

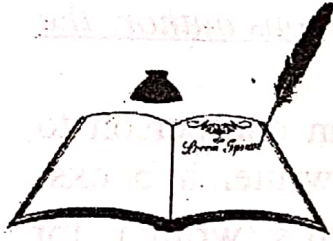
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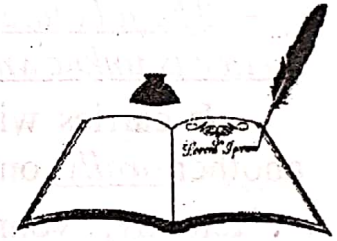
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Literary

Texts

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Literary Texts II 3.2

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HELLO EVERYONE!

Today, we will take a folk tale in order to introduce prose fiction for you. We are going to know the elements of prose fiction. It's an introduction for the whole course that we are going to study.

- Prose fiction is a fiction written in prose like in everyday language; not in verse.

- Fiction has a smaller version and a long version.

- The small versions are called novels. We have also novellas which are longer than a short story and shorter than the novel.

The novella is like a long short story. We have short story and we have the folk tale. The folk tale is the tale that our mothers used to tell us as children.

- The folk tale is a tale composed by an anonymous author; the writer is unknown.

- It carries wisdom and it is transmitted from one person to another orally, only by speaking. Later on, it was written in books.

Actually, your book is very intellectual. It's written for specialized students of literature. It takes a critical article from her and a literary passage from there. I will give you a simple introduction and later on I will introduce you to the terms that are in the book. The book is so long; it needs a whole semester to be introduced. I will give you simple examples only. We will not take the novel because it will take so much time. Maybe we will deal with short stories and drama. What I'm going to give you is taken from the book but in a simpler manner.

Let's read the short story and learn how to deal with prose fiction.

The Elephant in the Village of the Blind

Once there was a village high in the mountains in which everyone was born blind. One day a traveler arrived from far away with many fine things to sell and many tales to tell. The villagers asked, "How did you travel so far and so high carrying so much?" The traveler

said, "On my elephant." "What is an elephant?" the villagers asked, having never even heard of such an animal in their remote mountain village. "See for yourself," the traveler replied.

The elders of the village were a little afraid of the strange-smelling creature that took up so much space in the middle of the village square. They could hear it breathing and munching on hay, and feel its slow, swaying movements disturbing the air around them. First one elder reached out and felt its flapping ear. "An elephant is soft but tough, and flexible, like a leather fan." Another grasped its back leg. "An elephant is a rough, hairy pillar." An old woman took hold of a tusk and gasped, "An elephant is a cool, smooth staff." A young girl seized the tail and declared, "An elephant is a fringed rope." A boy took hold of the trunk and announced, "An elephant is a water pipe." Soon others were stroking its sides, which were furrowed like a dry plowed field, and others determined that its head was an overturned washing tub attached to the water pipe.

At first each villager argued with the others on the definition of the elephant, as the traveler watched in silence. Two elders were about to come to blows about a fan that could not possibly be a pillar. Meanwhile the elephant patiently enjoyed the investigations as the cries of curiosity and angry debate mixed in the afternoon sun. Soon someone suggested that a list could be made of all the parts: the elephant had four pillars, one tub, two fans, a water pipe, and two staffs, and was covered in tough, hairy leather or dried mud. Four young mothers, sitting on a bench and comparing impressions, realized that the elephant was in fact an enormous, gentle ox with a stretched nose. The traveler agreed, adding only that it was also a powerful draft horse and that if they bought some of his wares for a good price he would be sure to come that way again in the New Year.

• I want someone to tell me what the story is about in simple words.

Student:

A traveler came to a village with an elephant. The villagers

have never seen an elephant before. They ask the traveler how you arrived. He answers that he has arrived by elephant. They ask what the elephant is and they start to try to identify the elephant. Each one has touched the elephant and said what he/she could imagine about the elephant.

Instructor:

Each of the villagers touched a different part of the elephant. Therefore, each villager's definition of the elephant depends on their perspective. Each gave his/her definition based on his/her perspective and angle.

- What happened after that?

Student:

They disputed about the definition.

Instructor:

They argued about the definition of the elephant and each one believed that his/her definition is correct.

- How do the villagers settle the conflict?

Student:

They made a list of the description of the elephant.

- *What was the conclusion of the story?*

Student:

Each one sees the facts from his/her perspective.

Instructor:

This is one of the messages of the story.

Student:

The truth belongs to the whole villagers.

Instructor:

This is another message; this is not the conclusion.

The plot usually takes the traditional pattern; it has the introduction, the rising action (climax), the falling action, and the conclusion. I'm asking about the conclusion itself.

The conclusion of the story: the traveler leaves the villagers with a lesson to know in life.

> The Components of Prose Fiction:

Prose fiction consists of:

1. The story or the plot:

(The plot is so different from the story but we are going to deal with them similarly since you are specialized in literature).

2 The narrator:

The one who is telling us the story.

- Who is the narrator in our case?

We are going to deal with this idea in the future. The narrator can be first person, second person, and third person.

In our case, the one who tells us the whole story is a third person. But, when each villager tells his/her own definition of the elephant, they speak with the pronoun 'I'.

- First person uses 'I'.
- Second person uses 'you'.
- Third person uses 'he, she'.

Again, the one who tells us the story itself is a third person. But when each villager tells his/her own perspective, then this is a first person narrator.

3. Setting:

When and where the story happens.

It is the geographical location and the time line of the story.

- What is the setting in our story?

Place: an anonymous mountain. In most cases, folk tales have anonymous settings. Why?

This is because the message is universal. Therefore, there's no geography and there's no time line. It suits all humans in the whole universe across the ages.

The folk tale carries a universal message. Whereas, a novel located in England carries specific characteristics and interests to this geography. Of course, all literature is universal but a novel taking place in a particular place is related to this specific place.

If we have a novel about Syria, there will be universal themes but there will be themes that are only related to Syrian people.

Again, the setting in our folk tale is unknown. It happens on a mountain but what mountain? In what country? We don't know.

In the exam, I will say for example that this mountain in Syria. This is a wrong answer. But, if I say a mountain in an unknown place, this is the correct answer.

4. Characters:

The characters are the people involved in the story. In our story, the traveler, the villagers, and the elephant are the characters. In Animal Farm which is a very famous novella, the characters are animals.

Student: Folk tales are considered short stories or novellas?

Instructor: Folk tales are a category of their own. They are stories but in literature they are called folk tales or oral tales or myths.

Are the characters in this short story fully developed? Do you identify with the characters? Are their psychological problems and conflicts clear in the short story?

No. Characters in the short story are used to carry a theme. They are useless for the development of the story, unlike the novel that explores the characters.

Actually, novels of 18th century, 19th century, and 20th century dig into the inner psychological world of the characters. We know all the fears and beliefs of the character in the novel. Even the physical appearance of the character is dealt with in the novel. Characters in novels are fully developed. They are called round characters.

We have two kinds of characters in literature:

- Flat characters: like the ones in short stories.
- Round characters: usually seen in novels.

Student: There's no plot in the short story that we have read.

Instructor: Of course there is a plot but it's a very simple one. The plot is a very sophisticated term. When you discuss the plot, you follow the narrative techniques; you follow how the writer wrote his story or novel.

Student: Dialog.

Student: Conclusion.

Instructor: Dialog and conclusion are smaller parts of the plot.

5. Theme:

The main idea that is discussed.

- What is the theme of this short story? Is there one theme in a story or a novel?

Not always. In this short story, we have many themes. It's like the perspectives of the villagers; each one of them comes with a theme that depends on his interpretation. There are so many themes in a short story or a novel.

Most times, there is one clear big theme and smaller themes that comes with the novel.

- For you, what is the theme of this story?

Student: We should get the full picture of everything.

Student: We have to understand what is around us.

Student: Someone else can see differently.

Other themes are:

- Truth is subjective.
- We have to respect others.
- Don't be stubborn.
- Be tolerant.
- Acknowledge other people's perspective.
- No one has the full truth.

This is the message of most modern and postmodern literature unlike the classical literature that usually has one truth. The classical writer of the 18th century and 19th century claims to have the truth and he gives it to you. In modern novels in the 20th century and 21st century, the case is different.

The moral of the story is a true definition of its theme.

To analyze the fictional work, we need to answer the following questions:

- **Expectations: What do you expect?**
 - from the title? from the first sentence or paragraph?
 - after the first events or interactions of characters?
 - as the **conflict** is resolved?
- **What happens in the story?**
 - **Do the characters or the situation change from the beginning to the end?**
 - Can you summarize the **plot**?
- **How is the story narrated?**
 - Is the **narrator** identified as a character?
 - Is it narrated in the past or present tense?
 - Is it narrated in the first, second, or third person?
 - Do you know what every character is thinking, or only some characters, or none?
- **Who are the characters?**
 - Who is the **protagonist(s)** (hero, heroine)?
 - Who is the **antagonist(s)** (villain, opponent, obstacle)?
 - Who are the other characters? What is their role in the story?
 - Do your expectations change with those of the characters, or do you know more or less than each of the characters?
- **What is the setting of the story?**
 - When does the story take place?
 - Where does it take place?

• Does the story move from one setting to another? Does it move in one direction only or back and forth in time and place?

• **What do you notice about how the story is written?**

• What is the **style** of the prose? Are the sentences and the vocabulary simple or complex?

• Are there any **images, figures of speech or symbols**?

• What is the **tone** or mood? Does the reader feel sad, amused, worried, curious?

• **What does the story mean? Can you express its theme or themes?**

• **Answers to these big questions may be found in many instances in your answers to the previous questions. The story's meaning or theme depends on all its features.**

The conflict is a part of the plot.

Instructor: What are the things that you didn't understand from this list?

Student: Protagonist and antagonist.

Instructor: Protagonist means hero but there is a big difference between them. In romance, the hero is always brave and good, whereas in modern literature, the characters are more realistic.

Protagonist is the main character in the literary work.

Antagonist is the character that works against the protagonist.

We don't use the terms 'hero, heroine' in modern literature. We use them in epics where we have supernatural characters. In modern literature, we use the terms 'protagonist, antagonist'.

Student: Villain.

Instructor: It means the bad guy in the story.

Instructor: The story functions literally or symbolically?

Symbolically, because we cannot take any tale literally.

• What is the *elephant* symbolic for?

Student: The elephant is the symbol of something that we don't

know in life.

- What is the *blindness* of the villagers symbolic for?

Student: Ignorance.

Instructor: I am blind to your perspective. I don't know everything and I don't know your perspective. We are all blind; no one should assume to be the clever one with the open eyes.

The whole time literature functions symbolically, otherwise it's so silly and doesn't mean anything. Some novels use symbolism more than the others. Symbolism in poetry is condensed and more obvious to the eye. Poetry is the world of symbolism and imagery.

THE NOVEL

I'm going to introduce the novel for you and we are going to take a short story as an example of the novel because we can't deal with a novel but I'm going to introduce the genre.

The novel is a very long short story. It's more sophisticated but you can have an idea about the novel by reading a short story.

- What is the novel for you?

Student: The novel is sometimes written in verse.

Instructor: Most novels are written in prose not verse. There are some novels that written in verse but they are not the common type. People love novels because they are written in prose.

Student: The novel is a story long enough to fill a book. The characters and the events are usually imaginary.

❖ The definition of the novel:

✓ It is a long story that comes in large books.

✓ It is written in prose.

✓ It is fictitious or fictional.

- What is the meaning of the word 'novel'?

Novel means new. It's derived from Latin. The novel as a genre

is new. When I was a student of literature, they taught us that the first English novel was introduced in the 18th century. The birth of the novel is far recent whereas poetry and drama are as old as humanity. But, when I was a postgraduate student I was taught that things are more complicated.

According to classical English tradition, the first English novel is *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. It's about a sailor who gets lost on an island and he develops the island, grows crops, domesticates the animals, and builds the island.

This is the first English novel according to classical criticism but it is not the case actually. Novels are there with epics. The novels have their roots in epics. Game of Thrones and Harry Potter are examples of epics. Epics are so popular nowadays. An epic is a story about the supernatural. Epics are longer than novels. They tell us stories in verse and they are fictitious. It's the same definition right?

The novel has its first roots in epics and epics are as old as humanity. Epics existed before Jesus Christ.

The epic is a very long narrative about heroic actions and adventures. The events are supernatural; we have gods, monsters, dragons, etc.

The second root of the novel is the romances.

- What does romance mean?

It means love. Epic romances were common in the middle ages and up until the 18th century. They were revolutionized in the 19th century. Romance is also a long narrative that deals with heroic action of a man. This hero falls in love while he is on adventure. There is a love story in romances between a man and a woman; the man is perfect and the woman is perfect. The hero vanquishes something and saves the lady. Then they get married and live happily ever after. This is romance.

Example of romance is the Night Tales of The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer is a famous English poet

who wrote the Canterbury Tales which is a book that constitutes of tales.

The 18th century was the century of the industrial revolution, scientific progress, capitalism and the rise of the middle class. The novel became so prominent in the 18th century because printing was developed and people could print large amounts of magazines, journals, books, etc. The industrial revolution expanded the number of factories that needed workers so people traveled from the countryside to cities to work at factories. There were no peasants and farmers anymore. When these people went to the factories, they had time to read and they had money to buy novels which were the entertaining means just like social media nowadays.

Women were very decisive in the rise of the novel. Women at the time were only maids and house workers. In the 18th century, women worked at factories and so they had money. You know the typical idea of women that they love stories. The novel was a good in demand; the novel flourished.

Thank You

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