

The lovely bones: themes loss and grief



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In Margaret Laurence's Manawaka cycle her female protagonists try to overcome the conventional thinking they acquired in their childhood. In *A Bird in the House* the protagonist Vanessa grows up in the small prairie town Manawaka. Since her life is determined by strict conventions she desperately wants to leave her place of birth. But after many years she still has not left her past behind. She writes a book about her childhood to finally be able to accept and understand her life. So *A Bird in the House* is the story of an older Vanessa recounting her life.

Hence one of the main themes in the book is the increasing awareness of the child Vanessa. One very important means Laurence employs to emphasize the significance of the child's development is the double narrator who enables Vanessa to speak from two perspectives simultaneously. By employing this formal device the immediacy and originality of Vanessa as a child is obtained while an older Vanessa provides additional information by making comments. Hence the process of growing up is emphasized. This paper will mainly focus on the connection between the main theme of growing awareness and narrative form.

Another aspect I am going to cover is Vanessa's engagement in writing her own stories since they also contribute to the process of growing up. But first of all there will be a short introduction to the analysis of narrative perspective. 2. Analysis of narrative form Narratology is occupied with the analysis of narrative, a "representation of a series of events meaningfully connected". To mediate a story between author and reader a narrator is necessary. There exist multiple possibilities of different narrating

techniques. So the traditional approach to analyse the narrative form has to be broadened.

As Wayne Booth points out the common distinction of first- person and third- person narrator and the degree of omniscience alone does not provide any information unless more specific qualities are given. Therefore aspects like intrusiveness, self- consciousness, reliability and distance have to be taken into account to characterize a narrator. Intrusiveness refers to the degree the narrator expresses his own ideas in his narration. For the reader dramatized or intrusive narrators seem “ as vivid as those characters they tell us about” while undramatized or unintrusive narrators are more or less impersonal maintaining a low profile.

Furthermore a narrator “ may seem more or less aware of that he is narrating”. On the one hand he may comment for example on his own writing style whereas on the other hand he may seem completely unaware of that he is writing. Another aspect which has to be considered when analysing the narrative perspective is whether one can trust the narrator or not. So there are reliable and unreliable narrators. Narrators may also vary their distance from the narrated events. This distance may be “ temporal, physical, intellectual, moral, emotional and so forth.

Furthermore one can differentiate between observers and narrator-agents who engage into the plot. All this characteristics of a narrator have a strong influence on reading and interpreting a narrative. So the unreliability of a narrator makes the reader think critically about the information given by the narrator since they might be wrong. Or an intrusive narrator may comment on certain events to emphasize their significance or to lead the reader’s

attention to another important, but less obvious aspect. Besides the question whether the reader likes the narrator or not also depends on his narrative qualities.

A narrator who always intrudes into the story by giving unnecessary remarks is much likely not to be accepted by the reader. A further possibility to extend the narrative frame is to include more than one narrator into the plot. By doing so it is possible to spotlight a certain situation from more than one point of view. After having given this brief survey of narratology and narrative perspectives I will now turn to Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* and analyse the narrative devices used since Laurence employs a very interesting technique to adapt the narrative form to the main theme of growing awareness.