

Power in O'Connor's The Artificial Nigger and Mason's Shiloh

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Flannery O'Connor's story *The Artificial Nigger* and Bobbie Ann Mason's story *Shiloh* both possess characters that exercise power. Mr. Head, the main character that exercises power in *The Artificial Nigger*, is an old racist man, who claims to know everything. In [Mason's](#) story, Norma Jean, a simple southern woman who wants change in her life, is the main character that exercises power. Both characters are similar in their successful exercise of power; however, the effects their power have are different.

Mr. Head's exercise of power has a negative effect on his grandson, Nelson, while Norma Jean's exercise of power serves as a way to benefit herself. Mr. Head's main focus is to make Nelson see black people as "niggers" and for Nelson to fear the city. Mr. Head's controlling nature affects Nelson in a negative manner. From the beginning of the story, Mr. Head's powerful and controlling personality is evident when the narrator states, "...he saw half of the moon five feet away in his shaving mirror, paused as if it were waiting to enter" (249). Mr. Head's desire to control also extends to all aspects of life. His intentions for

Nelson are clear when he says, "...but I mean for him to get his fill once and for all" (254). By making Nelson feel powerless, Mr. Head steals away his innocence. Before influencing his grandson, Nelson's description of a black man is "A man," but later in the story Nelson begins to see black people as "niggers," just like his grandfather (255). Fearing the city, also has a negative effect on Nelson. He holds pride in being born in Atlanta, but his grandfather wants to teach Nelson that "he had no cause for pride merely because he had been...

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...aking classes, she is able to slowly but surely find her independence again. Norma Jean finally tells her husband that she wants to leave him because she does not want to "...feel eighteen again" (500). By leaving Leroy and starting a new life, Norma Jean is able to forget the pain and embarrassment she felt many years ago. The power she possesses enables her to succeed in her wish to move on.

The characters in both stories have similarities and differences. Mr. Head and Norma Jean use their power to get what they want. Both are similar because they are successful in exercising their power and are different because their power has different effects. Mr. Head thrives on control and succeeds in his plan to control his grandson. Norma Jean works at self-improvement so that she can leave her husband and continue to live the life that she has longed for.

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