

# Quilts by nikki giovanni: literary analysis

Literature



## **Quilts: The Threads of The Old but Not Forgotten**

When we are young we do not think about getting old, rather older. But as we grow older and we find we are not as quick or swift as we used to be, we wonder. When we find out friends are as old as us, we wonder. We those around us are in nursing homes and unable to attend to themselves, we wonder. We wonder what will become of us as we get older. We wonder who will take care of us. We don't wonder who, but rather WILL anyone take care of us when we are not able to do so ourselves? Will we get tossed aside "like a fading piece of cloth"? (135). Nikki Giovanni's *Quilts*, asks the same question a tablecloth has when it has grown old, as we as humans do, as we grow older: What will become of us when we are no longer useful? However, we should not look for others to find what to do with us, but rather us to remember what we were in our younger days, and bring that to our older days, which will make us more useful than ever before.

The older we get we find we can't move as quickly. Our thoughts aren't as quick and we feel as though we may be holding others back, if not holding ourselves back. And the feeling of uselessness is the worst feeling someone can have. Giovanni gives a great description of the feeling of uselessness when she says, "No longer do I cover tables filled with food and laughter" (135). In our older age, we still want to be the life of the party and bring the joy to others that we did in your younger days. Not only do we start to feel like we are of no use to others, but we also worry about our appearance in the eyes of others. In our younger days, we were able to keep up on our appearances, but as we get older and especially in our older age, we not are not able to do so as freely. Our hands may not be as strong, or our eye sight

may not be as great, thus, we feel as though we are a fright. We become that tablecloth that was used for many occasions but is no longer appealing to the eyes because and suddenly we are saying to ourselves, “ My seams are frayed and my hems falling...” (135). We always want to feel useful to others, if not to ourselves, and we find ways to be just that, but sometimes, we are just longer “ for those first days” (135) when we did cover the table, like the brand new table cloth. When we are new, we are useful, powerful can’t be left behind. And its those days that we daydream about.

As we get older we find ourselves thinking of days gone by and how we could do more. In our younger days we are the tablecloths that could “ keep the water from seeping through” (135). We can protect those around us and “ Dazzled the sunlight with my Reflections” (135). We remember the days when others couldn’t wait to place us on display and bragged about, like the tablecloth that is only used for special occasions. And just like that tablecloth when it is new, its beauty is described, its skin is felt and it is looked upon as a thing of beauty. But when as the table cloth gets old and begins to fall apart, we are put in the back of a closet and forgotten. When we realize we are not longer useful and a thing of beauty to be displayed, we try to find ways to make ourselves useful by remembering what we have done for those around us and how made others feel. And all though we are not able to perform the duties we used to or perform them in the same manner as before, we take join in knowing that the “ tasks I can no longer complete, are balanced by the love of the tasks gone past” (135). We may concede to the fact that we may no longer be useful in the fashion we once were, we can be, however, useful in a new way.

All of us at some point in our lives will become like the tablecloth that has “frayed and strained and drizzled at the end” (135). We will find ourselves shoved to the side or put in the back of a linen closet, never to be used again or thought of; but for some reason, never thrown away. There is something to be done with the old that can either inspire the young or comfort another aging person. Our old age should not be the reason to toss us aside. Just like tablecloth that is no longer attractive on the table, we are still useable in a different way. We are now part of story. A worn out tablecloth holds many story that can be told and weaved in with other stories. Each one of us has a story that can be plucked out of us and tied to another’s story. An old worn out tablecloth is crying for someone to “cut a square and put me in a quilt” (135) so its stories can be carried on and embedded in with other stories of other tablecloths. And through the stories, that may never be heard, but felt, it might “keep a child warm” (135). And for those who can hear the stories, it will comfort “some old person with no one else to talk to” (135).

We don’t think about growing old when we are young, but we do think about being young when we are old. We try to find memories to hold on to and stories to tell that will keep others around as well as help us make new friends. Where we were once useful, like a tablecloth that prettied our tables for those special occasions, but has now grown old and showing signs of wear, we no longer become that one tablecloth used for special occasions. We may not be part of a quilt to keep someone warm, but we will always be found to be useful in someone’s life. We are all tablecloths in someone’s life and when we are done being the tablecloth, we can only hope we will become the memories the tablecloth holds.