



Introduction

“After Twenty years” by O. Henry is an interesting story. The story entitled ‘After Twenty years’ is about two best friends who had to part ways. They return to keep an appointment they had made twenty years ago.

Meeting Jimmy Wells

A 38-year-old Bob is waiting at the door of a hardware store in New York to meet his friend Jimmy Wells. A policeman is on patrol duty. He asks Bob why he is standing there. Bob tells the cop that he (Bob) is waiting to meet his friend.

After twenty years

Bob says that before parting they had made a promise to meet at the same place at the same time on the same date after twenty years. Bob tells the policeman that he (Bob) has kept his promise. Bob is sure that Jimmy Wells will surely come and meet him. After listening to the story, the cop walks away.

Arrival of Police officer

Twenty minutes later, a tall man in plain clothes comes to meet Bob. Bob thinks him Jimmy Wells but realizes that the man is not his friend. Actually, the man is a police officer in plain clothes. He gives Bob a letter from Jimmy. Bob learns from the letter that the police officer whom he had met earlier was Jimmy, his old friend.

Criminal Bob

Jimmy Wells identifies Bob as the most wanted criminal in New York. But he does not want to arrest his intimate friend. So, he sends another police officer to do the work.

Conclusion

For Jimmy Wells duty is more important than friendship.

THEMES

- Friendship

Bob clearly values the bonds of friendship that were forged between him and Jimmy all those years ago. However, it seems some of the knots may have come loose over the years that tied Jimmy to Bob.

- Loyalty

Loyalties to people and ideas can sometimes be difficult to maintain, especially when they are split between a person and an idea that might be close to their hearts. Keeping their 20-year appointment to the minute, Bob's loyalty to Jimmy is obviously unwavering. However, now that he is a policeman, Jimmy's loyalties to Bob and to the law are put to the test when he discovers his old friend is a wanted fugitive.

- Trust

Trust is a major theme in the story. It is clear that Bob is not able to trust Jimmy when it comes to keeping him out of jail. By the end of the story, it does not seem that Bob is able to trust Jimmy at all.

FIGURE OF SPEECH: IRONY

The definition of irony as a literary device is a situation in which there is a contrast between expectation and reality. For example, the difference between what something appears to mean versus its literal meaning. Irony is associated with both tragedy and humour. O. Henry is widely considered as the master of irony. Most of his stories have unexpected endings.

Here O. Henry uses dialogues, situational irony and dramatic irony to convey the unpredictable climax of the story.

Examples:

“Did pretty well out West, didn't you? Asked the policeman.” Irony in dialogue, soon the person is going to be arrested.

Ending dialogue ‘Bob I was at the ----- to do the job.’ We come to know that the policeman on beat was actually his friend Jimmy.

Find more examples of irony from the story.

SUMMARY

In this short story by O. Henry, the two main characters are policeman Jimmy Wells and outlaw 'Silky' Bob. At one time, the two had been as close as brothers.

However, once Bob left to pursue his fortunes in the West, the two eventually lost touch. Nevertheless, they had promised to meet each other in 20 years, to the hour, after their last dinner together at the same spot in New York City. Twenty years later, Bob is waiting outside where the restaurant once stood when he and Jimmy parted ways; the latter, who is now a policeman, comes upon him while he is walking his beat. After hearing Bob's story about the friends' pledge to meet up again and watching him light up a cigar, Jimmy recognizes it is Bob. He also realizes his old friend is a fugitive from Chicago, whom he had seen earlier on a police bulletin. At that point, Bob is not aware that the policeman is Jimmy, who goes about on his patrol, leaving the outlaw to wait for his friend. After a few moments, another man appears. At first, Bob thinks he is Jimmy. Although Bob cannot see the man too well in the dark, he notices that some things are off about him. Eventually, the man reveals that he is a plainclothes officer taking Bob under arrest. Before he does so, he hands Bob a note from the patrolman, who turns out to be his former best friend and betrayer, Jimmy Wells.