

Ernest hemingway's
short story a very
short story and oscar
wilde the selfish gia...



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The Short Story

V. S Pritchett said: '...the short story tells us only one thing, and that, intensely.' I do not agree with this assertion and believe that whilst this might be true to some short stories, this cannot be applied to them all. To show this I will look at two short stories. 'A Very Short Story' (Ernest Hemingway) which I believe does conform to Pritchett's claim, and 'The Selfish Giant' (Oscar Wilde) which does not.

There are many themes in 'The Selfish Giant' (SG): religion, love and first impressions. However they are not all made clear straight away, although you can see the theme of love running throughout the story, religion and first impressions do not become quite as obvious until the end.

'The Selfish Giant' is written as a fairytale, with the Giant being characterised very much as a typical 'fairytale giant'. By this I mean that he conforms to the usual actions carried out by giants in this genre. He dislikes children and so drives them away, 'what are you doing there?' he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.' However this giant differs slightly as he is really kind at heart, which is proven when he helps the boy into the tree. The story is set in a garden, which reflects the giant's change of heart as it becomes beautiful when the giant becomes kind but frosty when the giant is being selfish.

Throughout the story there is a fair amount of alliteration, 'rattled on the roof' and personification, 'The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost' this works very well in creating a fairytale image and adds to the simplistic, childlike tone. The language in the beginning and the end is <https://assignbuster.com/ernest-hemingways-short-story-a-very-short-story-and-oscar-wilde-the-selfish-giant/>

very uncomplicated and childlike, again in accordance with the typical fairytale genre and so leading us to believe that it is intended as a child's story. However, in the last section of the story the tone and language become much more biblical, 'Who art thou? Said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child'. It is here that the other themes of religion and first impressions become apparent. The oversimplified description of the child's stigmata wounds adds to the effect that the last section has on the reader.

The structure of the story is vital in the overall effect in allowing us to see what the story is actually trying to tell us. It is simple in the beginning and middle and then the tone and language changes in the end to emphasise its point that things are not always what they seem. The way we read this story is reflective of the way the Giant perceives the little child. We assume the story is a child's fairytale, the Giant assumes the little boy is what he appears to be, we find at the end of the story that it is not actually that simple and that it is actually telling us something, the Giant finds at the end of the story that the child is much more than just a little boy.

I believe that the story is trying to convey two messages; treat others as you wish to be treated and things are not always what they seem.

'A Very Short Story' is set in Italy and basically about a love affair between a soldier and a nurse during an early war period. It is quite an adult subject so is intended for a more mature audience. The tone changes and so reflects the content showing how a relationship can have its 'up's and downs'. It

goes from being light-hearted ' she was cool and fresh in the hot night' to sombre and serious ' He felt sick about saying good-bye like that'.

The structure is quite basic, its starts at the beginning of their relationship and ends when their relationship ends. The paragraphs flow from one stage to another as their relationship heats up, until the end when it's left as a ' cliff-hanger' to him. The middle of the story shows how this situation isn't just happening to them though, '...they went into the Duomo and prayed. It was dim and quiet, and there were other people praying.' This shows that other people are praying for each other too.

The language throughout is quite plain and blunt and there isn't much imagery used, it is also fairly formal and serious which could suggest that he is very bitter about the whole episode. This could also be because he wants the reader to concentrate more on the breakdown of their relationship than the surroundings they were in.

The purpose of this story is much more simple than ' The Selfish Giant'. It is just trying to show the reader how the war both created and lost love between people.

In conclusion then I refer back to Pritchett's claim, '...the short story tells us only one thing, and that, intensely'. I have shown that some short stories do conform to this, ' A Very Short Story ' being one of them as its purpose is to show how the war both created and lost love. However his theory cannot be applied to all short stories as I have clearly shown that ' The Selfish Giant' conveys more than one message that is that things are not always what they

seem and that by treating people in the way you expect to be treated can be rewarding.