CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The novel and the short story are genetic cousins. When we read a longer novel, we naturally break it up into smaller units and then at the end try to reconstitute into the whole which they suggest. Lohafer and Gerlach touch upon these points of memory and detail, but they claim more for the effect of brevity. They do not consider the converse:

That because a short story takes less time to read, even though we may remember its details for a while, it may make less of an impression on us in the long run than a novel, simply because we spend less time with it.\(^1\)

To distinguish a short story from a novel, a reader is bound to recall more of details in the short story than in the novel, mainly because of "the way memory works in relation to quantity and duration."\(^2\) It is logically deduced from this fact that each detail carries more weight in the story. Suzanne Hunter Brown’s essay on *Tess* experiments with this deduction. She takes out an ostensibly detachable portion of the novel *Tess of d'urbervilles* and compares the reading of it as if it were an independent
short story with the reading of it in its novelistic context. She concludes, “the reader sees the same text differently in these two instances.”

The short story is a very young literary form compared to poetry or even its narrative antecedent, the novel. The short story is a relatively new genre—perhaps one hundred and seventy five years in its modern tradition. It is distinctly an American literary phenomenon, despite important non-native influences. It would be presumptuous to declare emphatically that the form’s future scope will be traditional or otherwise: the American short story remains dynamic in its aesthetic character, flexible and varied, yet still recognizably what it has been, a vital mode of literary expression, continuously evolving toward the limits of its possibilities.

The development of American short story between 1945 and 1980 exhibits a gradual but ultimately clear movement in two distinct directions with respect to form. On one hand American writers of serious literary short fiction continued to work within the traditional formal conventions established over the previous century, consolidating and refining the techniques of expression we associate with American masters as Poe and Hawthorne, enriched by the influence of foreign practitioners such as Chekhov and Joyce. On the other hand, very recent contemporaries like Donald Barthelme indulged in various degrees of formal experimentation and innovation that derive perhaps as much from
the impact of Post World War II cultural history and as they do from earlier influential literary models. Kafka and Borges, in the century come to mind and one can cite fiction as early as Sterne in our novel tradition.

Jeffry Walker finds that authors writing in the aftermath of World War II, many of whom began their literary careers before or during the war, continued to use the genre as a vehicle for thoughtful depiction and analysis of American social manners, mores and morality. The stories of John O' Hara written both then and after a long hiatus during which he wrote his massive novels of manners can be used as an index to the particular social texture of both pre-war and post-war America. The American writers such as Peter Taylor, Eudora Welty and Flanery O'Connor use the short fiction as lens to view a society with a narrow frame, but close up, magnified to reveal telling detail.

The subjects treated by these writers come from their own experiences. The themes explicit or implicit, are distinctly American. There are more moral questions than moral conclusions, an attitude that can be traced to the dark puritan consciousness of Nathaniel Hawthorne. These writers' project two overlapping fields of vision, two separate angles of scope that are almost always in some degree of conflict. Society and the individuals' place in and relationship to that society. The themes of individual isolation and alienation repeatedly emerge from these
works. In addition to their concern with individuation of psychology and soul, the authors hold up society itself to serve moral scrutiny.

Each of these writers has one thing in common. They wrote fiction to seek positive values to take the place of those lost in the chaos of the depression and World War II. They recognized that the individual, confronted by the myriad changes that were taking place, was losing his identity and his importance as a person. This search certainly contributed to the starkness and reality of their short fiction. For some, this meant writing fiction without departing from the traditional plot of framework and creating interest through the interaction of character and incident. For the majority of others, however the challenge of presenting a portrait of the human scene with sharpened insight and with individually developed styles of their own enabled them to produce stories ranging in mode from the realistic to the allegorical and grotesque.

In breaking new ground these post-war writers worked in the characteristic American vein, which has always been innovative and exploratory, in their attempt to portray the manners of changing American society.4

The period from 1957 to 1968 was an extremely significant and productive one for American practitioners of the art of short fiction. It
saw the literary maturation of such major figures as John Cheever, Flannery O'Connor, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Peter Taylor. It witnessed the emergence of the new and the important voices of John Updike, Bernard Malamud and John Barth.

In the tradition of Hawthorne, James and Twain American fiction writers continued to evoke a sense of place in their fiction. Authors such as Cheever, Updike and Hortense Calisher began to explore what was rapidly becoming a North-eastern megalopolis. The southern renaissance was in full swing. Other writers in the Midwest and southwest drew heavily on the cultural background of these regions.

Ethnic heritage was also becoming a very important element in the creative process. In the late 1960s, a number of young writers initiated a black literary renaissance, reconciling their particular concerns with the demands of their craft. It was a synthesis that had already been achieved by Jewish-Americans such as Singer, Malamud and Saul Bellow who, from the 1950s on became not only the voices of their own ethnic ties but also ethical spokesmen for American society as a whole.

While it drew on such a variety of backgrounds, the American short fiction remained for the most part, a vehicle for the exploration of contemporary society. During this era the main purpose of the genre was
to create a fiction of manners. This was emphasized by the continued preeminence of periodicals such as The New Yorker and the popularity of authors such as Cheever and Updike. Richard Chase observes in The American Novel and Its Tradition that the American imagination "seems less interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil, less interested in incarnation and reconciliation" than in "the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction and disorder." Embodying these tendencies the American short story and the American novel, have often fused realism and romance, something that is particularly evident in the recent period.

Faced with radical changes of the previous few decades, with the growing complexity of contemporary life, the increasing perplexing relationships between the individual and society, short story writers in the late 1950s and the 1960s began more and more to discover the limitations of realistic or naturalistic fiction. Thus while some continued to employ traditional narrative forms, others began not only to reject conventional realistic narrative but also to expose and question the conventions of fiction in general. This blend of realism and romance, of traditional and innovative, characteristic of the fiction of the period as a whole, is manifested even in the work of artists, such as John Cheever, who have
somewhat fallaciously been labeled as celebrators and historians of the usual.

Short fiction of the 1960s and 1970s was heavily influenced by the intellectual turbulence caused by such forces as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam conflict. The amount of experimental work being written increased markedly during this era, and once the styles become better defined, a debate developed between traditionalists and experimentalists. Traditional fiction proceeds on promises solidified with the rise of the novel in eighteenth century: There is objective reality, and the best way to involve the reader's thoughts and feelings is to use convincing characters in believable situations. The experimental style grew from the belief that Post-World War II civilization had undergone such radical changes that old forms no longer met new needs of expression. The experimentalists questioned the existence of objective reality. The most common forms of experimentation are meta-fiction as in Curley's "Who, what, where, when-why,"? surrealism, and discontinuous narrative, as in Barthelme's *Views of my Father Weeping*.

The writings of these times and the effects reach much deeper into the outlook of a writer than merely into subject matter. The worldview of the individual writer shapes style and makes a philosophical statement, however muted it may be and the frame of reference within which
characters are placed determines the focus of the work. The writers in this context used themes to establish the identity of their characters: society at large, ethnic or religious group, or the family.

Characters who are presented primarily in relation to the mass of society, and not in relation to a smaller group within it, are inevitably and severely alienated. Either they utterly reject their family or ethnic ties, or struggle with shifting contexts. They tend to relate to society as a whole, although they may find solace in temporary romances. Typical example of this kind are stories by Donald Barthelme, Ann Beattie, Doris Betts, Ray Bradbury, Herbert Gold, Shirley Ann Grau, James B.Hall, Joyce Carol Oates and Irwin Shaw.

The most intimate context of anybody's identity is the family, the easiest to recognize and the hardest to escape. The closeness of family members offers countless opportunities for writers to portray dramatic conflicts that exemplify basic human problems. People feel alienated from each other, but "alienation within the society is the most bewildering while within the family is the most painful."

Regardless of this, however the family is the most consistent source of consolation in American short stories.
When the importance of something has to be proclaimed, it can’t be all that important. And certainly most of the people in the United States get along without reading fiction. But fiction is nothing less than the subtlest instrument for self-examination and self-display that mankind has invented yet. Psychology and X-rays bring up some portentous shadows, and demographics and stroboscopic photography do some fine breakdowns, but for the full parfum and effluvia of being human. For feathery ambiguity and rank facticity for the air and iron, fire and spit of our daily mortal adventure there is nothing like fiction: It makes sociology look priggish, history problematical, the film media two-dimensional and the National Enquirer as silly as last week’s cereal box.

We do not read fiction for information, informative though it can be. Unlike journalism, history or sociology fiction does not give us facts sung in their accredited truth, to be accepted and absorbed like pills, for our undoubted good: we make fiction true, as we read it. Fiction can poison our minds, as it did those of Madam Bovary and Don Quixote. It extends our world and any extension is a risk. The self we are left with when we close the book may not be a useful marketable one. Fiction offers to enlarge our sense of possibilities, of potential freedom. The novel and the short story rose with the bourgeoisie, an exercise in democratic feeling and in individual adventure.
Short stories are "the news bulletins of our lives" says Susan Mermir. A short story is one which is physically short and is praised for its 'compact impactness' which comes from the 'distillation' and 'telescopings' of events. It seems that the short story has become a versatile and vivid medium for expressing the concerns, moods and lifestyles of a particular generation in a particular period.

There is no large and distinguished corpus of short story theory because the short story does not exist as a discreet and independent genre. In a 1976 anthology, Charles May's short story theories, demonstrate the problematic situation. There are many approaches to define short story.

It is defined in terms of unity by Poe, Brander Mathews and others, techniques of compression by A.L. Balder, Norman Friedman and L.A.G. Strong; Frank O'Connor basing on its subject, Gardiner by its tone and Moravia by its lyricism. But there is no single characteristic or cluster of characteristics that the critics agree absolutely to distinguish the short story from other fictions.

A structuralist conception of fiction tends to confirm the suspicion that there may be no rational way to distinguish 'Short Story' from other narratives in the mimetic mode:
All stories short and long have certain required properties of narrativity, character, place, events, a beginning, middle and an end and coherence among the parts.\textsuperscript{9}

All stories can be reduced to minimal statements of the required elements or expanded by the inclusion of optional developments in the narrative chain, as long as they maintain a discoverable coherence in their inter-relationships.

\textit{Tristram Shandy} and \textit{Ulysses} suggest an extreme range of options for the extrapolation of simple narrative sequences into long and complex ones. Similar expansion could be applied to any story from “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse” to “Indian Camp”; but of course the best short stories give us a sense of the inevitability of each sentence and persuade us that they are as complete as possible, that any addition or deletion would destroy their aesthetic wholeness. But the omission of an entire sentence from Aesop’s “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse” would likely jeopardize its narrative coherence, we might add several without destroying its elegant symmetry or its moral. We might remove one or more sentences – or add a few without altering its theme or quality for most readers.
Many approaches are done regarding the theories of short stories since Edger Allen Poe. Mary Rohn Berger’s theory is representative. She says

The short story belongs to the tradition of romance, which in turn leads to the modernist tradition of symbolism.¹⁰

Thus plot of the short story, however realistic on the surface, contains emotional depths relating it to myth and dream and thereby to the lyric. Logically also she can limit her definition of novel to the tradition of realism – and here critics of this sort often call upon the work of Ian watt

She can keep the category of the long romance pure also, relying on the work of Richard Chase on the American novel to substantiate this point.¹¹

Valerie Shaw is another who postulates a deductive, ‘single term’ and mixed category definition. Following O’ Conner’s theory that story typically presents lonely people on the fringes of society, and despite the fact that she argues that it is too narrow, she develops an approach of her own which sees story as dealing characteristically with the border line between permanence and change, actual and strange, mundane and extraordinary, reality and dream. It deduces the structural characteristics of story as
Embodying the tension between surface brevity and deep intensity, spontaneity and artifice, richness and concision, involvement and detachment, suggestiveness and hard outline.\textsuperscript{12}

Further Valerie Shaw relates her theory, as Suzanne Ferguson does to that form of modernism which has come to be called impressionism that is the form which represents how an object appears to the observer rather than how it ostensibly is in itself. Thus art is seen as an attempt to objectify the subjective which ties in with those other theories of story, such as Rohr Berger’s. And this is offered as a rationale for explaining why story deals with epiphanic movements instants of crisis or change or realization rather than the unfolding process of change.

Poe’s other point, that the end controls the beginning and middle, is merely to say, as Rohr Berger quite rightly points out, that a short story is an art of form. It is the ‘imminence’ of the end. However its relative closeness to the beginning which creates effects differentiating it from longer and shorter works. For Lohafer this means

The story interrupts, displaces and becomes part of our other life rhythms during the reading process.\textsuperscript{13}
The structure of a narrative like the structure of a sentence both resists and forwards our impetus towards closure. Because we can complete it at one sitting, the experience of closure in a story relates differently to our other life rhythms than reading a novel or a poem. It creates a rhythm of its own which is definite enough to displace our life rhythm until it is over. We can enter, move through and leave story without interruption, and thus we build the story world as we read, apart from the other claims on our attention. So a story binds us more closely to the sentence than a novel and less closely to the word than a poem. Since the end is pushed closure to the beginning, each sentence carries a special urgency and calls for a higher level of attention.

Gerlach, while developing his own scheme of the signals of closure, admits that these are the same in genres. The difference is more of degree than of kind:

The novel advances and develops its theme,
while the story just shows it.14

Then he makes a useful distinction between two different forms of the narrative, direct and indirect. The first foregrounds the movement towards closure; the second foregrounds the movement away from closure. Both movements are present in any narrative; the difference is a matter of which predominates. He also observes that the modern short story
depends more on the indirect form but not on an experience of direct forms for its success.

Therefore the short story, according to these theories is that genre in which the anticipation of the end is always present and in which, therefore, the beginning and middle are constructed and represented differently than they are in the novel, a condensed novel cannot be called a short story. It does not utilize the supposed special powers and limitations defining the genre.

The modern short story is especially a popular genre different from the tale and sketch that preceded it. The modern short story shows all the shifts in sensibility and technique that affected the novel and the long story around the end of nineteenth century.

The association of the short story with certain national traditions—French, Russian, Irish and American can be seen to be linked with its impressionist elements rather than a particular national ‘gift.’ “Turgnev and Chekhov among the Russians, display in particular the foregrounding of setting, the reduction of physical action and the elevation of mood changes to the status of plots; a recent book, in fact, treats Chekhov with James as impressionist.” Among the French, Maupassant is preeminent in the short story, his techniques of compression and suggestion come
directly from Flaubert, not from a tradition of the short story. Though, James and Crane are the first Americans properly to be called impressionist writers, Poe and Hawthorne fore shadow impressionist techniques in the focus of inner states, the substitution of setting for action and the use of fallible, ambivalent narrators in first person as Poe and third person as Hawthorne in both long and short fiction. George Moore follows Turgnev, Joyce follows Moore and Flaubert, in changing the main stream of Irish short fiction from anecdote to impression.

The American short story has always lived in the shadow of its generic cousin, the novel. Poe and Hawthorne practically invented the modern short story in the mid-nineteenth century and succeeding generations of writers have continued to turn out short story masterpieces in glorious abundance. Americans tend to prize, as in other things for its expansiveness. Many experienced writers made explorations in the American short fiction. Perhaps the most surprising development in American fiction in the 1980s has been the revival of short story.

From the prominence of the New Yorker, Donald Bartheleme exerted a formidable influence on the short story of the two decades. Of recent writers of short experimental works John Barth, Robert Coover, Ronald Sukenick and Bartheleme have had the most visible and enduring impact on American fiction.
Looking at such writers in terms of the broad scope of their fiction reveals a sense of similar purposes and shows some parallels of style and theme.

Cheever and Updike reflects the styles and concerns of writers in the New York and New England areas, the traditional geographical bases for major American authors. But the mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of a remarkable group of southern writers, many of them women, who seem to have been influenced by William Faulkner’s preference for eccentric rural types and his willingness to portray the most violent depths of emotion. The writing of Flannery O’Connor, who died in 1964, is perhaps closest to Faulkner’s Gothic sensibility, both use bizarre, often terrifying characters and situations to probe psychological or moral mysteries. Like Faulkner, O’Connor disdained stereotypes of southern blacks,, depicting them in “The Displaced Person” and “Judgement Day,” as individuals possessing the full range of human virtues and foibles.

Updike possesses an even more virtuous prose style and a wider range of social intellectual curiosity. His stories move from the perplexities of adolescence to the celebration of married love and the discovery of religious symbolism in the routines of daily life. Almost all of his writings take place in the family hearth, sometimes embraced,
sometimes the unsuccessful object of escape. Updike is perhaps at his best when treating bewildered young men trying to gauge their place in the world.

Peter Taylor, a very different sort of southern writer, writes fiction concerning family relationships. Their tone is understated and the connections between the members seem more brittle and impersonal. Taylor’s male protagonists are mainly professionals – lawyers, teachers, or politicians – who face an unexpected assertiveness from their wives, children and black servants. Unlike the erratic and explosive behaviour in O’Connor and Welty’s stories, the discontents of Taylor’s characters are usually expressed politely and uneasily.

The young American short story writers have taken as their thematic models not the buoyant Mark Twain, or the analytical Henry James or the turbulent William Faulkner but some Europeans like Frenz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, who regard social institutions as opaque and frustrating. A smaller group that includes John Barth and Donald Barthelme as mentioned already has been influenced by the late Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, who transformed fiction into ingenious and erudite fables. The prevailing style is ‘minimalist,’ shorn of the usual ornaments of nature’s description, character portrayal or social and cultural background. The fiction style is influenced by the technique of
film, montage, which achieves its emotional effects by artful juxtaposition of apparently random-shots or disjointed slivers of dialogue. This attracted the audience of selected sophisticated section of university graduates, who appreciate avant-garde technique and abstraction.

Hemingway like Crane favoured monosyllabic words and uncomplicated short sentences. He could evoke riveting images of nature of unforgettable moods by the artful placing of words and phrases. But more consciously than Crane, Hemingway sought by his style of restraint to achieve an absolute honesty. His search for a stripped-down style that could capture what he called "the real thing the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion," had enormous influence in his own day, an influence that seems to have taken on renewed force in the dominant 1980s school of minimalists.

The connection between Sherwood Anderson and F. Scott Fitzgerald is less obvious than between Crane and Hemingway. It resides not so much in style as in attitude toward society. Both writers deal with outsiders who yearn to belong. Fitzgerald in his writings caught the poignancy of the wasted life, partly because his style was simultaneously gorgeous and stirring, partly because his heroes and heroines were so young attractive and careless. The power and weight to Fitzgerald’s stories is due to the reason that he was never really taken in by the false values
and frivolous lives he described so brilliantly. And he never forgot that he
was an outsider in that glittering world.

Among many rising practitioners of American short stories three
These three come out from widely separated parts of the country, each of
them has received unusual critical acclaim and they differ enough to
suggest the variety possible within a common school of modern fiction.
As Susan Merrit rightly says:

Their stories reverberate with suppressed
emotion conveyed through elliptical
dialogues, emblematic images and a carefully
restricted point of view. The action is usually
minimal but the dramatic rendering of a
situation endures through their powerful
presentations.17

In England and America the battle for realism follows much the
same course as in France, but it is delayed by several decades and marked
by certain differences which reflect the deep moral bias of Victorian
thought. Many British critics still scorn the novel as a “low” form of
literature, to be written and read primarily for its entertainment value.
Scott has been largely instrumental in making the novel respectable, yet
he considers it a much less important type of literature than history or
poetry. John Stuart Mill, Thomas De Quincey, and Thomas Carlyle all deride the pretensions of fiction, arguing that it deals only with externals, not with inner, transcendent reality — an idea echoed by Emerson and Thoreau.

The novel's gradual acceptance in England during the 1850s is partly due to the growing recognition that it could be an effective vehicle of moral instruction. Early in the decade, even though successive novels by Dickens and Thackeray achieve critical notice, doubts still lingered about the serious value of such works; but when the Edinburgh Review itself portentously acknowledged in 1853 that prose fiction no longer occupied "an insignificant or trivial province of literature," a definite turning point has been reached.

Thereafter, although the terms 'novel' and 'fiction' remain somewhat suspect for a time, English critics treated the new form with increasing respect, no longer questioning its artistic pretensions but rather analyzing the characteristics that raised individual novels to the level of genuine art. Meanwhile George Eliot set a new standard of artistic excellence in novels such as *Adam Bede* and *Silas Mariner*. It is taken for granted that the novel has become the modern equivalent of Elizabethan drama as the age's highest form of literary expression.
Measuring the work of one writer against that of another, the critics try to single out the qualities that made for true art in fiction, as opposed to the spurious devices that could be used to achieve mere effect. They question the basic purposes of the novel, its values, the needs it fulfilled. Almost unanimously they agree upon the moral purpose of art, even to the point of insisting that the offices of the novelist and the preacher are virtually identical and condemning a writer like Hawthorne for making "the moral subserve the art, instead of the art the moral." Yet most of them are opposed to direct exhortation and to novels in which character or plot is distorted to serve a moral end.

Most responsible critics by the late nineteenth century belittle the excessive use of poetic justice, that favourite device by which Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, and other moralistic novelists lavish rewards and punishments on their good and bad characters at the end of a story.

But morality and art at their highest levels, are reckoned inseparable by the most perceptive Victorian critics – men like Leslie Stephen. George Henry Lewes and David Masson, who formulated definite critical doctrines based on a sensitive awareness of the need for both aesthetic and ethical standards. Morality, in short, could not be superimposed on the novel as an extraneous element, it had to be infused throughout the whole work as a reflection of the artists' fundamental
being. This is the concept that Henry James reiterated several years later in saying that “no good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind.”

Dickens, who is insistent on the need for impersonal dramatization in fiction, develops a number of alternative devices for revealing the inner and outer lives of his characters, including the soliloquy. He inserts autobiographic narrative, and even an approach to the stream-of-consciousness technique used by many twentieth century novelists. The Victorians thus explore virtually every path for achieving in the novel a sense of immediacy and wholeness comparable to that of good drama. For example, without using the term ‘point of view’ as such, they recognize its technical significance and know the effects that could be achieved by manipulating it in various ways. They debate extensively the question of structural unity, and they air many differing opinions about the relationship of plot to character, the management of dialogue and setting, and the appropriate methods of achieving logical motivation. In confrontation with these various technical considerations critics, like their counterparts all over the world have much to say about the problem of realism. The terms ‘realism’ and ‘realist’ are first introduced into English literary criticism in 1853, when George Eliot, writing in the Westminster Review, named Balzac as the head of a new literary movement in France,
whose followers are called "realists" because they "copy from nature and above all from modern nature and nature that surrounds them."  

In the United States, Hawthorne, in 1851, in his famous preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, states that the difference between a Romance and a novel is that the latter "is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's existence. The former – while as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart – has fairly a right to present the truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writers' own choosing or creation. In a sense, Hawthorne summarizes here the whole issue between realism and romanticism: all creative writers whether realists or romanticists, have a basic obligation to present "the truth of the human heart," but there is a fairly broad range of subject matter and technique that they can legitimately employ in working toward this end. The real problem faced by writers and critics, then was to establish the limits of that range.  

The realistic tradition that has been developing in England during the late nineteenth century (1850-1880) is quite different from the tradition which Balzac and Faulbert has established in France. It is brought to a high level by Eliot in England by Henry James in America. It
demands idealism and gentility as well as truthfulness to life. Thus when Zola and his followers introduce a new type of realism which dwell on the most sordid aspects of reality, many readers drew back in disgust. Even the most avant-garde Victorian critics—cry as they might about the artist's obligation to present the truth—felt that the experimental novelists or naturalists have followed the truth too far. And many critics begin to question whether unpleasant subject matter might not, after all, be an inevitable by-product of the realistic method.

In America the influence of Zola is felt keenly even by a writer like Henry James, whose own realism is of an altogether different brand. A great symposium is held on the novel. American novelists Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain have been read and admired abroad. Howells publishes his essays on James in 1882 proclaiming that fiction has become with James "a finer art than it was with Dickens and Thackeray." Essays in England and America poured from presses, some seeking to reconcile the differences between realism and romanticism, naturalism and idealism. Many of the main issues in this symposium have been argued over for years, and the roots of the controversy could be traced clear back to Defoe. The critical attention is focused on the novel as a distinct form of art. For in developing their arguments for or against one of the various 'isms' the writers taking part in the symposium are compelled to think
hard about the novel as a medium of artistic expression. Thus they made
the first really exhaustive analysis of such interrelated problems as the
novelists' ethical and artistic responsibilities.

During the past few decades, the serious novel has proliferated in
many different forms, as individual writers have tried, each in his own
way, to raise the novel to the position of artistic eminence that Henry
James envisioned for it. Realism, romanticism and naturalism have ceased
to be common topics for debate, but the impact of all three movements
remains clearly discernible in the best writing of today. Thus a strong
strain of romanticism persists in the novels of Thomas Wolfe, William
Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway whose work shows no less the
continuing impact of naturalism.

The realism of James and Howells as well as the naturalism of
Dreiser has influenced such younger novelists as Nelson Algren, Saul
Bellow, and Norman Mailer learning from both the success and
limitations of their literary predecessors, the writers of the present century
have brought new insights, techniques and purposes to the novel and
made it the dominant literary art form of our day. The revolution which
has occurred in kind is no longer considered the world as readily
domesticated and no longer even believed in its depth. We witness the
growing repugnance felt by people of great awareness for words of a
visceral, analogical, or in contrary character. On the other hand the visual or descriptive adjective, the word that contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining indicates a difficult but most likely direction for a new art of the novel.

Modern realism as professor Ian Watt has pointed out “begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses.” The key word is individual. Throughout the Middle Ages and well into the seventeenth century, reality implied universal and timeless truths; and the writer who wished to dramatize these truths in literature have little concern for specific individuals or their problems, since their experiences carry no weight in his final scale of values. Type characters and situations, like those in John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, serve his ends more readily. Not until a climate of opinion exists in which the ordinary individual seemed significant could the modern novel come into existence. Later that climate of opinion is also made possible by the philosophical writings of Descartes and Locke.

In literature, a tradition upon which the realistic novel could be built is also established during the seventeenth century. Indeed even before Cervantes provided the blue print in Don Quixote, the widely popular Lazarillo de Tormes, prototype of all picaresque fiction has served as a hilariously authentic and satiric antidote to the gaudy and
pretentious chivalric romances. In the same vein is *Le Roman Comique* by Paul Scarron. But perhaps the most impressive of all early works of realistic fiction is the first “psychological novel” *Madame de La Fayette's La Princesse de Cleves* a remarkably finished work of art as well as a searching criticism of French society. In this work, for the first time in the history of prose fiction, characters are given proper names which helped to individualize them instead of merely to classify them by type or social class; for the first time they are placed in recognizable surroundings which are described in realistic details; and for the first time, too, the time scheme of their loves is carefully worked out, so that a cause and effect sequence of events could be seen to constitute the meaningful story of their experiences. *La Princesse de Cleves* represents a new species of creative writing.

It is Daniel Defoe, the English novelist, however, who establishes himself as the first significant practitioner of realism in fiction and as the “founder” of the modern novel. Although Defoe’s novels may seem technically deficient by today’s critical standards, the protagonists of his major works – Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and Roxana are genuinely believable as individuals. They struggle with problems of relationships common to the society of Defoe’s day and, even more significantly, they deal with those problems in a manner that is consistent with their own
individual strengths and weaknesses. They function as most men do, in a competitive world of secularized values. Their actions and reactions, their triumphs and defeats, are human ones, not the products of divine intervention. Defoe’s characters in short are presented as ordinary people who regardless of class, “are normal products of their environment, victims of circumstances which any one might have experienced and which provoke exactly the same moral conflicts between means and ends as those faced by other members of society.”

The term ‘romance’ harked back to the medieval chivalric romances whose extravagances Cervantes has satirized. In its later development the romantic novel continued to be identified with a type of fiction which concentrates its action in stirring episodes of love and adventure – woven largely from the imagination of the author and which is read primarily as a means of escape from the less pleasant realities of life. Romanticism implies simplicity, aspiration, and freedom from restraint; the predominance of imagination over reason and fact; the novelists’ right and his duty, infact to create a world that represents the ideals of the human mind and heart. It is in this sense that the term “romantic” is applied to critics and novelists who contend that the ‘truth’ of the artists’ imagination transcend mere fidelity to the facts of human experience.
Opposed to these critics and novelists are those who became known, increasingly toward the end of the nineteenth century as realists. Arguing that romantic writers tend to falsify life in fiction by ignoring large areas of human experience and by idealizing those aspects which they treat, the realists held that it is the artists' duty to confront life honestly and to represent it, however imaginatively, in all its various shadings of good and bad, pleasant and painful, beautiful and ugly. Romanticists counter by asserting that the realists also tend to falsify life for their fiction invariably emphasize the superficial, the materialistic, and the bestial. It ignores the ultimate reality of beauty and goodness. Thus each group claim for itself the greater "truth to life." At this juncture a succession of highly talented writers both European and American, gradually perfect the technique of the novel until it become recognized as a valid art form, worthy of a place beside poetry and painting.

"The novel" in general terms, accepting the assumption that genre has more than a theoretical reality. Presumably, then, we should be able to offer a description of that genre, to say what a novel is and what distinguishes it from other forms of prose fiction. Yet students of literature – and even so eminent a witness as E.M. Forster – seem to be uneasy with any definition of the novel more elaborate than the formulae familiar to authors of literary manuals. The novel, according to such
handbooks is merely “a fictional narrative in prose, of substantial length”; but so, one may add, are the prose *Lancelot, Pilgrim’s Progress*, Ballanche’s *Orphee*, and *Finnegans Wake*, none of which could qualify as novels were we to compare them with *Don Quixote* or *Madame Bovary, The Egoist* or *The Ambassadors*, “fictional narratives, etc” that are unquestionably novels and nothing else.

The reluctance to provide more explicit and more substantial descriptions of the novel may reflect the admirable desire to avoid the pitfalls of prescriptive theories of genre. But Aristotle’s reflections on tragedy have outlasted those “rules” that later critics dredged from the *Poetics*; and Aristotle’s attempt at description should remain our example. We must really face the facts of critical responsibility, and we must either drop such general categories as “the novel,” “the romance,” and so on, or be prepared to offer justifications for such terms, in the form of more extensive descriptions and discussions. This is not a matter of mere academic quibbling; the question is, as Humpty Dumpty neatly puts it to Alice, “which is to be master” – the words we use or we who use them. Especially in the criticism of literature, when we do not define our terms as precisely as possible, we invite exactly that form of bamboozling in which Humpty Dumpty himself indulges.
An adequate definition of the novel would, of course, have to be totally comprehensive, exhaustive, and infallible. It would have a borrow at once from the history of literature, the study of external form, and the study of the fictional matter of novels in general.

The matter of the novel – the theme that has informed the genre from *Don Quixote* onward – is relatively uncomplicated. The novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from that ignorance which is bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world. In the less loaded terms of Lionel Trilling, the novel deals with a distinction between appearance and reality. It is not necessarily a question of ontological subtleties: the reality to which the novel appeals is that to which it is historically connected, the reality of bourgeois life, of business, and of the modern city. The first Falstaff, as he stands on the field of Shrewsbury, the thought of money metaphorically coloring his speech – as he questions the value of such aristocratic absolutes as chivalric honor and resolves to be a live coward – Falstaff embodies the sensibility that will make the novel possible. The great expectations of the young Hotspur find ironic responses in the lost illusions of the old Sir John. The protagonist of the novel follows the same pattern of disillusionment – which Harry Levin sees as a major part
of what we call realism — from potential fulfillment to actual accomplishment, from a hopeful naivety to a resigned wisdom.

Thematically, then, the novel distinguishes itself from the romance in which the protagonist proves himself a hero, actually fulfills his heroic potentiality. *Vanity Fair* — "A Novel Without a Hero" — is rather an exemplary case than an exception. The protagonist of a novel is likely to be an "anti-hero," an "unheroic hero," as Raymond Giraud calls him — a Miniver Cheevy or a Walter Mitty who is able to elaborate his dreams of glory only by ignoring the material realities of his station and his times.

The action of the novel (which receives various episodic developments, as it informs the particular intrigue or plot of any given novel) is essentially a reworking of the basic action of romance — that familiar story which Joseph Campbell discusses, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, as the "monomyth," and to which Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, gives the more descriptive name of "the quest." A young man goes forth to discover his own nature and the nature of the world; he is often in search of his name, his father, in search of a mysterious treasure. The completion of the quest proves the young man, if he is the protagonist of a romance, to be what he, and the author, and we the readers knew from the start that he was — a hero. In the novel, the "going forth" may be metaphorical rather than actual; but the voyage
often provides the novelistic framework, and the protagonist's movement is always from a narrow environment to a broader one. He may move in space, like Dickens' Pip, from the English countryside to London, and like Balzac's Lucien de Rubempre, from the provinces to Paris; he may move rather in time, with Austen's Emma or Proust's Marcel, from the restricted awareness of childhood to the wider experience of maturity. The goal of the quest — the name and the treasure — may or may not be achieved; but the protagonist of the novel is likely to discover, with Falstaff, that there is no future for heroism, that he himself is a perfectly ordinary man, with the experience and the knowledge that suit his station. The magic name itself proves to be merely an inaccurate pseudonym: Don Quixote, the Knight of the Sad Countenance, is really Alonso Quixano; Lucien de Rubempre — the young "aristocrat" — was born Lucien Chardon.

Although Don Quixote dies with his boots off and Lucien hangs himself in prison, this is not to say that all romances end happily, while all novels end unhappily, that romances incline toward comedy and novels toward tragedy. The hero of a romance may realize his heroic potential only in death — the triumph of the Liebestod at the close of the Tristan legend is perhaps our most familiar example. The protagonist of a novel, on the other hand, may — like Elizabeth Bennet and Tom Jones,
Eugene de Rastignac and Pierre Bezukhov -- live happily ever after; yet all these protagonists succeed only because they have let fall their illusions and their pride. Such a fall, in a novel, is a happy one, since it represents the completion of that educational process with which the novel deals, an education into the realities of the material world and of human life in society.

The theme of the novel is essentially the formation of education. The terms of the education are themselves important, since the process described in the novel is analogous to that described in two other fictional forms, which serve perhaps as the boundaries between which the novelistic sensibility functions. At one extreme stands the romance, with its tale of triumphant adventure and its heroic protagonist. At the other extreme--stand such *contes philosophiques* as *Candide* and *Gulliver's Travels*, tales which depend on protagonists who are incredibly naïve and largely unheroic, which deal in the disillusionments one suffers in trying to apply systems to the unsystematic realities of life. The novel, as the French critic Gustave Kahn suggested, is perhaps more like the *conte philosophique* than like the romance, in that it records a similar process of disillusionment; but while philosophical tales cast such disillusionment in ideological terms, novels treat it experientially, in the terms of quotidian reality. Both the novel and the philosophical tale, however, reject that
“spirit of romance” which sees the world through a haze of imaginative and subjective interpretation, colored at the least by sentimentality and transformed at the most by the poetry of legend and of myth.

The novel would be an essentially ironic fictional form, occupying a middle position between the non-ironic romance and the philosophical tale, which is ironic, but in ways often different from those of the novel. The novel shares with the romance an emphasis on human situations rather than on ideas: both deal in experiential reality rather than theoretical questions. The novel shares with the conte philosophique a distrust of the romance sensibility, the sentimental and mythopoeic attitudes that make romances the enchanting and illusory works they are. Like the philosophical tale, too, the novel has a certain didactic purpose: irony has always been one of the major devices of the rhetor, a device by which the speaker separates his audience into the shrewd and the gullible. Within the total audience is an intelligent elite that responds to the rhetor’s irony, that understands from the first that Brutus is anything but honorable, that divines the real set of moral values behind the apparent one. In other words, the novel may be a far less “popular” form than we usually assume – far less popular, surely, than the romance, courtly, bourgeois, or historical. Romance persisted (and persists) even after the birth and eventual triumph of the novel, simply by adapting its methods
and matter to the fancies of a different social order. It had, after all, survived the late medieval questioning of the secular ethos of courtly romance that resulted in the various Grail cycles. Romance reflects an eternal tendency of the human mind that goes all but unaffected by historical change.

The novel, however, leads the reader back to reality by questioning the basis of romance; and the more sophisticated, the more subtle, or the more devastating the process becomes (as it becomes, in various ways, in Stendhal, and James, and Flaubert), the less "popular" the novel is likely to be, the more limited the audience that savors the novelist's irony.

Novels are relatively more or less "deflationary": Balzac "deflates" more than does George Sand, Flaubert "deflates" more than does Balzac. An equivalent trio of English novelists might be composed of Walter Scott, Dickens, and James. The question is not merely one of chronology, although these two lists might seem to suggest that the history of modern fiction is the record of a progression from an inflationary to a deflationary manner. On the other hand, the movement from burlesque to irony that appeared as early as Don Quixote may be another aspect of the same development.
In the early chapters of *Don Quixote*, Sancho Panza calls his master back to reality; but as they travel through Spain, the knight’s imagination fertilizes his squire’s mind – and by the time they mount the wooden Clavileno, Sancho is as capable of producing hyperbolic fabrications as is Don Quixote. Cervantes, on the other hand, has become progressively more reticent, less willing to tell us the facts, more prone to force his readers to arrive at the truth by their own efforts of understanding. Cervantes’ manner in the second book of *Don Quixote* suggests the manner which triumphs in the nineteenth century, when the novel definitely becomes the vehicle for literary realism. The irony of his novel, and of later novels, arises less from the presence of an *alazon-eiron* pair like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, than from the novelist’s attitude toward the characters and the fictional world he creates. While (as Ian Watt has indicated) the rise of the novel reflects the rise of the middle class and the spread of the bourgeois ethic, the bourgeois himself receives ironic treatment in the nineteenth-century novel, and M.Homais recalls Don Quixote as much as he does Sancho Panza. It is Flaubert’s attitude that counts, and not the social status and intellectual baggage of M.Homais.

The literary *alazon* writes advertisements for himself; he is, in Gustave Kahn’s sense, a “lyric” author, no matter what genre he
produces. His characters and his world are likely to be the projections of his own wish-dreams, his own imaginative transformations of the humdrum world about him. The "inflationary" novelist – a Balzac or a Zola – deals in a reality familiar to us all, but rendered almost hallucinatory. The real Vidocq becomes the diabolical Vautrin; all of Balzac’s characters, Baudelaire remarks, have the genius of their calling and their station. While the romancer transports us to a never-never land of fancy, where all our dreams of glory may be realized, Balzac overloads his reality and loudly proclaims that "all is true." But he protests too much. The "deflationary" – that is, the more ironic – novelist is more likely to disclaim responsibility, to apologize for the story he tells us and the way he tells it. I think of the elaborate fiction Cervantes invents, by which he shifts responsibility for his story to the Arabian chronicler, Cide Hamete Benengeli; of Stendhal’s false modesty, as he feigns shock at the morals and motives of his passionate Italians; of Gide’s review of the characters in Les Fauxmonnayeurs, his pretense that he has followed Bernard and Olivier wherever they chose to lead him. As the novelists continues this process, he arrives at what one usually thinks of as the extremity of the realistic method: like Flaubert, like Verga, he disappears completely from his novel, suppresses all explicit moral judgment, and lets his characters fend for themselves. Yet while understating his
responsibility and his personality, the ironic novelist remains in complete control. The hero of a romance may run away with his story; the protagonist of a novel is always held more tightly in check. Accepting as we do the theory that the novel tends to approximate a slice of life itself, to represent “real” men and women in “real” situations, it may seem paradoxical to suggest that the closing words of *Vanity Fair* – “Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out” – only make explicit what is implicit in every novel. The novelist is a puppeteer, the novel is a puppet show – and the patented collapsible ending of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, the comic resolution of the intrigue in *Tom Jones*, are merely more obvious examples of a common situation.

To look at the matter in another light, the novelist is the god of his fictional universe, observing and controlling his characters from above. Hardy, when he invented a “President of the Immortals” in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, in no way altered the narrative manner, the general authorial attitude that we find in *The Return of the Native* – but he did, consciously or unconsciously, reveal to us the sense of that attitude, the fact that the malicious deity rebuked by Eustacia Vye was in truth Thomas Hardy himself.

The novel as it was said is dying and utterly lifeless in its sudden lack of ability to reflect a current reality more suitable for cinema or
video. That was certainly how it looked at the turn of the 1960s, when a strange new decade found the novelists’ world located in either a super rational dystopia as in Anthony Burgess’s *A Clock Work Orange* or a mad house in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Throughout the 1960s English language authors around the world agreed that times seemed quite insane, with such madness offering such advantages as psychological respite for Doris Lessing’s protagonist in *The Golden Notebook* and transformative comedy for Kurt Vonnegut’s mortals in *Cat’s Cradle*.

But to keep the novel genuinely alive a new understanding of its purpose and way of functioning is needed. Hence the great wave of fictive reinvention is practiced by a new generation of boldly innovative writers who believe that their works are first of all a matter of words. For John Barth, those words are shaped less as reflections of reality than of parodies undertaken at the expense of earlier, more traditional forms of representation novels as early as *The Sot-Weed Factor* and as recent as *The Lost Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* are less stories about something than exercises in the fabulative joy of story telling itself. Thomas Pynchon took similar pleasure in the informational overloads of modern science and contemporary political history; John Hawkes spun captivating narratives not from gothic subjects but from the arabesques of the
imagination infected by its aesthetic pursuits; and from our own popular culture Donald Barthelme found a way of locating reality not among such shards of junk but within the language we use to manage it.

For a time the novel enjoyed a renaissance of formal invention, its unfettered exuberance eclipsing all bounds. In the United States Ronald Sukenick's works flew, according to their titles, both up and Out while in Britain Christine Brooke-Rose's novels take on a life of their own that go successively out, between and thru. Yet there are complaints that such fiction is incestuously academic and too selfishly divorced from the concerns of social life. In Mulligan Strew Gilbert Sorrentino brought the American 1970s to an end with a novel that literally deconstructed itself, its characters in the manner of Flann O' Brien's classic At Swim Two Birds turning on their author but also with the author's own competing forms of innovation. British readers found their mid-1980s vitalized by David Lodge's Small World, a novel whose dozen concurrent narratives critique each other and throw the whole question of post-modern theory into doubt. The notion that there are no real things in the world but rather just systems of differences becomes, in Lodge's hands, a device that fools everyone except his innocent protagonist, whose pathetic yet ultimately winning naïveté (simplicity) proves to be the rock-hard reality against which everything else bounces off. Like a radar or sonar echo, such
bouncing establishes a presence on both ends of the exchange, and so ‘small world’ is uniquely able to have it both ways. But in having it so the author shows how the question need not be so disruptively important after all.

Salaman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* convinced a significant portion of the world that such a book could be tremendous concern to an entire culture and a life-or-death matter for its author. Don Delillo’s *Mao II* reviews the same conditions that both prompt and threaten a writer like Rushdie’s work and finds that in the 1990s, the novelist and terrorist share similar roles in shaping the imagination. The important point to remember is that in becoming so immediately responsive to the world the novel has not returned to a mode of unquestioning realism, nor have the literary achievements of the past two decades been discarded. Rather in the 1990s the novelist can look at the world with a new sense of vision and write in a way that forever reminds us that, in Ronald Sukenick’s words, fiction is not just the news but ‘Our response’ to the news. Compelled not to be ‘about’ experience but to be ‘more experience.’ The late 20th century novel returns to the world freshly empowered to face life not simply in its social and political dimensions but on the imaginative level. “It is at this level of activity that both writer and reader agree that the social and political are not things to be accepted as givens but engaged
as artifices much like fiction's own — artifices that remind us how the world we share is essentially made up and that the contest over who directs this fabricating 'can’ well be a life or death struggle.”

Salaman Rushdie’s case is, of course, the most notorious one, but its implications set the terms for fiction in our era. In his 1990 Herbert Read Memorial Lecture, presented in absentia as Is Nothing Sacred? Rushdie made opening and closing references to William H.Gass, novelist and theoretician of innovative fiction, citing Gass’s belief that authors of the fictive “sign every word they write.” As such their words take on an importance no longer shared with science in an age of uncertainty and indeterminacy or history during times when all accounts are considered relative. “Only religious statements stand on such totally independent, absolute authority; and there lies the trouble for a novelist who writes about matters fundamental to the beliefs of certain readers, readers who feel challenged and insulted by such words in a way never entertained in response to outright attacks from the quarters of science and history for words in those disciplines are not signed with their writers’ imaginative authority, an authority some fundamentalists regard as religion’s own.”

Rushdie’s defense looks to fiction’s strength that by posing alternate worlds the novelist allows readers to see their own more clearly.
and that instead of attacking any particular person’s or culture’s Credo. *The Satanic Verses* respects the imaginative power of belief. Yet other authors have gone on the offensive seizing the turmoil in which the novel has suddenly found itself, and directing it in a counter-assault against those socio-political forces that have made conditions of life as precarious as those of characters in a novel whose author has an agenda dedicated to violent change. Motivating Don Delillo’s 1991 novel, *Mao II* is the understanding that the novelist and terrorist share a common role in striving to remake a history. Delillo’s own *Libra* had recast the assassination of President John F. Kennedy by taking the accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, and making him a creature not of “political forces but of fictive-fascination.” In *Mao II* Delillo, admittedly impressed by Salaman Rushdie’s sudden prominence in international affairs previously beyond the bounds of novel writing, pushes the theory much farther by putting a novelist in competition with terrorists, the prize being human kind’s current vision of what constitutes a desirable world.

In struggling for that prize, novelists and terrorists share a common object to which their efforts are directed; not a political structure or other material locus of power, but rather human consciousness itself. This new state of affairs builds on a sympathy that has been present in fiction, especially fiction’s most popular forms, almost from the beginning. As a
terrorist spokesman in Mao II tells the protagonist, himself a reclusive author, “Through history, it’s the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark. Where are your sympathies? With the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, the militaristic state? Or with the terrorist?”

Such allusions to the fictive worlds of George Orwell and Graham Greene are obvious; what is amazing is how their novels, while telling of volatile conditions. “Once seemed so stable themselves, while today novels and the persons who write them are as close to the edge as any of Greene’s fabled heroes.”

This understanding is ultimately beneficial, for it unleashes fiction’s power to express vast areas of human activity, especially areas that have previously lacked a voice. By admitting that reality itself is not an unchallengeable given but is instead a definition and a definition that is up for contention—our era has come into live with what anthropologists have known for most of this country: that a culture’s view of the world succeeds to the extent that it is a persuasive account, and that in modern times those who propose such accounts are fictive artists. Consider not just the world in Wilson Harri’s 1982 novel, The Angel at the Gate, but how it is portrayed. As a native of Guyana living and writing in London, Harris is privileged to depict a world for which fiction had no real place
before current times; moreover, new flexibilities in narrative allow him a voice unique in its departure from mainstream of received standards. Most importantly, the way he views his world becomes a discovery for the reader, who is invited to see his or her activity in reading the book replicated in the activities of the novel’s characters, all of whom experience the world by means of reading the texts that compose it. These particular texts were not acknowledged is the key, just as in the American southwest author Leslie Mormon Silko can weave a convincing narrative in her novel *Ceremony* not by using the dominant culture’s language but by drawing on the many-fold forms of expression available to her in her tribe’s oral history, myths, and song. New Zealand has its own language, composed not just of Maori phrases, but of idioms from Irish, American, and English ways of speaking as well is evident in Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*, a novel that proves again how representing a reality is secondary to finding the special form by which it can be expressed.

The most evident group of writers empowered by fiction’s new wealth and multiplicity of expression have been women. While some critics would think that opening the pages of novels to explicitly womanly concerns would lead to a de-aestheticizing and overtly politicized programmes. “Just the opposite has occurred whereas it has been the homological language of patriarchal authority that not only oppressed
dissenting voices but kept both expressions and visions within firmly restrictive lines, finding a voice for women’s narratives has opened the way to a universe of new forms.”

Some have been dialogical, multivoiced choruses whose carnival of song have allowed story telling to become a multi-faceted affair. Such is the practice in Alice Walker’s *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, a reminder that just as there can be no single typical black woman character, so too do their stories demand vastly different styles of telling. Even more significant are the ways these woman character’s voices must struggle against the dominant style. For Rose Lily, this means interjecting her thoughts into the text of a marriage ceremony; for Myrna, it involves writing a story of her own and tearing it into disarranged pieces to prevent its successful plagiarism by a rival wale. Silence and even muteness are new forms of articulation; not only is it inappropriate to write the oppressor’s language, but Walker shows as well how previously unheard statements can now speak volumes, as in “Rannie’s unbounded devotion to her dying baby and a spurned wife’s rage against the ideas that have seduced her husband from her.”

One of Alice Walker’s narrative insights is that women sequestered in their house-keeping duties often have no one to talk with; this recurrent situation in the stories of *In Love and Trouble* prompts the major structural device of *The Color Purple*, where the protagonist,
having no one to talk or even write to, writes her questioning and revealing letters to God.

Finding means to expression in a culture where someone else's text controls the nature of reality is a concern to which women writers respond not just thematically but in terms of technique, for technique itself is the issue in finding a voice where articulation is denied. Ursula Le Guin's *Earth Sea Trilogy* posits this struggle in anthropological terms, while Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* expresses it politically. A successful amalgamation of anthropology, sociology and politics leads to great technical advances in the works of Grace Paley, a committed feminist and anti-war activist who nevertheless believes that fiction works best when working as imaginative art. Her choice not to write a novel but to craft several volumes of interrelated stories reflects her view that in our day there can be no single totalizing vision, but rather many different aspects of the same character, (a woman of Paley's age named Faith), who can express herself in the stories she writes, conversations with her aged father, often about conflicting theories of story-telling and warnings to young parents shouted from her second storey window, "Speech, Speech!" One of her auditors chides when being so lectured; but Paley's achievement as a fictionist is that instead of delivering a politically
pertinent statement straight out, she devises a narrative strategy for expressing those same politics in an imaginatively compelling way.

The great achievement in this decade’s worth of fiction is that the novelist’s concern has not only been brought back to the world, but returned there made a new by virtue of years of metafictive struggle with only apparently abstract issues. Whereas once fiction risked being reduced to sociology or history now it can entertain those concerns and others from a posture of aesthetic vitalization. The novel’s business is not with laws or mores per se but with the imaginative structures that produce them; and an eye for such structures, which in this case involve questions of voice and textuality, distinguish the course novelists have followed over the past one-third of a century that in sum constitutes our “contemporary” period.

Malcolm Bradbury, one of the most Britain’s representative writers career began in 1959 with a series of traditional “University Novels” including Eating People is Wrong, Stepping West Ward and The History Man. All the novels wrote in the traditional style of social satire popularly accepted since Evelyn Waugh perfected this form in the 1930s. But by the early 1980s Bradbury could see new advantages in following innovative fictions lead and letting the form question itself; hence his masterpiece, Rates of Exchange which surpasses satire by effectively deconstructing all
of the assumptions that constitute both the academic life and novels about it. Systems of difference rather than things in themselves are the subjects of contemporary thoughts, and Bradbury acknowledges this distinction by departing entirely from his previous university venues of red brick, the model of Birmingham used in *Eating People is Wrong*, American for *Stepping West Ward* where the satire was of Indiana University, or newly regional, the University of East Anglia made fictive and mythical in *The History Man*. And creating an entirely different system that of the imaginary Eastern European country ‘Slanka’ and its hopelessly bureaucratic culture and seats of higher learning. As befits this new interest, the novelist is less interested in satirizing these conditions than exposing their generative forces, which for Slanka means decoding its language. The oddities of Slanka’s reality become evident from the curious ways its grammar operates; like a borrowed word dropped into a foreign language, Bradbury’s English professor protagonist is caught up within these linguistic transformations until nearly chewed up by them, he is spit out into the international transit lounge of Frankfurt Airport, from which he retreats to his post in Britain, the Slankan text he meant to bring with him having been exploded by the police as unclaimed left luggage.

Bradbury’s case is again instructive, for instead of concocting further satires he spends the balance of the 1980s generating further texts
from Rates of Exchange all of them based on languages and other systems of differences. First there is *Why Come to Slanka?* Published in the form of a tourist's guide-book but actually functional as a novel drawing as it does on a fully imaginative world and constructed as it is on predicates of fancy and amusement rather than of information. The 'information' itself is hilarious from the motto of the Gestapo like state travel agency, *We Have Ways of Making You Travel* to the helpful glossary of sample dialogues, most of which place the visitor in horrifying predicaments. Then the entire philosophy of system and difference is given novelistic treatment in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge*, in which a Derrida like a French philosopher is tracked in a manner less satirical of content than of form itself. Finally, there is a novelistic text produced by the author responding to his own literary and academic life: *Unsent Letters* a series of imaginative responses one could never make in the actual world but which once made as fictive exercises reveal some of the sillier aspects of lives we are forced to lead.

Hence the novel is once again engaged with the world, but less with the world’s objects than with the systems and structure that produce them. In the United States the identifiable trend has been toward a style called "minimalism," an indication of realism’s attempt to do its job with
a minimum of mimetic references while leaving maximum space for playing with those references' operations.

Among many rising practitioners of this tradition a few names standout: Stephen Dixon, Ann Beattie, Bobbie Ann Mason and Raymond Carver. Minimalism is an invitation to create virtual universes of interest and action. This can be best seen in the work of most prolific fiction writer Stephen Dixon. His works show that there can be an encyclopedia of interest actuated by the merest utterance. Even the simplest declarative statement in a Dixon work is immediately qualified, debated or withdrawn. Those actions in turn demand a response, and immediately an action is under way – an action that takes place right before the reader on the page and within the manageable confines of the tale’s first materials. That such behaviour is so much like life in its rhythmic variation of breathing in and breathing out makes Dixon’s writing inexhaustibly fascinating particularly as he is able to generate entire novels from such minimal provocations as a bar tender trying to do his day’s job within the systematics of supervised routine (work) and a man’s momentary notice of an attractive woman at a crowded party (Fall and Rise).

Through Ann Beattie’s frequent appearances in the New Yorker magazine and strong selling novels, she has become minimalism’s leader, and her own comments on such art have been instructive. “What does one
say about the undeniable?” she asks in her book about painter Alex Katz and her answer sheds light on her style of fiction as well. One must follow the lead of those most innovative pioneers, the French *nouveaux romanciers*, in being dedicated to the phenomenological surface. A boring reduction? Not so, for the subject thus portrayed is seen as “radiating from what it is, not from what it has been or from what it will be.” A narrative will result not one spelled out for us but inherent in how the world itself has made its subject, composed as it is of an inter text of cultural references. Beattie’s stories apparently slight and spare are strategically rich in suggestive signs, which rather than enunciated by the author allowed to be read by the reader. Instead of chronicling the destruction of a relationship Beattie catches her people in the act of pulling apart; from that action all the rest may be deduced.

In her fiction, Beattie deals mostly with relationships, as she tells us whether she writes about relations between parents and children, husbands and wives, or men and women in general, she accurately records the little joys and sorrows that are daily experienced by members of her generation – the “flower children” of the sixties grown into the yuppies of the eighties. But her faithful depiction is often unflattering and critical; She holds a harsh mirror up to her troubled society and reveals with disconcerting clarity its imperfections.
Ann Beattie has emerged as the most significant author in contemporary American fiction. She has done more than any other to redefine the neorealist movement in the contemporary period and to influence contemporary literature's progression from metafiction or surfiction to an acceptance of the conventions of realism.

An attempt is made in the following chapters to study the works of Ann Beattie in the perspective of neorealism and evaluate them in terms of their social contexts and characterization.
References


5. Ibid.


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22. Ibid; p.94.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid; p.xii.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.