

studying the novel



Jeremy Hawthorn

fifth edition

[studying
the **novel**



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Introduction to the fifth edition

In this fifth edition of *Studying the Novel* there is more extensive discussion of the novella in Chapter 3. Two new chapters are included: one concerned with fiction and the electronic media (Chapter 5) and one concerned with versions and adaptations that pays particular attention to the issues raised by film adaptations of works of fiction (Chapter 8). The section on using computers in Chapter 7 has been expanded, and this chapter also contains additional advice on writing essays and examination answers. The Glossary has also been expanded, and now contains an extended definition of cyberpunk and cyberfiction.

As in previous editions, I have tried to keep referencing to a minimum, omitting sources for many standard critical and fictional works.

Throughout the book I attempt to highlight the distinction between historical and structuralist or narratological approaches to the study of the novel – starting with some comments following.

I am grateful to those many friends and colleagues who have commented on ideas and drafts while I have been writing this new edition, especially Jakob Lothe and Paul Goring. They are not responsible for any errors or inadequacies in the final result.

■ History and structure

It is the discipline of modern linguistics that we have to thank for making us aware that many ‘objects of study’ can be approached in two fundamentally different ways – either as entities that evolve over time or as states or systems that can be studied ‘as they are’ at a particular instant of time. The individual who is generally given the credit for making us aware of the fundamental difference between these approaches is the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics* was put together from notes taken in his lectures by students, and was published after his death in 1915. Saussure is often dubbed the father of modern linguistics because he distinguished between what he termed ‘static’ and ‘evolutionary’ linguistics (nowadays the terms ‘synchronic’, or structuralist linguistics, and ‘diachronic’, or historical linguistics, are generally preferred).

Why should this be of concern to the student of the novel? Saussure’s work persuaded scholars in many different fields to approach their chosen ‘objects of study’ synchronically rather than (or as well as) historically. The theory known as structuralism attempts to generalize such work, and structuralism is the theory that has contributed most to what is known as narrative theory, or narratology. Because some of the most important narratives in our culture are

those that we call novels and short stories, many of the tools (concepts, terms, methods) that we use to analyse novels and short stories come to us from structuralism via narratology. Structuralists in general and narratologists in particular are interested not in how things evolve and change over time but in how they work at a particular moment of time, and they typically model their approach upon the synchronic study of language. Thus a narratologist interested in the concept of 'plot' is not primarily concerned with how novelists over many centuries refined their ideas about what a plot should be or do, but in how plot is one component in the system that is the novel (or, in some applications, in the system that is *a* novel), and in how it interacts with other components. Many of the terms included in the glossary at the end of this book come from structuralist narratology, an approach that is not just based on structuralist linguistics but that actually draws parallels between language and narrative and applies terms developed in the study of language to the study of narratives.

At this point a comparison may be useful. If you are a mechanic trying to work out how a car engine functions you do not need to know anything about the different stages of development through which the internal combustion engine has passed from the start of the twentieth century. But knowing something of this history *will* help you to understand why car engines today are as they are. Similarly, knowing how a car engine works will tell you nothing about how the internal combustion engine evolved, but such knowledge *will* make it easier to study this process of evolution. Synchronic and diachronic approaches complement each other, so that it should not be assumed that the development of narratology has put an end to the historical study of the novel. Indeed, the dimension of history probably remains more present in writing about the novel than in writing about drama or poetry. The odds are that in any general discussion of the novel the word 'history' will appear quite early on: of all the three main literary genres, the novel seems most fundamentally linked in our minds to the dimension of history.

Some of the chapters that follow – Chapter 2, for example, 'History, genre, culture' – outline a primarily historical approach. Others – most notably Chapter 6, 'Analysing fiction' – owe more to the synchronic approach of narratology than to the historical study of the novel. The distinction is not an absolute one by any means; you will note for example that, when discussing dialogue in Chapter 6 on p. 128, I refer to historical changes in the ways in which novelists represent dialogue. You should certainly not assume that the mapping of historical change in the novel cannot involve analytical detail, nor that the close analysis of fictional prose is unable to engage with historical processes or formal changes. Indeed, I do myself believe that histories of the novel that fail to engage with how the novel (as either a single work or a system at a point in time) works cannot but be superficial – just as I also believe that close analysis of fictional prose that is unresponsive to the detail of historical contexts and movements is arid.



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1

Fiction and the novel

Preview

This chapter deals with:

- some preliminary definitions: novel, fiction, narrative
- the universality of fiction and the distinctiveness of literary fiction
- imaginary characters and real life
- prose and narrative
- showing and telling
- characters, action, plot
- novel, short story, novella: some preliminary comments

If we are going to be using terms such as ‘novel’, ‘fiction’, ‘narrative’, and so on, we need at least some preliminary sense of what we mean by these terms: some working definitions. Such definitions inevitably raise the issue of history: if the novel is a genre that develops over time, then no single or short definition can exhaustively capture what it is at all times and in all places. Working definitions do nevertheless allow us to narrow down the field of possibilities and to home in on those characteristics that have continued to distinguish the novel from other literary genres, and from other examples of narrative.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a novel is ‘a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length (now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes) in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity’. This may sound a bit like stating the obvious, but there are some important points contained in this very concise definition. Let us consider some of its component parts.

■ The universality and the distinctiveness of fiction

Gregory Currie has commented that fiction ‘is one of those concepts like goodness, color, number, and cause that we have little difficulty in applying but great difficulty in explaining’ (Currie 1990, 1). ‘Telling stories’ is a function that is so central to our culture that we pay it little analytical attention. From a very early age we learn to distinguish not just between true and untrue reports, but also between different sorts of untrue reports – ‘lies’ and ‘stories’ for example. Fiction is much wider than the novel or, indeed, than prose fiction: jokes, imitations and parodies, songs and narrative poems can all be described as fictions – and wider, non-literary usages include such things as legal fictions and (perhaps) folk tales and urban myths (fictions do not have to take the form of a story or a narrative). Fiction has its historical

and cultural dimensions; if fiction seems to be universally present in the lives of all human beings, it nevertheless assumes different forms in different ages and different societies. Not all fictions are novels, then, but the specific tradition or set of traditions which we refer to as 'the novel' is made possible by a far more widespread and fundamental reliance upon fiction in human society.

We can start with a number of seeming paradoxes: fictions are not true, but they are not lies; they typically describe that which is not real but which is nonetheless not totally unreal; they can include references to real people and events without jeopardizing their fictional status; they are designed to get readers or listeners to respond 'as if', but not (normally) to deceive them; even though readers are aware that fictions describe people who do not exist or events which have not happened, they nonetheless produce real emotions, important reflections, and even altered behaviour in the real world.

In their book *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen provide us with a number of useful distinctions with which to approach this complex topic. First, they differentiate between what they call the 'object' and the 'description' senses of the term 'fiction', arguing that a fictional character is a fiction in the object sense while a work of fiction is a fiction in the description sense:

To say of a thing that it is fictional is to suggest that it does not exist, the implied association being between what is fictional and what is unreal. To say of a description that it is fictional is to suggest that it is not true, the implied association being between what is fictional and what is false.
(Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 16)

Second, they distinguish between fictional content and fictional mode, illustrating the difference by reference to Konrad Kujau's forgery which was presented to the world as Hitler's (genuine) diaries. As they remark, while it would be reasonable to refer to the content of this forgery as fictional, 'we should surely hesitate to call the finished product a "work of fiction" given the mode of its presentation' (17). These distinctions allow them to focus not on the structural or semantic properties of sentences 'but on the conditions under which they are uttered, the attitudes they invoke, and the role that they play in social interactions' (32). Such an approach leads to a stress on fictional storytelling as a convention with institutional resources or, to put it another way, as a more or less universally understood custom or family of customs within a culture.

If fiction is in one sense universal, those fictions that we call novels and short stories are arguably possessed of certain unique features. In her book *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), Dorrit Cohn approaches the definition of fiction from a narratological perspective, and makes an impressively energetic case for the distinctiveness of *literary* fiction. Cohn suggests that literary fictions can be distinguished from other non-fictional narratives in three ways. First, the distinction between *story* and *plot* (in her terminology story and discourse)

does not have the same validity for 'texts that refer to events that have occurred prior to their narrative embodiment'. You will find this point easier to understand after having read the discussion of story and plot on p. 111. Second, only in fictional narratives can narrators enter the consciousness of persons apart from themselves. Third, in non-fictional narratives the distinction between author and narrator does not make the same sort of sense as it does when applied to fictional texts (1999, 130).

In the 1950s the London *Evening Standard* ran a regular feature entitled 'Did it Happen?' The newspaper would publish an account of a striking experience, then ask readers to decide whether the experience really did happen, with the truth being revealed the following day. The authors ranged from Stevie Smith and Angus Wilson to Gerard Hoffnung and Benny Hill, and their contributions were gathered together and published as a book in 1956 (*Did It Happen?: Stories*). Reading through the contributions it is interesting to see what a writer has to do to leave the reader in doubt as to whether he or she is reading fact or fiction. All of the accounts are in the first person, and in no case does the narrator enter the consciousness of another person. No account suggests a distinction between author and narrator. Once we know whether the account is fact or fiction we can indeed recognize as Cohn suggests that the distinction between author and narrator, and that between story and plot, make a different sort of sense for the two types of account. But these are retrospective judgements. It is the entering of the consciousness of a person other than the narrator that seems to suggest most strongly that a narrative is fictional, and the authors of the 'fictional' accounts seem instinctively to have recognized this.

■ Fiction, play, fantasy

Anyone who has watched a child grow and mature will know that he or she attempts to understand and master the world and his or her relation to it through modelled performances which we call play. However much we may like to think of play as sharply distinguished from the real, workaday world, relegated to 'free time' or 'relaxation', there seems little doubt that the rules of games can function as a model of the social and material restraints which we meet with in the world, and that play can help us to internalize these aspects of the world and of our operating within it.

Fictional stories, too, present us with models of (especially) the social world which we can empathize with and observe because we are not constrained to act. According to Lamarque and Olsen (1994), readers 'often fantasize with fictive content; "filling in" as the whim takes them, and no doubt some genres of fantasy actively encourage this kind of whimsical response'. This is rather stern, and it becomes more so as the two authors then insist upon the need to distinguish between authorized and non-authorized responses – with 'the content itself and its presentation' as the source of this authority (89).

I call this a rather stern pronouncement in spite of the fact that as a

university teacher I spend a lot of time telling my students that they need to be able to justify their responses and interpretations by reference to textual and other evidence. I do this because although academic discussion of literature has to insist upon such standards in order to establish ground-rules for discussion and debate, I do not think that readers (as against students or critics) of novels are – or ever have been – obliged to remain within the boundaries of the academically authorized. Indeed, were it possible to render ‘whimsical responses’ impossible, then I suspect that novel-reading would be a lot less popular than it is today. I agree that certain aspects of literary response are like those forms of play which are bound by very rigid rules: football or chess, for example. But reading novels also resembles the child’s make-believe games, those games where it is the imagined roles and situations which offer the only constraints. To a certain extent Peter Lamarque himself clearly accepts this point, as in a later book he argues that fictive storytelling ‘disengages standard conditions of assertion, it invites imaginative rather than belief-based involvement, it creates worlds and characters, and it encourages participation, not a concern for correspondence with the facts’ (Lamarque 1996, 144).

This is not to argue that works of fiction impose no constraints on what we imagine while we are reading them. Indeed, it is precisely because our responses, our imaginings, have to confront and negotiate with what cannot be changed in a novel that the reading of fiction is able to model what it is like to live in the social and material world. We cannot read on through Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) pretending that Catherine does not really die but is only hiding somewhere, so that she can re-emerge outside Lockwood’s window and give him a shock. One of the things which games do, though, is to allow us to act out *alternative* moves, modes of behaviour, or whatever, in a way that is impossible in the real world where we often have to act quickly and irrevocably – and this, I believe, is also true of novels and short stories. Thus, although I would reach for my red pen if I received an essay from a student which argued that Catherine never really died but lived on the moor as a hermit, it seems to me that wondering what would have happened had Catherine not died, or wondering ‘how I would have behaved in Catherine’s position’, is an absolutely normal – indeed essential – part of reading a novel such as *Wuthering Heights*. One implication of the fact that novels stimulate our fantasy is that there can be no single, final, true, authorized response to a complex novel. Response is interactional, and in every new reading one of the interacting elements is different.

Remember, however, that ‘response’ is not the same as ‘interpretation’; my response may be different from yours, but we can try to reach agreement about our interpretation of a given work. Now this book is called *Studying the Novel*, not *Responding to the Novel*, and my emphasis throughout it is on those institutionally approved ways of categorizing, analysing and interpreting novels and short stories. I am concerned, in other words, with the ways in which those private, individual and utterly varied reading responses people

have can be introduced into society and allowed to converse to others. If our talk to others about novels is to be more than a semi-comprehensible outpouring of our highly idiosyncratic reading experiences then we have to anchor it to things that we can all share: textual details, scholarly procedures, and so on. We should however be very careful to avoid the assumption that such public and 'objective' information is all that matters.

Just as our account of a dream is not at all the same as our experience of actually dreaming, so too reading fiction produces responses and mental processes which are too complex ever to be fully captured in the discussion we have when we have finished reading. This does not make such discussion pointless: learning to study the novel helps us to refine and extend our reading experiences, and it allows us to turn the experience of reading into knowledge and self-knowledge through ordered and rational discussion. That said, we should never be ashamed to admit that the reading of stories is a mysterious process, only a part of which can be held on to and brought into the light of day through analysis and interpretative discussion.

■ Imaginary characters and real life

The novel depicts imaginary characters and situations. A novel may include reference to real places, people and events, but it cannot contain *only* such references and remain a novel. Even though its characters and actions are imaginary they are in some sense 'representative of real life', as the dictionary definition has it; although fictional they bear an important resemblance to the real. What exactly this resemblance is has been a matter of much discussion and dispute among literary critics, and it is arguable that it varies in kind from novel to novel. Even so, this resemblance to *real* life is one of the features that distinguishes the novel from other forms such as the epic and the romance (see the Glossary and also the discussion on p. 14), however much we recognize that 'real life' is a problematic concept. Later on in Chapter 4 we will see that the term 'realism' is one that, although arguably indispensable to discussion of the novel, requires careful definition and use.

As the dictionary definition puts it, a novel is concerned with 'the real life of past or present times'. There are of course many works which we would not hesitate to call novels which are set in the future – and this was also the case at the time that the *OED* definition was written. It is probable that it is the novel's association with what seems 'real' to us, with a recognizable human life in existing or past cultures, that has prompted the exclusion of 'the unreal' (however defined) from the dictionary definition. Even novels which have a significant dependence upon the fantastic typically seem still to direct our attention to the real life of past or present times more than do works belonging to genres such as epic or romance, although this is a more controversial matter and I will look at some dissenting views in Chapter 2.

It is common knowledge that people can 'lose themselves' in a novel. Even if the novel generally presents us with a recognizable, 'non-fantastic' world,

we exercise our fantasy and our imagination to live within this world for short periods of time. But although readers can and do lose themselves while reading a novel this does not mean that they are unable to mull over and learn from their reading experiences once they return to their everyday reality after finishing a novel.

The world of the novel is so familiar to us that we can on occasions recognize its distinctive qualities only by contrasting it to other genres. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin points out, for example, that '[t]he world of the epic is the national heroic past', it is based upon a 'national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it)', and 'an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality'. The novel, 'by contrast, is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future)' (Bakhtin 1981, 13, 15). The novel presents us with stories, experiences that are new; whereas those who experienced the epic knew what was to occur, when we pick up a novel we hope that our curiosity will be aroused by our wanting to know 'what happens'. As I will argue in Chapter 2, this difference has a lot to do with the different sorts of society from which these two genres emerge.

■ Prose and narrative

The novel is in *prose* rather than verse, although the language of novels may often strike us as very 'poetic' on occasions. It would nonetheless be a serious mistake to assume that the language of a novel is identical to that of ordinary speech or of most non-literary writing. Even so, the fact that the novel is in prose helps to establish that sense of 'real life' – of recognizable, everyday, 'prosaic' existence – that is the preserve of the genre. Generalization is dangerous, but prose has the potentiality of being a more transparent medium than, for example, verse. Reading a novel, our attention is not naturally drawn to considering the language as language. The tendency is more for us to 'look through' the language of the novel at what it describes and evokes than to 'look at' it – although novelists can write prose that arrests our attention as language, and many novelists are known for the manner in which they draw the reader's attention to their use of language. In the course of studying novels we must learn to pay more overt attention to their language than does the average casual reader.

The novel is a *narrative*: in other words it is in some sense a 'telling' rather than an 'enacting', and this distinguishes it in an important sense from the drama. One useful way to define narrative involves reference to what Seymour Chatman has called 'double chronology' (1990, 114): the things that happen in a novel happen in a particular order, and the telling of what happens also takes place in a particular order. Importantly, these two 'orders' or chronologies are not necessarily the same, and the interaction between them constitutes a fundamentally important aspect of the novel and the short story. You will find more about narrative's double chronology in the

discussion of story and plot on p. 111. Double chronology is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of a narrative, as it may apply also to plays and films (*Citizen Kane* opens with the depiction of events which take place after the events that are recounted in the bulk of the film have taken place: the order-in-which-things-take-place is not the same as the order-in-which-we-witness-what-takes-place). What *is*, I would argue, central to narration is the element of telling: events in a piece of prose fiction come to us mediated through a retailing and organizing consciousness that puts them into words.

What this means is that built into the very fact of narrative is an act of looking back, of recounting. As the first-person narrator of Javier Marías's novel *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* remarks: 'in fact, the person telling the story always tells it later on, which allows him to add things if he wants, to distance himself: "I have turned away my former self, I am not the thing I was nor the person I was, I neither know nor recognize myself. I did not seek it, I did not want it"' (Marías 1997, 308). Even though some theorists have pointed out that plays and films come to us via the organizing of a director – which is undeniable – what we see on stage or on screen 'is happening', while what we read in a novel is what someone *tells us* 'happened'.

Even though it is easy to make a distinction between prose fiction and drama, we often feel that novels contain very dramatic scenes, scenes that grip us with their immediacy. Reading such scenes, we may forget that what we learn of character and event is not experienced directly through a presentation or an enactment (as in the theatre or the cinema) but mediated through a particular telling, a narrative source. Take the opening of Henry James's short story 'The Lesson of the Master' (1888):

He had been told the ladies were at church, but this was corrected by what he saw from the top of the steps – they descended from a great height in two arms, with a circular sweep of the most charming effect – at the threshold of the door which, from the long bright gallery, overlooked the immense lawn.

If our first impression is that we are witnessing a scene directly, a second glance will confirm that we are actually being *told* about the scene. The telling is such that we can visualize what is described – that is often the mark of an accomplished narrative – but we see what is first selected and then pointed out to us by a narrator or a narrative voice or source. Of course, this selection and presentation are fictional: the author is actually *creating* rather than selecting what we see. Nevertheless, as we read we are given the sense that the scene's potentially infinite complexity is reduced, ordered and explained to us through the organizing and filtering consciousness of a narrator. Imagine that we were presented with a filmed version of the above scene. Would we necessarily think of the ladies as forming 'two arms'? Would we find the effect of the 'circular sweep' 'most charming'? I will say more about the difference between film and prose narrative in Chapter 8.

One word of caution is needed at this point. You should be aware that the term 'narrative' can be used both with a narrow and specific meaning and also

with a rather wider one. The narrower meaning restricts narrative to the telling of events, the recounting of things that happen. (Clearly events can just as well be mental as physical: a sudden dawning of insight is as much an event as is the outbreak of the First World War.)

The words 'tell' and 'recount' are both related to the action of counting, or enumerating (think of a bank teller, who counts money). As 'tell' is etymologically related to 'tale' we can say that behind the act of narrative itself lies the idea of communicating things that can be counted. (Compare the French *conte*, for which a brief definition is provided in the Glossary.) If we limit ourselves to such a narrow definition of narrative, therefore, we must remember that not everything in a novel is narrative. *Description* (of a beautiful scene) or *argument* (about, say, the existence of God) are neither of them examples of narrative in this strict sense; they do not involve the telling or enumerating of discrete events or countable entities. However, the term 'narrative' is also used in a wider sense to include everything that comes within the purview of a particular telling or recounting. From this perspective a novel is a narrative even though it contains passages of description and argument. If you think about it, much the same is true of our use of the word 'fiction'. After all, many statements in novels are literally true, yet we do not restrict use of the word 'fiction' to only those parts of novels that are untrue.

■ Characters, action, plot

The novel has *characters*, *action(s)* and a *plot*: it presents the reader with individuals who do things in a defining context or 'secondary world' (see p. 18) ruled over by some sort of connective logic: chronology, cause and effect, or whatever. In most novels we also find a connection between these three elements such that they form some sort of unity. A poem does not have to contain characters or a plot – or, indeed, any action – but it is only very rare novels which dispense with one of these elements, and in such unusual cases it is often a matter of dispute as to whether the net result is recognizable as a novel. Some recent narrative theorists have preferred to talk of *actors* rather than characters, pointing out that a work of science fiction might be based on roles filled by non-human participants.

We have of course to give the term 'action' a relatively broad meaning in the present context. Much recent fiction involves significant concentration upon what has been termed 'inner action': events taking place in a character's consciousness rather than in the social and physical worlds outside. It is nevertheless revealing that there are few novels that consist only, or mainly, of inner action. It is as if our view of the novel requires that it contain a significant amount of action more traditionally defined.

In Chapter 6, I will be talking about the important distinction between 'story' and 'plot' (see p. 111); at this stage I will limit myself to stating that the concept of plot involves some sense that the actions we have talked about represent a whole rather than merely a succession of unconnected events.

Here again care is needed, for, as my comments on the picaresque novel in the Glossary make clear, certain novels are characterized by a very *episodic* structure. Jerome J. McGann makes the interesting comment that '[Dickens's] early work is far more episodic than the later, so much so that many would be reluctant to call *Pickwick Papers* [1836–7] a novel at all' (McGann 1991, 82). It seems that nowadays readers tend to like their novels to have plots that unfold to reveal some principle of unity rather than episodes that merely succeed one another in an order that is without significance.

Ian Watt has argued that the novel is distinguished by the fact that unlike the works of the great English and Classical poets and dramatists, its plots are generally not taken from traditional sources (Watt 1963, 14). If we compare the modern novel with the prose fictions of antiquity, or the medieval romance, Watt's point is certainly justifiable. On the other hand even the modern novel has recourse to certain recurrent plots and story-lines (see the more extended discussion of plot on p. 111). As a result, many modern novels manifest an important and productive *tension* between their fidelity to the random and unpredictable nature of everyday life, and their patterning according to the demands of certain predetermined but widely different structures, from 'tragedy' to 'repetition' or 'the journey'. Novels can be written within traditions that are highly *formulaic* – that is, written to conform with a particular, pre-existing pattern. The popular romance of today with its shy blonde heroine who is finally appreciated by the good-looking hero after he has seen through the strikingly attractive but treacherous dark anti-heroine is but one in a long line of formulaic sub-genres that can be traced back to the folk tales of oral cultures.

■ Novel, short story, novella

Finally, the novel is of a certain length. A poem can be anything from a couplet to a thousand pages or more, but we feel unhappy about bestowing the term 'novel' on a tale of some forty or fifty pages. Of course it is not just a question of length: we feel that a novel should involve an investigation of an issue of human significance in such a manner as allows for complexity of treatment, and by common consent a certain length is necessary to allow for such complexity. In practice, therefore, we now usually refer to a prose narrative of some twenty or thirty pages or fewer as a short story, while a work that seems to hover on the awkward boundary between 'short story' and 'novel', having a length of between forty or fifty and a hundred pages, is conventionally described as a novella (plural: *novelle* or *novellas*). I say 'now', because some of these conventional categorizations are relatively recent, particularly so far as the short story and the novella are concerned, and some of the issues raised by dividing prose fiction into three main categories in this way are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

In my next chapter I will discuss the case made by a number of recent literary historians that terms such as 'novel' and 'romance' achieved a fixity of

meaning only in the nineteenth century. We need to remember that the same is true of terms such as ‘novella’ and ‘short story’ in the twentieth century. Moreover because the novel’s rejection of traditional forms and conventions and its ability to respond to and incorporate aspects of the changing world around it into itself are fundamental to its existence, the novel is *generically* characterized by a permanent revolution of both its form and its content.

Topics for discussion

- What elements *must* a novel contain to be a novel?
 - Is literary fiction different from other fictions? If so, in what ways?
 - Do you read novels to escape from ‘the real world’, or to learn more about it?
 - Does your reading ever make you see the real world differently, and behave differently in it?
 - Why do we classify novels and short stories as narratives?
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