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Reflective Essay

Kate Chopin and Katherine Anne Porter share multiple concepts in their short stories which influenced my own. For example, I modeled the overall outcome where Jean makes her own decision about not having kids after the scene in Porter’s “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” where two men try to pressure Miranda into buying Liberty Bonds to help the war effort that she declines. Miranda’s determined opinions about the war also influenced Jean to stand by her opinions when others try to get her to think the same way a lot of Southern women do about having children. In addition, an early scene in Porter’s “Theft” where the protagonist judges a man for wearing a new hat out in the rain influences another character in my story. The importance placed on physical appearance influenced the attitude of my protagonist’s mother-in-law, Loretta, in the scene where she wipes off Jean’s makeup because she believed she was wearing too much.

Furthermore, I modeled a scene where Jean chooses to keep and hide white wine for herself instead of sharing the alcohol with her husband, Mark, at dinner after the scene in Chopin’s short story “A Pair of Silk Stockings” where Mrs. Sommers decides to dine out at a fancy restaurant instead of eating whatever snacks are available at home. I chose this scene because both characters choose themselves in their respective moments. Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” also influenced my story through the relief that Louise feels when embracing her brief status of freedom for the scene where Jean feels free as she cooks in the kitchen by herself. I further modeled my story after this one in terms of the shock provided by husbands that Louise feels from her husband turning out to be alive with shock that Jean feels when Mark brings his mother to their date night.

When thinking about my story, I knew the protagonist should have an identity struggle that would impact her community status in a large way. Since having children is a large tradition held in high regard by most Southern women, the cultural survival of the group is altered by Jean who doesn’t hold motherhood in high regard for herself as an individual. Her choice to turn away and isolate herself from the group’s cultural tradition on this subject also messes with community status of ideal Southern womanhood since she remains a wife rather than wanting to be a wife and a mother. Both women Jean interacts with emphasize how great they believe having children is, which leads to assumptions of the idea of motherhood that Jean struggles with as a Southern woman. Her community status is seen as something that needs to be changed since the norm for married women in the South is to have children, making her role in the community questionable.

Public image ideals for Southern women affect my story when Loretta asks Jean if she’ll lonely as a childless woman even though both husband and wife would be childless. Another example of public image involved the concept of two women who know each other meeting in the grocery store and having a conversation. True Southern womanhood means that if you’re a woman, you make polite conversation when you see someone in public while going against that would tarnish a woman’s image because not speaking equals rudeness. I incorporated a specific example of Southern Mythology about women into Loretta who removes makeup because a woman who wears too much makeup is not respectable in Southern womanhood. The mother-in-law also enforces cultural traditions upon the protagonist when they pray before eating their dinner. In conclusion, Southern ideals involving community status and public image for women influenced the behavior of different women in my story due to how much they believe in them.