

The ride of his life



Horseracing has always been a magical sport and referred to as “ The Sport of Kings”. The excitement and drama has always caused new fans to flock to the sport. In “ The Rocking Horse Winner” by D. H. Lawrence it is no different. The racetracks and the thrill of gambling mesmerize Paul, and fuel his obsession with winning money for his mother. Throughout “ The Rocking Horse Winner”, Lawrence uses various literary techniques to satirize society and show how the immense desire for luck and money, which are unnecessary for true happiness, only lead to the destruction of the individual. The unique style of “ The Rocking Horse Winner” is significant in revealing the deeper meaning of the story. Throughout the story, fairytale-like elements are juxtaposed with deeper, more realistic elements, which help the story resonate with deeper meaning. Lawrence does not use the characters’ names in the beginning of the novel, which seems to establish the story as a simple story, with a light-hearted, fairy-tale like tone. However, it is juxtaposed with more realistic elements, such as family issues and overwhelming obsessions. Like fairy tales, the characters in this story are in pursuit of something important to them. Paul’s ability to predict the winner is not realistic, and is more likely to be a component of a fairy tale. His lucky ability, however, is juxtaposed with his inability to please his mother, as he cannot fulfill her desires. Thus, the shift in style highlights and intensifies the obsessions of Hester and Paul. The story later evolves into a deeper, more complex satirical story, which explores the pursuit of unattainable luck and materialism, as well as the consequences of being fully consumed by an obsession. The main theme present throughout “ The Rocking Horse Winner” is the immense desire for money, which is shown through various characters. Hester is so obsessed with money that it

dominates her thoughts and stifles her ability to love others. She is very concerned with maintaining her social status, and keeps spending to make sure “ the style was always kept up” (801). Hester is so greedy that when Paul arranges to give her one thousand pounds per year for five years on her birthday, she talks to her lawyer and asks to receive a lump sum payment to pay off her debt. However, when she does receive the lump sum, she uses the money to buy more, instead of paying off her debts, which causes the family to plunge farther into debt. In essence, the more money Hester receives, the more money she wants and the more money she needs to stabilize her financial situation. The situation is so severe that the house whispers, “ There must be more money!” (801). It is because of Hester’s desire for money and Paul’s desire to please his mother that he is engulfed by the need for more money, which eventually leads to his disturbing death. Hester has never expressed her love for her son and does not seem moved by Paul’s, but will gladly take the money he left behind, showing her shallow tendencies. These characters show how pursuing the quest for money is a fruitless quest, as it leads to Paul’s death and contributes to Hester’s incapacity to experience human emotions, as money is all she feels she needs. Lawrence uses juxtaposition throughout “ The Rocking Horse Winner” to criticize society and the disjointed family structure, as well as materialism, which was fairly common during his time. The relationship between Hester and her husband to her children is the main example of the disjointed family structure. Lawrence juxtaposes the concern Paul has for his mother with her lack of concern for him. Paul devotes himself to his mother and to earning her money to fulfill her wants, while Hester cannot provide Paul with the love and comfort that mothers are expected to provide. The lack of money in the

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house has caused friction between all of the family members, and Hester further splits the family apart by trying to maintain her social status instead of concentrating on her family. Hester's "heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody" including her own son (800). Only when Paul becomes completely out of control, does Hester "feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish" (809-810). This is significant because it is Paul's desire for his mother's love that drives him to find his luck to fulfill her desire for money. Lawrence uses this to criticize the absence of loving relationships between parents and children, as Paul does not have a close relationship with either his mother or father. This shows that Hester's desire for money has completely torn the family apart. More importantly, the relationship between Paul and Hester shows a unique relationship between mother and son. Paul desperately, but ineffectively, tries to win his mother's love by becoming lucky, to make up for his father's deficiency in providing for the family. Paul's father is only mentioned as a man who "never would be able to do anything worth doing" (801). His absence shows he does not play a major role in his children's lives, and his lack of regard for his family's financial situation shows he is not fulfilling his fatherly role. Paul falsely associates luck with love, believing that if he is lucky, his mother will love him. Since Hester believes her husband is unlucky, Paul falsely concludes that luck is the reason why she doesn't love his father. Paul attempts to become lucky, and fill the void left by his father. Also highlighted through Lawrence's use of juxtaposition is Hester's greed in contrast to Paul's generosity. Paul keeps giving to the family to relieve the financial situation, but Hester wants more and more money. When she is offered one thousand pounds per year, she wants all of the money at once.

This juxtaposition highlights and satirizes the materialism and consumption of society, and shows how Hester further distances herself from her family by allowing her obsession with money to completely consume her. The symbol of Paul's rocking horse is vital in the overall meaning of the story. The rocking horse is Paul's method of becoming "lucky" and fulfilling his mother's desire for money. However, like the rocking horse, Paul's efforts are ineffectual, as they never make any forward progress. A rocking horse does not move forward, therefore the effort in riding it is fruitless, just as Paul's actions to win money for his mother are fruitless, as his actions do not satisfy her desires, but intensify them. Paul becomes so engulfed by his obsession for pleasing his mother by finding the winner of the next race by "madly surging on his rocking horse" that he becomes consumed in a state of madness and frenzy (810). His horrific death shows how he destroys himself in his quest for attaining wealth. Style, juxtaposition, characterization, and symbolism all contribute to the idea that the pursuit of immense wealth is fruitless and results in the demise of the individual. Paul's death is significant because, by showing that he fails to help his mother or to receive the love he deserves, it exposes Lawrence's views that money cannot buy love and that devoting one's life to something unattainable, such as luck, is worthless.