Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story

In every good story, a writer uses numerous elements in order to help it develop. Writers use elements such as language, voice, tone, plot, setting, characters and structure as tools to build their story. In “Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story” by Russell Banks, Banks uses all of these elements to capture his audience. Banks also uses explicit detail in his story so that his readers can visualize the setting and characters themselves.

The first line of the story is “To begin, then, here is a scene in which I am the man and my friend Sarah Cole is the woman.” The author uses this line to create the first setting of the story. He continues to build the setting by explaining to us in the next few lines that this is a story from the past. He tells us that it is decades later and that Sarah is dead. In these first few lines Banks also describes to us in detail that Sarah was very ugly. He uses details such as “homeliest woman I have ever seen” and says that there were not many uglier than her, unless they had a “grotesque, disfiguring disease.” Banks use of details in this first paragraph allows his readers to create a mental picture of what they believe Sarah looks like. The reader would be able to use this image throughout the rest of the story, because Banks described it so vividly in the first few lines. This adds to the structure of the story because Banks can essentially build on the story from the bottom.

Banks’ next paragraph begins with the setting. “Here is the scene. You can put it in the present, even though it took place ten years ago.” Banks uses the continuous development of his setting to further tell his story. He goes on to tell us the physical setting of the story, which is Concord, New Hampshire. In the next few lines Banks tells us the exact time and day, which is a

Wednesday in late May. This detailed explanation of the setting keeps the reader interested and allows Banks to vividly tell the story of Sarah Cole. Banks then puts his readers in a cocktail lounge that is decorated with hanging plants and upholstered booths. These details also add to the plot of Banks' story.

Banks goes on to explain three or four men that he sees sitting at the bar. He describes what they are wearing and likely what their professions are by judging their outfits and looks. Much like the rest of the story, Banks uses second-person point-of-view to recollect on his story. Banks uses second-person point-of-view to retell this story because although it is fictional, the narrator is who lived through the experience. Banks continues to develop the setting throughout the next few lines by using descriptive details. He also uses details to begin to introduce new characters to us, much like he did in the first paragraph when he described the narrator's appearance compared to Sarah Cole's. In this paragraph we meet Ron. Ron is described as "effortlessly attractive, a genetic wonder, tall, slender, symmetrical and clean." Banks' uses the narrator in these lines to vividly describe to the readers what Ron looks like. We learn that Ron is humble, and nice despite how attractive he is, which the narrator tells us how uncommon this is in a man.

In the next paragraph Banks uses the narrator again to better develop the stories setting and also its plot. We learn that Ron is setting at the bar, unfolding the evening's paper. We learn that Ron has spent a lot of time in the bar recently since his divorce in the fall. We are given detail into Ron's life before his divorce and what led up to it. Banks use of second-person point of view allows the readers to put themselves into the narrator's shoes and watch the story unfold. The structure of the story is somewhat like a pyramid. We start from a very low point that is also very broad. Throughout the story we gain more and more detail in order to help develop the story

entirely. Banks's use of this structure keeps his readers interested until the end of the story because it is difficult to pick up on what will happen at the end of the story.

In the next paragraph we learn of the first interaction between Ron and Sarah Cole. Banks uses details in this paragraph to depict exactly what Sarah is wearing, how she looks in it and also how old she looks. Banks says her yellow t-shirt "clings to her arms, breasts, and round belly like the skin of a sausage." Readers are able to picture exactly what Sarah looks like which helps the plot develop because they already know that Ron is very attractive and that this would be an unlikely couple.

Banks uses tone and voice throughout the story. The tone of this story through the narrator's voice seems to be very sarcastic. We can tell as readers by the tone and the voice of this story that the narrator was at one point fond of Sarah Cole, but that there may have been a bitter ending between the two of them before Sarah died. The language that Banks uses in the story also helps to develop the plot. He uses descriptive words and also somewhat derogatory terms when it comes to what Sarah looks like. Banks also uses vivid imagery throughout the story in order for his readers to picture exactly what is happening in every scene without being given pictures.

We learn in the next few paragraphs that the narrator is actually Ron, the attractive man sitting at the bar. This detail helps thicken the plot of the story because we know that Ron has been sitting at the bar with Sarah. We also know from the beginning of the story that Sarah is dead now. This is where Banks seems to shift the point-of-view of the story to where the narrator is now clearly Ron, retelling the story of him and Sarah Cole. Banks has his narrator use words such as "me" and "I" now rather than telling the story from another outside character at the bar.

In the next few lines Banks continues to use imagery as he tells us of the interactions between Ron and Sarah outside the bar, next to her heavily smashed car.

Banks goes on to use dialogue in the next paragraph in order for his readers to greater understand the relationship between Sarah and Ron. Using dialogue in this part of the story allows readers to visualize the interactions between the two characters. Banks also uses the dialogue between these two characters in the next multiple paragraphs to help us understand the societal differences between the two. Banks continues to use descriptive words and imagery throughout these paragraphs such as when he refers to Sarah's shoulders as "doughy." Readers are able to create a visual that Sarah is not a small girl. In the next few paragraphs we are given more detail into the physical appearance of Sarah and also what her home looks like. She has large veins ep the backs of her legs and she lives in great poverty. These details both aid in the plot of the story but also in the character development of both Sarah and Ron. Banks uses Ron as the narrator telling us these facts in order for the readers to better understand what Ron is seeing first hand when he looks at Sarah. Banks continues to use detail in this paragraph to describe Sarah's children and how ordinary they look compared to Sarah's unattractiveness. These details also aid in the plot because we are given insight into what Ron is wearing and how expensive it is compared to the poverty that Sarah lives in.

Banks uses multiple elements throughout his story in order to better develop it. Banks' use of descriptive language and detail along with his development of character allows the readers to put themselves into the story. Banks's use of second-person point-of-view and then first-person point-of-view also aids in the telling of this story. The tone and voice of the story are also important in the development of the story in order for the readers to better understand the relationship between the two characters.