

Literary Texts II 7

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HELLO EVERYONE!

Today, we are going to talk about three subjects which they are the setting, the theme, and symbol and images.

Last time, we concluded with structure. We said that *structure is the way to organise the work of art*. So, structure is usually related to the question which is 'how'. How we organise the work of art.

In *setting*, we answer two questions which are 'when' and 'where'.

The *theme* answers the question of 'what'. What is this novel all about?

Symbol and *images* also related to the question of 'how', but in different way.

Last time, I forgot to tell you that the **structure is part of the plot**; it is associated with the plot itself. That's why we should differentiate between structure and form. **Form** is different from structure, they are not the same.

Form is the opposite of content. You can imagine that structure is the larger element. It is the one that is responsible for organising form, content and sometimes theme. So, the structure is the bigger circle. The smaller ones include theme, language, characters and every other element. They are within this larger circle that we call structure.

So, structure is larger than all other element, theme, plot, and

form. It is responsible for organization.

Now let's move to setting.

Setting

When I create a character I should imagine the setting around it. By creating a setting, we set **time** and **place**. So, the novel we write should be taking place at a particular time. When did it give place? In the past? At present? Is it going to take place in the future? So, that's why we speak about time which is part of what we call setting. Setting also means **context**. Context is another term to refer to setting. We speak about geographical context and historical context which means past, present, sometimes future. Added to this there is social context. So, this is of course when and where. Time cannot take place in vacuum. There ought to be a place.

But it is important to be aware of the context within which the action of a novel takes place - and this does not just mean its geographical setting; social and historical factors are also important.

If we say the setting is on the village or a desert, you cannot separate time from place. Therefore one cannot separate where from when. So, the setting is the outcome of this relationship of time and place.

The good writer is someone who chooses the appropriate setting. If I am familiar with the desert, I write about the desert. If I am not familiar with the desert, I chose a different place.

The rule here says: the writer or the novelist should choose the appropriate suitable setting.

Sometime the choice of a suitable setting helps an author to avoid the need to write about things that he or she is not good at, or interested in, writing about.

It was convenient for Conrad, for instance, that his ships often contained no women. A setting in the historical past can often help an author to avoid contemporary issues about which he or she feels confused; the setting that E.M. Forster chooses for *Howards End* enabled him to avoid writing about the very poor. It is generally agreed that Jane Austen chose settings for her novels which allowed her to exercise and conceal her weaknesses so far as her knowledge of different sorts of people and of human experiences was concerned.

For example: Nagib Mahfouz, the Egyptian novelist chose to write about Cairo because he is familiar with Cairo. Most of his novels take place in Cairo. This is in Arabic literature.

In English literature, we have a famous novelist like Charles Dickens who chose to write about London. In your book, we have three reasons why he decided to choose this. London here is not just a place.

The first reason **Dickens chose London** for his suitable setting is that because London is **rich with indirect relationships, or what we call underworld.**

The second reason is that London is **full of undiscovered secrets.**

In addition to a **complex network of social struggles.**

I choose Damascus because it is too old for example, or maybe because we might have the contradiction or contrast or gap between rich neighbourhoods and poor neighbourhoods.

So, this is setting.

Again, setting is the general context within which the novel takes place. The novel takes place within a general setting that is geography and time. The answer of the question is when and where.

By setting, we can also say social and historical context: Past,

present and sometimes the future. We have novels that talk about things that didn't happen; that may happen in the future. Like the novel *Coming Up for Air* written by a British novelist.

The most important novelist to remember is Charles Dickens, he wrote dozens of novels in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, Dickens's frequent choice of London as setting for his novels was convenient in other ways: the mass of concealed relationships, indirect forms of human communication, and innumerable secrets to be found in London offered a perfect opportunity to a novelist whose plots contain all of these elements in like abundance.

Dickens understood that human values and experiences could be displayed in the physical environment; a novel such as *Bleak House* sees the physical state of the London streets to mirror and to announce the values and inner lives of the people and institutions to be found on and around them. A classic example of this vision is to be found in this novel's opening, one that has been analysed so many times that further discussion of it is probably unnecessary.

This is all about setting.

Let's move to the theme. It is very easy.

Theme

Here we speak about the main idea behind the work. What is the main idea behind the novel? What does the big idea of a certain novel speak about? It speaks about the poor, individual.

'Theme' is a much used word in the literary criticism of the novel, and a favourite word for use by lecturers and teachers in essay and examination questions.

With the theme, we come to know all the major subjects. In

your book we are supposed to differentiate between novel of theme and novel of thesis.

First, they say when you write a novel, you rely on both. But then many critics or many readers consider theme to be better. Theme raises questions of free open ending.

The novel of thesis is less creative; instead of raising questions, it answers questions. The ending is fixed or stated. You can easily figure out what is it about.

The authors choose theme because it is more creative and more challenging to the reader's imaginations. The second type or the thesis is chose for children sometimes to teach a moral lesson whereas in the novel of theme it avoids being didactic. It means تبشيري أو وعظي .

Some critics find it useful to distinguish between theme and thesis. The simple distinction here is that although both pose questions, a thesis also suggests or argues for answers. A theme, in contrast, can involve the establishing of a set of issues, problems, or questions without any attempt to provide a rationale or answer to satisfy the demands these make of the reader.

Traditionally, novels dominated by a thesis have been valued less highly than those in which certain themes are raised or treated: in contrast to earlier generations of readers perhaps, some recent critics have preferred our novels not to be overtly didactic, to be open-ended rather than pointed towards solutions at which the author has already arrived. We should ask whether such an attitude is always justified; novels that are filled with their creators' crusading zeal or commitment to a belief or a cause constitute a very substantial part of the body of fiction, and since its birth the modern novel added a significant commitment to didacticism.

Let's move now to symbol and images.

Symbol and Images

Symbol and images make literature possible. It is related to style. It is related to the question of 'how' but in a different way. In every novel, we come across symbols and images. Without which, reading literature will be boring. So, what makes literature enjoyable is the manipulation of symbols and images.

Today, we are trying to differentiate between symbol and images. Sometimes, it is difficult to tell what is symbolic and what is imagistic; what is related to image, what is related to symbol.

Let's take an example of a car. The car can be symbol. Anything in nature can be used as a symbol. The chair can be used as a symbol. The pen can be used as a symbol. The mask I am wearing can be used as a symbol; every object that we can see or touch.

Usually we say, symbols begin in concrete objects and then go beyond the concrete towards the abstract. So, the movement of symbol is from the concrete to the abstract.

When I say the *pen*, it is a symbol of knowledge. So, notice that I am moving from something concrete that I can touch and I can see with my own eyes; *the pen*, to a term which is difficult to touch; *knowledge*. We cannot see knowledge.

In your book, they are giving you the example of the car. If I use a car in my novel as a symbol, it can stand for *death*. It can symbolize *happiness*. So, *death* and *happiness* are abstract things.

So, the thing you have to understand about symbol is that we move from the real touchable thing to terms that cannot be seen or touched.

The car may also stand for modernity. It can symbolize courage. Symbol of something means stand for something.

Many writers and authors use colors as symbols. Red, green,

white, yellow, black. Each symbol can be used to mean a lot of things.

Green stands for fertility or resurrection, the color of life, growth or harmony.

Red is a symbol of desire, passion, and love. Some people say it can be symbol of energy, strength, power, danger or determination.

White stands for innocent, purity, virginity, goodness.

Yellow is associated with sadness. **Black** stand for death.

The writer is not obliged to follow these rules. He can use them in opposite way.

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On the other hand, images in contrast to symbols don't refer to abstract, but they refer to the five senses.

An example of image is: *the sky is weeping*. The sky is compared to a human being, man or woman, who can weep, who can cry. So, when I read this image, I don't go to the abstract, my imagination goes to something real; senses, sensuous quality. If somebody is weeping, I can see it, I can hear it. This is what images are all about.

All images remind us of the five senses. This is the difference between symbols and images. They are almost the opposite.

Read in your book:

Symbols are not limited to literature and art: they are central to all known human cultures. When a woman gets married in white she makes use of the symbolic force of that color for dress within our culture - a symbolic force that has existed for an extremely long time. Any writer incorporating this convention in a novel would be taking what we can call a public symbol and adapting (or challenging) it for use within his or her work.

Although it is not always easy to distinguish symbols from images, the following points are worth remembering:

1. Images are usually characterized by concrete qualities rather than abstract meanings; images normally have a more sensuous quality than symbols - they call the taste, smell, feel, sound or visual image of the referred-to object sharply to mind.

2. symbols, in contrast, because they stand for something other than themselves bring to mind not their own concrete qualities so much as the idea or abstraction that is associated with them.

Next time, we are going to talk about Speech and Dialogue and The Short Story and the Novella and novel. This is before we go to the short story that I am asking you to read from now.

The short story is *First confession*.

«THANK YOU»



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