

Acknowledgements

No book is a solo-flight . It demands a dedicated and experienced crew to take it off the ground :

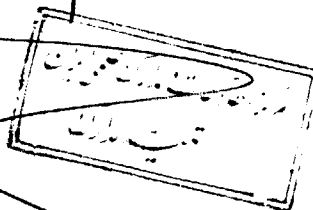
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Some readers turn to fiction out of a fascination with character . Certainly fiction can satisfy such an interest , but an interest in character divorced from the other elements of fiction is a psychological rather than a literary interest . Some readers may turn to fiction for what it can tell them of other times and other places . This too is a legitimate interest and one that fiction can satisfy . But an interest in setting divorced from the other elements of fiction is a historical or sociological , not a literary , interest. A literary interest will always concentrate on the whole work .

William Kenney

Introduction

(This thesis aims to adduce an unmitigated and comprehensive explication concerning the relationship of three significant elements of fiction : setting , character and the theme . My research is basically placed on two outstanding novels of the 19th century : Emily Bronte's 'Wuthering Heights' and Thomas Hardy's 'Return of the Native' . My endeavour lies in studying the correlation among the three above-mentioned elements as well as providing a detailed analysis of the term 'setting' . To put it in a simple way , my argument will play round a detailed scrutiny regarding the contribution of setting to the study of characters as well as its strong impact on the full perception of the theme or the main ideas of the two works .)

It seems important to explicate and enunciate peculiar note-worthy points concerning the application of setting in the two above-mentioned novels and take a short glance on how it makes a bridge to characterization and the theme of the two novels cited .

The significance of setting becomes more evident when we learn that everybody fails to create , develop , analyze or study characters on works whose settings are diminished in value . Characters need to be physically stabilized in a particular dwelling place . One is never independent of taking setting into serious consideration while he is studying characters , because they gain their identities out of the environment they live in, and are therefore , evaluated according to the criteria or standards prevalent in their living place .

Setting resembles a surface on which all events occur . This surface is composed of two main parameters : place and time . Setting can signal or foreshadow a coming event and also adumbrates the points ob-

literated in one's mind . It is potentially capable to aid readers to recall the memories stored in their minds . A particular moment of time, place , an object , a colour ... etc , may revive a peculiar concept or meaning in them . It may be associated with a certain memory and evoke a particular feeling in the observer . There are , of course , some settings to which every reader responds in the same way . In literature , sunset , for example , connotes death , gloom and disappointment ; whereas , sunrise implies birth , hope and optimism . Similarly , colours are divided into two distinct branches : light & dark , each capable to highlight a peculiar feeling and reinforcing a certain idea .

Generally speaking , setting can make a bridge between a reader and writer's implicit intention . Not only does it aid them to share common joy & grief , delight & dejection , hope & despair , but also it facilitates to predict concomitant events .

Description is the most important technique that setting avails to contribute to the study of characters as well as the main idea of a literary work .¹ Setting , in a novel , is made by delicate choice of appropriate words to impart to the reader the same sense or feelings that the author had in mind . Writers who describe a primitive , wild and natural setting , emphasize both the beautiful and dangerous aspects of nature . In fact , the wilderness of nature will represent a constant threat to the characters . Thus , in this peculiar situation we merely expect characters to opt for one of the two different possible states : To act either bravely or showing timidity . We shall have gone astray if we suppose such a wild and frequently threatening setting may evoke feelings of romantic tenderness or appreciation of its alluring charm , glamour and beauty . What we only expect them to do is to behave either as a brave man who welcome dangers with open arms , or treat timidly and escape the frightening scene .

A building or a room bespeaks the characters of those who build and inhabit it , and ultimately it reveals the social and political orders that maintain the condition . A magnificent or costly-looking setting indicates the refined taste of the characters living in it . Only few cracks in the wallpaper suffice to imply that the persons of the same setting undergoing a decline in fortune and power . Characters will definitely lose their real identities if they are detached from their own living places . They will be more credible in their own suitable grounds : a character like Bontsha the Silent can never exist in a sumptuous and splendid worldly palace ; similarly , one never expects to see two main characters of Japanese Quence in a lugubrious , ruined and desolate setting of Dicken's Bleak House .

This is worthy to point that between the two mentioned parameters of setting , I assume , 'Time' excels the place . It holds more influential quality and dominance to place . It surpasses place in playing more determining role to alter the qualities of a single place at different times of the day . Morning , for example , is a time of beginning and perhaps of optimism ; whereas , twilight is close to evening and hence a less optimistic time . The fascinate , charm and attraction that one may enjoy by looking at a forest at 10 in the morning turns to arouse feelings of horror , terror and fright in the same place at 10 at night . In other words , place is encircled by a halo of time around .² The description of place is not necessarily geographical , nor is the description of time restricted to 24 hours of a day . By the word place , one may mean the social condition of a nation , a group of people or a certain tribe . The word 'time' may also refer to a peculiar age of man's period of life . In this case , setting is formed through the conjoining and union of history and society . Looking at a society should be accompanied with historical consideration . The conditions of man's life

about a century ago definitely differs from our present social situation in the 20th century . The passage of time will certainly leave effective impacts on the social and cultural attitudes of two various generations living in the same place .³

In a short story the writer does not have enough time to describe everything in detail . In contrast , in a long story , novelette or a novel the writer finds an opportunity to scrutinize every small , exact and minute detail and describe it as precisely as possible . Only in the latter case can writer present a more realistic picture of settings . Not only is it capable to manipulate the study of characters , but also it prepares the ground to foretell the ensuing events and envisage the theme of the work in advance .

Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights provides numerous convincing examples regarding the relationship of setting , character and the major ideas as love , hatred , terror , grief and happiness . From the lush valleys of Thrushcross Grange to the stony heights of Penistone Crag the natural world is central to both actions and characters in the novel . Its elemental and unpredictable forces reflect the passions of the humans who inhabit the area . For instance , the moors are connected with freedom and childhood and with Catherine and Heathcliff . In the last chapter they return to the moors ; they are Catherine's idea of heaven . Weather is used as a symbol for the feelings and actions of the characters . Thus , storms are signs of danger and conflict . There is a storm the night Catherine is buried and when Heathcliff disappears a tree is struck by lightning . In contrast , as Cathy grows up , there are many descriptions of calm , summer weather . The harshness of the bleak upland moors is the setting for the intense and savage story that unfolds . It is a story that is certainly of grief and glory and a story where images of

Hell , Heaven and the forces of nature are central to the unfolding of its actions and its effect on the human hearts of the main characters . Love , in tandem with hate , is the main theme of the novel . Hatred activates the theme of revenge , degradation and savagery . In Wuthering Heights it is the obsessive desire to injure and degrade arising from frustration in love .⁴

As a writer wishes to strengthen characters , main idea ... etc, he may emphasize or minimize setting . At times a setting will serve as a mere location for events . In this case, its significance turns minimal. In certain novels , however , the setting may become so significant that it virtually becomes an active participant in the action . In addition to the setting of Wuthering Heights , another noteworthy example is the setting of Thomas Hardy's 'Return of the Native' . The desolate area known as Egdon Heath directly influences the characters who live there ; it governs their lives and most of their activities . Although the Heath occasionally serves to bring characters together , more often it acts as a barrier and it is even the active cause of the death of Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia Vie .

Details of time and geography are meticulously worked out in this peculiar work of Hardy . This novel is located in a carefully mapped out area of Wessex and covers a specified period of time (i.e., 1842 - 43) . The major place of the story where all incidents happen can be looked as a character too , because it dominates and controls the lives of its inhabitants .

Different approaches toward Egdon Heath aids to classify characters into certain groups . The most tangible and clearly perceived branch of this classification is the group which includes Clym , Thomasin and Venn. They are products of Egdon and can therefore , understand it : Clym ,

for instance , is endowed with an innermost , private and personal knowledge of the Egdon's natural features . Thomasin is not inclined to abandon it , although she lives in solitude . Venn is also depicted as the only person who is so familiar with the region who can at night walk across it without losing the way .

Hardy implicitly couches a fatalistic view of life in his theme . He expresses the idea that man lives in an indifferent universe and is subject to the control of an impersonal force . Fate and destiny may be regarded as this controlling force which is independent of both man and his gods . The desolate , wretched , barren and neglected state of Egdon as well the poor and ignorant inhabitants of it who long for the gay life of the world , enable Hardy to highlight the mercy of chance and events , a demonstration of the theme of the novel .

"The setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale and the historical time in which its action occur ." ⁵ I have expanded and divided the term into different branches of study . On the one hand , for example , it refers to the natural and artificial scenery or environment in which characters live , move and have their being , and on the other , it includes what in theatre would be called props or properties , the tools , instruments and every object employed or referred to in the work . "Setting is synonymous with *mise-en-scene* , a French term denoting the scenery and the properties , or movable pieces of furniture ." ⁶ There is , of course , a major difference between setting in fiction and that in theatre . In the former , it is the writer's detailed description which aids one to picture a scene to himself in mind . In the latter , however , everything is concretely displayed on the stage and no description is , practically , feasible or indispensable .

According to Hawthorn : "Setting is one of those terms about which recent critics have felt increasingly uneasy ." ⁷ Few commentators have given a complete and vivid explanation of the term . The definition that Kimney adduces in this regard contains too much details and purports to be complete . He believes :

Setting concerns both time and place . It is the hour or day or year the action takes place , as well as the scenery and all the details that compose it . Even the clothes described and the objects mentioned , no matter how trivial , belong to the setting . Without such a temporal , spatial and physical environment the characters would live in a vacuum , and you would be unable to experience their world . You would also have difficulty in discovering the mood of the story , the emotional climate , all so depend on the creation of a setting. ⁸

In addition to time and place , he takes costume , implements and the atmosphere into account too . All in turn , result in feeling and breathing the mood or the air of a work . Generally speaking , the setting of the novel is a whole , distinctive world created by the novelist . It is sum total of references to physical and temporal objects and artifacts .

Setting may be an element of primary importance in a particular story or even throughout the work of a particular author . "Nothing can happen nowhere , the locale of the happening usually colours the happening , and often , to a degree , shapes it ." ⁹ This term sometimes plays a crucial role in the story , manipulating and foreshadowing the main events of a work as well as rendering us the feeling of characters who have life and being in that specific locale . The potential , mani-

pulating power of setting has always drawn the attention of great writers of literature to it . "Physical places mattered so greatly to French novelist Honore de Balzac that sometimes before writing a story set in a town , he would visit that town , select a few houses , and describe them in detail , down to their very smells ."10 According to Henry James: "The place in which an event occurred was in his view (Balzac's view) of equal moment with the event itself ... it had a part to play ; it needed to be made as definite as anything else ."11

Any action is differently viewed in various settings . What may seem appropriate here , may be interpreted unsuitable elsewhere . The violent , savage , fierce , pitiless and wolfish character of Heathcliff in Wuthering Height , is best perceived in a rough , harsh and unpleasant natural setting in which he grew up . The presence of a character like him in a calm , peaceful and serene setting can hardly convey a reasonable and appropriate feeling as was intended by the author . In a word , setting is capable to justify and validate characters' deeds and actions in their own relevant milieu . In this respect Kenney comments :

Setting often defines the significance of events and actions . What is inappropriate , even rebellious behaviour in one setting may be appropriate , even conformist behaviour in another . A student who appeared naked in a classroom would , we suppose , intend this as a provocative act ; the same costume would take on an entirely different significance at a gathering of nudists . 12

Setting is capable to provoke readers to make an appropriate conjecture on the story , aiding him to anticipate what the forthcoming events might be . Approaching a dungeon or a lunatic asylum instigates

and goads the feeling of dread and fright of confronting dangerous people ; whereas , approaching a concert or a public music hall alleviates the same tension . "I am a twentieth century American , and that shapes me , I am sure , in more ways than I'll ever consciously realize ... responding to setting as an element of fiction sharpens my awareness of what it is to live in one time and place rather than another ; it helps me to get a sense of who I am ." ¹³ This specific impression or feeling that readers may sense and perceptually conceive , shapes his judgments and opinions in advance . It can aid readers to evaluate characters and anticipate the coming events . The peculiar grasp or apprehension that one may derive out of a setting is , by Kenney , called a spiritual setting :

By spiritual setting , we mean the values embodied in or implied by the physical setting . The phrase 'a small midwestern town' may immediately suggest one set of values , while New York City suggest quite another . That this is true not only in fiction but extends beyond fiction may be seen from a court case of not too many years back . A judge awarded custody of a child to the child's grandparents on the grounds that the grandparents were 'good midwestern people' . Apparently 'midwestern' had for the judge a spiritual as well as geographical significance . ¹⁴

Although the above-mentioned statement sounds correct and acceptable , it is wrong to assume that a specific setting is always associated with merely one certain meaning . If one supposes that a particular object or locality is necessarily evocative of a particular meaning or it contains an implicit idea , he has definitely made a presupposition in his approach to literature and this may diminish the real worth of

the work . For instance , the symbolic meaning of water may vary from purification , redemption , fertility and growth in one context to death and resurrection to another . Similarly , sun is known as the creative energy , law in nature , consciousness ... etc , while it may also mean passage of time and life . Colours play significant roles in conveying and arousing particular feelings in readers and retain dual implications. For instance , green which implies growth , sensation , hope and fertility , may be associated with death and decay in negative contexts . Likewise , the colour of white , in its positive aspects , signifies light , purity , innocence and timelessness ; whereas the same colour in its negative aspect denotes death , terror , blinding truth of an inscrutable cosmic mystery .¹⁵

It sometimes occurs that setting can add metaphoric energy to its purely mechanical function . Setting is often a form of imagery , for the qualities of a setting , like anything else , can be abstracted ; if these qualities are generally true , then the setting is metaphorical and may appear symbolic too . Therefore , when Poe writes about the impending fall and collapse of the stones of Usher mansion , he not only refers to the conditions of the house but also suggests the disintegrating state of Usher's mind . Kenney has an example in this regard , he holds : "The fog that lingers so oppressively in Charles Dickens's Bleak House serves as a kind of metaphore for the spiritual malaise and confusion of the characters ."¹⁶

Another example I may cite in this regard is the contrast between the fireless grate at Thrushcross Grange and the roaring fires of Wuthering Heights . Through the depiction of the two opposing lands , Bronte intends to sketch and illustrate the contrast between the luxury and comfort of Thrushcross Grange , lying in the soft valley below , and the fierce unpadding existence at the Heights , which lies exposed to the winds on high moorland .

Neither setting nor the other elements of fiction are complete in their own terms . Each one alone , may fail to serve as final clues to conceive and appreciate a work completely . It is rather the artistic combination of all elements by which an overall effect and pleasure is achieved . Kenney states :

We have seen that setting may be the dominant element in a work of fiction . Still , setting never exists by itself . It is always part of an artistic whole and must be understood as such. Some readers turn to fiction out of a fascination with character . Certainly fiction can satisfy such an interest , but an interest in character divorced from the other elements of fiction is a psychological rather than a literary interest. Some readers may turn to fiction for what it can tell them of other times and other places . This too is a legitimate interest and one that fiction can satisfy . But an interest in setting divorced from the other elements of fiction is a historical or sociological , not a literary , interest . A literary interest will always concentrate on the whole work .¹⁷

Kimney has not found setting very difficult to expound or explain. He believes that in some works it is scarcely a factor . In others it tends to be decorative or necessary only for establishing background atmosphere . In still others , it is unobtrusive and has no evocative quality . It may have no meaning beyond itself and much depends on the kind of the story one reads .¹⁸

What makes setting more interesting and still significant is the duality of the term . One may interpret it differently in various circumstances :

You see it from both within and without the main character as he first exalts in nature and then grows grimly aware of its 'fatality' upon viewing the ants picking clean the dying animal . You note the contrast between how the earth looks to him when he starts out on his hunt full of joy and confidence and how it appears to him after he discovers the cruel scene and resigns himself to the fact : ants must eat too . In this fashion setting becomes psychological .¹⁹

The significance of the term becomes more evident when one learns that it concerns itself with the mood of the story , character , ideas or combination of all . It can establish the background of the story , develop characters and highlight a basic point . It refers to the part which may be played by location or milieu or historical time in the design of the novel . This is more commonly a reflective or supporting role ; it underlies or enhances the nature of the action or the qualities of the characters which form the substance of the novels .²⁰ The value and eminence of setting should be reckoned or estimated by the influential impact it may leave on the total colour of the text . The confinement of a writer to a particular place of which he has great knowledge , enables him to write authoritatively and conceal his weakness or lack of familiarity with other settings :

Sometimes 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 ,