

Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society Anthology

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17th Edition

From the Founding Editor

It is with a great sense of pride that we present the 17th edition of *Nota Bene*, the literary anthology of Phi Theta Kappa. We delight in the words of these outstanding Phi Theta Kappa members and are honored to showcase their efforts.

In 1994 we embarked on a bold new venture to publish literary works by Phi Theta Kappa members, promoting the ideal of excellence in writing. Our initial efforts were rewarded with a gratifying response, both from our members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and by the audience who enthusiastically read the printed book. After 17 years we continue to see increased results as the number of manuscripts received escalates.

One of Phi Theta Kappa's oldest traditions is to encourage, promote and reward excellence in writing. We believe the writings contained herein not only showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members, but also affirm the commitment to academic excellence displayed by the community college arena. In more than 1,700 libraries nationwide and abroad, *Nota Bene* carries its banner of literary excellence to an ever-increasing audience. We are also pleased to offer the Citation and Reynolds scholarships to five outstanding *Nota Bene* authors.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We are hoping you will take note and be inspired to join us in our scholarly obligation to nourish good writing and exceptional authors.

We thank you for your continued support over the past 17 years. Without our members, chapter advisors, college presidents, librarians and friends, *Nota Bene* would not be possible. As we move forward, we encourage your continued patronage.

Sincerely,



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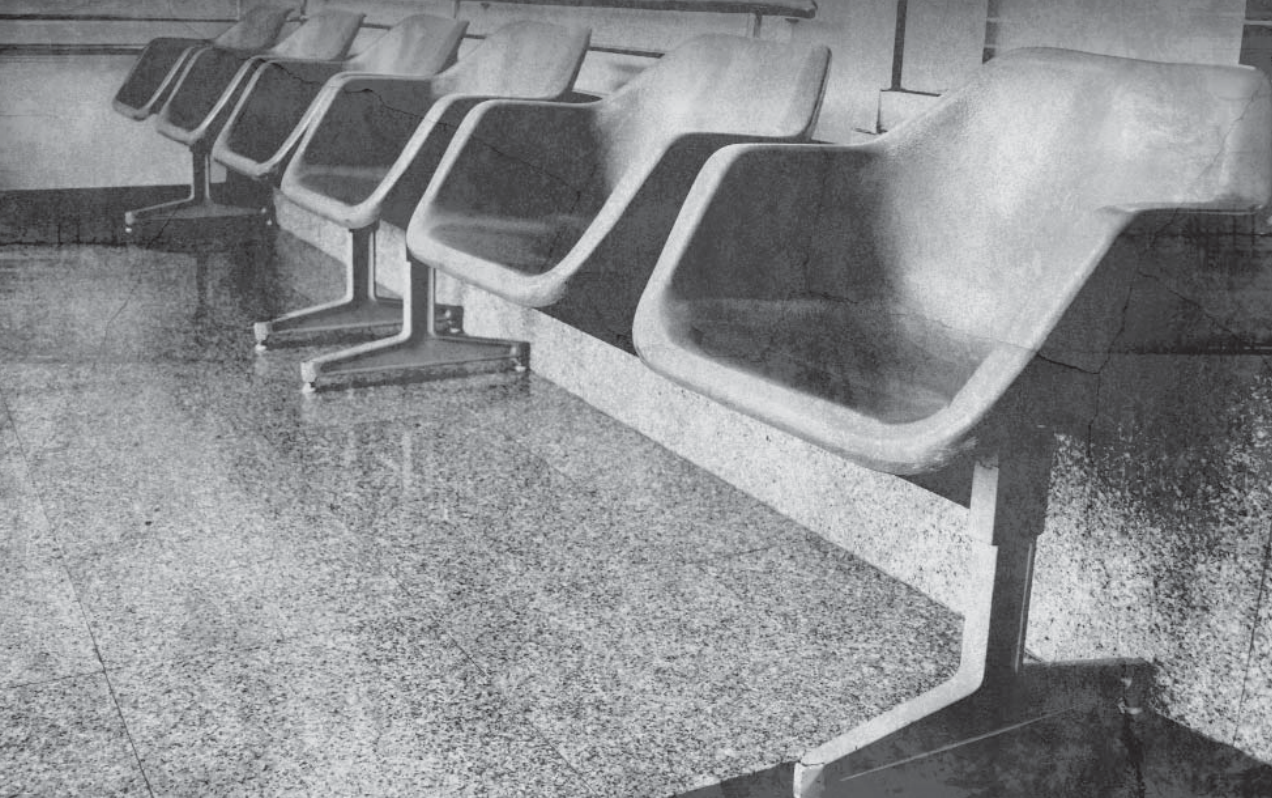
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Citation Scholarship

Michael Cobretti
Alpha Mu Psi Chapter
Front Range Community College
Westminster, Colorado

Full Night and Moths

“Got a smoke?”

Startled, I spread my fingers and opened my eyes. I neither raised my head nor shifted my hands from their alien mask over my face.

I could not, for the tears had failed to dry.

The raspy-voiced request had come directly to my left, hovering close as to where I could hear the phlegm rattling in the disembodied throat.

I ignored the intrusion and looked straight ahead. Across from me, a heavy-set Hispanic woman in a muumuu nightgown cradled the head and upper torso of an emaciated elderly man. The man was regarding me with a pair of rheumy eyes hidden so deep within the sockets that the shadow of his orbital bones obscured the eyeballs. His cheekbones and chin protruded from his face, looking as if the slightest breath of wind could turn razor and reveal the bone beneath. His mouth was little more than a shriveled rind, and he was trying to form words, succeeding in dribbling a thin trail of red-tinted spittle.

I quickly looked past the polar pair at a teenage girl with a bouffant hairdo, who was flipping through a magazine and chewing a cud of bubblegum. She paused now and again to pick at the corruption of acne speckling her pale complexion. Unbeknownst to the girl, her scratching had opened a furrow from one of the pimples and thin blood was trailing down her upper cheek. To my left, nearest the corner of the nurses' station, a newer model black and white television was alive with humanoid shapes being eaten by thick bands of static. From my narrow vantage point the static looked like crawling moths trapped and furiously pounding the thick glass with their wings. In unison to the rolling television, the overhead fluorescents danced and dimmed, throwing shadows to the far corners of the waiting room.

“Hey there? Hey mister? I say you looka like a Pall Mall man ta me. Get one from ya,

take it off your taxes.” The raspy voice to my left interrupted, strumming a few chords of laughter that manifested a livid trail of goose flesh from the crown of my neck to the rings of my ankles.

I didn't want to answer the voice so I severed the length between my fingers and, again, swallowed my eyes in the swirling darkness of thought.

And what the hell kind of people did we have here in Iowa? I thought, adding a little pressure to the elbows kneading deep into my thigh, effectively stopping the nervous tic of my feet. *Didn't they understand the conduct of leaving strangers alone in hospital waiting rooms? You are supposed to wait, stare into stoic space, drink coffee andbe quiet!*

Thinking of my Bobbie.

I wanted to stand and march up to the nurses' station and demand to be told what was going on, demand to speak to a doctor. I wanted to tell them that we thought the stomach pains were only cramps. Even when Bobbie began writhing on the seat, screaming in agony that her chest was on fire, I reasoned it had to be indigestion.

Should have taken her to the doctor way back in Denver, I thought.

NO. If I sit long enough.....long enough the telephone will ring. The receptionist will call my name and smile and.....and....

Sir? The doctor would like to speak with you now in room 306.

I shook my head, nodding to the new intrusive voice in my head that belonged to the attractive blond nurse who had taken our information some three hours ago. Three hours of silence. Bobbie could be.....and I wouldn't know it. What the hell were they doing? Sucking a martini?

Goddammmmittt!!!!!! Stop it STOPPP ITTTT!!!!!! Is.....

“That a yes?” It was the voice to my left again, hissing like a dislodged piston from an automobile. I could smell a pungent odor like tilled soil on his person. Across the room, the emaciated man cradled by the Hispanic woman began to moan loudly until he was quietly cooed to silence.

I took a deep breath and removed the sweat-lined hands from my face, thighs sighing in relief as the crook of my elbows lifted and settled to the hand rests of the cheap plastic chair.

Not supposed to smoke in a hospital waiting room.....

I gave up, righted myself, and twisted my head to the left.

A man dressed in a filthy patch-stitched black overcoat glared back at me. He was two seats away from my own. Next to him was an elderly man with rawhide-like skin who had fallen asleep against the grimy man's shoulder.

I wiped my face and frowned. The man began rubbing the stubble on his face, making a sound much like the moths in the television and the overhead fluorescents. His eyes were bright yellow, rimmed in red, like a juvenile depiction of a sun painted in watercolors.

The man studied me with those damned yellow eyes. A sly and cocky smile parted his peeling lips and he nodded, eyes momentarily leaving my face to train upon the lapel pocket of my overcoats, neatly folded on the chair next to me.

I followed his eyes and met the near-empty box of smokes poking from the lip of my coat.

I pasted a smile that felt as synthetic as the decorative plants spread haphazardly throughout the room. If I were anything but mild-mannered and dubious of creating a scene, I would have simply told the old coot to stuff his badgering. Instead, before I could even think of an alternative, I discovered my hands reaching blindly for the pack. By the time I plucked the smokes, Pall Malls indeed, from my coat, my mind bluntly cursed at me for opening the door to further conversation.

And smoking. Another one of those unspoken rules fixed in the common-sense wiring of most people's morality.

Hell, the moths in the television even know that. I thought, and almost burst into laughter.

What if they get out? This sobered me up and I frowned, looking over at the television and finally up at the buzzing overhead lights.

Nothing up there! What the hell are you talking about getting out?

The man reached one grimy hand and fumbled for the cigarettes. I shook the pack twice, releasing a pair of pale tubes from the shackles of their carton. Following the man's hand, I noticed his fingernails were the length of talons, corroded in filth and as yellowed as his

eyes. Watching from the corner of my eyes, I could see him staring at me.

Creeping drunk.....just ignore him, stay cool.....can't go to another seat.....that would attract attention.....

"Thanks." He grunted and stuck the stalk of the filter crookedly into his mouth. I could not resist. I turned to watch. The man's maw, canyons and fissures forming around his puckered lips, glided the butt to the hilt of the filter, reminding me of a novice teenage couple engaging in copulation.

And God his eyes.....like a moth...

Enough with the moths already! The alternative voice of my mind quipped.

I returned the pack to my pocket and stared at the television set; the picture was beginning to roll. It seemed as if the static had increased in volume, almost reminding me of a scream from a human throat that had grown hoarse. I thought about asking the night nurse to lower the volume or turn the damn thing off. I looked over to the counter.

The station was empty.

My feet began to tap upon the floor. I tried to will them to stop but I could not. From above, the lights seemed just a shade dimmer, for shadows were leaping from the corners across the walls and floor, making me think of all the souls that had passed within the narrow confines of this hospital.

The man to my left was still looking at me, his cigarette dangling from his mouth like the stick of a lollipop. I turned and angrily faced him, wanting to say something and even feeling the fury bubbling in my throat. It was the yellow red-rimmed eyes that burned the rage back into the pit of my stomach.

"Light?", he asked, leaning close to me. For the first time, I noticed the man had closed the distance between us and was now seated right next to me, close enough where I could see scabs and scars pecking his balding pate. The stench of his body also increased.

When did he move? Did you see him move? Did.....

Wordlessly, I reached back into my overcoat pocket, retrieved a pack of matches, and, before I could stop myself, flicked the booklet into the lap of the man. A lump of fear, disgust and slight shame rose into my throat as I leaned back into the chair. I wanted to close my eyes, but the heavy-leaded tension of the room forced them open like rude fingers.

The matches thudded off of the man's chest and came to rest in between his legs. From the corner of my eye, I could see that his stare had not wavered from my face, even as his fingers reached for the matches.

"Thanks," he grunted again, striking a flame and raising the match to his cigarette.

I wanted to loosen my tie, yet my fingers did the opposite, tightening the knot until the skin yelped in pain.

I just want to go home. Make it back to Phoenix and forget about tonight. Forget it ever happened. Bobbie and I. Ohhhh Bobbie.....this asshole next to me actually made me forget about you. God please tell me everything is all right, please tell me.....

I felt my lips tremble, vision threatening to swim again in tears. The pale girl with the acne scars met my eyes for a moment and smiled, the blood rivulet on her face had dried like a frozen trail of tears.

Don't weep for me! Bobbie will be okay, she must be okay.....has to be a dream that's all....has to be.....ohhhhh Bobbie!!!!

On impulse, I shifted and began to rise from the chair when the man next to me sighed and chuckled.

"I 'member seeing ya come in here. The girl your wifey? Pretty. Would give anythin' to spend m'day with somethin' like that there. Nights too."

I didn't move. I swore to myself that if the man said one more word I would.....would.....

I looked over at the scarred imitation oak coffee stand. The surface was littered with a cache of magazines, most of which were dog-eared and missing their covers, save for one. This particular magazine was facing me to where I could read the bold faced print of the magazine's feature article, "SEEN GOD LATELY???" It asked.

No, but I have seen moths, you betcha! They want out too, want to get out of that television and the lights and come into the room like a prophet of doom!

"DOCTOR SWANSEN TO PEDIATRIC PLEASE! DOCTOR SWENSEN TO PEDIATRIC STAT!"

The booming speaker was like a jolt of electricity and I leaped from the chair.

Bobbie!!!!!!!!!!

"That for.....a pediatric, mister." The grimy man's horrid and dirty voice implored, sounding as if he were chewing his own words. "One of them wee cuties done fall out of their cribs. Fallin's a spell of them cuties, m'guess."

I turned toward the man and he flashed a somehow knowing leer, eating away the bravado I had been sequestering for the better part of three hours. I could hear the emaciated old man from across the room begin to pant again, crescendo, and stop. The Hispanic woman began to mumble a foreign epithet.

"Ya see this guy r'here?" The grimy man interrupted, pointing a long finger at the rawhide man who was now sleeping with his head propped against the wall. "That call was his grandson. Boy fell from a tree. Twenny feet to the fuckin' ground." The man raised a trembling hand, the one holding his alight cigarette, and brought the hand crashing upon his own thigh, splattering ashes to the floor. Rawhide twisted his sleeping body toward me and I saw that his shirt was covered in dry blood.

Ohhhhh Jesus! What the hell!

He's like the moth of the waiting room! A Christ driven.....moth!!!! Hovering over chaos!

I hitched and looked away. Dirty.....blood.....

Ohhhhhhhh God. If you exist please end this. Just a little tale I can tell during nine holes over a brunch of champagne and caviar.

I turned away from the man, cutting away from his chuckle and wanting, needing, to leave the room and find Bobbie, not caring if the others stared and whispered that the man in the tie was going cuckoo.

The room began to lose its colors and newborn shadows blanketed my face, breathing the same acrid stench that had come from the nameless man calmly puffing on one of my cigarettes. I closed my eyes and tried to walk away, feeling lightheaded and dizzy. The emaciated man's halted breathing grew louder in my head, joining the flickering moths in the television and the lights; louder and louder like some ghastly chorus. I stopped and tried to focus on the ground, noticing the floor had taken on a radical shade of yellow.

"Full night, kid. She's a full night." The man added, yet it seemed as if his voice had become an echo traveling the length of some dark and dank tunnel.

I reached out a hand and steadied myself on a nearby chair, closing my eyes and taking a deep breath. The advice from my mind was drowned. I felt tired and weak, as if my brain were bathes in maple syrup. It suddenly became hard to breathe.

I was breaking. Cold hard *knowing* fractured civility and composure. I think I began to scream.

"Know it's bad when the doctor he comes to see you *one on one*. When the receptionist ain't gonna call you. It's *always* bad!" The man said from some other reality.

The double doors leading to the heart of the operating rooms were pushed open and I held my breath, watching as the world began to tilt like the surf. A tall skinny doctor in full scrubs paused for a moment before entering the waiting room. I could see his silhouette approach me just as the moths burst from both the television and the fluorescents, eating the remainder of the light.

The darkness prevailed.



Reynolds Scholarship

Angelina Colao
Rho Tau Chapter
Tallahassee Community College
Tallahassee, Florida

Little Brother

The black canvas refuses all colors but white.

I wake up knowing it's your last day on Earth. No recent complications have developed with your condition, but the dream I had - something about art, I can never remember my dreams anymore - tells me it's you. The "tortured artist": the crazy one. But I know that you're still in there somewhere behind the grey glazed-over eyes and the smell of stale piss that hangs in the air in your hospital room.

Do you remember when we used to run savagely through the yard, digging holes as deep as we could, and collecting caterpillars during their season? We'd fill entire terrariums and press our faces against the glass and look on proudly - smiling our nearly toothless smiles. You were my best friend in the summertime. I taught you to write our names, to count, to string together our bikes, roller skates and wagon to make some kind of parade float that we would ride down the street in and throw candy at the crowd: the squirrels and blades of grass that looked on with the wide smiles, cheering for more.

I was the one who taught you how to smoke a bowl. I held the carb and lit it for you, while you took in a deep breath. You immediately coughed it all out and looked as if you were going to cry for a few moments while you choked and I got you some water. I was patient, but laughed as you finally caught up your breathing and looked at me as if I had poisoned you. I remembered that feeling of confusion and skepticism, but I knew you still trusted me.

After you picked up pills, it was all over. Your art became dark, and working on your pieces became an obsession for you. The pills made me nervous, but for you they were an escape. From what, I don't think I'll ever know. The doctor said it was the drugs that made you act like that - but the effects lingered. The violence. Anger. Irrationality. All were followed by a calmness that always tricked me into briefly believing that you were going to be okay.

After I sit here for a while I give you a kiss on the head goodbye - sadly knowing that it will probably be the last. I leave the room. You call me back suddenly and ask me to help you to the closet. Inside is an easel holding a canvas painted almost completely white. You lift up your finger to point at something, and I suddenly know that we must have had the same dream. You know what's coming.

With your last breath, you touch the remaining spot of black with your white fingertip.



Reynolds Scholarship

C. Michael Downes
Omega Omicron Chapter
Cleveland State Community College
Cleveland, Tennessee

Widower

I.
Never more beautiful
these oak and maple
gilded leaflet letters
written in silver autumnal rains
prayers and words unspoken
relinquished to the land

II.
He held her hand from five years away
her death of this world
yet never from his life
his wife
his laugh
his pride
his tears now teaming with anticipation
for the moment outside of night

where morning refrains
for a few fleeting moments
and he sees her soul in the turning curve of color tones,
the sheen across the heavens' sphere

III.

A new dawn
a swath of pale, soft light
cut through the gaunt sky
a promise of sight
throughout the rest of his life
in a way he once
could have never imagined

The range is wrapped in feather-bedding
coniferous fog over cobalt waters
the City bleeds in buses
trains and traffic lights,
brothers and sisters in boots and umbrellas
step into puddles as seconds into minutes

A match is struck, run atop the road,
the warm, tiny flame lights the hearth of a heart
-and nothing would be the same



Reynolds Scholarship

Megan Ringel
Omicron Beta Chapter
Mesa Community College
Mesa, Arizona

Prey

It was in our old
Whaley street house
when I first felt
the burden of my religion,
handed down to me
by my parents. Their hushed voices
hypnotized me with stories
of demons, creatures
that preyed on God's followers,
testing us.

That first night
their words followed me
to the bedroom.
Indian style rigid
on the bed,
everyone asleep,
brother, mother, father,
as I kept watch for evil spirits,
hallway shadows in their reconnaissance
hunting me, I knew
with all the certitude of seven years.
For all the times
I disobeyed,
forgot to pray and
read my bible,
ignored sermons and admonitions,

for such sins they came
to seduce me,
devil's guardians, crouching
behind my open door.

The midnight breeze
whispered evil,
every creak in the floorboards
an absolution
as night after night
for a month of nights
I sat fixated,
down-sliding into paranoia,
awaiting my biblical
nightmares to emerge
from the darkness.
Crying and convulsing,
my body rocking back and forth
chanting Jehovah,
Jehovah, Jehovah,
no answer...
still I chanted like the very word
was pepper spray.

How that fear framed
my young life,
seamlessly integrating
with my consciousness.

How I have resented
my mother and father
for teaching me to believe
in things unseen,
for their blurry division
between
faith and terror
that obliquely dictated
everything I said
and did and was
because I thought God
wanted it so.

But now I work
to hand it back to them,
all of it. The fear
does not vanish
in one night, it cannot
be torn away from the skin
like an unwanted scab,
it must be in strips,
peeled away carefully
from the walls of my mind
until that place is bare,
windows revealed, opened,
the darkness safe and intimate,
and I see myself again,
alive, invulnerable,
fearless.



Reynolds Scholarship

Floyd Allen Strader
Beta Zeta Theta Chapter
Johnston Community College
Smithfield Campus
Smithfield, North Carolina

Charlie's Watch

I was sitting at the kitchen table in our house in northern Ohio on a cool clear autumn day. Across from me sat my grandma with my mom to her left. This was grandma's first visit in ten years. She had left my granddad and moved to Missouri with an insurance salesman when I was just a baby, much to the surprise of granddad and the rest of the family. I had only one prior memory of her, from her last trip out, when I was eight and, she and "Uncle Don" had stopped by my Aunt Mary's house. Because of the closeness between my mother and her father, questions about Grandma Madge or that side of the family were taboo. As a result, I knew very little about her or her siblings. But time heals all wounds and softens hearts, and she had driven here to meet and greet the family. As she and Mom sat together catching up on the last decade, faceless names drifted out of their conversation like shapes in clouds. Names like Charles, Catherine, Arnold and Harry were tossed around like they were close acquaintances. I smiled and nodded at all the right times, but it was like listening to people discuss a movie you haven't seen.

As Mom got up to refresh our coffee, Madge reached into her purse and pulled out a little silver pouch. She unhooked its clamshell clasp and dumped the contents softly onto the table. It was an old worn-out wristwatch. She slid it towards me. It wasn't very big, about an inch and a quarter in diameter. There was no band attached to the golden body. Hell, not even all of the gold was attached anymore. One could only assume that the adjustment knob had once been gilded.

It was covered in a grey-green patina so thick that it appeared to be a plastic coating. Large areas of the band support arms were bare expanses of a nondescript grey base metal. This same metal was exposed atop the ridges that circled the translucent crystal. The crystal had lost its transparency due to several small scratches and a myriad of tiny fractures that reminded me of the way safety glass looks after the errant baseball but before the shower of rubble. It was as if the crystal had split along every cleavage plane in its mineral structure.

Through the cloudiness, the face appeared to be copper-toned with even-numbered Roman numerals around the perimeter. Blue and white hour hands stood frozen at ten minutes 'til two while a thin red second hand rigidly pointed towards the place where a VII should be. Above and below the center pivot were pairs of words that read "Dolmy Automatic Antimagnetic Incabloc". I figured Dolmy was the manufacturer of this automatically winding antimagnetic watch; however, the meaning of Incabloc escapes me to this day.

I lifted the weighty watch and shook it beside my ear. The internal counterweight that once wound the main spring rattled loosely behind the stainless steel bezel that encompassed the entire back of the watch. The bezel was polished and shone like new chrome. Stamped letters touted the watch's water and shock resistance and repeated the declaration of its antimagnetic qualities. Every etched letter and notch was filled smooth with a black non-reflective substance that I hoped would remain unidentifiable.

I sat the watch back on the table and Grandma began to speak. She said that Charles was her dad. He was born in 1903 and had gone to work in the coal mines outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1920. He married Catherine the following year. They had four sons before Madge was born in 1932. Charles always said he got the watch just before the market "turned south." It was the only watch he ever owned and he wore it constantly. He worked nights in the coal mine because he didn't want to waste the sun by being underground. He worked until the Black Lung took him in the fall of 1960. The firstborn son had died in infancy and the second had been lost in France in '44. So Arnie took the watch. Arnie was a long-haul trucker and wore the watch until it stopped working in 1977 or '78. He had passed it on to Grandma shortly before he passed in 1984. Since then it had sat in her jewelry box. She said, "I know it's not much, and it doesn't run, but I can't throw it out. I was hoping you'd hold onto it."

I was speechless. Armed with the light of this new knowledge, I re-examined the watch. The suntanned face was crossed by blue, white and red lines beneath the cataract eye. The lens that had witnessed the greatest challenges and triumphs of the Greatest Generation had lost its clarity. The hands that marked the passing of some of the most significant moments of the twentieth century had fallen still on a forgotten day almost twelve years before. Thousands of temporal adjustments by callused sweaty fingers had dissolved the gilded veneer from the tiny knurled knob. Decades spent swinging on working forearms had polished the bezel to an almost mirror-like finish while countless shirtsleeves had worked together to erode the precious metal off of the most exposed areas of its body. Sure, the watch was worn out. But it was worn out from about fifty years of constant service. That is a true testament of its usefulness and reliability.

Charlie's watch spent five months in a jeweler's shop, mostly waiting on specialty parts from Europe. It seems that Nazi aggression consumed the original Dolmy Watch Works, making replacement parts a rare commodity. A new crystal was acquired from a watchsmith in Germany. A new ruby pin was located in France. A modern tension spring was altered to fit by my jeweler. He also installed an old-style brown leather wristband to complete the rebuilding.

I wear this watch every day now. The automatic winding feature builds up enough energy during the day to stay running through the night, but every morning I have to adjust the hands ahead precisely five minutes. It's as if the watch was built in a slower time and refuses to keep pace with today's hectic society. It reminds me of the part of my family I never met but feel I know. It reminds me that in spite of our intentions, we tend to wear out that which we love. Our favorite jeans or shirt can only be such for so long. Our best friendships only last a short time when we look back on them years later. Are we all not at least partly responsible for the lines in our mothers' faces? I am happy knowing that one day my son will wear this watch. I hope that I can instill its history in him and that he wears it with the same sense of pride and connection that I do.



Ashley Gazda
Alpha Xi Omega Chapter
Holyoke Community College
Holyoke, Massachusetts

Reversing Gender Roles in Mason's "Shiloh"

Through characterization, symbolism and point of view, Mason reveals that a reversal in one's gender role helps one to find a true personal identity.

In Bobbie Ann Mason's simple yet complex fiction story "Shiloh," two of the main characters trade gender roles and learn more about themselves through their new transformations. Norma Jean, a beauty consultant at the local drugstore, has to deal with the new adjustment of having her husband Leroy around the house more often due to an injury he suffered while on the road in his tractor trailer. Norma Jean changes her outer and inner appearance, along with her way of life, into more masculine characteristics. Leroy, on the other hand, feels useless since his accident so he sits around the house constructing projects that are considered to be feminine. By trading roles, each character is able to find out for themselves what they want to do with their lives and who they are as individuals. Through characterization, symbolism and point of view, Mason reveals that a reversal in one's gender role helps one to find true personal identity.

The characterization in "Shiloh" helps to illustrate how each of the characters finds their personal identity through the switching of gender behavior. "As the story opens, Norma Jean is 'working on her pectorals.' She lifts three-pound dumbbells to warm up, then progresses to a twenty-pound barbell" (Thompson, 55). She "is building her body and developing her stamina." Her body building is one of her attempts to become a new woman and start a new life for herself; however, this is a hobby that is more commonly practiced by males.

Norma Jean also is the only one contributing an income for the household since Leroy is injured and out of work. Although not many would consider working at the drugstore in the cosmetics department to be a "manly" job, since she is the only provider she is seen as having a man's characteristic ("bringing home the bacon" is more common for a man to do than a woman). This gives her a sense of independence that she never had before because she "can support herself" (Morphew).

Since Leroy is out of work, the money he uses to buy his crafts comes out of his wife's paycheck. He is collecting "temporary disability" (DiYanni, 67), however, more money would obviously be coming from his working wife's paycheck than from a check from the government. Leroy takes on a woman's stereotype - staying at home while the man works and then buying items with his money.

The symbolism throughout "Shiloh" reveals the switch in gender roles. While out of work, Leroy introduced himself to crafts - making miniature log cabins and string art, and constructing lamps (DiYanni, 68). He even announced that he made a needlepoint cover pillow, to which his mother-in-law Mabel exclaims "that's what a woman should do." Before his accident, Leroy would have been too busy to put together crafts, but since all he does is stay at home now, he has been able to experience new pastimes, even ones he never considered before.

Norma Jean's muscles are symbols of her new masculinity. "Her efforts to build a new body by lifting weights reveal also her efforts to build a new self" (Wilhelm, 278). When Leroy asks if he is still the king in their family, she then "flexes her biceps and feels them for hardness" (DiYanni, 74). This response illustrates that she wants to be seen as the head of the household and family, and that she is coming to view herself as more masculine than her husband, since showing off one's muscles is a more masculine characteristic. Norma Jean's response with her muscles flexed is her attempt to prove to Leroy that she is the man of the house - the king.

In "Shiloh," DiYanni states that Norma Jean "standing with her legs apart reminds Leroy of Wonder Woman" (67). Wonder Woman is a masculine-type of woman who can do anything that male superheroes can do. Norma Jean plays the song "Sunshine Superman" on her electric organ (72), which "emphasizes this gender role switch..." (Blythe and Sweet). "The song suggests she has transformed herself from superheroine to superhero," meaning, she has transformed from superwoman to superman.

At the end of the story, Norma Jean "turns toward Leroy and waves her arms. Is she beckoning to him? She seems to be doing an exercise for her chest muscles" (Di Yanni, 76).

Before this incident, Norma Jean told her husband that she wanted them to separate. Until this point in the story she did not use "direct confrontation with Leroy; instead she sought to create emotional distance..." (Morphew). She knew all along that she was unhappy, but instead of telling her husband how she felt, she took up numerous activities to hide her emotions. By doing so, she became an independent person and was interested in things she previously would never have considered. She was beginning to discover her personal identity and her personal needs.

When Mabel, Norma Jean's mother, sees the needlepoint pillow cover that Leroy has made, she states that "that's what a woman would do" (DiYanni, 70). She also sees her daughter becoming independent through working at the drugstore and taking up male-centered hobbies without her husband. Mabel realizes that her daughter is changing and wants something different with her life. Although she loves Norma Jean, Mabel is close to Leroy and wants their marriage to last. "A little change is what she needs," she tells Leroy about his wife (74). She believes that she can bring her daughter out of her new identity; however, we later see that Norma Jean's new identity endures.

The two main characters take on non-traditional gender roles in order to help understand themselves better. While the husband creates needlepoint pillow covers and stays at home, the wife earns the income and starts to body build. Reaching out to things they've never discovered before helps them to realize the lives they want to live. "As male traits mark Norma Jean's move toward independence, female qualities underscore Leroy's effort to regain power" (Giannone). Characterization, symbolism, and point of view helped Norma Jean and Leroy expose themselves for who they truly are through the reversal of traditional roles for their gender.

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Magic Moment

It had been twenty-three years since I'd seen him last. His smile was still crooked, still tucked in on one side, and still managed to be both cynical and charming. I had missed that smile, and those steamy, bedroom eyes. It was one of those amazing moments when the whole world stops, stands perfectly still, and just lets you feel.

Something cold and wet brushed my cheeks, helped me sink into the memory. It was snowing now, just as it had been that one glorious Christmas we spent in Tennessee. Even though the weather predicted sunny skies and sixty-degree temperatures, we had been caught in a snowstorm with no coats or mitts. We rushed from shop to shop, freezing, looking for jackets. By the time we found them, we were laughing, our eyelashes white with snow and my long hair was tangled and damp. And while the snow drifted around us, so clear and cold you couldn't smell anything, he pulled me to a stop in the middle of the street and kissed me. Laughing and gasping, he'd kissed me and declared to all who would listen, "This is the girl I'm going to marry!" How happy we'd been then.

I smiled. What a nice, warm memory for such a bitter, cold night. The street and the snow, so cold and clear, lay between us. What a wonderful time that was. I could've crossed the lane, struck up a conversation with him. I turned towards home instead. I was simply too old for that kind of thing. But, just for a moment I had remembered how good it was to be young and in love.



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Gender Differences in Color Perception (Or, “Honey, have you seen my white pants?”)

There has been a recurring theme in disagreements and misunderstandings at my house over the last 33 years; we just can’t seem to agree on what color things are! As a decorative artist, I've made color my business for the last 20 years - and I know a lot about the subject. My husband knows that, yet again and again we seem to have the same disagreements about color. I have spoken to many women who tell the same kind of stories, so I decided to do a bit of research to see if there actually is a quantifiable gender difference in the perception of color. I came to the conclusion that there is a great deal of difference, on many levels, in the ways that men and women see and communicate about color; differences that often lead to disagreements over the colors themselves.

My husband insists that he owns three pairs of white pants. From time to time he has been known to ask me if I've seen them. Knowing that there is no way that I would ever buy him white pants, my answer is always the same: “You don’t *have* any white pants.” At this point he will insist that he does, and there will be a flurry of activity in the closet as he sets out to find them. Eventually the pants turn up, and as he proudly holds them up he gives me a look that says “See, white pants!” Well, the manufacturer and I beg to differ; the tags label them *Stone*, *Light Khaki* and *Tan* - not white. But no matter how many times I tell him otherwise, to him they are still white.

I was curious as to whether anyone else had similar experiences, and sent out emails to a few friends asking for stories of their experiences with color confusion. Jacqui H. informed me that her husband calls all shades of tan, beige, and taupe, “brown”. Valri J. recalled that on their

wedding day, her husband Bob wore one blue sock and one black one, because he “knows” that no one can tell the difference - something that comes up every time they look at their wedding pictures. The socks (and their color difference) are captured there for posterity.

All this brought to mind the classic 1940s film, *Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House*. In one scene, Mrs. Blandings is seen discussing paint colors for her nearly completed home with the contractor:

I want it to be a soft green not as blue-green as a robin’s egg, but not as yellow-green as daffodil bulbs. Now, the only sample I could get is a little too yellow, but don’t let whoever does it go to the other extreme and get it too blue. It should just be a sort of grayish-yellow-green. Now, the dining room, I’d like yellow. Not just yellow; a very gay yellow, something bright and sunshiney. I tell you, Mr. PeDelford, if you’ll send one of your men to the grocer for a pound of their best butter and match that exactly, you can’t go wrong!

Now, this is the paper we’re going to use in the hall. It’s flowered, but I don’t want the ceiling to match any of the colors of the flowers. There are some little dots in the background, and it’s these dots I want you to match. Not the little greenish dot near the hollyhock leaf, but the little bluish dot between the rosebud and the delphinium blossom. Is that clear? Now, the kitchen is to be white. Not a cold, antiseptic hospital white; a little warmer, but still not to suggest any other color but white. Now for the powder room - in here - I want you to match this thread, and don’t lose it. It’s the only spool I have, and I an awful time finding it! As you can see, it’s practically an apple red; somewhere between a healthy Winesap and an unripened Jonathan.

“You got that Charlie?”, says the contractor, turning to the painter.

“Red, green, blue, yellow, white,” is the painter’s reply.

“Check”.

Mrs. Blandings was very specific about her color choices; right down to what hue of white she wanted, but what does the (male) painter hear?: “Red, green, blue, yellow and white.” I can imagine there was a great gnashing of teeth over that one!

So, I began my search for answers to why this miscommunication happens, and found a great deal of information that led me to believe that there are logical reasons why men and women so often cannot agree on color.

Scientists have long known that the human eye interprets color through its cone cell, but it has only recently been discovered that there are people (nearly all female) who have a fourth type of these photoreceptor cells rather than the usual three. A study by K. A. Jameson found that it may be as many as 50 percent of women and 8 percent of men who carry this extra cone cell. What this means is that people with this extra cone cell could be capable of seeing 100 million colors, as compared to the 1 million that the rest of us see (1).

One such person, a medical doctor, was confirmed through genetic testing done by Dr. Gabriela Jordan of Newcastle University in Great Britain. Dr. Jordan was quoted by Mark Roth in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* as saying of this woman that “this super color vision might give her the ability to tell whether a person is ill just by noticing subtle changes in skin tone that a normal doctor wouldn’t see” (2). As someone who was able to tell when my young son had strep just by looking at the whites of his eyes, I can certainly believe it!

There may also be sociological reasons for these color disagreements. In their paper *Sex Differences in Color Vision*, Bimler, Kirkland and Jameson theorized that although there appears to be a difference in the way some men and women actually see color; women also seem to have developed a larger color vocabulary, beginning in early childhood (1). Researchers Anyan and Quillian report that little girls tend to learn primary colors earlier than boys (2), although that may just be because girls, for the most part, begin talking earlier than boys. I do know that my three year-old granddaughter knows the intricacies of pinks and purples far better than her five year-old brother!

To test my assertion that men and women see color differently, I did my own small and thoroughly unscientific study. I put together 20 cards with four different color dots on them, and handed them out to classmates - 10 men and 10 women - asking them to name the colors on the card. The results (which follow) were intriguing. I must admit I expected more of the "red, blue, yellow and brown" sort of answers from the men, but instead was surprised by a much wider variety of color names.

Under the *BURGUNDY* spot (the color names given came from the paint labels), the women gave me a greater variety of color names, while the men gave more under *BLUE BAYOU*. The *CAMEL* spot drew three names from men, but four from the women. The *MELTED BUTTER* spot got an equal number of names from men and women, but men gave the most unusual (sometimes just *wrong!*) - like Peach and Teal. It's no wonder people often disagree on colors, when some of them are naming a pale yellow "Teal." It could certainly make choosing the right item off of a store shelf difficult, if one was looking to identify it by color!

On her website *Color Matters*, Natalia Khouw referenced color studies done in 1938 by M.W. St. George, which ascertained that men preferred blues, while women preferred red colors (1). Could this be why the men in my study gave more color names for the blues, and women gave more for the reds?

Not only do men and women seem to see color differently, and communicate those differences to each other, but there are tangible physiological and sociological reasons for their doing so. Our preferences are different, and our way of "seeing" is different; in some ways it is as though we are each speaking a different language. Knowing this, we really shouldn't be surprised when we cannot agree. Maybe we should begin to look at discussions on color with the opposite sex as though we were speaking to someone from another culture - because, in some ways, we are.

(Maybe my husband really does have three pairs of white pants!)

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Jonas Run

Jonas Run is a small creek that twists, turns and flows through the small community in which I live. Sometimes the water rushes rapidly and sometimes the flow is slow and gentle. I never knew of its existence until recently; now I pass over it almost every day. It's odd how something that has been here for so long can escape your notice unless you are paying close attention. Sometimes, we are forced to take notice.

Now, on a daily basis, I notice the progress of the water, the speed of the rushing current, the depth or lack thereof. It's a sad little creek with an old dilapidated bridge that I cross on my way to and from work. I have no knowledge of where it begins or where it ends. I only know that small portion of the run I cross. There are times I cry when passing over the bridge. It feels, sometimes, that this small creek reflects the turmoil in my life. It seems to mirror the path that life can take. Like a branch, dislodged from its resting place along the side of the stream swirling and twirling in the surging torrent of water, you have no choice but to follow the course.

First and foremost, I'm a mother. It's hard work to be a mother. Anyone who has ever been a mother knows this after experiencing the late-night feedings, mountains of laundry, emergency room visits to the hospital and running on little or no sleep to care for your little ones. However, the rewards can be substantial. I have witnessed the bounce in my children's steps when receiving all As on their report cards. My heart overflowed to see the look of joy when they hit those first home runs. There is no greater feeling in the world than to be the recipient of many uninhibited hugs and kisses. The fears and hopes and dreams you hold for yourself and your children are always in your thoughts. You believe that you know your children so well and then the unexpected happens.

My son was in a car accident. It happened on a Friday evening. He told me that he was going to dinner with friends and would be home late. I was in my bathrobe relaxing after a long week at

the office, watching a late night movie, *My Best Friend's Wedding*, when the call came at 11:45 pm. It was my son. He had wrecked his car, but he was okay.

It felt as if someone had punched me in the stomach. It was hard to catch my breath. My son sounded distant, alien and as if he was in shock. He said he swerved to miss hitting a deer. I called to my husband, who had already gone to bed, to pick up the phone. He asked him all the same questions I had: Are you hurt? Is anyone else hurt? Do we need to call an ambulance? My husband told him he was on his way.

My husband did not want me to go with him to pick up our son. It was as if he knew there was more to the story than we had just been told. I stayed home waiting to hear word of what had happened. It was a very long tension-filled night. Sleep eluded me.

My son was arrested that night for driving under the influence. I didn't want to believe it. My son had always told me that was not his *thing*. He told me he was smarter than that, but here it was staring me in the face. My 19 year-old son had crashed, totaling the car that he bought with money he borrowed from his parents just two months before. In a heartbeat, his future was dashed.

I was thankful that he survived the crash. I was grateful that no one else was injured or involved. He hit a tree on a perilous curve and his car, after the crash, was actually facing eastbound when it should have been westbound, balanced on an incline of an embankment. He was still able to walk away. He was still able to call home. He was still alive. I thanked the powers that be that my son was still with me. But our lives were changed forever.

At the time of the accident my son was working on completing his associate degree before transferring to a four-year school. He was attending community college to save money. He worked to pay for his gas, his schoolbooks and his insurance. Now he had no driver's license. His classes were scheduled during the day, which conflicted with my work schedule. My husband was commuting to work three counties away so it was left to me to make sure that my son stayed on task, that he followed the plan. I would have to wake up earlier in the morning to get him to his classes and work on time and still arrive at work on time myself. I had to work late to make up for the time I missed during the day chauffeuring him between two campus locations and his job and then pick him up late in the evenings. My normal routine for juggling work, home, sleep and a little relaxation was turned upside down. I now planned my life around my son's schedule.

We crossed Jonas Run every day traveling to work or school. I think he was remorseful but I wasn't sure. I tried to talk to him. I tried to understand. He was very uncommunicative in the beginning, riding silently, despondently staring out the car window. I would watch the waters of Jonas Run, taking note of the extremely high water level and the turbulent flowing water. It crashed upon the rocks, stirring up sand and debris from below the surface, creating yellow foam bubbles that spewed under the bridge. Rocks that were once submerged now appeared visible, changing the look of the creek but not its essence.

Eventually after many weeks and silent rides, my son began to open up to me. He really had no choice since we spent so much time together these days. My son began to share his feelings. As we crossed over the bridge that day, I saw that the water level was a bit lower. There was still incredible power in the briskness of its flow. There was the feeling that if you stepped into the water you could be swept away.

As a parent, sometimes you can't understand where your children's feelings are coming from. Has it been too long since you have experienced those intense hormonal emotions? Shouldn't I have seen this coming? Did I see this coming and blocked it out? How could I have let this happen? I started to doubt my abilities as a parent. What kind of mother was I? Was there something I should have or could have done to prevent this from happening? You want to believe that you have done the right thing; set the good example; taught the life lessons your children need to survive. As guilt consumed me, I questioned parents' ability to cover every life lesson.

There were times I just wanted to break down and cry, but I could not. I had to be strong. I had to be responsible. I dropped my son off at school every day. This schedule was hard on him too, I knew. Some days he would have to come to work with me and kill time until it was time to leave for one of his classes. On other days he had to arrive at school early and wait for classes to start. He had to wait around after classes for me to pick him up. He spent a lot of time just waiting. I remember pulling up in the rain to see him standing alone watching for my arrival, his hair and clothes soaked through. He spent a lot of time alone. There was too much time to think.

After several weeks, my son had finally purged all of his fears and concerns to me during our daily drive. It wasn't a time for me to preach or offer suggestions; just to listen. He spoke of his alienation from his friends since the accident, of his fears for the future, of his impending court

date and his sense of the loss of freedom. He opened up to me as he never had before. Now as we crossed over the bridge, Jonas Run was beginning to recede. The water still moved swiftly but now at a gentler pace.

I remember a movie I had seen not long before the accident. The message I took away from it was that we just need someone to bear witness to our lives, someone to validate our existence. We sometimes just need someone to understand without judgment.

I realized then that this was not my fault. I can't control what my grown children choose to do with their lives. This accident resulted from a split-second decision that another human being had made (albeit with clouded reasoning). My son chose to take that drink. He chose to drive home that night even when he was offered the chance to sleep it off. It was *his* choice, not mine. I was the parent, but no longer in control of his decisions. That is the hardest lesson a parent must learn as their children grow older.

My son has paid his dues. I believe he has learned a valuable lesson from this harsh glimpse of his own mortality; as well as suffering the consequences of his own actions. I was given the opportunity to understand the hopes and dreams of my child as he turned into a man. He has grown from the experience and I am proud to say that he continues on the career path he has chosen although it's a lot harder than he ever thought it would be. I admire him for his tenacity. He is now enrolled at a university. He is continuing with his plan for a degree in Information Technology. After that, who knows?

I have grown from the experience too. I have actually started taking classes at the community college so that I can finish something that I started so long ago.

Very recently, I crossed over the bridge to Jonas Run again. The water is lower now, moving leisurely and calmly. Maybe that's a sign that we are on the right course. But then again, you never know where the creek's path will lead. Life situations can change in a heartbeat.

If there is one lesson I have learned from this incident, it is that no matter the circumstances, you need to be there to support and communicate with the ones you love. Our children may not need us in the same way they did as youngsters but I think they need us all the same. A parent can only do the best they can. Our children grow up and move on in their own directions and as parents we must step back and let them live their lives.

Jonas Run to this day still ebbs and flows like the course that life can take. We are but rocks twisting, turning and every so often tumbling in the current, braving the events that occur in this limitless adventure we call life.



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On Becoming a Writer

It has never been easy
Being a woman.
Bringer of life,
Mother,
Wife.
Entrusted with the hearts of others,
Deafened by their demands.
Often not hearing the sound of your own voice,
Muffled by fears.
So, I will be the one who learns
To line up words
On sheets of paper

Like soldiers
Who do not know the meaning of surrender.
I will find
The one who will tell me that it is ok
To reveal secrets
I have been told
Should never be said out loud.
I will seek the one
Who will give me his blessing
To give the world mine.
I will be that woman.



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In the Face of Adversity

In the short story *Sonny's Blues*, James Baldwin describes the fear of a child in Harlem of becoming just another victim to the darkness when he says:

He knows that every time this happens he's moved just a little closer to the darkness outside. The darkness outside is what the old folks have been talking about. It's what they've come from. It's what they endure. The child knows that they won't talk any more because if he knows too much about what's happened to them, he'll know too much too soon, about what's going to happen to him (419).

Baldwin paints a picture of life within the poor streets of Harlem as his characters fight the influence of drugs, poverty, prostitution, crime and more. These are the darkensses of society that represent the violence, greed, addiction, corruption or constant struggle to tread water in a rapidly flowing river of dark. Growing up in Harlem, falling prey to the darkness is almost

inevitable. Yet, the ultimate outcome depends on the way characters live their lives, the choices they make, and the person they strive to be. The narrator in the short story "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin, lives a very different life than his brother Sonny, although both brothers are impacted and learn important life lessons through facing the darkness of society.

Darkness, overwhelming despair, and the absence of hope surround the characters in this story as they struggle to survive, marked by their birth in a place of adversity. This darkness can be seen through the faces of the youth, from the windows of the subway cars, in the dark, violent streets, and in the desolate existence that becomes the lives of many youth growing up in Harlem. The youth know two major forms of darkness, the one that fills their lives, and the one that is meant to sway them with the Utopian world of entertainment claiming everyone lives a happy life.

How can the media not claim that the absence of light has taken residence over Harlem with its ominous presence? (Baldwin 410). "It filled everything, the people, the houses, the music, the dark, quick-silvered barmaid, with menace and this menace was their reality" (Baldwin 412-413). Harlem is an unchanging place filled with drugs and violence from which some escape, but many are simply statistics that continue to support the stereotypical idea of those who live there (Baldwin 416). The children sense this darkness and sense the fear within the adults, knowing that this darkness is their inevitable fate (Baldwin 419). The characters of "Sonny's Blues" are no strangers to this darkness and their lives are shaped by the way they choose to deal with it (Reid).

The narrator of "Sonny's Blues" is a very logical individual who survives day by day by trying not to acknowledge the darkness around him. Despite growing up in Harlem, he pursues a career as an algebra teacher. He is able to escape a life consumed by darkness through a field that is filled with the known rather than the unknown and the dangers of addiction or corruption. Yet, he can see the way society's youth is being influenced and it causes him physical pain to see the innocence being stripped away right in front of him. His one connection to this world of greed and corruption is his brother Sonny. He sees in the faces of each of his students and is reminded that he couldn't save Sonny (Baldwin 409). Also, he feels it is his responsibility to look after Sonny, not only because he is his brother, but because no one else will (Baldwin 423).

Sonny is a dreamer who lives his life with a goal to do not what is reasonable, but what he feels he is meant to do: be a musician (Baldwin 422). He wants to leave Harlem after graduation and the narrator cannot understand this need to leave is rooted in his fear of becoming corrupted, of becoming like his father or of losing himself. Sonny is even willing to go into the army to get away from Harlem. It is his desperate plea to get out of this corruption that goes unheard (Baldwin 425). When he lives with Isabel and her parents, Sonny begins to find himself through the music that pours forth from him, his higher power. Isabel said, "...it wasn't like living with a person at all, it was like living with sound. And the sound didn't make any sense to any of them" (Baldwin 426). It may not have made sense to any of them, but it made sense to him. It wasn't just sound of strings of notes, it was his story, his passion, his sorrow, and the voice of all of the others who felt his pain as well all wrapped in one neat package. This music was his voice in a sea of stormy waves with no one to hear his cries; it was his blues. The difference between Sonny and his brother is that Sonny chose a path to give his life meaning and the narrator chose to "submissively take it" as an inevitable conclusion (Flibbert).

Although the narrator did not live a life of addiction like Sonny, he never seemed to truly understand his brother and listen to Sonny's blues. After Isabel's family made Sonny feel guilt because of his music, his only escape, Sonny, being a sensitive individual, chose to leave and find a place where he felt accepted. This is where Sonny stumbled upon the darkness, feeling accepted, not having to think about his problems, but at the same time losing himself. The narrator said, "...he treated these other people as though they were his family and I weren't" (Baldwin 428). This was because Sonny felt his brother has never really tried to understand him.

When Sonny is able to play again his brother finally understands Sonny's world. The narrator says, "Here, I was in Sonny's world. Or, rather, his kingdom" (Baldwin 436). This is the place where Sonny finds a light in the darkness; the place where he shines. Sonny's music is not only his, but it is the cry of the audience, the children, his parents, and his brother. It is the words they can't say themselves, their lament and their tears. Sonny is able to produce all of this sadness in one tune. The narrator sees that music can relate the multitudes. It can reach the unreachable and transcend time, culture, and race (Baldwin 437).

Both the narrator and his brother Sonny learn that unless people change their circumstances nothing else is going to change. Robert Reid says, "Freedom lies in the recognition of the

darkness and the light from which the darkness comes" (443). One should recognize that life comes with tragedy and darkness, but the important thing is to find the light and change or adapt to one's own situation. Also, to truly understand each other, people need to really listen. By doing so, they just may find, like Sonny and the narrator do, that others understand and struggle in the same way. Baldwin provides a voice to so many others of his life situation. Children can be corrupted by society and the darkness, yet these factors will also shape them and enable them to understand others. It is important to see the person behind the addict and the little girl behind the stripper in order to stand without judgment and see the light behind the darkness in the face of adversity.

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field trip (stories of a palace)

Ghosts of memories I have never had
press up against me in this place.
I hear the echoes of your footsteps
running up and down the paneled staircase
but I only see your scuffmarks.
I can sense you beaming at your chandeliers in triumph
and weeping over your darkly draped balcony in agony.

Somehow, I feel like we are family.

I want to comfort you as you weep before me
and bring joy back to your daughter's room.

I enter it freely

but I stop, hit by a wall of memories again
none mine.

Your heart has been stitched into a masterpiece
encased in glass before me.

Empty

these rooms ache for glory
and signs keep asking me to find it.

There's an address to send it to
and a glass box for my change
in case I can buy it.

"It's all so beautiful," I remark,

"but so sad too."

A seeker comforts me, saying, "That's just the way of things."

But will it always be?

The dollar in the glass box says "No."



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In Praise of the Dream Act

Every year tens of thousands of undocumented illegal immigrant children graduate from high school. For many of them, education ends here. While federal law requires that every child, illegal or not, be educated from kindergarten through twelfth grade, after high school this umbrella of protection is gone. The problem is a question of documentation. Every child who immigrates to the United States from another country can only obtain permanent status through their parents. If a child is brought into the country undocumented, they lack a Social Security number, often dubbed the “magic number.” This number is required in every aspect of American living, and problems arise once these children turn eighteen years of age and need the number. They are unable to get jobs or be accepted into many institutions of higher learning. The only way out of this dilemma is if the bill known as the Dream Act passes on the Senate floor.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The Dream Act) is a piece of proposed federal legislation that was recently introduced in the United States Senate and House of Representatives. The essence of this bill is to provide an opportunity for the undocumented immigrant students who graduate from high school to become documented legal residents (Passel). Most of these kids were smuggled into America across the U.S./Mexican border in the dead of the night with the hope of a better life through the American Dream. Many had no way of knowing that their troubles had just begun.

“Although exact figures vary, it is estimated that more than 12 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States. Mexicans and other Latin Americans make up 80 percent of this population and the remaining 20 percent come from Asia, Africa, and Europe” (Passel). The majority of children stuck in the midst of this immigration issue have multiple problems with which to reckon. They often cannot speak English, and many come from single-parent families torn apart by their immigration to America. With no documentation, they are unable to visit the

country of their birth, and many live in constant fear of being picked up and deported. Proponents of the Dream Act have held rallies in such states as California, New Mexico, Texas and Arizona (the U.S./Mexican Border States), urging Congress to help integrate these children properly into mainstream society.

The Dream Act is a ray of hope for these children. The legislation would grant a conditional immigration status to these children, with stipulations. They must have arrived in the country as children, and would have to show proof of having been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment. The students will be issued a temporary residency for a six-year period. They must be of "good moral character" and "no jailbirds" or "security risks" can apply. "Those who qualify will have a six-year period to acquire a degree from an institution of higher education in the United States or have completed at least two years, in good standing, in a program for a bachelor's degree or served in the military for at least two years" (McKenzie). If one of these requirements is met, they could start the process of becoming permanent legal resident aliens.

Discussions on immigration are often heated. Proponents and critics are often at wits' end with each other, and both sides present very logical arguments. The question of how to resolve the great immigration debate has been a hard nut to crack, as politicians walk a fine line, fearful of this hot-button issue. Many proponents have referred to the critics as racists while critics see the views of advocates of immigration as unreasonable. This debate has been going on for more than a hundred years, and based on the current political climate, may continue for another hundred years. As the debate moves back and forth and is churned at every election cycle, the future of a whole generation of immigrant children is in danger of falling through the cracks.

What critics fail to realize is that whatever decisions are to be made on ways to tackle the immigration demons of our time, these children should not be robbed of their future. The Dream Act addresses the casualties of illegal immigration, the innocent children caught in the trappings of their parents' ambitions to seek a better life in America. Critics of the Dream Act argue that assimilating these students in this way only rewards their parents for breaking the law. But what other recourse does the law have for these kids? What is the right and fair thing to do? Should they be torn away from the country of their formative years and be sent back to a country they barely remember? Is their future worth sacrificing for the sole aim of sending a message to those who may have intentions of breaking the law by migrating illegally to America? The answer to all these questions is no, of course. Allowing these kids to flounder will go against the ethical and moral fabric from which the American culture is woven.

Other critics cite that immigration is harmful to the U.S. economy. They refer to the millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money spent on the education and health care of these children, and rightfully so. But preventing these kids from furthering their education only convolutes the matter. The critics are correct in that money has already been spent, but it would be foolhardy to stop now. Furthering the education of these children will not only boost the economy, but will tackle the potential social ills that await a culture that fails to prepare its youth as contributing members of society. Young adults facing a bleak future have no incentive to stay in school and are more likely to embrace a life of crime, and that is why, according to William McKenzie of the *Dallas Morning News*, "The Dream Act makes sense for illegal immigrants and our country." There will be talent lost in this pool of children that will include potential doctors, lawyers, teachers and taxpayers, many who are ignited by the immigrant spirit and fired up to succeed. The better investment will be to tap into these talents and assimilate them into the main stream society. The Dream Act seals this deal.

When the Dream Act is finally passed, it will end the haunting gloom that hangs over the promising future of these young people. This bill ensures that these children will obtain a legitimate Social Security number that will enable them to get drivers' licenses and qualify for student loans. "Without these loans, a university education is simply out of reach for many of the 65,000 undocumented students who graduate annually from U.S. high schools" (Protopsaltis). The Dream Act is equally redemptive, allowing these youth a chance to disassociate themselves from the sins of their parents. So, while the war at the U.S. border rages on and the immigration debate begs to be resolved, the Dream Act ensures that there is some semblance of peace concerning the future of the invisible faces of this immigration dilemma. The future of these precious children is brightened by the hope that success in life for them was not just a dream.

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Clumsy

My poems are always so clumsy...
The words sort of
trip
over
each
other
in choppy rhythm.

Are they even poems at all?
Just weak collections of lines.

The writings of others
seem to know exactly
what they're about
as though they've skipped adolescence
and stopped falling over their own feet.

Their text,
black, straight, organized,
stands erect
in perfect,
rectangular columns.

Not mine though.
Mine finds a way of
slipping

off

the

page.



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Father-Son Relationships through Poetry

“My Papa’s Waltz,” by Theodore Roethke, and “Those Winter Sundays,” by Robert Hayden, both use imagery, tone and character to help reflect the relationship between a father and a son. But through differences within those literary elements, each poem is unique in its own way.

The relationship a son has with his father is an important part of both of their lives. Movies, music, and other works usually portray this relationship as a happy one through fishing trips or working on a project around the house together. Theodore Roethke and Robert Hayden, however, take a different approach at displaying a father-son relationship by showing readers what can happen in a not-so-perfect household between members of a family. “My Papa’s Waltz” by Roethke and “Those Winter Sundays” by Hayden both use imagery, tone, and character to help reflect that relationship. But through differences within those literary elements, each poem is unique in its own way.

Both poems include images that reflect the work that both speakers’ fathers put into their daily jobs. As Hayden’s poem talks about the father’s morning ritual, the speaker describes his hands as cracked and aching from working out in all types of weather (DeYanni, 496). “The ‘cracked hands’ of line three imply that the father is [a] laborer of some sort, which makes his work for his family even more difficult: his hands are already roughened by his efforts to support his family; now, every morning, they suffer more from working in the freezing cold.”

Roethke’s poem suggests that the father is a laborer or construction worker in his poem as well, shown by the line “with a palm caked by dirt” (DiYanni, 505). But unlike the other father, this one has a lot of energy even after a long day’s work. Whereas Hayden describes the father in

his poem in a depressing manner, Roethke does just the opposite. That father is waltzing around the house with his son in what some believe to be as a joyful manner (Jadwin,1). "The child preserves in the dance, possibly because he relishes his father's ritual of playfulness and affection in the midst of a life where hard labor and obligation are the norm."

"My Papa's Waltz" and "Those Winter Sundays" have wonderful imagery that helps the reader put themselves in the poem. "The 'blueblack cold' of the second line [in "Those Winter Sundays"] evokes a picture of ice, which is 'splintering, breaking' four lines later" (Peck, unknown). "The cold is rendered vividly in such an extended image." The heat from the fire that the father makes every morning helps warm the bodies of those who live in the home, however not their hearts. "Though the temperature in the house has apparently risen, there is still that 'blueblack cold' that must be dealt with" (Gallagher, 247).

"My Papa's Waltz" has hidden meanings within its imagery, unlike "Those Winter Sundays," which is very straightforward. With a first read one is able to smell another's whiskey breath, hear pans crashing, and feel a scrape from a belt buckle on their own ear (DiYanni, 505). But a second read, a closer glance, and relating the poem to your own personal experience may bring new meanings to the words the poet wrote, according to Bobby Fong, author of "Roethke's 'My Papa's Waltz.'"

"Students espousing this reading have noted that their own fathers were reserved when sober and that some of their fondest moments were when 'papa' became tipsy enough so that exuberance and love could slip through." But for some students of his, the imagery symbolizes something else for them. "For these students, alcohol is invariably associated with violence, and the mention of whiskey on the breath calls to mind incidents when their fathers came home drunk and "romped" with the family. What was 'fun' for the father, however, was fearful for the mother and children." The poem's imagery can trigger either joyful or fearful interpretations depending on the reader's own personal experiences.

The tones in "Those Winter Sundays" and "My Papa's Waltz" are different from one another. Ann Gallagher, who wrote "Hayden's 'Those Winter Sundays,'" explained that even though Sundays suggest a time of worship and rest, there is a rigid tone that emphasizes the same drabness and sadness that happens every other day of the week. "Sunday is no worse than Monday" for this family.

There is also relief in the speaker's attitude towards the end. "It is a relief for the reader to know that the child of the poem has escaped the despondency of 'Those Winter Sundays.'"
The speaker, who is recalling his past, is at peace with not thanking his father because it was impossible for him to understand the meaning behind his well-intentioned father's actions at the time. "I was a child then, the couplet implies, and I did not realize what it means to be a man, a father, and to perform the 'austere and lonely' duties that family love demands. I never thanked my father, and I cannot today" (Hayden, unknown).

As explained earlier, most readers find the tone of "My Papa's Waltz" to be a happy remembrance of childhood. Intrigued, John McKenna decided to look at the history of the poem itself. Like any piece of writing, this poem went through many drafts. In one of his drafts, Roethke had the speaker as a girl instead of a boy. "By substituting 'boy' for 'girl,' then, Roethke could keep the dual tone of this dance: a little rough and scary and a little dear and loving." He didn't want the reader to think it was a boys-against-girls poem, so with making the child a boy, the roughhousing wouldn't be looked as a man overpowering a woman.

The speaker in "Those Winter Sundays" is also a character. He explains how he would wake up when the house was warm because of his father's actions every morning, even on Sundays. He "remembers a moment in his childhood and thinks about the sacrifices his father made for him then" (Peck, unknown). Gallagher finds that the child is aware of the angers in the house, and because they abrupt without warning, he speaks to his father carefully. Even if he did realize at that young of an age the dedication his father made, he would have to be careful about how he said "thank you."

Even though Sundays are supposed to be a day of rest, the father doesn't sleep in and instead cares for his families' needs before his own. But who else is in this family besides the speaker and his father? There is no mother figure mentioned, or any other woman. The speaker also doesn't mention any siblings that notice their father's routine or others that live in the home. This reflects that the women and children in the home are not of great importance. The speaker talks about how the father's daily routine affected him personally, but not of any other characters.

The characters in "My Papa's Waltz" include the speaker as a child, the father and the mother. "When the dancers' stomping feet make the pans 'slide from the shelves,' the father and son seem to be enjoying the triumph of pleasure over orderliness" (Jadwin,1). The son hangs on like death as he and his drunken father waltz around the house. This was a routine for the father, and the son vividly remembers what occurred daily. Although some may believe that it is a happy memory, others may find it frightful, and the mother disapproves of it. Her attitude could be formed because of the mess they are making, or because of the abuse the father is inflicting on their innocent child. She is only mentioned in the kitchen "because she is unable to abandon her world of hard-won labor for the carelessness of play." As the son clings to the father's shirt in the end, he could be clinging out of fear that by going to bed the fun will end, or to literally save his life.

With the intertwinement of imagery, tone and character throughout their poetry, Roethke and Hayden were able to portray an untypical relationship between a father and son. Even though there were those similarities between the two poems, there were differences within those elements. The memories of daily rituals of hardworking fathers waking up early to warm the home for the family and romping around the house have remained with the speakers because of their importance to their life. The complexity of each of the poems is outlined through their literary elements and even though there are slight differences, the poets created very similar poems.

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Truth

It is an absolute truth that
The devil makes his own shoes
Angels dance to the blues
Humans were first created with eleven
Fingers, but god got angry and
He took one away
To show musicians he was the only
One who could play
divine music



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A Most Precious Gift

My father had just graduated from college and started his first teaching job when we moved to Sawleaf Street. At six years old I was an average sort of child; with two parents, one sister, a dog and two cats. I played with my sister, went to school, and learned to ride a bike. Mine was an ordinary, average life.

One day, all that changed. Linda and Valri Jackson moved into the house across the street, and my imagination began to unfurl like a seedling in the spring. My memories from before that time are pale and muted, but the Jacksons splashed into my world with dazzling color.

Linda and Valri were just a year apart in age, and I was right in the middle. From the day they moved in we were inseparable: LindaMargieValri, almost a single entity. I can hardly remember a day we *didn't* spend together, at their house or mine; playing, singing and dreaming.

Story was at the heart of everything we did, and we hoped to one day grow up to author children's books. Linda would write, and I would illustrate. We had reams of paper, full of ideas and drawings that were added to almost daily. We would act out the stories (Linda and Valri were both brilliantly dramatic!), and I spent hours perfecting my drawings.

On Sunday afternoons, my house was filled with music. My father was a music teacher, so we listened to everything from Handel's "Messiah" to Broadway musicals to opera. Sprawled on the floor in front of the console stereo, we listened as my dad would recount the stories - painting vivid mental pictures while the melodies washed over us. I learned more music theory by osmosis than most people will learn in a lifetime of study, and I loved it all.

We were exposed to other music, too. My mother brought home the music of the 60s' "British Invasion," and The Beatles became part of our DNA. We became instant, lifelong fans - at seven years old! We sang, we danced (Mom taught us to do the Twist), and we planned a trip to the airport for the Beatles' first visit to San Francisco, complete with handmade welcome signs, hats and buttons. My mother's better judgment kept us home that day, but we still had a ball preparing for it; standing on the backyard picnic table, screaming and waving our signs as a plane we were *sure* was theirs flew overhead.

Through the photographs in travel brochures, we journeyed to London and Rome; dreaming of seeing the world someday. In our mind's eye we climbed the Matterhorn, watched the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, and sailed the Atlantic like Columbus. By nine years old we had put together a life-list of destinations, along with an intricately designed plan to see them all; plotting the locations on a world map, with places marked to meet if Life should ever separate us.

We learned about nuns from *The Sound of Music* and the Catholic family next door, spending summer days exploring our spirituality; tablecloths draped over our heads as we knelt in quiet reflection (often with Valri softly singing "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" to accompany our genuflections.)

Every June, Linda and Valri would celebrate their birthdays with a slumber party. Their mother cooked exotic-sounding dishes like rice pilaf, and we devised elaborate role-plays to entertain ourselves. But before we settled down for the night, their mother would read aloud to us. The clamor of the evening would die down, and stories like *B'r'er Rabbit* or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* would spring to life. Fidgety little girls would fall silent as her mesmerizing voice wove the words around us until we were spellbound. I dreamt that one day I might speak as she did, and hold an audience captive with my words.

Ideas flowed between us constantly, and we took our cues from the world we lived in. Every book, TV show, or song on the radio became the springboard for imaginings. We took the things we loved, and made them into something new; something uniquely ours.

Then one day, mid-way through fifth grade, Linda and Valri moved away from Sawleaf Street. Although they only lived across town, I felt as if a piece of me was gone, and I was bereft. Doing the only thing I knew to do, I poured my grief into a book chronicling our years together - a book I still possess. The color drained from my world, but I was able to see it again as I put pencil to paper.

Life went on, as it always does. We still saw each other, but not as often. We shared teenage angst and first boyfriends, but little by little Life was separating us. They came to my wedding, but I missed Linda's. Valri kept in touch with my parents for awhile, but over the years we just lost track of each other.

Thanks to the Internet (and a bit of tenacity), I managed to find them again several years ago. We never made it to London together, but we did meet in Portland for the weekend. Leaving husbands and families at home, we spent three days catching up on each other's lives - and what we discovered was remarkable. Not only did it immediately feel as if we'd never been apart, but we found that we had realized many of our childhood dreams.

Valri became an actress, doing years of musical comedy on stage. A gifted writer, her prose is rich with pathos and humor, revealing a genuine understanding of the human condition.

Linda is an ASL interpreter; one of the most expressive I've ever seen (we got a chance to see her in action that weekend). She has an amazing command of language, and her Facebook posts are articulate and droll. When she speaks, she is like her mother: whether through word or sign, she can hold an audience in rapt attention. And me? I've sailed Columbus' course across the Atlantic, and journeyed to many of the places my nine year-old self longed to see. A passion for drawing became a twenty-year career as a muralist, and a love of language and learning has led me back to college in my 50s. And I have seen that same love germinate and grow in my own children; the older has just finished writing his first book, and the younger is preparing to become a history teacher.

A most precious gift was shared with me the day the Jacksons came to Sawleaf Street, and although they moved away again, I never let it go.

I merely passed it on.



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Inside the Sound

I want to crawl inside the sound
and let each vibration resound through my teeth.
And there I am:
touched and shocked beneath my skin,
out of sight
to strengthen the sense.

Inside the sound
is a tall, tall tree:
winding and rooting down
through earth and time;
listening to lovers
and liars and war.

Inside the sound is deafening peace
and perfect solitude.

Inside the sound is the tree of me.



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