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Marion’s Obsession with Honoria

Far before the events of Babylon Revisited unfold, three major events occur that change the lives of the main characters. These happenings set an initially negative tone for the story, leaving a lot of emotional room for Charlie’s happy ending to fill with positivity. The events also serve as an explanation for the relationship between Charlie and his sister-in-law Marion, who has the final say in whether of not Honoria will be allowed to go to Prague. These events are the Great Depression, Charlie’s alcoholism, and the death of Charlie’s wife Helen. These incidents establish a past of turmoil for our characters and results in Marion’s immense distrust of Charlie’s parental aptitude. Ultimately, this distrust seems to be the reason why the reader never sees the positive ending for Charlie that looks to be so inevitable for most of the story, as Marion refuses to allow Honoria to go with Charlie. There is an ulterior motive, however, for the decision that is made. That motive is an obsession that Marion has towards Honoria.

Marion makes it clear that she was very close to her sister. Marion’s remarks about Helen when discussion custody of the daughter, “Please leave Helen out of it. I can’t bear to hear you talk about her like that.” (Fitzgerald 706) and “My duty is entirely to Helen… She was my sister,” (Fitzgerald 706) are evidence of this strong sisterly bond. Given the tragic and expected death of Helen, it stands to reason that Marion misses her greatly. Marion copes with her grief by keeping Honoria around. This is why she is so frustrated when she finally concedes to allow Charlie to take her away the next day, crying in defeat “Do what you like!... I think if it were my child I’d rather see her – “ (Fitzgerald 708). The next day, when the family is interrupted by Charlie’s old drinking buddies, Marion seizes the moment as an opportunity to make a last minute case for not allowing Honoria to leave, allowing her to keep around the symbol of her attachment to her sister for at least six more months.

This obsession has a justifiable cause as well. Marion’s psychological state was heavily damaged by the aforementioned death of Helen, yet that damage was compounded by the effects of the Great Depression, Charlie’s continued alcoholism, and his eventual admittance into a psychiatric ward. Marion’s husband Lincoln suggests that these events are simply the reasons for the question of whether or not Marion has confidence in Charlie (Fitzgerald 706), but these incidents also have the hidden dual effect of negatively impacting Marion’s mental health. In such a situation, not only would Honoria serve Marion as a way to fill the void of her now missing sisterly bond, but that sisterly bond would also serve as a much-needed comfort in such a time of strife as the late twenties and early thirties. The fact that Honoria has lived with Marion’s family all the way through the Great Depression is justification for a very strong monodirectional emotional attachment as a coping mechanism for the loss of a very close family member.