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CHAPTER THREE: FICTION

Definition

In the literary context, **fiction** refers to a narrative written in prose (novel, novella, short story) and, sometimes, is used as a synonym for the **novel**. The latter is the last of the three main literary forms to evolve. It exists on a spectrum between history and myth at either end, which allows it to acquire aspects from both. The Western novel is traced to *Don Quixote* (1605–15) and 18th-century English writers like Defoe and Fielding. The novel remains the most prominent and commercial form of literature to this day. **The short story** and the **novella** share all their elements and aspects with the novel except for the length.

Elements of Fiction

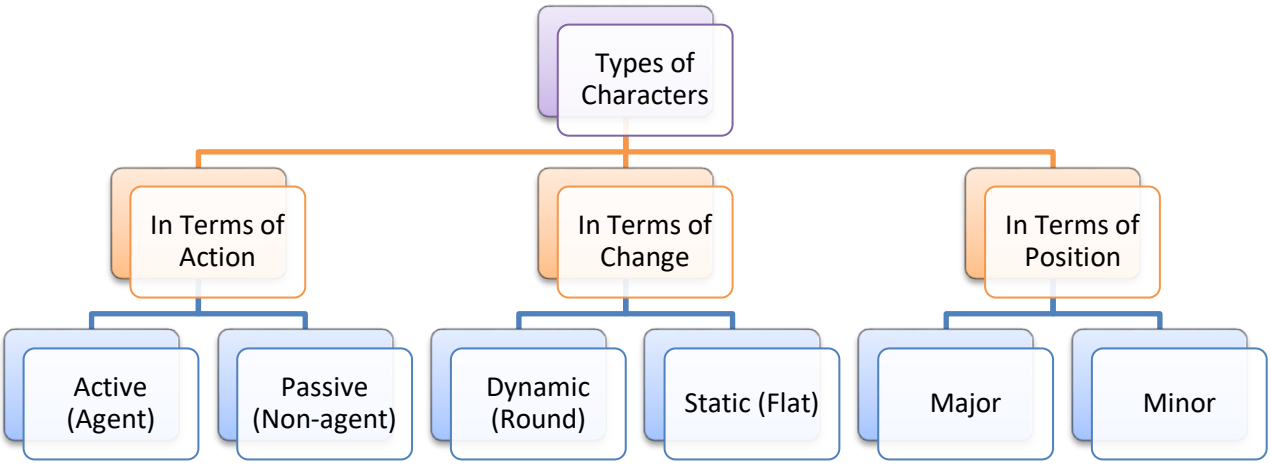
1. **Setting:** it refers to the time and the place of a narrative or dramatic literary work.

2. **Character:** an imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Literary characters are categorized in terms of three criteria: position, change, and action:

2.1. Major and Minor Characters: Most literary works are focused on one character. This character is called the central character, leading character, main character, or **protagonist**. If the protagonist has another character, force, or element that opposes them, that character, force, or element is referred to as the **antagonist.** Examples of this can be nature, society, family, a rival, etc. If there's a character that contrasts with or reflects the protagonist to highlight certain traits, it is referred to as a **foil**. The rest of the characters are called minor or supporting characters.

2.2. Dynamic and Static Characters: Throughout the plot, some fictional characters experience a change in character, behavior, social status, or any other aspect. Such a character is called a **dynamic** one. It can also be referred to as a **round character** because, like a circle, its position does not remain at one level. In contrast, a character that stays at the same level on all aspects and does not change from the beginning of the fictional work until the end is called a **static** or **flat** character.

2.3.Active and Passive Characters: Through a different scale, if a character appears to commit actions in the fictional work, affecting the path that the plot takes, the character is perceived as **active** or **agent**. However, if the character is reluctant to take action or is more immersed in thinking at the expense of acting, it is referred to as **passive** or **non-agent**.



3. **Theme:** The theme is the general idea of the fictional work. Every theme is accompanied by a thematic statement that indicates the perspective that the work adopts toward the given theme. The central theme can have other supporting themes that advocate the same idea, or simply multiple themes altogether. The earlier novels were more focused on social themes such as social mobility, child labor, poverty, marriage, etc. The themes of the novel often align with the historical background of the time in which the novel is being written.

4. **Narrator:** The voice and implied speaker of a fictional work. The narrator is distinguished from the actual living author. There are four types of narrators:

First-Person Narrator: Told from the perspective of a character, using "I" or "we."

The following passage from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is an illustration of this:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids-- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination-- indeed, everything and anything except me.

Second-Person Narrator: Told from the perspective of the reader, using "you."

The following passage from Italo Calvino's *if on a winter's night a traveler* is an illustration of this:

> You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, If on a winter's night a traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice— they won't hear you

otherwise—"I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" Maybe they haven't heard you, with all that racket; speak louder, yell: "I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!" Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone.

Third-Person Limited: Told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator, who is not part of the plot but knows the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a single character (often the protagonist).

The following passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is an illustration of this:

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

Third-Person Omniscient: Told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator, who is not part of the plot yet knows the thoughts, feelings, and actions of all characters.

The following passage from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is an illustration of this:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters.

There is a subtype of the third-person narrator known as a 'fly-on-the-wall' narrator, who observes the actions and events of all characters without knowing their inner thoughts or unspoken feelings. An example of this is Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants."

Narrative Arc

Definition

Every fictional work is characterized by a narrative arc (also referred to as a dramatic structure or stages of the plot). It is important to note that the flexibility of the novel as a literary form allows some works (such as modernist and postmodernist novels) to experiment with the narrative, creating sets that diverge from the traditional narrative arc. The traditional plot includes 5 stages:

1. **Exposition**
2. **Rising Action**
3. **Climax**
4. **Falling Action**
5. **Resolution or Denouement**

The **exposition** of a story introduces characters' backstory and key information about the setting. With this foundation laid, the dramatic tension then builds, thus creating the **rising action** of the story through a series

of related events that complicate and exacerbate the major conflicts of the story. The turning point of the story occurs at the **climax** , which typically changes the main character's fate or reveals how the conflict will move toward resolution, either favorably or perhaps tragically. The **falling action** works to unravel the tension at the core of the major conflict or conflicts in the story and between the characters, although it may include one last twist that impacts the resolution of events. **Denouement** is derived from the Old French word *desnouer* ("to untie"); the term suggests that the knot of conflict generating the tension in the story at last is loosened. Of course, not every aspect of the conflict may be resolved or may be resolved to the satisfaction of the reader. Indeed, in some stories, the author may intend that the reader should be left to weigh the validity or even the morality of further outcomes.

