

Gimpel the fool analysis essay



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Gimpel the Fool is a story written by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Saul Bellow translated the story I read because the story was written in Yiddish. Gimpel The Fool is a story about a simple man named Gimpel. He is considered by many to be a fool because he is a very gullible man. He is constantly falling for tricks laid out by almost everyone. Gimpel is persuaded to marry Elka, a woman who will wind up using him also. Elka treats Gimpel very poorly. She has “ his” child only 17 weeks into the marriage. Gimpel knows the child is not his, but allows himself to be persuaded into thinking that some babies are born premature. Gimpel also catches Elka having an affair, but convinces himself he is making it all up. On her deathbed, Elka confesses that none of his six children are actually his, and she had been cheating on him the whole time. After her death, Gimpel decides to get back at all the townspeople who have been mean to him by baking bread with urine mixed in it. Elka visits him in a dream, and he sees that she is turning black from being in hell. Gimpel changes his mind and buries the bread. He then leaves Frampol, giving all of his money to his children. It is during his journeys that he discovers that there really are no lies; whatever doesn't happen is dreamed at night. The story ends with Gimpel dying and going to a place where even he cannot be deceived. To find the true meaning of Gimpel The Fool I decided to analyze the plot, characters and point of view.

Plot is a sequence of events; these events include exposition, complicating incident, rising action, technical climax, falling action, dramatic climax and denouement. The three events that I thought were most important in reading Gimpel The Fool were exposition, complicating incident and dramatic climax. In the exposition, we are introduced to Gimpel. It is here that we learn why

everyone refers to him as Gimpel the fool. It stems from the fact that as a child he was easily tricked and deceived by the other children. This becomes a major part of Gimpel as the story progresses. Another aspect of the plot is the complicating incident. The complicating incident is where we first see there is a problem. Although many people will think that the problem is that he allows himself to be played the fool, I see the problem as being that he is in love with Elka and is blind to her deceit. Gimpel allows this because the Rabbi says “ It is written, better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are the fools. For he who causes his neighbor to feel shame loses paradise himself” (Kennedy 69). He is married to her for 20 years, and when she is dying, she confesses, “ It was ugly how I deceived you all these years. I want to go clean to my maker, and so I have to tell you that the children are not yours” (Kennedy 76). This is the wound to Gimpel’s heart that leads to the dramatic climax. The dramatic climax occurs when Gimpel buries the bad bread. This symbolizes closure and his decision not to be evil for a second. He is done being a fool. He “ goes into the world” (Kennedy 77) and leaves Frampol, closing his ties with everyone even his family whom he tells, “ Be well, and forget that such a one as Gimpel ever existed” (Kennedy 77). Because of this event his life is brand new, and his view of Elka is also brand new. She is no longer turning black. She becomes the complete opposite of who she was in reality. She is loving and supportive of her husband in his dreams, which he sees her in all the time.

Character may be defined as a verbal representation of a human being. By using character, the author is able to portray which people play what role in

the story. Singer used character to the fullest when creating Gimpel. He is quite possibly one of the most annoying, yet interesting characters ever created. I say he is annoying because you constantly want to just slap him and tell him to stand up for himself. But, in the end he winds up becoming a much better person for having gone through everything. On the surface he seems very simple, but I do not believe this is the case. Gimpel is not merely a fool; he is a very kindhearted person who lets his heart get in the way of his pride. I think the way he introduces himself in the beginning of the story is very important. He says, “ I am Gimpel the fool” (Kennedy 68). Although he denies that he really is a fool, the fact that he introduced himself like that says volumes about his character. It says that although he does not believe it to be true, it has become part of his identity. He is not Gimpel, he is Gimpel the fool. Not much is told of any physical characteristics that Gimpel possesses, but we are given some insight into his past. This plays a very important role in who he becomes. “ I was an orphan. My grandfather who brought me up was already bent toward the grave. So they turned me over to a baker...” (Kennedy 69). Later in the story, Gimpel becomes a highly successful baker, and it is this job that gives him the opportunity to get revenge on the people of Frampol. I would call Gimpel a major dynamic character. He is obviously the main character, and I think everyone will agree that he is not the same person in the end as he was at the beginning.

Point of view is the perspective from which a story is told. Gimpel The Fool is written in the first person. We are inside Gimpel’s head from the start of the short story. I say it is written in the first person because of several reasons. The primary reason is the voice that is used. Throughout the story we hear

the word I being used. “ I am Gimpel the fool...I went to the rabbi...Another shnorrer is waiting to inherit my bed” (Kennedy 68, 69, 78). Another reason I say it is in the first person is because of the position and presence of the narrator. The narrator is a major character and participant in almost every event that unfolds during the telling of the story. The presence of the narrator is definitely pervasive. Gimpel is the primary person in every scene. Gimpel’s reliability must be questioned though. I do believe we can rely on what we are being told; however we are only getting one side of the story. I don’t doubt a single thing Gimpel says, but I do have to wonder what is going on with the things we are not being told about.

Through the course of this paper, I have come to realize that it is not the obvious that Singer is trying to tell us. He uses the plot to show us that things are not always what they seem. But we could not discover this without seeing things from Gimpel’s point of view and the insight into his character. He never says he loves Elka, but through his actions, he makes that message quite clear. Had this story been told from someone else’s point of view we would not have been able to see that everything he did was because he loved her. In conclusion, through analysis of the above I have realized the truth of this story...

Gimpel was not a fool. He was in love.

Bibliography:

Kennedy, X. J., *Literature An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama* 5th Edition. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 1991