

Harrison and Maggie in Harrison Bergeron: a truly opposite characters

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When shopping at a thrift store, sometimes one may find a specific piece right away, but most of the time one must dig through racks of clothing to find the right piece. When contrasting characters from different stories, the same logic applies; opposite qualities in characters can either be noticeable or harder to find. The short stories 'Harrison Bergeron' and 'Everyday Use' are very different from each other, especially the main characters Harrison and Maggie. The two characters are different for obvious reasons, but also in ways which one can only find by deep analysis. Harrison and Maggie show opposite qualities: Harrison is independent while Maggie is a rule follower, Harrison uses his disabled appearance to become stronger while Maggie lets it bring her down, and Harrison is logical while Maggie is slow.

The ability to follow authority differs in Harrison and Maggie; Harrison prefers to be independent while Maggie would rather follow the rules. In 'Harrison Bergeron', Harrison is an escaped convict who wants to get back the ruling government for taking away his freedom. He wants to start a revolution and in order to kick it off, he plans to interrupt a ballet and declare himself Emperor. After he strips of his handicaps, Harrison insists on being the new ruler by saying, " ' Do you hear me? I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!' "(site) The government in the story is overly strict with equality, so strict it deletes personal originality and freedom. Harrison is a free spirited teenager who does not agree with the ways of the government. Instead of being controlled, he would rather change the rules to please himself, even if the consequences are dire. On the other hand, Maggie does not have the strong urge to go her own way like Harrison. In 'Every Day Use', Maggie's sister, Dee, is visiting home for the first time after being away

for an extensive period of time. Maggie is intimidated by her sister's overpowering demeanor; therefore, she tries to hide when she first sees her sister. Mamma explains, "Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand... and she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe." (site). Instead of continuing to go inside the house Maggie listens to her mother and stops against her will. Her body language of "digging a well in the sand with her toe" shows how Maggie does not want to stay, but is not comfortable with disobeying her mother. Harrison and Maggie show difference when it comes to authority because Harrison would rather take the lead and Maggie decides to follow orders.

Harrison and Maggie are both disabled in their appearances, but Harrison uses his disadvantage to become stronger while Maggie lets it affect her confidence. In 'Harrison Bergeron', the government created handicaps to decrease the intelligence of those who are smarter or more logical. From a red clown nose to oversized glasses, three hundred pounds of humiliating and excessive metal overpowers Harrison in handicaps from the government. As Harrison tries to take over, he says, "' Even as I stand here... crippled, hobbled, sickened- I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become.' " (site). Harrison then proceeds to strip of his handicaps in front of an audience and live television. He uses this as an example to show how much power he has inside of himself, despite his horrid appearance. Harrison uses his weakness the government has bestowed on him as motivation to become stronger; he does not let his handicaps get in the way of his goal of becoming Emperor.

Maggie also has a disability in her appearance. She was a victim of a terrible fire which gave her gruesome burn scars that stain her body. In 'Every Day Use', when Dee is coming home, Maggie's lack of self-confidence appears more prominently during this period. Mamma acknowledges this lack of self-confidence and says, "Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs." (site). Maggie is always self-conscious of her deformed body, but she notices it even more when she sees her sister. Dee is beautiful and exotic, it is hard not to compare. Being more aware of her scars makes Maggie want to hide in corners instead of facing the world. She is not able to stand up tall and do something great while she believes she is ugly, unlike Harrison who used his handicaps as motivation.

Knowledge between Harrison and Maggie is contrasting because Harrison is intelligent, while Maggie is feeble-minded. In 'Harrison Bergeron', Harrison was able to use his smarts to escape prison. His parents, Hazel and George, are watching the television while an announcement regarding Harrison appears. Frantically, the ballerina describes Harrison for the public, " 'He is a genius and an athlete, is under-handicapped, and should be regarded as highly dangerous.' " (site). Harrison was able to use his intelligence to break away from the overbearing government. For a single man to be able to do that requires great skill, logic, and planning. No ordinary citizen would be able to perform a task of this magnitude, especially since all the intelligent citizens are forced to be simple-minded by the handicap inventions. The fact that Harrison was under-handicap and was able to escape prison was highly

unlikely. His knowledge exceeds the government's system, and that is why he was able to escape. Maggie, on the other hand, is not very intelligent compared to Harrison. In 'Every Day Use' the mother is describing Maggie and is very blunt in her description. Mamma plainly says, "She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by." (site). Maggie herself knows that she is not the smartest or quickest, and knowing that this information is true only brings down Maggie's self esteem. Maggie's lack of knowledge inhibits her to do great things, make something of herself, and create a successful life. Harrison was able to use his knowledge to his advantage by escaping prison, but Maggie's slowness causes her to live a life of simplicity with her mother.

Harrison and Maggie deal with authority, feel about their appearance, and possess knowledge differently. Harrison prefers to go against rules and be in charge while Maggie follows what others tell her to do. Both characters are deformed in their appearance, but Harrison uses his handicaps to show his strength and Maggie falls behind her burn scars. Lastly, Harrison is said to be a teenage genius and Maggie is only a simple minded girl. The differences between these two characters could be considered obvious, but on the other hand some do not jump off the page immediately; nevertheless, Harrison and Maggie are truly opposite characters.