

Socks with Holes

Ashley Barnett

ABSTRACT

My thesis, *Socks with Holes*, is a poetry sequence containing seventeen free-verse poems. The poems focus on the main character, Evan, as well as several of his family members and friends. Evan is a flawed man with many problems, and the poetry sequence focuses on the other characters' perceptions of Evan and his problems. Some of the important concepts that influenced this sequence are dramatic monologues, Cubism, and the importance of voice.

SIGNATURE PAGE

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of The Honors Scholars Program.

Loren Grath April 15, 2013

Director

Date

Debra Bernal 16 April 2013

Reader

Date

C. J. 04-15-13

Reader

Date

Table of Contents

Introduction—"Concepts in the Poetry Sequence <i>Socks with Holes</i> "	i-vi
"Untitled"	1
"Mom"	2
"Mady, Sister"	3
"Christina, Wife"	4
"Keltie, Niece"	5
"Mady"	6
"Laura, Niece"	7
"Melissa, Girlfriend"	8
"Untitled"	9
"Aaron, Best Friend"	10
"Christina"	11
"Aaron"	12
"Lexi, Sister"	13
"Christina"	14
"Aaron"	15
"Christina"	16
"Untitled"	17

Concepts in the Poetry Sequence *Socks with Holes*

This sequence of poems, entitled *Socks with Holes*, was a piece that I spent about a year planning, working on, and revising. In this introduction to my poetry, I will talk about the purpose of the sequence, the process, the role of the dramatic monologue, the importance of voice in each poem, the intended audience, and the role of Cubism in the poems.

Overall, the main purpose of this thesis is to better understand Evan, and people like Evan. With that, another purpose is to see that many different people can have different views of the same person, and that person's problems. Many people are angry with Evan, others are sad for losing him, and still others love him despite his problems. Overall, I really wanted the reader to see that Evan, despite his problems, is a good man.

My thesis first began as my semester project for my Capstone Seminar course as an English Writing major. At this point, the sequence of poems only consisted of about twelve poems, all of which I wrote over the course of the semester. During this time, I also began working with my thesis director, Professor Graham, on revising them and polishing them. Towards the end of the semester, I presented my poems at the annual Literary Festival. After this, I continued working on my existing poems, and adding new poems, all while continuing my work with Professor Graham on a weekly basis. This is the basic way in which my thesis has come to be.

Another important concept is the idea of a dramatic monologue and how this has influenced my sequence of poems. According to critical theorist Erin Nerstad, a dramatic monologue is an "effort of thought and imagination to create or restore the inner world of another person [...] with whose position or point of view the reader is compelled to

identify” (543). One of the most famous poets who employed the dramatic monologue genre is Robert Browning, who lived from 1812 until 1889. In one of his books of poetry, entitled *The Ring and the Book*, Browning tells of the trial of a man charged with murder in Rome. In this book, we encounter several different characters, each one speaking in his or her own voice, from his or her own perspective, about the events of this possible murder. For example, we hear from the main character Count Guido Franceschini, the man accused of murdering his wife. We also hear from Pope Innocent XII, the man who Franceschini is appealing to, as well as a young priest who is accused of having an affair with Franceschini’s wife. Overall, Franceschini’s appeal is unsuccessful, and he is convicted of the murder. This book is a great example of several dramatic monologues coming together to form one, cohesive story.

Another important point about Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* is that of the differing opinions and perceptions that different characters are able to speak in their respective poems. Literary theorist Morse Peckham states that “the poem makes it perfectly clear [...] that the human mind organizes its phenomenal perceptions according to its own interests [...] This general condition of the cognitive process applies also to one’s interpretations of language” (245). This statement makes two important points—one about people’s different interpretations of the same event, and one about the way we interpret language. I will come back to the latter idea when I discuss voice, but for right now I want to focus on the former. What makes a sequence of dramatic monologues so special, in my opinion, is that each character has the opportunity to tell his or her side of the story. Literary critic Nina Auerbach states that Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* is

“a cacophony of obscure voices [...] telling a truth [...] as they contradict each other” (163).

Both of these concepts are evident in my sequence of poems. Each important person in the life of the main character, Evan, has the opportunity to speak at least once and sometimes more than once. Even Evan himself has the opportunity to speak for himself several times in the sequence. Similar to Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*, my sequence of poems is a collection of dramatic monologues, each given by a different person. In addition, each character differs slightly in what his or her specific problems with Evan are, because each character has a different relationship to Evan. Furthermore, it is left up to the reader to determine what the real truth about Evan is—is it what his sister has to say about him, what his wife thinks, or what his best friend remembers about him? Each character has a chance to speak his or her mind and opinion about Evan, and the reader is left to judge for him or herself the truth about Evan. For example, Evan’s mother still holds out hope for him and is sentimental and loving, while his sister Mady is angry and bitter towards him. His wife misses him, wants to help him, and also looks back lovingly at their past relationship. Evan’s best friend Aaron also looks back fondly on the memories with Evan, but also recalls being worried about him. Lexi, Evan’s other sister, differs from Mady in that she participated in his bad behaviors with him and can relate to his problems. His two nieces are also important members in this sequence and differ in some important ways. Keltie is a little more understanding of the situation because she is older than Laura and misses who her uncle used to be. Laura is younger than Keltie, and while she doesn’t understand as much as Keltie does, she still realizes

that Evan is not normal. Finally, Evan's girlfriend Melissa tries to appeal to him with logic and scientific facts.

As I was working on these poems, it became clear to me that many of my different characters seemed to sound the same; that is, they all began to sound as I sound when I speak. So, I began to work on allowing each character in the poems to have his or her own, separate voice, one that would be evident to readers, even if the titles were not given to each poem that named the character. I was able to achieve this by taking some advice from Professor Graham. He told me to think about the ways in which different people in my own life speak, and then to take on these voices in my writing. I was also able to achieve this by the language they used. For example, the sister Mady in the poems is full of anger and uses repeated swear words, while the mother is largely reminiscent and sentimental. In addition, the two nieces in the poems, Keltie and Laura, speak in the way children would speak—full of mispronunciations and odd constructions that only children would think to use. So, overall, the use of different voices was an important part of my process in writing these poems.

In addition, it is important to mention the role of audience and who the intended audience is in this sequence. Each of the characters' monologues is addressed to Evan—he is the audience to whom each character is speaking. Each character wants Evan to be able to understand his or her own point of view and perspective. As for Evan's poems, his intended audience is the other characters. He is attempting to explain himself and his problems to the characters around him in response to their monologues.

Another important, and connected, concept in this sequence of poems is that of Cubism. Essayist Jennie-Rebecca Falchetta explains that Cubism “instead of rendering

objects in space as viewed from a particular perspective, with proportional distances, foreshortening, and dimension [...] rendered objects in a mode which took into account more than one viewpoint” (111). An excellent example of Cubism in literature is Ernest Hemingway’s collection of short stories *In Our Time*. This book was published in 1925 during the time period in literature known as modernism. Some of the themes in this collection include the horrors of World War I and the different characters’ interactions with love and family. Literary theorist Jacqueline Vaught Brogan explains the connection of this book with Cubism:

At the level of style [...] simultaneity and multiplicity of perspectives (key characteristics of both visual and verbal cubism) are very much a part of Hemingway’s earliest crafted techniques. Such multiplicity is found not only in narrative voice(s) throughout *In Our Time*, but in narrative voice(s) within individual stories and chapters as well. (31)

This quote further explains how Cubism works in literature and also offers an explanation of how it is used in Hemingway’s *In Our Time*. This concept is also evident in my sequence of poems. Each character sheds a different light on Evan, and through each different voice we are able to see something about Evan that we may not have gotten to know about before.

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Nina. "Robert Browning's Last Word." *Victorian Poetry* 22.2 (1984): 161-173. Print.
- Brogan, Jacqueline Vaught. "Hemingway's *In Our Time*: A Cubist Anatomy." *The Hemingway Review* 17.2 (1998): 31. Print.
- Falcetta, Jennie-Rebecca. "Geometrics of Space and Time: The Cubist London of Mrs. Dalloway." *Woolf Studies Annual* 13 (2007): 111. Print.
- Nerstad, Erin. "Decomposing but to Recompose: Browning, Biblical Hermeneutics, and the Dramatic Monologue." *Victorian Poetry* 50.4 (2012): 543. Print.
- Peckham, Morse. "Historiography and *The Ring and the Book*." *Victorian Poetry* 6.3/4 (1968): 243-257. Print.

*I'll take my glasses off to watch her form
from afar. And put them back on again
when all of her frontage is in my face.
And take them off again when she puts my face
in between her breasts. She wonders
how I'm doing, though, and I tell her the truth—
I'm off to rehab. She doesn't hesitate
to dance in front of other men—and calculate
my persistence. I'm leaving the black-lit
bar, but she runs off of the stage to tell
me something special: she hopes
I will be okay. And that's what people
look like at the strip club.*

Mom

The way that you smell is so different
than before. I remember when you, my fire,
were young. Your dark hair smelled so good. Almost
like—well I'm not so sure anymore. Because you reek
like poison chemicals now. Some household cleaner, only a sick
one that bleaches the old into something
ill, something different. A sick, dying pine tree.
Like a bite from a horsefly might smell
if it had one. Except that it doesn't quite
heal all the way. Ever. Like the exploded
battery in my remote control.

Mady, Sister

Shit no, you can't come live with me. All of your clothes,
your socks have holes in them. And what am I supposed
to tell my kids when they ask why you can't drive
them to school, or golf practice, why
you can't golf yourself anymore, how come you fucking stink and stopped
swinging with them on the pale, blue swing, or the goddamned
tire-swing, how come you might fall over, or why you listen to the same
dumbass song, over and over again? So beat it,
you and your piece of shit backpack.

Christina, Wife

With us, marriage is just
a corkscrew that spins
us down and into
separate beds.
The little red hand
on our Budweiser
clock is sweeping out
the hours we have left
in our spiral toward divorce. No
one else would take me. I always wondered
why you would choose me.
I'm cheaper—
and I accept those other smells,
like Dial that isn't
in our bathroom. I used to believe
I couldn't leave, but now I can't believe anything else.
Evan, how have we revolved,
devolved so far?

Keltie, Niece

When you come over to watch The Backyardigans—
the yellow hippies, and blue penguins—you seem
funny. You don't dance. Different. Why did you eat
all my red potsicles, and chug my blue
Kool-Aid? You can't throw straight, can't hit
my pink, smashy ball over our neighbor's
fence anymore. Santa told Mom
they put it up because of you. Uncle Evan, please
don't go to Heaven. I still believe
in you, even if Santa is mad. Why
won't you help Daddy set up the pool? He waits
on you—hold up the walls while he puts in
the ladder. And chlorox, chlorine, chloride? Chemically stuff.
Please! go get my ball for me.

Mady

I'm not sure who gets used to nightmares.
Maybe not a little girl at the fair,
who wants a purple snow-cone (it's grape!), and who lives
on the "Yo-Yo." You said you'd ride the special
rides with her—the "Tilt-a-Whirl," "Tremors,"
"Tornado." "Hey, Keltie, can
we ride the 'Scrambler?'" "Dude, I'm dizzy." Hung over,
again (piece of shit). If you're gonna ruin someone's day,
please don't make it hers, because she still dreams
of purple unicorns, talking cats, and the Easter Bunny. And you.

Laura, Niece

You know i love that black chair. And i
need that Dave song sung to me every
day at noon. Why don't you remember
the words? Mom remembers them. Everyday.
Can we go on the swings? Evan, wake up.
i'm not happy anymore. Hey, Evvie. C'mon.
i'm hot. Let me in. Can you help me hop
the fence? Anymore? the sun is hurty.
my feet. Why did you barf in my mom's
backyard? She's not gonna be happy about this.
I won't tell. Don't worry. Just wake up.

Melissa, Girlfriend

I will leave. I don't love you now.

"I thought the understanding was two drinks, only two."

As I said that, I realized how damn

absurd this is, how stupid I

must sound. Two drinks? Why do we need

to limit alcohol? At all? Most people

don't have this problem. They worry about their

lawns, or vacuums, or whether to be a lawyer

or pediatrician, not a drunk.

Stop it, Evan, or else. It's called a chemical

dependency; affects the cerebellum

and frontal lobes, cognition and vitamin

levels, memory—leads to Wernicke-Korsakoff

syndrome, liver disease and pancreatitis, leads

to your not even having a license to drive

to work, makes you illegal.

*That tin, metallic can pulled close to my
flannel sheet-covered bed. The phone rings loud,
like a horn honking from my sister's car.
God, I can't go again—"I'm fucking dying."
"No, mom, I can't go to mass today." I'm
too busy—puking to the music. The sound
of me hating myself for twenty-five
years was too loud. And so were the minutes
passing by—riding my bike to Levi's
house, plucking weeds from our garden, drinking
black cherry Kool-Aid, and remembering
a time when I wasn't a hassle. Or an asshole.
I caught something, like a cold.*

Aaron, Best Friend

Remember when we were sixteen, and you
had that blue Camry? With the sunroof.
The antenna made that scary noise when
it'd come up. We'd forget that every time
you started the car, and it scared
the shit out of us every single time.
And I know you thought nothing
decent was supposed to happen to you, ever.
Well, nothing did. I knew you were a concern
when that came true, you fool. I thought about moving
on when we used to drive around, drunk—
always with that antenna lurking behind us.
We stole your dad's Pall-Malls and fancy
beer: at least better than that bum-beer of ours.

Christina

We snuck into my dad's basement
while he was working
late, grabbing that huge, heavy
jug of Montana-brand vodka, hiding
out in the woods with a green tent,
and just us. The noise
of the water running over
the rocks and logs drowned
out any other scary noise.
Besides, I was too drunk
to notice the bugs, creaking
trees, or harmless
deer wandering around the beaches.
That night, you held my hair for me.

Aaron

Remember when we stole that red Pall-Mall from my mom? And I thought you blew out, instead of sucking in. And I took my first real drag, and had to sit down on that huge, grey rock by the fast creek because I was too dizzy. But, you looked so manly, blowing smoke out of your nose. Watching it flow along the creek, up and down with each wave. Only to disappear inside each of the tall pine trees that seemed about to fall on me.

Lexi, Sister

“Don’t be a pussy,” you told me. “Look again, see if she’s sleeping.” Of course, she is, I think, wondering who the real pussy is. “It’s dark.” The tin foil crinkled, and wrinkled as you ripped it across the sharp, jagged edge of the box. God, the sight of our straw, with those yellow and red lines running up and down the sides still give me the pukeys. Our lungs would burn, like eating metal, or glass chips. Is this how normal tastes?

Christina

Were people actually right
when they'd rag on us about
how stupid we were? I'm starting
to wonder. It probably
should have been a tip-off
when I was stumbling,
tripping down the aisle,
chewing mint gum,
and you had forgotten your vows
already and were forced
to mumble them spontaneously
up there with the minister looking horrified,
but saying nothing. We danced
like crazy people afterwards.
It was simple, like loving needs to be.

Aaron

When we'd wake up to the sunshine at noon
through our bed sheet curtains, the rooms all stank
of cheap beer, harsh-tasting liquor, and ancient,
blue smoke. Each fake-wood table was sticky,
and filled with perfect circles of past Mickeys.
Noisy friends had come over, celebrating nothing,
remembering little. We weren't sure of much
of anything except fun. We'd push the bulk
of the door open to the overbearing
day, and walk to town to prepare for the night.

Christina

I'm pretty sure parents
are supposed to, required
to love their kids forever.
But you were proof they don't.
I was evidence, too.
When you showed
me the yellow trailer we
would live in, we said it'd be temporary.
We imagined curtains,
instead of striped
sheets, tile instead
of green shag carpet,
electrical outlets that worked,
windows with screens,
and a door that locked
all the way. But dirt
and dust were fun back then.

*It's only a hunch, but I suspect
I'll go ahead and drink myself
to death. I think I'll go to Heaven—
if those of us who forget our prayers
at night can get in. Maybe there's a different
kind of Heaven—one where my father
just watches All in the Family all day—
and I carry those brown paper
bags home. Either way,
it's some sort of contentment.
Now, I'll take off my glasses, lean
back, and let my eyes adjust to the dark.*