

Woven Words The Rocking-horse Winner

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Understanding the Text

1. What was the reason for young Paul's restlessness at the beginning of the story? How did it find expression?

Answer

Young Paul is restless at the beginning of the story because he was told by his mother that they were not lucky therefore don't have enough money to have a car and other luxuries of life. Besides young Paul had a feeling that deep down his mother was not as happy as she appeared to be. She blamed young Paul's father for not being lucky and making her unlucky as well because she was married to him.

2. Why do you think Paul's mother was not satisfied with the yearly birthday gift of 1,000 pounds for five years.

Answer

Paul's mother was not satisfied with the yearly birthday gift of 1000 pounds for five years because she was an unsatisfied lot. She always had the feeling that she deserved a better treatment from life and this resulted in not showing any enthusiasm for the handsome birthday gift from Paul. Instead Paul started to hear more whispers from the house for more money.

3. What was the reason for the anxiety of Paul's mother as he grew older?

Answer

As it can be implied from the story, The Rocking-horse Winner, Paul was an autistic child who also suffered Oedipus-complex. The story pictures a very young Paul who is at the threshold of teenage and is very eager to fight the sounds that keep whispering in his house that "there must be more money He was desperate to bring happiness to his mother through money and desired to replace his father in her life. As Paul grew impatient and betted on racing horses to earn money by means of gambling. Hester, realised that her son was indulging too much in horse racing and asked the gardener and her brother to keep him away from it. She realised how tensed Paul had grown. Yet she knew not that the worry that had been eating and consuming him up was of his mother. Eager to win, Paul lost and lost again. It was before Derby, he grew worried to earn for his mother and prove his

Paul lost, and lost again. It was before Derby, he grew worried to earn for his mother and prove his luck to her. She was worried so much that she left the party in the middle to return to her son to see him safe and healthy. However, it was the last time she saw her son in senses.

4. Paul's final bet his family richer but cost him his life. Explain.

Answer

Paul was a child that was doomed. There had to be some signs, indications to his disintegrating health, implying his mental situation. He was possibly an autistic child who needed more than general attention and care from his family. He heard the house whispering to him all the time that there must be more money. The child was possibly schizophrenic as well for he was hearing sounds that did not exist. And he was oedipal for sure. All these were already leading him to the inevitable, however, the child had no knowledge to what was happening to him. He tried and tried to earn for his mother's sake. He wanted to prove that he is lucky to earn and deserving of her love. And he did earn in Derby 80,000 pounds by predicting that Malabar would win through his clairvoyance. However, it deteriorated his health so much that he died in few days afterwards.

Talking about the Text

1. 'Luck is necessary for success in life'.

Answer

There are many who believe luck is important and one may find many such who believe in hard work. It is not though that those who believe in luck do not work hard. It is just that they believe in "do your best and God will do the rest. However, there are those who completely blame their fate for everything and do not do anything to change or improve it. Still there are people that believe that hard work is greater than luck and that it has the power to change the destiny. One may find various beliefs around them and it depends on what they chose to believe in.

2. Although Paul's mother liked to be rich she did not approve of betting on horses.

Answer

Paul's mother foolishly wished to be rich and yet was not able to achieve or materialise her desire. She blamed it on her husband for being unlucky. However, she was one of those humans who do not tread as per their cloth. She was used to a lavish lifestyle and blamed her husband and misfortune for low income. Yet there was one thing appreciable about her that she was against gambling. She did remark in her conversation with her brother that she had seen her family members pursuing it and how it led to their fall. She advised her son to not indulge in it and made him promise that he will not think about racing horses any more.

3. What were the voices that Paul heard? Did they lead him to success in the real sense?

Answer

Although the house Paul and his family lived in was a pleasant one, the money they had was not enough to maintain the social position they had to keep up. The mother realised that father had no luck to make enough money so she decided to do something on her own. It was then that the house started whispering from every corner that "there must be more money. The sounds started haunting the place and made Paul very uncomfortable and distressed and disturbed him. Though there were expensive gifts coming on Christmas, Paul could hear behind the shining rocking horse that "there must be more money. It is plausible that Paul was schizophrenic and imagined the voices on being stressed due to their misery. As it is written in the text that no body said it aloud and there is no mention of anyone else hearing such voices, it is clear that Paul imagined his fears giving them voice. Paul's fear transferred into him through his mother constantly haunted him and became his driving force. The boy was oedipal and unknowingly wished to replace his father from his mother's life. So, the autistic boy drove his shining horse ferociously until he "got there and would be sure of the horse that would win the next race. There were times when he was not sure, so he would be careful. The gardener Bassett was his partner throughout. Later even uncle Oscar joined as such was the conviction with which Paul used to declare the winning horse's name, and the horse used to win in actual. Call it clairvoyance or sheer luck, which he aspired to have to prove to be worthy of his mother's luck, Paul made money by betting on horses and finally left 80,000 pounds for his family by losing himself.

1. Examine the communication channels in the story between

- a. Paul and his mother
- b. Paul and Bassett
- c. Paul and his uncle
- d. Bassett and Paul's uncle
- e. Paul's mother and his uncle

Answer

- a. Paul and her mother shared the most intimate conversation through eyes. Though they were not actually love bound to each other as in the first paragraph, the author says that it was the children and the mother alone who knew that there was no love in their relation, they knew it because they read in each other's eyes.
- b. The friendship of Paul and Bassett or to say more clearly their partnership was an affectionate relation between them. Bassett knew and understood what the rest failed to even notice. He brought all the news of racing horses to Paul and then the clairvoyant Paul will decide in his trance who was to be the winner.
- c. Paul and uncle Oscar became partners soon after uncle discovers that Paul has an uncanny knowledge that makes him predict the winning horse. However, there is more to it, he realises that the whole betting thing was making Paul nervous and was hampering his health. However, Oscar Creswell asks Paul on how to win by betting, to which the child innocently replies that he just knows who is going to win once he "gets there
- d. Bassett and uncle Creswell shared a bond since long back. However, as Bassett had promised to Paul he never told about his betting to uncle Oscar as well. But later he found himself explaining things to Creswell and the three of them became partners.
- e. It would be totally unfair to call Hester that harsh a lady for she did care about her children after all, however, she gave importance to materialistic gains. When she realised her sons obsession with the racing horses, she asked Bassett the gardener to keep Paul away from Oscar so it did not affect her son's health. She realised that the obsession was proving to be neurotic for her son and she wanted her son to be healthy and for that she risked her relation with her dear brother.

2. How has the author linked the symbol of the rocking-horse to Paul's triumphs at the races?

Answer

The rocking-horse is one of the three symbols present in the story that Lawrence has dealt with throughout the story. The horse is symbolic of the victory that Paul achieves at last. The materialistic gain and the importance of money over love. The whispering that haunts Paul that "there must be more money and the rocking-horse are interrelated. The want of money to achieve the love of mother that he never had, he goes on betting and earning more and more, thus, proving his luck. The boy when asked his mother for what is luck, she explained him that luck is what brings one money. The boy is disheartened to know that his father has no luck and so will not make money. He is sad at the implication that he will never have his mother's love who is all consumed by indebtedness. The boy, autistic as he is, with some clairvoyance rides his horse harder and ferociously till he "gets there It shows his desperation to physically win his mother's love by winning the race and thus earning more money, as "there must be more money Post the ride, Paul will stand facing the horse with his legs apart and he would look at the bent head of the horse and its shining eyes. These interpret just one thing, the determination, the wanting, the longing for money. It is about success, money, love and most importantly, winning. And Paul gets it all, he wins and gets her mother the money through his triumphs in races. And he even found her love as she grew too concerned about her son's obsession with the races that eventually killed him.

3. The ending of the story is an instance of irony. Suppose Paul had not died at the end, how would you have reacted to the story?

Answer

It is true that a tragedy digs a deeper mark than a happy ending. It causes an emotional catharsis in the audience. Had the story had a happy ending it would have been pleasant, however, the reader would not have felt the emotions and passion that drove Paul to his inevitable climax. Yet some may find it not justified to have killed the boy at the end of the story that went so well with Paul achieving what he wanted all the while, money and love both. He sacrificed his life to bring to his mother what his

father couldn't and thus proved to be worthy of her affection, which hungered for. However, one can not have all the happiness in the world. They say that God is cruel when he gives us something, he gives it to us only with one hand while taking away with the other our most cherished possession. So, it can not be said that the death of Paul was justified or other way round; however, it is ironical. Had he lived post the Derby win, who knows what shape the story might have taken. Maybe what happens happens for some good yet it would have brought the story to a happy ending had Paul lived.

Language Work

1. 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush'.

- a. Explain the above statement in the literal sense.
- b. Explain it in the context in which it is mentioned in the story.

Answer

a. The proverb originates from the tradition of falconry, which implies that no matter the number of falcons in a bush, what matters is the falcon in possession, even if it is a single falcon.

b. When Paul and uncle Oscar decide to gift the 5,000 pounds to Hester, by giving her 1,000 pounds on each birthday. She becomes eager and asks the lawyer if she could have all the 5,000 pounds in once. Then the son decides to give them away to her mother in once so that she is free of the debt and said that he could make more with the left amount. The uncle doubted and tried to caution the lad by telling him that is wise to not give what you have with you right now for the possibility. However, Paul was sure to know of one of the three upcoming races he assured and so gave the money to his mother gladly.

2. Explain the following phrases

- a. Sure as eggs
- b. Spinning yarns
- c. Turned to dust

Answer

a. When a person is absolutely sure about something
"The man will not bet unless he is as sure as eggs."

b. To narrate a long and wonderful story
"Mother always spun yarns while putting the baby to sleep at night."

c. Ruined, finished completely
"The man was so ill fated every thing he touched turned to dust."

3. Given below is the dictionary meaning of

Smirk: to smile in a silly or unpleasant way that shows that you are pleased with yourself.

Look up the dictionary for the following words which are also related to facial expressions and write down the meaning of each

smile	grin	grimace	sneer
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Answer

Smile: A facial expression indicating happiness

Grin: To smile broadly to indicate pleasure

Grimace: An expression showing disapproval

Sneer: To show that one has no respect for somebody by a facial expression.