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The Modern Novel

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HONORS SPECIAL STUDIES

MODERN NOVEL

ENGLISH 491

Mrs. Bleck

Honors Paper #70

Rich Terry

January 4, 1968

Since there is no course in the modern novel offered at Ouachita, this special study was designed in order for me to fill some of the gaps in my high school and college reading with books from this category.

I was required to read five novels and write a brief summary or analysis of each one. The five I chose to read were: THE CATCHER IN THE RYE by J. D. Salinger, THE GREAT GATSBY by F. Scott Fitzgerald, TOBACCO ROAD by Erskine Caldwell, OF MICE AND MEN by John Steinbeck, and THE OTHER AMERICA by Michael Harrington.

6 Nov. 1967
Rick Jerry

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

J.D. Salinger: Salinger is a novelist and short story writer who is widely regarded as spokesman for American young people in the years following World War II. He was born in New York City in 1919 and received his education in New York public schools, a military academy, and three different colleges.

His work is marked by a sense of craftsmanship, a keen ear for dialogue, and a deep awareness of the frustrations of contemporary life in America.

CHARACTERS:

Holden Caulfield: Holden was the main character in the story. As a young boy sixteen years old, he was kicked out of Pencey Prep, a prep school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania, and spent his last three days, before the Christmas vacation began, roaming the streets of New York City. It was this three day period that the story relates and its effect on a young boy's life as he is subjected to the hard realities of growing up.

Phoebe Caulfield: Phoebe was Holden's eight-year old sister and really the only person in the world who, according to Holden, really cared for him.

Robert Ackley: "Ackley Boy," as Holden referred to him, was Holden's suite mate at Pencey. Holden didn't like him, because he was always picking at the pimples on his face.

D. B. D.B. was Holden's older brother, who had gone to Hollywood to make a big success as a writer.

Allie: Allie was Holden's younger brother, who had died of leukemia at the age of ten. Holden always spoke of Allie with much respect and admiration. Everyone liked Allie, and Holden sometimes wished that he had died instead of Allie.

Maurice: Maurice was the bell boy in the first hotel that Holden stayed in. He was a "pimp" for a group of prostitutes and tried to interest Holden in his little enterprise. Holden accepted and ended up with a broken nose and a lighter pocket book.

Stradlater: He didn't play too big a part in the story, but he was Holden's roommate at Pencey. He was a handsome boy and a go-getter with the girls.

Sally Hayes: Sally was one of Holden's old girl friends from New York. He spent one of his three days with her and tried to talk her into running away with him. However, she refused.

This is the story of Holden Caulfield, a sixteen year old boy who, on being dropped by his prep school, decides to spend three days and nights in New York before returning home. The events of those three days and nights, told in the boy's own words, form more than a dramatic story. They are the means by which Salinger skillfully portrays the thoughts and feelings of a young boy standing alone and unsure on the threshold of manhood.

Each word and each thought is just as a sixteen year old boy would think them, from the simple distaste of watching someone pick pimples to the wanderings of the mind as a prostitute takes off her dress and prepares to earn her five dollars.

Holden is subjected to almost every indecent practice known in the three days that he is alone in New York. His thoughts during this time make for hilarious but serious reading.

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE is a simple story, and one in which the reader must become involved in order to enjoy the author's portrayal of a young boy's first association with some of the realities of life.

6 Nov. 1967
Rick Terry

THE GREAT GATSBY

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Fitzgerald is an American novelist and short story writer and regarded by many as the spokesman of the Jazz Age. He was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and named after his great granduncle, Francis Scott Key. He was educated at Princeton but left before graduation to serve in World War I.

CHARACTERS:

Jay Gatsby (James Gatz): Gatsby was the hero of the story, a man who had worked his way up from nothingness to become the biggest party giver in Long Island society. He had made it big in several underhanded enterprises during the prohibition years of the twenties. He had served with honors during World War I and had spent all his time since then in search of his beloved Daisy, who had given up her hope of their future together. All his socializing was in the hope that Daisy might notice him and want him back again. As it eventually happened, Daisy was the ultimate cause for his tragic and untimely death.

Daisy Buchanan: Daisy had married but hadn't forgotten the love that was between Gatsby and her. She was unhappy with her marriage and was very delighted, when she finally got to see Jay again.

Tom Buchanan: Tom had married Daisy soon after the war was over. She had become tired of waiting for Gatsby to come home and decided that life with Tom wouldn't be so bad. Tom proved to be an unfaithful husband and was engaged in an affair, at the telling of this story.

Myrtle Wilson: Myrtle happened to be the one who kept Tom away from Daisy. She was the wife of a used car salesman and longed for the good things in life. Tom could give her everything she wanted, and so two homes were destroyed in their wrong actions.

George Wilson: George had the misfortune to be married to Myrtle, and his life was made miserable by her flirtations with other men. His life was one of sadness, and he ended it by blowing his brains out.

Jordan Baker: Jordan was a champion golfer and a good friend of Daisy's. She was important as a link between Gatsby and Daisy.

Nick Carraway: Nick was really the main character. He supplied the vital information necessary to put the novel into its proper perspective. He became good friends with Gatsby, and in the end turned out to be the only one he had.

James Gatz, later Jay Gatsby, came from meager means to a life of great wealth. His rise to prominence could be attributed to his desire to live life to its fullest. He had known the meaning of want, and so, when he met Daisy, he felt that he had found the promise of a full life. But a war and several months separation were to keep him from this goal that he had set in his life.

He found that liquor was a lucrative business during the twenties and reaped his reward accordingly. His prosperity only made his life without Daisy more miserable. Therefore, he set out to win her back. He moved into a large house directly across the bay from her and began to throw parties every week in the hope that she might attend one.

She never came and didn't until her cousin, who happened to be Gatsby's next door neighbor, asked her over for tea, at Gatsby's request. The rest was obvious. They found their love for each other had not died and attempted to make a new start together.

Daisy's husband, Tom, didn't like the idea of another man taking his wife away from him, even though he had been cheating on her for years. On their way to Daisy's house after a very heated argument with Tom, Daisy and Jay hit and killed a woman, Tom's lover, Myrtle Wilson, and left the scene of the accident. Although Daisy was driving, everyone assumed that Gatsby was the guilty party. Myrtle's dazed husband, George, found Gatsby and killed him, then, he turned the gun on himself.

This was the story of a social outlaw, James Gatz, making his way up in Long Island society, obsessed by the American dream of quick and easy success, yet haunted and then destroyed by the fatal woman of his youth.

This novel contained all the ingredients for a successful "American" novel: love, passion, hate, violence, and murder. Although Fitzgerald's writing was excellent, this was simply a story of everyday happenings. However, THE GREAT GATSBY is a very moving story of the "Roaring Twenties."

TOBACCO ROAD

Rich Terry
1-4-68

AUTHOR: Erskine Caldwell

Caldwell was born in White Oak, Georgia, and has been a cotton picker, stagehand, professional football player, book reviewer, and screen writer. His novel TOBACCO ROAD was later dramatized.

The setting for TOBACCO ROAD is the rural country outside the city of Augusta, Georgia, in the early 30's.

CHARACTORS:

Lov Benzey: Lov was one of the few white people on the tobacco road that had a steady job. He made a dollar a day shoveling coal for the railroad. He married one of Jeeter Lester's daughter, and since the girl was only twelve, they had a real problem marriage.

Pearl Benzey: Pearl was Lov's wife and suffered much from her environment. She eventually left Lov and went to the big city to seek something a little better than the life she knew.

Jeeter Lester: Jeeter was the head of the Lester clan and was one of the sorriest persons on the road. He boasted of the fact that he didn't really know how many children he had fathered. The only thing he ever did was talk about raising a bale of cotton to the acre. Of course, he never got around to actually working the land.

Dude Lester: Dude had the misfortune of being one of the last of the Lester children remaining on the old home place. Although he was sixteen, he never did a day's work. He passed his time throwing clods of dirt against their old sharecropper house.

Ellie May Lester: The only reason that Ellie May had remained at home was her harelip, which made her very unpleasant to look at. She eventually went to live with Lov, when Pearl ran away from him.

Bessie Rice: Sister Bessie, as she was called, claimed to be a woman preacher, but she was more nearly the hussy that Jeeter's wife called her.

Grandmother Lester: This woman was a most pitiful character. She was literally starved by the other Lesters. They left her the crumbs from every meal, and she was forced to eat grass and weeds. When she was run over by an automobile, they simply watched her die in the muddy road and then covered her body with dirt.

TOBACCO ROAD is the story of poverty in the South. It is the story of people who die of starvation because of their stubborn faith in the land. All these people had ever known was cotton. Generations of them had survived on the same plot of ground for years. But now, survival was not possible. Their soil was depleted, and unless they could keep up with the fast moving agricultural society, they were doomed to a life of misery.

The Lesters were such people. Every spring Jeeter would feel the call of the land to burn off the sage and turn the dirt with a plow. But his thoughts couldn't buy seed-cotton and guano necessary to farm with. He had mortgaged everything in past years to raise a crop, but the interest had been so high, that even his best year had only brought him a seven dollar profit. But even this couldn't kill Lester's faith in the land that he loved. He was always talking of borrowing the seed and raising a bale to the acre. His dreams, however, couldn't buy the necessities, and in the meantime his family starved.

Some people left the farms to work in the city factories. These were the lucky ones. They managed to live, though their move had cost them the only life they knew. Most of the Lester children had gone to the city and forgotten their deadbeat father.

The Lester parents ended their lives early one morning, as the old house caught fire from the burning sage of others farms. They died alone and hungry. But their faith in the land had never died.

Rich Terry
1-4-68

OF MICE AND MEN

AUTHOR: John Steinbeck

Steinbeck is an American writer and winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize for his great book of migrant workers, THE GRAPES OF WRATH. He was born in Salinas, California, in 1902 and grew up among the farming people in that western state. He read extensively as a child, and his knowledge gained from this and his work experience as hired hand on many different farms account for some of his best works being about the farm and its people.

The setting for the story is the farm country south of Salinas. The time is before the use of machinery had taken the place of the work mule on the farm.

CHARACTORS:

Lennie Small: Lennie was rather mentally retarded, but was a hard worker in the barley fields. His partner George took care of him and kept him going with the idea that someday they would settle down on a little place of their own. Due to his condition, Lennie received his greatest pleasure from his sense of touch. He loved to feel anything soft and warm. His brute strength and his lack of mental and physical coordination led to the deaths of many of those soft creatures that he loved to touch.

George Milton: George was Lennie's caretaker and companion. They had been friends in childhood, and George had promised Lennie's aunt that he would look after him. His fondest dream was getting a small piece of land and raising just enough animals and vegetables to get by with.

Curley: Curley was the boss's son. His father owned a big farm, and Curley straw-bossed for him. He had been a boxer at one time, and because of his small stature, he didn't like anyone who was large. Since Lennie was large, Curley was constantly trying to pick a fight with him.

Slim: Slim was one of the farm hands and was just about the best mule skinner around. He understood the relationship of Lennie and George and befriended them. Slim's problem was Curley's wife. She had a roving eye and seemed to always be where Slim was.

OF MICE AND MEN is the tragic story of two migrant workers who only knew the life of the hired hand. George and Lennie were real friends, and were it not for George, Lennie would have probably been in an asylum for the insane. George took care of Lennie and kept him out of trouble by doing all the talking and literally being Lennie's brain.

Lennie's passion for feeling soft things had gotten him into trouble many times. Once he had touched a girl's skirt and ^{had} become so frightened when she screamed for him to let go, that he only tightened his grip. When she did manage to free herself, she told some men that Lennie had attacked her. So George had to come to the rescue and hurry Lennie out of town. That's the way it had been for the two rovers.

George and Lennie were well on their way of realizing their dream of eventually owning a place of their own. They settled down to a job bucking barley near Salinas. It just so happened that the boss's son had a very pretty wife that couldn't keep her hands off the other men. Lennie was no exception. She was attracted to him, because he was always off to himself. One afternoon, while Lennie was in the barn, she came in and began to tease him. He felt of her hair, she screamed, and in his panic, he broke her neck.

Lennie ran away and hid where George had told him to hide, if he ever got into trouble. George found him and talked softly to Lennie, as he put a bullet through the back of Lennie's neck, just like one of the hands had killed an old, useless dog the night before.

Slim was the only one that understood George's feelings. The tragedy was that George, Lennie's only friend, had to put him out of the picture.

Rich Terry

1-4-68

THE OTHER AMERICA

AUTHOR: Michael Harrington

Harrington was born in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, and received his Master of Arts degree in English literature in 1949. He was associate editor of THE CATHOLIC WORKER from 1951 to 1953. He has worked on the Fund for the Republic's Study of blacklisting in the entertainment industry and served as consultant to the Trade Union Project of the Fund for the Republic. He is now a free-lance writer and a contributing editor to DISSENT and to NEW AMERICA.

The characters of the other America are the poor who made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry, or in the wrong racial or ethnic group. Once that mistake has been made, they could have been paragons of will and morality, but most of them would never even have had a chance to get out of the other America.

The poor live in a culture of poverty. Everything about them, from the condition of their teeth to the way in which they love, is suffused and permeated by the fact of their poverty. The family structure of the poor is different from that of the rest of the society. There are more homes without a father, there is less marriage, more early pregnancy, and markedly different attitudes toward sex. As a result of this, hundreds of thousands of children in the other America never know stability and normal affection. In a nation with a technology that could provide every citizen with a decent life, it is an outrage and a scandal that there should be such social misery.

Any attempt to abolish poverty in the United States must seek to destroy the pessimism and fatalism that flourish in the other America. In part, this can be done by offering real opportunities to these people, by changing the social reality that gives rise to their sense of hopelessness. A campaign against the misery of the poor should be comprehensive. It should think, not in terms of this or that aspect

of poverty, but along the lines of establishing new communities, of substituting a human environment for the inhuman one that now exists. None of these objectives can be accomplished if racial prejudice is to continue in the United States. Negroes and other minorities constitute only 25 per cent of the poor, yet their degradation is an important element in maintaining the entire culture of poverty.

The welfare provisions of American society that now help the upper two-thirds must be extended to the poor. This can be done if the other Americans are motivated to take advantage of the opportunities before them, if they are invited into the society. It can be done if there is a comprehensive program that attacks the culture of poverty at every one of its strong points.

There is only one institution in the society capable of acting to abolish poverty. That is the Federal Government. However, centralization can lead to an impersonal and bureaucratic program, one that will be lacking in the very human quality so essential in an approach to the poor. The other America is systematically under-represented in the Government of the United States. It cannot really speak for itself.

As a result of this situation, there is no realistic hope for the abolition of poverty in the United States until there is a vast social movement, a new period of political creativity.

Poverty in the 1960's is invisible and it is new, and both these factors make it more tenacious. It is more isolated and politically powerless than ever before. It is laced with ironies, not the least of which is that many of the poor view progress upside-down, as a menace and a threat to their lives. And if the nation does not measure up to the challenge of automation, poverty in the 1960's might be on the increase.