

Coming of Age Literature

Terms to Know

What is Literary Analysis?

- An attempt to carefully examine, evaluate and interpret works of literature.

Coming-of-Age Story

- A narrative in which a character—often a child or young person—first learns a significant, usually life-changing truth about the universe, society, people, or himself or herself; also called an initiation or rites-of-passage story.

BILDUNGSROMAN

- German, meaning literally a “novel of development.”
- Subcategories include “formation, education, or culture.”
- Focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the **protagonist** from youth to adulthood. **Change is extremely important.**
- Usually in the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave on a journey.
- This type of story evolves from folktales in which a youngest son leaves his family on a journey or quest.

BILDUNGSROMAN

- The goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty.
- The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. *Typically*, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he is ultimately accepted into society. **Not always.**
- Sometimes the opposite occurs and the protagonist rails against the established society.

BILDUNGSROMAN

- The process of maturation is long, strenuous and gradual, involving repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order.
- The main character often develops through "self-actualization." Self-actualization is defined as: "the achievement of one's full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world."
- Examples of a Bildungsroman would be the *Harry Potter* series, *The Hunger Games* series. Both Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen are examples of Bildungsroman protagonists.

SYMBOLISM

- Using a person, place, thing, or event to figuratively represent or stand for something else. Often the thing or idea represented is more abstract and general, and the symbol is more concrete and particular.
 - A dove is a symbol that can be a few things, such as...
- A **traditional symbol** recurs frequently in (and beyond) literature, making it immediately recognizable to those who belong to a given culture. In Western literature and culture, for example, the rose and snake traditionally symbolize love and evil respectively.
- Some symbols may accumulate their complex meanings only within a particular literary work.
 - The mockingjay, for example, is an important symbol within *The Hunger Games* books.

SETTING

- The time and place of the action in a work of fiction. The spatial setting refers to the place or places in which action unfolds.
 - Temporal setting: the period in time in which action unfolds (temporal setting is thus the same as plot time.)
 - General setting: the general time and place in which all the action unfolds.
 - Particular settings: the times and places in which individual episodes or scenes take place.
 - **Both general and specific settings include the cultural, economic, manufactured, natural, political, religious, social and temporal environment or contexts of a work, including everything that the characters know and own.**

Putting SETTING in CONTEXT

- The environment of a work of literature is considered the context. Context works with setting. Anything beyond the specific words of a literary work that may be relevant to the meaning of a literary work is considered Context. Context may be economic, religious, social, cultural, historical, literary, political, biographical, etc. For example, in Shakespeare, contexts include the political rule of Queen Elizabeth and King James; the religious context of Calvinism; the social context of rivalry between the sexes; and the literary context of Renaissance literature.

Putting SETTING in Context

- In *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, contexts would include geographical (England), natural (the way animals and natural spaces figure in the text – owls for example), cultural (the culture of the Muggle world vs. the magic world), economic (Mr. Dursley owns a company that manufactures drills and Harry Potter is orphaned and becomes dependent economically on the Dursleys), social (the fact that our protagonist Harry Potter and other characters are coming of age/growing up and moving from childhood to adulthood), etc. If I ask you for a setting and context from Rowling's novel you might say that the Zoo Harry visits with the Dursleys is a setting and the context could be cultural, natural or manufactured. Awareness of CONTEXT is important to understanding and interpreting almost every kind of literature.

Conflict

- A struggle between opposing forces that sets the action in motion.
- An *external conflict* pits a character against something or someone outside himself or herself—another character or characters or something in nature or society.
 - Harry's Conflict with Dudley. Dudley is constantly teasing and bullying Harry.
- An *internal conflict* happens when the opposing forces are two drives, impulses, or parts of a single character.
 - When Harry makes the glass in front of the snake at the zoo disappear. He does not necessarily do so consciously and this could represent an internal conflict.

Conflict

- Man vs Man
 - Harry vs. Dudley
- Man vs Nature
 - Hagrid vs. the sea (When he takes Harry from the Hut on the Rock by boat they must row and Hagrid uses his magic umbrella to move the boat forward)
- Man vs Self
 - Harry has to run between Platform Nine and Ten to get to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters (he has to believe it will work to get through to the Hogwarts Train)
- Man vs Society
 - Harry's magical powers vs. The Dursleys and the Muggle World. The Dursleys do everything they can to stop Harry from learning of his heritage and developing his magical powers. But in the end he goes to Hogwarts and learns the truth.

INITIATION

- An **initiation story** is story whose overall plot is concerned with putting the protagonist through a particular sort of experience -- initiation into something for which his/her previous experience had not prepared him/her.
- **The idea is the character is forced, by the what he/she encounters in the course of the action, to "reformulate" himself or herself.**
- Some initiation plots will turn on an **epiphany**.
- In others, the **protagonist** may make this change over time.
- This term is sometimes used interchangeably with rite of passage and/or bildungsroman.

Archetype

- A recurrent plot pattern, image, descriptive detail, or character that evokes from the reader strong but illogical responses. Archetypes recur in the myths and literature of all cultures and examples include:
 - the villain (character type)
 - the rite of passage (ritual)
 - the quest (plot pattern)
 - good vs. evil (plot pattern)

Archetype

- The term, and our contemporary understanding of it, derives from the work of psychologist Carl Jung (1875– 1961), who argued that archetypes emerge from—and give us a clue to the workings of—the “collective unconscious,” Lying deep within the mind, the collective unconscious is the **collective** knowledge of humanity, the memories of humanity’s past. Formed through the repeated experiences of humankind, this knowledge can be tapped through images of birth, death, rebirth, the seasons, and so forth within a text and can cause profound emotions to surface within the reader.

Archetype

- An example from Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone might be the archetypal “orphan experience,” (Harry is orphaned when his parents are killed). A character archetype might be Snape (the classical villain archetype) or Hagrid (the gentle giant archetype – a big powerful person with a tender heart).
- A “journey” or “initiation” could also be an archetype. For example, leaving for college is an archetypal experience.
- A character type can also be an archetype such as a “bully.” Dudley Dursley is arguably the archetype of a bully and spoiled brat.
- Archetypes can also be symbols, but generally are so well known to us that they rise beyond the specific text to the universal experience – such as the archetype of woman as “the temptress.”

RITE OF PASSAGE

- An incident which creates tremendous growth signifying a transition from adolescence to adulthood. An example might be learning to drive a car or a first kiss.
- A ceremony or event marking an important stage in someone's life, especially birth, the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage, and death:
- A novel which depicts the state of adolescence and the rites of passage that lead to adulthood
- Is sometimes a term used interchangeably with "bildungsroman."