revolution in Britain played major roles in such development. As a movement, **Romanticism** came as a reaction to Enlightenment as it focuses on scientific reasoning and revived the values of imagination, emotions, and the importance and freedom of the self /individual (Bennett & Royle, 2004). While poets turned to nature as a source to express their thoughts and feelings, writers continued relating fiction and politics which, due to the horrors of the French Revolution, resulted in the emergence of the **Gothic**

**novel.** Even though Gothic writings are meant to create a sense of horror in the reader, they addressed important psychological and political issues, such in **Mary Shelley's** *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

In the late of the 18th century, writers used the techniques of Romanticism—imagination and adventurous narratives—to highlight social oppression. **Female writers** are the main figures who contributed immensely to this debate. Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelly's mother, wrote *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) criticising **patriarchy** (When a society or a government is controlled by men and women are excluded from it) in the British community, while **Jane Austen's** novels focus on female protagonists and their path towards learning about themselves and their importance in their society.

The Victorian era prose continued its focus on the individual and what John Stuart Mill calls 'self-consciousness.' The period is viewed as post-Romantic for Britain became known for its industrialisation and urbanisation. The wealth of the kingdom also came from the spread of the British Empire across the globe, which led to a rapid social change and an increased interest in intellectuality, especially by the middle-class. However, this industrial wealth revealed a problem of *classicism* within the British community and the widened gap between middle-class and working class. Works like **Charles Dickens's** *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) reveal the poor social conditions of the Victorian period in the images of the poverty of the working class and the reliance on child labour.

## 7. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The return to Realism of the 19th century continued well into the beginnings of the 20th century with its characteristics of doubt and uncertainty. The turn of the 20th century brought with it a sense of loss and isolation which was stressed further with the First and Second World Wars and the first signs of the British Empire's collapse. Questions about the originality of the human being, supported by Charles Darwin's evolution theory, led writers to seek answers to the state of confusion and alienation through delving into other worlds/cultures (former colonies, mainly Africa and Asia) as in **Joseph Conrad's** *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Moreover, the 20th century allowed writers to challenge boundaries and break away from the social, political, and religious rules. Indeed, the rise of psychoanalysis with the works of Sigmund Freud led writers to separate their characters from the exterior world and instead focused on their psychology, i.e., ideas and thoughts which led to the emergence of the **stream of consciousness** in the works of **Virginia Woolf** and **James Joyce**.

### III. The History of the Short Story

In contrast with the novel, the short story is defined by its few characters, limited setting, and one central plot. The writer tends to move quickly through the events of the plot in the short story, making it a concise and effective literary genre.

Unlike the development of the novel, the short story is a product of the 19th century. Some critics argue that Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) are the first representations of the short story. Indeed, the short story, as a form of fiction, is rooted in orally narrated anecdotes and short myths and tales. Moreover, the spread of the newspaper in the 14th and 15th centuries led writers to publish their works in parts making them shorter for their readers. It was not until the 19th century that that tale became known as a short story, therefore a separate literary genre. **Thomas Hardy** and **George Elliot** were the pioneers of the English short story, whom **Sir Walter Scott** followed on their steps with his text *The Two Drovers* (1827). As it developed in Britain, the short story went through the same process around Europe and the USA.

The American poet and writer, **Edgar Allan Poe**, was the first to characterise the short story as a literary work that can be read in one sitting with an experience of unity of effect, that is the story's effect on the reader. **Nathaniel Hawthorn's** *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) was the starting point of the short story in the USA, followed by Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* in 1839. For a while the short story remained based on a centre and clear plot until the Russian writer **Anton Chekhov** started to write stories to make a living. In his writings Chekhov gives the reader the opportunity to judge the characters and the story through his creative **formless short story**. This new technique became commonly used in the 20th century short stories, in which the story no longer has a beginning, middle, or an end (traditional plot structure), which sets it apart from the traditional short story that has a clear, developed plot.

### IV. Components of Fiction

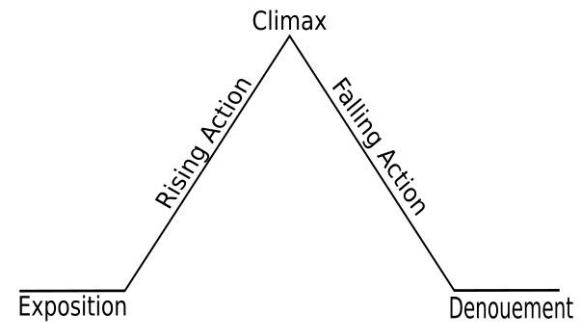
#### 1. Plot

'What happened in the story?' is the asked question to deduce the plot of a story. In other words, plot refers to the series of events that hold the story together. Usually, the plot is arranged in a **chronological order** as the writer starts with one event, which leads to the next, then the next (cause-effect order).

However, in works like crime fiction or science fiction, writers tend to use **anachrony**, that is flashbacks (analepsis) and jump forward or flashforward (prolepsis). In this form, the story moves from present to past events to fill in background information important to the plot or moves to the future in order to draw on possible developments of the story events. These techniques can result in creating subplots that might have lesser importance than the main plot especially in longer literary texts.

The structure of the plot has five main components:

- Exposition: First part of the plot where the author introduces basic information about the story.
- Rising Action: The stage of complications in the story that leads to the main conflict and creates tension.
- Climax / Turning Point: The point of highest tension in the story. The conflict at the climax level of the plot results in a change in the state of things, such with the character's personality.
- Falling Action: The end of the conflict caused during the climax and the complications are solved.
- Resolution / Conclusion: Or denouement, which means the closure of the story. In this stage, the writer tends to showcase the new changes in the characters compared to the beginning of the story.



## 2. Character

A character is the one that plays a role in a story and it can be a human being, animal, or object—as long as they reflect human abilities such as feelings. Characters can also have names or remain **anonymous** (nameless). Even though characters are imaginary in most cases, they are expected to have some relation to the society in order to connect to the reader. Characters in fiction can either be round or flat.

- Round (major) Character: A round character is the centre of the story as the writer provides a full description of their (complex) personalities, background history, desires, and dreams. The round character can also be referred to as the 'protagonist' who sets the story into motion. While the protagonist presents 'good' in the story, the 'antagonist,' or the villain, works in opposition to the protagonist.

- Flat (minor) Character: In fiction, writers usually include more than one flat character. Minor characters are described in one or two sentences and their existence in the story is limited. Writers tend to use flat characters to highlight the round character's personality or help them in achieving their goal.

### 3. Narrative Voice/ Point of View

Narrative voice or point of view reveals who is telling the events of the story and the position and perspective of the **narrator**. While works of fiction are usually narrated from one point of view, modern writings can use a mixture of two or three narrative voices.

- Third Person Narration: Using the pronouns she, he, and they, third-person narrative is the most used voice of narration. The narrator in third person point of view is neither a character nor takes part in the story, they are external to the events of the story. The third person narrator can be an **omniscient**, all-knowing, which means that they know everything about the characters and the story or a **limited narrator** who only has access to the protagonist's thoughts.
- First person Narration: In this type of narrative, the story is told by an **internal** character—one of the characters (not necessarily the protagonist), therefore the pronoun **I** is used by the writer. While it can be viewed as subjective, first person point of view allows the reader an access to the character/narrator's mind and inner experiences.

### 4. Setting

The setting of a story delivers the information of where and when the events of the story are taking place and it can be introduced through two aspects, place and time.

- Place: The location of the plot, it can be a single place or multiple locations.
- Time: Time is a key component of the story as it indicates whether the story is taking place in the past, future, or an exact date (author time).

### 5. Theme

A theme is the general idea of the story and the main message that the writer wants to convey and deliver to the reader. In other cases, themes represent certain morals which teach readers lessons about life.



References

Bennett, A., & Royle, N. (2004). *An introduction to literature, criticism, and theory* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education Limited.