

Short story analysis

Business



Short Story Analysis In this essay, your purpose is to fully explain an element (theme, characterization or symbolism) in a short story of your choice. I will provide you with examples of each element from stories by Hemingway, Updike and Vonnegut ; you may write about any of these authors except the ones that we have discussed in class. However, you may choose to investigate an author of your own choice. Below I have listed some contemporary authors and story collections you may want to check out:

Jhumpa Lahiri

Flannery O'Connor Raymond Carver William Faulkner David Sedaris Tobias Wolff Ernest Hemingway John Updike Kurt Vonnegut Carolyn Ferrell E. Annie Proulx T.

Coraghessan Boyle Melissa Bank John Edgar Wideman Jim Ray Daniels Kevin Canty Nathan Englander Amy Tan Z. Z. Packer Thom Jones Sarah Vowell “ The Best of Non Required Reading” Series All-Story Magazine *If you choose an author not listed above, please clear your choice with me before you begin drafting.

Below re definitions of the three elements that you can focus on for your analysis.

Characterization – the creation of the image of imaginary persons in drama, narrative poetry, the novel, and the short story. Characterization generates plot and is revealed by actions, speech, thoughts, physical appearance, and the other characters’ thoughts or words about him.

Theme-The idea or point of a story formulated as a generalization. In American literature, several themes are evident which reflect and define our society.

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The dominant ones might be innocence/experience, life/death, appearance/reality, free will/fate, madness/sanity, love/hate, society/individual, known/unknown. Themes may have a single, instead of a dual nature as well. The theme of a story may be a mid-life crisis, or imagination, or the duality of humankind (contradictions). Symbolism- A person, place or object which has a meaning in itself but suggests other meanings as well.

Things, characters and actions can be symbols. Anything that suggests a meaning beyond the obvious.

Some symbols are conventional, generally meaning the same thing to all readers. i. e: white= purity, fire= passion/intensity, Spring= rebirth

Short Story Analysis Requirements You will complete 2 short story analyses for this unit; you will choose 2 of the 3 elements (theme, characterization or symbolism) to focus on.

You may do the 3rd element for extra credit. In this essay, write as if your audience is not familiar with the story; therefore, you may have to do some summary of the story and provide some background so that your discussion would be understandable to your audience.

Here is what you will need for this essay: 1. A great title that alerts your reader to the content of the discussion. 2.

A full introduction in which you present the title of your story, the author's full name, and your thesis about the story. 3. A multi-paragraph body in which you explain the major element you are focusing on (theme,

characterization or symbolism). 4. Strong transitions that move the reader smoothly through the discussion.

5. A wealth of evidence from the story in the form of plot summary and quotation that SHOWS what you are saying is true. . Parenthetical references to show where your quotations come from. 7. A Works Cited page showing where you found your story.

8. A suggested total length of not less than 500 words (excluding Works Cited, title, etc.) 9. An authoritative tone that displays a thorough understanding of the story in question and the particular element being analyzed. 10. A conclusion that provides a sense of closure and leaves us with a strong thought or observation about the story or its theme

Without Politics: An Analysis of Symbolism in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man at the Bridge" Masterpiece.

We tend to overuse that epithet today, but Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Old Man at the Bridge" is certainly deserving. Set during the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway's tale is a masterpiece of conciseness and verbal economy, and the plight of the defenseless old man who is "without politics" clearly demonstrates the author's condemnation of the senseless brutality and destructiveness of modern war (Hemingway 79).

In this brief glimpse of war, Hemingway weaves several important symbols into the story to enhance his theme and point out the tragically ironic features of war's ability to destroy even the most innocent creatures in its wake. The story's most obvious symbol is the bridge itself. The nameless old

man of the title has walked over six miles from his home in San Carlos and now finds himself exhausted at the foot of the bridge over the Ebro River.

There he is met by the narrator, a scout for the anti-fascist forces, and warned to move along. Unfortunately, the old man is too tired to journey any further.

On the far side of the bridge lies Barcelona, which symbolically represents the possibility of safety and refuge. On the near side, only certain destruction awaits as the old man was warned to evacuate his hometown because of the impending shelling by fascist artillery. In short, the bridge symbolizes the point of no return for the old man: if he crosses over, he may be safe but he must give up all that he knows and loves in San Carlos; if he stays, however, he will most likely share the fate of his beloved animals he cared for in San Carlos.

The unseen animals are also important symbols in Hemingway's story.

The old man tells the narrator that he cared for “two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons” (Hemingway 79). Caring for the animals is the old man's sole purpose and joy in life, and because he does not have the strength to bring them with him to safety, he has had to leave them behind. Their fate troubles him. He tells the scout, “The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others” (Hemingway 79).

When the narrator tries to assure him that the birds will also be fine, the old man says, “Yes, certainly they'll fly. But the others. It's better not to think about the others” (Hemingway 80). Of course, the animals are all that the

old man is thinking of and concerned about, and their safety is more important to him than his own. Unlike the warring factions, the old man feels compassion for those who are not equipped to survive the massive destruction about to be unleashed.

Also, the different animals were able to live together peacefully with the old man's care and love, but the two human armies, ironically, cannot.

The significance of the old man's birds is heightened when the narrator asks the old man if he left "the dove cage unlocked" (Hemingway 80, my emphasis). By referring to the pigeons as doves, the narrator is alluding to the traditional symbolism of the dove as a bird of peace and innocence. In such an environment of hatred and carnage, these symbols of peace have no place and must "fly" or face death.

Their beauty and gentle nature are not fit for survival under such conditions, just as anyone who stands for peace will have no effect on the bloodshed to come. The narrator also points out that the story is set on Easter Sunday, a Christian holiday meant to celebrate Christ rising from the dead.

The irony is apparent; no one will rise from the dead, only join the dead, when the shells begin to rain down and the skies clear to allow the fascist bombers to make their runs. Easter is symbolically viewed as a highly anticipated, welcome time of rebirth, renewal, and possible change.

For the old man at the foot of the bridge, this Easter brings only inevitable death and the destruction of all that is meaningful to him. Finally, the most important symbol in the story is the old man himself. His symbolic innocence is seen when he tells the narrator, "I am without politics" (Hemingway 79).

The unarmed old man does not belong to either side and he has no interest in participating in the conflict.

He is 76 years old and has barely enough strength to make it to the bridge; he clearly poses no threat to anyone.

Even so, his fate is made clear when the narrator ominously tells us that the momentary delay of the imminent bombing “ and the fact that cats know how to look out for themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have” (Hemingway 80). Since the Spanish Civil War was a precursor to World War II and alerted the world to what horrors would lie ahead for innocent men, women, children, and animals all over the planet when the conflict spread, Hemingway shows us what happens to the innocent and the powerless in this new brand of total war.

There is no place for sympathy—beyond alerting the old man to keep moving and possibly hitch a ride to Barcelona, the narrator does not go out of his way to help the defenseless old man. Since the old man cannot help in the war, he is a hindrance, as is feeling any excessive emotion for him that might detract from performing one’s military duty. The scout tries to reassure the old man that his animals will be fine, but he is not going to go retrieve them for the old man.

He advises the old man to cross the bridge, but he is not going to move the old man himself. After all, he has the “ business” of war to tend to (Hemingway 78). This is as much kindness and compassion as the innocent can expect, and it is nowhere near enough to ensure survival. In the end, Hemingway captures the inhumanity and barbaric nature of war. Ironically,

he does so without a single shot being fired or one drop of blood being spilled in his tale of a nameless old man at a forgotten bridge.

His symbols are carefully placed and subtly developed, allowing readers to focus on the tragic fate of the old man without being sidetracked by heavy-handed literary devices.

We feel sympathy and sorrow for the old man and ultimately realize that he is a symbol of all those caught in the crossfire, those who have died and will continue to die in the wake of and the inhuman “business” of modern war.

Works Cited Hemingway, Ernest. “The Old Man at the Bridge.” *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Macmillan, 1986. 78-80.