**Feedback on “The Spider and the Fly”**

The main idea conveyed in the short, framed narrative, “The Spider and the Fly” is that life can be cruel, especially for those born into poverty. It asks, “Does man really have free will or is a person’s path pre-ordained by an accident of birth?” The third person omniscient narration mainly externally focalizes on a man who lies dying in a squalid and lonely room as a result of being a victim of circumstance. He had left the friendship of his drought-stricken rural village and the love of his betrothed to seek riches in the city, only to fall into further poverty, temptation, crime and illness. He is an archetypal underdog who allegorically represents the downtrodden masses, particularly the peasant class. In fact, this story could also be interpreted as being an indictment of capitalism and urbanization. The author has adopted a social justice perspective in order to position the reader to sympathize with the wretched plight of the anonymous protagonist. The timeless story of the everyman figure is mirrored in the interaction of a harmless fly and a predatory spider in the corner of the dying man’s room.

The peasant’s life is depicted as being unduly harsh and unjust in that he is forced to leave his home through no fault of his own due to drought and disease which had reduced his village to “*utter poverty*”. The main binary that underpins the humanist ideology of the narrative is wealth/poverty in that this is a story in which wealth, or at least material comfort, or even enough for survival, is desirable but unattainable. Circumstances have compromised the well-being and happiness of the hapless man. The peasant’s rural predicament is emphasized through the use of visual imagery and contrast. Where once there had been the “*emerald green of rich paddy fields*” there was now only a few rice plants which drought and disease had turned “*black and rotten*”. There is a strong motivation for the peasant to want money and to “*want it fast*”. He is, however, unable to satisfy his human needs because the city is malevolently capitalistic and hungry, just like the avaricious spider in the narrative frame.

The idea of the perils of urbanization is underpinned by a simple country/city binary in which the countryside, though drought stricken, is undoubtedly the privileged of the pair. There at least there is a sense of community, friendship and love. Life is hard in the city as “*too many people driven from the countryside*” compete “*to make a living*”. This is a ‘dog eat dog’ capitalist world where inequality and lack of employment result in bare survival. The man is reduced to living in lonely impoverishment in a “*dirty little room*”. Necessity leads him to crime, an “*underworld of drugs*”, illness and death. The idea of his suffering is enhanced through the emotive image of “*a spasm*” shaking his body as he dies. The reader is positioned to feel sorrow for this both personal and universal predicament. Even though the man had at more than one point succumbed to temptation, he is symbolic of the countless people living in a similarly dire predicament who struggle to merely live.

There is little specific characterization of the man who is represented only through the general facts of his miserable life. Although the narration is externally focalized on the man, we know very little of the specifics of his existence, not even his name. Instead, the reader’s appreciation of the dire situation of the man is enhanced through the symbolic use of the spider and the fly. The gloomy atmosphere is established in the description of a “*dusty corner of the room where the dim light of the day hardly reached*” where the spider awaits its prey. The fly is described, using auditory imagery, as being “*tired of buzzing against the dirty cracked window* *pane*” in the same way as the peasant is tired of his wretched struggle to survive in his village. Just as the man is attracted by the lure of the city, the fly is attracted by the “*dark corner*” of the room. The continued emphasis on lack of light foreshadows that ‘things will not end well’ for either the fly or the man. Although the fly “*struggled violently*” a “*foul, sticky substance held it*”, a substance that the reader aligns with the allure and pitfalls of the city. The narrative upholds prevalent cultural ideas on class by critiquing the continued existence of hopeless impoverishment, provoking a sympathetic reaction in the reader.

The narrative highlights the social injustice which abounds in the world and supports humanist ideology which posits that humans are of ultimate value and that the wellbeing of all people and individual responsibility for the happiness of others are paramount. Although the peasant had made regrettable decisions in leaving the village in the complication stage of the narrative, because he metaphorically thought the streets of the city “*were paved in gold*”, in mixing with “*petty criminals*”, and becoming involved with an “*underworld of drugs*”, he seems relatively blameless as poverty is his greatest motivator, a poverty which he has not ordained. The very act of setting off to the city, *“eager to make his fortune”* has exacerbated the negativity of his material existence rather than relieved him of his poverty. The climax and resolution of the story will inevitably be death; the spider of capitalism and urbanization inexorably “*moves slowly from the centre of its web*” to entrap the impoverished and the unwary. For some, self-determination is not an option.

Key

blue – theme statement and supporting ideas

yellow – w-c-c strategies

underline – t-c strategies