

An Analytical Essay of an Exerpt of Gary Soto's A Summer Life

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An flash writing analyzing an exerpt from Gary Soto's, A Summer Life

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Contrasting the holy, righteous behavior encouraged by his neighbors, church, and society with the hungry, animalistic greed of a six year old boy riddled with boredom, Soto explores the concepts of right and wrong through a child's eyes. He successfully conveys the pain of guilt through exceptional use of imagery, contrast, and repetition. The manner in which he uses these tools transports the reader into his innermost thoughts as he anxiously perspired before the rack of warm, fresh baked pies.

After providing background information concerning his holy roots, Soto leads the audience into a darker point of his childhood. As he gazes upon the bountiful display of pies around the German Market, "[His] sweet tooth gleaming and the juice of guilt wetting [his] underarms", he caves into sin before truly committing the crime. After slipping the pie under his Frisbee and departing the store with great haste, he sits to consume his stolen treasure in a nearby lawn. "The sun wavered between the branches of a yellowish sycamore. A squirrel nailed itself high on the trunk, where it forked into two large bark scabbed limbs" as he prepares to dine on the fruits of his unlawful labor. Soto not only evokes the image of a languid summer day, but also employs a biblical metaphor of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Soto's mastery of imagery describes the scene with impressive efficiency as well as supply a condemning biblical reference, prelude the guilt and self-loathing that follows his petty theft.

Soto temporarily strays from the path of God by succumbing to his greed. As he clawed into the pie, shoving sweet golden chunks into his mouth much as a bear cub would stuff its cheeks with stolen honey comb, he is contrasted to his neighbor, Cross-Eyed Johnny. Johnny politely requests a slice of Soto's pie, to which Soto pushes him away a rude manner that rivals that of Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens's A Christmas Carol. Johnny then whispers to the sinful Soto "Your hands are dirty", contrasting from Soto's clean fingers prior to plunging them into the stolen pie. Guilt begins to consume Soto when thoughts of the light reflecting of the balding grocer's glistening forehead, and he is led to crawl beneath his house to bask in the cool darkness. Questioning the consequences of his thieving actions, thoughts of his late Uncle and Father plague his mind. He knows that they would chastise him if they were still alive, and fears that the howling of the plumbing beneath the house may be of God himself, condemning him to eternal damnation. While prior to his theft, he believed he could recognize the shadows of angels flying over his backyard. As he climbs out from under the house, back into the light and back to God, he reaches an epiphany- "Sin is what you took, and didn't give back".

Repetition is used throughout the narrative, and in the hands of Soto it is a magnificent tool used to enforce key points in his experience. Reference to the howling beneath the house can be seen throughout the essay, possibly referencing souls who are forever lost, lead astray by sin. Soto's most prominent use of repetition is applied after he had his fill of the pie and sits, "sticky with guilt" on the curb. Paranoia clouds his mind, as "A car honked, and the driver knew. Mrs. Hancock stood on her lawn, hands on hip, and she knew. [His] mom, peeling a mountain of potatoes at the Redi Spud factory, knew" and suddenly it seemed that everyone had knowledge of his sin. Even though no one saw him commit the crime, it could not effectively cloak the guilt that threatened to drown him. Another notable use of repetition, water and thirst are explored throughout Soto's recount of the situation. He fears eternal thirst as he digs into the pie; fear that God would cast him into the desert for his sin, as was the case with Adam and Eve. Yet as he returns to righteousness, he notes the water he consumed to remedy his thirst filled his stomach far more than the pie obtained through an act of thievery.

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Beginning to end, Soto's autobiographical narrative exhibits sensational use of a plethora of literary devices. Imagery, contrast, and repetition were a few of the literary tools used by the author to construct an effective as well as enjoyable account of a childhood run in with sin.

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