

The Open Window Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

Supernatural (Motif)

Until readers understand Vera's deception, the supernatural motif invades and transforms the otherwise calm Edwardian sitting room. As the men approach the house they are described in horror-inducing language; they are "three figures" (not men) that appear in the "deepening twilight" and "noiselessly" approach the house like phantasms (227). Afterward Framton bolts as though "he had seen a ghost" (227). Through Vera, Saki uses the supernatural to bring some liveliness to the otherwise boring and quotidian setting.

Adult Fragility (Motif)

Adult characters are frequently satirized in Saki's stories. In naming his adult characters in "The Open Window," Saki highlights their fragility: The 'Nut' in 'Nuttel' implies that he is "nutty" or mentally unstable; the 'Sap' in 'Sappleton' connotes foolishness and gullibility. The only child in the story, Vera, exploits their adult fragility for her entertainment and fools both of them through her youthful imagination.

Window (Symbol)

The window is at once a symbol of the aunt's hope that her husband and brothers will return and a symbol of Vera's expansive imagination. Vera uses the window as a means to escape the boring, adult world and reimagine a more fantastical reality.

Man vs. Nature (Theme)

A theme in many of Saki's stories is a battle between man and nature. A huge follower of Darwin, Saki's stories frequently feature struggles between different species. In "The Open Window," as in many of his other stories, nature prevails. For example, in Vera's first fabricated story the hunters drown in a bog. In her second fabrication, several dogs chase Framton Nuttel into an empty grave.

The Open Window Metaphors and Similes

"The Open Window" (Metaphor)

The title of the story ("The Open Window") is itself a metaphor for the power of storytelling as a means of entertaining through humor and trickery. Reading the story is like looking out the window in Mrs. Sappleton's parlor, the window that Vera controls (and Saki in creating her) and through which the storyteller and trickster devises her own creations

The Open Window Irony

Vera's Name (Verbal Irony)

Vera's name is a play on the word 'veracity', meaning 'truth'. Ironically, she is the trickster of the story, always spinning a new tale to her audience.

Girl Trickster (Situational Irony)

In Saki's time girls were frequently portrayed as trustworthy and honest people. It is thus ironic that he chooses a female character to play the role of trickster and storyteller in "The Open Window."

Framton's Fright (Situational Irony)

Framton retreats to the countryside in order to recover from a bout of nerves. Ironically, the countryside only adds to his anxiety and Framton is thrown into another nervous fit when he believes he has seen ghosts.