Sunny Days and Blue Nights

Society itself is more connected to nature than people think. For example, Bill Gates is so successful because of his intellectual potential and ability to “adapt himself to his environment” and make money. However, most people have to work hard to gain those abilities and manage to adapt themselves to be able to survive. Then, there are those few exceptions of people that are just lucky and win the lottery or are simply “at the right place at the right time.” In nature, it is the same thing because only the stronger animals or plants manage to adapt themselves to their environment to successfully survive. In the story “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin, the same case of “survival of the fittest” is displayed as Sonny is a guy who is addicted to drugs and is described by the author as a sorry person who goes to prison and has always been living under the shadow of the narrator (his older brother), who is a math teacher and has a family of his own. Sonny does not seem to have the same abilities as the narrator to survive and be successful in life. The narrator and Sonny are like two trees trying to survive and catch sunlight (attention/love/nurture), but the narrator is casting such a big shadow over Sonny that Sonny seems to be too unfit to catch the sun’s rays.

In the story “Sonny’s Blues,: Sonny and the narrator’s story could be described similarly to two trees trying to survive and to adapt to life. As the story begins, the narrator is described as a strong and well organized character making it unlikely of him to have a younger brother that is addicted to drugs and in prison. According to “Interactions,” even the strongest of trees such as
the conifer species that are able to survive in the roughest winters are still vulnerable to parasites such as Dwarf Mistletoe. Drugs can bring thoughts of a peaking “high” and happiness, just like the Dwarf Mistletoe brings thoughts of happiness and cheerful Christmas time. However, the reality is that the Dwarf Mistletoe just like drugs can kill its host. Baldwin writes, “All that hatred down there,” he said. “All that hatred and misery and love. It’s a wonder it doesn’t blow the avenue apart” (para. 8) shows how even though the streets of Harlem are full of all those good and bad emotions that could “blow the avenue apart,” Harlem still forms part of who they are and people cannot change their roots no matter where they go. In nature, according to “Winter Adaptations of Trees” this could be symbolized as a similarity because no matter how much a tree tries to move like an animal to catch sunlight and food it cannot do so and can only lean slightly because trees are bound to the ground by their roots. By saying this, James Baldwin could be saying that if people are born in streets like Harlem or have dark backgrounds, that people are predestined to always be part of that violence and dark pasts.

Throughout the beginning of the story, James Baldwin makes the narrator seem to be a well-respected man since he is a teacher, has a family of his own, and stands out in the “dark” streets of Harlem. Baldwin also makes it clear that even though the narrator seems to be inquiring about Sonny and if he is ever going to quit those bad “habits” that made him go to prison, that the narrator does not really want to help him get out. Nevertheless, when the narrator’s daughter passes, the narrator receives a letter from Sonny telling him that he is sorry for everything that has happened. The narrator then is reminded of that connection of family warmth and nurture and for the first time begins to write to Sonny. Since the narrator seems to be a “healthier” and more fit to adapt tree when he has all the sunlight (Success, happiness), he feels like he does not need his brother since his brother seems to be in darkness when in reality his
brother lives in the shadow of the narrator. When the daughter of the narrator passed, her death could be symbolized as night and complete darkness for both of the trees (Narrator and Sonny). When there is complete darkness on the both of them, their differences (shadows) disappear and they are able to come together as family to overcome the darkness (any problem, in this case death). Baldwin could be giving a hidden message saying that most of the society only tends to come together only when tragedies happen or when they are reminded of their dark pasts.

“Sonny’s Blues” would be a completely different story if Sonny fixed his fatal flaw which is his disability to adapt to society just like a tree adapts to its environment. Sonny is clearly described as a failure when compared to his brother which suggests that if the narrator was not part of the story then maybe Sonny would not be such a failure in life. First, Sonny should let go completely of his drug addiction which is practically leaching his life away and giving him an excuse to be the unsuccessful bum he is. It seems that since he is unsuccessful at becoming as outgoing and respected as his brother, that he does drugs to have an excuse to why he cannot do half the things the narrator does. Also, Sonny needs to stop trying to make others feel sorry for him and do something to overcome that shadow that the narrator casts over him so he too can reach some of the sunlight (success, joy, happiness) his brother has been hogging up all for himself. He should also seek to play other types of music because when people think of music they think of lively and joyful things but ironically he plays jazz which is a genre that usually tends to be gloomy and talk about the bad things in life. Then, he should find a way to prove to his mother that he is able to take care of himself and does not need to depend on the narrator to take watch over him.

Nature can be real cruel to animals and plants such as trees by killing off the ones who are unable to adapt and only allowing the strongest to survive. However, we humans have
characteristics that plants and other animals are unable to have which makes us the more dominant species. We all share a heart and a mind that can help us reason right from wrong. Just like all animals, we share many differences and sometimes we allow those differences to put barriers up in between us. But if we use our similarities to come together and overcome our differences we can all overcome that shadow another casts over us. Therefore, allowing the ones who are unfortunate and weaker to also adapt with us. In effect, if the narrator would put away his differences with his brother, he could eventually help his brother overcome his drug problems and help him achieve his dreams.
Works Cited

