

The Lumber Room: Ideal artifact for prose analysis + an epistle on child rearing

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Abstract: *The Lumber Room* by Saki has undergone multiple analyses as a short story. This study firstly examines its socio-pedagogic suitability for a target population of fifteen year old students who are embarking on the path of appreciating literature in Sri Lanka as the short story is contained in their anthology. It is rich in analytical excellence. The tightness of plot, multiple themes, dramatic dialogue, economy and dexterity in the use of language make it an ideal artifact for analysis of the short story genre. There is an omnipresence of humour, especially satire and wit. Secondly this study utilizes the short story as an analytical cameo on development psychology of a child and adult-child relationships. Its autobiographical nuances enhance the realistic value in this context. At present within the institution of family in the Sri Lankan society a transition from the traditional extended family structure to an accelerated creation of nuclear families is witnessed. The short story generates awareness on the need in a child for strong emotional attachments with positive reinforcement from care givers who unlike in the past very often is restricted to the two parents at present. Additionally it affirms the right of children to engage in and experience creativity. Thus the thematic multiplicity of the short story targets a reader population of children who are given an occasion to evaluate the relationship they have with their own parents.

Index Terms: Appreciating literature, fifteen year old students, *The Lumber Room*, child rearing, adult-child relationships, Development psychology.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the author: H. H. Munro

The British author Hector Hugh Munro (1870 - 1916) published under the pen name Saki. Munro was born in Burma (Myanmar) in 1870. His father was an inspector general of the Burma police. His mother died in 1872 when Munro was only two years old. After her death he with his two older siblings a brother and sister were sent to England. Their childhood in England was not happy as their two maiden aunts, Charlotte and Augusta, were very strict disciplinarians who resorted not only to physical punishment but also cruelty which resulted in psychological trauma. Religion too played a strong role in the household. A fear of God and individual self-discipline was to be instilled in the children at a young age. Munro's sister, E.M. Munro, who wrote the *Biography of Saki* (1924)^[1] states:

'One of Munro's aunts, Augusta, was a woman of ungovernable temper, of fierce likes and dislikes,

imperious, a moral coward, possessing no brains worth speaking of, and a primitive disposition.'

Ethel Munro further states that the aunts 'imposed a regime of seclusion, restraint, and arbitrary rules enforced in the case of Charlie [Saki's brother] by corporal punishment and in the case of Hector [Saki] and Ethel by coldness, removal of privileges, and guilt' (cited in Byrne, 2007, 17)^[2]. According to Saki's sister their aunts and grandmother 'tried to instill the fear of God into their charges'. Thus it could be stated that *The Lumber Room* is a near-autobiographical depiction of Munro's unhappy childhood experiences under his guardians. The Aunt in the short story is not entirely fictional. She had a real life equal in one of Munro's aunts: Augusta making the background of author an important facet the short story.

1.2 Social aptness to the Sri Lankan student population

Globalization, westernization and socioeconomic factors have led to endorsement of nucleation of the majority of family units especially in urban Sri Lanka. Furthermore the Sri Lankan society is, at its core, still patriarchal. The role of the mother as the primary caregiver is still unchanged. But at micro-economic level most family units in our society at present have moved away from a single wage earner entity. Thus difficulties of child rearing arise due to the need for employment of the primary caregiver. The balancing of a professional life along with the responsibilities of a home maker while providing quality time to a child levies a heavy psychological tax on the working mother. Thus with the diminishing status of the extended family child rearing is a delicate process and is a challenging responsibility. Sociologically the behavior patterns and beliefs of parents are guided by general cultural norms and value systems of a society. Being obedient is recognized to be a good trait in a parent-child relationship in most Asian societies. Thus one main cultural expectation from a child in Sri Lanka is obedience and respect towards parents and adults in general. This obedience when flouted tends to result in punishment. Nicholas in the short story *The Lumber Room* is a whimsical child with a great sense of humour who rebels against punitive punishment in a creative and innovative manner annoying and provoking the Aunt who is his caregiver. This questions her child rearing style which is authoritarian. Furthermore in most societies a child very often is forced to fulfil parental beliefs in diverse aspects of socialization including rigidity in the instilling of moral values. If an instiller of moral values, such as the Aunt in the short story, violates what

they preach it confuses a child's grasp of the difference between right and wrong.

Another main value of the short story is that it requests the attention of parents to one, very often neglected, aspect of child rearing: the need to experience creativity. According to a key recommendation of the National Child Protection Policy (2013)^[3] of the National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka children should be subjected to creative experiences.

Allowing creativity to be nurtured at every stage in a child's life is crucial to enable the child to grow in different dimensions. This gives children the chance to process ideas, be creative, think flexibly, and use their imagination effectively and in different ways. Children can absorb the creative experience in different ways, ranging from emotional involvement to problem solving as well as the acquisition of knowledge. (National Child Protection Policy, 2013: 27)

What the short story depicts through its protagonist is a child who is denied the right to experience creativity. The lumber room is a barred territory and experiencing the creativity within it is denied to Nicholas. According to theories of child development experiencing creativity fosters free thinking, and experimentation. The short story illustrates that the few minutes of forbidden joy in the lumber room results in an emotional involvement with the story in the tapestry triggering the mind of Nicholas to enter a problem solution mode in the form of

experimentation on finding an ending to the hunting episode depicted on it.

Thus the authoritarian child rearing style, rigid instilling of moral values and the violation of the right of a child to experience creativity depicted in the character of the Aunt grants a high sociocultural requirement to analyze short stories as *The Lumber Room*. Such child rearing styles are not restricted to Edwardian England but might also be evidenced in the contemporary Sri Lankan society.

II. AN ANALYSIS: THE LUMBER ROOM

2.1 The Plot

In *The Lumber Room* the plot is ordered chronologically. Other than the flashback at the beginning which goes back to events which happened in the morning each progressive episode occurs in chronological order during the time span of one day. The selection of title *The Lumber Room* is also significant as it carries a symbolic meaning for Nicholas the protagonist of the short story. The lumber room symbolizes the happy world of a child. The climax of the short story too takes place within the Lumber Room.

Figure 1 below summarized the plot of the short story.

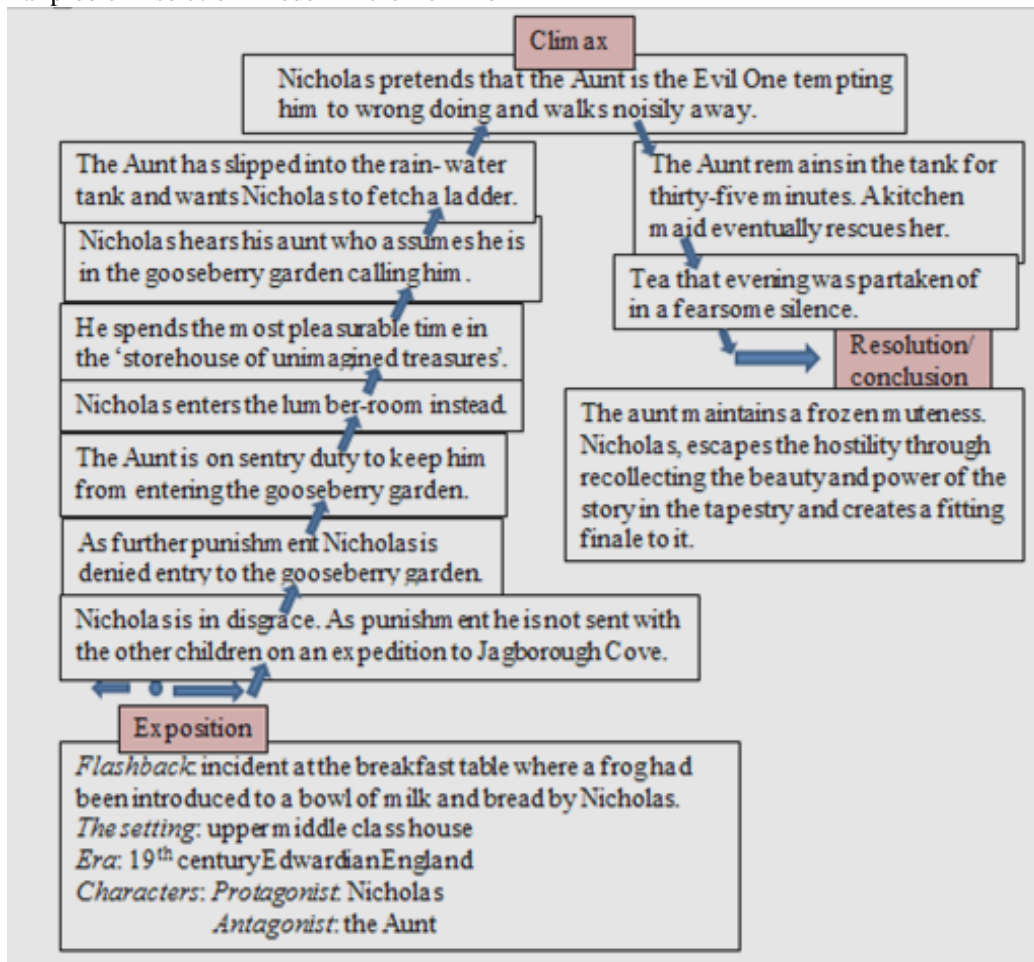


Figure 1: The plot structure of The Lumber Room

2.1.1 The exposition

During the exposition the author does not only describe the setting but also exposes the readers to his attitude towards characters through his tone and the mood he creates.

2.1.1.1 The setting

The setting is in an upper middle class (suggested by the horse-drawn carriage, with a library and a lumber room with rare items) house in the 19th century Edwardian England. The action moves around different locations in the house: the dining room, the gooseberry garden and the lumber room.

2.1.1.2 Point of view

The story is narrated from the 3rd person limited narrator position: The narrator can only see what Nicholas sees and experiences. Thus the reader is presented with a fairly biased and largely subjective view about the situations and the characters.

2.1.1.3 The tone

The author's attitude towards characters, especially the Aunt, and incidents is full of satire and irony but as the narration is witty humour is generated in the reader. Though the tone is critical, especially toward the behavior of the Aunt, it is handled in a subtle manner.

2.1.1.4 The Mood

The hostile atmosphere between the adult Aunt and Nicholas is vividly brought out during the first stages of the short story. The emotional effect or the feelings the author wants to create in the reader especially towards the Aunt and Nicholas is developed through words and descriptions. Nicholas is full of pranks and thus is fun and he is imaginative. Though the Aunt belonged to 'the older, wiser, and better people' her hypocritical manner and stupid actions clearly convey the negativity the author wants to create in the reader. Thus an atmosphere heavy with hostility is created in the exposition itself and built on at an increasing strength through the rest of the short story.

2.2 Characterization

The readers are introduced to the main characters: the Aunt and Nicholas and the minor characters: boy-cousin and girl-cousin and Bobby, Nicholas's brother. While the two main characters are used to develop the dramatic quality of the short story the minor characters are static.

2.2.1 Nicholas

Nicholas is the protagonist of the story. Though no physical description or age is given the powerful character description depicts an intelligent child with a very creative imagination. Some characteristics of Nicholas are as follows:

2.2.1.1 Ability to create and control events

Nicholas is portrayed as a child who is capable of creating and controlling events. The shrewd way he does this depicts the intelligence of the character too. For example at the beginning of the story he creates a situation where the Aunt has 'been proved to be profoundly in error' in matters about which she had 'expressed the utmost assurance'. Further the dialogue which ensues after the children are sent on the hastily planned expedition conveys that Nicholas uses impromptu strategies to put the Aunt who does not have his quick, sharp brain into a difficult position as she is made aware of the truth, i. e. the children would not enjoy the expedition, by Nicholas. She loses control of the situation and changes the subject as she is confronted with loss of face.

Additionally the question and answer session between Nicholas and the Aunt when while she was in the rain-water tank not only conveys his shrewdness but also the maturity in strategic handling of the situation.

"Now I know that you are the Evil One and not aunt," shouted Nicholas gleefully; "when we asked aunt for strawberry jam yesterday she said there wasn't any I know there are four jars of it in the store cupboard, because I looked, and of course you know it's there, but she doesn't, because she said there wasn't any. Oh, Devil, you have sold yourself!"

Thus Nicholas excels in creating and controlling situations to his benefit during a very short period of time especially when pitted against his slow witted Aunt.

2.2.1.2 Maturity

Nicholas's maturity is especially clear when compared with the juvenile behavior of the other children. Nicholas does not shed a tear when he is excluded from the expedition though it is expected from him. But in contrast his girl-cousin howls and weeps when she scraped her knee and 'the tightness of Bobby's boots had had disastrous effect on his temper'. The other children suffer without complaining but Nicholas is not afraid of the Aunt and is smart enough to point out her flaws. He criticizes her child rearing capabilities pointing out her lack of attention to the children's needs which is suggested through the following line.

'You often don't listen when we tell you important things'.

Thus it seems that he is the only child who rebels against the tyranny of the Aunt. But what is admirable in his personality is that he remains cool and composed in all situations. His maturity is shown yet again when his assessment of the outcome of the expedition is proven correct. The reader does not see happy children at the tea table describing the fun time they had at the Cove. The reasons pointed out by Nicholas and one thing overlooked by the Aunt: high tide had destroyed their enjoyment.

Yet we do not witness a gloating Nicholas as evidence around him was proof enough for the fact that the expedition had lost its main purpose: make Nicholas repent his deeds. Furthermore Nicholas has the mature ability of escaping from the depressing atmosphere around him to enter a fantasy world of his liking recollecting happy events.

2.2.1.3 Vivid imagination

Another characteristic is the power of his vivid imagination which is shown through his response to beauty. In the Lumber room Nicholas sees a tapestry where *'a man, dressed in the hunting costume of some remote period, had just transfixed a stag with an arrow'*. The tapestry becomes a *'living-breathing story'* for Nicholas. His creative ability is brought out vividly as he builds the story and pictures the fate of the hunter.

'Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene; he was inclined to think that there were more than four wolves and that the man and his dogs were in a tight corner'.

Later Nicholas recalls the scene on the tapestry during *'fearsome silence'* at the tea table. He creates the end to the story:

'The huntsman would escape with his hounds while the wolves feasted on the stricken stag'.

Furthermore his imagination is always ready to animate the inanimate. The sight of the colourful mandarin duck makes him commence on *'assigning a life-history to it'*.

All examples above convey and strengthen the idea that Nicholas is not a mere dreamer but has a vivid imagination and creative power which allows him to escape the hostile world outside.

2.2.1.4 Strategist

Nicholas is a strategist. The lumber room was a *'region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes and concerning which no questions were ever answered'*. As entering the lumber room was prohibited Nicholas strategically plans a way of exploring its *'mysteries'*. He finds the place where the key is kept and practices unlocking doors waiting for an opportunity to put the practiced skill in to use by making his entry to the lumber room quick and smooth.

Yet again the strategic manner Nicholas convinces the Aunt that he was planning to enter the gooseberry garden not only creates humour but shows that he is able to outwit his aunt. Accordingly he is able to *'put into execution a plan of action that had long germinated in his brain'*. The Aunt is made to stay under *'self-imposed sentry-duty for the greater part of the afternoon'* leaving him enough time to explore the *'unimagined treasures'* hidden in the lumber room. Thus the strategist in Nicholas takes maximum advantage of all available opportunities not only to deride the Aunt but also to put his preplanned activities into operation.

2.2.1.5 Observant

Nicholas is observant. The fact that Bobby has told the Aunt twice that the boots were hurting him because they were too tight but she was not listening had been noted down by the sharp-eyed Nicholas.

His observant capabilities are also evidenced in the lumber-room. Very methodically he goes through the items in it giving each one his unbroken attention. The fact that he spent more time with the more interesting items: framed tapestry and the book containing a portrait gallery of birds too suggests that he is not a random observer. Nicholas is a good judge of selecting what deserved careful scrutiny.

2.2.1.6 Intelligent and smart

Nicholas is Intelligent and has a sharp, quick mind. The logical built up of the argument to prove that it is not the aunt but *'the Evil One tempting him to be disobedient'* conveys how quick thinking and intelligent he is.

- First he states *'when we asked aunt for strawberry jam yesterday she said there wasn't any'*.
- Then he states he knows that *'there are four jars of it in the store cupboard, because I looked'*.
- Next he argues stating that *'of course you know it's there, but she doesn't, because she said there wasn't any'*.
- Therefore, Nicholas convincingly concludes, *'Oh, Devil, you have sold yourself!'*

Nicholas is smart. According to Nicholas when compared with the lumber room,

'The gooseberry garden was a stale delight, a mere material pleasure'.

Thus he is smart enough to prioritize his sources of pleasure. He is able to discern between the sublime bliss gained through the beauty of the artifacts in the lumber-room over the *'material pleasure'* obtained through frolicking in the gooseberry garden. The gooseberry garden may provide fruit eat and he may be able to play in it. These would give him *'pleasure'* which is physical. But supreme aesthetic delight would come from the time spent in the lumber room. So he is smart and intelligent enough to decide and choose the lumber room over the gooseberry garden.

2.2.1.7 Escapism

The world of Nicholas is a lonely one. Even his younger brother is *'quite uninteresting'*. But Nicholas when the surrounding becomes hostile and filled with fearsome silence escapes to his private world. There he *'has much to think about'*. His private world is a rich source of beauty triggering creativity and provides him much happiness which is lacking in the real world.

His ability to escape into a world of his own recollecting the beauty of the tapestry has strong parallels with a tenet set down by William Wordsworth (1802)^[4] in relation to powerful feelings: *'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility'*. In his poem *'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'* he describes the strength of the joy he receives when he witnesses the beauty of nature. Then in the last stanza in the poem given below he states that *solitude is bliss*

as it provides an opportunity to bring back your past experiences which have brought delight.

‘They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
Then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.’

Thus strong emotional pleasure received in the past can bring spontaneous present joy. This makes the beauty of the daffodils intransient to Wordsworth. It is permanent and everlasting as the poet can revive the same strong emotion he felt at the time he saw them when he is recollecting the scene later, in tranquility.

Similarly Nicholas has the power to escape his miserable atmosphere at the tea table through ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected’ in the midst of undesirable company. Thus using the character of Nicholas Saki suggests that not only adults but sensitive children too can transcend their loneliness through escaping into a world of imagination bringing back memories of pleasure experienced in the past.

2.2.1.8 Mischievous rebel

Nicholas is not all good. Saki’s realistic portrayal of his protagonist as a mischievous rebel shows the complexity of Nicholas’ complex personality. The Aunt is the victim of his mischievous rebellious nature.

A. The rebel in Nicholas

Nicholas is a rebel as he does not follow the conventional standard behavior of a child.

- He mocks his aunt proving that she is wrong and is not truthful.

Example 1: the aunt was proved wrong about the presence of the frog in the breakfast bowl.

‘You said there couldn’t possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there was a frog in my bread-and-milk.’

The simple hidden goal of this action would have been to avoid the hated tasteless meal.

Example 2: One lie of the aunt’s is craftily exposed by Nicholas in the following conversation between the aunt who is in the rain-water tank and Nicholas.

“Will there be strawberry jam for tea?” asked Nicholas innocently.

“Certainly there will be,” said the aunt.

But Nicholas joyfully states that previously she had said ‘there wasn’t any’. Thus Nicholas proves that though the Aunt tries to instill right behavior patterns in the children she herself does not set a good example.

- He answers back and knowingly provokes the Aunt.

Example 1: when the Aunt states that she has slipped into the rain- water tank and asks him to “Fetch the little ladder from under the cherry tree” Nicholas promptly says,

“I was told I wasn’t to go into the gooseberry garden,”

Example 2: Nicholas points out two reasons why the Jagborough expedition is going to fail to annoy his aunt. Cheerfully Nicholas gives the first reason. Pointing out the fact that his girl-cousin, who scraped her knee rather painfully against the step of the carriage, will not enjoy the expedition he states, “How she did howl!”

Then with a grim chuckle Nicholas gives the second reason.

“Bobby won’t enjoy himself much, and he won’t race much either,” as his boots “are hurting him. They’re too tight.”

Thus Nicholas grabs every opportunity to mock and provoke the Aunt. But the reader does not witness the rebel in Nicholas resorting to tantrums. As he is debarred from the expedition, though expected of him, he did not shed any tears. His sharp, quick mind already had a plan where he could enjoy his punishment especially in the absence of the other children.

Saki’s development of the character of Nicholas makes the reader feel that the rebellion against the Aunt is justified. The Aunt seems to deserve such a reaction as she lacks psychological understanding of a child’s natural reaction to an over strict upbringing.

B. Mischievousness in Nicholas

In contrast to the disobedient nature in Nicholas is his impishness. His mischievous behaviour is a continuous source of humour throughout the short story. All his pranks are psychological battles against the authoritarian behavior of the Aunt. His sharp mind works out methods to outsmart the Aunt and the success he gains makes the reader sympathize with rather than criticize his behavior.

Furthermore Nicholas is discerning. Thus he knows when to stop his pranks. After the short session of taunting the Aunt who was in the rain- water tank,

‘Nicholas knew, with childish discernment, that such luxuries were not to be over-indulged in’.

But when he ‘walked noisily away’ the Aunt suffers ‘undignified and unmerited detention in a rain-water tank for thirty-five minutes’. In this instance Nicholas’s mischievousness in tinged with revenge and the author too seems to suggest that such a severe punishment is not deserved by the Aunt who is trying to manage four young children on her own.

But in the final assessment of Nicholas’s character the reader sympathizes with his disobedience and admires his ability to survive through the hostility of the Aunt. Thus the author places the blame on the Aunt and her methods of bringing up children for Nicholas’s mischievous behaviour.

2.2.2 The Aunt

If Nicholas is the protagonist of the story the Aunt is the antagonist. Though slotted under the category “the older and wiser and better people” much criticism is aimed by the author at the Aunt’s conventional upbringing methods and her inability in child-rearing. Some of her flaws are as follows:

2.2.2.1 Self-righteous and didactic

A. Self-righteous

The Aunt's self-righteousness is 'characterized by a certainty, especially an unfounded one, that one is totally correct'¹.

Example 1: She assures Nicholas that, 'there could not possibly be a frog in his bread-and-milk and that he was not to talk nonsense.'

But Nicholas who has put a frog in his bread-and-milk proves that she is wrong.

Example 2: She always considers her actions as correct and punishment is deserved by every child for misbehavior. She has a punishment for every childish 'depravity' whether individual or collective.

It was her habit, whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred; if all the children sinned collectively they were suddenly informed of a circus in a neighbouring town, a circus of unrivalled merit and uncounted elephants, to which, but for their depravity, they would have been taken that very day.

Example 3: She feels that it is correct to keep beautiful things under lock and key. 'A teapot fashioned like a china duck, out of whose open beak the tea was supposed to come' was in the lumber room while the children were given the 'dull and shapeless' nursery teapot.

B. Didactic

She is didactic and tries to 'teach proper or moral behavior in a way that is annoying or unwanted'². Religion as represented in the short story consists of sinning by the children and the Evil One³ tempting them to be disobedient. The word Devil (the supreme spirit of evil⁴) is in the vocabulary of Nicholas. Thus to teach proper behavior the Aunt uses religion in an unwanted manner.

Example 1: Not only does misbehavior get classified as 'sin' it generates a lot of moralistic discussion. "The *sin* of grabbing a frog from the garden and putting it into a bowl was enlarged on at great length"

Example 2: Nicholas states the following to the Aunt in the rain-water tank.

"You may be the **Evil One** tempting me to be disobedient. Aunt often tells me that the **Evil One** tempts me and that I always yield.

The repetitive use of the term 'the Evil One' shows how it is used to instill fear of sinning or misbehaving in the minds of the children.

But does it work? The Aunt's attempts to prevent improper behavior though the use of religion are shattered when Nicholas says,

"Oh, **Devil**, you have sold yourself!"

'Sold yourself' in the above line conveys that the Devil has betrayed his identity by revealing himself as tempting children to be disobedient. But note the way he addresses the Devil. It is full of delight not fear. Furthermore Nicholas states that he has been able to experience, 'an unusual sense of luxury in being able to talk to an aunt as though one was talking to the Evil One'.

2.2.2.2 Unimaginative

The Aunt is a 'woman of few ideas' though she thinks that she is wiser. Her weaknesses are indirectly conveyed to the reader through her of behaviour and thoughts. The most pleasurable outings for the children she devises consist of an expedition to the seaside or circus in a neighbouring town. These planned outings are so boring to Nicholas. His resourceful mind finds alternative ways of enjoying himself. She spent a long time in the gooseberry garden doing 'trivial gardening operations'. It took the whole period Nicholas spent in the lumber room for her to grow suspicious about his disappearance. Throughout that period she imagined that he was still trying to get in to the gooseberry garden.

For her 'wholesome' food for breakfast is the unappetizing 'bread-and-milk'. We can infer that bread-and-milk has been served continuously at breakfast as Nicholas rebels against the loathsome food by putting a frog in it. Within the limited scope of the Aunt's mind she could only picture the whitish, gooey, tasteless bread-and-milk as 'wholesome'. In contrast the author shows us what the children like: strawberry jam which is bright red, delicious and nutritious.

The lack of imagination in her resulted in failing to understand not only the psychological needs of children but also their behaviour.

2.2.2.3 Punishes through withholding enjoyment

Instead of giving love to Nicholas the Aunt took every opportunity to punish him. The other children too did not escape punishment. Her readiness to punish through withholding enjoyment turns her into an infuriating grown-up even in the eyes of the reader. For example after withholding the enjoyment of going on the expedition she punishes Nicholas further for being bold enough to point out that the other children would not enjoy the outing. Assuming that Nicholas would try to spend his time in the gooseberry garden she tries to withhold his enjoyment and commands Nicholas in an arrogant manner as seen in the following line.

"You are not to go into the gooseberry garden"
"Because you are in disgrace," said the aunt loftily.

¹ Adapted from https://www.google.lk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=Self-righteous

² Adapted from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/didactic>

³ The force in nature that governs and gives rise to wickedness and sin. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/evil+one>

⁴ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/devil>

But Nicholas artfully turns this punishment into a far better form of enjoyment in the lumber-room. The Aunt's form of punishment can be so petty as to deprive the children from having strawberry jam when there were four jars of it in the store cupboard.

These oppressive punishments are meant to make the children feel sorry for their childish pranks. She especially targets Nicholas as he seems to be the naughtiest and wants him to repent (regret and apologize) his 'sins'. But throughout the short story we do not see him regretting his actions which are often planned to provoke the aunt. Thus what the readers witness is that the Aunt's methods of making Nicholas stop his pranks and disobedience through fear of punishment is useless and impractical. Nicholas artfully turns punishment into enjoyment.

2.2.2.4 Pretentious and obsessed with punishment

Though the Aunt tries to instill moral values she is portrayed as a person who is devious. Though she considers herself and pretends to be a 'better' person she lies. While in the gooseberry garden she states '*I can see you all the time*' and Nicholas smiles as he is in the lumber-room. Thus not only does she lie, her lies are found out though her stupidity.

Her dishonesty is seen when she denies having strawberry jam in the store cupboard which is pointed out by Nicholas in the following extract.

"When we asked aunt for strawberry jam yesterday she said there wasn't any".

Then he goes on to say,

"I looked, and of course you know it's there".

Thus her lack of moral values in the form of deceit is proved by Nicholas.

Revenge is a negative characteristic we discover in the Aunt. She is obsessed with punishment. Her revengeful nature is conveyed when she is exposed as a liar. Her dishonesty too is shown again as she had decided not to give strawberry jam for tea when she tells Nicholas that they will get it as seen in the following conversation.

"Will there be strawberry jam for tea?" asked Nicholas innocently.

"Certainly there will be," said the aunt, privately resolving that Nicholas should have none of it.

In this instance too the Aunt does not set down the correct ethical values as she is proved as a liar by Nicholas. As she represents the older generation the author seems to convey that the moral pretentiousness in the Aunt could be extended as a characteristic of a majority in the adult world. Thus the adults are cautioned by Saki. Support comes from Weissbourd (2010)^[5] who based on the conclusions drawn from his research states that children learn ethical values by watching the actions of adults.

2.3 Stylistic devices

Saki uses many stylistic devices to make the short story *The Lumber-room* a powerful study of human behavior. It is a 'prose poem' where many techniques are used to add to its beauty and creativity. Some stylistic devices used by Saki are discussed below.

2.3.1 Juxtaposition

One stylistic device is the juxtaposition of the Adult's world depicted through the Aunt and Child's world depicted through Nicholas throughout the short story as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Juxtaposition of Adult's world and the child's world

Adult's world depicted through the Aunt	Child's world depicted through Nicholas
Lacks understanding of the deep psychological needs of a child. Emotionally cold, lacks the ability to love and be compassionate.	Imaginative, intelligent with an abundant sense of fun.
Considers themselves to be superior as they are 'wiser, and better people'.	Restricted and oppressed by adult control.
Is full of criticism, contempt towards childish pranks and often makes disapproving remarks.	Has the ability to retaliate through careful originality of planning.
Neglects to listen when important information is conveyed.	Taunts at the lack of attention to child communication.
Has a shallow outlook towards childhood pranks. Inflicts cruelty through a system of rewards and punishments.	Retains the power to escape through into a world of private fantasy where they can transcend their loneliness.
Privileged to set down rules of behavior and to punish for disobedience. Authoritative. Do not like to be challenged by the children.	Children are expected be obedient and submissive. Subjected to constant punishment and denied forms of enjoyment when disobedient.
Infuriating behavior. Lacks communication with the children. Do not like to be challenged by the children. Though moralizing lacks good values thus cannot set a good example. Lacks sensitivity to a child's physical and psychological needs.	Not the conventional, innocent and obedient portrayal of a child's world. They are sharp and quick-witted enough to outsmart adults. They are also sensitive and creative and have the ability to generate humour and fun.

2.3.2 Figures of speech

Multiple figures of speech used by Saki gives the short story a poetic quality. These stylistic devices make the characterization realistic.

2.3.2.1 Epithet⁵

The author uses many epithets to bring out the attitude of the Aunt especially towards Nicholas. According to his aunt Nicholas was trying to refuse breakfast on the *frivolous ground* that there is a frog in his bowl of bread-and-milk. The Aunt says that he was talking the '*veriest nonsense*'. Thus the aunt does not consider that Nicholas is serious about the claim. Later she finds out to be true. Thus true the use of the above epithets the author highlights a characteristic of the Aunt: she does not consider that listening to children is important. Epithets are used again to reveal not only the positive but also the negative characteristics of Nicholas. Inside the lumber room he is the sensitive dreamer conveyed by the epithets '*unimagined treasures, golden minutes, undreamed-of creatures*'. As Nicholas's reasoning states that he could be '*in disgrace and in a gooseberry garden at the same moment*' his face takes on an expression of *considerable obstinacy*. Thus the epithet suggests that stubbornness is weakness in the boy. The '*grim chuckle*' Nicholas gives after giving reasons for the expedition won't be a success conveys that he enjoys taunting the Aunt after outwitting her.

2.3.2.2 Periphrases⁶

The periphrases *the Evil One* and *older wiser and better people* are repeated in the text. *The Evil One* talks about the Devil in a roundabout way which seems more suitable for the children. The periphrasis '*older wiser and better people*' is used in an ironical manner to talk about the older generation.

2.3.2.3 Hyperbole

The hyperbole *the sin of taking a frog* is used by the author to illustrate the Aunt's stern methods of child rearing. The pranks of a child in her estimation are evil deeds.

2.3.2.4 Metaphors

The Aunt spends a long time in '*self-imposed sentry-duty*' in the gooseberry garden. The term *sentry duty* creates a vivid imagery how seriously she fulfils her responsibility to prevent Nicholas from entering the gooseberry garden. The term has associations with strict military regulations which are transferred to the Aunt. The phrase '*self-imposed*' too conveys that she finds such duties her obligation.

In the metaphor '*had leapt to the conclusion*' the word *leapt* conveys how quickly she makes decisions.

⁵ An adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned.

https://www.google.lk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=epithets+definition

⁶ A roundabout way of expressing something.

2.3.2.5 Biblical allusion

To strengthen the ironic effect many biblical allusions are used by the author: paradise, the Evil One and the term Devil are references found in the Bible.

2.3.2.6 Rhetorical question

The creative power of Nicholas is conveyed by the author through the following rhetorical questions.

But did the huntsman see, what Nicholas saw, that four galloping wolves were coming in his direction through the wood? There might be more than four of them hidden behind the trees, and in any case would the man and his dogs be able to cope with the four wolves if they made an attack?

To find answers to these questions '*Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene*'. His powerful imagination continues to find the answers later in the evening at the tea table amidst a frozen silence.

2.3.2.7 Repetition

Repetition is used by Saki to heighten the ironic effect created by him. The repetition of '*wholesome*' is ironic as the children do not find the food palatable. The term '*Older and wiser and better people*' is repeated but it creates irony as the Aunt who belongs to the older generation is stupid and is a habitual liar.

2.3.2.8 Exclamatory sentences

Exclamatory sentences are used especially to depict the enjoyment Nicholas gets from beautiful things.

'How dull and shapeless the nursery teapot seemed in comparison! And such birds!'

Then again Saki uses an exclamatory sentence when Nicholas concludes gleefully the Aunt is the Evil One.

'Oh, Devil, you have sold yourself!'

The joy in outwitting the Aunt is conveyed through the use of exclamation.

2.3.2.9 Symbolism

The title of the story is "The Lumber Room". It is not only a suitable title it also carries a powerful symbolic value. It symbolizes the inner self of a child. A child's need for beauty and sources which can trigger their imagination generating deep psychological pleasure is powerfully symbolized by the lumber room.

2.4 Language

Saki's use of language is very economic. There are no descriptions of the physical appearances of even the main characters: Nicholas and the Aunt. The language associated with brings out their inherent characteristics and is used as a device by the author to show his attitude towards them.

2.4.1 Language associated with the Aunt

The Aunt uses imperatives very often in her speech as shown by the extracts below.

*You are to come out of this at once.
Go and fetch the ladder.
I told you not to, now I tell that you may.*

Thus her tone is always commanding showing that she enjoys having authority over the children. This commanding nature of the Aunt is heightened by the use of military words introduced to her vocabulary such as *expedition* and *sentry-duty*. The language associated with her denies her a gentle, maternal quality. Additionally as seen in the following extract her tone conveys her arrogance.

'Because you are in disgrace,' said the aunt loftily.

Her angry voice is raised in '*shrill vociferation*' lacking the control an adult should have when children disobey. The Aunt's speech is heavy with religious chastise. Nicholas says that the Aunt,

'often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield.'

Thus the religious terms with negative connotations '*the Evil One*', yielding to his temptation and '*sin*' are found in The Aunt's speech. It seems that she is using religion as a weapon to make the children, especially Nicholas, obedient.

Language associated with the Aunt shows that the author's attitude towards grown-ups is cynical. He is critical and very often ironic in his description of the character of the aunt. Irony is generated as the older generation who should be mature enough to understand the physical and psychological needs of a child deprives these needs through their arrogance, narrow mindedness and lack of sympathy.

2.4.2 Language associated with Nicholas

The fact that he disliked and refused to bow down to her authority and wanted to distance himself from the Aunt is shown through the following extracts.

*'His cousins' aunt, who insisted, by an unwarranted stretch of imagination, in styling herself his aunt'
'the aunt-by-assertion'
'the soi-disant'⁷ aunt*

The above extracts suggest that in Nicholas's view point the Aunt is a self-appointed to the position of caretaker and self-declares that she has authority over all children under her care. The resentment Nicholas feels towards the Aunt is strongly conveyed through language use of the author.

Language is also used to bring out the stubbornness and the rebel in Nicholas.

When Nicholas informs that Bobby won't enjoy himself at the expedition because his boots were too tight the Aunt sternly asks.

"Why didn't he tell me they were hurting?"

He points out her lack of attention to information given by children and stubbornly repeats.

"He told you twice, but you weren't listening. You often don't listen when we tell you important things."

The words the *cheerfully*, *gleefully* and *grim chuckle* shows that when Nicholas rebels against his aunt he obtains a large sense of satisfaction and even malicious contentment.

But the author powerfully uses language associated with Nicholas to bring out his impish quality making the reader empathize with him. The language is humorous and creates powerful imagery.

'Nicholas made one or two sorties into the front garden, wriggling his way with obvious stealth of purpose towards one or other of the doors'.

When the Aunt states that she can see Nicholas 'in the gooseberry garden,

'It was probably the first time for twenty years that anyone had smiled in that lumber-room'.

The reader shares his amusement at such an obvious lie coming from an adult. Furthermore the lyrical description of his experience in the lumber-room exposes his sensitivity and powerful reaction to beauty. We see the inner self of Nicholas and assume that his outer behaviour is a reaction to the harshness he has to encounter from the Aunt.

2.5 Themes

The short story carries multiple themes. Some of the main themes are discussed below.

2.5.1 Generation gap

This is the distancing of two generations due to inability to understand needs of each other and express their feelings. These needs and emotions are based on the values and preferences they have. The Aunt who represents the older generation is unable to understand a simple feeling as the food preference of a child. As a self-righteous and moralistic person she considers herself to be right in all her decisions and actions. She misuses the power she has over the young children. She loses her temper when she is ridiculed and outwitted. She lacks the aesthetic ability to respond to beauty. The older generation as represented by the Aunt assumes that a child's needs are all physical: food, expeditions etc. But what are missing are praise, smiles, love and attention.

On the other hand the younger generation represented by Nicholas is always out to find opportunities to make her angry. He has a remarkable insight into the Aunt's character, especially her weaknesses. All communication he has with his aunt is a not only a verbal but also a psychological battle of wills. The very things a sensitive child like Nicholas finds pleasurable are hidden in the lumber room forbidden to all children. The Aunt does not comprehend that the young value new experiences.

Through highlighting the tension between generations Saki raises doubts on whether they can have any harmony in their relationships. He seems to say that the adults have to understand and have more empathy towards the behavior of children. Furthermore Saki is critical of the superior attitude of the adults.

⁷ Self-proclaiming, self-styled and supposedly

2.5.2 Innovativeness of children

Nicholas invents a situation where he avoids eating the 'wholesome bread-and-milk' and he does so knowing that he would not escape punishment. Nicholas is not saddened by his punishments. Instead the 'skilled tactician' in him finds a way of obtaining maximum pleasure through deceiving the Aunt.

The highest moment of Nicholas's inventiveness is exposed to the reader during his creation of the story in the tapestry. The ability to make the story come alive and the argument raised to arrive at the end bear evidence for his fertile mind. His innovative nature is yet again seen when the Aunt seeks his help to come out of the rain- water tank. The innovative manner he argues and proves why he should not help the Aunt is evidence of his intelligence.

The innovativeness of children is further heightened by the fact that Saki portrays adults as unimaginative.

2.5.3 Misuse of religion

Throughout the story we witness negative religious terminology such as *sin*, *Devil*, *the Evil One* recur. These words are used to instill a fear against misbehaviour in children. Nicholas, the most disobedient of the children, states that,

'Aunt often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield.'

Nicholas uses a pretended fear of temptation by *the Evil One* when he says that,

'This time I'm not going to yield.'

Analyzing the statement the words 'this time' clearly suggest that he has been tempted by *the Evil One* in many prior instances. Though religion is used to instill fear what we witness is that it was not effective.

Additionally Saki ironically makes the adults violate one moral taught by religion: truthfulness. Within the short space of the story we find the Aunt lying thrice. Once about not having strawberry jam, the other when she says that she can see Nicholas in the gooseberry garden and thirdly when she says that 'Certainly there will be' strawberry jam for tea as she privately resolves that 'Nicholas should have none of it'.

Thus not only do adults use religion to instill fear in children they violate religious teachings setting a bad example.

III. DEVELOPMENT PSYCHOLOGY OF A CHILD AND THE UPBRINGING OF NICHOLAS

3.1 Literature on child rearing

Many scholars (Baumrind, 1978^[6]; McKay, 2006^[7]; Spera, 2005^[8]; Weissbourd, 2010^[9]) based on the findings of their research state that there is a strong link between the way a child is raised or child rearing styles and the effects these styles have on children. Martin (ibid), claims that child rearing is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Terry (2004)^[10] posits that parenting styles can foretell a child's outcome in areas such as psychosocial development, social competence and academic performance.

A parenting style according to Kordi & Baharudin, (2010)^[11] is the way parents rear their children through attempts to control

their behavior, discipline and influence them. Many researchers (Erden & Uredi, 2008^[12]; Terry, 2004^[13]) state that parenting styles can affect a variety of factors including self-esteem, academic performance, and mental health of a child.

Baumrind (1978)^[14] and, more recently, McKay (2006)^[15] have identified four main parenting styles in early child development: Authoritative, Authoritarian, Uninvolved and Permissive. Of the four this discussion is restricted to Authoritarian and Permissive which are at the positive and negative ends respectively in the continuum in styles of parenting; and Authoritative which is the optimal style of parenting.

3.2 Styles of child rearing

3.2.1 Permissive child rearing

Sociologists distinguish that permissive or indulgent parenting which is low in control and high in responsiveness to the demands of the child is considered as more popular in middle-class families.

- i. The children are allowed to regulate their own behavior.
- ii. The parents can be exceptionally lenient and immediately fulfil a child's needs and requests. (Svenkerud, 2008)^[16]
- iii. They are tolerant and give in to children's impulses and do not demand mature behavior in the process toward self-regulation. (Dornbusch et al., 1987)^[17]
- iv. They use minimal punishment. (Buri, 1991)^[18]
- v. As a result children who undergo permissive parenting evidence a lack of social responsibility and independence. (Dornbusch et al., 1987)^[19]

3.2.2 Authoritative child rearing

According to Baumrind (1978)^[20] this is the 'just right' style of child rearing which exhibits the following characteristics.

- i. Parents are assertive but not intrusive or restrictive. They monitor their children and give clear standards of behaviour. (Baumrind, 1991)^[21]
- ii. Recognition is given to the rights of parents as well as the children. (Dornbusch et al., 1987)^[22]
- iii. This child rearing style uses positive reinforcement⁸ and infrequent punishment.
- iv. They are sensitive to a child's feelings and capabilities.
- v. There is a give-and-take atmosphere involved in child rearer-child communication and both control and support are balanced.
- vi. The children form secure attachments and positive self-concepts.

⁸ Positive reinforcement works by presenting a motivating/reinforcing stimulus to the child after the desired behavior is exhibited, making the behavior more likely to happen in the future.

The following is an example of positive reinforcement:

A mother gives her son praise (positive stimulus) for doing homework (behavior).

Source: <http://bcotb.com/the-difference-between-positiveneegative-reinforcement-and-positiveneegative-punishment/>

- vii. Authoritative parenting styles were broadly associated with higher levels of children's school achievement. (Kordi & Baharudin, 2010)^[23]

- vii. Parents tend to be bitter or unresponsive toward children. (Svenkerud, 2008)^[26]
- viii. Children with Authoritarian parenting styles end up with behavioral problems. (Baumrind, 1991)^[27]

3.2.3 Authoritarian child rearing

This is the most negative form of child rearing. Some features of the style are as follows.

- i. This style consists of a rigid set of rules and expectations that are strictly enforced and require rigid obedience.
- ii. Watchful intrusive monitoring of behavior is evidenced. (Baumrind, 1991)^[24]
- iii. Corrective disciplinary styles are very often used to endorse future obedience. (Buri, 1991)^[25]
- iv. There is usually no explanation of punishment except that the child is in trouble for breaking a rule.
- v. "Because I said so" is a typical response to a child's question of authority.
- vi. This child rearing style disregards children's feelings and emotions as important.

3.3 The child rearing process of the Aunt

Analyzing the child rearing process in the context of Nicholas and his aunt her style definitely falls under Authoritarian child rearing. In the absence of Nicholas's parents she is his guardian cum main caregiver and thus is responsible for his upbringing.

According to Weissbourd (ibid)^[28] lack of self-awareness and confused priorities in the child rearer can dangerously undermine a child's development. Furthermore Spera (ibid)^[29] posits that a parenting style is fundamentally dependent on the overall emotional climate in the home. Both of the above finding are applicable to the negativity evidenced in the child rearing process the readers witness in *The Lumber Room* by Saki.

Table 2: Analysis of the Aunt's mode of child rearing

The Aunt's mode of child rearing in the context of Nicholas	
Anti-Authoritative	Pro Authoritarian
No positive reinforcement is seems to be given by the Aunt but punishment seems to be frequent.	The Aunt has a rigid set of rules and expectations that are strictly enforced and require rigid obedience.
The Aunt is not sensitive to Nicholas's feelings and capabilities.	Punishment is very often used to endorse future obedience.
No give-and-take atmosphere is involved in the Nicholas - Aunt communication condition. The Aunt always wants to control Nicholas rather than support his needs.	No explanation of punishment except that the child is in trouble for breaking a rule.
Nicholas seems to be unable to form secure attachments with even the other members of the family.	When Nicholas questions the authority of the Aunt very often the response does not provide a reason but he has to obey because she 'said so'.

Table 2 above illustrates that the upbringing Nicholas receives is anti-Authoritative and pro Authoritarian.

Thus the one day exposure the readers get to Nicholas's life under the rule of the Aunt identifies many reasons for his behavior. Though the Aunt is careful to satisfy his physical needs she lacks insight into his psyche. Furthermore the normal psychological need of a child to form strong attachments too is unfulfilled in Nicholas.

3.4 The Attachment Theory

Theorists on childhood personal development, such as Ainsworth (1967)^[30] and Bowlby (1969)^[31], state that forming strong attachments is an innate and instinctive need in any child. Bowlby (ibid) structured his Attachment Theory based on the findings of research conducted on the development psychology of children. Ainsworth (ibid) who conducted research on attachment behavior states that during childhood personal development a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver is critical. She further states that attachment behavior very often is demonstrated by insecure children. This insecurity is generated due to a presently absent caregiver. The child hopes to establish or re-establish a similar attachment to a caregiver who is present in his current existence. She further claims that children with weak attachments to a

present caregiver exhibit particular behaviors that are effective in attracting the attention of their caregiver.

Applying the Attachment Theory to Nicholas's upbringing by the Aunt, though they are within the same physical environment there is no positive emotional attachment between them. Weak attachments according to Ainsworth (ibid) produce caregiver attention gaining behavior in children. Nicholas's connection with his aunt is more negative than a weak attachment. During one day the reader witnesses an ongoing battle of wills: Nicholas's will against the Aunt's. Thus it is clearly depicted that Nicholas is unable to find a substitute for his presently absent caregiver/s in his aunt. This makes him create situations not only to grab the attention of his aunt through mischievous deeds but also to enjoy his victory in the battle of wills.

Critics of Attachment Theory state that in non-Western societies the idea of a child being intimately attached to a single caregiver is rather alien and child-rearing duties are more evenly distributed among a broader group of people. In Sri Lanka, an Asian society, in the past the institution of family was an extended model. Within the locale of a household, members of the extended family such as grandparents provided a mechanism where child rearing was a shared responsibility. These extended members very often provide a broader group of people to form strong attachments. But at present within the institution of family

in Sri Lanka an accelerated creation of nuclear families is witnessed.

Thus attachment formation very often is restricted to parents. This makes the violation of emotional and attachment needs in the upbringing of Nicholas in *The Lumber Room* an eye opener for contemporary parents, most of them with busy professional life styles, who are bringing up children within nuclear families.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Lumber Room falls into the genre of social satire⁹. Saki uses satire to ridicule the actions of the adults in their role as caregivers to children through exposing, disapproving and scorning their weaknesses and stupidity. The modes of child rearing in the story are not only satirized but is also criticized. Though the children are provided with all physical comforts they are deprived of love and their psychological needs are not understood. The universal and all time theme of the generation gap is explored by the author and he who has undergone an Authoritarian style of upbringing himself suggests that the adults should change their attitude towards childish misbehavior.

But is the author unbiased in his depiction of character? Is the Aunt all bad? She is a woman who has the responsibility of taking care of four small kids who are not her own. One of them: Nicholas epitomizes a child who rises against adult authority. Very often he works hard to put the Aunt into humiliating situations. The other children or the servants witness her humiliation. Thus is Nicholas all fun and imaginative? Or does he enjoy the Aunt's humiliation. Note that he leaves her in the rain- water tank to be rescued after thirty-five minutes by a kitchen maid.

Thus in the truceless battle between the Aunt and Nicholas he comes out as the winner. What we witness is that the author strategically points out that all children are not the same. Bobby 'the quite uninteresting younger brother' of Nicholas continues to wear the 'too tight boots' in silence. He is classified as uninteresting due to his passive acceptance of adult authority. Nicholas on the other hand boldly uses differing tactics to fight against adult authority. The two brothers portray two different forms of child behavior. Saki seems suggests that when a child is sensitive, creative, intelligent and has a rebellious nature special care should be used by the adults to understand his deep psychological needs. Thus child rearing per se is a daunting challenge to care givers and the young readers, most of them from a middle class background, who are critically analyzing *The Lumber Room* will assess and most probably appreciate the child rearing they receive.

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⁹ In this context social satire is a piece of literature that reflects on a (while criticizing or poking fun at a) specific group of people and certain lifestyles, morals, and beliefs of that group.

Adapted from http://www.answers.com/Q/What_is_social_satire