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ENGL109 – Introduction to Fiction

17 February 2015

Literature: A Comforting Friend

Literature has always presented itself as a timeless conundrum. Traditionally encompassing imaginative works of poetry and prose that captivates its reader, literature is an aspect of civilization that speaks directly to me, and personally used as an artistic aesthetic. Understanding elements of fiction, writing about literature, and the sheer enjoyment of reading literature has been a pleasant journey.

Understanding elements of fiction has proven to be a daunting task since I first started researching them in middle school. At the time, literature was not a significant part of my life as it was utilized simply as a way to pass the time and escape from the torture that presented to be middle school. In class teachers would often ask for the definitions of plot, setting, conflict, symbol, and point of view, and much to their dissatisfaction, I could not care the slightest. It was not until my freshman year of college that I finally started to have an appreciation for these terms and what they represent in literature. I realized that I understood a work of literature better when I could identify the functions of the various elements that make up the work, and in retrospect, understanding their relationship to literature in their entirety. Knowing elements of fiction increased my reading comprehension, as I understood how the role of each element interacted with each other, and knowing each term allowed me to appreciate good quality literature when I read it. For example, “Dead Men’s Path” by Chinua Achebe is a story that, if read by high school me, would not have knows the significance of the flowery path, or that the path “appears very important to them”( 284). I now recognize that from the unification of literary terms, consistent and quality literature is made, which can be applied to writing literature itself.

Writing about literature requires an immense amount of research, commitment, and creativity to turn out an acceptable work. These can vary from a number of different forms, ranging from something very informal and personal, to the very civic and formal. The book review is perhaps the most iconic and well-known form that writing about literature takes, and a facet of college that every student can relate to. The book review takes a paramount stance on the writers’ argument, and gives the reader a foundation of what to expect from the novel. Francine Prose of *The New York Times* wrote an amazing article called, “What Makes the Russian Literature of the 19th Century So Distinctive?” that can be applied to literature in general. She goes into detail about why we still read these masterpieces and states, “[Russian literature] is the force, the directness, the honest and accuracy with which they depict the most essential aspects of human experience”(Prose). Literature has a knack of making the individual seem universal.

My enjoyment of literature started at an early age when my grandmother would read stories to me in both English and Russian. My indulgence in literature continued to develop through high school when it was mandatory to read specific novels during the summer, and well into college. I remember the first time I read Bram Stocker’s *Dracula* for the first time and being completely enveloped into it. In high school I started branching out and reading books on my own, such as *Salem’s’ Lot*, by Stephen King, *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austin, and *The Master and Margarita*, by Mikhail Bulgakov. In my own opinion, I think that I continue to enjoy literature because literature is like a puzzle. Every time I read something, I realize something that I may have glossed over or not realize. For example, in “Hunters in the Snow”, by Tobias Wolff, Kenny states, “I won’t say a word. I won’t say anything about a certain babysitter”(Wolff 188). I completely missed this use of foreshadowing when it was clearly used. Literature is always surprising me with elements, and making me pause and think.

Understanding elements of fiction has rendered itself as an important milestone in my gradual respect for literature, and has made writing and reading literature a more pleasant experience. My evolution of appreciating literature has been slow, but steady. In the beginning I did not value literature as much as I do now, but that is in gratitude to learning literary terms, writing essays, and my overall experience with literature as a whole.

Works Cited

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