

Literary Analysis

Attention-grabbing opening

Thesis

BODY

First key point

Support and elaboration

Second key point

Support and elaboration

An Analysis of Irony in "An Astrologer's Day"

Can you always tell the difference between good and evil? Is it possible for anyone to be entirely good or entirely bad? In this tale of an astrologer and his victim, R. K. Narayan wrestles with these questions. In the world he describes here, almost nothing is what it seems to be, and one unexpected event follows another—for both readers and characters. "An Astrologer's Day," by R. K. Narayan, is a comic but thought-provoking story in which irony is used for several purposes: to make us doubt the astrologer, to build suspense, and to develop theme.

From the first sentence, Narayan uses irony to make us doubt the astrologer's character. His "professional" equipment (the shells, the cloth with mysterious writing, and so on) is only for show. Ordinary listening skills, not the stars, help him astonish his "simple clients" with "shrewd guesswork." Because the narrator tells us that the astrologer doesn't know the future, calling his work "an honest man's labor" is irony with a sharp bite. The narrator's comments expose the astrologer as a greedy fake.

The author also uses irony to build suspense during the fortune-telling scene. When Nayak challenges the astrologer to answer some specific questions about his future, we expect the astrologer to fail, since he is a fraud. Instead, however, the astrologer produces a surprising amount of accurate information about Nayak. He knows that Nayak is from the north, and he knows that long ago Nayak was stabbed and

Literary Analysis *continued*

Third key point

Support and elaboration

CONCLUSION

Restatement of thesis

Summary of key points

General comment related to the thesis

thrown into a well. The astrologer even knows that Nayak's assailant "died four months ago." It is obvious that there is something unusual about the astrologer, and we are left wondering if he is the fake that he seems to be.

The strongest irony to be found in "An Astrologer's Day," however, runs all through the plot and helps express the theme. Although the astrologer has tried to escape his past, he ends up bringing himself face-to-face with it; he's become an astrologer to get away from his crime while his victim is drawn to him for astrological help. Then, once he recognizes Nayak, he uses the truth to deceive him. It is dishonest to take money for fake prophecies, but the astrologer's customers are "comforted" and "pleased." It is the astrologer who is guilty of a violent crime, but Nayak was probably violent too—and still is. Every situation in this story takes an unexpected twist, and we are left with the message that life never turns out as expected, and that even good and bad aren't what they seem.

The irony is so strong in "An Astrologer's Day" that good, bad, guilt, and punishment aren't clear-cut. First, a kindly astrologer turns out to be a fake. Then, the fraud suddenly seems to have supernatural knowledge. Finally, all our expectations and value judgments end up turned on their heads. What should we think? Obviously, R. K. Narayan doesn't want us to take this tale too seriously. Because no real harm is done, we can laugh at this upside-down world, not be shocked by it.

Literary Analysis *continued*

However, as we enjoy the author's ironies, we might ask ourselves if the moral distinctions in our own world are always as clear-cut as they seem.

Literary Analysis

Definition

A **literary analysis** is an examination of the different parts of a literary work. An analysis of a short story can focus on one literary element, or it can show how two or more literary elements work together to make the short story memorable.

Many literary analyses use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own literary analysis.

Framework

Directions and Explanations

Introduction

- Open with an interesting comment on the story.
- Include a thesis statement.

Make a good first impression Hook your readers early in your paper. You can ask them a question that relates to your thesis, set the scene with a vivid description, or use a quotation from the story you are analyzing.

Set your focus The purpose of the thesis statement is to present your main idea about a literary element in the story. Make sure to include the story's author and title in your thesis statement.



Body

- State first key point with support and elaboration.
- State second key point with support and so on.

Make your point Write a paragraph to explain each of your key points. Arrange your points in a logical order.

Back it up Quote, summarize, or paraphrase information from the story to support your key points. Think of this support as evidence. You need evidence to prove that your point is valid.



Conclusion

- Restate your thesis.
- Summarize your key points.

Finish with a flourish Conclude your analysis by restating your thesis and summarizing your key points. Then, leave your readers with a final thought that relates to the thesis.