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A Semiotic Analysis"

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To my parents Heide and Helmut

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1 Introduction

Art is not a treasure in the past or an importation from another land, but part of the present life of all living and creating peoples.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Art is a universal phenomenon. It is basic to any culture in any time and carries various meanings attached to it by its makers but also by its consumers. Although art is present and known around the world, the actual cultural objects the term *art* refers to change over time and place. What might be called art in one cultural context could be popular or folk in the other. Thus, art cannot be measured, calculated or compared to absolute scales. It is also a cultural snapshot. This makes it a living and ever changing object of scientific scrutiny. For the purpose of orientation this introduction gives an outline of the topic and its peculiarities as well as a brief guide to the authors.

The written or spoken word and visual arts seem to be historically interrelated, as these examples show: illustrated books or book covers have been popular for many decades, pictures are signed or accompanied by a complementing plate, inscriptions can be found on sculpture or any architectural construction, and film unites the word and the visual in the most contemporary way. These conjunctions of the word and the arts have at least one thing in common: the one medium always expresses what the other cannot.

A few authors have chosen the artist or visual arts in general as subject matter for some of their stories or novels. Among those can be found classics such as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, but also *The Marble Faun: Or, the Romance of Monte Beni* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. They put the artist, artistic creation, the resulting piece of art, but also the audience as constituent of art in the center of their fiction, thus drawing on art's connotations. This analysis concentrates on three short stories written in the twentieth century by two American authors.

Confining the research to one literary genre and two decades of the twentieth century enables the comparison of texts in one cultural context with the benefit of two authors' differing points of view.

Short stories and visual arts, though being individual artistic means of expression, share a dense symbolism. Hicks calls it the 'challenge of much in little' concerning the restricted length of the short story,¹ and the visual artist encounters a similar challenge when creating a painting, sculpture or multimedia installation. The chosen form always entails certain constraints, such as a painting, which is two-dimensional and limited in space most of the time. For this reason, artists find a way to express themselves within those limitations and enrich their art with symbolism and metaphors. They develop an artistic language that needs encoding on their part and decoding on the audience's part. Most artistic disciplines use symbolism to convey something that cannot or should not be expressed directly. However, a novel might not need as much symbolism, as authors can take as many pages as they need to elaborate on a certain aspect. The short story does not have this freedom and therefore uses other means to put the desired information into a few pages. The same is true for visual artists who enrich their artistic work in order to express meaning beyond the concrete.

In more detail, the similarity of the short story and the visual arts can be boiled down to the following factors. To start with the most obvious, they are both *visual*, although a short story can also be listened to and the visual arts are not necessarily limited to the sense of sight. Often art can also be touched, walked through or even smelled. Furthermore, both media are united by their *brevity*—as looking at a piece of art often takes little time, the same is true for a short story. For this reason short stories as well as art share a dense symbolism. Art as well as short stories can only fill a limited space, resulting in *density* or what A. M. Wright calls a 'unified' state, meaning 'that the parts tend to function in multiple and economical ways, that there is a minimum of waste and arbitrariness' (A. M. Wright, 51). What needs to be said in order to convey a certain meaning underlies certain restrictions of time (short story) and space (art). Therefore, both media are complex constructs which try to tell a complete story by using only a certain amount of words or space. The stylistic means

¹ Cf. Hicks, 13.

employed by both convey more than is actually said or depicted, leading to a certain *complexity*. Abrams describes this complexity as follows: '[...] the details are devised to carry maximum import for the development of the plot' (194). This works only because consumers fill the gaps and arrive at a complete picture (or story) with their own associations. Those instruments can encompass semiotic devices like symbolism or formal devices as spatial relations, color, emphasis, and the like, with each medium using those devices within its possibilities and limitations as a matter of course. This leads to one more characteristic of these media; their relative *openness*. Short stories or works of art seldom tell the whole story—they leave room for the audience's own interpretations, personal feelings or even their appropriate endings. The limited space does not allow for extensive character development or endless descriptions of the circumstances. It is no exception that there is no explanation of what happened before or after. Sometimes the motives of the acting persons are vague, but it is the audience's role to make sense of them and draw their own conclusions. It is the user's imagination or sometimes knowledge that resumes the picture beyond its frame or the story after its ending. This glimpse of just one *moment in time* is the last characteristic that the two media share. When contemplating a piece of art or reading a short story, consumers are directly drawn into the events and it is this short period of time in which they get a glimpse of the protagonists' lives. Hence, it was inviting to merge short story and art and to determine how they interact and draw upon each other.

As the respective short stories contain references to different forms of art, the artist or artistic creation, this study is aiming at their decoding. For all the art references found in the stories, the questions of what, when, where, who, why and also how will be answered in order to allow a closer look at them: what is the piece of art? Is it a painting, a sculpture, and what is depicted? When was it created and where? Who was the artist, if the artist is known? Why was it created, if this is known and of importance to our analysis? If possible, the *how* of production can also be scrutinized in more detail, when brush strokes or tool marks are visible on the object. These basic insights into the artwork should emphasize that those references in the text are *texts* themselves, according to Barthes' definition,² having a background and

² Cf. Barthes, *Mythologies*.

meaning attached. This leads us to intriguing questions regarding the stories themselves: why are those specific references used in the text? What is their function in the story? What do they stand for/signify? What are the connotations and denotations regarding the works of art? When and where in the stories do they appear? Why are especially those pieces of art or these genres used (and not e.g. music)? How are the general themes of the short stories supported by the use of art references? Asking those questions might not bring forward only one exclusive and valid answer, but could raise more opportunities for research.

The deliberate selection of short stories was initially only based on their references to art, but then the pronounced disparateness of the two authors—Bernard Malamud and Alice Walker—appeared very intriguing. Although their background and oeuvre do not have much in common, their selected short stories, "A Pimp's Revenge" by Malamud and "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" and "Everyday Use" by Walker, use visual arts as a literary element to address the same questions about art and the artist's life. The following section gives a short glimpse of the lives of both artists to illustrate their personal background which surely also influences their different approaches to art in the short stories.

Bernard Malamud was a writer of novels and short stories predominantly set in the urban Jewish community. He was born in Brooklyn on April 26, 1914 to a poor Jewish Russian immigrant family. When Malamud was still a boy of thirteen he had to witness his mother Bertha going crazy. Her suicidal tendencies seem to have left deep scars on the talented young boy. Bernard Malamud's daughter Janna remarks that these years of helplessly watching his mother disappear 'damaged [...] his ability to live easily, openly, casually in the everyday world. His trust' (Malamud Smith, 18). His mother died in 1929.

After graduating from City College in Manhattan and Columbia he began teaching English and writing short stories, some of which were first published in 1943. In 1945 Malamud married the Italian-rooted Ann deChiara. Malamud published numerous novels and short story collections, earning different awards, among them the Pulitzer Price for *The Fixer* (1966) in 1967. Throughout his career Malamud taught at several evening schools, high schools, colleges and universities. On March 18, 1986, he died of a heart attack

and was buried in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Malamud as father, artist and human being was kindly epitomized by his daughter, Janna Ellen:

The moral education Dad offered was constant: read, value art, seek education and experience, attend to others, shelter the vulnerable, and try to treat each person fairly. (Malamud Smith, 148)

These values are not only intrinsic to his literary oeuvre but show the way he lived life. He traveled extensively across Europe, the Soviet Union and Israel, most of the time accompanied by his family. Especially his various trips to Italy, including Rome, Venice, Florence, and Assisi, fired his interest in the arts. He visited museums, churches and other tourist attractions, taking inspiration for many of his stories. In particular, his book *Pictures of Fidelman* is dense with those Italian impressions. However, his artistic interest accompanied him everywhere. This is why he enjoyed his friendship with painter Rosemarie Beck, with whom 'he could talk art' (Malamud Smith, 156). His favorite artist probably was Rembrandt and he particularly adored his self-portraits,³ which play a central role in his short story "Rembrandt's Hat."

The reason why Bernard Malamud found the writing of short stories an intriguing creative task was compactness, as Hicks discovered in an interview with the author:

[...] to say everything that must be said and to say it quickly, fleetingly, as though two people had met for a moment in a restaurant, or a railroad station, and one had time only to tell the other they are both human, and, here, this story proves it. (Hicks, 12-13)

Thus, Malamud provided his short stories with his most profound insights on life, morality and art, by only stating the necessary—as the short encounter of a short story has its restrictions—and leaving the conclusion to the reader.

Alice Walker states that her stories are 'inspired [...] by my life as activist, lover, mother, teacher and *wife* [...] wandering and dreaming across many parts of the world' (Walker, Author's Preface, viii). Her short stories mirror life as she knows and observes it. Therefore, 'short stories provide a form for the deep longing I feel to know human beings better. I become them for the duration of

³ Cf. Malamud Smith, 255.

my scrutiny of their lives' (Walker, Author's Preface, viii). Moreover, the short story offers a wide field of experimentation for her, that is compatible with her busy life:

While in college I was delighted to discover a story could be completed over a weekend [...]. As an activist I was happy to realize I could dream up and write one, even during a period of political activity [...]. Best of all, short stories could be completed while one brought up a child. (Walker, Author's Preface, vii-viii)

For this reason, Walker's short stories are imbued with her experiences and the people she encounters. She offers a glimpse at these lives, leaving her 'thumbprint. Unique to the soul and heart they are by creation attached' (Walker, Author's Preface, viii).

Alice Walker's tremendously diverse oeuvre consists of novels, short stories, poems, and critical essays. Being one of the most influential African American female authors of the twentieth century, her writing places African American women as creators and themes on a literary map which for a long time had no place for them. Walker calls her literary and personal creed womanism⁴, which cherishes the power and originality of the African American woman. However, this approach is more than feminist and does not comply with color lines. It is an inclusive view on women which acknowledges all cultural, historical, political, folklorist, and emotional aspects of womanhood. Lauret wittingly formulates: '[...] womanism is articulated as a political identity which is integrated into everyday life, non-elitist, and positive/active rather than determined by victimstatus' (20). Every piece of her literary oeuvre is part of this philosophy and adds to her personal picture of the African American female experience.

Born into a sharecropper family in Eatonton, Georgia, on February 9, 1944, Alice Walker learned early what it meant to grow up in a Jim Crow state. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta, the elite college for African American women at that time. Still feeling that her talents were restricted in this environment, Walker continued to study at Sarah Lawrence College, also exclusively attended by ladies. Walker's intense social activism was manifested by her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. She married the Jewish civil

⁴ Cf. Walker, Definition Womanism, xi-xii.

rights lawyer Melvyn Rosenman Leventhal in 1967. When her daughter Rebecca was born in 1969, her writing career was in full bloom. Alice Walker taught, among other colleges, at Wellesley, where she offered her students the first class on African American female literature at an American college.⁵ In this manner, Walker transferred her engagement in the Women Rights Movement to the classroom and helped to reveal the many stories by those authors often deliberately forgotten. Walker's publishing career has been recognized by several awards, among which was the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for *The Color Purple* (1982). The controversial novel was also made into a movie directed by Steven Spielberg, which was nominated for 11 Oscars but did not win a single one. Alice Walker continues to write in her home in northern California.

For both authors visual arts are of some importance in their lives, therefore, the motifs of art, and the artists can be found in several of their works. Taking the different gender, culture, religion and ethnicity of Alice Walker and Bernard Malamud into consideration, the selected three stories permit a diversified exploration of visual arts in short story writing from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Certainly the differences between the two authors are striking. Their personal backgrounds are so diverse that they are even exemplified in geographical matters: Malamud grew up in the urban North while Walker was raised in the rural South, Malamud traveled to Europe when Walker visited Africa. These dissimilar experiences and means of finding their personal roots as artists are mirrored in their literary oeuvre and their central themes: while Malamud's central theme is morality, Walker concentrates on the strengthening and liberation of femininity. However, both authors lived and wrote in almost the same period of the 20th century, which means that they experienced the same social, political and cultural transformations. How these changes affected both of them in very similar ways is their involvement with the SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Walker was a member of the SNCC, supporting them with her activism, whereas Malamud encouraged the same causes as he regularly donated⁶: the same concerns, their support taking different shape.

This analysis transcends boundaries of media but also those of gender,

⁵ For the class syllabus of Alice Walker's 1972 course see the Appendix – Illustrations, Illustrations I – V.

⁶ Cf. Malamud Smith, 71.

race and cultural background. The unprecedented union of Malamud's and Walker's short stories in one cross-gender, cross-ethnic and cross-cultural analysis allows a look at fresh topics and the possibility of addressing relevant themes without constraining borders. This should in no way suggest that their respective backgrounds and roots be ignored. On the contrary, it enables starting from a different angle and the exploration of their viewpoints on one shared topic *with* their history as a possible explanation for their unique approaches in mind. With as few restrictive preconceptions in mind as possible one is more ready for the answers the excursion might bring—possibly inspired by Gombrich's advice for looking at a painting:

[...] to look at a picture with fresh eyes and to venture on a voyage of discovery into it is a far more difficult but also much more rewarding task. There is no telling what one might bring home from such a journey. (37)

2 Definitions and Methodologies

[We] may not assume that there is only one correct way of defining something: a definition is always relative to the context and purpose of the inquiry, which in turn will determine which traits we select for the [...] definition.

Norman Friedman⁷

Although this thesis intends to transcend traditional boundaries of genres and art delineations, it still needs to be put into a theoretical framework, adverting to employed methodologies and sorting out definitional problems. As the art reference here is apprehended as sign, standing for something else which goes beyond its literary denotation, a semiotic approach will be undertaken. Semiotics understands that a certain sign (or art reference in this case) is for itself arbitrary. Only when personal or cultural meaning is invested in it does it begin to have additional layers of meaning. Thus, a semiotic sign is a cultural construct and always needs the respective cultural context. In the case of artworks, the cultural context is purported by its traditional, predominantly Western European, art historic background, which offers a well canonized but not unproblematic basis. The problems arise from its male, white, mainstream point of view, making it necessary to write women and cultural and racial minorities into the history of art. However, the given art historic overview is not a feminist approach, as both traditional and feminist definitions of art 'approach art on the basis of pre-established concepts which predefine the properties of art as well as its cultural significance' (Rateike, 8). This analysis is an attempt to disclose the troubles of this traditional history of art we are tempted to regard as the only history of art.

The theoretical part opens with a critical analysis of the short story, as the literary genre or cultural texts dealt with in the following analysis should also be placed within their literary definition. Continuing with the study of each short story, the text itself will be the starting point of each chapter, determining how

⁷ Cf. Friedman, 17.

the text itself imitates art. The subsequent parts of each chapter are devoted to the respective art references in each story, each of them treated as signs in the semiotic sense. Each chapter on a short story is concluded by a summarizing subchapter addressing the arisen themes in connection to art. As the argument proceeds, connections and parallels between the stories, as well as varieties on common themes will emerge. As a convenient manual, all the works of art or other exemplary works referenced to throughout this study can be found in the Appendix – Illustrations, starting on page 99.

2.1 Short Story

Historically, the short story's precursors can be traced back to 'religious stories of the Greeks, the incomparable stories of Scheherezade, the instructive narratives of the European medieval times' (Werlock, viii). The print of periodicals and annuals in the 19th century facilitated the modern short story's triumphant rise and gained popularity with stories by its founding fathers Russian Anton Chekhov and Guy de Maupassant from France.⁸ And although the short story is a fairly universal literary genre, it is often quoted as being 'a peculiarly American form' (Werlock, viii) with the first representative form being Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1819), soon followed by Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville.⁹

At first glance a definition of the short story seems to be an easy one; however, when considering the vast publications and controversy on this topic it becomes clear that the situation is more complicated.¹⁰ Poe, as one of the first short story theorists, stated in a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* that a short story can be read in one sitting and has often a certain unique effect (qtd. in Abrams, 194). Abrams also points out that short stories tend to feature few main characters and, due to their brevity, there is less

⁸ For a more extensive short story theory and Maupassant's influence on the development of the American short story see Fusco. Chekhov's influence on the short story is analyzed in detail by May.

⁹ Cf. Werlock for a detailed history of the American short story.

¹⁰ A good example for this is Lohafer and Clarey's collection of critical essays concerning recent short story theory, which shows that a definition of the short story is not a clear-cut case that can easily be applied to all forms of short stories.

character and setting development.¹¹ He observes that 'the story [often begins] close to, or even on the verge of, the climax' resulting in a rather fast denouement (Abrams, 194), so he argues that short stories are immediate in action and fast-paced, which seems to apply to many short stories.

However, most attempts to categorize the short story fail because critics tend to cling to historic definitions—such as the aforementioned—although the parameters changed drastically during the 20th century. Thus, insisting on Poe's unity of effect might not apply to recent short stories which feature no plot at all. Likewise, definitions such as these have a theoretical problem, as they need to decide whether they begin with the actual body of work and try to find a definition that encompasses all of it or if they formulate a theory first and then probe to which stories they apply. Thus, all of the aforementioned characteristics formerly safely established are repeatedly under scrutiny because they do not apply thoroughly.¹²

A suitable example for definitional problems when dealing with the short story is the first story in this thesis, as it is repeatedly disputed as regards its form; therefore, a short anticipating detour is advisable to clear these matters up. "A Pimp's Revenge" is sometimes read as part of a short story sequence;¹³ however, others understand it as a novel. The stories assembled in the collection called *Pictures of Fidelman* are different in style and mood and are also told from different points of view; however, they share the same characters, the Italian setting and the theme of the artist's morality in his art and life. Luscher points out that

[within] a sequence, the individual stories do not lose their distinctiveness but rather expand and elaborate the contexts, characters, symbols, or themes developed by the others (149)

Obviously read as a short story in this analysis, the plot of each is consistent in itself as each story has a beginning, climax, and end. In every story the main character is introduced anew, as if he were someone else.¹⁴ Direct references between the stories can be found very seldom and are

¹¹ Cf Abrams, 194.

¹² Austin M. Wright elaborates on this in his essay "On Defining the Short Story: The Genre Question" on pages 46-48.

¹³ Cf. Luscher for more theoretical background on the short story sequence.

¹⁴ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 388. Fidelman's first name is introduced as if not only Esmeralda meets him for the first time but also the reader.

certainly not crucial for the understanding of the separate stories. Malamud even explains cross-references between his stories:

I've made her old and young, and sometimes resembling Annamaria Olovino, or Teresa, the chambermaid in Milan; even a little like Susskind, when my memory gets mixed up, who was a man I met when I first came to Rome. ("Pimp's Revenge," 393)

Thus, even someone who has not read the other Fidelman stories can make certain connections. Certainly, when looking at all the Fidelman stories in connection, the overall theme becomes more obvious, as the

[...] six pieces collectively share the vision of an evolving consciousness, morality, and aesthetics. Each story presents a variation on the theme of the Portrait of the Artist, respectively, as Critic, Priest, Forger, Painter, Charlatan [*sic!*], and Craftsman. (Buchen, 64)

Still, all those visions are also contained in the separate parts, each part hinting at the connecting idea of the whole.

In an interview, however, Malamud claims that when he had written the first story that was later to go into *Pictures of Fidelman* he immediately had ideas for more Fidelman stories:

After I wrote the story in Rome I jotted down ideas for several incidents in the form of a picaresque novel. I was out to loosen up—experiment a little—with narrative structure. And I wanted to see, if I wrote it at intervals—as I did from 1957 to 1968—whether the passing of time and mores would influence [Fidelman's] life. I did not think of the narrative as merely a series of related stories because almost at once I had the structure of a novel in mind and each part had to fit that form. (Stern, 65)

Considering this, *Pictures of Fidelman* certainly features all the characteristics of a picaresque novel: it shows one central character which does not seem to learn in the course of his many odd adventures, while it is also 'realistic in manner' and 'episodic in structure' (Abrams, 130).

Nevertheless, the audience's experience is different: first, the stories were published over more than a decade, which consequently made experiencing them as a whole very difficult. Secondly, the stories were

published in very different magazines and newspapers.¹⁵ And finally, three of the short stories later contained in *Pictures of Fidelman* had been previously published in two other short story collections by Malamud. Therefore, the reader was not able to experience the Fidelman stories as one whole. The audience had more the impression of independent short stories with the same central character. When Malamud wrote the finishing story and published the stories in one collection, only then did he make it possible to experience them as a whole. This definitional dilemma is best epitomized by Hershinow: 'the final product seems as much a collection of self-contained stories as a fully unified novel' (87). Hershinow's dichotomy of how to categorize *Pictures of Fidelman* is also manifest by attributing them a whole chapter as a book/novel with the title "The Artist as Schlemiel: *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*" but on the other hand listing the Fidelman stories in his chapter on Malamud's short stories.¹⁶

These definition problems illustrate what is already known from Friedman's citation at the beginning of chapter 2: a definition needs a context or background in which it is embedded and where it makes sense.¹⁷ This simultaneously shows that a definition is not fixed once it is written down: it lives with its context and changes according to changes in the framework. A definition—be it of the short story or of art¹⁸ or of anything else—can only show 'central tendencies rather than absolutes' (Friedman, 16). Thus, the margins of a definition are fuzzy, and there is not one approved proper way of putting things into a category. Moreover, the wish to categorize is not always useful or even successful, as categories tend to block a broader view on things. Thus, often when a definition is found we tend to be content with it and leave it at that, without taking other aspects into consideration. Needless to say, definitions are the basis and starting point of discussions, thus it is necessary to agree upon one. Nevertheless, a definition should be a means 'of directing attention to certain features' (Tilghman, 67) of the discussed object, and pointing out

¹⁵ Cf. The first story to be published was "The Last Mohican" in *Partisan Review*, as early as spring 1958. "Still Life" was also published in *Partisan Review* in Winter 1962. "Naked Nude" was first printed in August 1963 in *Playboy*, where also "A Pimp's Revenge" appeared five years later, in February 1968. "Pictures of Fidelman," which later gets the name "Pictures of the Artist" in the collection, was published one decade after the publication of the first short story, in December 1968, in *Atlantic*.

¹⁶ Cf. Hershinow, 119.

¹⁷ Cf. Friedman, 17.

¹⁸ Cf. Tilghman, 69. Here Tilghman discusses the importance of the context in order to reach a beneficial definition. Although the discussion centers on a definition of arts it encounters the same framing preconditions.

differences between categories is more a matter 'of degree than of kind' (Friedman, 28).

As this thesis attempts to bring together the views on art by two very different authors, a non-restrictive approach to short stories and art best applies here. A global definition of the short story is used for this discussion, concurring with Friedman's simple yet generally applicable definition that a short story is 'a short fictional narrative in prose' (29). This gives all the necessary parameters: as the stories are prose narrative, rather than poetry or drama, they are fictional and, although different in length, all three stories can definitely be called short.

2.2 Art

Even more than the definition of the short story, the notion of *art* is prone to constant change, gradual adjustments or even dramatic revolution. Especially during the course of the last century the views on how to look at art have changed rapidly, which reflects the heterogeneous art scene but also the political, economic and social developments of the fast-paced 20th century. This chapter explores how the notions of *art* and *the artist* have changed, demonstrating that a fixed definition cannot withstand time or cultural delineations. Also, there is not one universally valid definition of art, as the connotations of that term might vary from individual to individual. Tilghman for this reason points out 'that the very idea of a theory or definition [of art] is a confused one' (187). However, a brief sketchy journey through art history might illuminate some important aspects of art which are crucial for the understanding of the further study.

In former times, being an artist was a profession like any other. Working as a commissioned artist required skills to fulfill the wishes of the contractor as accurately as possible. Art was used in all fields of everyday life but especially for political and ecclesiastic representation. Using art always had some kind of function, be it the decorative engravings in Egypt or the painted decoration of the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. The intention of art was to express world views and emphasize power positions, even to legitimate leadership.

Throughout the history of Western European cultures (and, indeed, most other cultures we know about), the powerful have used their wealth and prestige to promote artistic display as an attribute of their own preeminence and taste. (Ferguson, 176-177)

Thus, art was used by the sovereign to express and represent himself; it was not the artist's vehicle to expression. The artist was dependent on the commissions of the ruling class; therefore, they had 'to balance their own compulsion to create art with the practical needs of living' (Ferguson, 177). Although they might not have been able to express their own reflections on life, the artists of that time were still able to develop unique viewpoints and techniques as this also made the client show his sense of innovation.

Ferguson draws attention to one probably even more important function of art: communication:

The powerful of the society expect literature [and the fine arts] to glorify them and their social structures, and to be especially understandable to them, written [formed] in codes illegible to outsiders. (176)

As the ruling class or clergy intended to promote a certain position or world view, the works of art, had to communicate those values. However, the symbols and means of communication were only recognizable by those initiated into their code. Thus, depending on the intention of the work of art, the symbols contained only meaning for a small group or for the whole hoi polloi. Traveling some hundred kilometers North or South, however, often meant that these codes were not applicable anymore, especially as the pressure of time made formerly commonly known meanings disappear. Looking at Jan van Eyck's famous *The Arnolfini Portrait*, a 21st century onlooker might miss the dense symbolism the portrait is equipped with, in 1434 however it was obvious that the dog represented fidelity in marriage.¹⁹ Thus, although some pieces of art might still radiate impressiveness, the actual meaning that was attached to them might not be obvious to a contemporary onlooker in the first place. Only if the original code is recovered the meaning for former audiences can actually be grasped.

Over the course of time, not only art for the ruling classes was considered art but influential people moved towards being art patrons. Patrons,

¹⁹ Cf. Berger, 5.

museums and other art institutions took control over art and had an undeniable influence on art and its developments. Because of their support, art was able to become more than commissioned work. Art developed into a variety of directions, which is impressively demonstrated in the wide range of artistic developments of the 19th and 20th centuries. Art lost its claim to having a representative value but developed into a vehicle to present personal ideas, feelings and impressions. Thus, art became more individual, which consequently lead to the concentration on the artist, as opposed to the former emphasis on the client. Now, the understanding of the artistic piece often depended on the underlying principle promoted by the artist. This means that

one cannot necessarily tell a work of art by looking at it; its status as art depends on factors that exist outside of it in the theories members of the "artworld" have about it. (Lauter, 25)

Again, a mere look at the artwork itself might not be enough in order to understand its full meaning and importance. It is now the artist and the art world that put meaning into it, through personal, cultural, philosophical, even political positions.

The variety of artistic movements arising from this liberation of the arts made it more difficult to arrive at a common definition of art, but at the same time a definition became imperative 'to set down boundaries of value across a potential chaos' (Bell, 177). In addition to the *art* label, art gradually also received a price tag attached to it and was put on 'a capitalist market in tradable goods' (Bell, 206). Every new artistic development in the last 200 years has necessitated an enlargement of artistic understanding. However, theory's reaction to artistic movements is often delayed and does not recognize the impact of some artistic approaches until later, resulting in misunderstood artists such as Vincent van Gogh who 'sold only one painting during his lifetime [...], and was little known to the art world at the time of his death' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 234). Thus, in the 20th century, a definition of art became arbitrary and the existing literature still discusses how *real* art can be identified and defined.

The art historian also has to be aware that 'any history of art can only be a partial history [and therefore, one] should always look for what is left out as well as at that which is included' (Howells, 63). Since those who determined the

delineations of art were the ruling class or at least were influenced by them, art historical accounts mostly follow a certain purpose. Needless to say, a traditional art history, written by white male Christians concentrating on Western European art, focuses on those artworks that are known to them and accommodate their world view. Accounts of foreign cultures' art are often only included in regard to their influence on one particular movement or artist, such as the inspiration Picasso drew from African art, which cumulated in his simple and mask-like faces. More expansive art histories and iconologies of these foreign cultures are seldom included. This entails an even more problematic aspect, the fact that art by racial or social minorities within a culture is also often left out. Sometimes those artists were not even given a chance to pursue their art and if they nevertheless did so, their works of art were seldom permitted in the realm of what was called a *masterpiece*. Consequently, any art historical account only gives partial insight into what actually was and is being created in the world.

Unfortunately, the difficulty with art history does not stop here, as art historical accounts up to the middle of the 20th century rarely include works by women; in Gombrich's standard work *The Story of Art* 'not one of the 411 works illustrated [...] is attributed to a female artist' (61) as Howells observes. To conclude that there simply were less female artists is, however, only partly true, as feminist research has comprehensively shown: the mechanisms to keep women in their place, prescribed by men, reached from subtle to obvious. Either women were hindered in accessing art instruction and the execution of their arts or 'their contributions have been undervalued or overlooked by traditionally male art historians' (Howells, 61), often ousting them into the realms of domestic crafts. Thus, as Lauter indicates: 'art *is* gendered' (23). This fact actually is addressed in both of Alice Walker's short stories as her artists are African American as well as women, thus being confronted with a double fight for the recognition of their artistic voices.

In her essay "Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life" Walker addresses another problem for female artists and describes why finding Zora Neale Hurston was so important for her:

The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect—even if rejected—enrich and enlarge one's view of existence. (4)

As a female artist she lacks models for her art, because in the artistic canon no female artwork can be found. As an African American female artist it is even more complicated to find models, as, historically, their ancestors were doubly discriminated. When desperately looking for inspiration the rich male art history is of no help or guidance for the female artist as, like Virginia Woolf recognizes, '[...] we think back through our mothers if we are women' (75). For this reason, Walker perceives her female artistic models in those art forms nobody before even considered art: her female predecessor found her artistic relief 'in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use' (Walker, "Gardens," 239). Thus, quilts, songs, handmade earthenware or gardens become precious resources of female artistic inspiration, as these were the masterpieces of their mothers and grandmothers. 'Walker's attention to the black woman as creator, and to how her attempt to be whole relates to the health of her community' (Christian, 82) emphasizes that questions of heritage, identity and feminine liberation are central to the identity as an artist and are a recurring theme throughout Walker's works to support her intention of reclaiming female art into art, literary and cultural history. Therefore she unravels what others neglected for centuries.

Yet art history holds even more shortcomings, which Howells exposes in his *Visual Culture*:

[his]stories have a need for continuity, with traceable consequences, causes and effects. Everything is, ultimately, explained. Life, however, isn't always like that and neither – arguably – is history. [...] Could it be, therefore, that the traditional history of art actually *imposes* order upon the events which it so colourfully describes? (58)

This is the recurring problem of art theory, as there is always a discrepancy between practical output and theoretical approach. Since theory's mission is to define, it always runs the risk of exclusion and imposition. This means that the art historical canon—as the word *canon* already suggests—is self-perpetuating, as it is a canon of 'sanctioned art objects, thus creating a cultural tautology by

rendering the "expert" incapable of appreciating non-canonical work' (Lauter, 21). This also invites the suggestion that the canon might even be arbitrary:

Should we select a work for inclusion [in the canon] because it is outstanding (and therefore hardly typical) or typical (and therefore unlikely to be outstanding)? How and when might the canon be re-evaluated? Who has been left out, and why? (Howells, 62)

Finally, we have to be aware that 'the history of art tends to be the history of painting [...]' (Howells, 64). All of this brings further discussion of the pertinent reading of art history and complicates finding an appropriate definition of art.

Although this discussion might give the impression that the intention here is to dispose of or revolutionize art history, nothing of the sort is attempted, as art history still forms the basis for the study of art. Some of the artworks referred to in the short stories could not be analyzed in detail, if we did not have the art historic reference frame to draw connections, show influences and developments and give an overview. Nevertheless, other art references in the short stories are not commonly known yet *because* they were (or still are) overlooked by art historians. Thus, art history provides us with a map for placing certain works of art, however, other pieces of art will also find their way onto this map, which is only possible, if we assume a rather open-minded approach: 'Our responsibility is to keep the idea of art wide and useful, so that [various artistic forms] will be taken seriously' (Glassie, 86). For this reason it is helpful to consider a work of art as a cultural product: it reflects the time and thinking in which it was created, as much as it reflects the artists' personal intentions and interpretation as '[the artists], just like the works of art that they produce, are the products of their time' (Howells, 59). Taking this cultural approach to art, it is more natural to appreciate cultural artifacts as the art pieces they are, whether or not they have been included in traditional art historic accounts so far. Thus, no revolution or reinvention of the notion of art is attempted here, because this would again set parameters which then are used as a means of evaluation. However, any definition that is imposed upon art from the sides of theory or critics cannot be satisfying for our purposes as:

theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions. (Dewey, 10)

Therefore, in this thesis, the artworks are considered in their context and as part of their respective cultures, never disregarding that they are part of the artists' lives and their experiences. And, following Dewey's philosophy here, appreciating art is even more than understanding its context and meaning as a communicative instrument: it is also experiencing²⁰ it and looking closely²¹ as this brings us closer to the act of creation, which it is essential to re-experiencing art.²²

Finally, there still remain a variety of terms for referring to the art forms found in the short stories and unfortunately just employing *art* appears not to be distinct enough as it includes all forms of art: classic art, music, performing arts, literature, crafts, film, and the like. Now, arriving at a term that comprises all the art forms we encounter in the short stories is not that easy, as we scrutinize (among a few sidesteps) the following art pieces: painting, sculpture, photography, and quilting. Clearly, judgmental terms or terminology imposing categories are avoided here. Accordingly, the term *high art*, although this is what art history has for a long time concentrated on, is not adequate as it implies that there is also some kind of *low art*. And as quilting is not considered high art, a new term would have to be applied to it. However fitting *crafts*, *folk art* or *decorative arts* might seem for this purpose, the aim is to summarize all art forms in one notion. Other categorizing terms such as *male* and *female art*, *public* and *private art*, and *art with* or *without function* should only be mentioned to draw attention to some tremendous attempts to keep some new art forms in their assigned place. A far more suitable a notion appears to be *visual art*, as it encompasses high and minor and all the other former distinctions. Nevertheless, when using this term the problems are of a different kind, as sculpture is often assigned to the *plastic arts*, thus leading into another sub-division. Moreover, quilts are three-dimensional works of art as well, and (unlike

²⁰ Cf. Dewey, 54.

²¹ Cf. Dewey, 324.

²² Cf. Dewey's *Art as Experience* for more details. Rateike also summarizes Dewey's central statements in reference to quilts and their appreciation.

typical sculptures displayed at a museum) they can be grasped with more than the sense of sight: they are also a tactile and sensual experience. On the whole, the all-embracing notion of *art* still most suitably summarizes the art forms under discussion, as it eliminates artificial classification. Thus, *art* will be used in the following, bearing in mind that it is applied to painting, sculpture, photography and quilting.

2.3 Semiotics

Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. (Chandler, 2)

Semiotics is originally a linguistic term coined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the 19th century, to refer to the sign as a communicative vessel. According to Saussurean definition, such a sign always consists of a signifier and a signified: these are like the sides of a coin, the *coin* being called *sign*. The signifier is 'the form that the sign takes,' the signified is 'the concept to which it refers' (Chandler, 18). There is not one without the other, however: one signifier is not limited to only one signified, and vice versa, but then they are combined in a different sign. Thus, the verbal articulation of the signifier A R T can provoke several signifieds as pointed out in the previous chapter, however, formally speaking, each of those signifieds is together with the signifier A R T an individual sign. Similarly, the signified *two-dimensional piece of art* can have different signifiers: P A I N T I N G in English or G E M Ä L D E in German, again, each constituting a new sign. In the 20th century, these notions were expanded by French semiotician and structuralist Roland Barthes to apply to cultural discourse. Thus, the signifier assumes no longer an exclusively linguistic form but could be found in various forms: a word, a sound, a label, an object, an advertisement, a picture, and the like. The corresponding signified 'is a concept in the mind – not a thing but the notion of a thing' (Chandler, 20).

Crucial to the theory of semiotics is that the sign is in itself arbitrary, meaning that in the combined sounds A R T (the signifier) there is nothing

intrinsically *artistic* in those sounds that determines its meaning. The signified is only attached to the signifier by cultural convention, 'in other words, words only mean the things they do because we agree that they do' (Howells, 96). Without the cultural context, a sign has no communicative function at all. In fact, 'a sign has no absolute value independent of its context' (Chandler, 23). Thus, sender and receiver of a sign need to share a cultural context, which can be a common language or any other form of sign-system, and 'the value of the sign is determined by the relationships between the sign and other signs within the system' (Chandler, 24). In the analysis of the short stories, we encounter the sender and receiver of an art code. However, not the relationship between author (as sender) and reader (as receiver) is decoded, as this is not a production or reception theoretical analysis. In the subsequent chapters, sender and receiver are located within the short stories, thus, the cultural codes are those connected to art and the signs under scrutiny are the respective works of art. The intention is to disentangle what the art signs mean for the sender and receiver in the story, determining if the central conflicts can be ascribed to conflicting cultural contexts and codes, as the problems in the stories tend to arise from inconsistent connotations of art.

In semiotics, denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signifieds: a *denotative* signified and a *connotative* signified. Meaning includes both denotation and connotation (Chandler, 140)

The distinction between denotation and connotation is, however, slightly complicated, especially when dealing with art. Whereas in linguistics a dictionary can provide the literal meaning or denotation of a sign, looking at art objects one might lack a clear-cut commonly known denotation at all, considering the following: What *is* the denotation of a particular painting? Is there a literal meaning to a painting everyone in the same cultural context shares? Is it even possible that a work of art has some denotation across cultural borders? If we take Picasso as an example, what is the minimum denotation known in a certain cultural context? In some context, the denotation might only be *painter* and nothing more. Does this imply that those who do not share a common denotation about Picasso do not understand his art?

This study appreciates that the art references used in the short stories have different denotations and connotations depending on the cultural context of the readership. Hence, probably for one reader a quilt is just a bedcover, whereas for another it may be a cultural artifact. There is no feasible way to detect all possible meanings, as their connotations are not only cultural constructs, but sometimes are even personal constructs, depending on individual history, family and experience.²³ It is essential to state that there exists no *proper* code for understanding the short stories (or any cultural text) correctly, as there is no right and wrong when connotations are involved. Readers will simply interpret and appreciate the short stories differently, depending on their cultural codes involved. The detailed analysis undertaken here also does not claim to be the one appropriate reading of the stories, it just adds to a more complete picture. Maybe an analogy can rectify that there is no false and true reading of the stories, just a more detailed one: when the visitor of a museum contemplates a painting on the other side of the room, he gets an overall impression and can probably say what is depicted and draw his own conclusions from it. But the closer he comes, the more details are revealed: he can discern explicit features, detect a hint formerly imperceptible or marvel at the lush impasto. Hence, a more detailed picture arises that furthers the theme already observed from farther away. The proposition of *coming closer* to the short stories is to expand the understanding of the art references and how this supports the general themes of the stories. The context, as has been noted, remains within the short stories, thus the signs are explored in regard to their meaning for the protagonists.

Although a semiotic approach is employed, no strict semiotic terminology is used when referring to the art references. In the subsequent chapters, the terms *signifier* and *signified* are usually not mentioned explicitly as most of the following is the analysis of several denotative and connotative layers of signifieds. Thus, even when notions such as association, denotation, connotation, meaning, and the like are applied they all refer to the semiotic *signified*. As Chandler suggests, the different signifiers (the works of art and other art references) are subjected to a

²³ Chandler clarifies that 'connotations are not purely 'personal' meanings – they are determined by the codes to which the interpreter has access' (142), therefore, strictly speaking, the own experiences are composed of different cultural codes (e.g. a family code, a school code,...).

paradigmatic analysis [which] involves comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the text with absent signifiers which in similar circumstances might have been chosen, and considering the significance of the choices made. (99)

In this way, the signifier's impact on the story is further fathomed, as it displays the deliberate preference of one art reference to the other. During the course of the short stories' analysis, the vital aspect to keep in mind is that anything can stand for something else, even those things not included.

3 The Failed Artist in "A Pimp's Revenge"

Not to understand. Yes, that was my whole occupation during those years—I can assure you, it was not an easy one.

R. M. Rilke

The intellect of man is forced to choose Perfection of the life, or of the work...

W. B. Yeats

Both.

A. Fidelman

Epigraphs to *Pictures of Fidelman*

"A Pimp's Revenge," first published in the February 1968 issue of *Playboy*,²⁴ is the story about a self-proclaimed artist—Arturo Fidelman—who, living in Florence, has been trying to finish his painted masterpiece for more than five years. The oil painting is supposed to contain him as a boy in the arms of his already deceased mother. Basing the painting on an old photograph of his mother, which was taken when he still was a little boy, he struggles to capture life as it once had been. At the same time, he does not manage to make a decent living and live a moral life in the present, as he is so obsessed with this one painting. Thus, his girlfriend, Esmeralda, has to support both of them by working as prostitute, with Fidelman acting as her pimp. This seems the most convenient solution for him, as he still has time for his painting and can even use the pimping time for sketches.²⁵ However, his artistic struggle for inspiration goes on as his masterpiece just does not come to life. He continuously scratches off his or his mother's face only to start over the next day. During this whole process, Esmeralda's former pimp, Ludovico, comments on Fidelman's work, thus constantly challenging his artistry and self-efficacy, which adds to his insecurity and impedes him even more. Only when

²⁴ In 1969 "A Pimp's Revenge" became part of a short story sequence published under the title *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*. A discussion of this matter can be found in chapter 2.1.

²⁵ "Pimp's Revenge," 407.

Esmeralda burns the oppressing photograph is Fidelman freed from bedeviling memories of the past and succeeds in finishing his painting—which actually turns out to be a true masterpiece. However, because of his stunted self-confidence he takes Ludovico's unsettling remarks very seriously and unintentionally destroys the painting overnight by again trying too hard to make it more of a masterpiece. The story ends with Fidelman castigating himself by stabbing himself in the gut.

Malamud's short story explores the close correlation of an artist's life and his artistic output. In this case, the artwork of Fidelman reflects what he has become in his life—the painting shows all his imperfections, insecurities and his moral failure. In fact, his failure lies in the fact that he tries to be a great painter because of the wrong reasons: he only wants to be a great painter so that he will be recognized, so that people will remember him as an unchallenged artist. Therefore a central theme in "A Pimp's Revenge" is the artist's identity crisis triggered by a creative artistic crisis—or vice versa. Both—the personal and the artistic—crises involve questions of who am I, where do I go, where do I come from, what is my legacy, who are the people who support me when I need them. However, Fidelman does not succeed in answering these questions to his satisfaction and move on. He refuses to allow these questions to even surface, as he admits in one of the rare honest moments: 'the truth is I am afraid to paint, like I might find out something about myself' ("Pimp's Revenge," 394). Thus, those identity issues do not initiate the growth toward a moral individual and fine artist but toward failure on both counts. This interconnection of art and life is, undoubtedly, another theme of the short story, as even in the epigraphs to the short story collection Fidelman claims that he wants 'both' his art and life to be perfect (Malamud, Epigraphs to *Pictures of Fidelman*), although he does not apprehend what this means in practice. He ignores that the key to becoming a good artist is to come to terms with his past and work on his self-confidence while at the same time giving up his egotism. This should not be a struggle of 'life versus art' but an all-embracing of 'life *and* art' (Field, 13).

This theme comprises another central theme repeatedly found in Malamud's oeuvre, the burden of time and the past.

Time represents a burden for Malamudian heroes because their unhappiness is prompted by remembering the past or by the negative circumstances in the present, conditions that force the characters to ignore the future. (Sío-Castiñeira, 4)

In Fidelman's case the unresolved past is a hindrance for development and artistic inspiration, leading to a frustrated artist without roots. The picture Fidelman attempts to paint is the key to reconciling with the past. He needs to accept the past and his heritage as part of himself in order to complete this one picture and advance as an artist and a person. Fidelman's neglect of his past, present and future make him a forlorn person on a never ending quest. He is incapable of admitting feelings or of letting anyone close to him, so even Esmeralda's efforts to support him and make him aware of the situation he has gotten himself into are in vain. However, in his struggle for orientation, inspirations and a guiding hand, he is deceived by the wrong people, such as Ludovico, Esmeralda's former pimp.

The following chapters illustrate how these central themes are supported by the visual devices and art references in the text.

3.1 Visual Devices of the Text

Malamud employs stylistic means that support the world seen through the artist's eyes. In various parts of the story, the text imitates painting through the unusual extensive use of adjectives, especially adjectives of color or other visual descriptions. These parts evoke pictures, and as they are not used throughout the text, they are not a generally applied stylistic means but a selective way to show the artist's way of seeing. Interestingly enough, these parts seem to paint different pictures, e.g. a still life when Fidelman crosses the market:

In the market close by, F pinched the tender parts of two Bosc pears and a Spanish melon. He looked into a basket of figs, examined some pumpkins on hooks, inspected a bleeding dead rabbit, and told himself he must do a couple of still lifes [*sic*!]. ("Pimp's Revenge," 386)

When Esmeralda comes with him to his small apartment, the text evokes a

portrait of her:

The girl's hair, when she tossed off her baggy hat, was brown and full. She had black eyes like plum pits, a small mouth on the sad side, Modigliani neck, strong though not exactly white teeth, and a pimply brow. ("Pimp's Revenge," 388)

Right at the beginning of the short story, the reader sees through the main character's eyes and a landscape painting arises:

The painter blew his nose at the open window and gazed for a reflective hour at the Tuscan hills in September haze. Otherwise, sunlight on the terraced silver-trunked olive trees, and San Miniato, sparkling, framed in the distance by black cypresses. ("Pimp's Revenge," 382-383)

Even genre scenes, in the sense of 'depicting scenes from daily life' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 218) can be found occasionally:

He enjoyed the narrow crowded noisy streets, the washing hung from windows. Tourists were all but gone, but the workshops were preparing for next year's migration, mechanics assembling picture frames, cutting leather, plastering tile mosaics; women plaiting straw. He sneezed passing through a tannery reek followed by hot stink of stable. Above the din of traffic an old forge rumbling. ("Pimp's Revenge," 384)

The effect of such passages is two-fold. On the one hand, they make the reader enter the artist's mind and understand his way of seeing. They 'see' what he sees and therefore they are drawn closer to the character and sympathize with his situation. On the other hand, they draw attention to the general importance of art in the short story. These descriptions actually enable the reader to visually perceive the story and thus make the impact of art on the main character comprehensible.

Another stylistic means that occasionally evokes visual associations is the change of narrative voice throughout the story. The prevailing narrative voice of "A Pimp's Revenge" is a figural narrator, which reflects Fidelman's point of view and his confusion. These third-person narrations are frequently interspersed with interior monologue passages. The change from one voice to the other is often so subtle that the reader is imperceptibly drawn into the artist's despairing mind.

He had tried it every which way, with Momma alone, sitting or standing, with or without him; and with Bessie in or out, but never Poppa, that living ghost; and I've made her old and young [...] ("Pimp's Revenge," 393)

Within only one sentence the narrative voice switches from third-person to interior monologue. Furthermore, parts of the story are told in dialogue, culminating in the interview between Ludovico and Fidelman.²⁶ All these narrative techniques provoke images of people talking or arguing, which is not surprising for the dialogue, but the change between third-person narration and interior monologue does so as well. It is similar to a picture with several people in it, one of them—represented by the interior monologue—acting as a repoussoir figure in the foreground that leads the viewer into the picture and makes the subject matter more accessible. The same is achieved by Fidelman's interior monologue, as it makes his point of view and emotions comprehensible for the reader.

The importance of time and the past for the protagonist can also be visually experienced by the reader through a sequential structuring of the story, the change between past and present tense and the course of Fidelman's masterpiece.²⁷ The overall eight sequences of the short story are clearly set apart with the beginning of a new paragraph, thus encompassing the events of about three months, emphasizing that the past is also of crucial significance for the course of events.

Malamudian characters perceive temporal sequences they are unable to connect with each other. That is why time is an enemy impossible to defeat without the need to start a battle. (Sío-Castiñeira, 4)

This 'perception' of 'temporal sequences,' as Sío-Castiñeira expresses it, corresponds to that fragmentation of experience conveyed by the separation of the story in loosely combined parts and the constant change in point of view within the narration. On a larger scale, the fragmentation can again be found in the organization of the short stories into the volume of *Pictures of Fidelman*.

The centrality of time in "A Pimp's Revenge" is supported by the change of tense in the narration. The whole story is told in the past tense, except part

²⁶ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 399-402.

²⁷ The latter visual device, the gradual change in Fidelman's portrait is explored in more detail in chapter 3.2.

seven, which is the part where Fidelman's and Esmeralda's daily routine as pimp and prostitute is described. By using the present tense in this part—and switching to the past tense again in the last part—Malamud emphasizes this one passage.²⁸ Accordingly, it shows Fidelman's moral decline most prominently, as he is willing to offer his girlfriend's body in order to achieve his own aim. The change in tense has a similar effect to filmic techniques like a close-up, where the camera comes very close in order to study a person or situation in more detail. The immediacy of this part conveyed by the present tense is, however, accompanied by a matter-of-fact neutral style:

She hands F the money—usually two thousand lire, sometimes three; and if she can get it from a wealthy-type client, or an older man especially fond of eighteen-year-old girls, seven or eight thousand. That sum is rare. F counts the money—often in small bills—and slips it into his wallet, wrapping a fat rubber band around it. ("Pimp's Revenge," 407-408)

This detailed and clinical depiction, however, is reminiscent of a dolly shot in movies, where the camera follows the moving protagonist, always keeping up with its pace. Thus, Malamud pulls the reader more into the course of events and at the same time acerbically repels his readership.

Throughout the story the painter Arturo Fidelman is called simply 'F'—the artist's name reduced to a symbol. This anonymity suggests that he is just one of many failing artists, his life and fate representative of so many people's. This naming also forms a certain barrier to the reader: not only is the main character called by his last name, it is also diminished to the initial. Thus, the reader is more skeptical towards his attitude and story. His name is not important because he has not managed to produce something unique or worth mentioning—and probably never will. There are only few who have enough talent, inspiration and uniqueness to transcend above amateurism and rise into the realms of the famous and respected artists. Interestingly enough, Fidelman's full name is revealed at two crucial points in the story where he shows his true character. His first name is given when he takes Esmeralda to his studio for the first time.²⁹ Only when Fidelman is bare naked is he truly himself. When he goes to his studio with the young prostitute he cannot even

²⁸ The seventh sequence of "A Pimp's Revenge," the one in present tense, can be found on pages 407-409.

²⁹ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 388.

afford to pay, he shows the kind of man he really is: lonely but too self-consumed to open up to other people. Fidelman's last name is revealed by Esmeralda's former pimp, Ludovico, during the exclusive interview he tries to get from Fidelman.³⁰ In this interview, Fidelman gets caught up in contradictions which Ludovico uses against him to confuse him even more and make him look like a philistine without opinion. Again, this is the point in the story when Fidelman seems like he has been stripped of all his masks. In this interview Fidelman cannot pretend to be someone else, as Ludovico exposes that he is not the inspired and sophisticated genius. Therefore, the symbolization of Fidelman's name broaches the theme of identity, as the reduction of the name stands for the loss and search for his true self.³¹

3.2 The Artist

In this short story the artist Fidelman has a problem living up to what he thinks is expected by *the artist* in the classic sense. Typically, an artist is a creative and inspired genius with a unique view on the world. Although an artist might not always lead a carefree life, he knows exactly what his vocations are, even though he might not be recognized or understood by his peers. Nevertheless, eventually the *true* artist goes down in art history and is admired for his invaluable masterpieces. On any account, he is a free and independent spirit. For Fidelman, being an artist is foremost a symbol of mastery and ingenuity, grandeur and success, consequently, these are the values he tries to do justice to. Moreover, he is repeatedly concerned with the financial aspect of art and he understands painting his masterpiece as compensation for all that he has done wrong.

³⁰ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 399.

³¹ The name as most basic representation and determination of a person's identity is again addressed in the discussion of "Everyday Use" in chapter 5.1.

"[...] If a man does only one such painting in his lifetime, he can call himself a success. I sometimes think that if I could paint such a picture, much that was wrong in my life would rearrange itself and add up to more [...]."

"In what way?"

"I could forgive myself for past errors."

("Pimps' Revenge," 398)

He thinks that through his art he can become moral again, although he never attempts to do so in his real life. Thus, the artist is misled by these ideal notions of an artist's ingenuity and morality and does not comprehend the close interrelation of art and real life—the attempts to construct himself and his mother fail.

Fidelman's personal development and moral decline is embodied and mirrored in the portrait he struggles to finish. However, he does not realize that what becomes manifest in his portrait is his moral failure.

This is my most honest piece of work. [...] And what it means, I suppose, is I am what I became from a young age. Then he thought, it has no meaning, a painting's a painting. ("Pimp's Revenge," 409)

Throughout the story, he repeatedly comes close to embracing his true self and art as part of his life, but then again, this truth is unbearable for him and he tries hard to dismiss these realizations. The stages of his picture effectively reflect Fidelman's personal development and moral decline.

The subject had changed from "Mother and Son" to "Brother and Sister" (Esmeralda as Bessie), to let's face it, "Prostitute and Procurer." ("Pimp's Revenge," 409)

Originally, he wanted to paint a picture of his mother and himself, to finally deal with his mother's early death that left him without guidance and a deep scar on his soul. Many years he tried to avoid this grievous chapter of his past, but when Bessie sent him the old picture of him and his mother, it triggered the old unprocessed feelings:

I remember so little, her death, not even the dying, just the end mostly [...]. I was about six or seven, or maybe ten, and, as I remember, didn't cry at the funeral. For years that never bothered me much, but when Bessie sent me the snap and I began painting Momma's pictures, I guess it did. ("Pimp's Revenge," 394)

However, he still is not able to look back and look at himself, he just wants to paint a masterpiece and leave the unmanageable feelings behind again. This is why he tries to change the people in his painting into 'Brother and Sister,' but as he is as detached from her, this attempt is unsuccessful as well.

The only image that Fidelman can finish is the one which is most true to what has become of him. His moral decline is gradually traceable throughout the story. Although his selfishness is obvious throughout the story, for the first time it hurts another's feelings when he lets the young prostitute live with him, as she offers to 'take care of [his] needs and won't interfere with [his] work' ("Pimp's Revenge," 388). He does not intend to account for something in this relationship and sees her as a kind of commodity as she keeps house, cooks, does the groceries, 'obliged in bed when he wanted her, could be tender, and generally made herself useful' ("Pimp's Revenge," 395). As he even calls her 'whore' ("Pimp's Revenge," 403), it is only one step further that he wants her to go back to the streets again in order to earn money for his painting, while he is pimping for her.³² His disrespect, dishonesty, egotism and general emotional impotence, make him not only promise Esmeralda that he is going to marry her as soon as his painting is finished to keep her compliant, he is even relieved when Ludovico wants to do the pimping again.

As Fidelman can neither free himself of his oppressing past nor confront it, Esmeralda realizes that the old photograph stands in the way of Fidelman's self-expression and her own future. When Esmeralda burns the photograph, Fidelman's artistic inspiration can flow freely. He now is liberated from the past and the impossible task of reconstructing his childhood. He no longer tries to invent his mother, but lets his feeling dominate. He 'paints with confidence, amusement, a sense of discovery' (Wegelin, 145). The result is a picture of Esmeralda and himself as 'Prostitute and Procurer,' a picture that reflects reality. Although he fails to reconstruct the past, he manages to paint the present and in doing so creates his 'most honest piece of work' ("Pimp's Revenge," 409). Consequently, Fidelman's sad but accurate view of himself should have led him to realize his moral weakness. He understands that 'what [the picture] means, I suppose, is I am what I became from a young age' but immediately dismisses his thought and comforts himself by thinking 'it has no

³² Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 406-409.

meaning, a painting's a painting' ("Pimp's Revenge," 409). Dramatically, he has invested so much time and effort in his painting and then cannot face what its true testimony is. Nonetheless, he tries to sustain the pretense of being the inspired genius, which is shown in his response to Ludovico's critique of the painting's impasto: 'I don't think it'll bother anybody so long as it looks like a spontaneous act' ("Pimp's Revenge," 411). But no matter how hard he tries, he will never be an authentic artist as he again evaluates the result of his work against other people's opinions. The painting is destroyed, and this shows his ridiculous ignorance of artistry.

Malamud's stories move inevitably toward a conclusion in which complex moral dilemmas are not so much resolved as they are frozen in a symbolic final epiphany or ironic gesture. His characters are always caught in what might be called the demand for sympathy and responsibility. But the moral/ aesthetic configuration of his stories is such that the reader is not permitted the luxury of an easy moral judgment. (May, 212-213)

The irony of the story lies in the fact that Fidelman wants to capture the past in his portrait but is afraid to get involved in it. Whenever he gets closer to reconciling with his past, his mother's death, his family, even religious deeds, he blocks those influences. However, this anxiety toward dealing with the past and himself only stands in the way of artistic expression. The unresolved past

[...] hangs upon them as a burden; it invades the present with a sense of regret, of opportunities not used, and of consequences we wish undone. It rests upon the present as an oppression, instead of being a storehouse of resources by which to move confidently forward. (Dewey, 18)

Fidelman's lack of confidence is also what leads to he only 'moral act' ("Pimp's Revenge," 412) and at the same time highly ironic act in the story. Fidelman is bound to fail because he does not trust his feelings about his masterpiece and its true intentions. In the end, he again is not self-reliant enough to listen to his gut feeling that the picture is finished; consequently, he is unsettled by Ludovico's remarks and overnight ruins the picture in his attempt to make it 'truer to life' ("Pimp's Revenge," 411). By stabbing himself in the gut, he castigates himself for not trusting his gut feeling about his masterly painting.

The fact that Malamud created an artist as the central character in "A

"Pimp's Revenge" is significant as the identity crisis and unresolved past are mirrored in Fidelman's portrait. His art becomes a reflection of life and

[if] the recognition of the fragments of history is a necessary element in the construction of personal identity, the knowledge of one's own identity is required in order to effectively communicate with others through art. (Polster, 67)

Without a reconciled past, the present and future seem unclear, as one is unable to bond and communicate with others, which is impressively shown by Malamud's attempt to *paint* a portrait of the artist.

3.3 The Self-Portrait

Fidelman's masterpiece is a complex one, which is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to finish. On the one hand it is a self-portrait, on the other hand it is supposed to be a portrait of his mother. Thus, it tries to unite one person deceased and one alive. On the snapshot he was young and innocent, while he is now grown up and a moral failure. This feeling of personal collapse is contrasted by his idealization of his mother and their relationship. What was once so close is now so far apart. The necessity of merging past and present is constantly hindered by the attempt to express his feelings but at the same time impress the art world. Thus, the portrait is supposed to be a masterpiece of art historic significance but then again it is more of a personal Kaddish. In this way, for Fidelman the creation is a very religious act, stunted by his profane and selfish motives to earn money and become a renowned artist.

Considering these confused feelings associated with the self-portrait, it is clear that the actual problem Fidelman should address is: what do I want and who am I? Thus, the different intentions embodied in the picture stand foremost for his search for identity. In fact, a self-portrait seems the obvious and adequate medium for this task, as a self-portrait for the artist reflects all aspects of the *self*. A self-portrait is a very intense statement. It is a way of self-representation which goes hand in hand with self reflection and self assertion. It is associated with clearness, directness and openness as the artist allows for personal insight. Creating a self-portrait is also a very intimate way of looking at

oneself, as the painter actually has to look at his image in the mirror. Usually, the painter sets up his easel with a mirror close by, so he can paint the self-portrait from his reflection in the mirror. Thus, the creation of such a portrait includes some sort of dialogue with oneself. While the artist looks in the mirror and paints what he sees, he is also confronted with every detail of the self: aging, emotions, and also skill, if the painting might not turn out to look like what the painter sees. A self-portrait, consequently, involves honest self-awareness and self-confidence, or—as in Fidelman's case—the lack of both. Fidelman does his self-portrait from the old snapshot and interestingly enough, throughout the story, there is no mention of a mirror, which he might use to help him create the masterpiece. Thus, he wants to create the self-portrait but without actually confronting who he has become.

Indeed, a self-portrait not only accounts for self-realization or self-expression, as a self-portrait is always intended for some kind of audience. Thus, the artist not only paints what he sees or thinks he sees, but also what he wants the audience to see, meaning, that a self-portrait does not necessarily show how the artist sees himself but also how he wants to be seen. These considerations are of a representative kind, as the artist also makes a statement about who he is in the art historic canon. Yablonsky points out that self-portraits can even have the function of disguise or an attempt to depict oneself as someone else.³³ A self-portrait is not necessarily the honest self-critical outcome of an introverted journey. A self-portrait also has a manipulative aspect. The audience gets the impression that what they see is the artist, but what they are allowed to see is only what the artist wants them to see and how he likes himself to be viewed. The audience cannot trust what they see, as what they are offered is a very subjective and often constructed glimpse of the painter. Yablonsky summarizes the double-edged quality of a self-portrait very pointedly: 'On the face of it, nothing could be more straightforward than a self-portrait. And nothing could be further from the truth' (138).

Nevertheless, a self-portrait provides a very intimate insight into the artist or at least his motives. Never in art is the contact between the artist as person and the audience as person so close as in the self-portrait. The audience not only sees a picture painted by the artist, but the artist through his own

³³ Cf. Yablonsky, 138.

brushstrokes as well. These personal aspects a painter cannot disguise, as a painting always tells certain things about its creator. However, the interpretation of a painting normally has to go the detour of looking at how a picture is painted to find out about the motifs of the artist and the artist himself. In the self-portrait contact to the creator of the picture seems to be more direct. Not only does the audience *look* at the artist himself, the artist also often *peeks* at the audience—especially when the eyes of the person look directly at the audience. Thus, a kind of dialogue between audience and artist seems to be taking place and offers a very immediate and timeless experience. By painting a self-portrait the artist also shows a certain pride and self-confidence in his painting. He not only paints a picture but he is confident enough to paint himself in his own style and manner. Thus he states *I am my own work*. A self-portrait is like the signature on a painting, because the artist considers it to be good and finished. Unsurprisingly, Fidelman's self-portrait combined with the emotionally charged portrait of his mother is a rather burdensome task.

From an art historic point of view, Fidelman is not the only artist who seems to have failed in the attempt to paint himself with his mother. Amazingly, the art historic canon knows virtually no pictures containing only the artist's self-portrait and his mother.³⁴ The only historic picture was painted by an American woman, Rolinda Sharples, around 1820 and shows the artist working at an easel while her mother stands behind the easel attentively watching her daughter's painting come to life. The mother's encouraging smile matches the historic documents stating that she and her husband were both artists who supported their daughter's artistic aspirations.³⁵ The other available self-portraits with mothers are paintings by contemporary artists. The one by the mysterious artist Cypher is the only one painted by a male artist. It was painted in 1988 by an artist who was—according to his own accounts--physically and emotionally abused by his mentally ill mother.³⁶ The last work of a contemporary artist included here is from Dorota Quiroz, from 1997. It is a very colorful (self-)portrait featuring the artist as a child on her mother's lap, the artist looking right out of the painting, while her mother's gaze is averted. The interesting aspect about Quiroz' portrait is that she states it was 'painted from a

³⁴ The illustrations VI – VIII referred to in this section can be found in Appendix – Illustrations starting on page 99.

³⁵ Cf. Borzello.

³⁶ Cf. Cypher.

B/W Photo' (Quiroz). Thus, she attempted the same as fictional Fidelman did when she painted herself and her mother after an old photo and in remembrance of her childhood.

The fact that few works of art with this subject matter exist seems curious, when considering the vast art historical canon and especially the contemporary output. The reasons are certainly hard to fathom, as that which has not been painted can hardly be explored, however, the story "A Pimp's Revenge" gives a few insights into the emotional struggles the artist goes through when attempting such a task. The challenge is to unite those two and therefore face all the emotions inherent in that relationship. Besides, the mother is usually protecting and nurturing, giving safety and harmony, and as the artist Fidelman believes he does not deserve these motherly comforts, they are impossible to paint. The constant presence of his idealized mother, his past and present demeanor and their unresolved relationship, add to the difficulty. Ducharme emphasizes that '[...] Fidelman is attracted to an image of past innocence; but [...] he has failed to learn the lessons of the past' (33). However, Fidelman could have been successful in painting the masterpiece, if he only managed to be honest to himself.

3.4 Religious Symbols

Another aspect of the mother and child portrait is without doubt its biblical connotation. The depiction of the holy mother with Jesus as a child has been a popular theme since the Council of Ephesus, 431, where Mary was acknowledged as Theotokos—mother of God. When Madonna with child are pictured, they are sometimes looking at the beholder or at each other, and often they are in a playful pose. However, in any case, they are shown in harmonious sacred unity: Mary watching over her son as nurturing mother, while the innocent child adverts to the forthcoming suffering and resurrection. Following a long tradition, many artists executed a variant on this theme, thus, for Fidelman the theme is even more art historically biased and predisposed. To illustrate the sacredness of such a portrait and its possible haunting qualities for the short story's main character, Raphael's *Madonna del Granduca* (*The Grand Duke's*

Madonna) is attached as Illustration IX. This painting is displayed at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, and as Fidelman also 'took Esmeralda to the Uffizi in the afternoon and explained some of the great works of art to her' ("Pimp's Revenge," 397), it is possible, that he also took the leisure to visit other museums in the city. 'One morning he tried chalking blue-robed Madonnas with Child, after Raphael, on the sidewalks [...]' (Pimp's Revenge," 404). Thus Fidelman has to be familiar with at least one of Raphael's Madonna and child depictions. The example illustrates what Fidelman probably considers as a measure of his own work, however, the calm radiation of Raphael's portrait never applies to the tormented picture of Fidelman and his mother. In Fidelman's eyes, his mother is also sacred, however, his own wretched soul does not comply with these standards. When the picture is finished, finally, he experiences the divine dimension of his masterpiece:

The picture completed itself. [...] It assumed completion: This woman and man together, prostitute and procurer. She was a girl with fear in both black eyes, a vulnerable if stately neck, and a steely small mouth; he was a boy with tight insides, on the verge of crying. The presence of each protected the other. A Holy Sacrament. ("Pimp's Revenge," 409)

Reconsidering Fidelman's creative process of attempting to copy a scene from a snapshot—which is again only a copy of the original, it is striking that he actually follows a long-held artistic tradition: the creation of an icon. In antiquity, the concept of an icon was applied to pictures of God and the Saints, although a strict interpretation of the Decalogue forbade not only worshipping images of God but even the creation of such pictures or objects. However, the icon's "validity" was seen as resulting from the kind of relationship that was believed to prevail between the image and its sacred model' (Barasch, 7). The idea that the image resembles the original and carries some of its features, though, goes back to early philosophers such as Plato and Socrates.³⁷ An intrinsic likeness of the icon to the model provoked the idea that the icon was actually fraught with the original's spirit, which brought the worshipper closer to God. These true archetypes of God functioned as kind of allegory³⁸ and were meticulously copied to retain their original sacredness and meaning. In Fidelman's case, this

³⁷ Cf. Barasch for a closer examination of Plato's and Socrates' philosophies in regard to the image, 70pp.

³⁸ Cf. Barasch, 64-70.

one true archetype he frantically tries to copy is the photograph of him and his mother, yet he always has the feeling that he cannot 'settle on her true face' ('Pimp's Revenge," 393). Again, this attempt to copy (the copy) in order to come closer to the original and finally make it 'come to life' ("Pimp's Revenge," 382) is an indicator of his detached idealization of his mother, which hinders his success.

The Madonna motif appears in different forms throughout the short story, haunting Fidelman. First, there is the ever present picture in his studio, then, he even tries to chalk the Madonna with child on the pavement for tourists. In addition, he occasionally earns a few lire by carving wooden Madonnas and selling them to a merchant. Generally, the woodcarving is a rather easy task for Fidelman, therefore it is fascinating that these figures are Madonnas without child. When the merchant offers to pay him more for carved Madonnas with child, Fidelman refuses.³⁹ Possibly he feels that the mother and child motif is too emotionally laden and he would spoil the untroubled work on the wood Madonnas. He might also want to reserve this motif for his personal painted 'Mother and Child' '[...]' so they would be eternally mother and son '[...]' ('Pimp's Revenge," 393).

In some of his rare ingenuous moments, Fidelman admits what this picture actually means to him: it is a personal Kaddish. In Jewish belief a son has to say Kaddish after a parent's death for eleven months and on the anniversary of their death. The prayer 'is an expression of acceptance of Divine judgment and righteousness at a time when a person may easily become bitter and reject God' (Schoenberg). Moreover, it is supposed to help to 'increase the merit of the deceased person' (Schoenberg). Buchen also points out that

[one] of the mystical explanations for the recitation of the Kaddish is that some souls do not immediately find a resting place, and the belief is that the Kaddish hastens the loved one to a final home. (69)

However, Fidelman admits that he has not exercised his duties, which obviously troubles him:

³⁹ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 385.

I have not said Kaddish, though I could have looked up the words.

What if she were still a wandering figure among the stars, unable to find the Pearly Gates? ("Pimp's Revenge," 394)

The fact that he has not done his religious duty implies two things: on the one hand, he has not dealt with the traumatic loss of his mother and on the other hand, he has turned his back on his religion and heritage. Saying, or as in his case painting, Kaddish would be a relief to this oppressive inner quarrel. Although he understands the creation of his picture as a holy process, Kaddish or even resurrection, his aspirations to be a renowned artist with this one picture stand in the way of freeing himself and his mother.

[...] it might be like an attempt on my part to release her from the arms of death. But that sort of stuff doesn't matter much. It's first and foremost a painting, potentially a first-class work if I ever get it done. [...] If a man does only one such painting in his lifetime, he can call himself a success. ("Pimp's Revenge," 398)

Bernard Malamud employs religious, specifically Jewish symbolism in this short story to give it an additional layer of meaning. Fidelman's lost religious heritage represents his disregarded past and immoral conduct towards others as well as his lack of faith in his own abilities. Thus, Malamud's concern is not actually Judaism, although Fidelman is unmistakably Jewish,

Malamud's Jewishness is a type of metaphor—for anyone's life—both for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious. To the extent that the Jew and his problems become a way of envisaging the human condition, he becomes more symbol than fact, fashioned to the service of an abstraction. (T. Solotaroff, 237)

3.5 Material

The choice of material is more than an aesthetic issue for the artist, as the material predetermines many aspects of the subsequent outcome. Fidelman chooses oil paint on canvas for his masterpiece, and as preparation

he also does sketches in charcoal and pencil.⁴⁰ The textual quality of oil paint invites a lush, expressive impasto, leaving the artist's personal brushstroke as a kind of signature, although layering of thin coats is also possible, when the preceding layer has dried. Oil paint allows very rich colors, as the pure pigments are mixed with different kinds of oil: however, Fidelman's painting is constrained by his financial situation:

Most of my earnings go for supplies. Everything's shot up so, oils, pigments, turpentine, everything. A tube of cadmium costs close to thirteen hundred lire, so I try to keep bright yellow, not to mention vermilion, out of my pictures [...] ("Pimp's Revenge," 386)

Although he obviously mixes his colors himself to save money, there is still not enough money left for high-quality canvas.⁴¹

In consideration of this economic burden, it is all the more interesting that Fidelman chooses oil painting for his masterpiece. As he is so obsessed with being admitted in the realms of art history's great masters, this might have influenced the choice of this classic medium. However, his 'Mother and Son' seem to be trapped in the two dimensions of the painting as he feels that 'something [is] always missing' ("Pimp's Revenge," 393), so he scrapes off the mother's face every time before it dries—the good thing about oil painting is that it allows changes like these. Still, the

painting [...] was encrusted in places (her hands and feet, his face), almost a quarter of an inch thick with paint, layer on layer giving it history, another word for thick past in the paint itself. ("Pimp's Revenge," 393)

It is symptomatic for Fidelman's situation that even his painting is actually physically burdened with his unresolved past. His attempts to repeatedly scrape off his mother's face and create it anew stand for his wish to undo 'past errors' ("Pimp's Revenge," 398), which is never quite successful. Envisioning this task of layering, drying, then scraping off, then starting from scratch, it is evident that this also has to be a physical strain for the artist, as there is always something in the end that he has to throw away. Even Esmeralda suffers just from hearing the noise of Fidelman scraping off another face.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 396.

⁴¹ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 382.

⁴² Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 402-403.

[...] he daily or nightly scraped it off (another lost face) with his rusty palette knife, and tried once again the next day; then scraped that face the same night or the day after; or let it harden in hope for two days and then frantically, before the paint stiffened, scraped that face off too. All in all he had destroyed more than a thousand faces and conceived another thousand for a woman who could barely afford one; yet couldn't settle on her true face—at least true for art. ("Pimp's Revenge," 393)

This passage illustrates his loneliness and distress in this never ending process, as he never feels that he reaches the ultimate face—even if he does, there is always the judging art historian in his head that tells him true to Fidelman might not necessarily mean true for art.

He also adheres stubbornly to the little photograph—even when he decides to change the picture to 'Brother and Sister' instead of 'Mother and Son',⁴³ as this is the last document of his mother and he fears that his own memories might not be enough to commemorate and paint her.⁴⁴ In this story, photography fulfills the classic purpose of documenting and recording a moment in time to preserve it for future contemplation, however, for Fidelman, there is definitely more contained in the small picture than a historical document. For him it is like a door to a bygone day, the loving mother and a better self, but the two-dimensional picture is only a copy of reality. 'For Fidelman to copy the copy would mean that he is not only unoriginal, but also ignorant of what art needs in order to be art' (Buchen, 69). So, again Fidelman clings to superficial things and wonders why he cannot create freely. Only when Esmeralda burns the picture is he forced to paint from memory and his heart, and he succeeds in finishing a personally liberating painting *and* a masterpiece.

Esmeralda, being not only Fidelman's muse but also the rational part of the relationship, observes that painting does not seem to be the right medium for him. She realizes that he is 'a lot more relaxed when [...] working on the Madonnas' but when painting his 'masterpiece' he does not have 'the civility of a dog' ("Pimp's Revenge," 397). On the one hand, this might be due to the subject matter, as he does not have to take care of the son in these depictions of a holy mother. On the other hand, the physically demanding work with a still moving and changing medium actually seems to be a freeing and balancing act.

⁴³ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 403.

⁴⁴ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 394.

After another depressing day spent in front of the never finished painting

[he] hid the canvas and turned then to the statuette of the Madonna *without* [my italics] child. Esmeralda liked to see the chips fly as the Holy Mother rose out of wood. ("Pimp's Revenge," 394)

The 'flying chips' highlight that he is quick and confident in his chisel movements while when painting he is much more hesitant and noncommittal. It is also possible that Fidelman is content in this medium because he can physically manipulate and design the warm and natural material while trusting his talent and keeping his emotional distance. The canvas seems more like a prison to the protagonists, however, in wood, Fidelman is able to free the Madonnas easily. Although he knows that Esmeralda is right, he still cannot change his perception of himself and others, art and life. For him, the wood sculptures are solely a means to earn money in order to buy painting supplies for his vital painting and not another form of artistic expression. It does not matter that these sculptures are 'beautiful' in Esmeralda's eyes⁴⁵ and he is admired for his craftsmanship by the merchant⁴⁶—*craft* probably being an affront to him. Too obsessed with being a painter, he does not realize that his artistic talent finds its way to the surface in the form of his wooden Madonna statues. The true irony lies in the fact that throughout the story Fidelman regards 'his woodcarving (he never regards it as sculpture) as a kind of artistic whoredom to pay for his supplies' (Helterman, 85) but he has no scruples about sending Esmeralda to whore for his painting gear.

3.6 The Great Masters

'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists' (15), states Gombrich at the beginning of his mandatory reading for art historians, thus highlighting that art history is made up of a succession of geniuses. Therefore, the names of the great masters are not only basic knowledge among art students, but are well known by anyone. These people—may they be called

⁴⁵ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 405.

⁴⁶ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 385.

Rembrandt, Picasso or Leonardo da Vinci—are the epitome of *the artist*⁴⁷ and personify an ideal many artists aspire to. So does Fidelman. As a permanent reminder of the great masters he wants to belong to, he inscribes some quotations from renowned artists as maxims on his studio wall:

Constable: "Painting is for me another word for feeling."

Whistler: "A masterpiece is finished from the beginning."

Pollock: "What is it that escapes me? The human? That humanity is greater than art?"

Nietzsche: "Art is not an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it in order to overcome it."

Picasso: "People seize on painting in order to cover up their nakedness."

("Pimp's Revenge," 383)

John Constable (1776-1837), an English painter, was praised as one of the most important British landscape artists. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) was an American expatriate living in England who is famous for his harmonious portraits and landscapes. He believed that painting is close to the abstract art of music and should be free of any moral or ideological declarations that go beyond art itself.⁴⁸ Notorious for his 'drip and splash' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 441) technique in his paintings, American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) revolutionized the concept of painting by using all kinds of tools to cast color on the flatly laid down canvas. The same is true for the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), who found ways to express his ideas in various media, as he transformed traditional ways of portrayal by deconstructing and rearranging visual impression. All of these artists have two things in common: they all contributed to important artistic movements and were geniuses in their profession. The citations show that these artists also had their own views of the world, and in this way, they were also philosophers—these are original mindsets Fidelman so desperately wishes to have for his own. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), is the only one among those celebrities who is not an artist. However, the German philosopher is best known for his atheist declaration 'God is dead,' which might be one of the reasons why Fidelman is so intrigued by him. Regardless, each of these quotations applies to the situation Fidelman finds himself trapped in and he probably wonders why

⁴⁷ The notion of *the artist* is explored in more detail in chapter 3.1.

⁴⁸ Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* for more detailed information in all of the artists.

he cannot free himself when the solutions seem to be right in front of him.

The quotations in his studio are literally and metaphorically a *writing on the wall*. He looks at these citations as inspiration, but does not grasp that they actually loom in his studio like an apprehension hinting at his insufficiency. When reading these inspired insights on art, Fidelman envies their genius⁴⁹ and is painfully reminded that he has not yet deserved to be part of them. However, this is what he yearns for—to create a masterpiece, earn money as an artist and generally be successful:

So beautifully complete the idea of them together that the viewer couldn't help but think no one has to do it again because it's been done by F and can't be done better; in truth, a masterwork. ("Pimp's Revenge," 393)

His true dilemma lies in the fact that he is so blinded by the great masters' ingenuity that he is constantly competing with them by comparing his own works of art to theirs; consequently, he never quite fulfills his own high expectations. At the same time, he does not embrace those great masters of art history as the source of inspiration they could be. Thus, he torments himself:

Make an interesting impressionist oil, green and gold mosaics and those black trees of death, but that's been done. Not to mention Van Gogh's tormented cypresses. That's my trouble, everything's been done or is otherwise out of style—cubism, surrealism, action painting. If I could only guess what's next. ("Pimp's Revenge," 382-383)

In the same way Fidelman fails to see his own history as inspiration for his art; he does not apprehend art history as a source for new ideas. He thinks that the only way to be a successful artist is to create something completely new. This shows his complete ignorance of art history, as nothing emerges from a cultural and artistic vacuum. There are always cultural and art historical influences that shape the thinking of a good artist, thus, in the course of actively engaging in art and life novel and unique approaches might arise; however, these are always part of a history and their present surroundings.

The question that continually bothers Fidelman is: what is original in art? He tries to find an answer by defining his own originality according to what has already been done by others. Thus, every thought and inspiration is immediately compared to what others have done, and immediately dismissed if

⁴⁹ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 383.

someone else has had the same idea. Nevertheless, he cannot find his own answers to questions of art and thus repeatedly tries the ways and methods other artists have used. This puts him into a never ending cycle of imitation of what has already been done to dismissal of the idea because it does not seem to be original enough and finally to frustration about his lack of inspiration which again causes him to search for inspiration somewhere else. What he does not realize is that

[originality] and successful creation can still mean adopting or modifying or rejecting the forms, subject matters, and techniques of the past or the present to render the artist's own visionary way of seeing. [...] Fidelman is so overwhelmed by what others have done because he is in good part ignorant of the value of his own experience. Why not a mother and child starring Bessie and himself if this is the most powerful image of the subject that presents itself? (R. Solotaroff, 96-97)

Fidelman's approach to art is rather theoretical, though, and not practical, much less emotional. The insuperableness of the gap between art theory and practice is demonstrated by the conflict between Ludovico and Fidelman—the former and the current pimp. As Ludovico seeks revenge for the forfeited income of Esmeralda's whoring, he gradually and subtly unsettles Fidelman and in this way heightens his ever-present insecurity. This is epitomized by their heated confrontation in the interview⁵⁰ where Ludovico constantly declares Fidelman's statements to be nonsense. Thus, he tells Fidelman to 'talk with good sense,' asks him where his originality was and deconstructs every detail of Fidelman's awkward home-made pseudo-philosophy ("Pimp's Revenge," 400-402). Ludovico's tactic is successful, as Fidelman's world view and self-esteem begin to crumble when he confusedly tries to justify: '*It's just a thought I had, I guess. I suppose I mean that maybe a painting sort of gives value to a human being as he responds to it [my italics]*' ("Pimp's Revenge," 401). First, Fidelman loses his self-confidence, then, in the end, also his temper.⁵¹ Ludovico's final maneuver is to undermine Fidelman's artistic achievement and buoyancy when he finally finishes his masterpiece. Ludovico again boasts his artistic expertise and the mastery of other artists, thus initiating a wave of insecurity in Fidelman, leading him to

⁵⁰ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 399-402.

⁵¹ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 402.

irrevocably ruin the picture when he tries to enhance its effect in the darkness of the night.⁵²

3.7 Gender Aspects

"A Pimp's Revenge" is dominated by male characters, as the main character, Fidelman, as well as his antagonist, Ludovico, who has tremendous influence on him, are both men. Furthermore, the role models Fidelman chooses for his moral and artistic support are also consistently male artists. Fidelman is also characterized by a general disrespect towards women; his ultimate moral failure being his encouragement of Esmeralda to work as a prostitute. However, his demeanor towards her is morally questionable from the beginning.

She said she liked the studio and offered to stay.
He was momentarily panicked. "I wouldn't want it to interfere with my painting. I mean I'm devoted to that. Besides, this is a small place."
"I'm a small girl, I'll take care of your needs and won't interfere with you work."
He finally agreed. ("Pimp's Revenge," 388)

Generally, he does not hold her in high esteem and often ignores her when he is occupied with his work. However, 'the girl was a talented cook' and 'all in all two lived cheaper than one' ("Pimp's Revenge," 395). As she also 'obliged in bed when he wanted her, could be tender, and generally made herself useful' ("Pimp's Revenge," 395), Fidelman keeps her as a maid and for his private enjoyment. Thus when Fidelman shipwrecks with his wooden Madonnas and several other odd jobs, her offer to go back to her work comes as a great opportunity for him to have his mind free for his work. Ironically, he finally manages to finish his painting, supported in this manner by his loving girlfriend.

As Fidelman does not view Esmeralda as an equal partner in this relationship, he cannot take her remarks about himself and his art seriously. If he was able to listen and to admit that she is actually far better rooted and wise in her approach, he could see her as an inspiration. The same is true for his

⁵² Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 410-411.

mother and Bessie, his sister; both of them do not function as an inspiration or link to his past, but as an annoying hindrance. For him they are figures of the past, and he tries to pretend that his family is not important anymore. Nevertheless, his mother haunts him to the present day. However, the key to his success toward becoming a better artist would have been to embrace all the influences and aspects of the past and present; consequently, if he had tried to be a better son/brother/boyfriend, he might have been able to finish his masterpiece.

3.8 Art as a Mirror of Life

In Bernard Malamud's short story "A Pimp's Revenge" art functions as a mirror of the main character's life. Thus, the central theme is that art and life are inseparable. There is no way to achieve success as an artist, as Fidelman disavows who he is in real life. He turned his back on his past and religion, neglected his sister and never dealt with the early death of his mother, so that it is no wonder that he is disoriented and insecure, as these are all factors that constitute one's identity. He is in desperate need of inspiration or guidance but aspires to the wrong—for him unreachable—ideals of art. Thus, his stenciled citations turn into a writing on the wall and he is blinded by Ludovico who follows his self-serving vengeful motives. Puzzled at the ever-incomplete portrait of 'Mother and Son,' Fidelman does not realize that this is not a detached bygone portrait of himself and his mother but a portrait reflecting life as it has become. However, Fidelman never takes a critical look at himself in order to confront the man he has become. Instead, he still paints the ten-year-old boy next to his mother from the old photograph. Although in the last version of the picture the boy has become a teenager, he still cannot bear to paint himself as the grown man who sends his girlfriend pimping in order to sustain his painting career. His moment of self-realization is a short one, when in fact he cannot deny what subconsciously has become of his portrait. This is, in fact, the one triumphant moment in the short story when his masterpiece is finished, however, due to his ignorance of life and art, he immediately destroys it again. Thus, his failure as man, son, brother and boyfriend is revealed in the

destruction of his painting.

Closely connected to the theme of identity is the importance of—or in Fidelman's case, lack of—communication to order to be part of the world. In general, Fidelman's struggle is a very solitary one, as he dismisses those who actually support him and follows those who cannot offer him true guidance. Thus, the protagonists communicate but seem to lack the potential of understanding one another. The protagonists' failure is often determined by non-communication, miscommunication or the inability to comprehend one another. Here, language is merely a means of self-assertion and manipulation, rather than of bonding. As a result, Fidelman is not able to use his art as a means of communication. Although there are serious inner quarrels which should be articulated and dealt with, Fidelman keeps these issue inside—hidden from other people, sequestered away from himself and masked in his art. As for him, painting to free himself is not enough; he wants to do it all in one piece: a masterpiece, a Kaddish, a resurrection, an attempt to undo time and a testimonial of self-discovery. The irony is that all these aspects might have been explored in art: had he only settled on one facet after the other, he might have been able to communicate to the world through his art. However, here the artist fails, rendering himself lonely and disconnected.

4 "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" as Journey to Artistic Inspiration

Because objects of art are expressive, they are a language. Rather they are many languages. For each art has its own medium and that medium is especially fitted for one kind of communication. Each medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue.

John Dewey⁵³

"A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring"⁵⁴ centers on Sarah Davis, a girl from Georgia, who is the only African American art student at a fictional New York women's college named Cresselton, where she studies art. She is called back to Georgia for the funeral of her father, where she is confronted with her past and the heritage of her people. It turns out that her father was very abusive and her mother died early, therefore, Sarah wonders how to deal with these memories and what her past means for her future. She also begins to doubt whether her true vocation is art as she feels that there might be more important things in life than her art studies. However, her brother and grandfather appear as a vital connection to her past and heritage as they give her the necessary strength, pride and confidence to find her way as an artist. The trip back to her roots also emerges as a source of inspiration when Sarah finds a new artistic medium to release her creativity: she discovers her grandfather as a role model and a physical model. She understands that her being the only African American girl at an elite college is also a kind of protest for the rights of women and African Americans. Moreover, she finds a way to express her heritage and her concerns in her art. Thus, she comes to terms with her background and describes a purpose for her future artistry.

The theme of an artist's struggle for inspiration familiar from "A Pimp's Revenge" is also central to "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring," however, the

⁵³ Cf. Dewey, 106.

⁵⁴ Published in the short story collection *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* in 1981.

outcome is very different. Sarah identifies the reason for her artistic reluctance and openly deals with it. Like Fidelman, Sarah has to reconcile with her oppressive past in order to unleash her creative potential. However, Sarah realizes that the past, her family and her heritage define who she is as a woman but also as an artist—unlike Fidelman, Sarah grows.

The importance of history as a part of personal identity is announced in the dedication of the short story 'For the Wellesley Class' ("Sudden Trip," 248). This dedication hints to a historical event in the history of African American literature instruction: in 1971 Alice Walker taught the English 228 course at Wellesley College entitled "Black Literature in America," 'concerned primarily with black women novelists of the 20th century'⁵⁵, which was one of the first courses ever taught in America on African American writers and certainly was the first to concentrate exclusively on the topic of female African American novelists.

Like many colleges in the aftermath of the civil rights struggle, Wellesley was attempting to expand its enrollment beyond the affluent whites who had attended the all-female institution for more than a century. (White, 222)

Thus, a 'handful of black students' (White, 222) studied at Wellesley in the early 1970s, some of whom probably attended Walker's class, as the majority there were, of course black women.⁵⁶ Her mission was to quarry literature that had previously been unknown to most people and claim its place in the literary canon. She also included male authors and female white authors in her course to show how only the reading of all experiences and literary viewpoints forms a complete literary survey.

4.1 Visual Devices of the Text

The most prominent visual device of the short story is the figurative language Alice Walker utilizes to illustrate the central aspects of the story. By

⁵⁵ Cf. Illustration I in the Appendix – Illustrations, where a copy of the original course description is attached.

⁵⁶ Cf. White, 222.

doing so, Walker evokes a powerful picture that the reader can easily relate to. The first metaphor is used to characterize Sarah: 'One of her [roommate's] first poetic observations about Sarah was that she was "a poppy in a field of winter roses"' ("Sudden Trip," 251). Sarah is the poppy, as she is one of only two black girls at the all-female Cresselton College;⁵⁷ her classmates, on the other hand, are compared to winter roses. Obviously the poppy sticks out because of its eye-catching color, but also because of its soft and peculiar nature, as opposed to the more classic beauty of the winter roses. In that way, Sarah is special, but also alone.

Sarah compares her unresolved conflict with her abusive father to the conflict of writer Richard Wright with his father. Richard Wright is therefore a symbol of Sarah herself, as the questions he tried to answer are also those which are important for her to reconcile with her past.⁵⁸ Another metaphor recurring throughout the story connected to her father is the *door*. Sarah observes that

Wright's [i.e. Sarah's] father was one faulty door in a house of many ancient rooms. Was that one faulty door to shut him [her] off forever from the rest of the house? [...] I see him as a door that refused to open [...]. ("Sudden Trip," 253)

Because of the troubled relationship to her father and now his death, she feels that she has lost her connection to her family, community and heritage. The father, whom she sees as the door to all these rooms full of memories, family stories and traditional heritage, never offered her access to a deeper understanding of who she is and where she comes from. At times, he was 'a hand that was always closed. A fist' ("Sudden Trip," 253). Here, the synecdoche 'fist' stands for the actual person of her father, who was so hard and cruel that he never opened up to her. However, during her stay at home in the South, Sarah realizes that there are other people who are kind and open and support her on her way, thus, Sarah's brother is her open door to her people's heritage and her identity.⁵⁹

As soon as Sarah arrives at her old house, another metaphor appears

⁵⁷ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 259.

⁵⁸ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 251-253.

⁵⁹ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 260.

under her father's casket: the rat.⁶⁰ In fact, the rat seems to be literally in the room, for Sarah, however, the rodent becomes a metaphor for unpleasant memories or challenging situations. When her brother does not emerge to assist her, she decides to confront the rat: 'Stare the rat down, thought Sarah, surely that will help. *Perhaps it doesn't matter whether I misunderstood or never understood*' ("Sudden Trip," 254). Her decision to stand tall and proud is successful shortly afterwards: '*Stare the rat down*, she thought, and did. The rascal dropped his bold eyes and slunk away. Sarah felt she had, at least, accomplished something' ("Sudden Trip," 255). In this whole section, oppressing memories of her deceased father arise and it is clear that the early death of her mother destroyed a vital part of their family bond. Thus, the rat embodies these unresolved feelings of her past, however, her determination to 'stare the rat down'

suggests a combination of acknowledging, controlling, and suppressing the pain of their [Sarah's and her father's] emotional separateness during her father's life—painful feelings which threaten to overwhelm her now unless tightly held in. (Erickson, 15)

However, in the closing paragraph of the short story her resolution to confront the issues of the past in order to go on with her life is more confident and positive:

Stare the rat down, thought Sarah; *and whether it disappears or not, I am a woman in the world. I have buried my father, and shall soon know how to make my grandpa up in stone.* ("Sudden Trip," 261)

Sarah recognizes that there are other role models in her family she can consult and be inspired by. First, there is her grandfather, who 'stood like a rock, outwardly calm, the comfort and support of the Davis family. The family alone defined him, and he was not about to let them down' ("Sudden Trip," 258). The other is her brother, the radical preacher, who 'was tensely smooth, like a river that any day will overflow its bed' ("Sudden Trip," 256). Both are characterized by similes taken from nature which are strong and hardly shaken by anyone. Unlike the memories of her father, which were compared to the rat, the two forces of nature—rock and river—are there, no matter what happens

⁶⁰ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 254.

and whatever they set themselves as targets they unrelentingly follow. Thus, with those two self-confident relatives, she can begin to open the doors previously closed to her past and heritage.

The short story consists of six numbered parts, each of them like a different scene in a movie. The first and the last 'chapters' function as a frame to the other parts, as they are set at Sarah's school in the North, where the center of her life is at the moment. Here, she is the popular exception among the rich white girls. To them she is special because she sticks out, but none of her friends actually understands where she comes from and neither does Sarah possess 'the inclination or the proper ticket' ("Sudden Trip," 254) to be part of their world. For this reason, 'she did not miss them. The school was all they had in common' ("Sudden Trip," 253) and she seems a little indifferent in these surroundings. However, all the other four parts are set in Georgia, where her roots are and where each chapter leads her to find out more about herself. The second part of the story focuses on her father, showing her complicated childhood. In the third part, Sarah has a talk with her grandmother that confronts her with what is traditionally expected of her as a young woman: marriage and children. However, in chapter four, she gets support for her artistic career from her grandfather, who inspires her to sculpt him out of stone. The fifth chapter is dedicated to Sarah's brother, another inspiration and encouragement in continuing her vocation as artist. Thus, the parts set in the South confront Sarah with her past and ignorance of her heritage, but then, through the grandfather and brother, she strengthens two vital links to her family, which makes her move back with new confidence.

To visually highlight crucial statements of the story that help Sarah to grow, Walker uses italics. In all these vital moments of the story, the narrative voice also switches from a third-person narrator to interior monologue. Sarah's first insight marked in this manner, is: '*Perhaps it doesn't matter whether I misunderstood or never understood*' ("Sudden Trip," 254), which offers a kind of closure to the past. Another important realization is the sudden perception of her grandfather as a role model, as her grandfather is the 'comfort and support of the Davis family [...] and he was not about to let them down' ("Sudden Trip," 258). The concluding paragraph, which is also a kind of conclusion to the story,

is emphasized by italics as well,⁶¹ as she finds a way to deal with the oppressive emotions connected to her father and emerges with new self-confidence. Moreover, she establishes a connection to her heritage through artistic inspiration. By highlighting these important aspects of Sarah's journey with italics, Walker also employs a visual concept which structures the story beyond content. This parallels Sarah's discovery of the expressiveness of material which also goes beyond content.⁶²

4.2 The Artist

The story is set in two diametrically opposing places of American existence and thus portrays the divided identity of the main character and her journey to inspiration. Sarah's crisis is clearly determined by her divided life since as an art student she feels that she has lost the connection to her family and roots. As already mentioned, the setting of the elite college in the North builds a kind of frame to the rest of the story, which is set in the South. The American North and South are opposites in many ways, as, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the North was associated with urban industry whereas the South was typically rural and agricultural. Historically, North and South were also on opposing sides during the War of Secession and in the South slavery was an important factor in its agricultural success. During the Great Migration of the 1920s many African Americans left the South in hopes of finding better working and living conditions in the Northern cities. Instead they were confronted with increasing ghettoization. This historical background illustrates the connotations of the American North and South, which Sarah also experiences during her trip home. She leaves the wealthy urban college in the North to return to her simple rural home in the South. In the North, all her friends are white and rich and in these surroundings Sarah is noticed as special and extraordinarily beautiful. In the South, she is 'just another ordinarily attractive *colored* girl' ("Sudden Trip," 251), however, there she is with her family, people who sincerely care for her and vice versa. In the North, Sarah is

⁶¹ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 261.

⁶² More on the significance of material in this story can be found in chapter 4.6.

so popular only because she is an exception, not because the people appreciate her for the person and artist she actually is. For this reason, it is essential for the continuation of her studies in these surroundings that she discovers who she is. The North and South also embody different ways of approaching learning and growth: in the North, Sarah learns a theoretical and practical approach to art through formal education. In the South, on the other hand, she learns through her family and the scrutiny of her heritage and herself. Hence, she gains indispensable knowledge about the tools and techniques for becoming an artist in the North, whereas in order to be a real artist, she learns to come to terms with her background and past in the South.

The burden of "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" is that one must go back to one's family in order to go forward, that the family background must be experienced as a resource rather than a liability. (Erickson, 14)

Therefore, all places in the South, although—or because—they are all connected to the funeral of her father, help her to grow as an artist. Dewey also draws attention to tension as a vital resource for artistic growth,⁶³ as only through these internal personal conflicts is the artist forced to attempt new approaches and viewpoints. Thus Sarah changes places and is able to change her view on the world and her understanding of herself. In this way, North and South are part of her personality and identity as a woman and an artist.

Sarah experiences a problem similar to Fidelman's in "A Pimp's Revenge," as in order to find artistic inspiration the artist has to come to terms with the past, especially when the artist strives to paint such a personal picture as Fidelman and Sarah do. Fidelman does not recognize this fact as he thinks he can paint a masterpiece without being too emotionally involved and thus he fails. Sarah accepts the influences she is confronted with during her trip home and in this way finds inspiration. For Sarah, art is not theory but a central part of her life, thus, it is a very personal way of expressing herself and her view on the world. Therefore, Sarah communicates through the medium of art and discovers its connecting potential. Although she 'had not spoken the language they both knew' ("Sudden Trip," 255) to her father, she can speak to the world now in her own words. Art is for her a way to make a statement, in the same way her brother preaches to the people in order to change something.

⁶³ Cf. Dewey, 15-19.

However, Sarah at first falters as to whether art is not too disconnected from the important aspects of life to actually change something in it.⁶⁴ On the contrary, Fidelman considers art a detachment from life as the true prerequisite for painting an exceptional masterpiece.⁶⁵ But, as Sarah is inspired by her brother and grandfather, she is convinced that artistic expression is her language and way of conveying a message. If the audience is open to her language and understands it, Sarah's art might even have the potential for change. Thus, Sarah is able to go on, whereas Fidelman fails in his attempt to become an artist.

4.3 Reproduction and Collage

Sarah's awakening as a woman corresponds to her self confidence as an artist. Already in the beginning of the story, it is clear that Sarah is not only different in her appearance but also in her perception and understanding of art:

Sarah Davis's room was next door to the gallery, but her walls were covered with inexpensive Gauguin reproductions, a Rubens ("The Head of a Negro"), a Modigliani and a Picasso. There was a full wall of her own drawings, all of black women. She found black men impossible to draw or to paint; she could not bear to trace defeat onto blank pages. Her women figures were matronly, massive of arm, with a weary victory showing in their eyes. Surrounded by Sarah's drawings was a red SNCC poster of a man holding a small girl whose face nestled in his shoulder. Sarah often felt she was the little girl whose face no one could see. ("Sudden Trip," 250)

In contrast to the neighboring modern art gallery, Sarah creates her own art gallery with reproductions and drawings by herself. Although the gallery 'with some very good original paintings, lithographs and collages' ("Sudden Trip," 249) is right around the corner, Sarah wants to be surrounded by art in her own room. Unlike her colleagues,⁶⁶ Sarah is content with her pictures because the essence of their expression is also captured in a reproduction. Her walls reflect the way she sees the world at that moment. In fact, collecting pieces and

⁶⁴ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 256.

⁶⁵ Cf. "Pimp's Revenge," 398.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 249-250.

putting them together in a creative way is already an expression of Sarah's vision, as

[in] montage, collage, pastiche, and assembly, twentieth-century artists have shown that the collection, the new unit composed of gathered bits, is a major expressive mode of industrial civilization. The painting expresses the painter. The collection of paintings expresses the collector. (Glassie, 84)

Sarah's picture wall represents the way she understands art and where she is standing as an artist at the moment. She does not look at the originals in awe because of their intrinsic worth or the artist's merit manifest in them; she cherishes the art around her as an inspiration for herself and her own art, as these reproductions function also as a study of other people's approaches to the artistic difficulties Sarah also encounters. As she 'sometimes spend[s] weeks [...] trying to sketch or paint a face that is unlike every other face around [her]' ("Sudden Trip," 260), she tries to find out more about painting faces by looking at other artists' portraits. Her most challenging task at the present stage is painting black men, because 'she could not bear to trace defeat onto blank pages' ("Sudden Trip," 250). On her trip home, she finds out that 'the defeat of black forever defined by white' ("Sudden Trip," 258) she cannot paint is closely connected to the image of her father. Thus, in order to be able to paint black men, Sarah turns to her proud brother and grandfather as new role models. For this reason, Sarah's art wall is surely an inspiration, but she cannot find the solution to painting black men only by studying them; the missing pieces to that puzzle appear when she returns to her roots.

The inspiring art wall by the young artist Sarah is like an antithesis to Fidelman's wall. Probably, Fidelman also stenciled the citations of prominent artists on his studio wall as an inspiration and incentive to become one of them. However, Fidelman is always restrained by the geniality of other artists, which transforms the apt quotations into a menace or threat—a literal and metaphorical writing on the wall. When looking at works of art by other artists he thinks that 'everything's been done or is otherwise out of style' ("Pimp's Revenge," 383)—thus he cannot appreciate art as inspiration. He constantly feels that in order to be the genius artist he aspires to become he has to invent a groundbreaking masterpiece, disregarding that art always emerges as a part

of history. For Sarah, on the contrary, looking at other artists for inspiration is no confession of incapacity, but an opportunity to grow as an artist. As even artistic innovations spring from their respective cultural backgrounds and a certain artistic tradition, there is nothing wrong with trying other artists' approaches. Although the pictures hanging on her walls are all by male artists, as there are not enough female artists Sarah can consult for problems similar to hers, there is still enough she can derive from them. It is only because Sarah appreciates her heritage and personal burden that she can become that artist.

4.4 The Great Masters⁶⁷

The Rubens hanging on Sarah's wall is the only picture for which the name is given—'The Head of a Negro.' It stands out among the others because it is of crucial importance to her as Sarah cannot paint black men because she always sees 'defeat' in their faces.⁶⁸ Rubens' painting functions as illustrative material to study his view on black men; however, Sarah cannot find the solutions she is looking for in this picture, as it is again defeat that she finds there. The man's face is painted in a very dark and sad mood. His face is averted from the viewer as he casts his eyes and face down at a point out of the viewer's scope. The face is surrounded by a dark wall, lit only by a dim spot that lights the man's face. The picture is dominated by earthen colors and to the left and right of the face, the wall is a dark brown, almost black. The light shirt he is wearing is painted in very long and vague brushstrokes to the lower and left frame of the picture. This gives the impression that the shirt and the wall merge into each other; it is not exactly clear where the one begins and the other ends. Thus, the wall the man is probably leaning against functions as support but it also seems that he is dissolving into it. This light surface contrasts to the dark parts surrounding the man's face. The darker parts linger around his head as if they suppress the man's energy. The portrait is not one of representation, but of emotion as the overall composition; coloring and pose heighten the focus

⁶⁷ All works of art referred to in this chapter can be found in the Appendix – Illustrations (Illustrations X-XIV). Concise information on the various artists can be found in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*.

⁶⁸ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 258.

on this man's inner feelings. Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who was a Flemish Baroque painter, usually painted such oil sketches not as commissioned works but as painted studies for other larger works,⁶⁹ which might explain why the brushstrokes in the lower left appear unfinished and open. Unlike Sarah, who is looking for a way to express herself and her people, Rubens paints with distance to the emotional impact, which is the reason why Rubens cannot answer Sarah's questions. Thus, Sarah surely admires Ruben's execution and technique and the fact that a black man was painted by a prominent painter like Rubens, but cannot take the portrait as an example for her own objective.

Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), the French painter, is predominately adored for the pictures of Tahitian life in which he captures the beauty and peace of the people living far away from Western civilization. The picture in this discussion was randomly chosen in order to give an impression of his style and view on people and represents his powerful use of color which he often used 'unnaturalistically for its decorative or emotional effect' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 216). He uses color flatly, structuring the canvas into distinct areas of beaming color. Thus, the picture radiates energy and calmness at the same time. Gauguin represents these people with dignity and self-confidence, in harmony with each other and their surroundings. Their faces are open but keep a kind of mystery or wisdom. Gauguin left his family and civilization as he felt that they were constricting him and his art. Somerset Maugham takes him as inspiration for his fictional work *The Moon and Sixpence* but his true intentions and feelings are most accurately recorded in his journals and especially in *Noa Noa* where he describes the freeing experience of moving to Tahiti:

All the joys—animal and human—of a free life are mine. I have escaped everything that is artificial, conventional, customary. I am entering into the truth, into nature. Having the certitude of a succession of days like this present one, equally free and beautiful, peace descends on me. I develop normally and no longer occupy myself with useless vanities. (Gauguin, 17)

Although the Tahitians were exotic to him, he felt more connection to them and their lifestyle than to the occupations of a Western world. He saw in them vision

⁶⁹ However, in Sutton it is pointed out that this particular oil sketch does not appear in any known work by Rubens. Sutton, 112-113.

and tradition, something Sarah is also looking for. Gauguin states that

[in] view of the persistent physical beauty of the race, it seemed unbelievable that all its ancient grandeur, its personal and natural customs, its beliefs, and its legends had disappeared. (7)

This view reflects Sarah's feelings toward her own people when she realizes that 'we are a very old people in a very young place' ("Sudden Trip," 260). Therefore, the honesty and pride of Gauguin's portrayal is surely an inspiration for her.

The appeal of Amedeo Modigliani's drawings lies in the simplicity of their form.⁷⁰ His 'paintings of the later years, with their long necks and concentrated gaze, are easily recognizable' (Rose, 223) but at the same time their expression is difficult to grasp. His portraits always convey a feeling of impersonality, even superficiality and shallowness. This distance is for the most part due to the inexpressiveness of their faces and their impersonal eyes. Although it has been noted that 'the viewer [...] must look with more profundity' (Rose, 223), Modigliani makes finding a connection to the people in his pictures complicated. The eyes, which are the primary visual connection between people and thus between artist and model—consequently also between model and viewer—are without expression. Thus, the pictures seem to miss personality, but in fact Modigliani's pictures express alienation. Sarah often feels alienated from her surroundings since she is 'a poppy in a field of winter roses' ("Sudden Trip," 251) and although her friends adore her eyes⁷¹ they cannot establish a true connection because her eyes are as strange to them as Modigliani's. Moreover, Modigliani's impersonal eyes offer not the solution she is seeking for the black men

[she] found [...] impossible to draw or to paint; she could not bear to trace defeat onto blank pages. Her women figures were matronly, massive of arm, with a weary victory showing in their eyes. ("Sudden Trip," 250)

Another important aspect of Modigliani's work is the profound influence of African tribal art on his paintings and sculptures. Their impact lies in the 'primitive power of the African masks that inspired them' (*The Oxford Dictionary*

⁷⁰ Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), was an Italian painter and sculptor.

⁷¹ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 249.

of Art, 374), thus, it is not surprising that the eyes are without expression—the faces are masks. For Sarah, this African aspect of Modigliani's work might also be important as he appreciates, understands and incorporates folk tradition in a very powerful way. As it is also her African heritage that he values, this might give her power to believe in the power of her own roots.

The effect that African art had on the pictures of a whole generation of artists is undisputed and can also be found in Picasso's paintings. Most critics see Picasso as the 'most famous, versatile, and prolific artist of the 20th [century]' as 'he provided the incentive for most of the revolutionary changes during this time' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 431). His art is original and varied in topic and form, thus, it is not easy to concentrate on one aspect of his oeuvre. However, his most revolutionary achievement was his unique point of view on the human being. Influenced again by African sculpture, 'he concentrated on the analysis and simplification of form' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, 431). Therefore, his cubist portraits depict not only one aspect of a person, but many impressions at the same time, showing concurrent impressions from different angles. In *Les Femmes d'Alger* the women are interpreted as consisting of various parts, together forming a whole. They look as if they were composed of assembled aspects of impersonalized women in general. The sitting woman in the front is shown from behind, but at the same time she looks directly out of the picture. Thus, she visually establishes a connection to the viewer while at the same time retaining distance. In this picture, Picasso also states that there is not only one way of looking at a person, but that there are several aspects that have to be seen together. His approach to composition is—still—unconventional, as it does not stop at flat representation but captures three-dimensionality. Hence, Picasso has found ways to solve problems that were left untouched by artists before him as he rejected conventional ways of seeing. Sarah certainly takes his originality as an inspiration to her own potential, but she also sees that it is possible to unite several, often conflicting, aspects of a person in one picture. Moreover, the subject matter of this picture ventures into groups of social outsiders, as it depicts five prostitutes.⁷² This aspect of artistic freedom confirms Sarah's wish to focus attention on her own situation on the social margins.

⁷² Cf. *The 20th-Century Art Book*, 366.

Surrounded by Sarah's drawings was a red SNCC poster of a man holding a small girl whose face nestled in his shoulder. Sarah often felt she was the little girl whose face no one could see ("Sudden Trip," 250)

At the college, no one sees Sarah's true face, which is why she feels so connected to this poster.⁷³ Her classmates look at her and admire her face but fail to understand the person behind it, thus, her true face is hidden from them. Moreover, Sarah needs a strong shoulder to hold on to, which gives her support and makes her feel at home and sheltered. She never got this feeling from her father but needs this feeling of comfort in order to last in her ignorant surroundings. Later in the story, the image of the poster is echoed when 'Sarah briefly leaned her cheek against [her grandfather's] shoulder and felt like a child again' ("Sudden Trip," 257-258), thus, she finds this support from her grandfather. Erickson comprehensively discusses that the 'crucial image for identity in the story is the face' (12).⁷⁴ Her face is never quite recognized by her peers and thus is hidden like the little girl's in the SNCC poster. Then there are the faces of black men she cannot bear to paint, and each of her pictures on the wall reveals a different approach to faces—the broken image by Rubens, Gauguin's pride natives, Modigliani's inexpressive faces, concealed by African masks and Picasso's multi-faceted all-embracing portraits. Since Sarah is looking for her identity as an African American woman artist the face is the mirror of her soul.

4.5 Portrait

As in "A Pimp's Revenge," the painting of faces is of central importance in this short story. Both artists have difficulties with the specific faces they choose to paint because there are unresolved issues of their past they need to deal with in order to go on. In Fidelman's case, this is the traumatic death of his mother and his moral failure. Sarah, on the other hand, suffers from oppressive memories of her abusive and indifferent father, whom she holds responsible for

⁷³ Illustration XIV shows a small image of what this SNCC poster probably looked liked. Unfortunately, its authenticity could not be verified.

⁷⁴ Cf. Erickson, 12-14. Erickson demonstrates various ways in which the face represents Sarah's search for identity.

her mother's death.⁷⁵ Now that he is dead, she has to find out what she owes him,⁷⁶ although they were never close when he was still alive. Standing at his casket, 'Sarah looked for a long time into the face, as if to find some answer to her questions written there' ("Sudden Trip," 254), only to realize that '[it] was a completely silent face, a shut face' ("Sudden Trip," 254). Her father, the 'shut door' with the 'shut face,' never provided any answers, consolation or inspiration as he was too withdrawn from the world. As her father's existence was 'black forever defined by white' ("Sudden Trip," 258), 'defeat' is what she saw in his face and what she finds in all the black men she attempts to draw. The face—in life and in portraits as well—is the connection to the person behind it; it is the mirror of the inner self. Thus, a person's identity, heritage and history can be traced in it since—as Picasso supposedly observed—'all faces are as old as the world' (Stein, 13). However, the 'shut face' of her father never allows an approach or provides access to his past. In a way, Sarah's portrait of a black man is not a portrait of any anonymous man, but the personal expression of how she has always looked at black men because of her alienation from her father. Thus, it is not the death of her father that leaves her hurt and questioning her identity, but the lack of a father figure, a role model, during her lifetime. Thus, Sarah has to *face* a part of her past and herself in order to succeed artistically.

Any work of art is a means of communication for the artist; however, in the portrait it seems that the depicted person also speaks to the beholder, as the close portrayal creates an intimate atmosphere. For Sarah, her art is also a way to communicate her ideas to the world, yet the black men she wants to paint only talk about defeat. As she 'had not spoken the language they both knew. Not to [her father]' ("Sudden Trip," 255), she never had a chance to get close to her father or to understand his despair. To emphasize the importance of communication in general and specifically in order for Sarah to come to terms with her past, a large part of "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" is told in the form of dialogue and direct speech. Thus, her family visit enables her to find herself and gradually come to terms with her oppressive memories through closer contact to the rest of her family. In this short story language and communication have the power to connect and unite people but also to alienate

⁷⁵ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 254.

⁷⁶ Cf. "Sudden Trip," 252-253.

them from each other through the lack of it.

The portrait, formerly biased by her father's despair, promises to come to life when Sarah discovers that her grandfather unites all the qualities her picture has been missing so far.

His back was straight, his eyes dry and clear. He was simply and solemnly heroic; a man who kept with pride his family's trust and his own grief. *It is strange*, Sarah thought, *that I never thought to paint him like this, simply as he stands; without anonymous meaningless people hovering beyond his profile; his face turned proud and brownly against the light.* The defeat that had frightened her in the faces of black men was the defeat of black forever defined by white. But that defeat was nowhere on her grandfather's face. He stood like a rock, outwardly calm [...] ("Sudden Trip," 258)

Thus he represents all the aspects of being African American that she has always been looking for, in her people but also in herself. In him, Sarah finds her inspiration for portraying the black man with pride and confidence, something she has tried to seek in her pictures on the wall. However, in these pictures there has always been something missing, some aspect that connected her with them. The true inspiration comes from her family, who is the source for all she is. Subsequently, it is also her grandfather who suggests making him in stone, rather than painting him—the final trigger to Sarah's newly awakened self-confidence as an artist.

4.6 Material

In none of the other short stories in this analysis is the issue of material so explicitly addressed as in "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring." The material is in fact vital to the denouement of the story; only when Sarah finds a new medium for expression is she inspired to go on with her artistic career. In the beginning, she is—like Fidelman—determined to paint the faces of black men; however, her mindset changes during her stay with her family in the South.

"One day I will paint you, Grandpa [...]. Just as you stand here now, with just"—she moved closer and touched his face with her hand—"just the right stubborn tenseness of your cheek. Just that look of Yes and No in your eyes."
 "You wouldn't want to paint an old man like me," he said, looking deep into her eyes from wherever his mind has been. "If you want to make me, make me up in stone." ("Sudden Trip," 258-259)

When Sarah recognizes her grandfather as a model, her artistic inspiration reaches even beyond subject matter when he advises her to carve him out of stone. Actually, the answer to Sarah's questions was always there, not only in the person of her grandfather but also in her perception of him, as she perceives him as a 'rock' ("Sudden Trip," 258). As she feels the urge to touch him and explores his face and skin, the experience of seeing him the way she does does not end at the visual perception but includes a tactile aspect as well. Thus, stone as a material offers an additional sensual feature of expression that embodies qualities of her grandfather not possible to capture in two-dimensionality. Artistically, this also makes a lot more sense to her, which shows that '[the] medium is not 'neutral'; each medium has its own constraints' (Chandler, 53) or opportunities. Thus, when a different medium is suggested to Sarah, the signifier—the portrait of a black man—is changed at the level of form and suddenly she feels more connection to her art. In this case, the different medium has also changed the connotations she wishes to express.

To begin with, a stone sculpture is a three-dimensional shape that requires room and has a spatial presence. Stone is often associated with cold and hardness, but stone is not only inanimate as it also reacts to its surroundings. Stone can store warmth and thus adjust to its surroundings; nevertheless, it is a material that—in its essence—cannot be changed easily. For this reason, stone is extremely durable and can survive thousands of years without significant damage,⁷⁷ which makes stone an ancient witness to human history.

⁷⁷ The ancient Venus of Willendorf statuette is reckoned to be about 25.000 years old.

Sculpture is a rock in the river of time. It is a fragment of existence, captured and held in a continuous and unchanging present moment. Flesh made marble resists the wear of time. (Read, 81)

As stone is also a product of the earth, 'produced as a result of heat, pressure, or a combination of both' (Liebson, 19), it is associated with the most powerful forces found on this planet. Consequently there are various kinds of stone, differing in hardness and brittleness, which predetermines the methods and tools of processing it. From the easily shapeable soapstone to limestone to harder stone such as marble or granite, there are innumerable options regarding color and size but also availability and, thus, the culturally attached value.

For the artist, the whole body and all senses are involved in the creation of a stone sculpture. In order to form stone, heavy tools have to be utilized, such as a hammer and various chisels for carving. In the refining stages of creating a sculpture, files and rasps are also employed, later followed by the finishing touches of sandpaper and polishing devices. The artist is well advised to protect him- or herself from the disagreeable and dangerous fragments by wearing goggles, a dusk mask and also gloves. This shows that the artist cannot maintain the same distance to his or her working tools and materials as when painting an 'ordinary' painting. Also, once a notch is made, it cannot be easily be erased or undone. Unlike clay, with which a sculpture is formed by adding material and creating something where there was nothing before, a stone sculpture is carved out of a stone block. Thus, the artist sees something in the inanimate stone before anyone else can, and by removing layer after layer, the artist brings the sculpture to life. Therefore, the artist frees the sculpture from the impeding and inhibiting stone that blocks the view to its true nature. Carving out of stone is a very rooting task, as one's hands are in contact with the earth and nature during this process. The material needs to be repeatedly explored physically in order to achieve the desired result.

The natural material and bodily process of creation seem to be less artificial than painting and therefore form a closer connection to folk traditions in which natural materials are the only resource that can be used for creating art. These characteristics very vividly represent why stone fits perfectly for the task Sarah wants to accomplish. She strives to create a piece of art that reflects her

truth. In this way, '[the] creation of sculpture, moulded from clay or freed from the matrix of stone, is always a kind of birth' (Read, 75).

4.7 Gender Aspects

The main character in this short story, Sarah, is a young female artist. The other important characters are female as well as male, all of them being members of Sarah's family. This highlights the significance of the family as a whole; even when there are parts of the family or past that seem oppressive, there are other people that counterbalance these influences and provide new energy, strength and confidence. Thus, Sarah finds her way as a woman in the world by taking inspiration from her family, especially from the male members of it. Actually, her role models are male throughout the story: first, the memory of her abusive father complicates her artistic expression, then she tries to find inspiration in the male artists on her wall, but finally she can try new ideas when she identifies her grandfather and brother as personalities she can look up to. The fact that Sarah has no female role models can be ascribed to two factors: on the one hand, there are no women she can find inspiration in, as her school is full of white girls, who have a different view on so many aspects of art and life and, above all, are not physical models for her paintings. On the other hand, when she is looking for other artists' solutions to painting faces, the art historic canon offers few to no female, let alone African American, approaches. At the same time, Sarah already paints confident and matronly black women, thus she does not need women to inspire her. Her image of women seems to be well developed. It is her impression of men that needs to be readjusted.

Only in "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" do the relationships between men and women seem to be closely interconnected. On the one hand, Sarah suffers from the memories of her father who hindered her in developing enough self-confidence. On the other hand, it is her grandfather—and in another way also her brother—who gives her support and shows her a way to deal with the past, her art and herself. Therefore, this short story shows that the male and female aspects can also be united in the arts. There are no separate realms of female and male art, as they merge to form a functioning whole. The male

protagonists in this short story are of crucial importance to the advancement of the female main character. This is different from the other short stories discussed in this thesis. Whereas in Bernard Malamud's stories, the main protagonists are male and women play only a marginal role, Walker's story "Everyday Use" demonstrates the opposite scenario.

4.8 Art as a Statement

For Sarah in "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring," her art is a way to make a statement and be heard as an African American woman. Artistic exertion is her means of expression, which is the reason why she has difficulties painting the faces of black men. This inability to paint them is the manifestation of the oppressive memories of her father, as up to this point it was his defeated image that repeatedly found its way into her paintings. The conflict within her is that the image she actually wants to paint and show to the world is a different one—the one she finds in her grandfather and brother. The thing Sarah admires about her brother is that he can communicate his ideas through his preaching, as she feels that he has found a vehicle to make a difference in the world. However, when Sarah is inspired by her family, she is convinced that she can also make a difference through her art. By continuing her education as an artist, she will find her unique voice as an artist in order to communicate who she is and where she comes from and to make a statement as the only black girl from the South at an elite girls' college in New York. These new ideas and her self-confidence in following her artistic path are epitomized by the stone sculpture she wants to create of her grandfather. Thus, through the medium of stone, she finds her strong and proud voice as an African American artist, sister, granddaughter, daughter and '*woman in the world*' ("Sudden Trip," 261).

Furthermore, the short story shows how closely art and life as well as practice and theory are intertwined. Exemplified in Sarah's journey from the urban North to the rural South, only the unity of academic art education and the inspiring contact with her family enable her to find the solutions she is looking for. Moreover, Sarah's confrontation with her burdened childhood, her past and

her heritage are the key to continuing her artistic career, which highlights that art and life cannot be separated.

5 Art for "Everyday Use"

Who decided what is useful in its beauty
 means less than what has no function besides beauty
 (except its weight in money)?
 Art without frames: it held parched corn,
 it covered the table where soup misted savor,
 it covered the bed where the body knit
 to self and other and the
 dark wool of dreams

Marge Piercy⁷⁸

Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" uses the quilt as a central image in exploring matters of family, culture, and history and how to appreciate heritage. It was published in 1973, as part of the short story collection entitled *In Love and Trouble*. Only two years before, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York arranged an exhibition entitled "Abstract Design in American Quilts," which triggered a tremendous interest in scholars in the quilt and other *folk art*.⁷⁹ This exhibition was unparalleled as it hung quilts alongside *high art*, displaying them at a museum and highlighting how quilting patterns were similar to abstract art. This naturally boosted various feminist agendas, thus 'the pieced quilt has become one of the most central images of the new feminist art lexicon' (Showalter, 161). It was during this quilt hype and rediscovery of domestic and female traditions that the short story "Everyday Use" was written and published. With this short story, Walker established an argument about art in women's lives in fictional form that she shortly after also emphasized in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" (first published in 1974 in *Ms.*). She drew attention to a primarily female art form often denied the definition of art because it was associated with domestic and everyday life. For a long time women did not have access to the realms of high art because they were confined to the home. Any of their attempts to express themselves freely was obstructed, so they found other ways to articulate their creativity. For this

⁷⁸ Cf. Piercy, 35.

⁷⁹ Cf. Torsney and Elsley, 2.

reason, "Everyday Use" is dedicated 'for your grandmama' ("Everyday Use," 45), to honor their work and art. Moreover, the quilt as a symbol of female expression, bonding, and existence as such, reappears in her novel *The Color Purple*, published in 1982.

"Everyday Use" is the story of the Johnson family; the mother living with her daughter Maggie, scarred when their old house burned down, in a small and unadorned house, while Dee, her other daughter, has left the rural South to make something of herself. The story encompasses the events of Dee's short visit home; however, she appears to have changed profoundly, which is exemplified by the fact that she has changed her name to Wangero. Between Dee (Wangero) and her family there is a cultural gap she seems to be proud of, as she has been capable of freeing herself from the impeding surroundings. However, her change has also alienated her from her family and traditions. The tense atmosphere during Dee's (Wangero's) visit culminates in her claiming several everyday use items, among which are two quilts that have been handed down in the family. 'The visitor rightly recognizes the quilts as part of a fragile heritage, but she fails to see the extent to which she herself has traduced that heritage' (Coward, 2). Thus, her mother refuses to pass these quilts on to her fashionable daughter and gives them to Maggie. Although Dee (Wangero) protests that 'she'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use' ("Everyday Use," 54), mother Johnson is convinced that this is the only way to truly appreciate this living art form. Moreover, Maggie—as opposed to Dee (Wangero)—has learned how to quilt on her own from her direct ancestors and thus is able to keep this tradition alive.

The short story's central conflict is that of two colliding comprehensions of how to appreciate one's heritage. For Maggie, her heritage is closely connected to the family and living traditions of her community.⁸⁰ Dee (Wangero), the educated fashionable daughter, however, has a more theoretical approach to art and the heritage manifest in quilts: only by preserving and elevating the quilt into the realms of high art can the heritage of their suppressed and exploited ancestors be truly valued. Dee (Wangero) is convinced that she knows the only suitable way of appreciating the quilts but at the same time misses the crucial fact that she lacks the essential connection to

⁸⁰ Cf. "Everyday Use," 54.

her people in order to truly understand them. She is estranged from the life, traditions and values of her community and thus does not speak the same language anymore. However, in order to understand art, one also has to comprehend its tradition. To be able to decode art's meaning and a quilt's value, one has to speak the same language as its makers. Communication and mutual understanding is not possible if one does not know the language. Thus, understanding—not admiring—art requires a shared vocabulary of creator and viewer.

5.1 Visual Devices of the Text

"Everyday Use" is written in the voice of Mrs. Johnson, Maggie and Dee's mother. It is a figural narration, exclusively written from the mother's point of view. Therefore, the narration is full of her own interpretations and personal feelings. Through her eyes the reader is also initiated into past events and her personal views on her own two daughters. She knows that both of them are not perfect although the one—Dee (Wangero)—seems to have managed to take her life into her own hands. The narrator grants Dee (Wangero) more narrative space than Maggie, which has the effect that the reader feels the capturing presence of Dee (Wangero), whereas Maggie only occasionally appears in the background. Thus, the two daughters are not only described differently by linguistic means, but also by the relative effort of the narrator. In this manner, the reader can re-enact the protagonists' presence and character.

The most striking visual device used in this short story is its reference to television shows and stage directions as found in theater. In the introductory section of the story, the narrator, Mrs. Johnson, characterizes herself and her daughter by dreaming their reunion in a television show 'where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother [...]' ("Everyday Use," 46). Mrs. Johnson goes on to describe the emotional and pleasant fantasy:

On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. ("Everyday Use," 46)

In her TV show fantasy, Mrs. Johnson is 'the way my daughter would want me to be' ("Everyday Use," 46): an eloquent, slim and beautiful woman. However, this ideal world is contrasted with Mrs. Johnson's honest and straightforward description of who she really is. The mother is a very practical and realistic person as she has often had to fight her way through life and she describes herself as a 'large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands' ("Everyday Use," 46). This contrasting comparison of her true self and the fantasy image she thinks her daughter Dee (Wangero) would prefer foreshadow the later conflict of two colliding world views.

For the arrival of Dee (Wangero), the short story is written like a script's stage directions, which deepens the impression of her dramatic, impressive entry.

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves [...] ("Everyday Use," 49)

This minute instruction of the actions and the props is enforced by the use of color; moreover, the description is so realistic that even a sense of warmth is awakened. This visualization of Dee and her dress contributes to her self-confident appearance; when she enters the stage everyone is supposed to pause in admiration. However, Maggie's reaction forms the perfect contrast to Dee's awe-inspiring performance: she makes a noise '[like] when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhhnnh."' ("Everyday Use," 49). This again emphasizes the gap between the two sisters, and Dee's behavior during her visit only makes it more profound. Her appearance, attitude and comments repeatedly stress that she does not fit into this environment.

Before the prodigal daughter arrives in part four of the story, the narrator highlights various details of her life that define her existence and form the home

she feels bonded with. These aspects are described in great detail in the opening paragraph to allow a visual image in the reader:

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house. ("Everyday Use," 45)

The yard, although plain and without fancy, is a center of rest and relaxation for the two Johnsons; it is a place where neighbors can drop over and communication happens. For them the yard is a comfortable part of their house that deserves as much care as the rest of it. By describing the 'breezes' Walker provokes the reader to imagine the yard in a lively way, again found in the enlivenment of Dee's dress. Similar to "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring," the yard establishes a kind of frame for the story, as in the end 'the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed' ("Everyday Use," 55). Like the quilt, later of central importance in the story, 'this yard [...] is another symbol of the cultural something produced out of nothing by people lacking everything' (Coward, 6). However, as Coward continues, 'the author describes that emptiness [of the yard] in terms suggestive of spiritual wealth' (6), meaning that this basic lifestyle still offers them a rich, fulfilled and contented life. For Baker, the yard is even a 'ritual ground [...] prepared for the arrival of a goddess' (159). Considering Mrs. Johnson's admiration and awe for her successful daughter, whose way of living is beyond her comprehension, and the powers Mrs. Johnson imputes to her daughter, the comparison of Dee (Wangero) to a goddess—at least in the eyes of her mother—is credible. After all, Mrs. Johnson observes that Dee (Wangero) 'burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know' ("Everyday Use," 47) and "'no" is a word the world never learned to say to her' ("Everyday Use," 45), which ascribes a lot of power to her and deducts power from herself and Maggie in equal measure. Nevertheless, it is more incomprehension from her family's side that makes Dee (Wangero) appear so powerful. As the closing sentence of the story shows, the yard has not only

been prepared for the returning daughter, but in fact for their own enjoyment and contentedness.

The yard being the frame to the story corresponds to the yard as the framing entity for the house, another central visual element of the story. The Johnson house, home to the mother and Maggie, is another part of their existence Dee (Wangero) seems to exert crucial influence on. When the old house burned down and seriously injured and scarred her sister, Dee (Wangero) stood

off under the sweet gum tree [...] a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much. ("Everyday Use," 47)

Now that the house is rebuilt, Mrs. Johnson is still convinced that Dee (Wangero) 'will want to tear it down' because she cannot abide these miserable circumstances her family 'chooses' to live in ("Everyday Use," 48). However, when she returns home, she is quickened by a 'fashionable, or stylish, interest in what she passionately describes as her "heritage"' (Baker, 160), which includes taking abundant Polaroid snapshots of this formerly disagreeable house. Always 'making sure the house is included' ("Everyday Use," 50), she takes these pictures before she has even greeted her family, which attests to her artificial interest in her heritage; otherwise she would first address the people who are the genuine link to her ancestors. The same is true for her keen interest in all the household items she suddenly claims for herself. There she is, in the house of her childhood, where she is surrounded by heritage and history. All she wants to do, however, is grab the things she considers most obviously full of heritage and get back to her new life.

As in "A Pimp's Revenge," the name is a symbol for the person's identity in this short story, thus, the fact that Dee has changed her name to Wangero reveals her identity struggle but also her ignorance of her heritage. She states that 'Dee' is 'dead' because she 'couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress' her ("Everyday Use," 50). 'You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie' ("Everyday Use," 50), her mother counters and 'probably could have carried [the namesakes] back beyond the

Civil War' ("Everyday Use," 51); however, Dee (Wangero) is convinced that at some point before that, this name was given to her ancestors by the white man. Thus, Dee (Wangero) 'has joined the radical, black nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s' (Baker, 159)—in her opinion—in order to get closer to her true roots. On the contrary, by changing her name and belittling her family's way of living, she only 'proclaims a deplorable degree of alienation from her rural origins and family' (Coward, 2). Besides the obvious estrangement and mutual lack of understanding between Mrs. Johnson and her daughter, Walker very subtly alters Mrs. Johnson's demeanor by changing tense in the narrative voice.

"Well," I say. "Dee."
 "No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Lee-wanika
 Kemanjo!"
 "What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.
 "She's dead," Wangero said.
 ("Everyday Use," 50)

The short story commences in the present tense and ends in past tense, the turning point being the exact moment when Dee (Wangero) announces her change of name. Thus, her alienation from her backward family immediately migrates to her mother, who just cannot restore her previous admiration for her educated and radiant daughter. For Mrs. Johnson, this is probably the most palpable renunciation of her family's values and origins, which later surfaces in her refusal to pass the quilts on to Dee (Wangero).

5.2 The Artists

The artists in "Everyday Use," represented by Mrs. Johnson and Maggie, are all the female ancestors who immortalized themselves in the quilted works of art for everyday use. These are people who neither thought of themselves as artists nor had been recognized by classic art history as such. The fact that these and other 'domestic' arts had been ignored for a long time surely accounts for the enthusiasm that seized the art world during the 1970s quilt revival. Suddenly quilts were hung in museums and revaluated as works of art; their creators seen as preservers of American heritage. Although feminist critics were skeptical towards this widely aroused interest and mostly saw it 'as a

fundamental threat to the quilt tradition as a whole' (Rateike, 59), this new appraisal of quilts helped to write a new chapter of female art history.⁸¹

The artist Maggie lives with her mother in a small house in rural America where she leads a simple and down-to-earth life. The narrator—this is her mother—is very straightforward and slightly nasty in her description and characterization of Maggie. The narrator observes that Maggie 'will stand hopelessly in corners, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs' ("Everyday Use," 45) until her sister leaves. Even Maggie's walk is compared to that of a 'lame animal': 'chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground' ("Everyday Use," 47). This fire, in which she suffered severe burns, is probably one of the reasons for her withdrawn behavior. She feels comfortable with the activities she is used to and intimidated when she is confronted with unfamiliar things; thus, she even tries to hide when Dee (Wangero) arrives but is relaxed when she is alone with her mother again. The narrator describes Dee favorably—at least in the beginning of the story—as being 'lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure' ("Everyday Use," 47) while her other daughter has 'a kind of dopey, hangdog look' ("Everyday Use," 54). In fact, the mother is also very plain in her own assessment,⁸² which shows that her descriptions simply reflect the way she understands the world. In her eyes, it is natural that the one child is always favored by luck, whereas the other daughter's life is much harder. However, during the course of Dee's (Wangero's) visit, Mrs. Johnson realizes that Maggie is blessed in different ways: Maggie is the successor of a precious tradition she will also teach her own children. This enables her to be an artist and part of history.

The conflict between Dee (Wangero) and her Maggie stands for two opposing lifestyles. Maggie maintains the old traditions and lives a rural life whereas Dee (Wangero) tries to find her place in society by adopting a modern way of thinking and living. Hers is the life of self-assertion and self-fulfillment: through education she learns about the world and is then able to find her place in it. Maggie, on the other hand, was born in her place in society and community and does not have the intention of changing anything about it. She is content with the people, community and environment she lives in and keeps

⁸¹ Cf. Rateike, 58pp, for a more detailed discussion of the feminist interpretation of quilt art.

⁸² Cf. "Everyday Use," 46.

up the traditions which were passed on to her. For Dee (Wangero), this contentedness is not enough, as she is looking for happiness and self-expression. This conflict between two fundamentally colliding views on life, the individual and community reaches its climax when Dee (Wangero) claims two family quilts for herself towards the end of the story. These quilts, however, were supposed to be handed down to Maggie when she marries. Again, Dee (Wangero) takes everything for granted and cannot understand why Maggie can appreciate the quilts better than she would. In her eyes, the only fitting way to preserve the quilt and its cultural significance is by hanging it on the wall like a picture. The idea of Maggie being 'backward enough to put them to everyday use' ("Everyday Use," 54) is almost unbearable for her. Similar to the other short stories, this is a conflict between the artist and the theorist: both are concerned about the work of art, but they follow different approaches. In "Everyday Use" the title already gives the answer to that ubiquitous question.

5.3 The Quilt

Before the actual references to the quilts in the story are explored, some fundamentals should draw attention to the most significant features of this traditional bed cover and blanket. Making a quilt generally involves four subsequent steps: selecting a pattern and the fabrics, cutting the textiles into small pieces according to the pattern desired, piecing them into larger blocks and then into a big cover or appliqu  ing small patterns on a bigger fabric; finally, the actual quilting happens, when the top, batting and back are quilted together. The materials for a quilt were traditionally different kinds of natural fabrics such as cotton and linen, but also silk or wool, although more recently, there is virtually no restriction to the materials used.⁸³ Choosing patterns, colors and fabrics and composing them to achieve the desired effects is often the most creative part for the quilt maker. Here she is able to introduce her ideas and aesthetic understanding, although quilt patterns appear at first glance to be very repetitive and rather restrictive in their variation. However, when consulting a collection of documented quilt patterns like Brackman's, it becomes obvious

⁸³ Cf. Rateike, 132.

that the choices of pattern alone were myriad. Thus, the exceptional part about quilting is that there are some aspects that are deeply rooted in tradition, but this still leaves manifold options for the quilt maker to express her creativity. Moreover, Dewey indicates that

[relationships] rather than elements recur, and they recur in differing contexts and with different consequences so that each recurrence is novel as well as a reminder. (169)⁸⁴

However, not all quilt makers were that unrestricted in their creative choices, as '[the] hands that pieced the master's rigidly patterned quilts by day were often the hands that crafted a more functional design in slave cabins by night' (Baker, 156). Thus, in a majority of the cases the choice of material depended simply on which materials were available: often discarded clothes were included in the quilt out of lack of other fabrics. However, by reusing these old dresses, uniforms or baby clothing their wearers and stories were remembered. The Johnsons' quilts also contain several stories:

In both [quilts] were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faced blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War. ("Everyday Use," 53)

When the interpreter knows how to read these quilts, they almost function as a kind of historic document. Sometimes, it is not only specific persons that are alive in the quilt; cultural influences can also be traced in them. Thus, various African American quilt patterns or colors can be ascribed to African roots⁸⁵ and Brackman's *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* contains patterns from the 1830s to the present day. These are the aspects of a quilt that go far beyond function or creativity, as they are a record of their time.

In "Everyday Use," the two quilts the family argues about are in the 'Lone Star' and the 'Walk Around the Mountain' pattern.⁸⁶ The Appendix – Illustrations contains samples of these quilts, as well as their schematic Brackman diagrams. The 'Lone Star' pattern consists of diamond-shaped pieces that are

⁸⁴ Cf. Dewey, 161-171, where he observes that repetition is actually essential in different aspects of art and life.

⁸⁵ Cf. Wahlman for an extensive study on the African influence on African American quilts.

⁸⁶ Cf. "Everyday Use," 53.

assembled to form either a six- or eight-pointed star. The most common shape, however, is the eight-pointed star that is either 'placed in the center of the quilt top and can be appliquéd down to the background or pieced in' (Wulfert). This pattern is reserved for the skillful quilt maker, as the diamond-shaped patches have to be pieced meticulously; otherwise the star does not maintain the desired form. According to Wulfert, the name 'Lone Star' originated in Texas, the lone star state,⁸⁷ however, as the Brackman *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* vividly illustrates, numerous names for this same or only slightly different patterns exist. In her introduction, Brackman points out that

not every pattern has a name, that there is no "correct" name for any design, and that some of the names we take for granted as authentic nineteenth-century folklore actually have relatively short histories. (Brackman, 4)

For this reason, it is not surprising that the other quilt pattern found in "Everyday Use," 'Walk Around the Mountain,' cannot be found in the collection of over 4000 quilt pattern samples in Brackman's *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Names for quilts were given to them by their makers, thus some patterns might have a specific family connotation or are a reference to this one special quilt. Also, '[pattern] names, like all vocabulary, change over time' (4) assesses Brackman; she goes on to ensure that '[the] right name for a pattern is what you [as quilt maker] call it' (4). As there is no exact match for the 'Walk Around the Mountain' pattern, its appearance remains speculative. In the Brackman Encyclopedia there is a pattern with diamond-shaped blocks called 'Walk Around'⁸⁸ and another, well known in the quilting community, with the name 'Trip Around the World.'⁸⁹ The Encyclopedia lists a few possible variations of the 'Trip Around the World' pattern; however, all consist of square patches that center on one pivotal patch. Considering both patterns, it is possible that this quilt consisted of patches spread over the whole quilt top; however, as quilt naming in the end is a matter of the designer, personal or intra-family patterns, not known to quilt researchers, are also thinkable. Consequently, the exact design of the second quilt in "Everyday Use" remains a mystery. In any case, this cryptic pattern name hints at the precious and rare

⁸⁷ Cf. Wulfert.

⁸⁸ Cf. Illustration XX in the Appendix.

⁸⁹ Cf. Illustration XIX in the Appendix.

nature of this quilt.

As the selection of patterns, fabrics and colors is the creative part in making a quilt, piecing the fragments to achieve the desired pattern is where the quilt maker shows her true skills. Liebson formulated this relation as follows: 'Creativity is the impulse sent by the brain to the hands; technical skill, the transfer of creativity from the hands to the medium' (64). As a quilt often consists of thousands of individual patches, the cutting and subsequent piecing of those fragments is an enduring task, in which the quilt maker has to prove her patience and resilience. Due to the small pieces, however, the task of piecing can be distributed easily over the day, which 'reflects the fragmentation of women's time, the scrappiness and uncertainty of women's creative or solitary moments' (Showalter, 149). In the short story "A Jury of Her Peers" Susan Glaspell explores how even this slow and sustained task of piecing reflects a woman's personality, present situation and even emotional strain.

The individual effort of piecing is then followed by quilting together the pieced top, a batting and a backing cloth; this step is often a communal gathering. Also the two quilts in "Everyday Use" 'had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them' ("Everyday Use,"53), which illustrates the community aspect involved in quilting. Such gatherings around the quilting frame are called quilting bees, where all seamstresses sit around one work of art to quilt and finish it.⁹⁰ Attached to the image of the quilting bee is a romantic notion of the domestic woman, pursuing their needlework, socializing and bonding. Thus, '[men] tolerated this community because it appeared to reinforce a view of women that the patriarchy was only too pleased to encourage' (Elsley, 54). However, this female bonding strengthened also their individual power as there they were able to

exchange information, learn new skills, and discuss political issues; it was at a church quilting bee in Cleveland, for example, that Susan B. Anthony gave her first speech on women's suffrage. (Showalter, 148)

In the nourishing non-hierarchical quilting bee, even class and racial distinctions were blurred, providing local communities with a social matriarchal center.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Sometimes, also the piecing is done in the group. Cf. Cooper for firsthand accounts of quilters, who also point to the fact that men were occasional participants of these gatherings.

⁹¹ In Whitney Otto's *How to Make an American Quilt* these issues are also addressed.

Quilting is quiet, slow, meditative work.[...]
 Quilting is tactile, sensual, spiritual work. (Elsley, 53)

The aforementioned aspects of quilting make creating a work of art like this such an exceptional experience. All senses are involved in their creation, but also in their use, as they are everyday commodities. When Dee (Wangero) wants to take the quilts with her and Mrs. Johnson recollects their intrinsic history, the mother immediately has the urge to touch them in order to grasp them with all her senses.⁹² 'The connotations of fabric [...] are [...] fundamentally connected to the needs of the human body and the habits and practices of daily existence' (134), as Rateike illustrates. Quilts are thus associated with protection and warmth as well as 'physical and emotional security' (Rateike, 134). These general physical aspects of the quilt are of course reinforced when some of the patches included actually refer to a known person and function as a tangible link to them.

As in all other works of art, it is important to understand them in order to fully appreciate them. Likewise,

[the] materials in a quilt are not in themselves meaningful,
 but their communicative potential unfolds in their
 interactive relationship with the maker and the viewer.
 (Rateike, 128)

The symbolism contained in a quilt goes beyond that of material. It encompasses technical choices, patterns, traditions, family relations and issues of the community. A quilt thus reflects the individual quilt maker as well as her community and cultural background. It can be a historic document and memento, or it can be fabricated for a specific purpose such as a wedding, birth or funeral.

A quilt is a text. It speaks its maker's desires and beliefs,
 hopes, and fears, sometimes in a language any reader
 can understand, but often in an obscure language
 available only to the initiated. (Elsley, 1)

In order to fully understand the meaningful layers of a quilt, one has to learn its language. In "Everyday Use," Maggie is the sister who has learned from Grandma Dee and Big Dee the art of quilting, thus she knows their history and can read what they stand for. Dee (Wangero), on the other hand, was never

⁹² Cf. "Everyday Use," 53.

particularly interested in quilts, as she once thought that 'they were old-fashioned, out of style' ("Everyday Use," 54), when her mother wanted to give them to her. As Dee (Wangero) cannot experience⁹³ the quilt from the point of view of the family by which it was created, she misses important aspects of this work of art. She probably sees on an abstract level the variety of women's experience in the quilt, but not the personal family stories contained in them.

5.4 Art Without Frames⁹⁴

The Johnson house is full of precious works of art that also have a function. Dee (Wangero) especially admires the 'benches [Dee's] daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs' ("Everyday Use," 52) and a butter dish from Grandma Dee. She also marvels at a churn⁹⁵ whittled by Uncle Buddy and the dasher, which tells a story of its own:

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie [...]. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash." [...]

When [Dee] finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived. ("Everyday Use," 52)

The churn, although it is used in the short story as a jug in which unskimmed and unpasteurized milk is kept until it naturally turns into clabber,⁹⁶ is actually a tub for making butter, which 'consisted of a tall, narrow, nearly cylindrical stone or wood tub fitted with a wooden cover. The cream was agitated by a hand-operated vertical wooden plunger, stave, or dash' ("Ways of Churning Butter") until it was butter.⁹⁷ Dewey observes that '[works] of art that are not remote from

⁹³ Cf. Dewey for his claim that art has to be experienced in order to appreciate it.

⁹⁴ Cf. Piercy, 35.

⁹⁵ An image of a butter churn with dasher is shown in Illustration XXI.

⁹⁶ Cf. "Everyday Use," 52.

⁹⁷ Cf. also the narrator's description in "Everyday Use," 52.

common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life' (81). This is the charm and essence of those works of art: a union of beauty, function and history.

The functions a work of art can serve are varied and depend on cultural and personal circumstances. In order to recall people or stories memory is often attached to concrete objects. A keepsake or picture functions as a reminder that helps staying in touch with the past and personal experiences as well as with certain people and the tradition they are part of. In the African American tradition, works of art were made and kept for everyday use. Often they were also a reminder of something—like a friendship or wedding quilt; however, their main purpose was functional. For a long time, African American tradition and storytelling was passed on exclusively orally, as people were not able to read and write. For this purpose everyday works of art were a kind of visual illustration of these stories passed on from generation to generation. As communicative symbols and secret code quilts were also used by abolitionists who assisted fugitive slaves in their escape on the Underground Railroad during the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ However, not only works of art that are embedded in folk traditions have a functional purpose. In fact, any work of art has some kind of function: the promotion of a certain religious idea, the representation of a powerful sovereign, the personal expression of the artist's world view, or a Kaddish as in Fidelman's case. Thus, the full comprehension of a work of art includes dealing with its original function or intention.

In addition, the statement made in "Everyday Use" is that people tend to be preoccupied with material objects as memento of the past. In a time obsessed with material representation everything has to be written down or otherwise made tangible in order to preserve it. When Maggie says that she 'can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts' ("Everyday Use," 54) she not only resignedly gives in to Dee (Wangero) but also shows that she is not dependent on material things in order to be able to remember. Thus, she is not only able to continue the tradition of quilt making but also the oral tradition of her people.

⁹⁸ Cf. Tobin for a detailed account of how quilts were utilized as warning or sign posts to support the fleeing slaves.

5.5 Photography

As opposed to the art without frames in the previous chapters, Polaroid photography constitutes an artificial frame for Dee (Wangero). When she arrives, and before she even greets her family, she begins to take snapshots with her camera:

"Don't get up," says Dee. [...] She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead. ("Everyday Use," 50)

Dee's attitude again shows that she wants to preserve her heritage by freezing her family on a picture and putting it in a frame—the same as she wants to do with the quilts and other everyday objects she finds at her mother's house. By putting these impressions and objects into her everyday surroundings they remind her of a remote past she does not want to be a part of anymore but at the same time they comfort her because she feels she is part of history and still has a connection to her roots. Taking a series of photos might also be her way of bringing order to the irritatingly alien life of her family. This is the only way she can handle it: on paper and with the appropriate distance and detachment. For this reason, Dee (Wangero) is not—although she thinks she is—a herald of African American rural folk traditions. She is merely trying to embellish her fashionable new self. She is so concerned with finding her way in a world that offers new opportunities that she is actually losing her connection to her roots.

'[...] Polaroid cameras—devices that instantly process and record experience as "framed" photograph. Ultimately, the framed Polaroid photograph represents the limits of Dee's vision.' (Baker, 161)

Dee (Wangero) does not understand the everyday life, thinking and traditions of her family anymore, thus, preserving artifacts of that life is not enough to pass their culture on to following generations.

Dee's (Wangero's) choices are influenced by fashion, which is also the

reason for her unexpected interest in the quilts she never liked before. Edwin H. Land invented the first portable Polaroid camera in 1972 and suddenly instant photography was made accessible to the public.⁹⁹ Taking Polaroid pictures was very fashionable at that time. In fact, as "Everyday Use" was already published in 1973, one year after the invention of Polaroid photography, Dee's (Wangero's) Polaroid camera exhibits the importance of contemporary culture and recent social developments for her.

Considering the social and cultural surroundings Polaroid photography was born into, 'a period of intense scrutiny of mass consumerism and obsession with popular culture' (Kao, 18), this tool had an immediate impact on the artistic landscape.

The snapshot aesthetic to which the SX-70 helped give rise became fodder for artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Heinecken, who approached it as a cultural "ready-made." Other artists, such as Lucas Samaras, substantially manipulated the photographic process, during exposure—by the use of projected colored light—and during development—by pressing and scratching the prints. This served to accentuate the distance between the perception of reality as captured in the "amateur snapshot" process and the artist's construction of a new reality within that matrix. (Kao, 18)

Taking Samaras' reaction to the accessibility of instant photography as an example, artists were unexpectedly put under pressure to rethink their legitimacy. The Polaroid's intrinsic openness to the public put previous definitions of art at stake as now everybody was able to be an artist. Land's intention to invent instant photography was 'to make available a new medium of expression to numerous individuals who have an artistic interest in the world around them' (Hitchcock, 8), thus creating a new awareness of the individual. With the invention of a compact Polaroid camera, everybody's view on the world is different, valuable, worth being expressed, and might even show artistic creativity otherwise undiscovered. Formerly, art had been elitist and confined to a few privileged or extraordinarily gifted people, therefore the Polaroid's democratic approach to artistic creation led to the artist's re-evaluation. Certainly, this fueled another basic question of photography, as the invention of Polaroid photography addressed

⁹⁹ Cf. Kao, 13-19. Illustration XXII shows an image of this first publicly available camera.

[...] the fundamental and enduring paradox of photography's place in modern culture: photography is viewed as both a mechanical tool capable of accurately transposing the natural world for scientific inquiry and social scrutiny, and as a pliable process of subjective visual expression bound only by the syntax of its technology. (Kao, 14)

Although '[the] unique mimetic qualities of the medium led early critics of photography to question its independent creative potential' (Kao, 14), any artist is able to find his or her personal form of expression and interpretation of the world with any available medium. Thus, using photography is not considerably different from other artistic media like paint or plaster. Every material offers ways of—as well as limits to—artistic manipulation, if an imaginative mind works with it.

Besides its artistic aspect, however, any work of art, regardless of its form or medium, is also a document of personal and cultural aspects and in that way is always part of history. Polaroid photography, and photography in general, can show personal scraps of history; thus, the definition of history becomes more personal, as everyone is able to preserve his or her own history. Put together, personal photographs can tell a more complete, or at least a multifaceted, story of life. As a Polaroid artist interviewed by Kao and Hitchcock points out, there exists 'the historically and culturally prescribed expectation that photographs will record, describe, document, or depict 'reality'' (117). However, the 'reality' that photography depicts is only the personal view of the photographer, thus, Dee's (Wangero's) Polaroids of her family and the shabby house show only her interpretation of reality. In this way, photography supports constructivist ideas, as it is a personal and everyday art. It paves the way for unique expression and creativity for everyone and thus gives validity to the individual's point of view. Thus, Polaroid photography is a very democratic medium, which concurs with Land's original intention as 'for him, instant photography fulfilled both a social and an aesthetic function' (Kao, 18).

Interestingly enough, the art Dee (Wangero) chooses as her expressive medium is in many ways similar to that of quilting. Both Polaroid photography and quilting document personal views and stories and thus form a part of history. When Dee (Wangero) 'lines up picture after picture' ("Everyday Use," 50) of her family, she actually creates fragments of reality, like scraps in a quilt,

which later, when put side by side again, might form a whole. Still, Dee's (Wangero's) approach is more modern and fashionable, which is why Polaroid photography is more accessible to her. Moreover, Polaroid pictures are much easier to create, as they do not require long lasting instruction and practice, and are immediate in their effect. This makes the pictures also more amenable to the viewer, as there is not the complex vocabulary of quilting that the viewer has to be familiar with to unravel the layers of meaning. Like any other art form, photography also consists of a vocabulary that transports meaning, however, it is not as essential here as it is in other art forms, as various aspects are obvious and not hidden. As Dee (Wangero) craves attention—we are reminded here of her dress' screaming colors—and wants to be heard, Polaroid photography is the adequate medium for her personal and artistic expression.

5.6 Gender Aspects

The main characters in Walker's "Everyday Use," Mrs. Johnson and her daughters Maggie and Dee (Wangero), are all women and not much space is granted to male protagonists. Thus, Hakim-a-barber only functions as an appendage to Dee (Wangero) and is not an integral part of the story. Still, she is more attached to her male partner—at times they communicate with 'eye signals' ("Everyday Use," 51) in a secrete code—than to her family, as he also represents her new mindset. Meanwhile, Mrs. Johnson and Maggie live their lives rather independently of men; surely, Maggie is promised to John Thomas, but this seems to be a rather remote concept for them. Several male relatives are also mentioned in conjunction with the art objects found at the Johnson house. Thus, Dee's (Wangero's) father, Uncle Buddy, Aunt Dee's first husband and Great Grandpa Ezra are immortalized in their everyday works of art or commemorated in the family quilts. However, all these male family members do not take part actively in the present situation, which presents women as the true carriers and preservationists of history. Although male and female are seen as part of a whole in "Everyday Use," the women are the catalysts of cultural heritage and artistic traditions.

Nevertheless, the quilt is depicted here as a uniquely female art form, as

the traditions are handed down from generations of women to the following female generations. The short story is a statement in appreciation of the female experience and heritage and claims the place in history and art that they are entitled to. All role models in "Everyday Use" are women; even Dee (Wangero) regards with respect the women that quilted out of necessity, for comfort and as personal creative exertion. The art references in this short story are a vehicle for female independence.

5.7 Art as Heritage

The short story "Everyday Use" centers on the question of how to truly appreciate one's heritage and roots, here symbolized by the quilts and other works of art. Especially for the artists themselves, they are not merely works of art, but they have a useful purpose and a function of remembrance. Dee (Wangero), as an outside observer, is of course not completely ignorant of its underlying significance; however, for her the quilts' importance is more of an abstract nature, which is the reason why for her the only appropriate way of commemorating their creators is by elevating them to the realms of art. To interpret her role as the 'evil sister in the flashy clothes' (Torsney, 15) is, however, too easy. Her approach shows her actual disorientation and deracination, but in fact, her way to cherish the past is just another—more theoretical—way to do so.

True, she wants to remove [the quilts] from everyday use, but her motive is, after all, preservation of personal family history in the context of larger cultural history, and preservation, as many recent feminist readers understand, of a valid text(ile) of women's tradition. (Torsney, 15)

The great criticism is not her approach to the quilts solely as works of art, but her general attitude to all other links with her heritage. She cannot appreciate them fully if she despises all the other aspects of her community, and thus, the quilts

represent a heritage she has already discarded, for she no longer shares a name with those whose lives, in scraps of cast-off clothing, the quilts transmute. (Cowart, 10)

The crucial point is that showing-off heritage, without being capable of—or interested in—continuing these traditions is insufficient.

This short story also shows that art is everywhere, even in everyday objects. This emphasizes the close connection between art and life, as the functionality of a work of art does not make it less of a work of art. In fact, what is considered art always depends on the context and the eye of the beholder. However, only with an open-minded approach to art can its communicative potential be drawn upon. In this story Dee's (Wangero's) and her family's views differ so dramatically that a common communication is impossible, as she is estranged from the life, traditions and values of her community and thus does not speak the same language anymore. However, in order to understand art, one also has to comprehend what it stands for: its tradition, its maker, its intention—in short, its code. To be able to decode art's meaning and a quilt's value, one has to speak the same language as its makers. However, the fact that communication and mutual understanding are only possible if a shared vocabulary exists is not only true for art; it is a fact of life. Thus, listening, looking closely and understanding are the key factors.

6 Conclusion

You exist only in what you do

Federico Fellini

Art is the uniting element of the three short stories in this analysis, although the stories do not seem to have much in common at first glance. Two of the stories are written by women, and in these two stories women are also the main characters. Two stories culminate in a positive and hopeful denouement, whereas in one story the artist fails ruefully. One story is set in Italy, centering on a Jewish expatriate, the other stories are set in America and are pictures of the African American community. Even the references to the visual arts are so varied that they reach from classical to folk art. The tantalizing aspect that this study reveals, however, is that the stories engage in the same themes. Each story approaches the major themes from slightly or completely different angles, thus exploring different shapes of human experience. The artist and his or her art function as a vehicle for the main ideas of the stories; however, their validity is not restricted to the visual arts. Rather, the crucial themes are concerned with basic questions about human existence, social interaction and life in general.

All three short stories accompany the main characters on their search for identity. Fidelman attempts—and fails—to create himself as an artist persona by consistently neglecting his personal past and doings as a non-artist. Sarah, on the other hand, travels to the South to reconcile with her past and find inspiration as a painter and sculptor. In "Everyday Use" the theme of identity is addressed by Dee's neglect of her heritage and attempt to redefine herself as Wangero, while the two artists, Mrs. Johnson and Maggie, are rooted and content with who they are. Thus, everyone's identity is defined by his or her heritage, which includes cultural, personal, familial and even religious aspects. Acknowledging this part of personal identity is crucial. However, this engagement with personal heritage encourages change and development, as the heritage does not form a static corset that predefines one's destiny.

Heritage simply constitutes one important component of the personality; thus, in order to achieve something in life, one's heritage should be appreciated as this integral part of oneself. Fidelman does not manage to confront his oppressive heritage, which is the reason he remains static and fails. However, Sarah manages to go on, as she confronts her emotionally oppressive heritage. Identity is thus influenced by heritage but also by the community, which offers both security and guidance and understanding and support, but can also be a source of inspiration. The fact that the stories' protagonists choose different paths on their search for identity is surely influenced by their dissimilar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as their gender and age. This also entails their appreciating to differing degrees what they find on their journeys.

For the artists, this search for identity also implicates that art and life are inseparable. Especially in "A Pimp's Revenge," the main character's failure is caused by his insistence on a morally artistic life strictly disconnected from his everyday life, where he cannot face who he has become. In "Everyday Use" the tight interconnection of art and life is emphasized by the works of art that also serve a practical purpose. In this way, art and life are so closely interwoven that art should not be displayed in the realm of a museum, but put to the use for which it was originally intended. Sarah also has the experience that as long as she does not get in touch with her roots again, she cannot construct the male faces she wants to paint. The theme of the interdependence of art and life demonstrates that a person is reflected in his or her doings. Thus, not only the artistic output of the artists but anything they do is a manifestation of who they are.

Another theme manifest in all three short stories is the gap between artistic practice and art historic theory, which often is the source for misunderstandings. For Fidelman, this is actually an inner conflict, as he follows a very theoretical approach to art, and his intention is to paint an innovative masterpiece. Thus, he constantly evaluates his artistic creations instead of letting his creative potential flow. Moreover, his creativity is also restricted by Ludovico, who purposely unsettles him with his remarks in order to take his bitter revenge. The conflict between practice and theory culminates in the interview, showing that not all aspects of artistic creation can be put into words. In "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring," this gap is represented by Sarah's journey from the North to the South. In the North, she is immersed in all

aspects of art and also taught the technical aspects of artistic creation; however, the actual inspiration of how to practically translate her artistic voice into a work of art comes from her family in the South. The conflict is directly addressed in "Everyday use," where Dee (Wangero) has a theoretical approach to the preservation of heritage inherent in everyday art and wants to display them as one would in a museum. Maggie and her mother, however, continue the traditions by using these works of art in the way they were originally intended to be and appreciating their heritage by quilting themselves. All the stories elaborate on the idea that an exclusively theoretic approach to art misses some aspects vital for the understanding of a work of art.

Art is also a means of communication for the artists in the stories. Through their respective media, they try to convey certain ideas, world views and aspects of their existence and personality. For Sarah, her art is a statement for expressing herself as an African American woman. Similarly, the quilts and other works of art in the Johnsons' house communicate various aspects of their experience and existence. Fidelman also strives to express himself through his painting; however, he does not fully embrace the expressive potential that his art offers. As the works of art are vessels of the artist's intentions and cultural surroundings, it is essential for its true appreciation to understand these aspects. In this way, art is seen as a language. Only when the artist and the audience share the same language can the work of art be apprehended and esteemed in all its aspects. The expressive vocabulary includes various aspects regarding the choice of material, the applied technique or the use of color. To grasp what these aspects mean for the creator and to be aware of the work of art's context means getting closer to experiencing it fully.

The comparison of "A Pimp's Revenge," "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" and "Everyday Use" results in the conclusion that they share major themes, although their general approach varies dramatically. Most obvious are the different gender roles found in the stories: Fidelman is the only male main character and also the only one who fails in his attempt to grow and be content. Conversely, Fidelman and Sarah are united by the fact that both try to overcome their oppressive past through their art. Both of them also choose a rather classic approach, looking for inspiration in the great masters of art history and first turning to painting as their expressive medium, although the more sensual materials appeal more to them. While "Everyday Use" celebrates

women as the true preservers of heritage; in "A Pimp's Revenge" they only play a marginal role and are neglected by the main character: this, however, leads to his ultimate setback. Some of these gender aspects are unquestionably due to the authors' focuses in their oeuvre and are a characteristic hallmark of their writing; however, they show that there are various approaches that still can lead to related outcomes.

Every work of art tells at least one story and every short story draws pictures in the mind of the reader. Thus, both add another facet to the understanding of human experience. Like the quilt that is a composition of different scraps, repeated but always different, all of them elaborating on the same theme, together forming a whole. In a sense, this study of the uses of art in literature can also be compared to a quilt: it consists of glimpses of different aspects of the short stories and their art references. It seems that the scrutiny of different points of view on one topic yields a more complete picture of the whole. Thus, this thesis concludes with a citation by Alice Walker, which subsumes the intention of this thesis of transcending ostensible borders in order to arrive at a more complete picture.

What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity, a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and the public world. (Walker, "Saving," 5)

7 Appendix – Illustrations

English 228 - BLACK LITERATURE IN AMERICA (II 1971-72) Miss Walker

The course will be concerned primarily with black women novelists of the 20th century. However, students should be prepared to read the poetry and novels of 18th and 19th century authors Lucy Terry, Phyllis Wheatley and Frances Watkins Harper. Writers to be considered carefully are Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Dorothy West, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Paule Marshall, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. To this list will be added stories and novels by black male writers who approach the fictional exploration of the black woman in truthful or unusual ways. Cane, by Jean Toomer, should be read and also The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, by Ernest J. Gaines. It would also be helpful if students would read, perhaps over the summer, The Souls of Black Folk, by DuBois, and one or two of the following books: The Timeless Place, The Chosen People, by Paule Marshall, God Bless the Child, by Kristin Hunter, Mojo Hand, by Jane Phillips, or To Be Young, Gifted and Black, by Lorraine Hansberry. A perusal of one or more of the recent anthologies on The Black Woman might also prove interesting and valuable.

Two short papers and one long paper will be required.

Illustration I

WALKER, ALICE. *English 228 course at Wellesley College*. 1971-1972. Course Description.

Slaight, Wilma R. "Re: Fwd: Alice Walker course at Wellesley College ." Private E-mail to the author. 18 May 2004.

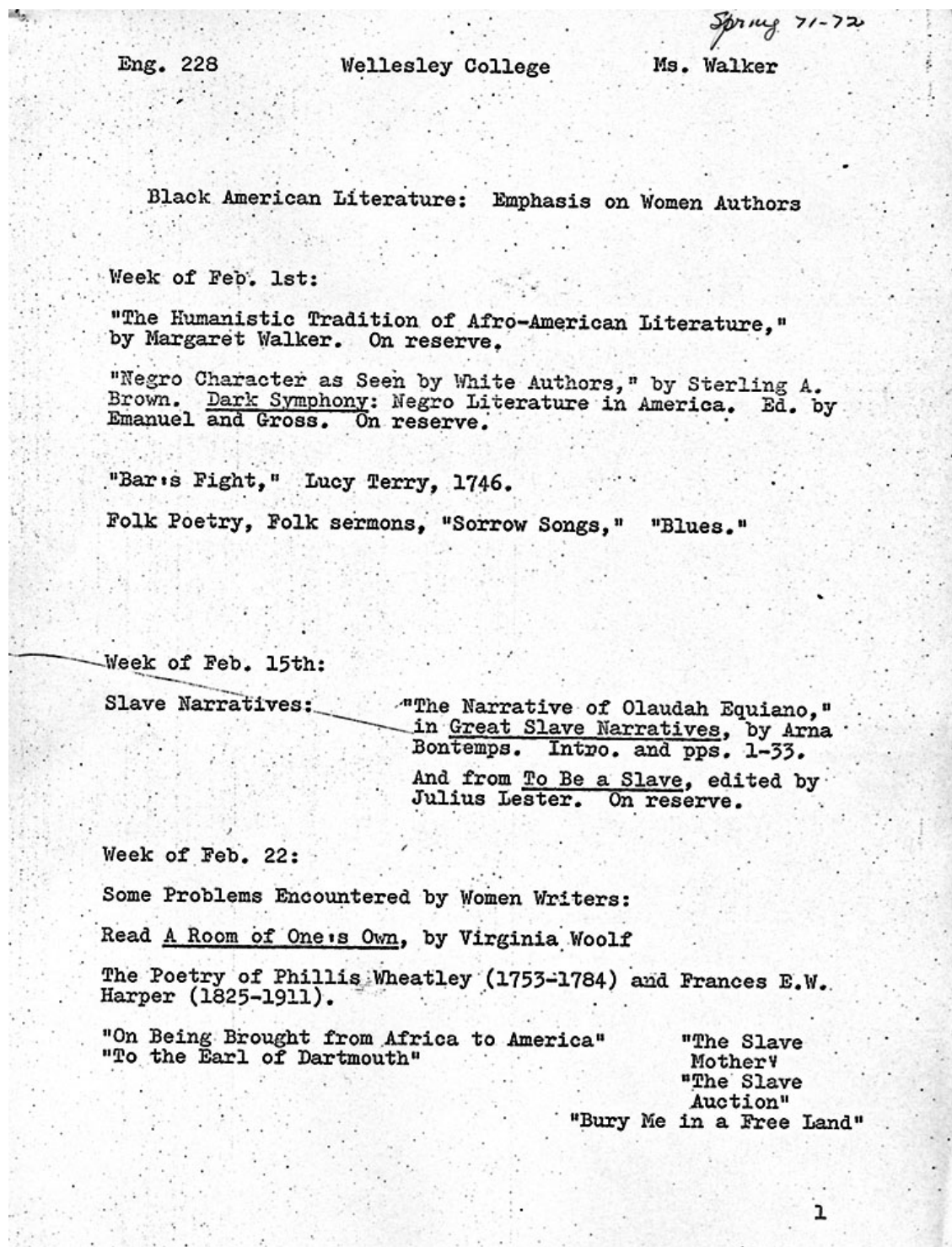


Illustration II

WALKER, ALICE. *English 228 course at Wellesley College.* 1971-1972.
Syllabus Page 1 of 4.

Slaight, Wilma R. "Re: Fwd: Alice Walker course at Wellesley College ." Private E-mail to the
author. 18 May 2004.

Week of February 29th:

Some Problems of the 19th Century Woman

Optional reading: Iola LeRoy, by Francis E.W. Harper, 1892.
Clotel, or the President's Daughter, by
 William Wells Brown. 1853.

Of Special interest, but also optional: The Awakening, by
 Kate Chopin. 1899.

Independent research into the writings of Black Women Authors
 in America, published or unpublished, prior to 1920. Results
 to be discussed in class.

Week of March 7th:

The Black Renaissance of the 20s:

The Big Sea, by Langston Hughes;
 pps. 223-255. On reserve.

Infants of the Spring, by Wallace
 Thurman, in Negro Caravan; on reserve.

Illustration III

WALKER, ALICE. *English 228 course at Wellesley College*. 1971-1972.
 Syllabus Page 2 of 4.

Slaight, Wilma R. "Re: Fwd: Alice Walker course at Wellesley College ." Private E-mail to the
 author. 18 May 2004.

Week of March 14th:Cane, by Jean Toomer

"The Negro Renaissance: Jean Toomer and the Harlem Writers of the 1920's" by Arna Bontemps, in Anger and Beyond, edited by Herbert Hill. On Reserve.

Chapters from Earth-Being, an unpublished autobiography, by Jean Toomer. In Black Scholar, Jan. 1971. On Reserve.

Week of March 21st:CaneWeek of March 28th:Quicksand, by Nella Larsen

Nella Larsen
Zora Neale Hurston
Jessie Fauset
Dorothea West
See index, The Negro Novel in America, by Robert Bone

Week of April 4th:The American Comedy, by Jessie Fauset, an excerpt in: The Negro Caravan.Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale HurstonDust Tracks on a Road, chapter on reserve. (Autobiography of Miss Hurston).Week of April 11th:Optional: The Living is Easy, by Dorothy WestUncle Tom's Children, by Richard Wright (One story required)The Street, by Ann Petry (Required)Week of April 18th:"Reena", by Paule MarshallBrown Girl, Brown Stones, by Paule Marshall

Illustration IV

WALKER, ALICE. *English 228 course at Wellesley College*. 1971-1972.
Syllabus Page 3 of 4.

Slaight, Wilma R. "Re: Fwd: Alice Walker course at Wellesley College ." Private E-mail to the author. 18 May 2004.

Week of April 25th:

"For My People," by Margaret Walker

Selected Poems, by Gwendolyn Brooks

Week of May 2:

"Diary of an African Nun," "To Hell With Dying," and "The Child Who Favored Daughter," by Alice Walker.

For the Reading Period: Recent Poetry, Fiction, and Autobiograph
choose one.

Coming of Age in Mississippi, Anne Moody

If They Come in the Morning, Angela Davis

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou

Homecoming, Sonia Sanchez

Black Judgments, Nikki Giovanni
(Or other poet of your choice)

Who Look at Me, June Jordan

Song of Lawino, Okot p'Bitek

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison

The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Alice Walker

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, Ernest J. Gaines

Alice Walker
English 228
Wellesley College
1972

Illustration V

WALKER, ALICE. *English 228 course at Wellesley College*. 1971-1972.
Syllabus Page 4 of 4.

Slaight, Wilma R. "Re: Fwd: Alice Walker course at Wellesley College ." Private E-mail to the author. 18 May 2004.



Illustration VI
SHARPLES, ROLINDA. *Self-Portrait with her Mother*. c. 1820.
City of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.
Oil paint on panel. 36,8 x 29,2 cm.

Borzello, Frances. *Wie Frauen sich sehen: Selbstbildnisse aus fünf Jahrhunderten*. München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 1998. 113.



Illustration VII

CYPHER. *Self-Portrait with My Mother in Florida*. 1988.

Privately Owned.

Pencil on Arches. 73,66 x 53,34 cm.

Cypher. "Self-Portrait with My Mother in Florida." *Oisín Gallery*. Copyright Cypher. 27 August 2008 <<http://www.oisingallery.com/Painting.asp?PaintingID=2000062916&ex=06>>.



Illustration VIII

QUIROZ, DOROTA. *Self-Portrait with Mother*. 1997.

Privately Owned.

Oil paint on canvas. 77,4 x 103,7 cm.

Quiroz, Dorota. "Self-Portrait with Mother." *EBSQ Self Representing Artists*. Copyright Dorota Quiroz. 27 August 2008 <<http://www.ebsqart.com/OnlineArtGallery.asp?CMD=DOSEARCH&ID=7312&FILTER=&AFILTER=&Gallery=&GALLERYTYPE=MEMBER&PAGE=8&ITEM=1&VIEWMODE=G&IID=196452&MID=7312&SCMD=ZOOM>>.



Illustration IX

RAPHAEL (Raffaello Sanzio). *Madonna del Granduca (The Grand Duke's Madonna)*. 1504-05.

Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina.

Oil paint on panel. 84,4 x 55,9 cm.

Gregori, Mina. *Uffizien und Palazzo Pitti: Die Gemäldesammlungen von Florenz*. München: Hirmer Verlag, 1994. 166.



Illustration X

RUBENS, SIR PETER PAUL. *Head of a Negro*. c. 1618-20.

The Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, New York.

Oil on panel. 45,7 x 36,8 cm.

Sutton, Peter C., and Marjorie E. Wieseman. Catalogue. *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2004. 111.



Illustration XI

GAUGUIN, PAUL. *Nafea faa-ipoipo: Quand te maries-tu?*. 1892.

Foundation Family Rudolf Staechelin.

Oil on canvas. 101,5 x 77,5 cm.

Kosinsky, Dorothy, Joachim Pissarro, and Maryanne Stevens, eds. *Von Manet bis Gauguin: Meisterwerke aus Schweizer Privatsammlungen*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1995. 78-79.

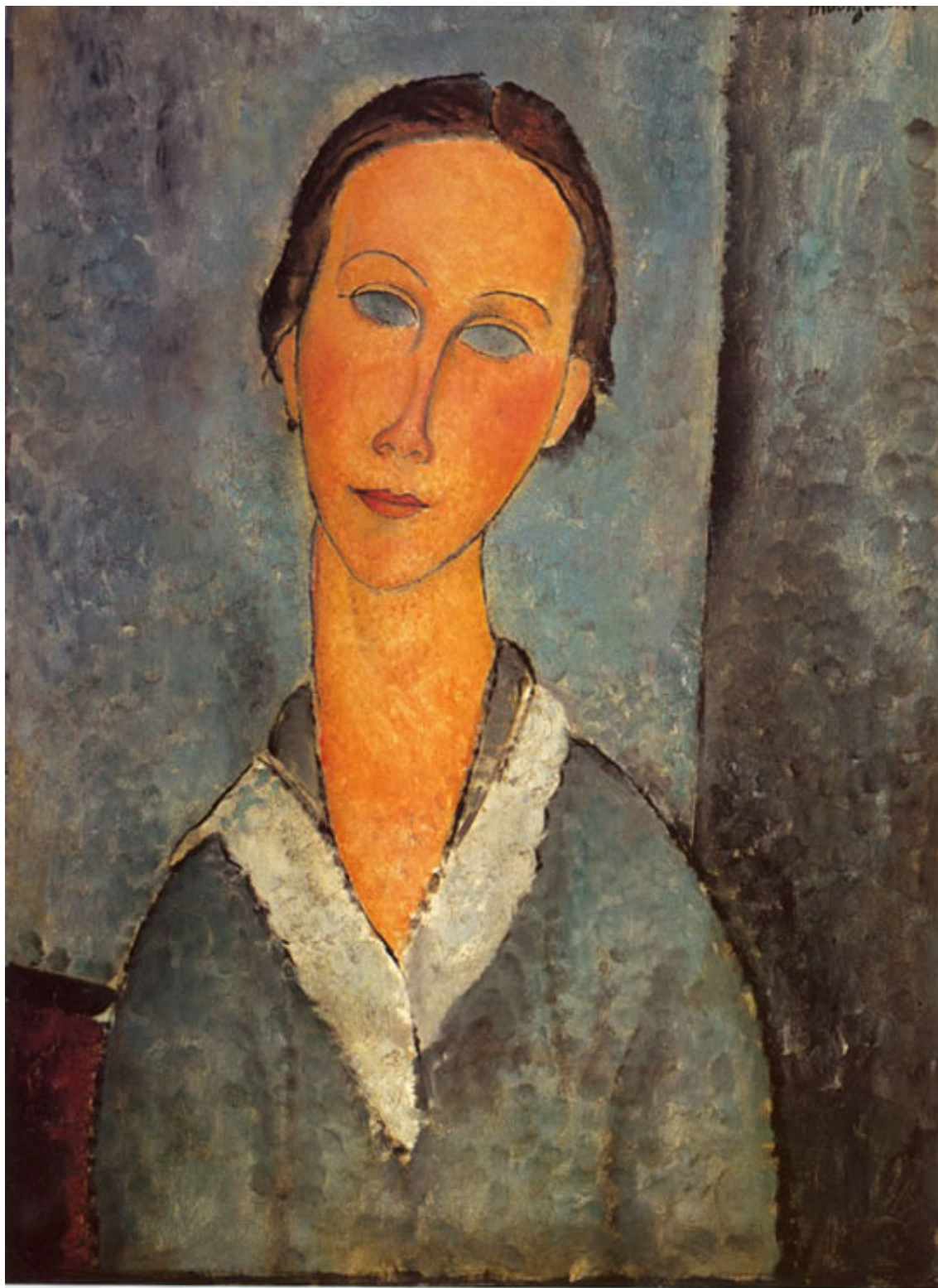


Illustration XII

MODIGLIANI, AMEDEO. *Girl in a Sailor's Blouse*. 1918.
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Oil on canvas. 60,3 x 46,4 cm.

Wayne, Kenneth. *Modigliani & The Artists of Montparnasse*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.
104.



Illustration XIII
PICASSO, PABLO. *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon*. 1907.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Oil on canvas. 244 x 233 cm.

The 20th-Century Art Book. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996. 366.



Illustration XIV
RED SNCC POSTER

No further information on this poster is available at this point.

"1997 WOODSTOCKINGS at the COSMIC BASEBALL ASSOCIATION." *Cosmic Baseball Association*. 20 January 1998. 10 October 2008 <<http://www.cosmicbaseball.com/97pwr.html>>.



Illustration XV

DAWSON, MARGARET. Quilt Pattern "Lone Star." c. 1890.

Privately Owned.

Brackman number: 4005.

Top: silk, hand piecing; Back: cotton, chintz; Batting: cotton; Quilting technique: hand quilting. Overall size 193 x 212,1 cm.

"Lone Star." *The Quilt Index*. Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives. 24 September 2008 <<http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?pbd=TennesseeTSLA-a0a2e9-a>>.

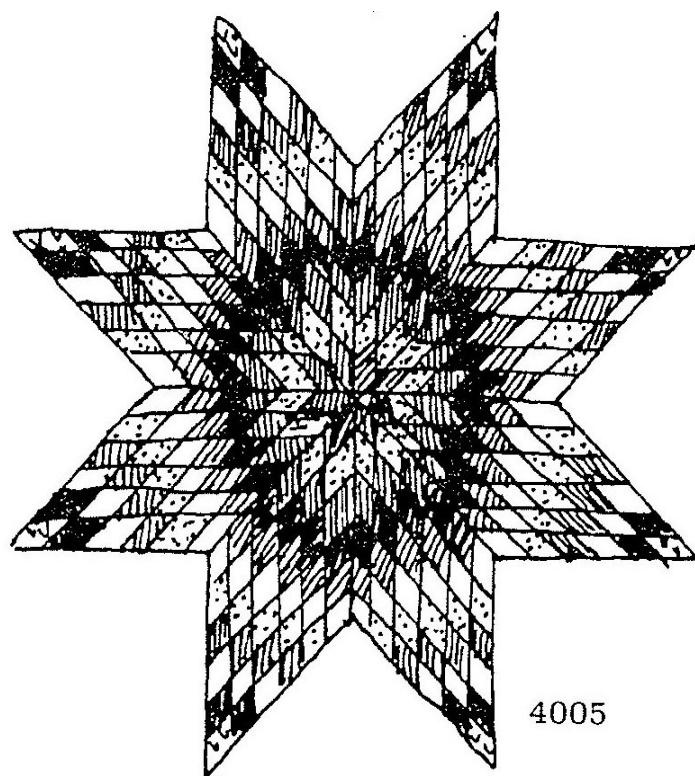


Illustration XVI
QUILT PATTERN "Lone Star."
Brackman number 4005.

Brackman, Barbara. *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1993. 491.

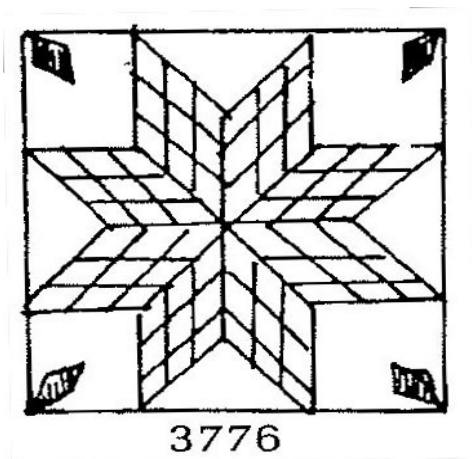


Illustration XVII
QUILT PATTERN "Lone Star."
Brackman number 3776.

Brackman, Barbara. *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1993. 457.



Illustration XVIII

BATT, ELLA MAE IDEN. Quilt Pattern "Trip Around the World." c. 1925.
Privately Owned.

Brackman number: 2293.

Top: cotton, machine piecing; Back: cotton; Batting: cotton; Quilting technique:
hand quilting. Overall size 193 x 215,9 cm; Block size 5,1 x 5,1 cm.

"Trip Around the World." *The Quilt Index*. Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives. 10
July 2004 <<http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?pbd=tennesseetest-a0a0q2-a>>.

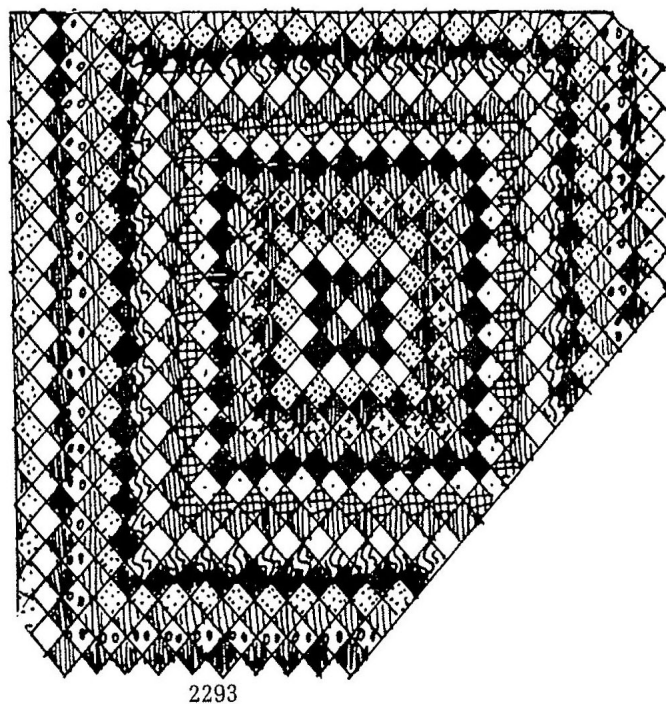


Illustration XIX
QUILT PATTERN "Trip Around the World."
Brackman number 2293.

Brackman, Barbara. *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1993. 289.

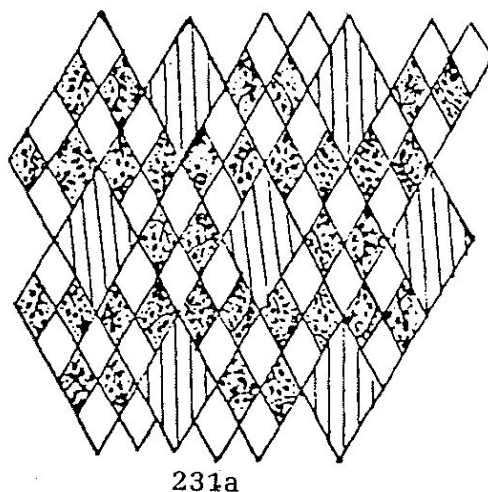


Illustration XX
QUILT PATTERN "Walk around."
Brackman number 231a.

Brackman, Barbara. *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1993. 47.



Illustration XXI

ALLEN, FRANCES AND MARY. *Betty at the Churn*. c. 1904.

Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield MA.

Photograph, platinum print.

Allen, Frances and Mary. "Betty at the Churn." *Memorial Hall Museum's American Centuries*.

Copyright Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield MA. 10 October 2008

<<http://memorialhall.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=3422>>.



Illustration XXII
LAND, EDWIN H. *Polaroid SX-70 Camera*. 1972.

Kao, Deborah Martin and Barbara Hitchcock. *Innovation/Imagination: 50 Years of Polaroid Photography*. New York: Harry N. Abrams. 1999. 119.

Erklärung:

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Abstract

The diploma thesis at hand explores how references to the visual arts and the artist function as a device to support the central themes of the three exemplary short stories under scrutiny, where art is employed in a figurative sense to explore human struggles in life and art. To unravel the connotations of the various art references, a semiotic approach is undertaken. This study, with a focus on American literature, includes the story "A Pimp's Revenge" by Bernard Malamud and two stories by Alice Walker: "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" and "Everyday Use." The visual art found in these stories ranges from painting and sculpture to quilting and photography, and also includes various references to classic and famous artists. As the analysis unfolds, differences and similarities concerning the use, importance and function of art can be detected. Although the stories' general narrative approaches differ, they share some central themes: the close interrelation of art and life, the ubiquitous gap between the artist and the theorist, and questions of identity related to history, heritage and community, as well as what it takes to truly appreciate art. The study illustrates that even when works of art—in this case the three short stories—seem to differ dramatically, a closer scrutiny might reveal unexpected connections.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit untersucht, wie in den drei hier betrachteten Kurzgeschichten, die Bezugnahme auf die bildende Kunst und den Künstler als ausdrucksstarkes Instrument dient, um die zentralen Leitmotive der Geschichten zu unterstützen. Da Kunst im figurativen Sinn verwendet wird, um verschiedene Aspekte menschlichen Strebens im Leben und der Kunst zu betrachten, wird ein semiotischer Ansatz unternommen, der diese Konnotationen am Besten beleuchten kann. Diese Untersuchung, welche ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf amerikanische Literatur richtet, beinhaltet "A Pimp's Revenge" von Bernard Malamud und zwei Kurzgeschichten von Alice Walker: "A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring" und "Everyday Use." Die Arten von bildender Kunst in diesen Geschichten reicht von Malerei und Skulptur bis zu Quilten und Fotografie und beinhaltet weiters Verweise auf verschiedene bekannte klassische Künstler. Im Zuge der Analyse tauchen Unterschiede und Ähnlichkeiten im Gebrauch, der Wichtigkeit und der Funktion von Kunst auf. Obwohl die erzählerischen Ansätze der Kurzgeschichten unterschiedlich sind, vereinen sie doch die zentralen Leitmotive. So finden sich in allen eine enge Wechselbeziehung von Kunst und Leben, eine allgegenwärtige Schlucht zwischen dem Künstler und dem Theoretiker, Fragen der Identität und wie Kunst tatsächlich gewürdigt und wertgeschätzt werden soll. Die Abhandlung zeigt, dass selbst wenn Kunstwerke—welche in diesem Fall die Kurzgeschichten selbst sind—auf den ersten Blick sehr unterschiedlich erscheinen, eine genauere Untersuchung oft unerwartete Zusammenhänge aufdecken kann.

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