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Third Edition

Richard Gill

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I dedicate this book to all my pupils, both past and present; they have helped me in the life-long quest of understanding and enjoying literature.

Introduction

It's likely that you are reading this book because you are studying English Literature, that you are attending lessons or lectures, and that you will be sitting examinations. This book is designed to meet the chief demands of A-level examinations and the first year of university. It can also be used as a 'refresher' for teachers, providing as it does a map of the issues and the kind of thinking that literary study involves.

The first three parts reflect the requirements of the A-level syllabus. Students are required to study prose fiction (which usually means novels), drama and poetry. In addition, they must study at least one work by Shakespeare and ensure that pre-twentieth-century literature is covered. Study in the first year at university makes similar demands.

This book presents ways to think about what you are studying. The important features of literary texts are presented, and the issues and problems they raise are discussed. Many of the examples are chosen from the texts that appear regularly on syllabuses. This allows some questions associated with particular texts (and particular authors) to be explored, which will help in the study of those texts, but even if you are unfamiliar with them, the discussions may enable you to see how literary thinking works.

Frequently, examination questions require a student to discuss a text in relation to the genre or type of literature to which it is regarded as belonging. Questions often ask to what extent a text can be said to be, say, tragic or comic or satiric. To answer such questions, you need to know what people mean (and have meant) by the major genres. Genre is a matter of writing and reading. Authors know when they are writing according to the conventions of a particular genre; they are aware of the elements and ground rules that make a genre what it is. To know the rules also means that they can experiment by extending, amending and even, at some points, departing from them. Similarly, readers who are told that a particular work is, say, a comedy, need to know what features are commonly associated with that particular genre. Traditionally, there are five genres – Tragedy, Comedy, Epic, Lyric and Satire. To these I have added three that exert strong influences on literature – Romance, Gothic and Pastoral.

Knowing what makes a tragedy, say, is an aspect of the literary tradition in which authors write. Literature is never news from nowhere. Writers inherit ideas about what literature is like and how it might be written. But the literary traditions of genre are not the only things with which an author works. Authors – and hence the books they write – always have a context. Books are always written by people who live in particular places at particular times.

Context is now recognized as a major aspect of literary study. At A-level, for example, students are required to know about the historical circumstances in which works were written. There are examination papers with titles such as 'Texts in Time' or 'Texts in Context'. The basic idea of context is that the times in which a work is written influence that work: in addition to the literary traditions of genre, works are shaped by popular ideas, by barely recognized assumptions, by the books an author reads, and by prevailing religious and political beliefs. Furthermore, the way families are organized, the way the young are treated and how wealth is distributed open up plot possibilities. Moreover, these are present in the language of the texts. The historical or contextual study of literature involves finding past times in the words of a text.

Contexts are not just made by this or that assumption or belief. A context forms a whole world. Each historical period (and that includes today) is a kind of web or network of assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and ideas. Together, these form what scholars have variously called a background, a culture, a milieu, a world picture or world view, and a Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age). Contextual study often identifies the feel, flavour or texture of the times in which the work was written. This is why, where possible, I have supplied the date of the works discussed. This is either the date of writing or publication (including first performances). In some cases, it isn't known when a work was written. In the case of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* I have chosen c.1390, and for Thomas Wyatt, John Donne and George Herbert have given the dates of publication, even though they are posthumous. For William Shakespeare, the date is a probable one of composition.

To look at the context of a work is a way of interpreting it. People have always thought about the nature of interpretation. In the Bible, for example, Joseph claimed that it was God who interpreted dreams. Today, the business of interpretation is built into examinations. A familiar form of question is one that asks the candidate to debate two very different interpretations of a work. An aspect of this interest in interpretation is the popularity since the 1970s of literary theory. Many university English degrees start with a course on theories such as Feminism, Marxism and Structuralism. What usually emerges from such courses is the point that how a work is looked at tends to determine what is found in it. Part Six of this volume – Interpretation – examines several of these approaches to literature and raises questions about how helpful they are.

Interpretation is a way of finding out what a book is about. Many examination questions ask students to discuss a book's subject matter. The most frequently used word for what a book is about is *theme*. Hence, in Part Seven of this volume, some of the major interests of English literature are considered. Broadly speaking, literature has been about everything (one of the delights of studying it is that there is a lot on the table) – the doings and thoughts of people, the world of animals, the realms of nature and of God. One of the reasons we read literature is that it brings before us ourselves and the world about us. Some people complain that studying books blunts the freshness and delight they bring to what matters in human life. If this is so, it is a great pity. Speaking personally, I can only say that studying it makes a book more alive, and therefore it matters more to me as a result.

When we study we do at least two things. First, *we think*. This is what this book is designed to help you to do, by raising the issues that are frequently encountered in literary study. For example, it explores the different ways in which stories can be told. Once we see that certain things in a book matter (for instance, what an author chooses to tell us about the minds of the characters), we have to ponder what effects this has, how it shapes our responses, and what it contributes to the meaning of the work. Most of the time we have to do this for ourselves. A book such as this can point us in the right direction, but we still have to walk the path ourselves.

The second thing we do is *to work* – we read, make notes, write essays and sit examinations. As you are likely to be doing, or preparing to do, these things throughout your course, the rest of this Introduction will be taken up with suggestions as to how you might go about studying.

Hints on reading

You should read frequently. And it may seem obvious, but it needs saying: you have to read *all* the book. Because you don't know the book, you can't know what is important in it until you have read all of it. Re-reading novels helps you to see the movement of the plot and the development of the characters. The frequent reading of poetry helps you to recognize the style, the tone, the attitudes and the thinking of the poet. It is also helpful, particularly in the case of poetry, to vary the pace of reading. The slow reading of passages can alert you to the ways in which meaning is established, tone created and the movement of the writer's mind made evident. Finally, you will need to find out the circumstances in which you can read with appropriate concentration on the text.

Reading with understanding

Study is attentive reading. Ask youself:

Do I understand what I am reading?

The following questions may help:

- Am I following what is happening?
- Why are the characters behaving in these particular ways?
- Am I aware of the mood of the scenes?
- Can I see how the plot is moving?
- In what ways is this work similar to others? (This is important in the study of collections of poetry.)
- Can I visualize what is happening? (Applicable to drama and novels.)
- How are the words inviting me to respond, and am I responding in that way?

Making notes

Pencilled notes in the margins of a book can be used to explain a passage, draw attention to the development of a theme, single out the recurrence of an image and mark decisive moments in plot development.

You will also need to make longer notes, either in an exercise book or on separate sheets of paper. You may want to keep longer notes on the following topics:

- Your responses to a work. These can be very helpful, particularly as these responses may change as you read on.
- The problems that books raise. You will also find it helpful to mention the different ways in which these problems may be tackled, and the stages of each argument.
- Contextual material. You might, for example, make notes about ideas that were popular at the time, contemporary events, the organization of society and books written in the same period.
- Plot summaries. If this helps you to see the plot as a whole, then the notes are useful. But, of course, the more you get to know a book, the less useful such summaries will be.

It is unlikely that you will be told to take notes in class, and even more unlikely that notes will be dictated. Taking notes is something you will have to learn to do for yourself. You should remember that this is a very useful way of learning, chiefly because you have to judge what is important.

Some 'dos and don'ts' of note-making

- Notes should be brief.
- Develop a consistent code of abbreviations, such 'K' for John Keats.
- Distinguish the different kinds of notes you take, perhaps by adding headings.
- Don't lump notes together; leave a line between each one.
- Don't mix notes. It is better to have separate sheets on different issues.

As you study

Always remember that:

> **What happens in the classes and lectures is a necessary but not sufficient condition of successful study. What matters is what you do in your own time.**

In a lesson or lecture you listen and talk. Listening helps us to see what might be important. If a passage provokes lots of questions, it may be that this is because it is of particular importance. Talking about literature is more difficult than you might imagine. Talk arises out of understanding and requires the talker to find an appropriate way of framing ideas. This is a way of saying that talk is thought.

Preparation and follow-up

There are, however, things that can be done both before and after the lesson or lecture. Beforehand, you can remind yourself of what has already been said about the book. It is also wise to look through the passages that are going to be discussed and try to identify anything that looks important or that you find difficult.

After a lesson or lecture, it is a good idea to look through what has been discussed and explore the ideas further. This may involve putting ideas in your own words. Also, keep your notes in order; they can easily get out of hand. And while you are sorting out your notes, look at the earlier ones. We are likely to forget what we have noted down unless we review it regularly.

Making up your mind

We make up our minds as we study, as we write essays and as we prepare for examinations. It takes time, and much of it happens without consciously realizing that we are doing it.

We can, however, deliberately think things through. The following are tips as to how this might be done:

- You need to recognize that books present problems, and that there are issues each of them has raised for generations of readers and playgoers. For example, is Hamlet consistently mad?
- One way of coming to see that a work presents problems is to note down the ideas of teachers and lecturers. It may be that you don't fully see the importance of the point being made, but if you make a note you may see its significance later.
- It is as well to realize that issues raised are not matters that are likely to be settled; what matters is that we understand why they are debated.
- One way of consciously thinking through a problem is to see how it looks from a number of different perspectives. Part Six of this book may help in this.
- When you are thinking about a way of understanding a problem, try to think through the consequences. This might help you to see why a particular aspect of a book is problematic. Even if thinking through the consequences does not help you come to a satisfactory conclusion, it might help you to discount some views. There is often greater certainty about what we don't know than what we do.

Essays

Writing essays helps us to think about the issues raised by literary works. As has already been indicated, you are not required to 'solve' problems but rather to show that you can think through them. This is why essays are often in the form of 'How far do you agree that…' or 'To what extent do you think that…'. Saying

how far you agree with a particular view involves framing arguments about how the book works. These arguments will be based on the features of the book that have emerged during study, and the ideas you have got about what the work means and how it makes its meanings. Here is a possible way of going about writing an essay:

- As an essay is usually an answer to a question, you need to understand exactly what the question is about. Questions should be answered in the terms in which they are put. It is a good idea to spend some time deciding what the issue of the question is.
- Once you have identified what the question is requiring you to do, you need to frame arguments that will address it. Some arguments will probably occur to you. You may find others by looking through the book, bearing in mind the question you are trying to answer. Looking through the text will also provide you with material you can use to support what you are saying.
- You need to plan your essay so it is clear to you (and to the reader!) why you are moving from one point to another. Sometimes this is made easier once you have decided what your conclusion is going to be. Good essays are sometimes written 'backwards'.
- Write a first draft. This should include the main arguments and the support from the text. It is wise to discuss the language of some of the quotations. Once it is written, it is a good idea to leave the essay for a couple of days. When you return to it, you are often aware of imprecise statements, woolly arguments and awkward transitions from one argument to another.
- Once you are satisfied that you have written what you think, you can then add the opening and concluding sentences. You can't start and finish an essay until you know what it is about. Remember to run the spell-check – and be careful about names!

A point about time: use all the days you are given. Some days will be spent in thinking, some in making notes, some in organizing and some in writing. In short: if you are given a week, use a week.

Coursework and long essays

Coursework and long essays are a welcome feature of study. You have time to think and time to get things right. They are an opportunity to exercise considerable control over the process of assessment. Much of what has been written in the section above also applies to coursework. In addition, the following points may be made:

- If you are allowed to choose your own topic and frame your own question, make use of the opportunity. You are likely to write better about topics that interest you.
- Because you usually have a long time to complete the work, make use of it. However, it is a good idea to get something down on paper early. You should also be prepared to change your mind, both about the content and the way

you present the argument. If conditions permit, make use of your teacher or tutor. They can help you to recognize issues, see other ways of tackling them, frame clearer arguments and organize your work.

- Coursework is generally marked against assessment objectives. Make sure you have met these. Try to fulfil the objectives that will award you with a top grade.
- Coursework is a chance to explore, so don't be afraid of trying out unusual ideas. Sometimes it helps to make it clear that the ideas you are advancing are speculations.

Revision

The following suggestions may help with revision:

- The best revision is done throughout the year as you study. For each subject, set aside time to look through what you have done. Start with recent work and relate it to earlier work. If you do this, you will find that when the examination date approaches you know the books and have an understanding of their important features.
- Any revision should be active. It is better to recall ideas or quotations actively than merely to read your notes (this applies to any form of learning). Similarly, it is wise to do some writing as part of revision. Timed essays are obviously helpful, and so are sketching outlines to answers and putting the main arguments down on paper.
- Making revision notes can be helpful. Indeed, the process of making notes – of selecting what is important and devoting separate sheets to the different issues – can be as helpful as reading through the notes you have made.
- Look through past questions to identify the kinds of issues examiners require students to think about, and the terms in which they frame the questions. Remember that questions often require you to discuss four or five major points.
- If you want to learn quotations, go for short ones. The business of selecting which ones to learn can help you to think about what matters in a book.
- Seek help from your teachers or tutors. They can often help you to see the major issues. Also, go to revision classes. If nothing else, they are a relief from working on your own!

Examinations

Much of what has been said above applies to examinations. Given that marking is becoming more systematic (even mechanistic), you will need to know what the assessment objectives are for each paper. You will also need to know what kinds of questions you will be facing. For example, an extract question is different from an essay question. You will need to know your books, and need to know what you think about them. But always remember: it is the question on

the paper you must answer, and *not* one that you would like to write about. It is therefore vital (and you should spend some minutes on this) that you understand what you are being asked to do. There are three things to remember about how to organize your time in the examination room:

- Decide at the outset which questions you are going to answer. This gets rid of the tension of uncertainty at once, and you may find that as you are writing one answer, your mind is thinking through the questions you have yet to do.
- Essays need to be planned. As you are sorting out your arguments and the order in which you are going to set them down, remember to keep in mind the terms of the question. An answer is only an answer if it meets the demands of the question.
- Make sure you time yourself. It is better to leave an essay unfinished than write two long ones and one very short one. If you time yourself sensibly, you will be able to check through your answers.

Part One The novel

1 Stories

1.1 Popularity

A best-seller

Harry Potter is news: shops open at midnight on publication day; there are special covers for adults who don't like being seen reading children's books; there are books explaining the 'meaning' of Harry's deeds, and the films are 'big box-office'. And people talk about them.

The *Harry Potter* phenomenon tells us three things:

- We are still a nation of readers.
- We discuss what we read.
- Stories allure us.

The popularity of novels

People still read, and they read novels.

The novel is the literary form in which many of us encounter stories.

Novels are abundantly available; they can be bought in both bookshops and supermarkets. They are news. Each year, the winner of the Booker prize is discussed on radio and television. Novels are even peak-time popular entertainment, as when the final of *The Nation's Favourite Read* was broadcast on a Saturday night. Radio and television regard the serialization of a 'classic' as high-class entertainment. People still recall the BBC adaption of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in 1995, and in 2005 the novel was made into a film starring Keira Knightley.

Talking about novels

We enjoy discussing what we have read; we want to understand what a book is about, and why it did or did not engage our interest. For example, people have debated whether the Harry Potter novels are original. The school story, they point out, is not new. Ever since Thomas Hughes wrote *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (published in 1857), we have been accustomed to the genre (type or kind) of the school story. Jennings and Mallory Towers are part of many people's childhoods.

We have also (again, often as children) read stories of ghosts and goblins, dragons and demons. C. S. Lewis used those figures in the Narnia books, and Alan Garner often used a plot in which, as in C. S. Lewis, an ordinary present becomes entwined with a mythical realm. In that sense, J. K. Rowling is not original; she draws on the genres of the school tale and the folk story. In keeping with the school story, Harry has a friend – Ron Weasley – and an enemy – Draco Malfoy. What *is* original, however, is her combination of the two genres: *Harry Potter* is a school story about wizards. Consequently, she invents (and does so entertainingly) a series of wizard equivalents to the conventions of the school tale. Hence the game of Quidditch and the entertaining idea of a corridor that leads to somewhere different on a Friday (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 1997).

Summary

We are a nation that reads, and we discuss what we read. When we talk about novels we are drawn into a debate about originality and genre.

1.2 Human identity

We sometimes ask what it is that makes human beings what they are. There are many answers to this big question, one of which is:

We are story-tellers.

If we are asked about what has happened to us today, we reply in terms of little narratives. These narratives have settings, dialogue, are delivered from a particular viewpoint and have a form: introduction, climax and close. Stories allure us, because we see our lives as stories. We do this in two ways.

Stories in our lives

Thomas Hardy called Chapter 8 of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) 'The Malthouse – The Chat – News'. He shows how

Story-telling establishes our identities.

Gabriel Oak, a man with ambitions, has lost his flock of sheep because of an accident and has been forced to seek employment on a farm in Weatherbury. He goes as a stranger to the Malthouse, where he is welcomed by the little group of rustics (country dwellers). The rustics have gathered to tell stories, one of which is about a bashful man, much given to blushing, called Joseph Poorgrass. Jan Coggan, in spite of a protest from Joseph himself, tells a story about how Joseph 'lost his way as he was coming home-along Yalbury Wood':

> '– And so 'a lost himself quite,' continued Mr. Coggan, with an impassive face, implying that a true narrative, like time and tide, must run its course and would respect no man. 'And as he was coming along in the middle of the night, much

afeared, and not able to find his way out of the trees nohow, 'a cried out, "Man-a-lost, man-a-lost!" A owl in a tree happened to be crying "Whoo-whoo-whoo!" as owls do, you know, shepherd' (Gabriel nodded), 'and Joseph, all in a tremble, said, "Joseph Poorgrass, of Weatherbury, sir!"'

This wonderfully comic yet affectionate tale shows how this little community works. People are given identities through the stories people tell about them. In turn, these stories define the community.

Stories also give our lives meanings.

Our lives in our stories

Beyond individual and communal narratives there are larger, over-arching stories, that give meaning and a context to our lives.

We tell national stories about how our nation came into being and received its character.

This is one purpose of Epics (see Chapter 22). In *The Aeneid* (written between 29BC and 19BC), Virgil told of the foundation of Rome by relating how Aeneas fled from the destruction of Troy. The impulse to define the nature, and therefore the significance, of a nation appears in later works. Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of New England, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), explores the identity of America by presenting the early days of its Puritan settlers.

Bigger than national stories are the stories religions tell. These are stories that people live by.

Religious stories give a picture of our history and how we stand in relation to God, so they form our ideas strongly of who we are and how we should live.

The Bible presents stories ranging from the beginning of the world to the end of time. It has given Western literature plots, characters and themes that still arouse us (see Chapter 29, Sections 29.2–29.5).

Summary

We are story-tellers. The tales we tell establish our individual identities, the identity of our nation and, in religious stories, a sense of our place in the world.

1.3 Thinking about stories

Most television programmes are stories. Some have distinct beginnings, middles and ends, while others (the soap operas) might continue indefinitely. Even the news might be said to be a set of tales. Journalists often talk about 'news stories'.

Those who enjoy novels find a number of things in them – interesting characters, convincing atmospheres and a picture of what human life is like. These emerge in and through stories.

Fiction

The word 'fiction' has been in the language since the late Middle Ages. It has acquired a number of meanings. Here are two definitions from The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*:

> Fictitious composition. Now usually prose novels and stories collectively, or the composition of such works.
>
> Feigning, deceit, dissimulation, pretence.

These definitions date from 1599 and 1609, respectively. From very early on, therefore, 'fiction' was a slippery word. For much of its history, it has hovered between a technical literary meaning and a negative moral one.

Fictions and lies

The fact that the word denotes both a literary work and a lie indicates that people have long held ambivalent views about art. In Ancient Greece, Plato conducted a moral debate about the status of art. He wanted to banish poets from his ideal Republic. His reason is strictly philosophical. Because what we see is a shadow of what is real, art is less real because it is a shadow of a shadow.

This debate has left its mark on our language. Take the word 'design'. We use it to discuss the organization of a work of art, but when applied to human actions, it indicates something morally questionable. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mr Wickham, intent on seducing Darcy's sister, travelled to where she was staying 'undoubtedly by design' (Chapter 35).

The ambiguity of the word points to one of the puzzles of literature. We know that literary works are made up and yet we treat them as real. The characters are invented and yet we take a moral and emotional interest in their lives. This is the mystery of art – what is made up matters to us.

Written and read

We sometimes assume that works of art (of which novels are an example) are windows on the world, unmediated slices of life. But

Fiction is *art*. Art means whatever has been made.

Other words used for the making of art are: created, fashioned or produced. There are many terms for the process of making art: constructed, crafted, designed, edited, moulded, selected, shaped and trimmed. And someone did the making. Novels have been *written*.

A novel is how it is because someone made it that way.

When we ask whether someone has read, say, Jane Austen, we are recognizing that a novel has been written – put together in a particular way – by a writer.

It follows from this that the characters of any novel are as they are because the author has made them that way. All too often, students write about characters as if they can be met at the bus stop. Characters only exist in the pages of a book.

Readers have a part to play in knowing and understanding characters. A novel is written by an author and read by a reader. We could not know any character in a book unless we read what the author had written. There are therefore three elements in the understanding of a novel:

- The characters and events of the book.
- The author who made the book in a particular way.
- The reader who responds.

To put it altogether:

The reader reads the words that the author has written.

Writing about novels

At this point, a hint about how to write about novels is necessary. Teachers often sit down to mark well-organized and fluently written essays that could be about the boy next door rather than a character in a book, but those essays don't get highly rewarded. Poor essays rarely mention the author or the reader.

So, when you write, make sure that you show how events and characters are what they are because of the way they have been made by the author and read by the reader.

For example, if you are writing about the opening chapters of *Jane Eyre* (1847), you might say that Charlotte Brontë leads the reader to sympathize with Jane by showing how her relatives treat her badly.

The elements of novels

Because novels are varied, precise definitions are very difficult. (In any case, what would we *do* with a definition?) We can, however, point to the following elements:

- It is a composition, usually in prose, concerned with the acts and speech of imagined characters.
- A story is told; there is a teller of the tale.
- It is a story in which the events are related to the reader in a particular order and for a particular reason.
- The events are imagined as taking place in specific places.
- The characters and events form a fictional world, which may be close to or remote from our everyday world.

- The totality of characters and events adds up to something. We can find meanings in the work.

Consider these points in relation to Jan Coggan's tale about Joseph Poorgrass lost in Yalbury Wood, discussed above:

- It is a tale of characters, action and conversation, although the conversation is with an owl!
- The story is told by Jan Coggan and told with the purpose of showing what kind of a person Joseph Poorgrass is.
- The order of events is selected to show why Joseph was lost: he had been working late and had been drinking.
- The story takes place in a wood, which, as in so many tales, is a place where travellers lose their way.
- The story creates a world of rustic labour in which people travel to relatively distant places for a day's work.
- The story is about timidity and an innocence that perhaps is only possible in the countryside.

Literary study

When we talk about how an author prompts a reader to respond to and think about what he or she has written, and when we see how an author has made a work, we are doing what is traditionally called Literary Criticism. Mastering a novel (or mastering any literature) starts when we see that it is something that has been made. Once we see that we can think about how the making has been done, and then ponder what the effects of this making are. It seems obvious to a lot of readers that a good place to start this thinking is with the characters.

Summary

Fictions are stories that have been made up. There is always a writer and reader, or teller and hearer. The events of the story occur in particular places and together they form a special world. Moreover, this world adds up to something – it has a meaning.

2 Characters

2.1 Responding to characters

Teachers and examiners sometimes talk about characters as if they don't matter very much. They sometimes advise students to attend to other aspects of a novel – its structure or imagery – with the implication that concern for characters is a low-level response.

But this runs in the face of generations of critics and readers, who have found that

Characters cannot be ignored.

Characters show how creative a writer is. One of the reasons that Charles Dickens is valued is that, in any one of his novels, there are sufficient characters for three or four works by a lesser novelist.

Engaged by characters

As readers, we find we are drawn into the lives of characters: we listen to them, observe their actions, try to understand their thinking, feel for their plights, judge their motives, recoil from their attitudes, appreciate their wit, and wonder at their insights.

This is one of the mysteries of art. We know that characters only exist in books and yet we respond to them as we do to people whom we know. Like many of the people we meet in everyday life, we are engaged by – drawn to and interested in – the characters we meet in books. Readers follow characters with fascination and concern, often regarding them as real, and imagining, as the 'Janeites' do with Jane Austen's characters, a world separate from the novel, in which the characters carry on living. We can't understand the popularity of sequels – books that continue the story of a novel's central characters – apart from a concern for the characters. If it is argued that characters don't matter very much, then our response to novels is incomprehensible. Any discontent we have with novels is often related to characters. This is particularly so with novels in which we are invited to approve (or disapprove) of some of the characters. A notorious case is D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), a novel about a young man, Paul Morel, who is torn between devotion to his mother and the feelings he has for Miriam Leivers. The novel is written so that we are sure to find Paul Morel sympathetic and recoil from Miriam. But many readers don't respond in this way.

Summary

Characters cannot be ignored. Readers are drawn into their lives. Writers expect us to approve or disapprove of their characters.

2.2 Characters, readers and authors

Knowledge

It is a fact of reading that we sometimes feel far more for fictional people than real ones whom we don't know particularly well. People weep more over books than over stories of accidents that they read in the newspapers. The reason for this is probably that we know a lot about fictional characters. The more we know, the more likely we are to be concerned. Reading books is a matter of knowledge. Reading, to use a philosophical term, is epistemic. Furthermore:

What we know about a character depends on what an author has told us or shown us in the words of the book.

Reading novels is a matter of gaining knowledge, and there is only one source of knowledge in the case of novels – words the author uses.

The way in which a character is put together will shape how we understand him or her.

Readers at work

But it is not quite as easy as that. Authors expect us to use our imaginations and infer things that are not directly given to us in the text. For example, in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) we might infer that because Heathcliff wins at cards, he has spent his time away as a professional gambler. Inferring must not be confused with imagining that characters are as we would like them to be. The only way to curb such unhelpful inventiveness is to attend to the words of the text.

Characters, characterization and persons

We need to distinguish between 'character' and 'characterization'.

Character is product; while characterization is process.

To think about characters involves thinking about how they are made.

'Characters' is the word we use when we are discussing how we understand books. But *within* a book a character is a person. Characters in books regard each other as persons. Fiction works through means of the fictional characters not behaving as if they were fictional. This might be why we are moved; we see that they matter to each other.

Summary

The only way we can get to know a character is through the author. Sometimes, the reader is expected to work on what the author has supplied. Characters are the figures in a book; characterization is the process that creates them. When we talk about a book we regard characters as figures that have been made. Within a book, however, characters regard each other as persons.

2.3 Language and the making of characters

Said and made

> **All literary criticism is a consideration of the dual nature of literature: it says something and in doing so it makes something.**

The difference between people we meet in the street and characters we meet in books is that the second group is 'constructed'. They would not exist but for the words that have made them.

But making – construction – is an activity practised in the everyday world. We make images of ideal men and women, we turn pop stars into what we call 'icons', and we bring up children with pictures of what adults are like. Those who study the media are aware of how people in public life are packaged and presented. Perhaps we enjoy fiction because it is a pure form of what happens in everyday life.

Language revealing character

The seventeenth-century poet and dramatist, Ben Jonson, made a collection of remarks about culture, behaviour and literature that he called *Explorata: or Discoveries* (published posthumously in 1640). One remark of his is that language reveals who we are:

> Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind. No glass renders a man's form, or likeness, so true as his speech.
>
> (2515–19)

We are more clearly present in our speech than we are in our reflections in a mirror ('glass'). Language shows us most clearly; when we speak, others know who we are.

Novelists know this. Mr Casaubon, a scholarly clergyman in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), talks in this way (Chapter 42):

> 'Not immediately – no. In order to account for that wish I must mention – what it were otherwise needless to refer to – that my life, on all collateral accounts

> insignificant, derives a possible importance from the incompleteness of labours which have extended through all its best years. In short, I have long had on hand a work which I would fain leave behind me in such a state, at least, that it might be committed to the press – by others.'

The language is the man. Mr Casaubon so piles up clauses that in the second sentence we have to wait some time to hear what it is that gives his life a possible importance. All that he says, as in a work of intricate scholarship, has to be qualified. In the last sentence, 'In short' leads not to an incisive conclusion but to yet another wordy meander. In Jonson's terms: he speaks, and we see him. Mr Casaubon is dry, over-correct and incapable of being either brief or exact.

The life of reason

We reason in words. In Chapter 13 of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet is puzzled by Mr Collins' self-approving letter, in which he expresses regret that he will be the means of depriving the Bennet sisters of their family home. Elizabeth comments:

> 'And what can he mean by apologizing for being next in the entail? – We cannot suppose he would help it, if he could. – Can he be a sensible man, sir?'

Jane Austen gives Elizabeth the language of reasoning. She sees that a man cannot apologize for a state of affairs which he would not change, even if he were able. Her language is both logically probing and tentatively exploratory. Her dismantling of pretension encapsulates something of English common sense.

The language of value

Language embodies values.

> **Authors can use language in such a way that the reader can see the words express values that should be honoured.**

This is what it means when one says that vocabulary is 'moral'. 'Moral' does not have to mean rules about what is right and wrong; it is concerned with value, with what matters. Words such as 'reasonable' and 'friend' can be used to show that the user values rational thinking and the expression of friendship. And, of course, there is also a *negative* moral language. Words such as 'mean', 'narrow' or 'shallow' can denote qualities that we deplore.

Moral words are most telling when they are ones that are normally used in a non-evaluative way. This is the impressive feature of Joseph Conrad's short story, *The Secret Sharer* (1912). The plot concerns a young captain who hides a fugitive on his ship. When the captain first talks to the fugitive he discovers that his guest is a wanted man, who freely confesses: 'I've killed a man'. That would be sufficient for the captain to arrest the fugitive, but, instead, trust develops. They learn they were both at the Conway Naval School, and the captain begins to see life from the other man's point of view: 'I saw it all going on as though I were

myself inside that other sleeping-suit.' The word 'saw' comes to mean a moral perception. 'Inside' has multiple layers of meaning: inside the suit, inside someone's mind, and sharing an outlook on life. The last point is important. The language of value discloses an understanding of life.

The moral ambiguity of fluency

We are suspicious of those who are too articulate. In particular,

> **We are unhappy about characters who remain unruffled and smooth in speech despite the most trying of circumstances.**

We expect people to show in their speech the moral and emotional difficulty of a situation. We feel they should have difficulty in controlling their emotions, and be hesitant about what and how much to say. Perhaps this is a characteristically English trait: emotional inarticulacy being seen as a virtue, and confident fluency a moral failing?

In the first chapter of Marian Halcombe's diary in Wilkie Collins' intricate and mysterious novel *The Woman in White* (1860), Laura Fairlie indicates unambiguously to Sir Percival Glyde, the man to whom she is engaged, that she no longer loves him, and that he would, therefore, be justified in seeking an end to their engagement. Collins alerts us to the moral delicacy of Laura by showing that this is a very difficult thing to say: 'She hesitated, in doubt as to the expression she should use next'. But Sir Percival shows neither hesitation nor doubt. Even when she plainly tells him she no longer has feelings for him, he is unabashed: 'You have said more than enough,' he answered, 'to make it the dearest object of my life to keep the engagement.'

We are suspicious at such assurance, and when we read of Sir Percival's tone and manner – 'he spoke with such warmth and feeling, with such passionate enthusiasm…' – we judge that his untroubled ease is morally dubious.

Declarations

Drama, and particularly Shakespeare, has had a strong influence on the language of the English novel. Shakespeare's influence can be found in the design of plots, the presentation of characters, and their actions. A Shakesperian feature is the self-revelation of a character in a long speech.

Shortly before his murder, Julius Caesar talks of how firm and resolute he is, comparing his consistency and integrity to the unmoving northern star. In Chapter 9 of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy delivers a long speech to Nelly, the housekeeper, in which she compares her love for Linton, the man whom she will marry, and Heathcliff, the companion of her youth. The passion of her speech has the momentousness of seventeenth-century drama. This is a part of it:

> 'My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal

rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff.'

Her speech is hardly part of a dialogue; it is more like what has been called direct self-explanation (see Chapter 10, section 10.1). The author gives a character a speech in order to reveal what the character is like. So we know that Caesar is firm, and that Cathy has an almost mystical sense of sharing her identity with another.

The mannerisms of speech

Many of the most compelling and vivid characters in fiction achieve distinctiveness through verbal mannerisms.

In Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837), Fagin, the most memorable character, frequently addresses Oliver as 'My dear'. The reader soon sees that this is, in part, a strategy to persuade Oliver into a life of crime. By contrast, there is in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Gatsby's 'Old sport', an indication of his self-image as a man who has received an English education. The reader, however, might feel the pathos of a man whose embarrassing English is an attempt at elevated self-definition. Gatsby is an example of a character who creates his own public image. The reader sees that it is not easy to see who he really is.

Class and dialect

Often, in praise of a novelist, it is said that he or she has a good ear. What is often meant by this is that

The novelist picks up the class features of conversation with such accuracy that we see characters authentically exhibiting the marks of the social class to which they belong.

There is a class aspect to language. Certain words are used frequently in some classes and only rarely in others. K. C. Phillipps, in *Language and Class in Victorian England* (1984), points out that, in the nineteenth century, the term 'sweetheart' was almost completely confined to the working class. Class was evident in grammar. The word 'ain't' – short for 'is not' – was a speech mannerism of the upper classes. (Later in the twentieth century, 'ain't' came to be regarded as slang.)

A feature of working-class speech is its dependence on proverbial sayings, its resort to generalizations and its avoidance of abstract words. When, in Chapter 12 of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), Tess returns, pregnant, from working away from home, her mother sums up the situation: 'Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose. 'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God.' 'Making the best of it' is proverbial, and the appeal to 'nater' (nature) and what 'do please God' stand in for more abstract phrases such as 'necessity' or 'providence'.

Joan Durbeyfield here borders on dialect – the language of a particular region which often survives in a relatively complete state among the rural classes. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë bravely introduces an important character,

Joseph, who speaks in a dialect so thick that many readers just skip what he says. (The clue is to read it aloud with a Yorkshire accent.) Joseph's dialect speeches give a strong sense of the local community (very carefully presented by Emily Brontë), and the difference in speech from the main characters enforces the idea that he has other ideas about the conduct of life from the strident characters such as the elder Cathy. He is also, for those who bother to work out what he is saying, an invaluable source of information about what happens – in particular, the death of Hindley.

Summary

Characters are created by the language they speak. Style of speech reveals character. There is considerable variety in speech. Characters reason. Their values emerge in their language. Sometimes readers are invited to mistrust those who are too fluent. Some characters make revelatory speeches, and others have distinctive verbal mannerisms. Dialect and class have a role in creating characters.

2.4 Dialogue

Everyday dialogue

The language of dialogue in novels has little in common with the fragmented and imprecise exchanges of everyday life. Everyday conversation is less formal in its grammar, and its structures are less complex. Its vocabulary is simplified; there are very few abstract terms. Our language is more colloquial and is more likely to include taboo terms (swearing, obscenities). We do, however, frequently use titles, such as 'Doctor'. We tend to use proverbial expressions, either couplings such as 'hale and hearty' or fixed expressions such as 'But at the end of the day…'. And some of the expressions are uninformative – when asked how we are, we might say 'Not bad'. This list does not include the contractions – 'shouldn't'ave', for example, and the 'ums' and 'ahs'.

> **Dialogue in novels, by contrast, is conversation raised to the level of polished art.**

This is why we so often envy the elegant intelligence of Jane Austen's heroines. In Chapter 56 of *Pride and Prejudice*, the over-bearing Lady Catherine, aunt of Mr Darcy, visits Elizabeth to extract from her a denial of the report that she is engaged to Darcy. Elizabeth is not, of course, though at this point in the novel such a prospect is not disagreeable. Lady Catherine says the report is 'a scandalous falsehood':

> 'If you believed it impossible to be true,' said
> Elizabeth, colouring with astonishment and disdain,
> 'I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What
> could your ladyship propose by it?'

> 'At once upon having such a report universally contradicted.'
> 'Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family,' said Elizabeth, coolly, 'will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence.'
> 'If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?'
> 'I never heard that it was.'
> 'And can you likewise declare, that there is no *foundation* for it?'
> 'I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. *You* may ask questions, which *I* shall not choose to answer.'

Dialogue is at the heart of Jane Austen's work. It is the means by which the reader sees how the characters are engaging with each other, and through those engagements, character is revealed, and the substance – the themes and issues – of the book emerge. It is worthwhile thinking about this dialogue under several headings.

Dialogue and everyday speech

The dialogue quoted has little in common with everyday speech. The sentences are clearly and (in the case of Elizabeth) deftly organized. The vocabulary is high-level, though Jane Austen shows Elizabeth using Lady Catherine's title.

The presentation of speech

The passage is written in direct speech – we hear the actual words the two speakers use – and to assist us there are what some critics call 'tags' – those indicative statements such as 'said Elizabeth'. Sometimes these tags tell us how the words were delivered, as in 'said Elizabeth, coolly'.

The shaping of speech

There are elegant balances in the language, a feature rare, though not unknown, in everyday talk. Elizabeth's last sentence, with its telling contrast of 'you' and 'I' neatly represents the conflict between the two women.

The politics of conversation

'Politics' is here used in the sense of a struggle for power and advantage. Critics often talk about the control of discourse. In conversation, people persuade, pressurize and seek to out-manoeuvre. This is what we see here. Lady Catherine wants Elizabeth to bend to her will, but Elizabeth resists firmly. One form of resistance is Elizabeth's refusal to use Lady Catherine's vocabulary. Lady Catherine asks

(though is it really a question?) whether the news of the engagement has 'been industriously circulated' by Elizabeth and her family. The standard meaning of 'industriously' was 'diligently', but it also had the meaning of working with a set purpose – that is, with design. As set out in section 1.3, 'design' is a morally dubious word, which can have suggestions of manipulation and deceit. Elizabeth resists the imputation by avoiding the word.

The revelation of character

The dialogue reveals characters. Lady Catherine's language is loose and betrays her lack of intelligence. How can one person 'universally' contradict a rumour? But Lady Catherine thinks so, probably because she is accustomed to her words being universally obeyed.

Dialogue and theme

The dialogue indicates the theme of the novel. One of Jane Austen's concerns is the future of her nation. Though conservative by temperament, she has suspicions about those who control her country. Is the future to be left in the hands of stupid snobs? England depends on alliances between the wealthy and the witty. The powerful Darcy needs the wit and charm – and the sheer, elegant intelligence – of an Elizabeth Bennet. Though Elizabeth is not engaged to Mr Darcy, she can relish the pleasure of that prospect by contemplating the report as if it were true.

Summary

Dialogue, unlike everyday conversation, employs high-level language and complex sentences. Authors sometimes tag conversations to indicate who is speaking and how the words are delivered. In dialogue there is a struggle for power (the politics of conversation) and a revelation of character and themes.

2.5 Last words

As novels are shaped works of art, special importance is attached to the way they close. Consequently, the last words of a character have special status.

Novelists often make last words the revelation of character and/or the disclosure of theme. Consider the last words of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Marlow, the narrator, has travelled up a river into the heart of Africa to meet the sophisticated Kurtz, who, rather than civilization, has brought (indicated by heads on poles), savagery. This is the moment of Kurtz's death (Chapter 3):

> Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper

> at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath –
> 'The horror! The horror!'

What we hear in the repeated phrase is the summation of his life, a life that has entered the heart of darkness and found something so overwhelmingly dreadful that he is almost inarticulate. 'The horror!' is not a description but an appalled recoil from the knowledge that he yielded to the temptation of an undefined desire. That is the heart of darkness.

Summary

Last words can reveal character and indicate theme.

2.6 Language about characters

Novelists, and through them narrators, create characters in two kinds of language: physical language, and mental and moral language.

Physical language

Physical or external language is concerned with whatever is open to the senses – whatever can be seen, heard, felt and so on.

> **It is convention that when a character is first introduced, there is a detailed presentation of his or her appearance.**

These presentations are not neutral. They consist of those things that the author has chosen to tell us, and the way in which they are told, may indicate to us their relative importance. Jane Austen, for example, chooses not to describe many physical details about a character's face. In the first sentence of *Emma* (1816), Emma Woodhouse is said to be 'handsome', but we are not told what it is that makes her so.

Later in the nineteenth century, readers expected very full character delineations. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Thomas Hardy satisfies that expectation in his opening presentation of Gabriel Oak:

> When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant distance of his ears, his eyes were reduced to chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared round them extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun.

That is a complex sentence, all about a smile. It is closely observed, not only in the sense that there are many details but also because the reader is placed very near the imagined face; we see minute details – the 'chinks' and 'wrinkles'. The image at the end shows us how we should respond: Gabriel Oak's smile is warm, even radiant. The smile is the man.

Mental and moral language

> **Mental and moral language reveals what characters are like in themselves – how they think, what they value and, possibly, how the reader might value *them*.**

As in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* opens with the central character, Dorothea Brooke. The long passage weaves together the physical and mental language, dress and character – the outer with the inner –

> Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters…

The physical detail says much about the mind. Dorothea's plain dress suits her; its absence of self-conscious style implies she has the inner poise of the Blessed Virgin. The passage continues to give an insight into Dorothea's family:

> The pride of being ladies had something to do with it: the Brooke connections, though not exactly aristocratic, were unquestionably 'good': if you inquired backward for a generation or two, you would not find any yard-measuring or parcel-tying forefathers…

Here the language of history and the language of class (very much a matter of economics) are used to contextualize, and thereby characterize, Dorothea's pride in herself.

Still using Dorothea's plain dress as a key to her character, the narrator says that 'well-bred economy' would have sufficiently explained Dorothea's unassuming clothes 'quite apart from religious feeling; but in Miss Brooke's case, religion alone would have determined it…'. Dorothea, the narrator continues, cannot reconcile a preoccupation with clothes with weighty spiritual considerations. Having established that, the language becomes decidedly inward: 'she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects…'. The turn of Dorothea's mind is given in the words 'enamoured', 'intensity' and 'rash'. She is the kind of character whose strong emotional commitments can make her heedless of consequences.

The power of character language

We should resist the assumption that inner language is better than outer language. The test case is Dickens. His characters can be vigorous and entertaining even though they consist almost entirely of external details. Here is Mr Bounderby from Chapter 4 of *Hard Times* (1854):

> He was a rich man; a banker, merchant, manufacturer and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare and a metallic laugh. A man made out of coarse material, which seemed to have stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up.

There is no inner language in the passage, yet the writing is forceful and entertaining. Mr Bounderby is monstrously funny: a manufacturer in a manufacturing town, he is like a factory-made article. The coarse material of which he appears to be made is 'stretched' and 'strained'. Through the comedy, an important point emerges: as in the cases of the workers in his factory, the manufacturing has diminished Bounderby's humanity.

Summary

Language about character can be external or internal. We should not assume that one is better than the other.

2.7 Growing up

Assumptions about age are present in fiction. Mr Brownlow in *Oliver Twist* (1837) has learnt to judge and be charitable. But age does not automatically bestow such qualities: Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* has never learnt tact, and Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1860) has learnt no wisdom in her life of resentment.

From childhood to adulthood

> **The passage from childhood to young adulthood, from a carefree to a burdened life, from ignorance to knowledge, has become the special preserve of the novel.**

In and through the polarities of childhood innocence and adult experience, individual identities emerge.

The *Bildungsroman*

The *Bildungsroman* is the novel of formation – formation of character and identity. The German writer Goethe is usually credited with initiating the genre in *Wilhelm Meister* (1795). The *Bildungsroman* is therefore a romantic and post-romantic genre. Many romantic concerns – innocence and experience, childhood, the nature of subjective experience, the place of memory, the work of the imagination – are central to such writing. Given the subject matter, the *Bildungsroman* has several common features.

Places

To grow is to be aware, and an important part of a character's experience is awareness of place.

Great Expectations opens with Pip coming to consciousness of who he is when he looks at the graves of his parents and brothers in the churchyard on the marshes. He becomes aware of himself by way of his awareness of the place he is in. The evening in the churchyard is his 'first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things'. He finds out for certain that 'this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard', that the graves were his dead family and that 'the dark flat wilderness beyond, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes'. Dickens' writing sharply and indelibly delineates the scene. The nouns with their substantiating adjectives enact the moment when a character becomes aware of the concrete actuality of the world. This abrupt, unavoidable experience of the abrasive solidity of the world ends with the discovery of the self: 'and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry was Pip'.

Authority figures

To be a child is to be weak, dependent and under the control of adults. In some cases the adults are parents. This is the case with Paul Morel in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. The presentation of a marriage between two characters of widely divergent expectations is masterly. Deprived of the kind of companionship she sought in marriage, the mother turns to her children for consolation and inspiration. Hence the struggles in Paul's later life between being a son and a lover.

Sexual awakening

Before novelists described sexual encounters in detail, sexual attraction and sexual expression were coded. The first sight of the beloved is a traditional element in the code of sexual attraction. In *Great Expectations*, Pip sees Estella at the end of a corridor holding a light, which will guide him to Miss Havisham's room. Although he is a young man, Gabriel Oak's first sight of Bathsheba fulfils the same function. Sexual expression is intense in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Jane and Rochester are remarkably physical in their expression of affections. They squeeze each other's hands tightly. *Jane Eyre* is a novel that works with an intense awareness of the erotic impulse. In this it is interestingly different from *Wuthering Heights*. We are brought up to think of Emily Brontë's novel as one of the great romantic novels, but its heroine, the elder Catherine Earnshaw, is virtually without sexual feelings and is only fleetingly aware that she arouses them in others.

Choices

To be an adult is to face choices. The child becomes an adult when he or she is faced with dilemmas or temptations. Jane Eyre effectively grows up when she decides to seek a post outside Lowood School; Pip has most of his decisions made for him until he encounters his real benefactor.

When choices are related to love, there is the familiar plot element of whom to choose. Plots are frequently designed around two characters. The two characters are either the basis of the contrast novel, as in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), or form the romantic options of the central figure. In Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849), the hero is attracted to two women.

Summary

The *Bildungsroman* – the novel of formation – concentrates on the growth of the young into adulthood, paying attention to how places become the sites of self-realization, the shaping influence of parents and other authority figures, how sexual awakening occurs, and how in making choices, identities are confirmed.

2.8 The contexts of characters

We are shaped by our contexts or situations. We are situated in life by material factors and by the assumptions of the society into which we are born. We are, to use the term broadly, people of cultures.

Gender

An aspect of the *Bildungsroman* is that characters arrive at an understanding of what it is to be a man or a woman. Novelists are sometimes very conscious of the extent to which male and female identity is a matter of adapting to the expectations of other people. We learn what it is to be a man or woman from those who have responsibility for us when we are young (see also Chapter 40, section 40.1).

Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* is particularly interesting, because her adoption of a female manner and outlook happens with symbolic suddenness. Heathcliff recounts to Nelly about how he and Cathy roamed the moors until they came to Thrushcross Grange, where they gaze through the window at the luxury of the Linton children's home life. They are detected, a dog is loosed, Cathy's foot is bitten, and she bleeds. She has to stay at the Grange for five weeks and is visited by her brother's wife, who starts the transformation by raising 'her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery'. When she returns (Chapter 7), she has become a young woman:

> instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in.

The transformation works in a number of ways. She dresses fashionably and behaves as a young lady. She has entered superior society and has acquired social ambitions. She has also entered womanhood. Symbolically, her change coincides with her bleeding. The wild, hatless Cathy is now Catherine in her beaver hat. Furthermore, we can work out from Cathy's diary that when they left to roam the moors, they took the dairymaid's cloak. That symbol of the childhood bond between Cathy and Heathcliff now gives way to the long habit, which, in a ladylike manner, she carefully holds up with both hands as she, again symbolically, sails into her new life. Clothes, it should be observed, are significant in nineteenth-century novels, no doubt because class was very evident in the way people dressed. But, as with Dorothea Brooke, choice of clothes also indicates character.

Culture and nationality

The nineteenth-century novel often dealt with the meeting of two cultures, usually the working class and the middle class. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) is about a sometime clergyman who moves north to an industrial town to seek employment as a tutor. This allows the author to treat a number of cultural encounters: north meets south, poverty meets wealth, and managers encounter workers.

In the twentieth century, another cultural difference has emerged in the novel. This is the relationship between the British and those countries that once constituted the empire. The postcolonial novel can now be regarded as a separate genre. New countries, or old countries that have secured independence, seek to establish their own identities through re-discovering their histories and presenting themselves in their own terms.

One way of doing this is through rewriting English classics. In *Windward Heights* (1998), Maryse Conde creates a Caribbean version of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Another way is to find a setting that is representative of the new nation. Thus, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the Nigerian novelist, Chinuha Achebe, presents African village life rather than the more Western cities. The theme of cultures meeting (or, as is sometimes the theme, not meeting) is long established in the English novel. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) can be read as a parable of colonialization, and there is a critical controversy about where *Mansfield Park* (1814) stands in the debate about slavery. Certainly, some of the wealth of the Bertrams' English estate derives from the colonial one, and almost certainly Jane Austen imagined that the Antiguan estate was worked by slaves. But where does Jane Austen stand? Fanny Price, the unobtrusive heroine, seeks to engage Sir Thomas in conversation, but she is disappointed to find him silent on the matter. Does Sir Thomas sense that Fanny is in favour of moves to further control the trade in slaves and therefore avoids the topic? E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) explores the cultural differences between the British and the Indians, and seems to conclude that the differences are considerable. Recently, postcolonial criticism has further stressed differences, partly in an attempt to make English Literature shed some of its claims to speak universally (see Chapter 42, section 42.1).