Amongst The Black and White

As you commence reading chapters ten through fourteen of Thomas Foster’s informative: How to Read Literature Like a Professor, you are presented with a collection of bold-printed - seemingly irrelevant - titles separating the equally captivating text. Throughout these pivotal chapters, Foster communicates the immense benefit *and* essential steps a novice reader must inherit to evolve into the desired professor-like bookworm. Mr. Foster infuses his philosophy of deeper meanings into an author’s choice in *weather conditions, violence, symbolism, politics,* and *religious culture.*

Foster – who possesses the skill of interpreting that lay booklovers wish they had - informs the reader on his innovative approach to deciphering a novelist’s choice in weather. He reveals the four crucial meanings to weather conditions that one must consider while analyzing: plot device, atmosphere, misery factor, and the democratic element. He stresses his beliefs on paper, “Here’s what I think: weather is never just weather. It’s never just rain” (75), the reader’s mind begins to churn, reevaluating all of their freshly accomplished books. One may wonder, “Was the setting in Les Miserables established as dank, dreary, and frigid for a purpose?” There is always a purpose. Victor Hugo created this piece’s setting to merely depict the town’s devastating atmosphere, and if he hadn’t, it may have never been the trendy title it is today. Since the reader was thoroughly informed on the significance of weather conditions, I would advise you to ponder the weather forecast for your next upcoming novel.

As a developing youth, your parents often times persuade you that violence is never the answer. Let’s elaborate on that slice of advice. If an author is wishing to “… make actions happen, cause plot complications, end plot complications, [or] put other characters under stress” (90) they may resort to a brutal bludgeoning, aggravated homicide, or an artless disappearance. Found on shelves upon shelves across the globe is Jodi Picoult’s, My Sister’s Keeper. If the Fitzgerald family hadn’t endured the tragic loss of their terminally cancerous member, Kate, the household may have ceased to ever reach closure. Picoult resolved plot complications, by “kill [ing]-off” Kate Fitzgerald and reuniting a once-corrupted family. Regardless of whether or not a reader appreciates the acts of violence a character may suffer, it generates the passion your heart possesses for that novel.

In chapter twelve of Foster’s intriguing text, How to Read Literature Like a Professor, you are enlightened with an idea, foreign to any other that you have imagined: every reader yearns for a level of complexity – to some extent. Foster jumps out of his habitual mature and intellectual diction, translating into basic terms, “Here’s the problem with symbols: people expect them to mean something. Not just any something, but one something in particular” (97). Foster teaches you that dissecting the deeper meaning from a symbol is not simple, “… you must use a variety of tools on it: questions, experience, preexisting knowledge” (100). Throughout F. Scott Fitzgerald’s metaphor for the American dream, ­The Great Gatsby, a reoccurring symbol is present: the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. This emerald radiance is vital, signifying Gatsby’s dying passion for Daisy. As you acquire the essential tools Foster uses to construe the meaning of symbols - the light perched at the end of the dock - discovering the deeper meaning will begin to come with an abundance of ease.

No matter your latitude, nor longitude, escaping politics is a frequently botched attempt. Politics linger in all atmospheres. He explains that concealed within the lines, the vast majority of text comprises politics. Mr. Frost portrays the wide array of differences between “ ‘Political writing’ ” (109 & 110) and itself. This contrast may boggle the minds for a snippet of time, but it is quite simple. The first “political writing” he referred to possesses a tendency to “… influence the body politic …” (109). The opposing “political writing”, that he is highly captivated by, incorporates economic status and “the wrongs of those in power” (110). Lorraine Hansberry’s, A Raisin in the Sun, occurred in the “slave era”, and had it not, the plot would cease to exist. This epoch depicted the implied struggles of each and every African American near and far, composing an astonishing novel. Politics release charisma and appeal to all varieties of bookworms.

In the midst of these chapters, Thomas Frost has acquainted readers with a small array of mechanics one must inherit and apply when wishing to comprehend, dissect, and analyze as a professor does. He merely scratched the surface with his handy methods of interpreting a work by its climate, harmful character interaction, symbolism, and government. There are many details small in size, yet vital in comprehension; cloaked between the black and white of each work is *always* meaning and purpose.