September 25, 2015 Amanda Murphy

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*The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare is about an adolescent girl named Kit Tyler who moves from an affluent life in Barbados, when her grandfather dies, to a dreary colonial Connecticut to live with her Aunt Rachel, Uncle Matthew and cousins Judith and Mercy. Kit struggles to fit into the harsh Puritan way of life, changing her colorful wardrobe to the drab garments which are more “pleasing to God,” and made for the tedious work done by women in the community. After only a day, Kit is pursued by Wethersfield’s wealthiest young bachelor, William Ashby. Conflicted by a lackluster relationship with William, and homesick because of the misguided beliefs of her Puritan family and neighbors, Kit finds herself comforted by an older Quaker woman who has been outcast by the same community. Kit and Hannah, as well as innocent, young Prudence and the compassionate, strong-willed Nat find strength and acceptance with each other. Their lives outside of the acceptable customs of the Puritan town are tested as Hannah and Kit are accused of being witches, for which they could be put to death. The climax occurred when the town’s suspicions turned into a violent witch hunt. In the end, Kit is set free by the courts, and in her heart, as she agrees to go to sea with Nat to build a life together.

**Kit Tyler**: headstrong, loyal, considerate, dogged

**Hannah Tupper**: benevolent, resolute, compassionate, empathetic

**Nat Eaton**: reliable, hard-working, persistent, caring

**Judith Wood**: arrogant, pretentious, self-involved, hopeful

1. This novel is set in the late 17th century in colonial New England. Considering the strong Puritan influence, as well as cultural norms and political structures in America and in England, how does the setting of this novel contribute to the conflicts throughout the novel?

**A: The main conflict is an internal struggle Kit has to be accepted in her new home, while staying true to herself. She comes from Barbados where she has experienced the joys of life that men and especially women in New England could never imagine. Puritans are reserved and often concede to tradition instead of true happiness. Kit learns that staying true to herself, and loyal to her friends and family is more important than fitting into a culture that conflicts with her personal values.**

1. Conflict (internal and/or external) is the force that drives the plot of a novel. Describe one of the main conflicts Kit faced, which made her a dynamic character and then illuminated the theme.

**A: Kit is faced with a choice to abandon her friends because she may encounter consequences from a strict community, including her own family, or to stay loyal to the needs of her comrades. She began her journey as a spoiled young girl, but after hard work and a commitment to those who have taken her in and cared for her, she realizes that love can be shared with others who are not familial. She is able to grow into an independent young woman, making her own life decisions and giving back to others, while standing up to the wrongs she sees in her society. Thematically she learns that freedom of individuality trumps oppressive, misguided tradition.**

1. Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent an idea. The meadow, for Kit, as well as some of the other characters is meaningful. Discuss the meadow’s symbolic meaning for Kit.

**A: When Kit first runs from her fears and problems at the dame school she finds herself in the meadow. Here she experiences a peace that she has been unable to attain anywhere else since arriving in Wethersfield. The meadow, for Kit, symbolizes freedom. There are no barriers (fences) to keep anything or anyone in or out. This is a place where she exercises her freedom of choice. She feels peaceful and close to nature. She also meets Hannah in this field. Hannah helps her to establish a confidence to pursue her freedom of choice and self.**

From chapter 19, pages 221-222

**Speaker- Goodman Cruff**: “Well this is a new country over here, and who says it may not be just as needful for a woman to read as a man?...Any rate, I got someone now to read the Good Book to me of an evening, and if that’s the work of the devil, then I say ‘tis a mighty queer thing for the devil to go working against himself.”

This is the most important passage in the novel because it is a turning point with the conflict, leading the plot toward a resolution. Goodman Cruff once represented one of the novel’s antagonists, but has a change of heart and mind once he sees the compassion Kit, the protagonist, has shown his daughter. Not only does he, and others in the town, come to the realization that Kit is not a witch, but some of the intolerant Puritan views become subject to new interpretation, as Goodman Cruff expresses that, “this is a new country,” and it is, “just as needful for a woman to read as a man.” This is the first sign of gender equality. This passage illustrates thematically that one’s identity cannot be forced upon him/her and should not be presumed, because we all have a right to free choice, deserving equal respect. While one may maintain his/her faith, it is not always necessary to submit to tradition.

This was a fantastic novel. I felt that the characters were relatable, making it easy to form connections. I felt the disgust for Goodwife Cruff, which I have felt for other close-mined people I have encountered in my life. Kit inspired me to fight for my true self, yet to stay loyal to those who have shown their loyalties to me. While the action was not as prevalent in this novel as much as in others, the themes the novel revealed were inspirational and empowering. To quote another novel whose theme exemplifies individuality, “The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings.” I have enjoyed learning more about the colonial Americas and the types of people upon whom our nation was built, for better or worse. I would recommend this novel to anyone, especially those with an interest in historical fiction and the relationship between religion and politics.