Subplot

Definition of Subplot

A literary technique, subplot is a secondary plot, or a strand of the main plot that runs parallel to it and supports it. It is usually found in plays, novels, short stories, television shows, and movies. It is also known as a "minor story," or as "B" or "C" story. Its purpose is to add complexity and depth to the story, and thereby increases tension – a state of high interest and suspense about events in a story. Not only does it show various aspects of the characters, connecting the readers with them, but it is also a story within a story.

Examples of Subplot in Literature

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

William Shakespeare has incorporated subplots many times in his plays, such as in *Romeo and Juliet,* which is a love story of the two leading title characters. While a subplot runs in the form of an old rivalry between their families (the Capulets and the Montagues), the conflict increases due to the restrictions placed on young lovers' romance further adds to the drama in the story.

There are many scenes depicting young Capulets (Juliet's friends and cousins) fighting with young Montagues (including Romeo's friends), and some scenes depicting older Capulets and Montagues discussing hatred towards one another. Thus, this subplot plays a vital role, else the central romantic plot would have been ordinary rather than dramatic.

Example #2: *The Great Gatsby* (By F. Scott Fitzgerald)

In his popular novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald has shown his main [character](#), Jay Gatsby, becoming an overnight success, despite having no family inheritance. It becomes clear that Gatsby has earned good fortune through bootlegging — the illegal preparation and selling of liquor. He, on the other hand, wastes his wealth on useless and extravagant parties.

He does this to seek enjoyment with friends, including a beautiful married woman, Daisy Buchanan, whose company he enjoys very much. However, when Daisy's husband Tom learns Gatsby is engaged in illegal [activities](#), he shows his suspicion in an intense [argument](#) by accusing Gatsby of illegally selling alcohol through their drug stores. This subplot about prohibition adds intensity to the main plot..

Example #3: *King Lear* (By William Shakespeare)

William Shakespeare, in his popular play *King Lear*, describes the main plot: King Lear disowns Cordelia, his faithful and loyal daughter, and divides his entire kingdom between his unfaithful and treacherous daughters, Regan and Goneril. However, the subplot involves the Earl of Gloucester and his sons, Edmund, an illegitimate son, and Edgar, a tricky man.

Edgar is very cunning, tricking his father into thinking his faithful son Edgar is engaging in intrigue against him. The earl forces Edgar to leave. This subplot points toward major events in the plot, such as neither father could differentiate between their faithful and treacherous children. Nevertheless, the events get mixed up, and Regan and Goneril start falling for Edmund, when he becomes the Earl, and Edgar ties the knot with Cordelia.

Example #4: *Great Expectations* (By Charles Dickens)

Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* is a huge web with a series of subplots. One of these subplots is Pip's acquaintance with Herbert, as he cares more for his friend's finances than his own. Pip even asks for money from Mrs. Havisham to help Herbert. Another subplot involves Pip's plan to get Abel Magwitch out of the country with the help of Wemmick.

Example #5: *The Lord of Rings* (By J. R. R. Tolkien)

J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Lord of Ring* contains an excellent example of a subplot. The main plot concerns the quest of Frodo to go back to the ring, while the secondary plot moves around Legolas and Aragon's adventures in their pursuit to protect settlements while destroying the Orcs' armies. Another subplot concerns the escape of Merry and Pippin from the Orcs. By the end, these three subplots weave into the main storyline.

Function of Subplot

The function of subplot is to describe hidden impulses behind actions of the major characters. While this secondary strand has two effects on a storyline, mostly it ties directly to the main plot and characters, putting an immediate effect on situations and characters.

However, an alternative way is that subplots run parallel to the main story. This serves as a contrast to explain decisions of the leading characters. Usually, subplots create justifications for actions, and unexpected actions taken by protagonists and antagonists. In addition, they add a back-story, or reminiscing element, to a main plot without directly affecting the pace of action. Subplots also provide contrast to the events of the main story in order to make it more meaningful and intricate.