

Sample Student

March 11, 2014

English 101B – Christensen

Extra Credit Double-Entry Journal Response #1

Yonnondio by Tillie Olsen pages 98-101

<p>“Set, intent faces passed by. Terrible faces, masked in weariness and hate and lust, faces that knew her not, that saw her not. The long street stretched infinite, a space that could never be finished traveling over, distorted buildings blocking each side” (99).</p>	<p>In this section, Mazie is walking down the street while in a dream-like state, oblivious to the world around her. She is almost catatonic in response to her move from the farm. Olsen’s description makes the environment seem like hell and the people as demons. Mazie is so damaged by her circumstances that she is having a psychotic episode. To me her reaction does not match her circumstances. It appears that Olsen has a reason or agenda for portraying Mazie, a six-year old girl this way.</p>
<p>“She put her arm around the lamppost. Its solidity was fearful to her. As for the first time she saw the street and people, and it entered into her like death” (99).</p>	<p>Why does realizing where she is “enter into her like death”? I think this passage is designed to elicit feelings of horror and sorrow for this little girl’s terrible situation.</p>
<p>“Every step was pain, every look was pain. The spit felt on her face again and the terrible face of the soldier as he ran down the stairs thickened her horror that over it held the shadow of something mushy, opening in the middle, pressed hard against her cheeks” (100).</p>	<p>Could this be referring to her incident with Sheen McEvoy in chapter one? Is Mazie reliving the trauma associated with his face, described as a “red mass of jelly . . . [with an] opening in the middle” (16)? I think Olsen is making a connection between the coal mining town and this new home – nothing has changed. Different place, same problems.</p>
<p>“‘Today they hire. Damn shame you aint a nigger,’ the other man interrupted. ‘If you was you could get on in a minute. They think you are a scissors bill maybe they take you too-that is why they taking blacks-they think they scab if there is a strike-have to scab, how else they get job?’” (101).</p>	<p>These paragraph is ironic. The workers that are being oppressed by the slaughterhouse (and complaining about it) are in turn using racist terms that are in themselves oppressive. I think Olsen is taking a calculated risk here by using racism to demonstrate how “evil” the company really is – they are willing to hire blacks (a bad thing) before hiring white workers. She is making a point that the company cares more about profits than the lives of poor workers. It is clear to me that Olsen is making a political statement. I feel like I’m being sold by a political operative. She seems to be using every literary tactic possible to convince the reader to take action against these companies.</p>