

SCOP

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SCOP 33

Works by Students of Southwest Baptist University

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2005 Creative Writing Contest Winners

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Danny Hill

Age Ten: First Expletives

It happened
When my little brother was sick in bed—
Urinating on himself—
Unable to remember his name.

I probably did it again
Later that day
Sitting in the emergency room.

When we found out he would be okay—
Just a minor coma,
His brain most likely wouldn't swell—
I breathed a sigh of relief,
My hands and feet still clammy.

Ben Cassil

tone deaf

this dissonance
smacks of my uncertain past
and it's throwing me off key

it's following closely behind
like a second set of footsteps
but i won't acknowledge the reverberations

it doesn't sound quite right
i don't want this so very close
for soon it may overtake me

Briannon Scott

As I Watch

It seems to me...
That
In just spring
The waves beat the shore
With less fury
Brave little flowers
Peek out of their
Hiding places
Sneaking little bits of color
Under the nose
Of the gray sky
Until
Summer's flood of light
Cascades into consciousness
In a golden rush
The hand of Midas
Painted with a rainbow
Tiny drops of glass
Shatter against the light,
Releasing dreams and hope
Catch them in your hand
Where they glow like the
Fireflies that die if you
Try to keep them in a jar
Let go and watch them fly
Where
Autumn celebrates wisdom
The hands of time
Turn in on themselves
To discuss what they have seen
Their memories flare
Into fireworks that silently
Explode from the trees
Until all their lights
Fade into darkness

But
In the dead of winter
There shines a single light.
Frail, delicate, and indestructible
It dips and spins
Setting aflame cold, dead branches
And hard, frozen hearts
They melt and burn
Exposing fresh green chances
And then
It seems to me...

Laura Dixon

The Skinny Blonde

I'm sorry, but that doesn't look good.
The cut and pattern of your shirt shout
that you wear it much smaller than you should.
Those buttons could put an eye out.

I can see your underwear
when you wear your pants so low.
Do you really want all to be aware
of articles that should not show?

Fried blonde hair, toasted brown skin,
too much Maybelline, too much Chanel No. 5.
I'm afraid you're sick—you look so thin.
If you eat a doughnut, I promise you'll survive.

All these trappings and shiny things:
the straw of your hair which has a perfect part,
the shoes that dance and jewelry that sings,
make me question whether your beauty begins in your heart.

Nancy Simmerman

Make Believe

Let's pretend it's warm outside
Think shorts and sandals
Find some shade
Just ignore the snow.

Let's pretend the lights are on
We can't see each other
Visible truth
Just ignore the night.

Let's pretend the cut is healed
The band-aid covers all
No more pain
Just ignore the blood.

I'll pretend to forget you
Wait here by the phone
No big deal
Just ignore the ache.

You'll pretend I didn't happen
It wasn't really love
Wasted time
Just ignore your heart.

Let's pretend we wanted this
Walk our separate ways
Don't look back
Just ignore the tears.

Elizabeth Miller

He Shoots to Sacrifice

It is after the half, and both teams are worn-out. A man in shorts that are a bit too small is especially tired, but he does not want anyone to know. He continues to run up and down the court, even though his team is losing miserably. Finally, one of his team members pulls down a rebound and looks for the outlet pass. The exhausted player finds his second wind as he races for the long toss. Though he is actually jogging, he feels like he is flying. Harder, he sprints after the orange ball lobbed in front of him. He is running out of court, the basket inching closer and the ball bouncing further with every step. Finally, the ball within grasp, the man opens his arms to snatch it, but his lower body abandons him. For a moment, he is superman: hands outstretched, he soars through the air, half Michael Jordan and half Clark Kent. But gravity abandons him too, and an instant later, he plants his face in the wood. Striking to a painful halt, he stops inches from the padded red wall and well past the out-of-bounds line.

The crowd moans a sympathetic, “Oouucchh!” but I jump to my feet. Is he okay? My greatest fear hits hard and fast. Can he get back up? Finally, my dad heaves himself off my school’s court; I feel relief wash over me while people in the crowd begin to giggle. I am not sure if my dad’s face is red from the face plant or from embarrassment. I know him well enough to see he is hurt, but he smiles as he rests the remainder of the game on the bench.

After the scrimmage, he gives his account of what happened, ending with a bashful apology for potentially embarrassing me. I ignore the comments already coming from well-meaning community members and pat him on the back. I could care less about my dad’s lack of basketball skills. I know he was not here at community night to play ball. He was here because he loves me and wants me to know he supports me.

I think it just comes with old age, but nearly all parents play basketball the same way. When they shoot, they lurch forward, pushing the ball awkwardly with both hands and thrusting themselves with flailing legs. My father is no exception. Still, I think he is adorable when he tries to dribble more than ten steps and then lifts his leg for a once-upon-a-time perfect lay-up. I know when he makes a basket, he tries not to act surprised. Sometimes I wonder if parents shoot funny when they get older simply to make their children feel better about their own playing abilities. I do this when I play with younger kids. I miss on purpose and dribble much sloppier than I ever would in a *real* game. Perhaps this is one secret parents keep from their little all-star players. They sacrifice looking “cool” in order to encourage them.

Whatever the motivation, I am glad my dad is not afraid to give his all. No one in the gym could deny my dad did not try with everything he had (and unfortunately everything he did not have) to make another basket for his team the night he wiped the court floor with his face. Throughout my high school basketball career, when I did something stupid in a game, I would often think back to the time the community laughed at my dad. When I felt tired, I could flash back to my dad’s determined face and feet and know I had to keep going, even if my team was down by twenty. Though it may have been purely an accident, when my dad sacrificed comfort and reputation that night, I learned what it takes to be a real star, a real athlete.

Parents should realize the impact they can have on their children. Whether it be as cheerleaders in the crowd or as examples on the court, they can be teachers, trainers, and encouragers in ways a coach could never be. I hope when I am older, I will influence my children in a positive way like my father has impacted my life. Even if it means running down the court and wiping out, I hope I will do it with full force and floor burns. Sacrifice often spells love, and I know if I love my children, I will want to sacrifice for them. Therefore, I am grateful for my dad’s soaring example from which I have learned how to miss my shot in order to score a lesson in all-star love.

John Milton: The Causes of His Blindness and the Results on His Life and Writing

John Milton became completely blind sometime around 1652. However, today critics continue to debate precisely what caused his blindness, and how the handicap affected his life and writing. Different scholars have offered various hypotheses about the cause of Milton's blindness. However, the most common theory holds that Milton suffered from genetically weak eyes, and he simply damaged them during his years of intense study, eventually causing his complete loss of vision. According to Eleanor Gertrude Brown, even Milton appears to concur with this conjecture. He wrote, "I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak..." (qtd. in Brown 18). Brown continues her theory by adding that while scholars tend to attribute Milton's blindness to his intensive reading in dim light, most doctors do not believe eye stress can actually be the sole cause of blindness. More than likely, Milton simply hastened the onset of his blindness by his reading (18).

While eye strain may exist as the most common theory for Milton's blindness, scholars, based on evidence and their own theories, have offered countless other ideas. These ideas often still incorporate the concept that Milton's eye strain and genetically weak eyes contributed to his blindness; however, they do not concur that alone these two facts, based on his symptoms, caused his loss of vision. According to a letter that Milton wrote, he suffered from intense headaches, clouded vision, and strange flashes of light and color (qtd. in Wilson 181). These

symptoms can be applied to many different blinding disorders, such as glaucoma, a tumor, myopia, and detachment of retina, or simply infection.

Glaucoma, according to Brown, occurs slowly, causes cloudy vision and rings of light, leaves eye appearance normal, and connects with gout. Milton suffered from these four symptoms. He himself noted that his eyesight began to gradually disappear, and he suffered both from cloudy and discolored vision (39-42). He also wrote, with great pride, in his sonnet, "Cyriack, This Three Years Day," that even though he was blind, his eyes remained, "clear/To outward view, of blemish or of spot..." (line 1-2). Milton is further linked to glaucoma because he died of gout. According to doctors, gout and glaucoma come from similar causes and often occur together (Brown 42).

Dr. Lamber Rogers suggested that Milton's blindness might have developed after a growth applied too much stress on his pituitary gland. He bases his case on the account of a blind man who precisely paralleled Milton's loss of vision, and asserts that a disorder of the pituitary gland may have caused Milton's slight, almost effeminate appearance that gave him the nickname, "The Lady of Christ's College" (Wilson 182).

Brown asserts that Milton's blindness may have originated from a combination of myopia and detachment of the retina. Myopia is a genetic disease caused by distortion of the eyeball's shape and usually begins in childhood. The disease is common in children who spend long amounts of time engaged in academic pursuits, and is aggravated by a lack of sleep and excessive reading in bad light. Milton, by his own admission, often stayed up late reading in dim light. Quite possibly, then, the strain and distortion caused by the myopia led to the detachment of the Milton's retina, and caused his blindness (qtd. in Brown 43-44, 47).

Milton's blindness may have simply come from some infection due to the bad hygiene of the seventeenth century. According to an article about blindness in Sudan, bad hygiene continues to allow infection to be transmitted to the eyes and eventually causes blindness (*Sudan* para. 1). Arnold Sorsby backs up this theory and adds that Milton's blindness may have originated from some infection that no longer exists, thereby preventing scholars from being able to diagnose the cause of his blindness (Brown 48).

While precise evidence about the origin of Milton's blindness may be difficult to ascertain, scholars can relatively easily obtain information about how Milton's loss of vision impacted his life and writing. Some critics have gone as far as to assert that Milton's blindness actually allowed him to write more powerfully. According to T. S. Eliot, because Milton possessed a natural aptitude for the sound of words, his loss of sight "helped him to concentrate on what he could do best" (13). Milton's blindness also even more isolated him from the outside world. The darkness of his disease left him alone in a place where his imagination could freely roam, and, according to Walter Raleigh, "helped him by relieving him from the hourly strict solicitations of the visible world, and giving him a dark and vacant space in which to rear his geometric fabric" (105).

However, while Milton's blindness might have given him the ability to write with increased power, he mourned the loss of his sight. According to Wilson, because Milton had spent so much time in academic pursuits, particularly reading, "the deprivation caused by his blindness must have been acute" (216). Readers of Milton can obviously see the large impact his loss of vision had on him, merely by looking at his poetry. Many of his poems, including the sonnets "When I Consider," "Methought I Saw," "Cyriack, This Three Years Day," and others, deal exclusively with the topic and results of his blindness. However, while each poem deals

with blindness, each poem takes a slightly different angle of Milton's reaction to his loss of sight. At the beginning of "When I Consider," Milton worries that God will expect too much from him and not take allowances for his blindness; he asks, "Doth God exact day labour, light deny'd" (line 7). However, at the end of the poem, he relates a calm acceptance of his blindness and a realization that God can use anyone because God is perfectly capable of functioning without help from humans.

"Methought I Saw" presents a fascinating dilemma for readers. Who exactly is the woman Milton mentioned? Several scholars believe the woman mentioned to be Milton's second wife, whom he never actually saw. If this is the case, in the poem according to Catherine Maxwell, dreams become a type of eyes for Milton, allowing him to see. She provides a rather bleak picture of Milton's reaction to blindness by saying, "Night, the time when he gains his sight in dreams, is for him the time when he lives, while daytime, when he is awake to his blindness of the phenomenal world, is a disabling blank darkness" (58).

"Cyriack, This Three Years Day" provides a glimpse at Milton's pride that his eyes stayed clear, despite his loss of vision. He took comfort in the fact that at least he did not appear blind. Somewhat similar to "When I Consider," this poem also ends with Milton's statement of contentment, and he says that he continues to struggle and write on "In libertyes defence, my noble task..." (line 11).

Milton's great work, *Paradise Lost*, particularly at the beginning of book three, also contains reference to Milton's blindness. Milton inserts himself as the intrusive narrator several times, wondering why the Muse continues to compel him to write when God had stricken him with blindness. He questions why he must I "feel thy Sovran vital Lamp: but thou/ Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain/ To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn..." (lines 21-23).

Today, Milton's blindness and reactions remain debated and somewhat still misunderstood. However, despite what views readers might take on what caused Milton's blindness or how much an affect his blindness had on his life and writing, his works remain as a testament to a man who struggled with a severe handicap and went on to become one of the most recognized writers in English history. Milton did not allow his blindness to destroy his dreams of writing. Instead, despite his doubts and complaints, he allowed his problems to inspire him, and make his life and works truly worth remembering.

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Candace Orrino

Safe and Backwards

Cast

Garrison Jones

Hotel Clerk

Janey

Safe and Backwards is about Garrison Jones, a young man who has grown up in a very sheltered atmosphere. Making a home for him in the middle of nowhere, his parents created a completely different world for their son: they taught him everything backwards. “Yes” meant “no;” “no” meant “yes.” “Cold” was “hot;” “hot” was “cold.” You get the idea. The play begins with Garrison’s leaving his parents for the first time to venture out into the world to see what they have always spoken of so fearfully. What results is a hilarious encounter between Garrison and the city of Chicago, for with Garrison’s backward language, he is unable to clearly communicate. However, as the action of the play unfolds, the hilarity turns into something much more serious. Garrison’s language ends up leading him into danger. The play concludes with Garrison’s facing a decision: Should he return to the home of his family that is both safe and backwards, or should he try to start over in a world that is real and unfamiliar? In disguise, Garrison returns to his parents bearing a letter for them. It reads: “Dear Mr. And Mrs. Jones, We regret to inform you that your son was killed in an accident late Thursday evening. He crossed the street on a red light...” This final scene leads his parents and the audience to conclude that the backwards mentality his parents had created to keep him safe from the evils of the world was actually what caused his death.

Safe and Backwards is meant to capture the idea that parents cannot keep their children hidden from the truth of the world forever. Eventually, children grow up and will have to face the world as it is. Instead, parents should teach them how to face the world in spite of all the imperfections and problems it will inevitably hold for them.

Following is scene three from *Safe and Backwards*. Set in the lobby of a hotel in Chicago, it is Garrison’s first encounter with the real world.

SCENE THREE – HOTEL LOBBY

GARRISON

Bye, I’d like a house.

HOTEL CLERK

A house.

For thirty months.

GARRISON

Excuse me?

HOTEL CLERK

Oh, I'm sorry, are you all empty yesterday?

GARRISON

Are we empty?

HOTEL CLERK

No. Your houses. Are they all empty?

GARRISON

No.....

HOTEL CLERK

Well then, I'd like a house, thank you.

GARRISON

For one?

HOTEL CLERK

No, thirty.

GARRISON

Thirty people in one room?

HOTEL CLERK

Yes, yes, yes. Thirty months.

GARRISON

(Humoring him) Uh, huh. Well I meant one person. And I'm afraid I can't book a room for you for thirty months.

HOTEL CLERK

But we took your book. It listened I could go from May to June.

GARRISON

(Pause) So....you have a reservation.

HOTEL CLERK

Yes, but I don't have a cancellation. Do you need to hear it?

GARRISON

A cancellation? Then have you been staying with us already?

HOTEL CLERK

GARRISON

Yes, this is my last time there.

HOTEL CLERK

(Confused) Your last time.

GARRISON

No, but I hope it won't be my first time. I'd like to go often.

HOTEL CLERK

Right. Can I just see that uh, cancellation, please?

GARRISON

Never. *(Garrison hands the clerk the reservation notification.)*

HOTEL CLERK

Right then. You have room 205. It's a single.

GARRISON

Oh, I only need a double.

HOTEL CLERK

A double?

GARRISON

No, it's just for me.

HOTEL CLERK

Ah ha. Well I think you'll find that it will be fine.

GARRISON

But I don't want to have to pay for a smaller room.

HOTEL CLERK

The single is cheaper than the double, sir.

GARRISON

Well that doesn't make sense. Are you sure you know what you're listening about? Could I listen to your inferior?

HOTEL CLERK

I don't think that would be necess—wait, my inferior?

GARRISON

(Nods.) Maybe he could wrinkle this all out.

HOTEL CLERK

My inferior? Are you trying to insult me?

GARRISON

Okay, maybe you've had a really short day. I understand. I'll just give this house and we'll listen about getting the wrong one earlier.

(Janey enters, waits in line.)

HOTEL CLERK

Fine. That's fine. Here you are. I'll call someone to get your bags.

GARRISON

Yes, yes. I've taken it. Here's a penny. For troubling me in. I don't appreciate it.

HOTEL CLERK

Of course.

GARRISON

(With the best of intentions.) Have a terrible morning!

JANEY

One room please.

HOTEL CLERK

A single or a double?

JANEY

Single, please.

HOTEL CLERK

Yes, ma'am. And for how long?

JANEY

Um, I'm not sure yet. Is that alright?

HOTEL CLERK

Yes, ma'am that's fine.

GARRISON

You're hideous.

JANEY

Excuse me?

HOTEL CLERK

What did you say?

GARRISON

I'm sorry, that must seem very backward, but I guess it's just part of my downbringing.

JANEY

What?

GARRISON

(Embarrassed.) I just...well you're just about the ugliest person I've never met. Not that I've met a lot of.....

JANEY

Well I hope you have a great day too, jerk.

GARRISON

(Pleased.) Oh, I'm not. This is my last day in Chicago.

JANEY

(To Clerk.) Can I just sign whatever I need to sign and get my key?

HOTEL CLERK

Of course, ma'am. I'm so sorry. Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the lobby.

GARRISON

(Brightly, not moving.) Never.

JANEY

(To Hotel Clerk.) Is that all then?

HOTEL CLERK

Yes, thank you, Miss Grace. And I hope that you have a pleasant stay.

JANEY

We'll see.

HOTEL CLERK

Let me know if I can be of any service, Miss Grace. *(Exit.)*

JANEY

Thank you. Call me Janey.

GARRISON

(To Janey) So what are you there for?

JANEY

I beg your pardon?

GARRISON

Chicago. What takes you to the 'wavy village?'

JANEY

You've got a lot of nerve, you know that?

GARRISON

No, that's what my parents never hear.

JANEY

(Trying to get around him) Excuse me.

GARRISON

So are you here to lose yourself?

JANEY

(Turning, angry) What is your problem?

GARRISON

Problem?

JANEY

I don't know you, you come in here, you insult me, and then you try to make friendly conversation? Who the hell do you think you are?

GARRISON

Insult you?

JANEY

(Frustrated, incredulous.) Yeah, and you know what, great timing too.

GARRISON

What do you mean?

JANEY

Fine - you really wanna know about me? I'm an actor, okay? And today I...

GARRISON

An actor! Wow! But you're so old! My actor was really young!

JANEY

Great. Great! First I'm ugly, now I'm old.

GARRISON

Well I couldn't help noticing. Can you really blame me?

JANEY

(Speaking more to herself than to him.) That's what they said at the audition today. *(Doing an imitation.)* 'Sorry, honey, we're looking for someone, well, how shall we say it - that will grab the attention of our audience. But perhaps you could find work in wardrobe.' What *is* that? Why don't they just come out and say it. *(Imitating.)* 'Honey, you're too ugly. Go hide behind a sewing machine.'

GARRISON

Well I

JANEY

(Breaking down.) So why does it surprise me that some stranger on a street could be that blunt? Why shouldn't you? You're obviously repulsed by me.

GARRISON

(Comforting her.) Whoa, whoa, whoa. You're pretty happy, huh? Must've had a pretty easy day. It'll turn out awful.

JANEY

What is it with you?

GARRISON

Oh, just my suitcase. I unpacked heavy.

JANEY

You're something else, you know that?

GARRISON

(Shyly.) Please!

JANEY

I can't believe I'm talking to you. I'm going to bed.

GARRISON

It might help if you listen about it. Wanna get some ice cream? This is my last night in the village.

JANEY

(*Incredulous.*) Are you for real?

GARRISON

I promise, I'm totally fake. It'll be a terrible time. I'd like to get to know an actor anyway. And there's a big ice cream shop beside the street.

JANEY

That's a coffee shop.

GARRISON

Are you wrong? I could have sworn they bought ice-cream.

JANEY

Who *are* you?

GARRISON

Garrison Jones. And your name is Janey Grace, then?

JANEY

I don't get it. You're so incredibly rude and yet so ridiculously pleasant. You're like a walking contradiction, you know that?

GARRISON

(*Pleasantly.*) Well now you're just not making any sense.

JANEY

I get the sense that you're not – (*she motions around her temple.*)

GARRISON

Not what?

JANEY

Right in the head.

GARRISON

(Laughing.) Oh, I'm completely wrong in the head, I assure you.

JANEY

Ah ha. I'm going to bed.

GARRISON

Well, perhaps some other month.

(She picks up her bag and turns to leave)

JANEY

(Humoring him.) Sure.

GARRISON

(Calling after her.) Hello!

JANEY

Goodbye. *(Janey exits.)*

GARRISON

Interesting girl. A little easy to understand, but still....