

# Elements of Fiction

- Plot
- Characterization
- Setting
- Theme
- Symbol
- Irony
- Point of View

# Plot

- Plot is dependent upon *conflict*, or, to use another term, an *unstable situation*.

# Conflict



**Star Wars**

# Plot

- There are commonly 3 kinds of conflict.

# Man vs. Man



**Star Wars**

# Man vs. Nature



**The Empire Strikes Back**

# Man vs. Self



**Bridge on the River Kwai**

# Plot

- Plot is a series of *connected events* divided into 3 basic divisions.



# Plot

- Plot is a series of *connected events* divided into 3 basic divisions:
  - Rising Action

# Rising Action



A  
i  
i  
a  
d  
i  
n

# Plot

- Plot is a series of *connected events* divided into 3 basic divisions:
  - Rising Action
  - Climax

# Climax



A  
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# Plot

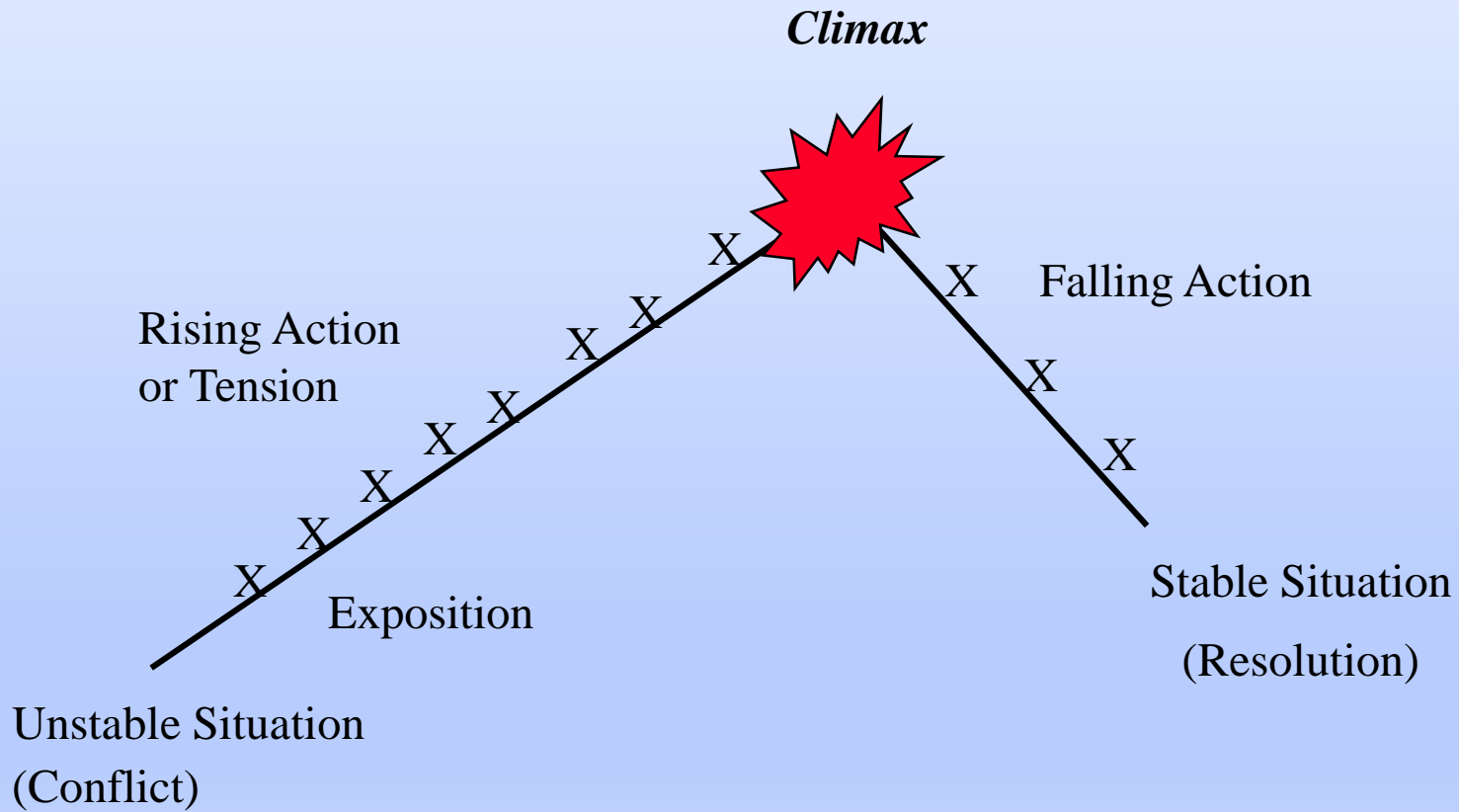
- Plot is a series of *connected events* divided into 3 basic divisions:
  - Rising Action
  - Climax
  - Denouement

# Denouement



A  
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# Plot



# Plot

- Plot depends on two interlocking characters



# Plot

- Plot depends on two interlocking characters:
- Protagonist—  
The central or main character whose situation is in flux
- Antagonist—  
The character in opposition to the protagonist

# Protagonist



Star Wars

# Antagonist



**Alladin**

# Characterization

- Characterization is a **major** element in American Fiction
- We determine character of a fictional person in the same manner we do of “real” people:
- By what they:
  - do
  - say
  - others say about them

# Characterization

- There are two major kinds of characters:

# Simple (Flat)



**Married with Children**

# Characterization

- There are two major kinds of characters:

Complex (Round)



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# Gone with the Wind



# Setting

- Place
  - Geographical Setting
  - Social Setting
- Time
  - Date of plot or story
  - Date of story's composition
  - Length of time to read or time perceived

# Theme

- Theme is an idea, or message, contained in a work of fiction.
- It can be related to the *thesis* in Non-fiction

# Rules for Themes

- Theme is Not the Same as a Topic or Subject.

- Topic: Love

- Theme: Love can kill!

# Rules for Theme

- Theme must apply to people outside the work.

“Love can kill? Oh yeah, my Uncle Jim-Bob loved her so much he robbed stores to buy her jewels that she never asked for. He got himself shot.”

# Rules for Theme

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*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway, offers two themes:

- Personal honor requires fulfilling duty, even unto death.
- Nothing is more important than loving and life.

# Rules for Theme

- Some works may have NO theme.

Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Black Cat" would challenge a reader to find any theme other than the simplistic idea that drinking can lead to domestic violence.

Poe went to great lengths to avoid theme in favor of emotional effect.



# Rules for Theme

- Theme can be a question rather than a statement.

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Herman Melville's novel Billy Budd raises questions about military discipline during war, rather than answers or offers suggestions.

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Examples:

- Hamlet
- Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
- War and Peace
- Don Quixote

# Symbols

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# Symbols

- A symbol is when an object (or person) has meaning beyond its literary self:

Two types of symbols:

# Symbols

- A symbol is when an object (or person) has meaning beyond its literary self:

Two types of symbols:

- Public
- Private



# Public Symbols

- Public symbols are symbols common to a given society.
- These symbols may not transfer meanings across cultural borders.

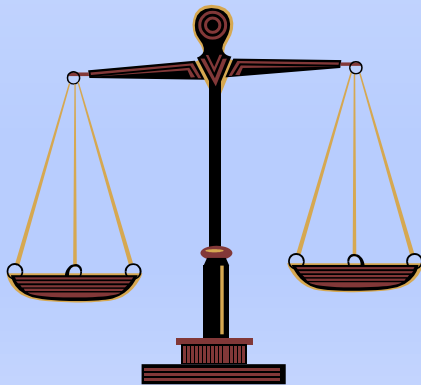
# Public Symbols



# Public Symbols



# Public Symbols



# Private Symbols

- Private Symbols are symbols used in a particular way in any given story or by author.



In the works of Flannery O'Connor, police officers are symbols of angels sent with divine messages

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In Ernest Hemingway's Africa stories, the lion is a symbol not only of courage but also of the freedom courage provides.

# Irony

- Irony makes apparent the contrast between perception and reality.
- There are four types of irony.

# Verbal Irony

- Verbal irony commonly makes use of Overstatement and Understatement.
- Overstatement:
  - In *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain greatly exaggerates his encounter with pickpockets in Paris, comparing it to a wild west stage coach robbery.
- Understatement:
  - Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* tells Romeo that his mortal stab wound is “but a scratch.”



# Situational Irony

- This is when the situation is different than what common sense dictates.
- When Henry, in Stephen Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, is injured while running away from battle, his head wound is mistaken for a combat wound, and he is honored for his “red badge.”

# Attitudinal Irony

- Reality, or the particular situation, is different than what the character(s) or reader(s) expect.
- In *Candide*, Candide expects this world to be the best of all worlds, but he continuously encounters the worse people and events that life can offer.

# Dramatic Irony

- Dramatic irony is perhaps the most powerful from the readers' standpoint because they know the outcome of the plot or the story, while the characters obviously do not. In general, the readers come to like the characters whose fates, commonly death, they know.

# Dramatic Irony

- The story of the defenders of the Alamo during the Texas Revolution is the most filmed western genre story in the world.

# Dramatic Irony

- The most recent popular story is that of the *SS Titanic*. History provides many of the events upon which the stories are based.
- Like tragedy, Dramatic Irony causes the audience to feel a *catharsis*, an “emotion cleansing.”

# Point of View

- This is defined as the author's relationship to his or her fictional world. It is also the position from which the story is told.

# Point of View

- There are FOUR points of view used in narrative fiction:
  - Omniscient
  - Limited Omniscient
  - First Person
  - Objective

# Omniscient

- This means the narrator, the one “telling” the story to the reader, is “all knowing.” What this means is that the story-teller understands character, motives, background, and usually reveals all to the reader.
- Example
  - *East of Eden*



# Limited Omniscient

- The author restricts revelations to a single character (at a time), sometimes giving only the mind, thoughts, and background.
- Example:
  - “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall”
  - *The Oxbow Incident*

# First Person

- Only the direct thoughts and words of a single character are given. The entire plot must play itself out before the central character. Popular in novels.
- Example:
  - *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
  - *Catch 22*

# Objective

- Author refuses to to enter a character's mind. Only the actions and words are revealed, no thoughts, emotion, or background are given unless verbally stated or physically displayed by the characters.
- Example:
  - The Nick Adams short stories by Ernest Hemingway

## Remember:

Fiction is more than a collection of parts, or elements. As with the unities of drama and the aesthetics of art, fiction presents a greater truth than sum of its parts.

In other words, the work is greater than a sum of its parts.



