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English 1102

4 March 2018

“Good Country People”: Innocence Can Only Be Judged from the Inside Out

Flannery O’Conner writes a twisted story focusing on a thirty-two-year-old Joy Hopewell who walks stiffly through life on an artificial leg. Joy, who legally changes her name to Hulga, thinks she is better than others because of her high level of education. Despite obtaining her PhD, her mother still thinks of her as a child, (O’Connor 266). It is clear that Mrs. Hopewell is crippling Hulga into childlike innocence, even more so than the loss of her own leg.

O’Connor introduces a character by the name of Manley Pointer. He is what Mrs. Hopewell considers “good country people”, a bible salesman who ends up catching the eye of Hulga. Hulga’s mood shows that she feels superior to him due to his innocence, both in age and his belief in God. When Hulga and Manley sneak off into the woods almost like children, O’Connor portrays some of Hulga’s childlike innocence in the form of gullibility.

O’Connor uses vivid imagery such as “a wide sheath of sunlight, filled with dust particles, slanted over her,” (O’Connor 275) all throughout “Good Country People”. O’Connor describes how the characters are standing, provides depictions of how they look and even how they think.

Hulga’s leg symbolizes her soul (O’Connor 276) in the aspect that she has been damaged to the point where she puts on a hard exterior but ends up believing in the lies of a stranger. Manley’s bible that has been hollowed out to hold obscene items shows symbolism in the display of Manley as a hollow Christian. This proves that it is important to get to know the inside, or soul of a person before judging them. Hulga is gullible by believing Manley is a Christian and ends up giving her leg (soul) away to a complete stranger.

Throughout this short story, O’Connor displays several levels of character development, tone/mood, symbolism and uses the theme of innocence to connect it all. Hulga, who thinks highly of herself and her beliefs, ends up being tricked into seeing that even believing in nothing becomes flawed. She learns that it is innocence is something that she possesses and that it is not something than can be so easily judged.

Work Cited

O’Connor, Flannery. “Good Country People. “The College Writer: A Guide to Thinking, Writing, and Researching. 5th ed., edited by VanderMey et al., Cengage, 2015, pp. 264-278