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English 1102

22 September 2011

The Lion and Clock

“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” by Katherine Porter, focuses on the last day of an elderly woman's life whose memories consume her as she faces death. Granny Weatherall, the main character of the story, has been internally disturbed by the betrayal of her first love, George, who left her standing alone at the altar on their wedding day. As she lies dying, Granny reflects on her long life and although she displays confidence and certainty on the outside, internally she lacks the courage to trust people. This quality was taken away from her by George on their wedding day. Because of this loss, Granny dies with the mistaken belief that she has been “jilted” not only by George, but also by God.

As Granny lies on her death bed and reflects about her life experiences, it becomes apparent that she will die an unsatisfied woman. This is evident on page 209, where Granny is angrily ranting about George and abruptly states, “Oh, God, no there was something else besides the house and the man and the children . . . something not given back” (Porter). These words demonstrate that Granny is still missing something despite having a husband, children and a home. In light of this, the idea is suggested that George took something away from Granny. Though not explicitly stated in the story, it can be inferred that what was taken from Granny was her courage, as symbolized by a possession she mentions at the beginning of the story.

The symbolism that connects Granny's material possessions to the courage she has lost is

evident at the beginning of the story, where Granny discusses “tomorrow” and describes how “there was nothing to trouble about” because her household-items are “clean and folded away” (206). One of the items she mentions, however, stands out from the rest, and that is a lion that sits on top of a bronze clock. Granny states that this item requires more maintenance than the rest because of the “dust [it] could collect in twenty-four hours!” (206). Viewing this statement through a metaphorical lens, the lion represents courage, as a lion is often a symbol of bravery and courage in many cultural contexts. Hence, the lion and clock reflect the very thing that George took away from her on her wedding day: her *courage*. It is understandable that Granny would have a loss of trust in people after being betrayed during an event as important as her wedding day. Furthermore, her courage is always in need of cleaning just as the lion is in constant need of being dusted off. The lion sits on top of the bronze clock, drawing attention to both the concept of time (clock) and courage (the lion). This concept may highlight her loss of courage over time - an idea that can be explained by Granny's basic life events. Prior to her wedding, Granny had the courage to trust people, and after she was jilted at the altar, this quality vanished. However, it cannot be for certain that Granny could trust people prior to her wedding, for she may have lacked this quality earlier in her life. Hence, the idea of her “losing” courage is plausible but not certain. Nonetheless, the dusty lion *does* symbolize the imperfections in her ability to trust people, and it relates to the most conflicting and troubling dilemma Granny faces as she approaches death: she has lost her faith and trust in God.

Throughout Porter's story, Granny makes continual references to God by asking for advice or expressing her gratitude for Him (207, 211). From these references, it is clear that she is a believer in God. For instance, it is evident that God plays a role in her decision-making and

reasoning processes, as seen on page 210, where Granny is doing some last-minute thinking before she passes away and says, “Oh, my dear Lord, do wait a minute,” as if she is having a conversation with God. While there are many references that illustrate Granny's religious commitment, she makes her most important reference to faith and God on page 207. Prior to this, Granny ponders her purpose in life. After giving it some thought, she tells a story that is very metaphorical, in which dense fog rises over a valley and “marches across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts” (207). As the fog draws closer, she tells her children that it is time to go inside and “light the lamps” (207). This symbol reveals a very important characteristic of Granny. During Hanukah, those of the Jewish faith light a candle of the Menorah each of the eight days of Hanukah to celebrate the “re-dedication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem following the Jewish victory over the Syrian-Greeks in 165 B.C.E.” (Pelaia). In Hebrew, Hanukah means “*dedication*” (Pelaia). Granny's reference to lighting the lamps with her children to save them from the ghosts symbolizes their “dedication” to God. This solidifies that at this instant, Granny has a strong faith in God. Her faith is further supported by the gracious statement, “Without Thee, my God, I could never have done it” she makes after telling the story about lighting the lamps (207). This fact is important, because as the story continues, Granny's faith progressively dwindles and weakens, and ultimately “dies” hand-in-hand with her.

The clearest indicator of Granny's decline in faith and trust in God is seen by the transformation of the color blue throughout the story. The color blue is often associated with faith and loyalty. Throughout the story, the resonance of the color blue changes and fades, and that is symbolic of the decline in Granny's faith. As Porter's story continues, the blue becomes

less vibrant and turns grey. This transition begins during Granny's lamp-lighting story, where her children "watched the flame rise and settle in a blue curve" (207). Granny's trust in God is strong again at this point and the color of the flame is solid blue. However, shortly thereafter, the blue color then begins to lose its color and fade.

Later in the story, Granny's eyelids "waver and let in blue-gray light like tissue-paper" (208) and blue light comes from Cornelia's lampshades (209). Granny clarifies the light as "no sort of light at all, just frippery" (209). These two textual references suggest that Granny's faith has diminished dramatically as have the fundamental properties of the color blue. The color blue also appears right before Granny's death, signifying that at that moment, God has come to take her to Heaven. However, Granny is unsuccessful in her confrontation with the All-Mighty, as evidenced by the blue light that eventually "fluttered and dwindled" (211). At this instant, God's presence in Granny's life is taking its last breath too, just as she is.

All of this leads to the conclusion that, contrary to what she believes, Granny actually jilts God in the end. Granny does the identical thing that George once did to her so many years ago. She believes God has "jilted" her, as suggested by her last words, "there is nothing more cruel than this" (211). However, Granny's denial of what happened sixty years ago at the altar prevented her from rebuilding her ability to trust people, as symbolized by the collective dust atop the lion. As a result, she was unable to keep the light burning blue from the beginning of her life to the end. This inability ultimately kills her in the end, and leaves her with no other choice but to dwell in her own sorrow and "blow out the light" (211).

Works Cited

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