English 521

*The Leap* (Echoes, pg. 190) Short Story Analysis

Directions: On a separate sheet of looseleaf in your binder or notebook, comment on each of the following elements of short fiction as they pertain to the short story “*The Leap*”:

A. **Narration/ P.O.V:**
   i) What type of narration is used?
   First-person

   ii) What is the narrator’s attitude toward her mother and the events in the story?
   -looks up to her, admires her determination. Love, devotion- she returns home to look after her aging mother.

B. **Setting:**
   i) Describe as many details about the setting(s) as you can.
   New Hampshire, USA- small town, older home
   “...surrounded by 100 year-old elm trees...” “...she loved the sagging farmhouse...”
   The circus: lighthearted, upbeat mood of the performers and crowd; excitement (set up to contrast with the darkened mood/fear of the thunderstorm).

C. **Plot:**
   i) The author provides a lot of background information that leads us to the climax of the story. Find two examples of foreshadowing in the story that give hints about the climax.
   -The passage “...sometimes I sit sewing...” in the 2nd paragraph foreshadows the fire
   -Author builds suspense by structuring the narrative around the statement, “I owe her my existence three times over...” After each incident, she brings us back to this statement, grabbing our interest in finding out about the next incident, and building up to the scene in which the mother and Anna leap from the burning house.

   ii) What is the climax of the story?
   When the narrator is rescued from the burning house by her mother’s leap. All other incidents lead up to this event. While the circus accident is a high-interest moment, it is really just background information on the protagonist (it is part of the rising action).

D. **Conflict/ Resolution:**
   i) What type is it?
   ii) To what degree is it resolved?
   3 possibilities:
   External; human vs. nature (fire) resolved- she is saved from the burning house
   External; human vs. nature (circus accident caused by thunderstorm) somewhat resolved- Anna survives but loses her husband and miscarries. Her hands are also scarred forever.
   Internal; human vs. self (Anna’s career comes to an end, she is faced with the decision of what to do with her life) unresolved- Her daughter moves back home to look after her, she has been blinded by cataracts.
E. **Dialogue:**
   i) Why do you think the author chose not to include any dialogue in the story?
   - First-person narration allows the story to be told with an immediacy (intimacy) that is not achievable by third-person narration or dialogue.

F. **Characters:**
   i) In your opinion, who is the *protagonist*? Describe what we know about him/her, including whether he/she is “static” or “dynamic.”
   - Arguably the mother, Anna Avalon. (see slide show for “The Leap”)

G. **Theme:**
   i) Create a theme statement for the story.
   - Great things happen when courage overcomes fear.
   - Take care of those you love.
   - Trust in those you love.

H. **Style:**
   i) Comment on the *diction* and *syntax* choices in the story.
   - Descriptive diction, complex sentences. The narration is “very matter-of-fact.” Many examples of imagery and figurative language:
 ii) Find at least one example of a simile AND a metaphor in the story. Comment on the effectiveness of the use of figurative language in the story.
   - **Similes:**
     - “They loved to drop gracefully from nowhere, like two sparkling birds...” (191).
     - “It was the friendliest tap, a bit tentative, as if she was afraid she had arrived too early at a friend’s house” (195).
     - “I felt the brush of her lips and heard the beat of her heart in my ears, loud as thunder, long as the roll of drums” (196).
   - **Metaphors:**
     - the stillborn child is a metaphor for Anna’s hopes and dreams, her past life, which dies when the lightening hit the tent in the circus.
     - metaphor of “flight” when she relates her mother’s discovery of books: “I wondered if my father calculated the exchange he offered: one form of flight for another” (193).
     - the title (see slide show on “The Leap”)

I. **Opinion:**
   i) Which ELEMENT in your opinion had the most impact on the story?
   - The mother- she makes the story, it is ultimately a character sketch about her. We learn a lot about her from the many and diverse life conflicts she has been through.
 ii) How realistic is the story? What changes may have made it more appealing or relevant?
   - The story is shocking and surprising, but logistically believable. The narration is “very matter-of-fact.” Perhaps dialogue would have given us a taste of the mother’s personality from her own point-of-view, instead of just from what someone says about her.

J. **Title:**
   - What is the significance of the title? Discuss both the LITERAL and a possible SYMBOLIC meaning.
   - (See slide show on “The Leap”)