

Skeleton in the cupboard (Part 3)

Introduction

This document is an extract from a short story entitled “Skeleton in the cupboard” written by Tony Wilmot.

At this point in the story, we have been introduced with the 2 main characters (a young girl and a middle-aged man named Robert Smythe). These 2 people have just met. The girl is leading an investigation about something which happened 20 years ago and as for Robert, we know that he lived a tragic event 20 years ago as well (*aussi*) (he killed a little girl with his car). As the girl pieces together the different elements she gets from her investigation, Robert starts thinking he has something to do with the girl’s past and that his secret story is about to be revealed. He feels trapped and decides to go to the girl’s flat to kill her.

In a first part, I’m going to describe the murder scene in the girl’s flat and in a second part, I’m going to comment on the final revelations and I’m going to explain the outcome (*dénouement*).

I – The murder scene (l.240 to 261)

a) The unfolding (le déroulement) : The scene takes place in the girl’s flat. She has been washing her hair when Robert knocked on the door. She offers him a drink and she tells him she has just found the name of the car’s owner, which is Robert Smythe. She sounds excited, thrilled, pleased and enthusiastic.

Robert apologizes for intruding on her unannounced. He pretends he knows the man she’s been looking for and that his name is Robert Smythe.

While the girl is getting him a drink, he kills her with a cord.

He kills her because she was tracking him down. The line 255 is the climax (*dénouement*) in the story, “was” is written in italics and it shows that Robert’s doubts are confirmed. He feels trapped because his secret will be revealed.

b) The atmosphere : This is an atmosphere of suspense and tension. The rhythm is fast. Everything goes fast. Robert has only been in the girl’s flat for a short time when he kills her. The dialogues are very short. He had planned his act because the cord was in his pocket. It was a willful (*prémédité*) murder.

II – The revelations (l.261 to the end)

a) Margaret’s secret : Margaret had a baby before she got married and had the baby adopted. She gets a letter which informs her that her daughter has been looking for her.

First, at the line 276, she is shocked, she feels guilty and is about to faint (*s’évanouir*). Then, from the line 281, we learn that she always knew her past would come up one day and unconsciously, she may have been looking forward to hearing from her daughter. After she becomes anxious and overwhelmed (*submergé*) by emotion. And finally, line 295, she is trying not to cry.

Her secret is revealed gradually through the letter. The letter is not complete, there are some parts of the letters and some narration passages between them.

Near the line 262, Robert is physically and psychologically exhausted. Then, on the line 291, he is in his own world. He’s unaware of what is going on around him. He’s worried about what he had done.

b) The outcome : The title of the short story is “Skeleton in the cupboard”, but there is not only one skeleton, there are actually two : Robert’s and Margaret’s secret story. Their past stories are finally intertwined (= linked). The ending is implicit : we only have a few parts of the letter. As readers, we gradually fill in the blanks to reconstruct the chronology of the events. We are finally made to understand that Robert has killed his wife’s daughter. The way it is written, with scattered (*dispersé*) elements makes the outcome even more horrible. Robert and Margaret cannot escape from their past.

Conclusion

To conclude, this final part is very important because a tragic event happens and because some tragic revelations are made. Robert went to the girl’s flat to kill her because he thought she had found out his secret and he didn’t want his life to be ruined. The day after, Margaret received a letter telling her that her daughter had been looking for her. The end is not explicit but as readers and with all the information we have been given, we finally understand that Robert killed Margaret’s daughter. The girl’s investigation had nothing to do with Robert’s secret past but with Margaret’s. Robert’s life will be ruined anyway, as well as Margaret’s.