

Trials Bring Strength: Psychoanalytic Criticism in *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*

Ellen Weatherall lies dying at age 80 after having lived a full life, but she still struggles with coming to terms with the jilting she received sixty years ago from her fiancé George. Eleanore Britton, in her article “An Approach to ‘The Jilting of Granny Weatherall’” suggests that Katherine Porter’s short story, is about Ellen being “jilted” again only this time “by the heavenly bridegroom who does not appear at her death to receive her soul” (39). Although some might think this story is about Ellen being jilted again, I argue that it is about Ellen’s confrontation with suppressed pain of abandonment so that she can finally feel like she is the master of her own destiny.

Ellen (Granny) had dreams and expectations of how she wanted her life to go. She wanted it to proceed the way she had planned. She wanted to be able to “tuck in the edges orderly” (Porter 696). She hadn’t expected the jilting that left her standing at the altar sixty years earlier. Granny remembered the day as having a fresh breeze blowing, with no “threats” in it. Up until then her life had been orderly. The jilting was the dark smoke that “crept up . . . into the bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows” (Porter 698). She had no control over the situation. Everything she had planned had taken an evil turn for the worse. In order to compensate for that pain and gain back the control she felt she’d lost, she meticulously ordered her life to prove to herself that she was in control of things. This would give her the peace she sought.

Granny had placed everything in her pantry in orderly rows. Even her hair brushes and tonic bottles were “sitting straight on the white embroidered linen” (Porter 696). These things she could control. She thought that by taking charge of the things she could control she might be able to take charge of the things she could not control. She thought “it was good to have everything clean and folded away” (Porter 696), but she had also “folded away” or suppressed her painful feelings along with everything else. Now, on her death bed, was the last chance she’d have to resolve these feelings.

Granny’s realization that she needs to come to terms with her feelings comes when she tells herself not to let “wounded vanity” get the best of her (Porter 698). At this moment she is actually honest with herself in admitting the source of her problem. This admission helps her to change her perspective into one where she can see how that trial has strengthened her throughout her life.

George may have been her first major loss, but she suffered many after that. She lost Hapsy, her youngest child. She lost John when the children were very young. John picked her up from the pain of losing George, but when she lost John, she had no one to help her. She fenced 100 acres digging the post holes herself. She raised all the children, delivered other women’s babies, nursed sick cattle—all by herself. She didn’t let her circumstances get the best of her, and she admitted “That changed a woman” (Porter 697). At this point Ellen finally starts to come to terms with how her loss has blessed her. She recognizes the strength she’s received from overcoming her trials.

Finally, having resolved things within herself, in her mind Granny tells Cornelia that she at last wants her to find George and tell him that she forgot him. What she is really saying is that because of the hurt he caused her she has become a better woman, a stronger woman. In fact, when she says, “I wouldn’t have exchanged my husband for anybody except St. Michael himself, and you may tell him (George) that for me with a thank you in the bargain” (Porter 700), she essentially is thanking George for being the catalyst that led her to become a much stronger woman—one that was the master of her own destiny.

An article in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* points out that when God refuses to give Granny the sign she expects at her death that it brings back all the memories of her first bitter disappointment (139), maybe so, but this time she is stronger and master of her own destiny because she is the one who blows out the light.

Works Cited

- Britton, Eleanore M. "An Approach to 'The Jilting of Granny Weatherall'." *The English Journal*. Vol. 76, No. 4 (Apr., 1987), pp. 35-39. National Council of Teachers of English. Web. 13 Nov. 2013.
- Porter, Katherine Anne. "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." *The Story and Its Writer*. Ed. Ann Charters. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1988. 821-830. Print.
- "Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980)." *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 233. Detroit: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2010. 103-270. *Literature Criticism Online*. Gale. Brigham Young University - Idaho. Web. 14 November 2013.