

Theme of duplicity in

Technology



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THEME OF DUPLICITY IN THREE SHORT STORIES OF HENRY JAMES: THE LIAR, THE REAL THING, AND THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE Nazan Gokay Theme of Duplicity in Three Short Stories of Henry James: “ The Liar,” “ The Real Thing,” and “ The Beast in the Jungle” The genius of Henry James manifests itself in duality of meaning in both his shorter and longer works. Appearance and reality provide for two levels of expression. On one level the theme is explicit as told by the narrator, but underneath lies the ambiguous meaning which is in a sense the main theme of the story.

The ambiguity is usually embedded in the narrative; it is the task of the attentive reader to seek it out, understand it and enjoy it. James does not make this task easy for the reader. His style is subtle, vague, and demands a lot of attention. One clue to the real meaning of James’s stories is the irony employed. Most of James’s narrators are unreliable in the sense that they are deceptive. Their unreliability is either a result of their blindness or unawareness of their situation and environment, or an egotistical engagement in their own affairs so as to distort reality.

The unreliable narrator misleads the reader. The Jamesian irony clarifies the story, brings out the real meaning beneath the apparent and reveals the unreliable narrator. “ The Liar” is a perfect example of the use of an unreliable narrator and the existence of two levels of meaning, the real and the apparent. Although the story is not told from a first person point of view, the narrator confines himself only to the mind of Oliver Lyon, a painter and former suitor of Mrs. Capadose. The events are recorded through Lyon’s mind and we perceive people through his eyes.

According to Lyon, Colonel Capadose is a villainous liar who has to be exposed. Lyon's conception of Capadose as a liar and his envy of the Colonel have blinded Lyon to appreciate him as an amiable human being which in fact he is. Lyon treacherously plans to expose the Colonel in a portrait he will paint as "the liar" and eventually renew his friendship with Mrs. Capadose. Lyon's account of the event is the apparent and superficial meaning of the story. Colonel Capadose is the liar and he has corrupted his wife through their years of marriage, for at the end of the story she, too, lies in order to save her husband.

Lyon, as the disillusioned hero, watches them depart from his life, thinking that "he had trained her too well." On a deeper and more significant level, Oliver Lyon is the real liar. Although Colonel has been known as a liar, he is a harmless man who is only engaged in a social game. In society, in human relationships, one has to wear a mask. Lyon himself points out at the dinner party that people like others not because they are strictly honest but because they are skillful in deception. Lyon's treachery is much more significant than Colonel's social games.

Lyon tries to violate the integrity of another man's character; moreover, he plans to expose him to the public. Subtle but definitely present Jamesian irony brings out the essence of the story. The most obvious ironical device is the name Oliver Lyon, who is the real liar. The exposure of the couple at the end is ironically at the expense of Lyon who loses forever any chance he might have had with this ideal woman, the woman that he has loved for so long. Through the story Lyon plots against the Colonel, but in fact he is bringing about his own disillusionment.

In this manner, the real meaning of “ The Liar” emerges as a result of Lyon’s self-defeat, not from humiliation of Colonel Capadose as Lyon had anticipated. The circumstance of “ The Real Thing” is slightly different than the “ The Liar. ” Although the theme of duplicity, dichotomy between the apparent and the real is still the central issue, there is no unreliable narrator. In “ The Liar” the superficial is conveyed through accounts of the unreliable narrator and the real is embedded in the ironical and false character of Oliver Lyon. In “ The Real Thing” the dichotomy between the real and the apparent is explicitly stated.

In this story James is concerned with the mission of the artist who seeks for expressive and imaginative realism in potential nothings rather than in concrete, conventional real things. Mr. and Mrs. Monarch, as their names imply, are types or norms of a superior humanity. They are ideal, real, and aristocratic in life, but they are not right for art. When the painter tries to paint them, their portraits materialise as rigid, photographic images. The painter-narrator discovers that Miss Churm and Oronte who are socially nothings prove to be the real things for art.

They can adopt aristocratic poses better than those who are really aristocratic in life. On a social level Mr. and Mrs. Monarch, “ a gentleman and a lady” as the porter’s wife announces them, are the real things. The social institution, their married life is perfect, they are devoted to each other. On an aesthetic level, the artist’s imagination is the real thing. On this level the reality of Monarchs is no longer valid; Miss Churm and Oronte replace them. The irony of the story rests on the fact that for the artist, the represented subject is more essential than the real thing. The Beast in the Jungle” is the

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story of a man who is haunted by fear and expectation simultaneously that something will happen to him. John Marcher is the typical blind hero of James. His self-indulgence prevents him from seeing the reality, thus his view, through which the story is narrated, is unreliable. John Marcher is similar to Oliver Lyon in that his self-deception results in inflicting pain to others, although his motives are not aggressive like Lyon's. Marcher is not a villain as Lyon is. He causes May's and his own unhappiness unwittingly.

His flaw is his blindness, but certainly not treachery. His situation is as ironic as Lyon's in that he tries to be ordinary and hide his uniqueness, while he is unaware that his uniqueness is that he is, in fact, ordinary. The double meaning is conveyed through the two characters of the story. John Marcher manifests the superficial and apparent aspect, while May Bartram presents the real and underlying theme. Most of the story is related through John Marcher's point of view as the "The Liar" was told through Lyon's point of view.

The underlying theme is expressed in the dialogues with May Bartram, who is a very perceptive and intelligent woman. Soon after she has made his acquaintance, she sees his real issue. She comes to love him, but he is too engrossed in his expectations to notice her unquestioned presence and friendship. As years go by she sees "it" not happening. Finally, before she dies she tells him that "It has come", but he is still unaware. His moment of recognition comes when he visits her grave and realizes that he has lost her forever, and that he is "the man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. As in the other two stories, the names of the characters are significant in stressing the theme of duplicity. Marcher is winter; May is

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spring. Marcher is fear; May is love. Marcher advances in a stately manner, but never reaches May in her lifetime. In “The Liar” and “The Beast in the Jungle” unreliable narrators are used to convey and stress the double meaning. In “The Real Thing” the dichotomy between the real and the apparent is presented as a problem confronting the artist. In either case the theme of duplicity is employed to add richness and depth to the meaning of the stories.

The double meaning, irony, and unreliable narrators have become indispensable elements of Jamesian fiction. BIBLIOGRAPHY Matthiessen, F. O. Henry James: The Major Phase. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963. Powers, Lyall H. Henry James: An Introduction and Interpretation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. , 1970. Stone, Edward, ed. Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. , 1961. Tompkins, Jane P. , ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Turn of the Screw and Other Tales. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. , 1970.