MODUL INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS

(PBI 321)

4th MODUL

ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE: PROSE

COMPILED BY

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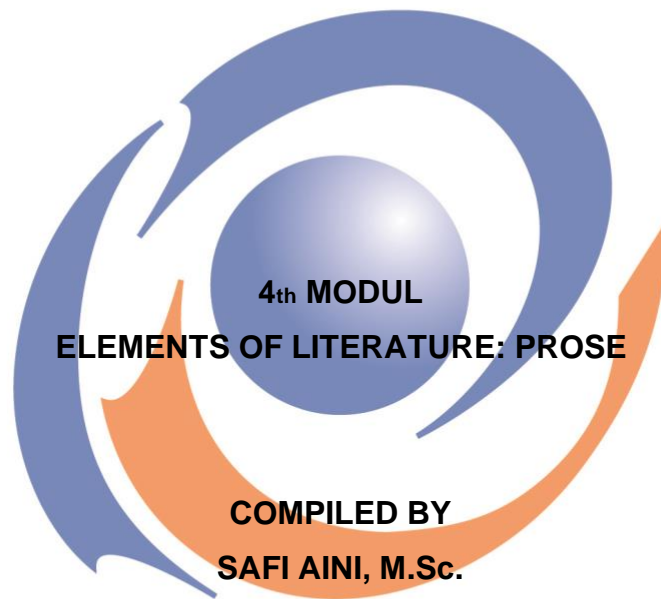
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ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE: PROSE

A. Learning Objectives

After completing this course, students are expected to be able to identify, classify, and elaborate the elements of literature specifically prose.

B. Explanation

The prose is a lot more normal as it uses a language that is ordinarily used while writing or speaking. Prose is written in term of sentences and paragraphs. It developed later than poetry and its style is usually traceable to particular author or genre. Novels and short stories are examples of prose. The content of the prose can be fictional, nonfictional and heroic. Fictional prose employs creative design and imaginative writing. The examples can be parables, drama, novels and short stories. When writing is fact based, it is called non-fictional prose. The examples can be biographies and formal essays. Heroic prose is based on popular tales. It employs aggrandizement of age-old expressions which are often transmitted through oral traditions. They include fables, lore and legends.

Though the dominant forms of fiction that we see today (namely the short story and the novel) are relatively new, narratives and storytelling are as old as human history. Each culture and language group can trace its beginnings to an establishing myth, folktale, epic, or romance narrative. These early stories were first passed from generation to generation through oral tradition before the widespread use and technology for writing became practical. Now, these earliest narratives have been recorded much as contemporary writers commit their works to history. These elements were first analyzed by the philosopher Aristotle, whose book Poetics was the first text of literary. Aristotle outlined the most basic elements that comprise any narrative, and any study of literature must begin with his list.

The Elements of Fiction

1. Plot

The arrangement of events in a narrative is called its plot. The significance of the plot in a piece of fiction, like the significance of all other elements, will vary. For instance, in a piece of detective fiction involving a complicated crime scenario, plot details will be of the utmost importance. However, in many modern short stories, writers are far more concerned with other elements (character, tone, symbols, etc.), and the plot may not play a significant role in understanding the piece.

A typical plot consists of a tripartite (three-part) action structure: rising action, climax, and falling action. The rising action of a work consists of the main character's attempts to overcome whatever obstacles stand in his or her way. This struggle usually results in the greatest dramatic moment of the story, the climax. After this climax follows the story's falling action, also called the denouement. The engine that drives this entire plot structure is conflict. Conflict may be internal or external. Stories may contain several different conflicts of internal or external natures. The main purpose of such conflict is to create a sense of suspense in the reader to foster continued interest in the narrative.

Some conflicts are divided into person vs. person, person vs. environment, person vs. self. This structure may also be referred to as the obstacle-anxiety-relief cycle. Many times, a writer will play with a reader's expectation of plot. In story's such as these, the use of irony can turn even typical, mundane scenarios into interesting stories.

2. Setting

A story's location and time is its setting. The role that setting plays in a story and its overall significance in forming an understanding of the work varies greatly. Some stories are particular to a time and place, while others could be set against almost any backdrop. Setting can be classified as place which means the physical environment where the story takes place. The description of the environment often points towards its importance. Setting as time includes time in all of its dimensions. To determine the importance, ask, "what was going on at that time?". Setting as cultural context also involves the social circumstances of the time and place. Consider historical events and social and political issues of the time.

3. Character

According to Aristotle, the most significant element of any narrative work was its character. In fact, Aristotle defined a story as "character in action," meaning that our human nature cannot help but reveal itself through our activity. Our interest in character in a fictional work is rooted in our own identification with other people, fictional or otherwise. The way in which an author creates character is called characterization.

Sometimes analyzing characterization is more difficult than describing plot as human nature is definitely complex, variable, and ambiguous. It is much easier to describe what a person has done instead of who a person is. The protagonist must be easily identified with and fundamentally decent, if he has vices they are of the more 'innocent' type, the kind the reader would not mind having. Moreover, characters are presented in two different ways-directly and indirectly. In direct presentation - the reader is told straight out what the character is like while in indirect presentation - the author shows the character through their actions; the reader determines what the character is like by what they say or do.

4. Point of View

The narrator's relationship to the story is called point of view. Since point of view affects every line of the story, it is one of the most important decisions that a writer makes in creating his or her story. Each type of storyteller has advantages and disadvantages. While a first-person narrator creates a level of closeness to the text, it limits the reader's access to only one way of seeing the world of the story. The second person point of view uses 'you' in the story but it is rarely used by most of writers. The third person narrator is the way the story told in the point of view of third person character in the story.

Conversely, an omniscient narrator, like a third person narrator but not from the character in the story, may satisfy any curiosity a reader may have about character or setting, but such authorial power may seem like a barrier between the reader and the text. The less-frequently used objective narrator may seem like a positive compromise, but it can also appear cold and unfeeling since it lacks any emotional or psychological input from the storyteller. The author's tone is also related through selection of point of view, and these factors help create the story's mood for the reader.

5. Symbol

Any object in a story whose meaning transcends its literal definition is a symbol. While not every object needs to be treated with weightiness and significance, symbols can be an important facet in understanding a story. Objects that reappear frequently in a text, that are described in peculiar ways, or are given special attention or focus are often symbolic.

6. Theme

The main idea expressed in a work of fiction may be called its theme. Correctly understood, all other elements of narrative contribute to the making of a theme. Every choice that a writer makes -- the events of the plot, the descriptions of the characters, the selection of the setting -- is geared toward conveying with greatest precision his or her intended message to the reader.

Unlike life in the real world, nothing is accidental in a fictional universe. Even seemingly random events were imagined and written by an intelligent being (the writer) with the intention of provoking a reaction in the reader. In this respect, properly understanding the theme of a work involves accounting for all the choices that an author has made.

7. Style, Tone, and Irony

The characteristic manner in which an author uses language to create specific effects constitutes his or her style, and is influenced by such things as word choice, diction, sentence length and structure, tone, and irony. An author's style may contribute significantly to the meaning and effectiveness of a work. As noted, part of what determines an author's style is tone. Tone reveals the attitude taken by the author or narrator toward characters, places, and events—whether that attitude is sympathetic, humorous, indifferent, angry, etc. Indeed, without paying careful attention to tone, one may miss irony—a figure of speech in which the actual intent of words is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning. Other forms of irony include situational irony—in which there is an incongruity between what is expected to happen and what does happen, and dramatic irony—in which a character's words have one meaning for them, but have a different meaning to those who know something the character does not.

C. Exercise

1. What is prose and what are its characteristics?
2. What do style, tone, and irony mean?

D. Answer Key

1. The prose is a lot more normal as it uses a language that is ordinarily used while writing or speaking. Prose is written in term of sentences and paragraphs. It developed later than poetry and its style is usually traceable to particular author or genre. Novels and short stories are examples of prose. The content of the prose can be fictional, nonfictional and heroic. Fictional prose employs creative design and imaginative writing. The examples can be parables, drama, novels and short stories. When writing is fact based, it is called non-fictional prose. The examples can be biographies and formal essays. Heroic prose is based on popular tales. It employs aggrandizement of age-old expressions which are often transmitted through oral traditions. They include fables, lore and legends.

   Its characteristics are plot, setting, characters, point of view, symbol, theme, and style, tone, and irony.

2. An author's style may contribute significantly to the meaning and effectiveness of a work. As noted, part of what determines an author's style is tone. Tone reveals the attitude taken by the author or narrator toward characters, places, and events—whether that attitude is sympathetic, humorous, indifferent, angry, etc. Indeed, without paying careful attention to tone, one may miss irony—a figure of speech in which the actual intent of words is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning. Other forms of irony include situational irony—in which there is an incongruity between what is expected to happen and what does happen, and dramatic irony—in which a character's words have one meaning for them, but have a different meaning to those who know something the character does not.

E. References

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