

Situation as a Narrative Concept

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Here is the situation in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery:" once a year, a New England town stones one of its residents to death. The story's victim, and how the ritual sacrifice unfolds, are overwhelmed by this state of affairs. In Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, the situation is that birds have started attacking humans. Various explanations arise, but the film itself does not confirm a cause. In Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," Gregor Samsa wakes up as a bug. The rest is details. In these examples, situation dominates character, plot, and setting, but it needn't do so in all narratives.

Situation is a version of the old dramatic dilemma, but it is less centered on a single character. Situation may also express itself as a repeated assemblage (of characters, for example) that solicits pattern recognition, as it does in situation comedy.

This panel invites papers to test the usefulness of situation as a narrative concept by exploring in a single narrative text in any medium its capacity to generate new readings while bringing out its connections to extant critical approaches.