

Ann beattie

[Life](#), [Love](#)



In the short story "Janus", by Ann Beattie, the central character is not a real character at all, but in fact is an inanimate object. The cream colored ceramic bowl serves as the main character throughout the story, and is correlated to the Roman God "Janus" that is identified primarily with doors or other places of passage, and is also represented as being two faced. Janus is one of two characters with names, which is also evident of her importance throughout the story. The author uses the character of Andrea to give life to Janus through discussing the bowl's importance to her. In many cases the primary character of a story is simply an object that is symbolic of an ideal or underlying meaning through which the author uses to convey their message. Throughout the story Beattie uses the bowl in many ways to convey different meanings to the reader. In the beginning, its sole purpose in the story is simply a tool that Andrea uses to sell houses. She places the bowl in homes she is trying to sell, along with house plants and even her dog at times. There is a strong connection made between Andrea and her bowl, and it becomes evident that Janus means much more to her than just an aesthetically pleasing piece of ceramic art. When Andrea is trying to sell a home, she essentially tricks people into buying them by creating these setups where she brings in her own props. Beattie also uses the bowl to show the weak relationship between Andrea and her husband. There are times when it is clearly obvious that Andrea cares more about the bowl than she does her own husband. It is implied when she wakes up in the morning next to him and feels guilty; it is understood as her feeling guilty for her deeper connection to the bowl, and almost as a betrayal to her husband. There is no passion in their relationship, they simply get along

fine and live together. Janus reveals another aspect of their relationship that is nonexistent, " She had asked her husband to please not drop his house key in it. It was meant to be empty", (113) their sexual life as well as their everyday life is not passionate either. The request not to drop house keys in the bowl can be viewed this way, and it is another way to demonstrate the parallel of relationships that Andrea has. The extremely weak and non meaningful marriage to her husband, who is left nameless throughout the story and the deep seeded connection she feels towards the cream colored ceramic bowl. Beattie also reveals through the bowl another meaning it could possibly take on. At the end of the story we are told about the first day Andrea sees the bowl. She is at an arts and crafts fair with her lover when she sees Janus. When she decides she doesn't really need the bowl she leaves it, but her lover saw something in Andrea sparkle when she saw it, so he buys it for her anyways. Not only is this man her lover, but he is also the man she is having an affair with behind her husband's back. It is clear that Andrea and this other man are truly in love, and have a passionate romantic relationship, but Andrea cannot bring herself to leave her husband and in turn her lover grows tired of waiting and leaves her. This brings another possibility to the table of Janus's symbolism, it could possibly be representative of the true love and passion Andrea once had in her life, but let escape. Now she doesn't want to let it go, it has become Janus. Many authors have used the same approach to emphasizing their true message in a story. For example, in " The Things They Carried, " by Tim O'Brien, (1098) the main character is Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, but in the story the letters and pictures he carries of a girl back home become more meaningful than

anything the he actually says. The fact that he carries these around with him is meaningful in itself because he is a soldier on the battlefield, and anything he packs around must have significant importance to him. He carries these letters and pictures because he believes he is truly in love with this girl, even though it is an unrequited love. He wishes for her to feel the same about him, but knows that she does not. He finds himself becoming obsessed with looking at these pictures and re-reading the letters multiple times. The notes and pictures are also symbolic of the outside world, the normal life that is going on outside of the battlefield. Jimmy finds himself getting lost in his own imagination, and thinking about home life more and more often. One day, one of his men is killed, and he believes it is his own fault for not paying enough attention to his surroundings and the situation his troop was in. He in turn decides that he must get rid of the letters and pictures so he burns them. Essentially this is symbolic of his maturity and realization that this girl does not and will not love him, and that his troop of men depends on him and looks to him for leadership and guidance. The use of the letters and pictures is like Janus because it is used to reveal more about the characters that go along with them, but also is used to portray many different shifts in the stories overall meanings. Another great story that correlates is "The Necklace," by Guy De Maupassant. This story further continues with this theme because the main character, Mme. Loisel, is shaped by the pearl necklace that comes into her life. When she borrows it from her rich friend, she assumes that it is a real pearl necklace. It comes to mean to her then that if she wears it to the ball it will be seen as a sign of her wealth, and people will see her as a more refined person. Time goes on,

and when she loses it she becomes desperate to replace it. Her and her doting husband work years to gain back the money to buy another set of expensive pearls for her friend. It turns out that the pearls were a fake, but it also makes Mme. Loisel more respectful in the sense that she has finally had to work for something in her life. The necklace was the main tool that gave her a reason to be proud of herself for working hard and earning enough money to buy a set of real pearls as a replacement for her friend. This resembles Janus because the author shows character traits and development through using an object that is symbolic for a deeper meaning. "Janus" is a story that is a great example of an author characterizing her characters through using symbols and objects. The effectiveness of this writing is great because it is easy as a reader to identify the connections between the characters and the symbols that they identify with. Using objects to form characters creates a more versatile story, this means of writing is able to take on many forms and thus develop many different underlying meanings that the author is trying to convey.