
UNIT 1 GENESIS OF THEMES: PREPARATION FOR WRITING

Structure

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1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit seeks to explain the genesis of the creative impulse in a writer. By the end of this unit, you should have learnt to distinguish the features of a genuine creative **impulse** in order to give it a concrete form.

- It is distinguishable from a superficial emotion by its recurrent and empathic nature;
- it needs distancing from the event in terms of time and impersonality;
- it is concretised through an intermix of sharpened experience, observation and imagination;
- it may arise out of factual events or from submerged memories of the subconscious;
- it is wedded to motivation and not vice versa;
- it can be cultivated and developed into a short story or a poem.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 1 of the first course on **General Principles of Writing** we dealt with the fundamental norms of writing like the need for lucidity and directness, authenticity and credibility, as well as the nature and function of the authorial voice.

This opening Unit of Block 2 on 'Structure of Material' is concerned with the genesis of themes and the preparatory stages of writing.

The choice of themes for a possible short story or a **poem** is rarely deliberate; it is mostly spontaneous. That is, themes occur to you as you go about your daily work, and you begin to feel ~~that~~ it will be a good idea to put pen to paper and write on the theme that has come your way. But does each such impulse get transformed into a short **story/poem**? No. Quite often the impulse withers away, in spite of the brilliant promise it offered you at one point of time. And in quite a few cases, while you do start writing it out at the earliest opportunity, and with enthusiasm unbounded, you are compelled to leave it off mid-way. It's all the same whether you tear it up in disgust or treasure the aborted mess, hoping to do something about it at some future date. Then, again, there would be that odd one you complete somehow or other in a determined sweep and add to your tally, but you are never satisfied with the way it **has** turned out, and suffer the feeling that the theme that occurred to you was not particularly bright, and you should have better left it alone. These are **the** common occupational hazards that a writer has to put up with.

1.2 ORIGINS OF THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

So much for the **themes that** may **occur** to you. Their origins may elude you, rooted **as** they may be in **memories** submerged in your subconscious. You should honour these impulses and test them for possible viability. Now use the methods suggested later on in this Unit **before** you start writing.

It would indeed be tragic in terms of time-management, if so many themes should be born only to perish. Therefore, you should persevere in using words and phrases which approximate the original.

1.3 GENUINENESS OF THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

You should **make** sure **that** the **impulse** is genuine. **Assuming** that the **impulse** has troubled you on the emotional plane, as it often does, the question you should ask-of yourself is—charming and overwhelming as it may have been at the given moment, was it not rather a **transient** and hence a superficial emotion? Just as an auntie of the neighbourhood bursts into tears at the sight of a puppy in distress or a bride leaving her mother's home? Could it have happened that you were taken in by the setting or the atmosphere? In a certain romantic atmosphere of moon **and** faraway music and what have you, you found the dialogue of an old couple particularly cute, and you thought you could write a poem on the theme of 'Love in the Afternoon'. Or while passing through a slum **you** were moved by the sight of a young, **goodlooking** mother being harassed by a brood of unkempt and potbellied children, and you thought you could write a story on the theme of 'Roses in the Dust' etc. It may well be that you can write a **powerful** piece on either. But let the **confidence** **grow** in you over a period of **time**, **after** you have satisfied yourself that (i) such emotive reactions have been fairly recurrent with you in **similar** situations, and (ii) you can identify reasonably well with the old couple or the young mother in the hard core of their lives.

Distancing is necessary **for** creative effort. Conversely, do not trust the impulse for **immediate** action, if it is much too intense, being acutely personal. Here one remembers the famous phrase of Wordsworth, 'emotion **recollected** in tranquillity' **as** the base of poetry. Let the storm settle into a calm surface; it is only then that you can write on it effectively, Truman **Capote**, a contemporary fiction writer of repute, writes in a similar **vein**—'I have to exhaust the emotion before I feel clinical enough to analyse and project it. . . My own theory is that the writer should have dried his tears long long before setting out to evoke similar reactions in a reader'. What he means to say is that **insofar** as the emotional stimulus is concerned, a **certain** distancing is necessary for creative effort. To cite an example: you have lost a child. You are naturally **overwhelmed** with grief **and**, being a writer, you **wish** to **release** yourself in verse or **prose**. You may surely do so for therapeutic reasons, just as you could release yourself in a **flood** of tears. But the best results in terms of literary merit can be achieved **only** when you can look upon the event from a distance—thanksto the passage of time, among other things—and can call upon other parents to share those **intenser** moments with you. Your literary piece would then be both authentic in terms of **emotional** experience, and objective in terms of expressed **thought**, the ideal combination that any writer could devoutly wish for.

1.4 THE CREATIVE IMPULSE AS DISTINCT FROM POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MOTIVATION

Do not **misjudge** the **stirrings** of an **abiding** motivation for a creative impulse. Suppose you are strongly motivated, by **temperament** and conviction, to expose the evils of social justice. Undoubtedly such motivation would govern your outlook on the **human** condition, and you would **smell** injustice in a situation, which to **some** others may be no more than a curiosity in terms of **interpersonal conflict**. **There** is

nothing inherently wrong in **such colouration** that is bound to creep into the works of a motivated writer (the motivation covered could well be cultural, philosophical or any other). But what is important is that the genesis should indeed be a creative impulse to start with, which could later be wedded to the motivation, and not vice versa. As a writer you should consider the impulse **as** creative only when you react to a **situation** primarily **because** it is interesting from the human angle, and only additionally because of its social implications.

The late Bhagabati Panigrahi, a noted writer who was also one of the founders of the Communist Party in **Orissa**, wrote a story named '**Shikar**' which has acquired considerable fame and **has** also been turned into a competent movie entitled 'Mrigaya' by **Mrinal Sen**. Here the theme, obviously, is of social injustice—the oppression of poor **tribals** by the moneyed henchmen of an alien administration. But one imagines that **Bhagabati Panigrahi** must have been impelled to write the story when he came across, through his observation-cum-imagination, a character such **as Ghinua**, a simple tribal who could never understand till his death, by hanging, the strange logic that he did not deserve an award more than any average hunter, for having chopped off the head of a well-known oppressor and presented it to the local **Commissioner**. It is the **bizarre** simplicity of truth embodied in the personality of the character that lends particular charm to the story and not the well-known fact of social injustice in the colonial times.

And so, look for the seeds of an illuminating circumstance in human terms—absurd, funny, or tragic as the case may be—in the impulse you have had to write a **certain** story or poem; you could consider later whether it would also serve your cherished motivation.

A story with a motivation written into it should indeed be richer, for it gives an extra dimension to the story. But let it not appear that the characters have been directed to 'prove' the truth of the motivation; for that may be self-defeating. On the other hand, give them the importance of being human and the freedom that goes with it—freedom to love, weep, howl, fight and act in all sorts of funny and foolish ways, in situations that may be called socially evil, and you will see how your motivation shines through the intensely human **narrative**.

For example, let us compare two stories that you may gain access to without much difficulty. One is Anton **Chekhov's** 'In Exile'—the story of the young Tartar and the old Simeon, nicknamed Wiseacre, thrown together in exile in Siberia **as ferrymen**, along with some others. The young man clings pitifully to the illusion that life **can** yet be lived, and so he feels miserable thinking of his young wife and family left at home, whereas the old man, who has seen it all, makes himself believe that he is happy, and **repeats—'God grant everyone such a life!**' The cruel irony of the human situation in **extremis** caused by the socio-political system comes **through** in the interaction between these two characters, both foolishly human and vulnerable, with others inciting them, as it were, from the sidelines. See how understated, yet devastating, the concluding lines are:

All of them lay down. The wind blew the door open. Snow drifted into the hut. No one could bring **himself** to get up and shut the door; it was cold, but they put up with it.

'And I am happy,' muttered Simeon as he fell asleep, 'God grant everyone such a life!'

You surely are the devil's own. Even the devil needn't bother to **take you.**'

Sounds like the barking of a dog came from outside.

Why is that? Who is there?

'It's the Tartar crying.'

'Oh! he is an odd one.'

'He'll get used to it!' said Simeon, and soon fell asleep. Soon the others slept too, and the door was left open,

1.5 PREPARATION FOR WRITING

Finally, do your homework. After you have made sure that your impulse is **genuine**, if not overwhelmingly **charged** with a personal emotion, and not '**created**' by a social or other motivation, the **task** before you is to convert the impulse into **the hardcore** genesis of a theme. In essence, what you have to do is to concretise **the impulse you** have had into flesh and blood and living tissue, so that it may **acquire a body**. This is the last stage before you put pen to paper, and it constitutes what may be termed as preparation for writing.

1.5.1 Marshalling of relevant facts concerning locale, atmosphere and characters

If you have a story in mind, you should take particular care to marshal the facts—authentic and recognisable details of the locale, the atmosphere, the historical or social background if that be relevant, as also of the **character(s)** you have decided to summon for your purpose. Focus on the concrete facts of perception which would make the reader alive to the 'reality' of the story, even though you would be **mixing** them up cleverly with loads of imaginative fiction.

Take, for example, R.K. **Narayan's** Malgudi. There is indeed no such town in India or elsewhere. But we seem to find our own small town (for those of us who are familiar with one, in present living or nostalgic memory) talking to us in numerous ripples of events, **peopled**, as it is, not merely by recognisable men and women and children, but by temples, hospitals, markets, goats, donkeys, **and what** have you. The writer has brought them close to us, no less by the care he has taken to study and **organise** the authentic factual details for his story, than by the other charms of his story-telling genius.

The importance of fact-finding is less, but only relatively so, in a poem. Subjectivity **has** no doubt **been, traditionally**, a distinctive feature in poetry. Nevertheless, thanks to the value placed on realism in modern literary thought, poems are considered to be richer and hence more acceptable, if they are seen to be in response to concrete scenes and situations of life in our times, as a reader would **recognise them—e.g.** the tourist and the beggar-woman following him gazing together at a **Mithuna sculpture** in the temple-walls of Konarak, the body of a child floating down the river in the **aftermath** of a bloody riot, the poor fish in the marketplace staring in awe and wonder, as it were, at the **amplitude** of the rich housewife closing in on 'him' for the bargain . . . **etc.** Won't the poem be more picturesque and powerful if you **could convey** authentic details of the **Konarak sculpture, a river** bank that was indeed **witness to a** bloody riot in recent memory, or the sights and sounds of a typical fish-market? And then what about longer poems rooted in history of **mythology**? **Can you** trust your creative impulse to yield a worthwhile poem unless you arm yourself sufficiently with factual **details** of the locale, atmosphere and **character(s)** relevant (or supposedly relevant, in a mythological piece) to the situation you **have** in mind?

1.5.2 Combining experience, observation and imagination

The emphasis, as above, on 'homework' is derived from the compulsion, in literary parlance, of the circumstance, that while a creative impulse is derived from (a) experience, (b) observation, and (c) imagination, the three ingredients **are hardly** ever matched in ideal proportions in the mental equipage of a writer. Hence the need to deepen the experience, sharpen the observations and avoid overdoing the imagination, by taking upon oneself, for the time being, the role of a researcher, and thus provide the genesis of a theme, that will hold, for a story or a **poem**.

1.6 ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THEMES

While the guidelines indicated above would apply to the genesis of creative effort in **general**, it will be advisable to apply **some** separate and additional criteria in **the case** of short stories and **poems**.

1.6.1 Themes for short stories

A theme may pass the tests referred to above and you may have **made** the necessary preparations, but it is still possible that it does not lend itself to the format of a short story, though it could **be** excellent material for a piece of journalistic feature-writing. So before starting to **work** on the theme (a) you should satisfy yourself that it is susceptible of **being converted** into a **story**, i.e. a tale that **begins** with a promise, can normally sustain a **conflict** or complication on its way, and ends with a certain revelation; and (b) you **should** be fairly confident that it will say, or appear to say, something 'new' **about the** human condition, howsoever limited the framework of your experience or observation may be.

Thus, for example, the antics of the **bandarwallah (monkeyman)**, sporting a flowing white beard and **indulging** in toothless chatter, who seeks to entertain the children of the **neighbourhood** with the performance of his monkey, much less **interesting** than his own, may have prompted you to write something on the funny, yet sad situation. Apparently, it would make for a delightfully moving feature-article. But could it also be brought within the **format** of a short story? Yes,—if you could, through your further observation and imagination, weave the outlines of a tale around the fascinating character. Possibly you could connect the mirth of his toothless **grin** to the ebullience of his youth, and his pathetic dedication to the trade, hardly popular in a city, of playing the **monkey**, to a fierce sense of independence that seeks to defy the fates which have been chasing the sunlights out of his life **one** by one. So what seems pitiful and ridiculous **too**, **could** well be an essay in bravery. Or could it be his way of taking it out on his family, a cranky old man pitted against his practical third generation? Whatever it is, you have to connect it with a tale, the brief story of his life or one outside it and so 'reveal' the essence of his character at the end. See if your theme can yield **such** a tale. And having assured yourself that you can make it, on with your story, and best of luck.

This example refers to a **so-called 'character-story'**. But there are many other ways of telling a story, derived **from** the twin prerequisites referred to above, and there are several other **cognate** considerations that go into the writing of a story. These are matters that would be **dealt** with in detail when the speciality of a short story as a distinct literary form is covered (Course 3).

1.6.2. Themes for poetry

While the writer's **statement** in a **short story** comes through by traversing a certain distance, **the** statement in a poem has to grip the reader's thought and imagination in an instant. This being so, **it** is of utmost importance before writing a poem on a well-chosen theme that **you** should be committed totally, right at the beginning, to what you are going to say and how. That is, to the basic thought-content and the tone (fearful, angry, excited, reflective or whatever) that you wish to adopt. The words will come later. **You** may have to chop and hew them any number of times. But your sights must be pretty **clear** at the outset, on the '**what** and **how**' of your poem-to-be, which would determine the overall nature of the impact you wish to create in the mind of the **reader**.

Let us take for example **the** theme of being lost in the woods on an evening when the darkness is setting in—a traditional yet **fascinating** theme which has a fable-like charm about it that has enticed poets through the ages, from the immortal Dante in his 'The Divine Comedy' to the modern poet of today, anxious to seize upon an image which would be rich in **possibilities** in terms of the various **kinds** of response that it tends to evoke. **There** is a **fatal charm** about such themes, and they can tie you up in knots, if you are not careful enough to start with.

In a poem the **thought-content** and the tone **often tend** to **coalesce**; **the** verbal, **seeking** to **express** a thought, would merge into the non-verbal, i.e. the pervasive mystical **experience** of the poem which can only be expressed symbolically. In its totality it may be, as most modern poems are, a complex **phenomenon** in awareness **that** you **wish** to share with the reader. Even **so**, it is necessary for your **poetic** craft that **you should** commit yourself to the quintessence of your statement in the mould of an overall emotion, before you **begin**. **Using**

1.8. ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) An emotional **reaction** to a scene or incident, however **strong**, is a passing phase, unless it **continues** to recur in similar situations and disturbs you deeply. A genuine creative **impulse** is distinguishable by a persistent emotional turmoil as well as a **capacity** for identification with the object.
- ii) Distancing is necessary to get away from excessive personal involvement, in order to control **the** overflow of emotion. Creativity needs a measure of calm and detachment.
- iii) Every creative **impulse** has a deeper and more pervasive human perspective than motivation **which** constitutes a strong sense of purpose in a writer. In any great writing, **motivation** does not dominate the creative impulse but only subserves it.

Activity 2

- i) The three factors **involved** in creativity are experience, observation and imagination. **Unfortunately**, imagination alone is **often-commissioned** to substitute for experience and observation. This invariably leads to shallow writing.
- ii) **Hints**
Write about **something** that really happened to you. If that is not possible, then recall a similar incident that affected you deeply. Precise details would indicate close observation.

Imagination could **help** you to alter your account from a mere report to a fictional **narrative—change** of locale, names, descriptions of people and so on.
- iii) **Hints**
A writer's creative **impulse** enables him to raise a mere local event to the level of a universal experience.

1.9 GLOSSARY

You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the literary terms used in this Unit.

Atmosphere is the mood and feeling of a story. It is **created** by the writer through the use of imagery and symbols and communicates itself directly to the reader.

Conflict: In a literary work this term refers to **the tension** in a situation between characters who are in opposition to each other.

Fable: A fable is a short fictional tale, in prose or verse, in which animals often act out human roles. It is designed to make a point quickly, clearly and sharply.

Irony involves the perception of a difference between words and their meanings, between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality.

Mythology is the study of tales and legends of a particular **culture**. Myths offer explanations for the supernatural origins of man and his universe, and centre around a culture hero.

UNIT 2 OPENING

Structure

- 2.0 **Aims and Objectives**
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The importance of opening
 - 2.2.1 False starts
 - 2.2.2 Different genres and conventions
 - 2.2.3 The opening as a unit of composition
- 2.3 Planned narratives and openings
 - 2.3.1 The opening in the novel
 - 2.3.2 The opening paragraph or paragraphs
- 2.4 The opening and the short story
 - 2.4.1 Different types and targets
 - 2.4.2 General hints and suggestions
- 2.5 The narrative modes
- 2.6 Summing up
- 2.7 Activities : aids to answers
- 2.8 Glossary

'2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Unit ^{is} ~~reference~~ on the technique of 'opening' in creative writing with particular ~~reference~~ to the short story. It does not give you any readymade **recipé** for writing a short story, but talks about details which you will have to keep clearly in your mind in attempting this form. At the end of the lesson you should understand:

- ♦ the importance of 'opening' in a short story;
- ♦ that every genre of creative writing, be it poetry, drama or fiction, has its own particular requirements which **determine** the opening of each;
- ♦ that there can be two types of openings—the planned and the improvised—and this is applicable to both novels and short stories; and that
- ♦ in a short story the nature of the opening is determined by the target audience and by the conventions and requirements of the publication you are writing for.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we dealt with the genesis of themes in the mind of the writer, **the** genuineness of the **creative** impulse, its connection with the writer's motivation, **and** the art of combining experience and observation with an eye on relevant facts **concerning** the locale, atmosphere and characters.

In this Unit, we examine the importance of opening in a fictional narrative, acquaint **you** with the dominant narrative modes, and offer hints and suggestions about how to begin a story effectively.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF OPENING

In all types of creative writing, the first thing that teases the writer is the question of 'opening'. That is to say, he has to face the problem of **finding** a suitable answer to the question: 'How do I strike the right note at the start? He **must** solve it, if he is going to be able to continue at **all**, even when he happens to be an experienced artist. **Naturally**, then, the apprentice would be even more put to the **test, for** though certain helpful suggestions could, at times, lead him into the right street, no set rules or formulae could make him achieve the desired effect. There is a kind of mystery **about** the whole creative process, and the opening of a narrative is a part of that mystery. There is, as Oscar **Wilde** put it, pain at 'the birth of a star', and **each** new poem or play, story or novel, essay or biography, presents that problem. There is **distress** and despair when the blank paper seems to mock one's efforts, or, soon **enough**, becomes a pitiful **scrawl** of writing and scratching.

However, there is **nothing to worry about**, for **any** genuine engagement with **human** reality and any true **impulse** to create will **eventually** produce **the** desired **effect**. It is chiefly a matter of **trust**, application and insight.

2.2.1 False starts

False starts are **really** a part of the creative process, and need not cause undue anxiety. Even the greatest writers, as their diaries, manuscripts and letters, *etc.* show, have had to battle their **way** through after a series of **agonising** and awkward starts. What is important then, is the ability of the writer to act as his own critic, and see if he has been able to put **across** clearly and economically the **ideas** his imagination is struggling to organise. Indeed, to secure the right note, and the right tone, he may have to labour over the first few lines or even paragraphs. Maybe the scene or the idea will have to be written down in more than one narrative form, and from more than one angle, to test **which** of these modes suits him best in that particular case. And once the **imagination** is beginning to tick, as it were, the narrative often finds its own rhythm, and begins to take off on its own steam. Revision, then, is a part of one's vision of things, and must not be taken as a sign of failure.

2.2.2 Different genres and conventions

Obviously, there cannot be any standard advice with regard to the opening of a narrative. Each kind, **poetry**, drama, fiction, *etc.*, **has its own** peculiar requirements. Even now, daring experiments can only be made within the norms of **each kind** of writing. What may be an apt opening in a narrative poem may sound awkward in a novel or a short story. In other words, the opening of a narrative is organically linked to the requirements of **the** type.

Clearly, what has **been** suggested above applies chiefly to different **forms of fiction**—**the** novel, the novella, **the** tale or the short story—and is not intended to cover drama and poetry, though the question of opening is, in its own way, important in those genres also. True, a **poem** may begin with a startling line that makes the reader sit up, but we are not **talking** of openings here in that sense and context. The opening, in our context, is an **integral part** of the narrative process, and in a lyric or a song or a sonnet, there is hardly a **narrative** to tell. For the birth of **a poem** is often a matter of luck, sudden **illumination** or breakthrough, though even a great poet like W.B. Yeats is known to have **prepared** a prose version of a contemplated poem, and lifted some lines from it to fit the poetic frame. We are also leaving **drama** out of this account, for the theatre has its **own** conventions and constraints, and **therefore**, a separate statement would be needed for it.

2.2.3 The opening as a unit of composition

As a unit of **composition** in a novel or a short story, **the opening** is a part of an organic whole, moving (a) towards a visionary centre and (b) and then a logical ending.

2.3 PLANNED NARRATIVES AND OPENINGS

Some novelists and **short** story writers plan their narratives very carefully, and go on to prepare a **full outline** to be fleshed out later. In such cases, the opening is carefully devised so that it becomes a part of **the** operative vision and structure. It impinges directly or indirectly upon the **middle** (development and process), and more significantly, upon the ending of the novel or the tale in question. In the hands of a great artist like **Henry James** such a plan usually, though not always, works well. For **basically**, such constraints do not augur well for the health of the tale. Some novelists, therefore, **depend** a good deal on improvisation en route, and leave the narrative to take its **significant form** out of its own inner compulsions and **energies**. One may recall here **Thackeray's** statement that his characters took him where they liked; he **was**, so to **speak**, in their hands. A modern novelist like Saul Bellow, for instance, moves away **from** the **planned**, tight structures of his earlier novels (**Dangling Man, Seize the Day, The Victim**) to the open, **relaxed**, picaresque, catch-all form in later novels (such as **The Adventures of Augie March, Henderson**

the **Rain King** and **Herrzog**). The point we are trying to make is that the opening as a unit of composition may not be fully planned in advance where the novel in particular is concerned. It may even be desirable not to do so.

2.3.1 The opening in the novel

Since this Unit is more directed toward the shorter fiction, only minimal comments are offered as regards general rules or ideas governing the opening in the novel.

As we have hinted already, it hardly matters how the first sentence or even the first paragraph or paragraphs begin in a novel, though should the opening in this limited-sense be arresting, startling or amusing, it straightaway arouses the reader's interest. Eventually, of course, it is the full body of the novel and its total effect that would tend to measure its value, not a flashy sentence or two at the start. Still, there are some **interesting** examples of such startling openings, and one of the **well-known** examples is Jane **Austen's Pride and Prejudice**. Its celebrated opening sentence has already passed into the realm of sayings and aphorisms. 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a **wife**.'

Again, **Tolstoy's Anna Karenina** starts **thus**: 'Happy families are all **alike**, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' These are good examples, but, **as** a rule, the opening sentence or sentences in a work of longer fiction would hardly be remembered by the reader when he is through with the book. Or, take another opening:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a **moocow** coming down along the road that a **nicens** little boy named baby tuckoo. . .

The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
—James Joyce

The appeal of such an opening is almost purely linguistic, and it has hardly any **significant** bearing on the theme of the novel, but its 'fairy story' air **and** its repetitive pattern and slang make it an admirable example of an **arresting opening**.

2.3.2 The opening paragraph or paragraphs

A good opening may set the tone away as in Saul Bellow's **Henderson the Rain King**:

What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. **Things** got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.

When I think of my condition at the age of **fiftyfive** when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins—my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my **farm**, my animals, my habits, my money, my music, lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, 'No, no, get back, curse you, let me along!' But how can they let me along? They belong **to** me. They are mine. **And** they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.

Now, the two-line opening **paragraph** has hardly any great merit, but the condensed, capsuled second paragraph springs upon the reader all in a rush to whet his appetite, and soon plunges him into the whole mad world of this American **millionaire**. And somehow, **amazingly**, the high comic tone persists till the end. The opening has done the trick, so to speak. But equally, the raciness of the tone **characterises** the tempo of this rambling novel. So, here, the opening paragraphs tie up with the opening **as** a unit of **composition** in a long narrative.

Activity 1

- i) Why is 'opening' important in a fictional narrative? (50 words)
- ii) Distinguish between a 'planned' and an 'improvised' **opening**. (35 words)
(Check your **answers** with those given at the end of the Unit)

2.4. THE OPENING AND THE SHORT STORY

Since our business here **is** chiefly with the short story (and the apprentice-writer has often to start there), it is important at the outset to decide what kind of story is being **planned** and for whom. Any potential writer **will** have to take note of the 'target' audience. And since he must, more or less, begin with magazine and Sunday-paper short stories he may have to sort out his priorities straightaway. For when a subtle and refined imagination **is** at work (as in the case of Henry James), a writer may not, indeed **cannot**, write below a certain level even if he were inclined to court popularity and hanker after the 'best-seller' status. That is the theme of **James's** story, 'The Next Time', and the narrator laments, 'You cannot make a sow's ear of a silk purse! It is **greivous indeed** if you like—there are people who cannot be vulgar for trying...'

Choose carefully the area of your interest and operation. Art, however, is a wild cat, and no one really knows **how** it springs to life out of some bush to carry the author along.

2.4.1 Different types and targets

The magazine story has **roughly** been described as (a) 'pulp', (b) 'slick', and (c) 'quality' or 'art'. This **division** parallels the one in cinema. We have the 'commercial', the 'slick' **and** the 'art' film catering to low-brow, middle-brow and high-brow audiences **respectively**. So, if you are writing for, say, a ladies' glossy magazine, the conventions and requirements of such a magazine **will** have to be kept in **mind**, and that too will determine the nature of the opening. .

With a view to guiding the Bpprentice-writersome general hints and suggestions (not rules) are set down below.

2.4.2 General hints and suggestions

- i) Try to finalise the **title** of the story before you plunge into the unknown territory ahead. Generally speaking, a **kind** of outline is in one's mind, **even** if not sketched out on paper. The title naturally has to indicate the spirit of the story, and should, **therefore**, be apt and **effective**. It may even be ironical or humorous, if such is **your** intention, and such the nature of your **theme**. As part of the opening **process**, the right title will automatically set brakes on your imagination, which may sometimes **run** away with the situation. Of course, this is not a strict **practice**, and you may well be obliged at times to write out the full story first, and then **ponder** over the problem of the title. And here also, you may have to score **out** several headings before you hit upon the right title.

If it is a character study as 'Miss Brill' by Katherine Mansfield, the name of the chief protagonist is often quite convenient. Similarly, if it is about some place or institution of common interest such as a hospital or a station, you may highlight that part of the proceedings which concerns the theme of the story. One is reminded of HE. Bates's stories like 'The Waiting Room' and 'The Station'.

Sometimes, a governing symbol may be the most appropriate title as in the case of 'The Rocking-Horse Winner' by D.H. Lawrence.

- ii) In fact, even as the title is being finalised, you have to decide the question of the focus in the proposed short story. Is it primarily a study of (a) character, (b) incident or situation, or of (c) mood or atmosphere? Is it again, a specimen of (a) thriller or murder mystery, (b) the supernatural (ghost stories etc.), (c) humour/farce, (d) fantasy/allegory, or (e) science fiction, etc.? The opening of your tale will naturally be determined by the type of fiction you plan to write. For instance, a loaded hint or a startling comment or speech in a murder mystery may be just the right thing, and a joke in the case of a humorous narrative or sketch.
- iii) Never give 'the game' away in the opening itself unless, of course, that is the whole point of your story.
- iv) Avoid a show of artiness as far as possible. A flamboyant but forced opening, even when attractive, will not do in the end. However, a genuinely startling opening gives your narrative a head-on advantage.

Edgar Allan Poe's celebrated statement, made in his review of Hawthorne's Tales, seems to sum up the matter: 'If his very first sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step.' Says Poe, concerning a story-writer. This should not, however, be taken as gospel truth or as a 'sure-success' formula, though Poe is right to add that each sentence must logically be linked to the one that precedes and the one that follows. Consider R.K. Narayan's opening sentences of 'Half-a-rupee Worth'.

Subbaiah sold rice at the marketgate. In his shop you found, heaped in wicker baskets, all varieties of rice: from pebbly coarse rice to Delhi Samba. White as jasmine and slender as a needle. His shop was stuffy and dark but there was no place like it on earth for him. . . .

This beginning foreshadows Subbaiah's end: 'death due to accidental toppling off of rice bags'.

Or consider the opening of Raja Rao's famous story 'The Cow of the Barricades'.

They called her Gauri, for she came every Tuesday evening before sunset to stand and nibble at the hair of the Master. And the Master touched her and caressed her and he said: 'How are you Gauri?' and Gauri simply bent her legs and drew back her tongue and, shaking her head, ambled round him and disappeared among the bushes. And till Tuesday next she was not to be seen. . . .

Thus the central character of the story, the divine cow, is built up step by step. The details establish her as a figure of mythology, invested with signs of divinity. As the story ends in an incredible finale, the reader can accept the incident as well as the myth that immediately grew round the cow, because the storyteller has, right at the beginning, given us hints that as this is no ordinary cow, the story he is about to relate is no ordinary story.

- v) Also, it is important not to prolong the opening, or stretch it out so that it begins to look a thing apart, hanging separately like a bunch of balloons. A good opening should glide comfortably, unobtrusively and economically into the next 'gear'. The germinal idea is to be developed into a certain set length, and you cannot afford to linger over 'effects', etc.

Bonheim goes on to talk of closed versus open beginnings and endings. 'Closed' openings are static as compared to 'open' openings which are dynamic and suggestive. Modern writers prefer to use the modes of report and speech, for they are, as in **Hemingway**, 'dynamic' modes. Of course, there can be a judicious mixing of the modes to achieve optimum effects. In any case, long and leisurely passages in the nineteenth century style, **and** expository passages in the manner of the essay, are now out. And even if a description (time, place, earlier history of a character, etc.) is necessary, it is often embedded in the 'dynamic' modes. Even authorial comments, **much** preferred by the earlier writers, are now frowned upon, for they tend to rob the story of that air of surprise and expectancy which a good short story writer **would** always like to create and maintain. The modern trend, thus, is to start without an exposition or description, if possible. For the opening matters much more in a short story than in a novel or in a novella. The novel has an incremental character, **and** it can gather weight and momentum as it proceeds, but the short story is more like a poem; it requires speed, concentration and brevity. Its economy is a matter not of expenditure but of saving.

2.6 SUMMING UP

These are the main points made in this Unit:

- The importance of an opening lies in its capacity to arouse straightaway the reader's interest and curiosity.
- The opening leads to the middle and end of the story and hence it is an important unit of composition.
- A distinction is made between a 'planned' and an 'improvised' opening.
- The opening and its effectiveness will depend upon the kind of story you plan to **write** and the readers for whom you write.
- It is not advisable to give away the story in the beginning.
- It may be useful to ponder over a suitable title to help you get along with a particular theme or subject.
- The opening should not be elaborate, nor the language flashy or rhetorical.
- The four dominant modes of opening are—(a) description, (b) report, (c) speech, (d) comment.

2.7 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) A good opening holds the attention of the reader and straightaway arouses his interest. Also, it generates its own momentum, leading the writer to the high point of the story.
- ii) A planned **opening is** carefully plotted and organically connected with the middle and end of the story. An improvised opening, conversely, is relatively unplanned and depends on the inner compulsions of the narrative.

Activity 2

- a) The suggestions listed are:
 - i) **finalise** the title
 - ii) decide the focus
 - iii) avoid 'showy' openings
 - iv) do not reveal everything
 - v) the opening must **glide** unobtrusively into the story proper
 - vi) avoid clichéd openings and
 - vii) try to cultivate a **personal** style.
- b) Try to **think** of some more possibilities. For instance,
 - i) **an** appropriate quotation
 - ii) plunging right into the **middle of** an interesting event **and**
 - iii) an engaging bit of dialogue.
 - iv) now explore some more **possibilities**.

2.8 GLOSSARY

You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the literary terms **used** in this Unit.

Genre: Imaginative literature is divided into **types** or classes, defined according to their structure, called **genres**. The major genres are epic, lyric, tragedy, **comedy**, satire, novel and short story.

Mode: **When** a **literary** work is defined by its theme and tone, it is said to be in a certain mode. For **example**, a novel may be in the comic, ironic, romantic or tragic mode.

Narrative: An **account** which develops its theme **within** the limits of a **time-scheme—chronological** sequencing—is known as a narrative.

Picaresque: A novel is picaresque when its central character is a rather likeable scoundrel, who moves from adventure to adventure, without **settling down**.

UNIT 3 BUILDING A CLIMAX

Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The meaning of climax: an illustrative story
 - 3.2.1 The story moves towards its climax
 - 3.2.2 Resolution of the crisis
- 3.3 The climax is a happening of heightened intensity
 - 3.3.1 The climax leads to a resolution of the crisis
 - 3.3.2 It suggests a new thematic direction
 - 3.3.3 It throws light on the writer's world-view
- 3.4 The uncomplicated climax is most easily identified in the 'plot' story
- 3.5 The climax is not an essential component of reflective and experimental fiction
- 3.6 The postscript to the climax in complex fiction
 - 3.6.1 The postscript reorders an established understanding of the protagonist
 - 3.6.2 The postscript alters perceptions of time and matter
- 3.7 Summing up
- 3.8 Activities : aids to answers
- 3.9 Glossary

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

You will have grasped, by the end of this Unit, the **significance** of climax **building** in creative writing.

The purpose of this Unit is to show **how**:

- important the building of a climax is in the structure of a story;
- the story moves towards its climax which may be unexpected but is not improbable;
- the climax resolves the crisis in the story and reveals, as nothing else in the story does, the writer's perception of a particular reality;
- a postscript to **the climax**, in certain writings, profoundly affects the direction of the story and opens up newer perspectives.

It is hoped that you will also have learnt the technique of building a **climax** while writing a story.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Units 1 and 2 of this Block on the 'structure of material' have already given you an idea of how themes are generated and of the significance of the 'opening'. In this Unit we will discuss, in some detail, an important constituent of a plot: the climax in a story or a poem.

A well-structured climax is a revelation of the writer's world-view. However, if you think that there can be no story without a climax, read some modern **writers—e.g.** Borges, **Faulkner**, Prem Chand. Events and incidents are recorded. It is only in the postscript that the intention of the writer dawns upon the reader—and he may feel like rereading the fictional work.

3.2 THE MEANING OF CLIMAX: AN ILLUSTRATIVE STORY

Climax is an intense and crucial point of the story which precipitates a crisis. A crisis is the culmination of tension and conflict which heads towards an inevitable resolution. The story given below will illustrate to you the art of building a climax, its nature and function.

Malcolm Scott is an **embittered** young Englishman. He comes to India with some happy expectations but **has** not quite foreseen the hazards he would experience by way of the climate of the country, the general living conditions, the quality of assistance he must be content with in running his home, and so on. India **looks an awful place** to live in, **and** the Indians primitive and lacking in refinement. **Of** course, he is not aware that a different culture can have a totally different, but equally valid, value system. His **personal** miscalculations and prejudices prevent him from seeing that the people he comes to rule over had a culture centuries before his own ancestors did. He cannot **understand** their tact and sophistication when they, as village elders, receive him as an official and even bribe him unobtrusively! He is not aware of the fact that he has a clerk who is intelligent enough to master five languages. Once he goes on an inspection tour of a few villages. He takes his young wife along, and their lodging for a few days has to be an inspection bungalow—the only roofed structure in a landscape of acres of fields and open land. On **this** tour his contempt for Indians takes the **form** of thoughtless mischief, and he lifts **the saree** of a woman bathing in a pond, just to **know** whether the 'animal' was a male **or** a female. . .

3.2.1 The story moves towards its climax

From now on the story rushes towards its climax. Hardly is Scott back in his inspection bungalow then he and his wife notice a strange spectacle—men **in ones** and twos gathering round the bungalow. Each man carries a stick and stands **rocklike**. Scott discovers **that** his servants have slipped out. Now a stone comes crashing in. Scott and his **wife** know they are threatened but for what they do not **know**. Their only means of knowing is the clerk who knows five languages. The clerk goes out of the bungalow to enquire. He comes back with the news that the men are from the village the bathing woman comes from, and that they have come to seek **an** answer for Scott's **misdeemeanour**. Scott at first **thinks** of shooting his way out of the situation, but the clerk points out the impossibility of such a course of action. Scott promises to pay some money to the woman as compensation. The clerk goes out to the mob to negotiate. The mob, he **informs** Scott, will have none of the money. Scott has violated a woman of their own. The just penalty is **that** the same should be done to a woman of Scott's kind. Scott's wife faints. Now the clerk asks not **only** Scott but his wife also to go out and beg their pardon.

What is a terse narration of a possible situation in colonial India comes to a climax most unexpectedly. Scott teases the woman not **with** the intent of assaulting her; he is not in an agitated state of mind when he does it playfully, but in that action he reveals his deep-rooted contempt and racist prejudice towards a subject people. The climax in **such** stories is rather complicated because it is not easily identifiable. To a **discerning** reader, however, the indication is subtle and strong.

3.2.2 Resolution of the crisis

They beg pardon on their knees. Scott stays on in the town for another year and a half. He never mentions to Anyone the inspection bungalow incident. Nor **does** he make any more remarks about India or Indians.

The crisis is resolved not by the readily conceivable resolution of giving a thrashing to the guilty, but by transferring the outrage **from** the guilty to the principle **underlying** the guilt—insulting women, **and devising** a corresponding punishment. Personal sting and malice is **taken** out; no wonder Scott takes the punishment as a just retribution. He must have been at peace with his conscience because he continues to live **in** that region for a year and a half **more**. It is a conversion, a very radical **conversion** at that, but the climax brings it out effectively and effortlessly.

3.3 THE CLIMAX IS A HAPPENING OF HEIGHTENED INTENSITY

So in a narration of **imaginative** content, the climax is a happening of heightened intensity, but well **along** the **progression** of the events or happenings narrated already.

3.4 THE UNCOMPLICATED CLIMAX IS MOST EASILY IDENTIFIED IN THE 'PLOT' STORY

As against the complicated climax discussed above, both the climax and its resolution are **uncomplicated**, and are most easily identified, in an 'incident' or 'plot' story. There is quite a bit of the external world in these stories and these, in a sense, are easily shared **realities**. The author here has very little possibility of manipulating the nature of these **realities**—a railway station is a railway station, and the Qutab **Minar** is a tower of specific dimensions, situation and period. The concreteness of these **details** contributes to the enjoyment of the story by the largest number of readers. **Even** the predictability of the resolution can go towards adding to the enjoyment of the effort. The stories of Maupassant and Poe, even Chekhov, contain this structure, **and** are never the poorer for it.

3.5 THE CLIMAX IS NOT AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF REFLECTIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

The writings of **André Gide**, **Franz Kafka**, and in more recent times, **Alain Robbe-Grillet**, **Marguerite Duras**, and a host of new writers, do not necessarily tell a story, **though** they are interesting in themselves without the beginning-middle-end **structure** in which a climax-and-resolution is the final part. There is a story by **Hemingway** by the name 'Mr and Mrs Eliot'. It is a model short story in that it unfolds, very effectively, the despair of a childless, middle-class American **couple** in the early part of this **century**. Without being overtly 'experimental' in his rendering or in constructing the piece, the author succeeds in creating a moving story. Latin American writing, in **general**, and that of **Gabriel Garcia** in **particular**, does not entirely depend on climaxes. Apart from the exotic appeal the writing may have for a **non-Latin** American **reader**, it weaves one episode after another, still retaining a sustaining **interest**. **As a matter** of fact, it is considered, among the avant-garde writing community, that a climax **is** an outdated component of creative writing.

3.6 THE POSTSCRIPT TO THE CLIMAX IN COMPLEX FICTION

But there are a number of very special creations which even have a postscript to the climax-resolution structure, and which take the story far beyond its structural dimensions. The story of the English Deputy Collector in South **India** does not end with the official and the local residents coming to terms at the inspection bungalow. The story has a narrator, a very old man, telling the story to his great grandchildren. He ends his narration by saying that as he returned from the inspection bungalow after **all** the commotion, he still found the woman washing clothes in the pond. It is obvious that he was **the** Collector's clerk. A young boy points out a flaw in the old man's narrative. The pond was some distance from the village, and when the Collector teased the woman, there was none else besides the clerk on the scene. How come the **villagers** gathered round the bungalow to seek an answer **from** the Collector? Certainly, the woman was not the person who carried the news and made the villagers surround the bungalow.

The old man looks about confusedly. He says, 'You know, according to Scott's orders, I should have followed him to the bungalow. Instead I went the other way.'

3.6.1 The postscript reorders an established understanding of the protagonist

The story now **assumes** an entirely new dimension. **It** is not the story of an Englishman, but of his clerk. It is he who is the **protagonist** of the story; it is he who, in seeming to negotiate with the villagers on Scott's behalf, is devising a strategy for making Scott see reason, and **realise** how limited his understanding of the world has

3.8 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Using the given vocabulary—crisis, culmination, conflict, resolution—build up your answer.
- ii) The apology made by Michael Scott is not accepted. Now develop this different approach.

Activity 2

- i) An **uncomplicated climax** deals with the external world of **concrete** realities. The author has little scope for manipulating the nature of these realities. In such a case it is not **difficult** to predict the resolution. And such a **climax** is easily identifiable in the magazine 'plot' stories.
- ii) The postscript **gives** a radical twist to the story when the different strands of the narrative **suddenly** acquire a new meaning and **significance**.
- iii) The old man (**Scott's** clerk), and not the **Englishman**, stands out **as** the chief protagonist of the **story**. It is he who is able to expose Scott's narrow understanding of the world.

3.9 GLOSSARY,

You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the literary **terms used** in this Unit.

Climax: A climax is that part of a narrative in which the luck of the central character changes for better or **worse**. It is a moment of the greatest intensity and leads to the resolution. Often the climax and crisis coincide.

Avant-garde writing: **When** a creative writer experiments with style, form or content, his writing is **referred to as** avant-garde or **experimental**. It is a deliberate effort to break through the traditions of imaginative writing to search for newer meanings.

UNIT 4 APPROPRIATE ENDING

Structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Literary endings
- 4.3 **Kinds** of endings
 - 4.3.1 **Unique or single-effect endings: stories of incident**
 - 4.3.2 **Endings in detective stories**
 - 4.3.3 **Endings in mood and atmosphere stories**
 - 4.3.4 **Endings in formula stories**
- 4.4 **Summing up**
- 4.5 **Activities: aids to answers**
- 4.6 Glossary
- 4.7 Additional Readings for **Block 2**

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Unit is to inform the learner about the nature and **kinds** of literary endings. By the end of this Unit you should become aware: —

of the meaning of 'ending' **in** the contexts of art and life; in both, an appropriate ending lends significance to their structure; even when **something** is begun, its value is **determined by** how it is going to end;

that there is no such thing as the standard ending; therefore, the numberless ways in which stories can end should be studied;

of the various kinds of endings, which are all basically determined by the nature of the material: the detective story, the formula story, and the mood and atmosphere story.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the concluding Unit on the structure of material. The preceding three units dealt with genesis of themes, the opening, and building a climax. This Unit on 'appropriate ending' discusses different **kinds** of denouement or resolutions depending upon the nature of material and the writer's **particular** perception of people and things. We speak of the meaning of our lives in terms of their **ends**. In life, endings without **an** end bespeak futility, lack of purpose and moral anarchy. It is the end which makes the structure of life whole, lending it both meaning and **purpose**.

4.2 LITERARY ENDINGS

Our experience of life as **well** as of literature is in the context **of** time. Hence the need for **beginnings**, middles and ends—points around which this experience is **organised**. **Ours** is story-shaped world, and the story can be called a metaphor for reality. Stories, like lives, have an ending and an end. In both, endings and ends confer a sense of **finality** of accomplishment. However, by ending his stories, the writer does not package life into a neat aesthetic **whole**, but discovers its rich possibilities in varying contexts. Not a termination, an ending in a story is, in fact, in the nature of a revelation about **people and** things. 'Is that so? I never imagined it this way'—are common reactions to endings in stories. The revelation is itself a moral act in that it leads to knowledge about the eccentricities of our **behaviour**, **about** the deceptions of the world **surrounding** us, about dimensions hidden **from** our surface-view of things. As **Aristotle** argued, the proper function of the ending of

a tragedy was to purge the unhealthy emotions of the audience (a moral act), and if it did not do so the tragedy was not well-formed.

Considering that in constructing their plots, writers determine their beginnings in the light of the endings, it would not be wrong to say, to vary T.S. Eliot's memorable assertion, that 'in my ending is my beginning'. Endings determine the form of the story, the direction it would take in order to lend an experience coherence and intelligibility. Form is what makes a story easily understandable. Form 'concludes' it even as the experience always remains unlimited.

This is why endings are not closures, for closures involve shutting off of experience, sealing it as it were. On the other hand, endings are only turning points in the flow of experience. Closures come when the subject is exhausted, endings when the subject reveals its inexhaustibility. In Kafka's *The Trial* the hero is 'too tired to survey all the conclusions arising from the story. . .'. In quite a few other stories, too, the ending is open, leading to endless possibilities.

Unlike closures, endings provide a resolution of experience, both in artistic and thematic terms. Endings are invitations to further exploration even when they do not seem to say so. This is their deceptive power and their amazing hold on the reader's imagination.

4.3 KINDS OF ENDINGS

There are as many kinds of endings as there are short stories and novels, and the possibilities are rich and suggestive. Short stories are noted for their compactness, restricted compass and concentrated effects. Consequently their endings will be determined by both the nature of the material (an event, a moment, a brief illumination, to mention a few instances), and the manner in which it is treated. Being a complex form of writing, embracing many narrative types, it would be wrong to make generalisations about endings in stories, but a few familiar examples may be given to show their scope and limitation. Our reading experience itself would give us an idea of the types of endings in stories. There are action stories, atmosphere stories, formula stories and many other intermediate types of stories—each with an appropriate ending. Many of the stories in R.K. Narayan's *Lawley Road*, may have no perceptible endings and yet we find them dependent upon some kind of a conclusion. In what follows what we would like to do is to spend more time with those types of endings that are easily accessible without, however, forgetting that narrative innovation does not stop anywhere and that all endings do not have to be stereotyped.

4.3.1 Unique or single effect endings: stories of incident

Also called surprise endings, these are to be found in stories that end rather unexpectedly even though not abruptly. In such a story, the reading experience is built in the following way: while our expectations fluctuate with the unfolding of the plot, a situation that no one would have expected in the normal course does occur, and surprises us. Such an ending is unique inasmuch as it is not foreseen in the plot, even though it stays within the range of probability: it is single because once the ending occurs we begin to wonder whether it was not a slight gesture, a single hint, a sudden disclosure, that might have caused our surprise.

In this connection, we could examine at some length O'Henry's well-known story, 'The Gift of the Magi'. This story is like a riddle in which our expectations are built up in a certain direction. We watch both husband and wife parting with their most precious possessions in order to give fitting gifts to each other. But at the moment of giving, they discover that the gifts have no value since they would be of little use to either. Our initial reaction is one of being tricked. But only later do we realise the pathos of the situation. By reversing our expectations, we acquire more insight into the working of the human mind and the futility of its sentimental concerns.

Maupassant's story, 'The Diamond Necklace', provides another evidence of a surprise ending accompanied by a sudden reversal of our expectations. As in the O'Henry story, we are brought face to face with a human situation. The fact that the

4.3.3 Endings in mood and atmosphere stories

In the stories of mood and atmosphere, the aim is not to jolt the reader into a sudden recognition of the falsity of his expectations. It is to create an atmosphere in which a state of mind is presented or a complex situation created. Such stories may occasionally have unexpected endings, but that is not their real aim. In this connection two stories deserve special attention: 'The Monkey's Paw' by W.W. Jacobs, and Poe's 'The Black Cat'. The horror in both stories is created by the atmosphere, and the endings only complete the mood created in the scenic descriptions. In the Jacobs story, the ending corresponds to the fulfilment of the prophecy related to the monkey's paw. Towards the end, the news of the son's death is brought to the parent in a blaze of moonlight; but such an eventuality has already been anticipated by the varying contexts in which the strange object, the monkey's paw, is being presented. What is built up in the story is not so much the reader's expectation as his fear that gets confirmed in the last scene. The story creates a mood which in turn quickens the reader's fear. The ending is appropriate in that it comes just at the moment when the main characters are still uncertain about the evil effects of the monkey's paw—the ending confirms the evil effect.

In Poe's story the atmosphere is haunted by the mutilated eyes of both, the black cat the narrator has hanged out of fear, and the white cat who appears later in the story. The mutilated eye ominously suggests the story's ending because it provokes the horror in the story and seals the fate of the cats. The recurrence of the missing eye repeats the original horror as in a dream. Thus the ending is not really an ending—but a 'repeat'; and in one sense it is always present in the plot itself. Such an ending does not become dramatic (as surprise endings do) but gives rise to a train of psychological reactions in the reader. It invites us back into the character's mind to study its subtle workings.

If the above two endings are rather extreme examples of their kind, Chekhov's endings suggest a subtle manipulation of the reader's response to the atmosphere of the story. As in his plays (the ending of *Uncle Vanya* is a good case) the endings grow out of the plot but spill out unbidden as the pistol shot does in the play. 'Uncle Vanya' is yet another instance of how the author creates a mood of boredom and frustration and how gradually, almost imperceptibly, something new and strange takes place. Chekhov's endings have a quiet solemnity about them in keeping with their subtle and under-the-surface movement.

On the other hand, Gorky's stories end with the assured openness of a moral tale. Consider the story 'A Man Is Born'. We all know that the pregnant woman travelling along the river bank with the narrator goes into labour and the narrator helps in the delivery of the child. The ending is related as much to the moral as to the fact of the birth—the moral concerns the famine in the area and the possible trouble of feeding the new-born.

In 'Twenty-six Men and a Girl' or 'Tales of Italy', the moral emerges clearly out of the interaction of theme and character. In a story such as D.H. Lawrence's 'Sun', the ending is the result of a cumulative sense of feeling of identity between the human being and the world around. Virginia Woolf's stories in *The Haunted House* concentrate their endings in the momentary impressions created on the narrator's mind. In such stories endings and impressions are one and the same, and cannot be independently grasped. Faulkner's 'Old Man', though an extended impression, also climaxes a mood, expanded earlier in the descriptions, of his drift on the water.

Usually endings in mood or atmosphere stories tend to be situational. Obviously no story can be complete without establishing a relationship between a character and the world in which he functions. Albert Camus's stories end precisely when the relationship between character and atmosphere gets fully established, either through an identification of the two or through their alienation. Often these stories are projected against a bleak landscape ('The Guest' is typical), and the ending becomes symbolic. In 'The Guest' the schoolmaster's predicament places his character against the bleak setting and brings out the duality of his response to his guest. In an ordinary sense nothing exciting happens. And yet the hostile surroundings become

4.4 SUMMING UP

Our consideration of **endings** has shown that no ending can be **the ending**. Stories differ in their ends as well as their endings.

The main points discussed pertain to the nature of literary **endings** which are not closures but revelations **about** people and things. They are open and suggest varied possibilities. There are three major kinds of endings:

- i) Single-effect endings, as in incident stories with surprise reversals, or detective or crime stories with startling resolutions;
- ii) The ending in a mood and atmosphere story which becomes a revelation of a mood or atmosphere (**horror**, evil, fear, alienation), as it sustains the emotional tone built up **throughout the** story.
- iii) Endings in formula **stories** which are a projection of the reader's desires and fantasies. They have a form of poetic justice and are utterly predictable.

4.5 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

- i) Life and art have 'ends' and 'endings'. When the end of a novel is **closed**, the end and the ending coincide. If the final episode of a novel is open-ended, leaving something unsaid or undone, then the ending suggests a new beginning.
- ii) Single-effect **endings** are also known as surprise endings. The story ends rather unexpectedly as there is no clue to it earlier on. However, such an ending is entirely within the **range** of possibility. A good example is **O'Henry's** story 'The Gift of the **Magi**'.

Activity 2

- i) Such stories aim at projecting the subjective state of the protagonist so that the **ending** causes the reader to ponder over his mental subtleties. They also project the **complexity** of life-situations by investing the plot with an emotional aura. The effect here is achieved through a repeated use of the **visual** and other sensory symbols, **scenic** descriptions and the creation of moods. This is **followed** by a surprise ending which heightens the original effect.
- ii) Hint: Refer to 4.3.3 in this Unit.

4.6 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the literary terms **used** in this Unit.

Ending: The ending of a narrative shows the fate of the protagonist—his death, exile, marriage or whatever.

Formula story: A formula story is written to a given pattern. Romances, detective fiction, science fiction and other popular forms of fiction are all formula stories.

Reversal of fortune: See **climax**, Block 2, Unit 3.

Scenic description: This refers to a writer's attempt to achieve a scenic effect through vivid, **colourful** description.

Situation: see Block 1, Unit 1.

Soap opera: A radio or serial drama, performed usually on a **daytime** commercial programme and chiefly characterised by stock domestic situations and melodramatic or sentimental treatment.

4.7 ADDITIONAL READINGS FOR BLOCK 2

- 1 Beach, J.W., *Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1965.
- 2 Cawetti, John, G., *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (Formula Series On Art and Popular Culture), Chicago and London: The University of **Chicago Press** (©) 1976.
- 3 *Creative Writers Handbook: What to Write, How to Write it, Where to **Sell** it*, rev. ed. Isabel **Ziegle** (Everyday Handbook Series) Harcourt Row, no date.
- 4 **Doore**, Diana and Debra Johnson. *Sultana and Miriam's Two Hundred (and) Fifty Creative Writing Ideas*, R & E Publishers, 1985.
- 5 **Gardner**, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craji for Young Writers*, New York: **Alfred Knopf**, Vintage **Books** (©) 1983.
- 6 **Gruber**, Barbara. *Writing Ideas Ready to Use* (Instant Idea Books), **Schaffe** Publications (ISBN 0-86734-050-9, **FS-8304**), 1983.
- 7 Lubbock, Percy. *The Cmji of Fiction*, Scribner, 1921.
- 8 Marks, Percy. *The Craji of Writing*, Harcourt Brace, 1932.
- 9 Sloane, William. *The **Craft** of **Writing***, New York and London: WW Norton and Co., 1983.
- 10 Walker, **Lyn**. *Visions and Revisions—A Guide for Creative Writing* (ISBN 0-917962-72-9) TH Peek, 1981.