1 The Rise of the Novel

The novel is a modern form of literature. It is born from print, a mechanical invention.

We cannot think of the novel without the printed book. In ancient times, as you have seen (Chapter 7), manuscripts were handwritten. These circulated among very few people. In contrast, because of being printed, novels were widely read and became popular very quickly. At this time big cities like London were growing rapidly and becoming connected to small towns and rural areas through print and improved communications. Novels produced a number of common interests among their scattered and varied readers. As readers were drawn into the story and identified with the lives of fictitious characters, they could think about issues such as the relationship between love and marriage, the proper conduct for men and women, and so on.

The novel first took firm root in England and France. Novels began to be written from the seventeenth century, but they really flowered from the eighteenth century. New groups of lower-middle-class people such as shopkeepers and clerks, along with the traditional aristocratic and **gentlemanly classes** in England and France now formed the new readership for novels.

As readership grew and the market for books expanded, the earnings of authors increased. This freed them from financial dependence on the patronage of aristocrats, and gave them independence to experiment with different literary styles. Henry Fielding, a novelist of the early eighteenth century, claimed he was 'the founder of a new province of writing' where he could make his own laws. The novel allowed flexibility in the form of writing. Walter Scott remembered and collected popular Scottish ballads which he used in his historical novels about the wars between Scottish clans. The **epistolary** novel, on the other hand, used the private and personal form of letters to tell its story. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, written in the eighteenth century, told much of its story through an exchange of letters between two lovers. These letters tell the reader of the hidden conflicts in the heroine's mind.

1.1 The Publishing Market

For a long time the publishing market excluded the poor. Initially, novels did not come cheap. Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) was

New words

Gentlemanly classes – People who claimed noble birth and high social position. They were supposed to set the standard for proper behaviour

Epistolary – Written in the form of a series of letters

issued in six volumes priced at three shillings each – which was more than what a labourer earned in a week.

But soon, people had easier access to books with the introduction of circulating libraries in 1740. Technological improvements in printing brought down the price of books and innovations in marketing led to expanded sales. In France, publishers found that they could make super profits by hiring out novels by the hour. The novel was one of the first mass-produced items to be sold. There were several reasons for its popularity. The worlds created by novels were absorbing and believable, and seemingly real. While reading novels, the reader was transported to another person's world, and began looking at life as it was experienced by the characters of the novel. Besides, novels allowed individuals the pleasure of reading in private, as well as the joy of publicly reading or discussing stories with friends or relatives. In rural areas people would collect to hear one of them reading a novel aloud, often becoming deeply involved in the lives of the characters. Apparently, a group at Slough in England were very pleased to hear that Pamela, the heroine of Richardson's popular novel, had got married in their village. They rushed out to the parish church and began to ring the church bells!

In 1836 a notable event took place when Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* was **serialised** in a magazine. Magazines were attractive since they were illustrated and cheap. Serialisation allowed readers to relish the suspense, discuss the characters of a novel and live for weeks with their stories – like viewers of television soaps today!

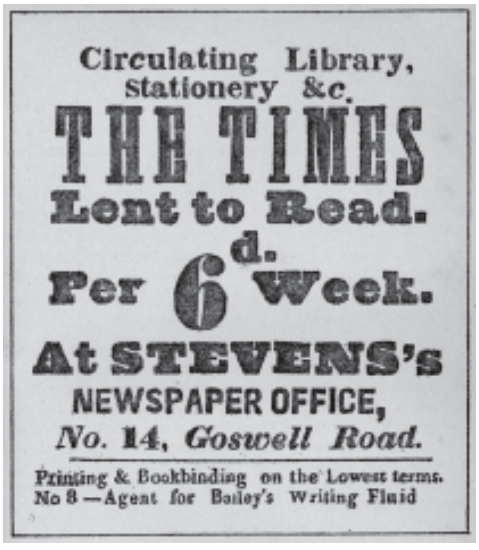
Circulating Library,
Stationery &c.
THE TIMES
Lent to Read.
Per 6d. Week.
At STEVENS's
NEWSPAPER OFFICE,
No. 14, Goswell Road.
Printing & Bookbinding on the Lowest terms.
No 8—Agent for Bailey's Writing Fluid

Fig. 2 – Library notice.
Libraries were well publicised.

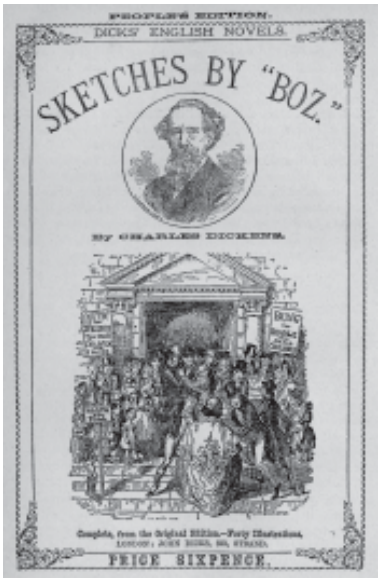

***Fig. 1 – Cover page of* Sketches by 'Boz'.**
Charles Dickens's first publication was a collection of journalistic essays entitled Sketches by 'Boz' *(1836).*

New words

Serialised – A format in which the story is published in instalments, each part in a new issue of a journal


ALL THE YEAR ROUND.
A WEEKLY JOURNAL.
CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.
GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

***Fig. 3 – Cover page of* All The Year Round.**
The most important feature of the magazine All the Year Round, *edited by Charles Dickens, was his serialised novels. This particular issue begins with one.*

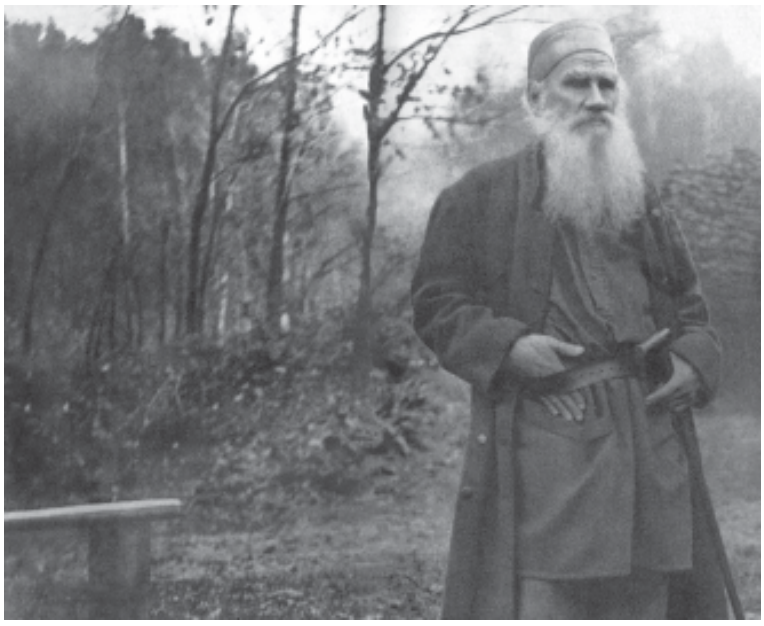

Fig. 4 – Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910).
Tolstoy was a famous Russian novelist who wrote extensively on rural life and community.

1.2 The World of the Novel

More than other forms of writing which came before, novels are about ordinary people. They do not focus on the lives of great people or actions that change the destinies of states and empires. Instead, they are about the everyday life of common people.

In the nineteenth century, Europe entered the industrial age. Factories came up, business profits increased and the economy grew. But at the same time, workers faced problems. Cities expanded in an unregulated way and were filled with overworked and underpaid workers. The unemployed poor roamed the streets for jobs, and the homeless were forced to seek shelter in workhouses. The growth of industry was accompanied by an economic philosophy which celebrated the pursuit of profit and undervalued the lives of workers. Deeply critical of these developments, novelists such as Charles Dickens wrote about the terrible effects of industrialisation on people's lives and characters. His novel *Hard Times* (1854) describes Coketown, a fictitious industrial town, as a grim place full of machinery, smoking chimneys, rivers polluted purple and buildings that all looked the same. Here workers are known as 'hands', as if they had no identity other than as operators of machines. Dickens criticised not just the greed for profits but also the ideas that reduced human beings into simple instruments of production.

Discuss

Explain what is meant by the following types of novels:

- Epistolary novel
- Serialised novel

For each type, name one writer who wrote in that style.

Fig. 5 – Charles Dickens (1812-1870).

In other novels too, Dickens focused on the terrible conditions of urban life under industrial capitalism. His *Oliver Twist* (1838) is the tale of a poor orphan who lived in a world of petty criminals and beggars. Brought up in a cruel workhouse (see Fig. 6), Oliver was finally adopted by a wealthy man and lived happily ever after. But not all novels about the lives of the poor gave readers the comfort of a happy ending. Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) on the life of a young miner in France explores in harsh detail the grim conditions of miners' lives. It ends on a note of despair: the strike the hero leads fails, his co-workers turn against him, and hopes are shattered.

***Fig. 6 – A hungry Oliver asks for more food while other children at the workhouse look on with fear, illustration in* Oliver Twist.**

Fig. 7 – Emile Zola, painting by Edward Manet, 1868.
Manet's portrait of the French author Zola, showing the novelist at his worktable in an intimate and thoughtful relationship with books.

1.3 Community and Society

The vast majority of readers of the novel lived in the city. The novel created in them a feeling of connection with the fate of rural communities. The nineteenth-century British novelist Thomas Hardy, for instance, wrote about traditional rural communities of England

that were fast vanishing. This was actually a time when large farmers fenced off land, bought machines and employed labourers to produce for the market. The old rural culture with its independent farmers was dying out. We get a sense of this change in Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). It is about Michael Henchard, a successful grain merchant, who becomes the mayor of the farming town of Casterbridge. He is an independent-minded man who follows his own style in conducting business. He can also be both unpredictably generous and cruel with his employees. Consequently, he is no match for his manager and rival Donald Farfrae who runs his business on efficient managerial lines and is well regarded for he is smooth and even-tempered with everyone. We can see that Hardy mourns the loss of the more personalised world that is disappearing, even as he is aware of its problems and the advantages of the new order.

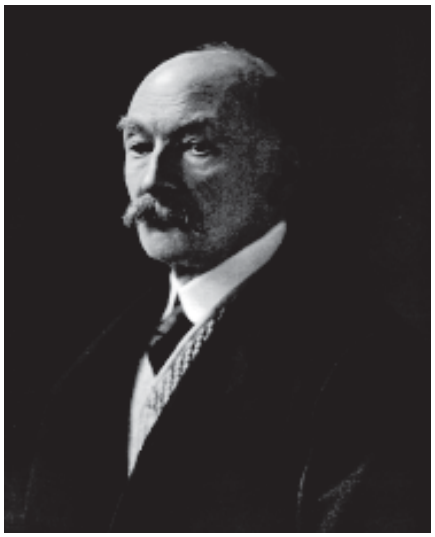

Fig. 8 – Thomas Hardy (1840-1928).

The novel uses the **vernacular**, the language that is spoken by common people. By coming closer to the different spoken languages of the people, the novel produces the sense of a shared world between diverse people in a nation. Novels also draw from different styles of language. A novel may take a classical language and combine it with the language of the streets and make them all a part of the vernacular that it uses. Like the nation, the novel brings together many cultures.

1.4 The New Woman

The most exciting element of the novel was the involvement of women. The eighteenth century saw the middle classes become more prosperous. Women got more leisure to read as well as write novels. And novels began exploring the world of women – their emotions and identities, their experiences and problems.

Many novels were about domestic life – a theme about which women were allowed to speak with authority. They drew upon their experience, wrote about family life and earned public recognition.

New words

Vernacular – The normal, spoken form of a language rather than the formal, literary form

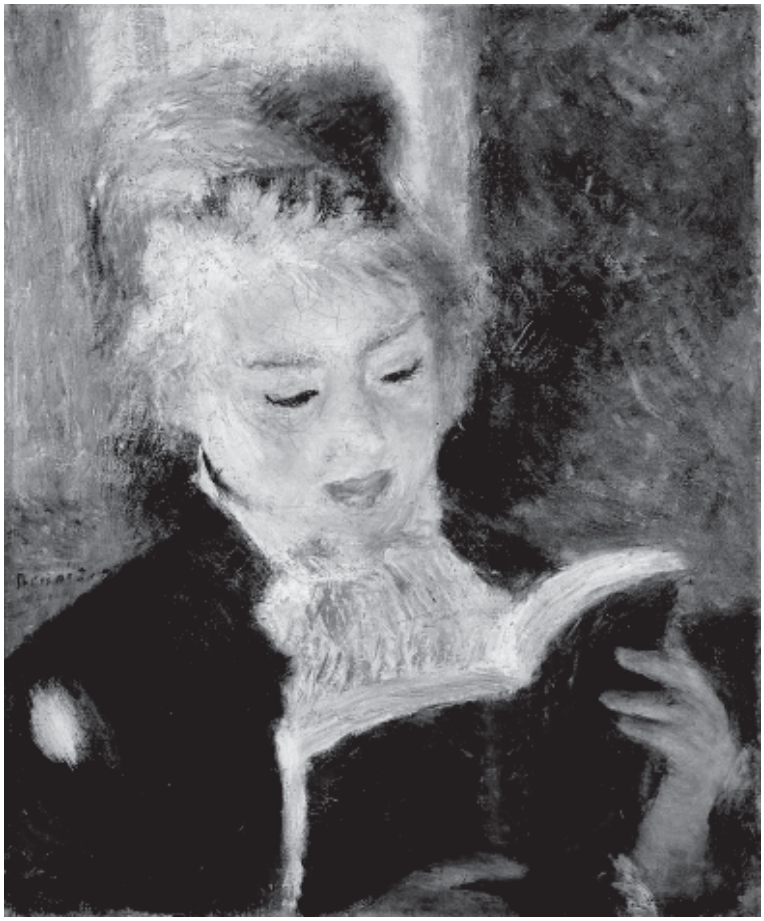

Fig. 9 – A girl reading, a painting by Jean Renoir (1841-1919). *By the nineteenth century, images of women reading silently, in the privacy of the room, became common in European paintings.*

Fig. 10 – The home of a woman author, by George Cruikshank. *When women began writing novels many people feared that they would now neglect their traditional role as wives and mothers and homes would be in disorder.*

The novels of Jane Austen give us a glimpse of the world of women in genteel rural society in early-nineteenth-century Britain. They make us think about a society which encouraged women to look for 'good' marriages and find wealthy or propertied husbands. The first sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* states: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.' This observation allows us to see the behaviour of the main characters, who are preoccupied with marriage and money, as typifying Austen's society.

Fig. 11 – Jane Austen (1775-1817).

But women novelists did not simply popularise the domestic role of women. Often their novels dealt with women who broke established norms of society before adjusting to them. Such stories allowed women readers to sympathise with rebellious actions. In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1874, young Jane is shown as independent and assertive. While girls of her time were expected to be quiet and well behaved, Jane at the age of ten protests against the hypocrisy of her elders with startling bluntness. She tells her

Fig. 12 – The marriage contract, William Hogarth (1697-1764).
As you can see, the two men in the foreground are busy with the signing of the marriage contract while the woman stays in the background.

Aunt who is always unkind to her: 'People think you a good woman, but you are bad ... You are deceitful! I will never call you aunt as long as I live.'

Box 1

Women novelists

George Eliot (1819-1880) was the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans. A very popular novelist, she believed that novels gave women a special opportunity to express themselves freely. Every woman could see herself as capable of writing fiction:

'Fiction is a department of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men ... No educational restrictions can shut women from the materials of fiction, and there is no species of art that is so free from rigid requirements.'

George Eliot, 'Silly novels by lady novelists', 1856.

Fig. 13 – Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855).

1.5 Novels for the Young

Novels for young boys idealised a new type of man: someone who was powerful, assertive, independent and daring. Most of these novels were full of adventure set in places remote from Europe. The colonisers appear heroic and honourable – confronting 'native' peoples and strange surroundings, adapting to native life as well as changing it, colonising territories and then developing nations there. Books like R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) or Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894) became great hits.

G.A. Henty's historical adventure novels for boys were also wildly popular during the height of the British empire. They aroused the excitement and adventure of conquering strange lands. They were set in Mexico, Alexandria, Siberia and many other countries. They were always about young boys who witness grand historical events, get involved in some military action and show what they called 'English' courage.

Love stories written for adolescent girls also first became popular in this period, especially in the US, notably *Ramona* (1884) by Helen Hunt Jackson and a series entitled *What Katy Did* (1872) by Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, who wrote under the pen-name Susan Coolidge.

Box 2

G.A. Henty (1832-1902):

In *Under Drake's Flag* (1883) two young Elizabethan adventurers face their apparently approaching death, but still remember to assert their Englishness:

'Well, Ned, we have had more good fortune than we could have expected. We might have been killed on the day when we landed, and we have spent six jolly months in wandering together as hunters on the plain. If we must die, let us behave like Englishmen and Christians.'

1.6 Colonialism and After

The novel originated in Europe at a time when it was colonising the rest of the world. The early novel contributed to colonialism by making the readers feel they were part of a superior community of fellow colonialists. The hero of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is an adventurer and slave trader. Shipwrecked on an island, Crusoe treats coloured people not as human beings equal to him, but as inferior creatures. He rescues a 'native' and makes him his slave. He does not ask for his name but arrogantly gives him the name Friday. But at the time, Crusoe's behaviour was not seen as unacceptable or odd, for most writers of the time saw colonialism as natural. Colonised people were seen as primitive and barbaric, less than human; and colonial rule was considered necessary to civilise them, to make them fully human. It was only later, in the twentieth century, that writers like Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) wrote novels that showed the darker side of colonial occupation.

The colonised, however, believed that the novel allowed them to explore their own identities and problems, their own national concerns. Let us see how the novel became popular in India and what significance it had for society.