

Psychological Realism in 19th Century Fiction

Psychological Realism in 19th Century Fiction:

*Studies in Turgenev, Tolstoy,
Eliot and Brontë*

By

Debashish Sen

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

This book is on the literary technique called psychological realism. However, before we start discussing it, a few words on literature in general and on novels, in particular, will be in place. This will be as much for the reader as for myself. I will be honest here – I think before we undertake an exercise, especially an academic exercise, one needs to be very clear about the purpose of the same. In other words, I need to justify to myself and you the purpose of writing this book in the first place. This becomes all the more necessary given the loss of interest in literature and literary activities in the current times, where most people just have sufficient time for activities that bring quick gratification.

The art of novel writing dates back many centuries. Life, as we know it now, existed in quite a different mode back then. Let's just say that in old times people had fewer things to amuse themselves with. Authors, as well as the art of writing, were held in high regard and were looked up to. However, in today's age and time, I've heard people (those who are not naturally drawn to literature) say that literature and novels written a century or centuries ago are now redundant and should be left to die a silent death. The very same people probably do not understand the importance of History; however, we shall not go into that and shall confine our argument to literature and novels. To people who hold this view, I will say this then: classic literature is neither outdated nor can we consign it to the realm of mere amusement.

Novels in general deal with the fullness of life and not its emptiness - that is why they are read. On the lowest level the reader fills the gaps in his existence by borrowing the imagined experiences described in what he is reading; on a higher level, he finds those experiences a guide, to places, to people, to ideas (O'Gorman 113). As Mark Turner writes in *The Material Culture of the Victorian Novel*:

Now, novels, more often than not, are based on actuality. A writer with a limited experience of life will write a limited book, whereas one who has touched pleasure and pain at many points will have more material, more

memories, on which to draw. (The life of a novelist is always worth reading for its own sake, but it will throw much light on the character of his books.) One reason these novels live on today is because they speak to us, in many different ways, about the present, and the relationship between the past and present, not because they are museum pieces. (O’Gorman 113)

Maybe it will surprise some to know that a novel written in the 18th or 19th century could speak to us “about the present”, but such is the affinity of life, human beings and human relations (and this is what novels deal with) in the past and the present that what applied then cannot help but be identifiable even now, often startlingly so. Also, since this work is not on any one particular author as such but a technique or art form, it will be in place to put in a few words here about Genre and Sub-genre.

A genre is a general kind of literary production (for example, novel /fiction, poem/poetry, and play/drama). The idea of a genre is to classify works of literature. We know that novels are recognized as a genre (Williams, Raymond). However, there are “so many different kinds of novel, the genre is so varied, rich and popular, that, as the critic Raymond Williams has remarked, ‘it is almost a literature in itself’” (Walder, Realist 9).

The novel as a genre in itself encompasses such varied art forms and it has emerged over the centuries in so many different hues and colours that if we wish to examine it and undertake a serious study of it, there is probably a need to classify it further into sub-genres. Sub-genre can be understood “as a more specific kind of literary production (for example, the Gothic novel, Bildungsroman, Naturalist Fiction)” (Walder, Realist 9). Borderlines between genres “are never clear-cut (we define them in terms of their dominant features)” (Khrapchenko 266). Talking about classification through genres, Dennis Walder says:

Nowadays most people would probably say that what is most important is the individual encounter with a particular work, rather than its classification. Nevertheless, literary works are still classified for particular purposes, by or on academic syllabuses, and there have always been people who believe in approaching works of literature (or art) in terms of their shared features. (Walder, Realist 3)

The sub-genre that we will concentrate on is, of course, psychological realism. I have, in this book, chosen works by four great writers: firstly, because (as the analysis of their works done in this book will show) they are masters of psychological realism and secondly because they are ones from whom I’ve derived pleasure and learning.

On Literature

In his book *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature*, Bernard J. Paris writes:

Because of its concrete, dramatic quality, literature enables us not only to observe people other than ourselves but also to enter into their mental universe, to discover what it feels like to be these people and to confront their life situations. We can gain in this way a phenomenological grasp of experience that cannot be derived from theory alone, and not from case histories either, unless they are also works of art. Because literature provides this kind of knowledge, it has a potentially sensitizing effect, one that is of as much importance to the clinician as it is to the humanist. Literature offers us an opportunity to amplify our experience in a way that can enhance our empathic powers, and because of this, it is a valuable aid to clinical training and personal growth. (Paris, *Imagined* 8)

Paris here refers to the act of reading (literature) as an experience that broadens our horizons, enabling us to understand (in ways that wouldn't otherwise be possible) the lives of others in as close a manner as possible, while yet remaining dissociated from those 'others'. No work of realistic fiction can be drawn from thin air, meaning, that realistic fiction (by the very definition of being 'realistic') must be drawn in some way or the other from real-life experiences. And yes, the fact that these experiences may sometime be the ones that are played out in the imagination of a 'real' person (the author) makes them no less realistic – they're after all the products of the mind of another person, carrying to us thoughts, ideas and feelings that wouldn't be known to us otherwise.

Works of literature are products made by creative persons. The usual reason why an author sits down to write literature is that he has something to say and to express. Often, he is looking for an outlet to his feelings and his subconscious desires. Just as the pain, the trials, and tribulations, the misfortunes and disappointments of the author's life contribute in shaping his or her personality, so also do they impact his or her writing, often profoundly so. Realistic novels, therefore, may potentially be not only 'real' representations of events and characters, but also of 'real' fears, limitations, prejudices and weaknesses. What Paris refers to as "sensitizing effect" and "empathic powers" is, of course, dependent on reader response, meaning that it depends on what a particular reader can take away from the text of the novel. A group of people who're given to read Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* or Leo Tolstoy's *Kholstomer: The Story of a Horse* will each react to the novel(s) in potentially different ways. While some, in tandem with the author's intentions will be able to understand the

story from the perspective of the protagonist (a horse in this case), be able to take a sensitive view of the creature's life story and conditions and empathize with its circumstances, others may not undergo a "personal growth" to a similar degree.

Paris asserts that novels enable the reader to "discover what it feels like to be these people" and Henry James, speaking in a similar vein in the *Theory of Fiction* says that a reader of a novel "likes to live the life of others" although he doesn't here touch upon the "humanist" aspect of it or talk about it as "a valuable aid to clinical training or personal growth":

The novel is of all pictures the most comprehensive and the most elastic. It will stretch anywhere - it will take in absolutely anything; all it needs is a subject and a painter. But for its subject, magnificently, it has the whole human consciousness, and if we are pushed a step farther backward, and asked why the representation should be required when the object represented is itself mostly so accessible, the answer to that appears to be that man combines with his eternal desire for more experience an infinite cunning as to getting his experience as cheaply as possible. He will steal it whenever he can. He likes to live the life of others, yet is well aware of the points at which it may too intolerably resemble his own. The vivid fable, more than anything else, gives him this satisfaction on easy terms, gives him knowledge abundant yet vicarious. It enables him to select, to take and to leave; so that to feel he can afford to neglect it he must have a rare faculty, or great opportunities, for the extension of experience - by thought, by emotion, by energy - at first hand. (James, *Theory* 338)

Aristotle acknowledged this in as many words. One of the "main ways that literature is unique, he said, is that literature ushers us into a larger life; without it, we have not lived enough to escape the confines of our parochial existence" (Barber, *Importance*). Only in literature, can the reader be "emotionally engaged with the character while being freed from the distortions of reality and the urgency of being required to think, feel and respond simultaneously": "We can read first about the tension of the facial muscles and then hear what words are said. The vital details are isolated and we learn what the author wants to emphasize. We can get close enough and still retain our comfort level" (Barber, *Importance*). Proust once said that "it is only in literature that we can fully identify with the other" (Barber, *Importance*). The reader can thereby "escape the confines" of "parochial existence" while simultaneously getting rewarded with an extension of experience (Barber, *Importance*). Not all of us can have the fortune (or misfortune) to be cast away on an island like Robinson Crusoe and then have the intelligence to survive the experience; neither can we be engaged in a listless pursuit of pleasure in the beautiful,

high reaches of the Caucasus Mountains like Lermontov's Pechorin in *A Hero of Our Time*. As Susan Barber says in *The Importance of Developing the Feeling Function*:

Too much of life would otherwise pass us by, and without its heightening effect on our awareness, we are not seeing and feeling with enough precision and keenness. Simply put, without literature, we are not as alive as we could be. The effect is both horizontal and vertical; we live through literature more widely and more deeply. (Barber, *Importance*)

When Thomas Hardy wrote in 1886 that his “‘art is to intensify the expression of things...so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible’, he foreshadowed Conrad’s oft-repeated and justly famous definition of realism, that ‘by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you see’” (Karl). As Henry James stated in his essay *The Art of Fiction*: “The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas or the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass” (qtd. in Walder, *Nineteenth* 137). A novel becomes worth reading when readers around the world begin to identify with its creations and this identification is only possible when the reader feels that he or she ‘knows’ a character.

Every novel presents to the writer an opportunity – the opportunity to explore the ‘human type’ and personality. Character types that are more unidimensional and lacking in depth, created for merely arousing the interest of the reader, will simply be stereotypes rather than adding to our knowledge of human nature or even meriting psychological analysis. To quote Alexei Tolstoy:

Literature records the path traversed, it unfolds a motley canvas of history in the wake of the moving masses. But there is another, and in my view, more significant side to it which has to do with the major discoveries in the history of art: the study of man as the subject of history. The individual in a literary work is not just a human type but the focus of all the writers’ quests. It is through the individual (human type) that a realist writer investigates the social being of man...Through the human type, the writer gives us an idea of the mentality of people, their moral attitudes, their ideals, and aspirations. (qtd. in Khrapchenko 11)

Novels that enrich our understanding of human nature and psychology are usually written by writers who have not only experienced life intimately and profoundly but through their writing have consciously made an effort to make Life and the study of human nature their quest.

It was around the 18th-century that “the ‘novel’ came to be increasingly associated with ‘realism’ and truthful depiction of life” (Walder, Realist 10). The 18th-century writer Samuel Richardson “went so far as to refer to his novel *Clarissa* (1747-8) as ‘the History of a Young Lady’ (in a letter of 1752)” (qtd. in Walder, Realist 10).

Photographic Reality

To talk of psychological realism, I must first start from ‘realism’ and how this term was understood and applied initially. The 18th century brought about advancements in science and technology, and this seemed to especially emphasize factual and statistical data and theories that were verifiable and stood the test of time, logic and reasoning. In some ways, it was only natural, that this emphasis on accuracy and legitimacy of presentation should also affect the arts, especially literature. This is not to say that works written before the 18th century did not have realistic portrayals. However, the developments that took place in the 18th century ushered in a trend for accurate and thoughtful writing:

...with the advent of the 18th-century stress came to be laid on the depiction of human life and social circumstances with a precision akin to that provided by photography. It must be understood that the emergence of photography had influenced the masses with its authentic capture and portrayal of Man and the social scene. Now, artists and especially writers strove to bring the same kind of consciousness in their works...The 19th-century French novelist Stendhal provides a memorable instance of this when he writes of the novel as ‘a mirror travelling along a highway’ (Walder, Realist 99).

The inimitable Henry James also had much to say on this. Of the many images of the artist which James employed, one of his favorites and one that emerged as the most famous is that of the architect. The famous passage about the “house of fiction” develops the photographic image of the ‘camera eye’ more amply, “assigning to the artist a more private position inside a completed building and the ostensibly more restful occupation of a ‘watcher’ whose sole activity is to observe”: the “consciousness of the artist” stands behind the “dead wall” of a building enclosing him, equipped “with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass,” and scrutinizes life through the window of his particular literary form (Holland). Here James “speaks of the dialectic of the productive conflict between observation and creation, between the relatively passive and relatively active modes, between taking things in (perception) and

then, after changing their shape, thrusting them out again into something else (penetration)” (Holland). Not all novelists and critics, however, espoused this kind of confidence in realism: “It was increasingly felt by some that the ‘camera eye’ was not equipped to take in all. It had its limitations” (Walder, *Realist* 99). B. Reizov wrote: “Human and social truth cannot be seen just with the ‘physical’ eye. The surface of life is not the whole truth and it is not the detailing of life that forms the main strength...” (qtd. in Khrapchenko 45). It is not surprising then, that some novelists “should dissent from the conventional methods of realism and express a preference to portray the ‘inner’ or the psychological life of their characters, a fiction of fleeting sensations and impressions, a preference for psychological intensity rather than social comprehensiveness” (Walder, *Realist* 99).

On Literature and Psychology

Since this study will focus on the use and portrayal of psychological realism in novels, it is essential to establish the relationship between literature and psychology at the very outset. “The years between 1800 and 1865 were formative for both psychiatry and fiction” (“Love’s Madness”): “1800 marked the decline of sentimentalism and the advent of medical reform in the treatment of the mad; 1865 saw the establishment of the Medico-Psychological Association at the height of sensation fiction’s popularity” (“Love’s Madness”).

Due to these developments in psychology, the “difference between human beings during the nineteenth century was subject to peculiar scrutiny and massively shifting perception” (O’Gorman 202). The complexities of mind and memory were explored by scientists and writers alike (Herbert Spencer, the sociologist and intellectual ally of George Eliot published *The Comparative Psychology of Man* in 1876), and new journals were launched, devoted to the subject, for example, *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology and Mind*. The “uniqueness of each individual was increasingly recognized, and in keeping with this, the novel opened the way to new subjectivities” (O’Gorman 202).

Interestingly, central to the life sciences lie questions of what make us live and develop as individuals and species; central to the novel are questions of how and why we develop as individuals and communities – ‘Man like *infusoria* (Infusoria is a collective term for minute aquatic creatures like ciliates and unicellular algae) in a drop of water under microscope’, Thomas Hardy noted from Schopenhauer, while George Eliot set up her study of provincial life in *Middlemarch* as an experiment. (O’Gorman 202)

One figure who can be said to have changed forever the way human beings were to be studied was Sigmund Freud. Freud's writings have been subjected to "sceptical scrutiny" in recent times, however, "his influence on the integration of psychology into the art of novel-writing cannot be questioned" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 22). Even today, there is "considerable respect for him among some of the leading scientific investigators of consciousness" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 22). The neuroscientist Gerald Edelman wrote that "while perhaps not a scientist in our sense, Freud was a great intellectual pioneer, particularly in his views on the unconscious and its role in behaviour" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 22). David Lodge in his work *Consciousness and the Novel* has pointed out how Freud's revelation of the "model of the mind" enabled writers to "plumb these depths" of psychological reality in the characters they portrayed:

The Freudian model of the mind was structured like geological strata: unconscious, ego, superego - in ascending order. It, therefore, encouraged the idea that consciousness had a dimension of depth, which it was the task of literature, as of psychoanalysis, to explore. For modernist writers, the effort to plumb these depths, to get closer to psychological reality, paradoxically entailed an abandonment of the traditional properties and strategies of literary realism. (Lodge, *Consciousness* 61)

It, therefore, has to be acknowledged that "one of the crucial factors in this shift of emphasis in literary fiction was the development of psychoanalysis, especially the work of Freud and, to a lesser extent, Jung" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 62). It was Freud who "first produced a plausible and persuasive account of human nature in which behavior was chiefly accounted for by motives that were hidden in the secret recesses of the individual psyche and hidden not just from observers but often from the subject's own conscious mind" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 62).

Psychoanalysis "is a set of theories and therapeutic techniques related to the study of the unconscious mind" ("Psychoanalysis"). It won't be wrong to say that Freud himself created psychoanalysis. In fact, for several years he worked on it alone and propounded his thoughts and theories through exhaustive writings. He was also the first person to use the term psychoanalysis (in French) in 1896 and he was the one who set the initial tenets of psychoanalytic theory. In *The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, Freud wrote: "Even today, when I am no longer the only psychoanalyst, I feel myself justified in assuming that none can know better than myself what psychoanalysis is, (and) wherein it differs from other methods of investigating the psychic life..." (qtd. in Mijolla 1192).

However, many others went on to contribute to the development of psychoanalysis – notable among these were Alfred Adler and Carl Gustav Jung, both mentored by Freud. Others like Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Erich Fromm, who came to be known as neo-Freudians (they agreed with Freud on some aspects of psychoanalysis, while disagreeing with him on others) went on to develop their own distinct personality theories. For the purpose of the literary analysis that we'll engage in this book, the basic tenets of psychoanalysis can be said to be the following:

- Instincts are the ultimate cause of all behavior. Some mental processes, such as motives, desires, and memories, are not available to awareness or conscious introspection. Many of the irrational drives that occupy the unconscious formulate human behavioral tendencies as well as cognition.
- While some mental processes are out of our awareness, there is the process of defense mechanism in which people are also motivated to push threatening thoughts or feelings from awareness. Attempts to bring these suppressed thoughts or feelings into awareness are resisted by the defense mechanisms.
- Any conflicts in the interplay of conscious and unconscious material may give rise to minor or serious mental disturbances and psychopathological conditions (most commonly depression, anxiety, and neurosis).
- The development perspective states that childhood relationships with caregivers play a role in shaping current and future relationships. The individual's development may be driven by forgotten incidents of early childhood, instead of being determined by inherited traits alone.
- The psychodynamic perspective, which emphasizes the importance of individual or personal meaning of events; how a person experiences himself, important others, and the world in general. (Richard 182-183)

David Lodge comments on the influence that Freud and the psychoanalytic movement had on the writers of the era:

It wasn't necessary for writers to have actually read the psychoanalytical writings of Freud and his followers to be influenced by them. His ideas became memes, seeds carried on the winds of the *Zeitgeist* (a German expression that means 'the spirit (*Geist*) of the time (*Zeit*)'). It denotes the intellectual and cultural climate of an era, propagating themselves in minds that had no first-hand knowledge of Freud's work. But we know, for

instance, that Frieda Lawrence, who had close personal connections with the European psychoanalytical movement, introduced D. H. Lawrence to Freud's theories, especially the Oedipus complex, and that this influenced the final version of *Sons and Lovers*. Amongst the later writers, Virginia Woolf had close personal connections with the British psychoanalytical movement, through the Stracheys (James Strachey, brother of Lytton, was Freud's English translator)". (Lodge, *Consciousness* 59)

Freud himself took a deep and serious interest in Literature and recognized how Literature and Psychology could each contribute to an increased understanding of the other. On reading *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1929, "he credited Hardy with intuitive knowledge of psychoanalysis" (Martin). Freud himself analysed literary texts with much sophistication. In her interesting work *Freud and Fiction*, Sarah Kofman presents an "examination of four fictional texts on which Freud himself wrote; a fragmentary poem by Empedocles, Hebbel's *Judith and Holofernes*, Jensen's *Gradiva* and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*" ("Freud and Fiction").

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is literary criticism or literary theory which, in method, concept, or form, is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Freud (Wilcox). Psychoanalytic reading "has been practiced since the early development of psychoanalysis itself and has developed into a rich and heterogeneous interpretive tradition" (Gleason). As Celine Surprenant writes: "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field...However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature...is fundamentally entwined with the psyche" (Waugh 200). "Literature", in fact, "can help to reveal Consciousness in ways that Science cannot" (Lodge, *Consciousness*).

Psychologically realistic texts give us "immediate knowledge of how the world is experienced by the individual consciousness and an understanding of the inner life in its own terms" (Paris, *Psychological* 24). It "enables us to grasp from within the phenomena that psychology and ethics treat from without" (Paris, *Psychological* 23). Gerald Edelman said that "'consciousness is a first-person phenomenon' which science, oriented to impersonal observation and the formulation of general laws, finds difficult to cope with" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 26). In his book *Consciousness and the Novel*, David Lodge creates a "fictitious cognitive scientist Ralph Messenger who makes the same point to the novelist Helen Reed" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 28):

"That's the problem of consciousness in a nutshell," Ralph says, "How to give an objective, third-person account of a subjective, first-person phenomenon."

“Oh, but novelists have been doing that for the last two hundred years,” says Helen airily. (Lodge, *Consciousness* 28)

Bernard J. Paris says that although “historians of literature have repeatedly addressed the issue of psychological analysis of literary works in connection with the works of individual writers”, in the history of literature, “one cannot find a consistent study of its inception, development, and transformation in various trends and schools or of the work of the great writers” (Paris, *Psychological*). Probably that is what makes the sceptics nervous. A classic novel is the work of an essential genius; it is an expression “of his magnificent intelligence, of his intense and delicate interest in human nature” (Leavis 23). We go to literature “for many things, and not the least of them is the immediate knowledge that it gives of variously constituted human psyches” (Paris, *Psychological* 18). Therefore, “there is a need for extensive research of the development of this relationship between literature and psychology” (Paris, *Psychological*). There have been eminent psychologists like Karen Horney and John Bowlby, who through their work have paved the way for such studies. I shall apply some of their psychological theories to this study.

On Realism and Psychological Realism

In the art of novel-writing, realism that deals by-and-large with visual perception (what I would prefer to call as photographic realism) needs to be differentiated from psychological realism. In the former, “the focus lies on *events rather than on characters* (italics mine)” (Brandt). There is very little if any, character development; psychological realism or characters’ interiority is not a significant concern in these texts. Characters “derive their significance from what they represent and how they contribute to the event in focus” (Brandt). They become “emblems of different aspects of human life: patterns of behaviour, states of mind, universal conditions” (Brandt). Novels using this technique often indulge in the “description of social setting”; “sometimes persons, as well as places, are non-specific”; and “attention is directed at the universal rather than the singular...the point being exposing a theme, generalizing an aspect of human life” (Brandt). On the other hand, supporters of realism in art themselves often characterize its principles and features in a simplified fashion (Khrapchenko 31). Khrapchenko stresses the need to explore realistic portrayals in 19th-century literature:

While there is an abundance of critical and historical literature devoted to the general features of realism, various ways and means of realistic

portrayal of reality are not explored sufficiently well. That is why it seems so important to analyze basic types of artistic generalization in realistic literature and primarily in nineteenth-century literature. These artistic generalizations will necessarily show the diversity of the aesthetic assimilation of the world and the role of the individual in it, as portrayed in texts that depict psychological realism. (Khrapchenko 31)

In his critical essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884), James argues that “fiction should compete with reality, should depict as painting does, and should record as history does” (James, *Future* 39). On a similar vein, in his book *Man as Purpose* Alberto Moravia wrote that realism is courage. He noted that the artist is a witness. To “witness means to name things, that is, to determine them and to establish their objective significance for us” (Khrapchenko 19). A novel is an ‘impression of life’ in the author’s mind, that is, through the creative process, conveyed to the reader as a story. Howsoever we may differ in our understanding of what a ‘story’ is or what a story needs to do, it is not difficult to understand that a story that gives ample focus to external events while ignoring the psychological significance of the events on the characters, whatever its other merits may be, cannot be psychologically realistic or psychologically enlightening. As Caro Clarke, discussing (from the writer’s perspective) on how to drive a story from inside a character’s mind, says:

You have to show the characters acting, and show why they are acting, or else the story isn’t a story, it’s just one damn thing after another. ‘I, Huck Finn, ran away from home and then I did this and then I did that and then I headed west.’ But that’s not why we read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We read it to share Huck’s inner adventure, how he responds to moral and physical tests. We see him change and grow strong by the choices he makes”. (Clarke)

Novels in which “psychological realism predominates tend to present society from the point of view of the individual; novels of social realism often take a sociological rather than a psychological view of character” (Paris, *Psychological* 8). Thus, “from Dickens or Jane Austen, where we have the individual concerned with society, to the extent that he or she depends on society for his or her definition, we turn to James, where the individual becomes more and more preoccupied with his or her consciousness, to the extent that his or her alienation from society becomes the gauge of his or her identity” (Bloom). In such works the “inner upheavals of the characters are shown in the light of the new and are related to their attitude to the ongoing change” (Novikov): “The characters respond to the contradictions in their own way and represent

different types of human behavior. The writer is concerned with the question of a character's responsibility for his actions, for his choice of his place in life and his allegiances in the midst of sharp contradictions" (Novikov). The "notion of psychological realism, the concept that the reader can place him or herself in someone else's mind, in this case, the character's, and see things from his own vantage point, came into existence as a way to bridge the gaps among our respective interiors" (Lollar).

James asserted that literature in general and the novel in particular "is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life" (qtd. in Haralson 311). This naturally gives primacy to the role of the author as the creator of the work and its characters. Bernard J. Paris says that "through the novel's rhetoric we become aware of the meaning which the characters' experience has for a mind like that of the implied author" and suggests that viewing the implied author as "a fictional persona, as another dramatized consciousness...enlarges our knowledge of experience" (Paris, Psychological 24):

What we have, in effect, is a deep inside view of *his* mind, a view which makes us phenomenologically aware of *his* experience of the world. When we see him as another consciousness, *sometimes the most fascinating one in the book* (italics mine), it becomes more difficult to regret the technical devices by which he is revealed, even when they produce aesthetic flaws. (Paris, Psychological 24)

Psychological Realism is the literary genre that delves on the internal life of the characters. Realism is lent to the text through a focus on the thoughts and motivations of the characters rather than on their occupations and external settings alone. The principal aim and characteristic of this genre are that the characters who inhabit a novel should be believable and living, breathing human beings who the readers can readily and inadvertently relate to. Human beings are complex creatures and it is the functioning of their minds (together with their psychological past) that makes them so. Psychologically realistic texts function with the assertion that it is through an in-depth understanding and portrayal of the human mind and personality that the author can hope to make the world depicted in the novel realistic, meaningful and enriching. It is, therefore, "a highly character-driven genre of fiction writing, as it focuses on the motivations and internal thoughts of characters to explain their actions" (Kennedy).

Although it was the 19th century which heralded exquisite usage of psychological realism in fiction, psychological fiction as such had existed much earlier. The *Tale of Genji* or *Genji Monogatari* is a masterpiece of

Japanese literature by Murasaki Shikibu, written at the start of the 11th century, and is generally considered to be not only the world's first psychological novel but possibly the first "mature" novel in world literature. In *A History of Japan*, Mason and Caiger comment on the uniqueness of this pathbreaking work:

Quite apart from its content, the Tale of Genji is significant as perhaps the first mature novel ever written. Earlier "novels" had too closely resembled fairy tales, or else were realistic but had no feeling for the complexity and capacity for development of their characters. Murasaki Shikibu's book, though imaginative fiction, is both descriptively and psychologically true to life. It deals with society as it was and people as they are. (Mason, R.H.P, 96)

In the western world, the first psychological novel to be written is probably Giovanni Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, written in 1344. The novel delves on the "psychological effects of unrequited love" (Todd). What makes the work unique is that Boccaccio "authors the text from the point of view of 'Fiammetta'" and "there is no omniscient narrator to offer an objective overview of the tale", so much so that "we must rely solely upon the account of Fiammetta, who quickly proves herself to be a most unreliable witness" (Todd). Madame De La Fayette's *The Princess of Cleves*, dating back to the 17th century, is considered by many to be an early example of the quintessential psychological novel, which may have served as a prototype to some of the 19th-century works which were to follow later. As perhaps the "first roman d'analyse (novel of analysis)", this novel is known for "dissecting emotions and attitudes in a highly intelligent and skillful way" (Brians, "Madame de Lafayette"). Amongst 18th century novels, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa: The History of a Young Lady* are prime examples of novels that employed psychological realism.

However, it was only in the 19th century that the portrayal of the characters' rich inner world and broad intellectual horizons became of prime importance and was increasingly explored by writers in their works. The technique flowered in different languages and in the works of some of the greatest novelists that we shall ever know. Psychological realism, an inquisitive investigation of life and man, "discovers deep processes of life and complexity of the inner landscape" (Khrapchenko 19). A cross-section of people read these works as they became increasingly accessible to the reading public. Khrapchenko states that "portrayal of the externalities of life" could not reveal the "psyche and motivation of the characters":

Creative investigation of the world presupposes not only exceptional sensitivity to what is going on within it, but also a determination by the artist to penetrate to the root of processes and phenomena, beneath mere appearance, and into the psyche and motivation of the characters. A portrayal of the externalities of life, mere copying or pure formal quests, obviously could not produce such results. (Khrapchenko 19)

When describing a character, writers, like painters, will first consider the exterior. However, it is to be noted that a writer who concentrates primarily on exterior descriptions will only create works that fall short in representing Life. Despite having a plot, narratives, where exterior descriptions of streets, places, even events dominate when they don't take into account the human element, will not be eminently readable, and far less interesting. For that matter, a writer who concentrates on what his people looked like and how they acted instead of the way in which they thought, or how their feelings worked, will also miss the element of internal life that prompts readers to identify with the characters of a novel. By describing mental as well as physical characteristics the novelist endows his persons with a more convincing life-likeness: "Defoe tells us a great deal about Robinson Crusoe's ideas and religious beliefs, and Swift allows Gulliver to express himself on political and philosophical affairs" (Walder, *Realist* 194). Virginia Woolf's essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924) "shows these ideas in action in a witty and quite devastating attack on the work of Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, and John Galsworthy, all then at the height of their fame" (Walder, *Realist* 194). She "imagines that each is trying to write a novel centered on a woman - Mrs. Brown - glimpsed in a railway carriage" (Walder, *Realist* 194). She proposed that Bennett would:

...observe every detail with immense care. He would notice the advertisements; the pictures of Swanage and Portsmouth; the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons; how Mrs. Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth's bazaar; and had mended both gloves - indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced... [this is just the technique he uses in his novel *Hilda Lessways*]...he begins to describe, not *Hilda Lessways*, but the view from her bedroom window...One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description, but let them pass as the necessary drudgery of the novelist. And now - where is *Hilda*? Alas. *Hilda* is still looking out of the window. Passionate and dissatisfied as she was, she was a girl with an eye for houses...Therefore the villas must be described...we cannot hear her mother's voice or *Hilda's* voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines (From *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*). (qtd. in Walder, *Realist* 194)

In this essay on Modern Fiction, commenting on the “scrupulous descriptions of external appearances” (Lodge, *Consciousness* 58) that it employs, Virginia Woolf asked rhetorically: “Is life like this...Must novels be like this?” and answered her own question: “Look within and life it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day...” (Lodge, *Consciousness* 58) “Look within,” she exhorts. The “heuristic direction of this kind of fiction is, one might say, always from outside to inside, from spoken to unspoken thought, from surface to depth” (Lodge, *Consciousness* 58). This is not to say that external details have no place in a psychologically realistic text. Paradoxically, the “material details are very often used to impart knowledge of things not usually visible to the human eye. For instance, a character’s state of mind or motivation might be revealed through a detail of clothing, or an aspect of a room” (McDonagh 16).

In terms of style, “many psychological novels feature interior monologue and stream of consciousness; these are literary techniques that give the reader direct access to the inner thoughts of characters” (“Genres”). Another merit in these stories is that the characters are not only true portraits, but they are ‘living beings’ (Baker 4). Their feelings and motives are seen to be “part and parcel of their natures and conditions, their talk is individual, belongs strictly to them, and not to the author” (Baker 4).

Novels differ in the emphasis they lay on the portrayal of the characters’ inner processes. Even so, one of the great achievements of novels of psychological realism is their “dramatization of complex patterns of feeling, behavior, and interaction” (Paris, *Psychological* 130). Although characters in a novel need not “embody the full potentialities of human nature”, the ‘character types’ that it portrays should be convincing (Paris, *Psychological* 130). Commenting on fictional characters, Bernard J. Paris says in his work *Imagined Human Beings*: “Psychological analysis has shown that they (fictional characters) are complex characters who are portrayed with considerable subtlety” (Paris, *Imagined*). To understand the intricacies of psychological realism in the 19th-century novel, criticism alone is not sufficient. After all, criticism is by-and-large reductive: “Psychological analysis is our best tool for talking about the intricacies of mimetic characterization. If properly conducted, it is less reductive than any other approach” (Paris, *Psychological*).

Certain literary techniques have come to be associated with psychological realism. These techniques are what make psychological realism possible; however, no specific technique is indispensable in a novel of psychological realism. A novel is the creation of its author and is hence subject to his (or her) innovativeness and literary idiosyncrasies.

One popular technique that has been employed by authors is known as 'Stream of Consciousness'. This is a suitable technical device to reveal the mental lives of the characters. This technique renders "the unceasing flux of thoughts and associations, conscious and otherwise" ("Encyclopedia Novel"). In psychology and philosophy stream of consciousness, introduced by William James, is the "set of constantly changing inner thoughts and sensations which an individual has while conscious", used as a synonym for the stream of thought (Westland 38). In literary criticism, "'stream of consciousness' denotes a literary technique which seeks to describe an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes" ("Encyclopedia: Stream").

Stream-of-consciousness writing "is characterized by associative (and at times dissociative) leaps in syntax and punctuation that can make the prose difficult to follow, tracing" as they do "a character's fragmentary thoughts and sensory feelings" ("Encyclopedia: Stream"). It is "the direct presentation of a character's thoughts in the first person" (Warren). It is "a technique in which the writer lets the reader see the thought processes of a character" (Warren). When we think, we don't think in sentences, with perfect logic: "Our minds jump from place to place with the flimsiest of connections, creating all sorts of images and calling on memories and sensations" (Warren). Intuitively, Virginia Woolf knew this: "In an interesting correspondence her friend Jacques Raverat, a painter, argued that writing's essential linearity prevented it from representing the complex multiplicity of a mental event, as a painting could. She replied that she was trying to get away from the 'formal railway line of the sentence...people never did think or feel in that way, but all over the place, in your way'" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 23). Stream of consciousness attempts to capture and present this flow of thought: "By breaking up the formal railway line of the sentence, by the use of ellipses and parentheses, by blurring the boundaries between what is thought and what is spoken, and by switching point of view and narrative voice with bewildering frequency - by these and similar devices she tried to imitate in her fiction the elusiveness of the phenomenon of consciousness" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 23). Joyce "perhaps came closer than any writer had done before to representing the extraordinary complexity of the brain activity that goes on just below the surface of the self-conscious mind" (Lodge, *Consciousness* 24).

Interior monologue "is a similar technique, in that it lets the reader see the character's thoughts. But in this case, the character's thoughts are not presented chaotically, as in 'stream of consciousness', but are arranged logically, as if the character were making a speech (to himself) in his

mind” (Warren). Inner monologues often “occur at the most dramatic points in the narrative and are in harmony with other artistic devices” (Novikov). These “monologues take various forms and discharge various artistic functions” (Novikov). Their primary function is to reveal deep emotions and the interplay of emotions.

Both these devices encourage the reader to empathize with the character. Skillful writers will often present ‘interior monologue’ in association with specific actions and gestures that work to heighten its effect and revelatory power. Psychological realists develop a character through several means. Other than a description of the characters and a narration of their life-history, which works to introduce the characters, they use dialogue and techniques like interior monologue and stream of consciousness to take the reader deeper into an understanding of the characters’ thoughts and psychology.

Another technique of psychological realism is Psychonarration. The “narrator reports the character’s thoughts to the reader, representing them in the third person” (“Narrative”). The “narrator remains in the foreground and may add some general observations (comments) not part of the character’s thoughts” (“Narrative”). We hear the narrator’s voice more than the character’s.

The fourth technique of psychological realism is Narrated Monologue. This is a mix between psycho narration and interior monologue. The “narrator often sets the scene, but the character’s thoughts are reproduced directly and in a way the character would think”, “though the narrator continues to talk of the character in the third person” (“Narrative”). The “syntax is less formal (incomplete sentences, exclamations, etc.) and the character’s mind style is reproduced more closely” (“Narrative”). We hear a dual voice; “the voices of the narrator and the character are momentarily merged” (“Narrative”). This “can create an impression of immediacy”, “but it can also be used to introduce an element of irony when the reader realizes that a character is misguided without actually being told so by the narrator” (Hecimovich).

Some mainstream authors of the 20th century have made advances in their quest to portray their characters accurately, as living, breathing, and thinking human beings. This has come through putting in a great deal of time and effort in the learning. We will analyze how much of a contribution was made by some of the 19th-century writers. George Eliot was an acknowledged genius among the novelists of the 19th century. In his ‘Preface’ to *The Princess Casamassima*, Henry James observed that it is George Eliot’s attempt to show the histories of her characters “as determined by their feelings and the nature of their minds” that made

“their emotions, their stirred intelligence, their moral consciousness...our very own adventure” (James, *The Princess Casamassima* 16). Skilton also comments on how Eliot and other 19th century writers actively involved themselves in such efforts:

This two-fold attention to the inner and outer aspects of character led novelists as different as Gaskell, Trollope, George Eliot and Meredith to anticipate many of the findings of psychoanalysis, and to develop for their own use a range of techniques for rendering simultaneous thought and speech or thought and action, such as incorporating ‘submerged speech’ or ‘submerged thought’ in the stream of narrative, as Jane Austen had done before them. (Skilton 156)

This brought into play a novel form of writing. Novels began to be written differently and this also brought about a change in the way they were read, understood and interpreted. While some realists incorporated this “two-fold attention” into their narratives in a moderate degree, others tried to “plumb the depths” of the characters’ mind and internal life. Some writers began to break from set traditions in starting to present the narrative through the thoughts and perspectives of a limited number of characters. In his work *Consciousness and the Novel*, exploring the relationship between consciousness and literature, David Lodge in considering “works of writers ranging from Jane Austen to John Updike, and Virginia Woolf to Philip Roth, examines how the novel represents consciousness and how such representation has changed through time” (“Consciousness”):

‘The world of objective facts has almost completely vanished...almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the *dramatis personae*’. This technique implies a belief that reality inheres not in the common phenomenal world but in the perceptions of that world in individual minds. (Lodge, *Consciousness* 58)

On Truth and Psychological Realism

“Fictional characters are more often than not taken from life. Equally the way in which people behave is drawn from life. There is, therefore, always a strain of reality running through fiction” (Khrapchenko 135). Margaret Oliphant put it in a different way when she wrote in 1855: “We feel no art in these remarkable books” (qtd. in Glen 1). As Mikhail Khrapchenko has commented: “The idea of the novel, after all, is that men must see the true essence of life in themselves” (Khrapchenko 135). He goes on to state:

Actually, what we feel is a force which makes everything real...a motion which is irresistible. 'Truthfulness' should be defined as the sum of devices designed to give shape to the artist's perception of reality, lend them harmony and completeness and make characters and situations convincing...Such writing is characterized by truthfulness – truthfulness in describing circumstances (even if they are fantastic they must be truthful in their exclusiveness, as in Lermontov's *Demon*), the relevance of the situations in the overall pattern of the work, the correspondence of style to content, etc. (Khrapchenko 19)

The “more talented the artist, the more vivid characters he can draw (characters, that is, which make sense in terms of psychology), the more entertaining the situations and conflicts and the greater their hold on the reader due to the illusion of truthfulness” (Novikov). In his work, *A Confession*, Tolstoy, who was obsessed with Truth and its depiction, gives several different definitions of 'truth'. He first sees 'truth' as “everyday life”; then as “death”, and finally concludes that 'truth' is “faith”. However, in his novels, the reader can only feel the truth, in all its simplicity. A reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* doesn't feel like one is reading a contrived story – it feels as if the omniscient narrator, from whom but little is hidden, and who is privy to the inner life of the characters, has but given a truthful account of people he intimately knows. Commenting on Tolstoy and his gift of writing, Hemmings says:

Tolstoy...perhaps more than any other author wrote himself into his works. A lot of his writing is drawn from his own personal experiences...he was for that matter an intensely private person. Also, like his other great Russian contemporaries, he had the gift of feeling life deeply. We can almost visualize him taking long draughts from the Cup of Life, and then pouring it out in his works...Tolstoy's characters...all distinct, all fascinating, because they were all, in their different ways, utterly human, truer than any biographer could make his subject. (Hemmings)

Tolstoy, in his lifetime, was witness to his works becoming immensely popular in other countries. However, it was Ivan Turgenev who had first enabled an appreciation of Russian Literature in the mind of the Western reader. He started with his thought-provoking work *A Sportsman's Sketches*. The stories in this Collection are not only excellent studies of the human type but also present the inconsistencies of human fate in an unsentimental yet touching manner. In his more famous novellas, which were to come later, he lays bare his seething vision of the human psyche and condition. V.G. Belinsky wrote in his work *A View on Russian Literature of 1847*:

The main characteristic of his (Turgenev's) talent is that he would hardly have been able to create precisely a character he had not met in real life. He had always to keep close to reality. Nature endowed him richly for this kind of art: with the gift of observation, the ability to understand and, rapidly and correctly, appreciate every phenomenon - instinctively guessing its causes and effects and thus intuitively supplementing the necessary information. (Esaulov 40)

Impartiality and truth were the hallmarks of Turgenev's writing. He concurred with "Belinsky's conviction that literature's primary aim was to reflect the truth of life" (Augustyn 255). Adopting "a critical attitude toward Life's injustices became an article of faith for Turgenev" (Augustyn 255). Turgenev preferred to be a secret psychologist in his writings, depicting and interpreting only as much, while encouraging the reader to himself try and understand the internal life of the characters. Towards the end of his novella *A Nest of the Gentry*, Turgenev concludes that the truth is best left unstated. He ends the novel beautifully by stating that he could not possibly explain what Lavretsky and Liza felt and that it is better to point out these individual tragedies and pass them by. Towards "the end of his life, Turgenev confessed in a letter to Claudine Viardot (August 26, 1878): 'In my work, I am a realist and I...prefer realism in art, poetic reality, that is, reality so truthful as to become beautiful'" (Khrapchenko 120).

Chares Dickens's contribution to realism is something many critics find difficult to acknowledge. But the characters that he created were not always plain creations of his imagination. In his work *The Realist Novel*, Walder cites an interesting fact related to one of the settings of *Great Expectations* to convey that literal copying of reality does not necessarily create the 'reality effect' in fiction:

The setting of *Great Expectations* was familiar to Dickens from his childhood, and it was his custom to show friends round the Kent churchyard on which the scene is based, but they would see thirteen little gravestones lying there! He had reduced the number to five for the novel, on the grounds that nobody would believe it if he gave the true number. (Walder, *Realist* 14)

According to "recent findings of an Australian neurologist, Dickens was so good at describing neurological disease in his characters that the symptoms were used word-for-word in medical textbooks of the day" ("The Times of India").

The 19th-century novelist's interpretations of diseases of the nervous system even predated formal medical classification, some by more than a

century. His description of the tics, teeth grinding and grimaces of the character Mr. Bell, now known as symptoms of Tourette syndrome, was published more than 40 years before Giles de la Tourette clinically described the disorder in 1885.

In *The Pickwick Papers*, Schoffer notes that Dickens links Parkinson's disease and dementia in an old man whose "limbs were shaking with disease and the palsy had fastened on his mind" ("The Times of India").

No wonder then that writers who have excelled at psychological realism and drawing psychological portraits have also been acknowledged stars of the literary world.

Some critics believe that "there is a very thin line between truthfulness and verisimilitude; however, to great artists, the difference has always been glaringly evident" (Khrapchenko 20). As Khrapchenko puts it: "All major realists – from Pushkin to Stanislavsky - were against supplanting of truthfulness by verisimilitude. Their hearts were moved by Truth and not by "little truth" (Khrapchenko 20). Pushkin too believed that "real geniuses of tragedy were concerned only with the truth of characters and situations" (Novikov). This definition is somewhat similar to the formula of Engels: "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, truth in the reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (Novikov). As James had said: "The evolution of a writer often takes place because of a compulsive need to portray the truth" (James, *Literary Criticism* 34).

We also know of George Eliot's affinity for truthful portraits of characters taken from life. Eliot, like James, "was an avid literary analyst and has left behind a fine body of critical writings that give us her ideas on the art of Fiction as well" (McDonagh 57). Eliot claimed that she aspired to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they had "mirrored themselves in my mind": "The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath" (McDonagh 30). F. R. Leavis tells us that "there is also a personal basis to some of her works, as in *The Mill on the Floss*" and how "it continues to be one of her most well-known novels": "The children of whom George Eliot wrote were of her own childhood, Maggie being her child-self. But as we read of Tom and Maggie it does not matter in what period the story is set: the characters are true to life and experience at the present time" (Leavis 52). Leavis further states:

But of course, the most striking quality of *The Mill on the Floss* is that which goes with the strong autobiographical element. It strikes us as an

emotional tone. We feel an urgency, a resonance, a personal vibration, adverting us of the poignantly immediate presence of the author. Since the vividness, the penetration, and the irresistible truth of the best of the book are clearly bound up with this quality. (Leavis 47)

Another writer, a genius, who almost had the power to make her readers live the life of her novels' protagonists, was Charlotte Brontë. Margaret Blom says that "deriving great satisfaction from realistic portrayal, Charlotte worked consciously to remodel her fictional world" (Blom 43). In 1836 she invokes her muse to "paint to the life," "detail with graphic skill," "scribe so well that each separate voice shall speak out of the page in changeful tone," and "shew us even those details that give truest life to the picture," for all these characteristics have the power to "astonish us" (Blom 43). Her work *Jane Eyre* "has conventionally been read as a psychologically realistic narrative of an unprecedented kind" (Glen 24). I have tried to impress upon the reader the authenticity of the psychological data that some writers use in their works. However, it is important to reiterate that (as in the case of *Jane Eyre*), often these very characters are as much a product of the imagination - that is why we refer to them as 'creations'.

Thomas Hardy too made ample use of the real: "New biographical information reiterates how often and closely Hardy dramatised episodes in his personal life" (Butler 88): "Given what we know about Hardy's use of the real, it seems unlikely that this repetition is without a personal origin" (Butler 105). Hardy "excelled at revealing the inner life of his characters" (Butler 90). He was "opposed to a 'photographic' naturalism, favoring instead a kind of 'analytic' writing which 'makes strange' common-sense reality and brings into view other realities obscured precisely by the naturalized version" (Kramer 74). Hardy claimed that "a novel is not an intellectual argument, but an 'impression,' that is, a general tone or effect imprinted on the mind, emotions, and eyes of the reader" (Kramer 148). Hardy believed that "Art is a disproportioning (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked" (Hardy, *Literary* 235).

More commonly in the 19th century, "the realist selected a single life and made it the subject of the novel" (Hemmings):

Characters in the novels of Flaubert, Tolstoy, Zola and other writers of the latter part of the century are invariably 'people of our sort', which does not mean of course that we see ourselves necessarily behaving as they do, but

that we can understand only too well what makes them behave as they do. They are never extraordinary (it is precisely because Dostoevsky's four great novels all embody abnormal heroes that some critics hesitate to claim him among the realists), and so, in general, their fates are never extraordinary. (Hemmings)

Amongst French writers of the 19th-century, Marie-Henri Beyle, who wrote under the pseudonym Stendhal was renowned for his realistic portrayal of the everyday characters he depicted especially his deep understanding of the characters' psychology. His achievements are all the more noteworthy since all his literary output was delivered in the Romantic period. In fact it was after his passing away that the rich contribution of his novels could be truly recognized. Hippolyte Taine considered the psychological portraits of Stendhal's characters to be "real because they are complex, many-sided, particular and original, like living human beings" (Pearson 38). Eric Auerbach believed that in Stendhal's novels "characters, attitudes, and relationships of the *dramatis personæ*... are woven into the action in a manner more detailed and more real than had been exhibited in any earlier novel, and indeed in any works of literary art" (Pearson 38). Auerbach also considered modern "serious realism" to have begun with Stendhal and his illustrious contemporary Honoré de Balzac.

Balzac, widely regarded as one of the founders of realism in literature, was so passionate about the truthful depiction of everyday life in his works, that in order to understand life better he is known to have wandered the streets of Paris incognito with the sole purpose of observing the ways and manners of the people and to familiarize himself with their struggles and tribulations. His art is also distinguished by the fact that even the minor characters depicted are not without their share of complexity, genuineness and moral ambiguity. He took inspiration not only from the events of his own life but also from those of people he interacted with. *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac's classic multi-volume collection of novels and stories is one of a kind. The novels and stories in the collection are often linked to each other through recurring characters and life-histories. Because Balzac wrote sans any moral agenda, his characters are brazenly human, with shades of both good and evil. In the preface to *Le Lys dans la vallée*, he wrote: "To arrive at the truth, writers use whatever literary device seems capable of giving the greatest intensity of life to their characters" ("Info List"). Balzac also had a wonderful sense of perception. Henry James, who was familiar with Balzac and his works, recognized that Balzac both loved and understood the people he portrayed. However, "it was by loving them - as the terms of his subject and the nuggets of his