

"the unicorn in the garden" by james thurber essay sample

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“ The Unicorn in the Garden” is a story written by the American cartoonist, author and journalist James Thurber. He was well known for his cartoons and short stories, mainly published in The New Yorker magazine. “ The Unicorn in the Garden” is about a man and his wife. One morning he sees the unicorn in his garden eating flowers. Positively excited he goes upstairs to tell his wife about it. She is being in a bad mood calls him a “ booby” and threatens to send him to a “ booby hatch”. The husband goes to the garden and falls asleep among the roses. At that time, the wife calls the police and a psychiatrist. She tells them that her husband saw the unicorn, but they think she is the crazy one. In the presence of the police and the psychiatrist, the husband denies having seen a unicorn. Therefore, the wife is taken to the mental institution. This story belongs to the belles-lettres functional style, the main aim of which is to give the reader aesthetic pleasure, to make them think and to entertain them by appealing to their emotions.

It is told in the third person from the viewpoint of an omniscient anonymous narrator. It is a mixture of the elements of the description and the dialogues, though the dialogues are not numerous. This short story has the features of the fable and a fairy tale. As a fable, this story has the moral given at the end, and one of its characters is a mythical creature – a unicorn. The elements of the fairy tale are presented at the first sentence of the short story and the one that is in the end. However, in this story the cliché “ Once upon a time” is violated and here it is “ Once upon a sunny morning”, and

the phraseological unit " They lived happily ever after" is violated and here it is " The husband lived happily ever after". The protagonists of the fable are a man and his wife; they are opposed to each other. The man is a quite, mild, dreamy and clever person, while his wife is egoistical, coarse and sly. For example, when the husband woke her up to share his wonderful news about the unicorn, the epithet " unfriendly eye" characterizes the attitude of the wife to her husband (" She opened one unfriendly eye and looked at him.").

With the help of the characterizing detail in the sentence " she said and turned her back on him." the scornful attitude of the wife to her husband is emphasized. The usage of such stylistic devices as epithet and detachment in the sentence " His wife set up in the bad and looked at him, coldly." shows negative attitude of the wife towards her husband. The characterizing detail that expressed by the simile " the wife got up and dressed as fast as she could." shows the desire of wife to get rid of her husband. The syntactic repetition in the sentence " she telephoned the police and she telephoned a psychiatrist." adds up the rhythm to the narration and characterizes the actions of the wife. The mood of the husband is expressed with the help of the words that show his positive attitude to the surrounding and his harmonious inner state. His cues in the dialogues are short and calm – " There is a unicorn in the garden, eating roses." His kind nature is expressed in his attitude to the unicorn – " he pulled up a lily and gave it to him." The action is laid in the small countryside in the two-storeyed building the suggestive of which are the words " the garden", " the man went up to the bedroom".

The garden was well cared and flourished with roses, tulips and lilies. The direct temporal marker " a sunny morning" and the indirect temporal markers such as blooming " roses", " tulips" and " lilies" are suggestive that the action takes place in late spring or early summer. The cliché that is usually used in the end of the fairy tale " They lived happily ever after" is violated in this story, and here it is " The husband lived happily ever after" that shows that if there is no love between two people, than it would be better to split up and live alone. In the mythology, the unicorn is the symbol of the happiness, purity and together with the flowers it creates a magical atmosphere imbued with purity and innocence. Here the reader can conclude that the end of the story will be happy, and it is, but only for the husband. Everything that concerns the unicorn takes place in the garden, so the garden is a place of wonders for the man, while the house becomes associated with madness and the author's occasionalism " booby-hatch" proves this fact.

The man who is obviously unhappy in his marriage has a hallucination of a unicorn that stands as a symbol of happiness and the fulfillment of dreams. The unicorn is a " he" for the husband and it represents happiness that the man does not have. Such implying details as " a man who sat in a breakfast nook" alone, " the man went up to the bedroom where his wife was still asleep and woke her", " she opened one unfriendly eye", " you are a booby, and I'm going to have you put in the booby-hatch" shows the tense relations between the husband and the wife. The repetition of the phrase such as "

the unicorn in the garden" adds up the effect of the real presence of the animal.

This marriage lacks strong mail power and it is expressed in the author's defining of the characters of the short story – she is " the wife", and the husband is called " a man" and then " the man". The mail character becomes " the husband" only in the end of the story when the wife is taken to the mental institution and he becomes happy. The proverb " Don't count you chickens until they are hatched" is violated in the last sentence and here it is " Don't count you boobies until they are hatched" with the help of which the author message is explained to the reader. Which is – you have to watch you do not fall into your own trap, because bad and sly people are always punished for their deeds.