Level: 1st Year (All groups)

Module: Literary Studies

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Course 2 : ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL

1. Fiction

The novel is a branch of fiction that developed late in history, but the relish for stories dates back to recorded humanity. It is also common knowledge that stories are mostly enjoyed for two main reasons. Firstly, for the sake of entertainment with fantasy, and secondly for the human curious desire and inquisitiveness to get insights about reality. But despite the fact that these two seem to be opposites, it is not always easy to divorce them completely. Fantasy is all too often said to be ridiculous; it is not completely useless, however as it may teach something about real wishes, weaknesses and intentions. Fantasy becomes harmful when confused with reality. Daydreaming, for example, is all too often conducive to self-deceiving. Because fiction tells of things that did not happen and fantasy -as its artistic spring -may mislead people, some moralists have considered all fiction as evil. Yet, the difference between a lie and fiction is quite clear. The lie is meant to deceive people, but fiction is meant to entertain. However, we are not drawn to fiction only by the fun of its fantasy but also by our interest in reality. It is in this sense that a distinction between greatest fiction and lesser fiction must be made. The former gives an essentially true and illuminating picture of life. The latter, however, belongs rather to a realm of a well-organised and intelligent fantasy; it is principally not more than entertainment and escapism. (Boulton, 1975)

2. Plot

Plot refers to the action or “story line” of the literary work. Both drama and fiction have plots, but sometimes poems also do. Plot often involves conflict between two or more characters or between a character and himself or between a character and external opposing forces. One has to bear in mind that there is no action without conflict. Conflict in literature might include the following:

Man VS Man or self?

Man Vs Nature?

Man Vs (God) Religion?

Man Vs the supernatural?

Man Vs Technology?

The typical and traditional representation of plot in literature involves the following steps:

 Exposition: a phase within which conflict / action begins. The author at this stage often introduces the characters, the setting and provides a description of the background.

 Rising action: these are the events that promote the conflict.

 Climax: this is the peak of conflict or the point of greatest emotional tension in the story.

 Resolution: a phase where the character solves the conflict or someone else solves it for him.

 Denouement: it’s the ending and therefore any remaining mystery after the resolution will be solved, explained and clarified either by the characters or by the author.

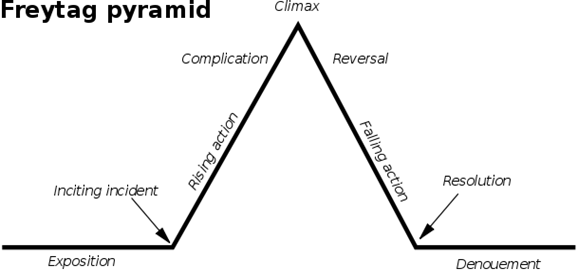


Figure 1: elements of plot in fiction . Source :https://www.google.dz/search?dcr=0&q=freytag+pyramid&spell=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjxiuLp-8XXAhXHIcAKHekQAikQvwUIISgA&biw=1440&bih=809

N.B. Not all literary works follow this design or sequence of events.

3. Characters

The character is the doer and the maker of the story. S/he may appear simply to advance a particular plot development, to serve the thematic or symbolic pattern of the novel as well as to voice a particular message or belief.

In fiction, the character may also be used as a narrator to tell the story. One important characteristic feature of characters is that, they may be invariable or they may change and develop during the course of the novel. In this respect, E.M Forster offers a useful explanation about characters that are fully described and, therefore, developed. He terms them “Round characters” as opposed to “Flat characters” with a limited scope of action.

3.1. Flat Characters

These characters are basically constructed around a single idea or striking trait. They are easily recognized and remembered as unalterable since they do not change in the story they are static and one-dimensional. Their actions are stereotypical and predictable.

3.2. Round Characters

Round characters are more complex in their make-up; they might act in contradictory or unexpected ways. They reflect a broader view of personality. They represent the different inconsistencies and complexities of real individuals. In this sense, events and circumstances can change their behaviours. Their capacity for change and development makes them more dynamic. That is why only round characters are used for tragic dimensions.

4. Characterisation

It refers to the various techniques and methods used by the author to ware and reveal characters. Authorial comments and self-description can be enlarged by other characters who report information and judgment. Thoughts and speech, whether in the form of a monologue or a conversation furnish additional elements. Behaviour in action can dramatize the portrait of a character. This latter may be given an extra dimension by his equation to some recurring image or symbol. Within this range, there are two basic methods or approaches:

4.1. Telling: The author here assumes omniscience and tells us all about the character. He opts for description, summary and analysis of character’s thoughts, words and actions.

4.2. Showing: The author or the narrator stands back and lets the character reveals himself directly. Hence, the character’s words, actions and reactions are reported and transcribed without comment or explanation. This technique reflects the way people interact in real life. It offers the reader the opportunity to make up his own mind as to what the character is like. Both techniques are imparted in the eighteenth century English novel.

5. Setting

Setting is where the action takes place and includes both the physical location as well as the time period. The use of settings contributes to the realism of the work. Novelists tend to create a plausible and life-like environment for their characters to act in. They often draw on the specific sights, sounds and smells of a particular locale such as Dickens’s London. Nothing can happen nowhere; the locale of events always colours, shapes and determines the nature of the action.

Focused questions :

 Where does the story take place?

 When does the story take place?

 What words or what part of the story help inform about the setting from the text?

6. Point of view

Point of view (also called the narrative perspective) is the angle from which the story is told. In other simpler words, the point of view in fiction refers to who is telling the storyline? Sometimes the narrator is a character within the work (s/he a participating character); we call this the first person narrator.

On other occasions, the story is told by someone who is not part of the action; s/he is external, dethatched and situated outside the story. This type of narrator is called a third person narrator. A third person narrator can know everything about the characters—their history, their minds, their emotions—in this case, the narrator is considered as being omniscient narrator (“all-knowing”). An omniscient narrator can also move back and forth through time and space. A third person narrator who has only limited knowledge of the events and characters, or who only knows the minds of some characters and not others, is a limited omniscient narrator. (McGee, 2001).

7. Theme

The first and foremost task of the analysis and interpretation of literature is to find out in some way or other what the text is about. In other words, to discover its theme, the abstract concept a literary text presents or deals with.One efficient way of reducing the destiny that is offered by the novelist in his/her novel is to adopt a thematic approach to its study. A strong emphasis must be attached with theme for it is the central unifying element of the story. Such an element ties together all of other components of fiction used to tell the story. Theme indicates the pivotal ideas around which the author is writing. In the attempt of identifying a theme of a story, one must know the whole story.