



THE MAIN DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF THE NOVELLA IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Samatova Gulnoza Nematjonovna
Finland Pedagogical Institute, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article explores the major developmental phases of the novella (short novel) genre during the twentieth century, highlighting the aesthetic, cultural, and social forces that shaped its transformations. Despite the novella's deep roots in earlier literary traditions, the twentieth century brought forth new narrative strategies, stylistic experimentation, and a reimagined sense of brevity and focus. By charting the novella's trajectory across different movements—from modernist minimalism to postcolonial hybridization—the article underscores how shifts in historical context and reader expectations influenced form, content, and authorial voice. Throughout these developments, the novella maintained an intermediate position between short story and full-length novel, harnessing both the precision of the former and the thematic range of the latter. Ultimately, this study offers a detailed look at how the novella adapted to rapidly evolving literary marketplaces, aesthetic philosophies, and technological changes, suggesting that its concise structure and flexibility continue to make it a vital vehicle for storytelling into the present.

KEYWORDS: Novella, twentieth century, literary development, modernism, postcolonial literature, genre evolution.

INTRODUCTION

The novella stands as one of the most flexible and compelling literary forms, bridging the brevity of the short story with the scope and thematic depth of the novel. Traditionally understood to be shorter than the conventional novel—yet more expansive than a mere tale—the novella encapsulates a moment or slice of life that remains too intricate for a short story's tighter constraints. While its historical lineage stretches back to medieval exemplars and Renaissance virtuosity, it was during the twentieth century that the novella underwent a series of reinventions, influenced by drastic cultural, technological, and aesthetic shifts. By tracing these transformations, we can observe how this middle form negotiated the demands of experimental modernism, political tumult, and emergent global voices.

Early in the twentieth century, the novella was a form frequently associated with the works of European authors who were experimenting with streamlined narratives and psychological nuance. The era's focus on interiority—sparked by such movements as modernism and symbolism—became woven into the novella's fabric. Unlike the serial-based length of the nineteenth-century novel, which often detailed expansive societal canvases, early twentieth-century novellas placed individual consciousness in the foreground. This tendency accompanied a broader cultural emphasis on subjectivity, memory, and the complexity of perception, mirroring philosophical discourses about the fragmentary nature of experience.



In the first decades of the twentieth century, authors such as Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, and Joseph Conrad presented novellas that deftly balanced impressionistic detail and thematic intricacy. Thomas Mann, for instance, elevated the genre's reputation with works such as *Death in Venice*, a text whose brevity belied a profound psychological exploration. Mann's approach combined symbolist motifs, decadent atmosphere, and reflections on art and sensuality, compressing them into a relatively brief narrative scope. Such compression not only showcased the author's stylistic precision but also epitomized modernism's tilt toward the interior. The conflict between rational intellect and irrational desire found an ideal venue in the novella's contained structure, intensifying the effect on readers.

Similarly, Stefan Zweig's novellas—like *Amok*—demonstrated how moral conflict and psychological obsession could fit concisely into narratives that teetered between short story economy and novelistic character depth. Because space was limited, Zweig's protagonists often revealed pivotal traits through charged dialogues or introspective monologues, propelling tension swiftly forward. The choice to employ fewer characters and more direct confrontations allowed deeper emotional resonance, a testament to how the novella harnessed psychological immediacy. Meanwhile, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, although sometimes categorized as a short novel, exemplified the period's experimental layering of narrative frames and moral reflection within a condensed framework. Its journey into the Congo paralleled the protagonist's plunge into the recesses of human corruption, a theme that found sharper focus when confined to novella length.

These modernist novellas benefited from innovative publishing contexts as well—magazines, literary journals, and specialized presses served as fertile ground for authors seeking to share more avant-garde or succinct texts. Because the novella length was shorter and thus potentially more approachable, modernist writers were able to reach a specialized audience eager for literary experimentation. As modernism waned and historical pressures such as World War II took precedence, the genre continued to adapt, reflecting new aesthetic and ideological imperatives.

Mid-century developments—the aftermath of two world wars, decolonization, and rising political tensions—further shaped the evolution of the novella. Writers increasingly sought to reconcile personal narratives with broader societal critiques, using concise form to highlight social injustice, displacement, and existential malaise. The tightness of the novella's structure lent itself to pointed commentary: by honing in on a pivotal event or crisis, authors could underscore societal ills without the expanse and digressions of a longer novel.

French existentialist writers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, recognized the novella's potential to probe moral conundrums in immediate, forceful narratives. *The Stranger* by Camus, often categorized as a short novel or novella, stands as an emblem of existential alienation and moral ambiguity. Its spare style, combined with a dispassionate first-person account, underscored the protagonist's isolation. The novella's limited length ensured readers confronted the protagonist's existential plight directly, intensifying the sense of strangeness. Sartre's own shorter works, though more varied in length, also highlighted how the constraints of brevity reinforced the immediacy of philosophical confrontation—characters found themselves in crises that demanded swift moral reflection.

On the other side of the Atlantic, authors such as John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway cultivated a style of barebones, unadorned narration that meshed well with the novella's

structure. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* showcases how a single, isolated experience—an old fisherman's epic struggle—can encapsulate universal themes of endurance, pride, and defeat. The text's restrained language conjures clarity, removing extraneous subplots and focusing on internal tension. The result is a narrative synergy of plot, character, and moral reflection that exemplifies how mid-century novellas balanced universal resonance with minimal extraneous detail.

Meanwhile, John Steinbeck used concise forms to articulate social criticism, capturing the American experience of dust bowl migration, class tensions, and the complexity of moral responsibility. In *Of Mice and Men*, the limited length underscores how swiftly fate and social prejudice can impact marginalized figures. Rather than expanding into tangential plot arcs, Steinbeck's narrative remains tautly focused on the central friendship and the tragic outcome. Such brevity intensifies pathos, revealing how socio-economic forces shape individual destinies in microcosm.

As the postwar period gave rise to postcolonial voices across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the novella form underwent further modifications. Writers from newly independent nations often found a balanced interplay between local storytelling traditions and the Western-inherited novella format, forging hybrid narratives that blended oral idioms, mythic structures, and contemporary political concerns. This was particularly evident in African anglophone and francophone literatures, where the condensed scope served as a vehicle for allegorical or satirical critiques of neocolonial exploitation, corruption, and cultural metamorphosis.

Chinua Achebe's shorter works, though overshadowed by his full-length novels, exhibited how the novella form could deliver potent commentary on the conflicts between tradition and modernity. Similarly, in Latin America's "boom" era, authors like Gabriel García Márquez experimented with short novels steeped in magical realism. Though better known for epic compositions like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez's novellas—*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is one prime example—demonstrated how mesmerizing narrative devices and elliptical time structures thrived in shorter spaces. In this text, the entire community's complicity in an impending murder reveals itself over a storyline that is thorough but highly compressed. By narrowing focus, the novella forced readers to confront moral complicity and cyclical violence head-on, reflecting social critique within an almost claustrophobic narrative environment.

In India, too, the novella found champions such as R. K. Narayan, whose *The Guide*—though again often labeled a short novel—exhibits a narrative economy that explores modern transformations colliding with spiritual traditions. Structured around a singular protagonist's evolving moral identity, the text underscores the tension between personal ambition and communal values. The book's scope remains sufficiently contained to emphasize a singular moral arc, reaffirming the novella's capacity for sharp moral or philosophical questionings.

By the closing decades of the twentieth century, postmodern experimentation reshaped literary forms at large, and novellas proved an accommodating format for authors interested in fragmentation, intertextual play, and the questioning of narrative authority. The succinctness of the form resonated with postmodern skepticism about grand narratives, as it allowed authors to disrupt linear chronology, insert metafictional asides, or provide multiple vantage points in short but dense texts.

Writers like Italo Calvino in Italy or Julio Cortázar in Argentina harnessed the novella to produce playful labyrinths of meaning. Calvino's *Invisible Cities*—debatably a sequence of short meditations—can be read as an extended novella hinging on dialogues between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan. The constraints of length serve the ephemeral, dreamlike quality, enabling each city depiction to stand as a fable-like reflection on language, imagination, and power. Cortázar, known for short stories, occasionally ventured into short novels that fused the interior monologues typical of modernism with surreal narrative leaps. This cross-pollination of influences made the novella a fertile ground for bridging the historical with the new wave of postmodern sensibilities.

Simultaneously, writers in Eastern Europe, amid sociopolitical upheavals, employed the novella to express existential inquiries under oppressive regimes. Authors in the Soviet or post-Soviet space found that the elasticity of the novella size let them balance compactness with sufficient room for allegory. Works often used coded references to critique censorship, focusing on individual struggles within collectivist frameworks, all while masked under the aesthetic of brief, potent storytelling. This strategy allowed them to escape the heavy scrutiny directed at larger, more obviously polemical tomes.

Throughout the twentieth century, shifting publishing climates also influenced the novella's place in literary culture. Magazine serializations, common in the late nineteenth century, waned or were replaced by anthologies and paperback imprints that favored shorter works—perfect for commuter reading or for fans of digestible intellectual content. Additionally, the rise of cinema and later television shaped readers' attention spans, increasing demand for narratives that could be consumed in short sittings yet still deliver the emotional depth of a novel. Novellas thrived in this niche, particularly when reputable publishing houses dedicated series lines to them. This synergy of marketing and reader preference facilitated a wave of mid-century novellas that found a stable readership.

Digital technology, emerging toward the end of the twentieth century, further bolstered the novella's viability. E-books and online platforms recognized that shorter forms often suited digital consumption. As a result, the tail end of the century glimpsed renewed interest in reissuing classic novellas or encouraging authors to produce fresh short novels that might capture fast-paced lifestyles. In tandem with this, literary prizes sometimes included categories specifically for short fiction, allowing novellas to gain recognition without competing directly against full-scale novels.

The twentieth century's shifting literary landscape ultimately confirmed the novella's adaptability and resilient appeal. Whether in modernist introspection or politically charged postcolonial allegory, its concise form consistently offered authors a space to refine thematic statements, highlighting characters' interior dilemmas with minimal digression. The perceived "in-between" nature of the novella meant that it could adopt stylistic tendencies from both short stories (economy of language, compressed arcs) and novels (depth of character portrayal, layered settings). This dual capacity explains why it remained a favored mode for authors grappling with society's transformations and personal revelations.

Indeed, in analyzing these successive waves—modernist minimalism, mid-century moral confrontations, postcolonial reinterpretations, and postmodern fragmentation—we observe a continuity of formal experimentation that shapes how contemporary writers view the novella today. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the novella was recognized as not just a

transitional or minor genre but a self-sufficient literary form wielding unique narrative power. Modern readers often cite well-crafted novellas as prime examples of how to delve into complex worlds without the sprawl of lengthy novels. For authors, the twentieth century's developments established the novella as fertile territory for bridging tradition and innovation, politics and aesthetics, psychological depth and universal themes.

CONCLUSION

Across the twentieth century, the novella underwent multiple redefinitions, each stage reflecting broader cultural or aesthetic imperatives—from the modernist fascination with interior subjectivity to the politically urgent narratives of postcolonial and existential reflection, culminating in the experimental forays of the late century. This evolving trajectory underscores the genre's remarkable flexibility in responding to historical turmoil, reader demands, and formal experimentation. While preserving an intimate scale that accentuates character psychology, the novella also proved adept at incorporating symbolic resonance, moral challenge, and stylistic invention.

By the century's end, the novella had secured a prominent niche in global literary consciousness, championed by authors who recognized its capacity to meld the concise impact of short stories with the layered complexity of full-length novels. Its sustained presence across varied literary movements attests to an enduring appeal derived from its narrative economy and emotional directness. Looking ahead, the legacy of the twentieth-century novella sets the stage for continued innovations—experiments in hybrid genres, digital publication, or transmedia adaptation—ensuring that this versatile form remains a key artifact in world literature. Just as the past century's upheavals spurred new directions, the ongoing transformations of the twenty-first century will likely bestow further permutations on this fluid yet potent literary container.

REFERENCES

1. Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. – Austin : University of Texas Press, 1981. – 444 p.
2. Franco, J. *The Modern Culture of Latin America*. – London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967. – 339 p.
3. García Márquez, G. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. – New York : Vintage International, 2003. – 128 p.
4. Mann, Th. *Death in Venice and Other Tales*. – Harmondsworth : Penguin Classics, 1955. – 350 p.
5. Steinbeck, J. *Of Mice and Men*. – New York : Penguin Books, 1993. – 107 p.