

Angel Pabon
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T.A.P. Summer Program

Breaking the White Silence

James Wright's "Hook"

Angel Pabon #2

The poem titled, "The Hook", by James Wright was more like two past lives brought together by fate. The way these two meet are in a world of frozen sadness, "dead snow" (7), not saying a word, almost as if it were "White Silence." Both men were caught in past habits that resulted in failure- possibly from gambling or stuck drinking, trying to end their life in a drunken haze. In the middle of nowhere the young man waits for a bus and Wright's suggestion of the theme of isolation is complete.

In the second stanza, Wright states:

I stood on the street corner

In Minneapolis, lashed

This way and that.

Wind rose from some pit,

Hunting me.

Another bus to Saint Paul

Would arrive in three hours,

If I was lucky. (8-15)

I assumed that he was waiting for a bus to get him away from some type of trouble; in the first stanza he stated he had trouble with a woman- but the possibility of what trouble? I noticed his sudden imagery of “Lashed/this way and that,” as if he were paranoid. That was one of the few questions I had for this poem, although it seemed like a regular man waiting for a bus.

Out in the blue, here comes another character in the poem, known as the “Young Sioux,(16).” It was clear to me that this character was Native American, but what did he look like? I imagined him as a meek young fellow with a scar on his cheek, faded from broken memories long ago. I also pictured him wearing a dark trench coat, long black hair, and wolf like eyebrows. As for the young man, {persona} also wearing a trench coat in black, but slightly trimmed hair and a thick mustache. The way they dressed would appear as mysterious to some women in any way. Then the young Sioux asked him, “Ain’t got no bus here, /A long time, he said. / you got enough money to get home on?”(19-22).The young man didn’t answer his question. Another point of imagery was the observation of the young man’s curiosity towards the young Sioux’s hook. He made a violent slash in the air. Almost as if it were like a sound of pure anger, or an emotional pause- after a certain question the young man had asked: “What did they do / To your hand?”(23-24).

Then the young Sioux answered, “Oh that? he said / I had a bad time with a woman. Here, / You take this.”(27-29). Out of nowhere the young Native American

offered him money out of the kindness in his heart, although it seemed bitterly cold. Although they don't know each other, a connection is started out of curiosity, and the same situation they resulted in, finding themselves in that location. Earlier in the third stanza, second line, "His scars were just my age," it clearly shows that the young man sees a comparison between the two of them; mistakes clearly show by the hook on the young Sioux's hand. They were in a barren cold area, isolated, when the poet uses repetition: nothing/nothing... nothing (4-6), when describing the imagery of the area, in the first stanza. It didn't pass my mind when I got the idea of their Blue Skies turning to Grey Skies, as the past failures made fate shovel a block of bricks in their faces. The person made by the poet, who is the young man, made me think of another question that caught my attention when the young man acted so dull and lifeless. Could it be that the trouble with the woman could be involved in an act to love her? Or without getting into trouble with a crime wave? Maybe the possibility exists of his murdering the woman, burying her in the snow? It could be the possibility of the poet referring to "dead snow" (7) in the first stanza as well. The persona asks the reader:

"Did you ever feel a man hold/ Sixty-five cents / In a hook, / and place it gently / In your freezing hand?"(30-35). The sounds of the hook against his hand almost felt like a rough, but freezing brush, almost like he was feeling the young Sioux's pain. Maybe it was one of those moral questions that sparked my mind just to figure out what he meant by it. Perhaps the poem suggests:

Even sometimes we don't know or see strangers to give in friendly offers, or see them with hooks as a replacement hand; we really have a hard time relating to what type

of situation they were once in. Although we feel we don't trust them, the situations were tough. Within the past, their difficulties with life have been to more stressful than what some other people deal with in reality. As I often say:

“Condemned... But at least we're still breathing.”

-Quote: My saying reveals that we know about a person by questions we ask, and are then answered, that start an unexpected relationship. When we don't know how much fire they dealt with, the struggle to live on with life as hard as it is, becomes an instinct of pure thought, and curious intentions that get a conversation going. Even though you feel weird talking.