

The efficacy of the plot elements in living arrangements



The efficacy of the plot elements in Living Arrangements by Alistair

Morgan
Incy Wincy spider climbing up the spout
Down came the rain and

washed the spider out
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
Now Incy

Wincy spider went up the spout again! Everyone knows this legendary

nursery rhyme and its efficacy in the proses of teaching small kids, though

little is realised that without its particular plot it wouldn't have been this

effective as it is. The plot of a story is the order of events that happens in the

story. In general terms it is known as the storyline. There is a beginning,

where all the characters are recognised; the conflict beginning; the rising

action, which is where the conflict happens; the climax, which is where they

solve the problem. This is generally where the theme becomes clear or

obvious to the reader.

Second to last is the falling action, which starts to end the story and lastly

there is the resolution or denouement, which then ends the story. These are

the elements of a plot. This essay will conclude a discussion on how these

elements provide a frame for the exploration of the characters, the setting

and the theme, in the short story Living Arrangements by Alistair Morgan.

The most important thing about a short story plot is that it should be about

an event in a person's life. The reader is drawn into a story by identifying with

the central character, the protagonist. It is this identification which should

hold his/her attention all the way through. The reader must start with a

person – a person facing some kind of predicament, and work out the story

in those terms. In the short story Living Arrangements there is a concerned

woman whose personality is at the beginning of the short story not made

clear.

She is complaining or rather testifying the predicament she is facing, involving the other character, her opposer – the antagonist, in the story. The fact that the protagonist's personality is not disclosed per se is however not only to let the reader's attention fade away from the main character, but also to indicate that there should be a balance of attention given to both the characters involved in the story. This is so that the reader understands both characters' personalities and their standings concerning the story. Both personalities of the characters are however disclosed in one-way or another further on, but still in the beginning of the story. Honorata, the ghostly parasites' personality is exposed by her actions, whereas, the narrator, being the main characters personality is disclosed directly as she tells what her daily life entails. Events happening in the beginning of the first part of the story and further on, contribute towards the further exploration of the characters and as their personalities are more explored a reader gets a vague idea of the character-clash as the story approaches the rising action – where the conflict happens.

The setting is very important in this short story and plays a major role in the exploration of both the characters and the theme. The setting helps the reader to find clues about the characters and the development of the story. The setting is the world where the characters live and will reveal them as they move through it. The setting may well inspire the plot and be an important element in the short story, but it is not a substitute for a plot. It is people, their actions and their feelings which make a story. The narrator subtly foreshadows plot elements by describing the mood and look of the surroundings. For instance the narrator discovers that Honorata has been

sleeping underneath her bed at night. This wouldn't have had the same effect to the story if she found Honorata at early noon watching television, or while eating the food.

The initial concept of the short story almost becomes certainly complete without the setting. It rarely needs much consideration on its own. At the climax of the story the conflicting forces which have given the story its energy since the opening come together and reach breaking point. Honorata is found and she is no longer living in disguise. There is a change in the moods of the characters and things are not as they were before. With Honorata present, she feels lonelier than what she was before she discovered her. She says that things were more straightforward before she met Honorata face to face.

She claims it was easier to accept her presence when she was invisible (page 152). The circumstances which gave rise to the original instability no longer prevail. The narrators horizon has shifted and, at least for the moment, the way forward is clear even though there is conflict between the characters. This however makes the reader familiar to the central theme; loneliness "being lonely isn't always physical; or companionship a companion doesn't have to be physical. If the plot is what happens in the story, the theme is what it means or what it is about; not in a general sense, but in terms of the specific struggle in which the central character is engaged. Without a theme a plot becomes episodic – A happens, then B happens, then C happens, etc.

without a sense of purpose or direction. The theme in this short story is the backbone of the story and it forms an unbroken link from the beginning to the end. The opening paragraphs of the story establish a situation which is unstable, which contains within it the necessity for change, and the ending shows the results of that change and the achievement of some form of stability. The nature of the initial instability is mirrored in the finally achieved stability and the connection between them is the theme. The reader should be able to see the opening of the story reflected in its ending, and the ending reflected in the opening. It is to say that the story is ??? gelled??? or put together by the plot. The progress from opening to ending should be logical, but not straightforward.

A simple situation of instability resolving into stability does not make a plot. A conflict between opposing forces is needed and should be integral to the theme. The conflict can be between the central character and other characters, between the central character and his/her circumstances, or between conflicting desires within the central character.

The conflict does not have to be violent or arouse extreme passions, nor does its nature necessarily have to be obvious or clear-cut. It can be subtle, but it must be there, holding the reader in suspense. In the story it might appear that the narrator, is having inner-conflict as she feels demeaned and foolish when she finds out that Honorata has indeed been living with her while she presumed that someone is in her house. Approaching climax, the narrator regards Honoratas presence as ??? utter disruption??? (page 155). The narrator struggles at a point to conclude that she has a house-mate.

Nonsense, I tell myself. Since when have I been so sentimental (page 154)
This influences her in her job and can also be seen as conflict in the story, but the most important conflict which also has a direct relation to the theme, is the conflict between the two characters, Honorata and the narrator. The narrator claims that Honorata doesn't have to be present to make her life better or fill in the loneliness gap. There is a hierarchical relationship, based on class; which makes it difficult for the two characters to live in harmony like a family. This lets Honorata act like she has no stand in their relationship.

Their differences cause tension, making the narrator to reach a decision that is very unpleasant, but could have been foreseen in regard of the circumstances in their relationship. "We cannot live like this. The only way is if we never see one another. I'm going out to a movie now. When I get back I don't want to know that you are here, or that you even exist. If you can do that, then we won't have a problem." (page 156) Honorata took her word; Through the short story the chronological plot plays a colossal role in the understanding and the interpretation of the Living Arrangements. In assistance of the different plot elements, the events of the story relate to each other with cause and effect.

The actions that the characters take, the emotional reasons why they take them and whether the characters deserve their final outcomes is completely understandable. Through the plot of Living Arrangements the theme is subtle.