

Elements of Literary Analysis

Genre

Genre defines a literary form, e.g., science fiction, short story, comedy, novel, essay, biography, romance.

Tone

Tone is the writer's attitude toward the material and/or readers. Tone maybe playful, formal, intimate, angry, serious, ironic, outraged, baffled, tender, serene, depressed, etc.

Writer's Style

Style is the manner in which a writer says what he/she says.

Plot

Plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed. Plot is usually divided into the following stages;

Exposition: the part of the story where the author provides background material about the past life of characters and about events that have taken place before the story opens. It may also introduce the character(s) and setting.

Initial Incident: the very first action that is considered to be part of the story, begins the rising action.

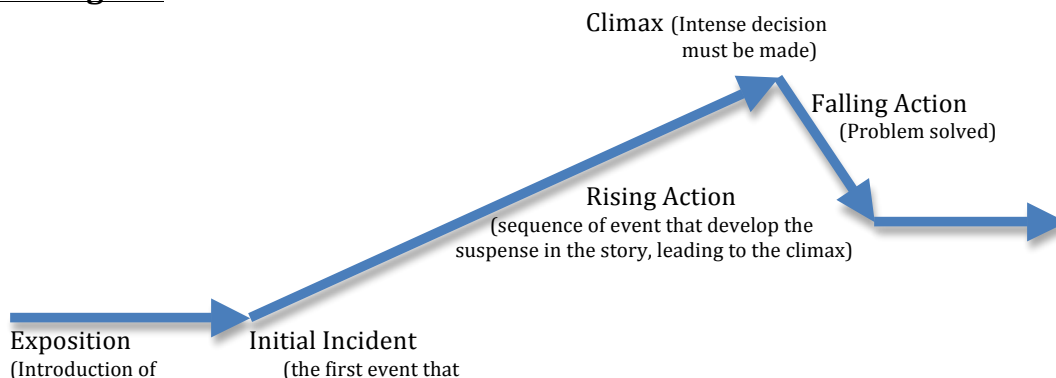
Rising Action: the part of the plot where action moves the story forward or rises towards a climatic even or moment where something is going to happen that will affect the fortunes (good or bad) of the main character. A problem is introduced and developed in the rising action.

Climax: the part of the plot where the action is at its most intense and dramatic point. The main character must make a decisive move in order to find some solution to his/her problem.

Falling Action: events that follow the climax once the problem is solved, creating movement toward the ending of the story.

Denouement: the conclusion, summary or ending that may or may not answer some outstanding questions. (and they all lived happily ever after.....)

Plot Diagram



Flashback

The author interrupts the logical time sequence of the story to relate an episode or scene that occurred prior to the situation.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing provides hints or clues, a shadow of things to come. The use of foreshadowing stimulates interest and suspense and helps prepare the reader for the outcome.

Suspense

Suspense is the uncertainty, expectancy or tension that builds up as the climax of a narrative approaches; curiosity regarding the outcome of a narrative. Suspense is that quality in a story, which makes the reader ask, "What is going to happen next?" or "How will this turn out?" and impels him/her to read on to find the answer to these questions. To common devices for achieving suspense are to introduce an element of MYSTERY, an unusual set of circumstances for which the reader craves an explanation, or to place a character in a DILEMMA, a position in which a character must choose between two courses of action, both undesirable. Closely connected with the element of suspense is the element of SURPRISE. If we know ahead of time exactly what is going to happen in a story, and why, there can be no suspense. As long as we don't know, whatever happens comes with an element of surprise.

Conflict

Conflict is the clash of actions, ideas, desires, or wills. The main character may be pitted against some other person or group of persons (CHARACTER vs CHARACTER); he/she/it may be in conflict with some external force – physical nature, society, or "fate" (CHARACTER vs ENVIRONMENT); or he/she/it may be in conflict with some element of his/her/its own nature (CHARACTER vs SELF), this character may be physical, mental, emotional, or moral.

Setting

Setting: is the time and place of the events of the story. The importance of setting as a story element depends on the extent of its contribution to characterization, plot, theme, and atmosphere.

Mood/Atmosphere: the predominate emotional feeling created in a literary work.

Character

Character consists of a person, a group of people, an animal, or a physical force invented by an author. An author may present his characters either directly or indirectly. In DIRECT PRESENTATION he/she tells us straight out what a character is like. In INDIRECT PRESENTATION the author show us the character in action; we infer what he/she/it is like from what he/she/it thinks or says or does.

Characterization: the techniques an author uses to develop the personality of his/her fictional characters so that they seem believable, act consistently, and speak naturally. These methods include characterization through:

1. direct analysis by the author of character's thoughts, motives, attitudes and actions
2. physical description of a character's appearance
3. description of a character's surroundings
4. the speech or conversation of a character
5. the behaviour or actions of a character
6. a character's reactions to events, situations, and other characters.
7. the responses or reactions of other characters in the story to his/her/its behaviour, and in some cases, their remarks and conversations and him/her/it.
8. a combination of two or more of these methods.

Protagonist: the central character in the conflict

Antagonist: the forces arrayed against the protagonist, whether persons, things, conventions of society, or traits of his/her/its own character.

Static Character: the same sort of person at the end of the story as he/she/it was at the beginning.

Developing or Dynamic Character: undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of his/her/its character, personality, or outlook.

Stereotype: a familiar, commonplace type of character rather than an authentic human being. A stereotyped character either possesses traits that are supposed to be characteristics of a particular class, or he/she/it reminds the reader of characters that have often been read about or seen on T.V. Stereotyped characters always act the same way and reveal the same traits of character.

■ Points of View

Point of view is the angle from which the author looks at the characters and events in his/her story and from which he/she relates to the reader the details about them. To determine the point of view of a story ask, "Who tells the story?" and "How much is he/she/it allowed to know?" and especially, "To what extent does the author look inside the characters and report their thoughts and feelings?"

1. The most obvious point of view is probably FIRST PERSON or "I".
2. The OMNISCIENT NARRATOR knows everything, may reveal the motivations, thoughts and feelings of the characters, and gives the reader information.
3. With a LIMITED OMNISCIENT NARRATOR, the material is presented from the point of view of a character, in third person.
4. The OBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW presents the action and the characters' speech, without comment or emotion. The reader has to interpret them and uncover their meaning.

Theme

Theme is the main idea of a literary work. The theme of most literature is usually implied rather than stated. It tells us about life, but not always what we want to know. To derive the theme, we must ask what is the story's central purpose; what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals. The theme must be stated as a generalization about life. In stating theme we do not use the names of the characters, for to do so is to make a specific rather than a general statement. We must be careful not to make the generalization larger than is justified by the terms of the literature. Terms like "every", "all", "always", should be used very cautiously; terms like "some", "sometimes", "may", are often more accurate. Not all literature has a theme.

Symbolism

Symbolism is a person, place, event or object that is real in itself and also represents or suggests a relationship or association. For example, a heart symbolizes affection and love; a horseshoe, good luck, etc...

Language

Literal language means exactly what it says; a rose is the physical flower.

Figurative language changes the literal meaning, to make a meaning fresh or clearer, to express complexity, to capture a physical or sensory effect, or to extend meaning.

Figurative language is also called figures of speech. The most common figures of speech are:

1. *A simile*: a comparison of two dissimilar things using “like” or “as”, e.g., “my love is like a red, red rose” (Robert Burns).
2. *A metaphor*: a comparison of two dissimilar things which does not use “like” or “as”, e.g., “my love is a red, red rose” (Lilia Melani).
3. *Personification*: treating abstractions or inanimate objects as human, that is, giving them human attributes, powers, or feelings, e.g., “nature wept” or “the wind whispered many truths to me.”
4. *Hyperbole*: exaggeration, often extravagant; it may be used for serious or for comic effect. E.g.: as strong as an ox.
5. *Onomatopoeia*: a word whose sounds seem to duplicate the sounds they describe --hiss, buzz, bang, murmur, meow, growl.
6. *Oxymoron*: a statement with two parts which seem contradictory; examples: sad joy, a wise fool, the sound of silence.
7. *Alliteration*: the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of a word, such as the repetition of b sounds in Keats’s “beaded bubbles winking at the brim” (“Ode to a Nightingale”) or Coleridge’s “Five miles meandering in a mazy motion (“Kubla Khan”). A common use for alliteration is emphasis. It occurs in everyday speech in such phrases as “tittle-tattle,” “bag and baggage,” “bed and board,” “primrose path,” and “through thick and thin” and in sayings like “look before you leap.”

Irony

Verbal Irony: a figure of speech, humorous or sarcastic, in which the writer’s words really mean the opposite of what they seem to say. For example, a writer might say of a character that has just taken several clumsy falls on the ice, “What a fine skater she turned out to be!”

Irony of Situation: when an event takes place that turns out to be the opposite of what the reader expected. For example, the heroic fire fighter rescues the baby from the burning building, and that night the same firefighter dies from smoking in bed.

Dramatic Irony: involves the reader knowing something about what’s happening in the plot, about which the character(s) have no knowledge.