ANCHETA, Jesus Jr.

Erik Schomann

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The Effect of Symbolism on the Theme

Setting the theme correctly in any literature writings is very crucial to its success, either it will be well absorbed or it will be totally misunderstood by its reader. As theme plays an important part of any story, writers must consider the best way to emphasize it by using the appropriate technique that will help its readers digest in their brain the gist of their stories. One common method that is widely used in introducing the theme by different types of writer, from neophyte or trainee to expert or professional, is through symbolism. Through symbolism, the theme is being express and emphasize with clarity or can blur its meaning if use in a wrong way. Symbolism compares the theme with common or popular objects to show clarity. It helps readers picture the theme in their mind through symbolism. On the other hand, symbolism can potentially give a blur definition of a theme if use incorrectly.

The intention or desire of a man to a certain woman can be seen on what color of flowers he gives. If he offers a bouquet of red flowers, the woman will automatically understand his aspiration to her without uttering any clarifications as red is known as a symbol of love and intimacy. This applies the same aspect of symbolism as it compares theme with common/popular objects. Because it uses objects that can be seen anywhere or used in our day to day activities to correlate the theme, it doesn’t need further elaboration to grasp where the theme is leading the readers. For instance, in the reading “Don’t you Think It’s Time to Start Thinking”, Frye compares the language of a student leaving high school with a structure but in opposite meaning. He didn’t expand the meaning of structure in his writing as this is a common object that surrounds us which obviously indicates well-built foundation and reinforced by solid steel bars. In the same writing, he made a parallel comparison between ideas and pregnancy and says “They have to learn that ideas do not exist until they have been incorporated into words. Until that point you don't know whether you are pregnant or just have gas on the stomach" which means that idea is not worthy until it is written and used while you never know if you are pregnant or not until your clinically tested. In addition, Ellison in his writing "Battle Royale" resembles success to a calfskin briefcase commonly used by working degree-holder professionals that hold key positions in their respective company. Symbolism points out theme by comparing it to known objects to most individuals which could be interpreted easily.

Pictures tell a thousand things so as symbols used in any kind of writings. Symbolism helps readers picture the theme in their mind. With the imaginary image symbolism creates, readers can build the flow of the theme. Going back to the previous example where a man gives red flowers to a woman which symbolizes love, readers can able to picture that the next scenarios will be a magnificent proposal in a fancy restaurant followed by a wedding ceremony where the man becomes groom and the woman becomes the beautiful bride in a bright sunny beach location attended by their families and friends wearing their suits and ties and their expensive gowns. Each detail of the symbol being used can able to connect to the theme which could help readers view it. The physical characteristics of a symbol speak also the theme like the color which can denote the different types of feeling like red for love or anger, blue is for calmness and black can be hateful. The shapes of an object used as a symbol can guide the readers to better understand the theme without adding any additional definition like a cross for Jesus Christ and his sacrifices. When used in any literature writings they just simply mention the word “cross” or add some words before or after, e.g. “carry your cross” which most readers especially Roman Catholics can automatically understand its meaning. Writers can able to guide their readers picture the theme through symbolism.

Writers’ or authors’ main objective is to give an in-depth definition of their themes. Symbolism, if done correctly, is one of the most practical or convenient ways to explain the theme to their readers without putting it in too much text. However, reception of the symbol by the readers to define the theme can be of positive or negative implication as the symbol can have several meanings. For example, the symbol color red in the previous paragraph which denotes a positive feeling of love and at the same time it can be the opposite feeling which is anger. It is very important to consider that when using a symbol to present the theme it should harmonize also with the subject properly which is the main topic of the whole writings. In addition, readers can view symbols differently depending on the level of knowledge or experience in life. Some readers might look at the symbols in its literal meaning contradicting the theme that writers would like to impart. For example, Fyre noted that teaching humanities is a militant job and says “They must engage in a fight to help the student confront and reject the verbal formulas and stock responses, to convert passive acceptance into active, constructive power”. For some non-educated individuals, this symbolism, comparing teaching as a militant job, might first come in their mind that they need to use military weapons just like machine guns, M16 rifles and grenades to help students fight the government which is far behind what Frye means. As symbols denote several meanings and depending how the reader analyzes these symbols, it gives a wider definition of the theme, either its positive or negative aspects. This effect of symbolism should writers or authors must be careful about when using symbols as it can blur the whole definition of their themes and can eventually damage their whole writings.

Symbolism style of writing generally expresses and emphasizes the theme with clarity this is due to the fact that it compares the theme to known objects to most individuals. It creates images in the mind of the readers that could help better understand the meaning of the symbol which basically illustrates the theme. However, symbolism can greatly affect also the meaning of the theme if symbols are used incorrectly and depending on the readers' ability to sense the deeper meaning of symbols. Contrary to this negative effect, symbolism is a very effective way to convey themes in writings.