

English 521

Twins (Echoes, pg. 213) 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 "*Twins*."

A. Narration/ P.O.V:

i) What type of narration is used?

Third-person limited omniscient. By the end of the story, it is clear that the narrator reveals the most about the thoughts and feelings of "Lucy," the wife. (The very beginning of the story is arguably omniscient.)

ii) Why do you think *third-person omniscient* narration would not have been an effective choice for this story?

It would have given away the suspense. The outcome would be too predictable had we been able to see inside the husband's head and know his intentions.

B. Setting:

i) Describe as many details about the setting as you can.

- October (late fall), cold, barren, remote wilderness, rural Ontario, dusk

ii) How is the setting connected to the conflict?

It sets the mood for a suspense thriller (approaching darkness, cold, eery/creepy).

Descriptions of the setting are interspersed within the rising action part of the plot. The closer the reader gets to the climax, the darker it gets outside.

iii) How would the story change if the setting was changed?

The setting is key. The risk of "getting caught" would be too great if they weren't in a deserted, isolated wilderness area. There are no witnesses, so the plot is believable.

C. Plot:

i) Unlike most stories, this one does not necessarily start at the beginning of the plot.

Explain, and comment on whether you think this was an effective strategy.

It starts in the middle of the plot when they are already at the "crime scene." We are told that several events (which are part of the plot) happened before the narrative picks up:

- the wife noticed that her husband had packed sunglasses, a blond wig, make-up, and a gun in a fishing tackle box.
- she had known all along about his "mistress"

Ironically, even though this is the initial incident of the plot, it is revealed only in the last paragraph of the story.

Very effective: It keeps us in suspense right to the end, giving the reader the opportunity to make predictions for themselves.

Somewhat effective: Can be confusing to the reader, especially upon the first reading.

ii) Re-read/skim the details of pg 213 to where the resolution starts halfway down pg 216. Find and record the clues the author provides to the outcome of the story.

- the tension between husband and wife that is revealed through their dialogue
- the title and the mention in the text of the similar appearance and clothing of the

husband and wife (makes it believable that the one character could “pose” as the other and get away with it.

- the wife’s suspicions (“...but this time, she had come because she needed to know what was on his mind.”)
- the lack of interest on the part of the husband in how his story’s detective will solve the crime, and the fact that he is more interested in the plot workings than in the character’s development (usually he does the opposite, we’re told)
- foreshadowing in the description of the setting sun (darkness is symbolic of evil)

D. Conflict/ Resolution:

i) What type is it?

External conflict; human vs. human (wife vs. husband: cheating, lack of trust)

ii) To what degree is it resolved?

It is resolved completely: She gets rid of the problem by getting rid of him!

E. Dialogue:

i) The first half of the story is almost entirely dialogue, while the second has none.

Discuss why you think the author chose this format, and comment on the effectiveness of this style.

The husband is dead in the second half of the story, so logistically, he cannot be a part of any conversation anyway. The dialogue in the first half helps to develop the characters; it gives us insight about them. Using an omniscient narrator might result in too much being revealed about what is going on in the minds of the characters, especially the husband. If we knew what he was thinking all along, there would be no suspense, and the story would be boring. By using dialogue, the author plants clues.

The use of an omniscient (limited) narrator in the second half allows the reader into the head of the murderer and allows us to learn what her motive was, and why things went wrong for the husband.

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 wife (some might argue the husband). Lucy Coates is very intelligent, confident, conniving, fearless, merciless, and a risk-taker. These traits become evident when we learn what she has planned (cold-blooded murder), and how flawlessly she pulled it off, and covered her tracks. Her character is static: there are not enough details to indicate otherwise. ___

ii) i) In your opinion, who is the *antagonist*? Describe what we know about him/her, including whether he/she is “static” or “dynamic.”

-arguably the husband, though some might argue the wife. Harry Coates is a writer of crime fiction who has supposedly been having an affair with another women. He plots the murder of his wife so that he can be with his mistress. He is a static, flat character: naive, anxious, shrewd, dishonest, and imaginative.

G. Theme:

i) Create a theme statement for the story.

People aren’t always who they seem to be.

Be careful who you trust.
An eye for an eye.

H. Style:

i) Comment on the *diction* (word choice) and *syntax* (sentence structure) choices in the story.

Diction: the word choice is simple and occasionally informal. Very few words, if any, are unfamiliar.

Syntax: The dialogue is authentic. It contains short, choppy sentences and sentence fragments, which is typical of casual conversation. Some narration (for example, the description of the setting) stands in sharp contrast to the dialogue: it is very detailed with long, complex and compound sentences. It contains imagery which is necessary for the reader to “picture” the setting and for the atmosphere to be established.

ii) Find an example of figurative language in the story. Why do you think figurative language is used infrequently in “crime fiction”?

“People are often saying we look alike, as if we’re a couple of gerbils.” (simile)

Figurative language is often rare in “crime fiction” because the author’s purpose is different than that of most fiction writers: it is more about presenting facts, and solving a case, as opposed to appealing to the senses of the reader through imagery or rhetoric.

Note that even the example of the simile above is from the dialogue, not the narration. Crime fiction appeals to logic, not emotional appeal, and the style of writing reflects this.

I. _____ Opinion:

i) Which ELEMENT in your opinion had the most impact on the story?

ii) How realistic is the story? What changes may have made it more appealing or relevant?

In my opinion, the PLOT itself was the most significant element. The fact that there was such a twist made it especially interesting. The lot structure does not follow the typical pattern: it starts in the middle of the storyline, and it’s not until the very ending that the beginning details are revealed. For example, the details about the wife finding out about her husband’s plan to commit murder (which is why they ended up near the mine shaft at the story’s opening), was not revealed until the last paragraph of the story.

The story is quite realistic. The events are believable and logical. Upon close examination of the text, we see that the author did plant clues along the way, so we’re not completely dumbfounded in the end wondering how this could have ever been possible.