The Jilting of Granny Weatherall Study Guide

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall by Katherine Anne Porter

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Introduction

Katherine Anne Porter's story, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall1' was first published in *transition* magazine in February, 1929. The story, concerning a dying woman's memory of being left at the altar on her wedding day and her current fear of being jilted in a similar manner by God, was subsequently collected in Porter's first published book, *Flowering Judas*. She has said that the character of Granny Weatherall was based on her own grandmother and that the story was the first of many of her works to be inspired by her Texas roots. Porter's often fragile health may have also influenced the story. In 1918, she nearly died of influenza; funeral arrangements had been made and her obituary written. In her autobiography, Porter stated that the experience made her different from others: "I had what the Christians call the 'beatific vision,' and the Greeks called the 'happy day,' the happy vision just before death." Such experience may have led her to explore that moment of death in her fiction, a moment in which Granny Weatherall feels that her body is "a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up." Nevertheless, the story has remained popular since its publication for the complexities and ambiguities inherent in its stream-of-consciousness narrative and for its carefully drawn portrait of a Southern matriarch confronting the sum total of her life.

Author Biography

Katherine Anne Porter was born in Indian Creek, Texas, in 1890. Her mother died when she was two, and her family moved to Austin where she and her four siblings were raised by their paternal grandmother. When she was eleven, Porter's grandmother died and she was sent to convent schools, first in Texas, and then in Louisiana. At sixteen she ran away from the school's stifling environment and got married—her first of four trips to the altar. The union ended in divorce three years later, and Porter, who called herself a "roving spirit," found work in various cities as it pleased her.

First she moved to Chicago, where she was a journalist and movie extra; then Denver, Colorado, where she worked as a drama critic for the *Rocky Mountain News*; and then New York City. At this time, when she was only twenty-eight, she suffered a near-fatal attack of influenza that caused her hair to turn white. The permanent effect became one of her trademarks and also the basis for her novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider,* In 1920 she moved to Mexico and became involved in a coup attempt to overthrow the president. The social situation of Mexico became the basis for her first published story, "Maria Concepcion," and for many years, Porter claimed she understood Mexico more dian any other place she had lived.

Flowering Judas, her first collection of fiction, was published in 1930 and was comprised of stories that had previously appeared in various literary magazines. Porter's well-known story "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" was included in this collection. The book earned her a Guggenheim fellowship which afforded her the means to travel through Europe extensively. On a cruise to Germany in 1932 she met Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering, who along with the other diverse passengers inspired her only novel, *Ship of Fools*. She stayed in Germany for a year before travelling to Paris where she lived for four years, becoming one of the many expatriate American writers in the city, whose booksellers and publishers created a hospitable climate for the literary community before World War II.

Back in the United States in 1936, Porter lectured and served as a writer-in-residence at many universities. With the success of *Ship of Fools* in 1962, Porter retired from academic life and continued to write from her home in College Park, Maryland. Her last book, *The Never-Ending Wrong* was inspired by the Sacco and Vanzetti murder trial, in which two Italian political radicals were executed despite widespread belief of their innocence. Porter died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1980 at the age of ninety.

Plot Summary

The setting for' "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" is the bedroom where Granny Weatherall is dying, though most of the action occurs in Granny's head. Told as a stream-of-consciousness monologue, "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" is the story of the last day in the eighty-year-old woman's life. In her final hours with her surviving children around her bed, Granny Weatherall reconsiders her life and ponders her impending death. Almost against her will, her thoughts return to an incident that occurred more than sixty years earlier: She was left standing alone at the altar when her fiance George jilted her.

Porter gradually reveals the details of the jilting through Granny Weatherall's fragmented recollections. In Granny Weatherall's semi-conscious state, the past mingles with the present and people and objects take on new forms and identities. After the doctor leaves her alone, Granny Weatherall takes stock of her life, taking pleasure in the thought "that a person could spread out the plan of life and tuck the edges in orderly." But it is not long before she finds "death in her mind and it felt clammy and unfamiliar." The presence of death in her thoughts causes her to recall an earlier time when she thought she was dying and how she had spent too much time preparing for it. This time she considers "all the food she had cooked, and all the clothes she had cut and sewed, and all the gardens she had made" and declares herself satisfied. She imagines asking her late husband, "Well, I didn't do so badly, did I?"

Like an unwelcome guest, the memory of the day when she was jilted interrupts Granny Weatherall's reflections. As she rests against her pillow she is transported back to the day when "she has put on the white veil and set out the white cake for a man" who never arrived. Although "for sixty years she had prayed against remembering him," she decides now as her children hover around her that she wants to settle things with George, the truant bridegroom. What she wants is to even their accounts, to tell him "I got my husband just the same and my children and my house just like any other woman." The memory of that day "when the cake was not cut, but thrown out and wasted" is so powerful that sixty years later she seems to relive the moment. Her memory recalls when " the whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away."

The border between past and present, living and dead, becomes even more blurred in the final pages of the story and the final minutes of Granny Weatherall's life. While the priest gives her last rights, Granny slips closer to death and the sights and sounds in the room mingle with her memories. When she grasps her son's thumb, she realizes this is the moment of death. As "the blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain," Granny asks God for "asign," some reassurance about the afterlife. But "for the second time there was no sign." Granny Weatherall is jilted once again in a betrayal that is so monumental that it makes the first incident seem insignificant. "She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away."

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Granny Weatherall lies in her bed as Doctor Harry examines her. She considers him far too young to be a real doctor. Granny Weatherall scornfully tells him to take his schoolbooks and leave because there is nothing wrong with her. He feels her forehead and tells her that if she is a good girl she will be on her feet again soon. Granny Weatherall takes offense at being called a girl and tells the doctor that it is wrong to speak to an eighty year old woman that way. She reminds him to respect his elders. He responds by calling her "Missy" and warns her to stay in bed until she is well. Granny again claims that she is fine. Her bones feel loose and Doctor Harry appears to be floating around the bed, but she refuses to admit that she is ill. Instead, she tells him that he should not let her daughter, Cornelia, lead him on about the condition of her health. She says that she pays her own bills and refuses to spend her money on nonsense.

As the doctor leaves her room, Granny Weatherall feels too weak to wave goodbye. It irritates her to hear him discuss her condition with Cornelia. In her anger, she wishes that she could still spank her daughter. A moment later, Cornelia enters the room and asks Granny if she wants anything, but the older woman tells her to go away. Granny feels very tired after the examination. She decides that she will rest now, but she will have a lot of work to do tomorrow. Her thoughts drift to a box in the attic that contains letters from George and John, and her letters to them both. Tomorrow she will take care of the letters. She does not want her children to find them and see how silly she acted after she dies.

As Granny lies in bed, she ponders her imminent death. The idea of death feels unfamiliar, despite all the time she has spent preparing for it. Twenty years ago, when she was sixty years old, she had thought she was going to die. She felt old and finished, so she made a series of trips to see her children for the last time. When she didn't die, she stopped focusing on her mortality for a while. She doesn't believe she will die this time either. Contemplating death makes her remember her father. He had lived to be 102 years old and drank a hot toddy on his last birthday. She calls for her daughter and asks for a hot toddy to irritate her. Cornelia is kind, but does not get the drink. It infuriates Granny to hear Cornelia tell her husband that she is getting childish and they have to humor her. She is tempted to go to her own home where no one can call her old.

Granny's thoughts drift to her life. She thinks that she was a better housekeeper and did more work than Cornelia when she was younger. Her children always asked for her advice. She wishes she could return to the days when the children were young. It was a hard life, but she did a good job cooking, cleaning and sewing for them. She fantasizes about seeing her deceased husband, John, again and showing him how well she has done for herself. Yet, John may not want her if he were still alive. All of life's trials have

made her a different woman. She recalls sitting up nights with sick horses, sick farm hands and sick children. Granny wants him to know that she lost few of those that she cared for. He would have understood her life in those terms. Reflecting on her life makes her want to get to work again, but she suddenly forgets what she was working on and begins to hallucinate. She sees a fog moving toward her house. Her mind floats into the past, making old memories seem as if they are happening right now. She calls the children inside for the night. She tells the children not to waste fruit this year. It is wasting life to waste good food. Granny returns to the present, feeling very tired.

Later, Granny's mind drifts to the day she had put on a white veil and set out a white cake, but her groom did not come. It was hell. For sixty years she had tried to forget him and the pain of being jilted at the altar. Ellen had told her that plenty of girls get jilted. She shouldn't let her wounded vanity get the best of her. Lying in bed, Granny tries to keep the light out of her eyes. The old woman does not realize that Cornelia has entered the room until she feels a cold washcloth on her face. Cornelia's face looks swollen and Granny tries to tell her to go wash her own face, but Cornelia doesn't seem to hear her. The younger woman's mouth seems to be making strange movements. Doctor Harry has returned. Granny is confused, thinking that he just left five minutes ago, but Cornelia tells her that he hasn't been there since this morning. Doctor Harry compliments Mrs. Weatherall, saying that he has never seen her look so young and happy. Granny responds that she will never be young again, but she would be happy if everyone would just let her die in peace. The doctor and Cornelia don't answer her, though she thinks she has spoken loudly. The doctor gives her a shot. Granny nonsensically asks Cornelia about sugar ants in her bed.

Granny Weatherall wants to see Hapsy. In her mind, she travels through rooms until she finds the child. Hapsy melts and becomes a shadow. The child asks where Granny has been and tells her that she hasn't changed at all. Just as she is about to kiss Hapsy, Cornelia interrupts to ask if she can get her mother anything. Granny's thoughts continue to wander. She thinks that she would like to see George, the groom who left her at the altar. She wants him to know that she did find a husband and had a good house and children. She got back everything he took away from her and more. Suddenly, she becomes confused and her breathing starts to frighten her. Agony fills her body. She knows that the time has come.

The priest has arrived. Granny feels good about her soul. She knows that a few saints will clear a path to God for her. She has felt this way since the day George jilted her. The bottom of her world had collapsed, but God kept her from falling. The room around her looks like a picture. She thinks the priest is Doctor Harry. She tries to speak to him, but they don't understand her. Suddenly, Granny is in a horse cart with a man that she recognizes by his hands. She is aware that Father Connolly is murmuring in Latin and tickling her feet. Faces drift above her. Her other children have arrived. Granny knows that this her death, and she is surprised by it. There are so many things she wanted to do first. Cornelia should get her jewelry, and she needs to discuss her land. Cornelia begins to sob. Granny tells her, "I'm not going, Cornelia. I'm taken by surprise. I can't go."

She feels her heart sinking, as if there is no bottom to death. Cornelia's lampshade is like a flicker of light in the center of her brain. Granny is amazed as her body becomes a deep shadow in endless darkness. She wants God to give her a sign, but there isn't one. Again, she has no bridegroom. This new grief consumes her, and all of her other sorrows disappear. Granny thinks there is nothing crueler and she will never forget it. She stretches herself out with a breath and blows out the light.

Analysis

The narrative of this short story by Katherine Anne Porter is told in the third person, yet it seems to be a first person narrative because it is told strictly from the point of view of Granny Weatherall. The story seamlessly switches back and forth between Granny's view of the present and her recollections of the past. Granny's understanding of the present is altered by her unnamed medical condition. She has a limited recognition of the present. For instance, when the priest delivers last rights, she knows that he is in the room with her but does not comprehend why he is speaking in Latin and touching the bottom of her feet. In her cloudy state, she thinks that it is inappropriate for him to touch a married woman that way. Readers must decide what is really happening and is a result of Granny's misperceptions. Granny never pauses to think about her motivations and flickering awareness, but the reader is able to see how her past has shaped her feelings about death, independence, and family. Porter's writing style allows the reader to identify with Granny's feelings and understand that she is operating under a warped sense of reality.

Granny mixes past and present, and she still thinks that she a strong and healthy woman, capable of putting a home in order. Porter uses Cornelia to tell the reader what is really happening. Cornelia's few lines establish that Granny is confused and nearing her death. Cornelia is an attentive daughter, trying to care for her mother and make her comfortable. However, Granny is incensed by their reversal of roles and does not appreciate Cornelia's efforts. She remembers how her children used to need her. She hates that she needs them now and pretends that she doesn't. She rationalizes her deteriorating physical condition by saying that she is just tired. In Granny's version of the past, Cornelia could not move a piece of furniture without asking for her mother's advice. Now Granny feels like she has become the child. She is so angry that she wishes that she could still spank Cornelia, though her daughter hasn't done anything wrong.

"She could just hear Cornelia telling her husband that Mother was getting a little childish and they'd have to humor her. The thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought she was deaf, dumb, and blind… Wait, Wait, Cornelia, till you own children whisper behind your back!"

Although Cornelia might deserve more gratitude from Granny, there are some indications that Granny's anger is somewhat justified. For instance, Cornelia calls Granny "darling," which seems patronizing. Doctor Harry also treats Granny as if she is a child. He calls her "Missy" and tells her to be a good girl. Even as Granny nears

death, Doctor Harry is condescending, telling her that she has never looked so happy and young. Granny lashes out by criticizing the doctor's youth and lack of experience. Porter uses these interactions between doctor and patient to show how the elderly are often not given the respect they deserve. Doctor Harry illustrates the loss of dignity the infirm must endure.

This loss of dignity is especially painful for Granny, who has prided herself on her strength and independence. Porter implies that Granny lost her husband at a young age and took care of her children and property alone. She even built a fence to surround a hundred acres. Granny thinks about how the work and struggles changed her. She believes her husband John would have preferred a young, delicate woman had he lives. She realizes that she may not have turned into her husband's ideal woman, but she is proud of what she became and the immense strength it took to survive. Granny has lived a life of independence.

Granny's most painful memory surfaces as she relives her past. She remembers a man named George leaving her at the altar. She tried to bury the pain for sixty years, because she feared losing her soul in the agony of remembering made him. It is interesting that Granny connects being jilted with her views on God and religion. She thinks in very literal terms when she credits God for saving her from the "hell" of being left at the altar. For example, she believes that God physically reached down and grabbed her under the breast to keep her from falling on the floor. She also believes that she has an understanding with a few saints who will provide her with a straight path to God. This understanding is not explained, but the reader is led to believe that Granny does not fear death because she is convinced that she is saved.

The meaning behind the title of this short story is first revealed when the reader learns that Granny was jilted by George. However, in a surprise ending, Granny believes that she has been jilted for a second and more painful time by God. Just as she believed that George would meet her for their wedding, she believes that God is waiting for her upon her death. As she dies, she feels herself sinking endlessly, which contrasts with her experience when George left her. This time God does not keep her from falling. In her mind, she screams for a sign that does not come. God has jilted her. This second disappointment feels much more painful than the first. She says she will never forgive it. With that painful realization, she "blows out the light" and ends her life.

Porter uses this story to make a strong statement about the living's faith in an afterlife. It is clear that the author believes that there is nothing to look forward after death, and those who have faith in God will be sorely disappointed.

Granny's death also shows that she is still a strong woman, despite her treatment in her final days. In life, Granny could not depend on George, and she learned to be independent. After her husband died, she became physically and emotionally strong so she could care for her children. In death, she learns she can not rely on God, and she takes a deep breath and extinguishes her own life. Death, like life, has disappointed her, but she again deals with disappointment on her own terms.

Characters

George

George is the man who jilted Granny Weatherall, abandoning her at the altar on what was to be their wedding day when she was twenty. She eventually married another man, had a family, and convinced herself that she had put the pain of being "jilted" behind her. However, she kept letters from George in her attic all her life, and sixty years later his memory still has the power to upset her.

Hapsy

Hapsy is the youngest and apparently the favorite of Granny Weatherall's daughters —"the one she had truly wanted." Yet Hapsy also seems to cause her mother the greatest disappointment. Granny Weatherall asks for Hapsy five times during the story, but Hapsy never comes to her mother's deathbed. In her delirious state of mind. Granny mistakes her other daughters, Cornelia and Lydia, for Hapsy. At one point, Granny seems to confuse even herself with Hapsy, as a memory of Hapsy holding a baby comes back to her: Granny "seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting." Some critics have interpreted this memory of Hapsy as the sign of salvation that Granny seems to be looking for throughout the story.

John

John is the man whom Granny Weatherall married and with whom she had children. He has been dead for a long time, and though Granny still feels close to him, she is also aware of having gone through many changes since she lived with him.

Ellen Weatherall

See Granny Weatherall

Granny Weatherall

Ellen Weatherall is a strong-willed eighty-year-old woman on her deathbed. Having raised a large family, she still desires to play an active role in her own affairs and those of her children. Bedridden in her daughter Cornelia's house, she is often snappish and rude as she slips in and out of lucidity during visits from members of her family, a doctor, and a priest. Readers learn that some twenty years earlier, feeling old at age sixty, she had made what she had thought would be her final visits to her children and grandchildren: "She had spent so much time preparing for death there was no need for

bringing it up again." As death approaches this time, however, memories of loss and disappointment resurface and remain unresolved.

As a young woman, Ellen Weatherall was jilted, abandoned at the altar by a fiance named George. She overcame this setback and eventually married another man. Yet, on her deathbed, remembering these defining moments in her life brings back feelings of self-doubt and regret. Granny Weatherall feels "jilted" once again at the end of the story—perhaps because her favorite daughter, Hapsy, has not shown up at her bedside, and perhaps also because she has become aware of a more profound absence in her spiritual life.

Themes

Betrayal

The titles of both the story and the anthology (*Flowering Judas*) in which it first appeared suggest the idea of betrayal, a central theme underlying many of Porter's stories. Judas was the disciple who betrayed Christ with a kiss. At the heart of "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" are Granny's memories of her betrayal by George, the fiance who abandoned her at the altar some sixty years earlier. This is just one of a series of betrayals experienced by Granny, who also feels "jilted" by her daughter Hapsy for whom she calls out in vain several times in the story.

God and Religion

Many readers have suggested that the ultimate betrayal of Granny involves God and that the story is primarily a portrait of a woman at the end of her life facing a devastating spiritual crisis. When Father Connolly comes to visit Granny Weatherall on her deathbed, she is cordial to him. It is stated that Granny "felt easy about her soul." Yet, his arrival seems to trigger Granny's most vivid and painful memories of the day sixty years earlier when she was left by her fiance. The final paragraph appears to include a reference to the Biblical parable of the "foolish brides," in which Christ is compared to a bridegroom. Seen in this light, the ultimate jilting of Granny is her reluctance to acknowledge her own weaknesses and accept some form of spiritual salvation. Just as Granny was left alone with the priest on her wedding day as a twenty-year-old, at age eighty she faces death alone, accompanied only by a priest who seems unable to offer her sufficient comfort.

Death and the Cycle of Life

Early in the story, the suggestion is made that Granny Weatherall considers herself to be already at peace with her mortality. Some twenty years earlier she had made "farewell trips" to see all her loved ones: "She had spent so much time preparing for death there was no need for bringing it up again." However, death proves to be not so easily dismissed and seems "clammy and unfamiliar" now that it is truly imminent for her. Granny Weatherall struggles against death, and though she lacks the strength to get out of bed, denies even being ill. She tries to dismiss her doctor and imagines herself the next day "rolling up her sleeves putting the whole place to rights again." The final image in the story—of Granny blowing out a candle—evokes the notion that her life is coming to an end. Yet, there is no sense of closure to Granny's life, no sense that the conflicts raised in her memories have been resolved. The final realization in the story is that "there was no bottom to death, she couldn't come to the end of it."

As death approaches, many of Granny Weatherall's reflections on her life concern her role as a mother and caretaker. Besides the memories of being "jilted" early on in her

efforts to find a mate, she thinks mostly of her children. In one passage, she remembers her favorite daughter, Hapsy, who has herself apparently become a mother. The identities of mother, daughter, and grandchild all seem to merge in Granny's mind. Death and birth also become hard to distinguish as Granny, in pain on her deathbed, in a memory relives the pain of giving birth to Hapsy. She finally welcomes the presence of a doctor as she cries out ambiguously, "my time has come."

Memory

Memory is a double-edged sword in this story where the central character moves back and forth between the present reality and the remembered past. On the one hand, Granny Weatherall's memories are a source of strength for her; she seems to take pride in remembering her life's accomplishments, particularly in overcoming the setback she experienced in being "jilted." She values occasional moments for reflection when she is able to "spread out the plan of life and tuck in the edges orderly." She also finds comfort in remembering her late husband John and is confident that he would still understand her despite all the changes she has gone through since his death— "She wouldn't have to explain anything!"

On the other hand, Granny's reminiscences also seem to reopen old emotional wounds and bring back painful experiences she thought she had put behind her. Her memory of the other man in her life, George, seems to undermine her sense of order and self-worth and to create a kind of debris she has had difficulty throwing out. She is made "uneasy" by the thought of her children discovering the box of letters from George which she has kept in her attic all these years. At one point, she even fantasizes about going to the absurd length of instructing her daughter to find George and "be sure to tell him I forgot him."

Style

Stream-of-Consciousness Narration

One of the most striking stylistic aspects of "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" is its unusual narrative perspective. Though the story is written in the third person, its narrative point of view is extremely close to that of the central character, Granny Weatherall. The story is told through stream-of-consciousness. Granny's thoughts are presented in a spontaneous fashion, as if readers had access to her thoughts at the moment each one occurs to her. Porter conveys what it is like to be an eighty-year-old woman whose mind tends to wander by enabling readers to experience some of the same confusion Granny feels. Since Granny sometimes mistakes one daughter for another, for example, the characters in the story sometimes dissolve and become other characters. Because Granny's awareness slips back and forth between her present reality and her remembered past, events in the story are presented as they occur to Granny rather than chronologically.

Symbolism and Allusion

The disjointed way in which the story is told gives it a poetic, dreamlike quality and enables its author to juxtapose certain recurring motifs and images. Much of Granny's reminiscing about the past seems to be triggered by people and events in her present. The untidiness of the room in her daughter's house where she is lying, for example, reminds Granny of her own housekeeping, which reminds her of the box of letters in her attic that she has been intending to go through and of the man, George, who wrote some of those letters. As certain images appear and reappear throughout the story, they take on more associations with the events of Granny's life and acquire multi-layered, symbolic significance. The dust Granny worries about as it gathers on the objects around her, for example, could be seen as representing the disorder in Granny's life and the painful memories she has tried unsuccessfully to sweep away.

The layers of meaning within some of the recurring images in the story are multiplied since they allude to motifs from the Bible. As the story's title suggests, the most significant of these are those associated with Granny's "jilting." The story returns to Granny's abortive wedding day most vividly, perhaps, when her daughter Cornelia announces that a priest has come to visit. His arrival seems to trigger Granny's memories of the day when "the bottom dropped out of the world" and she found herself being supported by the arms of a man offering to kill the fiance who had failed to show up. It appears that Granny, on her deathbed, is once again left alone waiting in vain for the arrival of a loved one—in this case her daughter Hapsy—with only the inadequate comfort offered to her by a priest. Parallels between Granny's situation and that of the "foolish brides" in the biblical parable in which Christ is compared to a bridegroom are suggested in the story's last paragraph: "Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house."

The symbols and allusions in the story are constructed so that they can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Granny can be judged as a woman who, like the "foolish brides," has not accepted Christ and for whom death therefore represents a spiritual and physical collapse. Another interpretation views the closing reference to the biblical parable as a product-of Granny's own imagination as she reflects on her life and judges herself. The subtlety of Porter's art lies in the fact that she offers no definitive answer to questions of interpretation. Porter leaves readers with a portrait of a woman facing death who is confronting the unanswerable questions of life.

Historical Context

Progress and Social Fragmentation

First published in 1929, "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" appeared at the end of a period of relative prosperity in America and the beginning of what was to become the Great Depression. Emerging victorious at the end of the first World War, America in the 1920s was poised to undergo rapid economic growth and social progress. For women in particular, many new opportunities and roles were available. The decade began with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which for the first time gave women the right to vote. During the war, when many young men had left to fight in Europe, more women had entered the traditionally male worlds of work and higher education. In fields ranging from fashion to politics to literature, a new generation of women were expressing themselves with new levels of confidence.

The general prosperity of the 1920s, however, was not enjoyed by every segment of the population. Much of the economic growth, as well as the experimentation with social norms, was concentrated in large cities and industrial centers. The country was in many ways becoming more fragmented, as economic disparities and social distances between the urban Northeast and the rural South and Midwest deepened. Intergenerational conflicts were also heightened as the young seemed to adapt to changes more quickly than their elders. In the South, racially motivated murders occurred at the highest rate since the Reconstruction period immediately following the Civil War. A variety of radical movements including Anarchists, Socialists and Black Nationalists gained notoriety in calling for fundamental reforms, and such groups would gain more momentum in the coming years after the stock market crash in 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression.

Intellectuals Abroad

Many writers and thinkers of Porter's generation felt the need to leave their native country before they could write about it. Despite the United States' new economic and military prominence, European cities were still considered to be the most important centers of cultural activity. Like most of America's leading writers from this period—including Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and many others—Porter travelled extensively and lived abroad for much of her lifetime. Yet, despite the relative isolation in which they lived and worked, many of these writers sought to convey something quintessentially American through their stories. Porter was joined by other young writers, like Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner, in using settings and dialects identified with particular regions of the country.

On the other hand, while these American writers wanted to tell stories about farmers, small town folks and other characters living what could be called "traditional" lifestyles, they were also interested in exploring "non-traditional" ways of telling stories and in

describing experiences that seemed new and contemporary. One of the strongest influences on these American writers was the literary and intellectual movement known as modernism. A large and diverse movement which originated in Europe and affected virtually every field of artistic endeavor, the modernists sought to develop radically new techniques and forms of expression, which they felt were required to convey the rapidly changing experiences of life in the 20th century. Modernist experiments in literature included "stream-of-consciousness" writing and the use of absurd or surreal imagery. Porter's work quickly won support and admiration within this closely knit international community of intellectuals, though Porter would not have a very wide reading audience among the general public until much later in her career.

Critical Overview

"*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*" was included in the first collection of Porter's stories, *Flowering Judas*, which was published in 1930. Though the first print run of the book was fairly small, critical response was overwhelmingly positive. Virtually overnight, Porter won a reputation within an influential circle of writers and critics as one of America's finest writers. Reviewers noted that her work was mature and exhibited similarities to the writing of Ernest Hemingway, a fellow American expatriate.

Critics praised Porter's technical skill and her ability to approach each story in a new way. Often noted were her rich characterizations, whose personalities seem to determine the narrative form Porter chose. Edmund Wilson, one of the United States's most influential literary critics at that time considered Porter's stories with female protagonists, like "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*," her strongest and most interesting. He suggested that the author's ability to convey the intricacies of a woman's character made her stories unique.

Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, both renowned poets from the South, were also important literary allies for Porter. Warren, in particular, wrote extensively on Porter and stressed, among other things, the way her stories captured the culture and ethos of the American Southwest and Mexico, areas where Porter had lived for many years. Other critics discussed her use of religious imagery to elucidate her characters' psychological states, evidence of which can be found in "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*."

More recently, focus on Porter's works has centered on her feminist perspective, the aspect of her writing so admired by Edmund Wilson. Barbara Harrell Carson, for example, has pointed to the refusal of many of Porter's female characters to accept their assigned social roles. The conflict between social roles and a woman's acceptance in society is at the heart of Granny Weatherall's deathbed reminiscence in "*The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton is the coordinator of the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. In the following essay, Piedmont-Marton examines the narrative structure and themes of the story "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall."

In her essay "The Eye of the Story," fellow southern writer and critic Eudora Welty observes that "most good stories are about the interior of our lives, but *Katherine Anne Porte*r's stories take place there; they surface only at her choosing." "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is certainly one of these interior stories, as Porter uses Ellen Weatherall's fragile state of mind as a narrative device to connect past and present and the living and the dead.

While "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is told by a third person narrator, readers are drawn into the mind of Ellen Weatherall and come to see the events of the story from her perspective. Readers laugh along with her, for example, when she teases the doctor about his youth. Gradually, however, Ellen's grasp of reality slips off its moorings and she begins to journey back into her past. Readers are able to travel along with Ellen Weatherall as her memories slip in and out of the present time during the course of the story. This narrative technique, called stream-of-consciousness, allows the writer to abandon the ordinary constraints of time and space, and invites the reader to enter into the consciousness of the character. Porter's descriptive prose brilliantly portrays the way Granny Weatherall's mind wanders from the sound of whispered voices to remembered breezes, from the feeling of being in one room one moment, to the memory of another room long ago. Important events in Granny Weatherall's life are recounted in fragmented recollections, and readers become privy to these memories in the course of the story. In Eudora Welty's words, "The presence of death hovering about Granny Weatherall she [Porter] makes as real and brings us near as Granny's own familiar room that stands about her bed realer, nearer, for we recognize not only death's presence but the character death has come in for Granny Weatherall." As readers we become the unseen observers in the room, sympathizing with Granny's point of view.

The woman who "weathered all," for whom life has been "a tough pull," struggles first to suppress and then to address the worst moment of her life. This moment occurred on the day when George jilted her at the altar. Granny Weatherall is a woman who likes to take care of details and to make plans, and in exchange she expects certain results. She still believes that her death is not imminent. She thanks God that "there was always a little margin over for peace: then a person could spread out the plan of life and tuck in the edges neatly." But as her conscious control falters, she remembers the day when her faith in order was shattered: "the day... a whirl of smoke rose and covered it, crept up and over into the bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows." In this passage the smoke symbolizes confusion and doubt overwhelming her best laid plans, which are symbolized by the neat rows. These images of light and dark, clarity and confusion, recur in various forms throughout the story and foreshadow the final scene when darkness defeats Granny Weatherall' s careful calculations.

Although Granny Weatherall apparently takes pleasure in recollecting the accomplishments of her life: the children born and raised; the hard work taken on and completed; the "edges tucked in orderly"; she cannot keep the clouds of doubt out of her mind. John Edward Hardy discusses her doubt in his book *Katherine Anne Porte*r. Hardy writes: "the pleasure of her recollections ... is gradually undercut by a recurrent, terrifying sense of something lost, or missed, something that she can never quite define, something so important that the lack of it makes all that she had as nothing." Granny herself reveals what it is she had feared all her life: "For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell, and now the two things were mingled in one and the thought of him was a smoky cloud from hell that moved and crept in her head." There is dramatic irony in that she does not fully understand the connection between these two events, her death and her jilting.

Granny Weatherall believes that her prayers and her exemplary life will ensure that she will never again feel like she did on the day she was jilted. She remembers that day as a time when "[t]he whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away." She has spent a great deal of her dying hours coming to terms with her jilting, deciding that she wanted George to be told that she had forgotten him, measuring the husband and children she had despite him against his abandonment of her. In her final moments, however, she is jilted again. She asks God for a sign, and "For the second time there is no sign."

Several important elements in the story converge at this climactic moment, just as the light in Granny Weatheralls consciousness narrows to a tiny point. First, the images of light and dark that have occurred throughout the story are used for full dramatic effect in this scene. "Granny lay curled down within herself, amazed and watchful, staring at the point of light that was herself; her body was now only a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up." The darkness and obscurity of doubt and betrayal finally completely obscure the light of certainty and faith. Secondly, this scene reveals another meaning of the title. Just as Granny herself had thought that being left at the altar was the worst thing that could have happened to her, as readers we have believed until now that the jilting in the story refers to that horrible day sixty years ago. Several critics have pointed out however, that in this second jilting, the absent bridegroom is not the hapless George, but the Christ of Matthew 25:1-13 in the New Testament,

Porter's suggestion is not that the good and dutiful Granny Weatherall is betrayed by her God. It is rather that she has betrayed, or fooled, herself, into believing that the universe was an orderly place where you were rewarded for "tucking in the edges" neatly. Ellen Weatherall's characteristic response is outrage, "Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this I'll never forgive it." Eudora Welty argues that outrage is Porter's "cool instrument," and that "she uses it to show what monstrosities of feeling come about not from the lack the existence of love but from love's repudiation, betrayal." The final irony for Granny Weatherall is that in death she is finally free of the haunting memory of the day she was jilted. The sorrow of her final jilting is so great that "she could not remember any other because this grief wiped them all away."

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" first appeared in *Katherine Anne Porter*'s volume of stories, *Flowering Judas*, published in 1930. Critics have pointed to a number of echoes of other literature, or allusions, in Porter's story. Granny Weatherall's daughter Cornelia is similar to Cordelia in Shakespeare's tragedy, King Lear, whose unconditional love for her father is taken for granted. More striking are the resemblances of "Weatherall" to Henry James's story "The Beast in Jungle." Like Granny Weatherall, the main character in James's story is terrified of an unnamed emptiness, of having life mean nothing in the end. The name of the house where the story begins, Wetherend, recalls Porter's character's name, and the description of May Bartram's neat household is strikingly similar to the way Granny Weatherall describes her own habits: "The perfection of household care, of high polish and finish, always reigned in her rooms, but they now looked as if everything had been wound up, tucked in, put away."

Finally, students of American poetry cannot help but be reminded when reading the final scene of "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," of two Emily Dickinson poems. Hardy discusses this aspect of the story in his book as well. Porter's description of Granny's imaginary trip is reminiscent of lines in poem #712. "Granny stepped up in the cart very lightly and reached for the reins, but a man sat beside her and she knew him by his hands, driving the cart." In these words are the clear echoes of the opening lines of Dickinson's poem: "Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me / The Carriage held but just Ourselves / And Immortality."

Later, in the description of Granny Weatherall's last moments, we find the that Porter pays homage to another Dickinson poem concerning death and dying, #465: "With Blue —uncertain stumbling Buzz— / Between the light—and me— / And then the Windows failed—and then / I could not see to see."

Porter's description of Granny Weatherall's death is remarkably similar: "The blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain, it flickered and winked like an eye, quietly it fluttered and dwindled."

Source: Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Laman discusses some of the ambiguities in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" which have resulted in varying interpretations by critics, particularly insights into the character of Hapsy.

The ambiguities in Katherine Ann Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" have provided fertile ground for widely different interpretations. Most critics, however, agree that Granny dies without a sign from God that her soul will be received into heaven. I would like to present evidence to the contrary: Granny does indeed get a sign, but one that she does not recognize. Her mistake is that she expects to receive this sign from Christ, when it is not Christ whom she should expect, but her own daughter Hapsy.

Hapsy is an elusive character. Even her paternity has been questioned. David and Madeline Barnes, for example, in "The Secret Sin of Granny Weatherall," claim that Hapsy is George's child. Their conclusion contradicts evidence that Hapsy is Ellen's last child, born "forty years ago when [she] pulled through milklegs," a disease that Laurence Becker points out is related to childbirth. Charles Allen symbolically identifies Hapsy with George; Joseph Wiesenfarth argues that Hapsy, like George, never shows up; and John Hardy associates her with the "Blessed Mother" and merges "images of Hapsy's baby [with] the infant Jesus." The significance of Hapsy, however, lies not in her paternity, nor in her similarity to George or the Virgin Mary, but in the fact that she was Ellen's favorite child and that she died while giving birth to her own child.

Granny has demonstrated all her life that she is an independent and pragmatic woman who does what needs to be done with or without a man. Mostly, she appears better off without a man. Although George had the ability to pitch "her soul in the deep pit of hell," and John died and left her alone to fence in "a hundred acres ... digging the post holes herself," only Christ can utterly destroy her by not showing up at her deathbed: "There is nothing more cruel than this—I'll never forgive it." Merrill Skaggs calls Ellen Weatherall the female Romantic [whose] indomitable soul . dies unconquered----Recognizing the endless betrayals of God, lovers and a universe that can randomly "snuff out a dream," she can choose her own last moment, when she is ready for it, and can thus in her own time and in her own way, acting on her own impulse, embrace the dark.

Skaggs's valiant effort to elevate Granny to the position of feminist paragon fails to recognize that her blowing out the light is but a last-minute effort to gain autonomy over her own destiny, and that it comes as a result of her refusal to be humiliated once again.

Granny's last act (and indeed her entire life after John's death) contradicts her own theories that only by submission to a man and by being a mother can a woman achieve happiness and health: "A woman needed milk in her to have her full health," she says after giving birth to Hapsy. Her attitude toward George sixty years later proves not only that she did not forget the jilting, but that she has led a happy life, with a man and children, in spite of it: "I want [George] to know I had my husband just the same and my

children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him."

Because of her beliefs, Granny fails to realize the power of the feminine spirit. Her primary mistake consists not of blowing out her own light but of asking for a sign from the wrong person. Although normally quite aware of the proper channels through which requests to God are to be made—she had, after all, a "secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her"—on her deathbed she forgets the hierarchies and calls directly to "God [to] give a sign."

Confusing her approaching death with birth, Granny remembers telling John to "get the doctor now, no more talk, *my time has come*. When this one was born it should be the last. The last. It should have been born first, for it was the one she truly wanted" (my emphasis). Her several references to wanting Hapsy indicate that this last labor will result in the birth of Hapsy. That Hapsy gives birth to her own child is demonstrated by Ellen's command to John to "get the doctor now, Hapsy's time has come" (my emphasis). Clearly, the first time that has come (to give birth) refers to Ellen; the second to Hapsy. That Hapsy's child died with her, probably during childbirth, is evidenced by the fact that Granny, close to death, sees Hapsy and her child during what looks strikingly like an out-of-body experience, from which Cornelia calls her back.

Hapsy has been waiting for Granny for a long time, certainly not fewer than twenty years. If Hapsy died giving birth, then John died after her, inasmuch as Granny asks him to call the doctor for Hapsy's confinement, and John died relatively young. When Granny goes "through a great many rooms" to find her daughter with the baby on her arm, Granny seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting Hapsy came up close and said, "I thought you' d never come," and looked at her very searchingly and said, "You haven't changed a bit "

Hapsy's words to her mother are formulaic, addressed to a traveler returning from a journey. If we take them literally, however, then Hapsy sees only her mother's immortal and unchanging soul, which has gone "a long way back" to find Hapsy, and which now mingles with the souls of Hapsy and her baby in a threefold unity that fulfills Granny's wish because all along it has been "Hapsy she really wanted." This is the sign Granny asks for, and as it appears before she asks for it, Granny fails to recognize it for what it is. Granny confuses her out-of-body experience with reality. She forgets that she had to go a long way back to find Hapsy, and, when she does, she thinks Cornelia can converse with her too: "Cornelia, tell Hapsy to take off her cap. I can't see her plain." Indeed, as if to force Granny toward insight, right before she asks for the sign from God, the very recent memory of Hapsy pops into her mind. And Hapsy repeats her earlier phrase, as if to call her mother home:

You'll see Hapsy again. What about her" "I thought you'd never come" Granny made a long journey outward, looking for Hapsy What if I don't find her? What then?

Instead of accepting her now inevitable death and trusting Hapsy to wait for her, Granny engages in a futile contest with an absent male god. However, her apparent loss of faith and her doubts as to whether she will find Hapsy again are of little consequence. Because Hapsy spoke to Granny long before Granny realized that she was about to die, it appears to make no difference what she believes. The sign appears regardless of whether or not Granny calls for it, and the only reason Granny fails to perceive Hapsy as the sign is that, through her Catholic upbringing, she has been led to expect something entirely different.

Source: Barbara Laman, "Porter's 'The Jilting of Granny WeatheraUV in *Explkator*, Vol. 48, No 4, Summer, 1990, pp. 279-81.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Barnes and Barnes theorize that Granny Weatherall's strong lament of the past is due to the fact that she became pregnant out of wedlock before she was jilted.

As one of {Catherine Anne Porter's most brilliant technical accomplishments, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" has evoked a number of critical responses in recent years. Most commentators admit to a certain ambiguity in the story, brought about largely by Miss Porter's skilful exploitation of the stream-of-consciousness—almost to its ultimate limits of complexity; none, so far as we have been able to discover, has adequately treated the matter of Granny's "sin" and its importance to an understanding of the story. Indeed, most are inclined to dismiss it as at best a venial violation, a natural occasion for concern on one's deathbed, but of little moral relevance otherwise.

There is in the story, however, evidence to show that Granny's concern for the state of her soul is genuine and closely connected with her memories of George, the man who had jilted her so many years before:

For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell, and now the two things were mingled in one and the thought of him was a smoky cloud from hell that moved and crept in her head when she had just got rid of Doctor Harry and was trying to rest a minute.

While most critics have either assumed or implied that Granny's sin is little more than the "wounded vanity" she herself speaks of, her injured pride in being left waiting at the altar, "the fear that she has not withstood the shame gracefully," yet a more careful reading will, we think, reveal the true source of Granny' s fear of "losing her soul": there is more than one indication that her jilting was attented by one further complication—pregnancy—and that Granny' s sense of guilt for her premarital transgression has continued to plague her all those years.

The evidence for such a reading manifests itself principally through the associative pattern of her stream-of-consciousness: in passing successively from consciousnes to semi-conciouness and back again (and this is almost without exception the pattern of Miss Porter's extended paragraphs), Granny herself provides the necessary clues to the unravelling of the mystery.

To begin with, in her present semi-conscious state she confuses the purpose of Father Connolly's visit to her bedside:

"Mother, Father Connolly's here."
"I went to Holy Communion only last week. Tell him I'm not so sinful as all that."
"Father just wants to speak to you."
He could speak as much as he pleased. It was like him to drop in and inquire about her soul as if it were a teething baby.... (our italics).

The comparison is an apt one, as we shall shortly see; yet we also learn that "Granny felt easy about her soul," that she had a * 'secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her." Her pact with them was made, furthermore, on "the day when the wedding cake was not cut," the day that John came to her rescue:

He had cursed like a sailor's parrot and said, "I'll kill him for you." Don't lay a hand on him, for my sake leave something to God. "Now, Ellen, you must believe what I tell you...."

"So there was nothing, nothing to worry about any more".... Her confidence in this "secret comfortable understanding" does, by the end of the story, undergo a severe shock; indeed, her passage from extreme self-confidence to frustrating agnosticism marks the theme of the story as a whole.

If she misinterprets the reason for Father Connolly's presence, she also indicates a similar mistaken notion about Doctor Harry. In a single telling paragraph which presents her train of thought from conscious to semi-conscious level, Granny silently answers Cornelia's solicitation: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Yes, she had changed her mind after sixty years and she would like to see George. I want you to find George. Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him. Better than I hoped for even. Tell him I was given back everything he took away and more. Oh, no, oh, God, no, there was something else besides the house and the man and the children. Oh, surely they were not all? What was it? Something not given back___Her breath crowded down under her ribs and grew into a monstrous frightening shape with cutting edges; it bore up into her head, and the agony was unbelievable- Yes, John, get the doctor now, no more talk, my time has come.

Granny confuses her present pain with the pangs of labor and associates it quite naturally with the "time" of her delivery. Part of this may no doubt be explained by her failure to understand why Doctor Harry has come—she associates "Doctor" here, as she has elsewhere in the story, with childbirth and thus resolves her confusion by assuming that the doctor has come to deliver her of her latest baby. The importance of the passage lies in the fact that it reveals to the reader, once again, her mind's preoccupation with thoughts of a baby. But perhaps even more important, these thoughts may be traced back by association to the question which had triggered them in her mind: the "Something not given back" by George—her chastity.

This train of thought continues to dominate Granny: "When this one was born it should be the last. The last. It should have been born first, for it was the one she had truly wanted." The passage may be viewed as ironic: Granny's "time has come" {i.e., she is about to die), and this labor will, in fact, be her last. That the last-born (Death) "should have been born first, for it was the one she had truly wanted" may well allude to her wish to die at the birth of her first child. In any case, the text supports both the literal and

ironic readings with consistency. Whatever else it may suggest, this passage carries with it the hint that Granny's firstborn may well have been unwanted—at least for a time. Eventually, this same child became the apple of Granny's eye and, as the text seems to indicate, a fated child. We are speaking, of course, of the elusive Hapsy.

Hapsy (perhaps a diminutive form of Hap=Fate?) is clearly Granny's favorite among her children:

It was Hapsy she really wanted. She had to go a long way back through a great many rooms to find Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm She seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting

It seems clear from the story that Hapsy has been long dead, for Granny converses with her only during her lapses into semi-consciousness. Time is inextricably confused in Granny's mind; she waits expectantly for Hapsy to come to her bedside, but each time she catches a glimpse of her in the mist of her imagination, each time she attempts to answer Hapsy, Cornelia intrudes, bringing her back to the world of reality.

There is, moreover, the suggestion that Granny shares true empathy with Hapsy, for Hapsy appears to have given birth to a child with only her stepfather John and Granny in attendance: "John, get the doctor now, Hapsy's time has come." Even in the passage in question there is no indication of Hapsy's having a husband—she is alone with "a baby on her arm"—and if Granny "seemed herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy," so too many Hapsy be a mirror image of her mother, re-enacting her mother's sin with but one difference: she has no John to rescue her in her moment of need.

If we accept Hapsy as Granny's child by George, saved from illegitimacy by Granny's acceptance of John's marriage proposal, we may better understand some of the puzzling references elsewhere in the story. For one thing, her reminiscence of that fateful day when George failed to appear takes on a more pointed significance: "She tried to remember. No, I swear he never harmed me but in that. He never harmed me but in that ... and what if he did?" What, indeed, if he had harmed her more than simply by jilting her? What if he had left her alone and expecting his child? John had saved her from the shame, after all.

From the shame, but not from the guilt. For despite her understandable pride in how well she has succeeded in raising the children, in maintaining the farm all these years, in "weathering all" (as her name clearly suggests), Granny continues to be haunted by the memory, not simply of George, but of her own transgression with him. Her conscious confidence in heaven is, then, so much bravado and rationalization; it is only in her moments of semi-consciousness that the reader is able to perceive Granny's agonizing guilt, guilt which she has carried with her for sixty years, unable to expunge it wholly from her mind. To be sure, it is this same guilt which finally humanizes her for the reader and makes of her something more than a quaint caricature. It is this guilt which has led her do penance— by ministering to the nuns, making altar-cloths for the church,

and the like. But perhaps most important of all, it is this which validates her grief, justifies her horror at not seeing any sign of her salvation at the moment of death:

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this—I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light.

Source: Daniel R Barnes and Madeline T. Barnes, "The Secret Sin of Granny Weatherall," in Renascence, Vol XXI, No. 1, Autumn, 1968, pp 162-65.

Adaptations

Collected Stories: K. A. Porter is available on audiocassette, published by Audio Partners, read by Siobhan McKenna, 170 minutes.

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall was produced by PBS in 1980 for the American Short Story Series. The adaptation stars Geraldine Fitzgerald, Lois Smith, and

William Swetland; hosted by Henry Fonda, 57 minutes; available on video-cassette from Monterey Home Video and Karol Video.

Topics for Further Study

If the story were told in third-person through the eyes of a narrator who was not Granny Weatherall, how would it be different? Do you think that if it had been written from a different point of view that it would still be a good story?

Discuss the symbolism of Granny Weatherall's name. Think of some other names from literary works that have symbolic meanings. Do such tactics help you understand a story or novel better?

Research the phenomenon of the near-death experience. How do some people's accounts of what they believe to be death compare with Granny Weatherall's?

How are they similar, and how are they different?

Compare and Contrast

1929: Most people died at home, surrounded by family members.

Today: Most deaths occur in a hospital setting, and death is often prolonged by drugs and other medical devices.

1920s: Only 23 percent of the American workforce is comprised of women according to Historical Statistics of the U.S.

Today: In 1994, women made up 46 percent of the American workforce according to the U.S. Board of Labor Statistics.

1920s: Most doctors make house visits to sick patients.

Today: Doctors who make housecalls see an average of 8 to 12 home patients a year —less than one percent of the average practitioner's patients.

What Do I Read Next?

"*Flowering Judas*" (1930) a short story by Porter in which an idealistic young woman is betrayed by the group of Mexican revolutionaries when she fails to see them for who they really are.

"A Rose for Emily" (1931) by William Faulkner, a short story about the death of an eccentric Southern woman.

"The Death of Ivan Ilych" (1886) by Leo Tolstoy, a novella in which a dying Everyman tries to justify his actions and beliefs during his life.

"A Worn Path" (1941) by Eudora Welty, astory in which an aging African-American woman persistently continues on a difficult trek into the town of Natchez, Mississippi, in order to obtain medicine for her sick grandson.

Further Study

Allen, Charles A. "*Katherine Anne Porter*: Psychology as Art," Southwest Review, Vol 41, 1956, pp 223-30.

An essay in which Allen identifies Hapsy with George symbolically.

Unrue, Darlene Harbour Understanding *Katherine Anne Porter*, University of South Carolina, 1988.

A good place to begin researching Porter's life and career, Unrue's book makes connections between various stories and between Porter's life and work.

Wiesenfarth, Joseph. "Internal Oposition in Porter's 'Granny Weatherall'," Critique, Vol 11,1969, pp 47-55 Wiesenfarth argues in his essay that Hapsy, like George, never shows up at Granny's deathbed in the story.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535