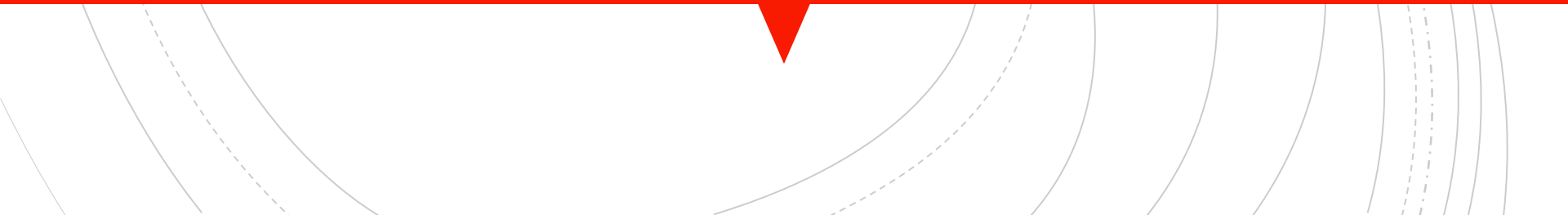




Anatomy of a Novel

The Nuts and Bolts of Reading Fiction



The Novel: a Definition



- There are many ways to define a novel, but for our purposes:
 - **A made-up work about made-up people in a made-up place**

- Voice gives a novel its life
- The narrator is what largely determines the “**voice**”
- Never confuse the narrative voice with the author’s voice
 - The narrative voice is an invention of the author
 - As imaginary as the story

A Made-Up Work...



My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too.

- Just like the narrator, characters are only make-believe
 - Minor characters tend to be flat
 - Major characters have more depth
- Authors can never give us the whole story
- But if they could, most wouldn't

About
Made-Up
People...




“Iceberg Effect”

- The truth of every character, and therefore story, lies below the surface
- We are shown only a sliver of the story, but we read between the lines and dig beneath the surface to find meaning

- Like the narrator and characters, places in a novel are never real either—but they must *seem* real
- **“Willing Suspension of Disbelief”**
 - The contract between the reader and the writer
 - We agree to buy into this pretend world in exchange for the promise of internal consistency (i.e., that the writer will not change the rules midway through)

In a
Made-Up
Place...

- 
- But why make up places?
 - Some stories, some themes, need their own space
 - Epic romances need epic space
 - Timeless adventures need timeless places
 - Sometimes we want to know more than just what the world is; we want to know what the world feels like
 - And we participate in the creation of these worlds by “suspending” our “disbelief”

Element One Voice



- Voice is the “**sound**” of the narrator
 - It must be authentic, and it must mask the author’s presence
- Three devices maintain the illusion
 1. Point of View
 2. Internal Monologue
 3. Diction and Syntax

- Three devices make up this “sound”

- **Narrative Presence**

- Where the voice resides relative to the story: *Disembodied or Physical, Outside the Action or Part of it*

- **Narrative Quality**

- How the voice sounds to the reader: *Calm, Frantic, Weary, Enthusiastic, Reflective, Satiric, Mysterious*

- **Narrative Attitude**

- How the voice feels about others in the story: *Kind, Harsh, Thoughtful, Dismissive, Superior, Inferior*



P.O.V.



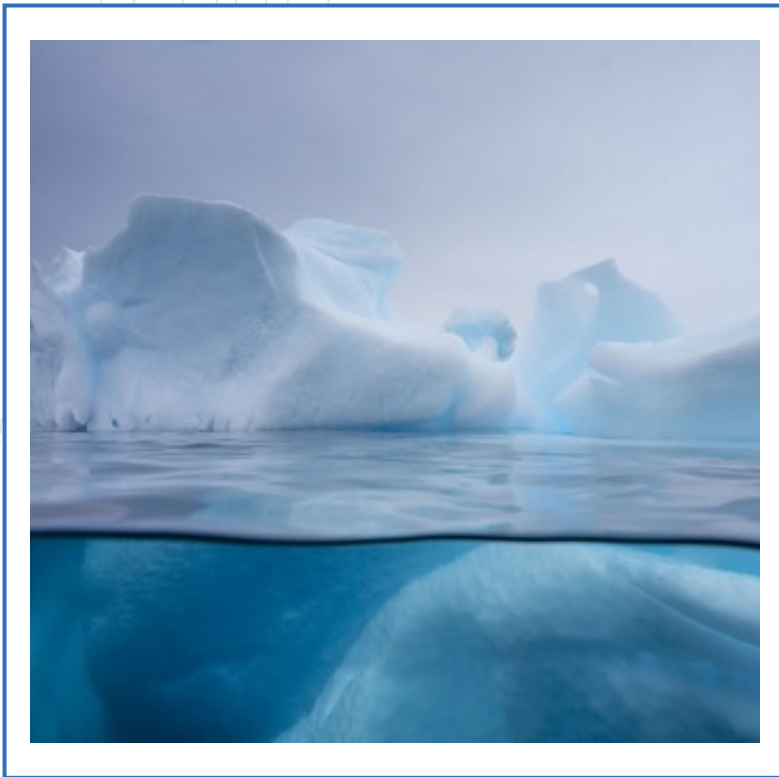
- 1st Person Central
 - Narrator is the protagonist
- 1st Person Secondary
 - Narrator is supporting character
- 3rd Person Omniscient
 - Knows all and sees all
- 3rd Person Limited
 - May know all and see all for some characters, but not all
- Stream of Consciousness
 - A technique that mimics the internal thought process

- 1st Person Narrative
 - Creates a sense of intimacy
- 3rd Person Narrative
 - Creates a sense of authority, but also distance
- 2nd Person Narrative
 - Creates the illusion that you are the main character
- Stream of Consciousness
 - Attempts to remove all “filters,” so we’re not just being told a story—we’re experiencing it
 - Interior Monologue and Memory
 - Voluntary vs. Involuntary Thoughts
 - Impressions, impulses, and perceptions—no matter how brief
 - Clock Time vs. Perceived Time



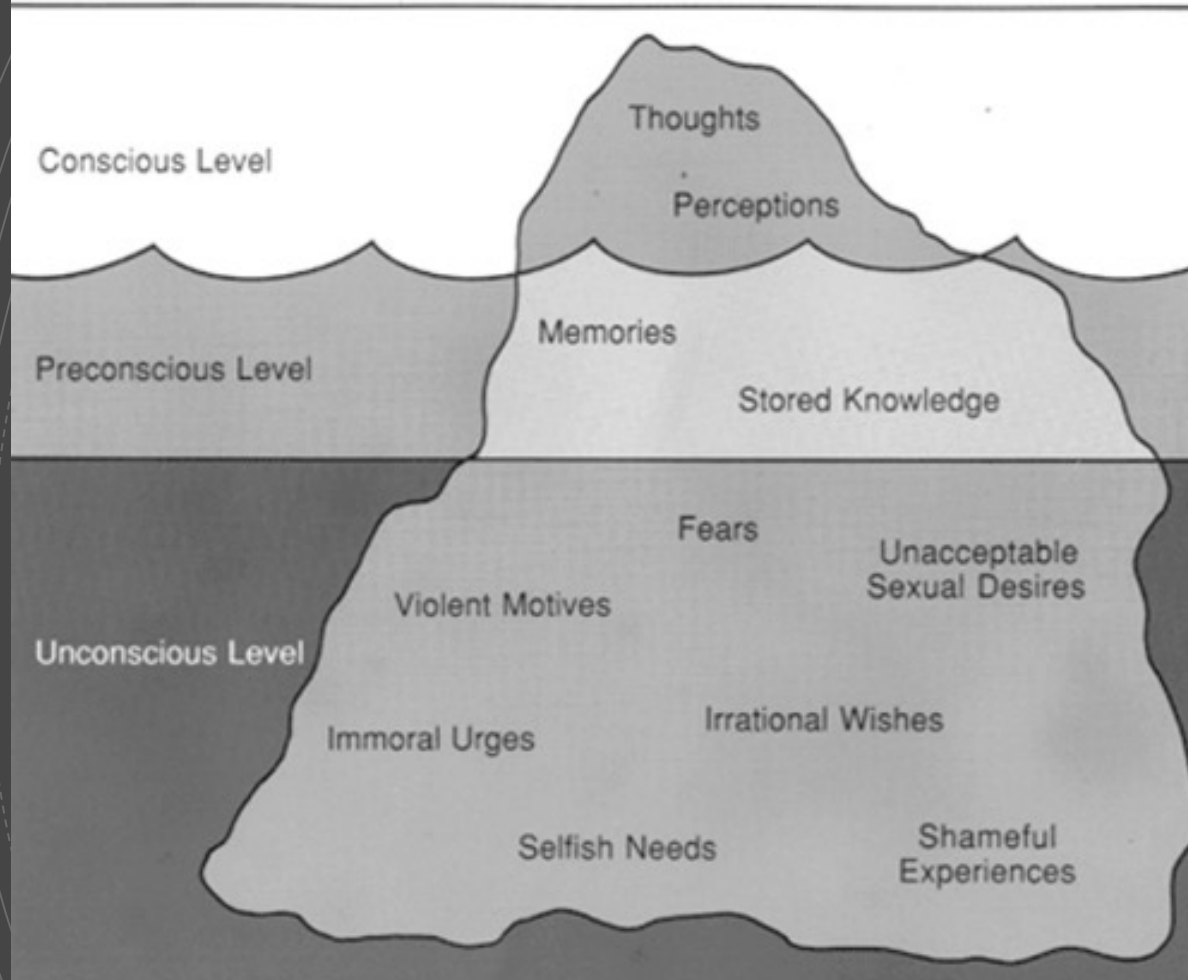
P.O.V.

Why Care?



- It has to do with perspective and trust—especially when dealing with 1st person p.o.v.
- What are we being shown?
- What aren't we being shown?
- How much should we believe?
- What lies beneath the iceberg?

PERS 5 Freud's View of the Human Mind: The Mental Iceberg





- Children tell us more than they understand
- Adults reveal only what they think is necessary
- Disturbed, insane, or compromised narrators yield disturbed, insane, or compromised narratives

1st Person Central

Call me Ismael.

I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.

I am an invisible man.

It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York.

The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling.



1st Person “Super” Central

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.

1st Person Secondary

We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street...

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

“Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.”

1st Person “Omniscient”

My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973. In newspaper photos of missing girls from the seventies, most looked like me: white girls with mousy brown hair. This was before kids of all races and genders started appearing on milk cartons or in the daily mail. It was still back when people believed things like that didn't happen.

3rd Person Limited

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic bug.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.

Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

3rd Person Omniscient

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

The story so far: in the beginning, the universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move.

124 was spiteful. Full of Baby's venom.

2nd Person


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.

2nd Person

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. Then again it might not.

Stream of Consciousness

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen...

 Oregon State
University

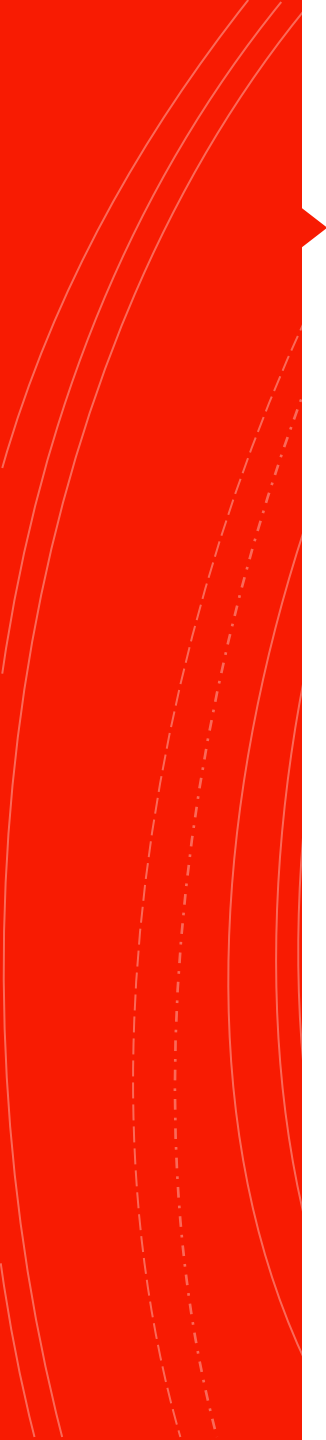


WHAT
IS
**STREAM OF
CONSCIOUSNESS**
IN
LITERATURE?

Element Two Character

- To know a character, we must know their desires
 - We understand characters not only by their physical description, but also by their motivations
- Always ask: **What do they want?**
 - All characters have a goal
 - Our job is to uncover that goal



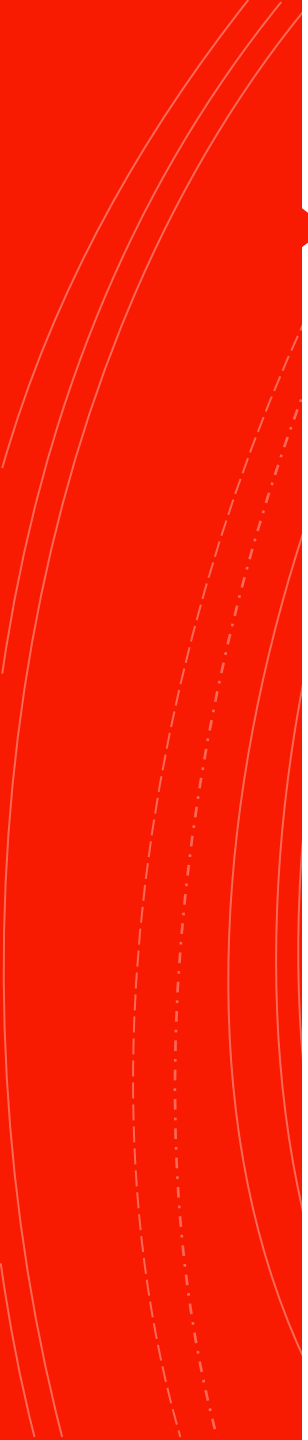


Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.

She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.

Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a principedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this triangle of thorns.



The best thing about my life up to here is, nobody believes it. I stopped trying to make people hear it long ago, and I'm nothing but a real middle-sized white woman that has kept on going with strong eyes and teeth for fifty-seven years. You can touch me; I answer. But it got to where I felt like the first woman landed from Pluto—people asking how I lasted through all I claimed and could still count to three, me telling the truth with an effort to smile and then watching them doubt it. So I've kept quiet for years

Now I've changed my mind and will try again. Two big new reasons. Nobody in my family lives for long, and last week I found somebody I'd lost or thrown away. All he knows about me is the little he's heard. He hasn't laid eyes on me since he was a baby and I vanished while he was down for a nap. I may very well be the last thing he wants at this late date. I'm his natural mother; he's almost forty and has got on without me.



Dear American Airlines,

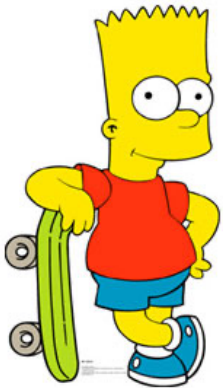
My name is Benjamin R. Ford and I am writing to request a refund in the amount of \$392.68. But then, no, scratch that: Request is too mincy & polite, I think, too officious & Britishy, a word that walks along the page with the ramrod straightness of someone trying to balance a walnut on his upper ass cheeks. Yet what am I saying? Words don't have ass cheeks! Dear American Airlines, I am rather demanding a refund in the amount of \$392.68. Demanding demanding demanding. In Italian, *richiedere*. *Verlangen* in German. But you catch my drift. Imagine, for illustrative purposes, that there's a table between us. Hear that sharp sound? That's me slapping the table. Me, Mr. Payable to Benjamin R. Ford, whapping the damn legs off it! Ideally you're also imagining concrete walls and a naked lightbulb dangling above us: Now picture me bursting to my feet and kicking the chair behind me, with my finger in your face and my eyes all red and squinty and frothy bittles of spittle freckling the edges of my mouth as I bellow, roar, yowl, as I bloooooow like the almighty mother of all blowholes: Give me my goddamn money back! See? Little twee request doesn't quite capture it, does it? Nossir. This is a demand. This is f-----g serious.



- We also understand characters by their “stuff”
 - Objects, images, and places that define them
 - All this “stuff” guides our responses to characters and becomes associated not just with the characters but with our ideas about the characters
- Always ask: **What sort of stuff defines them?**



007



Element Three Place

- Like the narrator and characters, all places—even if they actually exist—are only make-believe
- Particular characters populate particular places in particular ways
 - Middle Earth is very different from Narnia or the magic world beyond Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
 - *Sex and the City's* New York is very different from *Friends'* New York, which is very different from *Law & Order's* New York—yet all are recognizable
 - My Edwardsville is different from yours

Sense of Place



- Place is more than setting
- Place is more than when or where
- Place is atmosphere, time period, neighborhood, social class, perspective, and much much more
- A “**sense of place**” illuminates a particular corner of the earth and the way in which those who populate that corner perceive themselves both locally and within the context of the larger world



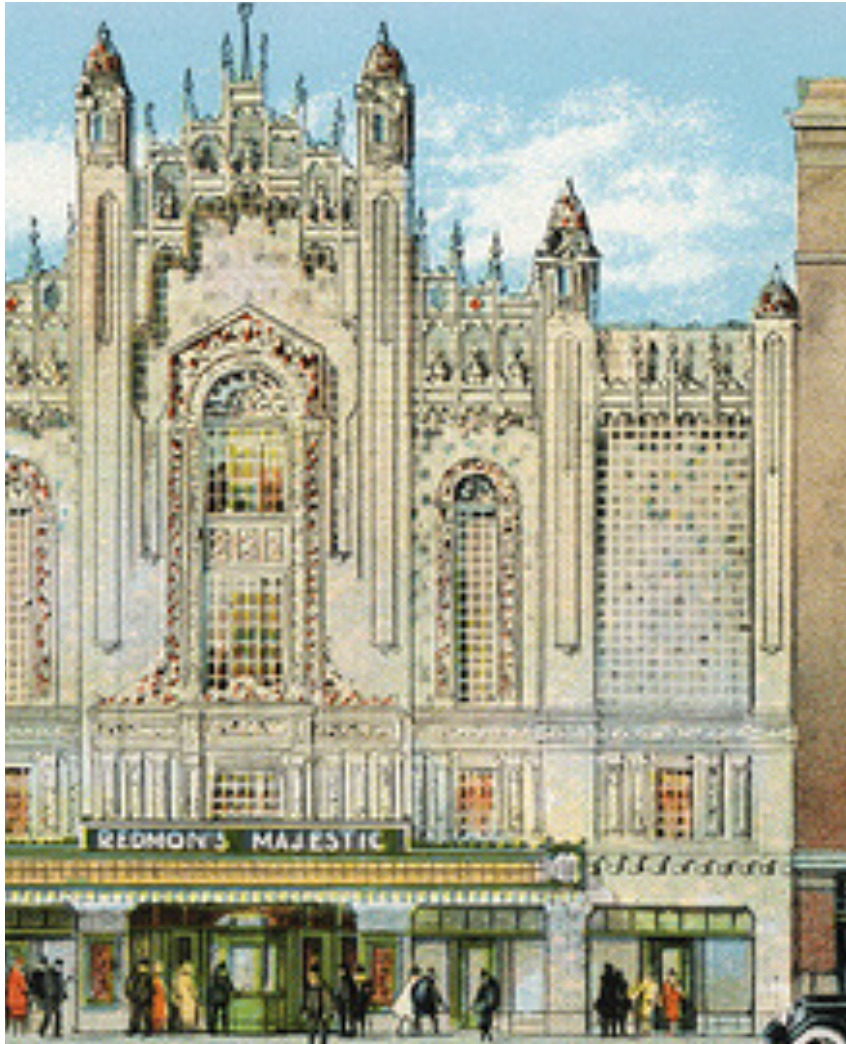
Edwardsville



East St. Louis



Edwardsville



Main Street, East St. Louis (1928)



Main Street, Edwardsville (1928)

Softly the snow falls. In the blue morning light a train winds through the hills. The engine pulls a passenger car, brightly lit. Then a dozen blind coal cars, rumbling dark.

Six mornings a week the train runs westward from Altoona to Pittsburgh, a distance of a hundred miles. The route is indirect, tortuous; the earth is buckled, swollen with what lies beneath. Here and there, the lights of a town: rows of company houses, narrow and square; a main street of commercial buildings, quickly and cheaply built. Brakes screech; the train huffs to a stop. Cars are added. In the passenger compartment, a soldier on furlough clasps his duffel bag, shivers and waits. The whistle blows. Wheezing, the engine leaves the station, slowed by the extra tons of coal.

The train crosses an iron bridge, the black water of the Susquehanna. Lights cluster in the next valley. The town, Bakerton, is already awake. Coal cars thunder down the mountain. The valley is filled with sound.

The valley is deep and sharply featured. Church steeples and mine tipples grow inside it like crystals. At bottom is the town's most famous landmark, known locally as the Towers, two looming piles of mine waste. They are forty feet high and growing, graceful slopes of loose coal and sulfurous dirt. The Towers give off an odor like struck matches. On windy days they glow soft orange, like the embers of a campfire. Scrap coal, spontaneously combusting; a million bits of coal bursting into flame.

Bakerton is Saxon County's boomtown. Like the Towers, it is alive with coal. A life that started in the 1880s, when two English brothers, Chester and Elias Baker, broke ground on Baker One. Attracted by handbills, immigrants came: English and Irish, then Italians and Hungarians; then Poles and Slovaks and Ukrainians and Croats, the "Slavish," as they were collectively known. With each new wave the town shifted to make room. Another church was constructed. A new cluster of company houses appeared at the edge of town. The work—mine work—was backbreaking, dangerous and bleak; but at Baker Brothers the union was tolerated. By the standards of the time the pay was generous, the housing affordable and clean.

The mines were not named for Bakerton; Bakerton was named for the mines. This is an important distinction. It explains the order of things.

Element Four Narrative

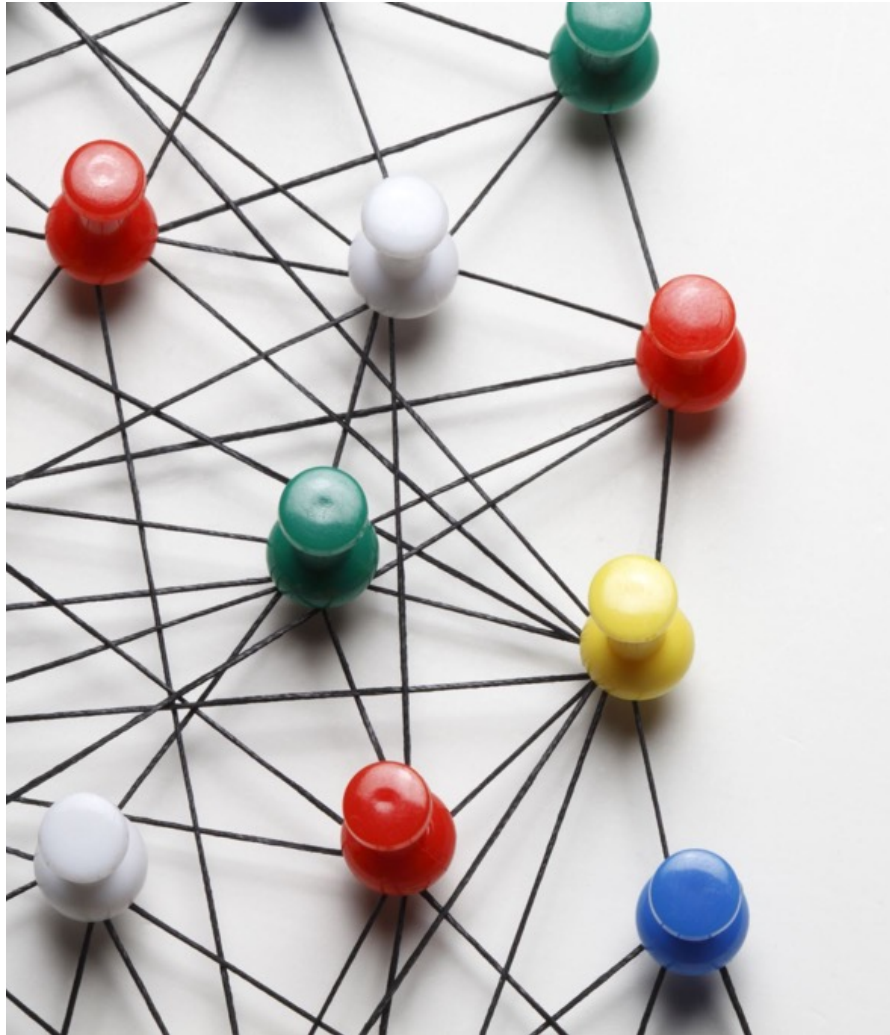


- Like everything else, it's designed to support our understanding of story, style, or theme
- Three questions to ask
 - **How is the narrative structured?**
 - **How is the narrative revealed?**
 - **How is the narrative paced?**

How is the narrative structured?



- In fiction, chapters provide structure
- Chapters exist to contain a meaningful block of story, breaking down a larger narrative into smaller, more manageable bites
- Chapters follow no rules but their own
- So long as they support the overall story, chapters can be anything
 - Separate Stories; Single Scenes; One Page or 100; they can shift perspective, develop theme, or act as a motif
 - Ask yourself how the chapters and their arrangement support the genre, style, theme, plot, setting, character development, etc.

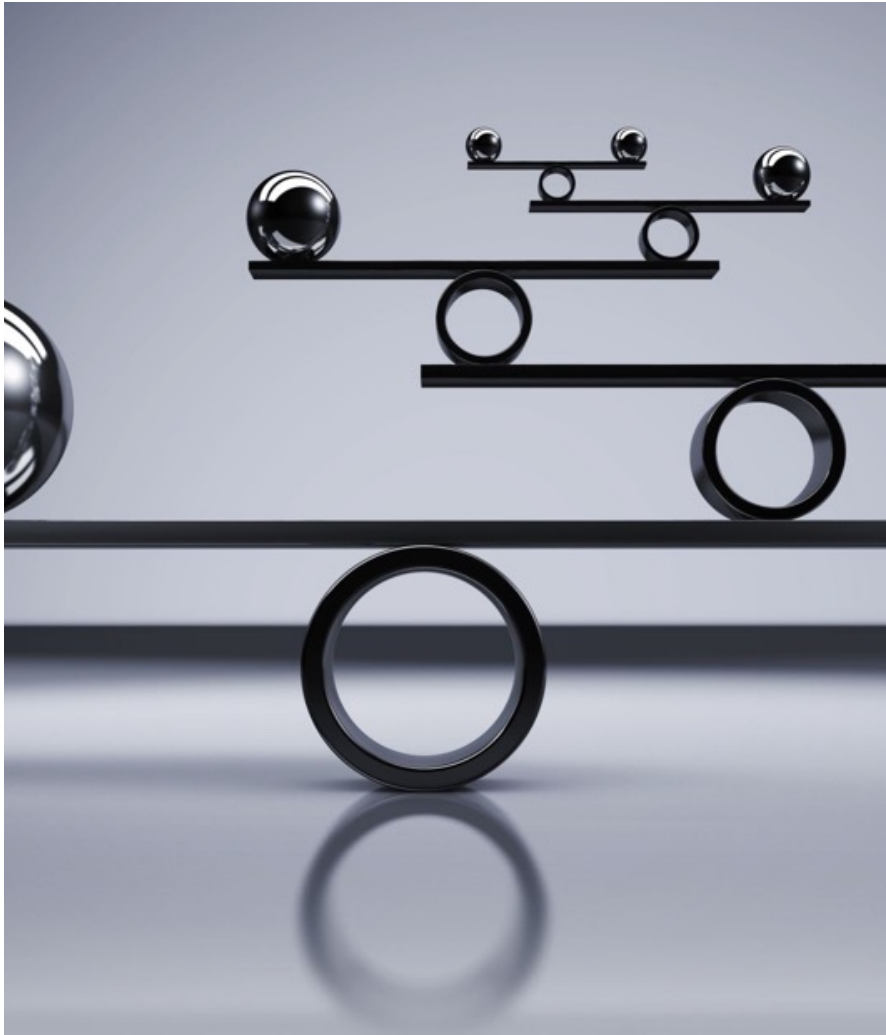


How is the narrative revealed?

- Linear?
- Non-Linear?
- Flashbacks?
- Flash Forwards?
- Backwards?

How is the narrative paced?

- Does it unfold in leaps and bounds or bits and pieces?
- Does time elapse slowly or quickly?
- Balance between dialogue and prose





Element Five
Style

- Style is the sum total—the overall effect—of those choices an author makes regarding literary elements and devices
- Voice, Point-of-View, Place, Narrative Structure, Metaphor, **Diction**, **Syntax**, Tone, et al—all working together to create a style

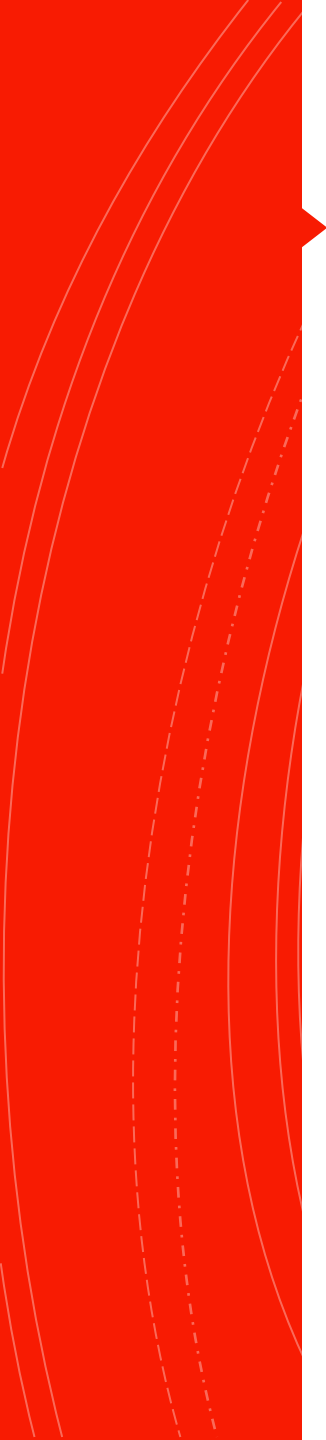


- Sentences are the lifeblood of a novel—and help determine a book’s style as much as anything
 - Just like chapters, there are no rules for sentences except those dictated by the story
 - Like everything, diction, syntax, and structure are a conscious choice and a decisive element in creating the overall effect

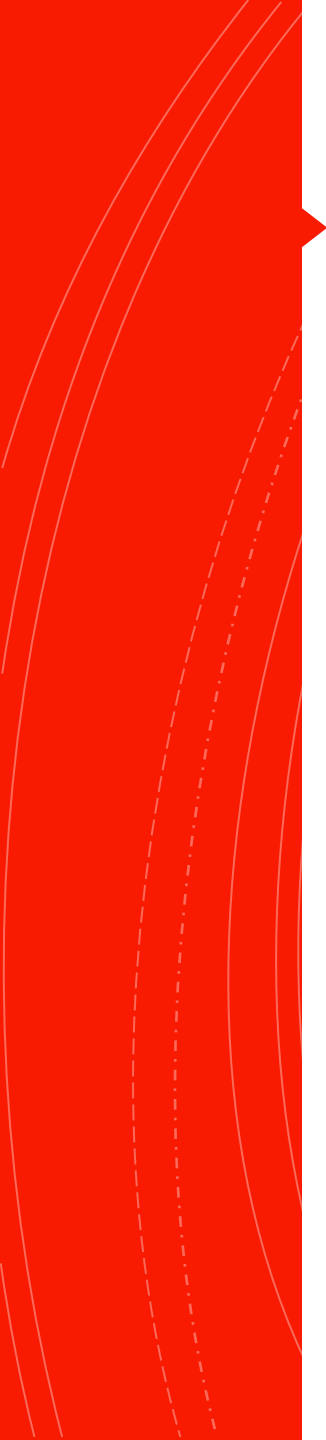
Why Care?

A photograph of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The top of the iceberg is visible above the water line, while the much larger, jagged base is submerged below. The sky is overcast and grey, and the water is dark blue.

- Style is what creates the “iceberg effect”
- We play an active role in interpreting the story
- We work to make sense of words, tease out meanings, build up associations, listen for subtle nuances and implications—we read *closely*



They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms—on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter even quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.



We drank three bottles of the champagne and the count left the basket in my kitchen. We dined at a restaurant in the Bois. It was a good dinner. Food had an excellent place in the count's values. So did wine. The count was in fine form during the meal. So was Brett. It was a good party.



“Well, how did you like the bulls?” he asked.

“Good. They were nice bulls.”

“They’re all right”—Montoya shook his head—“but they’re not so good.”

“What didn’t you like about them?”

“I don’t know. They just didn’t give me the feeling that they were so good.”

“I know what you mean.”

“They’re all right.”

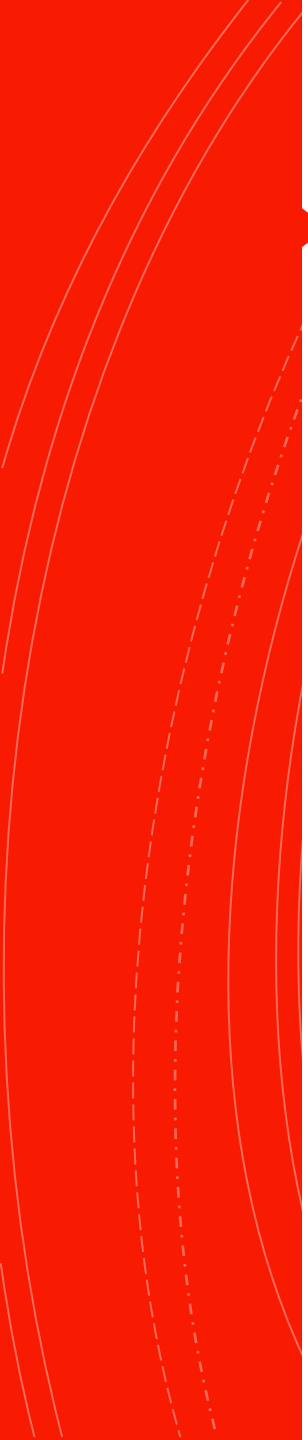
“Yes. They’re all right.”

“How did your friends like them?”

“Fine.”

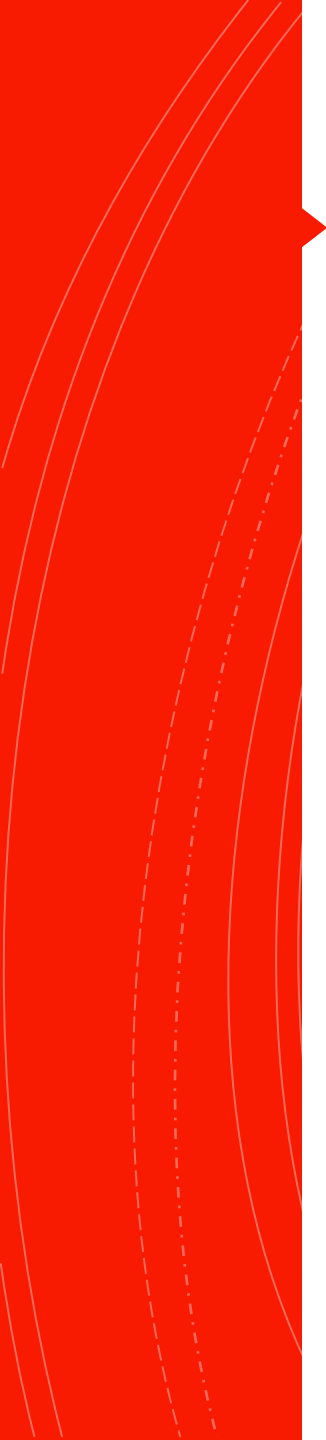
“Good,” Montoya said.

I went upstairs.

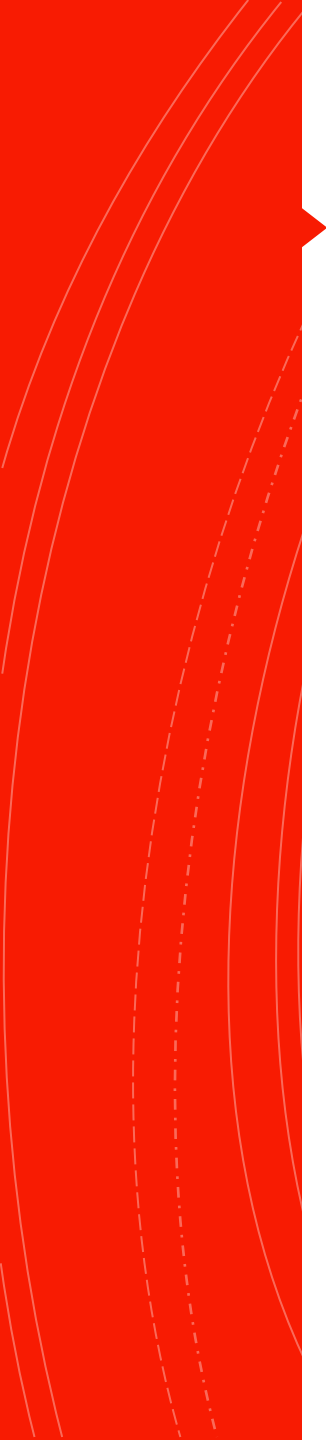


TRUE! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why WILL you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not destroyed, not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story.

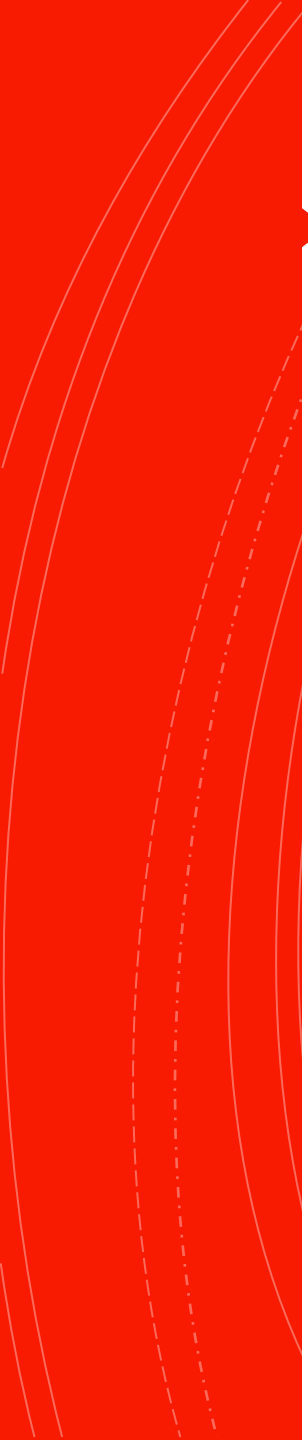
It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain, but, once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture -- a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me my blood ran cold, and so by degrees, very gradually, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.



You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly -- Tom's Aunt Polly, she is -- and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

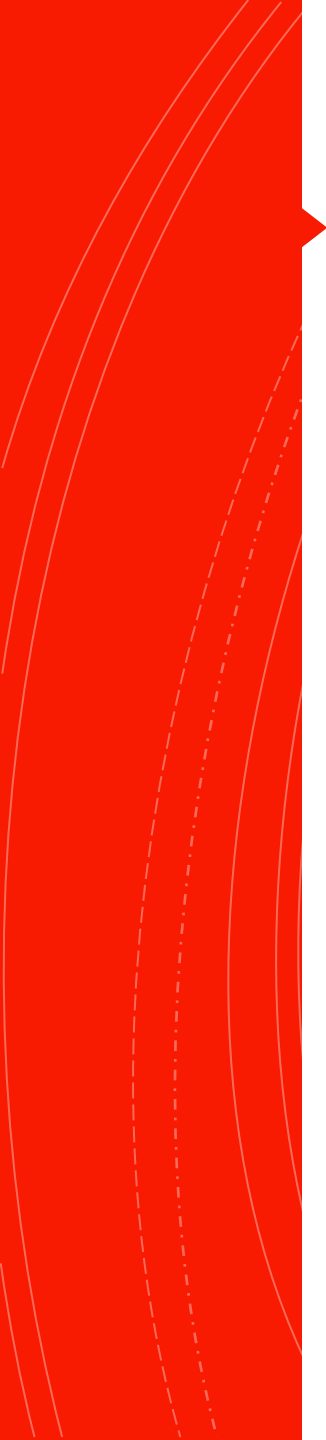


Though you will not recognize the characters portrayed in this work if you are unfamiliar with the author's earlier depiction of them in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* that is no cause of concern. Indeed, it is worth noting that *Tom Sawyer* contains more than its fair share of exaggeration and distortion despite the author's best efforts to report the facts honestly.



When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. When it healed, and Jem's fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury. His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh. He couldn't have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt.

When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident. I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. He said it began the summer Dill came to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.



riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passen-core rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatrick not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

- The style in which an author writes is an active choice, and must support the time period, the place, the genre, the theme, and the context of the story...

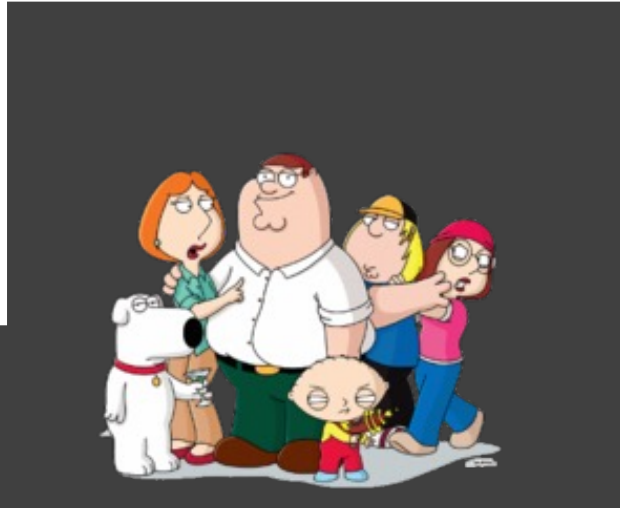
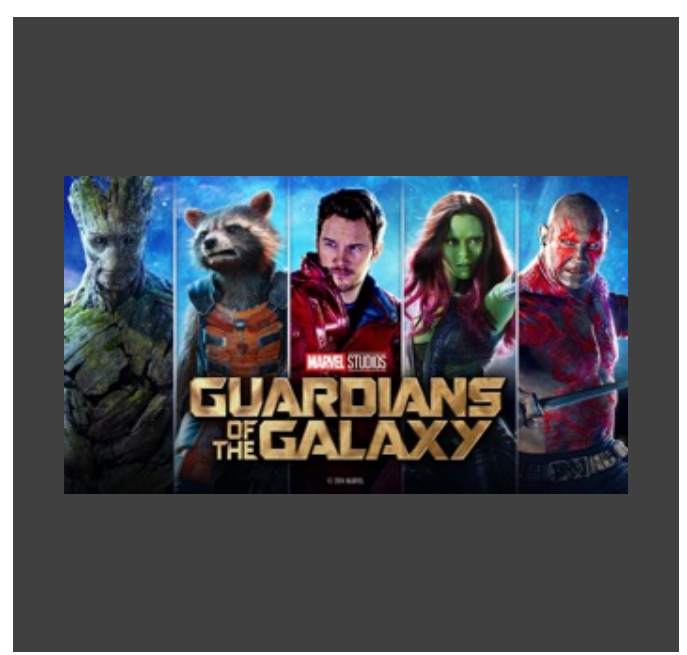


- Except when it doesn't . . .

Element for Hire Irony



- Rules go out the window when dealing with parody or irony

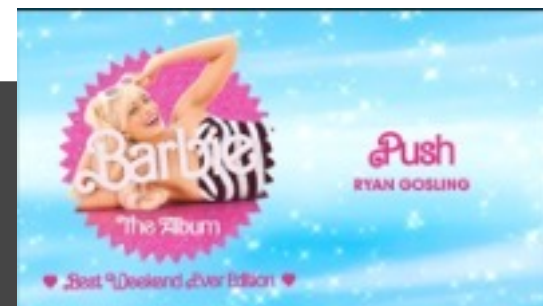




- In ironic works, we watch characters who possess a lower degree of independence, self-determination, or free will—who struggle with forces we might easily overcome
- There are two kinds of irony
 - **Verbal** (what is said)
 - **Dramatic** (what is happening)
- In novels, it is usually the events that establish the work as ironic
 - Heroes who are decidedly un-heroic
 - Monumental tasks that are far from monumental
 - Climaxes that are anti-climatic



- Ironic works often make use of parody, sarcasm, and satire
- **Parody:** exaggerated imitation of a particular style or genre for humorous effect
- **Sarcasm:** use of irony to mock or convey contempt
- **Satire:** poking fun at the faults and shortcomings of humanity to make a serious point



Element Six Theme



- **“Universal Specificity”**
- The idea that an author creates a story and gets the specifics right, so that the reader may infer its broader, more universal significance



Universal Specificity

- If you get the local right, the universal will take care of itself
- We are an inference-drawing species
- We crave patterns and create meaning
- If you want to write about everybody, start with one person, in one place, doing one real thing—the reader will take care of the rest

Annotation Exercise 1

They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun.

Annotation Exercise 2

Mother died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours." That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday.

Annotation Exercise 3

WE HAVE BEEN lost to each other for so long.

My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust.

This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well-known history of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother. On those rare occasions when I was remembered, it was as a victim. Near the beginning of your holy book, there is a passage that seems to say I was raped and continues with the bloody tale of how my honor was avenged.

It's a wonder that any mother ever called a daughter Dinah again. But some did. Maybe you guessed that there was more to me than the voiceless cipher in the text. Maybe you heard it in the music of my name: the first vowel high and clear, as when a mother calls to her child at dusk; the second sound soft, for whispering secrets on pillows. Dee-nah.