

Introduction



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PRELIMINARIES

o.1 *Literature* refers to some, but not all, cultural production in language. What counts as literature varies from time to time and place to place.

o.2 Here and now, *fictional narrative in prose* is the prototypical kind of literature. But this is not true everywhere, nor has it always been thus, and it may not be so in the future.

o.2.1 There is prose writing which is not literature. There is literary writing which is not prose.

o.2.2 There is prose literature which is not narrative. There is narrative literature which is not prose.

o.2.3 There is narrative prose which is not fiction. There is fictional narrative which is not prose.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

1.1 A fiction is a made thing. It is produced, circulated, and used by people.

1.2 A fiction is always made out of one or more *media* and one or more *genres*.

1.2.1 The medium of fiction is prototypically language.

1.2.2 The language of fiction is realized in a physical medium. The choices of media vary from time to time and place to place.

1.2.2.1 The bound and printed book (*codex*) is currently the prototypical physical medium for fiction in English, but it has not always been, and it may not be in the future.

1.2.3 The genres of fiction are many, and they vary from place to place and time to time. The prototypical fictional genres in literature in English in the last 200 years are prose narrative genres like novel and short story.

1.2.3.1 Genre plays a role in every instance of the production and use of fictions.

1.2.3.2 Genres always have formal, thematic, and rhetorical dimensions.

1.3 A narrative fiction is also made out of the components of narrative: modes of narration, plots, characters, narrators, narratees, chronologies, settings, points of view, and so on. These components are realized in, and constrained by, the characteristics of genre and medium.

THE ANT AND THE CRICKET

During the wintertime, an ant was living off the grain that he had stored up for himself during the summer. The cricket came to the ant and asked him to share some of his grain. The ant said to the cricket, "And what were you doing all summer long, since you weren't gathering grain to eat?" The cricket replied, "Because I was busy singing I didn't have time for the harvest." The ant laughed at the cricket's reply, and hid his heaps of grain deeper in the ground. "Since you sang like a fool in the summer," said the ant, "you had better be prepared to dance the winter away!"

This fable depicts lazy, careless people who indulge in foolish pastimes, and therefore lose out.

Fable 126 (Syntipas 43 = Perry 373), in *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 65–66.

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

Driven by hunger, a fox tried to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine. Although she leaped with all her strength, she couldn't manage to reach the grapes. As she went away, the fox remarked, "Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes."

People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this instructive little story to their own lives.

Fable 255 (Phaedrus 4.3 = Perry 15), in *Aesop's Fables*, 125.

THE MOUSE, THE FOX, AND THE GRAPES

A fox saw a cluster of grapes hanging from a trellis and wanted to eat them, but the grapes were too high and she could not find a way to get at them. A mouse saw the fox and grinned as he said, "You'll have to go hungry!" The fox didn't want a mouse to have the last word, so she replied, "Those grapes are sour!"

The fable indicts wicked people who refuse to listen to reason.

Fable 256 (Chambry 32* = Perry 15), in *Aesop's Fables*, 125.