

# The Modern Novel

## Critical Approaches

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## video timings

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4. The balloon dilemma	00:08:42
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6. Point of view and narrative voice	00:12:34
7. Ideas and patterns – themes and the writer	00:16:40
8. Love	00:17:57
9. Emotional versus rational	00:21:12
10. Science	00:24:27
11. The endings	00:26:16
12. The modern novel	00:30:29

### Regeneration

1st extract from the film of <i>Regeneration</i>	00:32:09
1. The idea of the novel	00:33:17
2. The title	00:35:42
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4. A perspective on the First World War	00:41:20
5. Fact and fiction	00:42:51
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# Introduction

## EMC Advanced Literature Series

EMC Advanced Literature Series is a resource for A Level English Literature (and elements of Language and Literature). It is designed to meet the requirements of the new AS/A2 specifications for 2000 in challenging, innovative and practical ways. Each publication includes:

- texts for study, both literary texts and extracts from literary criticism
- student activities
- teachers' notes.

Despite the shifts in emphasis implied by Assessment Objectives 4 and 5 – contextual issues and different interpretations – the text remains central. A Level students are still expected to focus primarily on the texts set for study in each module, and to:

- read closely and carefully
- get to know the text really well
- get below the surface and between the lines
- interpret and make meanings
- see patterns – big ones and small ones
- make links with other things they have read
- be alert to ways writers choose to use language.

The activities in all three sections of the book are intended to develop these critical reading skills. However, the resource is also intended to support teachers and students as they get to grips with the requirement to 'articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers' (AO4); 'show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood' (AO5i) and 'evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences upon literary texts and study' (AO5ii).

## The Modern Novel – Critical Approaches

The book is divided into three sections:

- Approaches to the Modern Novel
- *Enduring Love* with a video interview with Ian McEwan
- *Regeneration* with a video interview with Pat Barker

There is also an edited CD- Rom version of the interviews, containing most of the key sections.

## Section 1 – Approaches to the Modern Novel

Section 1 has been written for use with any of the modern novels studied at AS and A2. The first activities, exploring what is meant by 'modern' and 'novel' and the work on 'A personal reading profile', introduce students to AS level study in an accessible way. Students explore the narrative techniques and features of the novel through a series of practical activities; at each stage they are encouraged to experiment with the techniques in short pieces of creative writing and to apply what they have learned to their set text. Work on the development of the 'Literary Heritage' and the modern novel encourages students to think critically about the ways these labels are used and to see the novel they are studying within a continuing tradition.

## Sections 2 and 3 – *Enduring Love* and *Regeneration*

The activities on both *Enduring Love* and *Regeneration* provide practical and engaging ways into key aspects of each novel, particularly those areas likely to prove most challenging to students at AS Level. It is not expected that teachers will use the book sequentially. However the teachers' notes do offer a possible route through each novel and the study material, with suggested strategies

for the first reading. With *Enduring Love*, a planned approach to the first reading is particularly important, given that it has challenging elements for less experienced readers.

The video interviews could either be screened in stages during a first reading, or at one sitting soon after reading. It is worth bearing in mind, with *Enduring Love* in particular, that showing some sections of the video might give away plot and character information that could affect the first reading. We would, therefore, advise viewing the interview before showing it to your class.

The CD-Rom is intended as a useful addition to the video. It enables teachers to:

- find just one part of an interview more speedily than on video
- allow students access to the interview in pairs or small groups
- provide a Library copy, that students can access for themselves for independent study or revision.

The activities on both novels contain extensive contextual material and critical writing, to support AO4 and AO5. The contextual material on *Regeneration* includes extracts from letters, diaries, photos, autobiography, the film of Barker's novel, poems and extracts from other novels written about the war. This makes it particularly useful for students preparing for the synoptic paper for AQA A, whether they are studying *Regeneration* as a set text or not. The novel itself can be studied as one of the internal assessment texts for A2 in the AQA A specification. *Regeneration* also appears as a set text in the 2000 specifications for OCR and WJEC. *Enduring Love* is a set text for the 2000 specifications for AQA A and AQA B.

Quotations are taken from the following editions: *Enduring Love*, Vintage pbk, 1998 and *Regeneration*, Penguin pbk, 1982.

# Narrative and the novel

## Representing reality

Novels are constructs, existing only in the imagination of the writer and reader. They are not real life. Some writers aim to create a convincing reflection of real life. Other writers draw attention to the fact that the world of the novel is *not* the real world. In this section, you will have the chance to explore some of the choices the writer makes when creating the fictional world of the novel.

## Essential ingredients

All novelists work with the same four basic ingredients: story, plot, characters and setting.

How the novelist uses these ingredients is much more varied. In deciding how to tell their story, each novelist is faced with choices to make and problems to solve. These include:

- who tells the story and how
  - how the story is organised
  - how the characters are presented
  - how the ‘world’ which they inhabit is made convincing and ‘real’ to the reader.
- Add any other things which you think the novelist has to decide when telling a story.

## Story and plot – what’s the difference?

- Read E.M. Forster’s definition of the difference between a ‘story’ and a ‘plot’.

Let us define a plot. We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. ‘The king died and then the queen died,’ is a story. ‘The king died and then the queen died of grief,’ is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: ‘The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king.’ This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow. Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say ‘and then?’ If it is in a plot we ask ‘why?’

*Aspects of the Novel, E.M.Forster*

Printed below are the stories of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Of Mice and Men*.

Elizabeth Bennett meets Mr Darcy, and dislikes him. He proposes, she rejects him, but gradually realises she was wrong about him. She accepts his second proposal and they marry.

George and Lenny arrive together at the ranch. Lennie kills Curley’s wife and George shoots him. George is left alone.

- Annotate these ‘stories’ with the questions you need answering to turn the story into a plot, for example, ‘Why does Elizabeth dislike Mr Darcy?’

## The story of your novel

- In pairs, have a go at turning the novel you are studying into a three sentence ‘story’. Remember, you are only answering the question, ‘What happens next?’
- Take it in turns to read out your stories and come up with a version which you can all accept.
- Talk about all the different things which the ‘story’ lacks in comparison with the novel. What choices does the novelist have to make when planning how to turn a story into a plot?

# Writing your own narrative

- Use everything you have learned in this section to write your own narrative (this may have to be a short story, rather than a novel, given the other demands on your time). Experiment with the following aspects of narrative, looking back at your notes and ideas to help you:
  - beginnings, middles and ends
  - handling time (narrative and chronological time)
  - narrative voice
  - different methods of characterisation.

You could make a conscious decision to echo or imitate the kinds of narrative choices made by the modern novelist you are studying. Alternatively, you could write, more freely, in your own style. Show a draft of your story to someone else – a friend, member of your class, teacher or other adult. Give them the chart below and ask them to fill it in for you as a ‘response’ sheet, to help you to re-draft the story.

	<b>One aspect that worked well</b>	<b>One aspect that could be improved</b>
<b>Beginning</b>		
<b>Middle</b>		
<b>End</b>		
<b>Handling of Time</b>		
<b>Narrative Voice</b>		
<b>Characterisation</b>		

- Re-draft your story.
- Write a commentary, explaining your choices, using the insights gained from the work you have done on the Modern Novel.

# Ideas and patterns

## The role of the reader

In the interview McEwan says:

Themes are what readers have to address, rather than writers. You're dealing, as a writer, with generating a reality out of these scraps, and they come together in a haphazard way. And slowly, over months, or a year, or two or three years, you impose a kind of order, so that you have an intact world. And then you discover that you've addressed certain matters, and that they repeat themselves throughout, not necessarily in line with your intentions.

However, he does acknowledge that he was particularly interested in exploring ideas such as rationality and the new science of evolutionary psychology.

- You are now in a position to think back over your reading of *Enduring Love*. What ideas and issues do you think Ian McEwan has addressed? Which ideas and issues particularly interested you? Choose one to talk about briefly to the rest of the group.

## Exploring oppositions

One way to read *Enduring Love* is as an exploration of oppositions. The situation McEwan develops places these oppositions in tension and subjects them to extreme pressure.

## Exploring oppositions

- In pairs or small groups, take responsibility for looking in more detail at one of the oppositions listed below. Talk about the ways in which this opposition is explored in the novel, for example through the plot, Joe's thoughts, conversations, the letters, the characters and so on. Which character(s) do you associate with these ideas, beliefs or attitudes? Choose key quotations to illustrate your ideas and present your work as a display. Take it in turns to feed back your ideas to the rest of the class.
  - Rationality v emotion
  - Science v imagination
  - Religion v science
  - Faith v evidence
  - Belief v scepticism
  - Abnormal v normal behaviour
  - Individualism v society (me and us)
  - The individual perspective v the big picture
  - Fact v story
  - Truth v fiction
  - Male v female
  - Love v hatred
  - Homosexual v heterosexual
- Share your ideas as a class.

- Read the interpretations listed below and use them to help you focus your own reading of the oppositions in *Enduring Love*.
  - In *Enduring Love* oppositions are established but no conclusion is reached as to which is better.
  - Of each pair of oppositions, one is shown to be ‘right’.
  - In *Enduring Love* Ian McEwan sets up a series of oppositions and then deconstructs them, suggesting that they are not mutually exclusive.
- Talk about how helpful it is to analyse the novel in this way. What insights does an awareness of these patterns provoke? Which aspects of the novel do you think are marginalised by this kind of reading (for example, character or the response of the reader)?
- Read the following quotation and compare the oppositions identified here with your list.

Religion versus rationality. Your memory versus mine. Love versus daily existence. Sacrificing an individual for the good of the masses.

In McEwan’s works, the opposite is a theme. His characters may take action that seems opposite to all sorts of things, their best interests, their lovers, their friends, their morals, or their political, religious or rationalist beliefs. This is the tension and the story.

**from *The Random House Reading Group Guide on Ian McEwan***

# Structure – the glue that holds the novel together

*Regeneration* is very much a novel about ideas. As Pat Barker says in her interview, the normal plot structures do not really apply:

Life at Craiglockhart was inherently uneventful, I think. It was intended to be uneventful, because, after all, they were there to rest. So, apart from the three monthly medical boards, virtually nothing happens. And, of course, this is difficult. But I found that there is a kind of drama within the therapeutic conversation, that it's not people chatting together, it is very much a focused exchange, with its own peaks and troughs, and its own nuances of meaning underneath, and the subtext and all the rest of it. In that sense, it's alike, but at the same time different from court room dialogue, which, once again, is far more focused than normal conversational exchange ever is.

In this kind of novel, the techniques for holding it together and giving it a coherent development and structure, are particularly important. Listed below are some of the strategies used by Barker.

- Consider each one in turn. Add any other ideas of your own.

## The central metaphor of 'regeneration'

A metaphor can act as a motif, or organising principle for a novel. In this case the metaphor of nerve regeneration is used to unify many of the key ideas.

- Talk about all of the ways in which the novel returns to the idea of regeneration, thinking about:
  - the plot
  - the characters
  - the ideas about war, neurosis and healing.

## Oppositions and thematic patterns

- Think back to the work you did on oppositions on page 87. Consider how these oppositions help the reader to make sense of the characters and plot and give shape to them.

## Structuring dialogues and changing viewpoints

Much of *Regeneration* is a series of conversations, often simply the consultations between doctor and patient that form the patients' therapy. However, they are not just formless dialogues. Pat Barker shapes them into a development and interweaves them with other kinds of narrative and plot developments.

- Look at the chapter summary on pages 125 to 126. Annotate it to show patterns in the way Barker structures the novel. Think about the questions below, while you are doing your annotations.
  - How does the four part structure work? What marks the end of each part? Is it an event (such as Prior meeting Sarah, or Sassoon being given permission to return to France) or is it used to mark a major shift in a character's thinking?

- How does Barker shift the character focus? Is each chapter about a different character, in strict rotation, or does she move backwards and forwards? Are links made at the changeover or does she make a sudden switch? What does she do to stop the reader from becoming confused by the shifting viewpoints?

### Language – a central motif

Language is, in many different ways, an important issue in the novel, not just in terms of the language the writer uses to develop her ideas.

- Look at the different ways in which language occurs as an idea in its own right in the novel, which are listed below. Talk about the implications of each for the novel as a whole and write notes about your ideas.

There are many examples of mutism in the book.

The novel opens with Sassoon's written (verbal) protest.

Many of the men stammer.

Rivers has a stammer.

Yealland's patient is forcibly 'cured' of mutism.

Much of the novel consists of 'talk' – psychoanalysis is a 'talking' therapy.

Memory is uncovered through language.

Poetry is talked about a lot and extracts are included in the novel.

The language of the Officers, soldiers, Medical Boards and working women is strongly evoked.

Rivers reflects on silence, speech and protest.

- Are there any other motifs running through the book that give it shape and pattern? For instance, what is the function of the poetry quoted in the novel?