

Order in peaches



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Societal dictum and etiquette are fluid concepts, changing and differing dependent largely on location, culture, time period, and other factors. With reference to carting a carriage of Peaches through rural Japan in the middle of a cold winter night, the narrator of Abe Akira's Peaches discerns "Nowadays, perhaps. But back then? Unthinkable" (Akira 11). This serves to suggest that one or more aspects of Akira's narrative may have been taboo in his younger years, slowly beginning to normalize or at least escape large-scale humiliation or punishment as he made his way through adulthood. In Abe Akira's short story, Peaches, the narrator creates a central theme of disorder through his family's defiance of societal norms in the form of infidelity resulting in an illegitimate child, and abortion.

The breach in etiquette is first posed by way of suggested infidelity on the part of the narrator's mother. With a father away at war, the narrator recalls "the face and voice of a man...inseparably associated with the peach trees (Akira 14). Regularly stopping by to attend to the family's peach trees, the reader witnesses a handyman of sorts having frequent tea and chats with the narrator's mother. It is suggested to the reader, likewise, that there is always a job to be done in the household, suitable for the man. Akira writes, "the time would come when she would ask him to dig a bomb shelter as well. He could be asked to scoop the nightsoil, do any job", painting a picture of their home life in which the man's work and efforts are long lasting and ever-present. While no sexual matters between the two are outright stated, the child narrator is absent from much interaction between his mother and the peach tree man as he is still at school, and any interaction between the two during that time would be completely private. With a husband away at

war, the expectation for the wife was likely to take care of the house and children, and was certainly not adultery, by any means.

The aforementioned infidelity leads gracefully into the next point of disorder in the form of the implied illegitimate child. Whilst sitting and talking together, the peach tree man's promiscuous reputation is brought up and he seems to take it in a humorous and lighthearted way, " while on the other hand, there was [the] mother, increasingly serious to the point of catching her breath" (Akira 15). If the mother and peach tree man had hypothetically been having an affair for some time, why all of a sudden would she be serious, possibly to the point of concern, unless something had changed rather drastically? After hearing about the end of the war on the radio, Akira suggests, in reference to the " stifling" smell of the rotting fruit, " my father must have been aware of it long before he reached the doorway" (Akira 15). The author implies not the fruit's stench evoking a stifling awareness within the father, but the mother's infidelity and what had come about as a result of it, suggesting that it radiated a strong aura. Additionally, our narrator senses an irregularity in his mother's speaking tone with the peach tree man, but sees no physical manifestation of this in any way. He understands that something must be occurring outside his capable perception, noting " As far as I could tell, her life had undergone no change, and it was precisely because of this that I recalled the scene as though witnessing a dangerous tightrope act" (Akira 15). Perhaps knowing a bit more would have eased young Abe Akira's mind, at least a little bit.

Lastly and equally as important is the idea of the mother's abortion and how it fits into the theme of disorder. By now, the reader can infer an illegitimate

pregnancy as a result of the narrator's mother's infidelity. This can be, in one instance, inferred from the mother's fragmented conversation with the peach tree man in which the reader catches her say "What? She will? The woman?" (Akira 15). With the perhaps taboo and unavailable nature of the abortion, coupled with the fact that her fetus is illegitimate, she is surprised and arguably startled to hear of someone who would be able to help her. Perhaps the woman will perform some sort of abortion surgery or otherwise induce a miscarriage in some way. Moreover, in sorting out his thoughts towards the end of the work, the narrator concludes that if his thoughts served him correctly, "then [his] mother had taken [him] to the neighboring town not to buy anything, but to accomplish something far more important – or at least, something far more painful" (Akira 16). This serves to suggest, following her husband's demands, that the narrator's mother may have gone out in the middle of the night to pay a visit to whomever it was who could help her rid of the unborn baby – something far more painful than making a purchase. The narrator notes briefly as well, "a third person not actually present could well have been part of that night scene on the hill... Some unusual circumstance must have been responsible for my mother's being there at that strange time" (Akira 16). This suggests that perhaps an unborn child may have been inside the mother, or, forgive the morbid thought, miscarried and contained within the baby carriage. This would make sense of their night travel, slipping through the darkness to keep the secret of the illegitimate child from the community. Having the narrator present with the mother would alleviate much suspicion towards the matter, would anyone have happened to see the pair.

The ideas of order and disorder work themselves largely into the picture within Abe Akira's *Peaches*. Order is represented in the form of a strong family with the father away at war and the mother taking care of the house and children in a quiet, rural Japanese town. Disorder disrupts the scene, however, with the mother's infidelity and the resulting pregnancy and loss of the child. The narrative suggests that the aforementioned issues framing the conflict served to create the disorder, by definition. Abortion may not have been socially acceptable or legal or otherwise a normal occurrence, with infidelity in a similar boat. In the narrator's childhood years, aborting a pregnancy, especially one resulting from adultery, was not an option. But, as the narrator grows into adulthood, he notes that "nowadays", it very well may be a subject with more flexibility and consideration. Times have changed.

Bibliography

Akira, Abe. "Peaches." (n. d.): n. pag. Rpt. in *The Story and Its Writer*. 5th ed. N. p.: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999. 9-17. Print.