

Unit 2: Method of Literary Analysis

Semester 3, Week 2, 3, 4

Section: British Literature

Unit 2: Method of Literary Analysis

Time allotted: Three sessions

Weekly Workload : 1 hour 30 mn

Description

Detailed study and practice of the method of literary analysis which is based on the aspects of the novel

Objectives

- To familiarize the learners with the differences between the content and the form of the text
- Teaching EFLs to read and extract implicit meanings in literary texts
- To teach the elements of the novel and training students on writing about them
- Introducing the students to literary criticism through simple analysis
- Enhancing the students' critical thinking.

Pre-requisites

Learners must have a good knowledge and understanding of the novel *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* as an example of a literary text. The learners must also have an excerpt on which the analysis can be practiced.

Lesson Plan

1. Students are asked to provide a description of the excerpt in their hands
2. The method of identification of a literary text
3. Students are asked to identify the text according to the method provided to them
4. Gradual discussion of the different parts of the analysis and practice after each step
5. Assignment: Students must write an essay in which they follow all the steps provided to them

Lecture 1: The Method of Literary Analysis

A literary text can be studied from two different perspectives that are sometimes dissociated but also often complementary; they are the form and the content of the text. The text has a structure and style as well as meaning. The importance of the structure directly influences the meaning as a literary style shapes affects and

intentions. In a literary analysis, all the aspects of the text that participate into shaping meaning, interpretation, and perspective are put into light and analyzed.

1. **The Introduction:** The introduction of your essay must include all the possible bibliographical information that is provided with the text. The identification serves to situate readers and provide them with the necessary information they must be aware of. The identification includes the following:

- Author's full name and their origin.
- The complete title: the title must not be lacking any words, must be changed or paraphrased, nor summarized, and it must be underlined.
- The chapter, page, volume, year of publication, all other bibliographical information.
- **The Literary Genre:** There are three literary genres: Prose, Poetry, and Drama. Yet each of them is subjected to types and movements. The literary genre is an identification of the type of text under analysis and the movement to which it belongs. The genre can be one of the following:

Prose: short story, legend, myth, letter, report, pamphlet, religious book, journal, diary, account, novel, etc.

There are different types of novels, so if the text is extracted from a novel, the type of the novel must also be identified: Detective, sensitive, picaresque, adventure, comic, satire, novel of manners, moralistic (didactic), gothic, epistolary, psychological, etc.

Poetry: There are different types of poetry: Epic, Lyric, Ballad, Ode, Elegy, Satire, Limerick, Pastoral, Sonnet, Haiku.

Drama: It can be Tragedy, Comedy, Farce Opera, Melodrama, Historical Drama, Musical, etc.

After the identification of the genre, it is important to state the literary movement to which the text belongs to. There are different literary movements, namely: **Old English, Middle English, Elizabethan Drama, Metaphysical poetry, Realism,**

Romanticism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Post-colonialism, etc. The text can also be religious or political.

REALIST ADVENTURE NOVEL

- A very brief idea of the text or of the novel: in just one line or two, the student must explain very briefly what the text under analysis is about or the entire novel. The objective in this part is to show the student's understanding of the text.

EXAMPLES:

- This text is taken from Frankenstein, written by Mary Shelley, Chapter 5.
(INCOMPLETE)

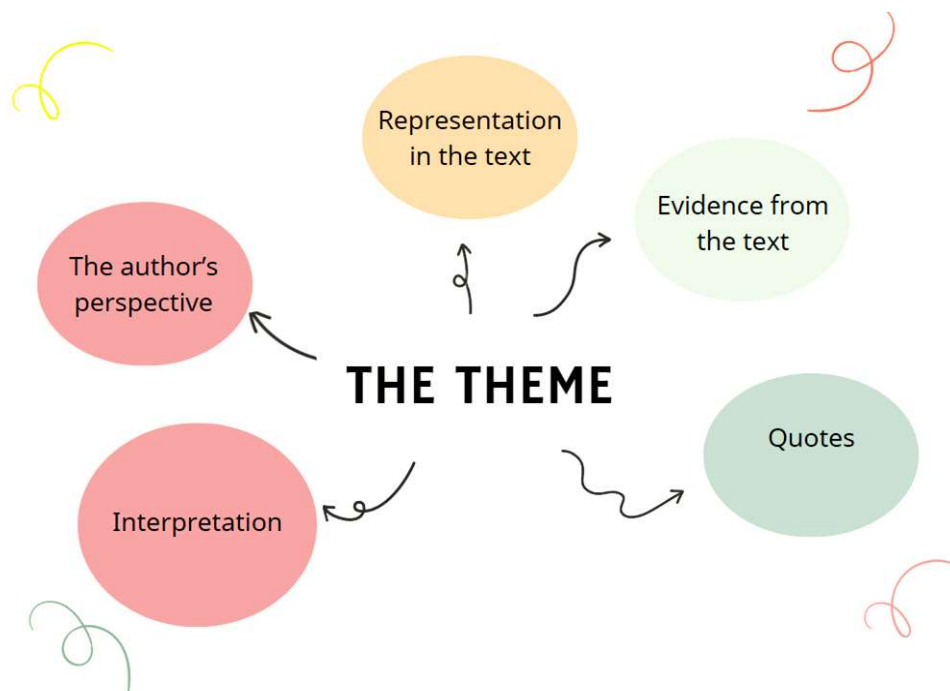
- This excerpt was taken from the Gothic Romantic novel Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus, written by the British author Mary Shelley in 1818, chapter Five, which shows Frankenstein's anxiety after his creature woke up.
(COMPLETE)

2. **The Analysis:** The body of the essay includes the different parts of the analysis. This includes a study of the different elements of the novel as well as interpretations, namely:

- **The General ideas:** this part covers the main ideas that are stated in the text under analysis. the goal in this part is to show understanding of the excerpt and the novel. It must detail the main events, names and roles of the characters, and clarify the prominent incidents. This analysis must not include interpretations as these are discussed later in the themes.
- **The settings:** The time and the place of the narration. They usually have a certain significance in the development of the narration. They can be related to the main themes, they may include symbolism, or simply signify major change in the events and lives of the characters. They are the time and the place of the novel or the narrated events, they are not related to the author of the text.
- **The Audience:** The targeted audience is the population that the author tries to influence and impact through the text under analysis. They can be scientists,

politicians, women, a certain social class, or other. The targeted audience is easily inferred from the themes extracted from the text.

- **The Themes:** Every text has a particular topic, an objective, or simply a general theme. The theme is the general topic of discussion in the text and the intended meaning by the author, yet, sometimes, some themes occur unintentionally when authors are not aware of the impact of their ideologies on their writing. While some texts have a didactic or moralistic objective like the works of Charles Dickens, others are written for a purely artistic purpose (Art for Art's Sake) like the works of Edgar Allan Poe. The study of the theme thus analyzes the general topic in a text; its exposition, author's perspective, and its interpretation. A proper study of the themes



includes the following:

The analysis of the theme must include **the topic** that is addressed by the author or in the narration, the way it **is represented in the text**, **the author's perspective** regarding the topic, **examples** from the text that serve as evidence, and **interpretation**.

- **Example:** There is the theme of racism in this text (**topic**). The author unintentionally devalues Friday by considering him a slave to Robinson (**representation and perspective**). Robinson chose to be called Master instead of his real name by Friday, he only taught Friday to say Yes and No instead of trying to

understand him, and gave him the name “Friday” instead of trying to learn to pronounce his real name (**evidence**). The author’s social background never considered a man of color equal to the white man and by giving Friday the status of a slave, Defoe was unaware that his representation was racist. (**interpretation**)

- **The Plot:** The plot is the exposition of events in the novel. It is the act of narration. It is presented in a sequence of connected events that shape together the narration in a text. The events in a traditional plot are characterized by a cause-effect relationship wherein one event leads to the next. It is composed of: **exposition** (introduction of characters and setting), **rising action** (development of the central conflict), **climax** (the turning point or highest point of tension), **falling action** (events following the climax), **and resolution** (the final outcome or conclusion).
- **Cinderella**
- **Cinderella lived with her stepmother and stepsisters. She was transformed into a maid.**

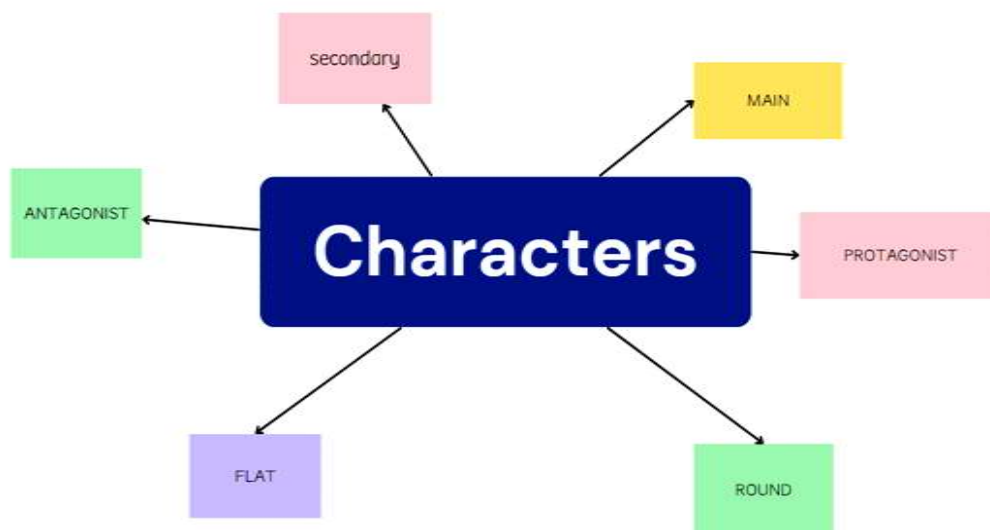
Mother died — father married the stepmother, -- Father away--hate —maid (servant) — prince and dancing party —helped her to reach the party — fairy — danced with the prince —midnight —shoe — prince tracks the shoe to find Cinderella— they meet and marry and live happily ever after.

Father away-- prince and dancing party — danced with the prince—marry and live happily ever after.



The diagram above (Freytag's Pyramid) describes a traditional plot. Yet, plots in contemporary literature tend to be “non-linear”, which means the narration does not necessarily begin with an exposition but is characterized by a time disruption. It may begin with the climax then switches back to the exposition and shifts back and forth between the events. This is called the **flashbacks**. In postmodern writing the ending is rather open which gives the freedom to the reader to make their own interpretations. While in a short story there is only one plot, the novel may have different plots, and a series of sub-plots.

- **The Characterization:** the characterization is the study of characters in a narrative text. Every character in a novel must do something, at least one small action. They can be humans as well as animals, sometimes objects, or even natural elements. The study of characterization includes the following:



The characters in the novel are rather life-like and realistic (unlike the short story wherein they are supernatural or very heroic). Thus, the term hero is used less often in the novel, to be replaced by the term **protagonist**. There are types of characters:

- **The protagonist:** the central character around whom all the events of the narration revolve. The protagonist is the most important character in the text.
- **The antagonist,** the villain. The antagonist is someone who attempts to hurt the protagonist. It is not always a human being, sometimes it can be a natural element or an animal.

- **Main (Major):** the major characters are the most important ones.
- **Minor (secondary)** the secondary characters have a very small contribution in the novel and usually do not change the course of actions.

The analysis of characters extends to their personality traits and roles in the narration, which split into **Round** and **Flat** characters:

The round character is a character that is life-like and that shows complexity and depth. He/she is a character that has multidimensionality. He/She grows through the narrative and develops. Usually this character goes through a journey of maturity through the narration so that by the end of the novel it is possible to trace his/her alterity.

The flat character is rather simple and static. He/she does not change through the narration but fulfills a representative job. He/she is a mouthpiece of social phenomena or class, a symbol, or a representative of an idea, philosophy, or a religious thought. Usually the flat character is a secondary character.

- **The point of view:**

- Author : that who makes and creates the world of the story/ text

- narrator : a character that exists inside the text , his function is to do the narration of the text. The narrator is the speaker in the text.

- The point of view is a reference to the type of narrators in a text and their impact on the understanding and reception of the story.

- it is defined by Henry James in *The Wings of the Dove* as “the aspects from which the events of the story are regarded or narrated” (qtd. in Rawlings 56). It is the perspective from which the events are narrated. The shift in voice of the speaker/ narrator changes the representation of events and the impact on the reader. The point of view concerns the narrator’s voice only, it does not concerns the characters nor the author, unless if these are doing the narration by themselves.

The point of view can be **first person** or **third person**.

- **The First person** point of view is used by a narrator that is directly concerned by the events which are narrated. In such case the speaker uses the first person pronoun "I" or "We". In this case, the reader has direct access to the affects and feelings of the character / speaker. The first person point of view can be **central** or **peripheral**. It is **central** if the narrator / speaker is the protagonist of the novel / story, and is **peripheral** if the speaker is using the first person pronoun and is directly concerned with the events, **but is not the protagonist.**

- **The third Person point of view:** The third person point of view is used by a narrator who only reports events that happened in front of him/her but has not taken part in them directly. This narrator can be reporting dialogues or other characters' lines, and adds his / her own comment in the narration. This perspective gives less access to the psychology of the characters and gives the narrator complete control of the reader's reactions to the text. In this perspective, the narrator uses the third person pronouns "He" / "She" / "It" / "They".

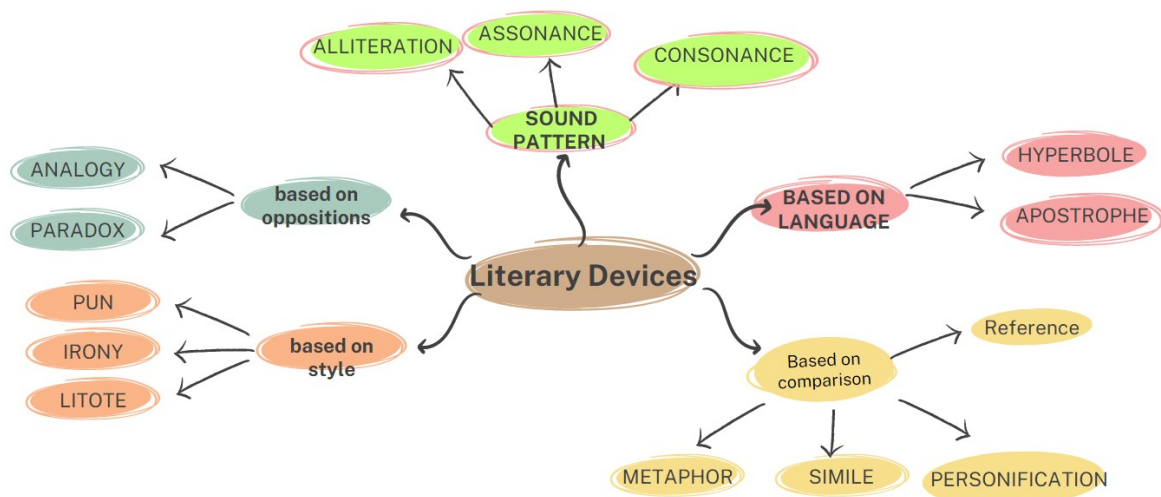
There are two types of third person point of view: **Omniscient** which concerns a narrator who knows everything about every character. This kind of narrator knows the past and the future and even the secrets of the characters. The second type is the **limited** narrator, this narrator knows only the things he/she sees and would often switch the narration to the voice of another character in the novel/ story. This is called the "unreliable narrator" (Kuiper 10).

- **Tone:** the feeling and voice of the author. It can be felt from the author's choice of words and decisions about the characters. To understand the tone, the reader must ask himself the question: if I was the author, how do I feel (about the characters and the narrative), example: the author seems to feel sympathy and pity towards the protagonist as he uses the term "poor" to refer to him. He also saves him from the blame of his wife as he makes her die before Rip's return to the village.

- **Atmosphere:** the general mood of the text that surrounds the characters. To understand the atmosphere, the reader must ask himself the question: if I was the protagonist/character, how do I feel (about the characters and the narrative) ? Example: the general mood in the text extracted from the novel Hard Times is

darkness and violence as the learners are subjected to the authoritative decisions of Mr Gradgrind's philosophy, which is destructive of their innocence.

- **Register: Formal, Informal, Scientific, religious, industrial, colloquial, slang**
- **Diction: word origin: latin origin, anglo-saxon origin.**
- **The Literary Devices:** also known as figures of speech, rhetorical devices, or aesthetic devices, they are used to give the text the aspect of literariness. The figures of speech are alternatives used in language to give it a certain style and impact that is made intentionally by the author. The different references used in a text reflect the author's intentions and ideologies. They are metaphors, references, and stylistic devices, each with its own function.



- **Simile:** it is a direct comparison that includes the tool of comparison "as" or "like", example: He was violent **as** thunder.
- **Metaphor:** a comparison that is not indicated (no tool of comparison), example: He is a fierce lion.
- **Personification:** a comparison wherein a human attribute is given to an animal or object. It is the act of personifying. Example: The anger of the waves.
- **Hyperbole:** an exaggeration in speech, example: I walked a million miles to reach home.

- **Apostrophe:** to address someone who is not in front of the speaker, example: although you are gone, my lad, I will always be your loyal friend.
- **Pun:** two meanings in one expression, the first is literal and the second is metaphorical, example: the town was cold and dark. The first meaning is that the town was literally cold and dark , but it also signifies sadness and hopelessness.
- **Irony:** to say something opposite to the intended meaning, irony includes laughter and satire, the goal of which is criticism. Example: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man with a large fortune must be in want of a wife.
- **Litote:** an understatement wherein something positive is expressed using the negative. The litote is considered an ironic statement, example: I've met her after the funeral and she was not a little sad.
- **Reference (allusion):** to refer to a historical event or famous place to emphasize a quality that belongs to it. Example: this freezer's brand is Alaska, it has to be cold!
- **Paradox:** an opposition of two words, example: she was dressed in black and white
- **Analogy:** an opposition of two situations, example: yesterday I was ill and tired, today I am healthy and dynamic.
- **Structure:** the length, special punctuation and symbols in the text and their function in shaping the theme. Example: chapter 5 "The Keynote" in Hard Times is written in a rhythmical way to refer to the boring routine of the industrial city Coketown, the structure of its paragraphs reflects the title of the chapter: the Keynote!

3. **The conclusion:** the conclusion of the essay must state conclusions and personal interpretations of the text in general and the themes identified by the learner. The learner must not use any personal pronouns in drafting the conclusion and must not address the reader.

Things to avoid in an essay:

1. Never use personal pronouns: I, me, my, you, your, our, etc.
2. Respect the capitalization and use capital letters where necessary only, especially for titles of books, chapters, stories, poems, and names.

3. Refer to an author using their full name the first time, then their last name only during the analysis.
4. Use the conjunction "and" only once in a sentence, if it occurs more than once that means you need to use a full stop or rewrite the sentence. Use clauses and connectors.
5. Use only one tense in a sentence and a paragraph. Do not switch back and forth in tenses. Use the present simple for narration and analysis.
6. Use the complete title of a novel
7. Do not use contracted forms like: "don't", "19th C", you should rather use the complete and correct forms: do not, nineteenth century.
8. Discuss only one idea in a paragraph and only one element in a sentence.
9. Use transitions between paragraphs and to shift from one idea to another.
10. Avoid long sentences, a sentence must not exceed 3 lines.
11. A paragraph should not be shorter than 4 lines.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Baghli Berbar, Souad. Introduction to Literary Analysis. *ResearchGate*. Work in Progress. RR10.13140/RG.2.2.33968.94725. (2024)

Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Vintage Books. 1983

Kuiper, Kathleen. *Prose, Literary Terms and Concepts*. New York: Britannica. 2012

Hunter, Adrian. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*. New York: Cambridge U. Press. 2007

You can access the complete method of literary analysis explained via this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx0swpJO8cw&t=3s>