



Setting As The Key Component Of The Text Interpretation And Its Role In Revealing The Character

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Setting As The Key Component Of The Text Interpretation And Its Role In Revealing The Character

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of this study is due to the need for a more detailed analysis of the setting as a component of the interpretation of the literary text. The definition of time and place of action is closely related to other components of linguistic analysis, such as theme, conflict, and helps to give a more accurate characterization of the characters, reveal their motivation and correctly formulate the author's idea. This issue was reflected in the works by domestic and foreign linguists, such as Denis Delaney, Cyran Ward, Carla Rio Fiorina, L.G. Babenko, E.N. Merkulova, Y.B. Yasakova and others.

It should be borne in mind that the possession of the instruments of interpretation in general and of the situation in particular is a necessary, but insufficient condition for understanding the image of the characters and the idea of the literary text. A more constructive and selective approach to the situation is required in terms of the functions it performs. On the example of the works of English and American writers the authors clearly reflect the interrelation of the setting with other components of the interpretation, examine the setting in the light of genre features and determine its role and functions in the characterization of characters.

According to the results of the study the authors identify the key points that serve as guidelines for interpreting the text which is of practical importance in the classes of linguistic analysis of the literary text and interpretation of the literary text as well as for teachers and linguists, philologists.

Keywords:

text interpretation, setting, time, place, theme, conflict, system of images, characters.



1. INTRODUCTION

Setting has always been the indispensable part of the interpretation of a literary text and played a crucial role in understanding the overall value of the work. Along with the narrative methods, plot structure, conflict and character representation it enables the reader to see the whole picture and contributes to the revelation of the message or the main idea of the literary work. If we draw the parallel between the real life and literature, we might as well assume that the setting in reality has a significant influence on our life, since it builds our character and shapes our personality consequently a person is the reflection and the product of the environment he lives in. Similarly, one cannot underestimate the role of the setting in a piece of writing, for reality serves as the foundation for literature and a source of inspiration for writers.

Setting conventionally embraces the time and the place of action in the story, which can be revealed explicitly and implicitly. Some scholars, however, for example the authors of the prominent work on the text interpretation “Fields of Vision” Denis Delaney, Ciaran Ward and Carla Rho Fiorina [Delaney D., Ward C., Fiorina C. R.. 2009] see beyond this definition and treat the setting in a broad sense, not only as a mere geographical or chronological point, but the entire atmosphere that surrounds the character, such as landscape, specific location (the kitchen, the castle ...), part of the day, season, etc. They even introduce the term “social setting” which stands for the social environment that the character lives in, and it might most often be more meaningful than the physical surroundings, simplified location in time and space. This perspective gives an added depth to the treatment of the notion “setting” helping the reader get beyond the boundaries of a formal approach and becoming more sensitive and open-minded when interpreting a piece of literary work. Nevertheless during the interpretation the definition of the time and place of action shouldn’t be the sole purpose of the research and the final destination of the process, as long as they serve as tools to see what is written between the lines, therefore it’s the functions that the setting performs that is the focus of the investigation as they yield the necessary information to the reader and give volumes of new meaning to the character or the atmosphere.



2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The definition of time and place of action is closely related to other components of linguistic analysis such as theme, conflict and helps to give a more accurate characterization of the characters, reveal their motivation and correctly formulate the author's idea. This issue is analyzed on the basis of the works by domestic and foreign linguists such as Denis Delaney, Cyran Ward, Carla Rio Fiorina [2009], L.G. Babenko, E.N. Merkulova, Y.B. Yasakova, Ch. Baldick [2004], V.A. Kukharenko and others. On the example of the works of English and American writers the interrelation of the setting with other components of the interpretation is clearly reflected, the setting in the light of genre features is examined, its role and functions in the characterization of characters are determined.

According to the results of the study the key points that serve as guidelines for interpreting the text are identified. They are of practical importance in the classes of linguistic analysis of the literary text and interpretation of the literary text as well as for teachers and linguists, philologists.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All researches, Yasakova Y.B. [2005] among them, undoubtedly agree, that one of the major functions the setting realizes is to reveal the character of the personage. In this respect the historical setting plays a prominent part and frequently defines the whole message of the work. Obviously, there is a close interrelation between the genre of the work such as historical pieces and the setting, for in historical novels the setting becomes most relevant and informative. Thus, in a world famous novel by Harper Lee "To Kill a Mockingbird" the action takes place in the USA, in 1935.

Ex. [Lee H. To kill a mockingbird. Available at:

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2657.To_Kill_a_Mockingbird?ac=1&from_search=true]. "That institution, gentlemen, is a court. It can be the Supreme Court of the United States, or the humblest J.P. court in the land, or this honorable court which you serve."

"There is a tendency in this year of grace, 1935, for certain people to use this phrase out of context, to satisfy all conditions."



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The setting is referred to explicitly and the author lays specific emphasis on the environment, as the problem of racial discrimination is exposed in the work, which was notably acute there and one could hardly expect it to happen anywhere else, since it would have blurred the idea of the whole novel. The actions of the main character, the motivations and the reaction of the members of the jury and other personages make sense only within the boundaries of this setting. The specific location, i.e the courtroom, lends solemnity and pomposity to the atmosphere and inspires fear and anxiety.

Likewise, in the short story by E. Hemingway “Old Man at the Bridge” the action takes place in Spain, namely, the neighborhood of San Carlos and the Ebro river and although the time is alluded to implicitly, the reader grasps the idea that the events happened during the Spanish war of 1939 owing to such indicators as fascists, the enemy, artillery, soldiers.

Ex. “Where do you come from?” I asked him.

“From San Carlos”, he said, and smiled.

It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. [Cronin A.J. Crusader’s Tomb. Available at: <https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/a-j-cronin/crusader-s-tomb>].

The setting in the story plays a determining role, it betrays and intensifies both the external and the internal conflict the protagonist faced and contributes to the revelation of the main idea that the author wanted to impose on us – a lot of innocent people become victims of war. The specific location, the bridge, which is definitely used by the writer for a reason, has a symbolic meaning – it’s the dividing line, the frontier, that separates him from the life he used to live, and which also serves as a link that is supposed to show the way to the future. The inability to move on both physically and above all psychologically emphasizes the idea that the war made the life of the character pointless, his past life was the environment he belonged in, thus the setting exposes the personal drama inflicted by the war on an ordinary man. Therefore we have every reason to believe that every element of setting plays a meaningful part and the reader should be alert to catch every time and place indicator that will help him to decode the message of the work.



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However, it's not only in historical novels and stories the setting becomes the focus of the interpretation. It has been conventionally believed that in the literary works that center around topics that convey human virtues, moral values and relationship between people the setting plays a minor role and becomes relatively unimportant, creating only a realistic background as its main function, because the situation under consideration could happen anywhere, at any point in time irrespective of the time and place of action. Evidently, such eternal issues as love, betrayal, misunderstanding, compassion, etc. are typical of all people and the problems connected with them might be topical in any country and at any century. This is unmistakably true to a large extent and as a matter of fact our persuasion is that the function to create realistic ambience in narration is the idiosyncrasy of the setting in any literary work.

Nevertheless, even in the pieces focusing on everyday personal problems setting can play a decisive role and unmask the internal conflict of the personage. A set of beliefs, customs and traditions, established in the community determine a person's behavior, his views and attitude to other people or the situation. For example, interpreting the extract of the novel "Angel Pavement" by J. B. Priestley the reader plunges into inner world of the father, who is confused and dismayed by misunderstanding between him and his children, the latter being the representatives of the younger generation. The setting in this novel could play only a secondary part and build the foundation for the events, as the problem is familiar to all the parents and children, but the place of action, Great Britain, which is conveyed explicitly, imposes the idea that as a conservative country Britain has deep-seated traditions and non-democratic views on upbringing, where children should be in awe of parents and parents should command respect from their children. It exacerbates the problem of generation gap and fuels the internal conflict within the character.

Ex. "They were less English, more cosmopolitan..." [Hemingway E. Old Man at the Bridge. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22821081-the-old-man-at-the-bridge>].

The time of action, which is also derived implicitly through such indicators as motorcycling, wireless sets, moving pictures, etc. makes one think of the revolution in



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science and technology that alienates the two generations. In this respect the setting is at an advantage to highlight the subject matter, the conflict, the characters and the message of the extract, since another setting, such as the USA with parents having a more liberal attitude, would make a significant difference and create a completely different story. Another bright example of the disguised significance of the setting is a short story “Miss Brill” by Catherine Mansfield. The plot centers around a lonely woman, who refuses to acknowledge her solitude and is willing to shrug it off, spending every weekend in the park. Owing to such a place name as Jardins Publiques (Public Gardens), the reader dissolves in the atmosphere of Paris life, which has always been the symbol of love, passion and romance.

Ex. Although it was so brilliantly fine – the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques – Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. [Priestley J. B. Angel Pavement. Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2413860.Angel_Pavement?ac=1&from_search=true].

On the background of her personal tragedy, surrounded by people in love, the main character stands out in stark relief and this contrast becomes prominent due to the place. Any large city would emphasize the idea of personal loneliness, Paris makes it extremely acute. As for the time references, the reader could draw conclusions taking into consideration articles of clothing people wore and it becomes obvious that the whole situation, including the setting, is perceived through Miss Brill’s eyes. The author also lays particular emphasis on the season-autumn-which symbolizes maturity, old age, fading beauty and depression. Thus the setting in a private story comes to the forefront and speaks volumes about the character, the atmosphere, the conflict she had and the idea of the story.

It’s worthwhile to say that in some works the reader doesn’t have to make a great effort and the writer specifies the setting clearly. For example in the literary work

“Crusader’s Tomb” by A.J. Cronin:

“On an April afternoon in the year 1937 a man, to be exact, an elderly clergyman, ... descended from a bus at the north end of Vauxhall Bridge, turned off into Grosvenor



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Road, and by way of the Embankment entered the quiet precincts of Millbank.”

[Mansfield C. Miss Brill. Available at:

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/33798543-miss-brill-by-katherine-mansfield-popular-mechanics-by-raymond-car?ac=1&from_search=true].

The detailed exhaustive setting besides other functions revives the atmosphere of London and those familiar with the city can trace the itinerary in their mind's eye what makes the story larger-than-life. Moreover, it creates intimacy between the reader and the writer and makes them emotionally attuned to each other.

Finally, another point to consider is the size of the literary work. As it has been mentioned above, the setting in a piece of writing is equivalent to the environment in real life. Therefore the sizable work is most close to reality and it is safe to say, that in a large novel the setting will be of paramount significance. For example, in the novel by J. Galsworthy “The Forsyte Saga”, where the setting determines the characters' behavior and the position in society full of prejudice makes them keep up appearances and prevents them from being truly happy. This idea, however, doesn't understate the importance of a short story and the reader is to deal with each specific case separately (the cited examples do illustrate the prime consideration of the setting in short stories), but sometimes the author's goal is to channel the reader's attention to more critical things. All things considered, the reader has to use his literary flair to make most of the setting in a literary work.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it should be stressed that the setting determination requires constructive judgment and a great deal of awareness on the part of the reader. One is supposed to be versatile and knowledgeable in history and geography to pinpoint the setting correctly as this is the stepping stone to further treatment of the literary work. Yet there are some questions to consider after the reader has managed to define the setting:

- Why is the setting pointed out explicitly/implicitly?
- What is the subject matter of the story and how is it connected with the setting?
- What is the conflict of the story and how does the setting affect it?



- What is the genre of the literary work? Is the setting relevant in the literary works of this genre?
- What functions does the setting perform?
- What information does it provide the reader with?
- What is the size of the literary work? How does the given setting influence the characters and the atmosphere?
- Would another setting make a significant difference in the story/novel?

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