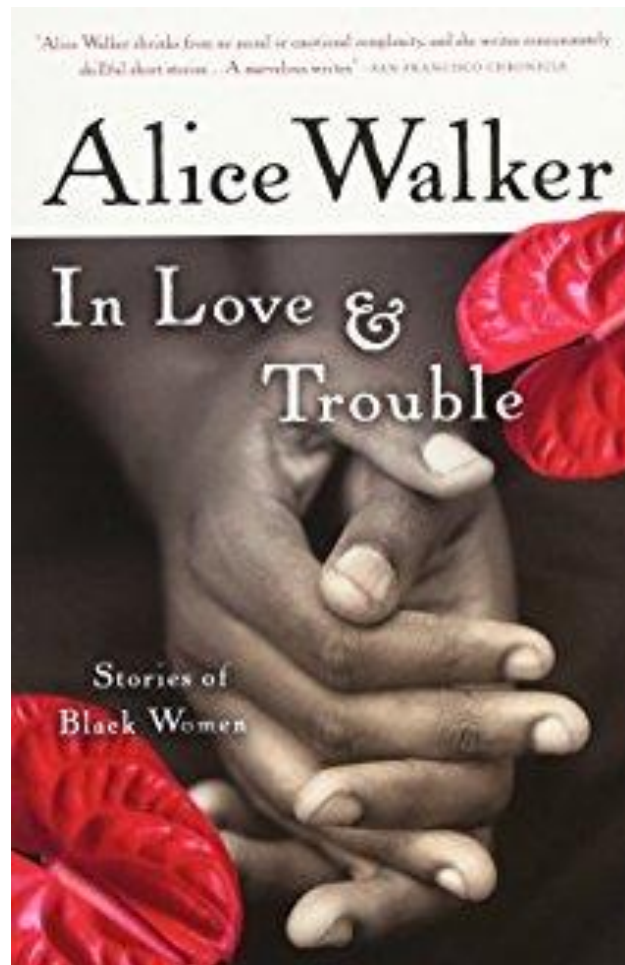


**The Defence Mechanisms and the Core Issues of Dee in
Alice Walker's *Everyday Use***

Sadia Munir, M.A. English, M.Phil. English Candidate



Introduction

Alice Walker has written over 30 novels, non-fiction books, and collections of short stories and poetry. *Everyday Use* is one of her most celebrated and quoted short stories. In early days of writing career of Walker her famous short *Everyday Use* was published. It appeared in her collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* in 1973. The work was excitedly audited upon distribution, and *Everyday Use* has since been called by a few critics the best of

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Walker's short stories. Similarly as with numerous different stories by Walker, *Everyday Use* is described by the raw and natural voice of a rustic black lady, in the author's endeavor to give a voice to a generally disappointed section of the populace.

Literature and Psychoanalysis

Literature is the expression of human beings and reflection of reality through verbal language. It basically represents the human life. Since, it is a representative of human life it can be studied through psychoanalytic lens that is the study of human mind and behaviour (Endraswara, 2011).

However, there are some critics that disagree with the use of psychoanalytic lens to understand and evaluate literary characters along with their behaviour and cognitive activities. They say that since these characters are fictitious therefore they do not have actually psyches and since they do not have psyches that can be analyzed so this way of examining a character should be discarded. Some critics have actually successfully defended this idea through two reasons (Tyson, 2006).

Those two essential causes are (1) by using psychoanalysis literary theory when someone analyzes literary characters or fictitious characters it does not mean that they are suggesting that those characters are real people but that they only represent the psychological experience of human beings in general; and (2) psychoanalysis only aims to analyze the literary characters through any critical literacy theory to represent those experiences by characters as explanations of real life issues (Tyson, 2006). Therefore, literary work can be analyzed through psychological approach because the literary work depicts the human life and human is the main focus of psychoanalysis.

The Term of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was developed by the great psychologist Sigmund Freud. He was born on 6th May, 1856 in Freiberg, a small town in Moravia, Hungary. He believed that the conscious psychic activities are determined by the unconscious mental activities. The word 'psychoanalysis' has three distinct meanings. First, it is a school of thought in psychology which

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gives importance to childhood experiences in forming one's adult personality and behaviour. Secondly, psychoanalysis has been described as a method of investigating unconscious cognitive activities within the human mind. Thirdly, it is a therapeutic method for investigating mental disorders including neurotic disorders in particular (Kim, 2011).

Focus of This Paper

For ongoing research from these three meanings the second meaning which defines psychoanalysis as method for investigating the cognitive unconscious mental activities is suitable. The researcher has described and deeply analyzed the character of Dee through psychoanalysis in terms of defence mechanisms and the core issues. Besides that, the first meaning is also important for this research. In this case, the writer will try to relate the main character's background, childhood experiences and her mental activities after she grows up. Moreover, her cultural and historic roots are also in the back of her mind which plays a vital role in making up the personality and behaviour of the character Dee.

Defence Mechanisms

According to Tyson (2006), defences are the processes by which the contents of human unconscious are kept in the unconscious position. It means that defences are the processes when human keeps his or her anxiety unconsciously in order to avoid knowing what she or he feels about the things that cannot be controlled.

Introduction to Dee's Character

Dee is a young well-educated and self-confident African-American woman. She is Mama's daughter and Maggie's sister. The story revolves around Dee's visit to her family at her childhood home in the Deep South. As a child, Dee was angry, bitter, and resentful towards her family and their poverty. She never liked her living conditions and the treatment she was given because of her roots and skin colour. When Dee returns to the family's house she behaves oddly. Her attitude towards the family's lifestyle has completely flipped. She actually craves for the family's heritage, but fails to appreciate them as part of her family's daily life. She does want some of the things but she is lost in the charm of fake life and keeping up images that she becomes rude and cold towards her own family and roots. Ultimately, her mother refuses to give

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Dee grandmother's quilts. Mama instead considers Maggie to be the better candidate for having those quilts.

Denial and Avoidance

According to Berger (2004), denial occurs when someone believes or wants to believe that the problem does not exist or the unpleasant incident never happened. It is like they have erased the memory of it from the mind. Denial is an individual's refusal to accept certain situations or circumstances. It is the denial to confront aspects of a given reality in order to avoid potential feelings of discomfort and unpleasantness. It exists on a continuum as it can be viewed as only a typical response to an upsetting occasion or to extreme psychosis. While generally characterized as a sort of protection instrument or tool, denial has a part in all defence mechanisms which is essential. It is also referred to it as disavowal (Freud, 1937). Dee is in constant state of denial throughout the story. She pretends and behaves like she does not belong to a poor family. By keeping her upper-class lifestyle and image she makes herself a fit character that is all together confused and lost in the mist of class and status. Moreover, she never visiting her home is also an indication denial of her actually being. She completely puts her thoughts and feelings regarding her actual roots and culture in the back of her head which directly leads to feeling of avoidance which is another major defence mechanism.

“Avoidance is the eluding of retrieval cues (people/circumstances) that bring about anxiety about feelings and experiences” (Freud, 1937). It is a self-defence mechanism that occurs when someone tries to stay away from people or situations that are liable to make him or her anxious (Berger, 2004). By avoiding her home Dee thinks she can make a new image for herself and leave behind her poor family and past. In order to do this Dee becomes obsessed with her image and social status. She actually changes her name or perhaps calling it a suitable up-gradation will be better. By avoiding her family and denying her past Dee forms a kind of a “psychological wound” which actually becomes a driving hand behind the construction of her personality. Such mechanisms have an impact on the personality and in Dee's case she does develop an annoying and greedy personality.

Core Issues

“Core issues can be seen when someone’s defence mechanisms momentarily break down, and he or she experiences anxiety” (Tyson, 2006).

Unstable Sense of Self, Fear of Abandonment and Intimacy

Insecure or unstable sense of self, fear of abandonment, and fear of intimacy are three core issues that Dee has hidden deep in her id. Her personality is complex and these core issues are stirred up after her defence mechanisms fail to comfort her ego. Dee is insecure and has an unstable sense of self. She loses her sense of belonging to anyone or anything. She is confused and conflicted about who she really is. She belongs to a poor, low-class, uneducated African-American family but she manages to pull herself up out of the slum. She gets a college degree from a reputable college. After getting the degree she is conflicted about herself. She is not sure whether she is a poor girl from lower class or now she has moved towards the middle class? She is never sure about it. All these changes bring a sense of fear in her. The achievements, her light skin colour and her differences push her to dangle between her old and new life. Dee is afraid that she will be abandoned by her family. She is even scared for future relations. She thinks that whoever she gets close to will leave her.

According to Tyson (2006), ‘fear of abandonment’ is the staunch belief by someone facing this core issue that his or her friends and family are going to abandon him or her. It is going to happen because they do not care at all. Dee was facing this issue. Perhaps, she feels this way because she abandoned her family and roots. It is her guilty conscious which makes her scared of being deserted.

‘Fear of intimacy’ is the chronic and overpowering feeling. It is that emotional closeness will seriously hurt or destroy oneself. The only way to be safe from this issue is to never getting close to someone emotionally (Tyson, 2006). People that suffer from such fear always keep themselves away from people. They stay distant as an act of self-preservation. In the story, Dee has done the same. She is scared of intimacy or being close to anyone for that matter and that is why she builds up a wall around her. She is so different from her family therefore she is not close to them. Dee does not have the same relationship with her mother which Maggie and her mother

share. They share a close bond. They understand each other. Dee has always been different and distant. This leads to an important question and that is if Dee did not have a lighter skin and if she would have been saved from the fire instead of Maggie then would she be in the same situation as Maggie? Possibly in a reversed situation that is Maggie be outgoing and intelligent and Dee burned and the favorite of their mother? This query cannot be answered but could be left open for a number of interpretations.

Conclusion

All the discussed defence mechanisms and core issues in Dee' character show her quest for being accepted in a superficial society. A human is a product of society so is Dee. She wants to fit in so badly therefore she tried so hard that it affected her blood relations. She completely transforms herself to hide her true roots. She does what she thinks would earn her that respectable position in the society but not everything is rainbows and butterflies. It is always compromises that move us along. But Dee failed to understand this completely. She could not comprehend the idea that she has to let go of some feelings in order to make room for the new ones. She, perhaps, shut down everything and chases a ghostly figure in a boundless realm.

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