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“A Good Man is hard to Find” V.s "Everyday Use"

The two short stories are written by different authors, each in different time periods. The first essay is the famous short story "Everyday Use," written in 1973 by a renowned American novelist named Alice Walker. The second short story titled “A Good Man is hard to Find” was written in 1955 by Flannery O'Connor who was also a reputable American writer. There are some evident differences in both the short stories addressing different social conflicts and approaches towards one’s life. Both of the stories are written in different periods in which one focuses on cultural conflicts and identity crisis, while the other highlights delusional views about society. Both of the accounts give a clear message of hypocrisy and how people practice it despite belonging to different races, different periods and living separate lives. Therefore, this paper will compare and contrast the ways in which these phrases are differently used in each story by both characters in the given time period.

In "Everyday Use" Mama, who is the mother of Dee, is the first person narrator; whereas in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the grandmother is the one whose thought the narrator has access to in the whole story. Dee from "Everyday Use" is related to the grandmother from "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Dee and grandmother are both raised in different kinds of environments but are grown to be women who are supposed to respect their traditional values and norms. Owens refers to this fact, stating that, "This woman has been struggling with the shift from the antebellum values" (101). Additionally, they both dismiss those who belong to another race. For example, in one scenario Dee clearly states that she rejects the oppression her ancestors had to go through while living with white people. Similarly, the grandmother also displays the same attitude towards a poor black child she sees during her journey. She adopts an aggressive behavior towards the child not because he is poor, but he is black.

Dee even changes her name to oppose racial oppression which, according to her, she is still a victim of. She does not refer to persecution in the past but in the present, indicating that she still feels controlled by another race. She does this to avoid the hurt and feels more prejudice than what it is required. This aspect of her personality also reveals that she is self-centered. This trait is similar to the grandmother's character in the other story "A Good Man is Hard to Find." She is also seen to be selfish and promoting personal interests in many situations as she takes good care of herself although she is in an age where it does not matter to maintain a class and physical appearance. Throughout the story, she has not shown even a little concern for her family. She is more interested in visiting that old house than to keep an eye on other family members. She does not listen to her son and convinces him to take her to her old house which is on their way. She also secretly brings along her cat of which her son Bailey does not approve of. Even when the Misfit attacks the whole family, she is only thinking about her survival and does not care what they are doing with her family. The family eventually suffers due to the grandmother's rigid and assertive personality.

Another similarity in both of the stories is that the troublesome characters, i.e. Dee and the grandmother, recall their past. For example, the grandmother idolizes her past with nostalgia, viewing the old south as a symbol of prosperity. Similarly, in “Everyday Use,” Dee looks back at her past with disgust. Dee completely ignores the fact that despite poor financial circumstances, her mother still managed to facilitate her education. Like in the start when Mama is waiting for Dee's arrival, she also recalls the time when their house caught fire and Dee was instead happy and rejoiced. She hopes that Dee will change, but it is revealed that Dee is now more prejudicial than she was in the past.

Furthermore, on looking closely at Dee in "Everyday Use" and the grandma in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," after it appears that the two characters share almost all the intents and purpose in contrast with each other. The two ladies are of various races. One thing they do share for all intents and purpose is their expulsion of those of another race: Dee, proclaims her dismissal of the mistreatment of her progenitors on account of whites (Gale, np); the grandma's apparently tolerant demeanor toward the little dark tyke they see on their trek is intelligent of her rejection of the youngster since he is poor, but since he is poor and dark. Dee makes her situation on racial mistreatment clear when she proclaims that she is never again to be designated "Dee," however "Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo." When her mom inquiries why she has changed her name, "Dee" states:

“I couldn't bear it any more extended being named after the general population who mistreated me.”

Note that "mistreat" is in the current state, demonstrating that her feeling of abuse on account of whites did not depend on relatives persecuted (particularly the tough ladies of her family in charge of the blanket that Maggie will most likely "put them to everyday use"). She feels racial control being applied over her now. With all she has, she appears to be increasingly biased that she has an option to be, for nobody is by all accounts harming her by any means. The storyteller could whine—she has nothing, however, she doesn't. Peculiarly, Dee has no compassion toward the ladies in her family that endured unadulterated abuse, including her mom who still lives in miserable neediness. Dee has come not to help her family and improve their lives, however, to gather treasures that will look chic in her new home (where she lives with delightful garments and gems, with her school instruction). In this maybe we see something different the two ladies share for all intents and purpose: they need profundity—they care just for self. Neither truly thinks about the situation of the lamentable (Gale, np).

The grandma in O'Connor's story is one that has little respect for her family, particularly her child. She weakens him to an awful degree, whimpering and pestering at him—never giving him acknowledgment for start an astute man. Similarly, as Dee demonstrated an absence of respect for the memory of her grandma and those ladies before her, the grandma in O'Connor's story demonstrations along these lines with her child. Their last, pivotal bind is a consequence of the grandma's persistent requests that her desires be completed in opposition to her son's. Her biased conduct is viewed as they pass a poor young man, and incidentally, her remarks accompany a reprimanding of her grandkids about proper conduct:

"In my time...children were increasingly deferential of...their guardians and everything else. Individuals did right at that point. O take a gander at the charming little pickaninny!" she said and indicated a black kid remaining in the entryway of a shack. "Wouldn't that make an image, now?... If I could paint, I'd paint that picture..."

This showed the way she vaguely perceived that little child and how inhumanly she responded to the appearance of that dark-skinned child. The biases and prejudice in the character is portrayed through this quote from the story. As she has no respect for her family likewise she is indifferent about the emotions of other people as well (O'Connell, p.71). Similarly, Dee's character has shown the same side in her story where she has acted like a hateful person towards her oppressors and she belittles her family values too.

Dee is hateful of the past, while the grandma looks to the past with wistfulness—for the manner in which things used to be. As Dee disregards her family's desperate monetary or financial conditions, the grandma does likewise of the youthful, half-dressed kid who is an Afro-American (Gale, np). For her, she sees nothing amiss with the life of the child—wishing she could safeguard it in a photograph or a work of art, this demonstrates her absence of insightfulness, therefore vagueness of things and how shallow she perceives the world, could be clearly seen in this story (O'Connell, p. 62).

In the two stories, both of the women are seen to be acting in a way that is contradicting with their real personality. They are trying to be someone which they are not. Grandmother tries to behave like a wise woman who knows what she is doing and is a good judge of someone's character. On the other hand, Dee shows that she is much attached to her family's ethnicity and wants to adopt the heritage for the rest of her life. This could be seen that Dee changed her name so it would better refer to her family culture (Cowart 171). The real face of both the characters is revealed in the end when the other characters get to see the contradicting statement they pass. Initially, grandmother, calls Misfit to be a person of good character but ultimately admits that he is one of her children revealed that both are equally sinful. While in the case of Dee, when she asks for the traditional quilts that her grandmother made, after receiving a rejection on this matter, she openly admits that the lifestyle her family has is not worthy of living. The author notes this hypocrisy by referring to Dee’s persona, Wangero, as “superficially more impressive” than Dee herself (171).

These terms “everyday use” and “good man” are ironically used by an utmost opposite meaning in the respective stories. The characters have justified with the paradox in which they were used in the story. While, in the controversial era of the world, there is a conflict between the two classes of the society; upper and lower, therefore this notion is seen very closely in these two short stories (O'Connell, p.56). The story ‘everyday use’ portrays a very imminent image of tension among the two classes. This is analyzed by the perspective of needs for survival and the expectations of the society, and these factors are valued by every society (Sadeq, and Al-Badawi, p.159). The main focus of these stories is on the lower and upper class of the society, and how they contradict with each other. The upper class has been seen oppressing the people from the lower class, with regards to their morals, values, and principles.

Both stories illustrated the fact that hypocrisy transcends culture, time, and experience. No matter how much society changes, hypocrisy, and prejudice will continue to persist. Both of the characters were equally biased and destructive and do not appreciate humanity in any case. They both were unappreciative as they did not care for the lives of their family members. In this way, dishonesty is clearly visible in both stories. Therefore, in the two stories, the ladies are unappreciative and emphatically one-sided. Regardless of the fact that one portrayed herself as wise (grandma) and the other was at the immature stage of her life (Dee), they exhibited a similar attitude not persisting to their age. This shows that there is no limit to the occurrence of bias or unjust attitude in a person, no matter how old or wise he may think he is. They are intrigued just with regards to self and see nothing amiss with the manner in which they see the world. They are self-absorbed in the fact that they have had a lot and they deserve more than the other people around them, no matter those people have born the oppression equally with them (O'Connell, p.63).

Consequently, a clear message of hypocrisy and how people practice it despite belonging to different races, different periods and living separate lives can be seen clearly with the comparison and contrast of the two stories and their main characters. Dee completely ignores the fact that despite poor financial circumstances, her mother still managed to facilitate her education. Likewise, they both dismiss those who belong to another race. For example, in one scenario Dee clearly states that she rejects the oppression her ancestors had to go through while living with white people. Similarly, the grandmother also displays the same attitude towards a poor black child she sees during her journey. Lastly, the stories demonstrated the fact that hypocrisy transcends time, culture, and experience. No matter how much society changes, hypocrisy, and prejudice will continue to persist. Therefore, this paper compared and contrasted the ways in which these stories are differently portrayed by using both characters in the given time period in their own scenarios.

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