

The Cop and the Anthem

CLASS VII



Key Words

- signs: indications
- cops: policemen
- prison: jail
- hanging around: roaming and waiting
- argue: protest

● SUMMARY

The first thing one notices about 'The Cop and the Anthem' is the storyteller's use of elevated language typical of the central character, Soapy. Indeed, the character of Soapy is as important to this story as its ironic structure, in which every action that he takes creates a reaction opposite to the one he wishes. The basic irony of the story is that as long as Soapy is "free," that is, loose in the city, he is not free at all, because of the coming winter. If he were in prison, however, he would indeed be "free" to enjoy life without fear. Soapy is a proud man; he does not want something for nothing and is willing to "pay" for his room and board by going to some effort to commit an act that will get him in jail. He rejects charity, for he knows that he will have to pay for philanthropy by being preached at and lectured to.

- The additional problem is that although Soapy breaks the law, he does not act like a criminal. Moreover, although he tries to be a "crook," he keeps running into real criminals who thwart him, such as the umbrella thief, from whom he cannot steal what is already stolen, and the streetwalker, whom he cannot offend because she considers him a potential customer. Thus, Soapy seems "doomed to liberty." A story with an ironic, mocking tone such as this one, in which a bum who talks like a gentleman tries to get himself thrown into jail but continually fails, can only end one way. The ultimate irony is that Soapy, who does not want something for nothing and who goes to a great deal to get thrown into jail, finally does get thrown into jail for doing precisely nothing.