

Reading short stories and poems

Literature



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Whether reading a short story or a poem, there is always a story to be found within. The authors of these stories are able to capture readers through the use of characterization, rhythm, and setting throughout their narrative. It is imagination that allows the reader of these literary forms to be able to visualize what the author would like the reader to perceive. Through the use of symbolism or descriptive wording. In the poem “ The Road Not Taken” or in the short stories “ A Worn Path” or “ I Used To Live Here Once” – There is a prevalent theme.

No matter what solitary journey we find ourselves on, ‘ we’ determine how the journey ends. The solitary journey that each of these literary pieces share is presented differently in each ending. Robert Frost designed “ The Road Not Taken” with specific designs in the narrative that revealed for me as the reader that there was a forthcoming journey. Frost also utilized the word “ I” many times, which made me imagine him alone. Comparative to this example let us compare “ A Worn Path” where Welty utilized the word “ she” throughout the writing piece. The linguistic choice inspired my imagination to visualize a woman walking alone.

This visualization was reinforced in other places of the writing when the character spoke to animals to get out of her way: “ Out of my way, all you foxes, owls, and beetles”. When Welty posed this conversation in the story, it gave me a sense of solitude. The submission that the woman also was walking a uphill path provided the symbolic comparison to a ‘ hard life’. Walking uphill for any length of time is exhausting for anyone and when you add the notion of being elderly, it brings pity to this woman walking uphill. Rhys also utilizes the word “ she” many times in ‘ Used To Live Here Once’.

Once again, this presents to a reader that the character is in solitude, be example: “ She came to the worn steps” and “ She was standing by the river”. In each piece of literature reviewed in this paper, the solitude of each journey varies by the choices that the characters make. Symbolism examples are abundant in the same poem. The word “ Yellow” was used to describe the two roads as aging or in decay; or maybe it was a reader reference for Dorothy in the play ‘ Wizard of Oz’ when she was at the beginning of the Yellow Brick Road and did not know what to do.

In another symbolic example, “ Two Roads” could be interpreted as two ideas, two dilemmas, two opportunities, two of just about anything that a person might have to choose between. The person Frost is writing about seems could be going through a difficult time for forced decision or new opportunity. Frost referred to both paths as “ in leaves no step had trodden black”, which is another example of a color being applied for symbolism. ‘ Black’ shows symbolism of death.

The narrative as crafted reveals him on a current path that observes a new choice as “ grassy and seemingly vibrant”, and like the one currently on, holds a future that is unknown. The analysis of the predicament seems as if an alternative pathway appears as enticing, yet also mysterious since he wondered why no one else had come back if they adventured down the path. Eventually the poem takes the read to a point where a decision is made and instead of being in front of two choices he was in “ a wood” in which he had decided to stay “ on the first for another day”.

I interpreted the understanding of frost to conclude that the unknown was more exciting than the knowing. The lack of distinction between his two

paths could also arguably indicate the resistance to make a decision at all as well. The setting that a short story or poem creates makes a major difference for the engagement of the reader for the overall reading experience. Consider the title of “ The Road Not Taken” by itself. Just the title exudes a conflict of where the writing piece may, or may not lead.

The first entry is “ Two roads diverged in yellow wood” and as a reader I was left wondering where the pathways would lead me. The poem is written with a first person narrative which allows the reader to become the character and see the pathways from his perspective. Frost wrote about one path specifically and shared a perception of “ where it bent in the undergrowth” and that the other path seemed “ grassy and wanted wear”. This created a vision of wilderness with two paths that differed in appearance; but most likely ended in the same place.

This was also interpreted as symbolism, with care for something that was much more immensely colossal. Moving on to the second literary piece “ Used To Live Here Once”, unlike the first literary review there was no mystery or conflict to draw me in as a reader; but rather pity felt because the setting was crafted with sadness. The imagination of a woman “ standing by the river” provided the notion that she had been there for so long that she forgot the beauty of the river over time. Though as a reader I dislike sad stories, this literary piece drew me in as the setting moved to her old home.

Since the author chose to craft the narrative from a third person prospective it was burdensome to identify with the woman on a personal level. With review of a quote from Rhys: “ It was strange to see a car standing in front of it” – The comprehension of a car ‘ standing’ in front of her old house was

considered bizarre since it was not an actual emotion of the character; but rather a observation of the writer. Though Rhys crafts the narrative from a third person prospective, I suspect that there is a possibility that she was writing about herself from a third person narrative.

Elizabeth Able wrote a piece on Jean Rhys citing that Jean's writings are "repetitive narratives and are variations of themes of failure and rejection" (Abel, 1979). Use of linguistics such as "shyly" solidifies the notion that Abel asserts – maybe Rhys is indeed writing out of a rejection position. The symbolism that Rhys applies to the short story allows me as the reader to find personal meaning. The river by example is symbolic of life. As the woman did not walk into the river itself, this was a submission of the woman's entire life.

Since the end of the story reveals that the woman was already deceased, I came to an understanding that she was in reflection of her whole life. The road is also symbolic to the narrative. As the road was "much wider than it used to be" there is a background understanding that the woman observes her life in a broader prospective. The color blue was used to describe the day: "This was a fine blue day" leaves the path open for peace, tranquility and acceptance instead of panic or anxiety. There was also a first person narration of the woman observing two kids playing in the yard.

The imagination born out of this scene was memorizing because of all the details that the colors provided to describe the setting. The application of colors as symbolism throughout "Used To Live Here Once" is a key tactic that the author uses to seduce any reader into reading more because they conveyed a deeper prospective of the situation. Though written in a third

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person narrative, readers may be more inclined to believe they are actually inside the story “ A Worn Path” because the author, Welty, applies in-depth detail in the design.

As an example: Welty begins with “ A bright frozen day early in the morning”. I imagined myself bundled up and wide awake from the crisp air falling on my ears and the warm sun on my forehead; ready for the excitement that lay ahead. According to the journal writer James Saunders, “ The story begins conspicuously on a cold December morning, and just as quickly we are made aware that this is an old black woman” (Saunders, 1992). James is referencing Welty’s description of “ an old negro woman” and described her as elderly; walking slowly through the woods.

My mood at this point changes dramatically to empathy for the little brittle old woman shivering as she walked through the bitter cold in the lonesome outback. Swatting through the brush with an umbrella being used as a walking stick; Welty courts readers back from posturing of empathy to excitement as “ the sun made the pine needles almost too bright to look up at”. The story launched from emotions of adventure and excitement, to empathy and compassion; and then excitement and adventure. Once the woman fought her way through the brush she speaks “ the sun so high” which left me to the assumption that she reached a clearing.

Then she notices that she had to use a log to cross a river. As if this old woman did not have enough to deal with as it were. All this in mind, the woman was going to persist to reach her destination through any cold, and brush, across any river; prepared to overcome any challenge in her quest. The symbolism, tone and personification applied within “ A Path Worn Thin”

are what are most appealing to me about this story. Crafted in a third person narrative, the story begins in a “ bright frozen morning”. This is symbolic to being mortal and a feeling of cheerfulness.

The character was walking down what appeared to be the only path she had to follow; and the determination was to forge ahead or to quit. The woman’s appearance was described as yellow underneath her dark cheekbones. This description provided me with a sense that the woman was elderly, wise, poor, but still full of life. Welty also personified the wrinkles present on the woman’s face by using a small tree which stood only as tall as the woman’s forehead. This allowed me as the reader to have a stronger imagination of the scene and make a connection inside the story.

Animals, trees, and thorns were used to symbolize life; while linguistics such as winter and frozen were used as symbols of mortality and death. The use of these examples and many others were used by Welty to describe the journey through life for all of us. Although she seemed foolish to be talking to animals and dancing with a scarecrow, her focus was still ‘ sane’, in one regard, to live. As the woman began to stride through “ trees silver in their dead leaves” it was apparent that she was walking into a period of season change.

The question then became for me as a reader whether she was walking into spring or death? “ She reached her hand up, but nothing reached down to give her a pull”. This dream symbolized that the Holy Spirit was not there to take her life yet. A hunter finds her and helps her into town where she goes into a medical building. Though alone and difficult, her ambition and love was sourced for her grandson. Had she not made the trip, he may have

perished. All three literary pieces reviewed had journeys that differed from one another; but were the same in that there was a journey to embrace.

"The Road Not Taken" was a solitary journey for a character to make a decision of a life path; familiar or unfamiliar. "Used To Live Here Once" was a secluded journey of a life that had already taken place. "A Worn Path" was also a solitary journey; however, this one exuded a reminder that love and passion can overcome the greatest obstacles. Each journey teaches a valuable lesson - The journey of everyday we live have decisions to be made; and can alter our course at any time - in some cases fate against will.