The outcome of Katherine Anne Porter’s “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” is not abundantly clear at the end of the story. The possibilities, commonly drawn from readers of this piece, have been that she dies, she loses her mind completely, or that she is “jilted” by God and is ready to die but doesn’t. The least likely, given Granny’s repeated outcries, inward and outward, of surprise and discontentment, would be that she is ready to die and doesn’t. Therefore, the two options that will be closely analyzed are Granny’s possible death or her complete loss of mind. However, all options will be addressed. Death holds the most support in the context, but maybe the death of her conscience is just as tragic and, to her, the same as physical death.

First, there was the possibility of her readiness to die and the lack of deliverance. This was ruled out quickest due to the surrounding clues at the end of the story. For example, the first clue is when she realizes that her children are there to, presumably, watch her die. At this she thinks, “But I can’t, it’s not time” (Porter). She follows this with many things that she wanted or meant to do before her death. Immediately after, she makes a similar claim to the one quoted above: “I’m not going, Cornelia. I’m taken by surprise. I can’t go” (Porter). This, again, indicates that Granny isn’t ready to die.

If this outcome were to be accepted at all, it would be because of Granny’s preparations for death 20 years prior to the actual occurrence. From what can be drawn from the text, Granny
tried desperately to control the uncontrollable. This extends to the control of her death as well. She expected to die at 60 and did what was necessary to be ready. It was not her time to die though, and when the time did come she was no longer ready or acceptant; hence the panic and confusion. Overall, the suggestion that Granny is ready to die but doesn’t does not offer a possible conclusion, only another possible jilting in the life of Granny. The panic-stricken thoughts continue until the end when she blows out the light that represents herself. This certainly implies some type of death, and whether it is physical or not, it is death to Granny.

Therefore, this possible outcome can be discarded with ease and support.

The two most likely outcomes are the loss of her mind or her death. First, the analysis of the loss of her mind. As mentioned before, whether this death is physical or mental, it is death in the subject’s eyes. The support for insanity or susceptibility to a mental illness, possibly Alzheimer’s, is the passage in its entirety. Granny is clearly confused throughout the entire story. She moves in and out of reality; she is imagining things, her track of time is flawed, and her speech and mere thoughts are chaotic. The audience experiences this with her, and it takes time and re-reading to understand what is real in the story and what is stream-of-thought. Clearly, she is losing her mind. Or maybe she has already had bad experiences with this illness, whatever the diagnosis. Regardless, her sanity is fading, and this makes the loss of her mind a very realistic outcome.

Although this can be supported in the passage alone, there’s no solid case for it. In addition, the majority of scholarly analyses of the story do not settle on this approach, or even mention it. It is most probable that she actually dies in the end. This can be drawn from several clues, other than her own perception of what is happening.
For instance, she is 80 and clearly sick. The probability of death at this age, especially when one is sick, is very high. Along with that, we can observe who is at the scene with her. A doctor, a priest, and her entire family are present and suggesting that they have come for care, her soul, and to say their goodbyes. The last piece of evidence within the text for this outcome is the last sentence, “she stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light,” symbolizing her last breath (Porter).

The tone and structure of this passage are extremely important to the interpretation. Because it is read in third-person, but taken from Granny’s mind/point-of-view, the audience’s perception of the story mirrors Granny’s perception of what is happening. Her thought process is chaotic and confusing, therefore the readers are confused. She is troubled, therefore the readers are troubled. And at the end, she believes she is dying, and as a consequence, the audience is forced to believe so too. Porter’s writing technique is strategic and allows her audience to feel what she intended them to feel. She also uses this narrative approach to open the ending to interpretation. For all is known, Granny’s mind is dead, which makes her believe she is dead and also makes the reader believe so too. Death is surely involved, yet, there is no way to be sure of the true outcome.

Based on this knowledge, one can assume death is the intended interpretation. Further support for Granny’s death can be drawn from many scholars and their interpretations of Porter’s work. According to David Estes, this story alludes to several of Emily Dickenson’s poems – the most significant being “Because I could not stop for Death -.” The first line of the poem is “Because I could not stop for death - / He kindly stopped for me.” This insinuates a lack of control of the matter, depicted through Granny’s story. Another reference appears when Granny compares Cornelia’s voice to a cart and begins describing this cart, very similar to the carriage of
death in Dickenson’s poem (Estes). Several other factors from Dickenson’s work are alluded to throughout the story, demonstrating Porter’s familiarity with Dickenson and further supporting the event of death.

Margaret Carter in her biography of Katherine Porter, featured in the *Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, claims that a common theme in Porter’s fictional work is “the exploration of the responsible individual’s survival in an essentially evil world” (Carter). In “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” as Granny approaches the end, she’s crowded with memories from her life. These memories aren’t her best memories. She remembers being left at the altar, she remembers the death of her child, Hapsy, she remembers John’s death, and many other unpleasant life events that result in some type of loss or abandonment. These memories haunt her until she takes control again and blows out the light (Mayer). It is almost as her survival during the story is supported by cruelty she has experienced, and the uncertainty that follows leaving the memories and “evil world” behind. “Oh, no, there’s nothing more cruel than this – I’ll never forget it,” are Granny’s last thoughts (Porter). This, possibly, is an address to the cruel world, and finally a deciding factor to blow out the light and face that uncertainty.

The light, the jilting, and Granny’s death parallel the parable in Matthew 25 of the New Testament (Estes). In the parable, the foolish virgins brought no oil with them, and the wise did. When the bridegroom was delayed, as Granny’s death was when she had prepared for it earlier in her life, they slumbered. When the bridegroom did arrive, those who had brought their oil were prepared to light their lamps again, but those who did not prepare could not participate in the ceremony. The parable ends with “’Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming’” (Matthew 25:13). The light - herself, therefore, is similar to the lamp light in the parable. When death did not come when she had expected it to in her 60’s,
Granny did no further preparing. Consequently, when it did come, she was like the foolish virgins - unprepared.

The jilting is the trivial part of the story. Who is jilting who when she blows out her own light? It is argued that Christ jilts Granny when she asks God for a sign but receives no answer. Barbara Laman refutes this idea by proposing that Hapsy is her sign (Laman). In the text, Granny sees Hapsy in her confusion and acknowledges the possibility to see her again through death, “You’ll see Hapsy again. What bothered her? ‘I thought you’d never come.’ Granny made a long journey outward, looking for Hapsy…” (Porter). The internal quote implies that Hapsy is speaking. Laman argues that God answers Granny’s cries through Hapsy, indicating that her death is truly coming and that there is some good in it.

“Granny is both the jilted and the jilter” in the end (Mayer). Granny was not prepared for the death coming for her, but she ceases the opportunity to, at least in her mind, take control. The light is going out regardless of how; whether it is blown out or dies on its own. Porter could have wrote that Granny watched the light go out, merely leaving her body a victim of the abandonment, but instead, Granny blows the light out on her own. As the misfortunes of her life crowd her and she realizes the despair she has bared in her life, she decides when the light goes out. “This time she jilts,” abandoning her life that was once so cruel (Mayer).

Given the clues from the text, as well as the popularity of death being the outcome among scholars, the conclusion is that she dies. She dies her unexpected death, but she also unexpectedly transforms before her death. Rather than allowing herself to be jilted by someone or something (death), as she has been several times in her life, she doesn’t allow herself to be abandoned. She blows out the light, assuming control and leaving her situation willfully.
Works Cited


