

Olsen and tan's writing techniques

Business



Introduction: Tillie Olsen's "I Stand here Ironing" is a story about a mother who is impelled to think about her daughter, Emily, by her teacher (or counselor) in a quest to find how to help her. The narrator of the story, Emily's mum, takes some time to reflect on her family's life some years ago. She reflects on the hardships they went through when Emily was growing up and the challenges they had to endure. Her reflections are interrupted when Emily returns home. On the other hand, "Two kinds" by Amy Tan is a short story featuring a mother who has issues with her daughter, Jing-mei. The narrator's mother is a Chinese immigrant and believes that in America, one could become anything he/she wants to be.

However, Jing-mei thought otherwise, when she says, "For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could do anything I wanted to be. I could only be me" (Tan 132). In pursuit of finding what her daughter is good at, Jing-mei's mother tries everything in her powers to make her daughter famous in a way. Towards the end, Jing-mei's mother dies and that is when Jing-mei discovers her talent and regrets having not listened to her mother. Both stories are based on mother-daughter relationships. This write up addresses the debatable differences in the writing techniques used by the writers of the two stories.

Writing Techniques in Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing": One of the most conspicuous techniques in the story is monologue. The story is written as though it was a rehearsal. For instance, when Emily's teacher (or counselor) asks Emily's mum about her daughter, she thinks through her reply. Emily's mum is engaged in an internal monologue. The reader can feel her thoughts,

feelings and associations in the monologue. The monologue is addressed to her daughter's teacher.

Instead of Emily's mother engaging with the teacher and working towards finding a solution to Emily's problem, she describes the causes of the problems and her thoughts. Although the monologue is private and unspoken, she intends to give it as a response to the teacher's question but in the real sense, it is clear that it is no response at all. This monologue helps us find out that Emily's mother has chosen not to be involved and hence Emily will be left on her own (Roberts 34). Another writing technique is the use of imagery. The imagery is associated with the baby's description.

" She was a beautiful baby. She blew shining bubbles of sound. She loved motion, loved light, loved color and music and textures. She would lie on the floor in her blue overalls patting the surface so hard in ecstasy her hands and feet would blur" (Olsen) In most cases, babies spit bubbles when cooing. The way she describes her child's beauty is the kind of image all mothers create of their babies.

Most mothers, if not all, believe that their children are beautiful and they love them so much so that they would do anything to make sure they provide them with the best life ever. In the above quote, the narrator translates an acoustic sensation into a pictorial one when she makes sound into " bubbles". Additionally, Emily's father's image is painted as a person who is uncaring and gives up easily as he leaves Emily's mother to take care of their child alone. This is evident when her mother says "... Emily's who could no longer endure sharing with us" (Olsen). The same

sentence creates an image that although the man is selfish, Emily's mother still searches for him meaning she still loved him.

Her description of her daughter lying on the floor in blue overalls gives a clear visual picture. In addition, Tillie Olsen uses first person, second person, third person and flashback in a captivating way. The narrator begins by stating that whatever she was asked keeps moving back and forth as the iron moves. In this case, the reader is tempted to think that the whole story would be about her. But that is not the case. As the story develops, the reader encounters several incidents of flashback where she tells about numerous things and speaks in third person.

She says, " She was a beautiful baby" (Olsen). She further continues to say, " She would call for me" (Olsen). Flashback has been used for the purpose of reminiscences of events. The actions of Emily's mother switch from ironing to recalling her daughter's childhood life. She enters the reminiscence with the feeling that she cannot do anything about her daughter's current situation. Even after recollecting, she is still in denial of Emily's problems.

She concludes by stating that she looked very lovely (Olsen). This indicates that she decided to focus on the positives of her daughter as she does not recount on any negatives. Important to note is the use of symbolism. In the story, it is evident that food was a scarce commodity as the narrator struggled to provide the basic wants for her child. Food and nourishment symbolize the changes in Emily's mental and emotional welfare.

When Emily is born, she is described as a beautiful child as she is fed by her mother's breast milk, but as the conditions worsens so does Emily's health.

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When she turned two, "all the loveliness was gone" (Olsen). By the time her mother was getting into her second marriage, Emily lost more weight as her mother turned her attention to the other children (Olsen). The iron represents the duties and responsibilities that Emily's mother was engaged in hence preventing her from being involved fully in her daughter's life. The forward and backward motions of the iron mimic the narrator's thinking as she switches her character while mother at the same time tries to identify the root cause of her daughter's problems (Roberts 17).

The convalescent home where Emily was taken to recover from tuberculosis symbolizes her mother's inability to take good care of her children.

Moreover, Emily's balcony embodies the emotional distance between herself and the mother. When at the center, she is not allowed to communicate with anyone to the extent that the letters her mother writes her have to be read to her once and thrown away afterwards. Parents are only permitted to visit on Sundays and when Emily's mother visits, she is unable to establish direct contact with her daughter. She describes it as an "invisible wall" that divides them.

This drives the plot further (Rau 34). Writing Techniques in Tan's "Two Kinds": Amy Tan writes this story using the first person narration. The narrator, Jing-mei, reflects on how her childhood life was. She reveals to the reader the kind of relationship she had with her mother as she was growing up. Through first person kind of narration, the reader is able to differentiate this story from a fictional one. Her story is given the feel of being real as the readers are pushed closer to reality (Allen 54).

Since the reader is allowed to accept the narrator as the character and the character as the real person talking directly, the reader easily connects with the story and is in a position to empathize with the narrator. Tan uses dialogue in her story in order to bring points home (Allen 56). She also incorporates the use of her dialect, the Chinese language. For instance, she uses a Chinese word, "Nikan" which means "so ungrateful" (Tan 142). This greatly contributes to the trans-cultural communications between Chinese and English.

Dialogue is used when Jing-mei argues with her mother; "Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese: "those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" "Then I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother" (Tan 142). The use of dialogue helps to emphasize the kind of daughter Jing-mei was; rebellious. She even wishes that she was not her mother's daughter! The mother and daughter's emotions are greatly displayed in the dialogue when they repeat the words "those who are" and "I wish" (Tan 142).

The repetition of those words creates an image of a Chinese-featured mother and an American-featured daughter. Furthermore, a lot of similes have been used in the story. For instance, the narrator says, "Her fingers felt like a dead person" (Tan 138). This implies she could not feel her fingers because they were kind of paralyzed. Nonetheless, the use of similes helps to develop the plot of the story and make it more interesting to the audience (Booth, Booth & Swartz 45). They also give depth to emphasis on some points and pass across the message to the audience in a manner they can relate with.

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In addition, memoir style has been used in "Two Kinds". The story keeps switching from present when the narrator is an adult and back to the time when he was a child. With this style, Tan is able to pass across the message through two different characters: innocent child and experienced adult. Readers are thereby put in a position to make their own judgments and interpret the struggle between mother and daughter in their own way. Similarities in Writing Techniques: Just like in Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing", Tan has used symbolism and imagery.

In this case, Jing-mei's piano is the main symbol of the story. It represents the disagreements between mother and daughter. Jing-mei suffered the pain of an unwanted child as she had to perform so as to earn acceptance and love from her mother and family as a whole. We see her pleading to her mother "Why can't you like me the way I am?" (Tan 142). At the end of the story, she turns the piano and sits down to play it.

This means that after all, she actually cared about her mother and the piano. The songs that she plays symbolize the whole story; "Pleading Child" and "Perfectly Contended". For the first time, she notices that the two songs were actually two halves of one song. "Pleading Child" symbolizes how her life had been with her trying to persuade her mother to let her be. On the other hand, "Perfectly Contended" represents what is to come as Jing-mei's mother is now dead.

She was no longer going to live in regret, misery and curse as all that was now gone. Jing-mei was in a proper position to develop her skills in playing piano and live a full life. When her mother gives her the piano, it symbolizes

“ a sign of forgiveness and a tremendous burden removed” (Tan 142)

Conclusion: From the discussion above, it is evident that both Olsen and Tan in their stories have used different styles to deliver the same message; mother-daughter relationships. We can see how different styles can be used to make an emphasis on the main points and make readers understand the story more easily. Moreover, when different styles are incorporated in a story it becomes interesting and captivating to the readers (Rau 12) Using one writing technique can make a story too boring to read. Olsen's use of flashback helps us to understand the context of the teacher's question to Emily's mother.

Without the flashback, it would be very hard for the reader to understand whatever is addressed in the story. Tan's first person narration helps us to understand what Jing-mei was going through. If a second or third party had narrated the story some vital details would have been missed.