
The Characterization of the Narrator's Childhood Memories in Cherry Bomb, a Story by Maxine Clair

Childhood directly affects adult life as shown by brilliant psychologists such as Piaget and his studies on developmental stages. Though childhood is a phase that all adults must go through, some wish to stay carefree and young as does the narrator in Maxine Clair's "Cherry Bomb". The author uses literary techniques such as change in tone, childish descriptors, and introduction of symbolic characters to portray the theme that childhood is wonderful, but it is not the ending of a beautiful life and if adults do not pass through this stage they will never fully see the world in the way adults do.

Tone is a powerful technique used in most all literature. The absence of one can indicate that a narrator is disconnected from the work emotionally while a gleeful attitude can attribute to a longing to return somewhere. In "Cherry Bomb" the tone is rather reminiscent throughout the work on the child-like things the narrator engaged in, yet in the last paragraph, the tone shifts and becomes, though still written in past tense, to more hopeful for a future. The reminiscent tone can be seen when the narrator describes the cherry bomb as a "memento of good times." This does not mean that her life is not good at the time of writing, just that she enjoyed that stage in it. But the tone of the last paragraph seems to shift to one that is not just looking back on the past but looking forward to the future as can be seen by "Except for Christmas presents, it was the first thing anybody ever gave me" leading to a belief that, in the future, more things will be given to her even if they are not materialistic that have the same effect of making the narrator happy. Yet, tone is not the only thing that characterizes the childhood memories.

The author also utilizes childish descriptors as a technique to portray the young girl's mind-set and create an image. Throughout the excerpt hyphenated descriptors arise such as "that-old-thing of an ice truck", "help-him-out block of ice", "daddy-said-so fact", "God-is-whipping-you straight" that indicate how young the girl is because either her vocabulary is not yet developed to describe these things in a single word or she is naïve, such as in the "daddy-said-so fact" scenario, and believes everything she hears. Also, these are used to create an image of how fast the tin was moving or how damaged the truck is. Though many more techniques are used through the piece, a symbolic character was used to convey the theme.

The "Hairy Man" is a character that symbolizes the narrator if she had never grown out of childhood. At the beginning of the piece, the narrator mentions the expression "I am in this world, but not of it". That when paired with the character of the Hairy Man shows what the narrator would have been like if it had not been for the cherry bomb that divided her childhood

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from the rest of her life, if it had not been for Eddy's accident she may not have mentally outgrown her child days, hence being "in the world" of childhood, but not of it because she would be an adult. The "shell-shocked" Hairy Man represents her without the cherry bomb. This technique is used to convey the theme that childhood is enjoyable and carefree, but it needs to be grown out of or there could be consequences.

"Cherry Bomb" author Maxine Clair uses many techniques to characterize the memories of the narrator's childhood.

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