

Michael Norman
Milan Lessons Learned
9-3-13

STRUCTURE NOTES

(500-600 Words)

"Lessons Learned" is the name of the précis that (or which: Grammar pop quiz #1) you will be writing after each of the five class modules (the two-week blocks we will be spending on each narrative). These papers are a straight-forward recitation of the structure lessons you have learned in each module. (You may not use the first-person singular). If you want to think of them as small essays, that's fine. They do not need an formal introduction or conclusion. But they should be well organized (your ideas should be logically ordered), always on point (no warm-up, no throat-clearing, no-spinning - if you don't know what you want to say, better to say nothing than to guess or give me empty sentences that write around the subject).

The first sentence should contain the name of the book. "The structure lessons in Rian Milan's *My Traitor's Heart* can be cataloged in three groups..." Or "The gross, or main structure, of *Rian Milan's My Traitor's Heart* is a triptych of narratives that represent the three frames of time that run from the beginning of the narrative to the end."

Remember to keep your paragraphs tight, around fifty words, this to allow you to cover more lessons. Remember to **double-**

space lines, number your pages, indent your paragraphs. Give me your very best sentences. I will be grading these papers on content and language. If, for example, you get a 90 on content, but the paper is sloppily, carelessly, or simply badly written and you get a 70 on the writing, then you're likely to get a grade of 80 or so, a low B. Conversely, a well-written paper that misses what we talked about in class and what you clearly should have discovered in your multiple readings, demonstrates to the teacher that you did not read the book closely enough and did not do the work necessary to make that narrative yield its lessons. That paper, even though cleanly written, is likely to get a 90 for the writing and a 70 for the content. Another low B. It demonstrates that the writer has failed to understand the basic concepts of the course.

Here's a sample of how a "Lesson's Learned" essay might begin:

"Rian Milan's *My Traitor's Heart*" does not have formal chapters per se. The author instead divides his work into three parts, three books within a book. Each part, or "book" is further divided into sections. A few sections begin with epigraphs that serve as de facto titles, but most sections have no names or labels. Malan abandoned the traditional narrative structure of chapter titles because... Perhaps he meant to create the effect of "movements" in a musical composition or unnumbered acts in a stage drama.

"Part I" turns on Milan's family history, starting in the 19th century and ends at the beginning of his adolescence. The reader is introduced to X characters in Part I, but none of them return in the succeeding parts of the book, though Milan does now and then invoke the name of his Boer ancestor Dawid Milan, this to remind the reader that the narrator is part of the book's history. The use of characters that are mostly fully realized gives the book its structural matrix. The reader remembers the people in the book, not necessarily the events or action.

"Part II" is the heart of the book, a series of what must be called murder stories. Each story has its own message and meaning, and yet they are clearly in a sequence. The first story is about X and is meant to X; the second is about Y and extends the meaning of the first by Y. Each story has a clear beginning, middle and end and could stand on its own. Milan means for the reader to put these stories together to come up with a larger meaning...

...(Toward the end of the paper) "The three parts, each with multiple stories, leave the book segmented. And there are sections -i.e. pp 45-56, 187-190, 245-261 to name just three - that serve as background and seem to be loosely, if at all, integrated into the stories that bracket them. This slows the narrative down...

...(Conclusion) "Using a three-part structure without formal chapters has both its advantages and disadvantages. It gives the writer.... And yet...."

These five papers, of course, serve as the basis for your final paper (if you pick the final-paper option), wherein you will be asked to compare the structure of three of the five narratives we read.