

Question:

Justify the title of the story 'Lamb to the Slaughter'. Also, state the various forms of irony found in the story.

Title Justification:

The title of the story carries a deep symbolic meaning.

The expression 'Lamb to the Slaughter' appears frequently in the Bible and also in the Old English Literature. To bring a lamb to the slaughter means to kill it. 'Lamb' symbolizes innocence, weakness, helplessness. The title of the story can be interpreted in various ways. In the first paragraph, lamb refers to Mary Maloney, the dependent wife and expectant mother who is supposed to be meek and submissive. She does everything for her husband. She prepares dinner for him, gets his slippers, and almost slaves over him. However the man, instead of expressing his gratitude to her, has his mind set to abandon her. A weak woman, Mary Maloney, has no say as her life is being torn apart by her husband and he wants it to be a quiet affair so that his position in work is not affected. Though Mary appears to

be a meek pathetic lamb who will be quietly led to the slaughter, the author surprises us as Mary fights back and kills her husband. She does not allow him to butcher her. It is the lamb (status) in the wife that is slaughtered leaving behind a free woman who has the ability to take care of herself.

The lamb may even refer to the husband. He is the follower of the laws and a slave of his profession. He cares only about his work and image. The irony lies in the fact that the husband who is the strong, unsuspecting trusting character in the story is ultimately brought to the slaughter. He thinks he will get away with a simple quiet divorce. But this doesn't happen.

Metaphorically, the investigating officers can be considered lambs. The naive police officers are led to the slaughter by Mary, first to the scene of crime and then to the dinner table to consume the evidence, the very weapon of the murder.

The title is appropriate in the sense that the author shows us how a person's weakness can make a lamb of him, a lamb which will finally be lead to the slaughter. While Mary's strength

of will redeems her, Patrick's attitude leads him to his doom.

Irony:

The various types of irony present are:

1) Dramatic Irony:-

When the hungry detectives while eating the lamb say that the weapon they are looking for is probably under their noses.

2) Verbal Irony:-

“Patrick, how are you doing darling?” This statement is an example of verbal irony. She calls out to her husband even after knowing that he is dead.

3) Situational Irony:-

The lamb that she takes from the freezer to cook and serve as nourishment for her hungry husband turns out to be the weapon used to kill him.