Talking To The Dead Essay, Research Paper

Nina in ” Talking to the Dead ”

The love of the two sisters in “Talking to the Dead” of Helen Dunmore is

somehow complicated. One is three years older than the other, they play their

roles perfectly between sister and sister. When they were young, the younger one

almost obeyed whatever the older said with no objection:

“and she knelt down and puts her arms round me, mouthing over my head to our father, ‘Neen wanted it to be a girl.’ I’d wanted nothing, but I hid my face in Isabel’s shirt .”

As child, they seem to fit in the game “mother- daughter”: “this time I lay passive, staring up at her while she patted me to sleep, the way we patted our dolls.” (Dunmore\_61). Such relationship can be reflected not just in the past, but in what they acknowledge in the present as well. Yesterday they shared so many memories together: the beach, the picnic, even the curiosity about their Mom’s giving birth to the little brother, Colin: ” What’s it like, having the baby ? I asked Isabel, and she wrinkled her nose, remembering. Noisy, she said at last.” ( Dunmore\_ 58).Yet today they also share their knowledge for each other which is a secret nobody knows, but them. What is the message the author want to tell ? What we can tell about such a special relationship of the two sisters who were raised under one roof; they were offered the same love from their parents, and the older seems to be always take care of the younger one as good as a mother: ” Isabel held me tight round the waist as the waves sucked below us. The water was deep here, and dangerous Isabel’s hands held me tight as I leaned out to throw the line clear of the rocks ” (Dunmore\_59). Unfortunately, everything changes when they grow up. Having an affair with her sister’s husband, Nina lead Isabel comes to suicide as she find out the truth. How could such tragedy happened? Whose fault? Nina? The questions need answers.. What is reinforcement for her doing so? Does she has reason for that?

They are sisters, they are best friends, Isabel and Nina altogether they shared a great of memories in childhood. Since the death of their little brother, Colin, they seem to be closer than ever. Grown up, Nina lives in London and works as a photographer; beautiful Isabel is married to Richard, a successful economist and settles her life at a small town in country. As Isabel has a first child, Nina comes to look after her sister. The reunion of the two sisters does awake their childhood, which was believed it had already gone; and the link between their dead baby brother with Isabel’s baby points out the hiding truth which stays beyond Nina’s expectation. Who killed the baby? Nina? Isabel? The questions still wait for the answers. Mean while, Nina has an affair with Richard. Later on, Isabel notices the relationship between her husband and her sister, she kills herself and leaves the baby for her husband and Nina.

Nina or Neen, as her sister usually calls her is the protagonist of ” Talking to the Dead”, a particular one and a talent photographer “They wanted to look at the camera, I had a Polaroid with me too, and that made things easy.”(Dunmore\_15). She likes to take pictures, she likes to draw, she likes food and she likes sex. Independence, intensity, and a bit persistence, Nina is really an attractive character to me.

Nina loves food and likes cooking. She uses food to get out her bad feeling when she was told that Isabel is in risk of health:

” My hands shook I had a pain in my throat ..I was clutching my towel tightly round me Then I went straight into the kitchen, cut a thick crust of a fresh white loaf, smeared it with butter ..and ate it fast ..There was sweat on my forehead kept on eating. I was not going to let myself think of the things Richard has said, not yet.” (Dunmore\_12.13)

In the way she prepare the dinner for everybody in Isabel’s house, Nina proves strongly that she is an expert in cooking and knows how to select the best items to serve for the meal: “They are not the right apples ..they must be cut evenly I let it cook a little longer ..Now it looks right I dip in run my finger over its back, then taste, closing my eyes…” (Dunmore\_68.69).The language here is beautiful, the taste, the smell, the flavor, all that brings out a passion in which the reader can sink in the journey of her cooking to experience. What a passion ! She is so sure that she is a good cook: “People who likes cooking make the best cook.”

Likewise, Nina is a young woman who is not a usual woman. She has her job as a photographer, and live alone in London. In addition, she does not care much about her appearance. The makeup, the scents or all stuffs which belong to woman seem not to bother her at all; otherwise, they ” seemed so complicated ” (Dunmore\_21) to her. Mean while, this could explain why she likes to take her own picture when she is naked. She admits that the way she is naked is not for sex, but “just naked” (Dunmore\_21). In her belief, the body, her body at least, is viewed as an object for her picture, no more no less and it is not a symbol of sex; otherwise, it should be something else, something about ” technicality” : ” In one I was naked. Not naked the way I’d want anyone else to see me, not posing naked or sex naked.” (Dunmore\_21). This might help explain why she could have sex with Richard even though she does not love him at all. However, Richard is not the first man in her life; if there is a countdown, Richard would stand in the twentieth line: ” How many men have you slept with ?\_ asks Richard. Nineteen\_ I say immediately.” ( Dunmore\_94). No one can tell what Nina really think about sex.

There must be a reason that could explain all Nina’s reactions. Younger than her sister three years, Nina must have found favor not just in her parents (before her brother was born, of course), but in Isabel as well. Nina is loved by her sister, she is looked after by her sister, she is “patted to sleep” by her sister and she is protected from the death of her little brother by her sister. Isabel has done so much for Nina. Eventually, as a child Nina took all the love for granted from Isabel, and keep in mind that Isabel is always hers; that Isabel would not love anyone else rather than her; that no one could take her place in Isabel’s heart because she already stays there. Certainly, with a child’s thinking, Nina could not notice the jealousy: ” I didn’t want it. She was my mother, mine and Isabel’s. Why had she chosen to make things worse like this? let alone the baby.” ( Dunmore\_ 58). But as a grown-up person, she should know what is going on in her mind when Isabel has the first child.

She does not like the baby, Isabel’s child. When she was asked to draw the baby, she refused to do so just because she does not like him: ” He is Isabel’s. I don’t want to draw the curve of her arm around him, or the way her neck bends, or his legs curling to her breast.” (Dunmore\_34). This probably reminds her of the time she spent with Isabel. The legs, the curve of arms.She notices she is abandoned by her sister, that she cannot have such a love like before from Isabel any more because her sister has someone else, the baby.

Nina was jealous with her little brother: “.My brother was born ..It seemed endless .I didn’t want it let alone the baby (Dunmore\_57.8)”, and now with her nephew, Anthony: ” The baby looks a bit like him .. My father ..” and her father ” was very selfish.(Dunmore\_36.7)” She does not like the baby. Then she blames that the baby looks like her father\_ a selfish man she does not want to talk about. Not just the babies, but Nina can be jealous with anyone who is around Isabel as well. She hates Edward because he is always with Isabel and makes her happy; she does not like Alex just because his concern for Isabel. She believes that it is worthless for her sister to have them here, in the house that must have belonged to her and Isabel only: ” and giving nothing back. Why does she do it? Why does she has them here, Edward and Alex and all the others who come for supper and stay a week? .I can never see her alone(Dunmore\_84).”

Back to the point that Nina and Richard come together just because they feel like abandoning by Isabel. There is too much people around her (Edward, Alex, the mid-wife, the baby, Susan ) and she does not want that. Why should she? “I only wanted her”, says Richard. Isabel is Richard’s and Nina’s: ” It wasn’t Richard who had wanted the baby, it was Isabel he would have prefered to be alone with Isabel. I know how he feels because it is how I feel myself.” (Dunmore\_19). They can make her happy without other helps. Isabel does not really need those people. Isabel needs them, her husband and her lovely sister. What Richard and Nina is doing just a reaction in which against to what they cannot change\_ a way to get out the jealousy that stretches their mind, makes their soul be tired so that pushes them to find something can release them.

Some might say that Nina is an antagonist character because of her reaction is somewhat against to her sister; that she is responded for the death of Isabel. The tragedy will not happen if she had not come over to look after her sister. Let’s look at the story in this way: It is difficult to say completely that the relationship between the two sisters is just sister and sister. That always means something else. In childhood, they almost spent all the time together, rarely to see them played separately. They always had each other in any game even the existence of the little brother did not bother them at all. For years, the game no longer belongs to the past. Nevertheless, the game now is a part of their life, even though they grew up and have a different life: In the game, each sister plays her role perfectly as if they used to do before: Isabel is older one so that she takes care her young sister; Nina is younger so that she needs to obey what her sister says. Also Nina keeps thinking Isabel is hers; that Isabel would love her as much as she would not have anyone else to love rather than her: ” She loved me so much, I always knew that. I always knew that Isabel loved me even more than my mother did.”(Dunmore\_148) The climax is made when the jealousy is blown out by the kiss Richard gave to Nina, not the death of Isabel at the final. Such an event happens in anywhere in life. The conflict comes to the highest level with the beginning of the affair between Richard and Nina.Then breaks down, finishes with the death of Isabel.

Helen Dunmore is so successful with the way she uses the language, the tone and the description. I love the way Nina tells me about her cooking, that is a passion! However, I do not like her talking about the dreams, those that Nina has while she stays in Isabel’s house. Such dreams may leave a confusing about the character Nina. Besides that, the story is really a successful work of Helen Dunmore: particular language, strong tone, characterization with specific characters; the novel really persuades readers about the love of the two sisters.

The final is the death of one of the main characters, Isabel. The play is over. It is time for closing the stage. A question still is a mystery after the death of Isabel that who murdered the little brother, or he died because of accident? Meanwhile, I can see the most beautiful love between sister and sister I have never seen before. I’m just noticed that we have been far away such a love a long time. We have been struggle for seeking a love somewhere while we do not know that we have been forgotten the love which comes from our family. Yes, I am talking about our brothers and sisters. We have been forgotten them for years, suddenly we notice them when time is gone.

The writer tells her story, the story of both sisters; who win, who lose, no one can tell. But the love in the story just flows from page to page as if a small river is going to go to the bigger river so that it can create the biggest river, the river of life which will keep flowing and never stop. I like character Nina, she is the one who reminds me I still have a family to care for.

Work Cited

Helen, Dunmore. Talking to the Dead. Little, Brown and Company, 1997.