

ENG440: Topics in Literary Genres

Basic Terms and Concepts

Genre: Defined in terms of five narrative elements:

- 1) Plot: Sequence of events linked by causality
 - DF: Crime, defined as disruption of social order
 - SF: Scientific novum (new aspect of science and/or technology)
- 2) Character: The actors who participate in the events as agents and/or victims (impacted by actions)
 - Both DF and SF may have Experts (those with specialized knowledge) and Laypersons (those without any specialized knowledge) as characters.
- 3) Setting: Time and Place in which the narrative takes place
 - DF: Familiar (time and/or place presented as known to the us)
 - SF: Unfamiliar (time and/or place that is unknown to us)
- 4) Theme: Abstract ideas that are explored throughout the narrative in terms of their definitions and values attached to them.
 - DF: Crime; Social Order; Justice; Truth
 - SF: Science / Knowledge (what is considered valid knowledge)
- 5) Affect: The mental and / or emotional impact a narrative finally has on us (after its conclusion)
 - DF: Satisfaction and / or sense of relief (created by solution of problem / restoration of social order)
 - SF: Wonder and / or Intellectual Curiosity about philosophical questions (created by the new possibilities explored in the narrative)

Narrative Arc: The overall trajectory of taken by the story (how it is told from beginning to end)

- DF: From disruption to restoration of social order
- SF: From novum to an exploration of its implications

Open vs. Close Ended Texts: Narratives may be open-ended or closed ended either in terms of plot (actions and their consequences) and/or in terms of theme (whether or not the abstract ideas explored in the narrative are finally given one concrete definition / valuation).

- DF: Usually close-ended in terms of both plot and theme
- SF: Usually open-ended in terms of theme even if closed in terms of plot

Some of the Concepts explored through this semester:

- Knowledge: Defined in terms of Content (data in terms of field from which it is gathered as well as actual facts); Method (how knowledge is generated); Purpose (why knowledge is generated).
- Ethical Relativism (different versions of right/wrong held to be equally valid) vs. Ethical Absolutism (one set way of understanding right and wrong)
- Self / Other: Self as the subject of knowledge (the agent / creator); Object as the field of knowledge (about which knowledge is generated and/or on whom knowledge is applied)

- Social Order: An acceptable 'right' way of organizing relationship between various people / groups of people in a society (as intended by the text)
- Institution: An organization of a specific profession such as policing and/or of the ideas related to an abstract concept such as science. It is defined at two levels – formal / literal and implicit / connotative. At the formal level, an institution is defined by its structure (relationship between various groups of people that function within it in terms of power / hierarchy) and purpose (what it is intended for). At the connotative level, an institution is defined by its authority (its ability to act in society) and its legitimacy (its being considered acceptable by society, which is what gives it the authority to act)