

The american tradition in literature

Literature



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The American Tradition in Literature

Introduction

Ann Beattie's *Janus* is a story that comments on the inertia and a sense of status quo that is created within bad marriages, marriages that for some reason, still continue to exist. Marriages which appear to be functional as the partners can coexist peacefully, but marriages which are devoid of companionship and hence happiness. Throughout the story, there are themes of dichotomy or duality, and this makes the title, *Janus*, an apt one for the story. *Janus* is the two faced god that enshrines symbolic transitions, but is often also used to show the intersection of past and future. The story too weaves across themes of intersections, dilemma and opportunities that could have proved to be turning points.

Body

Andrea and her husband were married for several years, and on the surface, their marriage looks stable and sustainable. However, Ann lets the duplicity of their marriage seep in early on when she writes, “ He (Andrea’s husband) had no more interest in the bowl than she (Andrea) had in his new Leica” (Beattie, 1999, p. 2000). This sentence highlights the subtle erosion of interest in or engagement and involvement with each other that Andrea and her husband share. The things that are dear to one spouse do not seem to interest the other. In addition, the fact that Andrea had an affair in the past, while she was married, indicate that the marriage is unable to fulfill her needs.

The title *Janus* is also used to depict the “ two-faced” attitude that Andrea’s lover accused her off, of her inability to make a decision and move on instead of being stuck at the crossroads. The lover leaves Andrea as in spite

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of her avowed love and happiness at being with him, Andrea chooses to ignore making the decision that could have united them. This “two faced” theme is also reflected in the difference between what Andrea believes her life is like, and the reality of her life. The story shows Andrea’s perspective of her own world and herself by using the allegory of the bowl. She describes the bowl as, “In its way it was perfect: the world cut in half”, (Beattie, 1999, p. 2000) indicating that she considers her life and marriage to be stable and even perfect.

However, in reality, her life is empty and discontented as she is divided between the overt task of meeting the current mundane needs of work and family, and her inherent desire to be loved and cared for by a companion. Andrea is increasingly estranged from her husband, and yet she is addicted to the stability of her marriage. She is lonely, as is symbolized by her ruminations, ““the bowl is meant to be empty,” (Beattie, 1999, p. 2001), and yet she thinks that she has a full life.

Conclusion

The title Janus for Andrea’s captures the essence of the duplicity of her life and her reluctance to acknowledge her true feelings and open the door to a truer life.

References

Beattie, A. (1999). Janus. In Perkins, G, and Perkins, B, Eds. (2007). The American Tradition in Literature, Volume II, 12th edition. (pp. 2000 - 2003). New York: McGraw-Hill