

An analysis of the short story "The Open Window"

The short story "The Open Window" written by Saki whose real name is Hector Hugh Munro is a great story which resides in the short story collection "Beasts and Super-Beasts". The story sets in a room, possibly the drawing room or parlor where visitors are received in an English house in countryside. The story illustrates how a gullible, naïve and neurotic adult is outsmarted by an ingenious and assertive girl.

When analyzing the thematic importance of the story, 'appearance and reality' comes the first. It is shown that most of the time people are deceived by the appearance without realizing the reality through wisdom. Another theme is deception. Though deception is there it is not because of malevolence or tediousness. It is only because of the childish mentality which encourages to scheme against adults and mock at them. Another sub-theme is the distinctions between introvert and extrovert, prudent and imprudent people in society and their confusions. It is clearly shown that even some adults cannot see the truth and they seem to be blind in the world of children. But the children who have good sense in dealing with practical matters, ridicule the gullible nature of adults.

There are only a few characters in the story. The main three characters of the story are Mr. Framton Nuttel, Vera, the niece of Mrs. Sappleton and Mrs. Sappleton. Mr. Nuttel is a very gullible, impractical, insane character who lacks understanding and logical thinking. He gets easily duped and so when he also "endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece, without unduly discounting....". Nuttel is not straightforward. He "grabbed wildly at his stock and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate" when he deceives what he sees is exactly ghosts. As Mrs. Sappleton says he is "a most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel".

Vera, a "self-possessed young lady of fifteen" whose forte is "to make at short notice" tells tall tales with her very flair. She is very perceptive and self-assured. She finds out the main weak points of a person to attack with her ability of creating tall tales and assess people. She herself seems to enjoy her talent as she carefully fabricates stories with the resources she has. With her ingeniousness she makes up the story of Mrs. Sappleton's "great tragedy". There is also a kind of warning nature in the phrase which Vera utters, "you must try and put up with me". This hints that Vera is going to play some of her mischief with him. She not only deceives Nuttel but her aunt and uncle too, by creating another tale to provide reason for Nuttel's sudden departure. Even "with a dazed horror in her eyes" Vera acts talentedly to deceive Mr. Nuttel without arousing even a trivial suspicion. Though Vera is fifteen, Saki addresses her as a "young lady" because of her precociousness and articulateness.

Mrs. Sappleton who becomes the antagonist in Vera's story acts freely in front of Mr. Nuttel without knowing a bit about her niece's tall tale. She who "rattled on cheerfully" not knowing about the tale asks "you don't mind the open window" making Nuttel more nervous. She is not really a complex character but she gives "only a fragment of her attention" to Mr. Nuttel. Mrs. Sappleton who knows well about niece too becomes blind in this instance and gets deceived. She is a cheerful, simple lady who awaits for her husband and two brothers to come with the spaniel to their home. She wants to be happy and spend time happily with them.

The story is written in the third person narration. So, the plot is revealed by a narrator who is not himself involved in the story. Using this method Saki mirrors the thoughts and emotions of his characters clearly and in different viewpoints and angles.