

Analysis of he by katherine anne porter



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Katherine Anne Porter's "He" In Katherine Anne Porter's short story, "He", Mrs. Whipple has the misfortune of a mentally retarded son. While struggling to feed and clothe the hungry mouths of her family, Mrs. Whipple tries to camouflage hatred toward her son by putting up a facade of love and concern for him in an attempt to look like a better individual. Mr. Whipple and Mrs. Whipple's neglect toward their son is evident right from the start by his lack of a name. He is only acknowledged as "He" or "Him".

Nance explains that this, "failure of the boy's parents to recognize his personality, symbolized by their failure to give him a name, is the root of their error and suffering" (Nance 19). If Mr. and Mrs. Whipple would take the time to understand their son as a person and recognize his abilities, they would be able to accept his situation more easily and Mrs. Whipple could be less concerned with what people say. The distortion of Mrs. Whipple's concern for her son is first evident when she says, "I wouldn't have anything happen to Him for all the world, but it just looks like I can't keep Him out of mischief.

He's so strong and active; He's always into everything; He was like that since He could walk. It's actually funny sometimes, the way He can do anything; it's laughable to see Him up to His tricks." (Porter 493) The truth is that Mrs. Whipple fails to put any considerable effort into keeping Him out of trouble in the first place. Mr. and Mrs. Whipple give the boy more chores because they say that He is bigger than average, and won't think twice about taking some of his blankets if the other children get cold in winter. On more than one occasion she intentionally puts Him in harm's way.

After receiving a letter saying that her brother and his family is coming for a visit, Mrs. Whipple insists on sacrificing a baby pig that would be worth a substantial amount of money by Christmas. With the mama pig being a great fighter, Mrs. Whipple asks Adna to retrieve the piglet. After Adna refuses the challenge, Mrs. Whipple believes it would be a great joke to make Him do it. After the boy manages to steal the pig, with the sow raging at His heels, Mrs. Whipple takes the pig from the boy without showing gratitude for the great favor He did. On another occasion, Mr. and Mrs. Whipple allow the boy to lead a full grown bull home.

Both knowing that the bull could easily tear the boy to pieces, they still allow him to bring the animal three miles home. She mustn't make a sound nor a move; she mustn't get the bull started. The bull heaved his head aside and horned the air at a fly. Her voice burst out of her in a shriek, and she screamed at Him to come on, for God's sake. He didn't seem to hear her clamor, but kept on twirling His switch and limping on, and the bull lumbered along behind him as gently as a calf. Mrs. Whipple stopped calling and ran towards the house, praying under her breath: " Lord, don't let anything happen to Him.

Lord, you know people will say we oughtn't to have sent Him. You know they'll say we didn't take care of Him. Oh, get Him home, safe home, safe home, and I'll look out for Him better! Amen. " (Porter 497) Without concern for the boy's safety Mrs. Whipple cries out at the boy to hurry up knowing that her actions could startle the bull. She then runs inside, not waiting to make sure her son made it all the way safely, and prays. Her prayers to get

Him home safely bear more on what people will say about her if he does not make it. “[This] is a prime example where Mrs.

Whipple’s superficial mask of love and concern is taken over by her abhorrence toward Him because of her personality flaw” (Makoid). Year after year the Whipple’s condition slowly dwindles. Adna and Emly move to the city for jobs, and He gets more chores placed upon his shoulders. One winter the boy slipped on some ice and fell over and started having convulsions. From then on He had to stay in bed. His legs swelled up and his condition didn’t improve. With the Whipples on their last legs, the doctors suggested they put the boy into the County Home. Mrs.

Whipple, still worried about what people will say, refuses to see the boy go. She thinks that with Adna and Emlys’ help the family will be able to get back on their feet by next summer and take care of the boy. Eventually Mrs. Whipple understands what has to be done. Her neighbor and the doctor drive Mrs. Whipple and Him to the hospital. On the ride to the hospital He starts to cry. This is when Mrs. Whipple realizes that He is going away forever. His tears signify that maybe He knew that He was going away and He was finally happy; Happy to get away from the distortion and confusion of his parents.

Mrs. Whipple understands her err, and is now truly concerned about his feelings. Mrs. Whipple and her family are poor southerners struggling to feed and clothe their children. With the addition of a mentally retarded second son, situations become more complicated for the family. Mrs. Whipple tries to mask the neglect of her disabled child by showing false love and concern

for him. Only if she could grasp reality and accept her situation, would she be able to overcome her position and truly be happy. Instead Mrs.

Whipple insists on hiding her conditions and doing whatever is possible to appear as a great family that is better off than they actually are. Works Cited Makoid, Terence. (2003, April 23). Katherine Anne Porter: Analysis of Mrs. Whipple in " He". Retrieved April 24, 2011, from University of North Carolina website: <http://www.unc.edu/home/tmakoid/english/he.html> Nance, William L. Katherine Anne Porter & the Art of Rejection. University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill , 1964. 18-23. Porter, Katherine A. (1927). He. In L. McDougal, American Literature (pp. 493-498). Evanston, IL: McDougal.