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The Vulnerability of Giving

"I have been one acquainted with the night" (Frost, 1969, p. 225), is the first line of a poem by Robert Frost entitled, "Acquainted with the Night." It tells the story of a man suffering from depression who takes a late night walk. During my senior year of high school, my classmates and I had to pick a poem by Robert Frost and analyze it. A friend of mine chose "Acquainted with the Night," and I immediately fell in love with it due to the use of form, tenses, syntax, and symbolism to further emphasize its meaning. The author constantly introduces these authorial choices to further emphasize the man's depression. This poem was brought to mind when I was introduced to Amorelle Jacox's video called "The Way Things Hold Each Other." Like Frost's poem, Jacox's video has a meticulous theme.

The young girl in Jacox's "The Way Things Hold Each Other" conveys a theme of detail. The girl in the video performs a simple act; she brushes her hair on a stool in the bathroom. The underside of this chair has a cobweb forming underneath it. The girl does not seem to notice this web. Rather, she swings her legs while sitting and brushing her hair, her feet barely missing contact with the cobweb. Then, the girl in the video begins to perform precise actions. She takes the hair that has clung to her brush and places the long, thin strands in rows on the windowsill. She proceeds to take these

almost invisible strands of hair and place them, one by one, on the cobweb in the nook of her stool. She wraps some strands around the web, while some are just placed on top. After doing this for a short amount of time, she begins brushing her hair again but with more speed and intensity. Why does the girl do this? Maybe she has anxiety and performing these careful tasks keeps her mind occupied. Maybe the girl just appreciates brushing and playing with her hair. Either way, significant emphasis is placed on the elementary task of brushing hair, reminding us to slow down and remember the little things.

The second half of Jacox's video involves a chunk of wood that is floating in the water of a lake. Although it is surrounded by water, it has a blaze of fire surviving on top. Unlike the meticulous girl, this mass of wood is splashing around the lake, moving with the waves as they lap the shore. There is a sense of recklessness here because you never know what will happen to the flame as it floats upon the deep, blue water. At the end of the video, the hunk of wood makes it to land, but as the waves continue to splash upon the shore, the fire is snuffed out. The life found in the blaze is no longer evident when looking at the wet slab of wood. This wood was not young like the girl, but it must have fallen off an old, dying tree. This led to me to think of adulthood or reaching mental maturity. Rather than enjoying the little things, we begin to let life take us wherever the waves go. We no longer pay attention to simple tasks because we seem to have more important things to be doing. We let the waves splash us and they

put our fire out, yet we push on until we reach the shore. At which point, our flame goes out.

These two halves flash back and forth throughout the video, contrasting the themes of carefulness and carelessness, comfort and displacement, and of youth and adulthood. For Jacox, this video was about vulnerability. Jacox calls herself “a giver” because she feels as though she always encourages others and loves them as Christ would want her to. The problem she runs into often, though, is that she struggles to find the line between giving love and being used for her love. In her paintings, Jacox often depicts the theme of nakedness stating that when you give too much of yourself in love to someone else, it begins to look negative and leave the giver feeling naked. This exhaustion from giving is depicted by both the young girl and the flaming wood. The young girl gives part of herself, in pieces, to this web as she attempts to help its formation. She does this with good intentions, but after a while the web will begin to be weighed down by the hair and fall apart. Once this web breaks, it will no longer be whole. Yet the girl continues trying to assist the formation of this web to the point of desperation, depicted by the urgency to brush her hair quicker than when she began (A. Jacox, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Furthermore, the fire, being carried along by the water, is dependent upon the water to take it where it wants to go. It needs to reach land in order to survive, and only the water can take it there. In the process of helping, the water extinguishes the

flame. If we pour out too much of ourselves, in the hopes of helping others, we may actually have a negative effect on them as well as ourselves. Jacox mentioned we must remember that as we fill others, we also need to be filled. Otherwise, we will have nothing left to give (A. Jacox, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

All artwork by Jacox is created to exhibit the idea of a giver who gives too much, creating a nakedness caused by the vulnerability that comes with giving (A. Jacox, personal communication, October 13, 2015). In her artist's statement, Jacox describes a "sigh" that occurs when the giver knows she has given so much of herself to others. This sigh represents "exhaustion," "tension," and "surrender." She struggles to find the line between giving enough and giving too much (Jacox). This fine line is critical for both the giver and the receiver. We must give, but if we give too much, it results in dependence and exhaustion. If we give too little, it results in failure and guilt.

In the tradition of Frost, Jacox created a magnificent piece that is worthy of admiration. This preciseness results in a simple work that needs to be further analyzed in order to discover its true meaning. The audience must look below the surface to fully understand the creation. Just as the artist or writer intentionally creates these meanings, the audience must be intentional when analyzing. This artistic technique places considerable demands on the audience, but the satisfaction in discovering that meaning makes it all worth it.