An Unforeseen Outcome

For a story to be considered successful, there are a variety of elements that are required. A fascinating, riveting plot is one of these vital ingredients. As seen from the popular short story, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, the point of view can be used to achieve a plot that excites readers. The abundant amount of intrigue that characterizes Ambrose Bierce’s short story is due in large part to the author’s skillful use of the third person limited omniscient point of view. The point of view adds to the allure of the story from the way that it surveys the action as a whole, provides insight into the thoughts of the main character, and allows for a surprise ending.

The third person limited omniscient point of view’s ability to survey the action as a whole contributes to the creation of a favorable story. This point of view gives the reader an objective introduction to the initial scene. Because of this objective approach, information about the setting and other elements of the story is revealed to the reader that the main character could not know about. As Peyton Farquhar flees his captors, the reader is given insight into every element of the chase—from the sound of rushing water, to the reports of guns and canons, to the music of the wind in the trees. Although this story is largely intriguing due to its ability to objectively report key details, it would lose much of its allure if it could not also examine Farquhar’s internal thoughts and feelings.

The third person limited omniscient point of view’s skill at doing just that—examining the main character’s thoughts—is what gives this short story its abundance of natural attraction. As Farquhar is continually urged on by the “thought of his wife and children” (Paragraph 34), the reader is able to get a front row glimpse of the heap of thoughts running through his mind. His natural possession of wit and cunning is also put on display for the reader. Farquhar’s knowledge of weapons and warfare is what keeps him alive throughout the chase and is evident from the way that he knows that “the report arrives too late” and that he must “keep [his] eye upon the gun” (Paragraph 30). The point of view’s ability to take a look into Farquhar’s thoughts certainly makes for an exciting story, however, nothing is more exciting than the surprise ending.

The unexpected ending of *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* is most likely the reason for its national success. Bierce brilliantly manipulates the point of view throughout the story in order to set up for such a crazy ending. Because of the third person limited omniscient point of view’s ability to enter into the main character’s mind, the whole story is essentially taking place inside Farquhar’s head. As the reader watches Farquhar happily “spring forward with extended arms” (Paragraph 36), the story is abruptly ended as Bierce explains that “Peyton Farquhar was dead” from a “broken neck” (Paragraph 37). This brilliant surprise ending would not have been possible without Bierce’s skillful use of point of view.

Although there are many components that go into the making of an intriguing tale, the third person limited omniscient point of view is the reason for this story’s acclaim. The benefits of this point of view are displayed through its ability to survey the action objectively, peer into the mind of the main character, and, above all, create a surprise ending. In a way, the story of Peyton Farquhar is a little bit like life—things can be going great and then an obstacle can suddenly arise and block our agendas. Jesus specifically warns us to not put our hope in earthly things because they will fail us. Our better hope is in the word of the Lord, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

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