The Monkey’s Paw: Fear Of The Outside

In numerous aspects, “The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs studies Mr. Whites remarkably convoluted character, one that transforms from being ultimately happy to one full of fear, guilt, loneliness and doubt. From the dark and stormy night that rages outside the family’s home in the beginning of the story, to the allegedly cursed object Morris brings back from his travels, to the knocking at the door, all of the dangers in the story originate from the outside threatening the safety of the home. Mr. Whites character unfolds and his warm and cheery personality is transformed to one that is full of fear from the dangerous elements that intrude the house.

The story is set inside the White family house and around the Laburnam Villa where “the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa, the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly” (Jacobs). Jacobs contrasts between the comfortable atmosphere inside and the desolate weather outside creates an atmosphere of suspense and foreboding. The Whites house is filled with symbols and representations of joyful domesticity; a fire place, a piano, a chess board, a breakfast table, a copper kettle and even knitting. However, this domesticity is ruined because the Whites’ repeatedly invite trouble into their cozy home. Sergeant Major Morris – a world traveler and a family friend—infringes the serenity in the Whites’ home when he shares his stories of the incidents he discovered in India and the magic he came across. The danger that is associated with welcoming this outsider into their home becomes evident when the monkey paw the Whites purchase from Morris leads to their son’s death. Mrs. and Mr. White mutilate the healthy atmosphere of their home time and time again shattering their happiness. The perception that outside influences brings misfortune to a once-protected family in this manner establishes the main contrast in the story of the inside being innocuous, while the outside is perilous and obscure. This gives rise to Mr. White’s anxiety causing him to become tense and apprehensive.

It is clear that throughout the story, Mr. White becomes increasingly fearful and more sorrowful for the situation he is in, precisely in the specified passage. The house becomes increasingly gloomier with strange shadows from candles and creaking stairs. The candle that is introduced in the beginning of the passage to light up the bedroom is said to “throw pulsating shadows” until “it expired” (Jacobs). The imagery used here is very strong in that it relates the throbbing light to a human being. The word, ‘pulsating’ suggests that the shadows get bigger and smaller in a recurring pattern which could resemble a heartbeat. However, when the candle is put out, that disappearing light has implications associated with death and demise. In addition to this, ‘throwing’ has been added to show that the shadows aren’t flowing in an orderly fashion but are being shot ominously at the wall. This shows the distasteful atmosphere that has corrupted the White’s house causing Mr. White to become more cautious and appalling of his surrounding.

The most horrendous threat to the family home is the likelihood that Herbert’s decaying corpse is knocking the front door. When Mr. White hears the knocking on the door, he becomes anxious and searches for the monkey’s paw desperately, “if he could only find it before the thing outside got in”. The accentuation Jacobs puts on the division of outside and inside amid this scene underscores Mr. Whites dread of the outside world and their sensation of wellbeing inside their home. Nevertheless, when Mr. White opens the door, he sees only a ' quiet and

deserted road' (Jacobs). Mr. White's frightened response to his dead child's yearning for entrance implies not simply his repulsiveness at the possibility of a vivified body, however his understanding, obtained from his experience, that any individual originating from the outside ought to be treated as a perilous danger to the holiness of their home.

By the end of the story, it is evident that Mr. White’s pain is twofold as he regrets his child’s demise just as his choice to make a wish on the monkey’s paw. Mr. White has learned the consequences that arise of making an attempt to change fate. His progression from a satisfied father to a childless man indifferent to his wife, shows that Mr. White recognizes that he should not have allowed trouble into his home by asking for the monkey’s paw and wishing for the two hundred pounds in the first place. The mere fact that Mr. White thinks an evil creature is standing outside knocking on his front door instead of his son implies his feelings of guilt and remorse for being so selfish as to wish for something he did not need. Rather than pass off the knocking as an extraneous coincidence, Mr. White instantaneously jumps to the assumption that evil is standing on the other side of the door, as if believing the paw has reprimanded him for being avaricious. His choice to utilize his last wish to dispose of the undesirable visitor may mirror his desire to save not just himself and Mrs. White's lives, yet in addition make up for his sins.