

Debra McDowell

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Engl 1301

Essay 3

Changing of the Doors

Change is a difficult concept for rats. Their brains are not large enough to comprehend the effects of change. In the story, "The Door," E. B. White describes the rats as having been "trained to jump at the square card with the circle in the middle," to get to the food. The rats are creatures of habit and get used to going in a specific direction to get to the food. The day the card is changed, the rats try to go the same direction, "but the card wouldn't give way." The rats' tiny brains cannot process the change and eventually go insane. Although a man's brain is larger and more developed than the rats' brains, the man in the story is similar to the rats in the sense that he seems to be trapped in a maze of doors that keep changing. The maze or "this so strange house" represents the man's life in general, and the changing doors symbolize significant events, or memories from the man's life.

One gets the feeling the man has lived a long time, he has seen many changes, and he has had many experiences, as he states in the story, "There have been so many doors changed on me." As with the rats, humans are creatures of habit as well. It is the tendency of man to resist change; they prefer things to be comfortable, familiar, and consistent, like a well-oiled machine. When change happens, it is like throwing a wrench into the works; the machine will not run smoothly, and in some cases, it may quit working all together. However, the man has come to the realization that change is impossible to resist: all one can do is accept it and move on. There

is no looking back, and one cannot stand still. Change will happen whether one wants it to or not.

The man explains:

But it is now becoming clear that it is an impossible situation, and the question is to jump again, [. . .]. But it is inevitable that they will keep changing the doors on you, [. . .] and the thing is to get use to it and not let it unsettle the mind. But that would mean not jumping, and you can't. Nobody can not jump. There will be no not-jumping.

A few of the doors are vaguely described: “the one with the equation on it and the picture of the amoeba reproducing itself by division,” and “the one with the photostatic copy of a check for thirty-two dollars and fifty cents.” One can guess the meanings of those doors as puberty and paying the bills, but the true meanings are unclear. The door with the picture of the girl, however, has a very clear meaning, and it is safe to assume the man is talking about his true love:

I remember the door with the picture of the girl on it (only it was spring), her arms outstretched in loveliness, [. . .] -and I guess we would all like to try that door again, [. . .] the door would open and you would go through winged and exalted.

The statement “winged and exalted” is such a cliché, but one cannot argue the meaning. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines winged as “soaring with or as if with wings” (“Winged” def. 2) and exalted as “to inspire.” (“Exalt” def. 3) So the man is stating that when passing through that door, he felt inspired and was soaring as if with wings. That is the feeling every person gets when he or she finds his or her true love. One can almost feel the devastation of losing a love like that. It is understandable that the man refused to move on and kept bumping his nose, “the time they changed that door on me my nose bled for a hundred hours.”

The man is old and weary, but he is reluctant to let death take him. He says, “If only when you put your foot down to take a step, the ground wouldn’t come up to meet your foot the way it does [. . .] anticipating ever so delicately the weight of the body, which is somewhere else.” He would not mind if his life continued, “Or would you prefer to show me further through this so strange house,” but in the end, he is willing to go through the door. As he takes his final steps, he expects to see one of the old doors. He hopes it is his true love door, and that he will be reunited with the love he lost. The story concludes, “But he saw instead a moving stairway [. . .] As he stepped off, the ground came up slightly, to meet his foot.” His life is over, and since humans can only speculate about the after-life, the story is also over.

Doors are simply the passages from one room to another. In “The Door,” the doors have a much deeper meaning than that. They are not just passages from one room to another; they represent the changes from one memory or event to another, and they carry all the feelings, emotions, and headaches associated with each memory. In that sense, the doors truly are symbolic of significant events, or memories from the man’s life.

Works Cited

“Exalt.” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed., Houghton Mifflin Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.

White, E. B. “The Door.” *Fiction The EServer Collection*, Accessed 17 June 2011,
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