

“Everyday Use” By Alice

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Introduction

In the short story “Everyday Use,” Alice brings out the theme as “The presentation of the harmony as well as the conflicts within African-American culture.” The short story by Alice Walker involves an encounter between members of the rural Johnson family and one member, Dee, who had studied and migrated to the American urban life. The story covers some sort of battle between Dee, who is the only member of the family who has received a formal education, and her male companion vs. Mrs. Johnson and Maggie, who were left in their rural home. Dee and his male companion have come back to their rural home to visit their mother and younger sister, Maggie. (Walker, “Everyday Use”)

Symbols and Signs is a short story by Vladimir Nabokov, which is in a more modernized setting in the city of America, unlike Everyday Use short story, which takes place in a rural and traditional setting. The short story takes action at the apartment of an elderly couple on public transit systems on both the streets and the mental hospital. The couple in the short story Symbols and Signs see the atmosphere and the weather as bleak and very cheerless. (Nabokov, “Symbols and Signs”)

A closely related analysis is available in [Critical Analysis Of “Everyday Use”](#).

In the short story Everyday Use by Alice Walker, Mrs. Johnson is waiting for Dee, her daughter, in the yard, which they built themselves long ago. Mrs. Johnson, who is Dee’s mother, compares herself to the environment in which she has sat waiting for her daughter Dee and her companion. According to the writer Alice Walker, Mrs. Johnson, in this traditional setting, points to the attachment that they, “mother and Maggie,” have to their home natural home and their daily endeavors. (Walker, “Everyday Use”)

From the other story symbols and signs, we get to see that the parents are the ones going to visit their son because it is his 20th birthday. The parents unlike Dee’s mother, therefore, decide to carry a very nice gift for their son who has a birthday party. (Nabokov, “Symbols and Signs”)

Mrs. Johnson points out the yard to be an expected living room on the page and not just an ordinary yard like others. She points out that the yard really exists as her place for life. (Walker, “Everyday Use”)

However, the parents, especially the mother in the Symbols and Signs short story, are very different from Dee’s mother. The mother is preparing for the birthday occasion of her son, and therefore, she dresses for the event though without makeup. The parents, including the mother, are familiar with the formal urban environment because they were living there before. The parents are used to this life of

the better situation, also described as the city life. Dee's mother, unlike them, does not know about modern city life. We see that she is waiting for Dee and her companion in the yard, which they had built themselves long ago, and the yard is something traditional. (Walker, "Everyday Use"; Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

Mrs. Johnson, in "Everyday Use," brings out a description of herself, which relatively describes how she is familiar and comfortable with all that surrounds her. Mrs. Johnson says that she is a very large, big-boned woman. She also says that she is very rough and has men working like hands, which is not normal for ladies. From the story, we get to see the comparison of Dee's mother with Dee, who is educated, weak, very soft, and slim. The mother describes Dee as she cannot fit that way of traditional lifestyle. That's because Dee is educated and has been away from her natural home; hence, she hasn't been exposed to hard work. In other words, Mrs. Johnson accepts her own body the way it is. (Walker, "Everyday Use")

The mother in the symbols and signs has been used for a modern lifestyle in the city. From the story, we see that both parents are used to staying in towns and enjoying urban life. The parents are both currently living in the United States, even though they previously had been living in the city of Russia. The parents were satisfied with the business that the father was running, but now they are not running the company any longer. (Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

In the story Everyday Use, Dee's mother is considered an influential and independent lady. Mrs. Johnson is supposed to be very strong, and she can do big things on her own without any assistance. She says that she is big-boned with rough-man working hands and is also a large woman in size. She says that she cleans a hog as mercilessly as a man as well as killing it herself without any assistance. Dee's mother says that she can work outside all day, breaking ice to get some water for washing. Mrs. Johnson also says that during one winter, she knocked a bull and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. These actions of Dee's mother show how the mother in Everyday Use is sturdy and very independent, and therefore, she goes to get food on her own. (Walker, "Everyday Use")

On the other hand, both the parents in the symbols and signs are dependent. The parents in both stories tend to be very old, but the parents in symbols and signs are weaker. We are told that the couple had been married for a long, had a business, but now they have stopped, and they are relying on the husband's brother, Isaac, an American citizen, for money and upkeep. They also call Isaac the prince because he is the one catering for them. (Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

The mother in the short story by Alice is traditional so much. The mother has put quilts in her room which were pierced long ago by Grandmother and then Big Dee, and they had put them on frames made to hang quilts. One of the quilts was in Lone Star pattern while another was walking around the mountain. Dee and her mother look at the quilts, which remind them of the past. They remember the dresses that the Grandmother used to wear since the quilts had been made from the pieces of the clothing. The quilts, though, also looked old-fashioned. The mother in this story is even traditional as she does not give Dee the quilts as she had wanted to give them to her daughter Maggie at the time

she gets married to Thomas. (Walker, "Everyday Use")

On the other hand, the mother in the short stories the symbol and signs in living a modern life. Before the mother sleeps, she goes through an album which had some old photos. The mother finds pictures of her maid, which remind her of the places and events. There is also the photo of her son, which tells her when the son drew pictures of birds whose legs and hands were like those of real human beings. The mother also sees another photo that reminds her of when the family migrated to the United States of America. She remembers when her son was sick with pneumonia, and then he later recovered and became delusional. (Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

In the short story Every Day by Alice Walker, there is symbolism when Dee's mother does not want to give Dee the quilts. Mrs. Johnson claims that she has preserved the quilts to give to her daughter Maggie, who is planning to get married to Thomas. The quilts that Dee wants were traditionally made by her grandmother and her aunt who were great figures in the family during those ancient times. Also, we get to know that it's symbolic as the quilts were made up of old scraps of dresses, shirts, and uniforms, which were used by Dee's grandmother, each representing those people who came up with and used the family culture, its heritage, and its values. (Walker, "Everyday Use")

On the other hand, in the short story Symbols and Signs, the mother also seems to also symbolic. The mother looks at the pictures of his son. The mother comes across the photos which her son drew showing birds that had human feet and hands. The mother, while on the bus, also comes across the girl who was carried on the shoulder of a woman, and she was really crying, the photograph of the relative who was long ago killed by the Nazis. All this is symbolic through the mother as they foreshow some terrible news to the end of the story where it may be assumed that she may be called that now the son had successfully succeeded in killing himself, which seems possible. (Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

Conclusion

In both stories, the mother and the parents have various similarities and differences. There are fragments of the past that may not merely be representations in the sense of the modern art objects we have around. These pieces are not necessarily removed from the daily life. Instead, they are made up of our daily lives and the materials which we live in. (Walker, "Everyday Use"; Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs")

References

Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use." *Harper's Magazine*, Apr. 1973.

Nabokov, Vladimir. "Symbols and Signs." *The New Yorker*, 15 May 1948.