

Article review on sonny's blues

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Response Paper: Sonny's Blues

Sonny's Blues, James Baldwin's 1957 short story, is all about two brothers, the narrator and Sonny, who have been estranged for a long time, but because of an unfortunate incident in each other's lives, found a way to mend their broken relationship and come to understand each other.

Although the story is told from the narrator's point of view as he tells what happened to his brother and what he believed led him to do drugs and heroin, it is also about how the narrator feels about his brother. It tells about how Sonny's actions and eventual life has affected his brother, especially since their mother asked the narrator to take care of Sonny when she is gone. Sonny's Blues is a straightforward, but touching story about anger, hatred, suffering, lack of self-confidence, brotherly love, music, and redemption, among others.

It all starts when the unnamed narrator reads in the papers that his brother Sonny is under police custody for doing drugs. He suddenly thinks about his high school students who could be like Sonny and what it would do to their future. He later on unexpectedly meets Sonny's friend who says he could have been one of the reasons why Sonny is in jail as he told Sonny what it felt like when under the influence of drugs. He explains that Sonny was not really a bad kid, but was more a troubled soul who kept all his feelings locked up inside. He says Sonny did not want to die, but actually wanted to leave Harlem to escape drugs. Apparently, the narrator did not reach out to Sonny until his own daughter dies. When he finally sent Sonny a letter, this initiated the communication between the brothers. This is also how the narrator learns about Sonny's distress and how he wanted to reach out to

him, but decided not to because of all the heartaches he has given to his family.

Despite his seeming apathy towards Sonny, I believe the narrator feels a strong, but suppressed brotherly love towards his younger brother considering that he, the narrator, was the older of the two brothers, and of course, they are family. The narrator even arranged for Sonny's living arrangements before he (narrator) went to war. The feelings of anger and hatred are mostly coming from the narrator, as he could not understand the life that Sonny chose for himself, his affinity to jazz music, and the people he constantly associated with.

On the other hand, Sonny has always been the withdrawn type of person who would rather suffer silently than voice out his opinions and feelings. In this regard, he was very much like their father. This "suffering in silence" was what pushed Sonny to do drugs, as he could not battle against his inner demons about life and living, which is contrary to what his brother thinks as the reason for his drug addiction, that is, jazz music. In reality, music was the only burning light in Sonny's life, including the people he hangs out with when he plays the music. With them, he feels alive and accepted, where he does not feel discriminated upon, but instead is respected through his music. I like that the narrator witnessed how good Sonny was as a jazz musician because the narrator came to understand and appreciate Sonny's music and the people who became Sonny's second family. In effect, jazz helped bridge the gap between the brothers. It also became the means for the narrator to understand what Sonny meant with people having different ways of dealing with fear, depression, and suffering.

I also think the title Baldwin chose is very appropriate for the short story because the word "blues" connotes several meanings. One is how it relates to feelings of sadness, depression, despair, and unhappiness, which are feelings felt by Sonny while he was growing up. At the same time, "blues" is also often associated with jazz music as it began from the African-Americans.