

The bet

Business



Imagine spending 15 years of your life locked up in a room with no human interaction and hardly anything to do. This is how the lawyer in “The Bet” by Anton Chekhov spent his young adult life all because of an argument one autumn night.

Anton Chekhov used a short, quick moving story to bring to light the controversial issue of whether or not life imprisonment is more humane than the death penalty. The character development, the way the plot is used, and the setting are all expressed to show Anton Chekhov’s view of the issue; the death penalty is more humane than imprisonment for life. To begin, Chekhov uses characterization to shed light on the argument regarding if the death penalty is more humane than life imprisonment. The main character in “The Bet” experienced first hand the distressing reality of a life spent imprisoned. An example of this is on page 212 when it says, “It was agreed that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers.

” In my opinion, this in itself is torture. To not see a human being for 15 years would be torture to anyone, especially a successful young lawyer. Throughout the story it also shows how much the lawyer changed from before he went into prison to the time he got out of prison. For example, on page 211 it says, “Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five and twenty. A lively discussion arose.

‘The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would

certainly choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all” When the lawyer said this, he was a lively and opinionated man with his whole life ahead of him. Then, on page 215 the lawyer says, “ With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.” This is an idea of what the lawyer’s attitude towards life was like after he was in prison for 15 years. He was cynical with no interest in life. Through the lawyers actions, it almost seems like the death penalty would be better than imprisonment for the life because the imprisonment for life pretty much killed him without him physically dying.

Another way that Anton Chekhov supported his view was in the plot by showing major developments in the story through the use of character developments, and he used minimal plot twists. He kept the story mainly off the physical topics. The plot is a flow of thoughts from both the banker and the writer. The setting rarely changes, in fact, it changes only five times throughout the story. However, the characters are constantly changing how they behave, and think about things. The story is mainly played out through the characters minds and how their thoughts are changing, so the plot is mainly a series of thoughts.

However, the most crucial point to the story and the strongest support for the authors view is in the final plot twist. It happens when the lawyer, an imprisoned man, decides to break the contract “ I renounce the two million that I once dreamed of as paradise and now despise. To deprive myself the right to the money, I shall go out from here five minutes before the time fixed and so shall break the compact...” - pg.

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216. While there are a couple plot twists in “ The Bet” the developments that have the most strength are “ mental.” Chekov favored using character’s thoughts to make major points. Next, the attitude and opinion of the author is conveyed using the tone and the way the author relates to the audience. “ The Bet” was written for a historic Russian audience, so the setting of the story was in Russia, and the story is time period appropriate.

Also, the author’s way of treating the subject was definitely opinionated, and his purpose in writing the story was political, because he was writing it to publish his opinion of the topic. The tone is generally lonely and depressing depressing, for example on page 213, Anton Checkov states that “ Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself.” Obviously, we can infer that since the lawyer had been seen talking to himself, he was lonely for human companionship.

Another place that you can see Chekov’s depressing tone illustrated is on page 214 when he says, “ His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.” The idea of a person reaching out and grabbing onto whatever he can find to keep himself afloat is very depressing because he is just swimming in loneliness.

The tone is consistent throughout the story and the author showed sympathy for the character by portraying his position as unfortunate. Finally, the setting shows how uncomfortable the lawyers situation was, and yet another reason why Anton Chekov’s idea that the death penalty was more humane than imprisonment for life was right. The most dramatic setting change

throughout the story was on page 212 when Anton Chekov showed the extreme difference between the inhumanity of prolonged solitude and the comfort of human company. The lawyer was only given one window to the outside world, literally “ By the terms of the agreement, the only relations he could have with the outer world were by a little window made purposely for that object.” This obviously shows his meager living conditions.

While the “ prisoner” was held in a basic room, the Banker’s house literally encompassed the lawyer, because the lawyers room was in the middle of the bankers garden. You are given the impression (because of how the banker is described as a character, and the fact that he is a flamboyant millionaire) that his house would be impressive. The author used these details to let you see the difference between where the two main characters were living, and to give you a mental picture so that you could put yourself in their place. You may think at first because the lawyer is given a way to make music and read books, that he does not have it “ that bad off.” however, those are meager provisions for a fifteen year stay in one room.

Also, the lawyer wasn’t given means to exercise, so his body wasted away. This was shown on page 215 “ His hair was already streaked with silver, and seeing his emaciated, aged-looking face, no one would have believed that he was only forty” The excessive amount of time spent imprisoned alone lead to the lawyer’s physical decay. The lawyers apartment was definitely not ideal, the author used this to further his point. Checkov used elements in his story to support his opinion that the death penalty is more humane than life imprisonment. He showed through the characters and their opinions and

thoughts the course of the story. In other words, he used the characters to tell the plot or direction of the story.

Also, the descriptions of the character were useful in proving his point. The character's own opinions mirrored the authors', and the setting was used to enhance the way you view the characters and understand the story. Overall, one of the main purposes of the story was to show that Anton Chekhov's opinion, " the death penalty is more humane than imprisonment for life", and he did this by using these ideas throughout the story. So if for some reason in the future you find yourself faced with the option of life imprisonment or death, just remember that insanity is the price you will have to pay if you choose the first option.