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## UNIT 3 BUILDING A CLIMAX

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### 3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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You will have grasped, by the end of this Unit, the **significance** of climax **building** in creative writing.

The purpose of this Unit is to show **how**:

- important the building of a climax is in the structure of a story;
- the story moves towards its climax which may be unexpected but is not improbable;
- the climax resolves the crisis in the story and reveals, as nothing else in the story does, the writer's perception of a particular reality;
- a postscript to **the climax**, in certain writings, profoundly affects the direction of the story and opens up newer perspectives.

It is hoped that you will also have learnt the technique of building a **climax** while writing a story.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Units 1 and 2 of this Block on the 'structure of material' have already given you an idea of how themes are generated and of the significance of the 'opening'. In this Unit we will discuss, in some detail, an important constituent of a plot: the climax in a story or a poem.

A well-structured climax is a revelation of the writer's world-view. However, if you think that there can be no story without a climax, read some modern **writers—e.g.** Borges, **Faulkner**, Prem Chand. Events and incidents are recorded. It is only in the postscript that the intention of the writer dawns upon the reader—and he may feel like rereading the fictional work.

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### 3.2 THE MEANING OF CLIMAX: AN ILLUSTRATIVE STORY

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Climax is an intense and crucial point of the story which precipitates a crisis. A crisis is the culmination of tension and conflict which heads towards an inevitable resolution. The story given below will illustrate to you the art of building a climax, its nature and function.

Malcolm Scott is an **embittered** young Englishman. He comes to India with some happy expectations but **has** not quite foreseen the hazards he would experience by way of the climate of the country, the general living conditions, the quality of assistance he must be content with in running his home, and so on. India **looks an awful place** to live in, **and** the Indians primitive and lacking in refinement. **Of** course, he is not aware that a different culture can have a totally different, but equally valid, value system. His **personal** miscalculations and prejudices prevent him from seeing that the people he comes to rule over had a culture centuries before his own ancestors did. He cannot **understand** their tact and sophistication when they, as village elders, receive him as an official and even bribe him unobtrusively! He is not aware of the fact that he has a clerk who is intelligent enough to master five languages. Once he goes on an inspection tour of a few villages. He takes his young wife along, and their lodging for a few days has to be an inspection bungalow—the only roofed structure in a landscape of acres of fields and open land. On **this** tour his contempt for Indians takes the **form** of thoughtless mischief, and he lifts **the saree** of a woman bathing in a pond, just to **know** whether the 'animal' was a male **or** a female. . .

### 3.2.1 The story moves towards its climax

From now on the story rushes towards its climax. Hardly is Scott back in his inspection bungalow then he and his wife notice a strange spectacle—men **in ones** and twos gathering round the bungalow. Each man carries a stick and stands **rocklike**. Scott discovers **that** his servants have slipped out. Now a stone comes crashing in. Scott and his **wife** know they are threatened but for what they do not **know**. Their only means of knowing is the clerk who knows five languages. The clerk goes out of the bungalow to enquire. He comes back with the news that the men are from the village the bathing woman comes from, and that they have come to seek an answer for Scott's **misdeemeanour**. Scott at first **thinks** of shooting his way out of the situation, but the clerk points out the impossibility of such a course of action. Scott promises to pay some money to the woman as compensation. The clerk goes out to the mob to negotiate. The mob, he **informs** Scott, will have none of the money. Scott has violated a woman of their own. The just penalty is **that** the same should be done to a woman of Scott's kind. Scott's wife faints. Now the clerk asks not **only** Scott but his wife also to go out and beg their pardon.

What is a terse narration of a possible situation in colonial India comes to a climax most unexpectedly. Scott teases the woman not **with** the intent of assaulting her; he is not in an agitated state of mind when he does it playfully, but in that action he reveals his deep-rooted contempt and racist prejudice towards a subject people. The climax in **such** stories is rather complicated because it is not easily identifiable. To a **discerning** reader, however, the indication is subtle and strong.

### 3.2.2 Resolution of the crisis

They beg pardon on their knees. Scott stays on in the town for another year and a half. He never mentions to anyone the inspection bungalow incident. Nor **does** he make any more remarks about India or Indians.

The crisis is resolved not by the readily conceivable resolution of giving a thrashing to the guilty, but by transferring the outrage **from** the guilty to the principle **underlying** the guilt—insulting women, **and devising** a corresponding punishment. Personal sting and malice is **taken** out; no wonder Scott takes the punishment as a just retribution. He must have been at peace with his conscience because he continues to live **in** that region for a year and a half **more**. It is a conversion, a very radical **conversion** at that, but the climax brings it out effectively and effortlessly.

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## 3.3 THE CLIMAX IS A HAPPENING OF HEIGHTENED INTENSITY

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So in a narration of **imaginative** content, the climax is a happening of heightened intensity, but well **along** the **progression** of the events or happenings narrated already.



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### 3.4 THE UNCOMPLICATED CLIMAX IS MOST EASILY IDENTIFIED IN THE 'PLOT' STORY

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As against the complicated climax discussed above, both the climax and its resolution are **uncomplicated**, and are most easily identified, in an 'incident' or 'plot' story. There is quite a bit of the external world in these stories and these, in a sense, are easily shared **realities**. The author here has very little possibility of manipulating the nature of these **realities**—a railway station is a railway station, and the Qutab **Minar** is a tower of specific dimensions, situation and period. The concreteness of these **details** contributes to the enjoyment of the story by the largest number of readers. **Even** the predictability of the resolution can go towards adding to the enjoyment of the effort. The stories of Maupassant and Poe, even Chekhov, contain this structure, **and** are never the poorer for it.

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### 3.5 THE CLIMAX IS NOT AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF REFLECTIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

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The writings of **André Gide**, **Franz Kafka**, and in more recent times, **Alain Robbe-Grillet**, **Marguerite Duras**, and a host of new writers, do not necessarily tell a story, **though** they are interesting in themselves without the beginning-middle-end **structure** in which a climax-and-resolution is the final part. There is a story by **Hemingway** by the name 'Mr and Mrs Eliot'. It is a model short story in that it unfolds, very effectively, the despair of a childless, middle-class American **couple** in the early part of this **century**. Without being overtly 'experimental' in his rendering or in constructing the piece, the author succeeds in creating a moving story. Latin American writing, in **general**, and that of **Gabriel Garcia** in **particular**, does not entirely depend on climaxes. Apart from the exotic appeal the writing may have for a **non-Latin** American **reader**, it weaves one episode after another, still retaining a sustaining **interest**. **As a matter** of fact, it is considered, among the avant-garde writing community, that a climax **is** an outdated component of creative writing.

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### 3.6 THE POSTSCRIPT TO THE CLIMAX IN COMPLEX FICTION

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But there are a number of very special creations which even have a postscript to the climax-resolution structure, and which take the story far beyond its structural dimensions. The story of the English Deputy Collector in South **India** does not end with the official and the local residents coming to terms at the inspection bungalow. The story has a narrator, a very old man, telling the story to his great grandchildren. He ends his narration by saying that as he returned from the inspection bungalow after **all** the commotion, he still found the woman washing clothes in the pond. It is obvious that he was **the** Collector's clerk. A young boy points out a flaw in the old man's narrative. The pond was some distance from the village, and when the Collector teased the woman, there was none else besides the clerk on the scene. How come the **villagers** gathered round the bungalow to seek an answer **from** the Collector? Certainly, the woman was not the person who carried the news and made the villagers surround the bungalow.

The old man looks about confusedly. He says, 'You know, according to Scott's orders, I should have followed him to the bungalow. Instead I went the other way.'

#### 3.6.1 The postscript reorders an established understanding of the protagonist

The story now **assumes** an entirely new dimension. **It** is not the story of an Englishman, but of his clerk. It is he who is the **protagonist** of the story; it is he who, in seeming to negotiate with the villagers on Scott's behalf, is devising a strategy for making Scott see reason, and **realise** how limited his understanding of the world has



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## 3.8 ACTIVITIES : AIDS TO ANSWERS

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### Activity 1

- i) Using the given vocabulary—crisis, culmination, conflict, resolution—build up your answer.
- ii) The apology made by Michael Scott is not accepted. Now develop this different approach.

### Activity 2

- i) An **uncomplicated climax** deals with the external world of **concrete** realities. The author has little scope for manipulating the nature of these realities. In such a case it is not **difficult** to predict the resolution. And such a **climax** is easily identifiable in the magazine 'plot' stories.
- ii) The postscript **gives** a radical twist to the story when the different strands of the narrative **suddenly** acquire a new meaning and **significance**.
- iii) The old man (**Scott's** clerk), and not the **Englishman**, stands out **as** the chief protagonist of the **story**. It is he who is able to expose Scott's narrow understanding of the world.

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## 3.9 GLOSSARY,

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You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the literary **terms used** in this Unit.

**Climax:** A climax is that part of a narrative in which the luck of the central character changes for better or **worse**. It is a moment of the greatest intensity and leads to the resolution. Often the climax and crisis coincide.

**Avant-garde writing:** **When** a creative writer experiments with style, form or content, his writing is **referred to as** avant-garde or **experimental**. It is a deliberate effort to break through the traditions of imaginative writing to search for newer meanings.