Literary Theme Analysis Essay

Student Name
Kitchens
ENG 101
April 10, 2011

Elements Illustrating Maturity: Myop Grows Up

How does a good writer of a story get his point across to the audience? Short stories, although entertaining, usually teach a lesson or illustrate a moral point throughout their pages. A truly great author will utilize many elements within his story to help push that point along; elements such as character, setting, point of view, symbol, and language can be used to create an overall feeling to a story. A short story by Alice Walker is the perfect example of an author’s use of elements to create an overall idea. Walker uses the elements of character, tone, and symbol in her story “The Flowers” to illustrate the idea of a grim and immediate process of maturity.

The first element Walker uses to associate the process of maturity is through her character Myop. Myop is the embodiment of youth; she is only ten years old. She is happy and carefree at the beginning of the story. Wendy Auspic states in her article “Losing Innocence with Alice Walker’s ‘The Flowers’,” that “Most people, especially children, tend to view summertime with a carefree mindset”. Because “The Flowers” is set in summertime, this explains Myop’s actions and carefree attitude at the beginning of the story: she walks along her family’s cabin and farm area making music on the fences with a stick. Walker writes that “nothing existed for [Myop] but her song” (82). Here, readers see that Myop, as a young child, is only concerned with what she is doing at the moment. Myop simply has not a worry in the world; she lollygags around picking flowers and enjoying her day. The same critical article agrees: “Myop is the center of her own universe and is ignorant to the reality of life different from her own” (Auspic). That ignorance in childhood helps to maintain her innocence. It is because of Myop’s age and
innocence that readers see the harsh maturity she faces. Once Myop finds the body on the ground, her whole childlike demeanor changes. Myop finishes picking her flowers, but then she “la[ys] down her flowers” indicating a change in her maturity level (Walker 83). An article entitled “Alice Walker: The Achievement of Short Fiction” reiterates this point stating, “Myop…has her childhood…shattered by the blunt social reality of lynching” (Petry). She is no longer happy and carefree; the grown-up world of death and cruelty has invaded her mind and she no longer wants to pick the flowers. Myop’s beginning innocence quickly and harshly turns to a maturity of understanding grown-up ideas and problems.

Additionally, Walker uses tone in her wording to show the abrupt change in childlike innocence. In the beginning, Walker uses words like “golden surprise,” “keenness,” and “light and good in the warm sun” to set the tone of a beautiful day ripe with harvest (82). These words all connote the sense of happiness and relaxation. Walker also uses the word “excited” to describe the tremors that run up Myop’s jaw as she readies herself for a new day (82). Readers feel the excitement and joy of the young girl as she begins her day. Overall, Monica Loeb, a literary critic, summarizes the beginning tones in the story: “The first section of the story abounds with positive expressions.” These positive expressions cement the childlike playfulness of the first half of the story. On the contrary, the story takes a dramatic turn in tone as Myop enters an unknown part of the woods behind her house. As she stretches out a mile or so from her home, Myop notices the differences in landscape and feeling of the area she is in. Loeb argues that Walker here turns to a “vocabulary of uneasiness and melancholy.” Walker uses words like “strangeness” and “gloomy” to describe the cove in which Myop finds herself (82). As Myop discovers the remains of the dead man, Walker cements the new change in tone. She describes the body with harsh and descriptive words such as “cracked and broken,” “rotted,” and “frayed” (83). Walker finishes the story with the most telling tone of all: “And the summer was over” (83). The point Walker is making with this statement is that all of a sudden, there would be no more childlike glee in Myop’s
attitude. Overall, the change in tone illustrates the sudden and violent transition from childlike innocence to maturity.

Symbolism is also used in “The Flowers” to illustrate a change in maturity. Walker uses flowers here as two symbols: a symbol of innocence and a symbol of death. Innocence is portrayed as Myop picks the flowers, each described with beauty. “Flowers tend to be universal symbol for joy and life[,]” contends one article (Auspic). The joyfulness symbolized in the flowers helps symbolize the positive innocence in the beginning of the story. Myop picks “wildflowers,” and “strange blue flowers with velvety ridges” (Walker 82). These symbolize Myop’s own youth and beauty. However, it is when Myop realizes the fate of the dead man that readers see the alternate and opposite flower symbol. Myop lays down her flowers and leaves the scene. Loeb suggests, “Walker chooses to emphasize a conciliatory, rather than a bitter, response to [this apparent] political violence.” When Myop understands what has happened to the man, she no longer has the desire to carry the flowers in fun; she lays them down in honor of him. The second symbol Walker uses is the noose that is lying on the ground. The noose symbolizes the cause of the man’s death, and the reason Myop must grow up so quickly. Walker explains, “Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak clung another piece [of the rope]” (83). Readers can see that this man was hanged; he was possibly an African American man, a sharecropper, that had had a run in with a group of racially biased and violent people. This hits home with Myop as she and her family are sharecroppers. This makes her realize the recent past violence that has been done to families like hers. Through the use of these symbols, readers are able to see why Myop matures so quickly.

Overall, the use of the elements of character, tone, and symbol give readers a true sense of the grim maturity that Myop faces in Walker’s “The Flowers.” Myop’s character evolves from a happy-go-lucky child to a serious girl; this is evident in the change of her actions. The tone of the story also
begins to change as Myop enters new and telling areas of land. The symbols of the flowers and the noose also help illustrate the mood change and give the readers the motivation for Myop’s sudden realization and maturity. Once Myop has realized the harsh reality of the world she lives in, she is never the same; she says goodbye to her childhood as she pays her final respects to the corpse on the ground.

Works Cited

