

Analytical essay Years 10 – 12: Maestro: ‘Everything grew larger than life in the steamy hothouse of Darwin and the people were no exception.’ How important is place in this novel?

Peter Goldsworthy’s Maestro demonstrates the importance of setting in understanding characters such as the protagonists Paul Crabbe and Eduard Keller. Written in a retrospective narrative from Paul Crabbe’s point of view, the novel is a reflection of Paul’s adolescence and how the settings of ‘steamy’ Darwin, ‘suburban’ Adelaide and ‘hypocritical’ Vienna affected him and provided an insight to the nature of other pivotal characters.

Upon moving from Adelaide to Darwin, Paul immediately falls in love with the ‘city of booze, blow and blasphemy’. Darwin is the backdrop to the sensual addiction Paul develops and feeds his heightened sense as a ‘steamy and lush hothouse’. Radically different from Adelaide, Paul thrives in the new setting, as his character develops. Paul meets Keller, the ‘Maestro’ in Darwin and is fascinated by the first impression Keller leaves upon him. The formal white suit Keller wears contrasts with the Swan, the dark and casual hotel he inhabits, symbolising Keller’s alienation and incongruity in Darwin. Described by Paul as a ‘type of monastery...a place for atonement’, Darwin and the Swan provide an insight into the Maestro’s character. To Keller, Darwin symbolises the social and cultural isolation he craves as atonement for the crimes he believed he had committed.

Keller’s history affects him so deeply he was changed by it, and to Paul he is initially merely a strict, authoritarian ‘Nazi’. Upon reflecting, Paul finds it strange to realise how much he ‘came to love the man, depend on him’ from his first impressions. As a teacher Keller taught Paul incomplete lessons of music and life that Paul comes to regret not appreciating. On Paul’s final night in Darwin he goes to the Swan with the intention of saying goodbye to Keller and then meeting with his girlfriend Rosie. Keller’s acceptance of Paul as an important part of his life is symbolised through the new chair and table he has purchased for Paul, finally ready to share his mysterious history. However, Paul doesn’t realise the confessional for what it was and with ‘the aroused sexual present’ overwhelming the past he leaves behind his broken teacher and surrogate father.

Keller’s past and transition in nature from a ‘romantic virtuosos’ to strict teacher is shown through music and his descriptions of Vienna. After the National Socialist Party (the Nazis) rose to power, Keller describes the ballroom of Vienna being turned into ‘the experimental laboratory for the end of the world’ demonstrating that Keller’s own world ended along with his love of Vienna. Keller’s love for his wife Mathilde gave him rubato, and ‘that extra littleness’ that Paul could never achieve, which made Keller an exceptional musician. However, it buoyed his arrogance and belief of his own invulnerability which prevented him from realising the danger his Jewish family were in, in Vienna. To Paul, Vienna represents a European city of culture and music but to Keller it is a reminder of his

Author stated
Title underlined
Contention stated

Type of narrative discussed and perspective
Language of the essay question used

Setting is the focus for the paragraph
Embedded quotes used
Characterisation
Language of comparison used to contrast settings

Contrasts drawn and setting mentioned again
Short embedded quote used
Link established with next paragraph

Topic sentence provides a clear connection between paragraphs

Retell of detail which demonstrates holistic understanding of the text

Symbolism discussed and links back to the question

Characterisation is linked clearly to the settings

Links into other themes

Contrast between the meaning of settings for characters and links to question

lost family and regretted choices. Their difference in attitude towards the setting of Vienna and even Darwin is important in understanding the characters and history of both Paul and Keller.

Vienna is also the cause of Keller's mistrust and suspicion of beauty, as he says 'never trust the beautiful'. This is something Paul, as a young and naive man, can't understand. Keller describes Vienna as a veneer, 'hiding the hypocrisy within' in an attempt to teach Paul the lessons he had to learn through awful experiences. Paul and Keller's natures are contrasted by Goldsworthy in Maestro and their similarity is what causes Keller to endeavour to teach Paul. The confessional that Paul snubbed, a privilege that he failed to realise through selfishness and sensual addiction, was Keller's explanation and he told Paul this as he called out 'I tell you this, not for me, but for you'. Paul's rejection of the deep connection he shared with Keller is something he would come to regret as he strove to defy the limits of perfection Keller had shown him.

When Paul leaves the setting of Darwin to attend school, he arrogantly believes that Keller has 'taught all that was in his power to teach'. In comparison to 'lush' Darwin, Melbourne and Adelaide are mundane and suburban and perhaps symbolise the direction Paul's future will take, as he rejected Keller and the incomplete lessons he strove to teach. Extending his travels to Europe, Paul realises he can't bridge the tragic gulf between talent and genius as he ignored Keller's advice of 'a little hurt now, to save a wasted life'. Paul's experiences in the city of Vienna, a place of culture and musical excellence, lead him to realise how he differs from his mentor, the Maestro. It is this realisation that ultimately motivates him to return to Australia and abandon his pursuit of perfection.

The settings of Goldsworthy's Maestro are important in understanding the history and context of each character and their actions. The settings are significant in the novel as they contrast the characters to their surroundings and develop meaning, such as Keller's chosen isolation in Darwin. Each place in the novel symbolises differences and similarities and Goldsworthy positions the reader to observe the way these characters understand and interact with their surroundings, be it Darwin, Adelaide, the Swan or Vienna.

Contrast between characters discussed in paragraph

Discussion of symbolism

Links into themes

Statement about settings is the topic sentence of the conclusion making a clear link back to the essay topic

Comparisons and links to characterisation discussed linking back in to the contention