

The Lottery: A Study of Narrative Irony and Its Role in Exploring Human Nature

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The Lottery: A Study of Narrative Irony and Its Role in Exploring Human Nature

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze various forms of narrative irony contained in Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery." This qualitative study used an in-depth text analysis approach to the narrative of the short story. This research method involved structural analysis to identify important narrative elements such as conflict, plot, and character. Using an irony analysis approach, this study examined how Shirley Jackson used this technique to highlight contradictions in human behavior and society. This study provided a deeper understanding of how narrative ironies function in literary works to stimulate critical thinking about human nature.*

Keywords: Narrative irony, The lottery, Character

1. INTRODUCTION

Among Shirley Jackson's short stories, "The Lottery" stands out as a disturbing and meaningful story. This seemingly simple story tells of an annual ritual that takes place in a small village. There, residents are chosen by lottery and stoned to death. Readers will be shocked by the brutality and intensity of this ritual, prompting them to question human nature and our current social expectations.

The lottery is not just a horror story, but an exploration of the dark side of humanity. Behind village traditions and superficial harmony, lies cruelty and blind adherence to dangerous norms. Shirley Jackson masterfully uses narrative irony to create suspense, surprise, and reflection, leading the reader to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human behavior.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

In "The Lottery," Shirley Jackson employs narrative irony to illuminate the darker side of humanity. Narrative irony, defined as the contrast between expectation and reality, serves as Jackson's primary device for intensifying the narrative tension, prompting reflection, and critiquing unquestioning tradition and conformity without critical thinking.

Kinds of Narrative Irony in "The Lottery"

In "The Lottery," Shirley Jackson employs a variety of narrative techniques, including irony, to imbue the narrative with a greater depth of meaning. Some of the forms of narrative irony utilized in the text include:

1. Verbal irony

Verbal irony is a literary device that occurs when a character expresses something that is contrary to their intended meaning. This can be done deliberately for purposes of sarcasm, humor, or emphasis, or unintentionally due to confusion or deception.

2. Situational irony

Situational irony is a literary device that occurs when the outcome of a situation is contrary to the expectations or intentions of the characters involved. Such occurrences may result from misunderstandings, unforeseen circumstances, or fortuitous turns of events. Situational irony frequently evokes a sense of surprise, shock, or amusement in the reader or audience.

3. Dramatic irony

Dramatic irony is a literary device that occurs when the reader or audience is aware of information that the characters in the story are unaware of. This can engender a sense of suspense and surprise, as the reader or audience is aware that the character will soon face the consequences of their ignorance.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative analysis of Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery". This study will focus on identifying and analyzing various forms of narrative irony contained in the text. The qualitative approach is conducted to examine in depth the meaning and influence of irony on the development of characters and themes of the story.

First, this study uses an in-depth text analysis approach to the narrative of the short story. The researcher is investigating how Jackson uses the framework of plot, dialog, and imagery to create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense that ultimately culminates in the lottery scene.

Secondly, this research method involves structural analysis to identify important narrative elements such as conflict, plot, and character. The focus is on the way Jackson makes readers assume certain things, and then their expectations are shattered by the tragic revelation at the end of the story.

Thirdly, using an irony analysis approach, we examine how Jackson uses this technique to highlight contradictions in human behavior and society. Irony is used to reveal the collective unconscious and the unwillingness to face unpleasant realities.

By combining these approaches, this study provides a deeper understanding of how narrative irony functions in literary works to stimulate critical thinking about human nature and society.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The short story "The Lottery" narrates the annual tradition of a lottery in the small, remote village in the United States. In this lottery, villagers draw the name of someone who will be killed by stoning. The narrative commences on a tranquil morning in the diminutive community, where the inhabitants congregate in the open air to conduct the annual lottery draw. Each family registers, and the draw commences with the selection of a paper from a black box. Tessie, who arrives late, discovers that her husband has drawn the numbers for her family. As the draw progresses, it becomes evident that Tessie is the lottery winner. However, the act of winning the lottery actually signifies that an individual will be victimized and killed by the entire village as part of a sadistic and gruesome tradition.

Brief Introduction of Setting and Main Characters

1. Setting

Time: On a day characterized by clear skies and abundant sunshine.

Place: Remote village in the United States.

Atmosphere: The initial phase of the drawing ritual is characterized by a sense of tranquillity and optimism. However, as the process progresses, the atmosphere becomes increasingly tense and ominous.

2. The Main Characters

a) Tessie Hutchinson

A late arrival at the village's annual lottery draw, a housewife is a pivotal figure in the narrative. She is ultimately selected in the lottery and killed by the villagers.

b) Mr. Summers

The individual in question is the man responsible for organizing the lottery draw each year and ensuring that all the rules are followed. Mr. Summers is depicted as stern and authoritative, yet he also comes across as cold and unfeeling.

c) Old Man Warner

He is the individual who persuades the villagers to continue performing the lottery ritual, despite the lack of knowledge regarding its precise origins and purpose. Old Man Warner is depicted as tenacious and espouses the view that the lottery tradition should be upheld.

d) Villagers

The villagers are depicted as tragic figures. The villagers are victims of cruel traditional practices that prevent them from challenging established norms and breaking free from the shackles of conformity.

Writing Techniques

In "The Lottery," Shirley Jackson employs a number of writing techniques to establish a normal, calm, and peaceful atmosphere at the beginning of the short story. This serves to create a contrast with the horrific climax that is to follow. The following paragraphs will examine some of the techniques employed by Jackson to establish this atmosphere of normality and tranquility.

1. The image of a typical, tranquil and serene village.

The text offers a detailed description of a picturesque scene on a sunny summer morning. The scene is populated by a variety of characters, including flowers in bloom, children playing, and people engaged in conversation. Furthermore, the villagers are depicted as being friendly and close to one another. This evokes a picture of village life that is both ordinary and tranquil.

2. Natural-looking Dialog and Social Interaction

In this narrative, the characters engage in dialogue with one another in a relaxed and intimate manner. The dialogue encompasses a range of topics, including climate, agriculture, and other quotidian activities. This dialogue serves to reinforce the impression that this is a tranquil village.

3. Introduction to the Common Characters

The primary characters, such as Tessie Hutchinson, Mr. Summers, and Mr. Graves, are depicted as members of an ordinary village society. The characters are depicted in the context of their daily activities, such as Tessie being late due to household chores.

4. An Ordinary Depiction of Tradition

Tessie Hutchinson The tradition of the annual lottery draw is depicted in a straightforward manner, with the drawing of the paper from the box and the villagers'

reactions to the numbers they receive presented as part of an annual routine that they engage in calmly and without any initial signs of tension.

By establishing a normal and slightly dull atmosphere at the beginning of the story, Shirley Jackson creates a sharp contrast with a chilling climax when the winner of the lottery is revealed to be someone who will be murdered. The sudden emergence of a pervasive sense of foreboding is a testament to the author's ability to disarm the reader with a seemingly innocuous introduction to the village and its customs. This underscores Jackson's critical message regarding the dangers of unquestioning adherence to harmful traditions and the collective cruelty that can lie behind them.

The Use of Narrative Irony in the Short Story "The Lottery"

1. Verbal irony

The use of irony in Conversation about the Lottery:

a) Tessie Hutchinson dan Old Man Warner

When Tessie expresses reluctance to participate in the lottery, Old Man Warner asserts that she has "she made it after all." This is an example of verbal irony, as Tessie is ultimately the one chosen and killed in the lottery.

b) Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves

"The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box, and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers' coal company and locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the square next morning." In referring to lottery preparation, it is evident that the act is perceived as a routine and straightforward process, despite the fact that it is a deeply unpleasant ritual.

The use of irony in character names:

a) Mr. Summers

The appellation "Summers" serves to introduce a counterpoint to the frigid and strained ambience that pervades the lottery ritual.

b) Old Man Warner

The appellation "Warner" is incongruous with his role in the perpetuation of the inhumane lottery tradition.

2. Situational irony

a) Lottery rituals as a celebration of society

The lottery tradition is believed to bring good fortune and prosperity to the village. In essence, the lottery tradition is a source of sorrow for the individual selected for execution.

b) Contrast between the beginning and climax of the story

The story commences with a description of the tranquil and idyllic village on a radiant summer day. The villagers are depicted as benevolent and approachable individuals. Nevertheless, the narrative culminates in the villagers' cruel stoning and killing of one of their own.

c) Ignorance disguised as a complicity

The villagers engage in the lottery process without a full comprehension of its purpose or the potential consequences. The villagers refer to the practice as normal and inevitable, although in reality they are engaged in a highly compelling and inhumane act.

3. Dramatic irony

a) Villagers' ignorance

The villagers remain unaware of the sinister nature of this tradition, while the reader is privy to its gruesome conclusion, thereby fostering a sense of suspense and dread.

b) Tessie's rejection

As the character Tessie's disbelief and rejection of her own choices increase, the dramatic irony of her situation intensifies. The reader is forced to confront the terrible fate that awaits her.

c) Children's participation

The participation of innocent children in raffles, rock collecting, and the act of rock throwing with the intention of killing Tessie is a matter of concern.

The Role of Narrative Irony in the Exploration of Human Nature

In the short story "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson, the author employs irony to illustrate a number of complex human traits. The following examples illustrate how irony is employed to illustrate these traits:

1. Cruelty

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that the people in this narrative, who appear to be a peaceful and ordinary society, willingly participate in a sadistic ritual. The lottery tradition is followed without an understanding of the consequences or the purpose behind it. The characters in the story engage in acts of cruelty that appear to be unjustified or exceed the reader's expectations. For instance, the murder of an individual selected at random in a lottery ritual. The following evidence is presented for consideration:

"Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one

that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here. Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being done."

2. Fear of change consequences

Although there are indications that some individuals may feel uneasy about the lottery tradition, the majority of the community continues to maintain the tradition due to a fear of the consequences of change. They prefer to follow and preserve the tradition rather than face the possibility of uncertain change or possible conflict. To illustrate, consider the following sentences:

"There's always been a lottery," he added petulantly. "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."

"Nothing but trouble in that," Old Man Warner said stoutly. "Pack of young fools."

"Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones."

The final quotation illustrates that although certain aspects of the tradition may have been forgotten or altered over time, such as the original black box being lost, the lottery tradition is still jealously guarded. This indicates that the apprehension of modifying the tradition may be more disconcerting to them than the act of following the tradition itself.

3. Blind adherence to tradition

This brief story illustrates a small community that follows the annual lottery tradition without significant questioning or resistance, despite the fact that the tradition has extremely adverse consequences. The following evidence demonstrates this point:

"The lottery was conducted—as were the square dances, the teen club, the Halloween program—by Mr. Summers, who had time and energy to devote to civic activities."

"The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions; most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around."

"The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles."

One of the key elements of the short story "The Lottery" is the use of irony. The use of irony serves to construct a dramatic atmosphere, encouraging readers to reflect on the content and meaning that can be derived from the narrative, and prompting them to consider how these characteristics can lead to the perpetration of inhumane acts.

5. CONCLUSION

The narrative irony in "The Lottery" serves to illustrate complex human traits, such as cruelty, fear of change, and blind adherence to tradition. By employing irony, Shirley Jackson encourages readers to reflect on the story's content and meaning, and to consider how these traits can lead to inhumane acts.

Narrative irony is a literary technique that contrasts expectations with reality. In "The Lottery," the author employs narrative irony to critique outmoded traditions and cultural practices, as well as to caution against unquestioning adherence to them. Three types of narrative irony are employed: verbal, situational, and dramatic.

Verbal irony is defined as a situation in which a character's words convey a meaning that is the opposite of their intended meaning. In "The Lottery," this includes Tessie Hutchinson being called "always lucky" before her death, and Dave Hutchinson's assertion that he is not a believer in the lottery. Furthermore, irony is evident in the character names, such as Mr. Summers and Old Man Warner, as well as in the character statements, such as Tessie's fear of violating rules.

Situational irony is defined as a discrepancy between the anticipated and actual outcomes of a situation. In "The Lottery," the villagers' belief that the lottery brings good fortune, despite the fact that it causes sorrow and death. The contrast between the story's peaceful beginning and tragic climax, and the villagers' ignorance of the lottery's true purpose, also exemplifies situational irony.

Dramatic irony is a literary device in which the reader is made aware of information that is not known to the characters. In "The Lottery," the reader is aware of the true purpose of the lottery, whereas the villagers remain unaware. Furthermore, Tessie's increasing disbelief and rejection of her situation, as well as the children's participation in the stoning, also contribute to the creation of dramatic irony.

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