

Compare the use of  
fantasy in the poor  
relation's story and  
superman and paula  
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“ All night I dreamed of flying... These nightly adventures in space began when Superman started invading my dreams and teaching me how to fly. He use to come roaring by in his shining blue suit with his cape whistling in the wind... In the magic whirring of his cape I could hear the wings of a hundred sea gulls, the motors of a thousand planes”. This is a quotation taken from one of the first paragraphs in ‘ Superman and Paula Brown’s New Snowsuit’. By examining this quotation it is clear that the narrator is truly in depth with her fantasy.

She fantasizes very affectionately towards her superhero Superman, in particular his ability to fly and to carry her away up into the sky and beyond into space, away from the real world, away from reality - clearly a young child’s fantasy. “ I really do not know in my castle, what loneliness is. Some of our children or grandchildren are always about it, and the young voices of my descendants are delightful - O how delightful! - to me to hear. My dearest and most devoted wife, ever faithful, ever loving, ever helpful and sustaining and consoling, is the priceless blessing of my house... .

This quotation is from ‘ The Poor Relation’s Story’. By examining this quotation it is clear that Michael too, is deeply involved with his fantasy also. He fantasizes about his perfect life, with his wonderful wife and his children and their children; all living together with him as the master of his castle. He also fantasises about a strong relationship with his business partner, and how his children are close friends with his own. This is more of an adult type fantasy; different to the kind of fantasy shown in the ‘ Superman’ story, which is more of a child’s.

So what is fantasy? From the two stories fantasy can be said to be something good; something that makes someone feel positive and high spirited which affects both children and adults. Reality is the converse, so does this mean fantasy is not real, not true, non-existent? Personally, I believe that fantasy can be positive, up lifting and not true, as shown in the two short stories, or indeed something negative, terrible and very much true e. g. people can fantasize about death, be it their own death or a close friend or relative's; this is obviously a terrible kind of fantasy.

Fantasies are day-dreams; they happen in the mind when the person is fully conscious and aware of what they are doing, with the ability to control what they do, unlike real dreams which only occur when the person is asleep - unconscious, with no control over what they are doing. A fantasy is a mental image - images which occur consecutively in the mind; very clear for the person who is fantasising to see, just like a story board of continuous pictures. Only the person having the fantasy is aware of it, it is unique to them, and the fantasy is made up with the thoughts and feelings of the individual fantasising.

The fantasies in the two stories are both how the person fantasising, wishes their life to be. If their life was like their fantasy then they would have the ideal life. The narrator of the ' Superman' story would have what she wanted more than anything - flight, and Michael would have what he always wanted - a perfect family union, both of these however, can only be obtained through a fantasy, as it is not possible for them to occur for the two persons in reality. In the ' Superman' story the narrator's fantasy adventures with

Superman occur primarily when she is put to bed very early in the evening by her mother.

The narrator says that her mother believed that she should have much sleep; “ Mother believed that I should have an enormous amount of sleep, and so I was never really tired when I went to bed. ” Being a child she would have been very energetic and full of much energy. She could not use her energy up physically; as she was confined to her bedroom and her bed, and so the narrator made up her adventures with Superman in her mind - mentally. Also, young children naturally make up adventures and stories; this is vital for the development of their mind and it is how children learn and understand things.

Superman’s significance in this young, innocent child’s life is phenomenal and he has a huge influence on her. She “ worships” him. She listens to him on the wireless every night, she makes up games involving him at school during recess with her single friend, and she imagines what her life would be like with Superman in it. Superman has the ability to fly - the narrator would love to fly; “ ... my love for the sheer poetry of flight”. She cannot actually physically fly, as humans cannot; we are not designed to fly, so she has to make it up and imagine what it would be like to fly hence her flying fantasies.

The narrator lived in Boston, not far from the Logan airport which is east of Boston; close to Massachusetts Bay and Boston Harbour, and so attracts many flying sea birds including sea-gulls. Also, because the narrator lived next to the Logan Airport, she was surrounded by loud powerful aeroplanes

twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. The opening paragraphs to the story, and indeed the opening quotation to this assignment, uses the birds and the aeroplanes to describe Superman's abilities; showing that these have had importance in building up her fantasies with her hero.

With the fast agile flying birds from the coast, loud powerful aeroplanes, and Superman being the current children's role model at the time, advertised pretty much all over the country, it is no wonder that this child is obsessed with flying. The fact that the child fantasises about Superman and not any other superhero or person, is because Superman was the current children's role model. There were no pop stars or Spiderman then as there is so today, only Superman. This is why Superman is relevant to the story, as he was the role model during the time in which the story is set.

The narrator is simply a product of her time; she is someone who fantasises in the way she does because the era she is living in is perfect for such a fantasy to evolve - the backbone is there, all it needs is an imaginative mind and a little inspiration and fantasy adventures will be created. Another factor which I believe is very significant to help explain why this child is so involved in her fantasy adventures, is that she was a loner. The only time she was allowed to play with the other children is when the game being played by them, needed an additional player and the narrator would be able to fit the place; " We need someone else...

Want to play? " here, it can be said that the narrator was used by the other children, and she was never actually seen as a friend to them. Other evidence I have found to back up the fact that the narrator was a loner, very

individual and didn't interact with many other children of her age, can be found in this quotation; " During recess, David and I came into our own. We ignore the boys playing base ball... and the girls giggling at the doge-ball in the dell. " Here, the narrator is admitting that she didn't play with the girls and her only play mate ignored the boys playing base ball.

They went into their own world away from reality and made up games involving Superman; total fantasy but, she is not ashamed or regretful in anyway. She believed that their Superman games were far superior to all the other games played by the other boys and girls; " Our Superman games made us outlaws, yet gave us a sense of windy superiority. " I believe that a child, and indeed an adult also, without many friends their own age, would almost undoubtedly get very bored; as they wouldn't have much to do in terms of interaction with others, and so would need entertainment of some sort to overcome their solitariness.

Sheldon Fein, the boy who is used as a villain in the games, tortured insects for his entertainment and the other children in the playground had many friends and therefore would probably be kept entertained by entertaining one another. The narrator however, would need to keep her young and active mind occupied somehow, other than conversation and play with another child, and so would fantasise. A similarity shared by both the narrator in the ' Superman' story and Michael in the ' Poor Relation's Story', is that they were both loners.

This is the reason why I personally think they fantasised in the depth in which they did so, and I will cover this essential point in more detail later on

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in my assignment. The narrator describes in much detail her fantasy adventures and her obsession with flying. She dreamed of flying all night long; " All night I dreamed of flying". Her dreams were bright and cheerful, truly believable and magical, and when she had them she was enjoying the best time of her day; "... my technicolour dreams... This was the best time of the day...

My flying dreams were believable as a landscape by Dali, so real that I would awake with a sudden shock, a breathless sense of having tumbled like Icarus from the sky and caught myself on the soft bed just in time. ". The memories of these dreams are so strong that the narrator has managed to reproduce her feelings towards her fantasies; 13 years later - clear to her as if it was only yesterday. Another clear indication of the narrator's feelings towards Superman is when she says; " I was not the only worshipper of Superman... ". To worship someone they must be immensely important to you, like a God or a supreme figure.

This child is most fully involved in her fantasies and her childhood is devoted to them. Even though this child felt so strongly towards Superman, her fantasies and flight, she knew it was just a fantasy. She knew that the Superman stories broadcasted via the wireless every night were not real and the games she played with David Sterling in the playground were made up entirely of falseness; as she admits so when she goes to the movies and unexpectedly witnesses the conditions for the Japanese prisoners of war; " Our war games and the radio programmes were all made up, but this was real, this really happened".

The narrator as a child knows where the border between reality and fantasy is and when necessary can relate to reality, unlike Michael in 'The Poor Relation's Story'. Although Michael can admit that his fantasy is not real; "My castle is in the air", he doesn't seem to be able to accept the fact that it is not real and therefore cannot live a 'normal' life without it. It is good that the narrator knew where the border between the two was because she had to accept the truth and reality of the real world when she is victimised and bullied by the other children and when the war began and her life changes completely.

Up to now it had been Superheroes and innocence, but when the war - the reality came, she had to accept it and think differently. By knowing that her fantasy adventures were not true enabled her to accept the truth when she needed to and not use her fantasy to escape into the sky and beyond with Superman. The narrator describes in much detail how she felt towards this newly exposed part of the world; "I lay there alone in bed, feeling the black shadow creeping up the underside of the world like a floodtide... othing was left.

The silver airplanes and the blue capes all dissolved and vanished, wiped away like the crude drawings of a child in a coloured chalk from the colossal blackboard of the dark. That was the year the war began and the real world and the difference. " Her innocent childhood was being erased by this creeping dark shadow which is described as a floodtide - no stopping its immense speed of advancement. Her childhood was over and nothing; no Superhero flying fantasies were left. She lay alone.



The real world of this torture and hatred is coming into the narrator's life; transforming her innocence into knowledge of the reality, the evilness of the world. The narrator required this fantasy to pass the time and to give her personal happiness; it was a huge part of her life and represented the innocence and enjoyment of this child. A devastating but necessary blow has come to this child and her fantasises which she had relied on for much time to give her self satisfaction, had gone - dissolved and vanished - never to be replaced again.

The narrator is being forced to accept the truth and as to come to terms with the real world and what it is really like - it is not anything like her fantasy adventures. This child no longer has same mind that she use to have. In 'The Poor Relations Story', Michael's fantasy, about his perfect life, is in occurrence all of the time. He seems to spend more time in his fantasy world than in the real world and it could be said that he lives in his fantasy world due to his involvement in it.

Without a doubt, Michael is much more involved with his fantasy than the narrator of the 'Superman' story is with hers. This could possibly be the reason why he, unlike the narrator of the 'Superman' story, cannot get over his fantasy and accept the truth - the reality, whereas the narrator of the 'Superman' story knows that her fantasy adventures are entirely false, and can recognise the boarder between fantasy and reality and so can accept that her fantasies are not true when need be. Michael cannot. Michael's fantasy is what he wanted his life to be like.

His fantasy life is totally the opposite to his real life. Michael wishes his life was filled with a wonderful, loving and devoted wife, and children and grandchildren and a close business partner whose children play with Michael's, and his castle homes this wonderful life which he wished for. Michael's life is anything but the life in the fantasy; Michael's only love wasn't devoted to him and Michael wasn't able to cope with the loss of this person - Christian, and so he couldn't find another love and have children and grandchildren.

Michael allowed someone to take advantage of his tolerant behaviour. He allowed someone to steal from him and cheat him ever since childhood but he still forgave this person every time which eventually lead to his failure. Michael is so involved with his fantasy, he has grown old with it; developing his fantasy all of the time - years of development has gone into his fantasy to get it how he wants it. When Michael admits he fantasizes to the; " well respected members of his family", at the Christmas gathering, we are informed of the sheer depth in which Michael is involved with his fantasy.

A quotation I believe shows Michael's fantasy well, is the one I used at the beginning of this assignment (paragraph two). The quotation, which is just a small part of an entire page, which is Michael giving his fantasy to the reader, gives a thorough detailed account of what he wanted out of life. This fantasy has taken a tremendous amount of construction and planning and repetition for Michael to repeat an entire page plus of dialogue from memory.

He interrupts himself to add extra feelings to what he is saying; "... are delightful - O how delightful! to me to hear", the use of exclamation marks emphasises the tone in which Michael is speaking; he is shouting his emotions to his family. His fantasy wife is too good to be true, he describes her with many adjectives and in a very positive way indeed; he doesn't criticise her in any way even though she actually left him. Michael wanted children and grandchildren and a perfect family union with close friends and family - he hasn't got this in real life and so fantasizes it, it is the only way he, as an elderly man, can obtain such things.

I believe that there is the possibility that if Michael's fantasy wasn't a fantasy but reality, it wouldn't be as wonderful as he imagined. After all, it is extremely rare to have a wife with all of those qualities even in the Victorian times, and I am not aware of any one who lives with their entire extended family and with close friends also. His fantasy is too far fetched and this is why I think it will not occur in reality, and if did, he would probably fail at that also.

Michael demonstrates his lack of self confidence at the beginning of the story when he is asked to be the first to tell a story for the audience of family members for entertainment but he hesitates (that someone else go first); "He was very reluctant to take precedence of so many respected members of the family... he modestly suggested". These statements inform the audience of what sort of person this character is; lacking of self confidence, humble, shy and reserved, the kind of person who be most likely fail in business and in life.

When the story unfolds we are informed of the mistakes Michael has made in life; being too friendly to John Spatter and believing his fianci?? wouldn't leave him for another man - these mistakes that this man has made contribute greatly to the fact that he now possesses a fragile mind and such poor living standards. I think that Michael uses his fantasy because he is; " at present a bachelor of between fifty-nine and sixty years of age" and too old to start a family and too old to rebuild his confidence and get a business.

This man's life since failing during his twenties hasn't got any better because Michael couldn't build up his charisma and accept loss after it occurred in his life and so he constructed a fantasy which developed as he aged into the way in which he would have liked to have lived. Michael's daily routine is scheduled the same, day after day, which he follows like a robot - the fantasy is Michael's protection, his security from reality.

He has no friends of his same age, he only has a much younger nephew - a child, who understands him and vice versa; too young to judge Michael for his mistakes he has made in life unlike his successful family members.

Michael gets by on the little charity he receives from his more successful members of the family. Michael has got so much free time, he spends all of his time virtually to himself and so, due to boredom also, fantasises. He fantasies just like the narrator of the ' Superman' story did as a child, because they were both loners and individuals.

The fact that Michael fantasises about what he does is also because his fantasy is relevant to the time of when the story is set. He is approaching an elderly age and still being single; fantasises about a family. The era he is

living in is the Victorian era and so his fantasy involves Victorian ideas - families were seen as essential then. It is probable that people in today's society in a similar situation to Michael, would want a family as well, but probably wealth would be as equally important.

As times change the people living in them will have fantasies relevant to the era. Just like the narrator of the ' Superman' story who fantasies about superman because of the time, and not about a pop star. The fantasies are relevant to the time in which the story is set. Michael is emotionally dependant on his fantasy; he cannot see the reality. Due to the length of time this man has used to construct his fantasy, he will never see reality, Michael has spent most of his life with his fantasy to retreat to when he feels alone, he can never let it go.

I personally believe that even shock tactics, which bring the reality upon the person which much force such as those which come upon the narrator of the ' Superman' story (the war and her being victimised), are powerless at turning this man. The writers of the two stories, Dickens and Sylvia Plath, cleverly convey a variety of techniques within their stories to show many things; including the character's fantasies. Dickens for example, writes in such a way that the reader can tell when Michael is fantasizing and when he is speaking about reality.

Dickens writes in great detail for Michael's real life; so much so that we can picture what he is describing but when he writes about Michael's fantasy he uses little detail; so little in fact it is difficult to imagine what he is describing. For example uncle Chill's house, and indeed himself and his servant Betsy

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Snap, are described in immense detail using alliteration, many similes, verbs and much personification.

The harshness and dullness and coldness of his life with his avaricious uncle is vividly described; “ My life at my uncle Chill’s was of a spare dull kind, and my garret chamber was as dull, and bare and cold, as an upper prison room in some stern northern fortress. ” Just from this single extended sentence, we can begin to construct an image of this person’s life. The harsh sounds used emphasize the dullness of this prison like location. Soon after this sentence, uncle Chill is described; “ Avarice was, unhappily, my uncle Chill’s master-vice.

Though he was rich, he pinched, and scraped, and clutched, and lived miserably”. This man is rich, but from this sentence, separated appropriately with commas so we pronounce the many onomatopoeic verbs with feeling, doesn’t spend much at all – he is rich but extremely greedy and therefore lives a miserable life. Onomatopoeia is used; “ pinched... scraped... clutched”, this is very effective because it clearly emphasises the way in which Dickens wants his audience to imagine this person.

Michael knows that he couldn’t possibly talk to his uncle about his feelings towards Christiana, and so writes him a letter; “ As Christiana had no fortune, I was for some time a little fearful of confessing our engagement to him; but, at length I wrote him a letter, saying how it truly was. I put it into his hand one night, on going to bed”. Michael knows that his uncle will disapprove of Christiana because she is poor, and so hesitates in telling him.

Michael, by writing a letter to his uncle, demonstrates to the reader that: i) their relationship as uncle and nephew isn't close and ii) that Michael cannot face up to things and needs to write a letter because he is not a confident person; an indication that his future life will not be a success. Michael comes downstairs the next morning; "shivering in the cold December air", which was; "colder in my uncle's unwarmed house than in the street", and approaches the long, large breakfast room with a small fire.

The room has a large bay window and it has raindrop marks from the previous nights downpour. He describes the scene as "tears of houseless people" which is ironical as Michael becomes homeless. The window; "stared upon a raw yard, with a cracked stone pavement, and some rusted iron railings half uprooted, whence an ugly out-building that had once been a dissecting-room..." Houses cannot stare; this is personification being used to add description to this place.

From this sentence the audience can picture this image of a haunted horror like house. The house once being a surgeon's home had a dissecting room, dead bodies used to be cut up here and the way Dickens has planned the appearance of the house, and the weather aspect also, makes the house feel as if it still possesses this 'decaying corpse' feel, or even a supernatural quality. Uncle Chill, whose name is obviously deliberate to reflect his personality, has chosen to live in this building - despite the previous happenings which took place in it.

Michael sees similarities between Uncle Chill and Betsy Snap and the corpses with their "...withered, hard-favoured, yellow old..." appearance. The reader

is informed of uncle Chill's terrible living standards despite his wealth. He has a small fire to provide the entire heating for the huge multi-story house. He appears to sit lifelessly in his armchair curled up to make sure all of his body heat is used to its maximum. He even employs an elderly woman to rub his legs in the morning - to circulate the blood thus increasing heat.

This 'yellow' woman, totally obedient to her master, complies to this demand and is controlled by this man, he rotates her head with his hand on top of her crown and she doesn't object in anyway - he has dominance over this woman, these two people are just as 'decaying corpse' like as one another. When Dickens describes Michael's fantasies he writes in a much different manner; " My castle is not a splendid place, but it is very comfortable, and it has a warm and cheerful air, and is quiet a picture of home".

Unlike uncle Chills' house, Michael's " Home", although much better, is not in the slightest bit described to the reader, it is impossible to imagine this place. Even though Michael mentions his home on many more occasions, we are not informed of its appearance. Just as how Michael's castle has no description, his wife's appearance also, is not described. We know that she is ' ever faithful', ' ever loving' and ' ever caring', but at no point are we informed of her physical appearance. We can picture uncle Chill because he is describe in much detail and was reality.

But as Christiana is not real, we do not know what she looks like. This is the way in which Dickens uses sentence structure and detail in the content to allow his aware audience to distinguish between reality and Michael's



fantasy world. Dickens also uses a lot of irony. Irony is used to add effectiveness to what he is trying to put across to the audience on how his characters behave. An example of this is when Michael is continuously repeating the word "supposed". This extended repetition makes the reader suspect the opposite in time, and allows them to see which of Michael's accounts of his life, is in fact the true one.

Sylvia Plath does not use the same techniques as Dickens to show her fantasy. She uses colour and the use of light and expresses this in many ways to show multiple things. Right from the beginning of the story bright colours and bright light is used; throughout the story they remain bright and cheerful to describe her fantasy adventures, but when the story approaches the end and her life changes when she experiences the evil in the world, these bright colours go with her vanishing fantasies and the dark shades enter her life - this is shown very effectively in her carefully constructed sentences used by Plath.

Here are several examples of the way in which Plath uses colour and light; "... lights of Boston that blazed and blinked far across the darkening water... The sunset flaunted its pink flags... red and green lights... technicolour dreams". These are all bright and 'happy' colours and lights, they are used to show that the fantasies were bright and cheerful for her. They were not dark and upsetting in anyway, and so dark shades are not used. The colours and lights fit her fantasies. We are then informed of Sheldon Fein's activities in his spare time; "... e became an expert on inventing tortures and even carried them out in private, beyond the game.

He used to pull the wings from flies and the legs of grasshoppers, and keep the broken insects in a jar under his bed where he could take them out in secret and watch them struggling. “. From here, after the introduction of this evil to the narrator’s life, she experiences a continuous stream of wickedness: during a cold wet winter which drags on, war is declared; she goes to the movies and unexpectedly witnesses Japanese prisoners being tortured and she vomits as a result of this shocking image; “... n a hurry and ran to the girls’ room where I knelt over a toilet bowl and vomited up the cake and ice-cream”.

The narrator also gets victimised and bullied by the other children and with these evil events – the reality of the real world, not present in her fantasies, colours change and the lights change and the bright attractive things in this child’s life no longer exist; “ Saturday was bitterly cold, and the skies were grey and blurred with the threat of snow... The dull, green light... came closing down on us, cold and final as a wind blind... ark brown”, but despite this dullness replacing the colourfulness, her home still offers a safe protection; warm and secure where she can feel safe and where the outside world is not welcome.

Her home, internally, still has light – welcoming to this child who has experienced such horrible things; “... bright squares of light in the windows that were home”. The narrator arrives home and play fights with her loving uncle whilst the mother prepares a candle, white linen tabled clothed dinner table. The flames of the candles are miniature and reflect in the silver and glasses.

She looks at the reflection of the room in the window and sees; "... a secure web of light held together by its indestructible brilliance". The reflection travels beyond into the outside world - she doesn't want this outside world to get into her warm and colourful, loving home, where she can forget about all of her problems. When David Sterling knocks on the door however, to inform the mother about the event previously, a cold drought enters the room - outside entering.

When the narrator identifies that her mother doesn't believe her she chokes on a piece of "... hick and bitter" chocolate pudding (it should be sweet and delicious), she feels rejection - her own mother does not believe her. Her pulse increases and then she rises from the table; her mother and uncle Frank sit there "solemn and sorrowful in the candlelight". This child is experiencing rejection, her entire life has changed and her mother and uncle reject her - they think that she is lying. The narrator walks through the long hall in the dark, noticing the "greenish light reflected in from the unripe moon" and she fiercely throws her self onto her bed.

The window frames are fringed with frost - the outside is entering, and she lays there alone. This child has never needed to be angry before, she now has shown angriness and her innocence is no longer remaining. Her uncle Frank comes to her room, knocks and enters, and asks her about the event - he still doesn't believe her even after her opinion on the matter. His face is dark in the shadows of the moon light, and the narrator cannot make out his facial features. He tells her that in ten years from now it will all be forgotten and no one will ever know the difference - ironically she writes the story thirteen years later.

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The narrator then describes the fact that superman no longer comes to take her away - he no longer exists as her innocence is over. The darkness comes and the story ends with her now experience the real world with its torture and evil and suffering and non-fantasy like reality. This is how Plath conveys the use of colour and light within her piece, to show feelings towards multiple things. Both stories are superb pieces written by excellent writers. The fantasies are clearly shown in the way in which the writers convey a variety of techniques to add effectiveness to their work.

Both stories share many similarities and some differences in the fantasies shown. Although the fantasies are different; one is a child's fun type of fantasy and the other is a serious adult kind, they both are used by the subject to get the perfect life - if their life was more like their fantasy life then they would have the ideal life; a better life. I thoroughly enjoyed analysing the pieces and found them interesting, exciting and unique. This assignment task was a challenge and most enjoyable.