

THE SACRED AND PROFANE

Ashley Naftule, Paradise Valley Community College
Second Place, One-Act Play

CHARACTERS: MR. JONES, a community college English teacher
BOBBY a student of Mr. Jones

SETTING: The small and cluttered office of MR. JONES. There are two fully stocked bookshelves looming behind MR. JONES' steel gray desk. A pile of papers are stacked in front of MR. JONES, a cup of red pens on his right, a bust of William Shakespeare on his left, and a trash can full of crumpled up papers resting against the left side of his desk. Two chairs are positioned in front of his desk, with a 2002 Swimsuit Calendar hanging to the right of the office door. The curtain rises as MR. JONES is busy grading papers with BOBBY sitting in front of his desk.

(MR. JONES pauses from his grading, setting his red pen down with a sigh. He looks at BOBBY'S eager young face, grinning in a humorless fashion)

MR. JONES: So, you wanna be a poet?

BOBBY: *(nods enthusiastically)* More than anything. Any advice you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

MR. JONES: *(leaning back in his chair)* Nice to see that someone values my opinion. Alright, I'll give you my pearl of wisdom. Think of all your influences. Conjure up their names and visualize them as though they were standing in front of you, like a police lineup. Now, name them all, one by one, in order of whose had the biggest influence on you as a writer. You ready?

BOBBY: *(claps his hands together)* I'm ready!

MR. JONES: *(shouting with obvious relish, arms thrown into the air)* Bring forth the accused!

BOBBY: *(points at the Shakespeare bust)* For starters, there's William Shakespeare and—

MR. JONES: *(chair snaps forward. He raises his hand like a crosswalk guard)* Whoa, stop right there. We're already off to a bad start.

BOBBY: But, its Shake—

MR. JONES *(sweeps his arm across the left edge of his desk, knocking the Shakespeare bust into the trash can)* Fuck William Shakespeare. Don't believe the hype, kid. Anyone who can't even bother to title their sonnets doesn't deserve to be a literary god. Besides, we all know that Christopher Marlowe wrote his plays.

BOBBY: *(rests his head on his hands, brow furrowing with thought, a bit taken aback by MR. JONES)* Well...how about Charles Dickens?

MR. JONES: (*laughing*) Dickens? Dickens?! Dickens was a whore! He got paid by the word! “How do you like it, honey?” “Excessively verbose, Mr. Dickens, and don’t skimp on the tongue.”

BOBBY: Edgar Allan Poe?

MR. JONES: (*shaking his head, smirking*) If you want to end up face first in a gutter after a bad opium trip, he’s your man.

BOBBY: (*leans forward, his posture becoming more aggressive*) William Blake?

MR. JONES: (*leans back, crosses his legs, still smirking*) Living proof that being a lunatic can make you famous. Follow him, kid, and you’ll be seeing angels in the trees, too. And don’t get me started on that Urizen crap.

BOBBY: Sylvia Plath?

MR. JONES: (*strokes his chin, leans forward, his smirk turning into a conspiratory smile*) I’ve got a joke about Sylvia Plath. How do you get Sylvia Plath down from a tree?

BOBBY: (*in a wary voice*) How?

MR. JONES: (*with a straight face*) Cut the rope. Moving along...

BOBBY: (*briefly stunned, then bursts out laughing. After a couple of seconds, it subsides*) Ar... Arthur Rimbaud?

MR. JONES: Oh, Paul Verlaine’s boy toy! A perfect poet for anyone with a death wish.

BOBBY: Wallace Stevens?

MR. JONES: (*shrugs his shoulders*) Well, that’s not a bad choice, if you’re willing to be married to an ice queen for the rest of your life. “*Look, dear, I won the Pulitzer!*” “*That’s nice. Did you take out the trash?*”

BOBBY: William Burroughs?

MR. JONES: (*in a giddy voice, gesturing his arms outwards towards some imaginary audience*) Hey kids! You too can be just like William Burroughs! All you gotta do is shoot your wife in the head and get hooked on horse!

BOBBY: (*frustration begins seeping into his voice*) John Keats?

MR. JONES: (*folds his hands on top of his desk*) Yes, poor whiny Johnny TB. Just like Arthur; a perfect choice if you don’t want to live to see thirty.

BOBBY: Ralph Waldo Emerson?

MR. JONES: (*pats his hands on his chair’s armrests*) Ah, fancy yourself an arm chair philosopher, don’t ya?

BOBBY: Jack Kerouac?

MR. JONES: (*lifts his hand to his mouth in a mock bottle drinking gesture*) The mama's boy who loves his bottle. Better start drinking now, or you'll never catch up.

BOBBY: (*in a completely exasperated voice*) Maya Angelou?

MR. JONES: (*pauses, genuinely taken aback. He bursts into laughter, pretending to wipe a tear from his eye. He stops laughing, a grave expression on his face*) I'm not even going to go there. Next.

BOBBY: (*throws his hands up in a "I Surrender" gesture.*) You?

MR. JONES: (*surprised*) Me?

BOBBY: Well, you are my English teacher.

MR. JONES: (*he picks up his red pen and places his hand on top of the stack of papers*) Listen up, it's a well-known fact that 9 out of 10 of all English teachers are failed writers. The only reason why I'm here is because I couldn't get my foot in the door... that, and I have a bit of sadistic streak. Unless you want to spend the rest of your life circling typos and grading essays written by subhumanoid hormone depositories, I suggest you take a different bus route.

BOBBY: (*shouting out with frustration*) Then who the hell should I imitate?!

MR. JONES: (*sighs, a pleased smile on his face*) Finally, you asked the right question. Do you have a mirror?

BOBBY: (*nods slowly*) Yes.

MR. JONES: (*leans forward; points at BOBBY, and speaks with an authoritative air*) Go home, look dead center into the glass, and write down what you think you see. Then spend the rest of your creative life trying to mimic what you saw in the looking-glass. Do that right, and you'll have completed the first step in being a good writer.

BOBBY: (*answers slowly, confused*) I don't understand. What step are you talking about?

MR. JONES: (*smiles and winks at BOBBY*) Herding all your sacred cows through a slaughterhouse.

