

Kaleidoscopic View of Short Story *The Bell*

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Abstract:

Short story is most popular genre of English literature which consists of many elements as plot, people (character), setting, theme, style and point of view. It is the kaleidoscope which reflects different colours of these elements in each story.

Hans Christian Anderson was a prolific writer and also best renowned for his fairy tales. In the present paper, his famous short story *The Bell* is analyzed keeping in account the theory of short story as a popular genre. It begins with the definition, elements of short story and over all techniques. Further, the short story *The Bell* is analyzed to high light different elements, the kaleidoscope of the technique and its message. The paper concludes showing the effective technique, language, symbolism and moral of the story.

Keywords: Short Story, Plot, setting, theme, style, point of view.

Being a social animal, man is always interested in other man's life and desire to listen stories. Oral story telling is the origin of short story which can be traced in the Anecdote which was popular in Roman Empire. Anecdote is a brief realistic narrative that embodies a point. Fable is another form close to short story which can be stressed in the 6th century. These ancient fables are today known as Aesop's fables. The short story is a literary genre which presents a single significant event involving a limited number of characters and can be read in a single sitting.

It is rather difficult to define short story as each definition emphasizes some aspects and cannot cover all. However, to understand the form of short story let us see some popular definitions of the short story.

Chris Baldick defines short story in his book *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as “A fictional prose tale of no specific length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels usually are a short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters more economically than a novels sustained exploration of social background.”

Another renowned scholar, Edgar Allan Poe defines short story in the book *Review of Nathaniel Hawthorn's Twice Told Tales*, “A prose narrative requiring from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal.”

The critic M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpman gives definition of short story in the book *A Handbook of Literary Terms* as “A short story is a brief work of prose fiction and most of terms for analyzing the component elements, the types and the narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short story as well.”

Though short in length, short story is very effective and entertaining form of English literature. It is compact with relation to time, action, character and length. For proper understanding it is necessary to discuss the formative elements of the short story. Plot, character, setting, theme, style and point of view are the main elements of short story.

The plot is defined as the arrangement of events in a particular pattern, sequence, cause and effect and how the reader views the story. Gustave Freytag, a German novelist and play writer considered plot as narrative structure that divided the story into five parts, like five acts of the play. These parts are exposition (of the situation); raising action (through conflict); climax (turning point); falling action and denouncement or resolution. The plot introduces the characters and their relation to each other and the situation. Further it raises the action to meet the climax. Then climax often contains much of the action in the story. Finally, there comes falling action and resolution that is reconciliation or poetic justice. Plot carries very important role is building the proper structure of the short story so as to keep suspense or to meet the effective end.

The people or character is another very important element of the short story. There is a limitation of three to six characters, each one being crucial to the story. No character development or exploration is possible in the short story. They are shown as they are. Therefore,

short story tends to focus period of life which can be shown in a limited framework. Mostly the characters are the ‘types.’

The setting of the short story is where the action of the story happens. Setting includes the place, time and culture where the story happens. The setting of the story also provides as richness and depth to the story as it can relate to the main message or idea to get across to your readers. Elements of setting may include culture, historical period, geography and hour.

The main idea or message of the story is known as the theme of the story. Short stories often have single theme and exemplify single idea. There can be incorporated in a short story through setting, clothing, music, sounds, certain smells and things that the characters touch or hold, transportation and the occupation, abilities of the characters etc.

Along with plot, character, theme and setting, style is considered one of the fundamental components of function in short story. It includes the use of various literary techniques. The story may be religious, humorous, satire, comic, tragic, didactic or a love story. The style must suit the story and its purpose. Style observes suitable tone and suitable choice of diction.

Narrator and his point of view are also very important role to play in making the short story effective. He is the teller of the story, the orator, doing the mouth work. The writer has many choices regarding the narrator of the story as, first person narrative, third person narrative, unreliable narrative, stream of consciousness writing. The person who tells a story is called as narrator and the angle from which the story is told is called its ‘Point of view’. A story can be told by someone who is character in the story or by outside observer.

Though short story is a recent development in English literature, the oral story telling tradition began to develop in Europe in its written form in the 14th century with Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Antoine Galland’s first translation of *Arabian Nights* was most influencing short stories in 18th century. Charles Brockden Brown may be one of the earliest short story writers from United States who wrote *Somnambulism*. Edgar Allen Poe was another famous short story writer between 1832 to 1849. In Germany, Heinrich Von Kleist, in France Prosper Merimee, in Russia Alexander Pushkin and in Denmark H.C. Anderson mainly contributed to popular short story.

H. C. Anderson (1805 to 1857) was a Danish author. Although a prolific writer of plays, travelogues, novels and poems, he is best remembered for his fairy tales. His fairy tales, consisting of 156 stories across nine volumes and translated into more than 125 languages, have become culturally involved on the collective consciousness of west. His short stories are really accessible to children but presenting the lessons of virtue and love for nature. In this paper, it is intended to analyze H.C. Anderson's short story 'The Bell' in the light of the above discussion of the short story.

H.C. Anderson's short story *The Bell* is rather different, mysterious and symbolic story. The story begins with the saying "The Evening Bell is sounding; the sun is setting." Who says this? – 'they'. The mysterious sounds of the bell are heard for the moment and which resembles to the church bell. But it is not the Church Bell. The sound of the Bell attracted to the people and they came out from the church and town and searched it in the "still forest". There they found some solace and peace of mind. All the action is related to the mass of the people, the human society when urbanization was started. At the evening when all the roads were crowded, they heard the tone of the bell in 'the narrow street of the large town.' There was 'the rolling of the carriages and the voices of multitude.'

The time reference 'A long time passed' suggested the generation after generation the people were unable to discover the myth of the sound of the bell. The mass was still more attracted to the mysterious sound of the bell. It may be because of the growing crowd and humdrum of urbanization.' Hence, 'the rich drove out and poor walked' to search the truth in the forest. In the company of the forest, they didn't find the source of the sound of the bell but get solace and peace of mind. This is the mass which has been in any age. They made the event of this discovery and behaved as if they were on the picnic. The sweet vendors, grosser and other merchants came there for the help of the masses. And the people understood another way of entertainment. Here, the mass as the character which behaves like a single person.

The plot of the story is the backbone of the structure. It chronologically arranges the action so as to expose the situation, raise the action, to climax and then tends to denouncement or resolution. In this story the situation is exposed very effectively by the sayings of the people, "The Evening Bell is sounding, the sun is setting." This line introduces the reader to the main

focus of the story. Further it is developed by describing the urban setting and hum drum of the life.

The action is raised by the desire of the people to search the source of the sound or the bell. Hence, they went to the 'still forest' because they thought that possibly the sound comes from the deep forest. The action is developed their further movement which turns only the picnic or weak end party. But some people who were more interested in searching the secret went further deep in the forest. Hence, the writer gets the opportunity to expose the beauty of the forest which is his ultimate aim.

The climax of action gradually develops when the son of the King and the poor boy meet at the bridge where the sea and forest meet each other. The resolution of action processed further when both of them realize that the deep and still forest is the real church and the music of the birds, the frequency of the flowers, the sound of different wild animals and the long-lasting beauty is 'the sound of the bell'. Thus, the plot of the story is very compact and effective to serve the purpose of the story.

The writer has developed the character of mass which is related to the history of human social development. Therefore, there came the 'king' who declared the award of 'Universal Bell-ringer' to the discoverer of the mysterious sound of the bell. Then came forward a 'Theorist' who declared that the sound proceeded from a very large Owl; a sort of learned Owl. Someone wrote a treaty – 'On the Owl'. It suggests a writer of treaties from the 17th century.

Further there introduced the 'theologist' who tries to explain the mystery of the sound of the bell. His pleading is based on the emotions, belief and assumption. Here, children are described as the discoverer, who are innocent and enjoy the life singing the song of nature by holding each other's hands. Then there came the age of realism and people that are the mass declared that it is only the fancy.

Now, the writer adds another character 'The son of the king' under whose leadership they try to discover the sound of the bell. They found in the deep forest a bell-shaped flower hanging on the canopy and declared that it must be the bell. All others unanimously accepted it but one who was rationalist discarded the saying and pleaded that logically it is impossible.

After the introduction of rationalist, there enter another character – a poor boy. The king's son and the poor boy wished to discover the truth by entering in deep wood. The king's son suggested to search it jointly. But the poor boy rejected it and both of them processed further on their own way. The path of king's son was full of sun light and the path of the poor boy was full of thrown, large stones and pains. But both of them are shown to be determined to follow their own path. It is again the two parts of medieval society personified in the form of 'king's son' and 'poor boy'. At last, they reached a certain spot where nature has shown them the mysterious scene. Both of them discovered the truth that is the sound of the 'natural beauty' which always calls everyone to be a part of the nature.

All the characters in the story are wooden characters. They are the traits. They never change. They are the representatives of the group of the society. All of them are flat. Still the author successfully used them to serve his purpose to show the beauty of nature and its power.

The story has an effective setting to fulfill the motive of the author. It begins at the evening in the large town which has narrow streets, rolling carriages and noise of multitude. The very first paragraph of the story suggests the forest because 'the rich people drown and poor walked' towards the still forest in the search of the mysterious sounds of the bell which rung at the evening time. The second setting is properly described as – "the confectioner of the town came out, and set up his booth there; and soon after came another confectioner," (Anderson p.1) It was like a picnic or a tea party. Actually, it was not in the deep forest but at its periphery.

As the story proceeds, the setting shifts to the deep forest. The beauty of the forest is vividly described which touches to the mind of the reader. Actually, nothing new happens in the story. Only the people are attracted towards the still forest and its beauty. There are different places in the forest as - colourful flowers, green bushes, weeds, willows, apple tree full of fruits, the still lakes, the mountain, thorny bushes, sweet sound of the birds, pleasant breeze, the essence of the flowers and the reaped berries, monkeys and other animals. The setting is decorated with minute details which is able to create a live picture before the eyes of the reader. Finally, the author successfully made believe to the reader that, "all nature was a vast holy church, in which the trees and buoyant clouds were the pillars, flowers and mass the velvet carpeting and heaven itself the large cupola."

In short, the setting of the story starts in the large town shifts to the still forest, proceeds forward in the deep forest, moves to the different beautiful places in the forest and ends at the bridge of the forest and vast sea. It is very apt to serve the purpose of the author to convey the message – ‘Return to the nature for the solace of the mind and healthy physic.’

The structure of the good story should be possibly – the good beginning, better middle and the best end. The present story has an undercurrent of the mysterious sound of the evening bell which rings at the evening in the narrow streets of the large town. The story opens with the sound of the ‘the bell’. The setting is a large town. The reader is introduced to the mystery of the sound of the bell. It is the chasing of the mystery for which the people drown to the still forest. But as usual the common people see towards it like a picnic or a tea party.

The subject matter of the story finely planned and effectively implemented. The middle of the story states different opinions about the sound of the bell regarding the medieval history of mankind. The poet, philosopher, theists, rationalists, realists and the common people express their views. But still, the search was continuous. There involved rich and poor by their own way. The son of the king and the poor boy is equally interested in the search of the truth of the sound. They proceed further in the deep forest. While describing their journey the author very effectively portrays the beautiful picture of the natural scenery of the different places in the forest. It is as if the people were hypnotized by the beauty and hence went forward to search the truth. This middle part of the story effectively serves the purpose of the author to describe the hypnotic beauty of the nature which is generally away from the reach of the urban people. The reader also falls in the love of nature and its beauty. And possibly this is one of the points of the success of this story.

The end of the story is also very effective. It is the round movement which start from the search of the mysterious sound of the bell and ends in the search – ‘The son of king and the poor boy had followed their own path and finally stood together hand in hand in the vast church of nature and poetry while over them sounded the invisible holy bell.’ Finally, the chasing of the truth ended and the circle was also completed. The structure of this story is apt, compact and very effective to convey the message of the bell.

The present story very much resembles to the fairy tales because it has a noble theme. It highlights the relationship of the human society and the nature. It also sharply describes that urbanization increases, the relation of human being with the nature decreases. There is a development of human society regarding the life means with the help of science but man has forgotten that he is the part and partial of the nature. The writer wants to remember the people, the danger of going away from the nature which will cause the great loss of peace of mind solace. The real happiness is not in the artificial comfort of urban life but it is in the company of the nature.

The style of the story plays very important role to convey the message or theme of the story to the reader. In this story the writer wants to convey very serious message to the reader hence he used mysterious and serious style or tone of the story. It has an undercurrent of suspension which increases the effect of message and the reader becomes serious about the theme of the story. This is not a common 'boy meets girl' story. It has the deep reference with development of human society from rural to urbanization. The life of people becomes artificial and fulfill because of the industrialization. Hence, human society should turn towards nature for the real happiness and meaning of life. The style of the author is lucid and effective to achieve his purpose to convey the message that 'Man is part and partial of the nature.'

The story is narrated by third observer or the observer who is omnipresent. The narrator is the mouthpiece of the writer. Hence, he writes, "People said", "They said", "the clergy man", "the king's son", "the poor boy" etc. The narrator is not involved in the story or the events. He is the observer and passes some comments. But his comments are pronounced from the mouth of the people as "they said.....it was quite a different sort of thing to a picnic or tea party." As the narrator is a third person, he is able to take the reference of social development of human society. Hence, he takes the reference of the theologian (clergyman), a rationalist, a poet, a treaty writer, the King's son and the poor boy. All these characters are nameless and only traits or representative of the particular social groups. Being a third person, the narrator takes the freedom to describe the nature in detail to make his arrangement solid that nature can give the solace of mind. As this is a didactic type of story, somewhat like the moral tale, the narrator remains at the distant point than the characters in the story and able to convey the message or moral to the reader. Therefore, the point of view used in the story is very apt for the style of the story.

As it is stated at the outset, the present story ‘The bell’ is challenging to analyze because it does not follow the set conventions of the characterization, action, conflict and climax. However, this is the best story regarding the characterization, setting, structure and the final effect. The language of the story is lucid and has the effect of 16th century British English. The use of words like ‘younder’ made the reader remember the medieval period. Another very important point to note regarding this story is the characters are not actual persons but the traits like philosopher, poet, the rationalist, the theologian, realist etc. The characters belong to 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th century because of their views about the nature and truth of the nature. The story is superb regarding setting and structure. The movement is cyclical as it begins with ‘the bell’ and ends with ‘the bell.’ Though it is not a detective story, it has the flavor of suspense which adds entertainment value. The length of the story is proper to its form as one can finish it in one sitting. The author has taken total freedom of narration by applying third person point of view. Hence, he is able to describe the nature properly but following the proper economy which is essential for the length of the short story. Finally, we can say that while entertaining the author successfully uses the kaleidoscope of different elements of the story to give the message – ‘Return to the Nature.’

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