

Lecture 04: Elements of the novel: setting, point of view, mood, themes, symbols, motifs.

Definition of Setting

Setting is an environment or surrounding in which an event or story takes place. It may provide particular information about placement and timing, such as New York, America, in the year 1820. Setting could be simply descriptive, like a lonely cottage on a mountain. Social conditions, historical time, geographical locations, weather, immediate surroundings, and timing are all different aspects of setting.

There are three major components to setting: social environment, place, and time. Moreover, setting could be an actual region, or a city made larger than life, as James Joyce characterizes Dublin in *Ulysses*. Or, it could be a work of the author's imagination, such as Vladimir Nabokov's imaginative place, space-time continuum in *Invitation of a Beulah*.

Types of Setting

There are two main types of setting:

- Backdrop Setting

Backdrop setting emerges when it is not important for a story, and it could happen in any setting. For instance, A. A. Milne's story *Winnie-the-Pooh* could take place in any type of setting.

- Integral Setting

It is when the place and time influences the [theme](#), [character](#), and action of a story. This type of setting controls the characters. By confining a certain character to a particular setting, the writer defines the character. Beatrix Potter's short story *The Tail of Peter Rabbit* is an example of integral setting, in which the behavior of Peter becomes an integral part of the setting. Another good example of this type of setting can be seen in E. B. White's novel *Charlotte's Web*.

Function of Setting

The function of setting in a fictional, poetic, and [prose](#) work is of great importance. It has immense effect on plots and characters, as it could act as an [antagonist](#), post a conflict that characters need to resolve, or shed light upon characters. It can also present symbolic persons, objects, place, action, or situations. Setting can establish the mood or atmosphere of a scene or story, and develop the [plot](#) into a more realistic form, resulting in more convincing characters. By establishing mood, setting also helps the [audience](#) relate themselves to the characters in a story.

Point of View:

Point of view refers to the perspective from which a story is told. It involves the narrator of the story – that is, the person telling the story. All stories are written from a certain point of view, and the reader sees the action occur from that point of view.

- **First Person point of view:** the storyteller refers to himself or herself as “I”. in the 1st person pov the narrator is a character in the story. Protagonist, antagonist, an observer, or minor character. You might even discover a story told in the first-person plural, or “we.”

- 1- **First person major participant:** the character who tells the story – narrator – is the central character or is deeply involved in the events (the tell-tale heart, and The Fall of the house of Usher).
- 2- **First person participant:** the narrator is involved in the story but isn't a major player.
- 3- **First person reporter:** narrator tells the story but isn't part of it.

-Third Person point of view: narrator uses third person pronouns, he, she, it, they. It can be divided as follows:

1. Third person dramatic objective: the narrator has a limited perspective. He or She reports on what the other characters do or say, but not on what they are thinking. The narrator functions as a video camera, which can record only what it sees and hears. Readers don't know the thoughts of the characters, but they can make inferences based on how the author reports the actions. Example:

2. Third person limited omniscient: (omniscient means to know all at once) the narrator can report on the thoughts and feelings as well as the speech and actions of a particular character, but can't get into the heads of other characters.

3. Third person omniscient: the narrator can describe at will the inner lives (thoughts, sensations, feelings) experienced by any number of characters. Omniscience is for God.

- Second person point of view employs the pronoun "you."

- "Sometimes you cannot clearly discern between anger and frustration."

Examples of Point of View in Literature

Example #1: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

Hamlet, the protagonist, explains the feeling of melancholy that afflicts him after his father's death:

"I have of late, — but wherefore I know not, — lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory."

This is one of the best first-person point of view examples in literature. The use of first-person point of view gives us a glimpse into the real inner feelings of frustration of the character. The writer has utilized the first-person point of view to expose Hamlet's feelings in a detailed way.

Notice how William Wordsworth uses the first-person point of view to express his subjective feelings about the scene of daffodils in his famous poem. The use of the pronoun "I" gives a special quality to the feelings expressed in these lines. The reader can see that the poet has employed first-person point of view to share with us his own personal emotions.

Function of Point of View

Point of view is an integral tool of description in the author's hands to portray personal emotions or characters' feelings about an experience or situation. Writers use a point of view to express effectively what they want to convey to their readers.

THEME

Authors usually try to convey some point about life and what that means to readers.

Theme is defined as a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly.

Major and Minor Themes

Major and minor themes are two types of themes that appear in literary works. A major theme is an idea that a writer repeats in his literary work, making it the most significant idea in the work. A minor theme, on the other hand, refers to an idea that appears in a work briefly, giving way to another minor theme. Examples of theme in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" are matrimony, [love](#), friendship, and affection. The whole [narrative](#) revolves around the major theme of matrimony. Its minor themes are love, friendship, affectation etc.

Difference Between a Theme and a Subject

It is important not to confuse a theme of a literary work with its [subject](#). Subject is a topic that acts as a foundation for a literary work, while a theme is an opinion expressed on the subject. For example, a writer may choose a subject of war for his story, and the theme may be his personal opinion that war is a curse for humanity. Usually, it is up to the readers to explore the theme of a literary work by analyzing characters, [plot](#), and other [literary devices](#).

Presentation of Themes

A writer presents themes in a literary work through several means. A writer may express a theme through the feelings of his main [character](#) about the subject he has chosen to write about. Similarly, themes are presented through thoughts and conversations of different characters. Moreover, the experiences of the main character in the course of a literary work give us an idea about its theme. Finally, the actions and events taking place in a narrative are consequential in determining its theme.

Examples of Theme in Literature

Example #1: *Love and Friendship Theme*

Love and friendship are frequently occurring themes in literature. They generate emotional twists and turns in a narrative, and can lead to a variety of endings: happy, sad, or bittersweet. The following are famous literary works with love and friendship themes:

- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
- *Wuthering Heights* by [Emily Bronte](#)
- *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen
- *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Example #2: *War Theme*

The theme of war has been explored in literature since ancient times. literary works utilizing this theme may either glorify or criticize the idea of war. Most recent literary works portray war as a curse for humanity, due to the suffering it inflicts. Some famous examples include:

- *Iliad and Odyssey* by Homer
- *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
- *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
- *Arms and the Man* by Bernard Shaw
- *A Band of Brothers: Stories from Vietnam* by Walter McDonald

Example #3: *Crime and Mystery Themes*

Crime and mystery are utilized in detective novels. Such narratives also include sub-themes, such as “crimes cannot be hidden,” “evil is always punished,” and others. Some well-known crime and mystery theme examples include:

- *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by [Edgar Allan Poe](#)
- *Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle
- *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens
- *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie
- *Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown

Example #4: *Revenge Theme*

Revenge is another recurrent theme found in many popular literary works. A character comes across certain circumstances that make him aware of his need for revenge. The outcome of his action is often bitter, but sometimes they may end up being satisfied. Examples are:

- *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare
- *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas
- *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* by Stieg Larsson
- *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham

Function of Theme

Theme is an element of a story that binds together various essential elements of a narrative. It is often a truth that exhibits universality, and stands true for people of all cultures. Theme gives readers better understanding of the main character’s conflicts, experiences, discoveries, and emotions as they are derived from them. Through themes, a writer tries to give his readers an insight into how the world works, or how he or she views human life.

SYMBOLS

Definition of Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense.

Symbolism can take different forms. Generally, it is an [object](#) representing another, to give an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant. Sometimes, however, an action, an event or a word spoken by someone may have a symbolic value. For instance, “smile” is a symbol of friendship. Similarly, the action of someone smiling at you may stand as a symbol of the feeling of affection which that person has for you.

Symbols do shift their meanings depending on the [context](#) they are used in. “A chain,” for example, may stand for “union” as well as “imprisonment”. Thus, symbolic meaning of an object or an action is understood by when, where, and how it is used. It also depends on who reads the work.

Common Examples of Symbolism in Everyday Life

In our daily life, we can easily identify objects that can be taken as examples of symbolism, such as the following:

- The dove is a symbol of peace.
- A red rose, or the color red, stands for [love](#) or [romance](#).
- Black is a symbol that represents evil or death.
- A ladder may stand as a symbol for a connection between heaven and earth.
- A broken mirror may symbolize separation.

Examples of Symbolism in Literature

To develop symbolism in his work, a writer utilizes other figures of speech, like metaphors, similes, and [allegory](#), as tools. Some symbolism examples in literature are listed below with brief analysis:

Example #5: *The Rain* (By William H. Davies)

“I hear leaves drinking rain;
I hear rich leaves on top
Giving the poor beneath
Drop after drop;

In this beautiful poem, William Davies has used the symbol of rain to show the different classes of society. He does this by describing the way the upper leaves benefit from the rain first, and then hand down the rest to the lower leaves. The same way, rich people pass on the leftover benefits to the poor people.

Function of Symbolism

Symbolism gives a writer freedom to add double levels of meanings to his work: a literal one that is self-evident, and the symbolic one whose meaning is far more profound than the literal. Symbolism, therefore, gives universality to the characters and the themes of a piece of literature. Symbolism in literature evokes interest in readers as they find an **opportunity** to get an insight into the writer’s mind on how he views the world, and how he thinks of common objects and actions, having broader implications.

Mood:

In literature, mood is a literary element that evokes certain feelings or vibes in readers through words and descriptions.

Usually, mood is referred to as the *atmosphere* of a literary piece, as it creates an emotional *setting* that surrounds the readers. Mood is developed in a literary piece through various methods, including setting, *theme*, *tone*, and *diction*. Let us see how writers use the afore-mentioned elements in their literary works to create a particular mood.

- Creating Mood through Setting

Setting is the physical location in a piece of literature that provides background in which the events of the *narrative* take place. A particular setting not only provides support to the contents of the story, but also sets the mood of the readers. Let us analyze a few examples of mood developed using a setting:

- Creating Mood through Tone

The manner in which a writer approaches this theme and *subject* is called the tone. The readers always rely on the writer's *point of view* of the events taking place in a story. They observe the story through his eyes. They feel the way the writer feels about the events taking place and the description provided. Therefore, the *attitude* of the writer evokes feelings and emotions in the readers.

- Creating Mood through Diction

Diction is the choice of words a writer uses. Diction or choice of words conveys deep feelings, and depicts the events, places, and characters in a literary work in specific colors, having an effect on the way the readers feel about them.

Function of Mood

Mood helps in creating an atmosphere in a literary work by means of setting, theme, diction, and tone. It evokes various emotional responses in readers, and thus ensures their emotional attachment to the literary piece they read. Once the readers are emotionally stirred, they fully comprehend the message that the writer tries to convey to them.

Motif Definition

Motif is an *object* or idea that repeats itself throughout a literary work.

Motif and Theme

In a literary work, a motif can be seen as an image, sound, action, or other figure that has a symbolic significance, and contributes toward the development of a *theme*. Motif and theme are linked in a literary work, but there is a difference between them. In a literary piece, a motif is a recurrent image, idea, or *symbol* that develops or explains a theme, while a theme is a central idea or message.

Motif and Symbol

Sometimes, examples of motif are mistakenly identified as examples of symbols. Symbols are images, ideas, sounds, or words that represent something else, and help to understand an idea or a thing. Motifs, on the other hand, are images, ideas, sounds, or words that help to explain the central idea of a literary work – the theme. Moreover, a symbol may appear once or twice in a literary work, whereas a motif is a recurring element.

Function of Motif

Along with presenting a prevailing theme, writers include several motifs in their literary works as reinforcements. Motifs contribute in developing the major theme of a literary work, and help readers to comprehend the underlying messages that writers intend to communicate to them.