



**Doctoral Programme in
North American Studies**

**A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN
SELECTED WORKS BY PHILIP
ROTH, CORMAC MCCARTHY AND
JONATHAN FRANZEN**

Doctoral Thesis presented by
SABAH SALIM JABBAR JABBAR

2021



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**Supervisor:
Dr. José Antonio Gurpegui**

Alcalá de Henares, 2021

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INTRODUCTION

America witnessed several problems and social aspects to establish its own identity in the world. Its multi-ethnic and cultural people tried to distinguish themselves as an American nation. Hence identity becomes a problematic and questionable issue, arousing profound questions: How do you know who you are? And what are the consequences of either not knowing or denying one's identity?

The impact of war on individual and the community is also profound and problematic. During the 1960s and early 1970s, veterans of the Vietnam War who suffered intensely from post-traumatic stress disorder and the violence they experienced in war brought back violence to their country. Through warfare, people are taught to hate their enemies enough to kill them. When they come home, killing instinct remains inside them. Hence, killing has become a way to survive, to make money, and to gain power. Even when they were cured of this disorder, they still wreaked terrible "vengeance" upon their community when they remained violent to their families and communities. On the other hand, Earthquakes, the environmental pollution, abortion, racial discrimination, and drug addiction are also considered important issues that changed people lives the way war changed them. Other social issues show themselves in the postmodern novels illustrating urban crime and decay, the flight of residents from the big cities to the suburbs, fears

from Communism, and increasing investment America has witnessed by foreigners who were interested in American companies and real estate. The dissertation studies these issues and their consequences on the society in selected novels for three of the American novelists who find themselves in a position to highlight these issues in their novels and enumerate people about them.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters including the conclusion. The first chapter is an introduction in which there is a discussion of the history of American society and several important movements and issues that affected that society.

The second chapter introduces literature review and the framework of the dissertation in which justification of this work and method of analysis are discussed as well as introducing the studies that dealt with the same novelists. It also introduces the questions of the dissertation.

The third chapter studies Philip Roth (1933). It starts with a brief note on the life and literary career of the novelist. Then it studies social issues in Roth's two novels *American Pastoral* (1997) in which Roth asks at the end: what insidious disease so infected the American middle-class culture that it could cause such terrible destruction? Some critics suggest that Vietnam War destroyed the spirit engendered by the victory over fascism. In *The Human*

Stain (2000), Roth introduces many ironies that pervade the novel. It deals with difficult questions such as: Who you are and how to know one's identity? The denial of parents and children is another important problem to deal with. In denying one's parents, he denies his own heritage and origin.

The fourth chapter deals with two novels by Cormac McCarthy (1933). It starts with a brief note on his life and literary career. Then it studies in details his two novels *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) which deals with themes of evil inside man, courage, and nostalgia for a past, where style of life was simple. The protagonist is forced to face the capacity for violence inside him when he kills his would-be assassin and feels murderous impulses toward one of the characters. Hence, some of his romantic illusions are shattered, and he becomes much less optimistic. He finds out that he cannot get whatever he wants; he gets neither wife nor ranch. At least he succeeds to preserve his integrity and prove his manhood. In *No Country for Old Men* (2005), McCarthy writes about violence, murder, greed, drugs, and coldhearted villainy. The novelist tries to remind the readers that no one can stand against these negative issues. There are some illusions to three major wars that USA entered. The reader might believe that McCarthy tries to make these wars as background through which evil is born. When vets come back home from war they bring with them the violence they experienced there.

The fifth chapter is devoted to Jonathan Franzen (1955). It starts with a brief note on Franzen's life and literary career. It studies then in details social issues in his two novels *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988) and *Strong Motion* (1992). In *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), Franzen introduces an essentially political thriller that deals with many issues of the 1980's, including urban crimes, the movement of residents to the suburbs, fears of Communism, and the foreign investment and ownership in American companies and real estate. Franzen presents the effects of these aspects in St. Louis County, a city that was the fourth largest city in the United States and declined to be the twenty-seventh. *Strong Motion* focuses on Louis Holland (23 years old) and Renee Seitchek (30 years old), believe that the earthquakes are not acts of God but instead they are created by the illegal pumping of hazardous waste materials deep underground via an abandoned oil well. It presents many aspects of life concerning the reticent new generation whose values are impossible for their elders to fathom. This so-called "Nowhere Generation" has something in common with mistrust of ideals.

The sixth chapter is the conclusion that sums up the findings of the study. It introduces a kind of comparison to show the common issues and problems among the writing of the three novelists.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN
SOCIETY

From the beginning of its establishment, United States of America witnessed several social, literary, religious, political and many other movements and issues in addition to World War I, World War II, Civil war, Vietnam War, American Dream... etc. that influenced deeply the American society.

I. 1 The American Revolution:

Among the social movements: the American Revolution that represented a battle to establish a fair democratic society. The revolution inspired other American social movements. It became a mental illness and divided the American society into supporters who preferred to develop their society without government and loyalists who opposed independence. The struggle to establish the USA and the war to achieve independence was a fight against forces and powers of that time (18th century) taking a long time as well as causing many deaths among American people. However, the Revolution succeeded to establish a government whose system works for a long time. It also helped in changing the American society by giving new chances of a better education for women as well as getting rid of slavery and focusing on

the equality among people and their rights which become part of the culture of United States of America.¹

I. 2 Women's Rights Movement:

Another American social movement was the Women's Rights Movement. It has something to do with the Declaration of Sentiments which has been issued in 1848 by some pioneers of feminism activism. Although there were efforts to restrict the place of women to her house and depriving her of having her real position in this world, some women refused to stay in their place and hence they decided to work and "gain social, political and economic standing equal to men."² As to what happened in the Revolution and Civil War, women after the Declaration kept struggling until they got the right to vote, formed a commission on the Status of Women. The struggle continued in the 1970s to have the National Organization for Women (NOW) and then they got the right to abortion.³

¹ Steven C. Bullock, *The American Revolution: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11-12

² Winston E. Langley, ed. and Vivian C. Fox, ed., *Women's Rights in the United States: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1994), xxii

³ Winston E. Langley, ed. and Vivian C. Fox, ed., *Women's Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*

I. 3 The Black Freedom Struggle:

The Black Freedom Struggle is another important movement in the history of the United States of America. It goes back to 1619 after bringing several slaves from Africa during the colonial period. Those Black people, who are usually called African American, struggled for a long time for freedom. They did not have the right to mix with white people. Some cities were divided into two parts, one for the White and the other for the Black.

The White men had large and stately houses with gardens and lawns whereas Black people carried rakes, brooms, dusting cloths, hedge trimmers, or buckets.⁴ This movement was accompanied by another important movement which is called Abolitionist. Its history dates back to post the 1830s when William Lloyd Garrison published his radical newspaper the *Liberator* in which he called for full equality for African Americans. They followed the international and antislavery movement trying to bring the attention of their society to it. They raised fund "for churches, newspapers, refugee settlements, and schools, and they helped to purchase friends, family, strangers, and occasionally themselves out of slavery."⁵

⁴ Françoise N. Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black Freedom Struggle in the Mississippi Delta after World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), xvi

⁵ C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers. Volume: I.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3

I. 4 The Labor Movement:

The Labor Movement dates back to 1930s and 1940s aiming at forming a law to save the rights of workers: their wages, health, safety. After the development of transportation in trains and steamships, there was a need for new railways. Since the trains worked on steam, there was a need also for workers in great coal mines to feed these trains. In their turns, railroads and trains caused a great movement of settlement and big cities were built also. What was notable here was the conflict between the employers and workers. There was a new Class in the society to be born and the contrast became noticeable. Workers succeeded to establish a unification to claim for their rights. They started their newspapers, claimed for new legislation and reduction of working hours.⁶

I. 5 Civil War:

Civil War had its own great impact on the American society that occurred in 1861 and ended 1865 between Northern States and Southern States. It involved demographics, economics, ideology, culture, and least of

⁶ Philip S. Foner, ed. and Brewster Chamberlin, ed. *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States: A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 53-54

all slavery aspects.⁷ There was a contrast between two regional parts: The Northern and the Southern. The Northern States witnessed great development in economy following modernity and diversity alongside the foundation of industrialization and the revolution in transportation including roads, steamboats, and railroads; in banking and insurance; and in networks of communication such as newspapers, magazines, and books, along with the telegraph. These states were sometimes referred to as free ones. On the contrary, the Southern States were referred to as slave ones because they depended on slaves to collect their products such as cotton. Unlike people in the north who invested their money in industry, people of the South invested their money in slaves. This gave rise to a more influential conflict between slaves and their masters.⁸

I. 6 The World War I:

The World War I, in its turn, had its impact on social problems, economic issues, isolation, education system, working class, immigration and above all on the American mind. The minds of American people were "fastened closely on the war's immediate tasks, rather than its ultimate

⁷ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion ! THE COMING OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2

⁸ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion ! THE COMING OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1789-1859*, 1

significance."⁹ The war and its meaning evoked the mentality of Americans who inspired different ideas concerning its importance. The Woodrow Wilson administration (1913-1921) tried its best to cultivate the public opinion to war by different means to agitate his people: "to the deliberate mobilization of emotions and ideas. Here, the Great War was peculiarly an affair of the mind."¹⁰ Although it is an exaggeration, but it was once indicated by the Attorney General of Wilson "that America was a country governed by public opinion."¹¹

The nation's schools and their young minds were center of attracting the attention of competing groups. Those schools indulged in a kind of ideological guerrilla warfare. This means that the American education system witnessed a struggle to control teaching about the war. Each competing group tried to force its interpretation of the war and then introduce it into the classroom. It was later when some national organizations that tried to promote present-day social reform.¹²

The economic and social changes that followed the war lasted for fifty years and had its impact on the working class in America especially for

⁹ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 45

¹⁰ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 46

¹¹ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 47

¹² David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 53

women. Because of the lack of male workers who joined the army and consequently war, women found their chance to join factories and to take the places of men. This opened new chances for women to earn money. This would not last forever since those new jobs were odd alongside with the pressures that happened due to wartime production, it caused some conflicts with male workers. The conflict took a wider scope when the Union of male workers considered the employment of women in the jobs of men as a threat to their usual duties, works and wages. These changes in working-class influenced deeply the two groups (men and women) "so contrarily that intra-class tensions along gender lines began to flare at home while the military conflict raged abroad."¹³

I. 7 The Great Depression:

The Great Depression followed the World War I which brought a new era of problems and difficulties. It started in 1929 between the collapse of stock market and 1941. The depression had its impact on farmers, laborers, women, and members of minority groups who suffered serious economic issues. Those who experienced "privation, tight budgets, and unemployment

¹³ Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. xx

years."¹⁴ The statisticians found that 20 percent, and more likely 25 percent, of healthy and strong persons were unemployed and looking for work. For the African Americans, the percentage was higher and worse than for the whites. Even for those employed in governmental institutions like schools, colleges or the military forces found there were reductions in pay. For farmers had their share of the depression especially when the commodity prices fell 61 percent. It was very difficult for those farmers who "expanded their indebtedness during the rise in farm prices before and after World War I."¹⁵ Many of them could not have the ability to make money to pay for the costs of their production. Banks also failed to cope with the rise of the depression. There were enormous problems "for consumers, workers, businessmen, and farmers—everyone. Savings evaporated as banks failed."¹⁶

I. 8 World War II:

World War II had the same impact of the First World War on the American society because it had its great influence socially, economically, and politically. On the society, all American people participated in the war and every family at that time must have one at least in uniform who was

¹⁴ Hamilton Cravens, *Great Depression: People and Perspectives*, ed. (Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-Clio., 2009), xi

¹⁵ Hamilton Cravens, *Great Depression: People and Perspectives*, xii

¹⁶ Hamilton Cravens, *Great Depression: People and Perspectives*, xii

fighting abroad. It was a difficult time indeed. Soldiers participated in the combats in Europe and the Pacific while ordinary people engaged themselves in the struggle from different perspectives. Workers joined the production of weapons for money. This point brought prosperity since they could buy what they needed again. This prosperity would not last long because of the rise of migration of a huge number of people in the whole country. Migration created another struggle and discomfort and dislocation especially to cities of great factories where there was a production for war for both the new arrivals and older residents.¹⁷

Migration led also to severe problems in the society especially most of the workers left the country a matter that resulted in high rates of divorce, lack of houses to live in and shortages in hospitals to receive patients. Some cities had debts to pay a matter that caused a shortage in developing the infrastructure services. Those cities found a great difficulty in coping with increased number of people who migrated to them. The houses that had been dedicated to those who traveled from rural areas to urban ones were crowded and cramped with those inhabitants. This caused depression to them because they used to live in open areas not cramped as now. The education system

¹⁷Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A: America during World War II*. Edition: 2nd (Wheeling, IL.: Harlan Davidson, 2000), 28-29

could not deal with the great number of children who migrated with their families because of the lack of schools.¹⁸

As in the World War I, women could not find jobs easily because some jobs were restricted to men only. The working women had opportunities in retail trade and domestic service. They had been paid less than men. After the changes happened in 1940, the government that used to prevent women from working in defense firms because they lack physical strength, changed its attitude. There was an important propaganda that invited women to join the industry. The Office of War Information issued several messages to women stressing the excitement of working for good wages in a patriotic cause. The number of women rose from 14 million to 19 million in 1944 and women constituted 36 percent of the civilian workers.¹⁹ After getting other opportunities in military services, navy, government jobs and even in manufacturing, women witnessed a new era of development. This resulted in a discomfort in men attitude. They found these jobs would undermine women and give rise to a new class of masculine independent women. However, those who stood against the advance women take were worried about the changes

¹⁸ Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A: America during World War II*, 48

¹⁹ Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A: America during World War II*, 55-56

in the traditional roles and sexual order. Traditionally, men worked, and women stayed at home doing all the domestic work.

There were several important questions rose about this problem: If women joined jobs, who would fill their places in the house? Who would cook? Who would wash? Who would bring up and nurture the children?²⁰ Children and the reflections of employment of women also became a concern. Most working women had children under 10 years old. This would contrast with real of duty of women at home and taking care of their children. One of the important bureaus in USA declared that children under two years who did not receive satisfactory care would cause “slower mental development, social ineptness, weakened initiative, and damage to the child’s capacity... to form satisfactory relationships.”²¹

²⁰ Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A: America during World War II*, 58

²¹ Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A: America during World War II*

CHAPTER II
FRAMEWORK

II.1 Justification of this dissertation

The most important reason for choosing the title of the dissertation “Sociological Study in Selected works by Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy and Jonathan Franzen” is to highlight the role of the novel as a genre in introducing the most important and critical issues that the American society faces through a long period of time.

This importance lies in the fact that those novelists find in the writing the novel a wide scope to discuss the issues and themes that touch the spirit of American people with a large number of themes and characters representing the society. These issues are usually absent among the successful and bright side of United States of America that shows it as a dream for other nations to immigrate and live in it. The novels being discussed in this dissertation try to depict the ugly reality, the loss of paternity, failure of American culture, failure of American dream, violence, greed, courage, discrimination, industry vs. nature, non-nurturing mother, American identity and many more issues.

There are several American novelists who were interested in the social novel finding in it a good source to edify the society and reform it. Among those novelists; Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Harper Lee, and Ernest Hemingway.

II.2 Literature Review

The current study focuses on some social problems in the American society as they appear in the works of the American novelists Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, and Jonathan Franzen. A close reading about the subject, it appears that there were no previous studies to deal with those three novelists together. It is noteworthy that there are several studies either Master Theses or Ph. D. dissertations that dealt with the subject or other subjects or novelists individually, i.e., we can find studies that dealt with Philip Roth alone, Cormac McCarthy alone or Jonathan Franzen alone. Here are some titles of some previous studies.

In his Ph.D. dissertation in (2001) that is entitled "The distant pandemonium of the sun": the novels of Cormac McCarthy," from the University of Gasgow, Tiffany McKirdy studies themes that has a relationship with the society as well as some narratorial aspects in some of McCarthy's novels. He studies novels like *The Orchard Keeper*, *Blood Meridian*, *Border Trilogy*, *Child of God*, and *the Outer Dark*. He studies the representation of female in McCarthy's novels and the depiction of animal-as-female, prostitute, misogyny, female, supernatural elements, lessons on masculinity and the horror of both maternity and paternity. He focusses on "the

relationship between landscape, society and the individual” in addition to the notion of “family and its relationship to ‘society’, region and nation.”²²

In his thesis entitled “Dust, ash, and the sublime: Tracing Kant's aesthetics in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing* and *The Road*” from the university of South Florida, Ben Gredts studies two of McCarthy’s novels. He tries to follow the existence of the sublime in these two novels and the nature’s and religion’s relation to the sublime.

Eirik Sanne Hardersen in the M.A. thesis, *Dialogue in No Country for Old Men and The Road: A Look at Dialogue in Adaptations from University of Oslo*, studies dialogue, and its adaptation in those two novels and how they adopted in cinema. The theory the scholar follows focuses on understanding dialogue and putting it into the correct context. McCarthy’s novel does not have very much dialogue. There is an emphasis on the character of the Sheriff Ed. Tom Bell presented in first person narrator to explore his experiences in the past, his experiences in the present time and his contemplation about what he will do in the future. Hardersen finds that if there is a dialogue, it remains without any development. In other words, it is a way to saying all without

²² Tiffany McKirdy, "The distant pandemonium of the sun": the novels of Cormac McCarthy. PhD diss. (University of Gasgow, 2001).

saying too much.²³ Hardersen writes about *No Country for Old Men* and how the characters have a feeling of not fitting in as well as the impact of Vietnam war on the society:

No Country for Old Men may allude to the feeling of not fitting in, this for instance could easily fit for Bell who struggles with the role of being an old sheriff and experiencing new times. Time is moving too fast and perhaps even so fast that he does not want to keep up with it anymore. He prefers riding a horse in order to investigate instead of taking the car....

Another aspect is the connection that it has with many of the characters having served in the Vietnam War and the notion that people had difficulty adapting to a normal life afterwards.

Chigurh is another character the title hints at. He is an abnormality, a person that seems to be impossible to get hold of. Chigurh does not fit in with society as he works according to principles few others can understand.²⁴

In the Ph. D. dissertation, “It’s All in the Family—Metamodernism and the Contemporary (Anglo-) American Novel,” Terence DeToy studies Jonathan Franzen’s novel *Freedom* in one of the chapters of the dissertation.

Terence claims that there is a close and strong relationship between the family and politics in the 20th century America insisting on the idea that this dissertation would introduce a new form of anti-politics and how

²³ Eirik Sanne Hardersen, *Dialogue in No Country for Old Men and The Road: A Look at Dialogue in Adaptations*. M.A. Thesis. (University of Oslo, 2011), 28

²⁴ Eirik Sanne Hardersen, *Dialogue in No Country for Old Men and The Road: A Look at Dialogue in Adaptations*, 24

“contemporary novel reflects new social functions for that which has trumped the political.”²⁵ Terence finds that Franzen’s *Freedom* “involves a societal shift away from the agency of political action toward an engagement with culture. Such a shift complicates.... The political struggles of the 20th century.”²⁶ Terence finds that Franzen aims at a cultural turn. Terence insists on the fact the “emerging generation in *Freedom* is not some ruthless, cynical profit-driven force... on the contrary, the ethos of the young generation in one which would reconcile a ravenous entrepreneurial spirit with its own hopeful opposition.”²⁷

Jesús Blanco Hidalgo’s dissertation “The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen’s Fiction,” is very important study that appeared around the novels of Franzen. Blanco introduces a social study for the novel of Jonathan Franzen. The dissertation studies the early novels *The Twenty-Seventh City* and *Strong Motion* as well as later ones.

The dissertation shows or explains “the workings of economic and political power under Western capitalism... by the portrait of a city of St. Louis which

²⁵ Terence DeToy, “It’s All in the Family—Metamodernism and the Contemporary (Anglo-) American Novel,” PhD Diss. (Tufts University, 2015), ii

²⁶ Terence DeToy, “It’s All in the Family—Metamodernism and the Contemporary (Anglo-) American Novel,” 52

²⁷ Terence DeToy, “It’s All in the Family—Metamodernism and the Contemporary (Anglo-) American Novel,” 52

both real and symbolic.”²⁸ Franzen portrays this city as a symbol of decay and corruption that cannot be reformed or find a suitable remedy. The source of corruption is seen in “the privatizing forces of capitalism.”²⁹ The novel presents a “fatalistic view of an immobile bourgeois society.”³⁰ The end of the novel is considered a collapse because of the “triumph of social apathy” which forms a “depressing conclusion.” Franzen finds in his fiction “a way out of depression.”³¹ In his second novel, *Strong Motion*, Franzen shows the effect of capitalism on environment. Blanco finds that the novel “salvational perspectives” which become the main interest of Franzen in the coming works. The novel revolves around a destructive earthquake and the real causes behind it and how can this earthquake shake not only the earth but also the society.

II.3 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The social or sociological novel goes back to the movement of Realism and the rise of the novel as a literary genre in the 18th century during this movement. The novelists followed this movement to pick characters from real

²⁸ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, “The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Franzen’s Fiction,” PhD Diss. (Cordoba University, 2015), 10

²⁹ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, “The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Franzen’s Fiction,” 10

³⁰ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, “The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Franzen’s Fiction,” 10

³¹ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, “The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Franzen’s Fiction,” 10

life and introduce real themes as well. People in the 18th century refused to accept previous types of fiction because they did not represent their age. They wanted a kind of genre that introduce their life and problems and to find protagonist from real life.

The sociological novel or thesis novel is a novel, as Cuddon defines, that “treats of social, political or religious problem with a didactic and, perhaps, radical purpose.”³² In this sense the novel turns to become not only a way of giving entertainment to the readers but also to draw their attention to the defect of their societies. Cuddon also includes “utopian and dystopian visions in fictional form” to this type of the novel³³.

This kind of novel is sometimes called proletarian novel. It is a novel that deals with “working-classes” and their life to “point out poor economic conditions”.³⁴

The theory of analyzing the works of the three novelists in this dissertation is ‘Close Reading.’ The decision is taking after consulting my director because we find it is the suitable theory to discuss the title of the dissertation. It provides us a wide scope for dealing with text itself and find out the social issues that may be hidden within the text. It gives us the chance

³² J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (London: Clays Ltd, St Ives plc, 1999), 913

³³ J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 913

³⁴ J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 703

to explore psychological issues, family relationship even the structure and narrative techniques if needed.

Close reading is defined by J. A. Cuddon as a “detailed, balanced and rigorous critical examination of a text to discover its meanings and to assess its effect.”³⁵ This theory was first established by I. A. Richards in his books *The principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929). He gives some poems to his students in the university asking them to give their own comments and interpretations.³⁶

The theory provides a kind of “thorough textual support” for literary interpretations. It was the major method of analyzing and studying literary works for several decades because it was “a standard method of high school and college instruction in literary studies.”³⁷

II.4 Available Means and Material Resources

The main sources for the dissertation are the texts of the novels subject of study. As the method employed in the analysis, a close reading to the text would open a wide of scope of knowledge and help the scholar to find the issues and elements he is looking for. However, there are several other

³⁵ J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 142

³⁶ Richard Dutton, *An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Hong Kong: Longman Group Ltd, 1986), 69

³⁷ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A user-Friendly guide* (London: TJ International Ltd, Padstwo, Cornwall, 2015), 129

resources that deal with the works of three novelists. The close reading helps the scholar to deal with each novel individually even though there are no studies that study the three novelists together. The role of scholar here is to study them and find out the common elements they present. The first novelist is Philip Roth who is studied by Irving Howe indicating that Roth can be considered as a “cultural case”³⁸ because he is a social realist who devotes his writings to focus on the social issues or social experience in his society.

Derek Parker Royal finds that there is a kind of connection to America and this connectedness helps Philip Roth for introducing the national character in a successful treatment in his famous *American Trilogy*. This is clear in the portrayal of main character and its accomplishments as American in *American Pastoral*. The subject of America in Roth’s novels was clear from the very beginning of his novels. A real and close reading to his works, one realizes that “America as an idea, America as a promised land and America as a refuge” were considered important visions in Roth’s narrative. This led Roth to write about the individual within the context of history to focus on his main concern in the American society which is “identity.” American identity, for Philip Roth, is a “hostage to the many social, political, and cultural forces

³⁸ Irving Howe, "Philip Roth Reconsidered," in *Philip Roth*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986. 71-88.)

that surround it.”³⁹ Royal indicates that Roth’s *American Trilogy* revolves around three important periods of time that describe America after World war II. For *American Pastoral*, Roth covers the American society after killing President Kennedy and the “cultural turmoil of the 1960s”.⁴⁰ In *Human stain*, Roth covers the scandal of President Bill Clinton and its consequences on the political scene in 1998. Both novels, according to Royal, show that the main character adopts a new character which completely different from his real character. In *American Pastoral*, Seymour Levov is transformed to be the Swede and in *Human Stain*, Coleman Silk, who transforms himself into a white person, is turned to be Silky who dies as African American. Those two characters, the Swede and Silky, represent “national identity” and this identity is threatened by the forces of history to “overtake personal freedom and individual agency.”⁴¹ The protagonist of *Human Stain* becomes a victim of “the persecuting spirit” as it is called by Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁴²

Jung-Suk Hwang also studies Philip Roth’s fiction. In his essay "Newark's Just a Black Colony": Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, Hwang starts this essay with the interview of Roth with the French paper, Le

³⁹ Derek Parker Royal, *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author* (Praeger: Westport, CT. 2005) p.186.

⁴⁰ Derek Parker Royal, *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, 187

⁴¹ Derek Parker Royal, *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, 187

⁴² Derek Parker Royal, *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, 187

Figaro. When asked about September attacks and America lost its innocence, Roth answer was: “What innocence?” He attacked the brutal segregation in the society. He refused that the America had innocence before 11/9 attacks. He criticizes “Americans for their innocence--their ignorance and lack of historical awareness--and their perpetuation of an idealized vision of the nation.”⁴³ This interview shows how Roth deals and introduces *American Pastoral*. He claims that Black people or African American were real believers in the essence of the American Dream, but they were inhibited to follow it because of omnipresent racism. For Roth, African Americans are thus crucial for defining America, and *American Pastoral* addresses them in relation to the myth of the American Dream. When Roth decides to make Newark the setting of *American Pastoral*, he intends to show the racial and class divisions that exist between the city and its suburbs.

Roth also highlights the Newark riots happened in 1967 describing the city as a “black colony”. Roth introduces the way the protagonist lives in his wealthy suburb and the way poor people live. The African Americans remain exploited workers by exploitative capitalism and they are excluded from pastoral suburbs and the American Dream.⁴⁴

⁴³ Jung-Suk Hwang, “Newark's Just a Black Colony”: Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* Volume:64, issue:2. (June 2018), 161+

⁴⁴ Jung-Suk Hwang, “Newark's Just a Black Colony”: Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*,” 161+

Roth's works, as Hwang puts it, have dealt with issues of Jewish identity and their experience in America in the "historical and social scope" of *American Pastoral*.⁴⁵

The Jewish identity is also a subject for Ben Siegel in the book he edited that is entitled: *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels*. In his introductory essay for the book, Siegel emphasizes the notion that Roth makes use of strategies of narration to achieve "self-discovery and self-definition". These strategies have something to do with the question of "what it means to be a Jew?"⁴⁶

Timothy L. Parrish sees a kind of subjectivity in dealing with personal and cultural identity in Roth's fiction. Parrish points at Roth's dramatization of "what we might call the self's essential elusiveness" in his novel *American Pastoral*. Parrish claims that this novel "invokes the end of identity "running out of being" as a way of summoning death and acknowledging that, dispute endless resurrections"⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jung-Suk Hwang, "'Newark's Just a Black Colony': Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," 161+

⁴⁶ Ben Siegel, "Reading Philip Roth: Facts and Fancy, Fiction and Autobiography" in *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels*, eds. Jay L. Halio and Ben Siegel, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005), quoted in Salomon Willis, "Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels," *Philip Roth Studies* Volume: 1. Issue: 2 (Fall 2005), 175+

⁴⁷ Timothy Parrish, "The End of Identity: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Shofar* Volume: 19. Issue: 1. (Fall 2000), 84+

Andrew Gordon sees *American Pastoral* as a tragedy and is haunted with death. In his essay "The Critique of Utopia in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* and *American Pastoral*," Andrew Gordon remarks that "Roth paradoxically ends up clinging to certain pastoral ideals, contrasting the wonderful lost America of his Newark childhood in the 1940s to the fallen America of the 1960s and 1970s"⁴⁸, and the novel is "death-haunted"⁴⁹ and "structured like a tragedy"⁵⁰.

Bonnie Lyons also finds the elements of tragedy in Roth's later fiction. In her essay "Philip Roth's American Tragedies," she argues that there is a "purity purge"⁵¹ in the *Human Stain* by which Roth exposes the "shameless impurity of life"⁵².

Sarah Bylund discusses in her essay "Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*," the novel from another perspective. She finds out that there is a relationship between food and rebellious empowerment and secure the personality of the character from the

⁴⁸ Andrew Gordon, "The Critique of Utopia in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* and *American Pastoral*" in *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels*, eds. Jay L. Halio and Ben Siegel, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005), quoted in Salomon Willis, "Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels," *Philip Roth Studies* Volume: 1. Issue: 2, (Fall 2005), 175+

⁴⁹ Andrew Gordon, "The Critique of Utopia in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* and *American Pastoral*"

⁵⁰ Andrew Gordon, "The Critique of Utopia in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* and *American Pastoral*"

⁵¹ Bonnie Lyons, "Philip Roth's American Tragedies," in *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels*, eds. Jay L. Halio and Ben Siegel, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005), quoted in Salomon Willis, "Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels," *Philip Roth Studies* Volume: 1. Issue: 2, (Fall 2005), 175+

⁵² Bonnie Lyons, "Philip Roth's American Tragedies,"

“expectations and values of her family and later from those of society.”⁵³ Sarah claims this relationship (food and rebellious empowerment) gives “political authority.” This dietary system works as rejection against the American Dream. Starvation, for the female character in *American Pastoral* becomes a “mantle of physical transcendence.”⁵⁴

Carina Staudte discusses Philip Roth’s novels from the perspective of athleticism and masculinity. She finds out in the *American Trilogy*, Roth both glorifies sport and parodies it which is reflected clearly in his narrator. Roth makes use of athleticism as marker for masculinity to the extent that all male characters in his novels are athletics. The main character in *American Pastoral* represents strength and masculinity which is clear in neighborhood where all people like him. It is noteworthy that American culture idealizes the successful-hero and they usually compare the achievements made by athletic figures with that of successful life. By the tragic fall of the main protagonist, Roth demonstrates that even “athlete heroes are not immune of tragedy.”⁵⁵ This notion is also true for *The Human Stain*. The narrator in his novels finds this power not only in sport but also in a man’s build. It is clear with the main

⁵³ Sarah Bylund, “Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*”, *Philip Roth Studies*. Volume: 7, issue: 1 (2010): 13+.

⁵⁴ Sarah Bylund, “Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*, 13+”

⁵⁵ Carina Staudte, “Athleticism and Masculinity in Roth's American Trilogy and Exit Ghost” in *Philip Roth Studies*. Volume: 11. Issue: 2. (Purdue University Press. Provided by ProQuest LLC, 2015), 55+.

protagonist who shows his body one day to narrator-character. He describes the protagonist as a “youthful handsome older man.” What spoils this appearance is his emotions because they are unsuitable for his age. Carina finds out that protagonist of *Human Stain* restores his masculinity only in having love affair with a lady who is 34 years younger than him. For the narrator, athleticism should be “directly connected to the person's morality and mind.” The narrator finds out that physical prowess must be accompanied by moral strength.⁵⁶

Cormac McCarthy has also received a wide interest and his works also became subject of study for several scholars. In the essay “The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy,” Vince Brewton indicates that McCarthy becomes a subject of interest for the publication of his novel *All the Pretty Horses*. Vince claims that the writing of the first period of McCarthy’s life was concentrated on American military involvement in Vietnam war. In the *Border Trilogy*, McCarthy shifts his focus towards “the changing political and cultural landscape of America beginning in 1980s.”⁵⁷ His novels of the *Border Trilogy* become a very important cultural and influential part on the contemporary

⁵⁶ Carina Staudte, “Athleticism and Masculinity in Roth's American Trilogy and *Exit Ghost*,” 55+

⁵⁷ Vince Brewton, “The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the *Border Trilogy*,” *The Southern Literary Journal* Volume: 37. Issue: 1 (Fall 2004): 121+

time with the influence of the historical events as well as cultural attitudes. Hence, his novels depict the changes occurred in the political scene and a better understanding for the Border trilogy is to study them according to “their historical context.”⁵⁸ Hence, Brewton finds that McCarthy’s work was a product of a changing aesthetic of violence.⁵⁹ This violence have erupted because of the impact of two wars on the “cultural Terrain of McCarthy’s career.”⁶⁰

Matthew Potts discusses in his book about McCarthy signs of sacrament and some moral aspects in his stories. Potts finds that the novels of introduces some aspects of goodness in order to “instill a moral and ethical charge in the reader.”⁶¹ In addition to presenting some good and positive issues in McCarthy’s novels, Potts tries to find out some religious aspects as well. Potts thinks that these issues receive superficial study. Potts studies seven novels McCarthy one of them is *No Country for Old Men*. He follows

⁵⁸ Vince Brewton, “The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy,” 121+

⁵⁹ Vince Brewton, “The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy,” 121+

⁶⁰ Vince Brewton, “The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy,” 121+

⁶¹ Zachary Michael, “Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament: Literature, Theology, and the Moral of Stories,” *Cithara* Volume: 56. Issue: 2 (May 2017), 43+

the psychopathic characters and how they can impose their will on other characters.⁶²

Rick Elmore discusses McCarthy's novels from the point of view of anthropology. He finds that McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* shows the "emergence of new type of human being"⁶³ with no regret of the crimes he has committed and without any signs of humanity. This criminal killed a 14-years-old girl and when they asked after arresting him whether he regrets his crime he denies being regret. McCarthy makes a kind of resemblance between this criminal and the main character in his novel "Chigurh." The new type of human being comes as a result of "a large-scale change in economics."⁶⁴ The novel, as Elmore puts it, documents a very important period of time in 1980 with neoliberal reforms that witnessed "the convergence of economics and human nature, the emergence of a new kind of humanity arising from a shift in economic processes."⁶⁵ Elmore writes about his essay and how he would discuss the novel *No Country for Old Men* and its impact on the society:

we show how *No Country for Old Men* details the anthropology of neoliberalism both in the character of Chigurh and in its framing of the characters and narrative of the novel as a whole. In addition, we look at

⁶² Zachary Michael, "Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament: Literature, Theology, and the Moral of Stories," 43+

⁶³ Rick Elmore , "Human Become Coin: Neoliberalism, Anthropology, and Human Possibilities in No Country for Old Men," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* Volume: 14. Issue: 2, (January 1, 2016): 168+,

⁶⁴ Rick Elmore , "Human Become Coin: Neoliberalism, Anthropology, and Human Possibilities in No Country for Old Men," 168+,

⁶⁵ Rick Elmore , "Human Become Coin: Neoliberalism, Anthropology, and Human Possibilities in No Country for Old Men," 168+,

how the novel presents sites of resistance to this anthropology, particularly how it challenges neoliberalism's claim that society as it currently exists is the necessary and natural outcome of our "competitive" human nature.⁶⁶

Although studies about Jonathan Franzen are not as much as that for Roth or McCarthy, still there are some important studies and books and reviews wrote about him. Gerhard Hoffmann discusses the novels of Jonathan Franzen according to post modern novel and how he manages to establish his name as novelist of this period. Hoffmann quotes what one of Franzen's colleague and friend whose name is Jeffrey Eugenides. He describes Franzen as a "postpostmodernist". Jeffrey insists on the idea that he and Franzen both "grew up backwards". He says that to tell our stories we first deconstruct them which shown in later novels which are told in a "more sober and temperate way"⁶⁷ Hoffmann finds that Franzen and his colleague make their experiment in writing the novel as a convention. They introduce "a contraction of the social scene... which is extended into wider social analyses and social criticism converging on the topical vices of the time and extending the geographical scope they collect."⁶⁸ In *The Corrections* (2001), Franzen

⁶⁶ Rick Elmore , "Human Become Coin: Neoliberalism, Anthropology, and Human Possibilities in No Country for Old Men," 168+,

⁶⁷ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 647

⁶⁸ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, 647

focuses on “a dysfunctional Midwestern family.” The source of this dysfunction comes not only from outside the family but also from within or what Hoffmann calls “inner dilemmas.” These dilemmas springs from “moral disorientation and existential problems.”⁶⁹

Hoffmann also sheds light on Franzen’s first novel *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988). The main concern here is St. Louis administration as well as the life of its people. Franzen stresses on the plots that destroy the whole city such conspiracy, rivalry and violence that happen because the new project the administration try to impose. Hoffmann finds in the conspiracy story a good feature of postmodernism and gives the novel some aspects of “a thriller and a seriocomic perspective on its realist base.”⁷⁰ The victim of this new project, of changing the chief of the police, as well as conspiracies and the terror result from them is the family of Probst. This gives the reader a notion that this novel is implicitly a novel of a family. This adds to the development of American novel during the 1990s whose main concern is the family and all the plot and setting revolve around the story of the family.

⁶⁹ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, 647

⁷⁰ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, 646

If the family becomes the victim of such project in the 1990s then it represents the decay of order.⁷¹

II.5 Research Questions

The three novelists cover in their novels a long period of time starting from the sixties to the beginning of twenty first century. The first chapter studies Philip Roth novels *American Pastoral* and *Human Stain*. There are some social issues in those two novels that have a great impact on the American society. Roth himself arouse some important questions in his works. In the first novel *American Pastoral* Roth asks at the end:

- what insidious disease so infected the American middle-class culture that it could cause such terrible destruction?
- What does life look like in USA during the Vietnam War?
- What does the novel say about World War II and life in America at the end of the war?
- Is the novel *American Pastoral* an antiwar novel?

⁷¹ Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, 646

A detailed study of the novel shows that these questions are not enough to the readers since there are other important questions that may not have an answer through the text itself. The questions that may arouse concentrate on some critical issues that the novelist imply in his text. Some developed questions may be as follows:

- Is the child a victim of the success of his parents?
- Is standing against the will of one's parents in taking personal decisions a crime?
- does the American Dream prove its failure?

However, in *The Human Stain* Roth introduces many ironies that pervade the novel. It deals with difficult questions concerning the participation in wars, discrimination and finally the search for one's identity.

- Who you are and how to know one's identity?
- What if someone denies his parents? Does it have something to do with his own heritage and origin?

The third chapter deals with two novels by Cormac McCarthy (1933), there are some themes or questions in his two novels *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) which deals with themes of evil inside man, courage, and nostalgia for a past, where style of life was simple. McCarthy makes use of the protagonist

to arouse some important questions that the reader confronts in reading the novels and recognizes these issues in the society. Such questions are:

- What urges evil inside man?
- How can a man face the capacity for violence inside him?
- Is nostalgia for past a good way to face the ugly reality?
- Does industry and oil production kill simplicity of pastoral life?

In *No Country for Old Men* (2005), McCarthy writes about violence, murder, greed, drugs, and coldhearted villainy. The novelist tries to arouse some questions that represent

- Is true that no one can stand against these negative issues?
- Does participation in American wars transform war to civil life?
- The important question about war here is: When vets come back home from war, will they bring with them the violence they experienced there?

In the chapter that is devoted to Jonathan Franzen (1955), there are some social issues in his two novels *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988) and *Strong Motion* (1992).

In *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), Franzen introduces a political thriller that deals with many issues of the 1980's, including:

- What is the impact of urban crimes on the life of people?
- What are the reasons behind the movement of residents to the suburbs?
- what is impact of terrorism on the American society.
- How does the foreign investment and ownership in American companies and real estate create a kind of fear among people?

Strong Motion focuses on the questions about the natural catastrophes society witnesses and whether that they are not acts of God but instead they are created by Man in his search for oil and other materials? People start to enquire about their ugly reality and the issues they face in their daily life. On the one hand the anti-abortion activists find that it is the wrath of God against the crime of abortion. On the other hand, readers discover that man contributes to these natural catastrophes by injecting chemical substances into earth.

- It also deals with some aspects of life concerning the reticent new generation whose values are impossible for their elders to fathom.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AMERICAN ISSUES IN PHILIP ROTH'S

AMERICAN PASTORAL AND HUMAN STAIN

III. 1. Philip Roth: An Introduction

Philip Roth was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1933. He was a social realist who refused to admit that there were no hopeful aspects in the horizon of American life. For Irving Howe, Roth was not only an interesting writer but also a “cultural case.”⁷² He was attracted by the various forces of the American society. This made him a spokesman for a growing sense of impotence, outrage, and disgust felt by American people who looked at the Vietnam War, World War II, corruption, vulgarities of their public life, and any other war or scandal with repulsion. American people would identify themselves in Roth’s works and recognize him as the most important writer in the last decade of the century. They believe that there was no other living American novelist who succeeded in portraying the destructive elements in American society⁷³. Most of his novels dealt with some thematic issues such as an individual’s search for identity, the effect of American culture on self-realization, and the relationship between art and life. These issues were mixed with dark humour which would usually come in outrageous satires offering an insight into the foibles of American life. John Gardner sums up Roth’s talent in saying that he was a novelist in need to be dealt with seriously: "on

⁷² Irving Howe, "Philip Roth Reconsidered," in *Philip Roth*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986. 71-88.)

⁷³ John N. McDaniel, *The Fiction of Philip Roth* (Haddonfield House. 1974), p.243

good terms with the hunchbacked muse of the outrageous"⁷⁴. There were several important social issues that formed the American society. Among those issues were Civil War, World War I and II, racism, ethnicity, identity, American Dream, family relationship, riots, and the impact of war on the individual. Racism was an issue that became a source of debate and argument. Ethnicity and color determined the personal identity of an individual. It created a struggle between white and black communities. Throughout the 20th century, black people became a subject of discrimination because of the harsh American system that ensured that the community remained underprivileged. Hence, racism was a dangerous issue that played a vital role in the identity of one's personality. This issue led to various civil movements that affected the very existence of the community in the country. It led to the emergence of charismatic leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King who advocated for equality within the society. Philip Roth's books *American Pastoral* (1997) and *Human Stain* (2000) discuss these issues in a wider perspective.

The civil war proved to be a disastrous occurrence that affected American society in a negative way. Numerous losses were recorded on each side; and this played a relevant role in changing the public perception of the

⁷⁴ John Gardner, in *The New York Times Book Review* (1972). p. 3.

United States Army as well as proving the military might of the United States in terms of combating off its enemies and dealing with them⁷⁵. The United States managed to maintain its position as the superpower through various initiatives.

The Vietnam War is an event that took place during the mid-20th century with an effective participation of the United States. The cold war was the contributing factor. Russia funded northern Vietnams during the war. This action foresaw a significant loss of human lives on both sides. The events affected the country as it cost the United States a lot of finances to fund a war⁷⁶. It soon led to the public outcry against the spread of the war on the region. The reason behind the war was based on communist and capitalists' ideologies that seemed to affect the American community in a negative way. A record of the events is related in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*.

⁷⁵ P. Hitchens, *The phoney victory: The world war II illusion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

⁷⁶ K. Marlantes, *Matterhorn: A novel of the Vietnam war* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010) .

III. 2. Social issues in *American Pastoral*

III.2.1. Impact of War

Roth begins his novel *American Pastoral* by explaining the unpopularity of the Vietnam War. At first, many people were drafted to the army to participate in the war. The government found it an easy task the country would overcome over a short period. However, the war took longer than expected leading to huge government expenditure on the military forces.

III.2.2. American Dream

The indication of the title has very important significance in the novel. "Pastoral" may simply mean rural life, but it has a symbolic meaning too. *American pastoral* refers to "notions of an idealized America, innocent and uncomplicated by contradictions or ambiguities" which may be in "the form of references to a simple agrarian society, American exceptionalism, a historical reading of race, and of course the 'American Dream' in all of its manifestations"⁷⁷. Jung-Suk Hwang notices that the myth of the *American Pastoral* can refer to "the national ideals and identity that coincided with the ideologies underlying the nation's founding: a new, previously unmapped

⁷⁷ Derek Parker Royal, *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author* (Praeger: Westport, CT. 2005) p.204.

space was to be a home for Americans, who could achieve the American Dream.”⁷⁸ To achieve this idealized vision, America must overcome “contradictions and ambiguities”: territorial wars, slavery, and the violence it employed to destroy a land inhabited by “indigenous people”. Although the main goals of the American Dream are to establish a successful life by offering equal opportunity for all people and enhancing social and economic life making use of the individual will and hardworking, it excluded certain American people such as women, Native Americans, and enslaved ones. These continuing struggles among groups of American society “point to the continuing privilege of whiteness and the structural barriers embedded in the American Dream.”⁷⁹

The protagonist of *American Pastoral* Seymour Levov “Swede” is an Upsala College graduate. From his early years, the Swede has been shown as a man of great will and power who wants to be different from others. When he has graduated in 1945 from high school, he joined the Marine Corp. There were rumours that his parents preferred to make him join the navy instead because they were afraid of "notorious Marine Corp anti-Semitism."⁸⁰ The

⁷⁸ Jung-Suk Hwang, “Newark’s Just a Black Colony”: Race in Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*,” *Twentieth Century Literature*. 64:2. (2018).

⁷⁹ Jung-Suk Hwang, “Newark’s Just a Black Colony”: Race in Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*,” p.

⁸⁰ Philip Roth, *American pastoral* (London: Vintage, 1997), p.14. Any other quotation is taken from this edition and referred to as A.P.

Swede in his turn, insisted on joining the Marine Corp because he preferred to be among "the toughest of the tough." (A.P., 14). He was in his basic training when the war has ended, and thus he did not participate in the war at all. The Swede represented the "third-generation inheritor of the American Dream"⁸¹ for his blue eyes, his blond hair, his athlete stature and his success in life and business. He was an important player in the school teams of football, basketball, and baseball. Whenever the Swede was on the team, they would never care for winning or losing. For all of these characteristics of the Swede, his neighbourhood "enter into fantasy about itself" (A.P., 3). This gave a very important role for sport since it could help people forget their "real life" and practice sport instead. Hence, sport became a way for his neighbourhood to "forget the war" (A.P., 4). The swede gave hope for his neighbours in that they thought people fighting in the war abroad or in World War II would come back again alive to their homes. He became a "symbol of hope" to his Newark neighbourhood:

Through the Swede, the neighborhood entered into a fantasy about itself and about the world, the fantasy of sports fans everywhere: almost like Gentiles (as they imagined Gentiles), our families could forget the way things actually work and make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes. (A.P., 3-4)

⁸¹ Sarah Bylund, "Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*", *Philip Roth Studies* Volume:6, issue:1 (2010).

The exaggeration goes on when the narrator observes that "Swede Levov! It rhymes with... "The Love!" all the neighbourhood respected the Swede and they were never rude to him. Young girls called him "Levov of my life!" (A.P., 5) Dale Pattison described the Swede as "a projection of American identity and, specifically, American political innocence."⁸²

During his study years at Upsala, the Swede met and fell in love with a beauty queen, Mary Dawn Dwyer, though she did not win the crown. Swede's father reluctantly allowed for his son's wedding to Mary who came from an Irish American working-class family; and Roth referred to her as "Shiksa" which was used either for a humorous effect or derogatorily. This term referred also to non-Jewish women. Some Jews like the Swede's father refuse to accept such wives for their children. This shows the division in the American society. Roth explores the American identity through his talent of narration that disintegrated myths and symbols to give a remedy for the wounds of time. The narrator in *American Pastoral*, Nathan Zuckerman, follows this illusion of myth trying to understand the myth of his nation through an American who could be a representative for it. Zuckerman presents

⁸² Dale Pattison, "Writing Home: Domestic Space, Narrative Production, and the Homeland in Roth's *American Pastoral*", in *Twentieth Century Literature*. 60:2 (2014).

an idealistic vision of the Swede from his childhood with his fair complexion and athletic prowess⁸³.

Swede witnessed success as he follows his father's flourishing glove-making business in the 1960's; settles with his wife and daughter, Meredith ("Merry"), in an old house in suburban Morris County (Old Rimrock) in which he and his wife decides to raise cattle.

In presenting Swede's life as a tale of American success, Zukerman made use of this tale to be "a mythic vehicle for a teleological narrative"⁸⁴ to reproduce future from the past and create a utopic synthesis:

..the anticipated American future that was simply to have unrolled out of the solid American past... out of each new generation's breaking away from the parochialism a little further, out of the desire to go the limit in America with your rights, forming yourself as an ideal person who gets rid of the traditional Jewish habits and attitudes, who frees himself of the pre-American in-securities and the old, constraining obsessions so as to live unapologetically as an equal among equals. (A.P., 85)

Roth was interested in describing the changes in American life and its attitudes between the 1960s and 1980s. He described the 1960s as "demythologizing decade" saying that "the very nature of American things yielded and collapsed overnight"⁸⁵. He was looking at the sixties of the

⁸³ Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Mourning the "Greatest Generation": Myth and History" in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. *Twentieth Century Literature*. 51:1 (2005).

⁸⁴ Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Mourning the "Greatest Generation": Myth and History" in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. *Twentieth Century Literature* Volume:51, issue:1 (2005).

⁸⁵ Philip Roth, "On The Great American Novel," in *Reading Myself and Others*, 65-80. (New York: Vintage, 1975) p.90.

previous century in terms of Cold War and World War II as a “struggle between the benign national myth.... and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly demonic reality ... that will not give an inch on behalf of that idealized mythology”⁸⁶. Roth or his narrator Zukerman seem to reconsider that period of the 1960s after twenty years. Swede Levov was described as “fettered to history” during the climax of US Cold War hegemony--between World War II and the Vietnam War. He was introduced as a true believer in "the benign national myth" of the American pastoral which was contrasted with his daughter Merry, a militant radical who joined antiwar movements. Roth described her as the "counter pastoral" impulse or the "demonic reality."

Merry is considered the "anarchic center of the novel"⁸⁷ and she represents a "postmodern horror". She obliges the Swede to face the falsity of his assimilated self. According to Parrish, “the postmodern is a threat to stable cultural identities.”⁸⁸ This horror shatters the happy pastoral life of her father by Merry’s stuttering. Although her stuttering is symbolic, it seems that it also motivates her rebellious teenage character, that pushes her in 1968 to bomb the village store and post office killing a physician, Dr. Fred Conlon, as a result of the bombing. Merry becomes a fugitive, going underground for five

⁸⁶ Philip Roth, "On The Great American Novel," in *Reading Myself and Others*, 90.

⁸⁷ Timothy Parrish, “The End of Identity: Philip Roth’s Jewish *American Pastoral*,” in *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth’s Later Novels*. eds. Jay L. Halio and Ben Siegel, (New Jersey: Delaware UP, 2005) p.91.

⁸⁸ Timothy Parrish, “The End of Identity: Philip Roth’s Jewish *American Pastoral*,” p.93.

years during which, she keeps on bombings causing the death of more people, as she tells her shocked father when he finds her living in a poor side of Newark. In this part of her life, she becomes Jain covering her face with a veil. She refuses to eat, and she never washes her body. Alongside with this calamity of his daughter, Swede's wife decides to leave him and the cattle business. This represents the end of American pastoral life, which means the end of the American Dream.

III.2.3. Stuttering

Merry finds herself in between her successful parents. She seems to feel jealous of the successful life of her parents and whether she can become just like them one day. She finds herself attached sexually to her father. She tries to be like her mother a beauty queen and to have a man like her father. One day while they are coming back from the beach, Merry "half innocently and half audaciously" says, "Daddy, kiss me the way you k-k-kiss umumumother." (A.P., 89) The Swede makes fun of her stuttering and he hurts her feelings saying "N-n-o" (A.P., 90). When he realizes that she is so hurt he holds her and kisses her passionately. He becomes frightened because this is the first time he surrenders to such strange urge. He thinks this urge is not serious since it lasts for a few second and he decides it will never happen again. As a result,

the Swede thinks if it is better to be cold with his daughter and to distant himself from her in order not to do it again. Although he wants to help her to feel better, unfortunately, he gives her the feeling that she is an unloved girl and rejected. When Merry starts losing control, he starts thinking about the reason behind it and whether it is that moment of the kiss that turns everything bad. He wonders about the reasons behind his fall: "So, if it wasn't the kiss, what?" (A.P.) When Merry comes back to Newark after she has been raped, Swede vomits on her and flees, imagining himself one of her rapists instead of getting her out of the filthy pit she lives in. Swede realizes that he has betrayed his daughter. First by telling others her location and secondly revealing her crimes to them causing her arrest by the police.

Merry's mother, too, presses on her severely to make her overcome stuttering. For Merry stuttering is not a problem at all, but the big problem is the way her mother looks at it and feels it. She tries to be a daughter of her successful parents. She joins ballet lessons and goes to speech therapy twice a week. When she goes to her psychiatrist, she goes riding her bike. Her speech therapist suggests keeping a "stuttering diary" (A.P., 98) to record her stuttering. It is a neat and tidy record. She writes down when and where she stutters, and what words and letters she stutters over. But with all these procedures, she cannot manage to stop her stuttering and she struggles to

communicate with others. The Swede thinks that Merry uses her stuttering to manipulate her parents but the psychiatrist tells him that this stuttering happens because he and his wife are successful people and have good looking which put Merry on pressure to make her work hard to become successful too and she stutters to control them. The Swede indicates that she stutters because "her brain is so quick, so much quicker than her tongue—" (A.P., 97)

Merry's involvement in anti-war movement starts in the 1960s. She is an anti-American radical girl who refuses to enjoy her family wealth. She is fascinated by anti-capitalist groups, finding herself planting deadly bombs which cause the murder of four people in rejection to Vietnam war; and Jerry, her uncle, calls her "Ho-Chi-Minhite" (A.P., 69) in reference to the founder and president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Jerry makes use of this term negatively, referring to an American who sympathizes with Minh during the Vietnam War which seems odd at that time.⁸⁹ Merry has insisted to expose America's political life and show the world its crimes. She finds herself between consumption and autonomy, or "palate and power" to expose the pastoralism of the "bourgeoisie American dream"⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ Sarah Bylund, "Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*".

⁹⁰ Sarah Bylund, "Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*".

Merry's stuttering has a symbolic significance. If stuttering stands completely against fluency, then Merry's stuttering reflects the fluency of the late 1960s when "American life has been cursed with a stutter."⁹¹ The Swede realizes that there is no fluency anywhere, "it was all stuttering" (A.P., 93) the pastoral enclave he creates for his family cannot make him escape "divisive differences". Jerry puts it clear about the Swede and his dream of getting a pastoral life: "my brother thought he could take his family out of human confusion" (A.P., 68) When Merry blows his life up, it seems that "the daughter and the decade blasting to smithereens his particular form of utopian thinking" (A.P., 86). The time he spends to create his Utopian pastoral realm now proves illusory "for history reveals itself as a complex network of economic, social, and political factors, a "mystery" full of "human confusion and 'stuttering'"⁹².

By bombing the post office, according to her uncle Jerry, Merry decides "to pay everybody back for her stuttering" (A.P., 76). When she joins the terrorist group at the commune Merry learns how to produce bombs. Ironically, this act makes the stuttering disappear. Sarah J. Fodor points out a very important issue in Merry's case. Although her father does his best to

⁹¹ Louis Menand. "The Irony and the Ecstasy," in *New Yorker*, LXXIII:12, (1997), pp. 88, 90-4.)

⁹² Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Mourning the "Greatest Generation": Myth and History" in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. *Twentieth Century Literature*. 51:1 (2005).

enjoy a good and happy life in an expensive suburb, Merry “develops from elfin companion to tormented stutterer, from anti-war protester to underground terrorist and bomb-throwing killer of innocent civilians.”⁹³

III.2.4. Parents-children relationship

This act of bombing makes Swede’s father stop and contemplate it carefully and wondering "what the hell happened to our smart Jewish kids?" Swede's father asks. "They have parents they can't hate anymore because their parents are so good to them, so they hate America instead." According to Louis Menand, there are two important questions which do not have answers for thirty years in *American Pastoral*: hating one’s parents and blowing buildings. This makes the reader wonder about the way Roth depicts the 1960s. This period seems to tear the American fabric which is clear in the question the novel raises: “Did children really love their parents so much better in older, whiter, more orderly Newark? Roth's social history, for all its heat, is curiously cranky and thin.”⁹⁴

Although Merry’s political actions are harmful and cause death of innocent people, they seem have nothing to do with politics. Marshall Bruce

⁹³ Sarah J. Fodor. “A Review of American Pastoral”, in *Christian Century*. (1997), pp. 1202-03.

⁹⁴ Louis Menand. "The Irony and the Ecstasy," pp. 88, 90-4.)

notes that her actions are “desperate attempts” to establish a life far away from the life her father creates for her. She realizes that her father’s dream house is a place only to escape reality. She complains that her father never acknowledges her as a person outside his dream. Merry expresses her own feelings and attitude saying that "I don't want to be understood - I want to be f-f-f-free!" (A.P., 107). She is transformed from a teenage to an adult who prefers her father's hatred to his love. There is a distinction here between the real self and fantasy. Hatred becomes a feeling for her real self: she tells her father: "I am the abomination. Abhor me" (A.P., 248). When Merry transforms herself into a Jain, she gives her father his own medicine⁹⁵.

Merry becomes the cause of her father failure. All he has done vanished, looking for his lost daughter blaming himself for what she has become. Zukerman thinks that Merry is "the daughter who transports the Swede out of the longed for American pastoral and [...] into the indigenous American berserk" (A.P., 86) When the song “Dream” is playing, Zukerman is thinking about the Swede. He says, "I am thinking of the Swede's great fall and of how he must have imagined that it was founded on some failure of his

⁹⁵ Marshall Bruce Gentry, “Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth's American Pastoral,” *Shofar* Volme:19, issue:1. (2000). 74+.

own responsibility. [...] It doesn't matter if he was the cause of anything. He makes himself responsible" (A. P., 88)

Merry's stuttering as well as her political and radical actions become the punishment the Swede receives for his negligence of American Jewish heritage. It is "in itself a product of the rootless and largely rule-free upbringing the Swede provides for her."⁹⁶ When the Swede rejects his ethnic heritage by insisting on marrying a Shiksa, it becomes an act against his father's will and has its consequences on his life as well as his "pastoral" dream. He starts contemplating Merry's violence and reconsider it with his own decision to challenge his father and marry a Catholic woman. Moreover, the Swede recalls the "secret baptism" (A.P., 390) that his daughter has received against his father's strict orders. Although it is a part of superstition, Swede now believes that it is that moment that is responsible for his family's plight: "perhaps everything bad that ever happened to Merry, not excluding the worst thing that happened to her, had originated then and there" (A.P., 390). This belief becomes symbolic in the repetition of history: Swede's refusal of the law of his father is repeated when he loses paternal authority on his daughter.

⁹⁶ Alex Hobbs, "Reading the Body in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*", *Philip Roth Studies* Volume:6, issue: 1 (2010). 69+.

Timothy Parrish finds that the loss of paternity by Swede's refusal to follow his father's advice causes the plight he has suffered after losing his daughter. For Parrish, both the Swede and Merry are shown "as hopelessly stranded" from the historical identity that originates from his Jewish father.⁹⁷

III.2.5. White-Black Struggle

Among other social issues is the struggle between the white and black people. Although the main narrative focuses on Merry's radical behaviour and how it affects her father ideal home, it also refers to the setting of the novel: Newark Maid where the riots of 1967 happen and influence the whole country. Roth does not write only about Jews or America during 1960s but he also "addresses America's larger racial issues."⁹⁸ Newark has its own deep history in American society. It has witnessed the war of 1812 and suffered during the Civil War. Newark has had its own share of the mass immigrations especially the black migration from the South to the North. It has suffered through the postindustrial decline among American cities. It has been a miserable and sad city by its crumbling buildings, streets and neighborhood. Middle class people have decided to flee to other directions. It has had a majority of black people

⁹⁷ Timothy Parrish, "The End of Identity: Philip Roth's *Jewish American Pastoral*," p.93.

⁹⁸ Jung-Suk Hwang, "Newark's Just a Black Colony": Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," in *Twentieth Century Literature*. 64:2. (2018).

who have hoped to leave the city fleeing the despairing circumstances they have lived.⁹⁹ (Michael Kimmage, 2012)

Leslie Fiedler describes the city's historical emptiness in an essay published in 1959. Fiedler writes:

It was at once depressing to live in a place which we came slowly to realize did not exist at all for the imagination. That Newark was nowhere, no one of us could doubt, though it was all most of us knew. What history the city possessed had been played out before our parents or grandparents were a part of it, and we did not even trouble to tell ourselves that we disbelieved it.¹⁰⁰

Contrary to Fiedler's notion that there are no writers for Newark, Philip Roth writes novels and stories "firmly grounded in sociological fact". He writes about the city he grew up in "choosing it again and again as the setting for his novels."¹⁰¹

In *American Pastoral*, Roth stands against the question he receives about the events of September 2001 and whether USA has lost its innocence after it? Roth rejects this notion asking: "What innocence? From 1668 to 1865 this country had slavery; and from 1865 to 1955 was a society existing under

⁹⁹ Michael Kimmage, *In History's Grip: Philip Roth's Newark Trilogy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012). P.2

¹⁰⁰ Michael Kimmage, *In History's Grip: Philip Roth's Newark Trilogy*, p.2

¹⁰¹ Michael Kimmage, *In History's Grip: Philip Roth's Newark Trilogy*, p.3.

a brutal segregation. I don't really know what these people are talking about"¹⁰².

By choosing Newark as the setting for his novel, showing the changes in the way of introducing African Americans from the 1940s to the 1990s, and underrepresentation of their voices, Roth challenges the Swede's innocence, as well as the nation's innocence. It is a criticism on the “insistence on American innocence--the ignorance of racial history and reality--and the idealized vision of America despite the antipastoral reality lived by African Americans.”¹⁰³

This notion brings to one's mind American racial history which is associated with Black America. The emphasis lies on the American Dream. African Americans are "faithful dreamers of the American dream" but deliberately prevented from enjoying that dream and fulfil it because of racial discrimination. According to Jung-Suk Hwang, African Americans are important for Roth to define “America, and *American Pastoral* addresses them in relation to the myth of the American Dream and "what kind of country America really is"¹⁰⁴. By portraying the Swede as a blond guy with blue eyes

¹⁰² Sam Leith, "Philip Roth Attacks 'Orgy of Narcissism': Post Sept. 11." [Daily Telegraph](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/4792421/Philip-Roth-attacks-orgy-of-narcissism-post-Sept-11.html), 5 October, 2002.

¹⁰³ Jung-Suk Hwang, "Newark's Just a Black Colony": Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*,"

¹⁰⁴ Jung-Suk Hwang, "Newark's Just a Black Colony": Race in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*,"

and athlete body, Roth seems to deprive African American from enjoying the privileges of the American Dream. It is a Dream for the white people.

The Swede describes Newark saying that it is full of black people who form gangs to terrorize other people in the neighborhood by stealing their cars. Swede's father Lou Levov shows his points of view on Newark in the 1960s. He says that racial tensions are just "the icing on the cake", after the decline of businesses because of high taxes. He says that the racial tension happens because of the "financial dire" and because of the lack of money for public services which has left Newark for ruins. Lou also predicts that "Newark will be the city that never comes back" (A.P., 345). For Swede, Newark "used to be the city where they manufactured everything. Now it's the car theft capital of the world." (A.P., 24).

The decline that happens in work ethic is associated with "prejudicial images of race" in *American Pastoral*. Lou keeps on belittling the black workforce that works instead of the immigrant workers saying that "nobody is doing a day's work and nobody is doing it right" (A. P., 163). Swede describes the black workers as "people who are careless" (A.P., 218). They are nothing in craftsmanship: "the beating we're taking from black people who care nothing any longer about the quality of my product... people who've got me over a barrel because they know there's nobody trainable left in

Newark to replace them” (A.P., 218). Although Swede accuses them of being nothing and they are not faithful for their work, Roth suggests that the African-American workers at Newark Maid are exploited and considered a source of getting cheap workers.

In a discussion with Angela Davis about communism, she tells him that "everything he's heard about Communism is a lie" (A. P., 192) adding that “imperialism is a weapon used by wealthy whites to pay black workers less for their work" (A. P., 192). The Swede tells her about Vicky and how, though she is black, he doesn't exploit her. During the time of 1967 riots, Vicky does not leave the Swede and put up signs in the windows of the factory saying "Most of this factory's employees are negroes" (A.P., 195).

The African Americans represent “a counter reality to the Swede's narrative.” Roth underrepresents their voices. The voice he gives to Vicky is weak and it is clear in the few words she utters. This underrepresentation is used by Roth to represent America critically and “the larger concern with race relations in the United States.” In his description of the setting of the novel, Roth tries to highlight “the American pastoral myth and the myth of the American Dream: the exclusion of African Americans, the racial and class divisions, and exploitative capitalism.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Jung-Suk Hwang, "Newark's Just a Black Colony": Race in Philip Roth's American Pastoral,”

The benign relationship between Swede and his African-American workers represents a significant counter to his daughter argument that “Newark’s just a black colony for my own father” (A. P., 165). This is clear when the riots come to an end, the Swede decides to remain in Newark. He thinks if he leaves, Merry will accuse him of hurting his black employees.

III. 3. Social Issued in *Human Stain*

The novel highlights how racism is a key matter of concern in the community and how it gives identity to a person. The main concern that the book revolves on is the discovery that Coleman Silk, the main protagonist, is an African American. The matter creates irony because he is identified as a white person throughout his life. The desire to operate freely as a white person drives him to continue acting like a real white person. It clearly explains that racism and ethnicity play a vital part in the identification of the personality of an individual within society. The ethnicity of Coleman, alongside with other characters, is a key issue in the novel as it affects his relations, prompting him to pretend to be of different descent.

In the *Human Stain* (2000), Roth introduces many ironies and several social issues that pervade the novel. It deals with one's identity as well as the denial of parents and children which are important problems to deal with. In denying his parents, Coleman Silk denies his heritage and origin. To the end of *Human Stain*, Roth puts it clear that a man who tries to change his history will become a victim of the same history:

"The man who decides to forge a distinct historical identity, who sets out to spring the historical lock, and who does so, brilliantly succeeds at altering his personal lot, only to be ensnared by the history he hadn't quite counted on"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Philip Roth, *The human stain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p.335. Any other quotation is taken from this edition and referred to as H.S.

The novel takes the year 1998 as a beginning, the year that has witnessed the scandal of the president Bill Clinton (42nd president from 1993-2001 and was born in 1946) with a young woman of twenty years old. The scandal that pulls the attention of people from the challenge of terrorism – the big threat at that time. Roth indicates that this scandal has happened after a long time from the last scandal of a model who has decided to leave her job. Roth refuses to deal with this scandal as mere adultery. He demands to apply the punishment of twelfth century following the law of Canon Abelard (Human Stain). This scandal has caused a debate in the United States of America that brings to the mind Hawthorne's ideas (of Puritanism). This scandal has its symbolic significance to the whole novel and has a parallel between Clinton and Silk.

III. 3.1 Identity

Coleman Silk is a man of African American roots who passes as a Jew since he was eighteen. He claims his new racial identity to join the navy, to have a good opportunity in education better than Howard University, to enjoy his life and marry white woman who refuses him when she knows he is black. He cuts all ties with his family and chooses the whitest field of study. He is a

man haunted by a decision he must take to change his life. In fact, he decides to "reinvent his racial identity in search of individuality and freedom."¹⁰⁷

The discrimination that exists in the American society during the time pushes Coleman to find out a different identity in his life. It is evident that his identification as a white person would give him a high societal status. The discrimination against the black community during the period affects the way people relate to one another. These representations push him to escape to New York and accompany local Jewish students who whitewash him. He is afraid of revealing his real complexion when he starts dating a white girl. When he is obliged to introduce this girl to his mother, the relationship ends because of the revelation of his black identity. When he has another chance to establish a new family and marries a Jewish woman, he decides to leave his own family saying that his parents are dead. In the final meeting with his mother, she tells him "You're as white as snow... and you think like a slave." (H. S., 139)

Proper evaluation measures describe that his life is much better when he continues living as a white person. As in the case of *American Pastoral*, Nathan Zukerman appears as a character in the novel and is the supposed author that Coleman Silk asks to write his story. Zukerman discovers that the

¹⁰⁷ Kimberly Cooper Plaszewski, 'Human Stain's' lessons about U.S. assimilation. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-nov-17-et-counterpunch17-story.html> (2013) (Retrieved on 21/11/2018)

professor is an African American after his death. It illustrates how important his secret is in his life. It leads him to live a completely different life. It is evident that the way in which people treat white people is different from how black people are treated.

Hence, Coleman becomes a man of a perfect reputation as a good lecturer but the issue he faces unknowingly ruins his career completely (H.S., 45). This issue labels him as a bad person although he does not intend to give negative comments. Ironically, Coleman's secret as well as his career as a Jewish college professor as a Dean in Athena University is endangered by false accusations of racism and is sent out of Athens when he refers to two absent students in his class by the word "Spooks.": "Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?" (H. S., 6) When it is clear that those students are black, there are some race discrimination charges filed against him for using such expression associated with black people, although Coleman declares that he "had known perhaps fifty years ago but had wholly forgotten that 'spooks' is an invidious term sometimes applied to blacks," (H. S., 6)

The term "spook" has racist connotations that mean "certain immateriality, invisibility, and inhumanity."¹⁰⁸ It implicitly shows how Coleman's speech is "haunted by the racial ancestry he has disavowed."¹⁰⁹ The insistence of Coleman on the fact that he means the "primary meaning" of the word (ghost or spectre) shows a contrast in his speech: on the one hand, he is unable to erase the racist meaning of "spook". On the other hand, he can pass into a white man and succeed in getting rid of his racial traces. This insistence seems ironic since it stands completely in contrast with Coleman's racial passing. While he wants to become someone else in his society and escape from the American racial ideology, he wants from the college as well as the absent students or whom he calls "spooks" to interpret this term according to its primary meaning. Silk's inner psychology becomes obsessed with haunting representations captured in words like "spook," "Negro," "nigger," and even "lily-white."¹¹⁰

Coleman finds himself a victim of racism because of the comments that he has given out about those students. The event makes him a widow for the death of his wife who could not bear this accusation. His wife is the first

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p.12

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality*, p.12

¹¹⁰ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press 2013), p. 188.

mortal victim of the hate campaign against him: "These people murdered 'Iris! [...] They meant to kill me and they got her instead" (H.S., 12-13). Finding himself alone without a compassionate partner, Coleman, 71 year old, soon finds solace and sexual enlightenment in Faunia Farley, a 34 year old hard-edged, blue-collar woman half his age. As Clinton, Coleman, the professor of the University, indulges in a sexual affair with this young woman. This similarity between Colman and Clinton is echoed by the letter sent by one of his colleagues, Delphine Roux, saying that "everyone knows you're sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age" (H. S., 38). This is one of the "stains" Roth wants to deliver to the reader.

Faunia Farley is also a character who decides to change her identity as Coleman Silk does. She is introduced as illiterate who was born into material privilege. She has been sexually abused by her stepfather, a matter that obliges her to escape from her house, at age fourteen. She witnessed hardships of life for several years living on the road before she married Lester Farley who was a Vietnam War veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome that makes him violent. He used to beat Faunia and in two of these occasions she went to the hospital. Faunia has had two children from Lester and has tried to have a small farm. One night, after her divorce from Lester, while Faunia has been outside for a date with a random man in a truck, her apartment caught

fire, killing her son and daughter. Lester blames her for the fire, and she tries to commit suicide twice: "The month after the children died, twice tried to kill myself" (H.S., 245)

Roth succeeds in giving an insightful description of human condition for his characters. He promotes this technique by using a style called "incantatory" to show what's there in the heart of his characters. In the following monologue, Roth describes to the reader Faunia's inner passion:

The kid who marries [Lester Farley], for the stability [that he will give], a combat-crazed veteran who goes for your throat if you so much as turn in your sleep. The kid who is false, the kid who hides herself and lies, the kid who can't read who can read, who pretends she can't read, takes willingly upon herself this crippling shortcoming all the better to impersonate a member of a subspecies to which she does not belong and need not belong but to which, for every wrong reason, she wants him to believe she belongs. Wants herself to believe she belongs. The kid whose existence became a hallucination at seven and a catastrophe at fourteen and a disaster after that, whose vocation is to be neither a waitress nor a hooker nor a farmer nor a janitor but forever the stepdaughter of a lascivious stepfather.... (H. S., 164)

Furthermore, Roth goes on to comment on the human stain through the mouth of Faunia in the moment she is talking to a crow whom she calls "prince":

we leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen—there's no other way to be here. Nothing to do with disobedience. Nothing to do with grace or salvation or redemption. It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. The stain that precedes disobedience.... (H. S., 242)

This puts the reader directly in front of the title of the novel and from where it is derived. Faunia, here, defines human beings as “the inevitably stained creatures.” “The human stain” that Faunia refers to bring to reader's mind the purists and puritans, the righteous vigilantes whom Hawthorne has talked about in his novels during the nineteenth century, and who betray a fundamental ignorance and intolerance of human imperfection. Faunia insists that “the fantasy of purity is appalling”. “It’s insane. What is the quest to purify, if not more impurity?” The *Human Stain* is a sad, imperfect record of the insane urge to purify, by both Silk and his antagonists Faunia and Delphine.

By "Human Stain", Roth wishes to introduce a different version of the more universally acknowledged phrase. A phrase that refers to something inherited from the first sin, something to refer to the notion that this human stain is "ingrained in us, never to be erased."¹¹¹

In Faunia-Coleman relationship, Roth focuses on a very important social issue that appears in most of his novels which is the relationship of sex to identity. The *Human Stain* is all about sex. One of the reasons that pushes Coleman to deny his black identity is that he has been rejected by girls as a

¹¹¹ Ben Siegel, (ed.), Jay L Halio, (Ed.), *Playful and Serious: Philip Roth as a Comic Writer* (Newark, NJ.: University of Delaware Press, 2010), p.226.

lover when they know his real black origin. Coleman Silk is rejuvenated by the sexual affair with Faunia, who is not his foil. A professor of classics who is a dean in his college finds himself indulged in this affair with an "illiterate" woman half his age. Faunia, however, passes several sexual experiences first by her stepfather who has raped and abused her. She finds herself with abusive men, who are not better than Lester Farley when she marries him. When she has divorced from Farley who has stalked and terrorized her, he keeps an eye on her and he is upset by the idea that she enjoys a sexual affair with another man. This feeling leads him finally to kill them.

Delphine Roux, the young intellectual French female in Athena, is seeking for a male figure to love. She is considered Coleman's female Nemesis who is full of jealous and malice that can be relieved by torturing Silk. She writes a personal ad for The New York Review of Books. Instead of deleting this ad she mistakenly sends to her colleagues in her department. Ironically, the man she describes in this ad is Coleman Silk. When she knows about the death of Silk, she accuses him of entering her office, turning on her computer, and writing and sending the message. Coleman Silk who passes as a white man, finally destroyed by both the outraged ex-husband and by the "hysterical female" whose false accusations contribute to the downfall and destruction of him. Zuckerman interprets Delphine's attacks against Coleman Silk in one of

their meeting telling him: "by defining you as a monster, she defines herself as a heroine. This is her slaying of the monster" (H.S., 42)

Thus, it seems that the relationship of sexual activity, sexual identity, and sexual reputation all attribute to the creation and destruction of human beings as if it becomes a site of sexual hysteria. Sexual identity is the only aspect in Faunia's identity. Coleman is aware of this identity as he tells Nathan Zukerman: "In bed she is a powerful, coherent, unified being whose pleasure is in overstepping the boundaries" (H. S., 31). She brings him "sexual intoxication" (H.S., p.32). Ironically, this identity that brings her power and comfort is associated with disaster and later becomes her fatal end. When her children have been caught in a fire, she has been in sexual date with a stranger. This is clear in the tragic end of both Coleman and Faunia in a car accident, she is in a position as if she were giving him oral sex.

Like Coleman Silk, Faunia and Delphine pass from one identity to another. Faunia comes from a wealthy family and is literate but decides to spend her life as an illiterate woman, working as a worker in a dairy farm leaving behind a history of sexual abuse by her stepfather and other men she has met in her life. Coleman describes her life as a simple one: "dropped so far down the social ladder from so far up that by now she's a pretty mixed bag of verbal beans" (H.S., 28). Although he refuses to "impose his virtue on her"

(H. S., p.35), Coleman finds himself playing the role of a teacher who deals with her as one of his students reading to her newspapers and some lines from the classics. In one of these lectures, while she wants to read about Clinton's affair, she becomes angry and shouts, "Enough of the seminar! I can't learn! I don't learn! I don't want to learn!" (H.S., 234). Instead she finds herself with a crow, called a Prince, she goes to sit with it and talk to. She finds relief with the company of non-human creatures:

She was just feeling good being here with the snake and the crow and the stuffed bobcat, none of them intent on teaching her a thing. None of them going to read to her from the New York Times. None of them going to try and catch her up on the history of the human race over the last three thousand years. (H. S., 240)

There is a kind of resemblance or analogy here. The crow for her is a creature that cannot know how "to be a crow, a woman who doesn't really know how to be a woman." (H. S., 247). The crow becomes a symbol for her. As he fails to acquire the language of other crows when it gets out of its cage and creates his own language, she creates her own identity by assuming to be illiterate "to spotlight the barbaric self-befitting the world" (H. S., 297). Thus, people around her will look at her outwardly and see what they want. By this choice to pass as illiterate simply because she "feels right to her" (H. S., 297).

Delphine Roux leaves France hoping to recreate herself. She runs away from her aristocratic family whom she feels of their overbearing presence and

their depressing shadow. Challenging her family, she establishes her own identity with an academic career in America. Like Coleman Silk, she creates her own identity which is completely different from what she was at birth. Her dilemma is similar to Coleman's tragedy. She is his nemesis. It seems that each one of them is a "symbiotic of the other". While Coleman lives in a conflict of ethnicity, Delphine lives in schizoid split between her profession as an academic person and her inner person that is insecure, lonely and vulnerable. In the college, in public, she looks a perfect scholar who is in control of herself while privately she disdains the conditions, she lives in.¹¹²

Thus, like Silk and Faunia, Delphine bears the "human stain," and like Silk, she denies her family, as Silk has denied his. Both Delphine and Silk recreate themselves by denying their birthright and their heritage.

Roth writes a very important satire through his intended voice Zukerman making fun of Delphine in a wicked way showing that she does not only laugh at humanity but at herself too:

She's such a phenomenologist ha-ha-ha!" ... she remembers being in France and being at Yale and living for this vocabulary; she believes that to be a good literary critic she has to have this vocabulary. She needs to know about intertextuality. Does that mean she's a phony? No! It means that she's unclassifiable..... Why the hell won't she at least have phone sex? (H. S., 271)

¹¹² Ben Siegel, (ed.), Jay L Halio, (Ed.), *Playful and Serious: Philip Roth as a Comic Writer*, 224.

III. 3.2 Impact of War

The events of the Vietnam War lead to the development of several perceptions in the mind of different individuals. The participants of the war face several challenges that affected the manner they deal with other people in the society¹¹³. Lester Farley is a complex mix of all social issues in *Human Stain*: identity, sexuality, racism and above all the impact of war on the individual and community. Farley is an American soldier who has served in Vietnam War and no longer fits into post-Vietnam American life. He suffers from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). This disorder prevents him from acquiring a civilian life after coming back from the horrible war although he tries and does his best to get therapy. He fails to change his identity of war to that of a civilian. Farley fails to cure himself from the severity of war as other veterans. After experiencing traumatic disorder, he is unable to return to normal life with Faunia. He acts with her in violent and inappropriate ways which make her leave him and get divorce. Roth describes Farley's life before going to war as a man who is "happy-go-lucky Les . . ., (with) tons of friends, (and) fast cars" (H.S., 65). After the Vietnam war, everything changes. Roth seems to parody "the glorified version of male soldiers" who used to celebrate and exaggerate the heroic actions of American soldiers abroad. Hence Lester

¹¹³ K. Marlantes, *Matterhorn: A novel of the Vietnam war* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010) p.67.

Farley typifies an exaggerated masculinity through combat. His inability to adapt a civilized life undermines this glorified version. Lester pays with his sanity to become finally an insane murderer.¹¹⁴

Lester Farley needs to realize that he will never be the hero that he has been promised. It is evident that catastrophic events have negative implications on the life of the soldiers. It explains the posttraumatic disorders that the war had on the personal identity of a person. Moreover, he seems to "belong to a forgotten page of history."¹¹⁵: "The Vietnam vets were men who, in their postwar lives, had themselves been through the worst—divorce, booze, drugs, crime, the police, jail, the devastating lowness of depression." (H. S., 73) Vietnam War illustrates that the individual is ready to take up any action without the fear of intimidation. When his children caught in fire and died, there are no tears and he could not cry. Lester realizes his dilemma. He is disillusioned that he already died during the war. It was "Vietnam. That's why! I never did cry for my kids.... Why can't feel?... why didn't I save them?..... Because I died already in Vietnam" (H. S., 73)

Later, the death of Coleman and Faunia points out to Lester as the key suspect of the tragedy. It is evident that Lester threatened the victims on a

¹¹⁴ Carina Staudte, "Athleticism and Masculinity in Roth's American Trilogy and *Exit Ghost*" in *Philip Roth Studies*. Volume: 11. Issue: 2. (Purdue University Press. Provided by ProQuest LLC, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Kral Françoise, "F(r)ictions of Identity in the Human Stain," in *Philip Roth Studies*. Volume: 2. Issue: 1. (Purdue University Press. Provided by ProQuest LLC. Spring 2006)

regular basis. It points out the negative implications associated with the participation of wars by the individuals. The murder creates a different approach on how we perceive wars together with its implications. Therefore, the events of this war affect the personality and identity of a person in a negative way.

The sexual relationship between Faunia and Silk has its impact on Lester. He was angry for seeing his x-wife dating Coleman. He was not only angry because she is dating another man, but he is angry because she is dating a Jew. This point seems to focus on the main social issue which is racism or religious racism as Zukerman states after the death of Silk: "Buried as a Jew, I thought, and, if I was speculating correctly, killed as a Jew. Another of the problems of impersonation" (H.S., 325)

The tragic death of Coleman represents a punishment by history since he left his country (Newark), family, and his race.¹¹⁶ *The Human Stain* "was a portrait of a sympathetic liar, passing to escape racism. It dwelled, in the end, on the entanglements of race, and on the refusal of one man to be defined by categories with limits and downsides."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Michael Kimmage, *In History's Grip: Philip Roth's Newark Trilogy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012). P.13.

¹¹⁷ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press 2013), p. 188.

It seems that all those characters represent the failure of American Dream. Each one of them has his/her dream of a better life. For Coleman Silk, he thinks by denying his black identity and adopt a white one will bring him successful life. For Les Farley, his dream of getting power and respect of people by joining the army and participation in the wars of United states turns to become a nightmare of drugs and crime suffering from PTSD. Delphine Roux leaves France for a better life in the United States. She ends miserably by denying her original identity.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL AMERICAN ISSUES IN MCCARTHY'S *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES* AND *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*

IV.1. Cormac McCarthy: An Introduction

Cormac McCarthy (1933) is an American novelist, short-story writer, playwright, and screenwriter. He has written ten novels. He is well-known by his style of writing and his depiction of violence. He is considered one of the greatest modern American writers. Steven Frye argues that McCarthy succeeds in reconfiguring the most famous remarkable works in the history of writing including William Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, and Hemingway in a way to reproduce them in his own way.¹¹⁸

His early works are full of symbols and images that illustrate the beauty of rural regions, valleys, and mountains in his home state Tennessee. He no longer decides to shift his attention to write about the West and contributes in the tradition of the modern world literature but his works remain American and the nationality of his works are clear in “their narrative and thematic preoccupations typical of the American romance.”¹¹⁹ His works deal with themes full of philosophical perspectives.

¹¹⁸ Steven Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p.1

¹¹⁹ Steven Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 1

His real name is Charles Joseph McCarthy, and he earns “Cormac” from his father’s Irish aunts who to call him Cormac as a nickname. He was born in Tennessee state where he received his education in the university in 1951. He left it to join U.S. Air Force where he began reading books and discover his literary talent when he went back to university in 1957. He wrote his first two short stories *Wake for Susan* in 1959 and *A Drowning Incident* in 1960 receiving the university’s Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing.

His first novel was *Orchard Keeper* (1965) received positive feedback although it is not sold widely. It won the awards granted by several foundations such as Faulkner Foundation. His travel to Europe (1966-2968) helped him in writing his second novel *Outer Dark* (1968) which is followed by *Child of God* (1973) and *Suttree* (1979). The move he took to West Texas in 1980’s represents the most influential shift he ever took in his life where he wrote his fifth novel *Blood Meridian* (1985) which is considered, alongside with the subsequent work *The Border Trilogy*, his most important masterpieces at all. All these novels revolve around the borders of Texas, Mexico, and New Mexico.

McCarthy makes use of unconventional narrative techniques along with extended interior or exterior monologues, digressions, and dream sequences. In this way, an aesthetic approach must be done to arrive at a better

understanding for his works. The reader must concentrate on the themes hidden in a literary work. Steven Frye discusses the narrative techniques in McCarthy's works and how they introduce a variety the natural world: "His narrative textures mirror the mysteries of the natural world."¹²⁰ The stories narrated by characters in his novel *The Crossing* (1994) introduce a "metaphysical source and an underlying order in nature". In the other novel of the Trilogy, *Cities of the Plain* (1998), McCarthy makes use of a dream monologue to show "the complexities of the unconscious and the role of beauty in providing a compensatory order to the chaos of human perception."¹²¹

During entry into the second millennium, the world witnessed many revolutionary changes that affected the world directly. It is at this time that the author, Cormac McCarthy, wrote a lot of his work. The book *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) is about a sixteen-year-old cowboy who travels to Mexico in search of his cultural and psychological identity. McCarthy's other book, *No Country for Old Men* (2005) is McCarthy's ninth novel written from the late 1990s to early 2000s when many revolutionary changes like information technology, which had been the primary cause behind sharp gains, had already

¹²⁰ Steven Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 4.

¹²¹ Steven Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 4.

taken root and gained popularity¹²². These books offer a thrilling theory with its setting in the 1980s, Texas.

¹²² Stephen D Oliner and Daniel E Sichel, “The Resurgence of Growth in the Late 1990s: Is Information Technology the Story?,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 4 (2000): pp. 3-22, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.14.4.3>.

IV.2 Social issues in *All the Pretty Horses*

IV.2.1 Evil Inside Man

Walter Sullivan finds in McCarthy a kind of “prophet” who tries to “comprehend evil in all its dimensions,” and this evil is inherent of American culture in alcohol, drugs, and sex.¹²³ Evil, Violence and alienation will lead the protagonist later to face the failure of this culture. The novel *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy revolves around John Grady, a sixteen-year-old man from West Texas. The novel starts at the death vigil of Grady’s grandfather. In addition to losing a loved one, Grady is disappointed because his attempts to convince his mother not to sell the ranch had failed. He, therefore, decides to set out to Mexico in the quest of a new ranch with his friend Lacey Rawlins. Throughout his quest in Mexico, Grady struggles with the evil inside him that came from all the challenges he encountered.

The evil within the protagonist starts building up when his mother refuses to keep his grandfather’s ranch but instead chooses to sell it. Throughout the first chapter, Grady makes numerous efforts to ensure the ranch is kept in the family. He tries to talk to his father to understand why he

¹²³ Walter Sullivan. "About Any Kind of Meanness You Can Name." *The Sewanee Review*. Volume: 93, issue: 4 (Fall, 1985): 652.

has not bought the ranch when he has had money. He goes the extra mile to contact a lawyer who offers him no hope regarding the sale of the ranch (APH, 14). He is disappointed when his family fails to see the sentimental value of their ranch.

The theme of evil inside man is also revealed in the description Grady is given about the war.

He said that war had destroyed the country and that men believe the cure for war is war as the curandero prescribes the serpent's flesh for its bite. He spoke of his campaigns in the deserts of Mexico and he told them of horses killed under him and he said that the souls of horses mirror the souls of men more closely than men suppose and that horses also love war. (APH, 110-111)

This reveals the violence that exists within human beings. The conviction that the most appropriate way to deal with war is fighting back reveals the vengefulness people have.

The experience Rawlins and John Grady have at Rocha's ranch reveals to the readers how evil human beings can be. This encounter shows how human beings are often attracted to chaos and how it is difficult to resist this chaos. While at the ranch, Rawlins and Grady are arrested and serve as scapegoats for a society to eliminate hostilities it had repressed. In addition to this, Alejandra, Rocha's daughter, uses Grady to show her rebelliousness. She makes use of this love affair to rebel against the authority of her father. For

this reason, Rocha allows the arrest of two innocent boys. Being falsely accused further stirs up hatred and resentment within Grady's heart.

The war Alfonsa starts with John Grady is because of the challenges she has faced in the past. Alfonsa is shown as a free thinker who has worked together to start the Mexican civil war on behalf of the oppressed and needy individuals. She once fell in love with one of the revolutionary leaders, but her family never approved her relationship (APH, 114). Her problems have made her manipulative and cynical towards Grady, who has feelings for Alejandra, a girl beyond his class.

Rawlins and Grady are treated unjustly and accused of crimes they knew nothing about and are sent to prison. While in prison, they were tortured and questioned by the interrogators. They were later transferred to the big prison. Throughout this time, the prisoners were harassed and inhumanely treated.

The prisoners sat chained on the truck bed. In the dead mud yard, some children who'd been playing stopped to watch them, and a thin white dog who seemed to have been awaiting just such an arrival came over and urinated for a long time against the rear tire of the truck and went back. (APH, 146)

The guards seem to be having fun doing this to the prisoners; they laugh and smoke cigarettes. During their transportation to the big prison, they witness the assassination of their friend, Blevins. This death slowly reveals the murderous impulses Grady had developing towards the soldiers.

John Grady turned and looked at him. He looked at the guards, and he looked at the place where they were, the strange land, the strange sky. All right, he said. I won't. (APH, 149)

While in prison, the two friends are beaten to submission by other prisoners. Initially, they are offered protection by Perez, but they did not come to an agreement. Soon after this offer was made, Rawlins was attacked and cut with a knife by one of the prisoners. This further angered John Grady, making him buy a knife. When a prison fight that targets him is initiated, he kills the other party with his knife and luckily survives.

Unlike Rawlins, who returns home after their release from prison, John Grady finally acts on the duality of his nature. He takes the pain and violence inflicted on him and seeks revenge as the final step in his rites. He maintains his dignity and goes to San Angelo with the possessions he had at the start of his journey. Despite acting on his evil side, during the court proceedings in Texas, John Grady still struggles with the fact that he has killed the other prisoner in defending himself.

As it is clear in the novel, Evil “functions differently depending on culture and environment”. When the young boys cross the border to go Mexico, they meet another boy, Belvin, who asks to accompany them in their journey saying that “Cause I’m an American” (APH, 45). This means that the conflict they would witness would be of national background and they need to keep themselves together against cultural systems that have “different ways of perceiving evil and environment”.

IV.2.2 Courage

The character of John Grady has advanced throughout the novel. He has undergone numerous challenges and has managed to come out of it at the end. This highlights that the journey he has taken brought him from innocence to experience.¹²⁴ Gail Moore Morrison views this journey as a classic example of a man who goes beyond American tradition, a youthful man “turns his back on civilization and heads out... through desert and mountain on horseback – into the wilderness where innocence experiences the evil of the universe and risks defeat by it”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Mahshid Younesi and Hossein Pirnajmuddin, "Nostalgia and The Sublime In Cormac McCarthy's The Border Trilogy", *Atlantis. Journal Of The Spanish Association For Anglo-American Studies* 40, no. 2 2018: 45-62, doi:10.28914/atlas-2018-40.2.03. 52

¹²⁵ Gail Moore Morrison, “All the Pretty Horses: John Grady’s Expulsion from Paradise.” *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*. Eds. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999. 178.

The psychological growth of John Grady after following his desires in the novel makes him struggle mentally and physically; he counters all this with passion and courage. His courage and progress are depicted throughout the novel; when he leaves his home country, how he interacts with strangers, his career, fighting with the prisoner, and when he goes to meet Alejandra after his arrest.¹²⁶ According to Scoones, Grady and Rawlins left their home to make their individual paths; this was a courageous decision.¹²⁷

John Grady lacks parental care from his parents. The novel begins with John Grady's search for identity; he feels hopeless when his grandfather dies, and his mother chooses to sell the land, their ancestral property. Any attempt to convince her not to sell has failed as she did not seem to care. His father, on the other hand, is a drunkard who cannot adequately convey what he earned for his son. As the heir of his grandfather, the protagonist should have some rights to the ranch. His mother, however, ignores this after the death of his grandfather. After all the failed attempts, he gains courage and comes out of the desire to get an inheritance and decides to create his path. He starts his journey with his friend Rawlins; they move to Mexico on their horses.

¹²⁶ Mahalakshmi L and Leelavathi M, "Cormac McCarthy's All The Pretty Horses Is A Bildungsroman Novel", *International Journal Of Applied And Advanced Scientific Research* 2, no. 2 2017. 219.

¹²⁷ J Scoones, *The World on Fire: Ethics and Evolution in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy. A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*. Ed. Edwin T. Arnold & Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 2001. 142

Their journey to Mexico is not simple; they met thieves, strangers, and get a new friend, Jimmy Blevins. How John interacted with all these people reveals the courage he has gained during his journey¹²⁸. Their new friend is a liar and a thief who has lied about how he has come to obtain his horse. After realizing that he is lying, they are followed by armed men, and Blevins is separated from the two. In this situation, John Grady is the only person who could peacefully negotiate with strangers.

John Grady also shows his courage when he inquired about work after meeting a group of vaqueros that was with a herd of cattle. This inquiry led him to eleven thousand hectares of land located in the state of Coahuila.(APH, 82) Don Hector Rocha owned it. After their meeting, Don Hector conducts his interview with Grady;

What is your opinion of the mares, he said.

There's some good mares in that bunch.

Yes. Do you know a horse called Three Bars?

That's a thoroughbred horse.

You know the horse?

I know he run in the Brazilian Grand Prix. I think he come out of Kentucky.(APH, 114)

¹²⁸ J Scoones, *The World on Fire: Ethics and Evolution in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy*.A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy.

Throughout the interview with Don Hector, John Grady shows his enthusiasm and the knowledge he has regarding horses. They have a lengthy conversation about the horse varieties and their behavior. John reveals his adventures through his willingness to deal with powerful horses. His courage during the interview secures him a job at La Purisima. At this ranch, his career quickly advances, and he achieves his dream of working with horses. After struggling in his journey and finding his way to a foreign country, John secures himself in his dream job at a ranch. He also works at the ranch with his friend Rawlins.

John Grady's courage is also tested when he is taken to prison:

Where did you learn to fight? he said.

John Grady took a deep pull on the cigarette and leaned back.

What do you want to know? he said.

Only what the world wants to know.

What does the world want to know.

The world wants to know if you have cojones. If you are brave.(APH, 193)

This is a conversation Grady has with Perez while in prison. His physical courage and willingness are tested during his time in prison. He shows his courage when he cauterizes his wound. After a prisoner attacked his friend, he was disturbed and decided to get a knife for his protection. When attacked, John Grady was courageous enough to fight back even though he

gets hurt in the process. During this time, he does not despair. Even while in prison, John still believes in his dream of working with horses. He has a dream of the resonance of the world and running horses. His praises cannot be spoken and are only praised.

His love for Alejandra also shows John Grady's courage. Soon after getting his dream job, John Grady falls in love with Don Hector's daughter. They meet in private, and the enjoyment within them grows within a short period. Alfonsa, Alejandra's aunt, warns Grady about his relationship with Alejandra. She tells him what has happened to her and how her life has been destroyed because of a love affair she has had with a commoner; her family never approved their relationship. Her warnings fall on deaf ears as John does not heed to any of her advice. He is, however, arrested when Alejandra goes for further studies in Europe. Even after coming out of prison, he looks for her to win her love back, but unfortunately, she has been manipulated by the aunt to let him go.

This love affair is seen by Willard P. Greenwood as "a western bildungsroman" that adds depth to the tragic dimension to this Western. McCarthy does not write about the romantic relationship between man and woman in his novels. The affair between John and Alejandra is powerful and

poignant and McCarthy makes use of this affair to bestow John with “wisdom, sadness and a willingness to die.”¹²⁹

The trials John Grady faces can be reflected by the statement, “And a deep conviction that nothing can be proven except that it be made to bleed.”(APH, 192)

His pain and suffering have made him a stronger person. Throughout the novel, he always finds a way out. Even though the defeat of John Grady is inevitable, his courage and valor are evident to the end. He fights against social barriers and overwhelming odds to achieve his dreams. The horses are a symbol of Grady’s manhood, and in the end, he gets back his horses and goes back to Mexico on the back of the horse; this shows that his manhood is in place.

IV.2.3 Cowboy Lifestyle

According to Dary David, the cowboy culture in the American West, is a combination of imagination and facts.¹³⁰ This novel portrays John Grady as a person who may be above 16 years old. Growing up in the ranch, he is used to this lifestyle and could not just let it go smoothly. Being a cowboy has

¹²⁹ Willard P. Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy* (Santa Barbara, CA.: Libraries Unlimited, 2009), 57.

¹³⁰ David Dary, *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries*. Lawrence: University Of Kansas Publishing, 1989.

always been a part of him, and he refuses to let go of this identity.¹³¹ In this novel, the death of John Grady's grandfather is symbolized as the last line of commitment to land and pastoral life. His mother insists on selling this land to the oil company. When he fails to convince his mother not to sell the ranch, he departs to Mexico on horseback, searching for pastoral harmony. Throughout, the novel depicts the disappearance of pastoral life and how John struggles to resist this change. The loss of pastoral life is one of the sources of melancholy in the novel John faces. This loss resembles an "imaginary wound" that keeps bleeding without any remedy. John Grady and his friend Rawlins can be seen as "allegorical figures, reenacting the old new tale of pastoral quest and failure."¹³²

The end of pastoral life in the novel is symbolized by the use of technology, the death of his grandfather, the vanished tribe of the Indians, and the sale of their ranch. John Grady has a vision as he travels through an old road once used by Comanche Indian;

...that lost nation came down out of the north with their faces chalked
and their long hair plaited and each armed for war which was their life
and the women and children and women with children at their breasts
all of them pledged in blood and redeemable in blood only ... nation
and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across the mineral waste

¹³¹ Michael Wainwright, "Too Far Gone: The Psychological Games Of Cormac Mccarthy'S All The Pretty Horses", *European Journal Of American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2016), doi:10.4000/ejas.11630. 1.

¹³² William T. Pilkington, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (College Station, TX.: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 119

to darkness bearing lost to all history and remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives.(APH, 3)

Here the author compares pastoral life to the extinction of the Native Nations of the west. When he feels the souls of the Natives that once used that road, he feels the cowboy lifestyle coming to an end, just like the culture before. John Grady's mom symbolized the end of the cowboy culture when she decides to sell the ranch to an oil company. She prefers to live a life that is more civilized in San Antonio.¹³³ The cowboy culture was patriarchal, and despite this, she is a divorced woman who focuses on her career. Her actions to sell the ranch disrupted Grady's dream of pastoral life. The train that passes through the landscape also shows the end of this lifestyle as it shows that there are no open spaces left for cowboys. This means that much time has passed since cowboys moved without trains and fences. These two cultures are both revealed at the border towards their extinction.

The stereotype of the Western hero believes that cowboys are supposed to be strong and silent¹³⁴. At some point in the novel, John Grady's personality depicts this character. This was when he went to San Antonio, where his

¹³³ Erik Hage. *Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2010), 34

¹³⁴ Hayder Gebreen, "Identity Crisis In Cormac McCarthy's All The Pretty Horses", *Advances In Language And Literary Studies* Volume:7, Issue: 2 (2016), doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.2. 92

mother lives. To get there, he went together with an older adult who was driving a truck. During their journey, the older man talks to John Grady but rarely got a response; He looked at John Grady. You don't talk much, do you? he said. Not a whole lot. That's a good trait to have. It was about a two-hour drive to Brady.

In this scenario, John Grady's personality represents the cowboy lifestyle.¹³⁵ His resilience and struggle to come out as the hero in all the situations he found himself in also shows how his personality speaks for the culture.

Many times, novels depict cowboy riding horses to show how they long for a culture that is lost. Despite the crisis of losing the ranch, John still longs to live the idea of pastoral life. On his last ride with his father, he gives him a saddle. He does this as a way to confirm his identity as a cowboy. He, however, informs Grady of the change in culture. The author reflects on cultural change through Grady's father. His father acknowledges that cultural change has affected their way of life, and he looks at the land as if it is his last time to see it. John Grady's nature as a cowboy is revealed when McCarthy

¹³⁵ P Snyder, "Cowboys Codes In Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy", *A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*, (2001).

describes him as a “The boy who rode on slightly before him sat a horse not only as if he'd been born to it which he was.”(APH, 18)

After he arrives in Mexico, John Grady quickly gets the endorsement and support he got from others because of his cowboy skills. After his long journey from his native land, John is happy with the fact that he is slowly achieving the pastoral harmony he had always desired. At Don Hector's ranch, his skills quickly identified him as a cowboy. Here he gets the chance to advance. For the first time in a while, Grady feels confident and at peace with himself and his accomplishments.

The novel comes to an end with a horse-riding scene,

With the sun coppering his face and the red wind blowing out of the west across the evening land... horse and rider and horse passes on their long shadows passed in tandem like the shadow of a single being. Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come.(APH, 252)

This is a symbolic image of a cowboy going through the plains before getting lost in the darkened land. This is despite the fact that the effect modernity has had on the pastoral life. In the novel, John is a representation of the vanishing cowboy lifestyle. Even as he relocates to Mexico, he still has a great desire to get back the pastoral culture.

After securing his job at the ranch, John Grady starts an affair with Alejandra, Don Hector's daughter. The relationship between the two is intricate as they both come from different countries with different cultures. He finds what he missed in his native land, pastoral life, and love. McCarthy shows the allegories of the 20th century in which frontier life being against the final castle that is against progress in the wilderness. John Grady is obsessed with the idealization of the cowboy culture. Even at the end, he refuses to let go of the idea that this culture has been passed with time. The cowboy culture greatly relies on the nature of relationships within the community; without this, the Individuality of the Western culture would not be complete. His attempts to get back what is lost has placed him in a cultural and psychological crisis.

IV.2.4 Depiction of failure of the American culture

The novel *All the Pretty Horses* shows the clash between the cowboy culture and reality. The collision is revealed through the life journey of Rawlins' and John Grady from the time John Grady's mom sells the ranch to the oil company. Depiction of the failure of the American culture is evident throughout the novel. Grady feels like most of the people have turned away from American culture.

The failure of the American culture starts from the beginning of the novel, when John Grady discovers that his mother plans to sell the ranch.(APH, 3) John was brought up in the ranch, and he got used to the lifestyle of a cowboy. The death of his grandfather symbolizes the end of this lifestyle for him. He, however, finds it difficult to accept the cultural change taking place. He makes numerous attempts to try and change his mother's mind. He talks to his father and later talks to a lawyer from San Antonio. All these attempts do not bear fruits as his mother has made up her mind.

Another instance where the American culture has failed John Grady is the collapse of his family. The novel is set up in a "patriarchal"¹³⁶ society, and despite this, his parents are divorced. His mother's modernity has interrupted John Grady's dream of living in pastoral harmony. While in San Antonio, Grady goes to one of his mother's play to understand her better. Even after attending the play, he does not understand his mother's decision to sell the ranch.

On the other hand, John's father is a drunkard who seems to be depressed because of the experience he had during the war.¹³⁷ However, he

¹³⁶ Meg King, "'Where Is Your Country?': Locating White Masculinity in All the Pretty Horses", *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* v.12, no.1 (2014), 69+

¹³⁷ Hayder Gebreen, "Identity Crisis In Cormac Mccarthy's All The Pretty Horses", p.90.

gives John his blessings to follow his dreams.¹³⁸ He feels like in his family, the adults are dead, absent, or powerless and cannot contribute to his dream.

After his mother's betrayal, John Grady sets out to move to a place where there is no American civilization. His determination in this journey is to look for the romantic cowboy life that he lost in his native country. The American culture fails him at this point as it forces him out of his native country. After arriving in Mexico, John Grady and Rawlins are lucky to find a job at Don Hector's ranch.

I believe these are some pretty good old boys, whispered Rawlins.

Yeah, I believe they are too.

You see them old highback centerfire rigs?

Yeah....

...You reckon that was his daughter?

I'd say it was.

This is some country, aint it?

Yeah. It is. Go to sleep.(APH, 81)

At this point, the two celebrate for getting the job at the ranch. His journey out of his country, however, places him on a path where he experiences numerous challenges. John Grady's destruction starts soon after he starts dating the daughter of the boss, Alejandra. Soon after Alejandra

¹³⁸ G Guillemín, "As of some site where life had not succeeded: Sorrow, Allegory, and Pastoralism in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy." *A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*. Ed. Edwin T. Arnold & Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. (2001). 93

returns to school, John and Rawlins are arrested by the Mexican authorities. The American culture fails to protect them from the corrupt Mexican authorities. While in prison, both John Grady and Rawlins are tortured and almost killed. John and Rawlins move to Mexico to live their cowboy dreams. They have not been aware that this came along with extreme brutality. In addition to being arrested in Mexico, John Grady attempts at love fail. After getting out of prison, he looks for Alejandra with the hope of picking up where they left. This attempt also fails as their relationship is at the mercy of Alejandra's aunt, Alfonsa. She is against their relationship because, in the past, her family also denied her the chance at love. In this novel, John Grady losses almost everything; his dream to live a cowboy lifestyle, his family home, and the love of his life. John Grady views modernization and abandonment of pastoral life as the failure of the American culture; this failure is responsible for all his misfortunes.

IV.2.5 Nostalgia for the Past

This novel reveals how Rawlins and John Grady crave for a past with a simple pastoral life. They move to Mexico to escape from the modernization that was taking place in their country. Their journey is a trip back in time. It functions as a criticism of imperialism as John links the less advanced Mexico

with the past he idealizes. The border between the two countries represents the physical barrier that separates them. This physical frontier is distinctly different from the last frontier linked with the westward growth of the century before.

The praises he got for being good with the horses at Don Hector's ranch give a direct link to the nostalgic memories link of his past.¹³⁹ The nostalgic memories of the past the protagonist has are present in the narratives and reveal ideologies connected to the West's expansion. John Grady becomes nostalgic because he is consistently acting on impulses on cultural values he learned as a child growing up in the ranch. Growing up, he slowly became aware of a world that no longer shared these values. The ride he has with his father shows the struggle he has to exist in such an environment successfully.

In the afternoon, they passed through the ruins of an old ranch on that stony mesa where there were crippled fenceposts propped among the rocks that carried remnants of a wire not seen in that country for years. An ancient pickethouse. The wreckage of an old wooden windmill fallen among the rocks. They rode on. They walked ducks up out of potholes and in the evening they descended through low rolling hills and across the red clay floodplain into the town of Robert Lee.(APH, 23)

¹³⁹ William Carl Brannon, "Riding For A Fall: Genre, Myth, And Ideology In Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels" PhD, Graduate Faculty of Texas Tech University, (2003). 77.

John Grady also feels nostalgic when he imagines the Comanches riding through the road¹⁴⁰.

When the wind was in the north you could hear them, the horses and the breath of the horses and the horses' hooves that were shod in rawhide and the rattle of lances and the constant drag of the travois poles in the sand like the passing of some enormous serpent and the young boys naked on wild horses jaunty as circus riders and hazing wild horses before them and the dogs trotting with their tongues a loll and foot-slaves following half naked and sorely burdened and above all the low chant of their traveling song which the riders sang as they rode, nation and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives.(APH, 3)

At this point, the Comanches are just in his imagination. This imagination reveals how quickly time and culture passes by. It shows how John had idealized the past to negotiate the present. This also happens when his father does a similar thing in their conversations. In the conversation, his father expresses his concern over the drastic change in culture.(APH, 20)

John Grady also feels nostalgic about his past encounters with horses when he has a dream about them while in prison.

¹⁴⁰ William Carl Brannon, "Riding For A Fall: Genre, Myth, And Ideology In Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels"78.

in his sleep he dreamt of horses and the horses in his dream moved gravely among the tilted stones like horses come upon an antique site where some ordering of the world had failed and if anything had been written on the stones the weathers had taken it away again and the horses were wary and moved with great circumspection carrying in their blood as they did the recollection of this and other places where horses once had been and would be again.(APH, 233)

John Grady is nostalgic as he continues to live according to values that make his life unrealistic. Instead of accepting that his culture was slowly fading, he moves to Mexico with the hope of maintaining it. Later on, his experience with violence makes him confront the deceptive nature of his heroic code.¹⁴¹

John Grady is good with horses, and this is evident even during his interview with Don Hector. He views horses as a representation of the cleansed world, a world that embraces pastoral harmony. A world that embraces the past he closely associates with. The actions of John Grady and Rawlins throughout the novel are motivated by the nostalgic views they have of the past. They are attracted to the simple camping lifestyle and taking care of horses.

¹⁴¹ G.M Morrison, *All the Pretty Horses: John Grady Cole's Expulsion from Paradise. Revised Ed. Perspectives On Cormac McCarthy Southern Quarterly Series.* Ed. Edwin T. Arnold & Dianne Luce. Rev. ed. Jackson: University of Mississippi. 1999. 175

IV.3 No Country for Old Men

IV.3.1 Introduction

No Country for Old Men revolves around three characters, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, hunter and Llewelyn Moss, and psychopathic hitman Anton Chigurh. The novel describes disturbing and violent events those three characters find themselves in.

The readers come to know, about an experience Sheriff Tom Bell gave his testimony. Bell recalls in the monologue the novel begins with, the man who killed a 14 year old girl and how that man told Bell that the crime is not a crime of passion as the investigators believe. He believes that his views are completely different from other people who live near the borders between Mexico and USA in 1980.

Llewelyn Moss, a Vietnam veteran, finds himself in front of what looks like a fighting ground full of dead bodies of drug dealers. While walking among the dead bodies, he witnessed a Mexican survivor who is badly wounded and pleads Moss for some water. Moss tells this man that he does not have any. Moss, then, finds truck full of drugs. Keeping searching the area, Moss finds a dead body holding a bag full of \$2.4 million in cash. Moss, in an unwise action, takes the money and returns home without having any idea that the bag has a radio transponder. When he arrive a his house, he finds himself

with great sympathy with the wounded man, so he decides to come back again to the site of drug fight holding a jug of water. When he arrives there, Moss finds that the man has been shot and killed. He discovers that there is another truck comes close to his truck. There is great chase in the desert which becomes the beginning of the main hunt for Moss in the novel.

After escaping the chase, Moss asks his wife Jean, to go to her grandmother's house in Texas. Sheriff Bell becomes the investigator in this crime and decides to protect Moss and Carla Jean. The reader comes to know that Bell is still haunted by his services as a soldier during WWII and how he was awarded a Bronze Star in the aftermath of the destruction of his unit. Bell seems eager to follow this case considering it a crime of cowardice and declares his sympathy with Moss and wife during his investigation. In the meanwhile, Anton Chigurh appears to retrieve the money carrying with him his silenced shotgun alongside with "stungun", he succeeds in hunting Moss and the money in a great chase that left them severely wounded. Moss has been taken to a hospital in Mexico, while Chigurh decides to steal medical supplies to recover himself.

During his recovery in the hospital, Moss is visited by Carson Wells, ex-special forces officer, who decides to save Moss in exchange for the money. After Moss's refusal, Wells asks Moss to keep in touch with him if he

needs any help leaving his phone number if he feels he can no longer deal with Chigurh. After recovering from his wounds, Chigurh follows Wells and kills him. When Moss calls Wells to talk about money, Chigurh answers telling Moss that he will kill his wife if he refuses to abandon money. Moss refuses to give up money and decides to tell Carla to go to a motel in El Paso. Carla Jean decides to tell Sheriff Bell about the meeting with her husband. This call has been traced by Mexican hunters who succeed in killing Moss before the coming of the Sheriff. Chigurh succeeds in taking the money from the place Moss has hid in the motel. He decides to go to the house of Moss's House playing with a coin to decide what he will do with her. He shoots her and while getting outside he is struck by a car. He succeeds in getting rid of the authorities and they never track him. Sheriff Bell retires after a long service full of investigation but for this case he feels defeated. In recalling two dreams with his father, Bell realizes that he is an old man and there is no country for old men in the country he lives in.

IV.3.2 Social issues in *No Country for Old Men*

In this novel, McCarthy introduces various characters to bring out different themes that relate to the contemporary world. Bell, McCarthy's Sheriff, is seen to bring out the right side of the book. Through his work, justice and good against evil are portrayed. Other characters like Moss and Well, who are ex-veterans, bring out the theme of violence and corruption, which is associated with the drug trade happening near the borders of Texas and Mexico. According to Rita Brock and Gabriella Lettini, although people believe that a military career is one that embodies core moral values like love of the country and service to others, most come back morally impaired¹⁴². All the main McCarthy's characters are Ex-soldiers who participated in wars that America has entered. The concern is that, will they bring back home the violence they experienced in war? McCarthy demonstrates the different themes these characters will show. As a way of continuing life with a purpose, most veterans are likely to join combative works like joining the police force¹⁴³. Accordingly, violence never ceases in their lives. The central theme portrayed in the book is about violence and how some situations reflect war.

¹⁴² Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair* Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

¹⁴³ Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate, "The Soldier As Victim: Peering Through The Looking Glass", *British Journal Of Criminology* Volume:51, issue: 6 (2011): 900-917, doi:10.1093/bjc/azr057.

This chapter will also attempt to discuss other themes like drugs, murder, greed, and coldhearted Villainy.

IV.3.2.1 Violence

Violence seems to be an important part of America identity and culture.

According to Slotkin, violence becomes a metaphor for American experience:

“The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience.”¹⁴⁴

Violence in the works of McCarthy, as some critics find, seems to be inherent in human condition. It is dangerous and risky to sublimate the power of violence because it is both dangerous and risky. In an interview with New York Times Cormac McCarthy points out this fact:

“There's no such thing as life without bloodshed. I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom. Your desire that it be that way will enslave you and make your life vacuous.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.

¹⁴⁵ "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," in *The New York Times Magazine*, Vol. CXLI, No. 48,941, April 19, 1992, pp. 28-31, 36, 40.

Cormac McCarthy sets the novel's mood with the frequent use of violence. Similarly, the setting in which the novel is happening is filled with lawlessness but only in a modern sense. The illegal trade and transportation of drugs that come into the country through the Texas, Mexico border is associated with a lot of violence, which is threatening human life. There are fear and uncertainty in a barren land where death is not a strange happening. Early in the Novel, McCarthy introduces the character of Llewellyn Moss. He is hunting a deer when he stumbles upon dead men and dogs who were shot dead in a seemingly thwarted drug deal with blood and bullets everywhere. Left in the horrific scene is a bag of money that Moss takes. The following day he barely escapes a gunfight with drug dealers sent to hunt him down and retrieve the money. McCarthy's description of the bare land at the beginning of the novel adds to a bad mood and portend violence.

McCarthy uses different acts of violence to demonstrate the theme of violence early in the novel by the character of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, who has contributed a lot to the theme. The use of first-person narration at the beginning of every chapter reflects on the sheriff's digestion of the constant increase of crime and violence. An example of his sentiments about violence is seen when he says¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 39

The old boy opened up on me twice more and shot all the glass out of one side of the cruiser...point being you don't know what all you're stopping when you do stop somebody... you don't know what you're liable to find.

In the novel *No Country for Old Men*, the cowboys are responsible for implementing law and order in Texas, but still, it is a land full of crime and violence. Violence continues to drive the story forward, bringing the main characters into conflict with each other. The novel portrays a series of horrific events that show terrifying acts like the character of Anton Chigurh's efforts of hunting and killing, mostly for no valid reasons. The main reason for his hunt is to retrieve the money Moss took in the horrific scene. He also seeks revenge just for the mere fact that he was inconvenienced. When Sheriff Bell realizes Chigurh's reasons, he can foreshadow his capacity for violence when early in the novel, he mentions that he doesn't want to meet and confront the prophet of destruction, who is somewhere out there.¹⁴⁷

It has done brought me to a place in my life I would not of thought I'd of come to. Somewhere out there is a true and living prophet of destruction and I don't want to confront him. I know he's real. I have seen his work. I walked in front of those eyes once. I won't do it again. I won't push my chips forward and stand up and go out to meet him. It ain't just bein older.

¹⁴⁷ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 2

The sheriff's description of Chigurh clearly defines his unrelenting violence towards others. Also, Chigurh's violence is demonstrated when he kills Wells, getting rid of the obstacle that stood between him and killing Moss. Chigurh's unstoppable acts reflect the kind of war he fought like a soldier. Victory or death puts an end to the war.

McCarthy also uses the theme of violence to demonstrate the presence of evil in society. Chigurh's unrelenting will to pursue his violent acts is a clear demonstration of evil. Also, the presence of lawlessness in the land contributes significantly to the theme of violence. However, the author uses the conflict between the main characters to demonstrate a war between good and evil. McCarthy uses Sheriff Bell's participation in violence to demonstrate the good against evil. His narrations and sentiments at the beginning of every chapter demonstrate his longing for the older traditional world and the decency of humanity. Through his career as the Sheriff, he is in the best position to demonstrate the exponential changes of evil and Morality in society affected by violence. His concerns about evil in society is demonstrated when he says¹⁴⁸:

Because a lot of the time ever when I say anything about how the world is going to hell in a handbasket, people will sort of smile and tell me I'm getting old...Nobody that can't tell the difference between

¹⁴⁸ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*, 196

raping and murdering people and chewing gum has got a whole lot bigger of a problem than what I've got.

The character's comparison of violent acts such as rape and murder to harmless acts such as chewing gum implies that the harmful acts are becoming the new normal in society. When he reflects on the articles he had read earlier, McCarthy uses these reflections to demonstrate the change witnessed by society.

In conclusion, McCarthy's constant use of violence in *No Country for Old Men* develops an essential awareness of how violence affects Morality in society. In the novel, the use of the theme of violence throughout the book might seem to be excessively used. Still, its frequent use contributed to the coherent advancement of the novel to bring out awareness of specific themes like good versus evil to the readers. It is a novel that intends to achieve a change. It shows a new type of “evil and the crumbling destruction of society”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Keller Estes, “No Country for Old Men”. *Spatial Practices*. Issue no. 16. January 1, (2013), 179+

IV.3.2.2 Greed

In *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy tries to demonstrate the presence of greed in society. Greed, along with drugs, the social upheavals during the 1960s, and Vietnam, show that the country is “falling apart”.¹⁵⁰ Greed is depicted in the novel, not just by drug dealers who do everything in their power to acquire wealth in whichever means possible, but also by the most uncomplicated people. According to Mahinda Deegalle, the adverse effects of acquiring large amounts of wealth is that by nature, humans are prone to be greedy and perhaps may use wealth in corrupt pursuits¹⁵¹. The author also demonstrates the presence of corruption in society. Greed is the selfish desire to acquire something. Usually, it is associated with wealth, power, and food. According to Long Wang and J. Keith Murnighan, greed is a central element of human existence¹⁵². When a person has unconscious desire to acquire wealth, even in his or her dreams, it can also be termed as greed. In *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy first demonstrates the theme of theme when Llewelyn takes a bag full of drug money, which was not meant for his ownership. Firstly, he was there to hunt for a deer and stumbled upon the

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Keller Estes, “No Country for Old Men”.

¹⁵¹ Mahinda Deegalle, "GREED AND ACQUISITION AS IMPEDIMENTS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE INSTRUMENTALITY OF WEALTH CREATION FOR A BUDDHIST VISION OF A FAIRER SOCIETY", *Research Space* Volume: 62 (2016): 228, <http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/7432/1/7432.pdf>.

¹⁵² Long Wang and J. Keith Murnighan, "On Greed", *Management Of Academy* Volume: 5, issue: 1 (2017): 3.

money accidentally. Llewelyn meticulously enjoys the process of hunting his targets. The stealth movement of his short and smooth strides towards a mile-away position in line with his targets is thrilling. Just after a few moments, his whole life changes when he stumbles upon 2.4 million dollars. In the novel, McCarthy says that¹⁵³:

He sat there looking at it, and then he closed the flap and sat with his head down. His whole life was sitting there in front of him. Day after day from dawn till dark until he was dead. All of it cooked down into forty pounds of paper in a satchel.

In this moment, Llewelyn reflects on his future life of retirement and the opportunity to die while rich.

Sheriff Bell also contemplates vaguely about how a person could get freedom when they get the money. He demonstrates this when he is just from a phone call with a woman reporting about dead cats in trees¹⁵⁴: “He hung the phone up and sat looking at it. It's money, he said. You have enough money you don't have to talk to people about cats in trees.”

Sheriff Bell expresses his tiredness and does not want to be bothered by petty issues of the community. Although his desire to get his freedom and get

¹⁵³ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 18

¹⁵⁴ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*, 19

away from violence is through wealth, he finally gets from violence due to fear.

The main characters of the novel, Bell, Wells, and Moss, and other minor characters of the book, are military veterans who fought different wars during WWII. McCarthy, on many occasions, has mentioned the adverse effects that war has caused in society. The struggle of power by military operations also depicts the corrosive forces of war in the country. In a conversation in the novel, Moss' father talks to Sheriff Bell telling him about the consequences of Vietnam War and how the soldiers were mere boys going to a horrible action of war¹⁵⁵:

A lot of them boys that come back, they're still havin problems. I thought it was because they didn't have the country behind em. But I think it might be worse than that even. The country they did have was in pieces. It still is. It wasn't the hippies' fault. It wasn't the fault of them boys that got sent over there neither.

The incident where Moss stumbles upon a bag full of drug money in a thwarted scene of drug exchange demonstrates the monstrous impacts of an operation instituted by greed and corruption. Throughout the book, the events that follow this event are characterized by greed and corruption. Later in the

¹⁵⁵ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*, 294.

novel, McCarthy reveals that the money found in the thwarted drug deal belonged to a high executive from the Matacumbe Petroleum Group in Houston. McCarthy demonstrates greed and corruption, not just in low levels of the community but also in very high places.

The author explores the lives of Bell and Moss at individual levels by showing their fight against greed and corruption in the novel. Towards the end of the novel, the readers understand that Bell's whole career is founded upon the shadows of lies and falsehood. During his bronze award ceremony, Bell feels that he is unworthy of the award, but he is told that if he accepts the award, it will demonstrate to the nation the American efforts in Europe. On the other hand, Moss's experience during his fight in Vietnam made him delusional. The condition affected his character and decision making. According to Alistair Munro, an individual exhibits paranoid trait when they get delusional.¹⁵⁶ For example, greed is evident in his character when he takes the bag full of drug money. His intentions with the money are not clear when he becomes paranoid and offers to give some of it to Moss if he helps him return it. The greed of power by Moss is demonstrated.

The theme of greed also comes out in the novel when Chigurh tries to address it. His character ultimately demonstrates the consequences of these

¹⁵⁶ Alistair Munro, *Delusional Disorder* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

vices: greed, violence, and corruption. McCarthy uses the character of Well to show the vanity of greed and power. At the close of the story, Chigurh manages to kill both Bell and Moss's narratives when Moss dies, and Bell decides to resign from the Sheriff's office living in shame and guilt. According to (Donald Wargo, et al), greed brings about moral melt-down.¹⁵⁷ The author demonstrates that greed and corruption only bring suffering and tribulations to an individual's life.

IV.3.2.3 Drugs

In the novel *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy sets the setting of the story to happen in the year 1980s. Although the author does not highlight the significance of the year, it is essential since the United States of America experienced significant moments that made important marks in history. President Ronald Reagan won the elections the same year. McCarthy does not discuss the country's political state so much, but it is in President Reagan's Era that marked the start of the war against drugs in the country.

No country for Old Men is among the books that have tried to address drugs and the war against drugs in the USA. Just from the beginning, the novel

¹⁵⁷ Donald T Wargo, Norman Boglini and Kate Nelson, "The Global Financial Crisis - Caused By Greed, Moral Meltdown And Public Policy Disasters.", *Forum On Public Policy*, 2009, 9, doi:10.1.1.508.2688.

highlights drugs as the first theme of the book when the character Llewellyn Moss comes across a thwarted drug deal and gets away with a bag of drug deal left on the horrific scene. Throughout the novel, the author highlights how the drug trade has contributed to the lawlessness in the country. In chapter eight of the story, Sheriff Bell is seen thinking about friends he had lost in the war against drugs. He wonders how the people involved in the drug trade do not consider the laws of the land. He is surprised by police officers at the border who are also involved in the drug trade. He notes how the drug dealers caused the death of a judge in San Antonio. He is sad since the drug leaders do not even consider killing him important.

The plot in *No Country for Old Men* demonstrates how violence and death are associated with drug dealings. Throughout the story, the hunt for the drug money that Moss took is covered with many bloodsheds. At the beginning of the plot, Moss is seen dreaming about how his whole future would change for the best if he took the money. His expression of greed is clear, not withholding the fact that the money does not belong to him. At that particular moment, he is confident that he can handle the consequences that come with taking the drug money. Later in the story, Moss changes his mind about the money and decides to ask Sheriff Bell to return it. Bell tells him¹⁵⁸:

¹⁵⁸ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 86

You're not listening. You need to pay attention. This man won't stop looking for you. Even if he gets the money back. It won't make any difference to him. Even if you went to him and gave him the money, he would still kill you. Just for having inconvenienced him.

Moss realizes that drug money can never be free as it is associated with violence and deaths that an individual can never run away from.

In the theme of drugs, one thing that comes clear is the use of weapons used during the dealings and the war against drugs. The presence of usage of weapons in McCarthy's novel highlights how drugs have majorly contributed to the wars in the novel. Weapons appear to be everywhere drugs are present. In his article, *Drugs and Guns*, Benjamin Levin, expresses his concern about how guns and drugs are often tied together¹⁵⁹. Throughout the novel, the description of the character's gun portrays the nature of the drug business. Not only does Sheriff Bell carry multiple weapons as expected due to the nature of his work, but every character in the novel has more than one gun. The drug dealers also use multiple weapons to enforce their violent acts in their operations. At the beginning of the novel, the horrific scene that Well stumbles upon shows how the drug lords used their guns to kill each other after the drug deal went bad. When McCarthy's villain character, Anton Chigurh, is sent to

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin Levin, "Guns And Drugs", *Fordham Law Review* 84, no. 5 (2016): 2177, <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5194&context=flr>.

hunt Moss and retrieve the drug money lost in the gunfight, he carries different slaughterhouse weapons that give the readers a clear picture, the kind of violence he causes. His choice of weapons demonstrates how much destruction drugs bring in society.

In *No Country for Old Men*. The drug trade is fought for passionately due to the lucrative market available for the drug lords. McCarthy's demonstration of the money at stake shows just how lucrative the business is, with the Mexican drug cartels being the suppliers and the Americans being the market with demand. Due to its illegality, the business along the border is associated with a lot of violence and corruption. Every violent act in the novel can be traced back to the drug business. For example, if drugs were not being moved across the border secretly, Llewelyn would never have stumbled upon the bag full of drug money. Chigurh's violent pursuit for Llewelyn would never have happened too. According to Petrus Van Dyne and Michael Levi, the official US approach to dealing with drugs is 'war' which is being fought by the DEA and the police¹⁶⁰. The novel is a clear demonstration of the war on drugs along the borderland.

¹⁶⁰ Petrus c Van Duyne and Michael Levi, "Drugs And Money: Managing The Drug Trade And Crime Money In Europe", *Journal Of Criminology* 47, no. 4 (2007): 698-701, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azm032>.

IV.3.2.4 Villainy

McCarthy brings out the theme of Villainy through the character Anton Chigurh who portrays himself as being more than a villain but a monster. His indiscriminate and psychopathic behavior makes him a monster. His talent for improvisation makes him the convenient antagonist. His expertise is seen when he uses a coin to open an air-ventilations and murdering with his handcuffs.

In another incident, when Chigurh finds out about a bounty hunter named Carson Wells, he kills him after trying to make a deal with Moss. Chigurh tracks Moss ruthlessly but finds him already killed by Mexican drug dealers. Chigurh retrieves the money from where Moss hid it before his death and returns it to his employers. Towards the end of the story, Chigurh visits Moss's grieving wife and debates whether or not to kill her. The cold-hearted Villainy is demonstrated when he relies on a coin toss to decide whether to kill her. Although Chigurh has convinced himself that everything in life only advances through an infinite number of probabilities, his advancement throughout the story is by eliminating all the possible threats and competition.

Chigurh's fundamental perspective of achieving his goals without relenting can be compared to a company setting where it will rise above all competition. Therefore, however much surprising the readers are about his

unstoppable will, it is the typical way of achieving successful results. Inevitably, if an individual does not have the will to cheat and lie to all adversaries, then another person will rise to the occasion. Chigurh's will to cheat his way in eliminating all his adversaries demonstrates the cold-hearted Villainy in the book.

His Villainy is also demonstrated when he gets into a lengthy conversation with Moss before killing him. Chigurh says:¹⁶¹

You've been giving up things for years to get here. I don't think I even understood that. How does a man decide in what order to abandon his life? We're in the same line of work. Up to a point. Did you hold me in such contempt? Why would you do that? How did you let yourself get in this situation?

Chigurh staunchly believes that fate justifies his actions and that he is meant to do whatever he does. He does not display compassion or remorse but only deliberation, which makes him a cold-hearted villain.

Chigurh's ruthlessness and Villainy continue in the novel when he looks at his victim's eyes when he kills them. During his time in Eagle Pass city, he stumbles upon a wounded man who begs for help but instead, he compels the man to look into his eyes and shoots him in the forehead. Even after the man's death, he remains looking into his eyes, seeing the capillaries break. McCarthy

¹⁶¹ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 177, 178

highlights that Chigurh sees his image fade slowly from the dead man's world. In another encounter with Carla Jean, Jean tells him that he is the one who kills people and not fate or his coin. Chigurh considers the world a manipulated creation to please unseen forces like fate. Bell recognizes this trait in him and ensures that he never put himself in Chigurh's way.

McCarthy also portrays the character Chigurh as someone with psychopathic traits. His awareness of his action to things makes him a ruthless villain. Chigurh is aware of the consequences of his acts but does not care about anything but completing his actions. He is also careful not to get caught. Just like other psychopaths, Chigurh's victims must die for his well-being. According to David Lykken, Psychopaths only care about their objectives¹⁶². For him, as long as the deaths are not tied to his soul, then he is not responsible for their deaths.

Anton Chigurh is seen as the biggest villain in the novel *No Country for Old Men*. His pursuit of Bell and his unstoppable characteristics makes him appear more Villainy. Readers should not forget about the drug dealers who sent him to retrieve the drug money. McCarthy demonstrates this when the drug dealers hire a war veteran, Anton Chigurh, to retrieve the money. The

¹⁶² Christopher J. Patrick and David T Lykken, "Psychopathic Personality," in *Handbook of Psychopathy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2018), pp. 142-143, <https://doi.org/RC.555.H37>.

drug dealers' disposition to go every depth to retrieve the drug money contributes to the theme of cold-hearted Villainy. Also, when Bell stumbles upon the drug money in the horrific scene where a drug deal went wrong, he notices many bodies on the ground lying dead, including dog corpses. The death of dogs in this scene also demonstrates the cold-hearted Villainy of the drug dealers.

IV.3.2.5 Murder

McCarthy's novel, *No Country for Old Men*, starts with a narration of Sheriff Bell at every chapter. Sheriff Bell starts with a narration about a boy sent to the gas chamber for killing his 14-year-old girlfriend.¹⁶³

I went up there and visited with him two or three times. Three times. The last time was the day of his execution. I didn't have to go, but I did. I sure didn't want to. He'd killed a fourteen-year-old girl, and I can tell you right now I never did have any great desire to visit with him, let alone go to his execution, but I done it.

McCarthy's demonstration of the murder theme at the beginning of the novel may act as a forecast of what the readers should expect in the story. Death and violence. Sheriff's Bells' first narration also foreshadows that

¹⁶³ Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (Prince Frederick, MD, 2005), 1

perhaps, just as the boy is punished by death for the death of the fourteen-year girl, so will the vices die in the novel.

The theme of murder is first introduced in the novel when the character Bell stumbles upon the drug money while he was hunting for an antelope. He stumbles into a horrific scene full of dead bodies of drug dealers who killed themselves after a drug deal went wrong. The ultimacy of the consequences of a bad deal is demonstrated in this scene; that the only solution to bad situations is death. Everyday murder is typical for the drug business. The illegal trade contributes to most of the murders in the novel.

Again, the character Anton Chigurh contributes to the theme of murder during his pursuit of Bell to retrieve the drug money for his employers. His unrelenting will to eliminate everyone that stands in his ways shows how much he is not afraid to kill. The overwhelming influence of drugs on murder cases in the novel demonstrates the ruthless will of drug dealers along the border. According to Denise Boots research, in the 1980s to 1990s, she reveals a steady mortality rate of about 100 drug related murders caused by drug dealings in one year¹⁶⁴. The author uses the theme of murder to demonstrate the killings present along the border.

¹⁶⁴ Denise Paquette, "Drug Fight In Mexican Border", *A Journal Of Policy Practice* 3, no. 3 (2009): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pap021>.

In the novel, the author demonstrates how ownership of weapons is expected in the borderland of Texas and Mexico. The main characters own a series of weapons that cause a lot of destruction when put together. Sheriff Bell's possession of multiple guns, despite the nature of his work, demonstrates how murder is to be expected. The man slaughtering weapons owned by Chigurh also means that the body count of people murdered by just one person can be overwhelming. Murder is made easy and fast due to the availability of these weapons. Accordingly, McCarthy demonstrates a need to not only fight against drugs but also weapons.

Chapter V

SOCIAL ISSUES IN JONATHAN FRANZEN'S *THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CITY AND STRONG MOTION*

V. 1 Jonathan Franzen: An Introduction

Jonathan Franzen is an American author who has written a number of novels including *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), *Strong Motion* (1992), *Corrections* (2001), *Freedom* (2010), and *Purity* (2012). He was Born in Chicago, but he moved to live in St. Louis. He studied and graduated in Swarthmore College and went to Berlin and studied as a Fulbright Scholar. To find financial support to write his first writing attempts, Franzen worked in the seismology department at Harvard University, in which he got “an experience he would draw on for his second novel, *Strong Motion*.”¹⁶⁵

His first novel appeared in 1988 that brought him Whiting Writing Award. Franzen bases the first two novels on fiction which highlights social, political, and economic issues in the United States of America. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Jonathan portrays many social issues from the context of the 1980s including fears from communism, movement of residents from urban cities to the suburbs, the investments and ownership of American companies and real estate that witness foreigners, and urban crimes. This is why Philip Weinstein in his introduction to *The Twenty-Seventh City* states that Franzen “writes fictions that find their way into our contemporary dilemmas of desire

¹⁶⁵ Brian W. Shaffer, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction Vol. II.* (WILEY-BLACKWELL:A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication, 2011), 578.

and guilt”.¹⁶⁶ His novels seek to criticize deeply the sickness of the society he lives in. He points out this fact saying that the “postwar freak-out....., the sick society in need of radical critique”.¹⁶⁷

In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Franzen describes events of the fictitious city of St. Louis after a new police chief with the thirst for power is instituted. Franzen uses his main characters such as Jammu (the new police chief) and Martin Probst (an important businessman) to portray the nature of political greed and how it relates to social values. His story revolves around social conflict and political conspiracy which characterizes America as we know it today.

In *Strong Motion*, Franzen highlights the question of whether natural catastrophes are not natural occurrences but the effects of man’s quest for oil and other minerals and materials. He talks about the possibility of earthquakes being caused by the greed, selfishness, and irresponsibility of corporate and individual entities. The story revolves around the arrival of Louis Holland in Boston during spring at a time of strange environmental catastrophes including an earthquake which killed his grandmother and his love affair with a brilliant seismologist named Renee. Franzen speaks of the contemporary

¹⁶⁶ Philip Weinstein, (Ed.) “Introduction”, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, 25th Edition. (New York: Picador Modern Classics, 2013), xi.

¹⁶⁷ Qtd. In Philip Weinstein, (Ed.) “Introduction”, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, 25th Edition. (New York: Picador Modern Classics, 2013), xii.

issues affecting the society through his fiction work which was written at a time when the context of society was different from the one that exists today. This paper highlights the different themes and social issues as depicted by Franzen in his novels *Strong Motion* and *The Twenty-Seventh City*. It illustrates the nature of these issues using examples from the text.

V.1.1 Introduction: The Twenty Seventh City

The twenty-seventh city was Franzen's debut novel which received both appraisals and critics following its structure and content rich story. The title *The Twenty-seventh City* refers to the city of St. Louis which is described as the twenty-seventh largest city in America. The novel is based on the hypothesis that the city and a distant county were rejoined after being separated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Franzen features two characters, Jammu and Martin who are opposing parties in the political arena of St. Louis. Jammu's quest for political power leads to a display of cultural warfare, political corruption, and terrorism in the city. The author explores many themes that are normally avoided by most writers.

The Twenty-Seventh City talks about the city of St. Louis in the year 1984 where a new chief of police, who is an Indian woman named S. Jammu,

is installed. Jammu had previously been a leader in the Bombay force and was an American citizen on the paternal side. She is a power-oriented woman who uses her mother's wealth to lie to the public while planning to take control of the city and county. Jammu is accompanied to St. Louis by a gang of Indian operatives who are meant to help her build "The state" through pursuing the most prominent people in the city. Her companions include B. Singh and Asha Hammaker who is married into one of the wealthy beer brewing families in St. Louis. Jammu is an individual who is hungry for power and almost not capable of emotional connections. Jammu wants to seduce all top players in the city to join her side including Martin Probst who is an important member of the community and is known for engineering the St. Louis Arch. Probst is a moral role model in the community and has worked hard to develop his construction business despite being born in a poor family. He skipped college to join the construction industry where he became a man of principle who treats his employees fairly.

Martin met his wife Barbara when seeking legal action after his good intent activities met resistance. Barbara was the daughter of martin's lawyer and lives in a fine home in Webster Groves with Probst and their eighteen years old daughter. She discontinued her physics fellowship to get married to martin and is also a good role model in the community at the beginning of the

novel. Barbara works part time at the library and manages their house while trying to create a bond with her daughter Luisa who is distant. Barbara is constantly in conflict with Martin because of his financial and emotional meanness. Her daughter, Luisa, on the other hand is depicted as a bored young sexually active teenage girl whose routine is characterized by hanging out with friends and looking to get boys. Luisa becomes associated with Duane who is a college dropout and further moves out of their house to go and live with him in a bachelor's apartment. Martin is angry about Luisa's decision but let go of the issue after meeting Duane's father. His daughter continues with her schooling and talks to her mother (who tries to lure her with an offer of a car and money to come back home) over the phone.

The coming of Jammu brings a lot of changes in the city of St. Louis including the occurrence of strange events such as terrorist shootings, bombings and detonations which result to no deaths, only injuries. Jammu gains a lot of popularity among ghetto kids and the minority community. She recruited a huge number of blacks into the police force and is popular for reducing crime in the city and taking down terrorists attacking the city. Jammu manipulates the people through staging the crimes and then becoming the hero. This increases the people's confidence in the chief of police and Jammu orchestrates numerous plans to gain the favor of prominent individuals in the

city. She frequently lures men with real estate deals in the downtown of St. Louis which she wants to refurbish and many of those who question her were ridiculed or shunned as extremists. When Governor Norris, an elder statesman, realizes Jammu's plot, he tells his friends, including Probst, who ignores him. He even produces ample evidence that Jammu is spying on Probst, but no one believes him. Jammu's impact was being felt by the Municipal Growth which is a group of businessmen of St. Louis with an interest of developing the needs of the city and county. She has taken up a longtime initiative to improve a hospital and even dropped the crime rates in the city (the scary men in the streets disappeared).

Franzen introduces a number of characters to give different perspectives of the city's characteristics and social lifestyles. Jammu continues with her plans even after general Norris and his friends find her at fault. She is highly careful in her dealings and destroys evidence. In her plan, Jammu works towards winning the trust of the moral Probst through bugging his house, luring his daughter away from their home, seducing and later kidnapping his wife and seducing Probst himself. Jammu succeeds to seduce Probst who still disagrees with his plans her suggestion to merge the city and county. Following the failing of the merger, Jammu kills herself out of

depression and Barbara is found dead also. The deaths of the two furthers martin's trauma triggering his mental breakdown.

V. 2 Social issues in The Twenty-Seventh City

The first novel of Jonathan Franzen, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, has a daring story line which highlights multiple points of view based on the American social and political values. Franzen generally covers a number of social issues that affect many cities including the movement of people to the suburbs, urban crime, the fear of communism and the foreign investment and ownership in American companies and real estates. Franzen's novel emerges as a political thriller that is full of compelling power. *The Twenty-Seventh City* represents realist ideas that existed or still exist in the current societies which makes it a relevant piece of work even though many did not think so at the time.

V.2.1 Urban Crime

The issue of crime in urban areas has been of concern in America ever since urbanization began. As urbanization increases, the rate of crime also tends to increase. Crime in urban areas is defined by the values of the specific society¹⁶⁸. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Franzen depicts the nature of crime in

¹⁶⁸ Erdal Gumus, "Crime in urban areas: An empirical investigation." *Akdeniz IIBF Dergisi* 4, no. 7 (2004): 98-109.

the 1980s but in a more enhanced fictitious way that seems to have foreseen future occurrences. His idea of crime in the city of St. Louis was more centered on the actions of Jammu and her companions and how she fights crime in the city. During the time when immigration was rampant in America, many youths who were raised in the ghetto took to crime in order to earn a living following the insufficiency of employment opportunities¹⁶⁹. Young men in the ethnic ghettos have worked for organized crime lords such as gambling kings, racketeers and vice lords who provided ways for their upward mobility. Franzen portrays this type of society where organized crime revolves around the activities of Jammu, who is a female Marxist-indoctrinated chief of police in the city of St. Louis. Even as Jammu is the police chief and is famous for thwarting violent crime, she is also responsible for staging those crimes, including terrorist attacks in order to boost that reputation. She also works with Asha to seduce and marry Sidney Hammaker, one of the elite members of the society and also organizes the seduction and kidnapping of Probst's wife Barbara.

Franzen makes use of Jammu's plan to control St. Louis powerfully to narrate an American story in the perception of an outsider who is from the

¹⁶⁹ Mark H. Haller, "Organized crime in urban society: Chicago in the twentieth century." *Journal of Social History* (1971): 210-234.

Third World. It is a story that shows “urban decline, racial tensions, the maneuverings of money, power and politics”.¹⁷⁰ As if Franzen focuses on an important issue that all Americans are not aware of. Their history is not written by “Americans”.

Franzen’s novel opens with a description of St. Louis alleys both downtown and suburbs and the changes happened in the society of this city. Indians can be seen in the streets with their suits and the children wear “gym shorts and T-shirts” (Franzen 1988, 6). The description continues because “scenes like this had become a fixture of daily life in the city. Indians were noticed lounging with no evident purpose on the skybridge between Dillard’s and the St. Louis Centre.” (Franzen 1988, 6) These scenes show that “The United States is in a decline—in its economy, its health, its social vigor—and risks being superseded by non-Western societies of greater discipline and purpose.”¹⁷¹ Instead of getting people from Western countries to develop America, people of the Third World fill the society and they may cause some unaccepted activities.

Jammu, the new police Chief, is described as “the keeper of this peace” (Franzen 1988, 8) and she keeps herself awake all night. In her office on the

¹⁷⁰ Richard Eder, “America's History May Not Be Written by Americans.” *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (4 September 1988): 3, 7.

¹⁷¹ Richard Eder, “America's History May Not Be Written by Americans.”

fifth floor of police headquarters, she “leaned over the newspaper” to read an article written by Joseph Feig about her. The woman who came from Bombay and had a great operation known as “Project Poori” in which she was “locking up 1500 lawbreakers a week and impounding 30 million rupees in illegal goods and cash.” (Franzen 1988, 8) the article says that it is “now that a twist of fate has brought Jammu to St. Louis in the role of police chief”.(Franzen 1988, 8) Jammu, as Franzen describes her, looks like the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi(Franzen 1988, 8). She “kept her hair just long enough to pin it up in back. She had a large forehead, a hooked and narrow nose, and wide lips.”(Franzen 1988, 8) Later on we know that Jammu is a relative of the prime minister Gandhi from her mother side and it becomes clear that it is not Jammu’s talent that brought her to “be admitted to the Indian Police Service less than a year after Indira became prime minister”(Franzen 1988, 17) but rather her blood relation. When Joseph Feig asks her in an interview about this relationship with the Indian Prime Minister, Jammu replies that “what difference it makes to St. Louis if I’m related to certain people in India.”(Franzen 1988, 14)

In the same interview Joseph asks Jammu about her claim that she “wanted to escape the violence of Indian society” and how she spent about fifteen years in the leadership of a force whose brutality is notorious”.(

Franzen 1988, 14) He means the methods of torturing used there such as “hammered elbows, the tooth extractions, the rifle rapes”(Franzen 1988, 14). Her reply was vague, and short. She indicates that everything ended before she got there.

Franzen exposes the possibilities and extent to which crime in the urban areas can affect social life. Those who claim the urban reform and try to help the urban poor, they only repeat this slogan in front of people or media. In reality the profits would go to a few people by making use of such “massive economic shift”. The poor people would be dismissed, and their condition would not be better than before. A good share of these profits would go to Jammu and her helpers although she considers these profits a method to get “personal power and mystical need to make things happen”.¹⁷²

It is also common to find criminal methods of succeeding in poor neighborhoods in cities and most are controlled by organized crime leaders such as slumlords. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, one such area was the downtown of St. Louis where Cleon Toussaint, a notorious slumlord, was buying real estate with money from unknown sources (Franzen 1988, 68-69). The issue of crime in America has been common especially among the black

¹⁷² Richard Eder, “America's History May Not Be Written by Americans.” *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (4 September 1988): 3, 7.

and Hispanic communities living in ghettos in urban areas¹⁷³. Young men and women fail to get opportunities to continue their education and qualify for better jobs which leaves them no other alternative other than to join criminal syndicates in their local area. Many young black and Hispanic men in ghettos tend to join drug cartels which commission them to sell drugs in order to earn a living. Many of these men end up taking part in gun related violence that lands them in jail. The American society is filled with all types of crime that are not only taken up by people living in the ghetto¹⁷⁴. Franzen aims at providing the picture of police-initiated crime which has also been a common problem in the past and present.

The issue of urban crime can be defined in two perspectives which include a subculture of poverty and a subculture of violence. In the United States of America, all urban areas include ghettos where the minorities who are deprived access to resources live. Franzen highlights the lifestyle in the East St. Louis ghetto as scary with a subculture of terror and violence. The ghetto is painted out to be a terrifying site for all types of criminal activity where elite members of St. Louis cannot even think of visiting. Franzen depicts urban crime as a cunning activity where criminals like Jammu act

¹⁷³ Ann Dryden Witte, "Urban crime: Issues and policies." *Housing Policy Debate* Volume: 7, issue: 4 (1996), 731.

¹⁷⁴ Ann Dryden Witte, "Urban crime: Issues and policies." 731.

efficiently to cover their tracks and destroy evidence. He describes her as a woman who knows how to play a paranoid public inquiry to her own advantage by raising the specters of McCarthyism and sexism and racial prejudice and such. The ruthless disarray in the ghetto is what leads to the death of Barbara Probst. Franzen describes East St. Louis as a dark hell where an individual cannot only faintly spot figures that move around. He narrates:

She [Barbara] was lost in the place of her nightmares, of the nightmares of every citizen of Webster Groves, in a skeletal maze where every kid had a gun and every woman a knife, and a white female face was a ticket to gang rape after she'd been bludgeoned if she'd let them know she was afraid. (Franzen 1988, 497).

Franzen describes what the American society entails in terms of the privileged and underprivileged. American cities or urban areas are made up of different social classes including the elite and the minorities. Franzen depicts how the powerful in urban areas seek to exploit those who are underprivileged to do their bidding in exchange for capital. Cities are normally characterized by high crime rates because of the economic imbalances that exist. In America, this imbalance is fueled by racial divide and capitalism. Those with power can freely get away with anything even criminal offences. In the city of St. Louis, Franzen also demonstrates the struggles of a black man living in

a white dominated community through RC who is a black cop.(Franzen 1988, 64) Even though he does not demonstrate this aspect extensively, the power of the elite in the city is clearly visible. Many of those who run illegal businesses look to the ghettos such as East St. Louis to find manpower for their practices. This further promotes the culture of facilitation by the elite and powerful and implementation by the minorities and poor. Franzen highlights urban crime in its most destructive form even when the villain was a woman. In the current world, crime rates and occurrences resemble his prediction through *The Twenty-Seventh City*.

V.2.2 Movement to the Suburbs

In the novel, Franzen paints a disappearing picture of the city's face due to abandonment by people who preferred living in the suburbs. Franzen mentions the "cratered streets" of St. Louis and the closed houses without inhabitants (Franzen 1988, 389). These houses are infected by blight which means urban deterioration that leaves buildings looking gloomy and worn out. Urban deterioration occurs when people feel uncomfortable in the area they live in because of factors such as unhygienic environments and high crime

rates. The more people leave such areas, the more others follow suit resulting in empty localities. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Franzen says:

The question, if it arouse at all, arouse in silence, in the silence of the empty city's streets, and more insistently, in the silence of the century separating a young St. Louis from a dead one. What becomes of a city no living person can remember, of an age whose passing no one survives to regret? Only St. Louis knew. Its fate was sealed within it. Its special tragedy special nowhere else (Franzen 1988, 26).

In the wake of the blight occurring in cities in America, Franzen highlights urban deterioration early as a problem that faces urbanization. The United States government encounter a problem of racial discrimination that further influences the population settlement in urban areas. Majority of white communities tend to live in the leafy suburbs while black and other ethnic groups live in ghettos and poor neighborhoods. At the time Franzen was writing the novel, white flight was a common occurrence where white people living in low-income areas in the inner city were massively moving to suburbs and leaving black people in those areas.

Urban settlements have been related to politics ever since urbanization began. The need to make sure people live comfortable lives in cities and towns makes it necessary for the government to be involved in the planning and

execution of housing projects to create affordable housing for the underprivileged. Jonathan Franzen depicts the power of government entities in the real estate and housing projects decision making through the deals Jammu made with prominent members of the municipality. In the 1980s, racial discrimination was rampant in the American society which fueled white flight and racial marginalization in terms of community settings. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, the emptiness of the city was not only caused by the blight but also by initiatives introduced by the chief of police, Jammu. Jammu initiated an operation of gentrifying downtown areas that led to a huge clearing process that displaced many people in the low-income houses. She proposed to the elite members of the community that investing in real estate would be what's best for the inner city which was part of his plan to win their favor and gain more power. Franzen carefully covers the realist version of the modern day and previous trends where the rich invested in real estates in parts of the inner city leaving many people homeless due to the inability to afford the city's expensive houses. Clarence Davis's sister is among those whose rented houses are sold to white families (Franzen 1988, 456). As Clarence Davis drives down the poor black deserted downtown districts, Franzen narrates that "Clarence is scared, scared in a mental way nothing like the gut fear of murder he once might have felt down here. It is the scope of the

transformation; square miles fenced and boarded. Not one man visible, not one family left” (Franzen 1988, 256).

The process of gentrifying the city of St. Louis made it look like the community had been eradicated. Singh, one of Jammu’s conspirators, says:

I like St. Louis ... Buildings sit well here. Almost too well, if you know what I mean. The city is such a physical ramification—the brick, the hill, the open spaces—that the architecture and the landscape completely dominate. I don’t say there aren’t people, but for some reason they seem to get lost in the larger visuals (Franzen 1988, 241).

Many of the wealthy people in the community do not care about what happens to the poor who are misplaced but everyone is happy that crime rates have reduced extensively. At the end of the novel, Franzen highlights that the poor residents of St. Louis were forcefully driven out of their homes to the East St. Louis ghetto across the river in secret by police. According to Zygmunt Bauman, this process is similar to ghettoization, which involves the criminalization of poverty and institutionalization of urban fear.¹⁷⁵ It leads to planning of public spaces that is based on the interests of the wealthy (e.g.

¹⁷⁵ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen’s Fiction." PhD diss., Ph. D. Thesis. U of Cordoba, 2015. 158.

Safety concerns) making ghettos look like prisons where the inhabitants cannot get out¹⁷⁶.

According to Bauman, ghettoization does not help to sediment a community but eliminates mutual trust and solidarity which turns the ghetto into a laboratory of social anomie, atomization, and disintegration¹⁷⁷. The anomie makes it difficult for it to be a unified social system which can make it include develop a general view of social hostility. The lifestyle experienced in American ghettos was developed over time into a culture of survival for the fittest and many residents tend to be tough. Franzen depicts some of the situations that create social bitterness in the people who are forced to live in the ghetto. Many cannot afford the expensive lifestyle that other people live in the suburbs because they have less opportunities and low-paying jobs. Jammu does not care about the poor people even as she gives many black than white people police jobs. Her decision to give jobs to the black rather to the white was only get power over the city. This is clear when Nelson A. Nelson, the Police Board president called her asking her about the reason behind recruiting “190 blacks for the force and only 35 whites.”(Franzen 1988, 135) After the investigation, she gets praise after this recruitment. Franzen

¹⁷⁶ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

¹⁷⁷ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

highlights the power that the wealthy hold over the poor living in cities through the process of gentrification with an aim at pushing the poor further into the ghetto so that the wealthy can feel safer and benefit from investment.(Franzen 1988, 490)

V. 2.3 The Fear of Communism

The idea of communism has been a global subject that has sparked rivalry and war between the most powerful nations of the world including the USA. Communism supports the phenomenon that nations should have common ownership of production or wealth where individuals are not allowed to own land, act and speak freely or even follow the religion they want. This form of governance aims at avoiding social class, the state and money dominance in the society. The United States has been against communism because of the fear that freedom will be taken away from people and there would be a possibility for anarchy¹⁷⁸. Over the years, the US has fought against communism in support of capitalism which supports private ownership of the means of production. Jonathan Franzen applies the fear of

¹⁷⁸ George F. Kennan, "Communism and Conformity." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Volume: 9, issue: 8 (1953): 297.

communism in his novel *The Twenty-Seventh City* where he displays the impact of capitalism on the city of St. Louis and its social structure.

In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Franzen taps into the nature of the fear of communism in the lives of Americans during the post-world war II period. The second red scare, commonly known as McCarthyism, fueled the people's fear of communism which had an impact on the social structures and relations between Native Americans (whites) and immigrants or other races. People were afraid that the foreigners were working with foreign communist nations such as the Soviet Union to overthrow the American government and deprive citizens of their freedom¹⁷⁹. Franzen's novel goes into details that highlight the impact of social class and privatization on the nature of social groups and systems as a whole. In chapter two, Franzen seeks to explain the causes of the depravity of the city of St. Louis (Franzen 1988, 24-26). After the separation of the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County, the white middle and upper-class populations were prompted by the existing legal, economic and historical circumstances to leave the city and set up their businesses and settle in different St. Louis county municipalities. This led to a deprivation of a tax base for the city which meant that the available resources were not enough to

¹⁷⁹ Ellen Schrecker, "McCarthyism: Political repression and the fear of communism." *Social Research* (2004): 1053.

cater for the needs of city residents. Franzen highlights the effect of a capitalist economic system through this demonstration. He states, “Everyone worried about the city’s schools, but it was an exercise in hand wringing” (Franzen 1988, 25). He further emphasizes the division of race and social classes. The arrival of poor black inhabitants from the south into St. Louis fueled the movement of white communities into the suburbs because of their reluctance to share resources with people of the black community¹⁸⁰. Moreover, in chapter seven, Franzen shows the fear of terrorism and the conspiracies of the Red Indian group, as is so called by the speaker from the studios Jack Strom, Osage Warriors¹⁸¹ to throw fear among citizens which is clear in the incident of the stadium when Probst and Jack were there. A bomb has been planted and the fans were frightened and scrambled to escape the bomb. While Probst and Jack trying to save other people to escape the main scoreboard displays a kind of message by the group:

ATTENTION GENOCIDAL PIGS

GOD THE BIG RED

WE OW! ARE REDSKINS

¹⁸⁰ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 153

¹⁸¹ The Osage warriors were men pre-eminent, masters of their domain over which they reigned supreme. They often sought the big game animals of their hinterland, the buffalo and the bear, the deer and the elk, which were numerous on the upland prairies and wooded valleys of the upper White River watershed. (Source: <https://thelibrary.org/lochist/periodicals/wrv/V2/N6/w66b.htm#:~:text=The%20Osage%20warriors%20were%20men,the%20upper%20White%20River%20watershed>. Retrieved on 01/09/2020)

WE FREE THE LAND FROM IMPERIALT NAZI U.S.
DEATH TO PLACENT GENTIALS (Franzen 1988, 150)

The elite members of St. Louis feared the merging of the city and the county which would feel more like the fear of communism. The white population expressed fear for the criminal culture created by the black communities in the inner-city areas which made them avoid any type of unity with them.(Franzen 1988, 490) Franzen depicts the fear of communism in relation to race and origin when he introduces a takeover plan initiated by Indian operatives. This shows the worst that could result from the welcoming and tolerance of communist ideas from immigrants and non-native Americans. The fear of communism had a major impact on the American societies before and even in the current generation. It created a concept of ‘fear the foreigners, they do not care about you’ which further fueled racial discrimination and division of social classes. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, a wealthy member of the community states “A big reason the white middle class moved out to the county is, as we all know, their desire for good schools and, more specifically, their fear of black areas. If the city comes back into the county, there won’t be any place to run” (Franzen 1988, 290).

V. 2.4 Foreign Investment and Ownership in America

In the 1970s, foreign investment in America increased by an average of 13% annually and stood at \$34.1 billion in value¹⁸². The impact of foreign investment in the social system can however not go unnoticed. In the novel, Franzen exhibits the foreign ownership and investment in relation to power and decision making in the community. The city of St. Louis is mainly controlled by entities who are wealthy, most of whom own businesses and real estate.(Franzen 1988, 20) Jammu's plan involved luring the major players in the city onto her side through offering a platform for investment in real estate which sounded appealing to many of the elite community. In context, Franzen depicts the critical impact of power in the ownership of real estate and investment. Jammu's conspirator, Asha, on the other hand became engaged to a powerful businessman, Hammaker, which gave her a say in the elite community:

Last night, he'd failed to see the point of her [Jammu] strategy with North Side real estate.... Asha's men were buying up little lots throughout the area, from the river to the western limits, creating the impression of many parties acting on inside information. And they magnified the impression by buying only property owned by

¹⁸² Julius L. Katz, "Foreign Direct Investment in the United States--Advantages and Barriers." *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 11 (1979): 473.

local banks. This left as much land as possible in the hands of local black businessmen—politically, this was vital.(Franzen, 1988, 76)

Foreign investment and ownership further highlight the nature of the capitalist and communist economic systems in the United States. In the twentieth century, foreigners were linked to conspiracy and when they gained power through investment and ownership of resources, the Native Americans tended to suspect conspiracy. When Jammu shows interest in investment and projects that would develop the city and county, Governor Norris suspects her of conspiracy and begins investigating her. Franzen provides a show of mistrust between the powerful members of the community with regard to the availability of information as to where everyone stands. In Franzen's novel, there is a focus on this idea of mistrust:

Probst trusted no one. He had no knowledge of anyone's motives. How could he be central when he was so abysmally ill-informed? Was he uninformed because he was central? If so, then the conspiracy was working both ways, excluding him from the news and the news from him" (Franzen 1988, 216).

The novel outlines the realist version of closed, unaccountable, and small groups of interest which control the affairs of the public in secret to

satisfy their own self-interests through manipulating the opinions of the public and concealing information so as to have the people's support. According to Habermas' theory of disintegration of the public sphere in the modern mass culture¹⁸³, it can be deciphered that Franzen aims at exploring social fragmentation, politics and the effect of mass media and consumerism as a general concept of the public sphere.

¹⁸³ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 49.

V. 3 Introduction: Strong Motion

Strong Motion was Jonathan Franzen's second novel which was also perceived as another version of his previous beliefs and literature strategy of a post-modernist, systemic socio-political critique as in *The Twenty-Seventh City*. The novel is a saga of an environmental catastrophe and love that is twisted but magnificently intersects together into a fine piece of writing. The title *Strong Motion* is a term for the shaking of the ground near the source of an earthquake. *Strong Motion* revolves around the family life and love life of Louis, and the environmental catastrophes that occur as a result of the people's actions. The novel can be described as a tale of individual responsibility and hazardous legacies. It revolves around themes such as alienation, disposal of waste and the risk in the society, family affairs and community and agency.

Strong Motion revolves around the Holland family which includes the father Bob, Mother Melanie and siblings Louis and Eileen. The family can be described as a typical dysfunctional American family characterized by conflict. Melanie is obsessed with money and favors Eileen over Louis which brings about conflicting concerns. The father, Bob, is a Marxist professor who is not majorly involved in the family issues. The relationship between Eileen and Louis is not close and they both do not know much about the lives of each other because of sibling jealousy and guilt. Eileen is studying for her MBA

not far from their family's roots in Boston and has a boyfriend, Peter, who is the son to an executive at a company called Sweeting-Aldren. Louis on the other side works for a radio station and also lives near their Midwestern roots in Boston. After an earthquake strikes Boston, the Holland family is brought back together because Louis' eccentric grandmother is the only person that dies. The grandmother was the only person who hindered the family from inheriting a fortune of over twenty million dollars which originated from an investment in the Sweeting-Aldren company.

When Louis goes to the earthquake site, he meets a seismologist named Renee with whom he falls in love even when she is older than him (Louis is 23 while Renee is 30). The Boston area still experiences unexpected minor earthquakes that only cause minor damages, and no one can explain why there and at that time. Renee, the Harvard seismologist, develops a theory to explain the origin of the earthquakes which identifies Sweeting-Aldren as a facilitator. Renee determines that the earthquakes occur as a result of the organization inducing seismicity through injecting toxic waste into deep wells hidden in their vicinity. She continues her investigation into the company which scares Melanie, who has inherited wealth in form of shares. Louis is caught in a dilemma where if he opts to expose the company, he may live as a poor man his whole life as the stock may turn out to be worthless. However, Louis is

also happy to assist Renee in uncovering the truth about the company being the cause of the earthquakes. Renee ends up being threatened by company representatives and shot in the back, but she would not retreat. Her relationship with Louis faces ups and downs and they even split up after Louis' old flame who cannot let go reappears. However, the two seemed to have remained together and may even have a future as a married couple in the end. The company is finally exposed as the root of the earthquakes which leads to its bankruptcy. Louis' mother Melanie had however sold her shares before then which makes her offer Renee a \$600,000 reward. Renee rejects the money and burns the check in an ashtray after considering the money tainted.

V. 4 Social Issues in *Strong Motion*

V. 4.1 Earthquakes

Jonatan Franzen is usually considered a social writer and a writer that deals with family affair and relationships. Although *Strong Motion* is a novel that concentrates on characterization but still Franzen tries to focus on this characterization as a means to expose social defects and shortcomings of the American Society.

The title of the novel *Strong Motion* refers to the sound of shaking of the ground near the source of an earthquake. This term, or the title, has its metaphorical importance and the novel revolves around the “earthquake” that hits Boston. The metaphor shows that “the characters can register the symptoms of their strained relations and always partial contentment but fail to fathom the vague desires and fears that underlie them.”¹⁸⁴ The relationship between family member has been shaken, the morality of people has been vanished and they only care about money, greed spread in society.

Strong Motion is “an intimate depiction of a Massachusetts family whose emotional and economic lives are disrupted by a series of unexpected

¹⁸⁴ Brian W. Shaffer, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction Vol. II.* (WILEY- BLACKWELL: A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication, 2011), 579.

earthquakes in the Boston area.”¹⁸⁵ The main action in the novel is the earthquake that hits Boston and left materialistic damage as well as the death of one woman. This woman then come to be known as the stepmother of Melanie Holland, wife of Bob Holland and mother of Louis and Eileen. The family relationship seems to be rigid and everyone lives his/her life without intimacy which is clear in the phone call Louis receives before the earthquake from an old woman. Louis almost knows the woman and he reveals that it was seven years when he met his step-grandmother last time:

“Louis? Well, for goodness’s sake. This is Grandmother.”

He stared at the window for a long time. “Who?” he said.

“Rita Kernaghan. Grandmother.”

“Oh. Hey. Grandmother. Hey.”

“I don’t believe we’ve met but once.”

Belatedly Louis recalled an image, the image of a potbellied woman with a painted kitty-cat face.... This was some seven years ago—about a year after his mother had flown to Boston for her father’s funeral. (Franzen 1992, 10)

The step-grandmother is so happy to know something about Louis’ job and she asks him several questions about his job, and she asks him to see him sooner. (Franzen 1992, 10) This call and what come after it (the earthquake)

¹⁸⁵ Stephen J. Burn, Jonathan Franzen, *The Art of Fiction* No. 207 (Interview), (<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6054/the-art-of-fiction-no-207-jonathan-franzen> , retrieved on 1/10/2020)

change the life of Louis, as well as his family later on, completely. He is the center of the novel, 23-year-old young man, who is content with the way he lives his life. He lives in Cambridge and works as an operator in a radio station. When he was 16-year-old, he depends on himself to be an individual far away from the support of his father and mother. (Franzen 1992, 55)

When Louis was walking in the streets before the death of his step-grandmother, he found himself in middle of a demonstration made by some anti-abortion activists who try to stop abortion as an urban crime that causes the death of humanity:

They were spilling over the curb into the street as they marched towards the State House. Everybody seemed to be on the verge of angry tears. The women, who were dressed like stewardesses and gym teachers, held the stakes of their placards rigidly vertical, as if to shame the lightness with which other kinds of protesters carried placards. (Franzen 1992, 20)

When he escaped the parade of anti-abortion activists, he calls his step-grandmother again and there is no response for eight times of ringing. Finally, there is an answer by “a dead, low institutional voice: “Officer Dobbs” (Franzen 1992, 20). The voice in the other side of the phone tells Louis that: “we’re going to need some information from you.” He said. “As you probably

know, there's been an earthquake up here. And you're not going to be able to speak with Mrs. Kernaghan, because Mrs. Kernaghan was found dead a few hours ago." (Franzen 1992, 20-21)

When he picks a newspaper to follow the news of the earthquake, he reads several articles one of which laments the death of a writer, Rita Kernaghan, his grandmother. (Franzen 1992, 26) The newspaper article brings to the mind of reader the battle of Rita with Town of Ipswich to remove "the pyramidal structure she erected on the roof of her home." (Franzen 1992, 27) Historically, the Pyramid is a symbol of eternity where the ancient Egyptian used to bury the corpses of their dead kings and queens. An editorial works in Ipswich *Chronicle* discusses the famous pyramid of Rita in her funeral saying that this pyramid did not protect her "when push came to shove..... He said Rita had never maintained that the Pyramid offered eternal life in the present existence. That was not the point. It was man's personal view that the Pyramid had in fact served to concentrate the earth forces in the neighborhood—" (Franzen 1992, 40)

In another box of the newspaper on page 16 Louis reads about the activist Protestant minister Philip Stites who raises the slogan of "eliminating abortion" (26) Later in a TV interview Stites talks freely about his own beliefs

about the condition of his county the reason behind them is not nature but it is God Who is angry on the actions people do:

Stites said the earthquake had come close to striking “the epicenter of butchery,” by which he meant the Massachusetts Stat Home. God (he let it be inferred) was angry with the Commonwealth. Like the Church of Action in Christ, He [God] would not rest until the slaughter of the unborn had ceased. “Look for me everywhere,” Stites said. (Franzen 1992, 26)

The earthquake is also a cause for changing the life of The Holland family when Melanie Holland inherited from her stepmother 22 million dollars as shares in the same company that is accused of injecting the earth with chemical substances and waste. Greed becomes an important issue in the novel that is clear when Melanie the mother refuses to give any dollar to Louis asking him to live his life as if nothing happened, i.e. to forget about the money saying that “the best thing for the four of us to do now is just put it out of our minds.” (Franzen 1992, 56)

V.4.2 Disposal of Waste and the Risk Society

Franzen normally seeks to depict the potential toxicity of human habits and behavior which he has also done in first novel *The Twenty-Seventh City*.

In *Strong Motion*, he covers the irresponsible disposal of toxic waste by organizations through exposing Sweeting-Aldren, a company that has a lot to do with the main characters. It begins with the identification of a “greenish affluent” (Franzen 1992, 91) and then a whole trail of waste coming from Sweeting-Aldren facilities and contaminating the neighboring residential areas (Franzen 1992, 465). The process or responding to these events include sending officials wearing Mylar suits without credible information which basically adds to the possible risks (Franzen 1992, 472). Franzen seems to adopt Ulrich Beck’s idea of the modern society as risk society. According to Beck, the advancement in modernizations characterized by the availability of numerous risks that result from processes of production¹⁸⁶. Beck compares the risks in previous historical times with those in the modern society and concludes that contemporary risks are consequences of modernization and are politically reflexive¹⁸⁷. In *Strong Motion*, Franzen displays the consequences of modern processes involving chemical plants through linking their effect to earthquake occurrences. He tends to emphasize this point in a fictitious but realist event that even leads to a fatality and destruction. The identification of risks resulting from modernization, political decisions regarding their

¹⁸⁶ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 49.

¹⁸⁷ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 49

limitations and legal definition, and assessment of the consequences highly depends on the available scientific knowledge¹⁸⁸.

Franzen depicts the importance of scientific knowledge and how its relevance as a foundation for explaining phenomenon has reduced in the modern societies through the efforts of Renee to prove that Sweeting-Aldren is involved in the occurrence of earthquakes in Boston. When Renee uses scientific knowledge to scientifically present her case, other scientists deny its viability using similar scientific language. They claim “Almost no one in seismology would absolutely guarantee that Boston had seen the last of strong motion. The sole exception was Mass Geostudy, a private research venture sponsored by the Army Corps of Engineers and the nuclear power industry” (Franzen 1992, 246-247). Beck identifies that the development of the science is what contributes to the criticism that comes its way¹⁸⁹. As the world develops, scientific work also gets more complicated which triggers more questions from the public. Many people end up questioning the reliability on scientific information. Science becomes more and more needed in the contemporary world, but it also continuously becomes less adequate for

¹⁸⁸ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 226

¹⁸⁹ Qtd. in Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 155.

socially acceptable definitions of truth¹⁹⁰. This is because science can be used to argue opposite perspectives about a similar issue¹⁹¹. In the contemporary world, the use of science to fight against those producing risks for the general population is met by resistance from other theories of science which is more developed. The proof that a scientist provides against large corporations can easily be overturned by a more credible scientific organization that has been funded by the responsible corporation even when they are guilty. The producers of risks tend to win in the conflict with the people affected by those risks through the use of scientific knowledge which downplays or denies the hazards¹⁹². Franzen also depicts another perspective of the risk society that highlights that there is always a “boomerang effect” (Franzen, 1992, 23) from risks initiated by production during modernization through the strongest earthquakes resulted from the activity of Sweeting-Aldren.

Strong Motion also highlights the critical balance between the dangers of toxic waste pollution of the environment by production companies and the provision of labor, finance and resources by the same organizations. Job uncertainty is also a social risk that makes it difficult to dispute industrialization using scientific concepts and that is why many ask the ‘what

¹⁹⁰ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

¹⁹¹ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

¹⁹² Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

if' and 'are you sure' questions. Beck identifies that advanced modernity leads to a process of transition from the system of standardized full employment to another of pluralized and flexible unemployment¹⁹³. In *Strong Motion*, this phenomenon is familiar to Louis who thinks

all the thousands of jobs listed in the paper seemed like noxious effluents that the companies were trying to pay people to get off their hands ... He could feel their anger at the expense of disposing of all this garbage. The top executives dumped the problem on the personnel department, and the people in personnel wore plastic suits easily mistaken for faces and personalities. Their job was to handle the poisonous but inevitable employment by-products without letting them come in contact with their skin (Franzen 1992, 146).

Strong Motion discusses the impact of industry on nature. This has in its turn a reflection on the society. Franzen perspective of nature also seeks to link capitalism to the destruction of the environment. The issue of capitalism in relation to nature has also been explored by other previous researchers and writer through history like Romantic philosophers in the 18th century Europe or even American researchers who wrote ideas against the exploitation of natural resources by capitalism. Blanco discusses this point according to

¹⁹³ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction."

Thoreau in his book *Walden* (1854) as well as Ralph Waldo Emerson also identified a transcendentalist theory that recognized nature as assurance of divinity in his book *Nature* (1936). Franzen views nature as a transcendence where people can escape from current reification which comes as a result of the modern methods of production¹⁹⁴. Franzen identifies this aspect of nature in the accounts of the peace that Louis finds in nature during periods of grief where

He saw that as a material thing himself he was akin to rocks. The waves in the ocean, the rain that eroded mountains, and the sand that would form the next epoch's rocks would all survive him, and in loving this nature he was doing no more than loving his own fundamental species, expressing a patriotic preference for existence over nonexistence. He felt that, if nothing else, he could always anchor himself on the rocks in the world (Franzen 1992, 504).

V.4.3 The Concept of Alienation

Social alienation refers to a condition where an individual keeps a high degree of isolation with other people in society or certain social settings because they have a lower sense of social integration. In strong motion,

¹⁹⁴ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 229

Franzen has displayed alienation in many instances beginning with the social life of Louis. The novel is more domestic-oriented as compared to *The Twenty-Seventh City* as Franzen seeks to explore the dynamics of the self through more personal relationships and behavior emphasis. *Strong Motion* is evidently about the confrontations between a man and a woman which brings confusion as to the main view of the whole novel. Franzen is majorly concerned with the relationship between Renee and Louis through which he explores the dynamics of love relations and emotional attachments. He uses characters who are radically different and takes them through a process of accommodating each other until they become emotionally unified through the power of mutual need. Blanco also explores love according to Judith Butler in her book *Subjects of Desire* where she explains that a reflection of a subject in the other is attained by the process of reciprocal recognition which turns out to satisfy their individual desires¹⁹⁵. Butler identifies that individuals only have to understand the projection of desire when encountering other people with the same set of intentions¹⁹⁶. A person tends to find recognition in the other subject in a way that they have to understand their own identity as a person who is desiring has to be accompanied with claim from the other party.

¹⁹⁵ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 211.

¹⁹⁶ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 211

The situation is however not always pleasing or compatible on either side as there is always potential for engulfment or enslavement for one subject. In strong motion, Louis also experiences non-recognition which is highlighted in the excerpt: “He wondered why he had to feel so alone when they made love, so alone with her pleasure as he propelled the long wave train that led to her satisfaction (on the green plotting screen in the computer room she’d shown him what a large and distant earthquake looked like as it registered on the department’s digital seismograph ... It wasn’t that they didn’t fit together or come enough; it just seemed as if at no point, not even in this most typical of acts between sexes, did she ever present herself or give herself or even let him see her as a woman” (Franzen 1992, 209). Louis feels like his identity is threatened and that puts him in an emotional trap where he has no choice but to avoid wrecking the emotions of Renee, who is the other subject in this case. This created the urge to be dominant in order to balance dependency between the two subjects.

Louis was confused when he tries to understand Renee. Franzen represents this in the excerpt: “He was perplexed by her stubbornness. He honestly believed that she’d be a happier person if she could loosen up a little; but all he got for his pains was the feeling that he was an odious Male. Of course, maybe he was an odious Male. The odious Male seeking control over

a virtuous and difficult woman won't scruple to exploit whatever weakness he can find in her—her age, her mannerisms, her insecurity, and her loneliness above all. He can be as cowardly and cruel as he wants to as long as logic is on his side. And the woman, yielding to his logic, can do no more to save her pride than demand his fidelity. She says: "You've humiliated me and won me now, so you'd better not hurt me." But hurting her is precisely what the man is tempted to do, because now that she has yielded, he feels contempt for her, and he also knows that if he hurts her, she'll become virtuous and difficult again ... These archetypes forced entry to the apartment on Pleasant Avenue like vulgar relatives. Louis wanted to turn them away, but it's not so easy to slam the door in your relatives' faces" (Franzen 1992, 194).

Franzen however expresses the complexity and power of love and understanding of the self and others through the eyes of Louis and the other characters. Louis ends up hurting Renee because of his selfish need to prove his superiority and power as a man. He leaves Renee impulsively for Lauren who is younger. Franzen aims to depict a show of cruelty and domination in love through the eyes of Louis who has felt alienated for most of his life. He writes "He was aware of making a mistake, but he had no control. He was fascinated by the pain in Renée's face. He was finally seeing her. She was finally naked" (215). Franzen however also portrays the consequences of

failing to recognize the other. Louis finally learns that Lauren also has problems of her own and realizes that he made a mistake. Louis becomes the caregiver of Renee when she is shot almost to her death. He enters a process of atonement where he finds strength in his sacrifice and self-denial. According to Blanco, this realization can be referred to as the understanding of the other as a co-author of the self¹⁹⁷. “[Three months ago] He would have sneered at a person who said that love could teach him the many specific skills that constitute patience and grace, and certainly at the person who said that love was a gold ring which if grasped carried you upward with a force comparable in strength to the forces of nature. But this is exactly what he felt now, and the only question was why, when he was by himself or outside the apartment, his life with Renée still felt like such a sorrow” (Franzen 1992, 486).

Franzen implied in strong motion that individuals who feel alienated yearn for the recognition of the self by others with whom they interact emotionally. Many people seek the reassurance that they are needed especially when their self-esteem and confidence fall. Louis still shows that he experiences alienation even after he takes care of Renee where he feels like

¹⁹⁷ Jesus Blanco Hidalgo, "The Romance of Community: Form and Ideology in Jonathan Franzen's Fiction." 229

he is at her mercy. He thinks to himself “She wasn’t someone he knew, this underweight woman with the hectic face and overgrown hair and wire-frame glasses. A deft change had been affected, and no fraud was involved—the woman was clearly who she seemed to be. She just wasn’t the ghost made of memories and expectations that he had seen at breakfast” (494). Fortunately for him, Renee accepts him back. Franzen depicts that even when it takes pain to reconcile with the alterity of the other, accepting the power of others over the self is worthwhile.

V.4.4 Family Affairs and Conflict

Franzen has also widely demonstrated the social setting of the family in his characters in *Strong Motion*. He more precisely focuses on the conflicted and flawed versions of families which are shown through the families of Louis, Renee, Lauren and Peter Stoorhuys. In Renee and Louis’ families, he emphasizes the concepts of a non-nurturing and self-absorbed mother, and an ineffectual and withdrawn father. Melanie favors Eileen over Louis. In the opening chapter, Eileen wants to take Louis’ car, but he refuses saying that “he’d reserved the car a week earlier, she became furious with him, the way a person gets with an inanimate object that she keeps dropping and

mishandling. Finally, she made her mother go ask Louis to be selfless” (4). When she gets in the car, she is still furious to the extent that she left the keys in the car and it is stolen. Her mother reaction over the theft was simple as if nothing happened. When Melanie inherited the money, she refuses to give Louis anything of the money but for when Eileen requests money she gives her: “Eileen could be supernaturally silent and evil when something had been denied her.... She would not relent until money or its equivalent in goods was offered.”(63) Peter Stoorhuys gets annoyed at his father for his dishonesty as an executive of Sweeting-Aldren and also at his mother for agreeing with him. Franzen demonstrates the effects of bad parenting through Lauren, who is disturbed emotionally as she is an adopted and unwanted child. Her mother reflects in guilt:

The worst thing was that Lauren knew. Even when she was tiny, she could feel me doubting myself. She could feel how I didn't really believe I was her mother. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get us to believe in me. And how could I blame her then for all the things he did to me? For biting me like an animal? For the gutter language? ... How could I feel anything but guilt? (Franzen 1992, 69).

Renee and Louis on the other hand have low self-esteem due to inadequate parental support during their upbringing. This is why Louis always

does jobs where he asks for no benefits and minimum wage (507). Renee also depicts fierce competition while studying in Harvard. The feeling of having low self-assurance leads to the generation of other effects as strategy of defence. For example, Renee is self-righteous and possesses amplified pride while Louis is stubborn. They are both very angry people in nature and may rant unnecessarily like in Renee's scene: "And I can't help mentioning" she went on entirely to herself, "something else I forgot the other night, when you asked me what my problem is with Boston, I forgot to mention the way people call the subway the T. The people, I mean the implicating people, don't say 'I'm going to take the subway,' they say 'I'll take the T.' What's sick—to me; what I consider sick—is that it's like this code word, which every time I hear I become angry because I can hear the whole story, all these kids learning to say the T. instead of 'subway'" (154). When individual feel like they are worthless they are not generally happy or able to establish satisfactory relationships with others and this can trigger depression¹⁹⁸.

Franzen further portrays the effect of sibling competition for approval and recognition by their parents and rivalry which leads to resentment and

¹⁹⁸ Walter Toman, *Family constellation: Its effects on personality and social behavior*. Springer Publishing Company, 1993, 22.

damaged pride¹⁹⁹. The current behavior of an individual may have been majorly influenced by his/her upbringing and the nature of the family in which he/she belongs²⁰⁰. Franzen also works on the impact of teenage traumas in the characters and how it affects their future behavior. For example, Louis was mercilessly beaten by another kid in high school while his sister Eileen was popular and social, and she refuses to acknowledge him as her brother. His character is therefore made of endurance which is common in children who are socially unsuccessful and neglected²⁰¹. The image of him walking from school alone shows the feeling of non-belonging and neglect: “Even in the middle of a jammed and laughing back-seat she [Eileen] would glance out a window just in time to see her brother striding along the trashy shoulder of some six-lane suburban thoroughfare” (Franzen 1992, 4).

V.4.5 Agency in the Community

Jonathan Franzen also highlights the dynamics of agency in the community where specific social groups can raise their voice to fight for what

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Rosenman, and Bryan Rodgers. "Childhood adversity and adult personality." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 40, no. 5 (2006): 482.

²⁰⁰ Helen J. Raschke, and Vernon J. Raschke. "Family conflict and children's self-concepts: A comparison of intact and single-parent families." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1979): 369.

²⁰¹ Joel Paris, "Does childhood trauma cause personality disorders in adults?." *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 43, no. 2 (1998): 149.

is best for the general population. In *Strong Motion*, he clearly portrays agency through a group of young people who decide to oppose a large chemical company that is destroying the environment with waste disposals. In the 1980s, the youth followed values that were relatively acceptable by elder people as opposed to the youth in the contemporary society with values that are intolerable by most of them. In *Strong Motion*, Renee's effort to fight Sweeting-Aldren is brave and finally succeeds. However, its impact on a larger perspective seems little and incomplete. As explained in the risk society issue, corporations use science to shut down scientific evidence and rebellion from minor groups such as Renee's. The efforts to fight such a battle therefore seems like an impossible feat for single entities in the society unless massive support is provided. It is difficult for such activism efforts to be made on a global level which indicates an obvious failure of emancipatory politics even when a particular opposing community is successful in political articulation²⁰².

Renee and her group are however not the only activists depicted in *Strong Motion*. As discussed earlier, Franzen also includes a group of anti-abortionists led by reverend Stites that can be described as a political

²⁰² Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. (Verso Trade, 2014), 41.

community. He likely seeks to represent his own public denial. The group provides the opportunity for its members to get the blessings of the community and the sense of self-esteem and purpose. It represents the wholehearted commitment of individuals or revolutionaries to a specific cause. One member tells Renee “the last five months had been the most meaningful and light-filled time she’d ever known” (Franzen 1992, 317). Instead of turning fear into faith, the members of the congregation should relate to the risks that face them such as the collapse of the buildings they live in, which were abandoned after being damaged by the earthquake. The reverend talks to Renee and says: “I can live without fear because I can feel how I’m hanging right over death, in the hands of God. If you get your life in balance with your death, you stop panicking. Life stops being just the status quo that you hope won’t end for a long time” (Franzen 1992, 324).

Franzen clearly displays some of the forces that influence social systems and behavior with an interest of doing good. However, the contemporary society is filled with challenges to such activism even when government systems promise total transparency and concerns over the safety of mankind as a whole. The capitalist economic system has fueled many social inequalities and injustices because certain individuals possess enormous economic capabilities and that is mainly what matters. It can be said, justice

can be neutralized with wealth and problems can also be solved with violence where wealth fails (like in the shooting of Renee). The reverend and Renee represent the conflict between religion and science which is most characteristic in America. Franzen seeks to support the liberal side as he is more against the conservative perspective as demonstrated through the reverend's speeches. Franzen portrays Stites as "a turbulent fanatic, but he is also an idealist and formidably intelligent."²⁰³

Jonathan Franzen, after all, seems to address a number of social issues that affect the community. Franzen's first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, spoke about issues that can shake the unity of the community he lives in and cause the deterioration morally and ethically. Fears that spread throughout the society cause the emptiness of the city from its citizens and bring people who are outsiders to live in the city and bring its destruction. The fictitious novel covers these issues through the story of the city of St. Louis and the occurrences after the deployment of a new Indian chief of police with ulterior motives into the city instead of deploying a native man or woman from the city itself. Franzen addresses issues that exist even in the contemporary world and some which have already occurred after the novel's publication. In his second novel, *Strong Motion*, Franzen covers issues such as the causes behind

²⁰³ Richard Eder, "Shaky Town East." *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (2 February 1992): 6.

the earthquakes, alienation, disposal of waste and the risk society, family affairs and community and agency. He explores these issues through the story of the Holland family and other important characters such as Renee and Lauren. He highlights activism against the pollution of the environment by a corporate company which subsequently led to earthquakes in the area. Franzen is an important writer who is mainly concerned with issues that affect the community and seeks to make a difference in the society.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The three novelists who are the subject of this study, are considered social novelists whose main concern is the American society. Their novels were written in 1988, 1992, 1997, 2000 and 2005 covering the last years of the 20th century although they describe events happened earlier. They cover several themes and aspects of this society through which the characters are in severe conflict with these issues. They share one idea: there are several hidden issues behind the bright image of United States of America.

The first novelist is Philip Roth believes that there is no hope in reforming the American society which is full of corruption, scandal, and vulgarities. These issues become a background for his novels that influence the life of his characters as they influence the life of real people. His writings turn to be outrageous satires against defects he has seen in his society. Roth's main concern is quest for identity. The American individual keeps seeking for identity and self-realization. This is clear in Coleman Silk case when he acquired new identity for himself far away from his real one that is a black American. He decided to live as white man benefiting from his complexion. This new identity brought disasters for him. Ironically, while he wanted to get rid of his black identity, he found himself accused of insulting two black students calling them 'spooks'. This search for identity reminds readers of Oedipus' journey to know his real father and mother. Ironically, he kills his

real father in the journey and then marries his own mother. While Oedipus was brave enough to punish himself for what he has committed, Coleman dies without regretting losing his own identity and his real parents. Coleman's fall is also a tragic one, not only as Oedipus fall but also as Dr. Faustus fall. This tragic fall of Coleman becomes symbolic for the fall of USA as nation of glory to a nation of discrimination and lost identity.

Another issue in Roth's *Human Stain* is the impact of war on the American veterans and how they would behave when he came back to civil life. This is clear also in Lester Farley, the X-husband of Faunia (later one she became Silk's mistress) who found himself stranger in his society thinking that he would be a hero when he came back to civil life. He found himself a patient of PTSD that prevented him from changing his war identity into a civilian one. Roth seems to parody "the glorified version of male soldiers" that Fairly typified. This is the message Roth wants to portray about war. He is not interested in war as an action but as a consequence.

In *American Pastoral*, war also becomes a background for the deterioration of American economy and family relationship. Anti-war movement and supporters were influential in the novel. Merry Levov was one of the supports of anti-war movement who turned to become a terrorist when she bombed an office. She seems to move in contrast to the national myth

represented by her father. Roth describes her as the "counter pastoral" impulse or the "demonic reality."

The novel also demonstrates the failure of American Dream. Ironically, while America was considered a nation of achieving this "dream", it is introduced as a nation of slavery and territorial wars in addition to the violence practiced against the "indigenous" or original people. If it needs to impose idealization of the American Dream it must overcome these bad practices. The failure of the "Dream" represented in the exclusion of certain America people from enjoying it. The Swede is the representative of the American Dream for his blue eyes, his blond hair, his athlete stature and his success in life and business. The exclusion is implied here. Only white Americans have the right to join this "Dream". Levov ends in losing his pastoral land (the essence of the American Dream), his job as well as his wife and daughter. His tale turned from a tale of success to a tale failure.

In this sense, what Coleman did in his attempt to acquire a new white identity is clear. Coleman attempts to get outside of this exclusion thinking that he is excluded from the American Dream. He joins the navy, participates in boxing matches and marrying from a white woman.

American Pastoral also focuses on the parental theme. The Swede goes against the will of his father and married a "Shiksa", a non-Jewish woman.

This marriage in addition to the secret Christian baptism Merry receives against the will of Levov's father become a bad omen for the daughter as well as for the whole family. As in *Human Stain*, Roth here insists on the idea of keeping one's identity and restricting to it otherwise he/she may experience failure in their lives. It is implied here that going against the paternal will is similar to that of going against the will of God.

Cormac McCarthy also discusses different important social issues in his two novels *All the Pretty Horses* and *No Country for Old Men*. In the first novel, McCarthy discusses the issues the main protagonist John Grady faces in his journey to Mexico. He finds himself in an inner conflict to control the evil inside and to face the evil inside others. Evil starts to accumulate inside when he first lost the ranch after his grandfather death. It was a ranch with spiritual value. When he was arrested with Rawlins, they were tortured, treated inhumanly, and accused of crimes they do not know anything about. It is a criticism against the judicial system. Evil is revealed in when Grady describes war and how war can be fought back by another war. This reveals the vengefulness people have. Alejandra, the daughter Grady loves in Mexico, finds in this love affair a good chance to rebel against the authority of her father. Her aunt Alfonsa, who has supported the civil war, sets a war against Grady because he loves Alejandra. Evil and war here seem to control the

relationship among people and family member. War for McCarthy, in his novels, are also a background for the society and the problems that are inherent in it. War has turned people to act violently even in their love affair. This is clear in the case of Alfonsa who once fell in love with one of the revolutionary leaders, but her family never approved her relationship which turned her manipulative and cynical. The evil Grady witnesses makes him a killer and seek revenge.

Like Philip Roth, McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* depicts the loss of pastoral life presented by Cowboy life. From the very beginning of the novel, this loss is clear in selling the ranch of his grandfather. It is a symbol of commitment to land and pastoral life. After selling it, John sets on a journey to seek harmony with pastoral life. This loss reflects the melancholic tone in the whole novel, and it becomes an "imaginary wound" that keeps bleeding without any remedy.

Like Philip Roth, the theme of paternity is repeated here. When his mother insists on selling the ranch and his father is drunkard and powerless, Grady realizes that the adults are dead, absent, or powerless and cannot contribute to his dream. For Grady, his mother betrayed him when she sells the ranch for an oil company. This makes him set out to move to a place where there is no American civilization. His determination in this journey is to look

for the romantic cowboy life that he lost in his native country. The American culture fails because it forces him out of his country.

In *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy emphasizes the notion of the adults or old men are dead, absent, and powerless. He deals with issues of violence, war, greed, drugs, murder... etc. McCarthy tries to show that these issues become part of American culture that proves its failure.

McCarthy's constant use of violence in *No Country for Old Men* develops an essential awareness of how violence affects Morality in society. Although violence is introduced excessively in the novel, it is used to bring out awareness of specific themes like good versus evil to the readers. It is a new type of evil that leads to the destruction of society.

The novel demonstrates the consequences of greed, violence, and corruption. Greed brings about moral melt-down. The author demonstrates that greed and corruption only bring suffering and tribulations to an individual's life.

Moss realizes that drug money is dirty and bloody. Whatever you do, it can never be free as it is associated with violence and deaths that an individual can never run away from. Whenever there is drug, there must be weapons and

deaths. Drugs represent a factor that can set war in every moment. Drugs also become a source of violence that cannot be stopped.

McCarthy shows that his characters act in the shadows of lies and falsehood. When Bell gets the bronze award, he receives it not because it is worthy but because he is told to accept it to demonstrate the American efforts in Europe. Moss's experience during his fight in Vietnam made him delusional. The condition affected his character and decision making. Greed is evident in his character when he takes the bag full of drug money.

Like Philip Roth, McCarthy presents war as a background for his characters' actions. Sheriff Bell, Moss and Well are military veterans who fought different wars during WWII. McCarthy shows the adverse effects that war has caused in society. The struggle of power by military operations also depicts the corrosive forces of war in the country.

Franzen's novels are considered a satire against the sickness of the society. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, Franzen depicts the urban crimes that spread in the society, the organized crimes by some slumlords in the slums of the city of St. Louis. These crimes happen with the help of the police chief Jammu who comes from India and get this critical job. Jammu and is famous for thwarting violent crime including terrorist attacks in order to boost her

reputation. She also organizes the seduction and kidnapping of Probst's wife Barbara. In introducing Jammu, a woman comes from the Third World to control the police job, Franzen seems to say that Americans are not aware of this urban decline and racial tension. The history of America is not written by Americans.

Because of these crimes and the spread of Indians and other people from other nations, people of St. Louis decide to live in suburbs rather center of the city. It becomes a tragedy of its own that describes the emptiness of the city of its original people.

Like Roth and McCarthy, Franzen also highlights the idea of racial discrimination that further influences the population settlement in urban areas. Majority of white communities tend to live in the leafy suburbs while black and other ethnic groups live in ghettos and poor neighborhoods. The emptiness of the city happened because of the initiatives introduced by the chief of police, Jammu. She initiated an operation of gentrifying downtown areas that led to a huge clearing process that displaced many people in the low-income houses.

Another important social issue is that the rich people invest in real estates in parts of the inner city leaving many people homeless due to the

inability to afford the city's expensive houses. In addition, Jammu has also her plan in foreign investment in real estate offering a platform for this investment which sounded appealing to many of the elite community. Franzen depicts the critical impact of power in the ownership of real estate and investment.

In *Strong Motion*, Franzen introduces a socio-political critique as in his first novel. The title of the novel refers to the shaking sound near the center of the earthquake. This motion or shaking becomes symbolic for what is happening in the American society during the 1980s. The novel revolves around this action of earthquake that hit Boston. Louis' grandmother dies because of that earthquake. This event changes the whole family life. It exposes the loose relationship between family members. Readers come to know that they live in loneliness and alienation from each other.

Like Roth and McCarthy, Franzen shows himself as a writer of the American family in *Strong Motion*. He explores maternity attitude towards children when she inherits money after the death of her stepmother in the earthquake. She denies giving her son Louis part of that money asking him to live as if nothing has happened. On the contrary, if her daughter asks her to take some this money, she gives her. This emphasizes the non-nurturing and self-absorbed mother, and an ineffectual and withdrawn father. It is an issue

that appears also in Roth's *American Pastoral* when Merry's mother contributes to the stuttering of her daughter. It also exists in Roth's *Human Stain* when Faunia indulges in a sexual affair with a stranger while her children caught in fire. In McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, Grady's mother represents this issue when she decides to sell the ranch of his grandfather.

Franzen implies, through antiabortionists activists, that the earthquake is reaction of God against what is done by human being on earth. One of these examples is the crime of abortion that spread through the American society. It is an unjust action made against the unborn babies.

Franzen also focuses on the impact of industry on nature. This has in its turn a reflection on the society. Franzen perspective of nature also seeks to link capitalism to the destruction of the environment. The chemical companies inject earth with toxic waste. He exposes this act of these companies which represents a risk on the society. Franzen displays the consequences of the processes of chemical plants through linking their effect to earthquake occurrences. He emphasizes that this point leads to a fatality and destruction.

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