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I'm A Fool
by Sherwood Anderson
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Sherwood Anderson's "I'm A Fool" is a short story about how a young boy learned that his actions have consequences that will haunt him for a very long time. Although what he did was wrong, he will have the power to recognize his mistakes and mature into a fine young man.

To allow the readers to witness the young man's feelings and thoughts—past and present—Anderson chose to tell the story in the first-person point of view. By doing that, the readers find out immediately that after what happened to the young man the last time he lied, the young man became wiser: "It was a hard jolt for me, one of the most bitterest I ever had to face. And it all came about through my own foolishness, too...Perhaps, even now, after all this time, there will be a kind of satisfaction in making myself look cheap by telling of it" (250). The readers also realize that although the young man is a major participant, he is telling the truth and, overall, his story is a reliable source.

By telling the story in the first-person point of view, the author can provide accurate details about what his main character was doing during that summer. These details allow the author to maintain and increase the readers' curiosity about the plot. If the story would have been told in the dramatic point of view, it's pretty obvious that the author would have had a hard time trying to make his story credible. The first-person point of view also allows the readers to realize how much the main

character has changed over time, from his much improved vocabulary, to his way of thinking and acting. There are a few times when the author switches to the second-point of view. This allows him to describe things in the same informal way as in the first-person point of view by avoiding pronouns as he/ she: “Gee whiz! it was fun. You got to a county-seat town, maybe say on Saturday or Sunday, and the fair began the next Tuesday and lasted until Friday afternoon....It left you a lot of time to hang around and listen to horse talk...”(251).

As the story unfolds, the young man confesses that, before he learned his lesson, he was pretty full of himself. He even seemed to have forgotten his place and was looking down on people with same background as his: “And so there I was, sitting up in the grandstand as gay as you please and looking down on the swipes coming out with their horses, and with their dirty horsy pants on and the horse blankets swung over their shoulders, same as I had been doing all the year before.” (252). It is his foolishness that made him lie about his social status and identity, while trying to impress a beautiful young lady he met that summer. Although she was rich, he might have had a slight chance to remain friends with the girl, if he hadn’t lied about everything; and indeed he lost perhaps the only chance to meet true love. The readers know this because the story is told by using the past tense.

By using the first-person point of view and the past tense, the author allows the story teller to detach himself from the person he used to be. After he learned his lesson, the young man also learned how to stay out of trouble. In the end he detaches himself completely from the person he used to be: “I wish I had that fellow right here that had on a Windsor tie and carried a cane. I’d smash him for fair. Gosh darn his eyes. He’s a big fool—that’s what he is” (256). Although he made a big mistake, he also learned his lesson—and that is what counts the most.

The young man's story could be everyone's story of growing up. The readers sympathize with the story teller and are happy that a lesson was learned in the end. Anderson's story accomplished its purpose: growing up is not always easy, if ever.

Works Cited

Anderson, Sherwood . "I'm A Fool." *Literature: An Introduction to Writing*. Roberts, Edgar V. and Jacobs, Henry E. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. 250-257.