

Once Upon a Time

To begin with, focus on part 2 of the story, the story within the story

Markers of a 'bedtime story' and a 'fairy tale':

the title,

what the first part says,

repetitions of stock phrases (happily ever after)

and hyperbole ('loved very much', '*absolutely* trustworthy,' *highly* recommended')

'wise witch'

characters are types (no names, not an individual tale)

Levels of protection, verbs used early on

fenced

inscribed,

licensed,

insured,

subscribed

Constantly enhanced, layers of security:

"police and soldiers and tear-gas and guns"

gated house (presumably arranged by the husband),

restricted entry (advice from the husband's mother, 'the witch'),

a plaque "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED" (neighbourhood watch),

electronic controlled gates (the man)

burglar bars and a loud alarm system ('the trusted maid')

disconnection and dehumanization (do not encourage: the maid and the man)

higher walls (the wife, bricks paid for by the husband's mother)

from list of options (note the specifics of the list): Dragon Teeth's device

The situation: Apartheid South Africa

Constitutional racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against the majority non-whites, 1948-1994.

In the story within the story, presented as escalating threat:

The riots and the squashing (by shooting of even school children) in certain quarters

Burglaries

Intruders, often very hungry

Unemployed, 'importuning' for a job

Armed burglary

Outside the story within the story: how do read these? Socio-economic conditions?

Atmosphere of the story?

Irony, contrast, and inversions

- Overall?
- The final paragraph: contrast with the expectation evoked by the title, the theme/moral of the story?

- Christmas gift of bricks (also later ‘security consumerism’)
- “the most honest ... concentration-camp style ... all evident efficacy,” “encircling home, shining.” “... rustproof”
- The repeated all-caps "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED" (Who is the “you” being warned?) and titled-cased “The People For Total Security.”
- “silhouette of a would-be intruder. He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist.” [Compare with the famous quote from Anatole France: “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”]
- “intruders ... paused audaciously to drink the whiskey ... a loss made keener by the property owner's knowledge that the thieves wouldn't even have been able to appreciate what it was they were drinking.”
- Ensuring security, building prisons (the wealthy look at the sky through bars), in the neighborhood, “gardens and laws behind security fences, walls, and security devices”
- who is the victim? Including the writer (part 1)
- contrast the norm being set with the child and the cat

Fairy-tale, ‘a fairy story’, ‘a bed-time story’

fable, parable (a moral and ethical genre, hence what we may ‘teach’ children)

allegory of the contemporary society?

What is the lesson here?

Who is the “you” of the story who is being warned?

Part 1 of the story

what is the point of view from which the part 2 of the story is told?

I-narrator is an author/narrator (identified as Nadine Gordimer or not)

What is the position of the I?

“I have no burglar bars, no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as people who do take these precautions”

‘a victim already’

“neither threatened nor spared”

Built on History?

“a buckling, an epicenter of stress ...

...bringing uneasy strain to the balance and counterbalance of brick, cement, wood and glass that hold it as a structure around me.”

“...my heart tailed off like the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xylophones made by the Chopi and Tsongal migrant miners who might have been down there, under me in the earth at that moment.”

“The house that surrounds me while I sleep is built on undermined ground; far beneath my bed, the floor, the house's foundations, the stopes and passages of gold mines have hollowed the rock, and when some face trembles, detaches and falls....”

“The stope where the fall was could have been disused, dripping water from its ruptured veins; or men might now be interred there in *the most profound of tombs.*” (emphasis added)

Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014): writing trajectory