

Southern Accents
By Kajsa Hoffer

“Yo, you goin’?”¹
 “You goin’?”
“Obviously.”²
 “Right.”
“See ya win.”³
 “Maybe.”⁴
“Come on, now.”⁵
 “Maybe.”
“Have faith. Prize money.”⁶
 “Couple bucks.”⁷
“That’s enough... A dream.”⁸
 “Man, shut the hell up.”
“You’ll win.”

“‘The Star of Bethlehem’.”⁹
 “Kinda cringe.”¹⁰
“Nah, man, cool.”¹¹
“Better than those.”¹²
 “Yeah.”
“See that one?”
 “Love the.”¹³
“Damn.”
 “What?”
“Nah, you right.”¹⁴
“Have faith.”¹⁵

¹ My sister entered an art competition, and her piece was being displayed at the event’s gallery. She was invited to the reception where they would be announcing the prize winners, and was taking our parents along with her.

² “I’d never miss it. It’s your first competition.” (*It’s my first, too. I won an art competition before, but I’d never been to a real gallery or had my work posted up.*)

³ “I’ve got confidence in your work— in you. You’ll win something, I know it. Don’t you think so?”

⁴ “I know. But I’ll be mad embarrassed if I don’t, so don’t expect anything from me.”

⁵ “Don’t make me say it. You’re literally better than everyone else there. We both think so already, so stop acting humble. You’re not humble, you’re just too scared to brag.”

⁶ The competition offered up to five thousand dollars to the winner. “Think about the money you’re working for. That’s enough incentive.”

⁷ “It’s not enough money to be a real incentive. I won’t even win all of it.”

⁸ “You aren’t doing this for the money, we both know you want to win it. You want other people to prove your art is good enough, so that you can feel validated in pursuing a passion you try to pretend you don’t care about.” (*We’re the same in that regard. I’d never want to be passionate about something I’m bad at. If I were bad at art— if it got rejected— then I’d have a reason to give it up. If it were accepted, I’d have an excuse to love it.*)

⁹ The title of her piece. Also a flower that signifies purity. “I saw it on the wall here.”

¹⁰ “It’s trying too hard. It’s not that deep of a piece.”

¹¹ I’m no good at giving praise, and it never comes out sounding genuine, especially if it’s to her. “It’s just right if you mean it. I think it’s just right.”

¹² I refer to the other works in the gallery. “I mean, have you seen all the other pieces here?”

¹³ “There’s nothing good about it.” (*I agree. Well, I pointed to a bad one on purpose. If that had the same chance of winning an award as hers, then I’d say she has nothing to worry about. But still, I hoped she wouldn’t believe me.*)

¹⁴ “I want to believe that, too.” (*That nobody else exists except for us. Somehow, you and I are the only two people alive, and the only two people who will ever live. There is a mutual understanding between us that if either were born alone, we would be worse— objectively worse— than the average person, however that would be. Slower, stupider, more hateful. But there is also the understanding that if we were the same person, we would be such an amazing person. I think we’ll always be a little bit bitter about that.*)

¹⁵ “Go ahead, compare yourself. See how much better yours is. I’m sure you’ll win.” (*I’m not worried, but I am scared. I’m not worried for her— my fear is wholly self-centred. What if she believes in herself one day, what will my words be to her? There won’t be a need to comfort or soothe, but to congratulate and praise. And I’m no good at giving praise.*)

“Bro.”

“What?”

“The short films.”¹⁶

“Yeah.”

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“I know.”

“Come on, now.”¹⁸

“I know.”

“I ain’t a hater.”¹⁹

20

“Damn.”

“Come on.”²¹

“Ain’t even like that.”²²

“Next year.”²³

“You, too.”²⁴

¹⁶ One of the categories in the competition was for film, whether animated or not.

¹⁷ “I don’t like them.”

¹⁸ “Maybe I should have submitted something for this. I probably would have won something.”

¹⁹ “I don’t want to put others down, I have no right to.” (*Of course there exists a world outside just the two of us, a world outside this little bubble. I just want to believe that it’s a little less scary, a little more manageable, by convincing myself that our bubble is already on top of the world.*)

²⁰ “Don’t lie to me.”

²¹ “Let yourself be the last person to say that.” (*I’m her twin before I’m a hater; aren’t I? I’m her twin before I’m anything at all. Before I was anything, and after I am everything, whatever everything I am will be anything she was. Of course I’d hope my older is the best in the world.*)

Openshaw, Jonathan. “Seeing Double: How History Became Obsessed with Twins - Google Arts & Culture.” Seeing Double: How History Became Obsessed With Twins. Accessed May 28, 2024.

²² “Don’t be like that.” *Don’t call me out. Maybe I’d be able to handle it if you agreed that I was better instead of agreeing that I’m hateful.*

²³ “Sign up for the show next time they’re accepting applicants, if you feel so badly about it. Surely other people will say you’re great. Don’t make me say it.”

²⁴ I let her walk away, but I stayed standing by *The Star of Bethlehem*. As a statue, a guard, or an admirer, I don’t know. Maybe I’m standing not beside it, but amidst its darkness, feeling short strands of cold grass gnaw at my legs. A blinding white cuts through the shadow, and what am I looking at? I’d wrap myself around the comforting idea of *home*, even though home stares ahead just as petrified as I.

“Damn! Nice!”²⁵

“Congrats.”²⁶

“Fifty bucks.”²⁷

“Nice.”²⁸

“... You happy?”²⁹

“Yeah.”

30

“Next year.”³¹

²⁵ She won third place: a nice paper award and a check all wrapped up in a laminated folder.

²⁶ “I told you you’d win something.”

²⁷ “Still didn’t win much. It’s not first place.”

²⁸ “That’s not all you won. You can earn fifty dollars somewhere else if you want and it wouldn’t mean as much.”

²⁹ Something tentative and soft and hesitant, something so unlike who we are.

³⁰ “Me, too.” Neither of us were really happy.

I was sitting there in the audience, grinning from ear to ear as I clapped. I wanted my hands to hurt from how hard I clapped, and I wanted my ears to hurt because of how loud I clapped. And it looked like I was clapping, sure. But I’d already made peace with my inability to act on congratulations alone. I’m no good at giving praise. Neither of us were really happy.

Someone who knows I’m her twin glances over at me a couple times throughout the ceremony.

‘Isn’t Kajsa an artist, too?’

A clenched jaw accompanies the stinging in my palms. I am, I am, I am. I didn’t submit anything to the competition, there’s no need for me to feel bitter about not winning. But the Star of Bethlehem is a sour name, and an abundance of light blinds me just the same as a lack of it.

But her apathy stirred a deep satisfaction in me, and once again we were one. We weren’t happy. I’m not happy, as happy as a loser can be. How relieved I was!

Bakker, Peter. “Autonomous Languages of Twins: Acta Geneticae Medicae et Gemellologiae: Twin Research.” Autonomous languages of twins, August 1, 2014.

³¹ To comfort and soothe with an understanding that I was hoping for something more just by being part of her. I need to be more familiar with giving praise.

Next year, I’ll apply for the competition, and by then, my sister would have spent her fifty dollars and it wouldn’t mean anything to me at all. Until then, we will remain we and I will continue to be.



Sources

Bakker, Peter. "Autonomous Languages of Twins: Acta Geneticae Medicae et Gemellologiae: Twin Research." Autonomous languages of twins, August 1, 2014.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3434134/#:~:text=Twins%20are%20regularly%20reported%20to,twins%2C%20but%20often%20disappear%20soon.>

I researched how twins develop their own language in infancy, which is slowly lost as they learn their mother tongue. However, their language can stick with each other if they are neglected or fail to be taught a recognised language. Before elementary school, our parents were around, but they were at work for a majority of our lives once school started. During quarantine, my sister and I were really only around each other for obvious reasons, and even after, into our first two years of high school, we spent the entire day together. I think it's a given that the language we use with each other is different from how we speak to anyone else.

I originally thought of this prompt for my lyrical essay when she asked me one day if it was concerning, the amount of grammar we dropped around each other.

Openshaw, Jonathan. "Seeing Double: How History Became Obsessed with Twins - Google Arts & Culture." Seeing Double: How History Became Obsessed With Twins. Accessed May 28, 2024.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/seeing-double-how-history-became-obsessed-with-twins/XgliH-H78-86LQ>.

In conversation three, I included a section which mentioned the younger brother being defined by the older one. In the article, it mentions that in African culture, the firstborn twin is referred to as Taiwo, meaning 'to have the first taste of the world', whereas the secondborn is called Kehinde, meaning 'arriving after the other'.

Even in history, twins have been defined by the older and the younger. Even as their own people, it's always felt like I'm just an extension of my sister.

I asked my parents which one of us they thought was the 'real' one—the original—and they told me that they considered it to be my sister. I didn't ask them much about it, since I know they don't have an answer as to *why*, but I know there is a *why*.

Ynez Hoffer, The Star of Bethlehem, 04/23/24, Digital, 1600×786

The Star of Bethlehem is a flower that signifies purity. My sister had originally drawn the piece to share her experience of growing up physically while mentally still being a child— or rather, being seen as an adult, but not being ready to face the world. It is the piece that won in the competition, and I felt like it connected well with my topic of being a twin. Both because it was about growing up, and because of the situation we're both in; an eternal competition with each other, yet still turn to one another in search of solace and escape from the rest of the world.

SELF GRADING

	Excellent (3 points)	Satisfactory, but needs some improvement (2 points)	Partially complete/ needs significant improvement (1 point)
Focus	Purpose of the lyrical essay is clear and compelling. Writer represents the complexity of the subject perceptively, reflecting deep, sensitive, and sustained thinking.	Purpose of the lyrical essay is clear but could be more compelling. The writer could be more perceptive in their representation of the subject and its complexity.	Purpose of the lyrical essay is unclear. Or, the essay represents the subject too simply, neglecting complexity.
Style	The writer employs a variety of stylistic techniques (poetic devices, narrative perspective, varied prose forms) to challenge the reader to interpret meaning and shape the reading experience. Metaphors are fresh, original, and apt representations of the subject matter.	The writer employs several recognizable stylistic techniques but could do more stylistically to challenge the reader and shape the reading experience. Apt metaphors are present, but could be more specific or original.	The writer is fairly one-dimensional in their application of stylistic techniques. Or, metaphors fall into cliché territory.
Research	Writer uses accurate Chicago-style NB footnote format , indicating clearly at least 3 research sources in the text. Annotated bibliography follows proper format and conveys insight into the writer's thinking about the value and purpose of each source (describe, evaluate, and explain why/how it is relevant	Chicago-style footnote format has some errors. Writer indicates 3 research sources in the text. Or, annotated bibliography has some errors or does not include all required elements for each source (describe, evaluate, and explain why/how it is relevant to your lyrical essay).	Chicago-style footnote format is missing, or, writer does not cite 3 sources in the text. Or, annotated bibliography is incomplete.

	to your lyrical essay). See here for guide.		
Mechanics	The text is free from errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. From a mechanics standpoint, this essay is ready for publication.	The text contains some errors. These errors do not impact the reader's ability to comprehend material. One more round of editing/polishing is necessary.	The text contains some significant errors. These errors affect the reader's ability to understand the material in some places.