

Literary analysis

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Literary Analysis: The Ransom of the Red Chief ‘The ransom of the red chief’ is one of the most interesting and enjoyable short stories by the renowned American writer O. Henry. The story revolves around two petty criminals, who kidnap a son of a prominent citizen in order to get a ransom from the child’s father. Things, however, change once they get hold of the child. He becomes unbearable due to his naughty and irritating character and the criminals deem it fit to return him back to his parents and pay his father some money. This sharp twist in the plot is very common in most of the writings of O. Henry. This essay analyzes the story from a literary perspective, examining various literary devices the author has employed in the story. The main theme in the story is the triumph of the underdog. The captive also known as the Red Chief and his father are the underdogs in the story, who later emerge triumphant. They are oblivious of the plot by Bill Driscoll and Sam, to kidnap Johnny, also known as Red Chief and get a ransom of \$2000 (Bendixen, and James, 25). These petty criminals, who are the masterminds of the kidnapping plot, are the favorites to execute their plan. Things, however, change from good to worse for them and they eventually suffer the loss they hoped to inflict on Red Chief and his father. O. Henry makes use of several literary devices in the story. The three main stylistic devices that stand out in the story are humor, irony, and exaggeration. The first element, humor, is very prominent in the story. The whole plot of the short story is humorous. One instance of humor in the story is the description of the two criminals, Bill and Sam, who are portrayed as self educated. They end up using phrases and words that are humorous. The other humorous part of the story is the fact that the Red Chief is oblivious

that he has been kidnapped. He enjoys the trip as if it is a camping trip and even feels more at home with his kidnappers that he does among his stern parents. One other instance of humor is when Johnny the Red Chief, confuses his kidnappers with his irritating antics prompting them to release him back to his father.

The use of irony is also very prominent in the story. This refers to the use of words and phrases to imply the exact opposite of their meanings (Bendixen, and James, 56). One example of irony in the story is the phrase ' Johnny won all the local spelling bees and went to the State contest, only to misspell " train." (Henry, 88) This is ironic because Johnny is supposedly good at spelling, but fails to spell a simple word. Another ironic statement is the phrase "in a book written 100 years ago, it was predicted " People will never set foot on the moon because it would take too long to get there." This is ironic because man has actually been to the moon. The fact that Johnny compares himself to Albert Einstein using the phrase, ' Im a real Einstein! I just failed my math test.' Is ironic because Einstein is one of the greatest intellectuals in human history.

Exaggeration is also evident throughout the story. This refers to overstating the truth about something. Some of the exaggerated statements and phrases in the story end up to be funny, for instance the phrase ' I thought that dog was going to bite my leg off! (Bendixen, and James, 87) This is sheer exaggeration because the dog cannot bite someone's leg off completely. Another illustration of exaggeration is in the expression that Mr. Ebenezer would ' melt down for a ransom.' This is exaggerated because people do not actually melt.

In conclusion, the three literary devices combine effectively to make the story enjoyable and compelling to read. These literary elements allow the writer to express his thoughts in a manner that is consistent with his writing style, which makes the story a classical piece of literature.

Works Cited

Bendixen, Alfred, and James Nagel. *A Companion to the American Short Story*. Chichester, U. K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Print.

Henry, O. *The Ransom of Red Chief*. Mankato, MN: Creative Education, 2007. Print.