The Miss Noi Fan Club

In Robert Olen Butler’s “Fairytale” he uses tone, characterization, and other writing techniques to make the reader feel for Miss Noi. Miss Noi is the protagonist of the story. Butler portrays her as a woman who is just doing what is needed to scrape by in her average life. He uses this character’s helplessness to draw a feeling of pity from the reader. Butler is successful in this act and by the end of the story one can find that they have become a full-fledged member of the Miss Noi fan club.

The casual tone of “Fairytale” creates an odd sense of comfort, as if this is a story about someone oneself is familiar with. Miss Noi, the narrator, speaks broken English. This use of style makes the character truly come to life. This is evident when she must ask a friend if “up on” and “upon” mean the same thing. In the story she says, “After that, a few years later, I come to America and I read some fairy tales to help me learn more English and I see this word and I ask a man in the place I work on Bourbon Street in New Orleans if this is the same. Up on and Upon” (Butler). The way Butler uses tone is what makes this story worth the read.

Miss Noi was a delightful character to read about. She is passive as well as blunt; she is a contradiction. I personally found myself smiling throughout the story, due to Miss Noi’s outlook on her situation. She seems to let everything roll off her shoulders, which I appreciate. My favorite characteristic of Miss Noi is how naïve she is. She is Vietnamese, yet she seems to not know about the Vietnam War, which is alluded to multiple times in the story. For example she says “I have many men say they were in my country and they always sound a little funny, like they have a nasty secret or a sickness that you should be careful not to catch” as if she has no idea why they would not have enjoyed her country (Butler). To those who are aware of the war, it is obvious that the war is the reason for their lack of interest in Vietnam.

Butler sprinkles figurative language throughout the whole of the story. A simile is used when Miss Noi is describing her three ao dais, “one apple red, one blue like you see in the eyes of some American man, one black like my hair” (Butler). The use of figurative language and small details helps the reader to better understand what is being discussed in the text. Figurative language is a great use of imagery in this story as well.

All in all, Butler did a fantastic job of making Miss Noi relatable. He used a great mix of tone, characterization, and figurative language to create Miss Noi. She is a character that seems to always be the underdog, and it seems that people have a tendency to root for the underdog. I believe Butler knew that. I’m sure Miss Noi’s story has always struck a cord with readers, but I do think I am now the leader of her fan club.

Works Cited

Butler, Robert Olen. "Fiction from Robert Olen Butler." *Fiction from Robert Olen Butler*. Penguin Books, 1993. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.