

Stylistic devices in the rocking horse winner novel

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Luck is Money, Money is Luck: An Analysis of “ The Rocking Horse Winner”

D. H. Lawrence is best known as an English novelist. He mainly writes about industrialization and modernity taking over people's lives. His issues revolve around human sexuality, instinct, impulsiveness, and liveliness. Lawrence uses drama and supernatural elements in “ The Rocking Horse Winner.” In this particular story, Lawrence focuses on a relationship between a mother and son, eventually becoming strained due to a growing obsession with an unattainable lifestyle. In “ The Rocking Horse Winner” Lawrence illustrates the theme of the internal and external conflict surrounding luck, money, and materialism. Lawrence is most successful in doing this through the use of plot, characters, irony and conflict.

“ The Rocking Horse Winner” is narrative by D. H. Lawrence. At the beginning he introduces us to Hester, a wife and mother of three children. Hester and her husband have a plain and simple home. However, Hester has always wanted to live a life of luxury and wealth. She jumps from job to job to achieve the lifestyle she wants but is unsuccessful. Hester begins to blame not having “ luck” as the reason for her lack of money. When her son, Paul, asks her what it means to be lucky, she tells him, people who make money are lucky. Paul tells his mother he is lucky and when she does not believe him, he sets out to prove himself to her. Paul soon learns if he rides his rocking horse long enough the name of the winning race horse will just come to him. Bassett, the family gardener, helps Paul place his bets. Eventually his uncle Oscar, a gambler, discovers Paul's gambling habit and joins him and Bassett. Paul then sets up an arrangement with a lawyer where

his mother gets a certain amount of money, from his winnings, each month. As soon as Hester discovers this arrangement she asks the lawyer for an advancement. Hester is unaware of her son's problem and slowly becomes more concerned with his well-being. One night she comes home to find Paul riding his rocking horse vigorously and he collapses from a brain fever after he says the name of the winning horse. Uncle Oscar and Bassett place their money on the winning horse and earn a lump sum of money. When they tell Paul the news he dies later on during the night.

Throughout the story there is the recurring theme of luck surrounding money. Hester associates money with luck, meaning if someone is lucky, they have an ample amount of money. Lawrence uses characters, allegory, diction, imagery, point of view, and irony. In the story money is associated with luck rather than with hard work. Characters like Bassett and Paul's father are examples of this. Both work hard to make money however, neither of them is wealthy. Using allegory Lawrence makes a reference to God with regards to luck. Hester believes that only God can provide someone with luck. When Paul hears Uncle Oscar yell "Filthy lucre," Paul hears "lucker" instead of lucre. Lucre is a term used to describe money gained in a dishonorable way. Lawrence uses this to show how luck is not an honorable way to gain wealth. The point of view is omniscient third person. It is unclear who is telling the story but this is what makes the luck seem like an all-powerful, supernatural concept. The story starts off in a fairytale type way:

"There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned

to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them" (Lawrence 216).

Someone reading this may feel a connection to fairytales such as Cinderella, where there is an unlucky damsel but her luck slowly begins to change. The irony that surrounds luck is that Paul is so caught up with being "lucky" and winning his mother's affection, and luck is what ultimately causes his death. A rather unlucky situation for someone who is supposed to be lucky. The title is also an ironic phrase to the story, "The Rocking Horse Winner" suggesting that someone wins a rocking horse, however the rocking horse is what really wins here.

Through the use of plot, conflict, symbolism and irony Lawrence depicts how money has strained Hester's ability to have a normal relationship with her son. Hester has never felt true, unconditional love for her three children, or anyone for that matter. Instead she replaces love with carefulness and anxiousness. The children know their mother does not truly love them like a mother should. She is obsessed with money and wanting to live a luxurious life like many of the other families she knows.

The story's plot starts to pick-up when the children begin to hear their mother's unspoken words, "There must be more money," in their quiet house, to depict the money obsession Hester has acquired. In order to grasp how money is negatively affecting Hester, Lawrence shows two conflicts which she has, man vs. man and man vs. society. Hester is fighting an internal conflict because she is unhappy about not having money. She also faces a conflict with society. She is worried about keeping up with other

families and living the style they are. Paul feels as though he is competing for his mother's love with money. He believes his mother will love him only if her obsession with money is settled, so sets out to take his father's place as the breadwinner and is successful in the process. Throughout the story money is a continuous symbol for love. Money is also what drives the wedge between middle-class families, like Paul's. Snodgrass says money is a "symbolic substitute for love and affection." (Snodgrass 3) At the end Hester feels her heart turn to "stone" signaling the love she did have for Paul is now gone. In an ironical twist Hester gains money and the life she's always wanted at the cost of her son's life. This irony suggests Hester is someone selfish, and materialistic.

Furthermore, Lawrence uses symbolism, plot and imagery to represent how materialism has degraded the characters' lives. Everyone, especially Hester and Paul, are selfish and are only concerned with their own desires. Hester wants to live a life of money and luxury. Paul is only concerned with his rocking horse and its ability to bring him money. Along with Hester and Paul, Uncle Oscar is also materialistic because once he finds out Paul's secret, he uses him for his personal gain. Lawrence uses the imagery of shiny new items to show how the family uses materialistic things to maintain their lives. Even though the family cannot afford much, they would rather spend it on new toys for their kids such as the "shiny" rocking horse Paul received for Christmas that ultimately leads to his death. Others believe the rocking horse may be a symbol masturbation such as Andrew Harrison who says the "frantic ridding of the rocking-horse... operates as a symbolic masturbation" (Harrison 53). However, Robert G. Lawrence believes the rocking horse may

be “ familiar symbol of deception,” such as the wooden horse of Troy (Lawrence 1). There is also a new pram for a doll and a puppy that has replaced a teddy bear. The family feels as if the only way to maintain their status in the community is by buying items. In the plot, the climax specifically, Hester runs into Paul’s five thousand dollars, their lust for items begins to intensify more than before. Paul is given in home tutors, a luxury not many people have. Hester also has a love for new, modern luxurious furnishings, which she can now afford. The “ luxury Paul’s mother had been used to” was starting to become part of Paul’s life now too. However, this solves nothing the symbolism of the unspoken words throughout the house are still there. No matter how many things the family is able to afford, there will never be enough money to sustain their materialistic mindset because they are unlucky.

Overall, Lawrence’s use of irony elaborates on how the greed makes the mother-son relationship take a turn for the worse as Hester began to feel for her son. His use of imagery and point-of-view allow the reader to picture a familiar person they know who is either in Hester’s situation or Paul’s, not literally someone who rocks on a horse, but someone who is always out to get other’s approval by driving themselves to the edge. This short story is a timeless example of modern day society and how people use luck, money and materialism to gain other’s approval and affection.