Forgiveness and Faith: A recipe for Success

At some point in life, everyone experiences betrayal. Both Zora Neale Hurston and John Updike in their respective stories “The Gilded Six-Bits” and “Oliver’s Evolution” portray a character who is disappointed by family members. While Hurston shows infidelity and betrayal of a significant other, Updike details the betrayal and neglect of parents. Both stories suggest that to overcome betrayal, one must find faith in oneself, forgive others and move on in life to find fulfillment.

At first, in “The Gilded Six-Bits,” Hurston expresses that the relationship shared by the couple at the beginning of their married life was full of happiness and love. She also conveys that a marriage is a symbol of love, trust and forgiveness, which is shared by two people and that holds them together through good and bad times in their lives. The short story starts with Hurston describing the house of the couple as “a Negro yard around a Negro house in a Negro Settlement” (727). She also explains that, even though they were poor and lived in a Negro community, “there was something happy about the place” (727). This was the first emotion of happiness Hurston described about the couple. Also, the following paragraphs clearly explain how happy both Joe and Missie May were and how they loved each other. Between the description of the settings, Hurston brought in conversation between the couples, which made the audience understand more clearly the feelings the couple had for each other and how they cared
for each other. The happiness and love shared by the couple indicates that they had faith in the relationship and had the strength to face any problem.

Likewise, in “Oliver’s Evolution,” Updike explains about the relationship between Oliver and his parents. Here, the story starts with “His parents had not meant to abuse him; they had meant to love him, and they did love him” (Updike para.1). From the first line itself, readers can understand that Oliver had faced abuse from his parents, even though, his parents probably didn’t mean to intentionally abuse him. Further, in the first paragraph, Updike gives an idea to the audience that even during his birth time, he had to suffer pain because he was born with inturned feet and had to learn to crawl with his corrective casts. This clearly shows that Oliver faced suffering during his childhood and there was a lack of happiness and love in the relationship shared between Oliver and his parents.

Next, through the story of “Gilded Six-Bits,” Hurston conveys to the audience that betraying someone who is a part of one’s life can negatively impact the self. According to “The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitive Relationships,” “Betrayal is purposeful and self-serving” (Carnes xvi). Here, Hurston clearly explains her point by showing the changes that happened in the couple’s life when a third person Otis Slemmons’ enters their life. In the story, the author and Joe describes Slemmons’ as “He’s got a five-dollar gold piece for a stick-pin and he got a ten-dollar gold piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes’ crammed full of gold teethes” (Hurston 730). This sentence conveys to the audience that everyone viewed him as a wealthy man and explains that Slemmons’ knew how to get everyone’s attention by wearing gold. Slemmons’ also succeeded in this when he got attention from Missie May and slept with her. This was the main turning point in the couple’s life and in the story when Joe found out
about his wife’s betrayal and was the main cause for all the happiness and trust to fade from their lives.

Similarly, in “Oliver’s Evolution,” Updike portrays the betrayal Oliver faced from his parents throughout his life. According to “Psychology of Family Relationships,” the author says that “Parent-child attachment, characterized by avoidance and ambivalence, may influence this development negatively” (Russo 2). This can be compared with the life of Oliver as he had faced avoidance and ambivalence from his parents, which is clearly explained to the audience in the second paragraph of the story where Oliver is lying on the floor with a box of mothballs near him, in which some of the mothballs were wet with his saliva, and Oliver toddling after his parents at the beach where he had almost died of drowning and how his parents didn’t even care to take him to the hospital. These events in his life show that he grew up in a negative environment which affected his life and also lets the audience know that he didn’t receive any care from his parents, only betrayal.

In addition to Hurston portraying the harmful effects of betrayal in “Gilded Six-Bits,” he also explains the positive effects of forgiveness in the story by describing the events in the couple’s lives. Hurston explains that even though Joe was betrayed by his wife, he always remained calm and never reacted to her. But, like before, there was no more happiness and love in their life. Later, he decided to forget his past and move forward with Missie May when a child was born in their lives. The sentence “He threw the gilded half-dollar on the counter” (Hurston 735) in the story when he goes to buy kisses for his wife evidently shows that Joe decided to forgive his wife and move forward. Also, in the ending of the story where Joe starts repeating everything like throwing money at her like he used to do before when they were happy clearly indicates that he forgave her and decided to start a new life with her. These events obviously
show that forgiveness is an important factor in people’s life to move forward and to live a happy life.

In the same way as Hurston portrayed forgiveness in her story, Updike also shows that Oliver forgave his parents and had moved forward in his life. According to “Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life,” “Researchers have discovered that the healing power of the forgiveness are not only astonishing but also long-lasting – people continue to experience greater emotional well-being at four-month and fourteen-month follow-ups and on into the lifespan” (Ferch, 47). That is, at the age of sixteen when his parents got divorced, Oliver goes through the phase of abandonment from his family which affected his studies and college grades, and which got him into multiple accidents. But Updike shows that, even though, Oliver had faced all the abandonment throughout his life, he had overcome all the difficult situations because he decided to move on in his life by forgiving his parents and by not keeping any hatred in his mind against his parents which could destroy his life.

Also, Hurston through her story “Gilded Six-Bits” represented that one should have faith in oneself to face all the difficult and emotional situations entering their life and to overcome these situations by rising with full confidence without destroying their life. Based on “Love and Therapy: In Relationship,” “Life is described as a continuous balancing act between a positive and negative pole of existence” (Charura 14). In the story, Joe was also surrounded by the negative and positive emotions when a child was born into his life. But, Joe’s faith in himself and his relationship made him move forward from all the negative emotions and gave him hope for a good future with his wife and kid.
Similarly, in “Oliver’s Evolution,” Updike explains the importance of having faith in oneself to achieve success and happiness in life and to forgive and move forward. According to “Love and Therapy: In Relationship,” “It is when we let ourselves love life, love other people, love ourselves, and love the ideas that make sense of our existence that life can flourish” (Charura 14). Here, the author explains the quote in a beautiful way and can be compared with the life of Oliver because his life flourished when he got married to a woman Alicia and started loving her, even though she had much more problems than him. In the story, Updike describes Oliver’s wife in last paragraph as “accident-prone as he, given to substance abuse and unwanted pregnancies” (Updike para.5). But, as Updike mentions, “This was the key” (para.5). Oliver’s marriage to Alicia changed his life as he had hopes for good future with his wife and his two children. Here, Oliver had the higher chances of breaking down completely in his life, but he never lost hope and, instead, fought for a his future. By portraying the life of Oliver, Updike sends a great message to the community that if people have faith in themselves, they can overcome any situation with hard work.

Overall, both the stories “The Gilded Six-Bits” and “Oliver’s Evolution” convey a great message to the community about the effects of forgiveness and having faith and confidence in people’s life. Both the authors demonstrate how betraying someone who is a part of a person’s life can have harmful personal effects, taking away happiness. But, the authors also portray that if the people are ready to forgive and love and accept others, they will have the chance to live a happy life and have a positive future with their loved ones. In “Gilded Six-Bits,” with the example of Joe and Missie May’s life, Hurston explains the importance of love, trust and forgiveness in married life. She also conveys to the audience that money is not everything in life and happiness cannot be bought with money. Also, in “Oliver’s Evolution,” Updike shows the
relationship and struggle between the parents and their child. Most importantly, through the life of Oliver, Updike describes about the importance of having faith in themselves to move forward and to not lose hope about their life and their future. Finally, with the above stories as an example, readers can conclude that forgiving others, finding faith and trust in oneself, and moving on in life for a brighter future are very important in everyone’s life to succeed and to achieve happiness.
Works Cited


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