

Lecture 1: Thematology & Themes

Vijay Kumar Das points out in *Comparative Literature*:

“Comparative Literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. It further studies themes, modes, conventions and the use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more.”

Thematology

It is the contrastive study of themes in different literary texts. As a subfield in comparative literature according to the French school, thematology is a comparative study of literary works as they relate to other literary works beyond their national borders as far as the themes are concerned. It is a more specific and limited investigation in the field of comparatism.

Definition of thematology or thematics

Thematology or thematics is an important branch of study in Comparative Literature. It is a recent entrance in the field. The theme is defined as the main idea or the subject in a work of art. The term ‘thematology’ or ‘thematics’ was coined by Harry Levin, an American comparatist. It involves the study of ‘themes’. The chief contributors of thematology are Raymond Trousson from Belgium, Elizabeth Frenzel from France, Harry Levin, Weisstein and Cleanth Brooks from America. Trousson has performed his thematic study on the Prometheus theme in English literature. Frenzel on themes in World Literature and Levin and Weisstein have done theoretical discussions on the subject of thematology. Cleanth Brooks has done a thematic study of Faulkner.

Universal Themes in Literature

“There is no literature without theme in the works of writers.”

The theme of a book is a universal idea or message that stretches through an entire story. A theme may show up in a pattern (such as reoccurring examples of beauty in simplicity) or a theme may come through as the result of a build up (tragedy of war). It is often a lesson that we learn about life or people

Term Paper (assignment):

- Write a compare and contrast essay to discuss *the use and meaning of one of the following themes in two of the works listed below.*

NB: This is a team work, and the essay should not exceed two pages or three at most. Do not forget to properly reference your resources.

Examples of Theme in Literature

Example #1: *Love and Friendship Theme*

Love and friendship are frequently occurring themes in literature. They generate emotional twists and turns in a narrative, and can lead to a variety of endings: happy, sad, or bittersweet. The following are famous literary works with love and friendship themes:

- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
- *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte
- *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen
- *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Example #2: *War Theme*

The theme of war has been explored in literature since ancient times. Literary works utilizing this theme may either glorify or criticize the idea of war. Most recent literary works portray war as a curse for humanity, due to the suffering it inflicts. Some famous examples include:

- *Iliad and Odyssey* by Homer
- *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
- *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
- *Arms and the Man* by Bernard Shaw
- *A Band of Brothers: Stories from Vietnam* by Walter McDonald

Example #3: *Revenge Theme*

Revenge is another recurrent theme found in many popular literary works. A character comes across certain circumstances that make him aware of his need for revenge. The outcome of his action is often bitter, but sometimes they may end up being satisfied. Examples are:

- *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare
- *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas
- *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* by Stieg Larsson
- *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham