

Packing

by Jerome K. Jerome

Focus Spot

Use of Humour:

The short story 'Packing' is an extract from the Jerome K. Jerome's popular novel *Three Men in a Boat* that was published in 1889, where Jerome narrates a two-week boating holiday on the river Thames along with his two friends George and Harris. Initially intended to be a serious travel guide, with accounts of local history along the route, the book finally turned into a sort of comic novel because of the humorous elements that took over to the point that the serious and somewhat sentimental passages seem to be mere distractions.

This is a humorous story. The three friends George, Harris and J, the narrator decide to go on a boat trip. This story depicts their attempt to pack for the trip.

The humour in this story lies in the difference between what the characters say and what they eventually do. Each of them proudly boasts of being an expert in packing. First of all, the narrator offers to pack things, but he secretly wished to only supervise the act of packing while the others toiled. It came as a boomerang to him when the other two readily agrees to let him pack while they sit and relax. In spite of his boast of being exceptionally good with packing, J forgets to pack essential items. He packs and unpacks a number of times to correct his mistake.

But George and Harris are not quite satisfied with his packing. Hence, they start packing again and end up creating further chaos. They shatter cups and plates, put strawberry jam on the tomato and squash it. George treads on the butter and it sticks to his slipper, that they scrape off with a knife and put it on the chair, where Harris sits and it again sticks to his back.

Their dog, Montmorency adds to their confusion further. Thinking the lemons to be mice and he chases them. It is not only the incidents, but also the way in which the narrator describes them is extremely funny.

The story really details where the author and narrator, Jerome K. Jerome, flexes his comic chops. Jerome, in this story shows his knack for slapstick comedy. The story is full of examples of Jerome's flair for humour. Tripping over the dog while everything gets packed is one such instance.

The frequent use of hyperbole--exaggeration--is another key feature of the slapstick comedy. When J. shares how toothbrush haunts him in his sleep the night before his travel as he wakes up dreaming he has forgotten to pack it, hence he packs it before hand; but in the morning unpacks it again, as he needs to use it, and afterwards forgetting to pack it, finally to rushing back to check it and eventually carrying it wrapped up in his pocket

It is interesting to note that while Jerome ironically criticizes the habit of overpacking of the upper class in the story, we find him overpacking himself. Though his rant against it may be somewhat sincere, the irony of it adds to the humor of the story.