

Creating a Sense of Place

More than setting. More than landscape. More than location.
No matter what genre, Place is the world your characters inhabit.
Place is where your Story comes alive.

The sun beat down upon Wang Lung and his new wife, O-lan, for it was early summer. Moving together in perfect rhythm... turning this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods. The earth lay rich and dark, and fell apart lightly under the points of their hoes... [Wang Lung] looked at the woman. Her face was wet and streaked with earth. She was as brown as the very soil itself...Then in her usual plain way she said in the silent evening air, 'I am with child.' ~ *The Good Earth*, Pearl S. Buck

Study these lines from *The Good Earth* and see if you can feel the movement, intuit the emotion, visualize colors, feel the heat, the exhaustion, smell the organic earth, sense the hope and despair not only of the characters, but of this place in which they live their lives. Study the setting and how it creates atmosphere, and then symbolism.

Setting, Atmosphere, and Symbolism

In 1964, Peggy Simson Curry, Wyoming's first Poet Laureate, wrote the classic book, *Creating Fiction from Experience* (The Writer, Inc., Publishers, Boston). Here are a few of my favorite quotes from Chapter 5: The Realm of Emotion.

- Setting means the locale of the story, the place where characters are in duel with their difficulties...presented in descriptive phrases, give the reader a picture and knowledge of place.
- Atmosphere is the result of presenting the physical details in such a way as to create emotional reactions. There is dramatic effect. We have, as a result of emotional implications, a suggestive aura produced, and this aura may affect characters as well as readers...
- There is nothing more effective in the creation of fiction [or creative nonfiction] than the use of atmosphere. It helps to produce an artistic whole, a connected meaning of men and events that exemplifies theme and produces symbolism.
- Atmosphere prepares the intellectual and emotional soil from which symbolism may grow. It does this because of its suggestive aura that invites imaginative interpretation.

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