

Aspects of fiction

1. CHARACTERIZATION: the study and/or construction of characters in a fictional text (novel, short story). Types of character:

- a) *flat* (also called *static*): relatively unchanging and one-dimensional;
- b) *round* (also called *kinetic*, *stereotypes*): complex, multi-dimensional, those who may change during the narrative.

Some characters, however, can't be easily ascribed to any of the two categories, or they may also exhibit features of both (in modernist and postmodernist fiction, for example).

2. PLOT: the series of events and actions ordered by the narrative. Parts of the plot (in a linear narrative):

- a) *exposition* (or *introduction*);
- b) *rising action* (development);
- c) *climax* (where crucial episodes occur, also called *epiphany*);
- d) *falling action* or *denouement* (also called *outcome* or *resolution*).

However, this scheme does not appear in all novels or short stories: some parts may be missing or the order may be altered, or they may just overlap.

3. NARRATOR: the figure that narrates the story. This is inextricably intertwined with the so-called *narrative point of view*, that is to say, the perspective from which the novel is written or the way the story is told. The narrative point of view may present different forms, among them the following:

- a) first person (autobiographical or not: it may coincide with the central character or it may be a secondary character);
- b) third person (omniscient and objective);
- c) third person (limited);
- d) third person (intrusive, the one who interferes in the action);
- e) second-person (a borderline case);
- f) plural or collective "narrator" (first person plural, "we");
- g) self-mocking or self-questioning (in postmodernist fiction).

All of them may be *reliable* or *unreliable*. There are two axes of reliability, that of *values* and that of *facts*. (Cf. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart".) In some cases, both of them coincide.

In the account of the narrator sometimes we have to talk about the *narratee*, which is the figure presumably narrated to, and which may or may not coincide with the actual reader.

4. SETTING: the locale (place), time, and circumstance in which the action of a novel occurs. These elements are linked to character and plot.

Normally, there are two main chronological frameworks within which a story is narrated:

- a) *linear chronology*, in which the events spring naturally (or almost naturally) one from the other in a "realistic" way, that is to say, trying to reproduce the way in which events occur in real life;
- b) *non-linear chronology*, in which there may be *flashbacks* and *flash-forwards*. The *stream of consciousness* writing is a radical example of non-linear chronology.