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## UNIT 3 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL II

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### Structure

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- 3.3 Time and Place
- 3.4 Themes
- 3.5 New Areas of Novel Writing
- 3.6 Novels of the Diaspora
- 3.7 Third World Novels
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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, we shall be looking at the other three aspects of the novel. These will include the aspects of style, time and place and themes. We have already discussed as to why we need to study the aspects of the novel carefully so we will not go into it here. Suffice it to say that these aspects of the novel that are taken up for discussion in this unit will help us understand the novel better. After looking closely at these aspects of the novel we will then turn to the new areas of novel writing, at the novels of the third world, and the novels of the diaspora.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 1 and 2 we were introduced to the novel as a literary genre and we also learnt that reading a novel is not as simple as merely reading and following the story line. It involves our mental abilities and makes us draw on all the critical knowledge we have in our possession to really appreciate or even express an opinion about a novel. What we are trying to say is that, reading a novel is a very specialised activity, an activity that makes us use a whole new set of vocabulary (words such as plot, character, characterisation, narrative, narrative modes, critical, criticism, critique), knowledge and understanding of different genres, and aspects of the novel. It also means that we need to be able to make fine distinctions and be well acquainted with the text/ novel and the novelist before we get around to talking about the novel. You must know what a novel is, the different types of novels that are there since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the different types of novels being written in modern times, the various aspects of the novel and how these aspects ought to be studied. Putting it in another way, what we are really trying to tell you is that, studying a novel or reading the novel as the title of this course suggests is, in effect the ability to study the various aspects of the novel, hence, the focus on the aspects of the novel.

Studying the different aspects of the novel will help you in several ways:

- 1) You would know what to expect when you read a novel.
- 2) You will be in a position to read the novel intelligently and offer an informed opinion on it by developing the necessary critical skills and efficiency.

The earlier unit, Unit 2 and this Unit, have been prepared with the idea of helping you acquire the necessary critical skills and or improving (that is, assuming you already possess these skills) upon them, in order to read a novel intelligently. In this unit, we shall be talking about the three other aspects of the novel - style, time and place and themes, as well as looking at the new areas of novel writing, third world novels and the novel of the diaspora as these are newer trends in the area of the novel. Broadly speaking, every known literary work, the novel included, could be said to have two components: form and content. Simply put, content as mentioned in the earlier unit refers to 'what' a poem or a novel says and form refers to 'how' the poem or the novel says whatever it does. These two questions related to the 'what' and the 'how' of a literary work is, of paramount importance to anyone who wishes to unlock the mysteries of the work. Everyone recognises that there is a very close relationship between the two aspects though opinion on the nature of the relationship differs. But we have discussed this to some extent in Unit 2. In this unit, we shall begin with examining style as another aspect of the novel.

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## 3.2 STYLE

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It is commonplace to say that all literary artists, novelists included, have to work within the available range of a specific language. A good novelist always strives to enrich the language she/ he decides to work with. What really distinguishes a good novelist from an indifferent one to some extent is the way in which language is either used or handled. In a manner of speaking, language is the ultimate material available to a novelist's or writer. Style is essentially an aspect of language and is largely reflected in a novelist's ability to turn language into an effective and imaginative vehicle for the purpose of narration and or, communication of his/ her ideas. Since each novelist is likely to use language differently or in his/her own unique manner, the writing style of one novelist would obviously vary from that of the other. Style is a distinctive signature of a novelist, an expression of his/ her creative genius almost in the same manner in which your selection of a particular dress may be said to carry an imprint of your imagination or lack of it or reflect your personality. We would like to suggest that in view of a large variety of styles available, no classification is either possible or desirable.

If we are to study style more closely, it would refer to the way in which a literary work is written and the devices/ techniques or tools an author/ novelist uses or has at his/ her disposal to express his/her opinion or message or thoughts. The manner in which the message and the choice of words, diction, he/she uses to present it gives rise to the aspect of style. Style therefore, is particular to a writer/ author/ novelist in this case and often it is the distinguishing factor that separates him/ her from the other writers/ authors/ novelists. Added to the use of words, language and the manner of presentation is also, the individual's personal idiosyncrasies and quirks that obviously impact the writer and hence, also contribute to his/her style of writing. Even though we have tried to define and explain what style is or does, we must remember that style too is a literary term and by rule is difficult to identity, define and analyse as well as extremely elusive too.

We can also look at style from various points of view. For instance, we could look at style from the point of view of creating an effect. If we do so, we as critics would need to focus our discussion on the diction, imagery and rhetorical

devices that are used by a particular novelist. If we look at style from the point of view of whether or not it belongs to a certain literary age or movement or even when we talk about different authors, then we would need to identify and analyse only those aspects of a given work that reflects the general style in question. For instance, we could consider a work to be belonging to the Augustan age, or the Victorian age; or we could say a work is “ornate”, “Coleridgean”, “transparent”, formal, low, high Renaissance, alliterative, Jamesian” etc.. (*Murfin and Ray*, p. 385)

Style could also be divided into three major categories: the high/grand, the middle/mean, and the low/base/plain. **Northrop Frye** invented a new distinction of style that he based on whether a literary work makes use of “expression and rhythms of ordinary speech or, instead makes use of formal devices and elaborates in order to differentiate its language from the quotidian”. He termed these two distinctions – the *demotic* and the *hieratic*. But at the same time, he also identified a high, middle, and low level in each of these two classifications. Then there is the decorous style which implies that the language conforms to the speakers, or the subject matter as well as the readers, or simply put what it really means is that the language is in keeping with the literary genre in which it is written, the socio-economic class of those who are using it in the novel (in this case), and the socio-political/ socio-cultural context in which it is being used as well as the occasion for which it is being used. Decorum was an actual convention of writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that dictated that the style of a work should “match” or be consistent with all the aspects of the work.

When examining style, we could also look at whether the sentences of a novel or any literary work are predominantly periodic/ loose (non periodic). A periodic sentence according to **Murfin and Ray**, “is not grammatically complete until its very end. Typically, several dependent clauses and parallel constructions precede the final independent clause in a periodic sentence, so the meaning of the sentence cannot be ascertained until the entire sentence has been read”. They then explain non periodic or loose sentences as, “typically contain (ing) a number of independent clauses joined only by coordinating conjunctions such as and or but” (p. 386). Periodic sentences appear to be more formal and the style that emerges as a result of using these types of sentences is said to be an elevated style whereas, in comparison the loose sentences or the non periodic sentences appear to be more informal and therefore conversational or base. We could go on explaining style through use of such terms but that might merely serve to confuse you and that would mean defeating our purpose of study. So, we will not go into details here at this point. Suffice it to say that there are various ways of creating style and stylistic devices are used by novelists to create their own particular and distinguishing style and critics too have various looking at style and they have done so down the ages.

That being so ... you may wonder how you could possibly gain some understanding of a particular novelist’s style or his/ her creative use of language? Experts will suggest different ways of analysing the language that you may not find at all useful at this stage. For this reason, we suggest that you base your impressions of a particular novelist’s style on your ability to answer the following questions:

- 1) Does a novelist use the language in a manner familiar to you or does she/he strive for novelty, richness or creativity?

- 2) Does this creative use of language lie in his/her use of words, diction or his/her sentence/ structure or all of them?
- 3) Can you identify some of the recurrent images and symbols in the novel? If so, make a list of each of them.
- 4) Do images and symbols make his/her language 'obtuse' or transparent?

*(Remember: Overuse of images and symbols will make the language rich and allusive, sometimes obtuse; while discriminating use of both will make for transparency)*

- 5) Does she/he use a simple style or a complex one?

*(The answer to this question will depend upon how you answer the other four).*

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How would you like to define the term style?

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- 2) Why is it not possible to offer a neat classification of different styles?

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- 3) How can one assess the style of a particular novel? Can you suggest any method for it, other than the one outlined in section 3.2?

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### 3.3 TIME AND PLACE

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The notion of time and place is derived from the classical notions of the *unities* most often ascribed to Aristotle. Aristotle however, dealt only with the unity of action in some detail when he was talking about tragedy. Whenever we discuss

Aristotle, we need to remember that Aristotle always talked about drama/ tragedy and not about the novel. It is a different matter that we have chosen to adapt many of his insights on tragedy to other literary genres such as the novel. He also talks about the unity of time in the fictive form. However, the classical unities of time, place and action have been attributed to Aristotle and the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian and French critics expanded upon these unities.

Therefore, 17<sup>th</sup> century French Drama, particularly that of **Molière** and **Racine** were very strict observers of these unities and very regular. In sharp contrast are the English dramatists who wrote for the Jacobean stage. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century however, even English dramatists had begun evaluating their own work according to the rules of the classical unities. Thus, we had a highly irregular **Shakespeare** who did not adhere to any of these rules or strictures and the conservative and regular **Jonson** who followed the rules of the classical unities very strictly. Till **Victor Hugo's** play *Hernani* (1844) was staged, the classical unities were very influential in dramatic criticism. This play created quite a stir at its debut because it violated the rules of classicism. It must be remembered that Greek and Latin drama were very strict in the form and their stage presented a single place throughout the action, while the plot narrated the events of a single day and the action too took place on a single day.

The action of a novel, like that of any other human activity, has to be located in 'time' as well as 'place', if it has to make any sense to us. Both 'time' and 'place' as represented in a novel are, more often than not, imaginary and not real categories. It is so because a novelist always likes to exercise his/ her prerogative of adding an element of fiction to whatever she/ he may choose to describe or narrate. As a matter of fact, this tendency towards the fictionalisation of time/ place categories as also the characters, situations or actions is what makes a work of fiction different from a historian's work on the one hand and a journalistic report on the other. Even when a novelist chooses to describe an actual or historical time/place category, as she/ may often do, she presents it in a manner that it appears strange or unfamiliar. Sometimes she or he may describe the real or known time/ place in such a manner that it might appear far removed from the way we may have either experienced, seen, heard or read about it. This is not to suggest that a novelist cannot or does not ever use time/place categories without fictionalising them. She/ he may often do so, and whenever she/ he does it the novel may either become historical in nature or take on the shape of reportage.

Since a novel presents action on a fairly broad scale, a number of 'time sequences' and 'locations' often come into play. It needs to be pointed out here that the action of a novel can move either in a linear fashion or in a disjunction manner. It is said to move in a linear fashion when the chronology of events is consistently maintained in the act of narration and there is an onward movement from one place to another. Linear action follows the alphabetic order and if the action starts (in terms of both time and place) at say point A, it moves towards points B, C, and D... and ultimately Z.

**Charles Dickens** *David Copperfield* is a good example of what we mean by linear movement of action. On the other hand, disjunctive action comes into play when the chronology of events is carefully and systematically disturbed for the purposes of narration and there is a movement back and forth in both time and place. It often happens when a novelist either uses flashback techniques or makes a character reconstruct events in a random fashion. In this case, the action

may start at point H, revert to point A and move toward B, C, D...G before it jumps forward to P... and so on. Such disruptions in time and place make the action disjunctive and this is often deliberately and consciously done by the novelist with the explicit purpose of attracting the reader's attention through new ways of narrating or describing. The disjunctive mode is often associated with most of the 20th century novels.

To help you out with your reading of different novels, we suggest that you keep the following questions in mind:

- i) When does the action begin and when does it end?
- ii) Do you find any disruptions in the time sequence of the novel? If so, how many? Identify all such disruptions and if possible, account for them as well.
- iii) Identify the total time sequence presented in a novel. Prepare a chart so as to show how it moves from one point to another.
- iv) Where does the novel begin and where does the novel end?
- v) Which are the different places mentioned in the novel? Identify them.
- vi) Prepare a comprehensive list of all the places named in the novel. While doing so, keep the following order in mind: Country, town, parish, village, home, etc.
- vii) If possible, associate different characters with different places and different time sequences as well.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the two planes on which the action of a novel moves?  
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- 2) Does a novelist always use time and place categories in a realistic manner?  
If not, why?  
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- 3) What are the different ways in which time and place categories can be used in a novel? Identify, define and classify them.

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- 4) Why is it important to know about a novelists specific use of time and place categories? How can one glean such information from a novel?

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### 3.4 THEMES

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So far, we have restricted our discussion to what we call the ‘form’ of a novel, its various manifestations or critical concepts/ strategies with the help of which the ‘form’ can be comprehended fully. You would perhaps recall our earlier suggestions made in Section 2.1 to the effect that the content of a novel should preferably be mediated through its form. This is as much as to say that if you are able to put these critical strategies to an optimum and effective use, you may be able to decipher the ‘content’ as well. This brings us to a point where it becomes necessary to explain what we really mean by the term ‘content’. In its broad sense, content would refer to the themes or ideas that run through the fabric of the novel.

Themes arise from the interplay of the various aspects of the novel such as, the plot/ setting, character, sometimes the element of conflict and the aspect of tone (under style). If we were to analyse the meaning of theme very simplistically we could say that the theme of a piece of fiction/ novel is its views about life and about how people behave. The theme of a novel particularly these days is rarely didactic/ moralistic. In fact, most of the time, it is not even presented directly. We locate the theme with the help of the characters, the action and the setting of the novel. In short what we really do is to try and figure out or work out the themes ourselves. The novelist merely communicates his/ her message to the reader and it is up to the reader or us to decipher what the theme is. However, it is important to point out here that every idea a novel may seek to present does not necessarily develop into its theme. An idea becomes a theme only when it recurs through a novel in such a way as to demonstrate a novelist’s preoccupation with it. A novelist often reveals his/ her concern or preoccupation with a theme or a set of themes in several different ways, some of which are as follows:

- i) Indirectly through the medium of character/ characters, as a character is widely held to be the chief vehicle of an idea or ideas in a novel.
- ii) Indirectly through certain patterns of imagery and symbolism that run through a novel.
- iii) Indirectly through key words or phrases that find a recurrent expression in a novel.
- iv) Directly through authorial comments that lie interspersed in a novel, where a novelist takes the liberty to comment on either the characters or situations or both.
- v) Through the title.
- vi) Through allusions that are made throughout the novel
- vii) Through details and particulars in the novel and the greater meaning that those details could contain.

This by itself would make clear to you how closely interrelated and interdependent both 'form' and 'content' are. In your search for different themes of a novel you may focus specifically on this particular aspect of a novel.

*Remember: theme, plot and the structure of the novels are interrelated and all help to inform and reflect back on each other. Moreover, the theme does not always tell us everything about the novel, and that it is simply one of the aspects of the novel.*

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What is the meaning of the term 'content'?

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- 2) What is the main difference between an idea and a theme?

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3) In what different ways does a novelist usually reveal the theme of a novel?

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4) What kind of relationship exists between ‘content’ and ‘form’ and why?

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### 3.5 NEW AREAS OF NOVEL WRITING

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At the onset of the twentieth century, Western fiction grew modern and shed many images such as Victorian, realistic, and its image of what **Malcom Bradbury** calls “the great instrument of social representation”. It found a place for itself when paradigms were shifting, along with expectations, desires and imagination. At the end of the twentieth century different forms of the novel had taken centre stage. By the time we entered the new millennium the novel as a genre saw striking changes. A large number of writers who had contributed tremendously to post war British fiction had died. Novelists such as, **Graham Greene** (died in 1991), **William Golding** and **Anthony Burgess** (1993), **Kingsley Amis** (1995), **Iris Murdoch** (1999) and **Penelope Fitzgerald** in 2000, **Arthur C Clarke** in March, 2008. The millennium offered great cultural excitement and impetus to new writers. But what was also happening is that some essential notions of the novel and its Britishness were rapidly dissolving and getting lost and the stage was now set for writers from other cultures such as from Scotland, Ireland and India to name just a few.

Moreover, the changes also occurred in writing that began to emerge from different perspectives both on myth as well as reality and we saw fiction/ novels from America, Australia, South America, Caribbean, India, Africa, Ireland and other postcolonial countries. By mid - twentieth century most of the former British colonies had regained their independence from Britain. These former colonies were to be renamed Commonwealth countries and later postcolonial countries and a vast body of writing emerged from these countries. The novel these days has taken on a vast “variety of voices, forms and manners”, and is randomly open “to all styles, all attitudes, all kinds of performances, along with equal randomness of judgment about what is serious, worthwhile, valuable, authoritative” (**Malcolm Bradbury**, p. 521).

The most striking feature of the novel today is its sheer plurality, its diversity and mixed origins. Bradbury finds the novel in the millennium dealing with

history and the novelist's relationship with the past and he gives the example of **A S Byatt's** Booker novel *Possession: A Romance*. Other writers who were interested in the relationship between history and the fable include: **Penelope Fitzgerald** (*Innocence*, 1986, *The Blue Flower* (1995), **Kazuo Ishiguro** (*The Unconsoled*, 1995), **Tibor Fischer** (*Under the Frog*, 1992, *The Collector Collector*, 1997). But all said and done, fiction or the novel is at its richest in the millennium. There are certain themes that recur through novels, (and the list is the one prepared by Bradbury):

*apocalyptic cities, gender wars, gay and lesbian relations, marital collapse, feminist self- discovery, football fever, serial killers, child abuse, New age consciousness, laddish girls and girlish lads.* (p. 539)

He also says that social comedy has replaced hard satire and that “dark horrors have replaced familiar lives”, that, “serious literary fiction in under profound pressure from the commercial”, and “Grand Narratives are giving way to more plural and playful themes”. Before we conclude it needs to be mentioned that the novel still survives, it proliferates and penetrates. It has seen many deaths but it seems to be thriving and expanding its boundaries, cultures and horizons. In the next section we shall talk about the novel of the diaspora.

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### 3.6 NOVELS OF THE DIASPORA

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The word diaspora come from an ancient Greek word “ meaning “a scattering or sowing of seed” and it now refers to the entire process of forcing people or ethnic populations away from their own homelands, the dispersal of these people, and the ensuing developments in their culture including literature. The current usage of the word diaspora comes from the Hebrew Bible to refer to the population of Jews exiled from Judea in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, and from Jerusalem in ADE 136 by the Roman Empire. The term was assimilated from Greek into English in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. As an academic field, diaspora studies has been established and is related to the wider modern meaning of the usage ‘diaspora’.

The literature that developed as a result of the movement of people from their homelands to other countries for whatever reasons – be they economic, social, political, is what is known as diaspora writing or literature of the diaspora. Much of the writings tend to deal with as **H C Narang** puts it, with “the myths and legends, rites and rituals, songs and dances, faith and belief, philosophy and pragmatism, memory and amnesia, success and failures, and tears and smiles - In short, the lived experience of not one but two communities”. Let us look at third world novels briefly in the next section.

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### 3.7 THIRD WORLD NOVELS

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In a politico-economic sense the term ‘third world’ implies all the nations that were (and are still) generally considered to be underdeveloped economically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term arose during the Cold War to refer to nations that did not belong to the First and Second Worlds. It was used for countries either still developing or under-developed, especially in Latin America, Africa, Oceania and Asia. The term third world also has a reference to the Third Estate, the

commoners of France during the French Revolution, as they were opposed to the clergy and the nobility who comprised the First Estate and the Second Estate.

The political birth of the term third world strictly speaking took place at the Bandung Conference (1955). The third world is culturally and economically diverse and includes the petroleum-rich countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, etc. and the new industrial countries such as, India, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Brazil, Mexico etc. and poor countries such as Haiti, Chad, Afghanistan, etc.

The literature that has emerged from these countries is what is popularly known as third world literature. However, these days the term third world is not really politically correct, hence, a more umbrella term such as literature from the margins is used to refer to these writings. In some cases, the term used is also new literatures or sometimes known as postcolonial literatures, if the writings happen to be from former colonies. Some of the good examples of Third World Novels and Novelists are: **Sembene Ousmane** (*God's Bit of Wood*), **Chinua Achebe** (*Things Fall Apart*), which we will be studying, **Ngugi Wa Thiong'O** (*Petals of Blood*), **Gabriel Garcia Marquez** (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), **Salman Rushdie** (*Midnight's Children*), **Nawal El Saadawi** (*Women at Point Zero*), **Earl Lovelace** (*The Wine of Astonishment*), **Mario Vargas Llosa** (*The Real Life Of Alejandro Mayta*), **V S Naipaul** (*A House for Mr Biswas*), and **Isabel Allende** (*Of Love and Shadows*), to name just a few.

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have covered the three other aspects of the novel - style, time and place and theme, as well as looked briefly at the definition of and implication of terms such as third world novels or new writings or even diaspora novels. You need to remember that this unit is only an introductory unit and the purpose behind this unit has been to expose you to new areas and terms in the study of the novel. In Unit 4 we will be examining the future of the novel.

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### 3.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Style is the unique way in which each novelist uses language to narrate the story or communicate his/her ideas.
- 2) As each individual writer has his/her own specific style, it is not possible to classify such a diverse range of available or possible styles.
- 3) Think before you write your response.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The novel moves through time and is set in a particular place.
- 2) Refer to Section 3.3.
- 3) Time can be used either in a linear fashion or it can be made backwards and forwards in a disjunctive manner.
- 4) Refer to Section 3.3.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The themes/ ideas found in a novel constitute its content.
- 2) An idea is not necessarily the theme of the novel. An idea becomes a theme when it recurs through a novel, demonstrating the novelist's preoccupation with it.
- 3) Refer to 3.4.
- 4) For purposes of analysis, it is necessary to speak of 'form' and 'content' as separate categories. But as we know they are inseparable.



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