Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition Definition

Juxtaposition is a literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters, and their actions are placed side by side in a [narrative](#) or a poem, for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts.

In literature, juxtaposition is a useful device for writers to portray their characters in great detail, to create [suspense](#), and to achieve a rhetorical effect. It is a human quality to comprehend one thing easily by comparing it to another. Therefore, a writer can make readers sense "goodness" in a particular [character](#) by placing him or her side-by-side with a character that is predominantly "evil." Consequently, goodness in one character is highlighted by evil in the other character. Juxtaposition in this case is useful in the development of characters.

Examples of Juxtaposition in Literature

Example #1: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of the narrative poems that can be used as an example of juxtaposition. This well-crafted literary piece is clearly based on the juxtaposition of two characters: God and Satan. Frequently in the poem, the bad qualities of Satan and the good qualities of God are placed side-by-side, and the [comparison](#) made brings to the surface the [contrast](#) between the two characters. The juxtaposition in this poem helps us to reach the conclusion that Satan deserved his expulsion from the paradise because of his unwillingness to submit to God's will.

Example #2: *A Tale of Two Cities* (By Charles Dickens)

Charles Dickens uses the technique of juxtaposition in the opening line of his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way …"

In order to give us an idea of the factors responsible for the French Revolution, Dickens uses juxtaposition throughout the novel. Here, the haves and have-nots are put side-by-side to highlight the presence of severe disparity and discord in the then-French society, which ultimately paved the way for the revolution. By examining the given juxtaposition, readers can vividly imagine the calamitous atmosphere before the revolution, and understand its need at that time.

Example #3: *Do not Go Gentle into that Good Night* (By Dylan Thomas)

We can see juxtaposition examples in poems, too.

> "Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
> Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
> And you, my father, there on the sad height,
> Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
> Do not go gentle into that good night.
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

In Dylan Thomas' poem *Do not Go Gentle into that Good Night*, the speaker is asking his father not to give up, like ordinary dying men, but to fight against it to survive. The juxtaposition is in the action of struggle for life, to put off death by not merely lying down to wait for death.

Example #4: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Juxtaposition is a literary device that William Shakespeare uses most commonly in his play *Romeo and Juliet*. We notice the juxtaposition of light and darkness repeatedly. Consider an example from Act I, Scene V:

> "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;"

Here, the radiant face of Juliet is juxtaposed with a black African's dark skin. Romeo admires Juliet by saying that her face seems brighter than brightly lit torches in the hall. He says that, at night, her face glows like a bright jewel that shines against the dark skin of an African.

Function of Juxtaposition

Writers employ the literary technique of juxtaposition in order to surprise their readers and evoke their interest, by means of developing a comparison between two dissimilar things by placing them side by side. The comparison drawn adds vividness to a given image, controls the pacing of the poem or a narrative, and provides a logical connection between two vague concepts.