

dent. While equated with pearls by the Aunts, the Handmaids are then informed by the Commander that their utilitarian station is unfit for the flamboyant, spectacular nature of this gem. In a society rife with contradictions, the conflicting statements of the Gileadean officials illustrate the precarious structure of their regime.

In chapter 35, Offred demonstrates her quiet courage through an anti-pearl reference. Beholding the pilfered Polaroid of her child, Offred despairs: "Time had not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if I'm nothing more than a woman of *sand*, left by a careless child too near the water. I have been obliterated for her" (296). Offred instinctively deflates Aunt Lydia's romanticized label of "pearl" by referring to herself as "sand" (commonly believed to be the irritant that stimulates the growth of a pearl). Offred deems herself not a spectacular jewel, but an irritant (which she *is* to all those surrounding her). More important, as "sand," Offred is the instrument from which a pearl develops; hence, Offred's daughter must receive treatment as a "pearl." In this case, Offred is not obliterated, but a part of her daughter—the part that created her. Nonetheless, a darker notion demands attention: If Offred has created "a pearl," does that not indicate that her child's destiny is that of a Handmaid?

The pearl/oyster theme ingeniously binds the novel's central points. Serena Joy is not a Commander's wife; she is the complacent mistress of a Nazi. Offred is not an imprisoned woman; she is an object of possession, denied even the most fundamental pleasure of love. Gilead is not a fine-tuned machine journeying toward utopia; it is an inferior military-state swarming with contradiction. Finally, Offred's abducted child is not living a more privileged and moral life but is being brainwashed into becoming a fine, baby-producing "Gileadean." All this from a pearl.

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Walker's EVERYDAY USE

Images of animals and references to animal husbandry pervade Alice Walker's justly famous 1973 short story "Everyday Use." Not only is each of the three characters, Mama, Maggie, and Dee, explicitly or implicitly associated with animals, but the story takes place in a "pasture" (27), down the road from

which several "beef-cattle peoples" (30) live and work. Some of the comparisons between the women and fauna are highly conventional or purely descriptive: Maggie's memory is linked to that of an elephant (31); the voice of a pleading Dee sounds as "sweet as a bird" (32); Dee's hair stands erect "like the wool on a sheep" (28); and her pigtailed are compared to "small lizards disappearing behind her ears" (28). Image patterns involving cows and dogs, however, foreshadow the story's climactic scene, in which Mama decides to give the quilts to Maggie rather than Dee, and they play an integral role in the scene itself and its aftermath.

Mama frequently describes Maggie as a docile, somewhat frightened animal, one that accepts the hand that fate has dealt her and attempts to flee any situation posing a potential threat. When Dee arrives, Mama tells us that "Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. 'Come back here,' I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe" (27). Maggie's characteristic stance in such situations is aptly summed up by Mama in the word "cowering" (29). Although the etymologies of the words "cow" and "cower" differ, it seems likely that Walker is hinting at the former by employing the latter. Yet Maggie is not the only person described in bovine terms. Mama refers to herself as "a large, big boned woman" (24) and informs us that her own body language, at least in her encounters with white men, resembles Maggie's: "It seems to me I have talked to them with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is furthest from them" (25). Mama and Maggie's connection to cows is reinforced when Dee lines up a Polaroid shot of her mother, her sister, the house, and a real cow that has wandered into the yard (29). More important, in a key passage that adumbrates the ending of the story, Mama tells us that she used to enjoy milking cows until she was "hooked in the side" in 1949, adding, "Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way" (26). This is precisely the kind of mistake Dee will make later when she demands the quilts that Mama has already promised to Maggie.

Mama's comparisons between animals and Maggie, who bears the scars from a fire that destroyed the family's previous home (and who was perhaps burned trying to save the very quilts Dee covets), often seem insensitive. Without a doubt, the most shocking example of this occurs early in "Everyday Use": "Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone ignorant enough to be kind him? That is the way my Maggie walks" (25). Near the end of the story, after Maggie tells her mother that Dee can have the quilts because she can "member Grandma Dee without" them, Mama describes Maggie in similar terms: "I looked at her hard. She had filled up her bottom lip with checker-berry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look" (34). It is at

this moment in the story that Mama has her epiphany, realizing that her thin, scarred, pathetic daughter, who knows how to quilt and serves as her family's oral historian, deserves the quilts more than her shapely, favored, educated daughter Dee, who only wants the quilts because they are now fashionable. Acting on this flash of insight, Mama does two things that she has never, amazingly enough, done before: she hugs Maggie and she says "no" to Dee. Afterward, in the final paragraph, Maggie's face lights up with a smile that is "real [. . .] not scared" (35). Moreover, Mama asks her for "a dip of snuff" (35), and together the enlightened mother and the faithful daughter sit, enjoying their snuff and each other's company, oblivious to the "dopey, hangdog look" they presumably present to the world. Significantly, in seeing the value in Maggie, Mama has been able to look beneath the surface of things and see the value in herself as well.

It is perfectly appropriate that animal imagery should figure in "Everyday Use," a story with a rural setting, whose matriarch and narrator supports herself by raising livestock. Walker goes a step further, however, by using hooking cows and hangdog looks to reinforce the major themes of her story.

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Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use." *Everyday Use*. Ed. Barbara Christian. New Brunswick: Rutgers, UP, 1994. 23–35.

Monette's BORROWED TIME

I'd go around the house with a rag of ammonia
wiping wiping crazed as a housewife
on *Let's Make a Deal* the deal being
PLEASE DON'T MAKE HIM SICK AGAIN.

—Paul Monette, *Love Alone!*

We find vivid illustrations of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) as psychological defense against the obsessive fear AIDS can produce in the confessional pages of *Borrowed Time*,² Paul Monette's heart-rending account of the death of his lover, Roger Horowitz, from AIDS. As Rog's primary caretaker, Paul, who has an earlier stage of the same disease, tries valiantly, compulsively, and futilely to protect his dying lover.

To varying degrees, people with OCD are tormented episodically, or in

