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NAT MASTERPLOTS II
2004
Nol.3

SHORT STORY SERIES REVISED EDITION

Volume 3

Esm-Hor

Editor, Revised Edition

CHARLES MAY

California State University, Long Beach

Editor, First Edition

FRANK N. MAGILL

SALEM PRESS

Pasadena, California Hackensack, New Jersey

Editor in Chief: Dawn P. Dawson

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Second Printing

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EVERYDAY USE

Author: Alice Walker (1944-Type of plot: Social realism Time of plot: The late 1960's Locale: Rural Georgia First published: 1973

Principal characters:

THE NARRATOR, a middle-aged black woman Maggie, her younger daughter Dee, her older daughter Dee's male companion

The Story

"Everyday Use" is narrated by a woman who describes herself as "a large, bigboned woman with rough, man-working hands." She has enjoyed a rugged farming life in the country and now lives in a small, tin-roofed house surrounded by a clay yard in the middle of a cow pasture. She anticipates that soon her daughter Maggie will be married and she will be living peacefully alone.

The story opens as the two women await a visit from the older daughter, Dee, and a man who may be her husband—her mother is not sure whether they are actually married. Dee, who was always scornful of her family's way of life, has gone to college and now seems almost as distant as a film star; her mother imagines being reunited with her on a television show such as "This Is Your Life," where the celebrity guest is confronted with her humble origins. Maggie, who is not bright and who bears severe burn scars from a house fire many years before, is even more intimidated by her glamorous sibling.

To her mother's surprise, Dee arrives wearing an ankle-length, gold and orange dress, jangling golden earrings and bracelets, and hair that "stands straight up like the wool on a sheep." She greets them with an African salutation, while her companion offers a Muslim greeting and tries to give Maggie a ceremonial handshake that she does not understand. Moreover, Dee says that she has changed her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo, because "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me." Dee's friend has an unpronounceable name, which the mother finally reduces to "Hakim-a-barber." As a Muslim, he will not eat the pork that she has prepared for their meal.

Whereas Dee had been scornful of her mother's house and possessions when she was younger (even seeming happy when the old house burned down), now she is delighted by the old way of life. She takes photographs of the house, including a cow that wanders by, and asks her mother if she may have the old butter churn whittled by her uncle; she plans to use it as a centerpiece for her table. Then her attention is captured by two old handmade quilts, pieced by Grandma Dee and quilted by the mother

move beyond the limited world of her youth. Clearly, however, she has not yet arrived at a stage of self-understanding. Her mother and sister are ahead of her in that respect.

Style and Technique

The thematic richness of "Everyday Use" is made possible by the flexible, perceptive voice of the first-person narrator. It is the mother's point of view that permits the reader's understanding of both Dee and Maggie. Seen from a greater distance, both young women might seem stereotypical—one a smart but ruthless college girl, the other a sweet but ineffectual homebody. The mother's close scrutiny redeems Dee and Maggie, as characters, from banality.

For example, Maggie's shyness is explained in terms of the terrible fire she survived: "Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them." Ever since, "she has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle." In Dee's case, the reader learns that as she was growing up, the high demands she made of others tended to drive people away. She had few friends, and her one boyfriend "flew to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy people" after Dee "turned all her fault-finding power on him." Her drive for a better life has cost Dee dearly, and her mother's commentary reveals that Dee, too, has scars, though they are less visible than Maggie's.

In addition to the skillful use of point of view, "Everyday Use" is enriched by Alice Walker's development of symbols. In particular, the contested quilts become symbolic of the story's theme; in a sense, they represent the past of the women in the family. Worked on by two generations, they contain bits of fabric from even earlier eras, including a scrap of a Civil War uniform worn by Great Grandpa Ezra. The debate over how the quilts should be treated—used or hung on the wall—summarizes the black woman's dilemma about how to face the future. Can her life be seen as continuous with that of her ancestors? For Maggie, the answer is yes. Not only will she use the quilts, but also she will go on making more—she has learned the skill from Grandma Dee. For Dee, at least for the present, the answer is no. She would frame the quilts and hang them on the wall, distancing them from her present life and aspirations; to put them to everyday use would be to admit her status as a member of her old-fashioned family.

Diane M. Ross



Author/Authors

- First Person: Last Name, Then First Name
 - Johnson, Marie
- Second/Others: First and Last Name
 - Smith, Paul, and Diane Reed
- Just the Name (except for "Jr." or "IV")
- More Than Three, Can Use First & "et al."
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Diane M. Ross



Ross, Diane M.



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Volume 3

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Style and Technique

The thematic richness of "Everyday Use" is made possible by the flexible, perceptive voice of the first-person narrator. It is the mother's point of view that permits the reader's understanding of both Dee and Maggie. Seen from a greater distance, both young women might seem stereotypical—one a smart but ruthless college girl, the other a sweet but ineffectual homebody. The mother's close scrutiny redeems Dee and Maggie, as characters, from banality.

For example, Maggie's shyness is explained in terms of the terrible fire she survived: "Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them." Ever since, "she has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle." In Dee's case, the reader learns that as she was growing up, the high demands she made of others tended to drive people away. She had few friends, and her one boyfriend "flew to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy people" after Dee "turned all her fault-finding power on him." Her drive for a better life has cost Dee dearly, and her mother's commentary reveals that Dee, too, has scars, though they are less visible than Maggie's.

In addition to the skillful use of point of view, "Everyday Use" is enriched by Alice Walker's development of symbols. In particular, the contested quilts become symbolic of the story's theme; in a sense, they represent the past of the women in the family. Worked on by two generations, they contain bits of fabric from even earlier eras, including a scrap of a Civil War uniform worn by Great Grandpa Ezra. The debate over how the quilts should be treated—used or hung on the wall—summarizes the black woman's dilemma about how to face the future. Can her life be seen as continuous with that of her ancestors? For Maggie, the answer is yes. Not only will she use the quilts, but also she will go on making more—she has learned the skill from Grandma Dee. For Dee, at least for the present, the answer is no. She would frame the quilts and hang them on the wall, distancing them from her present life and aspirations; to put them to everyday use would be to admit her status as a member of her old-fashioned family.

Diane M. Ross



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Ed. Charles May. Rev. ed. Vol. 3.

Pasadena: Salem, 2004. 1228-30.



Medium

- For print reference books or anthologies, use "Print."
- For online examples, see 5.6.2



Inside Book Citation - Completed

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Print.



Inside Books: More Examples

Something in an Anthology (5.5.6):

Charming, Paul. "Being a Frog." *Royal History*. Ed. Phillip Kingston and Aurora Queenland. New York: Fairytale, 2001. 19-36. Print.

Something in a Reference Book (5.5.7):

Bussi, Francesco. "Benedetto Junck." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. 2nd ed. Vol. 13. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 283-84. Print.



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Please note that these are basic examples. There are many different types of resources. Check with the manual, your professor, or a librarian if you have any questions.

