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LIT105

INTRODUCTION TO PROSE LITERATURE

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Course code: LIT 105
Course title: Introduction to Prose Literature

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Origins and Evolution of the English Novel

Series 2: Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa

Series 3: Distinctive Features of English and African Novels

Series 4: Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions

Series 5: Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction

Proposed Outline for Series 1
Part 1.1 Historical Background of the English Novel

- 1.1.1 Early prose traditions in England
- 1.1.2 Social and cultural influences on the rise of the novel
- 1.1.3 Pioneering authors and their contributions

Part 1.2 Characteristic Features of the English Novel

- 1.2.1 Narrative structure and style
- 1.2.2 Themes and subject matter
- 1.2.3 Language and readership

Part 1.3 Evolution of the English Novel Across Periods

- 1.3.1 The eighteenth-century novel
- 1.3.2 The nineteenth-century novel
- 1.3.3 The twentieth-century novel

Part 1.4 Influence of the English Novel on Global Literature

- 1.4.1 Spread of the English novel beyond Europe
- 1.4.2 Adaptations and responses in Africa
- 1.4.3 Legacy in contemporary prose traditions

Introduction

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The English novel has played a central role in shaping literary traditions across the world. Emerging from earlier prose forms and responding to social and cultural changes in England, the novel quickly became a dominant mode of storytelling. Its development over centuries reflects not only artistic innovation but also the shifting concerns of society. By tracing its origins and evolution, learners will gain a deeper appreciation of how the English novel laid the foundation for prose literature and influenced other traditions, including African writing.

The aim of this Series is to guide you through the historical beginnings and progressive development of the English novel, enabling you to analyse its characteristic features and evaluate its influence on global literary traditions.

We shall commence this Series by examining the historical background of the English novel, focusing on early prose traditions, cultural influences, and pioneering authors. Next, we will explore the characteristic features that define the English novel, including narrative structure, themes, and readership. Following that, we will move on to its evolution across different literary periods, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. Finally, we will conclude by considering the influence of the English novel on global literature, particularly its spread beyond Europe and its legacy in Africa.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 1.1** define the historical background of the English novel, including early prose traditions and cultural influences,
- **SLO 1.2** explain the characteristic features of the English novel in terms of narrative structure, themes, and readership,
- **SLO 1.3** analyse the evolution of the English novel across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, and
- **SLO 1.4** evaluate the influence of the English novel on global literature, with particular attention to its spread and legacy in Africa.

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1.1 Historical Background of the English Novel

1.1.1 Early prose traditions in England

The **novel** is a long prose narrative that tells a story about human experiences, often with a focus on characters, events, and themes. Before the rise of the novel in England, earlier prose traditions such as chronicles, romances, and religious writings provided the groundwork for narrative

storytelling. These texts were not novels in the modern sense, but they shaped the way stories were told and received.

One of the key influences was the **romance**, a prose or verse narrative that often dealt with heroic adventures and courtly love. Another important tradition was the **chronicle**, which recorded historical events in prose form. These genres familiarised readers with extended narratives and prepared the ground for the emergence of the novel.

Fill in the blank: The prose tradition known as _____ often recorded historical events and influenced the later development of the novel.

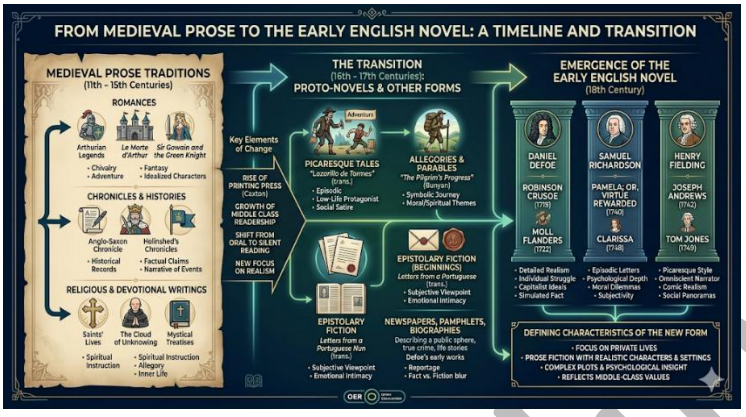

Figure 1.1: Transition from prose traditions to the English novel

1.1.2 Social and cultural influences on the rise of the novel

The rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century was closely linked to social and cultural changes. The growth of the **middle class**, defined as a social group between the aristocracy and the working class, created a new readership that desired stories reflecting everyday life. The expansion of printing technology and the availability of cheaper books also made novels more accessible.

The novel became a vehicle for exploring themes such as morality, social mobility, and personal identity. Writers began to focus on realistic characters and situations, which appealed to readers who wanted to see their own lives reflected in literature.

Fill in the blank: The growth of the _____ class provided a new readership that contributed to the rise of the English novel.

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Plate 1.1: Printing press and the spread of novels

1.1.3 Pioneering authors and their contributions

Several authors played a crucial role in establishing the English novel. **Daniel Defoe**, often regarded as one of the first novelists, wrote *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which combined adventure with realistic detail. **Samuel Richardson** introduced the epistolary form, or storytelling through letters, in *Pamela* (1740). **Henry Fielding** contributed comic realism in works such as *Tom Jones* (1749).

These authors demonstrated that prose fiction could be both entertaining and morally instructive. Their works laid the foundation for later novelists who expanded the scope of the genre.

Fill in the blank: Samuel Richardson is best known for introducing the _____ form in his novel *Pamela*.

Author	Contribution	Example Work
Tobias Smollett	Developed the **picaresque novel**, focusing on the satirical adventures of a low-born (but likable) rogue.	*The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748)
Laurence Sterne	Introduced **experimental narrative** and psychological depth, playing with time and "stream of consciousness" long before it was a formal term.	*Tristram Shandy* (1759)

Box 1.1: Selected pioneering authors of the English novel

Pilot questions 1.1

1. Which prose tradition recorded historical events and influenced the later development of the novel?
2. What social group contributed to the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century?
3. Name one technological development that made novels more accessible.

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4. Who wrote *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719?
5. What narrative form did Samuel Richardson introduce in *Pamela*?

1.2 Characteristic Features of the English Novel

1.2.1 Narrative structure and style

The **narrative structure** refers to the way a story is organised and presented to readers. Early English novels often employed linear plots, moving from beginning to end in a straightforward manner. Over time, writers experimented with more complex structures, such as multiple narrators or shifting perspectives. The **style** of the novel, meaning the author's choice of language and technique, also evolved to suit different audiences and purposes.

For instance, Richardson's epistolary style gave readers a sense of intimacy, while Fielding's comic realism provided humour and social commentary. These stylistic choices shaped how readers engaged with the text and how meaning was conveyed.

Fill in the blank: The _____ style, used by Samuel Richardson, created intimacy by presenting the story through letters.

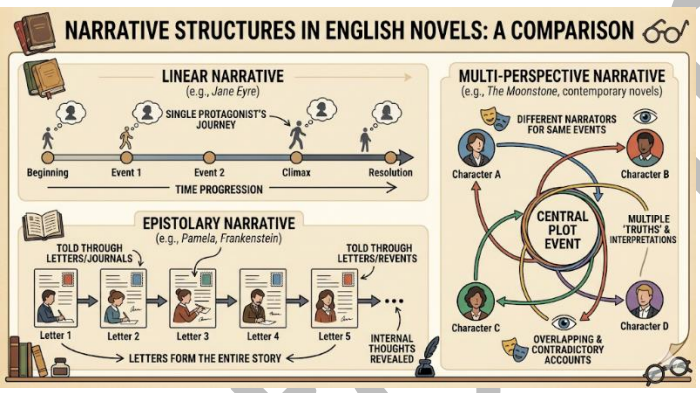

Figure 1.2: Narrative structures in the English novel

1.2.2 Themes and subject matter

The **theme** of a novel is its central idea or message, while the **subject matter** refers to the specific topics it addresses. English novels often explored themes such as morality, social class, love, and personal identity. These themes reflected the concerns of society and allowed readers to see their own lives mirrored in fiction.

For example, Jane Austen's novels frequently examined themes of marriage and social mobility, while Charles Dickens highlighted poverty and injustice. Such themes gave novels both entertainment value and moral significance.

Fill in the blank: Charles Dickens often explored themes of _____ and injustice in his novels.

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Plate 1.2: Illustration of poverty in Dickens' novels

1.2.3 Language and readership

The **language** of the English novel was shaped by its intended **readership**, meaning the group of people who read and responded to the text. Early novels often used plain, accessible language to appeal to the growing middle class. As literacy expanded, novels became a popular form of entertainment and moral instruction.

The readership influenced not only the language but also the topics chosen by authors. Writers sought to engage readers by reflecting their everyday experiences, concerns, and aspirations. This connection between language and readership helped the novel become a dominant literary form.

Fill in the blank: Early English novels often used _____ language to appeal to the growing middle class.

Feature	Description	Example
Characterization	The development of complex, "round" characters who change over time.	Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*
Social Commentary	Using the narrative to critique contemporary laws, class structures, or morality.	William Thackeray's critique of social climbing in *Vanity Fair*
Setting as Atmosphere	The physical environment reflecting the internal state of the characters.	The desolate, stormy moors in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Box 1.2: Key features of the English novel

Pilot questions 1.2

1. What narrative style did Samuel Richardson use to create intimacy in his novels?

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2. Which author is known for exploring poverty and injustice in his works?
3. What social group influenced the language of early English novels?
4. Define the term “theme” in the context of the novel.
5. Give one example of how narrative structure affects reader engagement.

1.3 Evolution of the English Novel Across Periods

1.3.1 The eighteenth-century novel

The eighteenth century marked the formal rise of the English novel. Writers such as **Daniel Defoe**, **Samuel Richardson**, and **Henry Fielding** established prose fiction as a serious literary form. Their works reflected the values of the emerging middle class, focusing on realism, morality, and personal experience.

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) introduced adventure and survival themes, Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) emphasised virtue and morality through letters, and Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) offered comic realism and social satire. These novels demonstrated that prose fiction could entertain while also instructing readers.

Fill in the blank: Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* is best remembered for its _____ realism and social satire.

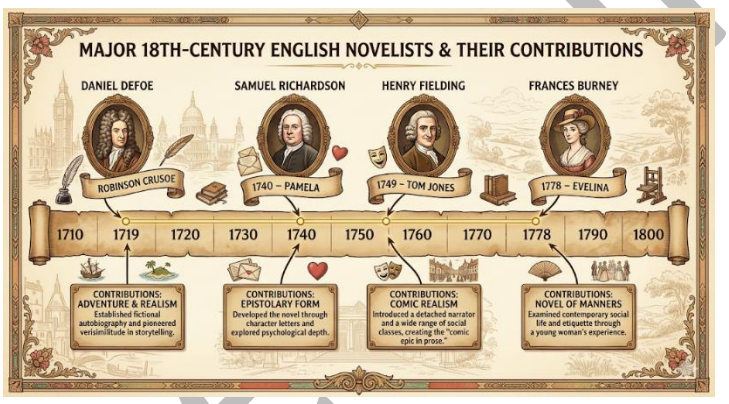

Figure 1.3: Key eighteenth-century novelists

1.3.2 The nineteenth-century novel

The nineteenth century was a golden age for the English novel. Authors such as **Jane Austen**, **Charles Dickens**, and **George Eliot** expanded the scope of the genre. Austen explored themes of marriage, class, and social mobility, Dickens highlighted poverty and injustice, and Eliot examined psychological depth and moral complexity.

The novel became a mirror of society, reflecting industrialisation, urbanisation, and shifting social structures. It also became a platform for social critique, with Dickens in particular using fiction to expose the struggles of the poor.

Fill in the blank: Jane Austen’s novels often explored themes of _____ and social mobility.

Plate 1.3: Marriage and social mobility in Austen's novels

1.3.3 The twentieth-century novel

The twentieth century brought experimentation and diversity to the English novel. Writers such as **James Joyce**, **Virginia Woolf**, and **D.H. Lawrence** challenged traditional forms and introduced modernist techniques. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) used stream of consciousness, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) explored psychological time, and Lawrence examined human relationships and sexuality.

The novel became more introspective, focusing on inner consciousness and fragmented realities. This period also saw the rise of postcolonial voices, which began to challenge and expand the English literary tradition.

Fill in the blank: James Joyce's *Ulysses* is famous for its use of _____ of consciousness technique.

Century	Focus & Movement	Key Innovation	Example Work
18th	**The Rise of the Novel**	**Verisimilitude**: Making fiction feel like a factual report or a real autobiography.	*Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe)
19th	**Victorian Realism**	**Social Panorama**: Using the novel as a tool for reform and wide-scale social mapping.	*Middlemarch* (Eliot)
20th	**Modernism**	**Stream of Consciousness**: Breaking linear time to mimic the chaotic flow of thought.	*Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf)

Box 1.3: Evolution of the English novel across centuries

Pilot questions 1.3

1. Which eighteenth-century novelist introduced adventure and survival themes in *Robinson Crusoe*?

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2. What social issues did Charles Dickens often highlight in his novels?
3. Which nineteenth-century author explored marriage and social mobility?
4. Name one modernist technique used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*.
5. Who wrote *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925?

1.4 Influence of the English Novel on Global Literature

1.4.1 Spread of the English novel beyond Europe

The English novel did not remain confined to Britain. Through colonial expansion, trade, and cultural exchange, it spread across Europe and beyond. The **English novel**, defined as prose fiction originating in England, became a model for narrative storytelling in many parts of the world. Its themes of realism, morality, and social commentary resonated with diverse audiences.

As English became a global language, the novel served as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and literary techniques. Writers in other regions adopted and adapted the form, blending it with their own traditions.

Fill in the blank: The spread of the English novel was facilitated by the expansion of the _____ Empire.

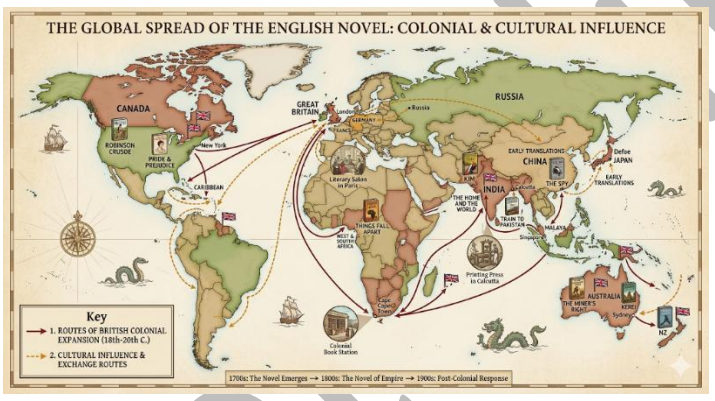

Figure 1.4: Global spread of the English novel

1.4.2 Adaptations and responses in Africa

In Africa, the English novel influenced the development of modern prose literature. African writers adopted the form but infused it with local experiences, oral traditions, and cultural contexts. This adaptation allowed African literature to engage with colonial realities while asserting indigenous identity.

For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) used the novel form to narrate the impact of colonialism on Igbo society. By combining traditional storytelling with the English novel structure, Achebe and others created a distinctive African prose tradition.

Fill in the blank: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* narrates the impact of _____ on Igbo society.

Plate 1.4: Achebe and African adaptation of the novel

1.4.3 Legacy in contemporary prose traditions

The legacy of the English novel continues in contemporary prose traditions worldwide. Writers use the novel to explore identity, politics, and cultural hybridity. Postcolonial authors, in particular, have redefined the novel by challenging Eurocentric perspectives and asserting local voices.

The English novel's influence is evident in the way modern literature balances global forms with regional content. It remains a flexible genre, capable of addressing both universal human concerns and specific cultural contexts.

Fill in the blank: Postcolonial authors often challenge _____ perspectives in their novels.

Region	Nature of Influence	Key Adaptation	Example Work
Europe	**Reciprocal Realism**	Refining the "Social Novel" to critique the bourgeoisie and class mobility.	*Père Goriot* (Honoré de Balzac)
Africa	**Linguistic Subversion**	Blending English syntax with indigenous oral traditions and proverbs.	*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Amos Tutuola)
Latin America	**Magic Realism**	Infusing the grounded structure of the novel with mythic and supernatural elements.	*One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez)

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Region	Nature of Influence	Key Adaptation	Example Work
South Asia	**Postcolonial Hybridity**	Using the "Nation-Novel" to explore identity and the fragments of history after independence.	*Midnight's Children* (Salman Rushdie)

Box 1.4: Influence of the English novel on global literature

Pilot questions 1.4

1. What global factor facilitated the spread of the English novel beyond Europe?
2. Which African writer used the novel form to narrate colonial impact on Igbo society?
3. What is one way African writers adapted the English novel to local traditions?
4. What perspectives do postcolonial authors often challenge in their novels?
5. Give one example of a global writer influenced by the English novel.

Series Summary

In this Series, we traced the **origins and evolution of the English novel**, beginning with its historical background in early prose traditions such as romances and chronicles. We examined how social and cultural changes, particularly the rise of the middle class and the expansion of printing, created fertile ground for the novel to flourish. The contributions of pioneering authors like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding established prose fiction as a serious literary form.

We then explored the **characteristic features of the English novel**, including its narrative structures, themes, and language shaped by readership. This provided insight into how the novel reflected society while entertaining and instructing readers. Following that, we analysed the **evolution of the novel across centuries**, from the realism and morality of the eighteenth century, through the social critique and psychological depth of the nineteenth century, to the modernist experimentation of the twentieth century.

Finally, we considered the **influence of the English novel on global literature**, noting its spread beyond Europe, its adaptation in Africa, and its continuing legacy in contemporary prose traditions. By the end of this Series, learners should be able to define, explain, analyse, and evaluate the English novel's development and its far-reaching impact on world literature.

Glossary of Terms

- **Novel**: A long prose narrative that tells a story about human experiences, often focusing on characters, events, and themes.

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- **Romance**: A prose or verse narrative from medieval times, usually centred on heroic adventures and courtly love.
- **Chronicle**: A historical account written in prose, recording events in chronological order.
- **Middle class**: A social group between the aristocracy and the working class, whose rise in the eighteenth century created a new readership for novels.
- **Epistolary form**: A narrative style that presents the story through letters written by characters, used effectively by Samuel Richardson.
- **Comic realism**: A style of writing that combines humour with realistic depictions of everyday life, exemplified by Henry Fielding.
- **Theme**: The central idea or message explored in a novel, such as morality, love, or social class.
- **Subject matter**: The specific topics or issues addressed in a novel, for example poverty or marriage.
- **Readership**: The group of people who read and respond to a text, influencing the language and topics chosen by authors.
- **Stream of consciousness**: A modernist narrative technique that attempts to capture the continuous flow of a character's thoughts and feelings.
- **Postcolonial authors**: Writers from formerly colonised regions who use literature to challenge Eurocentric perspectives and assert local voices.
- **Legacy**: The lasting influence or impact of the English novel on global and contemporary prose traditions.

Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. Which prose tradition recorded historical events and influenced the later development of the novel? (Linked to SLO 1.1)
2. Who introduced the epistolary form in the eighteenth-century novel? (Linked to SLO 1.1)
3. Which nineteenth-century novelist is known for exploring poverty and injustice? (Linked to SLO 1.2)
4. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is famous for its use of which narrative technique? (Linked to SLO 1.3)
5. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* narrates the impact of what on Igbo society? (Linked to SLO 1.4)

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define the term **novel** and explain why it became a dominant literary form in England. (Linked to SLO 1.1)

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2. Explain how the rise of the middle class influenced the language and readership of the English novel. (Linked to SLO 1.2)
3. Identify one major theme explored in nineteenth-century novels and provide an example of an author who addressed it. (Linked to SLO 1.2)
4. Describe one way in which African writers adapted the English novel to local traditions. (Linked to SLO 1.4)

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the contributions of eighteenth-century novelists such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding to the rise of the English novel. (Linked to SLO 1.1 and SLO 1.3)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe each author's contribution, such as Defoe's adventure realism, Richardson's epistolary form, and Fielding's comic realism.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may compare how these contributions collectively shaped the novel as a literary form, noting differences in style, audience appeal, and moral purpose.
2. Evaluate the influence of the English novel on African prose traditions, with reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. (Linked to SLO 1.4)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should explain how Achebe used the English novel form to narrate colonial impact while incorporating African oral traditions.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may extend the evaluation by discussing how Achebe's adaptation challenged Eurocentric perspectives and paved the way for postcolonial literature.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. Chronicle
2. Samuel Richardson
3. Charles Dickens
4. Stream of consciousness
5. Colonialism

Short-Answer Questions

1. A novel is a long prose narrative focusing on human experiences. It became dominant because it reflected everyday life and appealed to the growing middle-class readership.
2. The middle class demanded accessible stories, so authors used plain language and relatable themes, making novels widely popular.
3. Marriage and social mobility were major themes, often explored by Jane Austen in works such as *Pride and Prejudice*.

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4. African writers blended oral traditions and cultural contexts with the English novel form, as seen in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. **Basic response**: Defoe introduced adventure realism, Richardson developed the epistolary form, and Fielding contributed comic realism. **Value-added response**: Together, these authors established prose fiction as a serious form, appealing to different audiences and shaping the moral and social role of the novel.
2. **Basic response**: Achebe used the English novel structure to narrate colonial impact while incorporating Igbo oral traditions. **Value-added response**: Achebe's adaptation challenged Eurocentric narratives, asserting African identity and influencing the growth of postcolonial literature.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 1]

Part 1.1 Historical Background of the English Novel

1. Chronicle
2. Middle class
3. Printing press
4. Daniel Defoe
5. Epistolary form

Part 1.2 Characteristic Features of the English Novel

1. Epistolary style
2. Charles Dickens
3. Middle class
4. Theme is the central idea explored in a novel
5. Narrative structure shapes how readers engage with the story

Part 1.3 Evolution of the English Novel Across Periods

1. Daniel Defoe
2. Poverty and injustice
3. Jane Austen
4. Stream of consciousness
5. Virginia Woolf

Part 1.4 Influence of the English Novel on Global Literature

1. British Empire
2. Chinua Achebe
3. By blending oral traditions with the English novel form

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4. Eurocentric perspectives
5. Salman Rushdie

References and Attributions [Series 1]

This section compiles all references, attributions, and illustration prompts used in Series 1: *Origins and Evolution of the English Novel*. The referencing style applied here follows a simplified APA format for clarity and consistency.

Textual References

- Defoe, D. (1719). *Robinson Crusoe*. London: W. Taylor.
- Richardson, S. (1740). *Pamela*. London: C. Rivington.
- Fielding, H. (1749). *Tom Jones*. London: A. Millar.
- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*. London: T. Egerton.
- Dickens, C. (1837–1839). *Oliver Twist*. London: Richard Bentley.
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- Woolf, V. (1925). *Mrs Dalloway*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1928). *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Florence: Tipografia Giuntina.
- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Rushdie, S. (1981). *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

- **Figure 1.1: Transition from prose traditions to the English novel**
  - AI prompt: "Create a timeline diagram showing medieval prose traditions (romances, chronicles, religious writings) leading to the English novel in the 18th century."
  - Suggested OER search string: "timeline of English novel origins OER diagram."
- **Plate 1.1: Printing press and the spread of novels**
  - AI prompt: "Illustration of an 18th-century printing press with workers producing books."
  - Suggested OER search string: "18th century printing press image OER."
- **Box 1.1: Selected pioneering authors of the English novel**
  - AI prompt: "Create a simple table listing pioneering English novelists, their contributions, and example works."

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    - Suggested OER search string: “pioneering English novelists contributions OER table.”
- **Figure 1.2: Narrative structures in the English novel**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram comparing linear, epistolary, and multi-perspective narrative structures in English novels.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “narrative structures in English novel OER diagram.”
- **Plate 1.2: Illustration of poverty in Dickens’ novels**
    - AI prompt: “Illustration of a scene from Oliver Twist showing poverty and injustice.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Oliver Twist illustration poverty OER image.”
- **Box 1.2: Key features of the English novel**
    - AI prompt: “Create a simple table listing narrative structure, themes, and language as key features of the English novel with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “features of English novel OER table.”
- **Figure 1.3: Key eighteenth-century novelists**
    - AI prompt: “Create a timeline highlighting Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding with their major works and contributions to the English novel.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “18th century English novel timeline OER.”
- **Plate 1.3: Marriage and social mobility in Austen’s novels**
    - AI prompt: “Illustration of a scene from Pride and Prejudice showing marriage and social class.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Pride and Prejudice illustration OER image.”
- **Box 1.3: Evolution of the English novel across centuries**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising the evolution of the English novel across the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries with authors and contributions.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “evolution of English novel authors OER table.”
- **Figure 1.4: Global spread of the English novel**
    - AI prompt: “Create a world map showing the spread of the English novel through colonial expansion and cultural exchange.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “spread of English novel global influence OER map.”
- **Plate 1.4: Achebe and African adaptation of the novel**

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- AI prompt: “Image of Chinua Achebe holding or reading Things Fall Apart.”
- Suggested OER search string: “Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart OER image.”

- **Box 1.4: Influence of the English novel on global literature**
  - AI prompt: “Create a table showing the influence of the English novel in Europe, Africa, and globally with examples.”
  - Suggested OER search string: “influence of English novel global literature OER table.”

Course code: LIT 105
Course title: Introduction to Prose Literature

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Origins and Evolution of the English Novel

Series 2: Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa

Series 3: Distinctive Features of English and African Novels

Series 4: Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions

Series 5: Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction

Proposed Outline for Series 2
Part 2.1 Historical Context of Adaptation

- 2.1.1 Colonial influence and literary introduction
- 2.1.2 Early African responses to the English novel

Part 2.2 Integration of African Oral Traditions

- 2.2.1 Role of folklore and storytelling
- 2.2.2 Language and cultural identity in adapted novels

Part 2.3 Pioneering African Novelists

- 2.3.1 Chinua Achebe and the redefinition of narrative
- 2.3.2 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and language politics
- 2.3.3 Other notable contributors

Part 2.4 Themes and Concerns in African Adaptations

- 2.4.1 Colonialism and resistance

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- 2.4.2 Identity, tradition, and modernity
- 2.4.3 Postcolonial critique and global relevance

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored the origins and evolution of the English novel, tracing its historical background, characteristic features, and global influence. That foundation now allows us to examine how the English novel travelled beyond Europe and was reshaped within African contexts. The adaptation of the English novel in Africa is particularly significant because it demonstrates how a borrowed literary form was transformed to reflect indigenous traditions, colonial realities, and postcolonial identities.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to analyse how African writers adapted the English novel, evaluate the role of oral traditions and cultural identity in shaping these adaptations, and assess the contributions of pioneering African novelists and the themes they explored.

We shall commence this Series by considering the historical context of adaptation, focusing on colonial influence and early African responses to the English novel. Next, we will explore how African oral traditions were integrated into prose, paying attention to folklore, storytelling, and language. Following that, we will examine the contributions of pioneering African novelists such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, alongside other notable figures. Finally, we will conclude by analysing the themes and concerns in African adaptations, including colonialism, identity, tradition, modernity, and postcolonial critique.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 2.1** describe the historical context of how the English novel was introduced into Africa through colonial influence and early responses,
- **SLO 2.2** explain how African oral traditions such as folklore and storytelling were integrated into the novel form,
- **SLO 2.3** analyse the contributions of pioneering African novelists, including Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, to the adaptation of the English novel,
- **SLO 2.4** evaluate the themes and concerns addressed in African adaptations of the English novel, particularly colonialism, identity, tradition, modernity, and postcolonial critique.

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2.1 Historical Context of Adaptation

2.1.1 Colonial influence and literary introduction

The introduction of the **English novel** into Africa was closely tied to colonial expansion. Missionaries and colonial administrators brought English-language education, which included exposure to European literary forms. The novel, defined as a long prose narrative focusing on human experiences, was introduced as part of the curriculum in mission schools and colonial institutions.

This literary form was initially used to promote European cultural values and perspectives. However, African learners and writers began to engage with it critically, recognising both its potential for storytelling and its limitations in representing indigenous realities.

Fill in the blank: The English novel was introduced into Africa largely through _____ education provided by missionaries and colonial administrators.

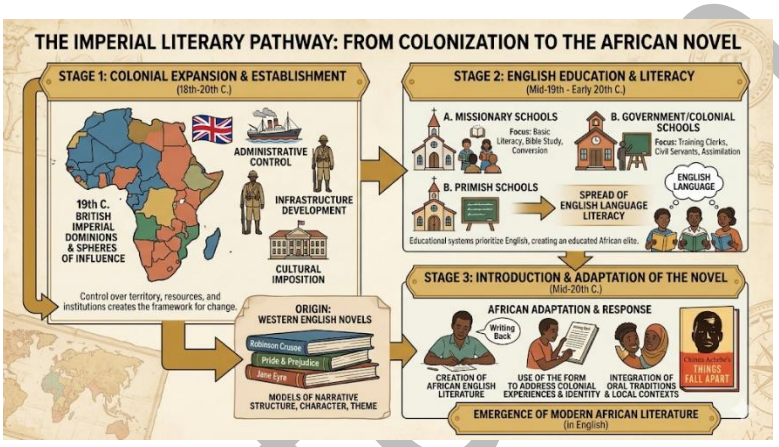

Figure 2.1: Pathways of the English novel into Africa

2.1.2 Early African responses to the English novel

African writers did not simply adopt the English novel; they responded to it by reshaping its form to reflect local realities. Early African novels often addressed themes of colonialism, cultural conflict, and identity. Writers used the novel to critique colonial structures while also preserving indigenous traditions.

For example, Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925) combined historical narrative with African oral traditions, while later writers such as Chinua Achebe used the novel to challenge Eurocentric depictions of Africa. These responses marked the beginning of a distinctive African literary tradition.

Fill in the blank: Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* combined historical narrative with _____ traditions to create a uniquely African novel.

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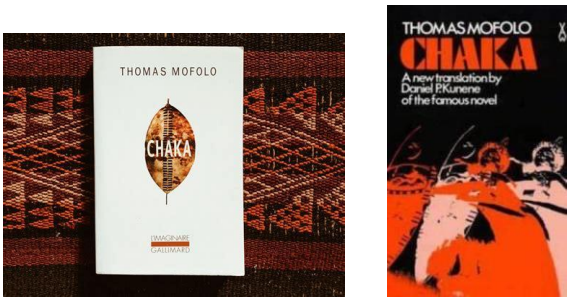

Plate 2.1: Early African adaptation of the novel

Author	Contribution	Example Work
Sol Plaatje	The first South African to write a novel in English; focused on the impact of colonial land acts and cultural identity.	*Mhudi* (Written 1920, Published 1930)
Flora Nwapa	Known as the "mother of modern African literature"; she shifted the focus to the lives and agency of African women.	*Efuru* (1966)
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o	Initially wrote in English but famously moved to Gikuyu to decolonize the mind and reach a local audience.	*Weep Not, Child* (1964)

Box 2.1: Early African responses to the English novel

Pilot questions 2.1

1. Through what system was the English novel introduced into Africa?
2. Which early African novel combined historical narrative with oral traditions?
3. Name one way African writers responded to the English novel.
4. Who wrote *Things Fall Apart* to challenge Eurocentric depictions of Africa?
5. Which African novelist used folklore and myth in prose?

2.2 Integration of African Oral Traditions

2.2.1 Role of folklore and storytelling

African writers adapted the English novel by drawing heavily on **oral traditions**, defined as cultural narratives passed down through spoken word, including myths, legends, and folktales. These traditions provided authenticity and rooted the novel in African cultural contexts. Folklore allowed writers to preserve indigenous knowledge while using the novel form to reach wider audiences.

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For instance, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) is a notable example of how folklore and myth were woven into prose, creating a narrative style that was distinctly African yet recognisably novelistic.

Fill in the blank: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a prime example of how African writers integrated _____ into the novel form.

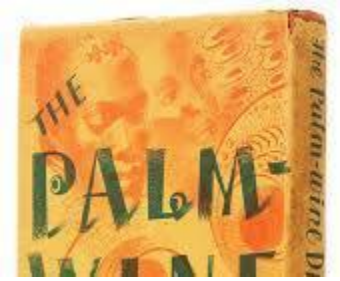

Plate 2.2: Folklore in African prose

2.2.2 Language and cultural identity in adapted novels

Language played a central role in adaptation. While many African writers initially wrote in English, they infused their works with local idioms, proverbs, and rhythms of speech. This blending created a unique literary voice that reflected African cultural identity.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, argued that writing in indigenous languages was essential for preserving cultural identity. His novel *Devil on the Cross* (1980) was originally written in Gikuyu, demonstrating how African writers could adapt the English novel form while asserting linguistic independence.

Fill in the blank: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o originally wrote *Devil on the Cross* in the _____ language.

Feature	Description	Example
Etiological Tales	Stories within the story that explain the origins of natural phenomena or social customs.	The "Turtle and the Birds" fable in *Things Fall Apart*
Call and Response	Narrative techniques that mimic the interaction between a storyteller and an audience.	Polyphonic voices in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's later works
Ideophones	Words that evoke a vivid sensory impression of a sound, movement, or state.	Onomatopoeic descriptions in Amos Tutuola's prose

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Feature	Description	Example
Genealogy & Epithets	Lengthy recitations of ancestry or praise-names to establish a character's social standing.	The heroic descriptions of the Zulu king in Mofolo's *Chaka*

Box 2.2: Features of oral traditions in African novels

Pilot questions 2.2

1. What cultural tradition did African writers use to adapt the English novel?
2. Which author used folklore and myth in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*?
3. How did African writers use language to reflect cultural identity?
4. Who wrote *Devil on the Cross* originally in Gikuyu?
5. Give one example of how proverbs were used in African novels.

2.3 Pioneering African Novelists

2.3.1 Chinua Achebe and the redefinition of narrative

Chinua Achebe is widely regarded as the father of modern African literature. His novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) redefined narrative by presenting African society from an insider's perspective. Achebe challenged Eurocentric portrayals of Africa by blending traditional storytelling with the English novel form. He used **proverbs**, defined as short sayings expressing cultural wisdom, to enrich his narrative and reflect Igbo oral traditions.

Achebe's work demonstrated that the English novel could be adapted to express African identity and critique colonialism. His success inspired a generation of African writers to use the novel as a tool for cultural affirmation.

Fill in the blank: Achebe enriched his narrative style by incorporating _____, which conveyed cultural wisdom and reflected Igbo traditions.

Plate 2.3: Achebe and the redefinition of narrative

2.3.2 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and language politics

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is another pioneering figure who emphasised the importance of language in literature. He argued that writing in indigenous languages was essential for preserving cultural identity and resisting colonial influence. His novel *Devil on the Cross* (1980), originally written in Gikuyu, exemplifies this commitment.

Ngũgĩ's stance on language politics highlighted the tension between accessibility through English and authenticity through African languages. His work encouraged debates about linguistic independence and the role of literature in decolonisation.

Fill in the blank: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o originally wrote *Devil on the Cross* in the _____ language.

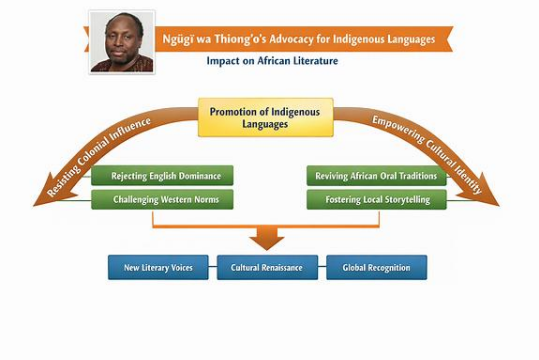

Figure 2.3: Ngũgĩ's language politics

2.3.3 Other notable contributors

Beyond Achebe and Ngũgĩ, several other African novelists contributed to the adaptation of the English novel. **Amos Tutuola** used folklore and myth in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), creating a surreal yet culturally grounded narrative. **Thomas Mofolo** blended oral traditions with historical narrative in *Chaka* (1925). These writers demonstrated the diversity of African approaches to the novel form.

Together, these pioneering authors established a foundation for African literature that was both globally recognised and deeply rooted in local traditions.

Fill in the blank: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is notable for its use of _____ and myth in prose.

Author	Contribution	Example Work
Sol Plaatje	The first Black South African to publish a novel in English; used the form to protest the Native Land Act of 1913.	*Mhudi* (1930)

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Author	Contribution	Example Work
Flora Nwapa	The first African woman to be published internationally in English; centered the narrative on the agency and daily lives of Igbo women.	*Efuru* (1966)
Buchi Emecheta	Explored the "double colonization" of African women—struggling against both colonial structures and traditional patriarchy.	*The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)

Box 2.3: Pioneering African novelists and their contributions

Pilot questions 2.3

1. Who is regarded as the father of modern African literature?
2. What literary device did Achebe use to reflect Igbo traditions?
3. Which novel by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was originally written in Gikuyu?
4. What tension did Ngũgĩ highlight in his advocacy for indigenous languages?
5. Which African novelist used folklore and myth in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*?

2.4 Themes and Concerns in African Adaptations

2.4.1 Colonialism and resistance

One of the most prominent themes in African adaptations of the English novel is **colonialism**, defined as the political and cultural domination of one nation over another. African writers used the novel to expose the injustices of colonial rule and to highlight the struggles of their societies. Resistance became a recurring motif, with narratives portraying characters who challenged colonial authority or sought to preserve indigenous traditions.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a classic example, showing how colonial intrusion disrupted Igbo society. By presenting the African perspective, Achebe resisted Eurocentric narratives that had previously dominated literature.

Fill in the blank: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays the disruption of _____ society by colonial intrusion.

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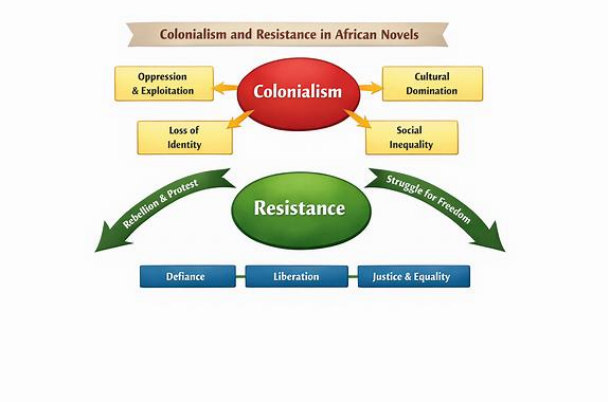

Figure 2.4: Colonialism and resistance in African novels

2.4.2 Identity, tradition, and modernity

Another major concern was the tension between **identity**, defined as the sense of self shaped by culture and history, **tradition**, meaning inherited customs and practices, and **modernity**, referring to new social and cultural changes brought by colonialism and globalisation. African novels often depicted characters caught between these forces, struggling to reconcile traditional values with modern influences.

For example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's works frequently explore how individuals navigate the clash between indigenous traditions and modern political realities. This theme remains central to African literature, reflecting ongoing debates about cultural preservation and adaptation.

Fill in the blank: African novels often depict characters caught between _____ values and modern influences.

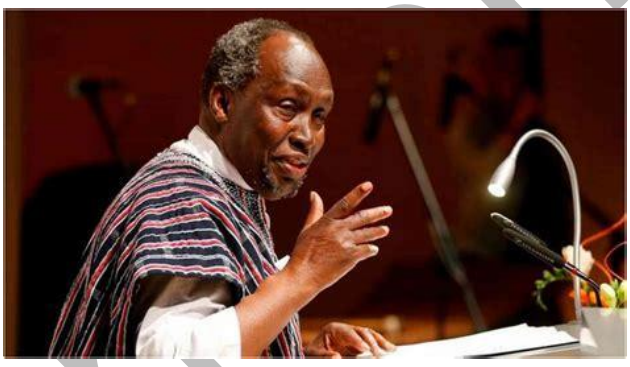

Plate 2.4: Identity and tradition in African literature

2.4.3 Postcolonial critique and global relevance

The **postcolonial critique** refers to the analysis of literature that challenges colonial legacies and asserts local voices. African novelists used the adapted English novel to critique colonial structures and to redefine African identity in a global context. Their works gained international recognition, showing that African literature could contribute meaningfully to world literature.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), though not African, illustrates how postcolonial writers globally used the novel to challenge colonial narratives. African writers such as Achebe

and Ngũgĩ similarly positioned their works within a global literary conversation, making African adaptations relevant beyond the continent.

Fill in the blank: The term _____ critique refers to literature that challenges colonial legacies and asserts local voices.

Theme	Description	Example Work
Cultural Hybridity	The merging of different cultures to create a "third space" that is neither fully traditional nor fully Western.	*No Longer at Ease* (Chinua Achebe)
Gender and Agency	A critique of how both traditional patriarchy and colonial structures restrict women's freedom.	*The Joys of Motherhood* (Buchi Emecheta)
Disillusionment	The sense of betrayal felt by citizens when post-independence leaders mimic the corruption of colonialists.	*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Ayi Kwei Armah)
Language as Power	The debate over whether to write in the "oppressor's language" (English) or return to indigenous tongues.	*Decolonising the Mind* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)

Box 2.4: Themes and concerns in African adaptations

Pilot questions 2.4

1. What theme in African novels exposes colonial injustices and portrays resistance?
2. Which society is disrupted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*?
3. What tension do African novels often depict between tradition and modernity?
4. Which African writer frequently explored identity and tradition in his works?
5. What does the term postcolonial critique refer to in literature?

Series Summary

This Series examined how the English novel was adapted within African contexts, showing how a borrowed literary form was reshaped to reflect indigenous traditions, colonial realities, and postcolonial identities. We began with the historical context, highlighting colonial influence and early African responses. Then we explored the integration of oral traditions, focusing on folklore, storytelling, and the role of language in asserting cultural identity. Following that, we studied

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pioneering African novelists such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Amos Tutuola, and Thomas Mofolo, noting their distinctive contributions. Finally, we analysed the themes and concerns in African adaptations, including colonialism and resistance, identity and tradition, and postcolonial critique.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to **describe** the historical context of adaptation (SLO 2.1), **explain** how oral traditions shaped African novels (SLO 2.2), **analyse** the contributions of pioneering African novelists (SLO 2.3), and **evaluate** the themes and concerns addressed in African adaptations (SLO 2.4). These outcomes provide you with a clear understanding of how African writers transformed the English novel into a powerful tool for cultural affirmation and global literary relevance.

Glossary of Terms

- **Colonialism**: The political and cultural domination of one nation over another, often involving control of education, language, and literature.
- **Folklore**: Traditional stories, myths, and legends passed down orally within a community, often used by African writers to enrich novels.
- **Identity**: The sense of self shaped by culture, history, and social context, frequently explored in African adaptations of the novel.
- **Modernity**: New social and cultural changes brought by colonialism and globalisation, often contrasted with traditional values in African literature.
- **Novel**: A long prose narrative focusing on human experiences, adapted by African writers to reflect local realities.
- **Oral traditions**: Cultural narratives transmitted through spoken word, including proverbs, songs, and storytelling, integrated into African novels.
- **Postcolonial critique**: Literary analysis that challenges colonial legacies and asserts local voices, central to African adaptations of the English novel.
- **Proverbs**: Short sayings that express cultural wisdom, commonly used in African novels to reflect indigenous traditions.
- **Resistance**: The act of opposing colonial authority or cultural domination, often depicted as a theme in African literature.
- **Tradition**: Inherited customs and practices that shape cultural identity, frequently contrasted with modern influences in African novels.

Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. Through what system was the English novel introduced into Africa? (Linked to SLO 2.1)

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2. Which early African novel combined historical narrative with oral traditions? (Linked to SLO 2.1)
3. Who used folklore and myth in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*? (Linked to SLO 2.2)
4. Which novelist originally wrote *Devil on the Cross* in Gikuyu? (Linked to SLO 2.3)
5. What theme in African novels exposes colonial injustices and portrays resistance? (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define oral traditions and explain their role in African adaptations of the English novel. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
2. Describe how Chinua Achebe redefined narrative in *Things Fall Apart*. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
3. Explain Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's position on language politics in African literature. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
4. Identify one way African novels depict the tension between tradition and modernity. (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the historical context of how the English novel was introduced into Africa and the early responses by African writers. (Linked to SLO 2.1)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe colonial influence, missionary education, and early works such as Mofolo's *Chaka*.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these responses laid the foundation for African literature by blending oral traditions with the novel form and critiquing colonial structures.
2. Evaluate the contributions of Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to the adaptation of the English novel in Africa. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should explain Achebe's use of proverbs and insider perspective, and Ngũgĩ's advocacy for indigenous languages.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may compare their approaches, noting how Achebe focused on narrative authenticity while Ngũgĩ emphasised linguistic independence, both contributing to cultural affirmation.
3. Discuss the major themes in African adaptations of the English novel, with examples. (Linked to SLO 2.4)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should identify colonialism and resistance, identity and tradition, and postcolonial critique, with examples from Achebe and Ngũgĩ.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may extend the discussion by connecting these themes to global postcolonial literature, showing how African novels contribute to wider debates on identity and decolonisation.

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Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. Missionary and colonial education
2. Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*
3. Amos Tutuola
4. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
5. Colonialism and resistance

Short-Answer Questions

1. Oral traditions are spoken cultural narratives such as myths, proverbs, and folktales. They were integrated into African novels to preserve indigenous identity and enrich storytelling.
2. Achebe redefined narrative by presenting African society from within, using proverbs and Igbo traditions to challenge Eurocentric depictions.
3. Ngũgĩ argued that writing in indigenous languages was essential for cultural preservation and resisting colonial influence.
4. African novels often depict characters caught between traditional customs and modern influences, reflecting cultural tension.

Long-Answer Questions

1. **Basic response**: The English novel was introduced through colonial education. Early African responses included works like Mofolo's *Chaka*, which blended oral traditions with historical narrative. **Value-added response**: These responses laid the foundation for African literature, using the novel to critique colonialism and assert cultural identity.
2. **Basic response**: Achebe used proverbs and insider perspectives in *Things Fall Apart*, while Ngũgĩ wrote in Gikuyu to preserve cultural identity. **Value-added response**: Achebe emphasised narrative authenticity, Ngũgĩ emphasised linguistic independence, and together they reshaped the English novel for African contexts.
3. **Basic response**: Themes include colonialism and resistance (*Things Fall Apart*), identity and tradition (*The River Between*), and postcolonial critique (*Arrow of God*). **Value-added response**: These themes connect African literature to global postcolonial debates, showing how African writers contributed to redefining world literature.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 2]

Part 2.1 Historical Context of Adaptation

1. Missionary and colonial education
2. Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*
3. By reshaping the novel to reflect local realities and critique colonial structures
4. Chinua Achebe

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5. Amos Tutuola

Part 2.2 Integration of African Oral Traditions

1. Oral traditions
2. Amos Tutuola
3. By infusing novels with local idioms, proverbs, and rhythms of speech
4. Gikuyu
5. Proverbs were used to convey cultural wisdom and enrich narratives

Part 2.3 Pioneering African Novelists

1. Chinua Achebe
2. Proverbs
3. *Devil on the Cross*
4. The tension between accessibility through English and authenticity through indigenous languages
5. Amos Tutuola

Part 2.4 Themes and Concerns in African Adaptations

1. Colonialism and resistance
2. Igbo society
3. Traditional values and modern influences
4. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
5. Postcolonial critique

References and Attributions [Series 2]

This section compiles all references, attributions, and illustration prompts used in Series 2: *Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa*. The referencing style applied here follows a simplified APA format for clarity and consistency.

Textual References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Achebe, C. (1964). *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann.
- Mofolo, T. (1925). *Chaka*. Lovedale Press.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1965). *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1980). *Devil on the Cross*. Nairobi: Heinemann (originally in Gikuyu).
- Rushdie, S. (1981). *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape.

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- Tutuola, A. (1952). *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. London: Faber and Faber.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

- **Figure 2.1: Pathways of the English novel into Africa**
    - AI prompt: "Create a diagram showing colonial expansion leading to English education and the introduction of the novel in Africa."
    - Suggested OER search string: "colonial education Africa English novel OER diagram."
- **Plate 2.1: Early African adaptation of the novel**
    - AI prompt: "Image of the book cover of Thomas Mofolo's Chaka."
    - Suggested OER search string: "Thomas Mofolo Chaka book cover OER image."
- **Box 2.1: Early African responses to the English novel**
    - AI prompt: "Create a table listing early African novelists, their contributions, and example works."
    - Suggested OER search string: "early African novelists contributions OER table."
- **Plate 2.2: Folklore in African prose**
    - AI prompt: "Image of the original cover of Amos Tutuola's The Palm-Wine Drinkard."
    - Suggested OER search string: "Amos Tutuola Palm-Wine Drinkard cover OER image."
- **Box 2.2: Features of oral traditions in African novels**
    - AI prompt: "Create a table showing features of oral traditions in African novels with examples."
    - Suggested OER search string: "oral traditions African novels OER table."
- **Plate 2.3: Achebe and the redefinition of narrative**
    - AI prompt: "Image of Chinua Achebe holding or reading Things Fall Apart."
    - Suggested OER search string: "Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart OER image."
- **Figure 2.3: Ngũgĩ's language politics**
    - AI prompt: "Create a diagram showing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's advocacy for indigenous languages and its impact on African literature."
    - Suggested OER search string: "Ngugi wa Thiong'o language politics OER diagram."
- **Box 2.3: Pioneering African novelists and their contributions**

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    - AI prompt: “Create a table listing pioneering African novelists, their contributions, and example works.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “pioneering African novelists contributions OER table.”
- **Figure 2.4: Colonialism and resistance in African novels**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing colonialism as a central theme in African novels, with resistance as a counter-theme.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “colonialism resistance African novels OER diagram.”
- **Plate 2.4: Identity and tradition in African literature**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Ngugi wa Thiong’o speaking at a literary conference about African literature.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Ngugi wa Thiong’o African literature OER image.”
- **Box 2.4: Themes and concerns in African adaptations**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising themes and concerns in African adaptations of the English novel with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “themes African adaptations English novel OER table.”

Course code: LIT 105
Course title: Introduction to Prose Literature

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Origins and Evolution of the English Novel

Series 2: Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa

Series 3: Distinctive Features of English and African Novels

Series 4: Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions

Series 5: Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction

Proposed Outline for Series 3

Part 3.1 Narrative Structures and Techniques

- 3.1.1 Linear and epistolary forms in English novels

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- 3.1.2 Oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African novels

Part 3.2 Themes and Subject Matter

- 3.2.1 Social mobility, class, and individualism in English novels
- 3.2.2 Colonialism, identity, and cultural conflict in African novels

Part 3.3 Language and Style

- 3.3.1 Standard English and stylistic conventions in English novels
- 3.3.2 Indigenous languages, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions in African novels

Part 3.4 Global Relevance and Literary Impact

- 3.4.1 Influence of English novels on world literature
- 3.4.2 Contribution of African novels to postcolonial discourse

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored how African writers adapted the English novel, blending oral traditions, indigenous languages, and cultural identity to create a distinctive literary tradition. Building on that foundation, this Series turns to a comparative study of English and African novels, highlighting the features that make each tradition unique while also showing how they intersect. This comparison is important because it helps us appreciate the diversity of literary forms and the ways in which novels reflect the societies that produce them.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to identify and analyse the distinctive features of English and African novels, compare their narrative techniques, themes, and language, and evaluate their contributions to global literature.

We shall commence this Series by examining narrative structures and techniques, focusing on linear and epistolary forms in English novels and oral traditions in African novels. Next, we will explore themes and subject matter, considering issues such as social mobility and class in English novels alongside colonialism and identity in African novels. Following that, we will study language and style, contrasting the use of standard English with indigenous languages and proverbs. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the global relevance and literary impact of both traditions, showing how English and African novels have shaped world literature.

Series Learning Outcomes

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Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 3.1** analyse the narrative structures and techniques used in English novels, including linear and epistolary forms,
- **SLO 3.2** explain how African novels employ oral traditions and multi-perspective narration to shape their storytelling,
- **SLO 3.3** compare the themes and subject matter of English novels, such as social mobility and class, with those of African novels, including colonialism and identity,
- **SLO 3.4** evaluate the role of language and style in both traditions, focusing on standard English conventions in English novels and indigenous languages, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions in African novels,
- **SLO 3.5** assess the global relevance and literary impact of English and African novels, identifying their contributions to world literature and postcolonial discourse.

3.1 Narrative Structures and Techniques

3.1.1 Linear and epistolary forms in English novels

English novels often employ **linear narrative structures**, defined as storytelling that follows a chronological order from beginning to end. This structure provides clarity and coherence, guiding readers through events in a straightforward manner. Another common technique is the **epistolary form**, which presents the story through letters, diary entries, or documents. This form creates intimacy by allowing readers direct access to characters' thoughts and emotions.

Classic examples include Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), which uses letters to build suspense and character development, and Jane Austen's novels, which often follow linear plots centred on social relationships and moral choices.

Fill in the blank: The epistolary form presents a story through _____, diary entries, or documents.

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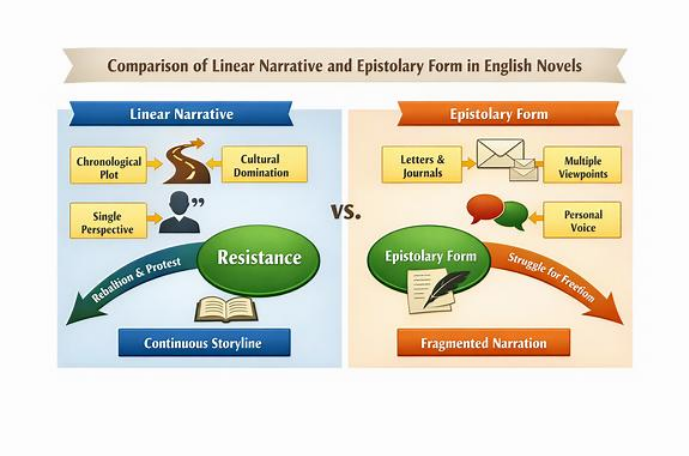

Figure 3.1: Narrative structures in English novels

3.1.2 Oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African novels

African novels often draw on **oral traditions**, defined as cultural narratives transmitted through spoken word, including myths, folktales, and proverbs. These traditions influence narrative structures by introducing cyclical storytelling, digressions, and communal voices. Unlike the linear form, African novels may present events from multiple perspectives, reflecting the collective nature of African societies.

For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* integrates proverbs and storytelling techniques from Igbo oral traditions, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* employs multi-perspective narration to capture diverse experiences of colonial and postcolonial Kenya.

Fill in the blank: African novels often present events from _____ perspectives, reflecting communal storytelling traditions.

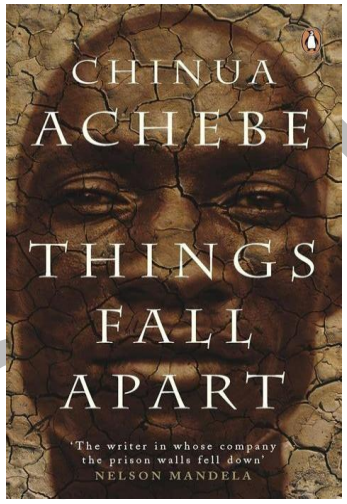

Plate 3.1: Oral traditions in African novels

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Tradition	Key Technique	Narrative Function	Example
English	**Omniscient Narrator**	Provides a "God-like" overview of social manners and moral consequences.	*Middlemarch* (George Eliot)
English	**Epistolary Form**	Creates psychological intimacy through personal letters and journals.	*Pamela* (Samuel Richardson)
African	**Orality & Proverbs**	Embeds communal wisdom and "philosophical shorthand" into the prose.	*Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe)
African	**Polyphony**	Uses multiple narrators to show how an event affects an entire community, not just one hero.	*Petals of Blood* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)
African	**Magic Realism**	Blurs the line between the physical world and the spirit realm.	*The Famished Road* (Ben Okri)

Box 3.1: Distinctive narrative techniques in English and African novels

Pilot questions 3.1

1. What is meant by a linear narrative structure?
2. Which English novel is a classic example of the epistolary form?
3. How do oral traditions influence African narrative structures?
4. Which African novel integrates proverbs and storytelling techniques from Igbo traditions?
5. What narrative technique does Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o use in *Petals of Blood*?

3.2 Themes and Subject Matter

3.2.1 Social mobility, class, and individualism in English novels

English novels often focus on **social mobility**, defined as the movement of individuals or families between social classes. This theme is closely tied to **class**, which refers to the hierarchical divisions within society, and **individualism**, the emphasis on personal ambition and self-determination. Writers such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austen explored how characters navigated these social structures, often highlighting the challenges of poverty, wealth, and status.

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For example, Dickens's *Great Expectations* portrays Pip's rise from humble origins to gentlemanly status, while Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* examines the interplay of class and marriage in shaping individual choices.

Fill in the blank: Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* portrays Pip's rise from humble origins to _____ status.

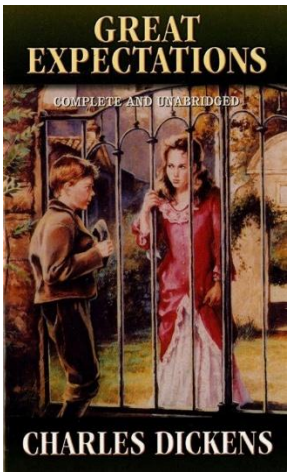

Plate 3.2: Social mobility in English novel

3.2.2 Colonialism, identity, and cultural conflict in African novels

African novels frequently address **colonialism**, defined as the domination of African societies by European powers, and its impact on culture and identity. Writers use the novel to explore **identity**, the sense of self shaped by tradition and history, and **cultural conflict**, the tension between indigenous customs and colonial influences.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* illustrates how colonial intrusion disrupted Igbo society, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* portrays the struggle of individuals caught between traditional values and modern influences. These themes highlight the resilience of African societies and their efforts to preserve cultural identity amidst external pressures.

Fill in the blank: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* portrays individuals caught between _____ values and modern influences.

Tradition	Central Theme	Focus	Example
English	**Social Mobility**	The desire of an individual to rise through the class system through money or marriage.	*Great Expectations* (Dickens)
English	**The Domestic Sphere**	The moral and emotional education of a protagonist within a family or small community.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)

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Tradition	Central Theme	Focus	Example
African	**Cultural Alienation**	The psychological impact of being torn between traditional African values and Western education.	*No Longer at Ease* (Achebe)
African	**Reclaiming History**	Using fiction to rewrite the "official" colonial history from an indigenous perspective.	*A Grain of Wheat* (Ngũgĩ)
African	**The Post-Colonial State**	Critique of corruption and the failures of independence in new African nations.	*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Armah)

Box 3.2: Themes in English and African novels

Pilot questions 3.2

1. What is meant by social mobility in English novels?
2. Which English novel portrays Pip's rise to gentlemanly status?
3. What major theme in African novels refers to domination by European powers?
4. Which African novel illustrates the disruption of Igbo society by colonial intrusion?
5. What tension is explored in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*?

3.3 Language and Style

3.3.1 Standard English and stylistic conventions in English novels

English novels typically employ **standard English**, defined as the widely accepted form of the language used in formal writing and communication. This ensures clarity and accessibility for a broad readership. Stylistic conventions often include carefully structured sentences, refined vocabulary, and consistent grammar. Writers such as Jane Austen and George Eliot exemplify this style, using precise language to explore social relationships, morality, and individual character.

The emphasis on standard English also reflects the cultural context of English novels, where linguistic uniformity was associated with education, refinement, and social status.

Fill in the blank: English novels often employ _____ English to ensure clarity and accessibility for readers.

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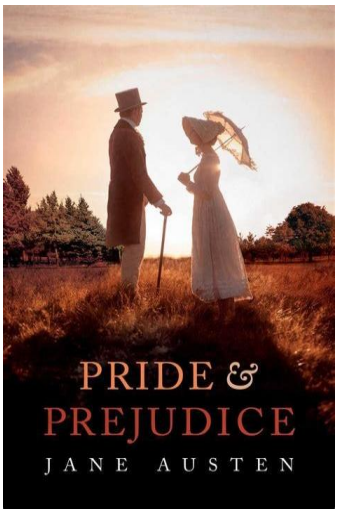

Plate 3.3: Stylistic conventions in English novels

3.3.2 Indigenous languages, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions in African novels

African novels often incorporate **indigenous languages**, defined as local tongues spoken within communities, alongside English. Writers use these languages to preserve cultural identity and authenticity. In addition, **proverbs**, short sayings that express cultural wisdom, and **idiomatic expressions**, phrases whose meanings go beyond their literal words, enrich the narrative style.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a prime example, where Igbo proverbs are woven into the narrative to reflect communal values. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o went further by writing entire novels in Gikuyu, such as *Devil on the Cross*, to assert linguistic independence. These stylistic choices make African novels distinctive, grounding them in local traditions while engaging global audiences.

Fill in the blank: Chinua Achebe enriched his narrative style by weaving _____ into *Things Fall Apart*.

Tradition	Linguistic Approach	Stylistic Function	Example
English	**Standardized Lexicon**	Establishes the narrator as a reliable, sophisticated authority on social manners.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)
English	**High Realism**	Uses dense, descriptive detail to map the physical and psychological "truth" of a setting.	*Middlemarch* (George Eliot)

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Tradition	Linguistic Approach	Stylistic Function	Example
African	**Transliteration**	Translating indigenous idioms directly into English to retain local "flavor" and logic.	*The Voice* (Gabriel Okara)
African	**Proverbial Wisdom**	Uses "palm-oil" (proverbs) to communicate complex social truths in a communal shorthand.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)
African	**Linguistic Resistance**	Abandoning the colonial language entirely to write for a local audience.	*Devil on the Cross* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)

Box 3.3: Language and style in English and African novels

Pilot questions 3.3

1. What form of English is typically used in English novels to ensure clarity?
2. Which English novelist exemplifies stylistic conventions through precise language?
3. What linguistic feature did Achebe use to enrich *Things Fall Apart*?
4. Which African novelist wrote entire novels in Gikuyu to assert linguistic independence?
5. How do idiomatic expressions contribute to the style of African novels?

3.4 Global Relevance and Literary Impact

3.4.1 Influence of English novels on world literature

English novels have had a profound influence on world literature, shaping narrative traditions across continents. Writers such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and George Eliot established models of storytelling that emphasised character development, social commentary, and moral reflection. These works contributed to the spread of the **realist tradition**, defined as a literary style that seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail.

The global reach of English novels was facilitated by colonial expansion and the spread of the English language, making them accessible to diverse audiences. Their influence can be seen in the adoption of linear plots, psychological depth, and social critique in literary traditions worldwide.

Fill in the blank: The realist tradition seeks to depict _____ life with accuracy and detail.

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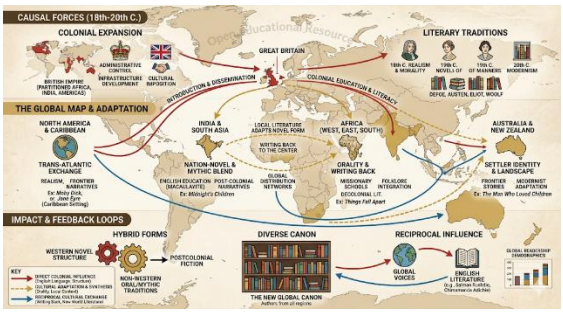

Figure 3.4: Global influence of English novels

3.4.2 Contribution of African novels to postcolonial discourse

African novels have contributed significantly to **postcolonial discourse**, defined as the body of literature and analysis that challenges colonial legacies and asserts indigenous voices. Writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o used the novel to critique colonialism, preserve cultural identity, and engage with global debates on decolonisation.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* became a landmark text, widely studied across the world for its portrayal of Igbo society and its resistance to colonial intrusion. Ngũgĩ's insistence on writing in Gikuyu further reinforced the importance of linguistic independence in postcolonial literature. Together, African novels have reshaped global literary conversations, ensuring that African perspectives are recognised and valued.

Fill in the blank: African novels contribute to _____ discourse by challenging colonial legacies and asserting indigenous voices.

Tradition	Contribution to Global Literature	Primary Function	Example
English	**Establishment of Realism**	Creating a detailed, probable world to explore class, ethics, and the individual.	*Great Expectations* (Dickens)
English	**The Novel of Manners**	Mapping the complex social codes and economic pressures of modern society.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)
African	**Counter-Narrative**	Using the novel form to dismantle Eurocentric myths and "write back" to the center.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)

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Tradition	Contribution to Global Literature	Primary Function	Example
African	**Linguistic Sovereignty**	Asserting that indigenous languages and rhythms are valid vessels for high literature.	*Devil on the Cross* (Ngũgĩ)
Global Hybrid	**Postcolonial Synthesis**	Blending Western structure with local myth, creating a new, "global" narrative style.	*Midnight's Children* (Rushdie)

Box 3.4: Global relevance of English and African novels

Pilot questions 3.4

1. What literary style seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail?
2. Which English writers contributed to the realist tradition?
3. How did colonial expansion facilitate the global reach of English novels?
4. Which African novel is a landmark text in postcolonial discourse?
5. What was Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's major contribution to linguistic independence in literature?

Series Summary

This Series focused on comparing the distinctive features of English and African novels, showing how each tradition reflects its cultural and historical context. We began by examining narrative structures, contrasting the linear and epistolary forms common in English novels with the oral traditions and multi-perspective narration found in African works. We then explored themes and subject matter, noting how English novels often highlight social mobility, class, and individualism, while African novels address colonialism, identity, and cultural conflict. Following that, we studied language and style, comparing the use of standard English and stylistic conventions with the incorporation of indigenous languages, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions. Finally, we considered the global relevance and literary impact of both traditions, recognising how English novels shaped realist traditions worldwide and how African novels contributed to postcolonial discourse.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to **analyse** narrative structures in English novels (SLO 3.1), **explain** oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African novels (SLO 3.2), **compare** thematic concerns across both traditions (SLO 3.3), **evaluate** the role of language and style in shaping literary identity (SLO 3.4), and **assess** the global relevance and impact of English and African novels (SLO 3.5). These outcomes equip you with the skills to critically engage with both traditions and appreciate their contributions to world literature.

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Glossary of Terms

- **Class**: The hierarchical divisions within society, often explored in English novels through themes of marriage, wealth, and social status.
- **Colonialism**: The domination of African societies by European powers, frequently depicted in African novels as a source of disruption and conflict.
- **Cultural conflict**: The tension between indigenous customs and external influences, particularly colonial ones, portrayed in African literature.
- **Epistolary form**: A narrative technique that presents a story through letters, diary entries, or documents, creating intimacy and immediacy.
- **Identity**: The sense of self shaped by tradition, culture, and history, often challenged in African novels by colonial intrusion.
- **Individualism**: The emphasis on personal ambition and self-determination, a recurring theme in English novels.
- **Indigenous languages**: Local tongues spoken within communities, used in African novels to preserve cultural authenticity and assert independence.
- **Linear narrative**: A storytelling structure that follows events in chronological order from beginning to end.
- **Oral traditions**: Cultural narratives transmitted through spoken word, including myths, folktales, and proverbs, which influence African novel structures.
- **Postcolonial discourse**: Literature and analysis that challenge colonial legacies and assert indigenous voices, central to African novels.
- **Proverbs**: Short sayings that express cultural wisdom, often woven into African novels to reflect communal values.
- **Realist tradition**: A literary style that seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail, strongly associated with English novels.
- **Social mobility**: The movement of individuals or families between social classes, a common theme in English novels.
- **Standard English**: The widely accepted form of English used in formal writing, employed in English novels for clarity and accessibility.

Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. Which narrative structure presents events in chronological order? (Linked to SLO 3.1)
2. What narrative form tells a story through letters and diary entries? (Linked to SLO 3.1)

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3. Which African novel integrates proverbs and oral traditions from Igbo culture? (Linked to SLO 3.2)
4. What theme in English novels focuses on movement between social classes? (Linked to SLO 3.3)
5. Which literary style seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail? (Linked to SLO 3.5)

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define oral traditions and explain their role in African novels. (Linked to SLO 3.2)
2. Describe how Dickens's *Great Expectations* illustrates social mobility. (Linked to SLO 3.3)
3. Explain the significance of standard English in English novels. (Linked to SLO 3.4)
4. Identify Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's contribution to linguistic independence in African literature. (Linked to SLO 3.4)
5. State one way African novels contribute to postcolonial discourse. (Linked to SLO 3.5)

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the differences between linear narrative and multi-perspective narration in English and African novels. (Linked to SLO 3.1 & 3.2)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe linear and epistolary forms in English novels and oral traditions with multi-perspective narration in African novels.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these structures reflect cultural contexts, with English novels emphasising individual journeys and African novels highlighting communal voices.
2. Compare the thematic concerns of English and African novels with examples. (Linked to SLO 3.3)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should explain social mobility, class, and individualism in English novels, and colonialism, identity, and cultural conflict in African novels.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may connect these themes to broader societal issues, such as industrialisation in England and decolonisation in Africa, showing how literature mirrors historical change.
3. Evaluate the global relevance of English and African novels. (Linked to SLO 3.5)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should note that English novels spread realist traditions worldwide, while African novels contributed to postcolonial discourse.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may assess how both traditions influenced global literary conversations, with English novels shaping narrative conventions and African novels challenging colonial legacies.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

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Objective Questions

1. Linear narrative
2. Epistolary form
3. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
4. Social mobility
5. Realist tradition

Short-Answer Questions

1. Oral traditions are spoken cultural narratives such as myths, folktales, and proverbs. They enrich African novels by preserving cultural identity and shaping narrative structures.
2. Pip rises from humble origins to gentlemanly status, showing how ambition and opportunity can alter social class.
3. Standard English ensures clarity, accessibility, and consistency, reflecting education and refinement in English novels.
4. Ngũgĩ wrote novels in Gikuyu, such as *Devil on the Cross*, to assert linguistic independence and preserve cultural identity.
5. African novels challenge colonial legacies and assert indigenous voices, contributing to global postcolonial discourse.

Long-Answer Questions

1. **Basic response**: English novels use linear and epistolary forms, while African novels employ oral traditions and multi-perspective narration. **Value-added response**: These structures reflect cultural contexts, with English novels focusing on individual journeys and African novels emphasising communal voices and collective memory.
2. **Basic response**: English novels explore social mobility, class, and individualism, while African novels address colonialism, identity, and cultural conflict. **Value-added response**: These themes mirror historical realities, such as industrialisation in England and decolonisation in Africa, showing literature as a reflection of societal change.
3. **Basic response**: English novels spread realist traditions globally, while African novels contributed to postcolonial discourse. **Value-added response**: Both traditions influenced world literature, with English novels shaping narrative conventions and African novels challenging colonial perspectives and enriching global debates.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 3]

Part 3.1 Narrative Structures and Techniques

1. Linear narrative structure
2. Epistolary form
3. Oral traditions introduce cyclical storytelling and communal voices
4. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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5. Multi-perspective narration

Part 3.2 Themes and Subject Matter

1. Social mobility
2. *Great Expectations*
3. Colonialism
4. *Things Fall Apart*
5. Traditional values and modern influences

Part 3.3 Language and Style

1. Standard English
2. Jane Austen
3. Proverbs
4. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
5. They enrich style by adding cultural depth and figurative meaning

Part 3.4 Global Relevance and Literary Impact

1. Realist tradition
2. Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, George Eliot
3. By spreading the English language and literary models through colonial expansion
4. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
5. Writing novels in Gikuyu, such as *Devil on the Cross*

References and Attributions [Series 3]

This section compiles all references, attributions, and illustration prompts used in Series 3: *Distinctive Features of English and African Novels*. The referencing style applied here follows a simplified APA format for clarity and consistency.

Textual References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Dickens, C. (1861). *Great Expectations*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- Eliot, G. (1871). *Middlemarch*. London: William Blackwood & Sons.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1965). *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1980). *Devil on the Cross*. Nairobi: Heinemann (originally in Gikuyu).
- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*. London: T. Egerton.

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Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

- **Figure 3.1: Narrative structures in English novels**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram comparing linear narrative and epistolary form in English novels.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “linear narrative epistolary form English novels OER diagram.”
- **Plate 3.1: Oral traditions in African novels**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Things Fall Apart Achebe book cover OER image.”
- **Box 3.1: Distinctive narrative techniques in English and African novels**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table comparing narrative techniques in English and African novels with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “English vs African novel narrative techniques OER table.”
- **Plate 3.2: Social mobility in English novels**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Great Expectations Dickens book cover OER image.”
- **Box 3.2: Themes in English and African novels**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table comparing themes in English and African novels with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “themes English vs African novels OER table.”
- **Plate 3.3: Stylistic conventions in English novels**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Pride and Prejudice Jane Austen book cover OER image.”
- **Box 3.3: Language and style in English and African novels**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table comparing language and style in English and African novels with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “language style English vs African novels OER table.”
- **Figure 3.4: Global influence of English novels**

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- AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing the global influence of English novels through colonial expansion and literary traditions.”
- Suggested OER search string: “global influence English novels OER diagram.”

- **Box 3.4: Global relevance of English and African novels**
  - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising the global relevance of English and African novels with examples.”
  - Suggested OER search string: “global relevance English African novels OER table.”

Course code: LIT 105
Course title: Introduction to Prose Literature

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Origins and Evolution of the English Novel

Series 2: Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa

Series 3: Distinctive Features of English and African Novels

Series 4: Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions

Series 5: Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction

Proposed Outline for Series 4
Part 4.1 Historical Foundations of Prose Traditions

- 4.1.1 Origins and development of Western prose
- 4.1.2 Emergence and evolution of African prose

Part 4.2 Narrative Techniques and Structures

- 4.2.1 Realism, linearity, and characterisation in Western prose
- 4.2.2 Oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration in African prose

Part 4.3 Thematic Concerns and Cultural Contexts

- 4.3.1 Individualism, morality, and social critique in Western prose
- 4.3.2 Colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience in African prose

Part 4.4 Global Relevance and Cross-Influences

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- 4.4.1 Western prose influence on African literary forms
- 4.4.2 African prose contributions to world literature and postcolonial discourse

Introduction

In the last Series, we examined the distinctive features of English and African novels, focusing on their narrative structures, themes, language, and global impact. Building on that foundation, this Series turns to a broader comparative study of African and Western prose traditions. By looking at their historical roots, stylistic techniques, and cultural contexts, we can better understand how these traditions developed, influenced one another, and contributed to world literature. This exploration is important because it highlights both the uniqueness of each tradition and the points of intersection that enrich literary studies.

The aim of this Series is to equip you with the ability to critically compare African and Western prose traditions, examining their historical foundations, narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and global relevance.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the historical foundations of prose traditions, beginning with the origins and development of Western prose and then considering the emergence and evolution of African prose. Next, we will study narrative techniques and structures, contrasting realism and linearity in Western prose with oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African prose. Following that, we will examine thematic concerns and cultural contexts, focusing on individualism and morality in Western prose alongside colonialism and identity in African prose. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the global relevance and cross-influences of both traditions, showing how Western prose shaped African literary forms and how African prose contributed to world literature and postcolonial discourse.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 4.1** describe the historical foundations of Western prose, including its origins and development,
- **SLO 4.2** explain the emergence and evolution of African prose traditions,
- **SLO 4.3** analyse narrative techniques in Western prose, focusing on realism, linearity, and characterisation,
- **SLO 4.4** examine narrative techniques in African prose, including oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration,

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- **SLO 4.5** compare thematic concerns in Western prose, such as individualism, morality, and social critique, with those in African prose, including colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience,
- **SLO 4.6** evaluate the global relevance of African and Western prose traditions, identifying cross-influences and contributions to world literature and postcolonial discourse.

4.1 Historical Foundations of Prose Traditions

4.1.1 Origins and development of Western prose

Western prose has its roots in **classical antiquity**, defined as the period of ancient Greek and Roman civilisation. Early prose works included philosophical dialogues, historical accounts, and rhetorical treatises. Over time, prose evolved into literary forms such as the novel, which became prominent in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Writers like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson pioneered the English novel, emphasising realism and individual experience.

The development of Western prose was shaped by cultural movements such as the Renaissance, which revived classical learning, and the Enlightenment, which promoted reason and human progress. These influences gave Western prose its distinctive focus on rationality, individualism, and social critique.

Fill in the blank: The Enlightenment promoted _____ and human progress, shaping the themes of Western prose.

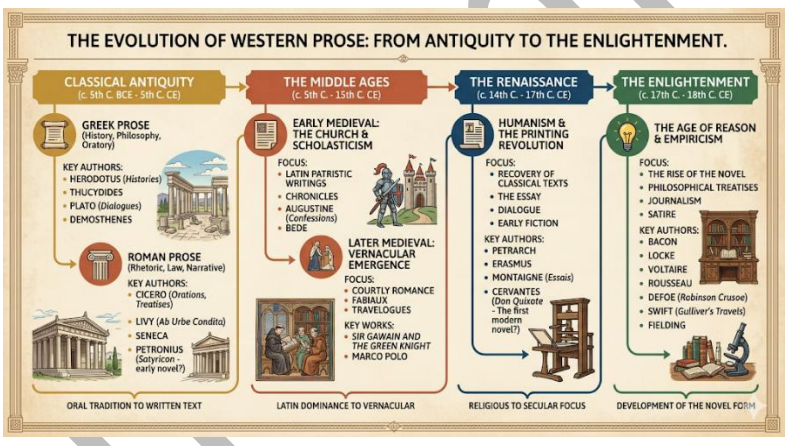

Figure 4.1: Historical development of Western prose

4.1.2 Emergence and evolution of African prose

African prose traditions emerged later, influenced by both indigenous oral storytelling and colonial encounters. **Oral storytelling** is defined as the transmission of cultural narratives through spoken word, including folktales, myths, and proverbs. These oral traditions provided the foundation for African prose, shaping its themes and structures.

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The colonial period introduced written forms of prose, often in European languages such as English and French. African writers adapted these forms to express indigenous experiences, blending oral traditions with Western literary techniques. Early African prose works, such as Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, demonstrated this fusion by incorporating folklore into written narrative. Later, writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o developed prose that challenged colonial authority and asserted African identity.

Fill in the blank: African prose traditions were shaped by a fusion of oral storytelling and _____ encounters.

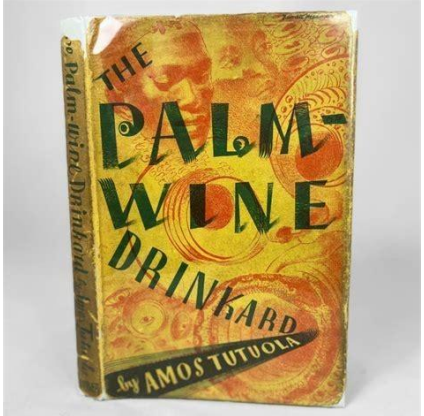

Plate 4.1: Early African prose blending oral traditions and written forms

Tradition	Historical Milestone	Core Characteristic	Example
Western	**Classical Foundations**	Focus on oratory, philosophical dialogues, and historical recording.	*The Republic* (Plato)
Western	**The Printing Revolution**	The shift from handwritten manuscripts to mass-produced vernacular texts.	*Don Quixote* (Cervantes)
Western	**Enlightenment Realism**	The rise of the "individual" hero and grounded, probable narratives.	*Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe)
African	**The Oral Foundation**	A rich history of myths, proverbs, and epics passed down through performance.	*The Epic of Sundiata*

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Tradition	Historical Milestone	Core Characteristic	Example
African	**The "Hybrid" Novel**	Merging Western novel structures with indigenous folklore and "Young English."	*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Tutuola)
African	**Postcolonial Assertion**	Using the novel to dismantle colonial myths and restore African dignity.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)

Box 4.1: Key milestones in African and Western prose traditions

Pilot questions 4.1

1. Which cultural period revived classical learning and influenced Western prose?
2. Name one early English novelist who pioneered realism.
3. What is oral storytelling, and how did it shape African prose?
4. Which African writer blended folklore with written narrative in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*?
5. How did African prose evolve during the postcolonial period?

4.2 Narrative Techniques and Structures

4.2.1 Realism, linearity, and characterisation in Western prose

Western prose is often associated with **realism**, defined as a literary style that seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail. Realist writers aim to present characters and events in ways that reflect ordinary human experiences, avoiding exaggeration or fantasy. Alongside realism, Western prose frequently employs **linearity**, a narrative technique in which events are presented in chronological order, creating a clear and logical progression.

Another hallmark of Western prose is **characterisation**, the process of developing believable and complex characters. Writers such as George Eliot in *Middlemarch* and Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations* used detailed descriptions and psychological depth to make their characters relatable and memorable. These techniques together give Western prose its distinctive clarity and focus on individual journeys.

Fill in the blank: Realism in Western prose seeks to depict _____ life with accuracy and detail.

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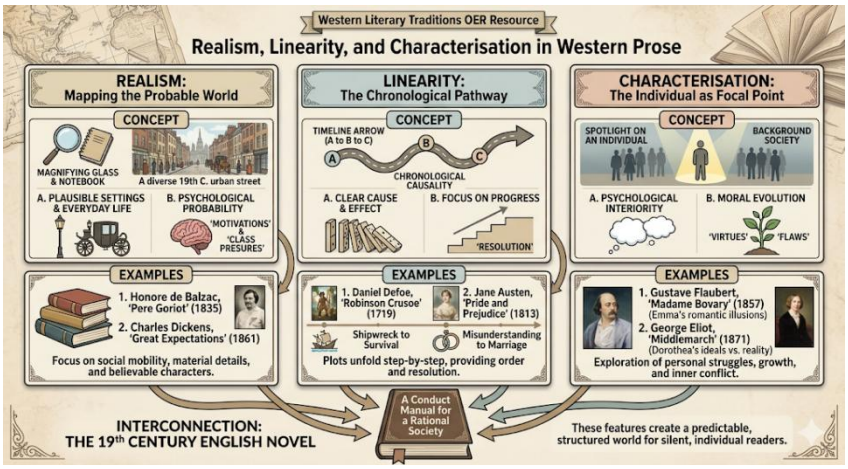

Figure 4.2: Narrative techniques in Western prose

4.2.2 Oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration in African prose

African prose draws heavily on **oral traditions**, defined as cultural narratives transmitted through spoken word, including folktales, myths, and proverbs. These traditions influence prose by introducing cyclical storytelling, digressions, and communal voices. African writers often use **symbolism**, the representation of ideas through objects, characters, or events, to convey deeper cultural meanings.

Another distinctive technique is **multi-perspective narration**, where events are presented from the viewpoints of multiple characters. This reflects the communal nature of African societies and allows for diverse interpretations of events. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* integrates proverbs and oral traditions, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* employs multi-perspective narration to capture the complexity of postcolonial Kenya.

Fill in the blank: Multi-perspective narration presents events from _____ viewpoints, reflecting communal storytelling traditions.

Plate 4.2: Oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African prose

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Tradition	Key Technique	Primary Narrative Function	Representative Work
Western	**High Realism**	To create a "probable" world using minute social and physical details.	*Middlemarch* (George Eliot)
Western	**Strict Linearity**	To establish a clear cause-and-effect timeline of an individual's life.	*Great Expectations* (Dickens)
Western	**Psychological Interiority**	To focus on the private thoughts and moral growth of a single protagonist.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)
African	**Orality & Proverbs**	To embed communal philosophy and the "voice" of the tribe into the text.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)
African	**Mythic Symbolism**	To blend the physical world with the supernatural or "unseen" realm.	*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Tutuola)
African	**Polyphony**	To use multiple narrators, reflecting a communal rather than individual truth.	*Petals of Blood* (Ngũgĩ)

Box 4.2: Comparative narrative techniques in African and Western prose

Pilot questions 4.2

1. What literary style in Western prose depicts everyday life with accuracy and detail?
2. Which English novelist used psychological depth in characterisation?
3. What are oral traditions, and how do they shape African prose?
4. Which African novel employs multi-perspective narration to capture postcolonial experiences?
5. How does symbolism enrich African prose narratives?

4.3 Thematic Concerns and Cultural Contexts

4.3.1 Individualism, morality, and social critique in Western prose

Western prose often explores **individualism**, defined as the emphasis on personal ambition, independence, and self-determination. Characters are frequently portrayed as navigating social structures in pursuit of their own goals. Alongside this, themes of **morality**, which refer to

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questions of right and wrong behaviour, are central to many Western works. Writers use prose to challenge readers to reflect on ethical choices and their consequences.

Another recurring theme is **social critique**, the use of literature to highlight injustices or flaws within society. For example, Charles Dickens's novels often expose the harsh realities of poverty and inequality in Victorian England, while George Eliot's *Middlemarch* examines the limitations of social conventions. These themes together illustrate how Western prose serves both as entertainment and as a mirror to society.

Fill in the blank: Dickens's novels often expose the harsh realities of _____ and inequality in Victorian England.

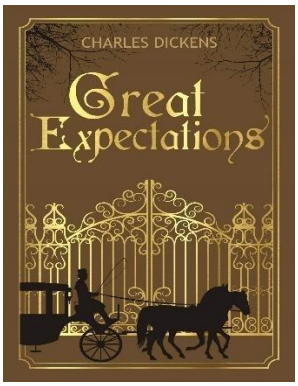

Plate 4.3: Social critique in Western prose

4.3.2 Colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience in African prose

African prose is deeply shaped by **colonialism**, defined as the domination of African societies by European powers. Writers often depict the disruption caused by colonial intrusion, showing its effects on communities and traditions. A related theme is **identity**, the sense of self shaped by culture, history, and social belonging. African prose frequently portrays characters struggling to reconcile indigenous traditions with colonial influences.

Another important theme is **cultural resilience**, the ability of societies to preserve and adapt their traditions despite external pressures. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* illustrates the clash between Igbo traditions and colonial authority, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* portrays individuals caught between traditional values and modern influences. These themes highlight the strength of African societies in maintaining cultural identity amidst change.

Fill in the blank: African prose often portrays characters struggling to reconcile indigenous traditions with _____ influences.

Tradition	Core Thematic Concern	Narrative Function	Example
Western	**Realism & Morality**	Mapping the detailed social codes and moral consequences of modern life.	*Middlemarch* (Eliot)

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Tradition	Core Thematic Concern	Narrative Function	Example
Western	**Social Mobility & Class**	The desire of the individual to navigate or rise within a defined class structure.	*Great Expectations* (Dickens)
Western	**The Domestic Sphere**	The psychological and emotional development of a protagonist within a family.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)
African	**Cultural Alienation**	The struggle of a character torn between traditional African values and Western education.	*No Longer at Ease* (Achebe)
African	**Colonial Resistance**	Documenting the collision of worldviews and asserting the dignity of pre-colonial culture.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)
African	**The Postcolonial Failure**	Critique of corruption and disillusionment in the years following independence.	*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Armah)
African	**Gendered Agency**	Re-centering the narrative on African women's unique struggles against both tradition and colonization.	*The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta)

Box 4.3: Comparative themes in African and Western prose

Pilot questions 4.3

1. What is individualism, and how is it portrayed in Western prose?
2. Which English novelist used prose to expose poverty and inequality in Victorian England?
3. What is meant by identity in African prose?
4. Which African novel illustrates the clash between Igbo traditions and colonial authority?
5. How does cultural resilience feature in African prose narratives?

4.4 Global Relevance and Cross-Influences

4.4.1 Western prose influence on African literary forms

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Western prose traditions significantly influenced African literature, particularly during the colonial period. The introduction of **written prose**, defined as structured narrative in written form, provided African writers with new tools to express their experiences. Many early African works adopted Western forms such as the novel, but infused them with local themes and oral traditions.

For example, African writers used Western linear structures to frame stories but incorporated indigenous elements like proverbs and communal voices. This blending created a unique hybrid style that reflected both colonial influence and African resilience.

Fill in the blank: Early African prose often adopted Western forms such as the _____ but infused them with local traditions.

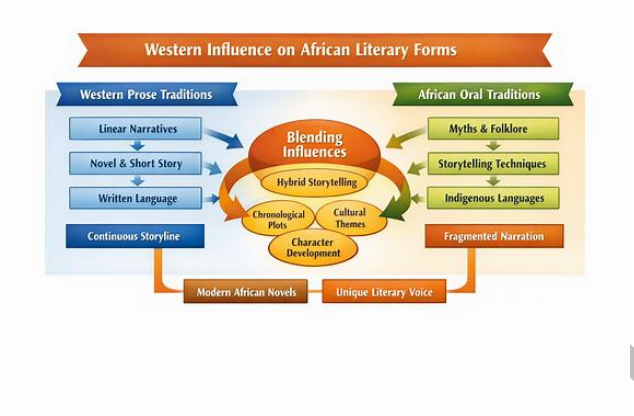

Figure 4.4: Western influence on African prose

4.4.2 African prose contributions to world literature and postcolonial discourse

African prose has made lasting contributions to **world literature**, defined as literary works that transcend national boundaries and are studied globally. By addressing themes of colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience, African writers have reshaped global literary conversations.

A key contribution is to **postcolonial discourse**, which challenges colonial legacies and asserts indigenous voices. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* became a landmark text in this regard, widely studied for its portrayal of Igbo society and its critique of colonial intrusion. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o further advanced this discourse by writing in Gikuyu, emphasising linguistic independence. These contributions ensure that African perspectives are recognised and valued in global literary studies.

Fill in the blank: African prose contributes to _____ discourse by challenging colonial legacies and asserting indigenous voices.

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Tradition	Key Contribution	Global Impact	Representative Work
Western	**Realist Framework**	Established the "probable world" narrative, focusing on individual agency and social mapping.	*Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe)
Western	**Formal Architecture**	Provided the structural "DNA" (chapters, plot arcs, interiority) used by global writers.	*Great Expectations* (Charles Dickens)
African	**The Counter-Narrative**	Dismantled Eurocentric myths by "writing back" to the center from an African perspective.	*Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe)
African	**Linguistic Sovereignty**	Proved that indigenous languages and rhythms are valid for high-literary expression.	*Devil on the Cross* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)
African	**Oral-Written Hybridity**	Enriched world literature by successfully blending ancient oral traditions with modern prose.	*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Amos Tutuola)

Box 4.4: Global relevance of African and Western prose traditions

Pilot questions 4.4

1. Which Western literary form influenced early African prose?
2. How did African writers blend Western structures with indigenous traditions?
3. What is world literature, and how does African prose contribute to it?
4. Which African novel is considered a landmark text in postcolonial discourse?
5. How did Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasise linguistic independence in his prose?

Series Summary

This Series examined African and Western prose traditions side by side, highlighting their historical foundations, narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and global relevance. We began with the origins of Western prose in classical antiquity and the Enlightenment, then considered the emergence of African prose shaped by oral storytelling and colonial encounters. Moving on, we compared narrative techniques, noting realism, linearity, and characterisation in Western

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prose alongside oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration in African prose. We then explored thematic concerns, contrasting individualism, morality, and social critique in Western works with colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience in African texts. Finally, we assessed global relevance, showing how Western prose influenced African literary forms and how African prose contributed to world literature and postcolonial discourse.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to **describe** the historical foundations of Western prose (SLO 4.1), **explain** the emergence of African prose traditions (SLO 4.2), **analyse** narrative techniques in Western prose (SLO 4.3), **examine** narrative techniques in African prose (SLO 4.4), **compare** thematic concerns across both traditions (SLO 4.5), and **evaluate** their global relevance and cross-influences (SLO 4.6). These outcomes provide you with the skills to critically engage with prose traditions from different cultures and appreciate their contributions to world literature.

Glossary of Terms

- **Characterisation**: The process of creating believable and complex characters in prose, often through detailed description and psychological depth.
- **Colonialism**: The domination of African societies by European powers, frequently depicted in African prose as a source of disruption and conflict.
- **Cultural resilience**: The ability of societies to preserve and adapt their traditions despite external pressures such as colonialism.
- **Identity**: The sense of self shaped by culture, history, and social belonging, often explored in African prose.
- **Individualism**: The emphasis on personal ambition, independence, and self-determination, a recurring theme in Western prose.
- **Linearity**: A narrative technique in which events are presented in chronological order, creating a clear and logical progression.
- **Morality**: Questions of right and wrong behaviour, often examined in Western prose through characters' choices and consequences.
- **Multi-perspective narration**: A storytelling technique in which events are presented from the viewpoints of multiple characters, reflecting communal traditions.
- **Oral storytelling**: The transmission of cultural narratives through spoken word, including folktales, myths, and proverbs, which strongly influence African prose.
- **Postcolonial discourse**: Literature and analysis that challenge colonial legacies and assert indigenous voices, central to African prose traditions.
- **Realism**: A literary style that seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail, strongly associated with Western prose.
- **Social critique**: The use of literature to highlight injustices or flaws within society, often seen in Western prose.

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- **Symbolism**: The representation of ideas through objects, characters, or events, commonly used in African prose to convey deeper cultural meanings.
- **World literature**: Literary works that transcend national boundaries and are studied globally, enriched by contributions from both African and Western prose traditions.
- **Written prose**: Structured narrative in written form, introduced to African societies during the colonial period and adapted to local contexts.

Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions

1. Which cultural movement promoted reason and human progress, shaping Western prose? (Linked to SLO 4.1)
2. Who pioneered the blending of folklore with written narrative in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*? (Linked to SLO 4.2)
3. What literary style in Western prose seeks to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail? (Linked to SLO 4.3)
4. Which African novel illustrates the clash between Igbo traditions and colonial authority? (Linked to SLO 4.5)
5. What type of discourse challenges colonial legacies and asserts indigenous voices? (Linked to SLO 4.6)

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define oral storytelling and explain its role in shaping African prose. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
2. Describe how George Eliot used characterisation in *Middlemarch*. (Linked to SLO 4.3)
3. Explain the theme of social critique in Dickens's works. (Linked to SLO 4.5)
4. Identify one way African prose contributes to world literature. (Linked to SLO 4.6)
5. State how Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasised linguistic independence in his prose. (Linked to SLO 4.6)

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the historical foundations of Western and African prose traditions. (Linked to SLO 4.1 & 4.2)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe Western prose origins in classical antiquity and Enlightenment, and African prose emergence through oral storytelling and colonial encounters.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these foundations reflect cultural contexts, with Western prose shaped by rationality and individualism, and African prose by communal traditions and resilience.

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2. Compare narrative techniques in Western and African prose with examples. (Linked to SLO 4.3 & 4.4)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should explain realism, linearity, and characterisation in Western prose, and oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration in African prose.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may assess how these techniques reflect cultural priorities, with Western prose focusing on individual journeys and African prose emphasising communal voices and cultural identity.
3. Evaluate the thematic concerns and global relevance of African and Western prose traditions. (Linked to SLO 4.5 & 4.6)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should note individualism, morality, and social critique in Western prose, and colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience in African prose, alongside their global contributions.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may connect these themes to broader historical and cultural contexts, such as industrialisation in Europe and decolonisation in Africa, and assess how both traditions enriched world literature and postcolonial discourse.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions

1. The Enlightenment
2. Amos Tutuola
3. Realism
4. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
5. Postcolonial discourse

Short-Answer Questions

1. Oral storytelling is the transmission of cultural narratives through spoken word, including folktales, myths, and proverbs. It shaped African prose by providing narrative structures and cultural depth.
2. Eliot used detailed descriptions and psychological insight to portray complex, believable characters in *Middlemarch*.
3. Dickens's works highlight poverty and inequality, critiquing social injustices in Victorian England.
4. African prose contributes by reshaping global literary conversations and asserting indigenous perspectives.
5. Ngũgĩ wrote novels in Gikuyu, such as *Devil on the Cross*, to emphasise linguistic independence.

Long-Answer Questions

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1. **Basic response**: Western prose developed from classical antiquity and Enlightenment rationality, while African prose emerged from oral traditions and colonial encounters. **Value-added response**: These foundations reflect cultural contexts, with Western prose emphasising reason and individualism, and African prose highlighting communal traditions and resilience.
2. **Basic response**: Western prose uses realism, linearity, and characterisation, while African prose employs oral traditions, symbolism, and multi-perspective narration. **Value-added response**: These techniques reflect cultural priorities, with Western prose focusing on individual journeys and African prose emphasising communal voices and cultural identity.
3. **Basic response**: Western prose explores individualism, morality, and social critique, while African prose addresses colonialism, identity, and cultural resilience. Both traditions contribute to global literature. **Value-added response**: These themes mirror historical realities such as industrialisation in Europe and decolonisation in Africa, showing how both traditions enriched world literature and postcolonial discourse.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 4]

Part 4.1 Historical Foundations of Prose Traditions

1. The Renaissance
2. Daniel Defoe
3. Oral storytelling is the transmission of cultural narratives through spoken word, including folktales, myths, and proverbs.
4. Amos Tutuola
5. African prose evolved by blending oral traditions with written forms and later asserting postcolonial identity.

Part 4.2 Narrative Techniques and Structures

1. Realism
2. George Eliot
3. Oral traditions are spoken cultural narratives that shape African prose by introducing cyclical storytelling and communal voices.
4. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*
5. Symbolism enriches African prose by conveying deeper cultural meanings through objects, characters, or events.

Part 4.3 Thematic Concerns and Cultural Contexts

1. Individualism is the emphasis on personal ambition and independence, portrayed in Western prose through characters pursuing their own goals.
2. Charles Dickens
3. Identity refers to the sense of self shaped by culture, history, and social belonging.

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4. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
5. Cultural resilience is shown through the preservation and adaptation of traditions despite colonial pressures.

Part 4.4 Global Relevance and Cross-Influences

1. The novel
2. African writers blended Western linear structures with indigenous traditions such as proverbs and communal voices.
3. World literature refers to works studied globally, and African prose contributes by reshaping literary conversations and asserting indigenous perspectives.
4. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
5. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasised linguistic independence by writing novels in Gikuyu, such as *Devil on the Cross*.

References and Attributions [Series 4]

This section compiles all references, attributions, and illustration prompts used in Series 4: *Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions*. The referencing style applied here follows a simplified APA format for clarity and consistency.

Textual References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Dickens, C. (1861). *Great Expectations*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- Eliot, G. (1871). *Middlemarch*. London: William Blackwood & Sons.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1965). *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1977). *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann.
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- Tutuola, A. (1952). *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*. London: T. Egerton.
- Defoe, D. (1719). *Robinson Crusoe*. London: W. Taylor.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

- **Figure 4.1: Historical development of Western prose**
    - AI prompt: "Create a timeline diagram showing the development of Western prose from classical antiquity to the Enlightenment."
    - Suggested OER search string: "timeline development Western prose OER diagram."

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- **Plate 4.1: Early African prose blending oral traditions and written forms**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Amos Tutuola’s The Palm-Wine Drinkard book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “The Palm-Wine Drinkard Amos Tutuola book cover OER image.”
- **Box 4.1: Key milestones in African and Western prose traditions**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising key milestones in African and Western prose traditions with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “African Western prose traditions milestones OER table.”
- **Figure 4.2: Narrative techniques in Western prose**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing realism, linearity, and characterisation in Western prose with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “realism linearity characterisation Western prose OER diagram.”
- **Plate 4.2: Oral traditions and multi-perspective narration in African prose**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Things Fall Apart Achebe book cover OER image.”
- **Box 4.2: Comparative narrative techniques in African and Western prose**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table comparing narrative techniques in African and Western prose with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “African vs Western prose narrative techniques OER table.”
- **Plate 4.3: Social critique in Western prose**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations book cover.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Great Expectations Dickens book cover OER image.”
- **Box 4.3: Comparative themes in African and Western prose**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table comparing thematic concerns in African and Western prose with examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “African vs Western prose themes OER table.”
- **Figure 4.4: Western influence on African prose**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing how Western prose influenced African literary forms, blending linear structures with oral traditions.”

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- Suggested OER search string: “Western influence African prose OER diagram.”

- **Box 4.4: Global relevance of African and Western prose traditions**
  - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising the global relevance of African and Western prose traditions with examples.”
  - Suggested OER search string: “African Western prose global relevance OER table.”

Course code: LIT 105
Course title: Introduction to Prose Literature

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Origins and Evolution of the English Novel

Series 2: Adaptation of the English Novel in Africa

Series 3: Distinctive Features of English and African Novels

Series 4: Comparative Study of African and Western Prose Traditions

Series 5: Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction

Proposed Outline for Series 5
5.1 Foundations of Literary Theory

- 5.1.1 Classical and Renaissance perspectives
- 5.1.2 Enlightenment and Romantic approaches
- 5.1.3 Early modern criticism

5.2 Major Theories of Fiction

- 5.2.1 Formalism and structuralism
- 5.2.2 Marxist and feminist criticism
- 5.2.3 Psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approaches

5.3 Contemporary Criticism and Applications

- 5.3.1 Postcolonial theory and African perspectives
- 5.3.2 Reader-response and reception theory
- 5.3.3 Ecocriticism and cultural studies

5.4 Evaluating Fiction Through Critical Lenses

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- 5.4.1 Applying theories to selected texts
- 5.4.2 Comparative evaluation of African and Western fiction
- 5.4.3 Strengths and limitations of critical approaches

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored African and Western prose traditions, focusing on their historical foundations, narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and global relevance. Building on that knowledge, this Series turns to the theories and criticisms of fiction, which provide the tools and frameworks for interpreting literary texts. Understanding these theories is essential because they help us move beyond surface-level reading to deeper analysis, allowing us to appreciate how fiction reflects, challenges, and reshapes cultural and social realities.

The aim of this Series is to introduce you to major theories and critical approaches to fiction and to equip you with the skills to apply these perspectives when evaluating African and Western literary texts.

We shall commence this Series by examining the foundations of literary theory, beginning with classical and Renaissance perspectives before considering Enlightenment, Romantic, and early modern criticism. Next, we will analyse major theories of fiction, including formalism, structuralism, Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic approaches, and poststructuralism. Following that, we will explore contemporary criticism and applications, such as postcolonial theory, reader-response, ecocriticism, and cultural studies. Finally, we will conclude by evaluating fiction through these critical lenses, applying selected theories to African and Western texts and assessing the strengths and limitations of different approaches.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 5.1** define the historical foundations of literary theory, including classical, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romantic perspectives,
- **SLO 5.2** explain the principles of early modern criticism and its role in shaping approaches to fiction,
- **SLO 5.3** analyse major theories of fiction such as formalism, structuralism, Marxist criticism, and feminist criticism,
- **SLO 5.4** examine psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approaches to fiction, identifying their distinctive contributions,
- **SLO 5.5** describe contemporary critical perspectives including postcolonial theory, reader-response, and ecocriticism,
- **SLO 5.6** apply selected critical theories to the evaluation of African and Western fiction,

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- **SLO 5.7** evaluate the strengths and limitations of different critical approaches when interpreting fiction.

5.1 Foundations of Literary Theory

5.1.1 Classical and Renaissance perspectives

The earliest foundations of literary theory can be traced to **classical perspectives**, defined as approaches developed in ancient Greece and Rome. Thinkers such as Aristotle in *Poetics* emphasised the importance of plot, character, and catharsis, while Plato questioned the moral role of literature in society. These classical ideas provided the groundwork for later theories by establishing literature as a subject worthy of systematic study.

During the **Renaissance**, defined as the cultural revival in Europe from the 14th to 17th centuries, literary theory was influenced by humanism and the rediscovery of classical texts. Writers and critics focused on the role of imagination, the value of artistic expression, and the moral purpose of literature. This period marked a shift towards celebrating creativity and the individual author's voice.

Fill in the blank: Aristotle's *Poetics* emphasised the importance of plot, character, and _____ in literature.

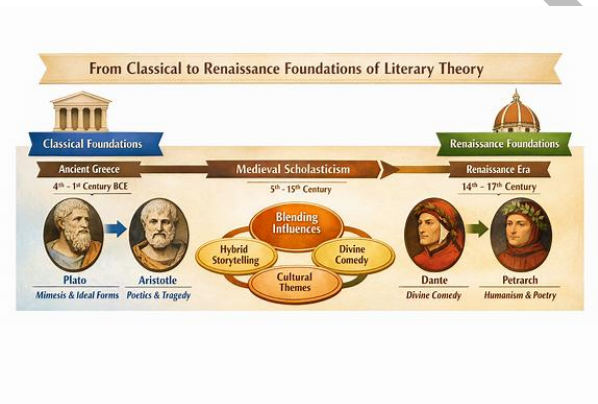

Figure 5.1: Classical and Renaissance foundations of literary theory

5.1.2 Enlightenment and Romantic approaches

The **Enlightenment**, defined as the intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, emphasised reason, clarity, and universal truths. Literary theory during this period often evaluated texts based on their ability to promote rational thought and moral improvement. Critics valued order, balance, and adherence to established rules.

In contrast, the **Romantic movement** of the late 18th and early 19th centuries celebrated emotion, imagination, and individuality. Romantic theorists argued that literature should express the inner world of the writer and evoke powerful feelings in the reader. This marked a departure from Enlightenment rationality, highlighting the tension between reason and emotion in literary criticism.

Fill in the blank: The Romantic movement celebrated _____, imagination, and individuality in literature.

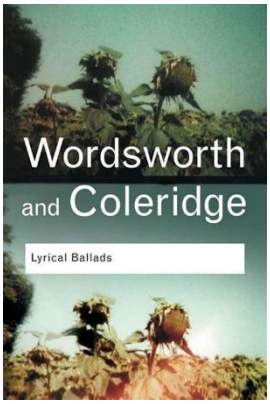

Plate 5.1: Romantic emphasis on imagination and emotion

5.1.3 Early modern criticism

Early modern criticism refers to the literary theories and practices that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This period saw the rise of professional literary studies in universities and the development of systematic approaches to analysing texts. Critics began to focus on the autonomy of literature, treating it as an art form with its own rules and structures rather than merely a reflection of society.

This era laid the foundation for later movements such as formalism and structuralism, which emphasised close reading and the internal organisation of texts. Early modern criticism thus bridged the gap between traditional moral approaches and modern analytical frameworks.

Fill in the blank: Early modern criticism treated literature as an _____ with its own rules and structures.

Period	Central Focus	Key Concept	Key Figures
Classical	**Mimesis & Ethics**	Literature as an imitation of life that must provide moral or emotional purgation (*catharsis*).	Aristotle, Plato
Renaissance	**Humanism & Defense**	Asserting the "divine" power of the poet to create a world better than nature.	Sir Philip Sidney
Enlightenment	**Reason & Neoclassicism**	Strict adherence to "Nature" and "Reason"; the search for universal rules of taste and clarity.	Voltaire, Pope, Diderot

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Period	Central Focus	Key Concept	Key Figures
Romantic	**Expressive Subjectivity**	Literature as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"; focus on the individual imagination.	Wordsworth, Coleridge
Early Modern/Victorian	**Culture & Morality**	Literature as a replacement for religion—a tool for social "sweetness and light."	Matthew Arnold

Box 5.1: Key milestones in the foundations of literary theory

Pilot questions 5.1

1. Which classical thinker emphasised plot, character, and catharsis in literature?
2. What cultural revival influenced Renaissance literary theory?
3. What did Enlightenment critics value in literature?
4. Which literary movement celebrated emotion and imagination?
5. How did early modern criticism treat literature?

5.2 Major Theories of Fiction

5.2.1 Formalism and structuralism

Formalism is a critical approach that focuses on the form and structure of a literary text rather than its social or historical context. It emphasises close reading, examining elements such as language, imagery, and narrative techniques. Russian formalists like Viktor Shklovsky argued that literature should be studied as a distinct art form, with attention to how it defamiliarises ordinary language.

Structuralism, defined as a theoretical framework that analyses cultural phenomena through underlying structures, extended this idea by examining literature as part of broader systems of meaning. Structuralist critics such as Roland Barthes explored how narratives follow patterns and codes that shape interpretation.

Fill in the blank: Formalism emphasises close reading and focuses on the _____ of a literary text.

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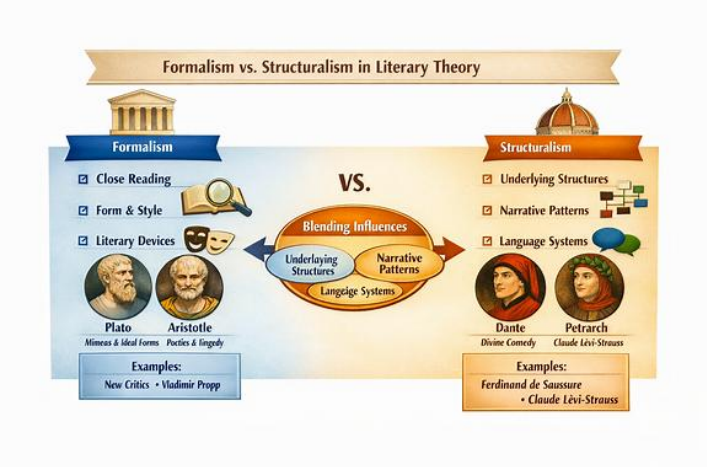

Figure 5.2: Formalism and structuralism in fiction criticism

5.2.2 Marxist and feminist criticism

Marxist criticism analyses literature in relation to social class, economic structures, and power dynamics. It views fiction as a reflection of material conditions and often critiques how texts reinforce or challenge social inequalities. For example, Marxist critics may examine how characters embody class struggles or how narratives reveal capitalist ideologies.

Feminist criticism focuses on gender representation in literature, defined as the study of how texts portray women, men, and gender relations. It seeks to uncover patriarchal biases and highlight female voices. Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter argue that literature should be examined for its role in shaping and challenging gender norms.

Fill in the blank: Feminist criticism seeks to uncover _____ biases in literature and highlight female voices.

Approach	Primary Focus	Key Analytical Questions	Example Work
Marxist Criticism	**Class & Economics**	Who owns the means of production? How does the text reflect or challenge the struggle between the ruling class and the working class?	*Hard Times* (Charles Dickens)
Feminist Criticism	**Gender & Patriarchy**	How are women represented? Does the text reinforce traditional gender roles or subvert the patriarchal "gaze"?	*A Room of One's Own* (Virginia Woolf)

Box 5.2: Key features of Marxist and feminist criticism

5.2.3 Psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approaches

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Psychoanalytic criticism applies concepts from psychology, particularly Freud's theories, to literature. It examines unconscious desires, symbolism, and the psychological motivations of characters. For instance, dreams, repression, and archetypes are often analysed to reveal hidden meanings in texts.

Poststructuralism, defined as a critical movement that challenges fixed meanings and emphasises the instability of language, emerged as a response to structuralism. Thinkers like Jacques Derrida argued that texts are open to multiple interpretations and that meaning is constantly deferred. Poststructuralist criticism highlights ambiguity and questions the authority of the author.

Fill in the blank: Poststructuralism emphasises the instability of _____ and the openness of texts to multiple interpretations.

Plate 5.2: Jacques Derrida and poststructuralism

Pilot questions 5.2

1. What does formalism emphasise in the study of literature?
2. Which theoretical framework analyses literature as part of broader systems of meaning?
3. What is the main focus of Marxist criticism?
4. Which critical approach seeks to uncover patriarchal biases in literature?
5. How does poststructuralism view the stability of meaning in texts?

5.3 Contemporary Criticism and Applications

5.3.1 Postcolonial theory and African perspectives

Postcolonial theory is a critical approach that examines the cultural, political, and literary consequences of colonialism and its aftermath. It highlights how literature reflects struggles over identity, power, and cultural survival. African perspectives within postcolonial criticism emphasise reclaiming indigenous voices, resisting colonial narratives, and asserting cultural autonomy. Writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o are central figures, using fiction to challenge colonial authority and foreground African traditions.

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Fill in the blank: Postcolonial theory examines the cultural and literary consequences of _____ and its aftermath.

Plate 5.3: Chinua Achebe and postcolonial perspectives

5.3.2 Reader-response and reception theory

Reader-response criticism focuses on the role of the reader in interpreting texts. It argues that meaning is not fixed within the text but is created through the interaction between text and reader. This approach values individual perspectives and acknowledges that different readers may interpret the same work in diverse ways.

Closely related is **reception theory**, which studies how texts are received by audiences over time. It considers historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape interpretation. For example, a novel may be read differently in its original period compared to modern times, reflecting shifts in societal values.

Fill in the blank: Reader-response criticism argues that meaning is created through the interaction between _____ and reader.

Figure 5.3: Reader-response and reception theory

5.3.3 Ecocriticism and cultural studies

Ecocriticism is a relatively recent critical approach that examines the relationship between literature and the environment. It explores how texts represent nature, ecological concerns, and human interaction with the natural world. Ecocritics argue that literature can raise awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainability.

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Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary approach that analyses literature in relation to broader cultural practices, including media, politics, and everyday life. It treats fiction as part of cultural production, examining how texts reflect and shape social identities, ideologies, and power relations.

Fill in the blank: Ecocriticism explores how texts represent _____ and human interaction with the natural world.

Approach	Primary Focus	Key Analytical Goal	Example Work
Postcolonial Theory	**Power & Empire**	To analyze how literature reflects, reinforces, or resists colonial power and its legacies.	*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)
Reader-Response	**The Reader's Mind**	To argue that a story doesn't "exist" until a reader engages with it, making meaning subjective.	*Hamlet* (Shakespeare)
Reception Theory	**Historical Context**	To track how the meaning of a book changes over decades or centuries based on the audience.	*Pride and Prejudice* (Austen)
Ecocriticism	**The Environment**	To examine the relationship between humans and the natural world in literature.	*Walden* (Thoreau)
Cultural Studies	**Social Practices**	To break the barrier between "High Art" and "Pop Culture," analyzing how all media shape identity.	*The Hunger Games* (Collins)

Box 5.3: Contemporary critical approaches in fiction

Pilot questions 5.3

1. What does postcolonial theory examine in literature?
2. Which African writer is a central figure in postcolonial criticism?
3. What does reader-response criticism emphasise about meaning in texts?
4. How does reception theory differ from reader-response criticism?
5. What is the main focus of ecocriticism?
6. How does cultural studies treat literature?

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5.4 Evaluating Fiction Through Critical Lenses

5.4.1 Applying theories to selected texts

At this stage, we bring together the theories studied so far and apply them to actual works of fiction. **Application** in literary criticism means using theoretical frameworks to interpret and analyse texts. For example, a Marxist reading of Dickens's *Hard Times* highlights class struggles and industrial exploitation, while a feminist reading of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* foregrounds gender inequality and the need for female creativity. By practising application, you learn how theories move from abstract ideas to practical tools for interpretation.

Fill in the blank: A Marxist reading of Dickens's *Hard Times* highlights class struggles and _____ exploitation.

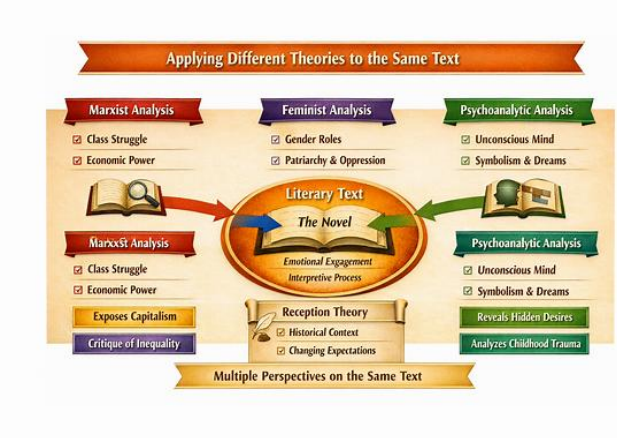

Figure 5.4: Applying theories to fiction

5.4.2 Comparative evaluation of African and Western fiction

Comparative evaluation involves examining how different traditions respond to similar themes using varied critical lenses. For instance, applying postcolonial theory to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals the clash between indigenous traditions and colonial authority, while applying structuralism to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* highlights narrative patterns and social codes. This comparative approach helps you appreciate the diversity of literary traditions and the adaptability of critical theories across cultures.

Fill in the blank: Postcolonial theory applied to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals the clash between indigenous traditions and _____ authority.

Text	Critical Lens	Key Theoretical Insight	Core Analytical Focus
Hard Times (Dickens)	**Marxist**	The industrial revolution turns humans into "Hands," stripping them of their humanity for profit.	The struggle between the utilitarian middle class and the exploited worker.

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Text	Critical Lens	Key Theoretical Insight	Core Analytical Focus
A Room of One's Own (Woolf)	**Feminist**	A woman must have money and a room of her own (economic/spatial autonomy) to write fiction.	The systemic silencing of female genius through patriarchal poverty.
Things Fall Apart (Achebe)	**Postcolonial**	The "center cannot hold" when a complex indigenous social order is forcibly replaced by a foreign one.	Dismantling the "primitive" myth by showing the internal logic of Igbo law and religion.
Pride & Prejudice (Austen)	**Structuralism**	The novel functions through a binary system: Pride vs. Prejudice, First Impressions vs. Reality.	Mapping the underlying "grammar" of social codes and the marriage plot.
Petals of Blood (Ngũgĩ)	**Materialist/Marxist**	Independence did not end exploitation; it merely replaced the white oppressor with a local elite class.	The betrayal of the peasantry by the new "Black Bourgeoisie" in a post-colonial state.

Box 5.4: Comparative evaluation of African and Western fiction

5.4.3 Strengths and limitations of critical approaches

Every critical approach has **strengths**, defined as the aspects that make it effective, and **limitations**, defined as the areas where it may fall short. For example, formalism is strong in close textual analysis but limited in addressing social context. Marxist criticism is powerful in exposing class dynamics but may overlook aesthetic qualities. Poststructuralism opens texts to multiple interpretations but can be criticised for excessive ambiguity. Recognising these strengths and limitations helps you use theories wisely and avoid rigid or one-sided readings.

Fill in the blank: Formalism is strong in close textual analysis but limited in addressing _____ context.

Image of a student reading with multiple critical theory books around. AI prompt suggestion: “Image of a student reading literature surrounded by books on literary theory.” Search string: “student reading literary theory books OER image”

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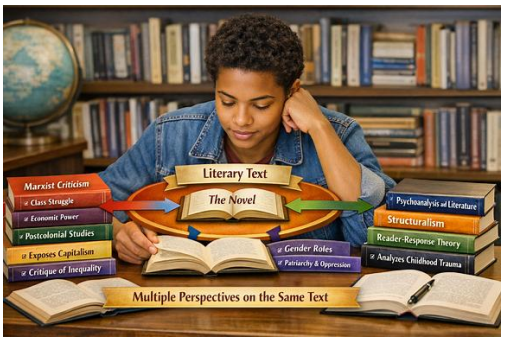

Plate 5.4: Evaluating strengths and limitations of critical approaches

Pilot questions 5.4

1. What does application mean in literary criticism?
2. Which critical lens highlights class struggles in Dickens's *Hard Times*?
3. How does postcolonial theory interpret Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*?
4. What is comparative evaluation in literary criticism?
5. What is one strength and one limitation of formalism?
6. Why is it important to recognise the strengths and limitations of critical approaches?

Series Summary

This Series focused on major theories and criticisms of fiction, providing you with the tools to interpret and evaluate literary texts more deeply. We began by exploring the foundations of literary theory, from classical and Renaissance perspectives through Enlightenment, Romantic, and early modern criticism. We then examined major theories of fiction, including formalism, structuralism, Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic approaches, and poststructuralism. Following that, we turned to contemporary criticism and applications, such as postcolonial theory, reader-response, reception theory, ecocriticism, and cultural studies. Finally, we applied these theories to selected texts, compared African and Western traditions, and assessed the strengths and limitations of different approaches.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to **define** the historical foundations of literary theory (SLO 5.1), **explain** early modern criticism (SLO 5.2), **analyse** major theories of fiction (SLO 5.3), **examine** psychoanalytic and poststructuralist approaches (SLO 5.4), **describe** contemporary perspectives (SLO 5.5), **apply** selected theories to African and Western texts (SLO 5.6), and **evaluate** the strengths and limitations of critical approaches (SLO 5.7). These outcomes equip you with a versatile set of interpretive skills, enabling you to engage critically with fiction across diverse traditions and contexts.

Glossary of Terms

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- **Formalism**: A critical approach that focuses on the form and structure of a literary text, emphasising close reading of language, imagery, and narrative techniques.
- **Structuralism**: A theoretical framework that analyses literature as part of broader systems of meaning, identifying patterns and codes within texts.
- **Marxist criticism**: A literary approach that examines texts in relation to social class, economic structures, and power dynamics, often highlighting class struggles.
- **Feminist criticism**: A critical perspective that studies gender representation in literature, uncovering patriarchal biases and amplifying female voices.
- **Psychoanalytic criticism**: An approach that applies psychological concepts, particularly Freud's theories, to literature, exploring unconscious desires and symbolism.
- **Poststructuralism**: A movement that challenges fixed meanings in texts, emphasising the instability of language and the openness of interpretation.
- **Postcolonial theory**: A critical framework that examines the cultural and literary consequences of colonialism, focusing on identity, resistance, and cultural survival.
- **Reader-response criticism**: An approach that emphasises the reader's role in creating meaning through interaction with the text.
- **Reception theory**: A perspective that studies how texts are received and interpreted by audiences over time, considering historical and cultural contexts.
- **Ecocriticism**: A literary approach that explores the relationship between literature and the environment, examining how texts represent nature and ecological concerns.
- **Cultural studies**: An interdisciplinary approach that analyses literature within broader cultural practices, including media, politics, and everyday life.
- **Application**: The process of using theoretical frameworks to interpret and analyse specific literary texts.
- **Comparative evaluation**: The practice of examining how different traditions or texts respond to similar themes using varied critical lenses.
- **Strengths and limitations**: The advantages and shortcomings of each critical approach, helping readers to use theories effectively without rigid or one-sided interpretations.

Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Poetics* and emphasised plot, character, and catharsis in literature? (Linked to SLO 5.1)
2. Which literary movement celebrated emotion, imagination, and individuality? (Linked to SLO 5.1)
3. What does formalism focus on when analysing literature? (Linked to SLO 5.3)

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4. Which critical approach seeks to uncover patriarchal biases in texts? (Linked to SLO 5.3)
5. Poststructuralism emphasises the instability of what? (Linked to SLO 5.4)

Short-Answer Questions

1. Define structuralism and explain its role in literary criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
2. Describe the main concern of Marxist criticism when applied to fiction. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
3. Explain how reader-response criticism views the creation of meaning in texts. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
4. State one way postcolonial theory contributes to the study of African fiction. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
5. Identify one strength and one limitation of formalism. (Linked to SLO 5.7)

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the historical foundations of literary theory from classical to early modern criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.1 & 5.2)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe classical, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romantic, and early modern perspectives and their focus.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these foundations reflect cultural priorities, such as rationality in the Enlightenment and individuality in Romanticism.
2. Compare major theories of fiction such as formalism, structuralism, Marxist criticism, and feminist criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should explain each theory's focus and provide examples of application.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may assess how these theories complement or challenge one another, highlighting their relevance to different cultural contexts.
3. Evaluate contemporary approaches such as postcolonial theory, reader-response, ecocriticism, and cultural studies in relation to African and Western fiction. (Linked to SLO 5.5 & 5.6)
    - **Basic response**: Learners should describe each approach and show how it applies to selected texts.
    - **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may connect these approaches to broader social issues such as decolonisation, environmental awareness, and cultural identity.
4. Assess the strengths and limitations of critical approaches when interpreting fiction. (Linked to SLO 5.7)

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- **Basic response**: Learners should identify strengths and limitations of at least two approaches.
- **Value-added response**: Outstanding learners may evaluate how combining approaches can provide richer interpretations and avoid one-sided readings.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. Aristotle
2. Romantic movement
3. Form and structure of the text
4. Feminist criticism
5. Language

Short-Answer Questions

1. Structuralism analyses literature as part of broader systems of meaning, identifying patterns and codes that shape interpretation.
2. Marxist criticism focuses on class, power, and ideology, examining how fiction reflects or challenges social inequalities.
3. Reader-response criticism argues that meaning is created through the interaction between text and reader.
4. Postcolonial theory highlights identity, resistance, and cultural survival, helping African fiction reclaim indigenous voices.
5. Strength: Strong in close textual analysis. Limitation: Weak in addressing social context.

Long-Answer Questions

1. **Basic response**: Classical theory emphasised plot and catharsis, Renaissance focused on humanism, Enlightenment valued reason, Romanticism celebrated emotion, and early modern criticism treated literature as autonomous. **Value-added response**: These foundations reflect cultural priorities, such as rationality in the Enlightenment and individuality in Romanticism, shaping later theories.
2. **Basic response**: Formalism focuses on form, structuralism on systems of meaning, Marxist criticism on class and ideology, and feminist criticism on gender representation. **Value-added response**: These theories complement and challenge one another, showing how literature can be analysed from textual, social, and cultural perspectives.
3. **Basic response**: Postcolonial theory examines colonial legacies, reader-response focuses on reader interaction, ecocriticism studies environment in literature, and cultural studies situates texts within cultural practices. **Value-added response**: These approaches connect literature to broader issues such as decolonisation, environmental awareness, and cultural identity, enriching interpretation.
4. **Basic response**:

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Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 5]

Part 5.1 Foundations of Literary Theory

1. Aristotle
2. The Renaissance
3. Reason, clarity, and universal truths
4. The Romantic movement
5. An autonomous art form

Part 5.2 Major Theories of Fiction

1. The form and structure of literature
2. Structuralism
3. Social class, power, and ideology
4. Feminist criticism
5. The stability of meaning in texts

Part 5.3 Contemporary Criticism and Applications

1. The cultural and literary consequences of colonialism
2. Chinua Achebe
3. The interaction between text and reader
4. Reception theory considers historical and cultural contexts, while reader-response focuses on individual interpretation
5. The relationship between literature and the environment
6. As part of broader cultural practices, including media and politics

Part 5.4 Evaluating Fiction Through Critical Lenses

1. Using theoretical frameworks to interpret and analyse texts
2. Marxist criticism
3. The clash between indigenous traditions and colonial authority
4. Examining how different traditions respond to similar themes using varied critical lenses
5. Strength: close textual analysis; Limitation: neglect of social context
6. To avoid rigid or one-sided readings and achieve richer interpretations

References and Attributions [Series 5]

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This section compiles all references, attributions, and illustration prompts used in Series 5: *Major Theories and Criticisms of Fiction*. The referencing style applied here follows a simplified APA format for clarity and consistency.

Textual References

- Aristotle. (c. 335 BCE). *Poetics*.
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- Arnold, M. (1865). *Essays in Criticism*.
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- Woolf, V. (1929). *A Room of One's Own*.
- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*.
- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*.
- Freud, S. (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*.
- Derrida, J. (1967). *Of Grammatology*.
- Thoreau, H. D. (1854). *Walden*.

Illustration Placeholders and Attributions

- **Figure 5.1: Classical and Renaissance foundations of literary theory**
  - AI prompt: "Create a timeline diagram showing classical and Renaissance foundations of literary theory with key thinkers like Plato and Aristotle."
  - Suggested OER search string: "classical Renaissance literary theory timeline OER diagram."
- **Plate 5.1: Romantic emphasis on imagination and emotion**
  - AI prompt: "Image of William Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads book cover."
  - Suggested OER search string: "Wordsworth Lyrical Ballads book cover OER image."
- **Box 5.1: Key milestones in the foundations of literary theory**
  - AI prompt: "Create a table summarising key milestones in the foundations of literary theory with periods, focus, and key figures."
  - Suggested OER search string: "foundations literary theory milestones OER table."
- **Figure 5.2: Formalism and structuralism in fiction criticism**

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    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram comparing formalism and structuralism in literary theory with key features and examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “formalism structuralism literary theory OER diagram.”
- **Box 5.2: Key features of Marxist and feminist criticism**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising Marxist and feminist criticism with focus and examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Marxist feminist literary criticism OER table.”
- **Plate 5.2: Jacques Derrida and poststructuralism**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Jacques Derrida, philosopher associated with poststructuralism.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Jacques Derrida poststructuralism OER image.”
- **Plate 5.3: Chinua Achebe and postcolonial perspectives**
    - AI prompt: “Image of Chinua Achebe, Nigerian novelist associated with postcolonial criticism.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “Chinua Achebe postcolonial criticism OER image.”
- **Figure 5.3: Reader-response and reception theory**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing how reader-response criticism emphasises interaction between text and reader, with reception theory adding historical context.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “reader-response reception theory diagram OER.”
- **Box 5.3: Contemporary critical approaches in fiction**
    - AI prompt: “Create a table summarising contemporary critical approaches in fiction with focus and examples.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “contemporary literary criticism approaches OER table.”
- **Figure 5.4: Applying theories to fiction**
    - AI prompt: “Create a diagram showing how Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories can be applied to the same text with different interpretations.”
    - Suggested OER search string: “application literary theories to fiction OER diagram.”
- **Box 5.4: Comparative evaluation of African and Western fiction**

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- AI prompt: “Create a table comparing African and Western fiction using different critical lenses with key insights.”
- Suggested OER search string: “comparative evaluation African Western fiction literary criticism OER table.”

- **Plate 5.4: Evaluating strengths and limitations of critical approaches**
  - AI prompt: “Image of a student reading literature surrounded by books on literary theory.”
  - Suggested OER search string: “student reading literary theory books OER image.”

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