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Compositional And Stylistic Approach To The Story “The Open Window” By Saki

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ABSTRACT

Hector Hugh Munro, better known by the pen name Saki, which is a reference to the cupbearer in the quatrains of Omar Khayyam, was a British writer and a master of the short story. Much of Saki’s work satirizes Edwardian society and culture.

Introduction

“The Open Window” is Saki’s most popular short story. It was first collected in *Beasts and Super Beasts* in 1914. The story begins with Framton Nuttel, a nervous man who has come to stay in the country for his health. His sister, who thinks he should socialize while he is there, has given him letters of introduction to families in the neighborhood whom she got to know when she was staying there a few years previously. Framton goes to visit a Mrs Sappleton and while he was waiting for her to come down, is entertained by her fifteen-year-old niece. The niece tells him that the French window is kept open, even though it is October, because Mrs Sappleton believes that her husband and her brothers, who were killed in a shooting accident three years before, will come back one day. When Mrs Sappleton comes down she talks about her husband and her brothers, and how they are going to come back from shooting soon, and Framton, believing that she is deranged, tries to distract her by talking about his health. Then, to his horror, Mrs Sappleton points out that her husband and her brothers are coming, and he sees them walking towards the window with their dog. He thinks he is seeing ghosts and runs away. Mrs Sappleton can’t understand why he has run away and, when her husband and her brothers come in, she tells them about the odd man who has just left. The niece explains that Framton Nuttel ran away because of the spaniel: he is afraid of dogs since he was hunted by a pack of pariah dogs in India. The last line summarizes the story,

saying of the niece, “Romance at short notice was her specialty”.

Composition. Exposition: The story starts off by the narrator giving details and background descriptions of the characters.

“My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel,” said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; “in the meantime you must try and put up with me”.

Inciting incident: Framton, the main character, gets introduced to a story and he takes it as truth.

“Her great tragedy happened just three years ago”, said the child; that would be since your sister’s time.”

“Her tragedy?” asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

“You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon”, said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

“It is quite warm for the time of the year”, said Framton; “but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?”

Rising action: Framton gets introduced to Mrs. Sappleton

and he thinks she is insane, but in reality she is telling the truth; this is setting up for the climax.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like your menfolk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic, he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

Climax: The main character sees that the husband and the sons were walking towards the house, the character reaches the point of no return.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window, they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Falling action: The main character reacts to the climax by running out and away from the "ghosts".

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"“A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel”, said Mrs. Sappleton; could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost”.

"I expect it was the spaniel", said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug

grave with creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve”.

Denouement (Resolution): The resolution of the story consists of the family thinking that Framton is insane because he runs away.

Stylistic devices. Metaphor: "whirl of apologies" (refers to the excessive amount of apologies); "to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic" (the nature of the act is resembled the quality of the verb to turn); "fragment of her attention" (attention is an abstract notion to express in fragments); "her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window" (the movement of the eye is compared to travelling); "chill shock" (shock is defined as freezing to intensify the meaning); "Who was that who bolted out" (human's movement is compared to the metal object to stress the meaning).

Epithet: "tone of distinct regret" (reversed epithet); "dreadful wet summer"; "dazed horror"; "shock of nameless fear" (reversed epithet).

Exaggeration: "you will bury yourself down...from moping" (so unwilling to act in a positive way that makes you bury yourself).

Oxymoron: "a fine mess" (expressed in the combination of inadvertent and incidental contradictions).

The lexis used in the story is rather complicated and literary. The author tries to enrich the content with range of stylistic devices. Additionally, the author pays special attention to a word selection. Thus the name of the main heroes is not called accidentally "Vera". The author ironically chooses this very name since the owner of it contradicts to this with her deceitful action through the story. The title of the story is explicit, for the main action goes around this object. It is symbolical in the story and quite appropriate to the content.

Saki dramatizes here the conflict between reality and imagination, demonstrating how difficult it can be to distinguish them. Not only does the unfortunate Mr. Nuttel fall victim to the story's joke, but also so does the reader. The reader is at first inclined to laugh at Nuttel for being so gullible. However, the reader too has been taken in by Saki's story and must come to the realization that he or she is also inclined to believe a well-told interesting tale.

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