

CHAPTER 1 A FOCUS ON LITERARY ANALYSIS

Introduction

Literary analysis is a formal and close reading of a literary work. It is a form of literary criticism. It is a critical analysis. Literary analysis involves a detailed opening up and examination of a work of literature. It is the study of the various elements in the work and how the elements combine to give meaning to the literary work. The criticism is based on the idea that:

- (i) a work art is a whole but made of parts;
- (ii) the parts collaborate and modify one another.

Literary analysis examines the structure or form of the work, its style, imagery, and indeed every aspect of it. It is also called analytical criticism.

In poetry, the term ‘explication’ is used interchangeably with ‘literary analysis’. The approach to the analysis of poetry can easily be differentiated from the general appreciation of poetry. Analysis of poetry is written in lines and stanzas, and it is line by-line-examination done. The line-by-line examination is the first step in analyzing a poem. The analysis is further combined with how the lines, stanzas, images, and so on relate. The method of analysis was first practised in France. The practice spread later to America and Britain.

Literary analysis also applies to drama and prose. A detailed analysis of any of the two cannot follow a line by line analysis. This is because drama and prose are, by the nature, generally not composed in lines and stanzas. A close study of any of the two is done by looking at certain components in it. Component parts such as symbols, setting and language may be looked at closely and related. A literary analysis in this wise generates a deeper level of meaning than a mere appreciation.

Differences between Literary Appreciation and Literary Analysis

Literary analysis is different from literary appreciation. The differences between the two may appear thin but they are there. Therefore, it is proper to state the difference. Literary appreciation may be intuitive and spontaneous but literary analysis is not. Literary appreciation may be concerned with issues ‘outside’ the literary text and how these affect the literary work. The literary analysis however does not show interest in such matters.

In literary appreciation, a reader may do any of the following:

- (i) look at the text in relation to the author’s mind or personality.
- (ii) discuss the work in relation to its source or sources.
- (iii) examine the political and social implications of the text.

In literary analysis, the critic

- (i) sees a literary work as a closed text;
- (ii) evaluates it as an ‘aesthetic object’;
- (iii) describes the elements of literary work in details;
- (iv) discusses how the elements relate; and
- (v) studies the work as one coherent whole.

Literary appreciation gives the reader a total impression of the work. The critic appraises some aspects of the work to illustrate some issues about the work. Literary analysis however assesses the work in its own right and explores it to show what goes on in it. It pays proper attention to the true life or the ‘form’ of the work. “Form” is literally the shape of a work and its pattern of arrangement.

Literary analysis studies the craft, follows the process and reads it constructively. It looks at how the literary work is composed and studies the literary process closely. It examines the devices which go to achieve the literary effect. So, literary analysis may be seen as an ‘advanced’ form of literary appreciation.

Close Reading: Analysis and Synthesis

A literary analysis attempts to give a thorough or systematic account of a work. It is scientific and is concerned with method. It shows with analytic precision the presence of any given quality in a work. Then, it looks at the given quality in details. It is a technical demonstration of how the work is achieved. It is more analytic, more methodical and, in general, more tough-minded.

Literary analysis involves analysis but is also concerned with synthesis, “a building-together”. It notices and points out the elements in a literary work, examines how they are related to one another, and states how they relate to the meaning of the entire work.

The basic tools of literary analysis are literary terms and devices. These terms and devices have been defined and described in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Book I. It is appropriate to study them in those chapters. A sound knowledge of the terms and devices is helpful in writing a good literary analysis. The tools are used in the discussion of a literary work.

Examples on literary analysis are taken below on:

- (i) William Wordsworth’s ‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal’
- (ii) Theme, Characterization and Symbolism in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*
- (iii) Theme, Symbolism and the Spider Image in Efua Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

They are models of literary analysis on poetry, prose and drama. The analyses are brief, and each one focuses on certain aspects on each genre.

Each analysis also describes how the parts collaborate and modify one another and contribute to the meaning of the work.

Two Contexts in a Poem: William Wordsworth’s “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal”

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Wordsworth’s ‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal’ is a popular poem. The poem appears regularly in anthologies. It is written in a straightforward language almost not deviating from the language of prose. However, the poetic nature of the ‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal’ is evident in its form. It is divided into two stanzas, each one a quatrain. The first line of each quatrain starts with a grammatical inversion. The concern of the poem with death is introduced in the last two lines of the first quatrain and theme developed further in the final quatrain. The poem has a rhyme scheme of ABABCDCD.

‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal’ is often read as a simple poem. The choice of Wordsworth’s language in the poem makes it seem so. Generally, critics read the poem as an expression of a pantheistic belief. Pantheism is a religious belief in Nature and her supernatural essence. A close reading of poem shows that its religious nature is not absolute. The poem is not simple. The religious interpretation is a partial consideration of the craft in the poem. A close reading of the poem shows that there is a dispute between the religious interpretation and another context in the poem.

A death has occurred in the poem. So, it is certain that the poem has a tragic-lament context. This meaning obtains instantly in the poem. The poem also shows that the death of the ‘she’ is seen as a return to the living unity nature. Thus, the poem has a religious outlook and a pantheistic context. So, the death is to be regarded cheerfully. The poem however does not give the reader any reason to choose the tragic-lament context or the pantheistic context as the more probable. The poem lacks any *clear* signal of emotion to support this choice.

Meaning in Wordsworth’s ‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal’ is, therefore, not definite. The poem supports both the tragic-lament context and the cheerful pantheist context equally well. However, the poet has organized language into one form and suggested two meanings within the same form successfully.

It is difficult to determine the context of the poem. Wordsworth had not written, for instance:

- (1) Rolled round in earth’s **lively** course
With **hallowed** rocks and trees.

Nor had he written:

(2) Rolled round in this earth's lifeless course

With rocks, and stones, and trees.

If he had written (1) or (2), Wordsworth would have given the reader what context to choose between the tragic-lament and the cheerful pantheist context.

What context would Wordsworth have given the reader in (1)?

What context would the poet have given the reader in (2)?

Theme, Characterization and the Beast Symbolism in *Lord of the Flies*

The theme of *Lord of the Flies* is that evil is innate in man. The theme is presented repeatedly in the novel. It is suggested for instance in the idea that man is a beast or that he is sick. The theme is understated by Piggy on many occasions. One instance is sufficient. In the instance, he says there is no beast but there is fear. According to him, "we get frightened of people." The theme is reinforced in Simon's observation about 'mankind's essential illness'. It comes out better in the narrator's words:

However Simon thought of the beast, there rose before his

inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick.

Golding uses characterization and the beast symbol to reinforce the theme of *Lord of Flies*. The two elements work together to develop further the idea that man is a beast. All the characters presented in *Lord of the Flies* are human beings. There is not a single beast- 'not with claws and all that.' The novel describes young children who are abandoned on an island after the plane carrying them has been attacked. The pilot carrying them did not survive the attack. He died and was left hanging in the parachute caught on a tree for some time. A parachute is a special balloon made to lift people to safety from the air.

The theme that man is a beast is reinforced by the symbol of a beast. A symbol is anything which signifies something else. The beast in the novel is the pilot or 'air man' as the children call him. It is helpful to read more about this man in Chapter Six of the novel: Beast from Air. To support this analysis, some portion is here quoted:

There was a speck above the island, a figure dropping swiftly

beneath a parachute, a figure that hung with dangling limbs.

The changing winds of various altitudes took the figure where

they would.... The figure fell and crumpled among the blue

flowers on the mountain side...till it lay huddled among the

shattered rocks of the mountain-top. Here the breeze was fitful

and allowed the strings of the parachute to tangle and festoon;

and the figure sat, its helmeted head between its knees, held by

complication of lines. (Faber and Faber 1962: 118-119)

The beast seen by Sam and Eric is the dead man in the parachute. The two boys see the figure from a distance. Eric *does* first, then Sam. Golding presents the discovery in a dramatic way:

Sam looked at Eric irritably. The intensity of Eric's gaze made

the direction in which he looked terrible, for Sam had his back

to it. He scrambled round the fire, squatted by Eric, and looked

to see. They became motionless, gripped in each other's arms, four

unwinking eyes aimed and two mouths open.

The events that follow this discovery are dramatic and, for the boys, more fearful. Nature conspired against them. The trees of the forest sighed, then roared. Fifteen yards away from the boys, the fabric holding the parachute man exploded.

The theme of *Lord of the Flies* is that man is essentially evil. The novel treats the idea that evil is innate in him. It suggests that man is a noble beast. The novel discusses how the evil in the children grows, and they degenerate into animals. He is noble or heroic but he is

also ignoble or villainous. When the camp begins to be divided, Piggy foresees the degeneration of the boys into beasts: ' If you don't blow, we'll soon be animals, anyway...' The children become animals and begin to hunt and kill their fellow children.

Lord of the Flies is a coherent whole. It treats the idea that man is a noble beast. The theme is treated in the character of the children. When abandoned on the island, they start their life there in a noble way. Soon, the evil in them surfaces. They degenerate into beasts. The novel develops man's evil nature through the beast symbol. The symbol is presented in the figure of the pilot in the parachute. No beast with claws presented in the novel. The novel goes on to confirm the fear of Piggy and Simon that man is essentially evil. Both Piggy and Simon are killed by their fellows.

Theme, symbol and characterization are elements in *Lord of the Flies*. They collaborate and modify one another to treat the theme that evil is inherent in man. The narrative elements are used in the novel to develop the message of Golding and they show that the novel is one coherent whole.

Theme, Symbolism and the Spider Image in Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

The theme of *The Marriage of Anansewa* is that one must be ready to take a risk otherwise one will not improve his or her status. The play treats the theme through the subject (matter) of marriage. Ananse laments the poor state of things in his family; he is sad that he finds it difficult even to train his one and only daughter.

Ananse sees his beautiful daughter, Anansewa, as his most valuable asset and plans to persuade one of the country chiefs to marry her. He wants Anansewa to be married however to somebody who truly loves her. Greed sets in when Ananse involves four chiefs in the plan. The four chiefs show interest in Anansewa and send gifts in cash and kind. Ananse takes all the gifts but makes sure nothing compels his daughter by tradition to marry any of the chiefs.

Troubles begin when the chiefs, one by one, want to take steps to arrange the marriage traditionally.

The Chief of the Mines, for instance, sends in a telegram to that effect. Cunning sets in at this stage. Ananse plots a scheme and brings in Anansewa and Christie, his woman friend, into it. Ananse tricks others to believe that Anansewa is dead and sends to all her suitors. All the suitors sympathize with Ananse and send in gifts. Only one chief however accepts the greatest responsibility for Anasewa's burial. The message from him to Ananse is set below:

THE MESSENGER: The-Chief-Who-Is-Chief, who was eager to blend his blood with yours and become a member of your family, wishes me to inform you about his painful grief, and add that he accepts responsibility for everything concerning the woman who but one more step to take to enter his home.

Therefore, from his hands to yours, here are all requirements for her funeral.

Ananse performs a ritual to the ancestors and pleads with them that they send Anansewa back from the land of the dead. He pleads the love of Chief-Who-Is-Chief for this request. The ancestors hear and send Anansewa back to the land of the living.

Spider and Rain Symbolism in *The Marriage of Anansewa*

Sutherland employs the symbolism of the spider and the rain in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Ananse is presented in the play as a spider. The symbol of the spider is introduced immediately after Ananse sets about his plan. The symbol is introduced in the Story Teller's words:

STORYTELLER: Ananse certainly needs a rest after spinning such a web...

Spiders are associated with spinning webs. Therefore, Ananse is here equated with a spider. The scheme set by Ananse is compared here with a web.

The symbol of the spider recurs in the play. Ananse is screened off from the audience by a spider web from time to time in the play. This confirms Ananse as a spider. The spider web screen is used to screen Ananse off on many occasions when his scheme becomes a problem. One instance is when Chief Sapa of Sapaase sends a telegram announcing his messenger's arrival to conduct head-drink ceremony for Anansewa. After the telegram, Ananse recognizes that trouble is imminent, in the words below:

Oh spirits, what shall I do? [Turning on PROPERTY MAN] Hey, haven't you any
sympathy for a man hit by a storm?

Immediately after Ananse's words above is the stage direction below:

[Ananse sits thinking with his jaws agape. PROPERTY MAN brings in a spider web screen and screens him off]

A web is a complex series or structure. The scheme of Ananse at this stage has become complex.

Rain Symbolism in *The Marriage of Anansewa*

Rain is a symbol in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. It is a symbol of hardships. The symbol is introduced at the beginning of the play. When the play opens, Ananse enters his room, ‘escaping from the rain outside’. Thereafter, he shakes his head like a troubled man and speaks about his hardships. Ananse associates the rain with his physical hardships in the speech:

Ananse:While life is whipping you, rain also pours down to whip you some more...

In the speech, he lists his hardships and concludes that the world is really hard.

The rain symbolism is deepened after Ananse has discovered the simple solution for living his life kindly. It no longer rains hard after Ananse has discovered that Anansewa is most valuable asset. After deciding to trade off her daughter for wealth and comfort, also the rain quietens down. Ananse also confirms the connection between rain and life here:

ANANSEWA: [Having checked on the rain outside]It isn't raining too hard now.

ANANSE: It has quietened down, has it Well, I don't feel quite so whipped by life as I did when I came in...

In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the rain is a symbol. It is associated with the fortune of Ananse. When his fortunes are the lowest, the rain is heavy. He is beaten hard by the rain. When his fortunes improve, the rain quietens down. By the time he comes into wealth fully, no sign of rain is heard again.

Songs in *The Marriage of Anansewa*

Song is a major dramatic element in the play *The Marriage of Anansewa*. There are over ten songs in the play. Each one is better appreciated in both the context of the play and the point in which it is sung in the play. The song ‘My father is selling me’ is chosen for analysis in this study.

The song is by Anansewa. She sings it and is joined by the PLAYERS. The song comes in when she discovers that her father is getting four chiefs to be her suitors. The song is simple:

My father is selling me,
Alas, alas!
Whoever thought he would?
Alas, alas!
But let me tell you bluntly,
I'll never comply.
I will not let you sell me
Like some parcel to a customer.
Not ever!

The song points to Ananse's idea that his daughter is an asset. It is on the idea of wealth and life in the story. Ananse complains of hardships in the family. He discovers marrying his daughter to a chief could make his (Ananse's) family comfortable. By involving four chiefs in the engagement, Ananse shows that he is commercializing the relationship.

The theme of Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* is: nothing ventured; nothing gained. The play treats the idea that one must be able to take some risks in order to make some gains. The playwright employs symbolism and songs to develop the theme. She uses the symbol of the rain to examine Ananse's fortune or misfortune. Heavy rain signifies Ananse's hardships; light rain suggests his fortune has improved; no rain shows that he is wealth. Sutherland presents Ananse as the spider and his schemes as a web. The playwright employs the song ‘My father is selling me’ to show how Ananse has introduced commerce into the subject.

Revision Questions

1. What is literary analysis?
2. Differentiate between literary appreciation and literary study?
3. Explain the terms:
 - (a) close reading
 - (b) text coherence
 - (c) synthesis.

4. Examine how a symbol in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is related to another narrative element in the same work.
5. With reference to any literary work mentioned in this chapter, explain "reinforcement" and "repetition" in literary study.

Objective Questions

1. Literary analysis is a form of literary _____.
a. Appreciation b. Theory c. History
d. Criticism e. Ideology
2. Every literary analysis is _____.
a. Intuitive b. Artless c. Impulsive
d. Systematic e. Spontaneous
3. In poetry, literary analysis is also called
a. Explication b. Complication c. Poetics
d. Meditation e. Poesis
4. A literary analysis
a. Examines the faults of a literary work.
b. Evaluates the strengths of a literary work.
c. Assesses a literary work in its own right.
d. Examines the weaknesses of a literary work.
e. Discusses the vices of a literary work.
5. In literary analysis, the first step is analysis but the final step is _____.
a. Synthesis b. Prognosis c. Litotes
d. Diagnosis e. Meiosis
6. Literary analysis involves a _____ of a literary work.
a. Detailed study b. Bird-eye view
c. Long overview d. Close-range view
e. Hand-to hand study
7. In literary analysis, the critic evaluates the literary work as an _____ object.
a. Nifty b. Arty c. Aesthetic
d. Ingenious e. Artful
8. The person involved in a literary analysis is called a _____.
a. Critique b. Kritique c. Creetique
d. Critike e. Critic
9. Literary analysis is essentially an integrating and _____ process.
a. Disintegrating b. Consecrating c. Constructive d. Coordinating e. Integrative
10. Literary analysis may be defined as an _____ study of a literary work.
a. Exocentric b. Extrinsic c. Endocentric

d. Intrinsic e. Embryonic

Answer to the Objective Questions

1. D 2. D 3. A 4. C 5. A 6. A 7. C 8. E 9. C 10. D