Is Forgiveness Really Worth It?

Zora Neale Hurston in “The Gilded Six Bits” uses imagery and a very unique dialogue to depict true love and redemption. The theme throughout the story is forgiveness and just how difficult it can be when someone that is loved deeply shows betrayal. Joe is conflicted whether or not to forgive his own wife, Missie May, after her affair with the new, cool man in town. Everyone has asked this question of whether or not to forgive someone they love, so this story is completely relatable. Zora Neale Hurston’s detailed descriptions of imagery and her choice of dialect allows the reader to see how much love these two main characters have for each other, and it is this love that helps them work through the terrible incident. In the end, it is obvious just how rewarding forgiveness can be if there is enough courage present to look past what others have done wrong. Sometimes pride stands in the way and people cannot forgive others, even over trivial acts.

Right from the start, there is an overwhelmingly strong sense of love and comfort from Hurston’s description of Joe and Missie May’s house. “The front door stood open to the sunshine,” and “a mess of homey flowers planted without a plan [were] blooming cheerily from their helter-skelter places” (Hurston 727). The imagery here simply seems very bright and homey, without being over the top or too flamboyant. It is sensed that a happy couple lives here and that their true love is overflowing from every crevasse of the home. How could anyone malicious live in a home so quaint and charming? It seems absolutely impossible. The imagery in
this instance also gives the reader the very first hint that the couple is not rich, but, despite their lack of abundant wealth, it is still sensed that they are beyond pleased with what they have. This extremely joyful opening scene also portrays a little bit of foreshadowing. All of the happiness and cheer seems a little bit too good to be true, and later on in the story, this is demonstrated to be right.

The dialect in this short story is rather odd, but it is extremely important to the meaning of the story. Hurston’s use of “Ah” instead of “I” and “de” rather than “the” really shows the culture of the characters (Hurston 727-736). This is Hurston’s way of “represent[ing] the language of the Southern black community realistically” (Heard 131). The couple is living in a small town that is predominately African American, and they are relatively uneducated. This lack of education, along with their lack of money, really seems to enhance to their relationship, and it is, in a way, what makes their marriage flourish. Missie May and Joe Banks clearly do not have much, but they have each other throughout the entire story, and that is what matters the most. There is a strong emphasis put on the “importance of an emotional attachment over material wealth” (Hoeller 762). Rather than the two focusing solely on money and material possessions, they put more emphasis on their true love for each other, which is what helps them pull through to a happy ending.

Not only does the reader understand clearly that Missie May and Joe are in love, but they tell each other and prove the fact a plethora of times. Through Hurston’s unique dialect, it is obvious that the love these two have for each other is real and extremely strong. It would take an overwhelmingly strong force to split them up indefinitely. At one point, Joe points out that he is “satisfied de way [he] is. So long as [he] get to be [Missie May’s] husband, [he] don’t keer ‘bout nothin’ else” (Hurston 731). This quote is a direct reference to their lack of money and the fact
that Joe truly believes that he and Missie May do not need all of the money that Otis Slemmons seems to have.

Another strong instance where dialect is so important is right in the moment when Missie May and Otis Slemmons get caught in the act of the affair. After Joe walks in on the affair, Missie May utters the explanation of “Ah love you so hard and Ah know you don’t love me no mo’” (Hurston 732). This quote hits home because it is clear right away that Missie May is so in love with her husband, Joe, and the only thing she is worried about at that moment is if he still loves her the same. Because of this, the reader seems to get the feeling that Missie May only had relations with Slemmons to get her husband what he seemed to want so badly. Even in her time of sin, she was still only thinking about her husband’s interests and her love for Joe. After he spoke so highly of Otis Slemmons and all of his money, Missie May set out on a mission to make her husband as happy as possible by getting him the money he desired. Before Slemmons even came into the picture, Joe and Missie May “live[d] happily on silver money,” but after a while, Otis Slemmons “seduces both Missie May and Joe into desiring gold money” (Hoeller 761). Their greed distracts them momentarily from their strong love for each other, and this is what separates them from one another but only temporarily.

The actions of the characters cue the reader in on a change within Missie May and Joe’s relationship. In the beginning of the story, Missie May chases Joe around the house and tears into his pockets to find the candy kisses he would bring home on special occasions after pay day. They play fight and laugh for what seems like a good while. After the affair, there were “no more pockets to rifle. In fact, the yellow coin in [Joe’s] trousers was like a monster hiding in the cave of his pockets to destroy [Missie May]” (Hurston 733). As Nancy Chinn describes, “the pockets which once symbolized their intimacy now emphasize their estrangement” (Chinn 2016). Missie
May’s avoidance of Joe and the object within his pocket shows the tension between the two. It is only after Joe trades the gilded coin in for “some good, ole ‘lasses kisses” that the tension between him and Missie May seems to disappear, allowing things to return to normal (Hurston 735).

Sounds are also another very significant aspect throughout the story. The story opens with Joe coming home from work creating “the ring of singing metal on wood” (Hurston 727). This quote is so important because Hurston uses it again at the end, word for word. This is Hurston’s way of letting the reader know that Joe has completely forgiven Missie May, and that things will return back to the way they were before. There is a comforting feeling where the reader is reassured that their loving relationship will return given the right amount of time. It was questionable at one point whether or not Joe would be able to come back to Missie May and love her the same, but after Hurston reveals this line again, the reader is reminded of how strong the couple’s love was before. Their “true love transcends all things, [and] Joe and Missie May are reconciled at the end of the story” (Carson 2016). With a love as strong as theirs, there was no way that they would not end up back together.

This story is so great because it depicts the whole “love conquers all” theme found in many Disney movies, and people are just suckers for that. Hurston shows just how in love this couple is, and, in the end, they are able to overcome the affair and be happy again. Through imagery, it can be concluded that their lives are full of joy and happiness, despite their lack of wealth and material possessions, and “all that glitters is not gold” (Carson 2016). The dialect also points out the inseparable bond that is their true love for each other. It is through this unselfish love that Joe is able to find the will in himself to finally forgive Missie May and go back to a loving, happy family in the end. So do you think it was really worth it for Joe to conjure up the
courage and lay down his pride to forgive Missie May? Is forgiveness really worth it? Or should we walk around with constant grudges throughout life, not focusing on what is actually most important?
Works Cited


