

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)

Fitzgerald was a legend in his life time, and he has become even more of a legend since his death. He has always been considered the symbol of the 1920s —The Jazz Age; The Roaring Twenties; a symbol of the delights, the dangers, and also the failures and defeats of the so called “Jazz Age”. He was born in San Paul, a small town in Minnesota. On his father’s side, the family was prominent; a family of once prosperous, land owners, legislators. On his mother’s side, he came from a family of a newly rich, Irish immigrants. His father failed and became poor, so the family lived from the income of the mother’s capital. Later in life, Fitzgerald referred to this divided heritage saying that his father’s side of the family had “that certain series of reticences and obligations that go under the poor old chaffered word ‘reading’”, and that his mother’s side had the money. From this divided family heritage, Fitzgerald acquired a very deep ambivalence toward money and social status; he also developed from this a very intense aspiration to a social position that he would never reach, and he wrote about this —about failure as an experience, one of the crucial themes in his works.

His life was characterized by extravagant success and devastating failure. He has been a famous figure in American popular culture; the story of his life combines glamour and dissipation, disillusion. From San Paul, Minnesota, he went to many places; he went to Princeton University; New York, Paris, Hollywood, and other places.

Fitzgerald was simultaneously a very fierce critic and a perfect representative of his time, of the Jazz Age. He felt ambivalent about great wealth; and we see this reflected in Gatsby, a character that Nick Carraway both admires and detests; so Fitzgerald felt both attracted and repulsed by the idealization of great wealth, and also by the romanticization of sexual love.

His first novel was titled *This Side of Paradise* (1920), which is autobiographical. This novel is about Fitzgerald’s years at Princeton University, he wrote most of this novel during his time in the army; he accepted a commission to join the US Infantry in 1917. However, he did not participate directly in the war, because the war ended before he was going to embark for Europe. When he was in the army, he was stationed in Montgomery, a small town in the state of Alabama, where he met his future wife Zelda Sayre, a beautiful and talented woman. Zelda was very responsive to the ambitions of Fitzgerald; they both wanted the same things from life —glamour, success, fame, publicity.

Fitzgerald and Zelda got married in April of 1920, and they started a life together, which was characterized by glamour, extravagance, emotional storms, good publicity; through the 1920s and until the 1930s they were famous, specially in Paris —they dressed fashionably, they stayed in expensive hotels, they took baths in public fountains, they rolled on the roofs of taxis, and danced in restaurant tables; that life is partially reflected in Woody Allen’s movie *Midnight in Paris*; a life of endless partying, expulsions from public places, irresponsible behavior, irresponsible squandering of money. Fitzgerald made a lot of money as a writer because he became an instant success with his first novel —*This Side of Paradise*—, but with the lifestyle they had, they spent the money quicker than he made it —and he made a lot.

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They lived a way of life whose catastrophic consequences can be seen reflected in Fitzgerald's story "Babylon Revisited".

As already mentioned, his first novel was incredibly popular—in the first year it sold 40,000 copies—and this made him instantly famous. He became the spokesman, the cultural hero for many of his generation. It was a novel that announced the new era, a novel that presented a new generation that was hungry for life and pleasure in this rapidly changing America.

It was the success of this novel that made Zelda accept him as her husband, because she was the type of girl who would only consented to marry him if he became rich and famous.

The second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), had very bad reviews. This story was inspired by their life together; a story of moral and sexual disillusion. In 1924, the Fitzgeralds left America, and they moved to Europe for an extended stay—it is in Paris where Fitzgerald met Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. It was also in Paris where he began a very intense and very competitive friendship with Hemingway; it was always a very competitive relationship that they had.

Then, he went to the French Riviera, and it was in the ex-patriot isolation of the French Riviera where he wrote most of *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925. According to Fitzgerald's words, his intention with this novel was to write "a novel better than any novel ever written in America", and this was a novel in which he made a very significant statement about America, about the modern age of the limitation and the inefficacy of idealism in the Modern Age. This novel was initially a failure; commercial—it was less successful than the first and the second novels that he wrote. The reviews were mixed—some were positive, and some were negative. The first printings sold fairly well, and the second printing did not. Then, the novel was mostly forgotten until WW2, and this was something that many people do not know, and it is very curious because it was the edition of *Gatsby* that was printed for the American soldiers in WW2, the so-called the "American Service Edition", which was given to the soldiers that were in college to read during the war; it was this what rescued *The Great Gatsby* from obscurity. The reprinting of the novel for the American Troops created a mass audience, a mass readership for this novel, and this has persisted ever since the WW2 period.

Fitzgerald went to spend some time to Hollywood work in movies, to write screenplays, but he was a total failure; he only made it to the credits of a movie, but he was not famous.

In 1934 he published his 4th novel, called *Tender Is the Night*, which according to some critics is even better than *The Great Gatsby*. The novel is about an American psychiatrist in Europe and his disastrous marriage to one of his rich patients. Its title comes from a poem by John Keats, which was titled "Ode to a Nightingale". With this novel his financial situation did not improve; he went to Hollywood again, which was another failure. This led to his drinking problem getting worse; which coincided with his wife Zelda suffering mental problems. He died young in Hollywood from a heart attack in 1940 at the age of 44.

He is famous for his tendency of self-destruction, which places him in the group of American icons—among names as James Dean, Elvis Presley, Janice Joplin, Michael Jackson—who live by the principle or credo that says "Live fast, die young". His wife Zelda continued to fight her severe mental problems, her

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depression for another 8 years. She died in a critical condition; she was burned to death in a hospital fire in North Carolina in the year 1948. In 1932 she published her own novel —*Save me the Waltz*. This is a novel to which —specially— female critics have been paying increasing attention in the last years. The is about herself, a version of her life with Scott Fitzgerald.

Finally, *The Last Tycoon* is the last novel he wrote, which he left unfinished, and was later published in 1941. This novel is about a Hollywood producer, and which is based on a real person.

The Great Gatsby (1925)

This is a novel that has been enormously popular, at least four films were made based on this novel, and thousands of critical articles have been written about it. Probably, the popularity of the novel is due, at least in part, to the emphasis of Fitzgerald's favorite themes —love and money.

It is a novel that implicitly asks questions such as “is there room for romance and romanticism in the 20th century capitalistic America?”

This novel that has been successful with a mass audience, with the reading public, and also with the academics, with the critics. This success with the critics has been related to the ability that Fitzgerald had to in-view this popular subject with cultural mythology, with literary seriousness. It is a novel that captures perfectly well the spirit of the Jazz Age, the pleasure seeking of the Jazz Age. It is a book which is characterized by simplicity, and this simplicity is part of his beauty and, at the same time, a book with beauty and simplicity has a complex structure, is an intricate structure.

The prose is easy to read, but it is a very concentrated prose; it is a prose which is _ (00:24:15), with meaning and suggestions. This novel has several levels; it is a love story, of course, about a man consumed by nostalgia, by lost love, so it is the love story about a man's obsessive desire to win back the woman that he lost, and it is also about the destructive consequences of that desire. Fitzgerald is one of those so-called American innocents —like Captain Ahab, from *Moby Dick*, like Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner—, isolated by their obsession of persisting in seeing everything through their own plan, their own life design; usually these characters live in the past.

It is a love story, but it is also a novel with social satire. The novel satirizes some of the attitudes of the period; it satirizes the whole conception, the whole mythology. It contains denunciation of the shallowness, the egotism, the carelessness —a crucial concept in this novel—, the dissipation, the irresponsibility of a particular class of people —mainly represented by Tom Buchanan, and also by Daisy, who ultimately decides to stay with him, who has money and power. These are the careless people who make a mess and leave it for others to clean for them.

Related to the social satire, there was a working title for the novel that Fitzgerald decided not to use at some point, which was *Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires*. This title would point to the theme of social inequality, a theme which we perceive, and which is very intense in the novel. There was another title that Fitzgerald thought about, which was —*Trimalchio in West Egg*. ‘Trimalchio’ was every vulgar man who

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became very rich in the novel satirical by a roman writer —Petronius—, but just once in the novel Gatsby is referred as ‘trimalchio’, famous for his parties, and ‘trimalchio’ like Gatsby was, a *pare-venue*, a social upstart at the so called *nouveau-rich*.

The action takes place in 1922, and Nick, at the end of the novel, goes back to the Mid-West, where he writes and narrates the story, in 1924.

The novel’s title, after you read the novel, becomes ironic, satirical even, because Gatsby is great in some respects but, in many other, he is not.

In some respects, Gatsby thinks of himself as a magician —The Great Houdini—with unlimited powers who can transform reality, and the only tool he has to do so is his incredibly romantic vision. This novel has many references to magic, to enchantment and, in a sense, Gatsby thinks of himself as all-powerful, he believes that he can make things happen just by snapping his fingers.

The Great Gatsby, a novel in America in the 1920s, has an allusion to a phenomenon which, in America, is called the ‘hero-worship’; there was a lot of ‘hero-worship’ in America, a place famous for its abundant sports idols, movie stars.

When we read the novel, it is easy to see that superficially, Gatsby is great but, at bottom, he is weak; he is uncertain, he shows many moments of uncertainty and weakness, so the title is ironic. One of the questions that the novel implicitly asks is “is it possible to be great and admirable in the age of disillusion?” —the lost generation; the period of the anti-hero. The protagonist of the novel *This Side of Paradise*, whose name is Amory Blaine, says at the end of the novel that “*all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken*”, so there does not seem to be room anymore for the traditional hero, for the individual who achieves fame and distinction and glory through combat, through adventurous actions; that belongs to the past. This is the 1920s, and two decades before, at the end of the 19th century, the movement of Naturalism takes place, which portrays the individual as powerless, unable to reach greatness. The individual, for the naturalists, is powerless because he is not in control of himself, he is controlled by forces, which can be internal or external.

Fitzgerald had read the Naturalist’s particularly Theodore Dreiser, and he knew about this, and he was influenced by Dreiser, who wrote a very famous novel titled *Sister Carrie*, the new woman who wants out of the provinces, and she leaves a small town in America, and she leaves all those values behind and goes to the city, where both triumphs and becomes a victim.

One of the questions about the novel poses is why the narrator, Nick Carraway, makes Gatsby great; he is the one who writes Gatsby into being as it were. Nick is a man from the Mid-West with traditional values; so how is it possible to explain the fact that this man with a traditional morality writes such a lyrical account of a man like Gatsby who is incredibly corrupted?

Gatsby is the representative of America and the American dream. This novel has been described as a study of America, and in this novel, Fitzgerald manages to tell the whole story of America through Gatsby, so it is a study of America —of the significance and meaning of America, and also of its contradictions. America is

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divided, as Lionel Trilling—a very famous cultural critic—says in the following passage, written in 1945; *Gatsby* is also divided between the dream and the romance, on the one hand, and on the power, corruption and Wasteland on the other hand.

The following quotation explains how *Gatsby* stands for America itself: “*For Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America itself. Ours is the only nation that prides itself upon a dream and gives its name to one, ‘the American Dream.’ We are told that*” —and this is a quotation from the novel, in Text 1— “*‘the truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty.’ Clearly it is Fitzgerald’s intention that our mind should turn to the thought of the nation that has sprung from its ‘Platonic conception’ of itself. To the world it is anomalous in America, just as in the novel it is anomalous in Gatsby, that so much raw power should be haunted by envisioned romance. Yet in that anomaly lies, for good or bad, much of the truth of our national life, as, at the present moment, we think about it.*” (Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, 1950, 251-52).

One of the aims of the novel is to analyze the condition of America in the first quarter in the early 20th century. Another title that Fitzgerald conceived for the novel—at the end, when the novel was being printed—was *Under the red, white, and blue*. This indicates that Fitzgerald really wanted to investigate into the ideals that gave birth to the American nation. The idea of birth is very important in this novel; it is a novel in which the two places where these people lived were significantly called East and West Egg, so it arouses the ideas of beginnings, of origins. Many of the ideals that had given birth to the American Nation were dying or were already dead in the 1920s. The novel reflects on, and speculates about American ideals on the modern world.

The novel ends with this incredibly beautiful and perfect passage, with a lot of ideals. Aesthetically the end is superb, and the novel concludes with a vision Nick Carraway has on the Easternmost place of the American continent, on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean in NY; there is where he relates *Gatsby* to the first settlers of America, who came across the sea to the New World, and they had a vision of some new beginning.

The novel reflects on the ideals that were being sacrificed to the materialistic values represented in the novel by Tom Buchanan. One of the things *The Great Gatsby* asks is “what makes a nation successful?”, and it also asks about the wealth acquired by the powerful, and whether this wealth becomes the disadvantage of many others; if material success inevitably leads to the loss of innocence and honesty.

Nick Carraway has ambivalent feelings towards *Gatsby*, he both admires and detests him, and this tension is related to the American Dream, to the conflict between two versions, two variations of the American Dream. The first is the ideal version, which is associated with one of the images of the last passage, which deals with what the first settlers contemplate—the fresh, green breast of the New World—and it is related to the sense of wonder, the belief in unlimited possibility. This is what constitutes the essence of America; these are some of the things that *Gatsby* stands for, that he represents—the belief in human potential, human freedom, specially from the past; he breaks away from the past, even changing his name—. This version of the

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American Dream related to the idea of reinvention, to the possibility of redemption and of a second chance in life. This is one aspect of the personality of Gatsby that fascinates Nick.

The second version of the American Dream is usually the materialistic version, and this version identifies creating oneself, making oneself anew by becoming rich, which is totally illusory. In *The Great Gatsby*, wealth is acquired through heritage in the case of Tom Buchanan, and crime in that of Gatsby. Nobody becomes rich through honesty and hard work in this novel, which is something that disgusts and repels Nick Carraway —the corruption on which Gatsby makes his money; the vulgar display of money and power on the part of Gatsby. Gatsby is prototypically American in the sense that he makes himself anew; he leaves his past and his parents behind. He represents the American Dream of self-making.

The belief that you can escape from constraints, from the determinism of your social class, from your family background; the belief that you can just invent a new ideal identity.

The novel shows that, in 20th century America, romanticism is inseparable from capitalism, from materialism. Romance is always connected to brutality, infidelity, selfishness. Still, the novel and the character of Gatsby both reaffirm the value of romantic aspiration, one of the things which makes Gatsby admirable. This is what Fitzgerald was interested in, what his imagination felt attracted to; what he calls in this novel the transitory enchanted moment; that is what he wanted to evoke. This phrase appears in the memorable passage at the end of the novel.

Gatsby is the American Dream, but when the novel was published the phrase of the ‘American Dream’ had not appeared yet, it had not entered the American lexicon. The term ‘American Dream’ was coined years later, during the Great Depression.

The historian James Truslow Adams published the book *The Epic of America* in 1931. The atmosphere was dark and gloomy. Truslow wanted to call this book *The American Dream*, but as it was amid the Great Depression, his publishers did not allow him to do such a thing; however, he used the phrase ‘the American Dream’ so many times in the novel that it stuck in the language; it became part of the American lexicon. The following quote is his definition of the American Dream: “...that American dream of a better, richer and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming and dispelling it.”

The Great Gatsby always considered to be the novel that exemplifies the American Dream, is actually the novel prophesied the American Dream. The American Dream is inseparable from the car, and there was, in Fitzgerald’s life and in the lives of most young men, in the America of the period, a connection between the car and the dream, and between the car and the perfect, rich, beautiful woman.

In *The Great Gatsby*, cars are so important; they are inseparable from the dream; in the early 1920s, when the car was a fairly recently established characteristic of the American life, and it denotes wealth and represents status, the car offers a new freedom. In the novel it has a central presence as both a symbol of status, and agent of destruction.

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There are a lot of references to cars in the novel, which are, at least implicitly, related to the society, characterized by ruthlessness, mobility, restlessness —that is the spirit of America. The car is associated with manifestations of power and economic power; specially near the end of the novel it was more and more frequently associated with death.

This is a novel about people who wanted to achieve success; the car indicates how far you are on the path to success and to the American Dream; however, cars also indicate the violence and the destruction of the Modern Society.

Characters destroy not just people, but the environment as well. There are two very significant conversations in the novel. Nick starts a relationship with Jordan Baker, and they have two conversations about cars and about driving them. Jordan Baker is a fairly dishonest person, and in these conversations —and not only in the conversations— the car becomes a symbol for the life of the careless people, such as Tom, Gatsby. This careless people whose wealth isolates them from the reality of other people's lives.

At the end of chapter 3, Nick and Jordan Baker are in together in the car, and she drives recklessly, *"she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat"*. The conversation is the following:

"You are a rotten driver," I protested. "Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn't to drive at all."

"I am careful."

"No, you're not"

"Well, other people are," she said lightly.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"They'll keep out of my way," she insisted. "It takes two to make an accident."

"Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself."

"I hope I never will," she answered. "I hate careless people"

In this scene, driving becomes a metaphor for ethical standards, of how you conduct yourself in life. If you reflect about the author, he is not a very good example of carelessness; quite the opposite. His life was very much like a careless, reckless car drive. This scene is connected to another one in the final chapter when Nick and Jordan Baker break up their relationship and they talk about this to Nick:

"Oh, and do you remember."— she added ——"a conversation we had once about driving a car?"

"Why — not exactly."

"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."

"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." (156)

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Jordan's name is symbolic and it is related to cars; it refers to certain brands of cars —he Jordan sports car and the conservative Baker electric. In a certain way, this expresses her contradictions, —she wants the modern and the conservative, traditional; she wants to enjoy both the freedom of the modern girl, and also she wants to have the advantages of the traditional, conservative lady.

There are other other episodes in the novel in which cars actually destroy, in which they actually injure people. There is an episode in chapter 4, after Tom Buchanan's marriage to Daisy, where he is having an affair with a hotel's chambermaid in Santa Barbara, and "*Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken — she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel*" (60)

No doubt, the most brutal damage caused by cars and bad drivers is in Chapter 7 where Daisy is driving Gatsby's car, coming back from New York to East and West Egg, and she is irresponsible, a bad driver; she runs over her husband's mistress, George Wilson's wife, who was literally raped by the car: "*Michaelis and this man reached her first, but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was winging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped a little in the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long*" (131, Ch. 7)

The car is described as a death machine in that very episode; "the death car that came out of the darkness". This passage includes interesting images that appear throughout the novel, like the breast, which appears at the final passage related to the "fresh, green breast of the New World".

In this passage, the language emphasizes the violence; the car is like a death machine, and the word 'vitality' is only used 5 times in the novel, and 4 of those times it is related to Myrtle, who has a feverish, burning vitality. She lives in the valley of ashes, and she tries to fight that valley in which she lives, and she takes the wrong path. She brake out of her social class, and has an affair with a rich man, resulting in the unfortunate consequences displayed in the previous passage.

Cars are important; they gave these young women a lot of freedom and mobility; it liberates the women, but it also kills them. Myrtle is punished for trying to break out of her social class; Jordan uses the car for her careless driving; Daisy drives recklessly, and lets the car go out of control, and she refuses to pay for the consequences of her irresponsible driving, it is Jay who eventually pays for them.

George Wilson, whose life has no glamour, no romance, represents the dispossessed, the underclass. Significantly, he has a business with wrecked cars, and his life is connected with the waste land, because his car business —which is a moribund business— is located in the waste land, and this is one of the most heavily symbolic episodes in the novel, the beginning of chapter 2 —the description of the waste land, with a certain element of surrealism. T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* reflects on a mundane individual who is spiritually dead, a waste lander. George Wilson is one of those; a man with no ambition, no sense of wander. He is exploited and excluded from promise and hope. Completely opposite to Gatsby.

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Those responsible for the waste land are the careless ones —Tom Buchanan, Jay Gatsby—, at least indirectly responsible for the waste land, for the poverty of people like Wilson; the Wilson's are literally destroyed by the carelessness, the wealth and the cars of these people, and the novel ostentatiously relates the cars to the waste land —the cars kill, not only the people, but the land itself.

T. S. Elliot's poem was a crucial theme, a crucial literary marker of the period; it was one of the direct influences of *The Great Gatsby*. It was a very long poem, but Fitzgerald knew the poem by heart; he sent Elliot a copy of the novel, and he responded with a very positive comment saying that Gatsby was the first advance in the American novel since Henry James. There are critics who say that one of the reasons that the action of *The Great Gatsby* takes place in 1922 is a kind of homage to *The Waste Land*, which was published in that same year. That year was very important for Modernism; it began with the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and it ended with the publication *The Wasteland*.

Deeply connected to the Wilsons is the famous Valley of Ashes, present in the following quotation, which belongs to the first paragraph of Chapter two. America started as this mythical wonderland of Dream, and it has become a Waste Land. One of the titles that Fitzgerald had conceived was *Among The Ash Heaps And Millionaires*, so this is one of the questions that the novel implicitly asks: if Gatsby represents some home, if there is some possibility of redemption among the Ash Heaps. T. S. Elliot, completely pessimistic, he could only see waste landers, who were not really human beings anymore; they were zombies blocking death. Fitzgerald was not so pessimistic, so he could also see the gorgeous bright lights of the big city, and the delights.

George and Myrtle Wilson lived on the edge of the powerful symbol of the cruel society; it causes despair. The place where the Wilsons lived has become a dumping ground for the garbage of this modern industrial society.

There are many references in the passage to sterility and death, and this people live there. George Wilson is a total failure, he is a victim of a society that denies him identity and opportunity:

“About half-way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes —a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air”

Then, the following passage is another important symbol in the novel, which are the eyes of God, blind to human misery. This a big advertisement that someone had place in that place that is now the waste land, a long time ago: *“But above the grey land and the spasm of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existing nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away.”*

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These are very powerful images, and here there is an association of the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg and the eyes of God, and the issue is blindness; the eyes of God had become blind to the human misery. This oculist, the passage says, has disappeared, absented himself; an allusion to God, who in the Modern day is absent, has disappeared, has hidden himself; this God does no longer turn his eyes to these human beings who live in the waste land. After the accident, when the car that Daisy is driving kills Myrtle, this man Michaelis looks at George, who is saying incoherent things, and he is speaking of God, and he says “God sees everything, and he is looking at the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg”, and Michaelis tells him “George, there is no God there, that is an advertisement”, and that is the concept —advertisement is a false god that modern America worships. That is what America has become; dominated by commercialism. Gatsby, with his fancy house, his fancy car, his fancy shirts, is something like a composite advertisement himself.

This passage connects the 20th century commercial world and the world of traditional religious beliefs, traditional faith. The connection is made through the disjunction, by stressing the difference between the two. This is the early 20th century; God is dead, God has disappeared, and he is just an abundant advertisement with the valley of ashes behind him. Wilson identifies the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg with those of God, but the reader perceives that if there is an observant God up there, he is not necessarily a compassionate God.

Excerpts from class book

The first one is when Gatsby was 17, and the second one is the famous passage in which Gatsby insists that you can't change the past, and this is five years before the present time of the story. The first conflict of the novel. In the first draft of the novel, the story was narrated by a 3rd person. This first draft revealed the totality of Gatsby, so Fitzgerald decided to change the narrator to 1st person. This was the most sensitive decision from Fitzgerald. The narration of the past of Gatsby was redistributed. These famous passages are very important pieces in Gatsby's life.

Text 1, Chapter 16: Nick reconstructs significant roles of Gatsby's past. Nick puts together some facts from the information he hears from Jordan and other characters. This passage is about his origins, and when he meets Dan Cody. He becomes his protégée as James Gatz.

At the beginning of the passage we see something very American: transformation, an act of self-creation. Gatsby's real name was James Gatz. As it by magic, James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby. This is the beginning of the story for him. We have two significant constituents in Gatsby's life that determine his life: Daisy. Gatsby imposes his own vision. He says of course you can change the past.

It is admirable and heroic in a sense, but as Gatsby it's destined to fail. It is the beginning of Gatsby. We have two significant constituents in the life of Gatsby. His meeting with Cody and his love for Daisy are two elements that determine the life of Gatsby and what he believes of himself. For Gatsby reality doesn't matter, he imposes his own visions, he says: of course you can change the past. His own vision is more real than reality.

Many critics see Gatsby as a parallel of America becoming independent from England in 1776. What comes after this is probably the most famous passage in the novel.

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There is a coexistence between continuity and disjunction (in the change of the proper name).

The imagination. Rejection of the past, make yourself a new person. For Gatsby the change of name is like a change of the self.

Most famous passage in the novel. Emphasis on invent because Gatsby was invention.

“Platonic conception of himself”: he sprung from it, which illustrates Platonism; Plato is an idealist: ideal world; Gatsby has this idea of himself, and this is comparative because Plato has this idea that reality is not in this world, but in the idea/ superior world. Connection between Gatsby and the USA, Gatsby wants to be ideal American.

“His Father’s Business”: Allusion to a famous passage on the Gospels when Jesus disappears.

This thing about Gatsby being the son of God, and being about his Father’s business, is about Jesus. This is a reference to a passage from the Gospels where Jesus is young and goes to Jerusalem... This business involves beauty:

Gatsby is a son of God in a sense, and to identify him as such is something really strong and a way of saying there is some search for perfection, that there’s something in him that identifies him as a son of god, and that he is utterly dedicated to his dream and his mission: to win back Daisy’s love.

Beauty is the Father’s Business in *The Great Gatsby*.

Search for perfection.

Quote 3

“Grotesque and fantastic conceits” are Gatsby’s imagination.

The clock and the moon: Gatsby wants to ignore the clock that marks the passage of time and change, he wants to stick to the moon, which is romance. Several references to clocks in the novel. It represents two different conceptions of time: Nick’s and Gatsby’s conceptions of time. Gatsby says that you can change the past and forget some facts.

This significant contrast, he ignores the clock that marks the end of a life, and that sticks to change. He wants to stick to the moon. The moon from romance. There are many references to clocks in the novel, and it presents different conceptions of time. We have Gatsby’s conception, and Nick’s. Nick says that he cannot change the past, and Gatsby believes he can change the past and make Daisy fall in love with him again.

Reality is unreal to Gatsby.

“Fairy’s wings”: Before being Daisy Buchanan, Daisy was Daisy Fay. This is Gatsby rejecting the material world, he prefers imagination, which is the real foundation for him. For Gatsby imagination is the real foundation of the world.

When Gatsby was seventeen, the appearance of Dan Cody changed his life. Dan Cody was a millionaire and a really important figure in America. This is an important figure of power who takes Gatsby, at seventeen,

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under his wing. He is the son of God. Dan Cody's business is exploit America and this becomes Gatsby's business. Gatsby is faithful to Cody's memory; being materialistic.

The name Dan Cody evokes important historical figures related to the West and the frontier that was initially a dream and turned into a symbol of materialism and exploitation. He is telling the future of America through Gatsby. Dan evokes to Daniel Boom, a famous colonel, and William Cody (who had another name, Buffalo Bill) was famous for shooting animals in the West.

This passage relates to American history, during its expansion to the west. The contrast between East and the West is important: Nick comes from the West, he later comes back.

Text 2:

Gatsby insists that you can change the past.

Chapter 6: Gatsby is throwing an incredible party to impress Daisy. She is impressed by the shirts and the party but she does not want what Gatsby is trying to proceed Gatsby's way of life. She is unable to process that romantic extravagant way Gatsby has brought their lives together.

The passage begins with a conversation between Nick and Gatsby, where Gatsby comments that Daisy was not having a good time.

He wants to change history. Some critics say that there is a suggestion to how the settlers wanted to get rid of the past and start something new. Similar to Gatsby's ideas that the future is determined to the past.

Nick tries to make Gatsby understand that the past can't be repeated or changed. Gatsby's obsession makes him very lonely. He thinks he is all powerful and that he is able to change reality. Gatsby does not respect Daisy as an individual with her own personal needs, it is just him all the time, his problems and aspirations. He wants Daisy to make himself complete.

Childish.

This passage presents the main flaw in Gatsby: the denial of change, he refuses to change. He met Daisy five years ago and he has not developed from then. He is fossilized, he limits himself. He also represents nostalgia.

The maiden name of Daisy Buchanan, which is Daisy Fay, is important because the suggestion of "Fay", meaning 'fairy' —magical creatures from the world of fantasy and romance— is, to a certain extent, what Daisy is in Gatsby's imagination —a splendid creature of romance—. Daisy has the name of a flower, white and gold, which suggests that she is perishable; the flower is immersed in a world of capitalism and mass production and consumption; a world of industrialism. There is a contrast between the name of a delicate flower and the world in which she is immersed. Flowers represent the natural world, but Daisy is totally removed from it; she is the idealized woman who becomes the object of romantic obsession, which is a persistent theme in Scott Fitzgerald. In this novel, Gatsby is kept alive, he is kept going because of that obsession to get Daisy back; through this, he hopes to recover his sense of self.

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Fitzgerald had a lot of personal experience about social inadequacy; a dream of fine girls which was frustrated by his lack of money —the father became bankrupt, and the family went through economic problems, which they survived because of the money they had from his mother's family. Fitzgerald has a constant feeling of social inadequacy, dreaming of fine girls all the time, but always frustrated by his lack of money.

Between Christmas of 1914 and January of 1917, Fitzgerald had a very intense romantic relationship with Ginevra King, a fine girl from Chicago —beautiful and wealthy, and greatly admired—, but the relationship failed, mainly because of his social inadequacy. The failure of this relationship showed him his social and monetary barrier which prevented poor boys from marrying rich girls; this was a preoccupation of Fitzgerald that became prominent in his novel *The Great Gatsby*. This was what, according to some sources, Fitzgerald was told at a party —“poor boys shouldn't think about marrying rich girls”—, and Fitzgerald once said “the whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I lived it.”. Probably, the reason why Daisy is presented so vaguely as a character is the crucial fact that she is nothing but a romantic construction; a victim of the conventional image of woman as an object of male desire. The following passage is the first introduction of Daisy to the reader, carried out through Nick. In this first description of her, Nick spends more time describing her voice than her physical presence:

“I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered ‘Listen’, a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.” (14-15, ch. 1)

This is all about her voice, about the promises about exciting things, both in the past and in the future, and this is Gatsby's dream of her; a dream that contains no present, only past and future —the past that he wants to bring back and the future moments of ecstasy with her that he fervently expects—. This description that emphasizes both the romantic and sexual attractiveness of Daisy, and what matters is not what she says, but the sound and the musicality of her voice; it is a voice that seems to hold out amazing promises. This passage acknowledges the charm that Daisy has for these males, including not just Gatsby, but also Nick. This passage exposes Daisy's central role in Gatsby's dream, and at the same time, the passage makes her a prisoner and a victim of this conventional image of woman as object of male desire. This description prompts to the similarities between Nick and Gatsby, because they are both romantic, and they both admire Daisy. Daisy is most likely aware of this role; in this world she is the nice girl, a beautiful woman, and her role is to be charming and seductive. The reader becomes aware of this when she cynically informs Nick of what her words were when she found out her baby was a girl: “*All right*”, I said, “*I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.*” (Ch. 1) According to Scott Fitzgerald, those were the exact words that his wife Zelda said when their baby daughter was born.

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Daisy is fairly cynical and sarcastic when she says those words, but that indicates that she is aware that in that world, in that society, in order to be successful and happy, girls had to be charmers. They did not need to have any substance; they did not need to have any autonomous thinking or to be feeling human beings; they had to be emotionally passive, flowers that blossom when their man touched them. One of the sentences of a previous passage, when they kissed for the first time, says that when his lips touched hers, she blossomed for him, like a flower. The way she is presented to the reader in the novel, she has no reality or entity of her own; she exists only through the image that these men created of her. Significantly, the technique of the novel never allows Daisy to tell her own story; most of what we know about Daisy is told to the reader by Nick, who gets most of the information about her from Jordan Baker and Gatsby.

It is clear in the novel that Daisy does not find any happiness in this world; she is not really happy with these traditional roles of wife and mother, but she has no real talent for those roles. The fact that the Daisy that Gatsby loves is not a reality, rather it is an object of his desire; it is the creation of his imagination. In this passage about the voice, by concentrating on her charming voice —that captivated Gatsby—, Gatsby can ignore the real Daisy, who is not perfect, who has inconsistencies and deep ends. For Gatsby, she is the dream figure, and as long as she remains a dream figure, she will remain perfect.

Gatsby's romantic vision totally conditions Daisy, and it actually makes her into a prisoner. This romantic vision imprisons Daisy in that moment in time, five years ago. As Gatsby says in chapter 6:

“‘Can't repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously ‘Why of course you can!’ because he desires to bring back that moment, when he and Daisy were together in Louisville. Gatsby also says to Nick ‘I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before’ [...] She'll see”. (Ch. 6)

In this passage, Gatsby refers to a magical night they spent 5 years before in Louisville, Kentucky, when he kissed her: *“as his lips touched, she blossomed for him like a flower, and the incarnation was complete”*. It is Gatsby, the male, who makes the passive female flower blossom; it is he who creates Daisy and who gives life to the Daisy of his dream.

Daisy is caught in the middle of a conflict between Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, she is caught between Gatsby's romantic vision of her and Tom's materialistic consideration of her. Tom gets to marry Daisy because of his economic power; this materialistic conception is symbolized by the magnificent wedding present that he gives her *“a string of pearls valued in one hundred and fifty thousand dollars”*.

Daisy Fay could not wait for Gatsby's romanticism so she chose Tom because of his enormous wealth and his aggressive male sexuality given by his social power, which attracted her the most. Tom Buchanan represents the powerful —hard power— hierarchy; he is ultra-conservative and very racist. He realizes that the patriarchy that he represents is threatened by social change, something a conservative does not want. Neither Tom nor Gatsby acknowledges Daisy as an individual of her own —with her own personal, sexual needs—, she is always perceived as passive —the blank page on which these males write, and where they write themselves.

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In chapter 7, there is an episode when they are in the hotel in Manhattan. Gatsby forces a confrontation which means the beginning of the end for him. He asks Daisy the impossible, he asks her to deny in front of Tom that she ever loved Tom. This was a mistake on his part; he thought that he was all-powerful, and that just by clicking his fingers he could obliterate the last five years of Daisy's life. Gatsby is unable to see that in those five years that have passed, she could have had a personal and emotional life of her own. He is so obsessed with his dream, and so completely dedicated to his own dream that he never takes into account Daisy's reality; he never considers Daisy an autonomous person. This is a clear example of Gatsby's inability to accept change where limits and diminishes himself. He cannot accept change in Daisy either; Gatsby does not understand that Daisy is not the same person as five years ago. He still hears the voice that she was/ had five years before, but he refuses to listen to her adult voice.

In this episode Daisy is, once again, the passive object. The first thing she says in this episode is that she had never loved Tom because Gatsby asks her directly to say that, but later she admits that she at least sometimes did love Tom. She does not control the situation well, which resembles the scene where they leave the hotel, and as she drives Gatsby's car, she loses control again. Moreover, it is in his episode when Tom tells Daisy about the illegal sources of Gatsby's money, so in this moment, Tom assert himself over Gatsby and Daisy; it is in this assertion when he decides to let Daisy leave home with Gatsby in his car.

The evening of the day of the accident is the end of the dream. Nick informs the reader about what he sees through the window in Tom and Daisy's house. This is, in fact, the last time Nick sees Daisy, and again she is in a passive position:

"He was talking intently across the table at her," —Tom is talking at her, and not to her— "and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own, Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement. They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale – and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together" (122, ch. 7).

When Nick says that *"they were conspiring together"* makes us think that they were both planning to tell the lie to George Wilson that it was Gatsby who killed Myrtle. We will never know because Nick do not clarifies if the liar was just Tom or both Tom and Daisy.

This passage symbolized the return of Daisy in the safety of her marriage; she is safe in the protection of the male strength and the wealth of Tom.

After Gatsby's death, Nick calls Daisy, but she has disappeared, and as Nick says, she never sent flowers or left a message. She chooses Tom's materialism over Gatsby's romanticism. This wealth is a wealth in which Daisy Fay was born, in Louisville, which, as we can read in a passage, *"keeps her safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor"*, represented by the Wilsons in this novel —particularly George—. Some of Daisy's reality is revealed and, as this happens, she disappears from the novel.

That event marks the end of Daisy as dream, because the reality and dream cannot coexist; we assume that she will remain forever a safe, passive and protected lady. Even Nick contributes to this safety of the lady by

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his silence, since he does not go to the police to tell about the woman who was driving the car that killed Myrtle Wilson. This is the typical gentleman's code of honor: the lady's name is always protected by these honorable men. This is the way in which the upper-class women are presented in Fitzgerald's novels, as charming, morally and economically passive mothers and wives in a world which does not have any other role for them.

Going back to Daisy's voice, in chapter 7, there is a passage in which Gatsby is talking to Nick about Daisy and one of the main reasons he likes her, because "*her voice is full of money*"; the fact that Gatsby's romantic admiration and love for Daisy is inseparable from money is incredibly sad, and closely connected to her wealth. Nick informs that "[In 1917] *Gatsby was overwhelmed about the youth and mystery of the wealth imprisons*" —the prison as metaphor for the social environment in which you are born—"and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming, like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (ch. 8).

Daisy is nice and charming, seductive and mysterious in some ways, which is natural in her but, at the same time, she is a product of the environment of wealth in which she has born. Nick has a moment of illumination about all of this:

"That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money –that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it...High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl..." (ch. 7).

The Great Gatsby is the novel in which the romantic is inseparable from money. It is a constant juxtaposition of the romantic and the material element; the conclusion that we could extract from this is that money is what dreams are made of.

The ending

Nick's final vigil on the Long Island shore. This is one of the most memorable passages of the whole American literature. This passage corresponds to Nick's final night on the East because he is returning to the conservative traditional Mid-west, his birthplace. In this moment, Nick is putting all the pieces together in the composition of Gatsby's story. Here he comes to understand Gatsby's contradictions, his triumphs and failures. He acknowledges the failure of Gatsby's dream. This passage is very intense and suggestive. In this moment, Gatsby represents human and American aspirations.

This novel is about the contrast between East and West. West Egg, where Gatsby and Nick live, represents new money, while East Egg, where Daisy and Tom live, represents inherited money. This novel also reflects about the origin of America, the impulses, the forces and the myths that originated America. "Egg" refers to origins, beginnings.

This passage is probably located in November. Gatsby dies at the end of summer, on September 20th of 1922. Earlier in this last chapter, Nick says "*I see now that this has been an story of the West after all*", which means, among other things, that this is the story about what happened to those American ideals that

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were originally associated with the West. In American mythology, the West has been the condition of permanent transformation and renewal.

“Gatsby’s house was still empty when I left - the grass on his lawn had grown as long as mine. One of the taxi driver in the village never took a fare past the entrance gate without stopping for a minute and pointing inside; perhaps it was he who drove Daisy and Gatsby over to East Egg the night of the accident, and perhaps he had made a story about it all his own. I didn’t want to hear it and I avoided him when I got off the train”.

The emptiness of Gatsby’s house is an interesting issue. The long grass indicates that time passes. When Gatsby was alive he could pay servants to cut it, with his money he could achieve perfection: the perfect house with the perfect house.

The taxi driver is important because Gatsby has always been the object of rumors. He was a mysterious figure and, at the end, we see how he continues to be an object of speculations and inventions even after his death. Nick speculates that the taxi driver had made up a story about Gatsby. Gatsby’s story has been debased: the story that the taxi driver is probably inventing about Gatsby.

“I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and the laughter, faint and incessant, from his garden, and the cars going up and down his drive. One night I did hear a material car there, and saw its lights stop at his front steps. But I didn’t investigate. Probably it was some final guest who had been away at the ends of earth and didn’t know that the party was over”.

The cars are important from the beginning to the end of the novel. Here, Nick mentions a “material car”, which could be related to Gatsby’s Platonism. Maybe is making a distinction between materialism and realism which have been throughout the novel two conflicting conventions of reality.

The idea of finality is very important: “The final guest”. This is the only time the word “final” is used in the novel and the word “last” is repeated three times.

The protagonist of this story resembles Fitzgerald itself, in many ways. When Fitzgerald returned to Paris he realized that “the party was over”.

“On the last night, with my trunk packed and my car sold to the grocer, I went over and looked at that huge incoherent failure of a house once more. On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight, and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspingly along the stone. Then I wandered down to the beach and sprawled out on the sand.”

Here there is a contrast between Nick’s inexpensive car and Gatsby’s magnificent car.

“That huge incoherent failure” refers to the car, but this is also referred to Gatsby’s person. This can also be a reference as America, the nation, which became a huge incoherent failure. The house is magnificent, but it has flaws, like its owner.

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Some critics see here the possibility of a hint at Nick's project, once he goes back to the Mid-west, what he feels to do is to bring coherence into Gatsby's story, to infuse Gatsby's life with coherence and success.

The new America in which boys are no longer innocent. Again, the moonlight makes an appearance to advise us of what follows: the moment of vision that Nick has here. He erases it because Nick wants Gatsby's memory to preserve in his literary language. Nick does not want the story to be contaminated by obscenities. This is something that Nick was trying to do all along, he has been trying to erase the dirty side of Gatsby.

Nick is on the very edge of the American continent ("*I wandered down the beach*") and he has a romantic vision that elevates Gatsby to the level of myth.

"Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that had flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of his continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

The moon is related to Gatsby's romanticization of Daisy and reality. The moon, the real world, disappear to make way to the moment of vision, that is, revelation. The story moves very rapidly from the inessential to the essential, and moving away from selflessness into essences.

In this passage there is an allusion to Dutch soldiers. Initially, New York was colonized by the Dutch, and it was known as New Amsterdam. American is seen as ideal, as a utopia where life begins as Gatsby's self-reinvention. America as the place of dreams and possibilities, everything that Gatsby has represented all along. Then, there is a description of America as "a fresh, green breast of the new world", this is a very powerful that combines the maternal, the erotic, the natural and the territorial. This sentence brings together three very important symbols of the novel: the eyes, the flowers and the breasts, and one of the most important colors which is green, the color of hope. America is here associated with traditional female characteristics: growth and beauty. The green breast is a suggestion of a mother who gives life.

These Dutch sailors came to colonize and rape this virgin land and "*the green breast of the new world*" was the ideal. There is a connection between this and the descriptions of Myrtle's body when she is dead lying on the road: the breast. This is a period in America when the green breast has given way to Myrtle Wilson's left breast.

"*The transitory enchanted moment*" is what Fitzgerald is trying to capture in all his fiction.

Nick what admires most about Gatsby is "*his capacity for wonder*", the good side of the American dream which is represented by Gatsby. It is important to know that the Dutch were one of the first settlers of America, but at the same time, it is the ending because it says for the last time in history, so in this magical

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moment is impossible to find something “commensurate”, but this is already in the past. This is the paradise that has been lost.

“And as I sat here brooding on the old unknown world, I thought Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night”

Parallel between Gatsby’s contemplating the green light of Daisy’s dock and the Dutch soldiers contemplating the green breast of the land. Gatsby continues and preserves the ideal of the first settlers when he watches the green light, which he sees with hope. The desire to return to paradise that will never be part of the material reality because the ideal is lost in the complex world of material ambition.

“The dark fields” is an allusion to the West, which both Nick and Gatsby come from. Gatsby had already left behind the West for the East. Nick is talking about the passage of time and the history of the United States because from beginning to end, the story of Gatsby is fused with the story of America. The journey of Gatsby is the equivalent of the journey of America.

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning – So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past”.

The future of glory and dream, the future of sexual orgasm is already receding.

This is a novel about the desire to achieve something, but the moment of achieving the object of desire is the moment of loss. The desire drives and sustains the individual. It is impossible to say the nature of the dream.

Gatsby does not know that the American romance is over and the dream has not survived that encounter with materialism. Tom Buchanan made of money and power. In that way, he succeeded but he is despicable as the other like him.

In some way, we keep repeating the past, but not in the way Gatsby wanted. We are repeating it in the sense that we keep living the same experience: going after the dream, moving from expectation to failure, from hope to disappointment.

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Babylon Revisited (1931)

Charlie, the protagonist, rejects his past. In the present he is rich, but he had lost the important: a house, a family, love, etc. Charlie is a suffering person who aspires to fix the past, he wants to gain his daughter back, but he can't because of what happened to her sister. Charlie is trying choose stability and honor. Who prevent Charlie from succeeding on regaining respectability and honor are those representatives of the Babylonian past.

The description of Lorraine is highly significant. Charles is prevented from regaining respectability and honor from those representatives of the past.

The title is related to the Biblical tradition of the Western culture. "Babylon" in the Bible is referred to a center of power, a place where Jews were exiled for some time. Charlie has been an exile, but he returns to Paris (Babylon) and does not achieve what he wanted. 'Babylon' comes from the book of revelation, the apocalypse. Babylon refers to a symbolic female figure and a place of evil, her full titles is *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations of the earth*. This Babylon is a place of moral degeneration, it is referred to as 'the great'.

This story has many thematic coincidences with *The Great Gatsby*: Charlie is also obsessed with the idea that he can change the past. He does not want to go back to the past, there is a part of him that is nostalgic about the past. Gatsby wants to repeat the past and Charlie wants to escape from the consequences of the past, the consequences of his irresponsibility.

This story is about "the party is over" (148), as Lincoln says. The story evokes the past with very a strong significance. The past is something that threatens to destroy Charlie from the very beginning. The past is represented by Lorraine desperately tries to hold on to the old days that won't come back. She is unable to adjust to the new time.

Is Fitzgerald reaffirming this old traditional values as an antidote to the dissipation of the boom years", that is, the 190s?

Issue of the past and the tragic consequences of the 1920s.

This story is about the tragic consequences o the excesses of the 1920s. On page 450, there is a description of Duncan and Loraine, when they go to Peter's house: "They were gay, they were hilarious, they were roaring with laughter". On page 452, there is a passage in which Charles was convinced that the snow wasn't real, but now he is forced to admit that it is not real.

A single incident from the pat conditions the present situation of Charles: Charlie locking out his wife is an important event which determines his present situation and his honor.

This is story that reminds us to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was very interested on the inevitably conditions of the past which are impossible to bury. The past as an inevitably force which consequences cannot be avoided.

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Is the theme of home important in the story?

This story is about home and money, moral and financial transactions. Home is very important in the story. In the past, Charles excluded his wife, Helen, from home. In the present, he is the one excluded from his daughter. The story establishes a contrast between the life of the Peters and the lack of family life of Charles. Relevant descriptions of the Peters' home: "It was warm here, it was a home, people together by a fire". The children felt very safe and important" (449).

At the end of section II, on page 443, it is said that Charlie has to go to a hotel to spend the night, after spending the day with his daughter and taking her back home. In this episode we see the powerful sin, outside in the cold night. Charlie is outside watching his daughter inside the house through the window: "He waited in the dark street until she appeared, all warm and glowing, in the window above and kissed her fingers out into the night" (443). This is what he did to his wife, locking her out in the cold dark: On that terrible February night [...] a slow quarrel has gone on for hours [...] When he arrived home he turned the key in the lock in wild anger. How could he know she would arrive an hour later alone, that there would be a snowstorm in which she wandered about in slippers, too confused to find a taxi?" (447).

The fact that the story takes place in the autumn is a way of announcing that winter is coming for Charles, that is, another six month of spiritual winter. The daughter is 9 years old and she is about to lose other six irrecoverable months.

The story begins and ends at the Ritz which represents the past, moral dissipation and all the excess and irresponsibility of the Americans that lived in Paris during the 20s when the economic boom took place. This setting also shows Paris situation during the great depression. The story opens and closes at this place to emphasize the past and its tragic consequences. In section I, we see Charles there asking about the past consequences. The bar is important for Charlie because he does not have a home, the bar is like a substitute for a home that he has lost and has not been able to regain.

This is a story in which we see geographical movement – Charlie comes from Prague to Paris –but no much internal movement (psychological movement) because Charlie is the same at the beginning and end of the story (a sinner). The story is based on a circular movement, the same place in the beginning and ending of the narration indicates that no one is achieving anything. This is the tragic aspect of the story.

The fact that Charlie goes to the bar could it indicate some insincerity in him. He is not totally a sinner, even though he says he is. Something in Charlie wants to go back to some aspects of his past. The important issue here is that he wants to reform himself, lamenting his past but, at the same time, there is this partial ambiguity.

The money is crucially important. The story establishes a parallel between public real monetary transactions and private transactions. There is also a parallel between the collapse of market and Charlie's moral collapses, parallel between spiritual and economic.

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At the end, finances are very important, as we see in page 452. This great passage shows the double meaning between the money, the financial issue and the material and spiritual aspects of finances. Charlie thinks that he would come back someday.

The story asks the question whether a real home compatible with money because Charlie had a home only in retrospect because he did not value it until he lost it. In the present, Charlie has much more money than Marion and Lincoln, but he does not have a home. In contrast, Marion and Lincoln have a warm home with children. Charlie is aware of the fact that he is always buying expensive things for others at the end of the story: "There wasn't much he could do now except send Honoria some things; he would send her a lot of things tomorrow. He thought rather angrily that this was just money" (452).

Issue of identity.

The new Charles, the reformed sinner: What does Charles want to be? Are Marion and Lincoln ideal?

The most important passage in this story is found in page 439, this is a passage of moral dissipation. This is the gist of the story: "So much for the effort and ingenuity of Montmartre. All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale, and he suddenly realized the meaning of the word "dissipate" – to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something. In the little hours of the night every move from place to place was an enormous human jump, an increase of paying for the privilege of slower and slower motion" (449).

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)

For many, Hemingway is the most popular American serious writer and the one with the best international reputation. He is very famous for his method and his outlook on life. He is probably the most absolutely American, although none of his novels are set in the United States.

He was born in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. His father was a rich physician and his mother was a music teacher. His most intense early life experiences are related to hunting and fishing, which he knew from his father. His father's lesson taught him the importance of physical and psychological abilities. All these themes are seen in many of his works.

After high school, he did not go to university, instead he started to work as a newspaper reporter. It was in this moment when he started to develop the language and style that would characterize him as a writer.

Like so many other young Americans, he was attracted to the war, so he soon left to Europe. Because of an eye problem, he was rejected by the Army, but he volunteered for the Red Cross ambulance corps, starting duty in Italy in 1918. There, he was severely wounded at only 18 years old, this fact meant so much for him. After the war, he came back to the United States but he found himself unable to adjust to the life there.

In 1921, he married the first of his four wives. In this year, he returned to Europe to join the self-exiled writers in Paris, where he met important people.

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Hemingway, a member of the lost generation, experienced the same sense of loss and disillusion as all the other ex-patriots living in Paris. He came to consider World War I as “the great betrayal”. He became disgusted with this. Hemingway was fascinated by violence and its consequences, one of his favorite themes. He was particularly attracted to bull fighting because he considered that it combined courage and art.

Hemingway's literary career

In 1926 he published *The Sun also Rises*, known as *Fiesta* in Europe, which was his first literary success. The novel is about an American reporter who lives in Paris and other heavy drinking alienated ex-patriots who live a tormented life. The novel reflects the post-war mood of disillusion.

Hemingway uses the following epigraph: “You are all a lost generation”. Practically everything that Hemingway wrote was influenced by this feeling of loss and threat of violence.

The novel talks about Jake Barnes, a sexually impotent man due to the war wounds. Many of the events take place in Spain where the protagonist finds some ideals in the Spanish peasants, and in the bullfighting.

A Farewell to Arms, his second novel, was published in 1929. In 1932, he wrote *Death in the Afternoon*, a non-fiction book about bullfighting, containing much of Hemingway's philosophy of life: “Courage is grace under pressure” (fascination with, danger and death).

In 1935 he published *The Green Hills of Africa*, a book about his experiences in Africa. It combines travel descriptions and mythologizations about hunting. There is a passage in which characters discuss about American writers:

“All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing good since.”

The reasons why Hemingway admire Huckleberry Finn is because of the style and philosophy.

In the 1930's Hemingway was criticized because he refused to engage in progressive causes. He was famous for his hedonistic life he promoted. He was skeptical about ideological abstractions and he defended very fiercely his independence as a writer: “There is no left or right in writing, there is only good and bad writing”.

His next novel, *To Have or Have Not*, published in 1937, is the only of his novels that is set in America. In this book he introduce a bit of social awareness. The novel is very famous for the dying words of the protagonist: “One man alone... ain't got no bloody fucking chance”.

In 1936, Hemingway came to Spain with John dos Passos to work on an anti-fascist documentary film, but he stayed and ended up covering the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent. From his period there, he got the materials which he would use later to create *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a popular novel set in the Spanish Civil War. *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) was his best-selling novel.

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Hemingway is most famous for his style and language which were simple, disciplined and characterized by conciseness and precision. Hemingway wanted his language to be understood by anybody with a high school education. His aim was to restore the force of words, to eliminate all the words “that you could not stand to hear”.

The iceberg metaphor is one of his aesthetic principles, to purify and strengthen the American language: “I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven eighths of it under the water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show –”.

Another statement on the **iceberg principle** taken from Hemingway's book, *Death in the Afternoon*: “If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water”.

The Hemingway code, was Hemingway's ideal related to the stoic ability to live in a world without safety nets; acceptance of the pain and futility of life without illusions. The aim is dignity: self-control in the face of nada, destruction, and death (“grace under pressure”).

His protagonists try to find the way to accept the pain and the way of living with the futility of life in the modern world, with no illusions.

Hemingway and the Modernist movement

Hemingway belonged to a generation of Americans that came to maturity during the Great War, which brought so much disillusionment because, as all wars, proved the failures of nations and politicians to resolve the differences. This war was characterized by stupidity and brutality. It was a war with no rationality. So many things died in the soldiers that were left alive because so many ideals died. This war killed the optimistic values of the Victorian period, in the 19th century. It also destroyed the faith in human progress and the faith in liberal democracy and capitalism.

Only seven months into World War I, Henry James said: “The war has used up words, they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tyres...”: awareness of the limits of the power of writing, of the exhaustion of words; sense of artistic impotence that gave rise to the artistic innovation and experimentation of Modernism.

Modernism: Ezra Pound's obsession “make it new”, that is breaking away with tradition and convention. Irreverence; style is more important than content; effort to invent a new language; to force people to see, hear, and think about the world in totally new ways.

In this context, Modern implies a historical discontinuity, breaking with the past. It is also related to the idea of the lost generation and the sense of alienation and loss. The aim was to make people think in completely different ways.

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A Farewell to Arms (1929)

Published ten years after the participation of Hemingway in the war, which the novel is about.

Most critics agree that this novel is a **Bildungsroman**, a novel basically about the education of the protagonist. It is also a story of Frederic Henry's growth and maturation.

The very title suggests movement, transition and progress. The name of the protagonist, Frederic Henry, is important. This name comes from Henry Fleming, the protagonist of another novel based on war and on the education called *The Red Badge of Courage*. This novel focuses on a naïve young man who decides to join the Army to fight in the American Civil War.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry learns to live from the hard lessons of life. He is wounded at one point in the story, this event changes him: it makes him less cynical and more authentic. Frederic Henry grows in understanding and moves towards authenticity, and he refuses to sentimentalize or falsify reality. In all of Hemingway's works, authenticity is a crucial issue.

The title of the novel indicates that this is a story of love and war: farewell to the arms of the lover and farewell to the arms, that is, weapons.

There is an interesting passage about learning, at the end of chapter 3, in which Henry discusses with other characters the issue of learning. One of the lessons he learns is about the war. War is a struggle and a confrontation between the rich and the poor.

A very powerful first lesson takes place in chapter 4 when Katherine, a girl he has recently met, tells him about the death of her fiancé in the war. She says "*they blew him all bits*", this anonymous "*They*" suggests the impersonal horror of the war. This war was so atrocious because the machines of destruction were so destructive because of new technological advances and the capability of these weapons crashed with old-fashioned military tactics. Many soldiers were massacred.

The novel portrays the increasing isolation of the protagonist. He is a man without a country that has joined a foreign army (he is an American fighting in a war which takes place in Europe). There are different moments in the story that he is taken to be French, Italian and even German, he is alienated. We do not know anything about his family but we see that he is friends with the priest and also with the lieutenant. He also has some aristocratic friends.

When Henry and Catherine decided to leave the war and move to another country, they go to a place where they do not know anybody. They try to live romantically in Switzerland, but, at the end this fails, he is left in isolation.

Chapter 1: The "Subtractive" method

This chapter is very famous for the language because it is a very good example of what has been called the "subtractive" method of Hemingway. This method is the opposite of addition.

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The chapter opens with a no description of the character nor speculations and meditations, only the concrete: actions, perceptions... Hemingway does not like to get involved with ideas because they are dangerous for mental health.

Initially, we know anything about the narrator, we are told nothing; we only hear his voice. We do not know who the narrator is, we do not know if it is male or female. We do not know his name or what he is doing in the army, we do not know which war this is or in which country is taking place. This is all the iceberg metaphor.

The narrator hides his feelings because it is not manly to show them. The idea is this reticence.

Emphasis on the precise use of language, which Hemingway is trying to purify. The language is very colloquial.

Intimacy with the reader.

“In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channel. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves.”

The dust in this context refers to the famous verse in Tomas Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where dust is death. Death, in biblical tradition, returns as dust. The presence of the troops alters everything. The narrator gives us the contrast between the landscape with and without troops: the dust raised powder the leaves of the trees. War is something that disrupts the cycle of nature. If the troops defeat life, the leaves are powdered with dust and they fall early.

“Sometimes in the dark we heard the troops marching under the window and guns going past pulled by motor-tractors.”

What was initially pure, green, idealist in a sense that is not disrupted by all the motor-tractors. These are forces of death, manifestations of a very cruel power.

“There was much traffic at night and many mules on the roads with boxes of ammunition of each side of their pack-saddles and gray motor trucks that carried men, and other trucks with loads covered with canvas that moved slower in the traffic. There were big guns too that passed in the day drawn by tractors, the long barrels of the guns covered with green branches and green leafy branches and vines laid over the tractors.”

This is the terribly destructive machine of war violating nature.

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“To the north we could look across a valley and see a forest of chestnut trees and behind it another mountains on the side of the river. There was fighting for that mountain too, but it was not successful, and in the fall when the rains came the leaves all fell from the chestnut trees and the branches were bare and the trunks black with rain.”

The rain is a dominant symbol in this novel and it is present from beginning to end. It. In this passage rain is not life-giver nor fertilizer, it is the rain of the autumn and winter which causes the leaves and trees to fall. The rain is associated with darkness and death, loss and suffering.

At the end of chapter 19, Katherine says that she is afraid of rain. She connects rain with death.

The very last word of the novel is rain. At the end the protagonist is walking back to his hotel in the rain.

The rain is expressing both death and life, it expresses the inseparability between the both of them.

Henry and Katherine fall in love, but they also fall into nature's biological trap, which is linked to death. The baby is born dead. This is a novel about sexual love and war.

“The vineyards were thin and bare-branched too and all the country wet and brown and dead with the autumn. There were mists over the river and clouds on the mountain and the trucks splashed mud on the roads and the troops were muddy and wet in their capes; their rifles were wet and under their capes the two leather cartridge-boxes on the front of the belts, grey leather boxes heavy with the packs of clips of thin, long 6.5 mm. cartridges, bulged forward under the capes so that men, passing on the road, marched as though they were six months gone with child. [...]”

The soldiers carrying weapons and bullets are described as pregnant women. From the very beginning, the novel insists on this fusion of birth and destruction. This is a way of foreshadowing the woman dies in the act of giving birth. The unborn baby is a destructive weapon because it kills the mother.

This is a novel about making love and making war. Both of them are associated with destruction.

“At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army.”

This pessimistic passage foreshadows the final. This passage is full of sarcasm.

This chapter shows how language has poetic rhythm and it also establishes Hemingway's position about this incredibly destructive war. Nature is destructive in many ways (nature is rain and rain brings cholera).

Henry tries the romantic dream of love, but he deceives himself about its power. He declares his “separate peace” but cannot escape from suffering and death:

“But with Catherine there was almost no difference in the night except that it was an even better time. If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry”. (Ch. 34).

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Again, the sarcasm is present in the narrator's words. This is one of those passages that constitutes the reflection of the protagonist sometime after he has experienced the war. This passage expresses perfectly the view of life that Hemingway's elaborate throughout his career: human existence as something tragic. Hemingway insisted on confronting this tragedy with dignity and stoic endurance.

For Henry and Catherine the alternative peace does not work. They think they can live in a social emptiness in Switzerland, but they keep reading about the war. Henry cannot escape the war, he keeps thinking how his friends are doing there. The chaos of this war is so vile that it threatens to kill Henry's internal strength. The separate piece is not possible for him because human life is war without peace.

At the end of the novel, Fredric Henry's view of the world coincides completely with Hemingway's view. This occurs after Henry experiences the malevolence and the evil of the world in Catherine's death. He goes into the hospital room where she is lying dead and he tries to say a romantic goodbye, but he fails. This is the farewell to the arms of the lover that is now dead. After this, he informs about his final action: "After a while, I went out and left the hospital and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain". It was very painful for Hemingway to come to a decision for the ending of this novel. In 2012, a new special edition of this novel was published, which contained 47 alternative ending that apparently Hemingway had contemplated. Hemingway once said that the most difficult of writing was "getting the words right", as he well said this was his obsession. "Getting the words right" lead to getting the right message.

The end is the beginning

"But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and I left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain."

In this passage, the word 'nothing' is repeated many times and there are many negative forms.

This ending is another good example of how the iceberg principle works. Most of the message is submerged. This is an ending that excludes any religious consolation. This pessimistic ending is in agreement with the inefficacy of Henry's prayers to save Catherine from death.

In the last sentence, we have a very obvious poetic rhythm. The fact of leaving the hospital and walk back to the world is the announcement that he is certainly going on with his life. He describes the decision without any complaints or melodramatic gestures: he has lost his lover and his baby. He is telling us how he is responding to this knowledge and this experience. Here, emotion is suppressed, it is kept under control. There is no crying here, only the rain, which has been present many times throughout the novel to remind us the malevolence.

The protagonist knows the painful truth, but he is moving beyond this without forgetting what happened; he is integrating it into a large world view which insists on the possibility of moving on.

This is in a sense when the story begins because Henry is walking away, defeated, deeply hurt, but he is also walking away from the failure of language: "*It was like saying goodbye to a statue*". In a sense, he is walking to the story which he is going to write.

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Patriot's progress: courage in a world of antiheroes

This is the passage in which Frederic Henry generalizes and summarizes for us what the action of this novel confirms practically everywhere. This is brought about a conversation that he has been having about war with his friend Gino, who is nice but he is fairly optimistic.

"I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates" (184-185, ch. 27).

In this passage Hemingway expresses more explicitly his philosophy: rejection of abstractions and preference for the concrete. Abstract words are false and unreal, he likes concrete names of places, rivers and regiments, among others. This is the authentic Hemingway rejecting romance and sentimentality.

When Hemingway says *"the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it"*, he is referring to the times when Chicago was the place where all the cattle from many places in America came. Hemingway compares war and soldiers sacrificing their lives to the slaughter of animals in the stockyards.

The rejection of abstract words like glory, honor and patriotism are abstractions that hide the fact that essence of war is death and that words leads to nihilism. War, as it is said in chapter 1, violates the sanctity of life. In this passage, Hemingway rejects the life of the immoral politicians, who declare wars, but do not know anything about wars because they do not fight in them.

Hemingway has no patience with ' clichés', he hates the clichés about patriotism and military glory because these abstractions lose meaning when they are confronted with the reality of war and this is related to Hemingway's conception of language and the iceberg principle, and all of Hemingway's aesthetic principles because the use of abstractions makes language conventional, it prevents clear reception. In Hemingway's works both moral and esthetic implications are found. For Hemingway, the esthetic standard is the purity of language and clarity of expression. He demands amoral commitment which is related to clarity of vision. The cliché uses words to avoid the truth, the use of clichés imply moral capitulation. To use cliché is to imprison oneself in world which rejects realism. In a situation of war, the use of cliché is a way of escaping from the inevitable truth: death.

The Hemingway hero code rejects the sentimental illusions and maintains his intellectual and moral integrity. There are critics who say that this rejection of abstractions reflects Hemingway's aversion to the rhetoric of the fascists.

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The title “Patriot’s progress” was one of the titles that Hemingway contemplated as the title of the novel, which is an obvious allusion to Pilgrims’ progress. This passage from chapter 27 is highly connected to Hemingway’s ideas of literary style. This passage also expresses his obsession with the precise language.

This fragment can be related to another in chapter 29, when the conversation between Henry and the soldiers working in the ambulance takes place. They talk about their impression on the war, the reasons and their motivations of all of this. The talk about the war as something in which only hurts the poor. It is the poor people who participate to give their lives for the rich because they are fighting for the rich. They also mention the madness, the cruelty and the immorality that takes place there. One of the soldiers, Pasini says Henry likes their reasoning about the war. The proof that what they are right in what they say is that right after this conversation, they are blown up and Pasini dies. In chapter 30, Henry is very close to death for a second time, because he is shot.

We are not told exactly what were the original intentions that led Frederic Henry to join this war, we are not sure if he had initially been a believer in patriotism and if he shared the romantic belief of the poet Horace, who says: “It is sweet and glorious to die for one’s fatherland”. If ever Henry had those ideas, he had definitely lost them.

Ettore is an officer whom Catherine despises because he has an ugly obsession with rising in the war, winning medals and winning glory in the war. This is not the kind of hero that Frederic Henry wants to be, he does not want to be a patriot like his friend Gino who is very conservative and naïve in his beliefs. The novel is essentially pacifistic. There is an aristocrat count, who is a good friend of Henry, is a very wise person that he knows that war among nations is something stupid. He knows courage and value of heroism and patriotism can be an illusion and patriotism is usually false and patriots usually act very foolishly because they are moved by these illusions. Maybe, Frederic Henry went to war with some of this illusions about honor, and soon, he realized the soldiers in war are nothing but powerless victims of this monstrous brutality.

Henry: The modern antihero

Frederic Henry is the prototypical modern antihero. He is a protagonist without the heroic qualities that were presented in conventional war novels. Obviously, for the modern reader it is easier to identify with Henry than the traditional heroes like Ulysses or Hercules or even Napoleon. This novel was written and published in the 1920s and still many readers in those days felt unsympathetic with Frederic Henry for not being the conventional courageous patriotic hero.

We know Henry is antihero from early in the novel, for example, when he is starting a relationship with Catherine. He is very cynical, he uses “clever” tactics to seduce her. All of these techniques he uses have nothing noble or heroic about them. This proves that Henry is definitely not the traditional war hero who wins the heart of the lady because of his courage in battle.

The beginning of the relationship with Catherine takes place in chapter 5. In this passage we see things that do not present him as a sincere person. In his chapter there is an implicit connection between the game of war and the game of love. Henry starts this relationship with Catherine as a game, in which he is going to

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make moves and hide some of his intentions: *"She was like looking at me in the dark. I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game"* (ch. 25).

In chapter 6 he explicitly describes courtship as a game of bridge:

"I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you and put your cap on backward as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers. I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like a bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge you had to pretend you were playing for money or playing for some stakes. Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me." (30-31, ch. 6).

Henry is very irresponsible and fairly cynical at the beginning of the relationship, but later on, he changes and walks towards discipline. This is all due to the influence that Catherine has on him, there are many things that he does not know about courtship and war. There are so many things about which she knows more than him. She also knows that he starts this relationship as a game.

In this passage, Henry is certainly taking advantage of Catherine. She is in a weak position as she recovers from the death of her fiancé in the war in France. Catherine is searching for comfort and security in Henry. Later in the story, Henry finds out he is really in love with her in spite of starting this only as a sexual relationship.

One of the things that the novel makes us see is the positive value of the love affair. Love as probably the only the positive value in this alienated and cruel world. This is a world with no religious beliefs, so this becomes the human equivalent of the religious faith.

Henry: The failed messiah

At the end of the novel, Henry is a loser. He wouldn't say that he is defeated because the Hemingway hero would never accept that. Hemingway says that you can be destroyed but not defeated. Henry is a helpless witness to Catherine's death. We wonder how much aware he is that her dying has something to do with the chain of interactions that he put in motion with his irresponsible of taking birth control precautions. He is modern antihero so he has no power saving Catherine, he can simply watch. In this respect he is a failed messiah.

There is a conversation between Henry and Catherine in chapter 21, in which he describes himself as mediocre, and through an image of baseball, he says that he is a ball player that bats 230 and knows he is no better, he is a mediocre beater. This is an example of the cynical sarcastic antihero.

"Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you."

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This passage occurs right after he finds out that the baby is dead, and previously to the moment when he discovers that Catherine is going to die. In this passage he applies all the madness of war to the whole of life. There is also the thing about comparing life with a game in which eventually you always loose.

Henry and Catherine respond to the demands of life. They love each other and the result is death. In the fragment above, we notice the insistent repetition of the impersonal pronoun 'they' because this represent what human life is in the hands of the invisible and totally arbitrary 'they'.

In this passage, Frederic's view of the world coincides a hundred per cent with Hemingway's. This relates to other passages in which Henry has been identifying the war with a game, which you join irresponsibly, and like in war, you choose one of the sides. For Henry, the game of war ended up being too risky. Even after he deserted and went to Switzerland, he kept thinking about the war in terms of sports: "*The war seemed so far away as the football games of someone's college*".

The most interesting passage is that in which Henry rather cynically remembers a past moment in his life in which he was very selfish and cynical, he had the chance to become a savior and he rejected it to become a destroyer instead:

"Once in camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first toward the centre where the fire was; then turned back and ran toward the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whiskey in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants" (ch. 40).

This is the antihero; he is selfish and he misses the chance that he had of saving the ants from the fire. This selfishness and cruelty are the reflection of a God, represented by the priest, who never listens to prayers. The priest prays for the end of the war, but war never seem to end. Henry also prays to God to save Catherine's life, but God never listens. Here, as God, he refuses to ease to those who suffer the pain of life and human existence. Frederic Henry describes himself as a failed messiah, ineffectual as the authorities, the king, the police, the doctors and the nurses that could not save Catherine from death.

Hemingway and women

In the 1960s and 1970s, Hemingway was rejected as the typical male chauvinist by most of university female students and feminist critics. Hemingway was hated and rejected, Scott Fitzgerald had said that Hemingway needed a new wife for every book he wrote. Hemingway cheated on his wife with her friend, but he kept portraying himself as a victim of predatory women. Hemingway was severely criticized for something that Catherine Barkley says in the novel: "*I want you so much, I want to be you, too*". In this line the female identity is totally submerged. In recent years, male and female critics have been finding a hidden sensitivity

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towards women in Hemingway. Gertrude Stein talked about Hemingway and his “Kansas City-boy brutality”. This was a mask for Hemingway’s complicated sexuality and sexual ambiguity. Hemingway always talked about how macho he was and his obsession with war, fishing, hunting and bull-fighting. He went around most of his life making himself very much into a parody of masculinity.

Biographers have discovered interesting facts about his sexuality and thanks to this we know that Hemingway’s mother raised him for a few years as his older sister’s twin. Often, dressing him in dress clothes. This could be one of the reasons of his sexual confusion. His sexuality was much more complex than he wanted us to know. It was a sexuality characterized by trauma. He was attracted to the excitement of crossing sexual boundaries. When he died from suicide, he left an unfinished novel titled *The Garden of Eden* that was published some years after his death. This novel is about a very beautiful and unstable woman who is on her honeymoon in France that keeps cutting her hair shorter and shorter (this is related to Hemingway’s obsession with women’s short hair) and this woman sleeps with another woman and when she is in bed with her husband, who is a writer, she does some strange things: she pretends she is the man and he is the woman.

Catherine Barkley is one of the most controversial female characters in American literature. We have to version of this character; many have considered Catherine to be the typical dream of the male chauvinist, the romantic figure characterized by selfless love and devotion to the male hero, a very passive sexual object without thoughts or feelings on her own, a very young and beautifully attracted ornament for the male to display in public places, the toy you take advantage of before you move on another younger conquest. Other critics and readers, have considered Catherine to be a fully developed character, important in her own rights and realistically portrayed and a character who is as much an actor in this drama, as Henry himself. She has also been considered as more heroic than Henry, very strong and noble, morally and physically courageous, in other words, some, in recent years, have come to consider Catherine to be the real Hemingway code hero in this novel.

In the 1970s, a very fierce and feminist female critic, Judith Fetterley, in a famous essay from 1976, sees Hemingway as the macho man who thinks that the best women are the caretakers, women who cook and have sex, never thinking individually. Probably the most violent attack on Catherine Barkley is from Judith Fetterley, who asks “why the emotional charge of this novel and others on the same theme, so often depend on the death of the woman and so rarely on the death of the man?”. This is also a reference to Edgar Allan Poe who once said that the most exquisitely, poetic and romantic subjects was the death of a beautiful young woman.

Fetterly believes that behind the idealization of Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms* “is a hostility whose full measure can be taken from the fact that Catherine dies and dies because she is a woman”. Fetterly adds: “if we weep at the end of the book, it is not for Catherine but for Frederic Henry. All of our tears are ultimately for men, because in the world of *A Farewell to Arms* male life is what counts. And the message to women reading this classic love story and experiencing its image of the female ideal is clear and simple: the only good woman is a dead one, and even then there are questions.”

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Most recent interpretations of Catherine see her in a new light, acknowledge her strength and courage and approve of her “separate peace”. To understand Catherine better, we have to take the environment into account; this is an environment of a war that becomes a metaphor for the conditions of life. Catherine is as much a victim of this war as her fiancé, who was killed in it.

She retreats into a private world of her own making and she resolves the decision to get involved in a love relationship. This relationship is not necessarily an expression of female passivity, maybe it can be considered an act of personal resolution.

There are many things that Catherine knows about before Frederic Henry gets to know about those same things, so she arrives earlier than Henry at the knowledge of the world, in which traditional notions of meaning and order have been destroyed by the war, and she has plenty of courage and stoicism. As the novel progresses, we that she resembles more and more the ideal Hemingway hero. Catherine is engaged in the effort to build a tolerable existence that has some meaning, no matter how short and fragile this is. She teaches Henry what this is all about, she is willing to teach him how to cope with this and how to live in this world. Catherine is very strong and plays a crucial role in the education of Henry. Another title that Hemingway considered but ended up rejecting was *The Sentimental Education of Frederic Henry*. This title shows that the mentor is actually Catherine.

Catherine Barkley, the code hero

As it was mentioned before, some critics refer to Catherine as the hero of the novel. Actually, this character is based on a real American nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky. Hemingway met this woman in a hospital in Milan while the war was taking place, in 1918. She was a very intelligent and strong woman. Apparently, Hemingway and Agnes had a relationship that was never sexually consummated.

The critic, Sandra Spanier, sees Catherine as “the one character in the novel who, more than any other, embodies the controls of courage and honor that many called the Hemingway code. As one who knows the world and has devised as best she can a way to live in it, she serves as a mentor to Frederic Henry”.

This crucial role that Catherine plays as Henry’s educator brings about his progressive awareness and contributes to his maturation as a protagonist. In his maturation, Henry both learns about these truths.

To understand Catherine, we have to take into account the environment in which she and Henry live. The war has changed everything. Twenty five years after the war, Hemingway called it: “the most colossal murders mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth”.

Catherine is wiser about the war, her fiancé died in a battle in France, which was very important during World War I. Frederic becomes aware of all these issues through her and she comes to share her impressions that this war is never coming to an end, which it was going to become the permanent condition of mankind. In this situation where the war seems to be never ending, what Catherine does is to withdraw into a private world in which devises her own strategies of survival. Before the start of the novel, Catherine knew everything about the war, she had already lost her faith in traditional values and she already knew the things

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that Henry still had to learn. When their relationship starts, Catherine is already much more experienced than Henry and he irresponsibly joins this war.

Catherine is also wiser about the relationship. She knows about love as the means to survive in a crazy. Catherine's commitment to Henry is an act of courage, courage to build a value existence. She sees their love relationship as the cure for the world; she has a determination to live as long as she can in the present moment. For Hemingway, this is the quality of the gifted soldier. This something that Catherine says in chapter 23: *"I am a simple girl. No one ever understood it except"*. Here, she does not mean that she is stupid, she means that she wants things to be simple. Something similar to what Henry says in the previous passage that talks about concrete things. All of this is related to Hemingway's constant rejection of thoughts and abstractions which is the way to avoid going crazy. Hemingway sees non-thinking as something positive. Catherine's simplicity is necessary for her to escape from those complications that drive you crazy if you think too much about them. This is what makes Catherine similar to other Hemingway's protagonists that have been traumatized by the war, they keep their minds from think by concentrating on simple things.

Catherine is the synthesis of the priest's faith in an ideal of charity and service and Rinaldi's cynicism.

Catherine has also developed a very interesting strong sense of irony that allows her to maintain mental control and stability, she is very into black humor is an indication of strength and courage. She could be considered positive in some respects, but the withdrawal is a way to cope and maintain sanity. She retires from this world because it is no her show anymore.

Self-reliance is the rejection of tradition and convention in favor of private and personal values. Frederic is in many ways more conventional than her. At some point in their relationship, he thinks that maybe they should get married, but she is not interested, and she says: "We are married privately" (ch. 18). For Catherine, their love is their only religion, as she says to him once: "you are my only religion". It is important when she checks into the hospital to have the baby and she gives her name as Catherine Henry. Both Catherine and Henry are unbelievers.

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“Hills Like White Elephants”

What does make this story peculiar is the iceberg method. It is characterized by the things left unsaid including the central issues. It is also characterized for being a metaphor.

The main topic of the story is a discussion about an abortion; however, the word ‘abortion’ is never mentioned.

The narrator is impartial, objective. The story does not make any moral evaluation whatsoever, on the contrary, it leaves that duty to the reader—to make the moral evaluation of the characters—.

The story starts *in medias res*, when the characters are in a train station, which is probably most significant; from that, it is three pages of dialogue. From this, the conclusions that can be drawn about their life; the main issues that complicate their relationship is an unwanted baby; this unwanted pregnancy has been complicating their lives for some time now. There are indications that the young woman wants to keep the baby despite the drastic change that it would imply upon her life. At the end, she says that she is okay, and that she will have the abortion, but she is not sincere.

They don’t agree with one another. They don’t want the same type of life, otherwise the story wouldn’t make sense and would go nowhere. The American man wants a life with no stops—keeping the train metaphor—and having a baby would mean getting down the train in one station and settling down, and he does not want that. The more they talk, the more they disagree, and the more they talk, the more they drift apart. In the end, it ends for them too. They do not have a future; if she refuses to have the abortion, he would leave her, but if she does the abortion there will be trauma and resentment; there will be guilt on her part for destroying a life, and she will end her relationship with him anyway. Their situation they face is similar to a train station situation between two different lives. No matter which way they go, their relationship is doomed.

It is a story in which we have to pay close attention to each detail, every gesture, and every word. We are not given the names of the characters because they are not important. We have to read between the lines in order to draw a conclusion regarding what kind of person each one is.

The story presents a problem, but it does not provide a solution to that problem. This is a prototypical Hemingway story, characterized by its low density. This is what most of his critics admire: this low density of language, this obsession with the integrity, the authenticity of language, the avoidance of abstraction, and the lack of emotional choice of words. Also, the refusal to tell the reader how to feel through the narrator. There are others who do not like this aspect of him, that believe he should give the reader enough information to make the necessary evaluation of the moral of the characters. This is a story where everything works by implication, a story that demands a close attentive reading.

The setting being a railway station is important, because it represents a point where the reader has to look backwards and forwards. At the beginning we see that the abortion can change everything in the couple’s life; the abortion has already been discussed, and the consequences are already present, although it has not taken place yet. One of the things the girl says early in the story is “*those hills look like white elephants*”; on the one hand, the story looks backwards to those days in which she would say such trivial comments and

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he would agree with her, which he does not already do in the train; this takes us back to the consequences to an event that has not even happened yet. On the other hand, the story looks forward to a dark future in which she would be frustrated and traumatized, and she would not be able to say those things anymore.

The couple's problem is not resolved at the end of the novel, which means it does not have any closure whatsoever. In the end, the girl does not want to keep talking anymore, because, again, the more they talk, the more further apart from each other they drift.

There is a very short description of the setting, because Hemingway wanted words to be meaningful, so he did not want to use too many words and descriptions. However, there is a brief description; the story is located in a small train station in Barcelona, the north of Spain.

This story is from the 1990s, the Modernist period and the decade of the Waste Land. The physical and the moral Waste Land theme present in this story; this is a story in which the reader gradually realizes that what the couple is discussing is an abortion, and that this unwanted child has been present in the thoughts and emotions of this couple for some time. The story seems to indicate that the girl would like to have the child, and there is some sense of urgency; the train adds some tension to the situation. In a sense, the story displays a moral waste land, and the setting is so very skillfully used that it has something to add to it.

The fact that the setting takes place in a catholic Spain in the 90s is very significant; it gives the story an ironic turn, dimension, since the Catholic Church opposes abortion; the fact that the moral dilemma that the woman is facing takes place in a country in which the Church opposes abortion is significant.

The girl does not know Spanish, which increases her independence and her sense of helplessness. The fact that they are in a train station —apart from the fact that it means they are going in opposite directions— it is the idea that they are going from one place to another that she says at one point "*That's all we do, isn't it— look at things and try new drinks?*" (212); a life of ruthlessness. This idea, which is emphasized by the description the narrator gives the reader of their luggage —"*There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights*" (214)—. Maybe a way of refusing to face settling, especially on his part. The lack of responsibility; instead of being a couple thinking about building family and about family life, he insists on abort. There is a choice they are facing —having the baby, starting a family; changing their way of life—.

The description of the setting, of the valley that surrounds the train station implies a crash of opposites. One part of the valley represents the waste land, sterile, and the other, on the other side of the tracks, is fertile, with trees, and green. They are sitting on the sides where there are no trees, where the hills are white in the sun, and the country drained of life. On the other side which, significantly, only the girl looks at, there are "*fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains.*" (213). She looks to this side of the valley, and she sees the river, which is a symbol of life and of the flow. Suddenly, amid the aforementioned description of the valley of fertility, there is a cloud —"*The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees*" (213)—, which announces the death of an unwanted baby, announcing trauma in the future life of the girl.

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The following exchange of dialogue in page 211 when she talks about the hills:

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

This dialogue obviously signals, not only tension between the couple, but also a different outlook on life. Among other things, this proves that she is more creative, more imaginative; more open to new beginnings.

A white elephant is a very rare type of elephant, which are sacred in the countries they inhabit. If a white elephant is gifted to someone, that person needs to take care of the present, since it is sacred in that culture. It is a very expensive possession to maintain, you would rather not be given a white elephant as a gift. It is something exceptional but excessively expensive to maintain. This is the meaning of the metaphor of the white elephant.

In the context of the story it applies to the baby for the American; for him, the baby is a white elephant, and he doesn't want his life to be complicated by it. For her, however, maybe the baby could be a white elephant in the sense that it would be something precious, sacred.

The conversation comes to a point where she, in spite of her instincts and beliefs, she says to the American *"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me"* (213). When she says that he thinks that this is something stupid for her to say that she does not care about her; he cannot understand for the simple reason that she says that because she loves him, but he cannot understand love because he has never loved anyone.

The story manages to portray him as fairly insensitive and abusive; an emotional blackmailer, because he threatens that he will leave her if she does not agree to the abortion; she then says something that summarizes the moral emptiness of her life, the moral waste land in which he likes to live. The spiritual sterility of the way of life that he likes, represented in the aforementioned quote of page 212 *"That's all we do, look at things and try new drinks"*. This represents his escape from responsibility and obligation.

In spite of the use of few words of the Subtractive method —focus on the concrete, not getting involved with ideas, since they are dangerous for the mental health—, Hemingway gives the reader the right amount of information they need to come to conclusions about the personality and the moral attitudes of the two characters; the narrator does not make moral evaluation, leaving that responsibility to the reader.

This is a story in which all gestures, all words, the silences, what is not said are all charged with a deep meaning. Actually, at the end of the story, on 3rd paragraph from the bottom, there is an especially descriptive part:

"He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting

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reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him. "Do you feel better?" he asked.

"I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine." (214)

In this part, what matters is what it is not said, and what she means at the very end is to tell him shut the fuck up. He stands in the bar, to have a drink by himself, to be alone, already indicating that he is going to continue his life without her; he is going to cut her out of his life. Then, he observes people "*waiting reasonably for the train*" (214), he thinks that everybody is waiting reasonably for the train, behaving reasonably except for the girl, who persists on being unreasonable. The conviction that everybody except his girlfriend is reasonable proves that he has not learned anything from the discussion. On the same page, there is a clear example that displays Hemingway's belief that the less you say, the better display of an emotional truth; the more you talk the more you spoil the narrative and the emotion, because the more you speak the more lies you tell, the more insincere you are. On the first half of page 214, the discussion is getting heated, and the girls gets so mad that she says: "*Would you please please please please please please stop talking?*" This is Hemingway's way of proving that silence is best way to oppose the violence and the darkness of the world, and also the best way to oppose the loneliness of the individual.

In the end, it is unlikely that they will resolve their problems and be better; their relationship is doomed to failure.

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"

The title of the story expresses of Hemingway's ideals.

The place in which the story takes place sounds like an expression of Hemingway's ideals. The place is important because it relates to the character and theme. The story contrasts two kind of places which are mentioned by the two waiters when they talk about the differences that exist between the place in which they are, a café, and other places like bodegas and bars, which are not as ideal nor nice as the café. All of this is connected the differences between the two waiters. The old waiter would like the café –the clean, well-lighted place- to be opened all night and the old man, a customer of the cafe, agrees with him because he would like to continue having drinks, but the young waiter does not want to stay in the café for too long because he wants a clean well-lighted place on his own. He does not seem to value the life in the café, he wants to close up and go home to sleep. This establishes an opposition between those who want to sleep (young waiter) and those who suffer from insomnia (the old waiter and the old man).

The main themes of this story are:

Loneliness. The old waiter and the old man feel lonely that is why they want be in the café day and night.

Differences in age. The story starts out with the old man, but he is not the protagonist, as we may think at the beginning. This old man has dignity, something crucially important for Hemingway. This old man attempted suicide, and this something that the young waiter can't understand because of the age difference between

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both of them. The coincidence between the old man (customer) and the old waiter. The differences in age expresses different outlooks in life.

Awareness. It is directly related to insomnia. The ones who suffer from this are the ones that have the dignity and courage to acknowledge the nothingness, synonym of the keyword in the story: 'nada', of which characters are aware. The fact that they acknowledge the nothingness makes them capable of confronting, whereas the people like the young waiter are all faith, as he says at one point: "'I have confidence. I am all confidence'" (290) and that, for Hemingway is self-deception and alienation; that is what existentialists call 'bad faith'.

At the beginning, we think that the protagonist is the old man, but we have to pay attention to the difference between the two waiters' attitudes towards life, which separates them, to know who the protagonist is. Initially, the old man is the main topic of conversation between the waiters, but he is less important as a character than the other two. He is more a part of the setting; he is there to demonstrate the way things are and then he becomes the means for the verbalization of the two waiters. What Hemingway does is a structural necessity in the story for the old man to disappear from the story. In a sense, Hemingway merges the characters of the old man and the old waiter: the old waiter identifies himself with the old customer. He feels for both of them and he is the one who remains with the reader until the end of the story. The old waiter is who expresses the despair and denial for both himself and the old man.

The young waiter does not like the old man's presence there. He is too unaware to understand why this old man who has everything would try to commit suicide, but as we see, the old waiter feels sympathy for the old man: he explicitly defends the dignity to confront life and attempt suicide, which requires courage. But only that, the old waiter defends the determination of the old man.

This old customer is one of those individuals with which the old waiter sympathizes as he says in page 290: "With all those who need a light for the night".

The old waiter does not want to leave the clean, well-lighted place to go home. This story is in which Hemingway looks most directly into the abyss of life. He not only acknowledges but also celebrates the lack of meaning, the emptiness and the despair. This story is very much Hemingway's version of the spiritual wasteland that our contemporary world has become. Significantly, the key word is 'nada'. The nothingness is so powerful and overwhelming that, near end of the story, the old waiter goes to a bodega and he says: "Some lived in it and it never felt it but he knew it all was *nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada*. Our *nada* who art in *nada*, *nada* be thy name thy kingdom *nada* thy will be *nada* in *nada* as it is in *nada*" (291). All of this comes from a traditional prayer, "Our Father". Even though we are not told about this explicitly in the novel, when the waiter looks for comfort, he prays, but the religious consolation is totally fake for the young waiter. The word *nada* invades the prayers and substitutes the important words. This passage makes explicit his rejection to religious consolation. One of the characteristics of Modernist literature is its irrelevance, God is definitely in the story, in the abyss of absurdity and nothingness which the world has become. The new values that the story accepts are very limited and simple, and they are related to the simplicity that

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Hemingway likes: the simplicity of language. The light in “a clean well-lighted place” is related to the issue of awareness, the story confronts the inexperienced young waiter and the old enough waiter to know.

The fact that Hemingway uses the Spanish words *nada* is important. He makes this word so important because there is irony implicit in the fact that in Spain, the Catholic faith is very strong. The words ‘nada’ is much more efficient written in Spanish than in English because it is more powerful this way.

The protagonist of the story is the old waiter. We come to this conclusion gradually, because we read this story and we perceive that the two waiters are very different. The point of view changes, it starts being subjective and then gives perspective to the old waiter's consciousness.

As in “Hills Like White Elephants”, characters have no names and there is no descriptions of their physical appearances because Hemingway is only interested in attitudes which are expressed through words and gestures.

As it was already mentioned, age is the major difference between the two waiters. This difference in age has a crucial relevance. The young waiter is the one who says “I have confidence, I am all confidence” (290). For Hemingway, this is faith; to have faith is one of the things society imposes on people. One of the things that the story indicates is that this confidence belongs only to the young, to the naïve and inexperienced. If we look at the old waiter we come to the conclusion that this confidence is nothing but a vain illusion that disappears with age. The story divides people into two types: those who are like the young waiter and those who are like the old waiter, those who like the young waiter and want to go home to sleep, who never feel the ‘nada’, they live it but they are unaware of it and those who are conscious of the ‘nada’. The young waiter thinks he has everything, but the truth is he lives a life of ignorance and convention. He lives happily in his ignorance. The old waiter has nothing, that’s why he is aware of the ‘nada’, this ‘nada’ keeps him really alive and what gives his life meaning.

Night and sleep are important in the story. The darkness and the night trouble the old waiter, because it increases the awareness of ‘nada’, so he has no other option to confront it and his defense is the clean well-lighted place. The café is like a refuge which becomes a substitute for the church. In the old days, a troubled person would go to church to pray to God and drink the wine of community. Here, the café and the bodega become the substitute for the church.

When people’s lives are moved by traditional values, they believe in the light and his individual, Jesus Christ, who describes himself as ‘the light of the world’. This ‘light of the world’ is totally valued, but it is not the light that liberates the individual anymore as we see when the old waiter says on page 290: “I am of those who like to stay late at the café [...] with all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night”.

The lack of communication between waiters is an important issue in the story. The old waiter tells so many things which meaning is intended for the readers because there are many things that the young waiter does not understand or disagrees. At one point, the young waiter tells the old waiter to stop talking nonsenses. The

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point of view changes after the dialogue the waiters, in this moment the reader gets access to the old waiter's point of view. The lack of communication appears again at the end of the story.

The coincidence between being a waiter and being aware. The old waiter suffers from insomnia and the connotations of insomnia in this story are positive: the old waiter who cannot sleep is unaware and the young waiter is insensitive. The old waiter benefits from that. After the unconventional and blasphemous prayer, we read: "He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine" (291). This is crucial because he confronts this. This awareness of the 'nada' is what allows him to be like the old man, to survive with dignity.

This point of awareness is something that many critics identify Hemingway's philosophy with the French existentialists who show a strong interest in this author and the coincidence between the awareness, the nothingness and the despair. Hemingway shows here the salvation achieved through the individual courage and through this discipline acquired through the Hemingway code: the literally language is clean because it fights the dirt of convention and self-brutality. It opposes to obscurity of abstractions. Remember the passage from *A Farewell to Arms*.

William Faulkner (1897-1962)

William Faulkner was born in 1897 in the state of Mississippi, but when he was four, his family moved to Oxford, Mississippi. This is the town he called home for the rest of his life. He grew up in contact with legends of ancestors in his family, especially one of his great-grandfathers whose name was William Clarke Faulkner, who was a landowner, lawyer and politician. He also wrote some books, including a popular Romantic novel titled *The White Rose of Memphis*. This ancestor is important in Faulkner's writings and imagination, he represents the white social class. Faulkner writes about aristocrats and also about the poor whites, so called "white trash". One of his best novels titled *As I Lay Dying*, a novel about the "white trash".

He is considered as the greatest 20th century American fiction writer. His novels and stories are described as difficult and obscure. In 1950, during his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he gave a very simple explanation for his fiction: "There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth about, worth about the agony and the sweat".

Faulkner acknowledge the importance of the extended family stories in his education as a writer: "The South's the place for a novelist to grow up because the folks there talk so much about the past. Why, when I was a little boy, there'd be sometimes 20 or 30 people in the house, mostly relatives, aunts, uncles, cousins, and second cousins, some maybe coming overnight and staying on for months, swapping stories about the family and about the past, while I sat in a corner and listened. That's where I got my books".

Faulkner dropped out of high school in 1915, but he was still interested in classic and modern literature. He went through a crisis when his childhood girlfriend married another man. He was so worried and frustrated

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because of this that he enlisted in the army, but was rejected for being too small. Many years later, he married this sweetheart from childhood.

Actually, what he did was lie about his situation in the army, but he eventually joined the Royal Air force of Canada, but the war ended before he concluded his training, so he returned to Mississippi dressed in her officer's uniform and telling dramatic tales of his adventures as a pilot in the war. He even told people that he was wounded and many of his friends were killed, etc.

A decisive moment in his career came in 1924, when visited New Orleans and he met Shawn Anderson, a writer who Faulkner deeply admired. It was Anderson's advice which impulsed Faulkner to start writing. He started writing poetry. His first novel was *Soldier's Pay* (1926), novel about the coming home of a badly wounded Air Force veteran. The second novel *Mosquitoes*, published in 1927, is about a group sophisticated bohemian people.

In 1929, he wrote *Sartoris* in which he invented his mythical country Yoknapatawpha, based on Lafayette county and establishment of his most powerful themes, including the force and the burden of the past: "the past is never dead. It's not even past" (Gavin Stevens in *Requiem for a Nun*): Southerners are condemned to keep looking into the past, which explains the present and which they can't get rid of because white Southerners have to pay for their original sin to as slavery, the terrible crime they have committed. He wrote 20 novels and 15 of those novels are set in Yoknapatawpha county.

Writing this novel, Faulkner made a crucial discovery for his career as a writer: "I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by subliming the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to uses whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos on my own". This novel is about the history of several generations of a distinguished family of Mississippi.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), probably his most famous novel and the best story of the 20th century. This novel is about the moral and economic deterioration of the Compson family, an aristocrat family. The novel has four sections, each of them narrated from a different character with a different consciousness and conception of language and time. The first chapter is narrated by Benji Compson, who is a 33 year old idiot.

The title is taken from a passage of *Macbeth*, in which his wife has just died and Macbeth becomes very pessimistic. In this novel and in *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner is very experimental, he tries to express all those inexpressible aspects of individual psychology, through a very dense and complicated language.

Other titles: *Sanctuary* (1931) is a story about a college girl who gets involved in prostitution and drug addiction, among others. This was one of the first novels that had some commercial success.

Light in August (1932). A story of racial violence, sexual obsession and religious fanaticism. It is a very rich novel in terms of themes and morals situations and destinies. One is the typical pregnant character who searches for the father of her child. In this story, there is another character named John, who is presumed to be a murderer, he castrated and lynched. We never know if he is black or white.

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Absalom, Absalom! (1936): This is Faulkner's most complex presentation of the Southern myth, the rise and the fall of the South. It is told by four different speakers, each of them try to find the meaning of the South. The novel is basically about the very intrigue family history of Thomas Sutpen, who started as a very poor white man and came to Mississippi moved by his obsession to find a dynasty. The story "Wash" is taken from this novel.

During the depression, in the 1930's, Faulkner was not happy with the critics. His books did not sell very well. By the mid-1940s, only one of his books, the one titled *Sanctuary*, remained in print. But there was a reevaluation of Faulkner during the late 1940s and early 1950s. All of this was in part due to the publication of the novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), which is about racism. In 1946, a very influential critic edited a compendium of Faulkner's works. This book helped Faulkner's reputation.

In 1950, Faulkner got the Nobel Prize of literature, shortly after the publication of his collection of short stories.

Faulkner achieved the reputation he deserved when the critics realized he was not only talking about the south. They came to realize that he was not only focusing on the rural and grotesque, he was writing about the modern world and human condition. In the same way Russian writers had done this.

Faulkner worked form movies in Hollywood intermittently between 1952 and 1953. He wrote many movie scripts from very famous movies like *To Have or Have Not*, based on Hemingway's novel.

"Dry September" (1931)

It is a brilliantly constructed story that says so much about the crucial issues of the south: oppression of women and the oppression of blacks. In this story we find a very effective dramatization of the connection between racial and sexual discrimination of the connection between racial and sexual discrimination, between the racial problem and the situation of the white woman in the American South.

The story is famous for its image patterns and metaphors, essential for the construction of the story. It is a story about a wasteland, a place abandoned by God, where the human beings are victims of a very rigid and sterile social traditions. It is developed around the central image of aridity: the original title was "Drouth", an arcade word for drought. A drought implies the need for a scapegoat because the situation is so explosive. In the South, the scapegoat is always the black individual; scapegoat is a victim that can bring back fertility to the land. When talk about scapegoat we refers to the fact of blaming others when things go wrong, the ones that are blamed are those who are unpopular and unpopular, that is, those who cannot defend themselves because they are powerless. It is the belief that if get rid of those people, all the problems will be solved blaming, gays, Muslims, etc. The scapegoat was born in Israel to displace the sins of the community onto a goat, and the goat was just expelled from the community.

The central image in this story is the dust that suffocates and oppresses. The dust is the earth portrayed as the permanent and thick cloud of dust under a clear sky. The word 'dust' is crucially important, it suggests death,

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stability, suffocation and oppression. The metaphors of draught and dust are more than physical, they apply to human relationships.

The drought makes people very nervous. The opening paragraph of the story perfectly explains this explosive situation:

“Through the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass -- the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro. Attacked, insulted, frightened: none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air, sending back upon them, in recurrent surges of stale pomade and lotion, their own stale breath and odors, knew exactly what had happened”

This first passage creates very strong emotions. This is a Southern small town and the barber shop is a place exclusively for men. People living in that town, if they were bored and wanted some emotion they would go kill a black person.

The idea of the vicious cycle at the end of the passage: the ceiling fan moving the air but not freshen it represents a vitiated cycle that no one can break.

The first image is very powerful, the “*bloody September twilight*”, suggesting violence, drought, and death.

The very long dry has created a lot of anxiety among people and the rumor of a sexual attack is like “*a fire in dry grass*”, predominant image in the rural culture, which was in those days the American South. The rumor is probably not true, but all the man in the barber shop accept it as true because the real motif for the reactions of these white males is racial prejudice. They are convinced black people are inferior and they live in a society in which “*you take a white woman’s word before a niggers*”

Story about racial violence which has a clear cycle sexual base, which was of the things that Faulkner so brilliantly shows in this story. This story is about the assertion of power, the poor whites are inferior in the predominant group of whites. The color of their skin makes them feel important and powerful. They destroy those who are further down in society.

The “dry September” of Minnie’s Life

The central characters are Minnie Cooper and John McLendon. Each one of them is presented as simultaneously, a victimizer and a victim. The two of them cause the death of an innocent black man, Will Mayes. Minnie by starting the rumor- the reason why she does this is complex -and McLendon is the one who incites and leads the lynch mob of Will Mayes.

Faulkner obviously denies the horror of their action, but he portrays each one of them, Minnie and McLendon, with some compassion, giving to understand that they are victims of these rigid social codes that govern relations of gender and race. Both of them are in the dry September of their lives. This is the problem neither of them are able to accept and face the reality of their present lives, so they choose the fantasy, the dream. They are incapable of accepting the fact that they are living in the dry September, their golden moment of glory is far back in the past and they both live in fantasy worlds that are related to the sexual

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roles, described for them as the traditions of this society; society in which they had not have the chance to fulfill their roles as humans.

When Minnie was popular, that is, on the high point of her life; when she was young in this small town in which everybody knows everybody else: *“She was of comfortable people – not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough – and she was still on the slender side of the ordinary looking, with a bright, faintly haggard manner and dress. When she was young she had had a slender, nervous body and sort of hard vivacity which had enabled her for a time to ride upon the crest of the town’s social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious.”* (173-174)

This passages says a lot of social class. The social class that she belongs to imprisons her and prevents her from marrying that is below her social class. The problem with Minnie now, as we see in page 173, is that she is 38 or 39; in other words, she is practically a spinster: an unmarried woman, typically an older woman beyond the usual age for marriage.

In this society to be an old lady is a disgrace. This is Minnie’s problem which imprisons her: her increasing age makes it more and more difficult for her to be sexually attractive. This is what places her in the dry September of her life. Her fertility and sexual attractiveness is coming to an end.

Minnie is the product of this society that considers women to be inferior to men and that assigns a very strict role to women, especially from the upper classes. These women are not allowed to do anything in life apart from being attractive to men, but they cannot be attractive to men who are socially inferior. This arrangement which limits the women’s options in life and society.

The role of women is limited to their sexual function, women will fulfill only if they are able to function in this role. In the South, there is a traditional distinction between the ladies and belles, that is, married ladies who become mothers vs. unmarried girls who are young and attractive that have to play the game of seduction and be chased and coquettish. They have to be intelligent but not intellectual, they still have to be feminine. Their main goal is to win a man and make it to the altar to a man from a higher social position.

Minnie has failed in these roles; this never occurs to her to think that she could have a function in life apart from this purely sexual conception of having a husband as the main goal in life. She belongs to a genteel family that does not allow her to make a career for herself. Now that she is in her late 30s, the only thing she has is a distorted image of herself. She still desperately needs to see herself as sexually desirable and attractive, but she ends up being ridiculous.

The story tells us about a short period in time in which she went around with a widower, who is beneath her in the social class, so she has to drop him. Therefore, her town condemns her as an adulteress. Those who condemn her are the same ones who say awful things about her and laugh at her.

Minnie has accused black men of sexual assaults before, but nothing has happened to her in a long time that she feels so insignificant and powerless, thus she decides to do something to change her situation. All of this

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is a desperate attempt to have other react somehow to her femininity. She is marginalized because she is a woman, so she invents this rape because she wants to be sexually desired.

On the evening of Will Mayes' lynching, Minnie is charged with electricity, which represents her frustrated sexual desire:

"As she dresses up for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. 'Do you feel strong enough to go out?' they said, their eyes bright too, with a dark glitter. 'When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened. What he said and did, everything.'" (180)

Minnie lives in a fantasy in which she believes she still makes head turns when she walks down the streets, she needs to believe that people still talk about her. This is a world born out of her imagination as unreal as the made in Hollywood fantasies.

There is a significant passage in the movie theaters, where Minnie is forced to confront the terrible reality of her aging:

"The lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver; and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad, while still the young men and girls entered, scented and sibilant in the half dark, their paired backs in silhouette delicate and sleek, their slim, quick bodies awkward, divinely young, while beyond them the silver dream accumulated, inevitably on and on. She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note until the taxi came up and they helped her in." (181)

The ideology that directs this society is expressed through popular culture; through movies made in Hollywood. The images projected on the silver screen are identifies with Minnie's fantasies. Inside the movie theatre movie is forced to confront reality: she is not young anymore. She sees the young people entering the movies house and she comes to realization of who she truly is and thus her friends have to take her home because she is hysterical. Minnie sees the social standards propagated by Hollywood movies: be sexual attractive, young and popular.

The "dry September" in McLendon's life

This story is not only focused on females, it also deals with masculinity in the American South.

In this environment, the white male is also a victim of a social role which is to defend and protect the purity and honor of the white woman. In the American South, purity has a double meaning: female chastity and forbidden interracial sex between a white woman and a black man, and not the other way around. A child born from a white man and a black woman will always be considered black. The aim of this belief is to avoid white race to be contaminated, it must stay pure.

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These two conceptions – female chastity and race purity – are tragically interrelated in Southern society and everybody becomes a victim of this.

The image of the white masculinity is closely related to the racial question. The black male represents a double threat for the poor white male: on the one hand, sexual threat because there is a myth that claims that black men are more sexual potent, and on the other hand, an economic threat because they were becoming to take jobs from the poor whites.

The story opens in a barbershop which is an exclusively masculine space where a man who defends black is not a true Southerner, he is considered a traitor, a Northerner. Some men on the barbershop know that the black man has not done anything because they know Minnie's past, but nobody dares to mention the possibility that this white could be lying with an exception of one of the barbers whose name is Hawk, who tries to prevent the lynching. These men in the barbershop are the ones that laugh at Minnie's back. But from the moment the rumor comes to them, they feel obliged to kill the accused black men. They are not really defending her, they are defending white supremacy. Social pressure is what makes these men prisoners of these old social traditions. Individually they are all powerless but when they come together they form a pack and none of them wants to appear as a coward in front of the rest. The point there is not even if Will Mayes did what Minnie reports; this is something McLendon acknowledges himself: "*McLendon whirled on the third speaker [the one who asked "Did it really happen?"]. "Happen? What the hell difference does it make= Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?"*" (171-172) McLendon expresses the main issue so explicitly, McLendon assumes that Will Mayes committed that crime because he represents the whole black race; the race that has to be punished and suppressed, s Will Mayes has to be taught a lesson, in order to tell of the blacks a lesson of inferiority. In this society, from time to time, black men are killed by white men to prove their superiority. The killers of Will Mayes know he is innocent but they decide to kill him so that white superiority cannot be put in question.

The initial description of McLendon stresses his aggressive masculinity:

"The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold glance swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor." (171)

This passage exemplifies McLendon's moments of glory: when he was on the battlefield, many years ago. In the present, McLendon is in the dry September of his life. What the story gives to understand is that his life in Jefferson, living in a house similar to a "birdcage", is a failure. He does not like his wife because he finds her unsatisfactory. He is frustrated in the routine and boredom of a small town in comparison to those day in the war in which he was important.

In this story there is a parallelism between Minnie and McLendon: each of them try to cling to the fantasy of when they were young, and in the case of Minnie also attractive and desirable, and when McLendon was important in the battlefield.

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The short final section centers on McLendon. When the story moves back to public into the private space:

“It was midnight when McLendon drove up to his neat new house, It was trim and fresh as a birdcage and almost as small, with its clean, green-and-white paint. He locked the car and mounted the porch and entered. His wife rose from a chair beside the reading lamp, McLendon stopped in the floor and stared at her until she looked down.” (182)

The description of the house as a birdcage indicates that McLendon is trapped somehow and he is a prisoner of social codes and traditions. At the end of the passage we see McLendon's abusive behavior towards his wife, he stares at her until she looks down.

There is a lot of irony in this last section: McLendon, the powerful macho man and the defender of Southern white femininity; the man who organizes a group of men to lynch a helpless black man because of a rumor that not even himself believes, beats his own wife. The ending emphasizes the unfortunate situation of women in the Southern society: Minnie Cooper is frustrated because she has remained single and unmarried. The situation of McLendon's wife shows what would have happened to Minnie if she had gotten married.

McLendon is also the representative of the Southern masculinity, but he does not seem to have a normal and harmonious sexual life. The fact that there is no mention of any children in the house is suspicious and surprising which makes us think that he could be sexually impotent.

In the final paragraph we see all of the tensions of the story: violence of white males, the passivity of the white women and the permanent dry September, the social aridity and the moral waste land the characters live in. The concluding paragraph is a very effective return to the dust and drought, the intolerable suffocating heat of the American South. In a sense, this final passage is a summary of the main issues of the story:

“He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off. He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body against, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars.”

This passage resumes the feeling of disappear and abandon. The moon is bright and cold and the stars show no pity towards these people who live in this earth which is permanently under a cloud of dust. The Southern sky cannot close his eye on the horrors that happen beneath it. There are moment in the story in which the people here are described as the hissing of the snakes. As the stars, snakes cannot close their eyes either. The people from Jefferson are like snakes in the sense that they cannot close their eyes to look inside themselves.

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“Wash”

‘Wash’ was published in Harper’s Magazine in the year 1936. This story is about Wash, but is also about another character named Sutpen, who is very powerful. It is an obscure story because of the time jumps and the flashbacks. It is not a linear story, and it lets us see the before and the after of that day.

The story has 3 sections separated by a blank space in the page. The events take place entirely in one Sunday five years after the Civil War; it opens before dawn and it closes after sunset, after the entire family is murdered.

In section one, after the opening scene there is a flashback that explains everything, since it is about the relationship that has been going on between Wash and Thomas Sutpen, both before and after the Civil War. Then, the story comes back to the present and the story resumes from the point when Wash repeats in his mind the words Thomas Sutpen said to Milly in the second paragraph of page 535, after she has just given birth. Hearing those words from Thomas Sutpen, an innocent, impotent man, a powerful figure who resembles God, foreshadows the beginning of the end, which is Wash opening his eyes to the reality of who Thomas Sutpen really is –far from a god, he is an immoral man who abandons his child.

The word ‘dawn’ has to be brought in the story because it is important. We see ‘dawn’ at the opening of the story and also it exemplifies what happens to Wash Jones in the story: he is dawned; he finally gets to see the truth about Thomas Sutpen, and indirectly, he gets to see the truth about himself.

Social class is not the main theme, but it is one of the issues. This story is located in the American South, a place where if we deal with social class, we have to deal with race too. It is important because Wash Jones belongs to the so called “white trash”, that is, the lowest of society. He does not consider himself to be himself at the bottom of the white society, because he has created a fantasy where he is about to become Thomas Sutpen’s friend and associate. He finally gets to see the truth about himself. He believes himself to appear superior to the black people. Wash misinterprets the Bible in order to be superior to the black people that worked for Sutpen before the Civil War, although, in the back of his mind, he knows they are better clothed and fed than Wash is; he knows that there is no place for him in the plantation. However, he hears the blacks laughing at him at his back, because he is “white trash” and he is inferior to them. He deceives himself with his position in society. As we see in one of the passages from 538, Wash deceives himself from the blacks. This is the part of the reality that Walsh refers to.

Class is extremely relevant in this narrative, because although there is no class struggle the reader is allowed to see, Wash Jones has a crucial vision at the end, when he gets to see the truth about Sutpen and his friends, which gives Wash some dignity. Thus, the main theme is coming to awareness, and being able to see the truth; finally reaching the moment of vision and getting rid of the illusion. The story deals with the betrayal of an illusion, which occurs when Wash realizes that Sutpen, the figure he had romanticized and idealized, is immoral. The figure of the family patriarch assuming mythical dimensions becomes immoral, so the story is about Wash losing faith.

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Thomas Sutpen represents the traditional the Southern aristocracy and, in this story, we see the fall of it, the fall of the corruption. He represents the defeated, fallen and post-civil-war south, fake and shallow. He represents the degeneracy of those who describe themselves as aristocrats, and that much Wash eventually understands. Thomas Sutpen is the typical white plantation owner, related with slavery, oppression, and patriarchy. He is a powerful man who rides horses, which is relevant and recurrent in Faulkner's fiction.

Thomas Sutpen impregnates Wash's granddaughter, Milly; if the baby were a boy, he could have been the one to take over the plantation and to start a dynasty, but as she is a girl, she is not considered important.

Wash idealizes Sutpen because he represents everything that Jones wants to be, and he expects to become part of the family. Wash has no wife, the only he has in life is an innocent, stupid, illiterate granddaughter, Milly. He is desperately searching for some sense of self, so he turns Sutpen into a hero. Wash creates this fantasy where they are friends; he idealizes Sutpen to escape the intolerable reality of this place at the bottom of this society where he is in a lower than the black people, so he needs to believe in the myth of Sutpen, and not only that, he needs to believe in the myth of white supremacy as much as Thomas Sutpen did. The relationship he thinks he has with Sutpen gives Wash some relief from this intolerable isolation.

The handling of time and how it relates to theme is crucial. The way the story handles the passage of time is important; the description of time is fundamental in "Wash", both structurally, formally, and thematically. Wash Jones has been deceiving himself and ignoring the painful reality that hunts him; he ignores the passage of time, just like Jay Gatsby. He has blinded himself to the truth that Thomas Sutpen is a figure of the general individual who lost his power after the Civil War, and who is nothing but a man with no morals.

The handling of time is directly related to the incapacity of Wash to distinguish fantasy from reality. As long as Wash persists in making Sutpen the myth, as long as he claims him as the myth and legend, he will ignore the passage of time.

Significantly, the action of the story extends from the early morning, from dawn, and it ends with the darkness after sunset on a Sunday. The day begins with the birth of a child and it ends with the murder of the father at the hands of Wash with the scythe.

This is a story in which we see Wash Jones move literally and figuratively from the darkness to the light, and then back to the darkness of death at the end of the story.

Before they break Wash lives in a state of ignorance, and then he hears to the words of Sutpen, and that is when Wash enters the daylight and he sees the proof about Sutpen and about himself, and he opens his eyes to the brutal reality of who Thomas truly is, and he acts accordingly; he kills Thomas Sutpen in broad daylight; that is when everything changes for Wash.

It is dawn, it is daybreak when a new life begins, and this coincides with the birth of a colt, and as the baby is a girl, he loses interest, which Wash hears. Jones reaches understanding of what is said inside, so he grasps the meaning and the intention of those words "*Well Millie, too bad you're not a mare, otherwise could give you a decent stall in the stable*". When he kills Sutpen in page 545, after he finds the truth about himself and Sutpen, he enters a state of despair, and the causes of that are the meaning of Sutpen's words, and this is

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when he realizes the Sutpen is a man who has the courage to abandon the child conceived. That is why the flashback that follows the opening scene is so important because it gives a background to understand the causes of the despair that Wash feels once it has penetrated the true nature of Sutpen's personality.

After the war, Thomas came back and he lost everything with the South's defeat, he went completely bankrupt so, after that, as he is used to have a drinking companion he just takes advantage of Wash, never being completely aware of his existence. It is Wash who puts Sutpen in bed when he is too drunk to even walk. This explains Wash's identification with the plantation's owner; it is what makes him believe that he is superior to the blacks and that he is like, and at the level of, Thomas Sutpen. He believes he is important by association; this phenomena is called psychological wage in the American South, which is the advantage that whites have over other people. The whites think they something that brings them to the superior class, they have priority over blacks. This psychological wage is something that powerful people in the south took advantage of; there was no class solidarity in the South, only race solidarity. The thing about whites in the south is that they misinterpret the Bible due to their advantage. They found justification in the Bible to enslave the blacks.

It is in page 538 when Wash idealizes Sutpen, in the following quote: *"Meanwhile on weekdays he would see he fine figure of the man – they were the same age almost to a day, though neither of them (perhaps because Wash had a grandchild while Sutpen's son was youth in school) ever thought himself as being so- on the fine figure of the black stallion, galloping about the plantation. For that moment his heart would be quiet and proud. It would seem to him that that world in which Negroes, whom the Bible told him had been created and curse by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his; that world in which he sensed always about him mocking echoes of black laughter was but a dream and an illusion"*. When he is describing a black stallion, we have to pay attention to the possessive personal pronouns he uses to do so. There is a powerful image in this passage; in this passage Wash identifies himself with Sutpen, and, thus, he finds a place for himself. He transforms Sutpen into an image for his only eye, an image that shows bravery and the power that irradiates from the plantation owner. Wash is raising himself to divinity by identifying himself with Thomas Sutpen.

In this passage, Wash identifies himself with Sutpen, and, thus, he finds a place for himself. He transforms Sutpen into an image for his only eye, an image that shows bravery and the power that irradiates from the plantation owner. Wash is raising himself to divinity by identifying himself with Thomas Sutpen, because he puts Sutpen at the level of a god. However, there are moments in this passage in which we are not sure whether it is Thomas Sutpen or Wash Jones riding the horse and becoming a God.

It is also in this passage that Wash achieves his own apotheosis, he finds a place for himself in the social hierarchy of the Southern Society. He transforms Sutpen into a legendary figure, who is nothing but a powerful image for him: Sutpen riding a black stallion through the plantation. This is an image of bravery cavalry officer, but this supposed bravery is one of the things that Wash learns about. This bravery was just fake, just pretense.

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Here, we also see the fine figure of the man is what Sutpen is for Wash. He sees Sutpen as a figure rather than a real person. Wash makes illusion into reality, and the other way around, as well. The actual world was that in which he was lonely. It is not completely clear whether he refers to Sutpen riding the horse or to Wash building his own fantasy.

There is a connection of this passage with the opening and also the closing passage scenes. Horses are portrayed at the opening and at the final scene and, thus, they are the central image of the story. In the opening scene the narrator mentions a scythe that Wash had borrowed from Sutpen, and it is that very instrument that he murders Thomas later on in the story, to be precise, in the final scene. The final scene is described through Wash's point of view that now knows the truth and realizes what his place in the world is. It is not even worth for him to escape because wherever he goes he only goes away from the American South.

At some point, Wash learns that Sutpen has been taking advantage of Milly, and he says that if Thomas Sutpen did that it is okay because she is an ignorant girl (532). This proves that his faith in Thomas Sutpen is complete and blind. With this, Faulkner is showing the reader all the changes in Thomas Sutpen after the Civil War: he lost not only the plantation, but everything he had, so he tries to make a living with other business, but he fails.

'Barn Burning'

This story was written in 1938 and it was published in Harper's magazine in 1939. Faulkner originally intended to make this story the opening of one of his novels. The story is a complex exploration of the internal conflict of a ten-year-old boy. This story is obscure. The language is complex in the story; this is an issue in Faulkner. This language is one of the things that makes him a famous celebrated author; this depth creates the extraordinary ability to put into words what his characters are thinking and feeling; if they were narrated in the 1st person it would be impossible to follow them. This story deals with very acute problem; the story focuses on an excruciated internal moral conflict.

The main conflict in the story is that there are two contradictory forces that are pulling this boy in two opposite directions. On the one hand, he wants to be loyal to his father, but he wants to be loyal to himself as well, so on the one hand there is the pull of the blood, and on the other hand, his thirst for justice and his desire to achieve internal _; to develop his independent mind. He has to separate from the father in order to do that, which is what he does at the end. The last two paragraphs at the end: it is a fairly open ending, but we need to relate everything said in this class with the end of the story.

The characters' names are important. Sarty's father is Abner Snopes and his son is named after Kernel Sartoris. In Faulkner's works we find these two family names: the Sartoris and the Snopes, which are combined in Sarty's name. The Snopes are bad and evil, while the Sartoris are aristocratic people who have tradition, class, nobility and honesty. To the boy, being named Sartoris Snopes is important as it is seen on page 4 when the boy is testifying and he says his name to the judge: "Colonel Sartoris? I reckon anybody

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named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth. Can't they?" (4). Colonel Sartoris is the opposite of the rest of the family.

Abner Snopes: the fact that they are called Snopes is important in Faulkner's mythology. He represents resentment for the upper classes, he rebellion against them. Abner's actions are, indeed, motivated, because the rich built his empire by means of the blacks' sweat. He is an exploiter, the same as Thomas Sutpen. Major de Spain built a magnificent house on "nigger sweat" and also white trash sweat: "Pretty and white, ain't it?" he said. "That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it." (12). Major de Spain represents different things for the boy and the father and, in this case, the reader is expected to empathize with the father and not the boy, because he is too young and unexperienced to understand what are the bases of Major de Spain's power and social-economic situation.

Abner Snopes is not totally evil; he has some redeeming qualities, there is some dignity and integrity to him. Good and evil are mixed, and people are complicated. The problem with this character is that he has some qualities that *per se* are good, but he takes them to the extremes, making him a tragic character.

The main life motifs –something that characterizes the characters through the repetition, they accumulate meaning–, respecting the father are, for example, the way he walks –the stiffness–; he refuses to bend. The stiff leg identifies him with one of the most famous characters of the American literature: captain Ahab, from the novel *Moby-dick*, also a tragic figure. Both refuse to bend, to accept the law, external authority, anybody imposing on their will.

This story is an initiation story for the boy into experience, knowledge, into life. The break from the father is clear at the end of the story; that for this boy there is no going back to the father and consequently to the father. The story does not explicitly say that the father is shot at the end of the story.

The phrase 'barn burner' in the traditional rural South is someone who does what the boy Sarty does at the end of this story; to leave the family behind and move away to explore and live on their own, as many people in the American South do. This has nothing to do with Faulkner's intention, it is just a coincidence, since in this story they call the father a barn burner, but he is not in that sense, since the barn burner is specially a young person.

As it has been said, , this story presents the conflict of the 10-year-old boy, and it is identified in the very opening scene, in which the judge says "I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?"; in this very scene, the boy is suffering from physical hunger –as when he is in the country store, and he smells cans of cheese, and some types of food–, however, the story is about Sarty's spiritual hunger; the boy is hungry for freedom and for ideals, which are the opposite to the ideals his father represents.

The two polarities pulling Sarty in different directions. One is in relation with what the one the judge says – justice, honor, truth–, and the other is represented by the father, what in the first page is called "the old fierce pull of blood". This pull forces Sarty in opposite directions, represented by two external correlatives, one is

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his father, the blood, the family, the other is, only apparently, Major de Spain. That is the __ that the boy explains and fears when he sees Major de Spain's house for the first time, but the conflict here is between Abner, the poor white, and the rich aristocrats like Major de Spain, because Abner has __ conflict with __, mostly with poor people, poor farmers like himself. This means that the conflict is very much between the boy's father and the rest of the world, and the story opens with a court, and the accuser is another simple farmer whose barns have been burned by Abner. Abner burns the barns of both the rich and the poor.

There is this plantation house which, for the child, and because he is too young he is naïve, the plantation house represents justice, and honor. Significantly, the first reaction of the boy when he sees this house is to think it is like a court house where there is justice and peace. What Sarty feels when he reacts when he sees the house is that Major Spain is going to be safe from the evil touch of his father, and that there is going to be peace and freedom.

There is a passage in page 10 when the boy sees the house for the first time, and some of the parts are in italics; these are the bits that Faulkner uses to express what the boy is thinking, to describe what he is too young to put into words, so the author does it for him. Towards the end of the passage pay attention to the description of life motifs. The passage starts in line 6 of page 10: "he saw the house for the first time and at that instant he forgot his father and the terror and despair both, and even when he remembered his father again (who had not stopped) the terror and despair did not return. Because, for all the twelve movings, they had sojourned until now in a poor country, a land of small farms and fields and houses, and he had never seen a house like this before."; this is a poor family and, as such, they do not own any land, so they become share cropper, which means they rent lands with the most poor, infertile soil, and they pay the owner of those lands with a share of their harvest. The twelve movings are a consequence of the father's inability to behave, and his tendency of burning barns. The quote continues: "*Hit's big as a courthouse* he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words, being too young for that: *They are safe from him. People whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch, be no more to them than a buzzing wasp: capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and the stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the puny flames he might contrive...*this, the peace and joy ebbing for an instant as he looked again at the stiff figure which was not dwarfed by the house, for the reason that it had never looked big anywhere and which now, against the serene columned backdrop, had more than ever that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow.". This description of the father is a life motif; the way he walks with the stiff leg, the general stiffness that possesses his body, as well as the blackness is related to a cold, stiff metal, which do not bend. Also, when he says that "sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow" is a reference to some cultures, where belief is that the devil casts no shadow, and that it is one way of warning us of the satanic traits that this character has: he will not accept any outside interference with his will; like the angels who decided to assert their freedom, disobeying God and becoming devils.

The quote continues: "Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the

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drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride.” The “undeviating course his father held” reminds us again of Captain Ahab, from Herman Melville’s novel *Moby-dick*. Also, the fact that he could have avoided stepping on the excrements expresses his personality perfectly.

Major de Spain’s house signifies so much. It is such an important moment in the psychological development of Sarty; the way he reacts when he sees the house, and he innocently thinks that there his father has found somebody he is not going to touch, somebody who is safe from him, and protected from his father’s fires in this environment in which everything is fixed about peace and justice. It is here where it is necessary to establish the difference between how Sarty feels and how the reader feels. Usually, the reader identifies with the father, Abner, because Major de Spain belongs to the same social class and kind of cowardly Thomas Sutpen –who represents corruption and exploitation–, and he belongs to the same character. There are indications in the story –exploitation, slavery, corruption–, and this, Sarty is too young to know, to understand.

The fact that the reader perceives these issues that Sarty is too young to comprehend, those are the issues that somehow redeem the father, because Abner is right about this unfair social, economic system, which keeps him at the bottom of the society; which keeps him exploited. This is related to Abner’s obsession with his integrity; he refuses to be pushed around. This is described as “his wolflike independence”.

The main conflict is Sarty’s internal conflict, but apart from that, the reader perceives and feels the conflict between social classes; there is this opposition between Abner Snopes, the poor, exploited, white trash, the white nigger; and the aristocrat, and this conflict has _____. Abner is right when he says that the house of Major de Spain is built on the sweat of the black slaves and poor whites like him.

Abner has this obsession with fire, with the defense of his integrity, and the problem is that he takes these qualities, which are good, into the extremes, he makes them into absolutes, and that is when tragedy strikes.

Abner’s alienation from human nature and his obsessive dedications to his this abstraction, which is integrity and not being pushed around. The blackness, the stiffness, the cold violence that characterizes him, and the fact that he demands complete submission from his child, from Sarty. His child needs to develop a mind of his own. This obsession that Faulkner has with abstractions, such as integrity; this is something that blinds Abner, it makes him blind to the needs of his own child. Blind to the individuality, and to the rights of others, including his own son.

Zora Neale Hurston*Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston is today considered the most important African American writer of before World War II. She has born and raised in Eatonville, Florida, which was America's first all-black town, and it is also the same town in which the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* takes place. Her father was the mayor of Eatonville. He was a very authoritarian person with his wife and eight children. Hurston's mother died when she was eighteen so she was practically left with no home life.

In 1917 she began her studies at Morgan Academy in Baltimore, and one year later she attended a famous African-American university at the time, Howard University in Washington D. C. She studied with Allan Locke, a very famous black educator, who became famous for an anthology of black writing *The New Negro* (1925). Later, Hurston got a scholarship which took her to study in Barnard College, New York, where she studied with a very famous anthropologist named Franz Boas. Under his guidance, Hurston developed a very strong interest in black folks in the black folk traditions.

She did not live in New York for a long time, but in spite of that she is considered a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. In Harlem she was famous as an informal performing artist. This was the place of cultural explosion and cultural celebration of blackness. It was also a place of assertion of black identity and a spiritual and spiritual and aesthetic celebration for African Americans and the connections to the American past. Between 1917 and almost the end of the war, many blacks migrate from the South to the North due to social and economic reasons. They were escaping the poverty of the south and the oppressive system of the South.

Boas arranged a scholarship for Hurston and this allowed her to travel in the South, Florida and Louisiana, between 1927 and 1932, to collect Black Folklore, especially from the town she was born, Eatonville. She went around recording the lives of the rich blacks that stayed in the South and the result of this travel was the publication of her first collection of folk tales titled *Mules and Men* (1933). Historically, this was a very important publication because it was the first book of Afro-American folklore collected by a black American and presented to the reading public by a major publishing

Tell my Horse (1938) is her second collection of folk stories, but this time, focused on her experiences and travels in the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica and Haiti. These two collections have been frequently used as sources for myth and legend of black culture.

Zora Neale Hurston's work was not very popular with the male intellectual leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. She actually corralled with most of them, particularly the poet Langston Hughes, who was one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance and famous for incorporating jazz rhythms in poetry. She corralled with most of the important black male cultural figures because she refused to follow the convention that blacks should write racism and oppression they suffered at the hands of whites. For Zora Neale Hurston fiction is not the place for giving lectures about racism; for her fiction is the tool to reflect life. She wrote novels but she did not make them sociological criticize about the racial problem. She opposed this idea that

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the main concern of the black writer should be how blacks were being portrayed to the white reader. She insisted on presenting black characters as a mixture of good and bad; strong and weak, and not always victims of white oppression.

Hurston is best known for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). A novel about a black woman's quest for identity whose name is Janie Starks. In the opening chapter she begins to tell the story of her life to her best friend Pheoby. The story is taken up by the voice of the narrator, but in the final chapter it returns to Janie's mouth. She has a lot of experiences, adventures and different relationships (the first one with an old black farmer, Logan Killicks; the second one is a very loud politician, Joe Starks, and the third one is a young itinerant worker whose name is Tea Cake. In these three different relationships, she learns a lot about men and herself, she also explores different roles in relation to men. Her first two husbands are solid and stable men whose aspirations in life are too limited for Janie. Both of them refuse to see Janie as a separated individual person with her own individual needs. The third husband is the one who liberates her and then at the end which is also the beginning, she starts to tell the story of her life to her friends. The story is framed by the two instances in which she is having a conversation with her friend, Pheoby. At the end, Janie is left alone in a big white house in the middle of Eatonville and she is happy to be there, as she says, after "been to the horizon and back."

The work of Hurston was not recognized as important until many years after her death. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* got bad reviews which were written by influential black writers and intellectuals. Hurston was ignored for a long time; the novel was out of print for forty years after its publication, this was because she was a black woman writer in a period when American male writers had the power, influence and the necessary support to sustain an editor career. Another issue was that black male writers of the period dictated that in black fiction whites should be portrayed as cruel villains and blacks as proud and suffering victims of racism. As it was mentioned before, Hurston did not want to be the protest writer. It was not until the early 1980s that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* achieved the position of prominence in the American literary tradition. The new printing of the novel by the University of Illinois in 1978 constituted a huge re-evaluation. This novel is today acknowledged as the precursor of the African-American women's fiction of the 1970s and 1980s: Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Naylor, Jamaica Kincaid, and others.

Alice Walker has been the most influential figure in the establishment of Hurston's literary reputation. She wrote about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "There is no book more important to me than this one". Walker also wrote two essays about Hurston's: "Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View" and "Looking for Zora". Alice Walker introduced Hurston's folklore and literature to thousands of readers. In Hurston, Walker found a writer who challenged conventional standards; a writer who believed that beauty was a fundamental principle in African-American culture. Walker also wrote a poem titled "Janie Crawford" in which she speaks about Janie's first two husbands, the third one is not mentioned possibly because Walker does not like him.

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The two main factors that contributed to the reevaluation of this novel were, on the one hand, the establishment of feminist literary criticism as an important theory in American Universities during the 1970s and, on the other hand, the new evaluation of African American texts related to the oral storytelling traditions.

Since this reevaluation in the early 1980s, the criticism has concentrated mainly on two aspects: one, the nature and the meaning of Hurston's portrayal of Janie's reposes to the patriarchal attempts to define her and confine her inferior, unfulfilling roles and two, Hurston's use of black dialect and the African-American conventions of storytelling.

The main theme is the black oral tradition. Hurston attempted to find a combination of two literary traditions: the black oral tradition, characterized by active interchange between storytellers and listeners, and the (written) western tradition, in which the author composes in isolation and the reader reads as well in isolation; to bring into the American novel the expressive potential of the Afro-American culture.

The novel has an opening and closing frame which is a conversation in which the protagonist has just returned from her travels and she presents herself as a storyteller who is going to provide the audience, in this case her friend Pheoby, with the "understanding of the story of her life". This is a technique which expresses the experimental impulse of Hurston, who wants to use the novel form as a way to preserve and transmit African-American narrative practices. The technique is closely related to the theme because one of the things Janie fights for is her own voice in her life and in the life of the community.

This is a very rich and powerful novel in which we can find important issues such as romance, individual and communal rituals, race relations, female identity, female sexuality, etc. It is a novel that celebrates. This is a novel that celebrates the complexities of African American people and particularly, African American women. These complexities and experiences that had been denied to African American people in white American history. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston tries to allow black people the full existence that white authors typically deny to black people. She writes mostly about poor blacks with little education and usually the blacks that most black writers of the time were not interested in.

The novel emphasizes talking in the porch, which is a fundamental ritual for the individual and collective identity of African Americans. At the beginning of the novel, the porch acts as the stage where the blacks perform and evaluate the performances of others. This talking on the porch is what Hurston is really interested in.

This black culture was not always appreciated by many of those blacks who have left the south to go north.

"The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their sinks. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment." (9-10, ch. 1).

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It is a very potent identification of talking with freedom; talking makes them human. During the day, they work hard like animals, but after sunset, they sit in the porch, they are free from social, political and economic limitations. The short time they sit in the porch gives them power and they appropriate it through oral entertainment. These porch-sitting are crucially important because they bring freedom and life to the poor blacks who have no access to the American political, social and historical arenas. Hurston has her characters to speak their own language, the vernacular language of African Americans. Her intention is to assert the values and the cultural identity of African Americans; Hurston protests by denying the power of white oppressors to destroy black culture, to affirm black values within the American cultural context.

This is a novel of people talking. Black Americans were traditionally denied voice; they had to fight a very long time to create their own voice, so Hurston gives black people, and black women in particular, this voice. In the novel, Hurston explores difference between men and women talking through the rituals.

Janie is the character who breaks gender barriers that keep women silent inside the home and men outside, exploring the world. Emancipation for Janie means not only get freed from the oppressive and possessive males, but also to participate actively in the oral tradition of her environment. Actually, the conflict between Janie and her second husband culminates in an act of speech; she defeats him with words. Janie validates herself by telling her story in her own voice. In this respect we could say that the novel comes to its climax at the end of chapter 1, when the narrator stresses the crucial fact that Janie spoke: "*Time makes everything old, so the kissing young darkness became a monstrous old thing while Janie talked.*" (p. 19). In the last paragraph of chapter 1, Pheoby says something about the power of language; about how much she has grown as a person from listening to Janie's powerful story.

The theme to which most contemporary critics, especially Richard Wright, were blind is precisely the issue of the quest for self. A very important issue toward many writers and critics. The novel has a feminist consciousness.

The novel is about Janie, a very beautiful mulatto in search of liberation from patriarchal control, who wants to be a free thinking woman in a society controlled by men and also women who insist on defining her reality in their own terms. The quest motif is central to this novel in which the protagonist on two occasions leaves important established social positions for a more dangerous, adventurous and uncertain life. In one of the sections of the novel, Janie also experiences the danger of the hurricane and after that she is taken to court and she returns to Eatonville with all the knowledge and experience he acquired by the hard way. Back in Eatonville, she is like an artist who enriches the life of the community by telling her story. This proves that the novel has both an individual and communal dimension.

One of the most crucial episodes in Janie's search for selfhood is the pear tree episode. This moment takes place during the spring of the year before her first marriage. This is a passage with very explicit sexual imagery whose purpose is to express Janie's discovery of sexual desire.

"She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the painting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love

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embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from the root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. [...] Oh to be a pear tree – any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with her life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. She searched as much as the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over the gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made." (24-25).

Her waiting for the world to be made is an act of self-creation; this is the famous pear tree. At sixteen, Janie identifies marriage with total fulfillment.

Space is important not only in this passage, but also in the novel as a whole. As we see in this excerpt, nothing in this place or in her grandma's house answers her. This place confines and restricts her life. She lives in a very small house with her grandmother which acts like a prison for her and when she goes down to the front gate and she leans over to gaze up and down the road which attracts her; this is the open road she wants to walk on. This open road suggests vast possibilities that attract her; vast possibilities in contrast with her present situation of confinement. What Janie needs and desires to do is to embark on a personal journey to understand the world and herself.

This is a passage which presents a contrast with the ideas of her grandmother. There are two metaphors of Nanny about the black woman: one is the black woman and the spit cup of men; the other is the black woman as the mule of the world. What Janie contemplates here is the opposite. This fragment offers a powerful contrast with Nanny's images of black women. Nanny uses these images that suggest dehumanization because she is obsessed with black women being the sexual victims of abusive white men.

This passage suggests sexuality without domination; relationships between equals. It not only celebrates sexual fulfillment, but also creativity, fertility (imagery of the bees pollinating flowers) and so on.

After this, Janie begins to feel sexual desire and later on the same day, Johnny Taylor comes by and Janie sees him as sexually attracted because she has awakened to sexual desire and romance. From this moment onwards, her life is going to be a continuous struggle to bring her own life into harmony with the original fresh vision of the pear tree. The three men in her life are repeatedly compared with this tree; they are described in terms of their relationship with this pear tree vision.

The symbol of the pear tree resonates throughout the novel. At the opening of chapter two, Janie is beginning to tell her story:

"Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches" (20).

The tree is now in leaf and not in bloom, which suggests that Janie is middle-aged. Janie no longer sees the tree as a symbol of marriage, but as a balance of opposites.

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Most of Janie's problems and disruptions are due to her issues of gender. She is frequently attacked because of opinions of what a woman of her age should do and should not do.

Space is central to the novel. It is directly related to gender issues.

Janie in the novel comes to occupied progressively larger, physical spaces. The beginning of her life was in that cabin which her grandmother, Nanny, had in the backyard of the originally slave owner family. From there, Janie moved to Nanny's small house, where she has the pear tree vision. Then, during the first marriage, she lives in the farm and small house of Logan Killicks. After this, she lives in Jodie Stark's big white house in the center of Eatonville.

The larger the physical space, the more her house oppresses and confines her body and her consciousness. With the third husband, she goes away, after rejecting what Nanny called protection. Janie abandons the big house she has in Eatonville and moves with Tea Cake to the muck, a swamp area, a very wet land, which is a part of Florida called the Everglades. The only thing that Janie and Tea Cake have there is a poor shackle cabin. It is here when she really gains control of herself.

This novel establishes a contrast between, on the one side, what Logan Killicks and Jodie Starks represent and, on the other side, what Tea Cake represents; a contrast between bourgeois notions of progress (Killicks owns the only organ "among colored folks" and the Protestant work ethic, on the one hand, and more creative and lyrical notions of unity, on the other (Tea Cake). The only possession Tea Cake has is a guitar.

Nanny

Janie's grandmother was a slave woman. During her years as a slave, she did not own a house and she did not even own her body. Nanny was prevented from achieving what the dominant culture defines as self-hood. But she desperately wishes things to be different for her granddaughter, so she is constantly talking to Janie about this. When Nanny got her freedom, she tried to protect her daughter.

Nanny has always identified owning a house with liberation and self-possession.

Immediately after Janie's pear tree vision, Janie begins to be romantically interested in Johnny Taylor, who is at the bottom of society. This concerns Nanny, who begins to worry, so she pressures Janie to marry Logan Killicks, because she realizes that the fence around her house is not going to be strong enough to protect Janie from being sexually exploited.

Nanny and her former slave mentality is more concerned about Janie's survival than Janie's self-realization, so she practically forces her granddaughter to marry Logan Killicks against her will: "*Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection*" (30). For Nanny, safety means that a black woman need the protection of a male who owns a home. Nanny thinks that otherwise Janie will be destined to physical and spiritual destruction: "*And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe the menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cub outa you*" (37).

The characters in the present of the novel are living in the period around the 1930s called Jim Crow, in the American South, based on racial segregation.

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Nanny's ideas about black women leave Janie no room for independent thought or action. The black woman is "the mule of the world":

"Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw don de load and tell de nigger man to pick it up. He pick it up because he have to but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!" (29).

Nanny is right about this world in which white males are rulers, but her conception of alternatives for Janie is too limited because her sensibilities are restricted because she is still too close to her slave experience. Nanny is conservative in the sense that she accepts the qualities and hierarchies of the world as something immutable and throughout the rest of the novel, Janie is going to struggle against this diminishing vision; Janie is going to refuse to this definition of conformity of the black women as the mule of the world.

In her poem, Alice Walker also mentions women and mules. Walker describes Janie's the first husband as someone who wanted to "changed her into a mule" and then, further down, she says "a women unless she submits is neither a mule,/ nor a queen/ though like a mule she may suffer/ and like a queen pace/ the floor". There is a positive sense in which a black woman can be a mule. Maybe, Janie is a queen at some point in the novel, when she takes possession of the floor; Maybe Janie gets to be a mule in a positive sense, in which Alice Walker thinks in the poem, a different type of mule: an obstinate one. Janie is persistent, she suffers a lot but also learns from it.

The problem with Nanny is that she can only see Janie's maturity through her own experience as a former slave. She is convinced that what a black woman needs is a man with properties who can provide for her. This is where Janie's story begins: when her grandmother forces her to get marry to a man with lands, a mule and also an organ, the only one in town. Some critics say that the organ may be an implicit allusion of sexual power and social class. For Nanny, Logan Killicks represents respectability and protection:

"Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love...Heah you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres un land right on the big road and..." (41).

For Janie, the walls of Logan Killicks' house and the fence around his property are the opposite of protection. All of this isolates her from her sense of self and everything that she discovers in that vision that she had under the grandmother's pear tree.

Nanny's concern is well intentioned, but her love for Janie is misdirected, because she is unable to listen to the personal vision that was inspired to Janie by the pear tree. Nanny cannot see the limits of class values, the only thing she stresses is social status and financial security.

Logan Killicks acts like a slave master, insulting and threatening Janie, as Alice Walker mentions in the poem. With his personality, Logan Killicks desecrates the pear tree.

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Janie in the company of Logan Killicks, which despite of what Nanny the Grandmother said, it is not good for her. This is a situation for Janie in which she feels isolated from herself, this is exactly the opposite that she felt when she had the vision under the pear tree. She does not have a connection with the world around her, and Nannie dies in Chapter 3, not long after her marriage to Logan. Janie tries to escape from this restricted situation, and she is a woman, and this is a man's world, so she cannot go alone into the world. What happens is that Starks appears out of nowhere, and this is a second awakening for her –the sudden appearance of this glamorous stranger. Jody Starks is significantly younger than Logan, he appears in the spring, about a year after her marriage to Logan, who happens to be away from home. Janie hears this man coming down the road, whistling, she is enchanted by what she what she sees, which supposes a new awakening: *"It was a citified, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his Arn, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The Except straight ahead"* (47). This is a significant first description of Jody Starks; he walks like he knows where he is going, he only looks straight ahead, and this is a first indication of what this man is going to be, of what the situation of Janie is going to be with this man who is characterized for the single-mindedness that the passage gives to understand. This obsession, this single-mindedness of Jody is something that usually leads to self-defeat. Jody is on his way to Eatonville, a new town, all black, and he wants to become what he calls a "big voice", a "big person", and Janie, at this moment, is lonely and thus very receptive of the attention of Joe. She is uncertain, she is internally divided when she begins her relationship with Jody; on the one hand, she knows that he is not really part of the **pertry**(?) vision. The second quotation that says *"Janie pulled back a long time because did not represent sun up and polen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon, he spoke for change and chance."* The horizon is something crucial and important for Janie, she has an obsession with the horizon, this persisten attraction to it. She decides to run away with Jody and, in a sense, her dream is born again; this is a new awakening, but she has reservations; there is this sense of newness and change, which makes this is a moment of uncertainty, but the call horizon and the newness are the ones that prevail.

Jody will only be "the bee" –this terminology refers to the vision she had under the pear tree– that she needs for her blossom for a short time, because the real bee for her bloom, the authentic love for her will come later on in the story with Tea Cake, twenty years from this moment. This will happen after what resembles twenty years of spiritual hibernation. This marriage becomes fairly soon an unhappy marriage, but it is a marriage that gives her material security, after all, in the beginning of the novel, which is also the end of the novel, we see Janie coming back to this big white house at the center of Eatonville; this is her house, which she will inherit from her dead husband Jody Starks.

Jody is economically strong, a man who builds a city. He represents, even more than Logan, everything that Nanny the Grandmother wanted for Janie, he is a man of power that can protect her. However, only at the beginning, Janie's relationship with Jody is a relationship of good sex, intense romance; but the reader can see from the beginning that he is going to be so self centered and so controlling, so hungry for power; he is actually inflated with his dream all the time; he talks too much about his money and his accomplishment. Moreover, the same as Logan Killicks, Jody confines Janie, although in larger because he is more wealthy and powerful; he reduces her life to the inside of the house, and the store that they have in the house. He

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becomes the Major of the town, and he wants her to confine herself in this role of Major's wife, he wants to put her on a pedestal as she is this small town's first lady; that is the only thing she wants her to be, having no concern for her wants and needs. He wants her to be a woman who speaks only when she is spoken to, a woman who dresses as modestly as he indicates; the woman who stays inside the house and the store as he demands. As soon as he is elected Major, he says that "*she is a woman and her place is in the home*" so, because of her gender, Jody excludes her from the expressive rituals from the traditions of the Eatonville community. This relates to the passage from the opening of the novel about all this blacks who after sundown reunite on the porch and they become powerful, they become rulers of worlds; Jodie excludes her from all this because he refuses to let her participate in these storytelling sessions of the porch. The porch is a very important place; it is a transitional, liminal place between the outside and the public world, where the black community's consciousness is created.

Her relationship with Jody is initially okay based on this spiritual and physical, until he makes it clear with her and in public that he wants her to be the perfect traditional wife. In this sense, Jody Starks is very similar to one man with whom Zora Neale Hurston had a short relationship; she tells us about this relationship in her autobiography, she does not give the name, only the initials –P.N.P.–and, in the novel, Joe Starks attempts to make Janie submissive to his authority, and in the author's autobiography we learn that this man P.N.P. tried to transform her into a submissive, obedient companion; so, in both cases, the male tries to deny the power of voice to the female. In the novel, Joe Starks forbids Janie, who is oratorically brilliant, to participate in the storytelling sessions in the porch of the store; in the autobiography, P.N.P. demands Hurston to give up her career as a writer just to be with him, to follow him. Janie resists Jody's domination, and things go from bad to worst, and the older Jody gets, the more oppressive, and he makes the house and the store a prison to Janie. There is a passage that shows how terrible it got to be: "*It got to be terrible in the store, the more his back ached, and his muscle dissolved into fat, and the fat...the more people in there, the more ridicule he poured to her body to _ attention from his own*", (120). This public humiliation continues and it gets to the point that it becomes so bad, and Jody keeps making fun of her deteriorating, aging body in public: "*It was like somebody snatched off part of a woman's clothes while she wasn't looking and the streets were crowded. Then too, Janie took the middle of the floor to talk right into Jody's face, and that was something that hadn't been done before.*" (121-22). This is a description which really expresses the very clear sexual overtones in this passage. The significant change resides on the phrase "took the middle of the floor", which reminds us of what Alice Walker says in her poem about Janie, that Janie and women like Janie can become queens in the sense that they can pace the floor. This is Janie claiming a place of her own in the center of the store, asserting her own voice, and this is when she moves along the limits that Jodie has defined as her identity and her place. After practically twenty years of mental and physical abuse, she finally rejects the premise on which he had been basing their marriage, and the basis was this idea that she should be confined to her place in the home. Jody is shocked by her reaction, and what he says in front of everybody is "*you must be out of your head*", this represents the same shock from the novel *The Awakening*, when Edna Pontellier's husband reacted the same way when she was searching for, and moving into a space of her own; he went to talk to his doctor and told him that his wife, Edna, was going insane. Soon after this, in the same scene, Janie

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appropriates Jody's kind of language to attack him and his masculinity, "*You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look like de change uh life*" (123). The change of life in the south is a euphemism for the menopause. This attack on Jody's manhood is what ends his domination of Janie, his domination of the community and in the marriage; this destroys him and his will to live, so he dies soon after this public embarrassment in front of a male audience. It is interesting, the fact that he alludes to his sexual impotence, because this is something that stresses the emptiness of this model of male identity that has characterized him, a model of male identity which is based on this illusions of masculine power. He dies soon after this, and there is an interesting conversation that he and Janie have in his last moments where Janie tells him interesting things about their relationship and how bad it became; at one point she tells him "this my own mind had to be squeezed and...to make room for your in me" and she reproaches him for imprisoning her in the house, for excluding her from nature, from the organic world, from the natural world, the world in which she had had that vision of sexual and spiritual fulfillment under the pear tree, so she was left with no access to the outside world, with no space of her own, neither in the house, nor inside herself. Jody lies in the house, and Janie talks to him about the emptiness of his system, the structure of power that he represents, and what happens after his death is that Janie puts her thoughts in order and goes in front of the mirror. The mirror has been reflecting, so far, the corpse of Jody in the coffin, and now she puts herself in front of the mirror, and this is an important moment, when she thinks "about herself": "*Then thought about herself. Yeats ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but the handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off her kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there*" (134-135) Her hair is very important, and this is what drives all the black praised about, their hair. This internal division which is suggested by the passage, she has told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass, and she has been living through this period of double life, double existence. On the outside, she did not want to have a violent, physical confrontation with Jody, so she played the role of obedient wife, but inside she was going in different directions. This internal division is something that has strengthened her, something that has empowered her. In this passage in which she observes herself in the mirror, she likes what she sees, and this is a suggestion of something new, it is a new awakening for her now that her husband is dead; it is an assertion of recovery of self among other things. The double life has made her experienced and powerful. She is looking at her reflection as if it were for the first time since she was a girl, meaning that it has been a long time since she has been really herself, and, in front of the mirror, she frees and unveils her hair, and she likes what she sees. She uses the mirror to reclaim and recreate herself, and also to formulate a new self. Later in the passage it says that "*she took careful stop(?) of her self, then combed her hair, and tied it back again*".

Tea Cake appears when Jody dies. He is the man who embodies Janie's dreams more fully. He is the man who helps Janie break away from Jody's house, and helps her to begin her wanderings in space. This is important because she leaves this vertical space of the two-story house at the center of Eatonville, the house in which Jody had confined her, for the horizontal space, for the horizon, which represents the world of

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possibility, journeys, meetings with new people, rejection of false values, acquisition of new values, so she goes on this journey, and they go to the muck. Obviously there are crucial difference between Jody's house in Eatonville, Tea Cake's house, which is not really a house, it is a cabin that Tea Cake and Janie inhabit in this place in Florida where they go to work as migrant agricultural workers; they collect mostly beans. There they have a poor one-story house, which is called the unauthorized center of the job, full of people every night, since most people there are like Janie and Tea Cake –they work during the day, and then they have a lot of fun and they play games. One of the games is talking on the porch, so in that place, Janie and Tea Cake are some kind of leaders, but leaders among equals, however, and the mother's house, the cabin, is in the center of this community of agricultural workers, but at the same level as everybody else. It is their space, and at the same time, the community is constantly moving from this place, because this is the place where they meet after work, to play games, talk, and where they go to enjoy themselves –drink, fight from time to time–. At the same time they maintain their individual identities, Janie and Tea Cake.

For Janie this is an important experience, totally different from her experience with Jodie, because there she was totally submerged to his place, the space of his house, the space of his identity, this is, the physical space, but also a mental space.

The dominant figures, of this part of the novel, are figures of play and, in a sense, the many figures of play substitute the figures of flowering vegetation we saw on the first half of the novel. When we talk about play, it becomes an analogue for the porch-talking, which is rhetorical play.

In one of the many arguments Janie and Jody had, she accused him of not being able to laugh and play at the same time. The tension between them became the tension between work and place, between his way of life based on appearances of respectability and control, these mainstream middle class values, being in contrast with the verbal play of the porch, which is what she is interested in, it is where Janie wants to be. It is just verbal play, which is nice, enjoyable, but it is not profitable, it gives no money, no material, monetary game.

Play is the weapon, or love potion, with which Tea Cake wins Janie's heart. With play is how Tea Cake seduces Janie, and the following quote is from an episode in which he teaches her to play checkers and she likes it: *"He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Someone though it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points"* (146, ch. 10) Very soon after this, Janie and Tea Cake engage, and they teach one another to play in the game of love. Play is a thematic analogue to the rhetorical play of language, which is really important in this novel in which orality is so important.

In the muck, in the end, the house, which is not protected from the forces of nature, is destroyed by a hurricane, and they go through this period of danger, and they have no protection against a rabid dog that bites Tea Cake, and after he goes mad and gets very violent, she has to kill him in self defense. This is the end of Janie's wanderings in space, but not the end of her wanderings in time, so she then returns to her house in Eatonville with no regrets, and she says *"so ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah house and live by comparisons"* (284, last chapter). This passage connects with one of the author's autobiography, because Janie once again refers to

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the horizon, and this obsession with the horizon is something the author shared with Janie, and this is what she wrote on her autobiography: *"I had a stifled longing. I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded out front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. Everyway I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like"* (*Dust Tracks on a Road*). This passage reminds us of what Janie experienced when she was sixteen years old, what she felt immediately after the vision of perfect sexual love and fulfillment under the pear tree, when she started feeling this desire of taking the horizon and going away in search of adventure and herself; to follow this constant obsessive call of the horizon.

She comes back home, and this is the first time that she refers to this house she inherited from Jody as 'home'; now it is no more an oppressive space, it is her place and she is now a free person; she is alone after the death of her third husband, and the following passage, which is the very last paragraph of the novel, has had a lot of critical discussion; the fact that she is left alone has created some controversy. What arises the controversy is whether Janie is moving into a period of loneliness, isolation, and spiritual death or if, on the contrary, the house is going to remain alive because she is there remembering all her experiences, whether she is withdrawing from the outside world: *"The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room: out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing. Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see"* (286) She was taken to court for shooting Tea Cake, and the blacks wanted her to be sent to prison and probably killed in the electric chair, and it was the white judges and the white jurors that felt sympathy for her. This is a very intense lyrical passage, and probably one of the best things about her novels, the intense lyricism, the quality of the language, the very original language. "Tea Cake with the sun for a shawl" this is an indication that she is feminizing Tea Cake here, and she portrays herself as a fisherwoman when she says that she "pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net", masculinization. The thing about the horizon, and the fact that she pulls the horizon as a fishnet is an indication that she is excluding the possibility of any further exploration of the world, of the horizon. Fishing is important in the novel because one of the things Tea Cake does for her is taking her fishing, which is something that Jody has never done. This is related to the importance of play in the relationship with Tea Cake, and this is the play, which Jodie never allowed in their marriage. At the end, her friend Phoebe, the one Janie has been telling her story to, announces she is going to make her husband take her fishing with him, which is really important.

The end is ambivalent. The positive view holds that Janie is now free to move between the past and the present, between the inside and the outside, between the self and the world and the horizon, between the dream and the reality. She is alone in the second story room of her house, but she is not really isolated from

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the world outside. The negative views, as of the critics see it, is that she has returned to the community with which she has never had a very friendly relationship, and she returns to a place where most people hate her, and she is left in a position of excessive isolation, of excessive interiority, so maybe there is a suggestion in the passage of excessive confinement. The possibility that she is excluding any further exploration of the horizon because in the passage she is pulling it in, and she is alone in this room watching pictures of _ light against the wall, and the question is whether Jamie is becoming a passive expectator in a moving theater.

Back to Tea Cake, this novel is essentially the story of Jamies search for fun and fulfillment; she wants to enjoy life, she wants to live freely –work, have sex, enjoy sexual love, enjoying talking, playing–. So, the novel is the story of her search for happiness, and this is made possible by her relationship with Tea Cake, although he is less than ideal, he makes positive contributions to her life, but he steals from her, at one point he encourages the advances of another woman. There is an episode where beats her because he suspects that another man is interested in her; he shows the traditional sexist attitudes towards women, and the novel shows this could not be any other way. The fact that Tea Cake has internalized many of this culture's conventions of the masculine and feminine roles. The author herself had traditional ideas of the relationship between a man and a woman.

In this passage Janie idealizes Tea Cake, early in their relationship, and with him she recovers this images of fertility, desire, and everything connecting to the pear tree, the bees, pollinating the flowers: *"She couldn't make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women, He cold be to a blossom—a pear-tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God"* (161 ch 11) With Tea Cake, Janie experiences feelings and sensations that she remembers from her experience under the pear tree when she was sixteen, however, at the same there is a slight image of violence that resides in the repetition of the verb "crush"; he is crushing scent out of the world, crushing aromatic herbs; the aroma is nice, the aroma is spiritual fulfillment, but there is a suggestion of male violence here. The passage is clearly related to the passage of her sexual awakening in the garden, and Tea Cake is part of the pear tree; but he is more than that, he is the woods themselves, the whole of nature in a sense. Actually, his real name is Vergible Tea Cake Woods, Vergible meaning veritable; the cake suggesting some "feminine" sweetness; he seems to be an agent of truth –veritable–. This passage expresses the dream of Janie after two frustrating marriages; she has managed to keep inside her the dream, this image of an ideal male companion with which she can have a fulfilling sexual relationship, and the ideal male companion who is not jealous about her empowering herself by talking on the porch.

Tea Cake is much younger than her, he has no material possessions, he has nothing to offer her, but he seems to love Janie for herself, he gives her freedom to experience life on her own, and does not seem to be intimidated by that as a male; his masculine identity is not threatened by Janie's moving to the public space of traditional male rituals, based on games. On the contrary, Tea Cake introduces her to some of these activities, and invites her to these traditionally male places; they work and they play together, the play Jody would never allow. They share their life, and she participates in the rituals, the activities of the muck, the plays of this community agricultural workers, and this is a sharp contrast to her confinement and restriction

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in Eatonville, a contrast between her companionship and partnership with Tea Cake, and her subordination to Jody Starks. Her life with Tea Cake is full of ups and downs, sometimes it is an emotional rollercoaster, but she does not seem to mind that, although he beats Janie to show himself and others that he is a true male; but there is a previous episode when she beats him, so more or less they are even. The following passage, if you read it today it is offensive, but this is not taken seriously in the novel by the narrator, since it is the way it was, it is play and jealousy on both sides; she attracts many men, and Tea Cake does not like it, and the other way around. *“Some of these men made passes at Jamie, and women who didn’t know took out after Tea Cake. Didn’t take them long to be put right, however. Still and all, jealousies arose now and then on both sides. Then Mrs. Turner’s brother came and she brought him over to be introduced, Tea Cake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss”* (218 ch. 17). When the narrator says *“Didn’t take them long to be out right, however”* means that Janie has been violently fighting those women who felt attracted to Tea Cake. Janie is not a 21st century feminist, and the passage indicates she has internalized these conventional gender roles. In the full passage, and in other passages of the novel, indications that maybe Jane considers male domination to be normal in a relationship, and this is what the author felt as well. If Tea Cake had not been bitten by the rabid dog, she would have stayed in the relationship, and she would continue to live happily with him, so maybe Tea Cake has always been like this. Alice Walker was probably the figure who did most to rescue Zora Neale Hurston from literary oblivion, and what she says about this topic is completely wrong; she says that Janie shoots Tea Cake because she wants to punish him for that physical abuse, and it is the opposite of the truth. Janie’s love for Tea Cake is deep enough to sustain her through the difficult moments of the relationship, he has made her feel both the strengths and vulnerabilities of love and passion, and he certainly has made her feel something that she had never experienced with her two previous husbands.

After she returns home to Eatonville, Janie tells her friend Phoebe about her experiences, and she shows no regret for the life she has lived, and she indicates that the love that she experienced with Tea Cake has given her strength and integrity, and his tragic death has left Janie with the conviction that she has truly lived; this is what she wanted from life.

She returns to Eatonville, the place she left with a younger man –Tea Cake–; she left with him and returns without him. She is wearing overalls, a traditional male outfit, and she left the place in a traditional feminine blue satin dress. In a sense, this indicates she has moved from society’s expectations for woman and men, and into her own choices as an individual; she has found her voice, she has seen the horizon for herself. Maybe, most of the men in the community of Eatonville considered her to be the mule of the world, the oppressed, good-for-nothing, black woman. Maybe she is a mule, but in a positive sense, which Alice Walker hints at in the poem that we dealt with. Maybe she is a mule in the sense that she has become strong –mules are famous for being obstinate– by her suffering and her experiences, she is a mule because she has been made free by her obstinacy and determination; she has been to the horizon –the world of possibility, meeting new people, acquiring new values–.

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The opening of the novel is very enigmatic, intense, deep; the opening makes it clear that gender issues are going to be paramount, that this is going to be a novel about men and women culminating in the affirmation of the superiority of women, who know how to take advantage of the opportunities of life: *“Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.*

Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.” Here, Janie is making this brief, brave claim that men are limited by their commitment to false values and exteriority; that men are controlled by time, time that when it does not give the men their dreams, it destroys them. Men seem to be presented as more passive; they passively watch for what reality may bring them if they are lucky, whereas women seem to use their dreams as means to transcend reality, they don't resign themselves to it; women answer the call to their interiority, and sometimes the call of their interiority is stronger and better for them than following the call of men.

At the end of the novel Janie internalizes the horizon, which is like a fishnet that she is bringing in, and it is a way of saying that women control the process of memory, that women create their own lives from their interpretation of reality; they have a selected process for getting conscious remembering, which probably makes women more creative, and more capable of shaping and building a personal view of the world. Maybe the vision and the power of women are expressed differently; they are not expressed through physical violence, through dominion, through physical strength or material possessions, that is the world of men; in the case of women it is more through imagination. The vision of women in the novel, according to the passage, *“the dream is the truth”*, which is crucially important, because with women, the vision makes things happen, as if time had less power over them. This is probably related to the end of the novel, the passage when we see Janie’s imagination reshape the past, bring the past into the present as if it were a fishnet, and maybe this is a way of preparing for the future.

The third paragraph, the opening, is an assertion that this is going to be a woman’s story. It focuses our attention on a woman’s story (the woman’s awakening): *“So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet”*. It is like the book of genesis; the beginning of the world. This is like a revisionist version of the Bible. There is a very famous passage in the last of the gospel in which John says: *“In the beginning was the world, and the world was with God, and the world was God, he was in the beginning with God.”* This novel is about the world, about people talking and expressing themselves through talk, so Janie assumes the proportions of the female God, who returns from the dead, which is a new beginning. She returns from the dead to tell her story, and the reader begins to see the transformative potential of the story that she tells, because her friend Phoebe listens to her story and she says: *“Lord, I’ve grown ten feet higher since I’ve listened to you. I ain’t satisfied with myself no more”*, which indicates that Phoebe has started to feel herself transform; maybe this transformation can spread to the totality of the community.

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Janie is certainly back, and is going to make a deep impression on her world. The novel emphasizes orality, and Janie takes the middle of the floor and appropriates the power and the violence of language, and makes the spoken word a powerful weapon with which she destroys Jody; she destroys this illusory, fake power of patriarchy –everything that Jody Starks represents–; he is defeated in his obsession to silence Janie. All he wants to do is to become a what he calls “big voice”; this is connected to an expression he uses all the time, every time he is going to say something he starts with “*I, God*” (?). Jody is the most outstanding example of this male values dominated by exteriority; he is the male dependent on external issues, external definitions of self. His values are so false that he is actually killed by what Janie says, by these words in which she makes fun of his decaying male potency, she disparages his genitals. The fact that this is a woman’s story is important; this indicates this is going to be a very lyrical story, in which we are going to see the creation of the dream as truth.

There is a discussion about what kind of character Janie is; whether she is a “female hero” or a conventional romantic heroine. The definition the critique of Rachel Blau Du Plessis is the following: “*the female hero is a central character whose activities, growth, and insight are given much narrative attention and authorial interest*”. The heroine is “*the object of make attention and rescue*” (*Writing Beyond the Ending*)

It is something in the middle of both, it is one of the ambivalences of the character in the novel, she is something in between. One of the problems with the novel is that it contradicts the feminist readings in a sense that Janie never takes the initiative to go out alone into the world; it is always as if she were waiting for men to come, to appear out of the blue to rescue her, which is what happens with Jody, and later on with Tea Cake. In a sense she is a hero, because we see her autonomy and self-realization, because she uses some of the external marks of male power –wearing overalls, learning to shoot, going to work in the agricultural fields, going fishing are aspects that portray her as a rebel–, at the end she is not in marriage –she is alone and–, she also has resisted to the values of the community; she is very much a rebellious outsider –she has called into question many aspects of her culture, such as the insistence on materialism, the traditional treatment of women, these are aspects that make her a rebellious outsider–; her rebellion becomes a model, an example for anyone that hears her story, which can be seen in Phoebe. On the other hand, there are some qualities and characteristics in Janie which make her the traditional romantic heroine; she follows the dream of men –she is initially captivated by Jody, who speaks for far horizon, later on she follows Tea Cake on that dream of going to the muck–, she is extremely “feminine” in looks –she is extremely beautiful, and in the last part of the novel we discover that she is a mulato, which is something that the narrator does not reveal until fairly late, she is a mulato, she is beautiful, she has a caucasian-like hair, which drives all the males crazy–, then, the story of Janie and Tea Cake is a traditional, romantic story –he is the mysterious stranger who appears out of nowhere and takes away from her conventional life–, a story with the excitement and tension of romantic seduction. The fact that there is a big difference in age –he is at least fifty years younger than her–, and the fact that the people in the town disapprove of this relationship are all conventional characteristics of romantic fiction.

To conclude, what is probably the most valuable aspect in this novel is the fact that Hurston made Janie into an individual, not into an image, not into a type, she did not make Janie the abused woman, the black victim

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of white oppression, Janie transcends all those formulas, all those stereotypes; in Janie, Zora Neale Hurston created an individual black woman who likes work, who likes sex, who likes talk, a woman who is truly free, and the only ambition of Janie is to live, and to live as fully as possible.

Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor is a writer from the South, Georgia. She is a very conservative and devoted Catholic writer. O'Connor writes as an artist and not as a preacher who wants to convert readers to Christianity. Religion is very important in O'Connor's writings.

O'Connor is a peculiar writer, very different from other writers. She stands out for her ironic view of the characters; she is detached from them; she never shows sympathy or compassion. Her protagonists are constant objects of the ruthless satire; protagonists who persist in their delusion. These characters do not show changing and are usually very proud.

Flannery O'Connor writes stories in which protagonists come to a moment of crisis which usually takes place at the very end of the story or at the end of their lives. This moment is characterized by very intense and ruthless violence, which is necessary to shock and awake these individuals from the false premises in which they have been basing their lives. These are usually individuals who feel very comfortable with clichés and conventions that rule their lives. There is a lot of hard-headedness in O'Connor's stories. The pattern is usually the same: pride, humble grace and hardheadedness. Flannery O'Connor uses the Christian concept of salvation and redemption, but all these stories can be interpreted in a secular point of view.

What Flannery O'Connor calls a moment of grace is what modernists refer to as a moment of epiphany, that is, the moment of realization.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

Some critics say "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is O'Connor's best work. The story begins with the car journey, which is a physical and geographical journey in which the family is going on vacation to Florida.

The accident is caused by the stupidity of the grandmother and it puts an end to the physical journey. From that moment onwards, the journey is internal; the rest of the family disappears taken aside by the associates of the Misfit and the confrontation between the grandmother and the Misfit takes place. In this moment we get to know more about the two characters involved, the Misfit and the grandmother.

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Is the transformation of the grandmother credible? Is the end believable from the point of view of realism?

The Misfit says some crucial important words to the grandmother: “*she would of been a very good woman [...] if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life*” meaning that she has lived her whole life alienated; she has not been a good woman in her life, she has been a silly, manipulative and self-centered woman. The fact that the Misfit says “a good woman” is important because it contrasts with something that she has been saying about herself all her life which is that she has been a lady during her entire life. This concept is an absurd myth of the South, the grandmother wants to portray herself as a lady to the world. She has been making use of this pretentiousness of being a lady, manipulating others: “*I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady*”.

This story tragedy is combined with some humor that comes from the grandmother who is alienated and blind to her own reality and that is what makes her laughable and ridiculous. This is something that stands out in O’Connor’s writings: the comic and the sinister. Flannery O’ Connor is very good at exploring these convention between violence and humor. Her humor has a lot to do with the theory that a Henry Bergson, a French philosopher, said about humor: we laugh at other people that go through life like machines and do not pay attention to the unpredictability of the world; people who are characterized by what Bergson describes as mechanical inelasticity, that is, the lack of flexibility in the characters; characters who do not show any sign of adaptability and who are incapable of open themselves to change. Actually, all of this is what makes these characters laughable: they are individuals who feel comfortable with the clichés of their lives. As some critics say the formula used repeatedly in Flannery O’Connor’s stories is pride, humble, grace and endedness. For the author this ruthless and intense violence is a necessity in her stories because as she says, the protagonists are so hard-headed that violence is required to shock them into awareness; to shock them out of their clichés and self-perception.

This story dramatizes a universal truth: death is part of us and it is waiting for us. At the same time, the story is very persistent in the sense that this is a characteristic of the South: the violent death, which is random and unexpected. People like the Misfit are prototypical American characters who kill with no remorse. In this sense, the story is tragic and it expresses some of our most deep fears.

The story is divided into two parts: before and after the accident, which culminate the physical journey, so from that moment onwards the events take clear direction to the final shock. The destination is not Florida anymore; the destination is death and salvation for the grandmother, who at the very last second of her life, becomes a good woman, and not a silly old lady anymore.

We see a gradual development in the dialogue between the grandmother and the Misfit and we get to know more about them because they reveal one another. We also see the reasons why in this society there are many people like the Misfit and the grandmother.

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The grandmother

In Flannery O'Connor's stories we always see people fighting for power. This grandmother is powerless in the family because she is old and a widower. The fact that she, against the wishes and commands of her son, she takes the cat along for the journey, and this has serious consequences. Taking the cat is a sign of rebellion against her family because it suppresses her.

What we see in the story is an unexpected and surprising transformation in the character of the grandmother: at the end, she becomes a good woman and gets rid of the silly pretentiousness of being a lady. The grandmother has been selfish and annoying until the transformation takes place. She finds herself in a situation of shock caused by the extreme degree of fear. The story moves on towards a crucial moment when she for the first in her life, transcends herself and reaches up to touch the Misfit and accept him as her child. She finally recognizes that she is somehow involved in humanity which includes the Misfit; she feels a sudden rush of kindness and understanding for a stranger, but he shoots her at once. This is logical and makes perfect sense in the context of the story because something really violent and unexpected has to take place to shock the lady into awareness.

With the two mutual revelations of these characters, which happen at the same time, we get to know the Misfit's internal conflicts and traumas and we also see the final disclosure of the grandmother, which she has always repressed. The Misfit is an individualistic and violent male who expresses himself and his traumas through violence.

The story works if the reader is able to perceive what is happening, that is, be aware of the shock of the grandmother. The grandmother opens herself to the Misfit and the spiritual dimension of the world, because she has been alienated from reality; she has been living imprisoned in a ridiculous conventional identity, a perception of herself as the Southern lady.

What does the story say about the sentimentalized mythic of the South?

The grandmother idealizes the mythic south: she talks a lot about how the South was when she was younger because she represents so many people in The South. A characteristic of Southerners that the author despises and criticizes and that is represented by the grandmother is the romantic sentimental view of the South (the old South, the plantation South), the self-satisfaction of white Southerners who imprison themselves in this sentimentalized and romanticized view of the South. White Southerners descend from plantation owners and they want to see themselves as part of this that is why the grandmother describes herself as a Southern lady.

The black writer, Alice Walker, came to O'Connor's writings very late. One of the things that Walker discovered is that she was from a place in Georgia very close to where Flannery O'Connor lived most of her life. Walker came to admire this very conservative white Southern writer because "*she destroyed the last vestiges of sentimentality in white Southern writings.*"

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O'Connor was happy with the fact that Southerners had a strong sense of importance of their history, which was good to be aware of all those complexities of history. The fact that the south had such a complex and violent history was good for Southern literature because Southern writers grew in tragedy and self-perception, that is, what O'Connor opposes as the manipulation that creates a false mythology and pride; the idealization of this history that allows characters like the grandmother to remain blind to the harsh lessons of that history, so this is a false sentimentalism that Flannery O'Connor satirizes in the person of the grandmother.

There is tragedy inside the story, the grandmother talks about the plantation and she interrupts the physical journey to Florida to see this house, and she provides a description of that house, on page 123, that mixes fantasy and reality: “*there was a secret panel in this house*”, she said craftily, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, “*and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found...*”. In this quote, we see that she is trying to manipulate the family to take her there. A little bit after this, the grandmother remembers that she made a mistake: the plantation was not in Georgia, but in Tennessee, and when she realizes this and her feet jump up so she hits the valise and because of this, she scares the cat and this causes the accident.

The point that Flannery O'Connor tries to explain is the fact that this deviation of the route that the family take to see that plantation endangers them, this clinging to mythology has catastrophic consequences. All of this is what the grandmother stands for and this is one of the things that along with the confrontation with the Misfit allows the grandmother to drop her mask and to recognize her connection to humans.

When she reaches up to touch him that is the moment when she is no longer a silly old lady: “Why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my children!” This is not something she says to save herself; for the first and last time in her life, she is being sincere and authentic. She has moved to a higher level of awareness, she has opened herself to something new and to human creativity and responsibility, among other things. This is what O'Connor calls the moment of grace for the grandmother. O'Connor says that the grandmother here is in her most significant position in life because she is facing death; she is facing the fact that she is a mortal human being. This emphasis on the importance of the individual facing death is something that sort of draws Flannery O'Connor in synchrony with existentialist philosophy. The author agrees with existentialists when she makes emphasis on the individuals facing death and their awareness of mortality. Existentialists believe that life is absurd because in the end we are all going to die, so they claim that it is very difficult to find meaning in life, but it is found through awareness and responsibility.

The Misfit reacts violently, he rejects her, and this indicates that he has perceives what just has happened to the grandmother; he sees that she has reach a new dimension of being, she has finally opened herself to what Flannery O'Connor calls true Christianity. The misfit has to shoot her because he cannot accept this; he wants to continue being the way he is. To accept what happens to

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the grandmother would be something that threatens his whole life system. This woman who has never been a true, authentic Christian finally opens herself to true Christianity, but the Misfit cannot accept that because he has been basing his whole life on the premise that it is impossible to get to know Christ.

The fact that the Misfit shoots her is completely logical, but the preaching of this evil character is what converts the grandmother; it is what awakes her from her dream, making her aware of the mysteries of life to which she has remained blind.

Has the grandmother found something authentic?

The Misfit's words, which are crucial to understand the story, say that "*she would have been a good woman [...] if it had been someday there to shoot her every minute of her life*" (133).

The description of the grandmother in death answers the question of whether the grandmother has a happy death: "*The grandmother who half sitting and half lay in the puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky*" (132). This quote evokes to Christianity. The grandmother is a child in death in the sense of being truly innocent and open to life. She has a happy death, which means the story has a happy ending. The cloudless sky suggests that she has died in a state of grace.

"The Displaced Person"

Flannery O'Connor had an obsession with peacocks, which are very important both in the life and in the fiction of this author; one of her stories is about the peacock and there is a peacock in this story. When she was a child she made the local news because she taught a young peacock to walk backwards, which means it is a rural place in Georgia.

As a writer, O'Connor emphasized the concrete and hated abstractions; she was a follower of the philosopher Thomas Aquinas in this respect; in the belief that knowledge begins through the senses. In one of her essays she wrote about this saying that "fiction operates through senses... The first and most obvious characteristic of fiction is that it ideals with reality through what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched" ("Writing Short Stories"). This means that she disliked abstractions in fiction and in criticism as well.

The next issue is about her awareness of mystery; she believed that the sense of mystery grows out of the recognition of the incompleteness –of the fallen condition– of a fallen world. She believed that it is the writer's deep sense of something lacking in the world that gives value and meaning to serious fiction.

O'Connor agreed with other contemporary Southern authors on the importance of the fact that the South had lost the war, and this was one of the major reasons for the fact that the South gave us so many excellent writers in the twentieth century –because they lost the war. She was saying that the South had had its fall, it had entered the modern world with this tragically acquired knowledge of human limitation, human fallibility.

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The South had entered the modern world with this sense of mystery that you acquire only after you lose your innocence; the South lost its innocence and in this respect, the Southern literature had an advantage over the rest of the country.

Flannery O'Connor has been related to the Grotesque, this issue of the grotesque in Southern fiction, and it is a label that she did not like very much, it annoyed and it amused her. There is a quotation from one of her essays that addresses this topic, she explains why she uses the grotesque in her fiction to shock people into recognizing both spiritual and physical ugliness, and ugliness which they had been taking for granted; she liked a quotation from Wyndham Lewis where he said that *"if I write about a hill that is rotting, it is because I deplore rot"*; the quotation of Flannery O'Connor is the following: *"The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to his hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures."* (The Fiction Writer and His Country). This is a fairly coherent explanation of why she uses so much of the grotesque, why she uses so much violence, because this is necessary to shock the reader into awareness; in the other hand, the violence inside the stories is also a necessity, it is something necessary to shock the characters into awareness and out of their pride and self-complicity (7:27).

In her stories, the protagonists come to _ (7:49–7:54) in her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" the moment of crisis is the moment of vision, this is usually characterized by violence, which is necessary to awaken these individuals from the false premises, the false attitudes they had been basing their lives. This are, as seen the other day, the grandmother in the previous story and specially in Mrs. Shortley in this one; individuals who feel comfortable with the cliches by which they rule their lives, and one of the things that we see in "The Displaced Person" is the catastrophic consequences of those cliches and of looking at the world through those cliches.

There was a first short version of this story that was published in the *The Swanee Review* in 1954, and the second version, which is the final story, the one that we have read, appeared the following year, 1955, in the collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*.

This is a story about the famous D. P., i.e. the Displaced Person, and outsider who comes into this world, which is ruled by this farmer –Mrs McIntyre–, and causes problems, disruption and commotion. Therefore, an alliance is formed across both class and racial lines; an alliance to prevent the outsider from upsetting the balance. Everybody feels threatened in this microcosm which is this farm owned by Mrs McIntyre; everybody feels threatened; the whites of the South feel threatened in this story, not by the civil rights agitators who came from the North to try to liberate and free the Negroes in this period of American history, but by this Polish man, this European survivor of the madness of Hitler. There are two social groups in this story; the poor blacks, Sulk and Astor, the poor white trash, Mr. and Mrs. Shortley –a very expressive name–,

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and on the other hand, the white landowners, represented by Mrs McIntyre. There is a collusion, and these three groups come together, they unite to defend their place in society and in a story, which is about the displacements —people feeling threatened, about people feeling afraid of losing their place in the world, in society; people who are afraid of losing their status. This man threatens their positions.

Why does Mrs. Shortley go so furiously against the displaced person? This whites in the South despise and hate niggers, Mrs Shortley says that she prefers blacks to Poles on the place in the following quote where she says to her husband: *"I suspect," she said, "that before long there won't be no more niggers on this place. Ans i tell you what. I'd rather have niggers than them Poles. And what's furthermore, I aim to take up for the niggers when the time comes. When Gobblehook first come here, you recollect how he shook their hands, like he didn't know the difference, like he might have been as black as them, but when it come to finding out Sulk was taking turkeys, he gone on and told her: I known he was taking turkeys. I could have told her myself."* (207). The Pole is a white person, so this woman who hates and despises blacks says *"I'd rather have niggers than them Poles"*. Moreover, she is so disrespectful that she calls this man, whose name is Mr. Guizac, Gobblehook. 'Her' is the owner, Mrs. McIntyre. Mrs. Shortley prefers the blacks over the Polish immigrants because without the blacks she would be at the very bottom here, and there is another reason, which is the fact that Mr. Guizac is sufficient and so hardworking that his presence in the farm makes the Shortleys unnecessary, irrelevant. Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person, upsets the balance, not only with the blacks. There is this crucial episode in the story in which Mrs. McIntyre learns that Mr. Guizac is trying to marry one of his Polish cousins to the young black, to Sulk and, for a white woman in the conservative racist South, this is the ultimate sin; this is totally unthinkable, the ultimate threat to the social *status quo*. There was no way that Southern whites were going to accept the intermarriage, mixing the races —a white person from Poland marrying a black man in the South. Mr. Guizac is a hard worker, and he saves money, he improves in every way he can prosper; this makes him different to the white trash, the Shortleys are these people who have no ambition and no possibility; they are just content with what they have. The attitudes of Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person, make the white trash superfluous, unnecessary.

The story takes us to this point, specially in section II and section III, when Mrs. McIntyre herself starts to feel threatened by the presence of Mr. Guizac, not only because of this intention to bring his young cousin from Poland to marry one of the young blacks in the South, but she also starts to feel threatened because she is afraid that one day he is going to be more prosperous than herself. He might be more powerful than her because he is good with the machinery, he is good at working, he is practical, he is good at making and saving money. Then we also realize that Mr. Guizac becomes a threat for the very blacks themselves — which is obvious in the story— who eventually start to hate him. The reason is because he cannot tolerate the ways they behave —they steal chickens from the owner of the farm, the owner knows and she does nothing about it—, he wants them to work and to be responsible. However, Sulk and Astor seem to be happy with the place at the bottom at the social hierarchy; they seem to be comfortable with the *status quo*.

This is a story about the Displaced Person in which there are many displaced persons, not only the Polish refugee. Mr. Guizac is basically a good man, so he is not the only displaced person, but he is the one who in the very first section of the story displaces the Shortleys, and Mrs. Shortley knows that, at least this idea gets

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into her head, that Mrs. McIntyre is going to fire them, so she persuades her husband to leave the place before Mrs. McIntyre fires them. The Shortleys are displaced, and this is what we see at the end of section I, we will look at the passage later on, a beautiful passage, which is the end of Mrs. Shortley, and in the first version of the story that was the very end of the text; originally the story was about Mrs. Shortley, and in that passage she is “*displaced in the world from all that belonged to her*” (214).

At the end of the story, Mrs. McIntyre is displaced as well, we read that she feels as if she were in “*some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives*” (235). Mr. Guizac dies; he is brutally murdered, and by his death he is displaced from this new home place for him in the American South, and when we get to the end of the story we see that everybody has been displaced, each one in their own way everyone has disappeared from the farm except from the owner, who is confined to bed at the end.

As it has been said, the first version of this story was centered in the character of Mrs. Shortley. She functions very much as a foil to Mrs. McIntyre, she is very much a replica of her, and Mrs. Shortley’s actions are moved mainly by fear and ignorance. There is a passage in 196 that reveals her true nature when she recalls going to the movie theatre and seeing this newsreel, and the way she remembers this, and the way she interprets this memory tells us so much about her: “*Mrs. Shortley recalled the newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, and head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a hollow-sounding voice was saying, “Time marches on!” This was the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country, and watching from her vantage point, Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others?*” (196). This passage says so much, and Mrs. Shortley is one of those characters whom O’Connor despises; the story opens with her going up a hill to take a look at the family coming from Poland, and she is one of those characters who becomes an object to satirical description, relentless satire from beginning to end; one of those characters whom O’Connor expects the reader to hate and to laugh at because of what was said in the analysis of “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” about these characters who are like machines or robots.

An important thing in the story is the contrast between Europe and America,, and the conception that these people in the American South have of Europe, and this contrast is also important, even more to the story “Greenleaf”. This passage reveals the fear and the ignorance of Mrs. Shortley; she has seen a documentary in the cinema about the Holocaust, about the concentration camps in Europe, and most of the concentration camps were in Poland. In this passage, we can see, among other things, her lack of a sense of history —she sees all this carnage on the screen and she is unable to see the meaning of this; she actually confuses the victims of the crime with the perpetrators of that crime. Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person, is one of the victims, and in this passage she connects him, and makes him, one of the perpetrators; all this images of destruction and carnage that she sees do not mean anything to her because her intelligence is so limited that what she sees here that only because the Guizacs come from a place, and because the place is over the

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ocean, in Europe, she immediately imagines that this is a place in which there is no problems, so she immediately makes this foreigners and everything that happens in foreign country, she makes them into a threat to her place; not only the place where she lives, but also her place meaning her status in society, because she feels a constant threat of being displaced. Mrs. Shortley is one of the robotic characters who goes through life like machines, and she is dependent on this polarities—you are either black or white, either an advanced American or a backward European or Pole—. One of the things that this story shows is that one of the ideas and the motifs Mrs. Shortley and others like her defend are, at the bottom, not much different from the ideals and the motifs of Hitler; it is a story about chauvinism, about xenophobia, just like Hitler.

The following passage is the most suggestive description of Mrs. Shortley's death at the end of section I, which was originally the end of the story; the description is very suggestive, and there are images that refer to similar images and similar issues in other parts of the story. It is easy to relate the description of the death of Mrs. Shortley in the following passage to that of the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" or the death of Mrs. May in the story "Greenleaf". This description is simultaneously comic and tragic; there are a lot of issues—human beings behaving or becoming like machines and the frontiers of the true country related to the idea of displacement—. They are in the car, and they are leaving Mrs. McIntyre's farm: "*She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself*" There is an emphasis on fragmentation in the human body and in human personality as well. The quote continues: "...*She trashed forward and backward, clutching at everything she could get her hands on and hugging it to herself, Mr. Shortley's head, Sarah Mae's leg, the cat, a wad of white bedding, her own big moon-like knee; then all at once her fierce expression faded into a look of astonishment and her grip on what she had loosened. ... BNM*

The two girls, who didn't know what had happened tho her, began to say "Where we goin, Ma? Where we goin?" ... They didn't know that she had had a great experience or ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her." This is her death, and it is described in terms of just another displacement, and displacement is, as the title indicates, the key issue in this story. She had had a great experience suggests that maybe at that very last minute of her life she came to see the truth about herself and about the world. The quote continues: "*They were frightened by the gray slick road before them and they kept repeating in higher and higher voices, "Where we goin, Ma? Where we goin?" while their mother, her huge body rolled back still against the seat and her eyes like blue-painted glass, seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country*". (213-14). It is not until the very moment of her death that she opens herself to the mystery of life; for the first time she seems to be contemplating the tremendous frontiers of her true country, and it is quite a thing to say this about a woman whose name is 'Mrs. Shortley' and who is characterized by her moral and intellectual shortsightedness.

The moment of death is coinciding with the moment of vision, and Mrs. Shortley finally has the real vision of her true country, and as was said, the description of Mrs. Shortley grabbing the foot at the daughter and her husband's elbow is a description that seems to suggest that she, at the moment of her death, seemed to be trying to make herself somehow whole, and this is a repetition of the imagery of those separated body parts about the passage of the documentary about the concentration camps in Europe. Maybe, in her dead, she is

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expressing awareness of her own fragmentation, her own lack of wholeness. This passage is also connected to another episode in page 210 when the narrator describes a vision that Mrs. Shortley has, and at the end of this vision there is a question —“Who will remain whole?”.

Mrs. Shortley’s name indicates that she is short, that she is inadequate; she has this inadequacy to see, to value, to appreciate “the tremendous frontiers of her true country”. She lived her whole life alienated from what the narrator calls the “tremendous frontiers of her true country”; this is related to an early episode in which she is blind to the significance of the peacock. The peacock is present in this story from beginning to end; the peacock appears in the very first paragraph of this story. At the opening we see Mrs. Shortley going up a mountain followed by a peacock.

There is a passage in page 200 where Mrs. Shortley ignores the peacock, which signifies her blindness to its significance; she alienates herself from all the positive qualities, all the wonderful things that Flannery O’Connor suggests and expresses through the peacock: “*Then she stood a while longer, reflecting, her unseeing eyes directly in front of the peacock’s tail.*” —the peacock has displayed his wonderful tail, and Mrs. Shortley is so stupid, so inadequate, so short in her mentality and in her interests that she does not even look at the peacock, which is there in front of her displaying his magnificent glory, and her eyes are “unseeing”— “*He had jumped into the tree and his tail hung in front of her, full of fierce planets with eyes that were each ringed in green and set against a sun that was gold in one second’s light and salmon-colored in the next. She might have been looking at a map of the universe but she didn’t notice it any more than she did the spots of sky that cracked the dull green of the tree. She was having an inner vision instead.*” —This is something the reader is supposed to laugh at, and this is the satirical irony of O’Connor asserting itself, since she is not capable of having any inner vision. She is paying attention to her own situation, a situation in which she feels threatened by this foreign family—. “*She was seeing the ten million billion of them*” —There is just one of them, but she is making these foreigners, these outsiders into ten million billion— “*pushing their way into new places over here and herself, a giant angel with wings as wide as a house, telling the Negroes that they would have to find another place. She turned herself in the direction of the barn, musing on this, her expression lofty and satisfied.*” (200). Another description about the character of Mrs. Shortley full of criticism, full of satire and hate on the part of the narrator. The interesting issue here that Mrs. Shortley is blind to the significance of the peacock, which is displaying his magnificent tale, which speaks of fierce planets, there is also a map of the universe, but that is something she is not interested in; she is incapable of noticing and reading anything in the peacock, so she cannot see the map of the universe displayed by the peacock because she cannot see beyond her own narrow and selfish interests; the implication in the passage is that if she had read the map she would have known the “tremendous frontiers of her true country” earlier on. Mrs. Shortley dies on the end of the section I of the story but everything the stands for, the values she represents, all that prevails and survives her —her Southern chauvinism, her xenophobic American nationalism become even stronger in sections II and III of the story.

Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley reflect one another, they are replicas of one another. She has an obsession with controlling her place —her farm and her place in the social hierarchy—. She is very good at using people to her own advantage, and there comes a point in the story when Mr. Guizac is becoming a threat and

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she begins to feel powerless and helpless; this is because she sees that Mr. Guizac threatens with upsetting and disrupting the balance at her farm. Mrs. McIntyre is similar to the protagonist of the story “Greenleaf”, these two women are similar in the sense that they own farms, and they see the land that they own as an extension of themselves; these are women who are saying all the time “this is my place, I am in authority here”. She begins to fear losing authority, and that fear has catastrophic consequences for both herself and Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person.

One of her problems is her inability to see that her use of other for her own benefit is a form of dehumanization; she is dehumanizing other; this abuse of others, this use of others for her own benefit has the same roots as Hitler’s denial to humanity to the jews, and this story is about totalitarianism; this story frequently alludes to the concentration camps of the Nazis.

Mrs. McIntyre’s mind is dissociated from her heart, this is what critics usually call dissociated sensibility; she does not really see others as humans, she only sees others in terms of their value for her, so she wants to preserve this small world of the farm which, as we see in the story, has the same capacity to deny the humanity of others as the larger world. It is a story about displacement from humanity, about dissociated sensibility; it is a very powerful story, which is, in a sense, about the workings of the fascism in the domestic sphere, and this microcosm that the story deals with—a farm in the American South— reflects the global, the local reflects the global. The story establishes a parallel between the nativism of southern culture and the nationalist creed of totalitarian / fascist Europe.

It is a story of inhumanity denying humanity to others, about the inhumanity that is so frequently hidden beneath this facade, this cloak of patriotism and religion; the defense of womanhood as in the American south, traditional values.

Neither Mrs. Shortley nor Mrs. McIntyre is capable of understanding the atrocities that the Nazis are committing in Europe, they only see the impact, the influence in these events in their own lives, that is all they care about. These two women fight to preserve their world, a world as they conceive it, they fight to prevent change, new meanings. For them, Mr. Guizac is an abstraction, he is the Displaced Person, the D. P.; he is not a person with a name, with a family, with an individual life. They cannot separate him as an individual from what he represents to them; for Mrs. Shortley he is a threat to her territory and to the small power that she has in the farm, she is so proud of her superiority over the niggers and she is the woman who controls and dominates her husband. There is a significant progress in her husband; throughout the first part of the story he never says anything, it is she talking to him all the time, he does not even answer. At night they go to bed and she keeps talking to him; she says “don’t tell me anything; I am dead”. Then, Mr. Shortley returns to the farm shortly after the death of his wife, and in sections II and III he takes more initiative; he becomes a talker and manipulates Mrs. McIntyre.

For Mrs. McIntyre, initially, Mr. Guizac is useful for her, he is a hard worker, he is a tool that makes money for her; at one point she says to the priest about him that he is “my salvation”, she means salvation in the material sense. However, later in the story he becomes a threat to the *status quo*, that is, the _ about whether the Displaced Person eventually becomes somehow the indirect means, indirect agent of her salvation or

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redemption; she eventually says about him “that man is my salvation” (203), which is ironic because she is giving a very limited meaning to the word salvation.

There are critics that see some connections between Mr. Guizac and Christ because Christ was also a displaced person in his own time, in the context in which he appeared and died. There is an image on 222 about Mr. Guizac’s eyes that suggests that “they were like two bright nails”; some critics who like hunting for symbols see there is an allusion to the nails with which Christ was crucified.

The presence of Mr. Guizac does something to the soul of Mrs. McIntyre; he is made into this sacrificial victim, so his death and suffering are part of something that changes Mrs. McIntyre, since she becomes a different person after the death of Mr. Guizac. At the end she is confined to bed, and the only visitor that she has receives in the place is the priest, who brings religion and the word of God to her. In the end there are indications that Mrs. McIntyre has lost her arrogance, her manipulativeness, and maybe she is more receptive to what the priest and to what the peacock represent. Significantly, the story concludes by uniting once again the priest and the peacock—which opens and closes the story—.

The most important scene in the story, the climax, is the moment when all these forces converge, when things come to a head; in this scene we see how the three social groups, all those threatened with displacement, come to collusion; they want to avoid being displaced, so they commit murder. This is indeed a very powerful passage. What is happening here is that Guizac is lying on the floor underneath one of the tractors and he is repairing it: “*Mr. Shortley had got on the large tractor and was backing it out from under the shed. He seemed to be warmed by it as if its heat and strength sent impulses up through him that he obeyed instantly. He had headed it toward the small tractor but he braked it on a slight incline and jumped off and turned back toward the shed. Mrs. McIntyre was looking fixedly at Mr. Guizac’s legs lying flat on the ground now. She heard the brake on the large tractor slip and, looking up, she saw it move forward, calculating its own path. Later she remembered that she had seen the Negro jump silently out of the way as if a spring in the earth had released him and that she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head with incredible slowness and stare silently over his shoulder and that she had started to shout to the Displaced Person but that she had not. She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley’s eyes and the Negro’s eyes come together in one look that froze them all in collusion forever, and she had heard the little noise the Pole made as the tractor wheel broke his backbone. The two men ran forward to help and she fainted.*” (234). One of the motifs is that Mr. Shortley needs to take revenge on the Displaced Person, because the D. P. is to blame for what happened to Mrs. Shortley, but there is much more than that. The victim, Mr. Guizac, is dehumanized through his nicknames.

The power of the machine, the tractors, it is as if the machine were taking over, as if it were becoming the dominant power in that scene; Mr. Shortley seemed to be warned by the tractor and its heat and strength. Then the tractor is personified as if it were calculating its own path; the machine is taking over. Machines and men becoming inseparable, becoming one. The machine seems to be in control here, attributed with human qualities—the tractor calculating its own path. It is important to remember that the local reflects the global; in this episode we see a tractor in rural Georgia, in the South of the United States breaking the back of an immigrant. We have to connect this to the brutality of the German Panthers / Panks (?), when they

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destroyed Poland; what we see here is a small-scale holocaust. This is a local reenactment, repetition, replica of what is going on in Europe, of the bloody events in the first half of the European 20th century. This story is about fascism, totalitarianism in the local, in the home atmosphere, which reflects the global.

The priest and the peacock are two important interconnected figures, both heavily symbolic. The two of them appear in each of the three parts of the story, so they become somehow unifying elements. This catholic priest is the one who brings the Displaced Person over to Mrs. McIntyre's place. He brings Mr. Guizac who is an actual displaced person, and he is the priest who brings the Word of another Displaced Person, who was Christ, who was also killed because of the collusion of several groups in that society. They kill Mr. Guizac here because he threatens to upset, to disrupt the balance, which is the exact same thing that happens in the case of Jesus Christ, so they both displaced persons.

The priest is connected to the peacock throughout the story, and he is the only one here who responds to the beauty and the mystery of the peacock—alluding to the description of the peacock that Mrs. Shortley would not pay attention to because of her intellectual and moral shortsightedness. The peacock is an interesting and significant presence; it speaks of the need for _ (01:12:17), the need for admiration of the mystery of creation.

Flannery O'Connor loved peacocks; she raised many peacocks in the family farm in which she lived most of her life with her mother. The name of this farm was Andalusia. The peacock is also an important symbol in Christianity; it is a symbol of immortality, of the incorruptible human soul, and O'Connor was always fascinated by peacocks; she felt attracted to peacocks by instinct. The story opens with Mrs. Shortley followed by the peacock: "*THE PEACOCK was following Mrs. Shortley up the road to the hill where she meant to stand. Moving one behind the other, they looked like a complete procession. Her arms were folded and as she mounted the prominence, she might have been the giant wife of the countryside, come out at some sign of danger to see what the trouble was. She stood on two tremendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of a mountain, and rose, up narrowing bulges of granite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced forward, surveying everything. She ignored the white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a ragged wall of clouds as if it pretended to be an intruder and cast her gaze down the red clay road that turned off from the highway.*" This is the very opening of the story; from the very beginning the reader is expected to laugh at and to hate Mrs. Shortley, significantly followed by the peacock, the two of them forming a "procession", but she takes no notice of the peacock. She actually regards the peacock as nothing but a pea chicken, and it is not true that she is surveying everything here because she does not have the capacity to survey, to see and understand anything. Here, significantly, she has the pretense of surveying everything, and the next sentence says that she "ignored the white afternoon sun" because the sun is an intruder, as it says in the passage. It is possible to see something very similar, not to say exactly the same in the protagonist of "Greenleaf"; she has an obsession with the sun, she considers the sun an intruder, the sun that brings life and light. This shortsighted mentality that characterizes these characters, and the issue of the sun being an intruder is connected to the Displaced Person. Mrs. Shortley knows that an outsider is arriving, so she goes up to the top of the hill in order to inspect and observe. She is described as "the giant wife of the countryside", associated with the "bulges of granite"; in a sense, she has a granite nature because she has a heart of stone, and she

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displaced this massive resistance to the outsider, this lack of compassion. This massive resistance what displaces her from humanity, the peacock that she ignores, among other things. She just looks into the distance in this opening scene, and she ignores the presence of mystery in form of the peacock, which is right there behind her. There is this parallel between the peacock following Mrs. Shortley around, and the Catholic priest following Mrs. McIntyre trying to bring the Word of God, the possibility of Salvation to Mrs. McIntyre. Mrs. McIntyre has the same problem with the peacock as Mrs. Shortley; she is equally unable to appreciate the beauty of the peacock, for the peacock is just another mouth to feed for her; this indicates how materialistic she is. There used to be a lot of peacocks in the farm, but she let them die; she wanted to preserve just this one so not to offend her dead second husband too much; the peacock is something that has no value for her, since it is not something useful for her scheme of things. There is this parallel between the steady diminishing numbers of peacocks on her farm and the increasing materialism of Mrs. McIntyre, so the peacock is something spiritual, something mysterious, and all of that is displaced by the materialism. There is this parallel of the decaying of the flock of peacocks and the decaying of her ability to love, to recognize, and to respect the humanity in others. She has kept everyone around —she says it is because she does not want to annoy her second dead husband in his grave—; maybe this indicates that the fact that she has allowed at least one peacock to survive leads to think that there is a thin ray of hope for Mrs. McIntyre. Also, at the end of the story we see Mrs. McIntyre much closer to the priest than the Shortleys.

“Greenleaf” (1956)

This story revolves around Mrs. May and the bull, but we do not know who of them is the protagonist.

In this story, the bull is an animal and, at the same time, a symbol. The associations that accumulate around the bull as the story progresses sometimes contradict one another.

Flannery O'Connor was obsessed with the concrete, so the bull is a bull, but it has so many connotations around the bull, especially at the end of the story.

At the end of the story, the bull brings death, grace and salvation to the narrative. The ending of the story is a myth and, at the very end, the bull is shot by Mr. Greenleaf, and then the bull is running into the body of Mrs. May, pulling her forward on his head and the bull seems to be “*whispering some last discovery into her ear*” (334).

This bull that has finally reached her and in the end it there is the grace of these two lovers, because the bull is described as a lover.

From the very beginning there are many connotations around the bull. In the very first paragraph, it is mentioned that the bull is outside Mrs May's bedroom window and it seems to want to come inside. The bull is more than an innocent country lover that pursues Mrs May. In this same first page, the narrator says the bull is like a “*patient god come down to woo her*”: the bull is a patient god that tries to bring salvation to Mrs

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May. After this, it is mentioned that the bull is wearing something on the head similar to “a wreath across his horns”; the bull has a “*corned head*” (311). This suggests that there is something royal about the bull.

“She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing as if something were eating one wall of the house. She had been aware that whatever it was had been eating as long as she had the place [...] eating everything but the Greenleafs” (312). This passage suggests that the story centers on the conflict between Mrs May and the Greenleafs. At the end of the paragraph, *“the bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor”* and then *“The bull lowered his head and shook it and the wreath slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing prickly crown”* (312). These two quotes indicate that the bull is identified with a lover and a god, and it is also related to royal since it wears a crown of thorns, similar to the one that Christ wore. The bull is a lover, Christ, a free spirit and it is also related to the sun. Mrs. May has a problem with the light of the sun, she does not like the light of the sun to enter the place that she controls. There is a passage which very explicitly connects the sun with violence: the sun becomes a bullet, and that bullet is described in exactly the same terms as the bull that comes and gets her at the end of the story.

Does Mrs. May have a happy death?

Her death is extremely violent, but at the same time, what she experiences at the moment of her death is the “light unbearable” which is connected to the sun and her oppression to everything that becomes a threat to her; everything that signifies change.

In “Greenleaf” there is a confrontation between two worlds: Mrs. May and her two inefficient sons, and the Greenleafs, a very prolific family, who have twin sons, who are married two French girls and they have three children each.

Similarities between Mrs. May and the grandmother in “A Goodman is Hard to Find”.

At the end of the story we come to the conclusion that Mrs. May would have been a good woman if the bull had pierced her heart every minute of her life. At the end, Mrs May and the bull are described as two lovers, so in some respect, Mrs May has a happy death because grace comes through violence.

Mrs. May is another character who believes to be superior and better than others, she is one of those fictional women created by O’Connor who is subjected from beginning to end to the ironic observation. These characters are not really the people they believe to be. With respect to the Greenleafs, Mrs May believes herself to be more powerful, she is very paternalistic towards Mr Greenleaf. Mrs May has a problem with the sunlight in a story in which sun imagery is very important. We are told more than once that she has a problem with intense sunlight, she is described to have a sight condition which makes her intolerant to the sun.

There are all of these connections established in the story, like Mrs May’s aversion for sunlight which is the equivalent of her aversion to the bull and the Greenleafs, and Mrs. Greenleaf’s concept of religion, which is a simultaneously comic and serious: it is comic the moment when Mrs Greenleaf is lying on the floor and

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prays and shouts “*Jesus, Jesus [...] Oh Jesus stab me in the heart*” (317), but then there is something serious because as we later see in the story Mrs May is literally stabbed by the bull’s horns

Mrs May has narcissistic tendencies the same as Mrs McIntyre in “The Displaced Person”; we see this narcissism on page 321 “when she looked out any window in her house, she saw the reflection of her own character”. She identifies herself with what she has achieved in the material world, so in this respect she is like Mrs. McIntyre, like Mrs McIntyre, Mrs May considers the world to be an extension of herself. She is obsessed with the small place in which she tries to remain in control of. She significantly ends up being destroyed by the bull which from the very beginning made her into “the other”; into the object in which she keeps projecting her aspirations and obsessions. Significantly, this is Greenleaf bull because the Greenleafs represent everything Mrs May disposes and objects to. The Greenleafs represent the white trash of society, so they are the opposite of what Mrs May thinks.

The bull represents all those things which she has always rejected. The image that seals her death is an image of “light unbearable” which is related to divine grace and the image of Christ bringing life to the world. The light coming to her so violently is required.

These connections between the sun and the bull are important. There is a passage in page 329 where Mrs May even though is half asleep, she has a dream, which is her subconscious: “*Half the night in her sleep she heard a sound as if some large stone were grinding a hole on the outside wall of her brain*”. This persistence of images in which she is attacked and threatened; her world properly built; being herself is penetrated; she keeps rejecting time, and we see this at the very end when she is physically, spiritually, and even sexually, penetrated by the bull.

“*She was walking on the inside, over a succession of beautiful rolling hills, plating her stick in front of each step. She became aware after a time that the noise was the sun trying to burn through the tree line and she stopped to watch, safe in the knowledge that it couldn’t, that it had to sink the way it always did outside of her property. When she first stopped it was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down the hill toward her*”

This passage reminds us of the end of the story, when Mrs May is pierced by the bull and everything she can see is the sky. In this fragment from the story, the sun is compared to a bullet, which makes it something violent, threatening to kill Mrs May. Then, in the last line of the paragraph, there is a description that anticipates what happens at the end.

At the end, it is said that Mrs May “*has the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored, but who finds the light unbearable*” (333) and “*she seemed, when Mr Greenleaf reached her, to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal’s ear*” (334). The narrator refuses to tell explicitly what that discovery is.

The bull represents this threatening, menacing, a very powerful force —description of the crown—, this is something the bull represents, everything Mrs May wants to control, all those mysterious forces that she is

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afraid of, that is why she does not want to have the bull around. On page 313 she says she wants the bull “penned up at once”. Mrs May becomes hysterical thinking that the bull is going to ruin her house.

All these connections and associations with the bull and Mrs May foreshadowing dream change her life. Some critics say that the bull is connected to Greek mythology. There is a myth in which Zeus disguised as a bull which is a figure full of phallic connotations and related to the fertility to the Greenleaf family; the bull is also described as a lover, a country suitor. Mrs May is all the time expressing her possessiveness and competitiveness, and this is what she feels when the bull is putting her in danger.

In “The Displaced Person” there are many contrasts between Europe and America, and the stupid shortsighted people like Mrs Shortley and Mrs McIntyre, thinking that in the South of America they are more advanced than Europe. Mrs May belongs to this group as well.

Mrs May has a thing with the Greenleafs, always thinking that she is better than them, but at the same time we perceive that there are some issues in the reader that make her jealous, as McIntyre is afraid that one day Mr. Guizac, the displaced person, would prosper so much that he would become more powerful than her. There is one episode in “Greenleaf” in which Mrs May goes to the farms of the Greenleafs sons, and she does not like what she sees. These sons went to Europe and joined the army, and married French wives, so they are at the center of the historical process that brings change and advancement. They have taken good advantage of their opportunities in life, in other words, they opened themselves up to change and prosperity. They have benefited from their association with Europe; they have accepted every chance, but they have had to develop them themselves, so they marry French women, which indicates that there is a mixture of the two cultures in the story. The Greenleaf’s bull, no matter how comically, is related to all of this; the bull, no matter how much she hates him, is part of the historical process of change. The bull moves and transports history. This is why, for Mrs May, the bull represents all those things that the black niggers incorporated into their lives; the bull represents those things that have changed and threaten to escape from her control in her perfect restricted world which is dying unless some outside forces are brought into it.

The story develops the contrast between Mrs May and the Greenleafs’ world. The Greenleafs sons participated in the process of historical and social change in the world: they fought in the war, they had children and married French wives, they are modernized, and they have farms (this makes Mrs May very jealous), etc.

The bull is not only described as a lover, but also as a free spirit.

There is the issue of religion in pages 316 and 317 where we see a contrast between two conceptions of religion. Mrs. Greenleaf, an authentic, a pathetic and laughable woman, shouting to Jesus to stab her.

“Mrs May stopped still, one hand lifted to her throat. The sound was so piercing that she felt as if some violent unleashed force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her”. This force charging towards her is an anticipation of what happens at the end to Mrs May.

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“Mrs May winced. She thought the word Jesus, should be kept inside the Church building like other words inside the bedroom. She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion, though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true”.

The laughable part of the story takes place on page 317, when Mrs Greenleaf is begging Jesus to stab her in the heart. Mrs May is horrified by this scene. This passage provides us with a description that gives very explicit connotations related to sexuality and what Mrs Greenleaf's religion represents.

We have two conceptions of religion. On the one hand, Mrs Greenleaf represents ridiculousness but if we compare the two women's religion, we see that Mrs Greenleaf's is better in some respects; she is an ignorant country woman, but she is really authentic in her religious devotion which is also inclusive: she prays to help everyone and to accept everyone who is lost. On the other hand, Mrs May has an excessively rational Puritan concept of religion, as it is said on page 316 *“she thought that the word Jesus should be kept inside the church building like other words inside the bedroom”*. What we perceive here is that Mrs May's equivalent between religion and sexual repression. The fact that Mrs May is *“a good Christian woman with large respect for religion”* is very much a practicing believer. Mrs May perceives these shouts as something aggressive and threatening, the same thing as the bull, the piercing sound similar to the piercing horns of the bull. We see here an explicit connection between Mrs Greenleaf and the bull and how Mrs May suppresses her emotions because she wants to remain close to everything that is not her interest. This passage places Mrs Greenleaf in opposition to the excessive rationality and control of Mrs May. Mrs Greenleaf has a faith that opens her to the world in contrast to Mrs May, who represents control and repression.

The ending of the story is terrific. There is an episode in which she tells her sons *“you'll find out one of these days, you will find out what reality is when it is too late!”* (320). These words, in the end, have been applied to her, because it is what happened to her.

At the end, the language is related to discovery, connection, and the bull being so many things at once: the lover who gains the heart of his lady; Christ who wins to save a human soul. The moment of grace to her is another instance of this pattern in O'Connor.

This bestial attack at the end which is both physical and spiritual penetration, and the bull piercing her heart and turning her upside down, allows Mrs May to see the world from another perspective. At the very last second of her life, she discovers that she has not restricted her word, and there are things that have to come to her property. Too late in life, she gets to know from mystery.

Bernard Malamud (1914-1986)

Bernard Malamud is a Jewish American writer born in 1914 and died in 1986.

The central issues in Malamud's fiction, and the beliefs that he stands for are that suffering provides experience and nobility —“All men are Jews”—; that love is redemptive and sacrifice is empowering, and the centrality of compassion —you cannot understand great art if you are not compassionate, since compassion is at the root of great art—.

“The Last Mohican” (1958)

The fact that the action takes place in a foreign country is crucial. In American literature there is the conflict between American and Europe; the contrast between American innocence (lack of history and tradition) and European experience.

Fidelman

Fidelman is the protagonist of the story, a familiar and innocent American Jew.

Susskind, Fidelman's counterpart, is the historic European Jew, who has lived all his life in the exile from those countries of Jewish suffering like Germany, Hungary or Poland.

This story is similar to Edgar Allan Poe's, “William Wilson”, a story of the double in which one person is pursuing another. In this story, at first, Susskind who is constantly pursuing Fidelman and at the end of the story, it is the other way around, it is Fidelman who is pursuing Susskind. There are some suggestions that Susskind is Fidelman's double. Susskind might be a part of Fidelman which he is repressing.

In this passage, Fidelman is looking at himself in a mirror of a train station in Rome and then at the same time, he realizes that there is another person looking at him, and this turns to be Susskind. In this passage we realize that the two are the same size and the refugee sees Fidelman at the same time Fidelman sees himself:

“But almost at the moment, this unexpectedly intense sense of his being – it was no more appearance – faded [...] and Fidelman became aware that there was an exterior source to the estrange, almost tridimensional reflection of himself he had felt as well as seen. Behind him, a short distance to the right, he had noticed a stranger [...] Casually studying him, though pretending no, Fidelman beheld a person of about his same height” (47).

From the very beginning indications that Susskind is the representation of some aspect of Fidelman's psychic, which Fidelman will have to come to terms with; he will have to reconcile himself with the things that Susskind presents. It is very significant that the first appearance of Susskind takes place beside a statue of a famous figure of a pair of twins, Romulus and Remus.

Fidelman is the young American whose innocence going to be tested against the extremities of European experience. For Malamud, experience is suffering. Arthur Fidelman has been living a very comfortable life lately. He is a scholar and a failed painter, but he thinks he is promising, so he comes to Italy to write a

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famous essay about the painter Giotto. There, in Rome, he visits several places in Rome and in his search he comes into contact with places that are reminders of the tragic and fateful connections of Jews with Italians and Nazi allies. He visits a Synagogue where there is a man who remembers the tragic death of his son who was murdered by the Nazis. Fidelman also visits a Jewish cemetery where there is a gravestone that commemorates someone who died in the Holocaust in Auschwitz. This gravestone has an inscription that says “*My beloved father/Betrayed by the damned fascists/Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/ O Crime Orrible*” (66). He also visits the ghetto in Rome and there he sees poverty. The imagery here is interesting – “*poor houses, dark holes*”- but the ending is something positive ending in: “*pure interiors, silk and silver above all colors*”. This is the image of spiritual possibilities of suffering. In the end, there is an interesting episode in which Fidelman visits the place where Susskind lives and this visit is a moment of epiphany for him.

Fidelman came to Italy to study art history, but the history he is going to learn is his own history as a Jew. He has forgotten, or maybe he never really knew what it is to be a Jew. He cannot respond to the needs of the other Jew, who is Susskind, so Susskind rescues him; he gives Fidelman a spiritual test – Fidelman tests his compassion.

Reversal of roles

Susskind steals the briefcase which contains the draft of the first chapter of his study, so after the robbery, the situation is reversed and it is Fidelman who becomes the pursuer. The pursuit/search is most beneficial for Fidelman, who is after the real missing chapter of his own past, of himself.

Fidelman will confront aspects of himself that he will never find in libraries, he is pursuing a missing chapter of himself; a chapter of her own past as a Jew. He will have to confront some aspects of himself; he will have to learn about the tragic and comic parts of the Jewish past, which is part of him. He also learns about the paradoxical nature of reality; a reality which is his own reality.

The role of Susskind

The dream in which Susskind appears to Fidelman as a kind of Virgil. This represents what Susskind is, a Virgilian guide to Fidelman into himself. This Virgilian guide reminds us of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, which guides into hell. In the last dream, Susskind becomes the “*Virgilio Susskind*” (71), he guides Fidelman into himself.

Fidelman, the academic art critic who is concerned with abstractions and ideas, has not really understood so many things about art, like for instance, the relationship between life and art. In this last dream from page 71, Fidelman sees Giotto’s painting of St. Francis offering of his cloak to a poor beggar. This is a painting about human compassion which is the moral that the story teaches: Fidelman, the Giotto scholar, has missed the meaning of Giotto himself. Fidelman is the one unable to be moved by the harsh realities of this poor man – Susskind - who appears in his life. The relationship between art and life is a very frequent theme in Malamud’s fiction.

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What is most clear from the story is the fact that you cannot be a charitable person, you cannot act humanly in life. The lesson of the story is that the one who cannot act charitably and humanly has not sufficiently understood great art, which has compassion at its root.

In this last dream, Susskind asks Fidelman, “*Have you read Tolstoy?*” and “*Why is art?*” (71). He asks this because Tolstoy wrote a very famous essay titled “*What is art?*” This question has a double meaning here: art and Arthur. Fidelman’s full name is Arthur Fidelman, what is his real identity and his real engagement with life. The double meaning of this question is that it refers to both art and Arthur.

Tolstoy was firmly convinced that art has spaces in community, morality and compassion.

This dream about Susskind appearing as the Virgilian guide is something that comes from deep down inside Fidelman. The dream indicates that there is something awakening in him, there is an awakening Jew beginning to appear in Fidelman. There are indications that Fidelman has begun to be moved by the harsh realities of Susskind’s life.

Fidelman says at the beginning of the story: “*if there is something to learn I want to learn it*” (49), this stresses Fidelman’s condition of student, Fidelman is indeed going to learn, mostly about himself thanks to be in contact with the harsh realities of Susskind’s life. This is what we realize at the end of the story, when Susskind and Fidelman are talking about who is the professor and Susskind tells Fidelman he is the professor, but the truth is it is the other way around: Susskind turns out to be the professor because he teaches important lessons to Fidelman.

There are many allusions to money and be rich in this story, Susskind is always presenting himself as a poor man and Fidelman initially gives him a dollar to get rid of him. At one point in the story, Fidelman says: “*I’m not rich, in fact I’m poor*” (50). This acquires a new meaning as the story moves on: Fidelman’s poverty is spiritual rather than material. One of the things Susskind teaches him is about the Jewish concept of communal responsibility when Fidelman asks Susskind: “*Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?*” and says he replies “*Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew*” (56). This is something that Fidelman has to learn about the true source of charity and comparison; charity does not really come from how much money you give, it comes from the heart. This is a story about Jews in which we feel so many echoes of the persecutions and the holocaust, so that we can agree that one thing this story hints is the failure of human compassion is what allows the holocaust to happen.

There is a discussion about Susskind among critics. Susskind is a mysterious figure who functions as a corrective to Fidelman’s false image of himself. There is ambiguity around Susskind: is he a devil or a saint? Is he a corrosive cynic? Is he a generous guide? Is he a bad company or is he a guardian angel?

Susskind, the poor beggar, does a lot to Fidelman; he gives him the opportunity for compassion and responsibility. He is very much what Flannery O’Connor would call an instrument of grace because he brings salvation to Fidelman. There is a final epiphany moment in this story.

The burning of the draft of the first chapter is something tragic, but only for a while, because at the very, Fidelman realizes the implications of Susskind’s words: “*The words were there but the spirit was missing*”

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(72). Susskind is constantly asking Fidelman for help and he does this because he knows that Fidelman needs him; he knows that people like Fidelman will always need him as the object of charity and compassion. Susskind is an angel, but sometimes looks like the devil. We never know what he feels or thinks because the narration never gives us access to his consciousness.

This is a comic story about the spiritual progress of Fidelman. It also focuses on alienation and reconciliation with art humanity, Jewishness and even reconciliation with oneself.

JOYCE CAROL OATES (1938-)

Joyce Carol Oates was an incredibly prolific writer. She has written so many long novels and hundreds of stories.

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

This is the best-known of Oates’s hundreds of stories. This story was the basis for a commercially successful film titled *Smooth Talk*.

The story is based on a real case of the Arizona serial killer called “The Pied Piper of Tucson” in an article in *Life* magazine. This story is dedicated to Bob Dylan, at a time when she was intrigued by his music, particularly the song “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” which is similar to something that Arthur Friend says to Connie on page 45. This story came to Oates’s head after listening to this song and then reading about Arizona’s serial killer.

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” is described by the author as a “realistic allegory”, the story combines psychological realism and Gothic horror, the most characteristic fictional modes used in Oates.

Connie, the protagonist, is a middle-class teenage girl who is both a realistic portrayed American female, also a figure of legends. She keeps up her exterior of knowing and aggressiveness which hides her insecurity and romanticism. She does what every girl of her age and environment does: she goes to shopping centers with her friends, she fights with her mother and her older sister, who she despises, she spends a lot of time locked in her room, etc. This story suggests Connie’s developing sexuality, which is an important issue.

She is immature and full of vanity, but also is sympathetic in the sense that she makes the mistakes typical girl of her age. Connie pursues the false gods with which modern society has substituted traditional values:

“They went up through the maze of parked and cruising cars to the bright-lit, fly-infested restaurant, their faces pleased and expectant as if they were entering a sacred building that loomed up out of the night to give them what haven and blessing they yearned for [...] the music was always in the background, like music at a church service; it was something to depend upon” (27-28).

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We find in this passage interesting religious imagery. Oats try to suggest that what he have here is some false Gods with which modern society has substituted traditional values. This is a world characterized by the spiritual poverty and shallowness of those who, like Connie, identify pop music with the music of church services.

The superficiality of these values is revealed when Arnold Friend appears at Connie's home one Sunday. He is much older than Connie but he disguises himself as an adolescent. Externally, he represents the teenage ideals celebrated in popular songs. He appears listening to music and his clothes, his car and even his language are a reflection of the teenage ideas.

The beginning of the story leads the reader to think that Connie is going to suffer the disillusionment typical of teenage girls, but it takes a drastic turn at a point when she is alone and unprotected. Connie is sitting in the garden and she goes into a daydream:

"Connie sat with her eyes closed in the sun, dreaming and daze with the warmth about her as if this were a kind of love, the caresses of love, and her mind slipped over onto thoughts of the boy she had been with the night before and how nice he had been, how sweet it always was, not the way someone like June would suppose but sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised songs; and when she opened her eyes she hardly knew where she was, the back yard ran off into weeds and a fence-like lie of trees and behind it the sky looked perfectly blue and still" (30-31).

This turn in the plot is significant. Some critics suggest that from this point onwards everything that happens belongs to a dream. When she wakes from the daydream, in a sense, she finds herself in a real place and this is something that she does not know; she is entering a new world in which love is not sweet nor gentle anymore. This new reality is going to put a tragic end in Connie's adolescence.

Arnold Friend

Ironically named Friend. He is a character based on the real killer from Arizona. He appears as a demonic outsider who violently enters Connie's world to take her away from the innocence suggested by the garden in which she has been having a dream.

At the end of the story, Connie is the passive female who has given in to a violent demonic male. In the end, Connie's will is broken, she is in a state of nightmarish unreality, and she is totally alienated from herself: *"She felt her pounding heart. Her hand seemed to enclose it. She thought for the first time in her life that it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her, but just a pounding, living thing inside this body that wasn't really hers either" (47).* Connie is depersonalized and displaced from her own individual reality. Connie has lost control over her heart and body and she has surrendered her autonomy to male desire and domination and thus, she comes to see herself as if she was seeing another person: *"She put out her hand against the screen. She watched herself push the door slowly open as if she were back safe somewhere in the other doorway, watching this body and this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited" (47).*

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Many critics read this story as a feminist allegorical tale about the fate of most young women in our society: many are “going” where so many other women before them have “been”: into a life of sexual domination by their male “friends”.

Arnold Friend or Arnold Fiend?

Some details in the story seem to point at the issue as Arnold as the devil, starting with his name. Moreover, as usual with the devil, Arthur appears in disguise because he wants to look like a teenager.

There is one episode in which Connie listens to the horn of his car and it sounds to her like “a signal Connie knew”.

Many critics see the first question Connie asks to Arnold friend when she appears —“*Who the hell do you think you are?*” (32)— as a reinforcement of the idea of Arnold being the devil.

Suggestions of the supernatural: a frightened Connie sees Arnold Friend as “only half real”: “[*Connie*] *had the idea that he had driven up the driveway all right but had come from nowhere before that and belonged nowhere and that everything about him and even about the music that was so familiar to her was only half real*” (39).

Connie has never seen Arnold before, but he already knows everything about her, her family and her friends.

As the author herself said, this story is a contemporary prose version of a ballad in which a demon lover carries away his powerless victim. An early draft had the explicit title “Death of the Maiden”, and the author has spoken of the story as an allegory of the fatal attraction of death (or devil). Death coming in a car, or in a carriage as in Dickinson’s poem “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”.

Some critics argue that Arnold Friend is the incarnation of Connie’s unconscious erotic desires, but in uncontrollable nightmare form: “*his face was a familiar face*” (34); Arnold keeps insisting that Connie should have known him.

Joan Winslow wrote an essay titled “The stranger within” that talks about Arnold Friend as a devil figure which represents the “evil” tendencies inside Connie. Arnold: “the stranger within”, “A(r)n old Friend”? This reminds us of the story titled “Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. There is a famous episode at the beginning of the story about Connie’s permanent duality which relates to Joan Winslow’s opinion: “*Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home*” (27). Maybe split identity is one of the issues of this story.

Space

Space is a central issue in this story about the lack of freedom and vulnerability to male violence experienced by women in our culture.

The title itself refers to space. “Where are you going” and “where have you been” are questions that parents keep asking to their young daughters who traditionally had smaller spatial freedom than boys.

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Connie is a twentieth-century Eve whose Satan comes not only to her garden but to the kitchen door of a house in which she is totally unprotected.

Parallel between the attack on the domestic space and the attack on the body, the consciousness, even the “heart”:

“Arnold Friend said, [...] ‘The place where you came from ain’t there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out. This place you are now – inside your daddy’s house – is nothing but a cardboard box I can knock down any time’ (46).

In another passage, Arnold says: *“The hell with this house! It looks solid all right Now, put your hand on your heart, honey. Feel that? That feels solid too but we know better” (47).* Arnold has conquered Connie’s space and will and he soon conquer the interior spaces of her female body: *“And I’ll come inside of you where it’s all secret and you’ll give in to me and you’ll love me” (40).* He has penetrated her will and unconsciousness, the only left for being penetrated by him is Connie’s body. Later on in the story, Arthur also says to Connie: *“We’ll go out to a nice field, out in the country here where it smells so nice and it’s sunny” (46).* This passage resembles to the perversion of pastoral, Arnold Friend is Satan and Satan is leading Connie away from the garden, that is, Eden. All the nice things he says is to seduce Connie. What happens here is that Connie has dropped out all the walls defining and protecting individual self have been destroyed.

The ending

It is not clear that the story suggests that Connie is going to die because the story has an open ending. We do not know if she dies or she is sexually abused but she is able to come back home. In Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown”, the protagonist comes back and turns into a different person, but we do not know if Connie comes back and lives the rest of her life affected by this experience. We do not know if she dies literally or if it is just something in Connie that dies. In the film version, Connie doesn’t die, but nothing indicates that the author in the story intended to kill Connie, even though this is contradicted by the death references previously mentioned: the death carriage and the death chariot.

Connie somehow redeems herself at the end; she is shallow, vain, silly, but capable of an unexpected heroic gesture when she decides to accept her fate and save the family. Some critics see this as a moment of grace in which Connie transcends from herself.

JOHN CHEEVER (1912-1982)

John Cheever is a very prolific writer; he is most famous for his stories, although he wrote some novels as well. Most of his short stories are about middle-class Americans living in the suburbs. They are all white people with the same problems.

“The Swimmer” (1964)

Allusion and similarities with other stories.

In Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants”, the characters are people who have a tendency to evasion, to escape from the real problems; they refuse to confront and acknowledge problems. Another interesting issue that links Hemingway’s story and Cheever’s story is drinking. The American girl in “Hills Like White Elephants” wants to try new drinks; this is a way of escaping from real troubles, it is a strategy to avoid problems that run so deep.

Another very similar story to “The Swimmer” is *The Great Gatsby*, a novel in which pools and the passage of time are also crucial. Gatsby’s story ends when he dies in the swimming pool and this story begins when Neddy decides to swim in the different pools. In a sense, “The Swimmer” begins when Gatsby’s story ends.

Gatsby is a realistic novel, but this story mixes realism and fantasy. “The Swimmer” is about a journey which starts when the protagonist wants to go back home swimming.

The story begins in mid-summer and then we see signs of autumn and then, near the end, there are many explicit signs that it is winter. This neutral territory explored the actual and fantasy reminds us of Hawthorne.

As it is seen in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, summer is connected to dream, fantasy and magic.

Mythical and historical allusions.

In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald told the story of America explained through Gatsby. Something similar happens here, Neddy represents the whole American myth.

Symbols

Water: There is so much water in this story as we see in the water of the pools makes a river. Neddy thinks so naïve of himself, he looks into the pools to see his image reflected back to him. This story is a retelling of the story of Narcissus; Neddy is a twentieth-century Narcissus. One of the main issues in the story about Narcissus is self-destruction, which is also the central issue in “The Swimmer”.

Swimming pools represent wealth and leisure —similar to Gatsby’s pool—. The author expresses the loss and dissatisfaction of the white males living in suburban America. These places are earthly paradises with magnificent houses and beautiful gardens, but in this story we come to see the sterility and spiritual poverty of all of this.

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Drinks: All these people living in the suburbs, and even the priest, drink so much to avoid reality: “*I drank too much last night*” (603). Neddy takes a large number of drinks along his journey to hide the problems he does not want to confront; he tries to keep them on the surface of his consciousness.

In the beginning, Neddy is on top, as the events occur, we see him falling in financial problems, social ostracism, middle age, etc. Neddy is a representative of the American inability to accept imperfection: he refuses the devastation of the passage of time, he represents the American inability to accept imperfection; the refusal to accept the fact that we grow old. Very early in the story, there is a description of Neddy’s conception of himself: Neddy thinks of himself of a “*legendary figure*” (604) and, as it is mentioned later, a “*pilgrim*” (604) – allusion to the Pilgrim Fathers: “*Making his way home by an uncommon route gave him the feeling that he was a pilgrim, an explorer; a man with a destiny, and he knew that he would find friends all along the way; friends would line the banks of the Lucinda River*” (604).

The aim of this story is to tell the origins and failures of America through a fictional character, Neddy. Eddy describing himself as a “*legendary figure*” is very similar to a cynical passage in *The Great Gatsby* in which Nick Carraway describes himself sarcastically as “a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler”, also alluding to the same thing as Neddy. Through these images, Cheever is connecting his protagonist to the first settlers of America.

Neddy married an explorer and he is very pretentious about being an explorer. The issue is the ironic view of mythology. Neddy is exploring pools and not rivers, he is exploring highways, the suburbs. Neddy swimming from one pool to another is the equivalent of him falling lower and lower on the social scale. In the beginning, he is a rich resident of an American suburb and at the end, he is an outsider, even unwelcome in some houses, and excluded from his own house.

There is a moment in the story that divides the story into two parts. This moment of change takes place on page 607, when the swimmer crosses the motorway on foot. The first part or first world represents wealth, youth, power and sex, and the second one stands for middle age and despair, everything deteriorates after Nelly crosses the motorway.

Gatsby and Neddy

Neddy resembles Gatsby in the sense that he refuses to acknowledge the passage of time. Both want to live in perpetuate summer, in endless joy and endless parties. Neddy is the typical American, he is the product of the culture which admires youth and innocence. He is the type of individual who tries to suppress the winter of ageing and decline. Winter is coming and Neddy cannot escape from it.

This swim of Neddy’s is an immersion in the painful truths, and encounter with the new world which has fall, paradise lost. At the end of “The Swimmer”, what we see is very much the same that we see at the end of *Gatsby*: Nick identifying Gatsby with the first settlers. Nick Carraway gives a description of Gatsby’s house and garden, the same happens at the end of “The Swimmer” when we get to see the gardens full of weeds. Connection of these two fictional characters and American history.

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The main theme of the story is the passage of time, which is emphasized by the changes in the weather and seasons.

In page 610, Neddy approaches the pool of the Biswangers: “*No one was swimming and the twilight, reflected on the water of the pool, had a wintry gleam*” meaning that the winter of life is here.

“Empty” is the last word of the story. In this story, the wasteland, also seen in *Gatsby*, is like a new version. This wasteland is a world with no spiritual aspiration nor meaning, full of materialism. People like Neddy are the waste landers of the 1960s. At the opening of the story, it is Sunday, which is a dangerous day in Cheever’s fiction because on Sundays these people are free from their routines; they stop the competition of power for a day. Sunday is the day of church. As we see at the beginning of the story, people come from church and they talk about the drinks they had last night. Everybody, including the priest, is saying “*I drank too much last night*” (603). Hedonistic way of life. This indicates totally empty Christianity. Everyone is at the party and the social ritual that these people observe is drinking. Drinking is symbolically a perversion of the ritual of the holy community; drinking as a tool to repress the consciousness; this is what Neddy has decided to do.

Narcissism is another issue that connects Neddy with *Gatsby* (who thinks Daisy’s love cannot be compared to Tom Buchanan’s love for her). Neddy is a 1960’s Narcissus in the sense he seems to be searching for his own image by swimming in different pools. This story is a retelling of *Narcissus* story.

The ending deserves a second reading; in the last episode, Neddy arrives at a place that used to be his home.

This is a story based on the motif of the journey, the protagonist seems to be traveling simultaneously to his past and his future. Chronologically, the story moves from present to future, from summer to winter, but at the same time, the narration takes us to Neddy’s past which he has been trying to forget about: the loss of his youth, his strength, his family, his house, and the loss of self.

In the end, we see autumn and winter decay, and even death and loss. So much significance in Neddy’s arrival to his house. This is the point where we see the surface of his life breaking; Neddy falls into the abyss. Neddy has been living a life characterized by artificiality, we are not sure how much conscious he is of the fantasies in which he has been living. We, readers, are never allowed into his consciousness. This is necessary to preserve his privacy and to prepare the reader to this shocking ending, but the story very subtly reveals many aspects that Neddy refuses to acknowledge.

This story is about Neddy competing with himself in this capitalistic society for power, domination and obsession. For some time, Neddy was on top, meaning that he had won the race, but at the same time, he was winning the race but losing himself. He is physically exhausted as we see in the description of Neddy using the ladder for the first time to get out of the last pool: “*he never used the ladder*” (604) vs. “*he climbed up the ladder*” (612).

Neddy starts the story as an athletic individual, a threat in this culture that admires summer and suppresses winter of decline. In the second paragraph of the first page, there is a clear allusion to Sonnet 18 of Shakespeare, which is about holding on to eternal summer.

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Neddy arriving at his empty house reflects his empty life, a life full of darkness and despair, a life that has disappeared. The last word in the story is “*empty*” reflecting Neddy’s physical and spiritual emptiness.

Pools forming the river of renewal, middle life regeneration.

J.D. Salinger (1919-2010)

Salinger was from New York, from the posh section of New York City; Park Avenue in Manhattan. His father was a wealthy Jewish man, and his mother was an Irish Catholic. We do not know much about his life, because he always fought people; he took people to court for attempting to write biographies about him, and he insisted on the life of the loner, the recluse. He was always a loner; when he was a child he did not really fit in with other children. He is famous for his silent and reclusive life since he moved to Cornish, New Hampshire, in 1953; he lived there in seclusion until his death.

We do not really know what fiction he wrote, we know he published very few works of fiction, and he begun to publish scattered stories in the 1940s; the first book was *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), which is his only novel. In 1953 he published a collection of short fiction titled *Nine Stories*, which was very popular, and it stayed on the Best Seller list for three months. Another work is *Franny and Zooey* (1961); two fairly long stories. The last one was published on 1963, *Rise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*, which were another two fairly long stories.

All of his stories deal with the same theme, which is an expansion of the basic situation that we find in *The Catcher in the Rye*, and that is the effort of the sensitive, intelligent individual to come to terms with society and his surroundings, which are characterized by mediocrity.

He never allowed any photos, any biographical details to appear on his books; he consistently refused to give interviews or to let his works be reprinted and included in anthologies.

His love life was a series of women who were much younger than him, and these young women were initially idealized as goddesses, but they very soon became imperfect humans, which he rejected.

There is a biography published in 2013, titled *Salinger*, which could only be published after his death. Otherwise, he would have taken the writers to court. We learn from this biography, authored by David Shields and Jane Salerno, that Salinger was totally changed by his participation in WWII, where he witnessed some of the most horrific scenes of the war in Europe, and he was never the same person after that. The war made him a writer and destroyed him as a person. The many and deep traumas that he got from the war gave him the voice to write this wonder novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and the war traumas also left him suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder for the rest of his life.

The Catcher in the Rye’s fatal attraction

The fatal attraction of *The Catcher in the Rye* comes with a warning that if you like this novel too much you might be in trouble, you might have a disturbed mind. Mark David Chapman—who is still in prison—became a few years ago became a New-born Christian, he converted to Christianity in prison, which is what

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so many criminals do; they go to prison and there they experience redemption —some of them even become fanatic Christians. On December 8th 1980, this disturbed man approached John Lennon in front of the famous and shot him five times in the back. After the shooting, the man walked away, sat down on the pavement and began reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. He was 25 years old at the time, and he believed that at the moment he killed John Lennon he would become Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of the novel. Chapman was a man who loved children and perceived adults as ugly; he lived in Hawaii for some time and tried to have his name changed to Holden Caulfield. He went around calling himself the catcher in the rye for this generation. Chapman confused Holden, the literary character with a real person, and there are cultural critics and historians who say that Chapman was convinced that John Lennon was being corrupted by commercialism, and he felt the need to save him. This is what *The Catcher in the Rye* is about; about the protagonist's obsession with saving and protecting innocents, people who are in danger. At his trial, Chapman read a famous passage from the novel in which Holden expresses his desire and his plan to become the 'catcher in the rye' by standing at the edge of this field of rye in which children are playing, and he wants to stand there and make sure none of these children fall off the cliff. So, in Chapman's insane world, Lennon was also in danger of falling, of becoming spoiled, in danger of losing innocence. Chapman said he killed John Lennon to promote the reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Four months later, on March 30th 1981, another disturbed man, John Hinkley Jr., who was 26 years old at the time, attempted to assassinate the president of America, Ronald Reagan; he shot Reagan, but he did not kill him, and when the police went through Hinkley's things on his hotel, they found a copy of the novel. Hinkley was not only infatuated with the fictional character of Holden, but he was also infatuated with the actress Jodie Foster, and he wrote to her that he planned the assassination of Ronald Reagan to impress her. Jodie Foster, when she was very young actress, she became famous for her role in the movie "Taxi Driver", a movie by Scorsese, and there was a character played by Robert De Niro who wants to be 'the catcher in the rye'. In the movie, Jodie Foster is a child prostitute, and Robert De Niro wants to rescue her and to be her catcher in the rye.

Lastly, Robert John Bardo, who is still in prison, in July of 1989 shot the actress Rebecca Schaeffer in her apartment, who was a star in a TV series called *My Sister Sam*. He had insistently sent her letters and presents, and soon after the murder in a small street, an alley in the neighborhood, the police found a bloody shirt and a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Historical context

The novel was published in 1951, and the 1950s is a decade traditionally considered to be a period of conservative politics, economic prosperity and, above all, social conformity. It was the decade of the conservative Republican politics of President Dwight D. Eisenhower; it was the Cold War. There was a lot of anxiety about Communist aggressions both at home and abroad, and it was the time in which Senator Joseph McCarthy conducted his famous witch hunts; he was obsessed with exposing Communist infiltration in American society. He saw enemies through national security everywhere —scientists, diplomats, academics,

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entertainers. The famous witch hunts of Joseph McCarthy, which has a devastating effect on the cultural life of the 1950s.

The post-war time was a moment of material prosperity for most Americans; it was the beginning of the age of suburbia.

A lot of fine homes that were built, based on modern efficient appliances, and surrounded by large gardens. This period of social prosperity stressed traditional values —home, domesticity, community, church. There was a revival of Victorian respectability, and domesticity was made into the most desirable value —there was a significant fall in the rates of divorce, and a significant rise in births—.

The early feminist Betty Friedan wrote a very famous and influential book titled *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, in which she denounces this insistence on domesticity she really explores what is hidden underneath the surface, and she studies these American wives living in the suburbs. She found out that these women were not so happy as the ideology that was propagated would have it.

There was a lot of hidden depression and anxiety in these women who were not really allowed to go out to the work place. During the WWII, women were encouraged to leave home and work in the factories to make tools and weapons for the war, because the men were fighting, so it was critic to go and work in the factories; however, after the war, American women they were told differently; now they had to stay home because the males were back, so they had to leave the workplace.

There is a darker side to the 1950s in America, portrayed in many movies; also, there is a poem by Robert Lowell who wrote the famous line of “the tranquilized *Fifties*” in the poem titled “Memories of West Street and Lepke”. The tranquilized fifties because he was suffering from anxiety and depression, so he suffered a nervous breakdown that took him to a mental hospital, and he was given a drug that many Americans consumed at the time, a tranquilizer.

It was a decade characterized by a prosperity, conformity, and there were many jumps and a lot turbulence; there was uncertainty beneath the placid surface. In 1947, the English poet W. H. Auden, who was living in America, won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry for his collection of poems that was titled *The Age of Anxiety*, the first half of the 1940s, and the second half of the 1950s were the age of anxiety.

The Catcher in the Rye

As you read on this novel, it is important to ask yourself questions like if you sympathize with the protagonist or if, on the contrary, you are irritated by him. Also, about his virtues and positive qualities, if any; what does he really stand for? Holden is a very immature character with a lot of inconsistencies, which would be another question —what are the inconsistencies?

There are similarities between this novel and *Huckleberry Finn*. The most important question is that whether as a reader you have the feeling that the protagonist is somehow right about things in general; it is an essential question.

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This novel was published in 1951. The action of the novel takes place in 1949, and it tells the story of the two days before Christmas that 16-year-old Holden Caulfield spends in Manhattan, New York City, after being expelled from a very expensive boarding school that his parents sent him to —Pencey Prep.

It is a novel that mixes right talk and harsh manners; the spiritual quest and nervous breakdown. It is a novel which expresses not only the confusions of adolescence, but also the discomfort, the spiritual discomfort of a whole age.

The 1950s were the decade famous for the so-called “inauthenticity dramas” —the word that Holden uses is ‘phony’—, and to be phony is to be inauthentic, and we could say that *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of those “inauthenticity dramas”, because the value, the ideal that Holden pursues is authenticity.

Many famous so-called “subversive works”, like the novel *Invisible Man* (1952), by Ralph Ellison, or Allen Ginsberg’s very long and controversial poem *Howl* (1956); and the novel *On the Road* (1957) by Jack Kerouac. The poem and the latter novel were deeply connected to the counterculture movements of the 1960s.

Holden Caulfield is a critic of the “phony” value of his family and of his social class; he is desperately searching for a more authentic and sincere alternative; which connects him to many other rebels that appear in Post World War II fiction, and films.

The Catcher in the Rye is one of those novels which suggest that all was not well, that the prosperity and conservatism of the period —specially the pressures to conform that the novel shows that this demanded a very high price from the individual. Holden became the symbol of this spiritual rebellion, of this restlessness, the capacity for rebellion of this period. Holden is very sensitive, and he is rebellious —no matter how inconsistent, which he is, he is sensitive and rebellious in his own way—, and he reacts against the conservative spirit of American society in the 1940s and 50s. A society that demanded unthinking submission to the norms.

There was a cultural rebellion against the conformity of the period, which can be seen not only in novels like *The Catcher in the Rye*, but also in the movies like *Rebel Without a Cause*, featuring James Dean. It is a movie that blames middle-class parents for the unhappiness of their children; it is undeniable that the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* contributed to prepare the way to counterculture and the protest movements of the 1960s, and for the acute consciousness of the falsity of adult values; it contributed to prepare the way for the protest against a world in which individuals like Holden Caulfield can find no proper space, proper purpose, so this rebellion against a world characterized by too much conformity, too much regimentation. *The Catcher in the Rye* is the novel that most cultural critics associate with the very nervous, the very anxious 1950s.

Salinger gives us this account of Holden’s battle; the battle to live a life which is not contaminated with compromise, with conformity. What Holden wants, among other things, is a simple life, and this account of the society that Salinger gives through the character of Holden has resisted the passage of time much better than other novels of the period. *The Catcher in the Rye* did for American literature something very similar to what Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* did almost a century before; Holden speaks his own mind without

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embarrassment, without apology. This novel constituted one of the most successful, one of the most explicit literary attacks on Culture; in this novel, Salinger created a new type of literary hero; delusive.

This novel changed the very definition of what we mean by serious fiction. When reading the novel in the 21st century, we have to make an effort to imagine if we were readers at the beginning of the 1950s; imagine the young readers that felt attracted to this novel in 1951, because this was something totally new; it was a new literary language. In those days, the model were novels by Charles Dickens like *David Copperfield*. This novel was still very much the model to follow when telling the story of a life; this was the example of what a life in a work of fiction should be or should come to.

Significantly, *The Catcher in the Rye* very openly and explicitly satirizes *David Copperfield* at the very beginning; in the very first sentence. This novel changed that literary fictional tradition and the way we define the term of 'hero'; the way we approach speech in a novel; this novel is characterized by a very unique new voice, so we read the first sentence: "*If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it*". That is how he begins his narrative; a totally new voice is introduced in American literature. It is a novel whose language was considered to be really offensive in those days; it was very foul language, and it gave many people a reason to attempt to suppress the novel; to ban the novel. Actually, the book was removed from many American schools and public libraries because it was considered to be a book full of profanity. In 1973, *The Catcher in the Rye* had been the most wildly censored book in the United States.

In this novel, the parents of the protagonist are permanently absent, they are never around. We eventually learn that Holden's father is a corporate lawyer, but he never appears in the novel; his mother is present only as a voice that we hear speaking from another room; the only relative of Holden that the reader meets is his sister Phoebe. This is one of the things that could help to explain why so many parents in America fought this book; they fought for it to be banned from schools and libraries, because parents do not want their authority to be ignored or bypassed.

The book was banned from many places for similar reasons that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which had been banned in many places for years. These two books are about experiences of an unconventional hero who is really an anti-hero, and these experiences are not considered to be elevating by the establishment. These two books were read by teenagers, so they had a poor role model, either Huck or Holden. That is why parents were scared of their children getting bad examples from these books and these anti-heroes; parents were worried of these books giving rise to uncivilized behavior. Huckleberry Finn, who cannot even spell the word 'civilization', because that word has, for both Huck and Mark Twain, a distasteful look.

Very often, what we understand for civilization, what the word signifies, is very often most distasteful. Holden is the adolescent who swears, lies, smokes, is proud to be a loser and an underachiever. Holden was accused of being immoral, and the truth is that he is probably the opposite; he is probably too moral for a society in which most adults are phony and have learned to accommodate; in which most adults are happy with the regimentation, with the conformity that they live in.

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It is difficult to think of a contemporary American novel that combines accessibility and complexity, popularity and literary distinction; that combines the particular and universal as successfully, as brilliantly as *The Catcher in the Rye*. The novel took years to write; a novel whose simplicity is nearly apparent. It is a book about the education of a young man who has energy, spontaneity, he has freshness; however, Holden is not a rebel like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, like the members of the Beat Generation. But in his way, he opposes conformity and pragmatism. One of the problems with Holden is that he spends most of his time ranting, complaining, speculating; he spends much more time on very ambivalent and contradictory talk than on decisive action; he does not really stand out for any decisive action —no initiatives on his part to really change society.

The novel had some difficulties to get published; there were many editors who rejected the manuscript. The critical reaction to the novel was, initially, not enthusiastic, but the novel became so popular with university students that professors and literary critics began to pay attention. That new phenomenon in the culture was fascinating so many young university students. The character of Holden became the center of attention, and the critic's debate became the debate between those who loved Holden and those who hated him. Many critics attacked Holden because of his refusal to mature, to grow up; his rejection of the culture and the society.

The famous critic Maxwell Geismar asked a fundamental question for the novel —“What does it argue for?” —, but that is not the question we are supposed to ask about this novel, the novel _ (00:44:22). This is a novel that rejects those traditional patterns; a novel which is not intended to prove any point; it is not a traditional story of character development like *David Copperfield*; it is not one of those novels of destiny building.

The novel sold remarkably well two weeks after its publication and it made into the New York Times's bestseller list; it remained there for almost 30 weeks and today it remains one of the most popular and one of the most rare of all works of modern fiction.

Intertextuality has already been mentioned; *The Catcher in the Rye* has intertextuality to *Huckleberry Finn*. *The Catcher in the Rye* consciously echoes *Huckleberry Finn*, it may be read logically as an urban 20th century variation of that novel. There are differences and coincidences; differences in their respective situations —Huck is the victim of his father's brutal beatings; Holden, however, is a spoiled child of an upper middle-class family. Huck is aware of his ignorance and illiteracy whereas Holden is educated and has an educated, rich vocabulary; he is famous for these intelligent words that he uses from time to time: “*I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot*”. Probably the most essential difference resides in the fact that Huck's adventures change him, they make him mature and arrive at moral enlightenment whereas Holden remains the same self-indulgent, immature, inconsistent romantic kid throughout.

There are many similarities between Holden and Huck. Both show a preference for the “stretcher” or tall tale, for the tendency to exaggerate, to hyperbole when they speak and when they tell stories. Holden is exaggerating all the time, even fantasizing, about his impending death, about a tiny little tumor on his brain,

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he talks about an imaginary bullet in his belly, he talks about a recent operation in his “clavichord”, which may be referring his sexual organs; he is constantly expressing his suspicion that he has cancer.

Another similarity between Huck and Holden is the fact that the both of them acquire experience of a variety of adult corruption and viciousness. Both of them are protagonists in novels that are haunted by death, where mortality is a constant issue, a constant presence in both *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden is all the time played and troubled by the memories of his little dead brother Allie, he is afraid of cancer.

Another coincidence is the fact that both of them experience loneliness and isolation; Huck is slightly better off in this respect because he has the company of his friend, the runaway slave Jim, and he has idilic moments of fusion with the Mississippi River; Holden, however, is not so fortunate in this respect because he lives in a world of phonies and there is hardly decency, hardly any purity of heart. For Holden, there are no real moments of enjoyment; the only thing he likes is the museum.

In an episode, near the end of the novel, when he goes with his little sister Phoebe to the carrousel in Central Park, and she rides on the carrousel, she is wearing a blue coat; he is so moved by seeing her that he cries. Everything else he hates, because everything else is moving the world, changing, deteriorating, and he does not like it. He does not like to move into adult life, he hates that. He is a very neurotic character, he is afraid of the phoniness and, at bottom, he is afraid of death.

There is passage in the first page of the novel, from the opening, which establishes the tone and some of the general thematic lines. It is his voice from the very beginning; he is talking to us, telling us his story from some hospital from California, near Hollywood. He is from New York, but he is in California because he was taken to a resting place in California to overcome a nervous breakdown that he had in New York. This is sometime in the summer after the summer following the Christmas when he had the nervous breakdown.

Here he talks about his older brother, D. B.:

“I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my brother and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crumby place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end. He's going to drive me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those little English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't use to. He used to be just a regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, The Secret Goldfish, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.” (5)

From the very beginning, we can see some of his many inconsistencies. At the end of this passage he says “*If there is one thing I hate, it's the movies*”; he says that because his brother is not literally a prostitute, but metaphorically, since he gave up writing good stories for kids, and he took up writing for the Hollywood movies. Then, he says keeps saying that he hates movies but, at the same time, he is the boy who has seen so

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many movies, and he even tries to copy the attitudes of some famous so-called “hard-boil characters”, specially gangster movies from the 40s, specially the movies in which Humphrey Bogart appears. He is a movie goth, but here in one of his countless inconsistencies he says he hates movies. Probably the main point in this passage is that Holden prefers authenticity, he prefers the innocence and the secrets of children like this one in the story “The Secret Goldfish”. He prefers the innocence of childhood over the world in which D.B. is now immersed in, this world of making a lot of money and buying an expensive car; this world of getting and spending; this world in which former writers give up wonderful stories about goldfish for Hollywood, for the fame, the glamour and the money.

This is how one of the central of the novel is introduced, and one of the central themes is corruption. This passage is one of the first instances where we see how radical and how judgmental Holden can be. D. B gets written off with the single word ‘prostitute’; he is, metaphorically; he is a phony, he is corrupted; he is a failure, and the failure of the older brother is implicitly contrasted with the young brother, Allie, who is dead. He is purity, he is perfection; he died as a child, when he was innocent and not corrupted; he died long before the corruption of adult life.

Holden, from the very beginning reveals himself as an intolerant person, his intolerance with phonies is what caused his expulsion from one school after another; he does not fit in this world in which young people are supposed to be concerned about their futures. Young people like Holden are expected and demanded to play the game, which meaning writing the type essay your teacher demands and expects. This is a world where fitting in is much more important than sticking out; so this is a world in which Holden is going to be dismissed as a loser and an underachiever. To succeed in this society Holden will have to quit being Holden, but he will not do that.

Holden lives in a world which keeps providing ample evidence of its essential phoniness, as in this passage in the opening of Chapter 3, which is about one of the phonies that Holden hates:

“Where I lived at Pencey, I lived in the Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the new dorms. It was only for juniors and seniors. I was a junior. My roommate was a senior. It was named after this guy Ossenburger that went to Pencey. He made a pot of dough in the undertaking business after he got out of Pencey. What he did, he started these undertaking parlors all over the country that you could get members of your family buried for about five bucks a piece. You should see old Ossenburger. He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in the river. Anyway, he gave Pencey a pile of dough, and they named our wing after him. The first football game of the year, he came up to school in this big goddam Cadillac, and we all had to stand up in the grandstand and give him a locomotive--that's a cheer. Then, the next morning, in chapel, he made a speech that lasted about ten hours. He started off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down his knees and pray to God. He told us we should always pray to God--talk to Him and all-- wherever we were. He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me. I just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs. The only good part of his

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speech was right in the middle of it. He was telling us all about what a swell guy he was, what a hot-shot and all, then all of a sudden this guy sitting in the row in front of me, Edgar Marsalla, laid this terrific fart. It was a very crude thing to do, in chapel and all, but it was also quite amusing” (20-21).

In this fragment we clearly see Holden’s habit of exaggeration —“a speech that lasted about ten hours”—, he uses exaggeration to express his impatience and his need for attention. Ossenburger is said to give funeral parlors, which is connected to one of the major themes of the novel —death. Holden remembers his little brother Allie, telling him that he liked the poetry of Emily Dickinson, who was also obsessed by the idea of death.

In this passage, Holden gives the reader his account of how he imagines Ossenburger getting rid of the corpses. This is related to an earlier episode in which Holden tells us about his obsession with the burial practices of the Egyptian mummies. This is also probably related to Holden’s obsession with the ducks in Central Park; he is afraid that the ducks may die when the winter comes and the lake in which they swim freezes. This is an indirect way of expressing fear of death and loss, it is an indirect way of asking who protects life, and who protects and saves the innocent. Holden, in a sense, is himself a duck with no place to go, and he is implicitly asking whether there is anyone in the universe who cares, and whether there is somebody who has the power which could have saved his little brother Allie. He asks whether there is anyone who can hold his little sister Phoeby; whether there is a power to save Holden himself.

Holden is constantly worrying about the mutability that the future represents; he desperately wants to believe in salvation and redemption. Salvation is the main theme in the story; the desire to preserve innocence, which is why he aspires to become the catcher in the rye, the one who catches little children who are in danger of falling. For Holden, the future is not the future that the overachiever aspires to or is concerned about, that is the ideal which the school system tries to instill in him. His idea of salvation does not coincide with Mr. Ossenburger’s idea. Holden sees through the phonies of Ossenburger, who cares more about his sense of self-importance than about the suffering of the voice who have to listen to his long, boring speech; he cares more about the money he makes by disposing of corpses than about who those corpses once were.

Holden is embarked on a quest which is never explicitly defined, while wearing his long red hunting cap, and he is involved in that quest for something different from prevailing phonies, from the disgusting structure and arrangement of things. The fact that he wears a red hunting cap signals his difference from his school fellows, and the cap is like the concrete evidence that he does not fit into this school model. It is also a symbol of the hunt for himself, the hunt for a more authentic society that he perceives; it is a symbol of rebellion. For Holden, this hunting quest takes place in the urban jungle of Manhattan, and has no final destination, because one of his traits is that he keeps going around in circles.

Holden and Stradlater – Jane Gallagher

At one point in the story, Holden has a fight with Stradlater —his roommate at Pencey— for a girl called Jane Gallagher, but he loses the fight —he always gets into confrontations that he systematically loses—. He is the “all-American” boy who fits perfectly well into the system: he is good-looking, athletic, well adjusted.

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Stradlater is a conformist, he is socially successful but he lacks imagination as we see in the essays for the English class.

Holden looks through Stradlater's facade into his deficiencies and dark secrets —among them the fact that Stradlater, in his room, in his secret, private life, is a slob—.

This confrontation has a sexual dimension —Holden resents of Stradlater's good looks and his egotistical self-confidence—; Stradlater represents what Holden would become if he was sexually aggressive whereas Ackley, another roommate, represents the opposite —what Holden would become if he continues to stay sexually repressed. In the five final chapters of the novel, Holden kind of oscillates between these two.

In this passage, which is Holden's last night at Pencey School, Stradlater has a date with Jane Gallagher, who Holden respects and of whom he is platonically and secretly in love with —throughout the novel, he keeps repeating that he has to call her, but he never does—. Holden confronts Stradlater because he does not love Jane the same way as Holden, Stradlater is only interested in having sex with her. Holden holds on to his memories of playing checkers with Jane Gallagher, characterized by her aversion to risk. This passage is one of Holden's fondest memories —the way she approaches the game—; :

“Yeah. She wouldn't move any of her kings. What she'd do, when she'd get a king, she wouldn't move it. She'd just leave it in the back row. She'd get them all lined up in the back row. Then she'd never use them. She just liked the way they looked when they were all in the back row” (35-36).

Stradlater cannot understand why the way Jane plays checkers is so important for Holden. Holden is fascinated by the way she keeps her kings in the back row, which is like purity for Holden, like the purity of snow in winter, which is nice and white. The point is what the kings symbolize: the aversion to take risks, the need to stay protected. As many critics have pointed out, Holden has what psychologists call the ‘Peter Pan syndrome’. If you are invested in the game of life —a game which is competitive—, and in order to win it, you have to take risks and you have to use aggressive powers against your rivals. Jane is like Holden in this aspect, both of them have problems with the dynamics of competition, Jane prefers to look at her kings in the back row. All of this has a clear sexual dimension. Holden says: *“I kept thinking about Jane, and about Stradlater having a date with her and all. It made me so nervous I nearly went crazy. I already told you what a sexy bastard Stradlater was” (38).* Holden is afraid that Jane in her date with Stradlater is going to move her kings out of the back row and Stradlater is going to jump her, meaning, getting her into bed. If that happens, Jane Gallagher will no longer be the sad, innocent and virginal girl who Holden loves so much for being the sexually innocent and unthreatening, platonic relationship.

Jane's refusal to move her kings is also a symbol of her fear of adult life and experience typical of the adolescent period; these adolescents are little pieces on the checker board, and those pieces have to be moved forward. Jane does not want to move her kings, which is what makes her so attractive to Holden, because one of the issues with Holden is his fear of the mutability, of motion; his failure to accept the mutability of life, because mutability brings decay and corruption.

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This confrontation marks a beginning of his series of desperate, sadly comic efforts to be the savior of innocents.

Before leaving Pencey School, Holden contemplates the possibility of entering a monastery so he asks Ackley, *“What’s the routine on joining a monastery?”* Holden has the wrong idea of what a monastery is, he believes it represents a life with no phonies, away from the corruption of the world. For him, he associates the life of a monastery with Ackley —comes from a very religious family— and, for him, it is like the equivalent of the dream world where Jane Gallagher keeps her kings in the back row forever. The ideal world for Holden would be to stop the clocks that leads to adult life and to avoid the changes that he associates with sexual activity and with joining the conformist society. Ultimately, he —at least unconsciously— associates that with death, so Holden mistakenly thinks that the monks in the monastery live in a perfect and pure world which is outside and beyond the world; he imagines this to be a world with no imperfections and no battles.

Holden in Manhattan

Huck Finn has the idyllic Mississippi river and, at the end of his travels, he goes to the Wild West, but there is no such place for Holden.

Manhattan is full of threats to Holden’s innocence, with no images of tranquility, except for his memories of the Museum of Natural History: *“It always smelled like it was raining outside even if it wasn’t, and you were in the only nice, dry, cosy place in the world. I loved that damn museum”* (126).

Holden is searching for spots of tranquility in Manhattan, which is famous for its motion and unstoppable action. For Holden, the museum is a perfect timeless world which never changes. It is the superiority of art; it is like an unchanging source of beauty and truth for Holden.

Holden on sex

Holden’s obsession with sexual matters expresses his confusion: *“Sex is something I just don’t understand. I swear to God I don’t”*. He is more comfortable as an observer than as a participant.

There is a significant episode at Ernie’s Jazz club points to the connection between death and sex: *“What he was doing, he was giving her a feel under the table, and at the same time telling her all about some guy in his dorm that had eaten a whole bottle of aspirin and nearly committed suicide. His date kept saying to him, ‘How horrible . . . Don’t, darling. Please, don’t. Not here.’ Imagine giving somebody a feel and telling them about a guy committing suicide at the same time! They killed me”* (90)

In this episode Holden tells us about a young man talking to a young women. He is pressuring her and we see that he is as manipulative as Stradlater. This young man is putting the girl in the difficult position to sympathize with the tragic story he is telling and, at the same time, she is rejecting his sexual advances. This episode anticipates the suicide of James Castle, who used to be on one of the schools that Holden attended. Holden from time to time also has suicidal thoughts. Probably, this scene attracts his attention because he is obsessed with the connection between sex and death, Holden identifies sex with mutability and change, and even death. This explains why Holden keeps postponing the call to Jane, he does not want to see her changed, he is afraid that the beauty childhood memory of Jane would be gone. Holden is repressing his

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sexuality which is reflected in his platonic relationship with Jane Gallagher, in his desire to become a monk, in his attraction to the nuns, in his refusal to have sex with the prostitute sent to her hotel room, etc.

The episode with the prostitute

In this episode, Holden openly confesses to the reader that he is still a virgin, Holden represses his sexuality. In this episode Salinger changes the formula of male initiation: the prostitute is sent to Holden's room and he is overwhelmed by sadness of losing innocence, he is also surprised by the fact that the prostitute's name is Sunny which makes her occupation as a prostitute ironic.

"I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell--I don't know why exactly" (100)

Holden is secretly intrigued by homosexuality: the meeting with Carl Luce in chapter 19: "He said you could turn into one [=flit] practically overnight, if you had all the traits and all". This issue of homosexuality reappears in chapter 24 when Holden decides to pay a visit to a former teacher and he makes explicit homosexual commentaries.

Holden's uncompromising and inflexible notion of art. His take on jazz pianist Ernie:

"He had a big damn mirror in front of the piano, with this big spotlight on him, so that everybody could watch his face while he played. You couldn't see his fingers while he played--just his big old face. Big deal. I'm not too sure what the name of the song was that he was playing when I came in, but whatever it was, he was really stinking it up. He was putting all these dumb, show-offy ripples in the high notes, and a lot of other very tricky stuff that gives me a pain in the ass" (88-89).

This passage reminds us of the beginning of the story, when Holden talks about his older brother as a prostitute because he gave up writing stories to make movies, D. B. gave into the demands of the general public, the mainstream culture. The same thing happens to the pianist, Holden thinks there is no authenticity because the jazz musician only wants to become famous and very popular. The audience likes what the pianist is playing and for Holden, this is a sign that he is right because according to him, a true artist will never depend on tricks and would not care about the approval of the audience.

The theme of salvation

The theme of salvation is directly related to the title of the novel. Holden despises everyone, but he likes the performance of the neglected kid who is walking through the street, singing:

"The kid was swell. He was walking in the street, instead of on the sidewalk, but right next to the curb. He was making out like he was walking a very straight line, the way kids do, and the whole time he kept singing and humming. I got up closer so I could hear what he was singing. He was singing that song, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." He had a pretty little voice, too. He was just singing for the hell of it, you could tell. The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no

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attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more" (121-122).

This passage is directly connected to the following passage where Holden talks to Phoebe about his ideal of becoming "the catcher in the rye".

These two passages are connected to a complex network of images and symbols. This is also related to Holden's constant and painful memories of his dead brother abandoned in his grave. Allie's dominates Holden's thoughts. This obsession with Allie's death is related to Holden's obsession with his sister Phoebe because he thinks what happened to Allie could happen to Phoebe. All of this is also connected to Holden's memories of James Castle, who jumped out of a window after being repeatedly humiliating. Holden considers committing suicide as well after being beaten by the prostitute's pimp at the hotel. James Castle is important, he is one of Holden's obsessive memories, he is an extension of what Holden fears about the world, a world in which there is no justice. James Castle is like Holden's double. When he commits suicide he is wearing Holden's sweater and in chapter 22, Phoebe dares Holden to think of one thing that he likes and for a while, all Holden can think of is James Castle. This is just another indication of Holden's ambivalence and some critics say that maybe Holden has a secret wish to be punished with death which would free him. Holden also hopes to be saved, to be caught, as he says in an episode in which he leaves his parents apartment: "For one thing, I didn't give much of a damn any more if they caught me. I really didn't. I figured if they caught me, they caught me. I almost wished they did, in a way". When Holden talks about "being caught" what he means is that he wants to be taken back to society, he wants to be saved from his negativity.

Holden wants to be savior and for that, he has many thoughts about monasteries and he has encounters with nuns. It is also very significant that the action of the novel takes place just before Christmas, for Christian tradition, a time of the year related to salvation and renewal. Holden wants to catch people to prevent them from falling, like James Castle. This world in which he lives in depresses him because it is characterized by competitiveness and inhumanity. All of this is directly related to Holden's ideal of becoming "the catcher in the rye":

"Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy" (179-180).

This is Holden's idea of salvation which excludes serious conflicts and accidents. Adults usually ask teenagers about what do they want to be when they grow up. Holden prefers a world in which nobody grows, where nothing changes, a world in which nobody falls of the cliff into adult life, a world in which nobody falls in love nor has sex, a world in which nobody moves the king out of the back row. This passage is generated by the memory of the boy walking alone. Holden is always attracted to people who are in trouble,

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like the kid singing down the street. This boy is an outcast who is in danger because his parents are not paying attention to him, this danger is what originates the “catcher in the rye” fantasy. The image of kids falling off the cliff is connected to Holden’s guilt: when Alley dies, Holden had a nervous breakdown. Holden always felt guilty because he kept living after his brother death. When this incident happened, Alley was 10 and Holden 13, in the present Phoebe is 10 and Holden 16, but he does not seem to be very mature.

In the passage where the boy sings, Holden makes a significant mistake: he mishears the boy who sings, “If a body catch a body”. This was a song that practically every American family knew at the time, in spite of being a song with a lot of explicit sex connotations, it was a song sung by families around the piano. Phoebe corrects Holden: “If a body meet a body coming through the rye”. The song continues: “If a body kiss a body, need a body cry”, which expands its sexual meaning. This song is from a poem by Robert Burns, “Comin’ through the Rye” (1796), with very sexual connotations, but Holden avoids the issue of sex when he hears the song, like when he erases from his mind the ‘fuck you’ he sees painted on the walls. The first ‘fuck you’ that Holden sees is Phoebe’s school, so Holden decides to erase it to protect the children.

Holden’s ideal world is the one that exists in museums:

“The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody’d be different. The only thing that would be different would be you” (127).

This is like an expression of time being suspended, if the flow of time could be stopped, the transience would bring change, corruption and eventually, death. The Eskimo man fishing and the Eskimo woman weaving the blanket will never change. This what he would like to do: to return to the museum without growing older and find everything exactly the same.

The image presented in this passage is an image of a very protective society in which there is acknowledgement, love and comfort; this is a world in which there is no uncertainty because even the birds are certain of the destination of their flight to the south. This is perfection (the Eskimo couple) and it contrasts with the harsh reality of another married couple that we see in the novel: Holden’s parents. At one point in the novel, Holden imagines himself going to the museum to see these figures after he hears his mother and father having a terrific fight in the bathroom. Holden’s parents are real people who experience love, sexual love, and its consequences, the life of married couples is something that Holden perceives as a threat, this is why Holden finds comfort looking at the Eskimo couple because in the museum everything is unchanged and locked, something that Holden likes. For Holden, change is loss. The passage of time brings corruption to innocence. Holden is after permanence. Some critics related Holden’s preference to a famous poem of John Keats “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, about a piece of art on the British Museum. This poem is about purity and immutability, compared to the transience of life.

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Holden's attitude is at bottom of life because life is changed. His dreams are forms of death and they ultimately shock the individual off the possibility of love and communication, but maybe these two are the only answer to the human problem. Holden is demanding a return to paradise before the fall into the human condition. Phoebe is the one who tells Holden what is wrong with him: "*You don't like anything that's happening [...] you don't like any schools. You don't like a million things. You don't*" (176). Holden does not know how to answer her and eventually he says that he likes Allie, but her sister does not accept that because as she says "Allie's dead".

In chapter 25, there is another episode at the museum and this time, it is the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in which Holden runs into two little boys playing, Holden talks to them and takes them to the museum because he wants to show the boys an Egyptian tomb. The boys get scared and run away after Holden tells them the process of mummification: "I was the only one left in the tomb then. I sort of liked it, in a way. It was so nice and peaceful".

This is the only thing in which Holden was interested about ancient Egyptian lessons at school. Holden. Holden finds comfort when he is with the mummies because they are the representation of eternal death. The Egyptian mummies are preserved and this ties in with the fact that Holden would like his brother, Allie to be preserved. This moment of suspension at the museum is abruptly interrupted when Holden sees another "Fuck you" written on the wall. This finishes Holden: he has a nervous breakdown, he collapses on the floor. As we know, this is not the first time that Holden suffers a nervous breakdown, at the beginning of the novel he is in a sanatorium in California recuperating for a nervous breakdown. This "fuck you" makes him go to the bathroom and puke, and eventually, he faints. When seeing another obscenity written on the wall, Holden discovers that this quest for permanence is a hopeless thing: "*That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any*"

Holden criticizes everyone except for her dead brother and her little sister. He is inconsistent: he does not tolerate phonies but he behaves like them. There is an episode in which he goes in the train and she runs into a sophisticated woman and who invites him to drinks and cigarettes. In this passage, Holden is imitating the adult life that he is said to despise so much. Holden is uncompromising about those small details which express our phoniness; he is uncompromising when he expresses his opinion about movies. Holden is always relating to be people that he says he does not like, he supposedly hates Sally Hayes, a very phony girl, but during his brief stay in Manhattan he goes with her everywhere. Holden is always missing the every people he despises and he feels guilty because he can get better breakfast than the nuns, he gives money to them and then he feels guilty for not giving them more money. Holden has a desire to be liked, he says he hates people like his brother D. B. and he himself is all the time like him, showing off.

The theme of the lonely teenager created by Slinger

The teenager who is characterized by the artistically uncontrolled incoherence. The attractive absence of logic and coherence that appeals to the confused adolescent that is still in all of us. Holden is famous for his negativity which still remains today fresh and attractive in spite of all of the inconsistencies, this negativity is very authentic.

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The role of Phoebe

Phoebe represent the major theme of the novel: the relationship between innocence and responsibility. Some critics argue that ten-year-old Phoebe us the representative of the power of human love. She obviously represents the world of innocence, she is the one who really hits the nail on the head when she tells Holden what is wrong with him.

Neither Phoebe nor Holden are aware of the depth her observation, only the reader is aware of its implications because what she is really saying is that Holden's rejection of corruption is, in fact, at bottom of the perverse form of corruption, which is death, but Holden still persist in his attitude of not accepting others, he will be a perpetual loser. Some critics suggest that Phoebe represents loyalty to the family and she stands out for her loyalty to Holden as well. Near the end, Holden decides to go away and Phoebe shows up with her suitcase because she has decided to go with him. All of this happens in a novel in which death is seen as a traitor who took Allie away. It is Phoebe's persistence that holds Holden from making a terrible mistake, he obviously changes his mind. After this, they both to Central Park, to the carousel. This carousel passage is one of the best in modern literature.

"I went over and sat down on this bench, and she went and got on the carrousel. She walked all around it. I mean she walked once all the way around it. Then she sat down on this big, brown, beat-up-looking old horse. Then the carrousel started, and I watched her go around and around. There were only about five or six other kids on the ride, and the song the carrousel was playing was "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." It was playing it very jazzy and funny. All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (217-218).

This is a very different Holden from the Holden that wants to be the catcher in the rye and the Holden that went around wanting to clean all the dirty words from the walls. Here, he realizes that children will want to grab for the gold ring in carousels and that we must let them do it even if they risk falling. Holden is here somehow giving indication that he is joining the adult world, where you are at risk of becoming ordinary, nasty and messy. You risk falling into conformity, into phoniness, but there is always the possibility of resisting all of this.

There is a powerful symbol in this passage: the gold ring. Maybe the gold ring symbolizes opposite things, maybe it combines opposites. In the novel Holden started telling us about a wonderful short story titled "The Secret Goldfish". The gold there is something ideal, artistic beauty, but the gold in our society is simultaneously something ideal and materialistic, it is a symbol that combines the materialistic and the idealism, the ideal of the promise of life. The gold ring, in this passage, is something that all the kids want to grab at, it is probably related to the competition that characterizes society and life in America; it is probably related to the competition that characterizes society and which Holden despises, but Phoebe is, in some respects, an ordinary girl: she likes school and she is a good student in a very expensive school. There has to be a middle way between the competition and the materialism, between the phoniness and something else.

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There are these extremes that Holden contemplates: the phoniness and the withdrawal, maybe there is some space in between the world of fancy cars and the world of monasteries.

The world has a nasty way of turning our idealism into pragmatism, and eventually into cynicism. It is also a true that the love that Phoebe represents can be something redeeming. Robert Frost says in one of his poems that earth the right place for love. Phoebe is among other things the representative of this love. If Holden has persisted in his uncompromising attitude, his uncompromising romanticism, his fantasy of being the catcher in the rye. If he had persisted in all of that, he would never have allowed Phoebe going into the carousel and to grab for the gold ring. On doing that, she runs the risk of falling, but now, Holden knows that that is a risk that we all must run. Watching Phoebe going round and round on the carousel make Holden incredibly happy.

“Boy, it began to rain like a bastard. In buckets, I swear to God. All the parents and mothers and everybody went over and stood right under the roof of the carrousel, so they wouldn't get soaked to the skin or anything, but I stuck around on the bench for quite a while. I got pretty soaking wet, especially my neck and my pants. My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way; but I got soaked anyway. I didn't care, though. I felt so damn happy all of sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there” (219).

In this passage, we see that Holden still wears the hunting hat at the end of the novel because it is something that distinguishes him.

At the end of the fragment, is Holden addressing God directly or is it just an expression directed to the readers? We do not know what Salinger wanted to express in that last line.

Holden is perceiving something real: the value of experience. He knows that he cannot save Phoebe in the fantastic way he had conceived in the passage about the catcher in the rye, he cannot save her in that sense, so he will not try stop her from experiencing the risks and joys of life which are here represented by the carousel. The carousel combines motion and spaces, two opposites. There is movement but it is circular, it is a static movement. This stops when Phoebe steps off the carousel. Phoebe wearing a blue coat while she is in the carousel is a very powerful image.

This scene of Holden with Phoebe proves that Holden's alienation from the world is more phony than he thought, this is when we get to see his real character. If Phoebe goes with she will miss a lot of things that Holden does not want her to miss. This is what absolute phonies are. He immediately abandons the plan to go West and tells her that he is going home, he has realized that with his negativism, he has put Phoebe and her innocence in danger. Holden has been caught by Phoebe: she is the one who makes him see that love is stronger than his hate for the world, it is this love that he feels for Phoebe that saves him.

The last chapter

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The novel concludes with Holden in California, the west, which is completely different from what he has fantasied about. At the beginning, Holden says that he is going to tell us about “*madmen stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy*”. When he says “here”, here referring to the resting place in California. Which is a frontier, an end. The frontier also appears in *Huckleberry Finn* represented as a way of escaping from the civilization, but in *The Catcher in the Rye* it represents phoniness. The story is very pessimistic because it is told from a sanatorium, this reminds us that the west is not the place that author portrayed as the place of second chances anymore.

“That’s all I’m going to tell about. I could probably tell you what I did after I went home, and how I got sick and all, and what school I’m supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here, but I don’t feel like it. I really don’t. That stuff doesn’t interest me too much right now. A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I’m going apply myself when I go back to school next September. It’s such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you’re going to do till you do it? The answer is, you don’t. I think I am, but how do I know? I swear it’s a stupid question. D.B. isn’t as bad as the rest of them, but he keeps asking me a lot of questions, too. He drove over last Saturday with this English babe that’s in this new picture he’s writing. She was pretty affected, but very good-looking. Anyway, one time when she went to the ladies’ room way the hell down in the other wing D.B. asked me what I thought about all this stuff I just finished telling you about. I didn’t know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don’t know what I think about it. I’m sorry I told so many people about it. About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It’s funny. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody”.

By the end of the novel, it is clear that Holden is not going to devote his life from saving children from falling off a cliff. Holden is not going to be the catcher in the rye.

In this final passage there are opposite images: the catcher who wants to save the worlds and protect the innocence vs. Holden becoming the death mute, isolating himself from evil and corruption. At the end, Holden does not believe in any of these two alternatives.

Holden admits that he misses some of the people he used to despise. Holden ends up losing some of his impatience and negativity with those who are phonies, he also acknowledges that he himself has been a phony some times.

Raymond Carver (1938-1988)

Raymond Carver became very famous after the publication of the first collection of short stories *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976). Silence is a crucial issue in many of his stories, it usually indicates the difficulties characters have when communicating. This collection an allusion to Hemingway, whose stories were also concerned about silence, especially in “Hills Like White Elephants”. Carver acknowledges Hemingway, one of the American writers, as his antecedent.

Since 1976, Carver was, until his death, the American contemporary writer most admired by the critics and other contemporary writers. In the late 1970s and 1980s, some writers were put in a group by the critics and they were called ‘minimalists’. Another tag used to describe these writers was ‘dirty realism’ because they wrote about ordinary Americans with ordinary aspirations. There was a renewal of interests in the short stories in the late 70s and 80s.

The stories of Carver are very much like the stories of Chekhov, who was his master; stories in which meaning was indicate indirectly; stories in which little is said but a long is expressed (Hemingway’s iceberg principle), stories with simple language which takes a lot of efforts and polishing. Chekhov tried to represent reality by means of the simply description of external realities. Carver’s style was admired an imitated by many other writers. Carver’s characters are usually ordinary working-class people with small hopes. They are called minimalists, they prefer the ordinary individual to the romantic hero (which we see in *Huckleberry Finn*).

“Cathedral”

“Cathedral” is Carver’s most famous story. It belongs to his second phase. The stories from first phase were stories that did not say much and left out many things that readers wanted to know. This story was originally published in 1981. Since the middle of his career, Carver’s stories became more optimistic and more hopeful than the earlier stories.

There is an anonymous first person narrator which the readers have to come to terms to his personality. The main issues for the readers is to know what type of person the narrator reveals himself to be, the readers have to read between the lines; reader have to pay attention to the comments he makes about his wife’s relations with her first husband and then with the blind man. Regarding the relationship with his wife, the narrator never gives the wife’s name, they refer to each other as ‘my wife’ and ‘my husband’.

The stories is about a blind man who offers a new perspective of life to the narrator. The narrator reveals himself to be an ignorant man. The story focuses on the following issues: who is he blind man here? Who is the one who has the capacity to see and understand reality and himself?

The narrator is very unsympathetic and disrespectful about the things he says about his wife’s past, he says at one point “*this man [was] the first person who enjoyed her favors*” (435). The narrator is tremendously short-sighted and he cannot understand the relationship between the blind man and his wife Beulah, about whom the narrator shows his prejudice when he says: “*Beulah! That’s a name for a colored woman*” (436).

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The narrator cannot possibly understand how this blind man could have satisfying love relationship with her wife. At the opening of the story, the blind man is described in a very cynical way. The relationship of friendship that has been going on for years between the blind man and the narrator's wife bothers the protagonist. The narrator does not like that his wife sends poems to the blind man.

Is this a story with a moment of vision? Is there some type of transformation in the protagonist?

We know that there is a moment of vision but we do not know how much is going to last because the moment stops there, leaving an open ending. There is a big moment which is what the blind man brings to the narrator: the opportunity to transcend and liberate himself.

The main issue in the story is the release, the liberation from confinement, the openness to new experience and life, and even learning. At the end, Robert and the anonymous narrator express a gesture of brotherhood: they join their hands and they draw a cathedral together, which starts being a small box but then into a cathedral. This episode represents how the narrator moves from prejudice to understanding, to confinement to liberation. The narrator does not want the blind man in his house, he feels uncomfortable because the blind man coming to his house is something threatening to him, it is like an invasion of his territory and there comes a point in the story where he is afraid of being left alone with blind man —this symbolizes fear, prejudice and limitations—.

The story asks meaning of blindness and the different conceptions of blindness, different ways of see. This man has lives confined, he has no friends, he is very insecure, unsympathetic and prejudice. In a sense, he protects himself with alcohol because it is a way of fighting this.

The narrator is afraid of the unknown: he does not want to see nor explore, he is afraid of the 'other'. The narrator wants to have his small world protected from external threats and that is why the visits of his wife's friend is seen as an invasion: "*A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to*" (434).

The hostility he feels toward the blind man is related to the past of his wife because he could not control what happened in his wife's life. One of the things the narrator is obsessed about is his wife's first marriage, he cannot hide the fact that he is jealous of the blind man and at the beginning, he describes the blind in sarcastic terms:

"She'd worked with this blind man all summer. She read stuff to him, case studies, reports, that sort of things [...] They'd become good friends, my wife and the blind man. How do I know those things? She told me. As she told me something else. On her last day in the office, the blind man asked if he could touch her face. She agreed to this. She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose – even her neck! She never forgot it. She even tried to write a poem about this. She was always trying to write a poem. She wrote a poem or two every year, usually after something really important had happened" (434).

The narrator sees a friendship between a man and a woman unbelievable. He feels jealous of his wife's first husband that he describes very offensively as "*this man who'd first conjoined her favors*" (435) The protagonist is transferring the jealousy of his wife's first husband to the blind man because the blind man is connected to her past, which is very meaningful to her and in which the narrator is excluded.

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What is probably most significant about the blind man is the fact that he is isolated only physically. The main contrast between the blind man and the narrator is that the blind man is very friendly, he is fond of travelling – he has traveled to different places – and he has had several jobs; he has a hobby which allows him to talk to any person in the world. The blind man has been doing things that keep him in touch with the world. The fact that he recently experienced a loss makes him wiser and more capable of understanding the problems of others: “*I know about skeletons*”(443). The story shows that the blind man is superior to the protagonist in spite of his physical disability. The protagonist cannot express himself, he is unable to describe a cathedral, he is watching the cathedrals on TV. He is the blind one in the sense he is ignorant and that he is not able to see nor understand reality. This leads the blind man to the road that plays the role of teacher: the fact that he wears a beard emphasizes this.

Passage about learning in 443: “*I’m always learning something. Learning never ends. It won’t hurt me to learn something tonight. I got ears*”. This is the issue, the narrator has not ears nor eyes, in the sense that he lacks the basic skills to communicate with others. He is a man with no friends. The blind man implies that the narrator could improve himself if he learned a thing or two.

The drawing of the cathedral

This is an important moment, it is a very important gesture of eternity and cooperation. The main issue is human contact, this is what takes the narrator out of himself. Drawing the cathedral has metaphorical indications of salvation (what the blind man brings to the narrator). The cathedral indicates high aspirations, it is something that speaks about the importance of the prolonged collective effort. The moment in which Robert asks the narrator to close his eyes is when the narrator sees and perceives something that cannot be perceived by the ordinary physical sights. When the narrator shares this with the blind man, he achieves a perception of spiritual space, this is when the narrator gets rid of the feeling of imprisonment.

At the end, the narrator says: “*My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn’t feel like I was inside anything*” (447). This is the gist of the story: he has been liberated from his imprisonment. He ends up inside the walls of a cathedral that he has drawn; a cathedral which is so vast that we think that it is not a place that restricts or limits us.

When he started drawing at the beginning it was just a box “*that looked like a house [which] could have been the house I lived in*” (446). This is something totally new to the narrator: he learns to feel empathy and learns to see with different eyes, he gets rid of his short-sightedness.

In this story there are echoes of another story by D. H. Lawrence, *The Blind Man*. In Lawrence’s story blindness becomes the equivalent of imagination, the blind man is more powerful. “Cathedral” is also connected to Tiresias, a character from the Greek mythology, who appears in the *Odyssey*. Tiresias is a famous prophet who is blind and always tells the truth. He is female and male, he is complete.

The narrator achieves a feeling totally new to him: “*I didn’t feel like I was inside anything*” (447). He is able to see this once he has closed his eyes, this is him closing his eyes to his former life of short-sightedness. At the end, he does not want to open the eyes. You don’t need physical sight to see. At the end the narrator’s

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feelings are probably different, he does not say this explicitly. This is a character with limitations, he cannot find more expressive words to convey this experience.

The importance of travelling

Robert has been travelling long distance by train to see family and friends and then he arrives to the narrator's house and marks the beginning of the narrator's internal journey which takes the narrator from blindness to sight and from isolation to freedom. There is an episode in which the narrator says: "Put some people in there now. What's a cathedral without people?" (447). This is the thing: the cathedral is a vast structure like society, which becomes much better if we share this structure of confinement.

Sandra Cisneros (b. 1954)

Chicano literature is the literature written in the United States by Americans of Mexican origin or by Mexicans who live in the states and wrote about their experience living a situation of struggling when living in two different countries. The origins of this literature go back to 19th century, more precisely the year 1848, when the Mexicans of what is today the south west of the United States became conquered citizens. The United States of America, after the Mexican American war annexed all those large territories which belonged to Mexico. Ever since then, the Chicanos had been affected by the cultural and racial superiority complex of the Anglos, who tried to impose their language and culture. In the middle of the 1960, it was a significant rebirth of the Chicano literary tradition which coincided with the famous Chicano movement in politics and other areas. The Chicano movement made a strong emphasis on ethnic consciousness and awareness. All of this also coincided with the Civil Rights movement for the blacks and with all the counter culture movements of that period. Nowadays, Chicano literature is not considered second rate anymore, it stands out for its volume and high quality have force the expansion of what we call American literature. The fact that writers like Sandra Cisneros made it into the cannon of American literature is the best proof that there are many American literatures different apart from the male white authors that monopolize the canon of American literature until very recently.

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago. She was the child of a Spanish-speaking Mexican father and an English-speaking Mexican American mother. She was the only sister of six brothers. Her mixed background is reflected in the cultural hybridity which is one of her prominent themes. The family, when she was young, often visited her father's relatives in Mexico and as the author said herself, in those years she felt displaced when the family visited Mexico she was American and back in the States she was Mexican. Cisneros got considerable help from her mother, who was very different mothers from this ethnic group. Cisneros' mother did not push her to spend all her time helping the family with the traditional women's work. The mother encouraged Sandra Cisneros to develop her intellectual and imagination. Sandra Cisneros was educated in Catholic schools in the Chicago area, she took her BA from Loyola University in and after that she attended a prestigious writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, and there she got her Master in Fine Arts. Most of

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Cisneros classmates from the Writers' Workshop were all white and much more privileged social background and they shared a history which had nothing to do with environment in which Sandra Cisneros was living at the time. They share a history that did not include poverty nor black or brown skin. Cisneros felt out of place and alienation, but in spite of all of that, when she was Iowa she realized that her power as a writer resided in her difference. This is what she said in an interview: "It was not until this moment when I separated, when I considered myself truly distinct, that my writing acquired a voice. I knew I was a Mexican woman. But, I didn't think it had anything to do with why I felt so much imbalance in my life, whereas it had everything to do with it" (In Mirriam-Goldberg 43).

The turning point in her career was the moment when she learned not only that she felt different because she was different, but also that she could write about something her classmates knew nothing about: "*It had been as if all of a sudden I realized 'Oh my God! Here's something [poverty, discrimination] that my classmates can't write about, and I'm going to tell you because I'm the authority on this'*" (Ib 43).

In her essay "Ghosts and Voices: Writing from obsession" she writes: "*What did I know except third-floor flats? Surely my classmates knew nothing about that. That's especially what I chose to write: about third-floor flats, and fear of rats, and drunk husbands [in the neighborhood] sending rocks through windows, anything as far as poetic as possible*" (Mirriam-Goldberg 44). This is what she did —she wrote about what she knew and she discovered her unique voice.

Over time, Sandra Cisneros became involved as a teacher in educational projects that were created to promote and help the urban poor. She was counseling teenagers who did not fit in conventional high schools. In 1980, she became an administrative assistant at Loyola University and she went around recruiting poor students from the poor neighborhoods of Chicago. In 1981, she stopped working and moved to Massachusetts because she needed to work full-time in her first novel, *The House on Mango Street* (1984). This book made possible for her to travel the world and years later by her own house. Among her major works can be found *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) and *Caramelo* (2002). She also wrote poetry books: *Bad Boys* (1980), *The Rodrigo Poems* (1985), *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987) – she is "wicked" because she takes control of her own sexuality and defies the patriarchal definitions of what is legitimate for a woman and what is not –, *Loose Woman* (1994), the "loose woman" of the title poem assumes mythological proportions as a consequence of her subversive powers.

Cisneros is a Chicana feminist. She has always been fighting those female stereotypes promoted by Mexican American machismo and by the patriarchal values of the American and Mexican culture. At the same time, Cisneros has been fighting against class and racial oppression that all the Chicanos experienced.

Cisneros, being a Chicana, faced the problems that in her situation if you adopted models of femininity that thought to be Anglo, if you wanted to be the white American independent self-assertive woman is that what happens: "told you're a traitor to your culture. And it's a horrible life to live. We're always straddling two countries, and we're always living in that kind of schizophrenia that I call, being a Mexican woman living in an American society, but not belonging to either culture. In some sense, we're not Mexican and in some sense we're not American (Interview, in Madsen 108). This is what sociologists describe as 'the marginal

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individual', who is influenced by two different ethnic groups or suspended between two cultural realities in his/her struggle to establish his/her identity; the individual condemned to live in two societies and in two different, and often antagonistic, cultures.

The works of Sandra Cisneros has been widely praised by the critics who admire the authenticity of her characters' voices and the experiences that she writes about. She has also been highly praised by the marvelous simplicity of her style.

The House on Mango Street (1984)

The central importance of place

As the title indicates, both "the house" and "Mango Street" are central symbols. And the protagonist's response to this environment determines the direction of Esperanza's process of maturation. Through her dialectal relationship to the house and to Mango Street, Esperanza comes to an understanding of her individual self.

Mango Street is a physical and psychological indicator of an oppressive socio-economic environment, and Esperanza becomes conscious of her place in the socio-economic hierarchy: "*Then as if she forgot I just moved in, she says the neighborhood is getting bad*" (13).

The novel explores different issues of racial and sexual oppression, poverty and violence in 44 vignettes about life in a Chicano barrio. The stories are connected by an associated logic, each chapter works as an individual story and at the same time, each chapter is part of a larger story. Cisneros said she wanted to write a book which the reader could open in any chapter and find a story that made sense on its own.

Crucial importance of the female protagonist narrating her own text

The female "I" takes on narrative authority and thus she gains authority over her own life and her own story, an act which resists patriarchal confinement of the female self.

Importance of the fact that Esperanza, the protagonist is aspiring writer: through her creative imagination she projects her future self beyond the boundaries of the status-quo of her own socio-cultural environment.

Affected by patriarchal definitions of femininity, Esperanza compares herself to her great-grandmother, in "My Name": "With her she shares her name and the coincidence of being born in the Chinese year of the horse, *"which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female – but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong"* (10). Esperanza talks about this strong female ancestor as a *"wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry"* (11), eventually the grandmother was forced into marriage by Esperanza's great grandfather, who broke her spirit and cause this woman to *"[look] out of the window her whole life"* (11). This strong woman is the first woman that belongs to a long list of women that Esperanza gets to know. All of them are women who are broken in body and spirit, women who are brought into submission by the rules of the patriarchal society in which they live. Esperanza has a strong determination to escape from all of this: *"I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by*

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the window” (11). There is an important distinction in this passage, between the wild strength of Esperanza’s grandmother and the social cultural system that oppresses this strong woman. Esperanza is interested in finding a legacy of rebellion against patriarchal oppression that is the reason why she says she does not want to inherit her grandmother’s place by the window.

The issue of the name is important. Esperanza is trying to come to terms with her identity which is bicultural. Esperanza is aware that the fact she has a Spanish name has cultural and social implications and that is why mentions that she would like to give herself a new name, that is, a new identity. At the end of this section Esperanza says: “*I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Something like Zeze the X will do*” (11). What Esperanza is trying to say here is that she would like to have a name with no contradictory cultural connotations, she would like to have an empty name for her to fill up with meaning. Throughout this implicit parallel between the desire for a new name and the desire that Esperanza has for a new house on her own, different from the family house on Mango Street. Esperanza does not want to be defined by her house nor her social-economic circumstances, she does not want to be externally defined by her name which has all those connotations of patriarchal values.

The thing about the window is crucially important. The image of the window appears in many chapters of the novel. Many women are represented sitting by the window afraid or forbidden to go out, they do not want to venture out in the wildness of the street. Most of these women are prisoners of the imposed domesticity. Sally, Esperanza’s friend, lives with her father who beats her if she misbehaves. Later on in the story, we know that she marries at a very young age to escape from her father, but her husband also beats her if she speaks to anybody when he is not at home. The importance of the window is also seen in the characters of Rafaela and *Mamacita*. Rafaela is locked in her apartments, so she only communicates with the street through the window and *Mamacita* refuses to live the apartment because she cannot speak English. Early in the novel, Cisneros, in a chapter titled “Boys and Girls”, points to the limits placed on the development of the protagonist by emphasizing traditional Latino roles for boys and men in opposition to the numerous usually household duties imposed on young girls and women. In this episode, there is a passage in which Esperanza very well explains this opposition: “*The boys and the girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours. My brothers for example. They’ve got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the house. But outside they can’t be seen talking to girls. Carlos and Kiki are each other’s best friend ... not ours*” (8). For the girls, the location that the culture assigns them is the house. Cisneros is implying that Esperanza should be careful because she could easily end up being as one of the windows sitters because these women are skeptic to follow the cultural norms which say that they have to choose the house as the place of activity. Esperanza very clearly recognizes the dangers of this life of limitations and sterility.

Esperanza does not agree with her conventional friend Marin, who is convinced that “*you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away*” (26). In this passage, Marin is alluding to the American dream. Esperanza refuses to follow the sample of the older women in the novel, including her own mother as she says in the section titled “‘Beautiful and Cruel’” – this title alludes to the strong and evil women in classical

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movies – . Esperanza says about her mother: *“My mother says when I get older my dusty hair will settle and my blouse will learn to stay clean, but I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain”* (88). Esperanza chooses rebellion. This section is the section that emphasizes this rebellion. At the end of this chapter, Esperanza says: *“I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate”* (89). Esperanza has the intention of being a rebel, the intention of living an independent life, rejecting traditional values of both cultures. She is not going to be the Mexican American woman who devotes her existence to serve the men.

Esperanza tries to escape from the sexual, physical and emotional abuse, she does not want to go the way most of the other women from the novel have gone. The novel tells about too many enclosed and abused women. One is the neighbor Rosa Vargas whose “kids are too many and too much”. The kid’s mother *“is tired all the time from buttoning and bottling and babying, and cries every day for the man who left her without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come”* (29). We also meet Alicia, who is afraid of her authoritarian father (31-32), and Sally, who is a rebellious girl that shows some potential, but she lives under the constant fear of being beaten by her father. The narrator observes: *“And why do you always have to go straight home after school? You become a different Sally. You pull your skirt straight, you rub the blue paint off your eyelids. You don’t laugh, Sally. You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can’t come out from”* (82). What Esperanza wants is precisely a house for her own, a house which is made in her own style and where she wants to occupy her own space characterized by her creativity, desires and loneliness. This aspiration to have a house – or a room of her own – is a reaction against patriarchy and the cultural myth that denies a Chicana a place of her own. Esperanza has the determination to distance herself from the family, the community and the culture. This is something that was seen as surprising and reprehensible when the novel came out because for many Latinos see culture as something extremely important. In this world of Mango Street girls are prisoners in houses ruled by their fathers and they escape by acquiring a house, but in this culture the only way to get a house is by getting a husband. This is a difficult situation that drives these women into a kind of metaphorical prostitution, in the sense that they use their sex appeal to attract those husbands who will buy a house. Even in a patriarchal society, women have power over men – sexual power – , but they lose this power with age. This power eventually becomes a trap for these women when they realized that they have moved from a repressive father to a repressive husband. The best example of this is Sally, who gets married *“young and not ready [...] in another state where it’s legal to get married before eighth grade”* (101). Sally says she is happy, but in some respects she is even worse than she was before. In the “Linoleum Roses” section: *“Sally says she likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he is okay. Except he won’t let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn’t let her look out of the window. And he doesn’t like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission”* (101-102). The males living in large cities find difficult to control women because of the anonymity of big cities. In rural, small places control is made much easier, this is why the

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man forbids the woman to go into the streets. There is an interesting section titled “Alicia who sees Mice about Alicia which suggests issue related to sex and marriage as a way of escape. Alicia is a Chicana who chooses education at the university, but she is tight to her father, and as it is said, Alicia “inherited her mamma’s rolling pin and sleepiness” because she wakes up early to make tortillas for her father. The combination between Venus and the tortillas is ironic here: Venus is not associated with romance, it is female oppression.

From pages 76 to 85, there are four chapters in succession, all of them about women trapped in houses. The section “No Speak English” is about *Mamacita*, who sits all day by the window singing songs in Spanish. Another chapter titled “Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays” is about wife locked up in the house because her husband is jealous. Rafaela asks the children of the neighborhood to bring her fruit juice. Sally’s section is also included in these four chapters, and the fourth section is “Minerva Writes Poems” which is about a young wife beaten by the husband and who writes poems on little pieces of paper. The novel, and especially these four sections, focuses on the males’ obsession for controlling the women’s sexuality. This is the logic behind the female imprisonment, this logic seen is seen in the fact that one of the synonyms for ‘prostitute’ is ‘streetwalker’, implying that if a woman is not controlled inside the house that means she is sexually mobile. It is the dirty woman who walks the streets freely because the decent woman is inside the house. The novel shows all the male figures trying to control female sexuality and there are two categories: one is the males who want to suppress female sexuality and there are the male who want to exploit it and take advantage of it. The first one is rooted in fear, as we see with Sally and her father and husband, and in the second case, it is rooted in desire to possess the woman sexually. It depends on the relationship of the man to the woman. There is a crucially important episode titled “Red Clowns” which is very moving because in that section Esperanza herself is the victim of sexual aggression. She is abused by a much older boy, presumably white, because he uses her ethnicity to name her: “*I love you, Spanish girl, I love you*” (100). Esperanza discovers that a “Spanish girl” does not have any power and whatever is desired of her will be taken by force. Esperanza feels betrayed not only by Sally, who didn’t come to save her, but also by all the lies she has heard about sexual pleasure, the lies of “*all the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong*” (100). Esperanza gets furious by what she considers to be a complicity. She is mad at the silence of the older women in the family who never told her about the real facts of life and sex.

The last chapter: going away to come back

This last chapter is famous for its open-ending which encourages the reader to speculate what will become of the protagonist after the book has ended. This last chapter is about Esperanza as a writer and one of the things we see here is that writing transports the protagonist to another space, a place different from Mango Street which is under her own control.

In the second paragraph she refers to ghosts, she is comparing the feeling of belonging of a confinement space to being possessed by a ghost: “*I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free*” Not belonging to Mango Street is the equivalent of freedom and liberation from that ghost that brings pain.

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In the final paragraph Esperanza promises to come back: *“One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, what happened to Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I felt behind. For the ones who cannot out”*. Esperanza promises to come back, but not physically. She is coming because she is going to be a committed writer and she is going to succeed, but she does not want to betray her community. This dialectic between individual self and the community is important because Esperanza belongs to this community but she is planning to leave. After all, she finds her literary voice through the cultural experience of living in Mango Street as a Chicana. This is going to empower her so she is always going to recognize the commitment to her culture.

This paragraph is a repetition of something she says at the very beginning of the novel:

“We didn’t always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor; and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to”.

This novel is dedicate in to different languages, “To the women, A las mujeres” to the women who cannot out, the many women that we see portrayed in this novel and who in real life are locked in confinement structures. In this final chapter, there is a character that warns Esperanza about this, she tells Esperanza not to worry about who cannot live as easily as her.

There is an issue of social commitment. Esperanza will have to return to Mango Street, *“to the house I belong but do not belong to”* (110) – a return which is in agreement to the message of section like “The Three Sisters”, that is, the three ‘comadres’, and *“Alicia and I”* (106-107). She has a filial obligation to her parents and to her community, her origins. One of the three ‘comadres’ says to Esperanza: *“You will always be Esperanza. You can’t forget who you are”* (105). Alicia also comments about this: *“Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you’ll come back too”* (107). Alicia says that it is Esperanza, with her writing, and not the mayor, who is going to make Mango Street better (107). What Esperanza has been writing about is based on memories of Mango Street. No matter how many things she dislikes from Mango Street, that place is Esperanza. Mango Street gives her the material for her books, it determines her identity as a writer. With her example she is going to inspire other to follow her steps.

In an introduction added to the novel in 1994, Cisneros talks about a split in her personality that sort of coincided with the period in which she started to write this book. Back in that time, she had many meetings with the poor students she was trying to help, and there was a part of her that wanted to actively participate, make a difference in her community, coexisting with the more individualistic side of her that desired isolation and seclusion. This is the ambivalence that we perceive in the opening and ending of this novel. *The House on Mango Street* is a novel in the metaphor of the house leads controls the story, it is a novel in which the protagonist’s grow in awareness of herself as a woman and as an artist has been connected from the beginning to her need to find a space on her own. We remember the humiliation that she suffered early in the novel when one of the nuns of the school asks Esperanza for where she lives.

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As a writer, Esperanza will use words to construct a means of escape (the house of fiction/ words) and a means to return to the house on Mango Street. Connection between writing and the house, in the penultimate section, “A House of My Own”. Esperanza makes an explicit connection between building a house and building the house of fiction with words, this is what Esperanza wants: “*Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own. [...] My books and my stories. [...] Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem*” (108). The journey to independence merges two central themes: writing and a house of her own.

The artist novel (Künstlerroman)

A portrait of the artist as a young Chicana: writings is for Esperanza a way of constructing a self. In the final chapter Esperanza says: “*I make a story for my life [...] I like to tell stories. I’m going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong*” (109). Writing is for her a way of struggling, a means of constructing a self.

In the section “Bon Bad”, Aunt Guadalupe tells her: “*You must remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free*” (61) – through her writing she creates herself and her own space. She escapes from the male texts into a new Chicana text. By the novel’s end, Esperanza has discovered that as an artist, she has a mission for the women and not only for herself. She is going to escape from her Latino community, but this escape has to be instructive. Esperanza takes literature as her weapon and her opportunity to take control over her life.

A different type of Bildungsroman

This story is different from the traditional bildungsroman, centered on the individual development of a protagonist who is more gifted and more responsible. *Mango Street*, with so many stories of others, is different because of its collective politics and consciousness. This bildungsroman is not only about Esperanza, but also all those other women. Many section of the story are about ‘others’. Esperanza is luckier than the other women. One of the big lies of American Dream is that everybody cannot make it big. Legally everyone has the capacity to do it, but legal equality does not abolish the persistent economic inequalities. Esperanza is leaving the community, but she is not betraying the collective interests, which explains her determination to come back “for the ones who cannot out”. All the other have the same potentials as Esperanza, but they are not that lucky.

Cisneros’ mother liberated her from working in the house. In the novel, Esperanza is all the time paying attention to the difficulties and tragedies of these other women, she never blames them individually for their failures. In Esperanza’s house there is no patriarchal violence. Her family is not rich, but it has some advantages over other families: Esperanza can go to a private school, her parents own the house in Mango Street, etc. Cisneros says about her commitment: “None of us wants to abandon our culture. We’re very Mexican, we’re all very Chicanas. Part of being Mexican is that love and affinity we have for our *cultura*. We’re family centered, and that family extends to the whole Raza. We don’t want be exiled from our people” (In Madsen 129).