

Analysis of "sonny's blue" of james baldwin essay



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"Sonny's Blue" is a story about two brothers who see life in a different way but later find understanding in each other. Music brings this understanding. The story begins as the narrator is on his way to his teaching job when he finds out that the younger brother is in jail (Baldwin 2). Sonny has been caught dealing drugs.

On his way home, the narrator meets Sonny's friend who tells him about the challenges of his brother's drug addiction. However, the narrator does not make any attempt to help his brother. After some time, the narrator's daughter, Grace dies. The pain and anguish of this ordeal inspire the narrator to communicate with his brother. Their communication continues until Sonny is released from jail.

The narrator then welcomes Sonny into his home. Though Sonny appreciates his help, he feels uncomfortable at his relative's home and turns to music. It is an outlet where he expresses his feelings. We can learn from "Sonny's Blue" that music and art is a source of conflict and understanding. This paper examines how music and art affect the two brothers. It further discusses why music and art make the love between the siblings coherent.

Sonny's passion for music is a source of disagreements. After their mother's funeral, the two siblings discuss Sonny's expectations. When the narrator asks Sonny what plans he has for the future, his answer dismays the narrator. Sonny tells his brother "I want to play with jazz musicians" (Baldwin 12).

He tells his brother about his vision and dreams but the narrator dismisses these ideas. They argue about it for a while before they part ways. In another

incidence, music causes conflict between Sonny and his sister-in-law's mother. While living in their house, Sonny gets into a habit of missing School.

When he is confronted, he discloses that he was hanging out with the musicians in Greenwich Village. This revelation evokes a conflict between the two parties. Later, Sonny is sad because he recognizes that his dream is a burden to the people he loves (Baldwin 17). His passion for music causes them grief. Sonny enlists in the navy following this argument. After his return from the war, the two brothers argue again because of Sonny's choices. Sonny becomes furious with his brother and shouts at him.

Despite the fact that music is a source of conflict, it brings understanding. While sonny is living with his brother, the narrator has an urge to search his room for signs of drugs or mischief. As he thinks about his actions, he witnesses a street revival and reflects on its importance.

In the evening, Sonny invites him to attend one of his music concerts. Sonny explains that in music, he finds an avenue to express his pain and release his fears and struggles. In the club, the narrator realizes that his brother has earned the respect of the people because of his passion for music. He is a common figure among the people. Throughout the night, the narrator watches his younger brother struggle while playing music.

He becomes part of their family through his music. He then understands that Sonny's problems emanates through his music. The narrator realizes that his brother is giving back to the society. He says " And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever" (Baldwin 25). This incidence brings understanding. The narrator

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finally comprehends Sonny's identity and personality. He is proud of sonny's undertakings as a musician.

The love between the narrator and sonny is coherent because the narrator believes that it is his responsibility to look after his brother. The narrator loves his brother, but he feels that, by becoming a musician, Sonny will fail. In one of the flashbacks in the story, the narrator recalls his mother asking him to watch out for sonny.

His mother reminds him that when his father was young, he witnessed his brother's murder. He was knocked by a car, and the occupants of the car did not bother to check on him. His father never recovered from that the incidence and his mother did not want the same thing to happen to the narrator.

His mother's words encourage him to be his brother's keeper (Baldwin 9). As a result, the narrator feels compelled to ensure that his brother is safe. This obligation strengthens their relationship. However, the narrator still feels like music is not the best option for Sonny. The narrator wants only the best for his brother. The narrator has a loving family and a respectable career, and he wishes that his brother will find the same success in something else other than music.

Music makes the love among the siblings more coherently because of the narrator's feelings towards musicians. The narrator believes musicians are lazy people in search of a way to escape the issues of life.

Furthermore, the narrator thinks that musicians are drug addicts who lead immoral lifestyles. He relates this lifestyle to his neighborhood. Both of them are brought up in Harlem where, they endure the same poverty and hopelessness that engulf their neighborhood (Baldwin 10). The narrator decides to be a teacher while sonny desires to be a musician.

When he finds out that his brother is arrested, he does not attempt to help him because he is torn between love and disgust, apprehension and distrust. He is frustrated because Sonny has no intentions of leaving the poverty in Harlem. Music represents a cage that keeps him locked up in Harlem. He fails to comprehend why Sonny still goes back to the same lifestyle. This assumption and fear make his relationship with his brother coherent. He dismisses his dreams of being a musician because he believes it is a poor choice.

Music and art affect the relationship between the narrator and Sonny in many ways. They fight because of music, but in the end, they understand each other because of the same. The narrator does not appreciate the lifestyle of musicians. He believes they are lazy people without a vision. For that reason, he disapproves Sonny's decisions.

He associates music with poverty and does not comprehend how musicians can become successful. The narrator loves his brother, but he is frustrated with his choices. He wants his brother to rise above poverty and hopelessness. He feels a sense of obligation towards him and desires the best for him. Music is a source of conflict as well as understanding of this story.

Baldwin, James. *Sonny's Blues*. Stuttgart: Klett Ernst /Schulbuch, 2009.

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