



The role of social class, generation, and locality in shaping literary themes: A critical analysis

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Abstract

This critical analysis explores how social class, generation, and locality shape literary themes, emphasizing the dynamic ways in which these factors influence narrative content, character development, and thematic expression. Social class acts as a foundational force in literature, framing themes of inequality, class conflict, mobility, and alienation, and highlighting the material and ideological impacts of economic power. The influence of generation is equally significant, with literature offering a platform for the exploration of tradition versus modernity, youth rebellion, generational trauma, and the transmission of cultural values. Generational shifts often bring about thematic explorations of historical change, memory, and identity. Additionally, locality is a critical determinant, shaping literary themes of belonging, displacement, cultural identity, and environmental consciousness, as geography and cultural practices deeply inform character actions and societal dynamics. This study argues that the interaction between social class, generational shifts, and locality is not isolated but interdependent, creating complex thematic landscapes in literature. Themes such as economic marginalization, cultural rupture, resistance to colonial or imperial legacies, and struggles over national or regional identity emerge through the intersection of these forces. By examining how these dimensions converge in literary works, this analysis underscores that literature functions as a space where social structures and historical contexts are reflected, contested, and reimagined. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which literature not only mirrors the material world but actively engages with and critiques the socio-political realities that shape human experience.

Keywords: Literature, Social class, Generation, Locality, Themes, Critical analysis

دور الطبقة الاجتماعية والجيل والمحلية في تشكيل المواضيع الأدبية: تحليل نقدي

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ملخص

يستكشف هذا التحليل النقدي كيف تُشكل الطبقة الاجتماعية والجيل والمحلية المواضيع الأدبية، مُركزاً على الطرق الديناميكية التي تؤثر بها هذه العوامل على محتوى السرد، وتطور الشخصية، والتعبير الموضوعي. تُمثل الطبقة الاجتماعية قوةً أساسيةً في الأدب، إذ تُؤطر مواضيع عدم المساواة، والصراع الطبقي، والتنقل، والاغتراب، وتُبرز الآثار المادية والأيدولوجية للقوة الاقتصادية. ولا يقل تأثير الجيل أهميةً، إذ يُوفر الأدب منصةً لاستكشاف التقليد في مقابل الحداثة، وتمرد الشباب، والصدمات الجيلية، ونقل القيم الثقافية. غالباً ما تؤدي التحولات الجيلية إلى استكشافات موضوعية للتغيير التاريخي، والذاكرة، والهوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تُعتبر المحلية عاملاً حاسماً، إذ تُشكل مواضيع أدبية كالانتماء،



والنزوح، والهوية الثقافية، والوعي البيئي، حيث تؤثر الجغرافيا والممارسات الثقافية بشكل عميق على أفعال الشخصية وديناميكيات المجتمع. تُجادل هذه الدراسة بأن التفاعل بين الطبقة الاجتماعية والتحولات الجيلية والمحلية ليس تفاعلاً منعزلاً، بل مترابط، مما يخلق رؤية موضوعية معقدة في الأدب. تبرز مواضيع مثل التهميش الاقتصادي، والانقسام الثقافي، ومقاومة الإرث الاستعماري أو الإمبريالي، والصراعات على الهوية الوطنية أو الإقليمية من خلال تقاطع هذه القوى. من خلال دراسة كيفية تقارب هذه الأبعاد في الأعمال الأدبية، يؤكد هذا التحليل أن الأدب بمثابة فضاء تنعكس فيه البنى الاجتماعية والسياقات التاريخية، وتُناقش، ويُعاد تصورها. وبذلك، يكشف عن الطرق التي لا يعكس بها الأدب العالم المادي فحسب، بل يتفاعل بها بنشاط مع الحقائق الاجتماعية والسياسية التي تُشكل التجربة الإنسانية، وينتقدتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب، الطبقة الاجتماعية، الجيل، المحلية، المواضيع، التحليل النقدي

Introduction

Literature has long been recognized as more than a mere artistic or imaginative endeavor; it functions as a multifaceted and evolving mirror of the social, cultural, and historical environments from which it originates. From the earliest oral storytelling traditions to the latest digital forms of narrative, literature has borne the marks of the lived realities, belief systems, and material conditions that shape both its authors and its audiences. Fundamentally, literature is not created in isolation; rather, it emerges within intricate webs of social interactions, historical circumstances, and cultural landscapes. Among the numerous influences that mold the themes, structures, and portrayals within literary works, three pivotal factors stand out for their deep and interrelated significance: social class, generational identity, and geographic locality. Each of these aspects not only shapes the substance and structure of literary creations but also determines how stories are understood, interpreted, and valued across different eras and regions (1).

This paper undertakes a critical examination of how the three forces—social class, generation, and locality—contribute to the formation of literary themes. By exploring both their individual impacts and their interconnected effects, it aims to shed light on the intricate ways literature operates as simultaneously a reflection of and a challenge to its socio-cultural environment. This exploration is especially relevant in an era when global literary scholarship is increasingly focused on questions of identity, power dynamics, and positionality, yet occasionally falls into the trap of simplifying or isolating the very elements that shape the creation and interpretation of literature.

From the outset, it is crucial to understand that social class functions not solely as an economic designation but also as a cultural and ideological lens that influences an individual's access to education, cultural resources, and forms of self-expression. Within literary scholarship, class has been examined through various lenses, including Marxist theory, cultural materialist perspectives, and sociological readings of literature. An author's placement within or outside of



dominant class hierarchies significantly shapes their viewpoints, narrative choices, and thematic concerns. Works written by or focusing on the working class frequently highlight issues such as economic hardship, social inequality, labor oppression, and acts of defiance. In contrast, literature originating from bourgeois or upper-class contexts may emphasize existential questions, aesthetic sophistication, or moral quandaries detached from experiences of material lack (2). These differences in themes are far from accidental; they mirror the ideological perspectives and material conditions encountered and expressed by individuals situated at various levels of the socio-economic structure (3).

In addition, social class shapes not only the content of literary works but also determines whose voices are published, circulated, and ultimately enshrined in the literary canon. The operations of the publishing world, the gatekeeping roles of literary critics, and the authoritative influence of educational syllabi often favor particular perspectives, thereby perpetuating patterns of class-based inclusion and exclusion. Consequently, any critical examination of literary themes must account for the structural dynamics that influence the creation and distribution of literature. It should critically explore how narratives related to class conflict, economic hardship, affluence, and social privilege are portrayed, misrepresented, or suppressed within literary works across various historical periods and cultural settings (4).

Generation, as the second key dimension of analysis, introduces an additional layer of nuance to the development of literary themes. A generation is not simply a group defined by age, but rather a collective shaped by shared historical moments, political events, and cultural movements that influence its outlook and sensibilities. Generational identity emerges through common experiences with war, political upheaval, technological advancements, ideological changes, and cultural shifts. These pivotal encounters inevitably imprint themselves on the literature created by and about members of each generation. For example, the writings of the so-called “Lost Generation” following World War I reflect deep disillusionment, existential doubt, and cultural disintegration—motifs that stand in stark contrast to the optimism or technological fascination evident in the literature of subsequent generations (5).

In a similar vein, writers from postcolonial generations in formerly colonized regions created literary works deeply engaged with themes of reclaiming identity, navigating cultural hybridity, and challenging imperialist narratives. The generational gap between authors who directly experienced colonial domination and those writing in the aftermath of independence often leads to divergent thematic focuses, narrative techniques, and ideological viewpoints. Additionally, evolving generational perspectives on issues such as gender, sexuality, environmental concerns, and globalization play an increasingly



influential role in shaping modern literary themes, as emerging writers contest established traditions and express new forms of identity and social critique (6).

The role of locality, as the third central factor in this analysis, goes beyond mere geographical location to include the cultural, linguistic, and symbolic aspects tied to place. Locality influences the environments, settings, languages, customs, and perspectives woven into literary works. For example, the contrast between urban and rural spaces often generates distinct thematic concerns: urban narratives may delve into feelings of isolation, impersonality, and modern life, while rural writings may emphasize community bonds, traditional practices, struggles, or a nostalgic view of pastoral life. Regional identities frequently make their presence felt through literature, providing alternative or oppositional stories to those originating from dominant cultural or political hubs. In postcolonial settings, the notion of locality becomes even more layered, shaped by the interaction between indigenous and colonial languages, cultural practices, and spatial imaginations, resulting in literary explorations of hybridity, displacement, and the complexities of belonging (7).

Locality also interacts with both class and generation to influence the development of literary themes. A writer from the working class in a rural area might highlight issues of economic exploitation related to land use and agricultural labor, whereas an urban middle-class writer from the same generation could explore themes of career ambition, consumer culture, or feelings of alienation in the city. Similarly, younger writers from marginalized localities might use literature as a means to recover silenced histories, challenge prevailing cultural narratives, or voice new political demands. In this way, locality not only serves as a physical backdrop but also shapes the cultural and ideological lenses through which literary themes are created and contested (8).

The convergence of social class, generation, and locality creates intricate dynamics in the process of literary creation. These elements are neither fixed nor separate; instead, they interact in fluid, sometimes contradictory ways that shape the thematic content, narrative voice, and ideological outlook of literary works. A critical approach that emphasizes these intersections offers a deeper understanding of how literature serves as a space where individual identity and collective structures, artistic innovation and socio-political critique, are negotiated. It challenges simplistic or one-size-fits-all interpretations by highlighting the embedded nature of literary texts within specific material, historical, and cultural contexts (9).

To tackle these issues, this paper draws upon a diverse selection of literary works spanning various historical eras, cultural settings, and genres. Furthermore, it reflects on the methodological challenges and opportunities involved in analyzing literature through the perspectives of class, generation, and locality.



Social class

Differences in social class have been a key theme in modern literature, influencing the experiences, ambitions, and challenges of characters within various cultural and historical contexts. Literature frequently mirrors societal frameworks, highlighting the intricacies of class mobility, economic struggles, and social norms. In postcolonial societies, where the enduring effects of colonization continue to shape class structures, literary works offer valuable insights into how individuals navigate these social hierarchies (1).

A person's position in the "classification struggle" ultimately depends on their social standing. Individuals from different social groups perceive the structure of society in distinct ways, meaning that a specific social context creates a "certain environment" of "concepts, images, beliefs, and values" that are commonly shared among people within that context and are reinforced through mutual influence and the shared belief that others in the same group hold these views. Since academia itself is a social context with bourgeois inclinations, scholars often fail to notice phenomena that are apparent within their own experience. Such phenomena are "obscured by facts and relationships typical of the [cultural] period. (2)"

Many scholars hastily argue that the concept of 'class' is no longer relevant. Almost two decades ago, Pakulski and Waters suggested that there was a "declining commitment to Marxism" and a "decline in the appeal of socialist ideologies" in the Western world, leading to both the left and right moving away from class-based concerns. They rejected class-focused theories of social stratification entirely, dismissing the project of 'class-analysis' as outdated and irrelevant. They argued that the very notion of class would eventually vanish into history. However, this has not happened. The issue of social class remains pressing and, in fact, has grown more pertinent and significant. My work serves as evidence that, despite numerous bourgeois sociologists declaring the death of class throughout American history, the lived reality of social class continues to sustain discussions on the subject. As long as the lower classes remain oppressed by a powerful upper-class minority, the concept of class will endure, regardless of the claims made by bourgeois academics (3).

Literature, serving as both a mirror and a creator of society, is intricately connected to the systems and hierarchies that structure human existence. One of the most powerful and influential of these systems is social class. Rather than simply being a background factor, social class has a profound impact on the content, form, creation, distribution, and reception of literary works. It affects who is allowed to write, what gets written, whose narratives are shared, and the way these stories are understood and valued. This analysis examines the diverse



ways in which social class shapes literature, asserting that class functions not only as a material force but also as an ideological framework in the production and critique of literary works (4).

At its core, social class governs access to the means of literary creation. Throughout history, the opportunity to become a writer—whether through education, connections in publishing, or the freedom from the need for basic labor—has largely been reserved for individuals from the upper and middle classes. In many cultures, literacy itself was once a privilege exclusive to elites, clergy, or the aristocracy. The rise of print capitalism and widespread education in the 19th and 20th centuries broadened opportunities for literary involvement, but systemic inequalities persisted, restricting who could engage in the literary world and the conditions under which they could do so (5).

Writers from working-class or marginalized backgrounds have often encountered institutional and economic obstacles that not only affect their ability to publish but also shape the expectations placed on their work. For example, working-class writers have frequently been encouraged—or even coerced—into producing “authentic” representations of poverty or labor struggles, while their attempts at innovative aesthetic forms or philosophical abstraction have been dismissed as unworthy or derivative. As Pierre Bourdieu (1993) asserts in *The Field of Cultural Production*, cultural creation is governed by its own hierarchies of legitimacy and cultural capital, which are unevenly distributed according to social class. The prevailing tastes of the upper class in literary institutions influence which themes, genres, and styles are deemed worthy of canonical status, while those that are seen as popular, regional, or lesser are pushed to the margins (6).

Social class serves as a gatekeeper, determining whose literary voices are elevated and whose are suppressed. This structural reality challenges oversimplified ideas of literary merit or universal human expression. Instead, it highlights the way in which literary value is deeply rooted in class-based cultural power. Literary criticism that overlooks these structural factors risks reinforcing the exclusions and biases inherent in the dominant class. Beyond deciding who writes, social class significantly shapes the subjects of literary works. Literature from various cultures and historical periods consistently engages with class-related themes: inequality, exploitation, aspiration, mobility, solidarity, and alienation. From ancient slave narratives and medieval courtly romances to the industrial novels of the 19th century and modern working-class fiction, literature has long served as a space for examining the material and psychological realities of class relations (7).

In the European literary tradition, the rise of the bourgeois novel in the 18th and 19th centuries coincided with the growing awareness of class distinctions in modern capitalist societies. Works like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*



(1813) and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) depict the conflicts between social mobility and rigid class structures, using marriage, inheritance, and education as narrative tools to explore the possibilities and limitations of overcoming class boundaries. Dickens, in particular, became a symbol of literature's moral critique of industrial capitalism, highlighting the hardships of the urban poor while exposing the corruption and hypocrisy of the ruling elites (8).

In other literary traditions, such as Russian literature, class struggle emerges as a direct revolutionary theme. Works like Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (1906) and the writings of Leo Tolstoy examine the spiritual and material inequalities inherent in feudal and capitalist systems. Postcolonial literature adds complexity to class analysis by revealing how class intersects with colonialism, race, and nationalism. Authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Arundhati Roy investigate how colonial capitalist structures generate new forms of class division, often based on ethnicity or race. In these varied literary traditions, social class is not just a background element but a driving force that shapes characters' fates, moral struggles, and critiques of society. Literature provides a distinctive platform for dramatizing the lived experience of class, not only as an economic position but as a set of expectations, exclusions, and aspirations that shape everyday life (9).

Literature not only mirrors class structures but also plays an active role in shaping and spreading class ideologies. The way class is depicted in literary works influences how readers perceive and internalize their own social standing. For Marxist theorists like Georg Lukács, literature has the potential to reveal a "totality" of social relations, offering readers a critical awareness of their historical context. However, Lukács also cautions against representations that reify or simplify class oppression by individualizing or moralizing it. In many classic works, literature legitimizes class distinctions by presenting them as natural or morally justified. Fairy tales about royalty and commoners, Victorian stories about self-made individuals, or idealized portrayals of aristocratic excess often reinforce the dominant belief that class hierarchies are fixed, legitimate, or even transcendent. Even narratives about upward mobility—such as the "rags-to-riches" trope—can serve an ideological purpose by implying that structural inequality can be overcome solely through individual achievement, thus obscuring the broader, collective dimensions of class-based oppression (10).

In contrast, radical or proletarian literatures strive to deconstruct class divisions by revealing the systems of exploitation and advocating for collective resistance. In the early 20th century, socialist realism in the Soviet Union required literature to highlight the heroism of the working class and the



inevitability of socialist revolution. Although politically driven, this literature sought to foster class consciousness rather than encourage passive acceptance. Likewise, the Harlem Renaissance in the United States produced literary works that highlighted the intersection of race and class, confronting both capitalist oppression and racial subjugation through a dynamic cultural affirmation. Therefore, the representation of class in literature is not impartial; it either upholds or challenges prevailing ideologies. Critical analysis must thus explore how class relations are aestheticized, moralized, hidden, or politicized within literary works (11).

The impact of social class reaches beyond the themes of literature, influencing its form and genre as well. Some forms—like the epic, lyric poetry, or philosophical treatises—have traditionally been associated with elite classes, while others—such as folk ballads, oral storytelling, and proletarian novels—are tied to popular or subaltern cultures. The way these forms are either celebrated or disparaged reflects deeper class biases regarding cultural legitimacy, refinement, and universality. For example, modernist experimentation in the early 20th century was largely restricted to elite literary circles, with works by James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, or Virginia Woolf appealing primarily to highly educated audiences. In contrast, realist and naturalist novels often functioned as accessible representations of working-class life. The conflict between formal innovation and mass accessibility is itself a class-based issue: claims of literature's aesthetic independence are often grounded in exclusionary views of taste and sophistication, which are aligned with bourgeois cultural capital (12).

Postcolonial and feminist writers have worked to challenge these hierarchies by incorporating oral traditions, vernacular languages, and hybrid genres into their writing. In doing so, they contest the class-based limitations of literary forms and promote alternative ways of knowing that are grounded in marginalized experiences. Furthermore, social class plays a critical role in the formation of the literary canon and the reception of works. The process by which certain texts are elevated to canonical status while others are overlooked reflects the institutionalized class biases present in educational curricula, literary criticism, and cultural policy. Canonical works often embody the perspectives, values, and aesthetic preferences of dominant social classes, thereby marginalizing the literatures of the working class, indigenous peoples, and regional cultures (13).

This critical examination has shown that social class influences literature in various interconnected ways: by regulating access to literary creation; shaping thematic concerns; structuring ideological depictions; affecting literary form; and influencing canon formation and cultural validation. To ignore these factors is to disregard the material and ideological conditions under which literature is both created and consumed. A class-conscious approach to literary criticism



does not reduce literature to simple economic causes, nor does it treat class as an isolated factor. Instead, it considers class as a structural and relational force that interacts with other identity factors—such as race, gender, sexuality, and nationality—while also exerting its own distinct impact on literary production and reception. It aims to reveal not only the overt representations of class within texts but also the concealed exclusions, silences, and ideological mechanisms that perpetuate class hierarchies through cultural production.

By doing so, class-conscious criticism restores literature as a crucial space for comprehending, contesting, and altering the material inequalities that define human experience. It reaffirms the political and moral significance of literary analysis, reminding us that the narratives we construct—and those we neglect—are never just artistic decisions, but choices deeply connected to power, privilege, and potential.

Generation

The concept of generations has become increasingly important as workplaces grow more diverse, with multiple generations of employees now working together in the same organizations. Generations are a reflection of organizational diversity, encompassing both visible and deeper, underlying characteristics. While age is an obvious and visible aspect of diversity, the attitudes, thought processes, behaviors, and beliefs associated with each generation represent more underlying traits. Therefore, studying generations is crucial not only for understanding the various dimensions of diversity within organizations but also because generational dynamics play a fundamental role in many organizational phenomena (14).

The concept of generations has gained significant attention from managers, media outlets, consultants, and scholars alike. This widespread interest has resulted in numerous books by practitioners, consultant reports, magazine articles, blog posts, and workshops focused on generational differences in the workplace. While the corporate world and popular media have increasingly highlighted the presence of multiple generations in the workforce, academic research on this topic has only emerged since the mid-2000s. As generational studies expand due to their growing popularity and relevance, several challenges persist. These include generational research often being more descriptive than analytical, researchers relying on non-theoretical approaches, the need for more empirical testing of theoretical models, the predominance of U.S.-centric generational categories based solely on birth years, and a lack of consensus on how to conceptualize and measure generational differences (15).

Although there are several challenges in this area, this article focuses on one key issue: the varying conceptualizations of generations in the literature. These



differences in how generations are conceptualized and applied present a challenge, as they complicate the comparison and integration of research findings. The aim of this article is to build upon existing literature regarding the various conceptualizations of generations in this field and to highlight these differing perspectives. The article starts by addressing practical challenges in both practitioner and academic contexts, drawing on the literature to enhance understanding of the different generations. This deeper understanding could assist both practitioners and academics in being more intentional with their generational research, ensuring clarity about the specific conceptualization of generation being utilized (16).

The first conceptualization of generation draws from Mannheim's theory of generations as a social location within the historical-social process. According to Mannheim (1952), generations are composed of individuals born within the same cultural and historical context, experiencing similar foundational events that lead to shared characteristics. This approach, often referred to as the social forces perspective, views generations not just as demographic groups but as collective entities shaped by the influence of historical events and cultural contexts. In this view, generations are regarded as a social force within an organization rather than a mere demographic variable. Mannheim's definition of generations includes two key components: "common location in a historical time period" and a "distinct consciousness" that arises from significant events of that time. Mannheim (1952) described generations as "a particular kind of identity of location, encompassing related 'age groups' embedded in a historical-social process." (17).

The second conceptualization of generations is grounded in a genealogical definition, which relates to lineage or one's position within family lineages. Genealogy involves the retrieval and organization of family data into relationship patterns, with this data including familial and contextual information that forms the basis of socio-historical narratives. Genealogy is vertical in nature, defining individuals in terms of their ancestors, focusing on family descent, kin connections, and succession. In contrast, the concept of generation emphasizes the creation of horizontal communities, highlighting simultaneity and groups of people born around the same time. Generations defined through a genealogical lens reflect a kinship-based perspective, prioritizing ancestry and relationships formed through blood ties and marriage (18).

The genealogical perspective on generations offers valuable insights into how values are passed down from one generation to the next. In an organizational setting, genealogy can be interpreted as the succession of generations in specific roles within the organization. Literature related to this genealogical theme of generations often focuses on tenure within particular positions, which enables



individuals to acquire a set of experiences, values, and skills that can be transferred to their successors. The emphasis is on individuals occupying organizational roles, accumulating tenure in their positions, and how generational separation is determined by an individual's location within the organization. This separation is sequentially linked through shared organizational values and routines. The commonality between genealogy and generations lies in their use of biological relationships to reflect and define social connections (19).

The third conceptualization of generations is based on shared or common rites of passage. Van Gennep (1961) introduced the concept of rites of passage to describe the transition of individuals from one social status to another during key life stages such as birth, puberty, marriage, and parenthood. According to Van Gennep, these rites consist of three stages: 1) Separation, where a person is detached from their current social status, 2) Transition, in which the person moves from one social status to another, and 3) Reincorporation, where the individual is integrated into their new social status. Rites of passage include rituals and ceremonies that publicly mark an individual or group's shift from one stage of life to the next. Among the most significant rites of passage are those marking the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood (20).

The fourth conceptualization of generations is the idea of generation as a socially constructed identity, shaped by perceived differences that foster in-group and out-group distinctions, which are maintained over time. Generational identity is considered "a form of social identity" that involves recognizing one's belonging to a specific generational group, forming an emotional attachment to this group, and understanding the value of being part of it. In an organizational context, generational identity refers to an individual's awareness of belonging to a generational group or role, along with the emotional and value-based significance attached to this membership. Within organizations, three types of generational identities have been proposed: cohort-based identity, age-based identity, and incumbency-based identity. The cohort-based identity is formed through successive entries into an organization, with each cohort developing distinct skill sets, resources, and experiences based on their chronological placement (21).

The fifth conceptualization of generations is rooted in the lifespan development perspective. This approach offers an alternative and complementary framework for understanding generations, emphasizing age and development across the human lifespan. According to this perspective, human development is a lifelong process shaped by various influences. Unlike other models, the lifespan development perspective does not categorize individuals based on their birth years or shared experiences. Instead, it focuses on intra-individual changes and inter-individual differences. The lifespan model suggests that the impact of



historical and social contexts occurs at the individual level, rather than as a shared experience. It argues against using time-based generational classifications and instead emphasizes the significance of inter-individual differences (21).

The sixth conceptualization of generations is grounded in the concept of collective consciousness, as this was one of the dimensions identified by participants in a research study to define generations. The seventh conceptualization revolves around the idea of contributions made by people, another key dimension highlighted by the study participants. In this framework, generations are defined by the significant or outstanding contributions made by certain groups. The impact of these accomplishments is what defines a generation. For example, veterans who made notable contributions by serving during a war are seen as a distinct generation. The older participants in the study were the ones who emphasized the concept of generations based on contributions, as the younger participants had not yet made such significant contributions (22).

The implication of the various conceptualizations of generations in literature is that no single, unified approach to defining generations exists, a point also supported by Mannheim (1952). Generations are a complex and elusive concept, and although there are challenges in studying them, this remains a crucial area of research. Generation plays a central role in many organizational challenges, making it a vital subject for exploration.

The concept of generation in literary studies transcends the simple categorization of chronological age. It encapsulates a shared historical consciousness formed by pivotal experiences that shape a cohort's relationship with the world. In his foundational essay, *The Problem of Generations* (1928), Karl Mannheim argues that generations are not just demographic groups but social locations, each marked by a common "consciousness of being" that arises from shared participation in specific historical and cultural processes. Literature serves as one of the most dynamic arenas for expressing this generational consciousness. Writers, inevitably shaped by the cultural and historical forces of their formative years—such as wars, revolutions, and the ideologies they inherit or challenge—infuse their works with the marks of these influences. These influences can manifest not only in the content of the work but also in its tone, structure, and thematic concerns. Moreover, the generational experiences of both the authors and the readers affect how literary works are interpreted: a piece that deeply resonates with one generation may be perceived as outdated or irrelevant by another (23).

In this context, generational identity plays a pivotal role in both literary production and reception, influencing the themes that come to define specific literary periods. Throughout history, significant literary movements have often



arisen as generational reactions to the perceived failures, traumas, or stagnation of the previous generation. For instance, Romanticism emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a rejection of the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationalism and the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. This movement emphasized emotion, individualism, and a return to nature. The Romantic poets—such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats—can be viewed as a generational cohort, united by a shared disillusionment with the mechanistic worldview of their predecessors and a collective yearning to rediscover wonder, authenticity, and a more personal connection to the natural world.

Similarly, modernism in the early 20th century was deeply influenced by a generation traumatized by the horrors of World War I, economic instability, and the collapse of traditional values and social structures. Writers like T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound articulated themes of alienation, fragmentation, and cultural decay, using experimental literary forms to reflect a fragmented and disillusioned world. Their stylistic innovations and thematic concerns were intrinsically tied to their shared generational experience of disillusionment and existential crisis, confronting the failures of modernity and its institutions. In the post-World War II era, another generational shift emerged with the Beat Generation in the United States. Writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William S. Burroughs rejected the conformity, materialism, and repression of Cold War America. Their literature explored themes of spiritual exploration, sexual liberation, and resistance to societal norms, mirroring a generational desire for authenticity and freedom outside the constraints of mainstream culture. Through their work, the Beats expressed a profound rejection of conventional values, seeking a more liberated and individualistic path in a rapidly changing world (25).

Each of these literary movements demonstrates how generations act as collective agents of literary transformation, shaping both aesthetic forms and thematic content in direct response to their shared historical experiences. One of the most profound ways in which generations shape literary themes is through the transmission of collective trauma and memory. Literature frequently engages with the legacies of wars, genocides, colonization, and systemic violence, exploring how these traumatic events are remembered, repressed, or passed down across generations. For instance, post-Holocaust literature has been deeply influenced by the generational dynamics of bearing witness. Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel (in *Night*) wrote with the urgency and authority of firsthand experience, their narratives preserving the raw immediacy of trauma. However, the children and grandchildren of these survivors have contributed to what is often referred to as second-generation literature, which delves into the inherited trauma, the emotional voids, and the weight of memory that subsequent generations must carry. Marianne Hirsch's concept of



postmemory captures this phenomenon, describing the relationship between later generations and the traumatic experiences of their predecessors. This relationship is mediated through stories, images, and cultural artifacts that enable these generations to engage with trauma not as personal memory, but as an inherited legacy (26).

Similarly, postcolonial literatures often reflect generational shifts in how colonial histories are processed. First-generation postcolonial writers, such as Chinua Achebe, aimed to reclaim indigenous narratives and challenge the colonial misrepresentations of African history and culture. These works were often characterized by a direct confrontation with the lingering legacies of colonialism. However, later generations of postcolonial writers—such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—have shifted their focus to exploring the complexities of hybridity, diaspora, and postcolonial identity within the context of globalization. These generational shifts reflect how the distance from colonial rule allows for the emergence of new critical perspectives and narrative possibilities that engage more subtly with issues of cultural identity, belonging, and the legacies of imperialism. In diasporic literatures, generational differences between immigrant parents and their children often take center stage, dramatizing the tensions over cultural preservation, assimilation, and identity. Works like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* explore the struggles of second-generation characters, who find themselves navigating the complexities of bicultural identities. The generational divide in these texts represents more than familial conflicts; it symbolizes broader historical and cultural transitions, as younger generations seek to forge new identities in response to the inherited experiences of their parents, while also confronting the pressures of the new cultural environments they inhabit (27).

Generational conflicts are often central themes in literature, with stories depicting the struggles between the older and younger generations, tradition and progress, and inheritance versus rebellion. The motif of the defiant youth or the disillusioned parent appears repeatedly across literary traditions, symbolizing broader societal tensions between stability and change. In classical literature, works like Sophocles' *Antigone* illustrate generational clashes over issues such as law, authority, and family loyalty. In modern literature, the *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novel typically focuses on a young protagonist's journey to break free from the expectations of parents or society, as seen in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (28).

Postcolonial and diasporic literatures often examine intergenerational conflict as a symbol for the tension between tradition and modernity, homeland and diaspora, or colonial legacies and postcolonial identities. These generational conflicts are not merely personal struggles but reflect larger historical and



cultural shifts, with the generational divide serving as a framework for exploring themes of memory, belonging, and change (29).

At the same time, intergenerational dynamics can also foster solidarity and continuity. Literature frequently highlights the transmission of cultural knowledge, oral histories, and ethical values between generations, emphasizing the role of intergenerational memory as a form of resistance and resilience. Furthermore, generations influence not only the creation of literature but also its interpretation and critical assessment. Works of literature are revisited and re-evaluated by successive generations of readers and critics, whose evolving values, sensibilities, and ideological perspectives lead to new understandings of a text's meaning. In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates that generations shape literary themes in complex and varied ways: by providing a shared historical consciousness that shapes literary expression, by inspiring literary movements that respond to generational crises, by transmitting trauma and memory across time, by incorporating new technological and media contexts into narrative forms, by dramatizing intergenerational conflicts and solidarities, and by influencing the interpretation and value of literature as it is passed down through time (30).

Locality

Some critical studies in the "role of place" subfield focus on the significance of setting and space, frequently analyzing the functions of environments such as mountains, valleys, deserts, and homes. However, many of these studies overlook the social implications of placing a protagonist in an unfamiliar social context. In *Literature and Place, 1800-2000*, Peter Brown and Michael Irwin note that while place-based criticism is still emerging, it can be viewed as a platform for exploring various facets of identity, whether personal, social, or national. They also argue that an individual's journey of self-discovery often takes place in relation to their environment. Brown cautions that an overemphasis on place can lead to "parochialism" or, conversely, to a complete sense of displacement and loss of identity (31).

Although collective identity is typically seen as stemming from inherent, ethnolinguistic, and socio-familial connections to a group, Brown and Irwin propose that the "loss" (or more accurately, modification) of this identity might arise from distance or disconnection from one's native context. Regardless of the specific nature of the literary setting, the writing inherently reflects on the place itself through the ways characters interact with it. Therefore, the creation of a literary character is often intimately tied to the realm in which the action takes place. Leonard Lutwack, in his monograph *The Role of Place in Literature*, asserts that settings serve metaphorical functions, often yielding part



of their objectivity to fit the author's creative intentions. He suggests that the nature of a place in literature is subtly shaped by how a character enters, moves through, and leaves it. The overall impression of a place frequently depends on its role in a sequence of locations visited by a traveling character, whose shifting perspective provides comparison and highlights key moments in an otherwise static environment (32).

Lutwack further emphasizes that literary depictions of places always carry "symbolic purposes, even if they are rooted in factual elements." His analysis of the relationship between setting and protagonist development is particularly insightful: he asserts that "setting in fiction is intimately related to character because it functions as the detailed and continuous environment in which character is formed and to which character reacts over time." A character's identity is shaped in relation to their environment—either in harmony with or in contrast to it—and the action in any form of literature, be it fiction, theater, or poetry, relies on the settings. Just as one actor might bring the atmosphere of another experience that contrasts (or complements) the current setting, the narrative's action depends on the histories of both the characters and the places involved. According to Lutwack, "spatial dimensions and climate conditions" do not inherently elicit a consistent emotional response; instead, the essence of places is shaped by the subjective reactions of individuals. Lutwack also explores the theme of dislocation as a creative force, noting that "earth, body, and buildings set bounds to protect man from the terror of disorientation threatened by undifferentiated space." This reflects the existential tension between the need for structure and the unsettling force of displacement in literature (33).

Our fundamental instincts toward establishing territory and living within communities—seeking safety in numbers—lead us to draw distinctions between "us" and "them," as well as between "here" and "there." Modernist writers, such as Hemingway, explore the disorientation experienced by individuals in a constantly changing world, as well as the potential for reorientation. By removing protagonists from their familiar environments, these authors allow them to exist existentially, often reinventing themselves in unfamiliar or exotic places, or through the continuous movement from one place to another. As Lutwack puts it, "If there is any place at all in the lives of this new breed of character, it is the highway itself." This sense of movement and displacement becomes central to the modernist experience, highlighting the character's search for meaning in a world where the stability of fixed locations is no longer guaranteed (34).

Another important work on the concept of place in literature is Phillip Fisher's *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. In this insightful text, Fisher seeks to establish a paradigm for understanding setting, space, and place



by interpreting the social experiences individuals encounter in various environments. In a discussion about geography and culture, he notes: "The number of churches per square mile can be compared to the number of bars or bookstores or brothels. Frequencies exist for the desire for shows or the desire for food. Statistically, any city gives a map of the psyche, a quantitative account of the strength and complexity of the system of human(s)." Fisher extends this idea to foreign environments, suggesting that such places are not entirely alien, as many desires and behaviors are universal among humans. He further argues that a person is most socially "real" when contributing to society, and less so during times when they are on vacation, young, old, or ill—when it is easier for them to be seen as a burden (35).

Social contribution plays a crucial role in the behavior of Hemingway's main characters; each protagonist seeks to engage with and contribute to the foreign society they inhabit, finding stimulation and purpose through their involvement. The foreign setting, as I will explore in later chapters, functions as a social arena where we can assess the character's level of social contribution. In the context of settler-American literature, the American national identity has been partially shaped by the dissemination of cultural projections that aim to describe or convey a collective feeling, spirit, or essence shared by the population. These projections, often idealized, play a significant role in constructing the narrative of what it means to be American (36).

Leonard Lutwack contends that place serves a distinct function in American literature compared to other literary traditions, with physical space often being viewed as an opportunity for industry and the extension of sociopolitical control. In the case of settler-Americans, there is little emotional attachment to the land they inhabit, a concept that is reflected in their national literature. The perception of physical territory and the mental associations linked to it evolve over time, making the collective image of a region highly variable, even within a relatively short period. Several narratives in the American literary canon illustrate this fluid relationship. For instance, in Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*, the protagonist wakes up after a twenty-year absence to a transformed landscape. While the Catskills themselves remain unchanged, his friends have left the village, his wife (symbolizing the country) is gone, and his allegiance to George III is now obsolete. This rude awakening underscores that, in America, neither land nor community is sacred or permanent, with the exception of Native American civilizations, whose histories are often overlooked or misunderstood by the colonizers (37).

European settlers and other colonizers transformed the land to serve economic or social objectives, a process vividly depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, where the continent itself shifts from "wilderness" to "civilization." The titles of these novels, read in order, demonstrate the gradual



conversion of the territory from untamed wilds to cultivated land. A key aspect of this transformation is evident in Ernest Hemingway's belief that the place where one writes profoundly impacts the text produced. Hemingway had several tools that aided his creative process, including a rabbit's foot, a Royal portable typewriter, and the peace of the early morning. However, one crucial instrument was the location where he wrote, which, along with the distance from the subject of his writing, played a significant role in shaping his work. Hemingway's connection to his surroundings was so strong that he celebrated and immortalized the places he wrote about, as well as the places where he found inspiration and wrote his most profound works (38).

At its core, locality offers both a physical and symbolic foundation for literary works. The landscapes, cityscapes, climates, flora, fauna, and man-made environments of a place not only set the stage but also influence the atmosphere, tone, and mood of a story. In Charles Dickens's novels, for example, the grim, fog-filled streets of Victorian London are not just background details but serve as thematic elements that represent poverty, industrialization, corruption, and alienation. Similarly, the vast, open expanse of the American Midwest in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* serves not only as a literal setting but also as a metaphor for the struggles of pioneers, the resilience of immigrants, and the ongoing transformation of the American landscape (39).

In numerous literary works, the environmental aspects of locality—such as rivers, mountains, deserts, and forests—become rich with symbolic meaning, reflecting human emotions, desires, or spiritual journeys. For instance, William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County transcends its role as a mere geographic location; it serves as a mythic realm that represents the decline of the Southern aristocracy, the racial tensions, and the lingering historical traumas of the American South. In this way, locality becomes deeply intertwined with the themes of history, decay, and racial guilt that are central to Faulkner's writing. Locality, then, serves as a topographical canvas for meaning, where landscapes and settings act as symbolic reflections of psychological, social, or political issues. Beyond just physical locations, locality also includes the cultural practices, dialects, folklore, rituals, and belief systems that define a specific community or region. Literature often explores these cultural elements, offering readers an intimate look into the lifestyles and values of distinct localities (40).

In postcolonial literature, authors such as Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (*The River Between*) present Igbo and Kikuyu societies not merely as exotic backdrops but as culturally vibrant worlds whose traditions and internal dynamics influence characters' decisions, conflicts, and destinies. Achebe's integration of proverbs, oral storytelling traditions, and local cosmology highlights themes of cultural continuity and disruption caused by



colonial intrusion. Similarly, regional literature in the United States, like the works of Kate Chopin in Louisiana or Eudora Welty in Mississippi, focuses on local dialects, customs, gender roles, and community structures. These authors use the local setting to explore larger themes of freedom, oppression, and identity. By foregrounding the unique cultural contexts of these regions, these works resist generalized national narratives and suggest that themes of liberation, repression, and belonging are always filtered through place-based norms and values. In this way, locality shapes literary themes by anchoring them in culturally specific frameworks, challenging universal assumptions, and emphasizing the importance of regional identity and knowledge (31).

Postcolonial and diasporic literatures frequently explore the tensions between the metropole and the colony, the center and the margin, highlighting how characters navigate displacement, hybridity, and cultural translation. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for instance, places postcolonial India at the heart of its narrative, reversing the colonial hierarchy that once centered Europe as the authoritative source of literary meaning. In a similar vein, African American literature often examines locality through the lens of the Great Migration, contrasting the rural South with the urban North. Works like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and August Wilson's *Pittsburgh Cycle* delve into how Black identity, memory, and trauma are shaped by specific geographic contexts, while also critiquing the socio-spatial structures of racism and segregation. These literary explorations show how locality informs the formation of identity and the complex dynamics of cultural belonging and displacement (32).

Locality shapes literary themes by positioning place as a site of cultural resistance, marginality, and identity formation, especially in the face of spatial hierarchies imposed by forces like colonialism, capitalism, or nationalism. In recent years, the rise of ecocriticism and environmental literature has further emphasized locality as a crucial factor in exploring themes related to nature, ecology, and human-environment interactions. Writers from various cultural backgrounds have focused on local ecosystems, environmental degradation, and climate change, using these issues as central themes to their works. These narratives are often deeply tied to specific geographical regions and environmental crises, underscoring how literature can illuminate the complex relationship between people and the places they inhabit (32).

For instance, Australian Aboriginal literature often explores sacred connections to the land, highlighting locality as a spiritual, ethical, and historical inheritance. The destruction or loss of these lands due to colonial expansion becomes a key literary theme, intertwining environmental harm with cultural erasure and indigenous sovereignty. Likewise, literature from areas impacted by extractive industries—such as mining towns, oil fields, or deforested regions—frequently



focuses on themes of ecological violence, economic exploitation, and the displacement of communities, all tied to locality. Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, set in the oil-ravaged Niger Delta, uses the devastated landscape as a metaphor for environmental injustice and political corruption, illustrating how locality shapes both the narrative environment and thematic critique. In these works, locality is not just a backdrop but a powerful force that informs themes of survival, loss, environmental justice, and resistance (33).

While locality plays a significant role in shaping literary themes, globalization and transnational movements have complicated the relationship between literature and place. Contemporary writers often navigate multiple localities, diasporic identities, and global affiliations, giving rise to literary themes that are hybrid, deterritorialized, or translocal. Nevertheless, even in cosmopolitan literature, locality continues to exert its influence—whether through the longing for a homeland, the negotiation of foreignness, or the reconstruction of memory across geographical divides. Themes of exile, nostalgia, hybridity, and alienation often emerge from the experience of living in multiple, fragmented, or lost localities (34).

In a globalized world, locality still significantly shapes literary themes, albeit in more nuanced and dynamic ways that challenge fixed ideas of place. This analysis demonstrates that locality influences literary themes in various interconnected ways: by setting the scene and creating atmospheres; embedding cultural specifics and symbolic practices; mapping political struggles and contestations over space; challenging spatial power structures between center and periphery; exploring environmental relationships; and complicating our understanding of place within global and diasporic frameworks.

Conclusion

Social class plays a pivotal role in shaping literary themes by placing characters, narrators, and societies within economic hierarchies and material power relations. Themes such as class conflict, inequality, mobility, oppression, exploitation, aspiration, and alienation arise as literature examines the lived experiences of individuals from different class positions. In works like Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, which portrays the decline of the aristocracy, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which highlights the struggles of the working class, and modern critiques of the commodification of identity in capitalist societies, social class structures the narrative world by determining who has access to resources, voice, and agency. Thus, literature serves as both a reflection of class divisions and a medium for critiquing them, offering visions of resistance, solidarity, or alternative social structures.

Generational context shapes literary themes by positioning writers and characters within the cyclical processes of inheritance, rupture, rebellion, and



continuity. The generational divide structures narratives that explore themes like tradition versus modernity, youth revolt, generational trauma, memory transmission, and cultural transition. In postwar literature that grapples with the aftermath of global conflict, postcolonial texts examining responses to colonial legacies, or contemporary stories of intergenerational migration, literature captures the evolving values, anxieties, and hopes of cohorts defined by their historical moment. Generational consciousness drives literary themes that critique or uphold inherited ideologies, demonstrating how cultural and historical transitions unfold across different generations.

Third, locality shapes literary themes by grounding narratives in the particularities of place—geographical, cultural, political, and environmental. Locality influences themes of belonging, displacement, exile, cultural identity, landscape symbolism, regional conflict, and environmental awareness. From Faulkner's richly localized Southern gothic to Achebe's portrayal of Igbo cosmology, to diasporic literature that deals with fragmented homelands, locality imbues literature with both material and symbolic geographies. It shapes not only the setting but the very epistemologies, values, and worldviews that literature conveys, making place a fundamental element of literary meaning.

Importantly, these three forces—social class, generation, and locality—are interconnected rather than separate. Social class is experienced differently across generations; locality influences the structure of class hierarchies; and generational shifts alter attachments to both locality and class positions. The literary themes that emerge from their interaction are equally intricate, addressing interconnected experiences of inequality, historical transformation, cultural rootedness, and spatial belonging or displacement.

Ultimately, a critical analysis of literary themes must consider how social class, generation, and locality collaboratively shape the conditions of literary expression. These factors not only influence the content of stories but also construct the frameworks of meaning, the possibilities for agency, and the tensions that literature explores. In this way, literature serves as a space where these structural forces are made visible, interrogated, lamented, resisted, or reimagined, providing insights into the material, temporal, and spatial dimensions that shape human existence.

By emphasizing these intersecting determinants, we assert that literary themes are never abstract or universally neutral; rather, they are grounded, contested, and situated, shaped by the social, historical, and geographical contexts that literature both mirrors and transforms. Understanding the role of social class, generation, and locality in literature enables us to read not just what is being told, but also why it is told, for whom, and with what underlying stakes—



thereby deepening our appreciation for literature's critical engagement with the worlds from which it emerges.

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