

the rocking horse winner

The Rocking Horse Winner is a compelling short story penned by D.H. Lawrence that delves into themes of greed, luck, obsession, and the destructive pursuit of wealth. First published in 1926, the narrative explores the dark undercurrents of a seemingly affluent family whose insatiable desire for material success leads to tragedy. This story has captivated readers and critics alike for its powerful commentary on human nature, the dangers of greed, and the illusions of luck. In this article, we will explore the key themes, characters, symbolism, and moral lessons embedded in *The Rocking Horse Winner*, providing a comprehensive understanding of this classic work.

Overview of *The Rocking Horse Winner*

Plot Summary

The story centers around a young boy named Paul, who lives in a family that outwardly appears to be wealthy but secretly struggles with financial instability. The family's house is filled with whispers of luck and money, which creates an unsettling atmosphere. Despite their wealth, the family feels they lack enough money, leading to a sense of insecurity.

Paul, driven by his desire to help his family, discovers that he has a peculiar ability: when he rides his rocking horse vigorously, he can predict the winning horse in upcoming races. As he becomes obsessed with winning bets to generate money, he embarks on a series of increasingly risky bets, fueled by his belief that luck is somehow linked to his riding.

His quest to secure his family's financial future culminates in tragedy when Paul overexerts himself in his quest for luck, leading to his death. The story concludes with the family's realization of the destructive power of greed and obsession.

Major Themes

The narrative explores several interconnected themes:

- **Greed and Materialism:** The relentless pursuit of wealth corrupts and destroys.
- **Luck and Superstition:** The story examines the illusion of luck and the human desire to control fate.
- **Obsession and Madness:** Paul's obsession with winning ultimately leads to his demise.
- **Family and Expectations:** The pressures placed on children to fulfill adult desires create a cycle of despair.

Characters and Their Significance

Paul

The young boy at the story's core, Paul symbolizes innocence corrupted by greed. His innocence and desire to bring happiness to his family lead him to take extreme measures, showcasing how good intentions can have tragic consequences when intertwined with obsession.

Mother

Paul's mother epitomizes materialistic obsession. Her constant concern with wealth and social status reflects societal values that equate success with monetary gain. Her emotional distance from her children highlights her fixation on financial security.

Uncle Oscar

Uncle Oscar is a pragmatic and somewhat cynical character who recognizes Paul's gift and helps facilitate the betting process. His role underscores the influence of others who manipulate or exploit the boy's abilities.

Father

Although less prominent, the father's absence and detachment from the family's financial struggles symbolize the neglect of emotional bonds in favor of material pursuits.

Symbolism in *The Rocking Horse Winner*

The Rocking Horse

The central symbol of the story, the rocking horse represents Paul's pursuit of luck and his desperate attempt to connect with a supernatural force to secure his family's prosperity. The more he rides, the more he believes he can predict race winners, symbolizing the reckless pursuit of fortune through obsession.

The House

The house embodies the family's obsession with wealth. Its whispered secret, "There must be more money," reflects the underlying greed and dissatisfaction that pervades their lives.

The Horses and Racing

The racing theme symbolizes the unpredictable nature of luck and the illusion of control. The races serve as a metaphor for chance and the human desire to

master fate.

The Whispering

The house's whispering about money signifies the suffocating influence of greed and materialism on the family's psyche, showcasing how desire can become a haunting presence.

Literary Devices and Style

Symbolism

Lawrence employs rich symbolism to deepen the thematic impact, especially through the rocking horse, house, and racing imagery.

Irony

The story is ripe with situational irony; Paul's efforts to secure luck and wealth ultimately lead to his death, highlighting the destructive nature of greed.

Foreshadowing

Subtle hints foreshadow Paul's tragic fate, such as his intense riding sessions and the ominous whispers in the house.

Narrative Tone

Lawrence's tone combines a mix of tenderness and critique, emphasizing the innocence of Paul while condemning the greed that drives the adults.

Morality and Lessons from the Story

The Dangers of Obsession

The story illustrates how obsession with wealth and luck can distort priorities, leading to destructive outcomes. Paul's relentless pursuit of success at all costs underscores the importance of moderation and emotional well-being.

The Illusion of Luck

Lawrence challenges the notion that luck is purely a matter of chance, suggesting instead that greed and obsession can distort perceptions of control and destiny.

The Impact of Materialism on Family Relationships

The story highlights how material greed erodes familial bonds, emphasizing the importance of emotional connections over material wealth.

The Cost of Greed

Ultimately, it portrays greed as a destructive force that can consume individuals and families, warning readers to reflect on their own values and pursuits.

Relevance of *The Rocking Horse Winner* Today

Modern Parallels

The themes of greed, obsession, and materialism remain highly relevant in contemporary society. The story prompts reflection on how the pursuit of wealth can lead to neglect of personal well-being and relationships.

Psychological Insights

The narrative offers insights into human psychology, illustrating how desire and obsession can cloud judgment and lead to self-destruction.

Lessons for Readers

Readers are encouraged to consider the true value of wealth and happiness, and to recognize the dangers of equating material success with personal worth.

Conclusion

The Rocking Horse Winner is a timeless story that masterfully exposes the destructive nature of greed and obsession. Through its vivid symbolism, compelling characters, and poignant themes, D.H. Lawrence crafts a narrative that resonates across generations. It serves as a cautionary tale about the illusions of luck and materialism, urging readers to reflect on what truly matters in life—the emotional bonds, integrity, and inner contentment that cannot be bought or won through chance. Whether read as a critique of societal values or a psychological study, *The Rocking Horse Winner* remains a powerful work that continues to provoke thought and introspection.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'The Rocking-Horse Winner'?

The main theme is the destructive pursuit of wealth and luck, highlighting the dangers of greed and the illusion of material success at the expense of

moral values.

How does the motif of the rocking horse symbolize the story's message?

The rocking horse symbolizes the child's obsession and a desperate attempt to find luck and happiness through gambling, reflecting the illusion that luck can be controlled or predicted.

What role does luck play in the story's characters' lives?

Luck is portrayed as a powerful, almost supernatural force that influences the characters' destinies, leading them to chase material wealth driven by a false belief that luck can be harnessed.

How does the character of Paul demonstrate the dangers of obsession?

Paul's obsession with winning money leads him to gamble excessively, risking his health and life, illustrating how fixation on material success can be destructive.

What is the significance of Paul's ability to predict the winning horse?

Paul's ability signifies a mystical or intuitive connection to luck, emphasizing the story's exploration of fate and the illusion that one can control or predict luck through supernatural means.

How does the story critique materialism and social status?

The story critiques how the desire for wealth and social standing can corrupt moral values, leading characters to prioritize money over genuine happiness and moral integrity.

What is the story's overall message about happiness and wealth?

The story suggests that true happiness cannot be bought with wealth, and that obsession with material success can lead to tragedy and moral downfall.

Additional Resources

The Rocking Horse Winner: An In-Depth Literary Analysis of D.H. Lawrence's Masterpiece

Introduction

When exploring the landscape of early 20th-century literature, few stories manage to weave together complex themes of greed, luck, innocence, and societal expectations with the subtlety and finesse of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rocking Horse Winner*. Published in 1933, this short story remains a compelling examination of the destructive power of materialism and the illusions of luck and chance. As an expert review, this article offers a comprehensive analysis of the narrative, its thematic richness, stylistic features, and enduring relevance.

The Story at a Glance

Plot Summary:

The Rocking Horse Winner centers around a young boy named Paul, who becomes obsessed with predicting the outcome of horse races through an uncanny ability to "ride" his rocking horse with intense focus. His motivation is driven by his family's insatiable desire for wealth, which creates a sense of anxiety and dissatisfaction in their household. Despite his innocence, Paul's reckless riding and pursuit of luck inadvertently lead to tragic consequences, exposing the destructive nature of material obsession.

Core Characters:

- Paul: The young, intuitive boy with a supernatural gift for predicting race winners.
- Hester (Paul's mother): A woman consumed by social climbing and material wealth, whose desire for affluence fuels the story's tension.
- Father: A man burdened by debts and societal pressures, whose obsession with maintaining appearances influences the household's atmosphere.

Thematic Depth and Literary Significance

1. Materialism and Societal Pressure

At its core, *The Rocking Horse Winner* critiques the pervasive materialism of the 1920s and 1930s. Lawrence vividly depicts a society obsessed with wealth and status, illustrating how this obsession corrupts familial relationships and individual morality. Hester's constant lament of "I want more money" exemplifies the insatiable hunger for material possessions, which she believes will secure her happiness and social standing.

The story suggests that in such a society, the pursuit of wealth becomes an almost spiritual obsession, leading characters to prioritize material success over genuine human connection. Lawrence's critique is not merely societal but also deeply personal, revealing how these values seep into the household psyche and influence the children.

2. The Illusion of Luck and the Myth of Control

The narrative explores the illusion of luck and the belief that chance can be harnessed or manipulated. Paul's supernatural gift—his ability to predict race winners by riding his rocking horse—symbolizes a misguided attempt to control fate. His relentless effort to "ride" his luck underscores a fundamental human desire for mastery over uncertainty.

Lawrence portrays luck as an elusive force that cannot be truly controlled, despite Paul's earnest efforts. His obsession with winning and the fixation

on the "luck" he believes he can generate ultimately lead to tragedy, illustrating the futility of relying on luck as a substitute for genuine effort or moral virtue.

3. Innocence and Corruption

Paul embodies innocence, purity, and childlike intuition. His innocent belief that he can influence luck contrasts sharply with the corrupting influence of greed and superficial values embodied by his mother and the adult world. The story probes the loss of innocence and the ways societal greed can tarnish purity.

The tragic irony lies in Paul's genuine desire to bring happiness to his family, believing that by winning money he can satisfy their needs. His innocence makes his death all the more poignant, highlighting how societal flaws can corrupt even the most innocent.

Stylistic Features and Narrative Techniques

1. Symbolism and Allegory

Lawrence employs potent symbolism throughout the story:

- The Rocking Horse: Represents Paul's frantic quest for luck and the child's attempt to influence fate through his obsession.
- The House: Embodies the family's obsession with wealth and social status, exuding an "insatiable" whisper—"There must be more money."
- Horse Races: Stand for chance, luck, and the societal obsession with material reward.

The story functions as an allegory for the destructive nature of greed, illustrating how societal values distort personal morals and lead to tragedy.

2. Narrative Style and Tone

Lawrence's narrative employs a detached, almost clinical tone that enhances the sense of inevitability. The third-person narration provides insight into the characters' thoughts and motivations, creating a layered understanding of their internal struggles.

The language is precise, with sharp contrasts between the superficial appearance of wealth and the underlying despair. Lawrence's use of irony—particularly in the ending—heightens the tragic impact and underscores his critique.

3. Use of Repetition and Rhythm

Repeated phrases like "There must be more money" serve to emphasize the relentless obsession with wealth. The rhythmic cadence of Paul's riding on the rocking horse mirrors his obsessive compulsion, reinforcing the story's central motif.

Critical Analysis

1. Moral and Ethical Implications

The story raises profound ethical questions about societal values—what constitutes true happiness, the morality of greed, and the innocence affected by adult obsession with material success. Lawrence seems to warn that the relentless pursuit of wealth, especially when rooted in superficial values, can lead to moral corruption and personal downfall.

2. Psychological and Emotional Depth

Lawrence delves deep into the psychology of his characters, especially Paul's childlike innocence and desperate desire to please his mother. The story explores how societal pressures and familial expectations can distort a child's perception, pushing him toward dangerous pursuits.

3. Tragic Realism

Despite its allegorical elements, the story maintains a sense of tragic realism. Paul's death is not romanticized but presented as an inevitable consequence of societal flaws. The ending leaves a haunting impression, prompting reflection on the cost of materialism.

Enduring Relevance and Modern Perspectives

Though set in a specific historical context, *The Rocking Horse Winner* remains relevant today. Its themes resonate in modern society's obsession with wealth, consumerism, and luck-based success. The story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of valuing material possessions over human well-being and moral integrity.

In contemporary terms, the story can be seen as a critique of the "get-rich-quick" mentality and the societal fixation on external success. It encourages readers to reflect on the true meaning of happiness and the importance of fostering genuine relationships over superficial pursuits.

Conclusion

The Rocking Horse Winner by D.H. Lawrence stands as a powerful literary critique of materialism, societal obsession with luck, and the loss of innocence. Its richly layered symbolism, incisive psychological insight, and timeless themes make it a quintessential story that continues to provoke thought and emotional engagement.

For readers and literary enthusiasts alike, Lawrence's masterful storytelling invites deep reflection on the values that underpin our society and the personal costs exacted by the relentless pursuit of wealth. Whether viewed as a moral caution or a profound exploration of human nature, *The Rocking Horse Winner* remains a vital and compelling piece of literary art—an enduring testament to the tragic costs of material obsession.

In summary, this story is not merely a tale of a boy riding a rocking horse but a mirror held up to society's obsession with luck, wealth, and superficial success. Its lessons are as relevant today as they were nearly a century ago, making it a must-study for anyone interested in literature's power to reflect and critique human values.

[The Rocking Horse Winner](#)

the rocking horse winner: *The Rocking-Horse Winner* D.H. Lawrence, 2023-06-06 Hester appears to have it all - marriage, a nice home, three children and a stimulating job. But it is not enough. For no matter how much she and her husband earn, she spends more. Driven by a desire to be loved by his mother, young Paul starts betting on the horses with the family's gardener. He wins, wins and just keeps winning. But, as quickly as he hands her the money, Hester has splurged it away. Then, as Derby day approaches, the spooky secret of Paul's endless run of luck is revealed. As tragedy beckons, will Paul win his mother's love? This book is perfect for fans of Edgar Allan Poe and Ernest Hemingway. It was made into the 1949 fantasy film 'The Rocking Horse Winner', starring John Howard Davies, Valerie Hobson and John Mills. DH Lawrence (1885-1930) was an English writer and poet. He was at the centre of a great deal of controversy during and after his life, with the explicit nature of some of his novels leading to censorship and protests. Many critics admired his imaginative and deeply descriptive style, though. Among his best-known novels are 'Sons and Lovers', 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', 'The Rainbow' and 'Women in Love'.

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the rocking horse winner: *The Rocking-horse Winner*, by D. H. Lawrence David Herbert Lawrence, Ben Benenson, 1990 *The Rocking-Horse Winner* is a short story by D. H. Lawrence. The story describes a young middle-class Englishwoman who had no luck. Though outwardly successful, she is haunted by a sense of failure; her husband is a ne'er-do-well and her work as a commercial artist doesn't earn as much as she'd like. The family's lifestyle exceeds its income and unspoken anxiety about money permeates the household. Her children, a son Paul and his two sisters, sense this anxiety; moreover, the kids even claim they can hear the house whispering There must be more money. Paul tells his Uncle Oscar Cresswell about betting on horse races with Bassett, the gardener. He's been placing bets using his pocket money and has won and saved three hundred twenty pounds. Sometimes he says he is sure of a winner for an upcoming race, and the horses he names do in fact win, sometimes at remarkable odds. Uncle Oscar and Bassett both place large bets on the horses Paul names. After further winning, Paul and Oscar arrange to give the mother a gift of five thousand pounds, but the gift only lets her spend more. Disappointed, Paul tries harder than ever to be lucky. As the Derby approaches, Paul is determined to learn the winner. Concerned about his health, his mother rushes home from a party and discovers his secret. He has been spending hours riding his rocking horse, sometimes all night long, until he gets there, into a clairvoyant state where he can be sure of the winner's name. Paul remains ill through the day of the Derby. Informed by Cresswell, Bassett has placed Paul's bet on Malabar, at fourteen to one. When he is informed by Bassett that he now has 80,000 pounds, Paul says to his mother: I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and get there, then I'm absolutely sure - oh absolutely Mother, did I ever tell you? I am lucky No, you never did, said his mother. The boy dies in the night and his mother hears her brother say, My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking horse to find a winner.

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on trying to use luck as way to earn a better life. When the son develops the mysterious ability to predict the winners at the local horse race, he attempts to alleviate his family's troubles with his race-track winnings, but it soon becomes clear that money is just a symptom of larger issues. The Rocking Horse Winner is a story about obsession, dissatisfaction and misplaced values. Like many of Lawrence's stories it deals with the unfulfilling nature of modern, industrialized life. The Rocking Horse Winner was made into a full-length film starring John Howard Davies in 1949.

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