

Plot-making Devices in Children's Fiction: A Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

Plot is a set of sequences of events within the framework of a causal system. The present study argues that "narrative ornament" is a phonetic or semantic element in excess of the plot; it is also for the aesthetic enrichment of the narrative, and if removed, it does not distort either the plot's causal system, or the central core of the story. The counterpart of a "narrative ornament" is a "plot-making figurative device," which cannot be removed from the plot. The aim of the present study is to introduce these figurative devices which are not purely aesthetic elements, but, rather, form the structure of the plot in children's stories. The paper aims to find out if the definition of figures of speech can be semiotically generalized to plot-making figurative devices. In this regard, the study first describes the three elements in Peirce's semiotics, i.e., "the sign, object, and interpretant". Then, using a descriptive-analytical method, and making reference to a brief list of figures of speech, the article expands the definition of figures of speech to the semiotic definition of the plot-making devices. The present study for the first time highlights the narratological and non-rhetorical function of literary embellishment. Since the traditional poetry-related categorizations of figures of speech cannot be applied in the analysis of the narrative text, a study of figures of speech in narratives seems to be of great significance in literary criticism.

Keywords: Children's Fiction, Plot, Figures of Speech, Narratology, Semiotics, Peirce

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The present paper draws on Peirce's semiotic approach to extend the poetical functions of literary figures of speech to narratological functions in children's stories. Since the traditional poetry-related categorizations of figures of speech cannot be applied to the analysis of the narrative text, a study of figures of speech in narratives seems to be of great significance. The present study seeks to answer two questions: how can we move from superficial applications of figures of speech to their narratological ones? And, based on Peirce's categorization, how can the categorization of literary figures of speech be applied to plot-making devices in children's stories?

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts Peirce's semiotic approach to provide a semiotic illustration of literary figures of speech. It is argued here that these figures are not just aesthetic elements but help develop the plot in stories, including children's stories.

3. Methodology

The article describes Peirce's semiotic approach and defines the elements of plot. The descriptive-analytical approach is then adopted to apply the definition of literary figures of speech to a semiotic definition of the elements of plot. Here, the literary figures mainly used in poetry are identified and redefined with regards to children's stories.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The present study offers twenty six plot-related figures of speech, claiming that numerous figures of speech from literary texts and poetry can be applied to children's stories. It is shown here that Peirce's iconic, symbolic and indexical signs – words, phrases and phonemes – are not just a specific form of symbolic signs. In other words, figures of speech are not limited to words, as a specific form of symbolic signs, but can be applied to iconic and indexical signs as well.

5. Conclusion

The super-structural, concrete functions of literary figures of speech can be utilized in a different way and turned into infrastructural, axial elements to create the plot of a story. The plot-related figures of speech can be analyzed in the works by a writer or a group of writers so that the characteristic style is identified and the mental schemata of the writers are figured out. In Rumi's stories, for instance, the figures of speech are mainly based on indexical signs. However, in children's stories, these figures can be mostly based on iconic signs.

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