



Analysis of Elements on A Short Story “A Vine on A House” by Ambrose Bierce

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Abstract

Literature could refer to a collection of literary works that were written by the authors' imagination and thought. This study aims to examine the elements of a short story described in "A Vine on a House." This short story was written by Bierce and published in 1905. A descriptive qualitative method is used in this research. The findings show that the characters are Mr. Harding, Mrs. Harding, Mrs. Harding sister, Mr. and Mrs. Harding two children, the Rev. J. Gruber, Hyatt, and the sheriff of the county. The settings of places are at Harding House and Norton, while the setting of times starts in 1884, 1886, one summer evening, the next evening, by day and night, shows the story ends six or seven years later. The plot of this story is divided into four parts: exposition, conflict or complication, climax, and resolution. There are two themes in this story, namely mystery and death, which are shown by the condition of Harding's house and the invention of the dead body that resembles Mrs. Harding at the end of the story. It also shows that the author applies a third-person point of view with the use of pronouns for the characters, such as she, he, or they.

Keywords: A Vine on A House; Elements; Literature; Short Story

Introduction

Literature is a general term that encompasses such literary works as novels, prose, short stories, drama, poetry, etc. It has the purpose of presenting artistic and unique writing, as well as providing communication information about the background of a work (Irshad & Ahmed, 2015). In addition, Jones (1968) argues that literature is a work that is created by people as a tool for communication in which they can give and express their opinions, feelings, or experiences. It aims to



provide information in accordance with reality, such as explanations, factual events about people's lives and histories, as well as entertaining media that incites people's ideas and feelings.

A short story is a type of literary work that is in high demand because it is short and requires less time to read than a novel. Webster (1989:1319) states that a short story is a part of fictional works that is typically less than 10.000 words long. Short stories are much shorter than novels; they typically have only a few characters and are focused on one incident. A short story is a form of literature that can be read in one situation and is usually focused on one event, an incident, or issue (Klarer, 2004). A short story is a piece of prose about imagined events and characters. In addition, according to Kemendikbud (2014, p. 6), a short story is a form of prose that tells a part of a character's life full of conflict, the situation, and experience. It defines a short story as a manuscript that contains a free story, and the author can write anything, whether it is based on his or her experience or imagination.

There are so many short stories that are written by different authors in the world. Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) was a popular American author who wrote a variety of short stories. Bierce earned the nickname "Bitter Bierce" for his sarcastic cleverness and the sardonic perspective of human nature. He wrote numerous horror, mystery, and gothic literary works based on the horrific things he witnessed during the war. "A vine on a house," one of his short stories, was published in 1905. This story is about a mysterious house that has already been left by one family, the Harding family, and the people of Norton begin to feel and see strange phenomena in the Harding place.

By reading the story, readers can know and understand the elements of a short story. Character, setting, plot, theme, and point of view are all elements of a short story. Characters are people who appear in a story created by the author. Setting can exist in both place and time. Rahayuningsih (2019) defines setting as a moment that occurs or is caused by a character in one time or place. A plot is how the story line unfolds; it consists of several parts, including exposition, conflict climax, and resolution. Theme refers to the overarching concept or the central perspective of a fictional work. A point of view refers to how the author's perspective is presented in his or her story; it may be the first person or the third person based on the characters that are described in a story.

Literature elements cannot exist apart from the story. To comprehend the entire story, one must first read and comprehend the story's elements. It is a fundamental skill that everyone should have. That is why the researcher is interested in conducting this study and utilizing a short story by Bierce "A Vine on A House," because it is a story about the mystery of a house and the death of one of the house's owners.

Previously, Yuliani et al. (2013) conducted research on a similar topic to this research. Their research focuses on the major character and plot in "B. J. Habibie and Ainun" novel. They found the major characters are Habibie and Ainun, who have identical characteristics. This story is about the love struggle between the main couple (Habibie and Ainun). They faced all of the problems and could



still overcome all of the obstacles. Their romance could be witnessed throughout the story until the end, when Ainun became ill and died. The difference between the previous study and this present study is the source chosen by researchers. The previous study used a novel while the present study chose a short story. Furthermore, the previous study focuses only on the major characters and the plot of "B. J. Habibie and Ainun" novel, while this present study focuses on elements of a short story that are adapted from the theory of Guerin, et al. (2005) that are adjusted based on the needs of research.

In relation to the study's background, the problem of this research can be described as follows: How are the elements of a short story described in "A vine on a house" by Bierce?. It aims to find out the elements of the short story described in "A vine on a house" by Bierce.

Research Method

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. Creswell (2014) argued that qualitative research is an investigation process in comprehending the methodology that is different in observing social problems. Furthermore, Shank (2002) claimed that a qualitative study is a kind of systematic exploratory research into meaning. He meant planning, instructing, and building a community in accordance with the guidelines accepted by the participants of the qualitative research group. He identified empirically that such a kind of inquiry is centered in the universe of knowledge. Investigation into the concept indicates that writers are trying to recognize in the way someone else interprets their experiences. The researcher identified the words, phrases, or sentences, described the information in detail, and conducted the research to get the data completely.

In this research, the researcher used "A Vine on a House." This is a short story that was written by Bierce in 1905 and can be accessed on the website of <https://americanliterature.com/author/ambrose-bierce/short-story/a-vine-on-a-house>. Adapting the theory from Guerin, et al. (2005) to analyze the elements of a short story, the researcher adjusted the theory based on the researcher's needs to identify the elements of a short story, which has five elements such as character, setting, plot, theme, and point of view.

Several steps were involved in analyzing the data that was used by the researcher:

1. Reading a short story that is entitled "A Vine on a House" by Bierce.
2. Taking a note based on the elements of "A Vine on a House" by Bierce.
3. Classifying the elements of a short story such as characters, setting, plot, theme, and point of view of "A Vine on a House" by Bierce.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

1. Characters



The Harding family consists of Robert Harding as Mr. Harding, Matilda as Mrs. Harding, and Miss Julia Went as Mrs. Harding's sister.

- Robert Harding

Robert Harding was a silent, cold-mannered man who made no friends in the neighborhood and apparently cared to make none. He was about forty years old, frugal and industrious, and made a living from the little farm which is now overgrown with brush and brambles (Bierce, 1905: p. 2).

From paragraph 2, Mr. Harding is described as a quiet, hardworking, and a cold-hearted man who made no friends in the town and seemingly did not intend to make any of them. He was only focused on his business without caring about his surroundings.

- Mrs. Harding (Matilda)

Mrs. Harding was a gentle, sad-eyed woman, lacking a left foot (Bierce, 1905: p. 3).

Based on paragraph 3 above, Mrs. Harding is presented as a soft, quiet woman who didn't speak much.

- Miss Julia Went (Mrs. Harding's sister)

He and his sister-in-law were rather tabooed by their neighbors, who seemed to think that they were seen too frequently together--not entirely their fault (Bierce, 1905: p. 2).

In paragraph 2, Miss Julia Went is described as a woman who doesn't seem to really care about society's views or take care of her sister's feelings. It shows in the story that she and Mr. Harding are seen too frequently together, and their neighbors did not like their attitude because they thought it was not a proper thing for a brother-in-law to do.

- The Rev. J. Gruber of Norton

Gruber said nothing, but silently directed the other's attention to the foliage of adjacent trees, which showed no movement; even the delicate tips of the boughs silhouetted against the clear sky were motionless (Bierce, 1905: p. 8).

Based on paragraph 8, it could be said that The Rev. J. Gruber is illustrated as calm and someone who pays attention to their surroundings and easily understands the situation.

- Hyatt

A long vine that covered half the front of the house and dangled its branches from the edge of the porch above them was visibly and audibly agitated, shaking violently in every stem and leaf. "We shall have a storm," Hyatt exclaimed (Bierce, 1905, p. 6-7).

Based on the citation above, it could be said that Hyatt is illustrated as a calm and brave man. It's clear from the way Hyatt reacts calmly when he learns that something unusual has occurred at the Harding residence.

- The sheriff of the county



The matter was settled by the sheriff of the county, who as the lawful custodian of the abandoned estate ordered the root replaced and the excavation filled with the earth that had been removed (Bierce, 1905: p. 15).

As shown in paragraph 15, the sheriff of the county is described as a person who provides solutions quickly without prolonging the problem. He didn't even bother to ask the police to investigate the case.

2. Setting

- a. Setting of place is consisted of Harding's house and Norton.

- Harding's house

About three miles from the little town of Norton, in Missouri, on the road leading to Maysville, stands an old house that was last occupied by a family named Harding (Bierce, 1905: p. 1).

The setting in this story is Harding's house. It shows in the first paragraph is the description of the Harding residence, which is located around three miles from the small town of Norton, Missouri.

- Norton

They went to Norton, where they related their strange experience to several discreet friends (Bierce, 1905: p. 10).

In paragraph 10, it is describing that Norton (a town in Missouri) is also the setting of this story. It is described that people go to Norton to share their unusual experiences about Harding place.

- b. Setting of time consisted of 1884, 1886, one summer evening, the next evening, by day and by night.

- 1884

At some time in 1884 it became known that she had gone to visit her mother in Iowa. That was what her husband said in reply to inquiries, and his manner of saying it did not encourage further questioning. She never came back (Bierce, 1905: p. 4).

In paragraph 4, it is shown that the setting of time is 1884. That year is described as a time when Mrs. Harding did not appear in her place. When their neighbors asked about Mrs. Harding, Mr. Harding used to say that his wife visited her mother in Iowa, and even when the members of the Harding family left their house, Mrs. Harding never came back.

- 1886

Since 1886 no one has lived in it, nor is anyone likely to live in it again. Time and the disfavor of persons dwelling thereabout are converting it into a rather picturesque ruin (Bierce, 1905: p. 1).



Based on paragraph 1, the setting of time is 1886. It is described that, starting that year, Harding's house was empty and no one lived there anymore after the Harding family. People did not want to live in Harding's house, despite the fact that it was large and luxurious, because they believed it was haunted.

- One summer evening

One summer evening, four or five years later, the Rev. J. Gruber, of Norton, and a Maysville attorney named Hyatt met on horseback in front of the Harding place (Bierce, 1905: p. 5).

Based on paragraph 5, it is described as the setting of time that one summer evening. The setting shows that there is a meeting between the Rev. J. Gruber and Hyatt at that moment on the terrace of the Harding residence after the house has been empty for four or five years.

3. Plot

a. Exposition

The story started by introducing the Harding family that lived at Harding residence, about three miles from the small town of Norton in Missouri, on the highway to Maysville. They consisted of Mr. Harding, Mrs. Harding, Mrs. Harding's sister, and Mr. and Mrs. Harding two children. In 1884, Mr. Harding said that his wife went to her mother's house in Iowa when people asked him about his wife. In fact, Mrs. Harding has not returned to her house in Norton. Two years later, specifically in 1886, the Harding family left their house and country without any reason, and nobody knew why. So, the house was empty and nobody lived there after the Harding family.

b. Conflict/Complication

The conflict begins when the Rev. J. Gruber of Norton, and Hyatt (who is a Maysville attorney) made an appointment to meet on horseback in front of the Harding area after four or five years the Harding's place has been empty. They decided to sit on the veranda of the house to discuss something until it grew almost dark. Suddenly, they found something strange in Harding's place in which they looked at a lengthy vine covering partly in front of the residence and hanging branches of the vine in the corner of the veranda over them. They decided to return to Norton. The next evening, at the same hour, Gruber, Hyatt, and two unknown people went to Harding place. The strange phenomenon occurred once more on the veranda of the Harding Residence.

c. Climax



The climax happened when people of Norton decided to dig up the vine. There was nothing strange about it, so they kept digging the vine until they found something that resembled a human figure in size and shape. The head, body, and part of the body were all present; indeed, the fingers and toes were clearly outlined, and many claimed to see a monstrous suggestion of a face in the head. The figure had characteristic features of Mrs. Harding that lacked the left foot. It is shown in paragraph 14 below.

In point of resemblance to the human form this image was imperfect. At about ten inches from one of the knees, the cilia forming that leg had abruptly doubled backward and inward upon their course of growth. The figure lacked the left foot (Bierce, 1905: p. 14).

d. Resolution

The county sheriff, as the authorized protector of the discarded area, commanded the root to be changed and the digging to be filled to the brim with soil. They found out that Mrs. Harding or Matilda had never been to Iowa to see her mother, nor did her family know about it. The Sheriff of the county could not inform Robert Harding because he or people of Norton didn't know where they were.

The matter was settled by the sheriff of the county, who as the lawful custodian of the abandoned estate ordered the root replaced and the excavation filled with the earth that had been removed (Bierce, 1905: p. 15).

4. Theme

The theme of A Vine on a House is mystery and death. A Vine on a House shows a lot of mystery, where in the story it is shown that the Harding family is a closed family that is anti-social and mysterious. People don't even know when Mrs. Harding lost if they don't ask her husband. The house retained its evil reputation because no one wanted to live there after the Harding family left the country. Furthermore, Mrs. Harding, the discovery of a corpse buried in a vine remains a mystery as to how it occurred and who the perpetrators were thought to be. Bierce presented his short stories according to the horrific things he witnessed during the war, and A Vine on a House is one of them.

5. Point of View

The short story of "A Vine on A House" has a third-person point of view in which the author does not exist in this story and the author writes this story based on the character's experience in "A Vine on a House." It shows the pronouns of the characters used in this story, such as he, she, and they.

And leave they did. Forgetting that they had been traveling in opposite directions, they rode away together. They went to Norton, where they related their strange experience to several discreet friends (Bierce, 1905: p.10).



Discussion

The finding shows that there are five elements to a short story that the researcher found in "A Vine on A House." They are: character, setting, plot, theme, and point of view. Character is someone that illustrates a story, such as the Rev. J. Gruber. It indicates that there is a character that does not involve Harding and Norton, such as Hyatt who is illustrated as a Maysville attorney. According to Birkert (1993:47), characters are people that imagine themselves in a story, who readers recognize from the writing that they read on a page. The characters can be understood by looking at how the author depicts them, how the author illustrates them across their habitat or through their outfit, the characters' behavior, how they describe themselves, demonstrate how they think, how each character tells about another character, how a character communicates with another character, how the characters connect with each other, and how a character responds to another character (Aminudin, 2000:80).

The setting shows the background of the story such as in 1905. It assumes that this event happened decades ago in the 20th century in which people still look at the level of social status. It is supported by Klarer (2004), who stated that setting is the time and place where something occurs. To create a solid conception of setting, a writer frequently employs the portrayals of scenery, panoramic views, residences, seasons, or weather. Moreover it represents the place, the historical era, and social circumstances for which a statement's action occurs.

A plot is how an author tells the events of a story; it begins with an introduction and progresses to complication, climax, and resolution. A plot is a story that includes a causal relationship in which each part of the story is linked by cause and effect (Nurgiantoro, 2003:113). It indicates that the plot of this story portrays that there are many strange and mysterious things that happen in Harding House. This finding is similar to Rahayuningsih (2019), who also found that the plot describes many mysterious things happening, including the murderer's case. The plot is made up of views, propensities, perceptions, and information that stem from both the event and the character (Kusumawati, 2007).

Theme is the idea that the author wants to express that illustrates in a story. The theme in literature refers to significant topics and experiences in our both public and private lives, such as happiness, death, tragedy, family, hope, and anxiety. Typical situations in people's daily lives may serve as a theme in literary works (Marsh, 1999). The finding implies that several events usually happen in that era of the story such as mystery and death. It is similar to Rahayuningsih (2019), who also found that the theme is full of mystery about a murderer's case in the short story of "Murders in the Rue Morgue" based on the main character as the detective (Dupin) cannot solve the case without working together with people who live around the criminal spot. Additionally, Stanton and Kenny in Nurgiantoro (2003:80) say that the theme concerns the true meaning of a story. The theme is



presented indirectly, so readers must recognize and find the message through the story and the elements that comprise the story.

Point of view refers to how the author describes his or her views in a story. Simpson (2010) claims that point of view includes the author's perspective in a story. The point of view is essential because it screens every component of a story. It defines how much information the author conveys to readers. He also believes that the point of view in a story may be divided into two types: that of the first-person narrator and that of the third-person narrator. The story of "A Vine on A House" assumes that the author implements the third-person point of view. It is supported by Andari (2019), who discovered in her study that intrinsic elements such as "Tarian Bumi's" point of view are told by a third-person narrator, in which the author does not exist in the story and he or she presents a story about someone's experience in which the author is not involved.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The researcher conducted this research to find out the elements in a short story entitled "A Vine on a House" by an American author named Bierce. The researcher found five elements of a short story that are used in "A Vine on A House." They are character, setting, plot, theme, and point of view. The characters are the Harding family consisting of Mr. Harding, Mrs. Harding, Mrs. Harding's sister, Mr. and Mrs. Harding two children, as well as the Rev. J. Gruber, Hyatt, and the sheriff of the county. The settings of places are at Harding House and the little town of Norton, while the setting of times starts in 1884 and ends six or seven years later. The plot of this story is divided into four parts: exposition (the story started by introducing the Harding family that lived at Harding House), conflict or complication (It begins around four or five years later, when the Rev. J. Gruber of Norton, and Hyatt, who is a Maysville attorney, discussed something on horseback in front of the Harding residence), climax (they found something that resembled a human figure in size and shape under a vine in Harding house), and resolution (The county sheriff resolved the situation). There are two themes in this story, namely mystery and death, which are shown by the condition of Harding's house and the dead body that resembles Mrs. Harding. This short story has a third-person point of view. It shows the pronouns of the characters used in this story, such as he, she, and they as well as the author does not exist.

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher expects that this research can be used as an additional material for teachers in teaching literature and can be a reference for the next researcher who wants to do research, especially in a similar study. However, this research only focuses on elements of short stories, and it will be better for the next researcher to do research in a wider area.

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