



1955

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The story “1955” appears in Walker's collection of stories *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*; it is a creative depiction of one incident of black musicians' exploitation by the white-dominated entertainment industry. Elvis Presley made Mama Thornton's “Hound Dog” a hit; similarly, in “1955,” Traynor sings Gracie Mae Still's song into stardom.

The story clearly addresses a political issue, but Walker's approach transcends the political theme by creating multidimensional characters, drawn together by what separates them. Traynor becomes a pitiable character, as victimized by the entertainment industry as Gracie Mae—more so, in that he lacks her sense of self-worth. The greatest irony involves Traynor's lack of understanding of the song; never being in emotional possession of the song brings Traynor repeatedly to Gracie Mae, who cannot explain what lies beyond his understanding.

Over the years, Traynor gives Gracie Mae a car, a farm, a house, and countless other presents in an attempt to return some of the wealth her talent helped him attain. Traynor's success debilitates him spiritually, while Gracie Mae maintains a wisdom and integrity that Traynor cannot attain. Walker's “womanist” message is clear in Gracie Mae's inner strength and compassion that is great enough to embrace the man she so easily could have hated.

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