

Appreciation and Analysis of Novels

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April 2026

Plan

- 1) Self-introduction
- 2) Key elements in novels
- 3) Origins of the novel
- 4) Close-reading novel excerpts (group exercise)
- 5) Writing on literature
- 6) Q&A

1) Self-introduction

- Kindly introduce yourself and name a text (movie, TV drama, news, magazine, shorts, etc.) you read recently.
- Think about how a novel can be structurally different from your classmates' examples.
- How do these differences tell us about the basic elements of a novel?

2) Key Elements in novels

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a novel refers to:

‘a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length...in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity’.

'length'

- A novel is normally more than one hundred pages. It is longer than a short story (40-50 pages) or a novella (50-100 pages).
- The analysis of the characters and themes is more subtle, in-depth and detailed in a novel.
- For instance, Henry James' 1902 novel *The Wings of the Dove* is more than five hundred pages long...

‘representative of real life’

- A real life specifically refers to the everyday life of a secular world, that is, a world not governed by transcendental forces.
- Mimesis (representation, simulation) and diegesis (narrator’s account of what happened).
- Difference between showing and telling from Percy Lubbock’s *The Craft of Fiction* (1921).

'fictitious'

Novel, by definition, is fictitious, but it adopts different strategies to make its story look real. *Jane Eyre* (1847), for instance is written by Charlotte Brontë, but its cover shows that the novel is edited by a man called Currer Bell. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is written by Daniel Defoe, but the author claims that he is just an editor trying to publish Crusoe's private journals. Other novels adopt other forms of writings to authenticate their content, such as travel writing in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, historiography in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

‘prose’

- Not structured in some repetitive formal arrangements. No meter or rhythm. Most often appearing in sentence, not line.
- The dominant use of prose in public space.

‘narrative’

- What is a story?
- Why do people read novels?
- Why do audience become obsessed with romance novels or TV drama?
- Why do people like listening/watching/reading stories?
- What is the role of a story-teller?

‘plot’

- Strongly connected to *muthos* (myth), a story or fable consists of a series proposition about the world (cf. Allegory of the cave).
- Differences between story and plot.
- Story is the ‘raw material’ while plot is its re-arrangement.
- Story follows a chronological time frame while plot can do otherwise.
- A plot gives significance to an event in a story.
- Adaptations use the same stories with twisted plots.
- Cf. ‘A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order’ (Jean-Luc Godard).

‘action’

- Aristotle called it *praxis*.
- Willed activity, as opposed to theory (Karl Marx)
- ‘The praxis that art seeks to reproduce is mainly a psychic energy working outwards’ (S. H Butcher).
- Praxis is ‘the focus or movement of the psyche towards what seems good to it at the moment’ (Francis Fergusson).
- ‘An action is an activity designed to bring about an “end” and it has in it both an element of trained desire and an intellectual element’ (Colin Hardie).

‘character’

- Aristotle called it *ethos*, closely connected with the ethical.
- ‘Character is a specific moral factor in relation to action, not a vague or pervasive notion equivalent to modern ideas of personality or individuality’ (Stephen Halliwell).
- Reflected through actions which trigger moral judgement (virtues and vices).
- ‘Character is that which reveals personal choice’ (Aristotle).
- Proairesis (**proh-EER-uh-siss**) often translated as ‘moral character’, ‘will’, ‘volition’, ‘choice’, ‘intention’, or ‘moral choice’ (cf. Oedipus).
- The arrangement of events, their pattern, or structure is what makes an action into plot.

3) Origins of the novel

- Novel as the 'youngest' genre in the history of literature.
- The object of study in novel is near and malleable, whereas the content in epic is distant and fixed.
- The form of the novel is still evolving today.
- Novel gives allowance to parody and laughter due to its liberal relationship with the object of study.
- The novel contains diverse voices: from the king to the peasant, from the knight to the beggar. Every voice exists in relation to another. Every utterance is marked with tension.

4) Close-reading exercise

- The class will be divided into groups of two. Each group will be given two excerpts.
- Read the excerpts closely and decide which one you like better.
- Explain your choice to your groupmate. Provide evidence (e.g. diction, tone, imagery, setting, voice, etc) to support your preference. You may refer to the origins of the novel in the discussion.
- The contexts and titles will be revealed at the end.

5) Writing on literature

- Pause when you read – jot down significant facts, describe the impressions and responses the text provokes.
- Paraphrase, summary and description are basic for building up a good essay.
- Four key elements in an essay: tone, thesis, structure, evidence.
- Tenses, titles and names
- The emphasis on analysis and evaluation rather than summary, description and paraphrase.

Some classroom activity examples

- Creating character's monologue
 - Students impersonate a character in a novel and write an inner monologue from his/her perspective. The assignment is both analytical and creative. Students test their understanding of the character and imagine a dramatic voice for it. The exercise can be turned into written form, asking students the 'what-if' question about a main character.
- Hot Seat: Character on Trial
 - Students put on trial to answer questions concerning a selected character in a novel. Students work out a list of evaluative questions for the 'character' to answer. Eloquent and convincing answers will be rewarded.
- Zoom-in/Zoom-out Analysis
 - Select a passage from a novel. Zoom in. Start with a keyword, an image, or a sentence. Analyze its significance. Zoom out. Discuss how it constructs a larger theme in the novel. The exercise can be combined with 'wall analysis' where quotations are posted in the classroom for comments. It cultivates interpretations in the classroom.

Glossary

- Action
- Allegory
- Allusion
- Antihero
- Archetype
- Author
- Autobiography
- Bildungsroman
- Character
- Characterization
- Climax
- Comedy
- Coming-of-age story
- Resolution
- Conflict
- Dialogue
- Diction
- Drama
- Epic
- Epiphany
- Epilogue
- Episode
- Eponymous
- Exposition
- Fable
- Fantasy
- Farce
- Fiction
- Flashback
- Foreshadowing

- Genre
- Gothic fiction
- Imagery
- Irony
- Legend
- Literary criticism
- Magic realism
- Metafiction
- Metaphor
- Monologue
- Moral
- Motif
- Myth
- Narrative
- Narrator
- Nonfiction
- Novel
- Novella
- Omniscient narrator
- Parable
- Parody
- Personification
- Plot (and its 5 parts)
- Point of view
- Prose
- Protagonist
- Realism
- Rhetoric
- Romance

- Satire
- Setting
- Short story
- Situation
- Stream of consciousness
- Symbol
- Tale
- Theme
- time
- Tone
- Tragedy
- Subplot
- Understatement
- Verisimilitude
- Villain
- Voice

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