

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“Leroy and Norma Jean Meet Rock, Doris, and Dr. Strangelove in Bobbie Ann Mason’s  
‘Shiloh’”

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This final report addresses the results of a professional research project funded by an ATU Professional Development Grant. This report follows the instructions provided in the Guidelines for Professional Development Grants.

A. Title Page (see above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of conference paper presented:

Bobbie Ann Mason's story "Shiloh," by its very title, conjures up the Civil War, a battleground that serves as the setting for the final dissolution of Leroy and Norma Jean's marriage. Yet Mason also includes a telling detail that helps debunk a common charge that the story is an apolitical, ahistorical text. At one dramatic turning point, while the couple is watching a double feature at the local drive-in, their infant son dies in the back seat, a death that contributes to the death of their marriage. Both films are from the early 1960s, a time of heightened political protest about war and gender inequalities: *Lover Come Back* and *Dr. Strangelove*--an odd combination, until one examines the sexual politics that underlie the first, a conservative romantic comedy, and the second, a dark anti-war satire. In unexpected ways, the films summon up not only southern history, but, even more directly, a sexual politics that generates sympathy for Norma Jean over any identification with Leroy (whose point of view skews readers' sympathies toward him) or with old south notions of masculinity that inevitably lead to war. Stephen N. doCarmo asserts that in Mason's novel *In Country*, the "tactical use" of popular culture heightens the historical sense and becomes "the starting point" of "radical politics." I would argue

that the films in “Shiloh” are also significant signifiers of popular culture as the historical starting point for a more radical sexual politics.

#### C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the American Literature Association Symposium on the American Short Story in Savannah, GA, and presented my paper there. I flew out of Little Rock on October 19, and returned on October 23, 2016.

#### D. Summary of Experiences

My primary teaching area within literature is modern American, and within that, the literature of the American South. I teach a southern literature course every other spring. Bobbie Ann Mason’s work, and, in particular, this story, is consistently part of that course. I also regularly teach film courses, both the general education introduction to film and numerous special topics film courses, several of which combine film and literature. This paper reflects that focus, as well as my work in feminist theory (both literary and film). The positive feedback I received on my paper will not only help in expanding my teaching of both southern literature and film, but also in my ongoing research in both areas. I was also able to attend numerous other panels relevant to my teaching and scholarship.

#### E. Conclusions and Recommendations

I am working on expanding this approach of combining literary and film texts, hoping to put them together at some point in publishable form. Without the funds I received from the ATU Professional Grant, I would not have been able to attend the conference.