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Eastern Kentucky University

The Bookworm's Brain: An Analysis on Emotion Evoking-Literature

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of The Requirements Of HON 420

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By

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The Bookworm's Brain: An Analysis on Emotion Evoking Literature

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Abstract description: This thesis draws on several literary studies to create and propose the idea that fiction can cause genuine attachment for audiences as well as produce strong, emotional reactions. This attachment can be achieved through the use of universal literary elements found in writing. Through the use of literary elements, authors are able to convey stories that allow audiences to grow true attachment towards their worlds, characters, and ideas. In addition, the acknowledgement of these elements is helpful in understanding why readers often feel emotional connections to the fictional stories they consume. Being able to understand these elements is important for both audiences and authors. For audiences, it is important to understand the emotional draw of novels and what elements cause attachment to plot lines and characters. For authors, it helps in creating stories that resonate with audiences through appealing writing. This essay uses three novels spanning different genre types to help identify how these elements are used. This essay also creates an analytical guide to the importance of these elements within writing. The novels - *Salt to the Sea*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Heartless* - are intentionally used as they offer different and contrasting stories, furthering the ideas that literary elements and emotional writing are universal.

Keywords and phrases: literature, literary elements, emotional attachment, *Salt to the Sea*, *The Secret Garden*, *Heartless*, Honors, Honors thesis

TABLE OF CONTENT

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements and Dedications.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
Chapter 2: Author’s Disclaimer.....	6
Chapter 3: Introduction of Universal Elements.....	7
Chapter 4: The Importance of Atmosphere.....	8
Chapter 5: Narrative Style and Reader’s Absorption.....	10
Chapter 6: Finding Connection Through Characterization.....	13
Chapter 7: Two Sides Of The Same Coin.....	15
Chapter 8: How Fictional Is Fiction?.....	17
Chapter 9: Book Selection and Synopsis.....	18
Chapter 10: The Four Narrators of Tragedy.....	19
Chapter 11: Emilia’s Eternal Strength: Why Death Can Be Beautiful.....	20
Chapter 12: Mary’s Behavior and Realism Within Fiction (<i>The Secret Garden</i>).....	24
Chapter 13: The English Atmosphere.....	26
Chapter 14: Point of View vs. Focalization.....	29
Chapter 15: World Building and Atmosphere in <i>Heartless</i>	31
Chapter 16: Realism with Catherine.....	34
Chapter 17: Conclusion: Applying Elements to Genres.....	36
Chapter 18: Author’s Reflection.....	38
References.....	40

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Introduction

Literature as a whole is a fascinating yet complex subject. We as humans understand that the fictional literature we read is imaginary, yet it is incredibly common for audiences to cry, get angry, become homesick, and feel loss throughout the course of their reading journeys. In addition to the stories themselves, many readers even come to view fictional characters as close friends and “comfort characters”, especially after getting through fictional trials and obstacles together. This is all part of the overwhelming phenomenon literature has over readers and powerful connection stories has over the human soul. Thomas Carlyle, the British historian explained it best saying “a good book is the purest essence of a human soul”. Literature is an essence, a characteristic, and a part of all human souls. When authors create worlds, characters, and ideas to share with others, readers naturally get to see the humanity within their writing and grow to connect with the beauty they share. Hours upon hours are spent on books, from both authors and audiences. From the first idea to their publication, stories are carefully crafted by authors so that audiences can enjoy, feel empowered, and escape from life (at least for a little while). And, when authors focus on drawing out their audience’s emotions, they are able to evoke powerful emotions from their readers.

There is an important need and significance in understanding our own emotional responses as readers. The research provided works to explore the attachment we have to the “human” aspect of literature. Being able to acknowledge these connections is the first step that allows readers to understand their own emotional responses and attachment towards the literature they consume. This attachment can be very strong and often results in audiences investing genuine emotion into the plot of a novel. Knowing this, the goal for authors is to be able to create attachment and investment

from their audiences and evoke “real” feelings with their characters and worlds. This is all achieved through how authors are able to convey their stories to the public and require strong literary elements to help craft their narrative. In order for authors to evoke an emotional response from an audience, the readers must feel an attachment towards the literature they read. Before attachment can be achieved, literature must first contain common, universal elements including: world building, atmosphere, narrative style, characterization, and realism within fiction.

The idea of attachment to literature may seem abstract at first as it deals with real human emotions resulting from fictional based works. However, several literary theorists have explored this idea and have identified a set of fundamental literary elements that create attachment. The first portion of this thesis introduces and defines the universal elements listed above, providing background information on their use and importance within literature. The second portion works to explain them in use via three case studies created to examine how the elements combined in practice create attachment in specific novels.

Author’s Disclaimer

This essay touches on and discusses five universal elements used in literature. As a professional disclaimer, there are more than five literary elements within literature. These five are not the only or finite elements authors use when crafting their stories. Similarly, these universal elements are analyzed together as the elements are often used in tandem. There can always be more than one element implemented into the same book. Literary elements are intentional techniques used by an author to create a compelling story and often go hand-in-hand. For the purposes of this essay, the five

universal elements were chosen due to their direct, clear, and prominent use in the author's selection of books.

Introduction of Universal Elements

Literary elements are the essential and necessary elements used to build a narrative and its components. These components can include characters and narrator, plotlines, setting and environment, themes, and story direction. As previously stated, literary elements are intentional and important techniques used by an author to develop their narrative. The use of multiple elements within a single novel is common and having a blend of these elements helps develop strong writing, especially when authors want to really connect with their audiences. For this research, there are five literary elements used in the book analyses. The five elements are world building, atmosphere, narrative style, characterization, and realism within fiction. For the purposes of this research, the definitions for this elements are as follows:

World Building - The process of developing a plausible fictional world with convincing qualities

Atmosphere - The overall mood created by setting, objects, or thoughts; feeling not theme

Narrative Style - The intentional style an author uses to write their story; reader's perspective

Characterization - The representation of characters and their motives, logics, feelings, identification

Realism Within Fiction - Fiction that mirrors or directly parallels our reality

These definitions will serve as reference points when discussing the elements in the coming chapters and help clarify the uses and meaning then have with the selection of books used in the analyses.

The Importance of Atmosphere

Before delving into the book analysis portion of this essay, it's first important to offer some theoretical background on the universal elements discussed in this research. While the definitions provided in the chapter above are a good reference point, having background on their importance in application can provide clarification and a stronger understanding, especially on how to identify the elements in use.

Pirjo Lyytikäinen's "How to Study Emotion Effects in Literature" primarily focuses on the work of author Edgar Allen Poe. Poe was known for his timeless, gothic style. He was truly talented with the ability to create an intriguing and captivating atmosphere through a sense of mystery, suspense, and dread. Note the word "sense" as atmosphere primarily focuses on feeding into audience's feelings. Referring back to the definition of atmosphere, it's clear that atmosphere relies heavily on how the author uses setting, objects, or thoughts to help establish a feeling or mood for their audience. For Poe, he did not need to create a fictional world, but used a sense of mystery to lure his audiences in and disturbed them with a haunting spectacle within his reality. Overall, the way an author creates their setting and world is vital towards evoking an emotional response from readers. By exploring this idea further, it's safe to say that the way an author writes atmosphere is the foundation of how the audience perceives the "sense" of the plot and expresses real, outward emotions towards it. When an author

meticulously works to set up a fictional world through the use of atmosphere and setting, they are more likely to elicit or ‘trigger’ an emotional response from the reader (Lyytikäinen, 198).

Looking at Lyytikäinen’s example text “The Fall of the House of Usher”, Poe is able to articulate a sense of gloom via the experiences his narrating protagonist has. With the first and only interpretation of the house of Usher being dark, melancholy, and bleak, audiences feel a sense of gloom and react lacklusterly towards it. When narratives like Poe’s work incorporate elements of mystery, horror, or discomfort from an unknown world (unknown the reader’s perspective), the narrator may “function as a proxy for the audience” and interpret the responses real readers might have if they faced similar situations (Lyytikäinen, 257). Poe had his narrator explain his feelings and reactions to the atmosphere of the estate as a way to offer audiences the ability to step into his place and vicariously live through him. Incorporating atmosphere this way helps draw up real feelings from audiences by allowing for a shared connection in their senses and the narrator’s explanation of them. Having a compelling atmosphere plays into this character-audience connection as audiences should have a similar reaction to what “the narrator-protagonist fears and loathes” (Lyytikäinen, 257). This connection directly affects readers because of the influence the atmosphere can have on human senses.

Poe’s choice of wording also plays into his sense of gloom and dread. His narrator experiences a fairly bleak ride to the house of Usher and acknowledges his dismay to visit a rotting, old manor. Once arriving, the narrator transfers his feelings into the house’s description. His use of adjectives and adverbs “breathe[s] an overall melancholy gloom that is then attributed to the house” (Lyytikäinen, 257) and the atmosphere that

started the story flows seamlessly into the next focalpoint. In doing this, Poe is able to keep up the same sense of mystery and gloom presented in the narrator's feelings.

Overall, Poe's writing uses atmosphere as the main literary element and incorporates it to draw his audiences in, helping them invest their emotions into his work. Because of this "we" as a general audience are more connected to atmospheric literature than we realize, despite the age, content, or uniqueness of the texts we read. Poe's atmosphere is able to affect the mood and feelings the readers have and provides a strong, emotional sensation over his fictional reality. It is not so much that readers experience random emotional reactions towards a story. Instead, literature in general is written with an atmosphere that "gives" the reader such a reaction.

Narrative Style and Reader's Absorption

Narrative style encompasses a range of choices an author makes when deciding how to tell their story. The perspective and point of view of the story of two of those key choices. The perspective or lens in which an author tells their story directly plays into what the audience is "allowed" to know and see. A first-person lens tells a story solely through the main character's understanding and point of view. Third-person omniscient acts as an all-knowing narrator living "outside" the story, while third-person limited narrates their outsider perspective but only addresses what the main character(s) currently know. Knowing this, their intentional use of narrative style directly plays into reader's absorption of the story and influences if and how their emotions come into play.

The key for narrative style is to choose the perspective or narration that is best suited for the intentional reaction an author wants to evoke. In the case of first-person narration, narrative style can be used to hide plot twists, betrayals, love confessions, and

overall surprising information from readers until the author chooses to reveal it to both the main character and their audiences. This way, we understand and react similarly to the main character (if the main character isn't aware). When it comes to third person narration, audiences are exposed to more of a variety of character perspectives and feelings. Third person narration opens the narrative more and allows the authors to express more than one set of ideas, feelings, criticisms, and opinions because multiple perspectives can be presented by an "outside" narrator. Third person narration also opens up the story's world to readers. Stories written from this perspective can offer more information on the world or themes compared to the confines of a single point of view. There can be separation from main characters and the narration as well, causing for a more subtle or distant effect in tone. The tone might also seem more clarified as the narrator has less emotional ties to the events in the story and can relay information to readers in a reliable way.

Chesnokova and van Peer's article "What Literature Does to Our Emotions, and How Do We Know? Empirical Studies Will Tell" is a literary study that touches on the importance of both narrative style and how it ties into reader's absorption. The pair proposes the theory that different narrative styles (including but not limited to first and third person perspective) serve their own functions for readers, allowing (or not allowing) information to be shared to audiences as part of intentional storytelling from the author (Chesnokova and van Peer, 4). In their case study, the pair surveys how perspective plays into how an audience reacts to and invests themselves into characters. The study offered a conversation between a couple with a trivial issue with different perspectives. The first perspective was the female version, offering more details on the wife's perspective on the issue. In the couple's conversation, readers were informed that

the wife felt ignored and solely responsible for initiating conversations, causing her to be annoyed with her husband. For participants solely reading the wife's perspective, it was shown that they agreed with her side and were more likely to invest in her outcomes. The second perspective was the male version, offering more details and feelings the husband had on the issue. The husband felt his wife was somewhat invasive and did not allow him personal space. For participants who were solely reading the husband's perspective, it was shown that they agreed with *his* side of the story and were more likely to invest in his outcomes. The last perspective offered in the study was considered the neutral version, offering information that only a third person narrator would know. Compared to the other two perspectives, this version offered minimal information and simply stated the facts of the issue. For individuals who read this perspective, they agreed that this narrative style did not offer a lot of insight on the characters and that their conclusions on picking a side could not be determined. Here, the reader's absorption was minimal and less enthusiastic. After conducting multiple experimental studies, the overall conclusion was that narrative style and how much of the character's information and feelings are shared directly correlates to how audiences are going to respond and become absorbed in their lives.

Having the ability to directly point out and emphasize important emotions from characters helps readers cue in on what aspects of their dialogue is most important. This can help with showing the emphasis "in the moment" (what the character is currently feeling is important or needs extra attention), as well as character progression (showing how ideas and perspectives have changed over time and what ideas are now at the forefront of their minds).

Overall, their study helps to prove that literature is capable of evoking strong emotions and that readers often showcase true empathy towards texts where the audience's perspective and reaction is considered (by the author); and this is achieved through an appropriate and intentional narrative style. When an author is aware of their audience's knowledge of the plot's circumstances, supporting character motives, and general themes, they are better able to tailor the story and play on the audience's perception by using narrative style to reveal and share information as the plot unfolds.

Finding Connection Through Characterization

The importance of characterization relates to potential representation and identity readers establish with fictional characters. This representation can include similar mentalities such as motives, morals, and logic. It can also include self identification with aspects such as gender, ethnicity, religious, and societal beliefs or upbringings. Regardless of the exact representation readers associate with, characterization is necessary for attachment in literature. Writing team Rain and Mar elaborate on characterization within their article "Adult Attachment and Engagement with Fictional Characters". Within their article, the duo studies the close relationship between high attachment and immersion from readers and the engaging "bonds" formed with fictional characters. Rain and Mar argue that readers develop fictional relationships and preferences based on the representation of characters. They explore this idea in two case studies. The first study assesses that most individuals form attachments towards the same "types" of characters. Types can refer to the attributes of a character, meaning if a character is a hero type with good and sound morals or the villainous character with morally gray or out right immoral principles (for example).

This also means that the same types of characters are typically well liked, understood, and cared for by audiences. Being aware of one's audience is especially helpful with this idea. If we assume more readers are good and morally sound individuals, then authors can conclude that most people are going to favor "hero" like characters. Typically, children's books and stories with good morals will feature "good" characters as successful main characters. This is to help connect with young readers growing up (for example).

In addition to creating attachment towards characters who have the same morals, it is also true to say that audiences might empathize and better understand the struggles those same characters have while living with their morals and the choices they make because of them. This idea can be applied to the idea of sacrificing one's self for the greater good, a common trope portrayed in literature. If a hero character chooses to not abandon someone in need but misses their chance to escape peril, the audience may feel a sense of pride as well as empathy. In this broad example, the audience sees their character making morally sound choices and respect their humanity, despite the terror of staying behind and not escaping. They can empathize with the now unfortunate situation their connected character is placed in and their attachment grows as a result. This empathic understanding and care helps to create a powerful relationship between reader and character.

Rain and Mar's other case study is a general overview on how audiences "select" their preferences on characters. These preferences come from the readers as individuals and align with personal aspirations and desires. The conclusion of this study states that readers often choose to identify with characters who represent their own wishes and

hopes. This relationship is formed through personal desires and similar morals, or simply a relationship formed through characterization.

Because characterization gives readers a character that embodies themselves (based on their “choice” of similar background, wants, ideas, etc), this element helps form attachment to literature. This idea connects to living relationships and why people can show such strong emotions towards literature despite knowing that it is a work of fiction. It is due to the strong desire to live vicariously through the characters they invest hours into (reading about), and cheering them on to fully live out the lives most readers desire for but cannot live; and the grief or homesick feeling that comes after a fiction death or concluding a plot indefinitely. Regardless of the preferences audiences have with characters, characterization as a whole helps to create living relationships between readers and fictional characters.

Two Sides Of The Same Coin

There is a striking similarity between world building and realism within fiction. Both of these elements apply to how the world of a story is presented and focuses on the environment the characters reside in rather than the characters themselves. In many cases world building and realism within fiction overlap due to their similarities on how readers buy into and understand, as well as attach themselves to fictional worlds. An easy analogy to help understand the difference between the two is to refer to them as two sides of the same coin. These elements are closely connected and are often argued to be the same element. However their use is slightly different and can best be explained within this essay’s book analysis. When it comes to world building, the literary element consists of forming a world from a blank slate. Building a fictional world requires an

author to be able to create and sell ideas that not only captivates their audiences but offer enough stability and convincing qualities to cause the world to be plausible.

Applying this idea to this essay, world building is analyzed in the novel *Heartless*. In the case of this novel and most fantasy style stories, world building is a needed first step in setting up the world. This is because the environment of the world is something that only the author has visited (hence the idea that the novel starts as a blank slate). The author's job is then to effectively and creatively convey a world that readers can visit with ease. World building provides a much needed foundation for readers as they take the leap into an author's cognition and creativity.

In the case of realism with fiction, this stylistic choice helps authors to directly parallel our human reality into their own story. Often this is most clearly seen through the expression of social, ethical, gender, religious issues or norms characters have. This idea also is commonly seen through characters' ideology when it comes to how they perceive interactions with different people, environments, memories, motives, (etc.). Realism within fiction allows authors the ability to rely on their audience's preconceptions and understanding of social issues (from current time or historical time), historical context, or logical reasoning. This style focuses more on how novels can take real and human issues and apply them within an author's made-up space.

Looking at this idea in terms of this essay, the novel *The Secret Garden* is able to rely on the audience's intelligibility on a child's mindset. Readers are able to recall memories from their youth and empathize with Mary as she works through a drastic change in living situations, as well as her own coming-of-age discovery. For many readers, moving houses, the death of a parent, or going through a custody change is something they are familiar with. It doesn't require any foundation or explanation from

the author. Burnett's job is to help us feel Mary's emotions and relate to her struggles and discovery. Being able to parallel her journey with our own potential nostalgia and memories helps push the narrative and creates some realism to our understands and emotional responses.

In the shortest terms, world building requires an author to create a plausible world for audiences to "stand in" while realism within fiction requires authors to give audiences the chance to "stand in" a character's shoes.

How Fictional Is Fiction?

The last source discussed in this research touches on both world building and realism within fiction. In Walton's article "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?" she effectively examines the "truth" of fiction and applies it to our daily lives in the real world. Walton provides an overview of how fiction often mirrors reality as authors write from their experiences and perspectives from their time. The reason we are able to accept and understand fictional worlds is because creating new worlds requires logic and believable concepts. However, the question of where do authors come up with these concepts remains. The answer is simple: the concepts are taken from the author's human logic and personal experiences from the real world. This is why the argument is still present and relevant when examining the classics through any modern writing. While the lifestyle and fundamental structures of classic fiction don't apply to our modern reality, they were "modern" at one period in time, and the logic and concepts did reflect the author's reality. Even with fantasy world building, authors always tie in ideas from their cognition (even if it's subconsciously). This ideology ties together because if truth is based off of the author's cognition and that cognition comes

from real world experiences, then fiction has to mirror reality. This is why fictional worlds hold some connections with reality and why people are able to connect with and grow attached to them.

Book Selection and Synopsis

For this essay, three novels will be analyzed using the five universal elements explained above. The synopsis for each book contains possible spoilers. The first novel is *Salt to the Sea* written by Ruta Sepetys in 2016. This genre of this novel is historical fiction. The year is 1945, World War II has left devastation across the globe. In East Prussia, thousands of fleeing refugees are on the run, looking for any sort of freedom and safety. For some that comes in the form of the Wilhelm Gustloff, a German ocean liner moving both soldiers and civilians to salvation. Among the refugees is Luthethain nurse Joana, Prussian art apprentice Florian, a young Polish girl Emilia, and a Nazi soldier Alfred. All seek freedom but at what price? And what happens when their four paths collide and their secrets begin to unfold?

The next novel is *The Secret Garden* written by Frances Hodgson Burnett in 1911. The genre is children's fiction. Ten year old Mary Lennox has just moved from India to live with her distant uncle in his gloomy English manner. Neglected all of her life, and adjusting to a new environment, Mary remains isolated and distant, that is until she finds a hidden key to a lost-forgotten Garden. With the help of some unlikely friends, Mary might just bring the garden, house, and estate back to life.

Last in the book selection is *Heartless* written by Marissa Meyer. We all know the story about the girl who fell down the rabbit hole into wonderland, but what about the woman wearing the heart shaped crown? This high fantasy novel is the prequel to the

Alice in Wonderland story we all know from our childhoods. Heartless tells the story of Catherine, a young woman living in the vibrant kingdom of Hearts, who falls in love with the mysterious court jester. In the midst of their fantasy adventures and friendship-turned-romance, a terrifying monster wreaks havoc over Wonderland, causing Catherine to doubt everything she knows about her land, her future, and herself. And when faced with the ultimate sacrifice, will Catherine survive the terrors of this so-called Wonderland, or will she lose her head?

The Four Narrators of Tragedy

The first novel being analyzed in this thesis is Ruta Sepetys's *Salt to the Sea*. The book opens with a quick snapshot of the four main characters: Joanna, Florian, Emilia, and Alfred. Each has a short opening devoted to them, headed by a concise statement describing their greatest fears, pulling the audience into the seriousness of the story:

“[Joana’s] Guilt is a hunter”

“[Florain’s] Fate is a hunter”

“[Emilia’s] Shame is a hunter

“[Alfred’s] Fear is a hunter”

(Sepetys, 1-7)

Sepetys opens her novel with a very distinct narrative style. She writes her narrator’s opening statements with a poetic-feeling repetition, allowing each of their confessions to mirror each other. This repetition gives readers the opportunity to compare and contrast the early fears of the different characters and introduces their

motivations for fleeing their homelands. With these opening confessions, her audience learns two very important things. First, war is causing these characters to live through their worst fears. And with these fears comes very dark and heavy emotions that are reflected back to the audience. Second, the characters are being hunted. Regardless of the fact that their assailants aren't physical doesn't matter because to each of them, their hunter is so severe that they feel it chases them and they cannot stop it. This is a simple yet effective first use of narrative style, drawing audiences into the character's great fears and setting the stage perfectly for the rest of the story. Sepetys uses this alternative narration, giving each lead character the chance to relive and re-evaluate their actions over and over again. Being able to highlight the main motives, goals, fears, and desires of each character is important for the later distinctions between them. It also opens the story in a clear way, setting up a sense of what has happened and what personal conflicts and fears still remain. This use of narrative style is a strong technique that helps to set up the structure of characterization and really shows what is most important and necessary for each character's potential survival.

For this novel, narrative style and characterization go hand in hand as the main characters develop. Being able to connect how the characters perceive their world and view their logic/motive in real time helps to define their "true" characters. For the audience, being able to see the internal and external parts of the characters leaves no room to hide. Who and what each character represents is clearly stated as the plot continues. Because characterization is so open and exposed due to the multiple narrators, attachment from audiences is easier to form.

Emilia's Eternal Strength: Why Death Can Be Beautiful

Arguably, Emilia's death is the most heartbreaking part of the *Salt to the Sea*. Her loss comes after audiences have watched her survive her rape, prevail on her track to the Wilhelm Gustloff, give birth to her child at fifteen years, and give up her spot on a lifeboat to her child and best friend. Her entire character was full of so much hope and strength that audiences naturally rooted for her to escape safely and survive all that World War II threw at her. Emilia's characterization reveals her to be a timid and loving young girl. The world is so corrupt and broken that audiences are naturally drawn to her hope. It's not only appealing to have such a pure example of hope, but it gives audiences a reason to latch on and believe the end could be happy. Even in the moments leading up to her death, Emilia has survived Alfred's final attack on her and is left alone, floating among wreckage in the middle of the ocean.

“Less than an hour had passed since the ship was torpedoed. Thousands of dead bodies, eyes open, floated frozen in life vests... The soldier [Alfred] alternated between talking and heaving over the side of the raft. He was pointing his finger at me, speaking of Hitler. I hadn't realized: I was speaking Polish... He wagged a delirious finger at me.

‘Filthy Pole. You liar! Finally, I will serve my country.’”

(Sepetys, 350-351, 361)

“He leaned over and tried to shove me into the water. I kicked him with all of my remaining strength. He fell backward on the raft, chanting and repeating ‘Hero, hero’.. He didn't stop. He grabbed at me. I fought and clawed as he's saying.. his shoeless foot slipped on the icy surface and he dropped, his forehead smashing against the steel corner of the raft.. He looked Gravely injured. I reached to steady him but he jerked

away, violently recoiling from my touch. He lost his balance and fell backward into the water.”

(Sepetys, 361-362)

By the time Emilia passes away, Alfred has already met his end and audiences emotionally suffered less. It's clear why Alfred's death isn't as emotionally impactful. Ignoring his affliction with the Nazi party and strictly viewing his character, the use of characterization allows a clear look into Alfred's mind. Audiences are able to see Alfred's logic to be considerably hostile and destructive, as well as self absorbed and narcissistic. Alfred wasn't a character made to be loved as his characterization represents the dark and horrid parts of history. Everything he stands for reflects the Nazi party and people who preyed on vulnerable populations. His actions offered no redeeming qualities for audiences and his deliberate attacks on people like Emilia caused audiences to loathe him immensely. While audiences might mourn for the boy Alfred could have been if World War II ideologies hadn't corrupted him, his death ultimately brings more justice than sorrow. This is because his death offers Emilia peace and safety for a short time, no matter how lost the rest of her situation seems.

Shortly after Alfred's death, Emilia freezes to death and her body floats away on a raft, lost to the sea. Joanna and Florian, the survivors, don't know what became of Emilia until years later. At the very end of the novel, Florian (now married to Joanna and raising Emilia's daughter) receives a letter from Clara Christensen, a woman who discovered Emilia's body after the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff. Clara tells Florian that Emilia was laid to rest and that she created a beautiful burial site for Emilia. Clara assures Florian that even in death, Emilia could never be alone or forgotten:

“Countless things have floated up onshore over the years. There is a museum on the island of Bornholm, full of items. But this, of course, was different. She arrived not on a public beach, like most of the bottles and floats. She came directly to us...but those who are gone are not necessarily lost. Near our cottage, where the small creek winds under the old wooden bridge, is the most beautiful bed of roses. And there rests Emilia.

She is safe. She is loved.

(Sepetys, 376-378)

This ending not only warms hearts but evokes incredibly strong emotional responses. After all of the pain and fear Emilia lived through. After she spent her final moment floating alone at sea unsure of her baby’s fate. After all of the loss, grief, and terror she endured, Emilia was laid to rest in a bed of roses because someone chose to love her. Emilia’s story might end in death, but her death receives the care and love she was robbed of in life. There is a heartbreaking satisfaction to this conclusion. While the attachment readers had with Emilia isn’t answered in the way they hoped, there is still a great reward in following her journey. Emilia does succeed because she continues to be brave, strong, and hopeful even to her end. Emilia’s characterization represents so much more than her death. She represents the beauty and bravery of Poland, and the people who fought to survive and overcome. For readers, there was never the question of *if* Emilia was strong, and breaking down her characterization helps show *how* she was strong, *what* her strength represented, and *why* her strength will always be eternal.

Mary's Behavior and Realism Within Fiction (*The Secret Garden*)

Moving novels, *The Secret Garden* opens with the death of Mary's parents from the cholera epidemic and how she was discovered alive days later. Neglected all of her life, and adjusting to a new environment, Mary remains isolated and distant. The first few chapters detail this neglect and explain that Mary's parents didn't seem to want her, resulting in a non-existent parent-child relationship:

“Mary had liked to look at her mother from a distance and she thought she was very pretty, but as she knew very little of her she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to even miss her very much when she was gone.” “She did not miss her at all, in fact, and as she was a self absorbed child who gave her entire thought to herself as she had always done.”

(Burnett, 7)

From the beginning, the audience knows Mary is a neglected and unloved child. When Mary's parents die, she doesn't care. This is not because she is heartless or mean, but because she never knew them as her parents. Mary herself even knows her relationship with her mother was essentially non-existent. For a 10 year old girl, this is really heartbreaking to read. But this background lets audiences know that Mary has been alone her whole life and is very set in her ways when she moves in with her uncle. For a young child with no real way to process the immediate deaths of her parents (no matter how negligent they were), isolation and self indulgence are common traits we as readers see in our reality. Shutting down and struggling to form good relationships is often the result of neglectful caregivers, especially in a society where Mary was passed around the care of strangers before landing into her uncle custody. Mary remains this

way for the first few chapters of the novel, until she discovers a secret garden located in her uncle's estate:

“It was an old key which looked as if it had been buried a long time. Mistress Mary stood up and looked at it with an almost frightening face as it hung from her finger. ‘Perhaps it has been buried for 10 years,’ she said in a whisper. ‘Perhaps it is the key to the garden!’”

(Burnett, 60)

“She held back the swinging curtain of ivy and pushed back the door which opened slowly... then she slipped through it, and shut it behind her, and stood with her back against it... she was standing inside the secret garden.”

(Burnett, 69)

To an adult, the old rose garden was simply a forgotten place and a mournful reminder of the dear lady of the house who died far too young. But to a young girl, the vacant space is an enchanted palace of her own making, a new world full of wonder. This garden became Mary's responsibility. She develops new found determination to make something beautiful from the ruins left behind and invest herself into something other than her own indulgences and wants. Her choice of investment is the first big step towards her overall self growth. Her desire to make the garden her own also helps give Mary an outlet to her emotions and circumstances.

Eventually, Mary (along with new found friends) is able to slowly but surely revive the garden. In doing so, Mary herself starts to grow as a person and breaks

through her shell. At this point in the story, Mary has something to live and work for. She has discovered love and affection in the form of her garden. For a child without parents and a childhood in isolation, this garden is a way for Mary to cope and learn to be affectionate to something other than herself. This ties back into realism within fiction because this is a very real and similar reaction a modern day child might have towards coping from isolation. Having healthy coping strategies like taking care of a garden helps children open up, just like a rose bud begins to bloom. For readers, we are able to form an attachment through understanding Mary and being able to relate her reactions to her circumstances makes her character seem real. We as an audience empathize with her situation, and cheer her own as she grows as a person. For readers, it's rewarding watching Mary find joy and love in the form of her garden, and our "relationship" with her feels like a pay off when she gets the happy ending we want her to receive.

The English Atmosphere

In addition to Burnett's well written realism, her novel creates an atmosphere that's truly captivating due to Mary's perspective. For Mary, England is a gloomy, dark, and cold place. For readers, it's easy to understand why. Life in the English countryside is a huge contrast to the bright, warm lifestyle that Mary was accustomed to in India. Witnessing Mary's drastic change in scenery helps the audience feel not only the gloom of England but the same sense of mystery and potential fear that 10 year old Mary has. These feelings are first felt upon Mary's arrival to Misselthwaite Manor, her uncle's estate:

“The entrance door was a huge one made of massive, curiously shaped panels of oak studded with big iron nails and bound with great iron bars. It opened into an enormous hall, which was so dimly lit that the face is in the portraits on the walls and the figures in the suits of armor made Mary feel that she did not want to look at them...and she felt as small and lost and odd as she looked”

(Burnett, 19-20)

Here, Mary’s immediate first impression is discomfort. She feels small and lost in the environment she was thrust into by her circumstances. Because the novel shares these feelings with the readers at the same time, the reader’s first impression mirrors Mary’s. Burnett meticulously chose to reveal Misselthwaite Manor to her audience the same time it was revealed to Mary. There was no room for the audience’s own ideas or imagination of what the manor would be like. It is enormous, it is dimly lit, and it makes one feel small and lost and odd to be present there.

It is not until Mary settles into her new home a few days later that she feels brave enough to explore. Like most children, the want to understand and discover grows from their own curiosity. Because she had settled down, the manor did not seem so terrifying. It felt new, and Mary felt enticed to go and explore:

“She had never been taught to ask permission to do things, and she knew nothing at all about authority, so she would not have thought it necessary to ask Mrs. Medlock if she might walk about the house... she had found out a great deal this morning. She felt as if she had been on a long journey, and at any rate she had had something to amuse her all

the time, and she had played with the ivory elephants and had seen the gray mouse and its babies in their nest in the velvet cushion.

(Burnett, 49-53)

As she ventured through the manor, it's clear Mary's feelings towards the estate had shifted. She did not feel the need to get someone to stay with her, feeling brave enough to leave her room. Mary also recaps her exploration and feels that she enjoyed her time and had fun. Here, the atmosphere shifts from discomfort to an almost comfortable state of content, and readers feel more relaxed as they read Mary's feelings at the end of the chapter. Similar to Mary's initial impression of Misselthwaite Manor, Burnett reveals the new atmosphere to the audience at the same time Mary is feeling it herself. The shift in feelings comes "together" for both Mary and the audience. It makes Mary's first time exploring the manor more significant and helps to show her small but serious growth in comfort.

We readers feel more attached to Mary because we experience the same feelings in real time. Knowing only what she knows ties us together and helps us remain invested through her story. We feel a sense of satisfaction when she is brave enough to explore and a sense of accomplishment when Mary begins to break out of her shell. It's rewarding to follow Mary on her journey, and because we invest so much hope on her ending, the attachment we feel is genuine and results in an overwhelming feeling of joy as our emotional response.

Point of View vs. Focalization

As a whole, narrative style considers the way in which a story is conveyed to an audience. However, narrative style varies from author to author. Even within the book selection in this essay, the “styles” of narrative style are very different due to the unique purposes they serve in their respective books. Using *Salt to the Sea* and *The Secret Garden* for example, it’s clear that the style of the book’s narrator differs greatly. *Salt to the Sea* offers four narrators with alternating points of view. The narrators - Joanna, Florian, Emilia, and Alfred - take turns sharing their experiences and feelings through a first-person lens. Audience sees these characters narrate using personal pronouns (I, me, my, etc.) and “live” the story in their shoes. This technique is intentionally used to help put the readers into their shoes and “live” through the events of World War II and eventually the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff.

The Secret Garden differs from the Sepetys’ use of the first-person lens. While the story is technically told through Mary’s eyes, the point of view is focalized via a third-person narrator. Focalization is a term specifically used in modern narratology that discusses not just the point of view, but a specific perspective from which the events of a story are witnessed (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms). In the case of a focalized lens, events “observed by a traditional omniscient narrator are said to be non-focalized, whereas events witnessed within the story’s world from the constrained perspective of a single character are ‘internally focalized’” (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms).

“Mary skipped round all the gardens and round the orchard, resting every few minutes. At length she went to her own special walk and made up her mind to try if she

could skip the whole length of it. It was a good long skip and she began slowly, but before she had gone halfway down the path she was so hot and breathless that she was obliged to stop. She did not mind much, because she had already counted up to thirty”

(Burnett, 67)

Burnett’s choice to use internally focalized narrative style helps with the understanding and enjoyment of the garden. Here, the narration does not display any first-person lens. There is clearly another “individual” telling the story. Burnett is writing from the third-person and audiences are let into Mary’s personal feelings and well being. This third person perspective sees things through Mary’s narrow point of view. The passage above presents an omniscient outside narrator describing Mary’s actions in the story. However, the narrative is unraveled in such a manner as to focus on the tiny details that are given to the audience bit by bit. This unraveling helps present a vibrant sense of Mary’s experience in that moment. Everything the reader is given is something that Mary is “given” and or is currently experiencing in the story.

Relating this idea back to Mary’s chance discovery of the garden, Burnett’s choice to use internally focalized narrative style helps fuel the rediscovery for audiences. Burnett narrates through the eyes of a child, giving this event so much vigor and thrill that it honestly amplifies our emotions. Only a child could be this excited to find a run-down, weeded, and disheveled garden because to a child the possibilities of what it could be means so much more. Being able to understand Burnett’s literary style choice helps us understand why this discovery is so fascinating. To Mary, a sheltered, neglected child, this is a new world in need of her specific skills. No one else seems to care (from

her perspective), so she gets to take charge and finally make something her own. She is able to provide the attention she so desperately craved from her parents and raise the garden as her own.

For Mary, her thoughts and feelings are internally focalized as they address her state from her specific and constrained perspective. Mary's perspective is "spoken" like traditional dialogue and audiences are able to read both the plot and Mary's internal dialogue without breaking attention and focus on style. Addition to this, the dialogue and perspective is presented to the audience in a way that feels childlike. Mary's character is somewhat sporadic at times and her spontaneous focus on what's currently in front of her feels very childlike. As the plot unravels and Mary is able to grow and piece together the history of the Rose Garden and Misselthwaite Manor, her understanding, internal dialogue, and overall perception is so well articulated that audiences are able to see her character mature from her childlike ways.

World Building and Atmosphere in *Heartless*

Since her novel is a prequel to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Meyer is able to build upon a familiar, pre-existing fantasy most audiences have come to accept. Most audiences are familiar with Carroll's classic tale and Meyer is able to use this to her advantage. Her job with writing is to redevelop Wonderland into a plausible world inspired from Carroll's childlike dream world. It's important to note that Carroll was allowed the luxury of passing his version of Wonderland off as a dream. In the original novel, Alice wakes up at the end and audiences realize the insane and fantastical world they visited was just something created from a child's subconscious. In *Heartless*, Meyer has to take the familiar fantasy and recreate it into a plausible world readers believe is

real. The use of world building is paramount here. World building helps to breathe more life into the world and permits expansion on descriptions of how characters look and act. This as well as piecing together a coherent, livable world for her characters allows Meyer to rewrite Wonderland with enough detail to be a believable place. Instead of following Alice's path through Wonderland (from Carroll's novel), the setting for the majority of *Heartless* is the lush and beautiful kingdom of Hearts. Setting up a kingdom for example helps Meyer to narrow down details and make an abstract world feel real. She is able to define the dreamlike state enough so that her interpretation of Wonderland turns from a child's dream without order to a magical and romantic kingdom. In doing this, she is also able to create a world familiar in nature to readers who enjoyed Carroll's original tale. Meyer also adds some familiarity to the 1865 classic in her retelling, offering audiences a callback to characters such as the white rabbit, the Mad Hatter, and the King of Hearts all before Alice entered their world. Audiences can smile when they spot familiar characters and enjoy their new and more developed places within Meyer's fantasy world.

In addition to her world building, Meyer makes the fantasy seem believable through the use of atmosphere. In the beginning of the novel, Catherine is attending a ball hosted by the King of Hearts. Meyer enchants her audience with the spectacle of a grand party as she whisks them away into a celebration with a vibrant atmosphere. For readers, being able to take in the castle and appreciate the visuals through Catherine's narration makes the party feel more real. Meyer is able to accomplish this jubilant feeling by romancing the atmosphere of the castle and celebration. In her version, Wonderland is very Renaissance like, with art, dancing, royalty, and vivid descriptions of excitement and frivolity.

“The ballroom of Heart Castle had long ago been carved from gargantuan chunks of pink quartz, from the floor through the enormous pillars that supported the dome roof. The ceiling was painted in murals depicting various landscapes from the kingdom...”

“Large windows marched along the southern edge of the room, heart-shaped and cut from faceted red glass. The feasting table, overflowing with fruits, cheeses, and sweets, stretch the length of the north wall”

(Meyer, 20)

Right away, audiences are given a very clear expectation as to the luxury and romantic atmosphere they are going to receive as they continue reading. While the audience has never been to Wonderland, we can immediately see a resemblance to our art and depictions of the Renaissance and other romantic art periods. For readers, this is a similarity we can understand easily. In our world, ceiling art is also considered a luxury, famed for either the elite rich or ancient architecture. Meyer uses it both ways in setting up her castle and atmosphere, making it very inviting and adventurous. Her audience also receives a very vivid first description of the Kingdom of Hearts. The architectural style is very romantic, if not slightly flamboyant in nature. But, in a place like Wonderland where childhood wonder and excitement reign, it makes sense the adults would design a palace in the way a child might describe “a kingdom of hearts”. The vividness isn’t accidental, but intentional for Meyer, and it helps to display the same childhood nostalgia audiences know from the original tale. More so, Meyer is aware of her audience and is feeding into the imagination aspects. If one was to ask a child what a

kingdom of love and hearts looked like, they would most likely involve heart shaped structures, an abnormal amount of pink and red, and a large palace fit for a fairytale.

In Meyer's version of Wonderland, the Kingdom of hearts is a real place. It is not a child's dream or hallucination, but a real world outside of our own. Because audiences understand this divide in worlds, it becomes easier to buy into the fantasy. Meyer's isn't trying to sell us on the impossibility of our world like in the original Alice in Wonderland. She's taken inspiration from the nostalgic story from our childhoods and recreated her own whimsical verizon. Additionally, because audiences have already begun to associate Catherine's world with older, historical parts of our world, buying into the fantasy becomes easier. The audience also experiences Wonderland through Catherine's eyes. Catherine has grown up in Wonderland, so the "wonders" are not all that exciting, but rather normal. Having a neighbor who is a pig, frog, or white rabbit isn't unusual but rather just part of this world. Meyer does a strong job of keeping up the fantasy feeling throughout her book and audiences have no issues jumping into Catherine's reality and accepting the illusion. We instead form a liking, understanding, and eventual attachment to Catherine's world when accepting the fantasy as "real". It's no longer a fantasy world but a world that simply offers some fantasy elements, making it more fun.

Realism with Catherine

Despite Wonderland taking place in a completely fictional world and housing the most insane and fantastical characters, there is still potential for audiences to really connect with Catherine and find psychological realism within fiction. Catherine is seventeen years old and begins the novel with a very simple dream. She wants to own

and operate a bakery with her best friend Mary Ann. Catherine has a genuine love of baking and despite her high social status as a noblewoman she wants to leave it all behind to fulfill her own passions. Mary Ann has a good head for numbers and the duo decided to combine their interests in order to open their own business together.

Catherine doesn't mind that Mary Ann is of lower social status but cares more about the fact that she has a specific skill set that would help her achieve her dream. The two women share a genuine love and friendship with each other and that is more important than any social or economical differences between the two. Their shared dream is the goal:

“But she [Catherine] and Mary Ann had been dreaming of it for so long, she sometimes forgot that it wasn't yet reality”

(Meyer, 11).

“Mary Ann settled her hands on Cath's shoulders. ‘You are the best. And I've calculated the numbers again - with the expected cost attached to Mr Caterpillar shop, monthly expenses, and the cost of ingredients, all measured against our planned daily output and pricing. Adjusted to allow some room for error, I still think we would be profitable in under a year... which is why I need you on this venture. My brilliant oh-so-logical business partner’” (Meyer, 12-13).

The target audience for *Heartless* is teenagers and young adults. Readers might not be able to relate to the fantasy within Catherine's world, but this simple desire to follow a dream hits home to the younger audiences. Figuring out the near future,

potential careers, bucket list items, and overall goals is something most individuals within this age range relate to. In our reality, this is typically the time where individuals are finishing high school and starting college, applying for first jobs, learning to become more independent adults, and potentially falling in love for the first time. Starting the novel with a similar pathway for Catherine, despite the fact that she is from a fiction fantasy with talking frogs and white rabbits, helps to parallel some “human” and psychological realism into Meyer’s fantasy. Because of this realism, readers in this age range are then more likely to form an attachment with Catherine as they live through the similar unknowns and hopes for their futures.

Conclusion: Applying Elements to Genres

It is evident that while literary elements are universal, they can be successfully used to form attachment in different ways. The different uses are clearly seen through the diverse genres present in the case studies. In the case of Meyer’s *Heartless*, incorporating world building as her primary element was paramount in crafting her imaginary world and fantasy fiction. Meyer was able to take her audience’s preconceived and plausible notions about Wonderland and recreate the world into a more romantic and colorful place fit for a dramatic fairytale. Meyer took ideas from Lewis Carroll’s classic and breathed more life into the nostalgia he left behind. Carroll created a solid base for Wonderland, and Meyer was able to build upon it with her characters, societal expectations, and atmosphere. Her world was made up of enough plausible and convincing ideas that her audiences were able to buy into the fantasy and invest their emotions to form an attachment to her living world, as well as her main character Catherine.

With Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, the use of narrative style and atmosphere was most important when creating a narrative centered around a ten year old girl. When creating her children's fiction novel, Burnett was able to use atmosphere as a way to capture the feeling of the time period, transporting readers to a gloomy and mysterious English estate. Everything seems vivid because Burnett focused on creating an atmosphere that played off of Mary's uncertainty about her new living situation. Once there, readers were given information and clues about the world through the eyes of Mary. Because readers witness the events within the story from Mary's constrained perspective and are allowed to hear into her inner dialogue, Burnett's writing is internally focalized on a child's interpretation of the world. This stylistic choice brings Burnett's coming of age story to life. Audiences form a strong attachment to Mary as they grow to understand her actions and mindset as Mary herself develops more into a mature and confident character.

Due to her multiple narrators and switching points of view, Sepetys's *Salt to the Sea* relied on characterization to draw out the "truth" of the characters, and help offer audiences a dive deep into who Joanna, Florian, Emilia, and Alfred really were. Oftentimes it can be difficult to keep up with multiple narratives. Readers may find it hard to place their emotions in a reliable narrator if the narrators aren't fleshed out enough. However, Sepetys was able to extract the morals, mindset, and overall identity of each of her main characters (through characterization). Characterization was also important as her novel is historical fiction. Sepetys was able to help characterize her groups of people, fully fleshing out the motives and hopes of European refugees on the run for freedom. Lastly, Sepetys wanted to focus on creating a narrative based around the voices of children and young adults. Characterization helped to deliver this goal by

allowing her audiences to view World War II through the perspectives of young adults from different nations. Readers were able to learn through, empathize with, and feel heartbreak alongside characters who were forced to leave everything they love behind at a young age (Sepetys, 382). The audience's attachment comes from a place of deeper understanding, not just from the heartbreaking circumstances Sepetys brought to life but from her fully developed young adults and their struggles to survive one of the history's most destructive wars.

Author's Reflection

My hope with this thesis is to enlighten both readers and authors as they continue to embrace their psyche on their literary journeys. Sometimes books are simply an escape and we as readers chose to take them at face value and enjoy the ride. Often, comfort books can be guilty pleasure and allow us the opportunity to indulge in a great story. Enjoying books this way is perfectly fine, and books don't always require an analysis to be "truly understood". However the purpose of this research is to help readers start to understand the complexities of literary attachment and emotional reactions. Understanding the background of literary elements, the importance of fluent and element-filled writing, and how they directly connect with our emotions and natural reactions creates a more meaningful reading experience. Being informed on our emotions and feelings towards the literature we consume not only makes us more educated readers on the physical literature we consume, but also our post reading ideas, feelings, and reactions we have.

In the case of authors, my hope is this thesis highlights five of many useful and universal literary elements and how they can directly be used to help increase the

likelihood of audience engagement, attachment, and emotional reaction. My wish is that my research sticks with authors (especially aspiring authors) and helps you to view literature in a deeper and more educated light.

Lastly, this thesis is certainly not limited to the three novels provided. The theoretical background and breakdown of the elements is meant to work with other novels. This thesis is to serve as an analytic application for improved understanding of the literary attachment we travel on in our reading, the value of knowing when universal elements are effectively used, and how we as humans can overall connect with and better comprehend the bookworm sides of our brains.

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