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Comment on Five Modern Novels

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Honors Special Studies

English Lit.
American Lit.

English H-491

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Presented to

Mrs. Martha Black

May, 1968

by

Rich Terry

My purpose in taking this course was to read some of the modern novels, since there is no particular course on the modern novel offered in the curriculum.

My requirement for the one hour of credit was to read five of the modern novels and write a brief analysis of each one to include an analysis of characters and author's purpose in writing.

The five novels that I chose to read were: LORD OF THE FLIES by William Golding, VALLEY OF THE DOLLS by Jacqueline Susann, THE STRANGER by Albert Camus, HOTEL by Arthur Hailey, and FAIL-SAFE by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler.

On the following pages are the reports of the individual novels.

Rich Terry

LORD OF THE FLIES

AUTHOR: William Golding--Golding was born in 1911 and declared he was brought up to be a scientist and revolted; after two years of Oxford he changed his educational emphasis from science to English literature, and became devoted to Anglo-Saxon. After publishing a volume of poetry he "wasted the next four years," and when World War II broke out he joined the Royal Navy. For the next five years he was involved in naval matters. He finished his naval career as a lieutenant in command of a rocket ship. His novels include THE INHERITORS, THE TWO DEATHS OF CHRISTOPHER MARTIN, PINCHER MARTIN, and THE LORD OF THE FLIES.

CHARACTORS:

Ralph, the protagonist, is a boy twelve years and a "few months" old. He enters naively, turning handprings of joy upon finding himself in an exciting place free of adult supervision. But his role turns responsible as leadership is thrust upon him--partly because of his size, partly because of his attractive appearance, and partly because of the conch with which he has blown the first assembly. Ralph is probably the largest boy on the island (built like a boxer, he nevertheless has a "mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil"). At the novel's end Ralph has emerged from his age of innocence; he sheds tears of experience after having proven himself a man of humanistic faith and action. His insistence upon individual responsibility, upon doing what must be done rather than what one would rather do can be admired.

Jack, Ralph's antagonist, is approximately the same age. He is a tall, thin, bony boy with light blue eyes and indicative red hair; he is quick to anger, prideful, aggressive, physically tough, and courageous. But although he shows traces of the demagogue from the beginning, he must undergo a metamorphosis from a timidity-shielding arrogance to conscienceless cruelty. Jack symbolizes a stronger, more primitive order than Ralph provides.

Roger, Jack's chief henchman, is slightly younger and physically weaker, but he possesses from the beginning all the sadistic attributes of the demagogue's hangman underling.

Simon is perhaps the most effectively characterized of all. He is visionary, the clear-sighted realist, logical, sensitive, and mature beyond his years. We learn that he has a history of epileptic seizures. We see Simon's instinctive compassion and intelligence as he approaches the rotting corpse of the parachutist, which is the only palpable "monster" on the island. With his mysterious touch of greatness Simon comes closest to foreshadowing the kind of hero Golding himself has seen as representing man's greatest need if he is to advance in his humanity.

Piggy has all the good and bad attributes of the weaker sort of intellectual. Despised by Jack and protected by Ralph, he is set off from the others by his spectacles, asthma, accent, and very fat, short body. The logic of his mind is insufficient to cope with the human problems of their coral-island situation. But this insight into him is fictionally blurred--denied to the Ralphs of this world, who weep not for Simon, but for the "true, wise friend called Piggy."

The theme of LORD OF THE FLIES is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable. The whole book is symbolic in nature except the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island. The officer, having interrupted a man-hunt, prepares to take the children off the island in a cruiser which will presently be hunting its enemy in the same way.

The "lord of the flies" is a translation of the Hebrew Ba'alzevuv (Beelzebub in Greek). Golding's Beelzebub is the anarchic, amoral, driving force that Freudians call the Id, whose only function seems to be to insure the survival of the host in which it is embedded or embodied, which function it performs with tremendous tenacity.

The emergence of this concealed, basic wildness is the theme of the book; the struggle between Ralph, the representative of civilization with his parliaments and his brain trust (Piggy, the intellectual whose shattering spectacles mark the progressive decay of rational influence as the story progresses), and Jack, in whom the spark of wildness burns hotter and closer to the surface than in Ralph and who is the leader of the forces of anarchy on the island, is also, of course, the struggle in modern society between those same forces translated onto a worldwide scale.

Fable-like, time and place are vague. It is the post-catastrophic near-future, in which nuclear war has laid waste to much of the West. The fiery crash of the boys' plane upon a tropical island has been the final stage of their evacuation from England. How many children originally landed on the island alive we never learn; however, we do know that there were more than the eighteen boys whose names are actually mentioned in the course of the novel.

The novel has been taken as a straight tale of initiation, with Ralph as hero. Yet there is more to it than Ralph's facing a brutal adult world with a lament for his lost childhood and for the innocence he thinks has been stripped from him. What Ralph dimly fathoms, the naval officer "rescuer" cannot possibly understand--that the world is not yet ready to receive its saints, neither its Simons nor even its Piggy's and Ralphs. Whether he means it or not Golding provides a hopeful note, for even at mankind's present stage of development Piggy and Ralph, the latter with shame, relapse only slightly toward the barbarism of their contemporaries; wild Simon withstands the powerful regressive pressures completely. That these three represent three-quarters of the novel's major characters defeats any explanation of the novel in totally pessimistic terms.

It is not an obvious novel, as sometimes claimed. The timely arrival of the naval officer acts as no concession to readers demanding a happy ending. What we get is a necessary change of focus: the boys who have grown almost titanic in their struggle are suddenly seen again as mere boys, some just tots, dirty-nosed and bedraggled. If they have been fighting our battle, we realize, with both hope and dismay, that mankind is still in something of a prepuberty stage. Thus LORD OF THE FLIES ends as an act of recognition. The vision of Golding is through both ends of the telescope.

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

AUTHOR: Jacqueline Susann was born in Philadelphia; her mother was a schoolteacher and her father was a famous portrait painter. At sixteen she left Philadelphia and came to New York, lured by the intoxicating aura of Broadway. After appearing in many plays, Miss Susann decided she would do better if she wrote one herself. She did, or at least co-authored one, and LOVELY ME was produced on Broadway. In recent years she has stolen time away from her real career as wife of television producer Irving Mansfield to write EVERY NIGHT, JOSEPHINE. VALLEY OF THE DOLLS is her first novel, and she is hard at work on her second.

CHARACTORS:

Anne Welles was the icy New England young lady who came to New York seeking escape from her small town childhood. She found a new life and a career that was marred only by her falling in love with a man who would later destroy her.

Neely Ohara started out as many stars have and eventually worked her way to the top only to find that it can be very lonely if life holds no meaning.

Jennifer North was a beautiful starlet who only wanted, strangely enough, a home and children. She got neither and eventually took her life because she was afraid that her only attractiveness, her body, was going to be destroyed by cancer.

Lyon Burke was the man whom Anne finally married. His tragic flaw was that he couldn't understand that loving someone meant giving up a little bit of himself. He was unfaithful to Anne and only lived for himself.

Henry Bellamy was the head of the law firm that Anne worked for at first. He was the father image for Anne and advised her on matters which only a "father" could have. He loved Anne and Lyon both and couldn't stand to see her life ruined by his infidelity.

Helen Lawson was one of those ageless performers who got where she was by hard work and devotion to a cause. She was hated because she was powerful. But in reality she was lonely and found in Anne a person who cared for her as a person.

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS is a gripping story that leaves the reader wondering whether life is worth all the problems and setbacks that take all of us toward moments of real despair. It is the story of love, hate, envy, adultery, and all those other adjectives that describe the experiences of every person's life. It can be read for its sensationalism or it can be read for the shocking truth that it holds within.

This is the timeless story of man's desire to get to the top no matter what the cost and no matter what it takes. All the characters are tragic in the sense that they made it to the "top" and then found that life was more sweet at the bottom. They spent an entire lifetime trying to find something more out of life only to find that life is lived and not made.

The "dolls" are the pills which all the rising insiders take for pep, sleep, energy, and for chasing the truth away. The pills come in various sizes, shapes, and colors, but they all spell disaster to the ones who get hooked into thinking that all of life's problems can be solved with a capsule washed down with a bottle of bourbon.

Lyon lost himself in his own desires and in his failure to see that real love has a place in every one's life. Jennifer took an overdose of the "dolls" and thus solved her problems by getting out of the human race. Neely ruined her health and all but lost her mind because she thought that money was the real symbol of success. Anne finally succumbed to the dolls because she couldn't face the reality that Lyon would never love her.

In the end Miss Susann only showed us that life is too valuable to lose it by thinking that success is measured in terms of cars, houses, and color-TV's. It is valuable because we can live it and enjoy the satisfaction that the real winner in life is the person who is happy in being himself.

THE STRANGER

AUTHOR: Albert Camus--Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, in 1913. His mother was of Spanish blood; his father was a Frenchman and an agricultural worker who was killed in 1914 during the First World War. His graduate work was done in the University of Alger under difficult financial conditions, during which time he worked as an auto accessory salesman, as a meteorologist, as an employee in a ship-brokers concern, and for the Prefecture. Camus has been classified as an existentialist philosopher. At any rate, it may well be that Albert Camus is the most acute conscience of the contradictions of our times between the nihilism of destruction and the nostalgia for peace. He has produced two important novels: THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS, and THE STRANGER.

CHARACTORS:

Meursault is a simple little man living quietly in Algiers. THE STRANGER is a series of individual events that lead Meursault to a sentence of death for committing a senseless murder.

Marie is Meursault's girl friend. She is merely another girl to him, but she is determined to marry Meursault, even though she knows he really doesn't love her.

Raymond is a resident of the same apartment building as Meursault and reputed to be a panderer. It is through Raymond that Meursault becomes involved with the Arab that he eventually murders.

RÉSUMÉ

Meursault's mother has died. She had been living at an old people's home not too far distant from Alger, and Meursault goes there to attend the funeral. During these last years he had seen his mother but little; they had followed separate lives and had nothing else to say to each other, and Meursault, weary and somewhat bewildered, sits through the wake and then passively follows what is required of him during the burial rites. Directly after the funeral he returns to Alger. The following day he goes swimming, meets a girl he had once slightly known, goes with her to a comic film, and then takes her home with him for the night.

Meursault continues to see Marie, his girl friend. Also he indifferently accepts the proffered friendship of Raymond, a resident of the same apartment building. Meursault agrees to write a note to Raymond's former mistress, an Arab girl, so that Raymond could carry out a perverted plan of revenge for her infidelity. The plan is carried out, the girl is beaten and there are police involved. Raymond asks Meursault if he will vouch for him to the police that he had good cause for beating the girl. Meursault has no objection and agrees to this also. Through an acquaintance of Raymond, Meursault and Marie are invited to the beach. While there they discover that the beaten girl's brother is waiting near the beach hut to avenge his sister. There is a fight. Meursault is drawn back to

the place where the Arab had been. The Arab is still there, and Meursault moves toward the coolness of the rock where the Arab is lying. The Arab draws a knife and Meursault, numbed by the heat and glaring light, shoots him five times.

Meursault is arrested, arraigned for murder and the trial comes after a year in prison. During the trial the prosecutor describes Meursault as a hardened, unfeeling criminal; he had sent his mother away to a public home, visited her rarely, had not shed a tear nor desired to see her body during the wake and funeral, had smoked and drunk coffee during the wake and had not lingered at his mother's grave following the burial. Moreover, the day following his mother's death he had enjoyed the company of Marie. And Meursault's friendship with an underworld figure such as Raymond fully indicated his criminality. Meursault was found guilty and sentenced to be decapitated "in the name of the French people."

This is the story of the "stranger," yet there is more, much more, involved. These innocent and careless acts of his life have been gathered together, interpreted by a prosecuting attorney, confirmed by a jury, and Meursault is recognized as a "monster" whose death has been decreed by society. He has "learned that familiar paths traced in the dusk of summer evenings may lead as well to prisons as to innocent untroubled sleep."

The fragmentary and individually understandable events in Meursault's life were united under a moral judgment, and Meursault realizes that such a life under such a judgment means guilt. He did not feel that he was a criminal, although he could see that he came under that description.

In prison, awaiting the end and having but a dim hope of a retrial, Meursault is unchanged. His one regret is that his liberty has been taken away, but he realizes that in the end one can habituate himself to anything. He still lives and thinks in the present moment, but now a new element is introduced into his thought: the inescapability of his death. There is no way out, and it is no consolation to say that in thirty years he would be in face of the same fate, because it is precisely those thirty years of life that are precious and irreplaceable. No matter what life one chooses, no matter what privileged status one achieved, this is all equalized in the end by the fate which chooses all men, saints and murderers, whether they wish it or not.

Meursault has at last brought to light the secret of his indifference and the reason for his unchanging attitude even in face of death. It is because death is the foundation of this indifference. Meursault has shown his revolt against the illusion of moral absolutism, he has reaffirmed his passion for the irreplaceable present moments of life and he has become conscious of the boundless freedom that death grants to the living. He is not revolting against the absurdity of the world; rather, he is revolting against the attitude which holds that human life is to be governed and judged according to autonomous principles which are lasting and sovereign.

HOTEL

AUTHOR: Arthur Hailey was born in Luton, England in 1920. He was a flight lieutenant in World War II and served in the Royal Air Force in the Middle and Far East.

His novel of American hospital life, THE FINAL DIAGNOSIS, appeared in fifteen languages and was a Literary Guild selection. Another novel, IN HIGH PLACES, was translated into five languages and was also a Literary Guild selection. Mr. Hailey's plays have been performed throughout the world on television, and many of his stories have been made into successful motion pictures.

During the writing of HOTEL, the author spent many months in New Orleans studying hotel operations at first hand.

Mr. Hailey lives in California with his wife and three children.

CHARACTORS:

Peter McDermott was the St. Gregory Hotel's handsome general manager and main character in HOTEL. He had worked his way up from bell boy to manager of New Orleans's finest and oldest hotel.

Warren Trent was the St. Gregory's aristocratic owner. He had built the St. Gregory from its very meager beginning and, though aged, wasn't about to see it go on the market blocks simply because it had had a few bad months and was threatened by mortgage.

Curtis O'Keefe was the owner of a chain of hotels all across the world and upon hearing about the St. Gregory's financial difficulties, had come to rescue it by making it one of his countless mirror image hotels.

Keycase Milne was the hotel thief that had come to the St. Gregory in hopes of making ends meet and had left with more money than he had ever seen in all his life.

Christine Francis was personal assistant to Warren Trent. She knew many of the confidential matters of the hotel and encouraged Peter to overcome his past and be the real manager of the St. Gregory.

Herbie Chandler was the weaseled face bell captain who made more than some of the executives because of his control of tipping and call girls.

Duke of Croydon was an internationally famous statesman who hid behind the skirts of his arrogant, ice-maiden wife. He was involved in a hit and run accident and tried to use his diplomatic standing to avoid trouble.

Albert Wells was the little man from Canada who nobody but Christine paid any attention to. In reality he was a multi-millionaire and eventually bought the St. Gregory and turned it over to Peter.

Aloysius Royce was the young colored law student that Warren Trent had as his personal valet. He played a big part in Peter's decisions about integrating the hotel.

HOTEL is the kind of novel that may bring back the book that is for reading. Mr. Hailey convinces the reader that signing into a hotel is akin to signing into one of the most active volcanos. He takes one behind the scenes and shows him the tremendous task of running a first rate hotel.

The St. Gregory is one of the last of the remaining giants of the independent hotels. However, because of the financial difficulties that beset her, she is in danger of becoming entrapped in the modern world of the chain hotel system where everything is ordered to a set pattern of rituals.

This novel could well be trying to say to us what happens when we settle for modern conveniences simply because everyone else does. Our world is becoming rapidly automated, and those that fight against this machine existence are just as rapidly shoved to the bottom of the heap.

A large hotel is much like a miniature city, with people from all walks of life. Mr. Hailey weaves several stories in and out of the novel. There are situations which arise in the hotel much like the situations that arise in community living. From attempted assault to deliberate discrimination, the events of HOTEL prove that the St. Gregory was a city of concrete and steel with real people with real problems.

All in all Mr. Hailey has written a novel that keeps the reader spellbound throughout. He has written a story of everyday life and projected it into the luxurious atmosphere of HOTEL.

FAIL-SAFE

AUTHORS: Eugene Burdick, who died on July 26th, 1965, was an associate professor of political science at the University of California (Berkeley), wrote many articles and short stories, was the co-author of THE UGLY AMERICAN and SARKHAN, and the author of THE 480, THE NINTH WAVE, and other books. Harvey Wheeler provided the technical assistance which this most complicated novel required.

CHARACTORS:

General Bogan was the commander of the Strategic Air Command and headed the underground command post at Omaha.

Colonel Cascio was the second in command at Omaha and had stored in his mind much classified information about SAC's offensive and defensive capabilities.

Congressman Raskob was visiting the intricate setup in Omaha when the "accident" occurred that would change the course of the world.

Peter Buck was the Russian translator who worked for the President of the United States. He never thought he would use his knowledge of Russian to avoid world destruction.

Walter Grotaschale was the expert on world politics. He was addressing the joint chiefs of staff when the "accident" happened. He was an advocate for war as a means of making people see that our system of government is best.

Lt. Col. Grady was the commander of the squadron of SAC bombers that carried out the "accident" to its ultimate end.

FAIL-SAFE is a novel of our time. It is not an exposé. It does not purport to reveal any specific technical flaw in our defense system. This book does leave the reader defenseless. He is quickly subdued into staying with it until he finishes it because of its narrative pull and because it is his life that is directly involved in the outcome. He will be chilled by the awareness that the prime elements of this cosmic horror story exist in real life and are being intensified daily. And his entire perspective on the present world is bound to be altered.

FAIL-SAFE deals with a most urgent problem that few civilians are aware of. That problem is our intricate defense system with its many complicated machines which in reality may hold our future in their many coils of wiring and countless transistor tubes.

The "accident" that I have referred to is a mechanical failure that sends a group of six United States atomic bombers hurtling toward Russia at 1,500 miles an hour with no chance to recall them. The accident may not occur in the way described in this novel, but the laws of probability assure us that ultimately it will occur.

Basically our defense system is built around a system of highly complicated computers that are fed with all known information that would lend to a rapid analysis of our enemies' capabilities at any one time. All our systems are on one general hook-up and can aid each particular station in helping solve problems that arise. The most common problem is that of unidentified flying objects that appear from time to time on our radar screens. Until an object has been identified, our defense forces are on the alert. One such alert is the "fail-safe" system of the Strategic Air Command. In the event of an alert, all the bombers that are flying all over the world fly to a designated spot on the globe and wait for further orders by both computer and voice. If the order is "go," they fly to their predestined target and drop their payload. Usually the order is "no go," and they return to their original flight path.

In FAIL-SAFE the alert from an unidentified object was called off, but due to a mechanical failure, one of the groups of bombers left its fail-safe point and began an attack course on Moscow with four 20 megaton bombs aboard each one.

All attempts are unsuccessful to recall the bombers, because the men have been trained to the point that they almost work like machines. So for a few hours, the world totters on the brink of disaster. The President gets on the "hot line" to Moscow and tries to explain the accident, that the Russian's are viewing on their radar screens as an attack by us. The President tries every thing to persuade them of our sincerity and even orders our SAC commanders to cooperate with their Russian counterparts in shooting the six planes down. The Russians destroy four of them at the cost of about 100 Russian fighters, but the other two drop their bombs in the heart of Moscow. The President makes a terrible decision to sacrifice New York City and orders a SAC bomber to drop four 20 megaton bombs in downtown New York. This is where the story ends, but unfortunately, it is still being written. Hardly a week passes without some new warning of this danger by knowledgeable persons who take seriously their duty to warn and inform the people. In addition, all too often past crises have been revealed to us in which the world tottered on the brink of thermonuclear war while SAC commanders pondered the true nature of unidentified flying objects on their radar screens.

There is substantial agreement among experts that an accidental war is possible and that its probability increases with the increasing complexity of the man-machine components which make up our defense system. Although nobody knows when the accident will occur, the logic of politics tells us that when it does, the only way out will be a choice of disasters.