***Black girl, White girl*, Joyce Carol Oates, 2006**

Introduction

Tensions arise as black girl meets white girl. Roommates yet odd couple

1. **Room mate strangers : an odd couple**

a) An unbalanced relationship

Minette and Genna are roommates yet the narrator keeps pointing out how uneasy the relationship is. Nothing seems natural and simple as described by the narrator. Do they understand each other? Do they speak the same language?

b) An unrequited friendship

At school blacks and whites accepted so says society except here in ‘the most integrated’ (28) college, Minette will die. The title, Black Girl White Girl, points out the latent tensions between two groups of the American society as potentially embodied by the two girls. They mirror each other yet are poles apart, black v white.

c) Poles apart : what is is not

At Schuyler College, Haven Hall is no haven – this is the very place Minette will die in. On the contrary, Haven reads danger, life reads death, friend reads stranger. Opposition lies at the centre if this text : what is is not, the two girls speak yet don’t understand each other, they laugh together yet do not agree on the reason why they are laughing. Meaning is turned upside down.

T : An unbalanced relationship Genna feels overwhelmed by her brilliant roommate. How is it possible to describe someone when fascination has seized you, when a goddess is standing in front of you.

1. **Goddess Minette**

Striking first appearance dressed with a long white dress adorned with a ‘wooden cross’.

Minette’s description equates her with someone out of reach, a religious supreme entity. Following the rule of the text (opposition and contraries, what is so is not), Minette is humane so divine. Her appearance described by the senses: touch, vision smell. She is so overwhelming you that words cannot properly describe her, other means are necessary.

* Her **flesh** but you ‘dared (not) touch that skin’ or you may burn your fingers (3-4)
* Divine **smells** of ‘natural oil’
* Her hair. Stiff and jutting like wires: associated to the mythological figure of the snake-haired Medusa . She is a Gorgon, and she may turn you into stone if you look at her in the eyes. Not human.
* Her hair is wedge-shaped which was highly unconventional in the 70s in the US (long-haired hippy girls): Minette defies the period’s canon of femininity.
* Deep-set eyes that you cannot understand, evasive meaning, communication between the girls is defeated.

T : In spite of this, she is wearing cheap pink plastic glasses, a sign she still belongs to the realms of innocent childhood. A most difficult job for the narrator to perform: how to write about a larger than life character an entity that belittles you? Can you WRITE about such a topic and be efficient in such a task?

1. **Narrator at a loss / out of a job**

a) Because of emotions

First nominal sentence: incapacity to write full sentences + punctuation ‘!’ = the emotion of thinking about Minette Swift places the narrator at a loss for words.

 Moreover, she looks like ‘nothing like’ any other black girl. Reinforces her unique status at school , in the narrator’s mind.

Csq of Minette’s presence : the narrator is awe-struck. She becomes ‘clumsiness incarnate’ (see basketball passage)

b) Impossibility to decipher signs

Minette is a ‘riddle’ that the narrator cannot solve.

Many occurrences of the narrator’s powerlessness to interpret Minette’s attitude, gestures, words : ‘I could not decode’ (15) (importance and meaning of the modal), ‘I stumbled over my feet’ (18), Genna literally cannot do her job as a basketball player, she cannot equal the trailblazer, she can only ‘follow eagerly in her wake’ like a simple disciple (wake > death)

They do not speak the same language: Minette answers by incomprehensible monosyllables when the narrator speaks to her.

Minette speaks neutrally yet her roommate cannot make head or tail, ‘I supposed’, ‘not knowing if …’, ‘Or… maybe…’ ‘I heard myself sounding clumsy, eager’ ‘I wasn’t sure why I was laughing’…

The narrator doubts her own judgement, is not able to reveal what was going on back.

Conclusion

Difficulty of writing about a topic, a person that surpasses you. How to find words, and the right words? What does it take to truly understand people? Can people understand each other can blacks and whites in the US find common grounds?

Narrator’s reticence and fascination, protagonist’s enigma and dazzlement.

***My Antonia*, Willa Cather, 1918**

**Proposition de Mme Colinge-Germain**

A passage that contextualizes American the conquest of the west

1. **Westward expansion and Manifest Destiny**
* a journey: from Virginia to Nebraska by train (not wagon), a new world
* the wilderness: rawness of the land, prairie, alien nature
* an adventure, including the myth of the West, figure of the Desperado
* fate destiny (being carried by events), not resisting his destiny, parallels the History of the country: westward expansion
1. **Immigration**
* foreign vs. native born: contrast between people: Europeans and American-borns, migrations
* separateness: barriers, groups, language
* Intertextuality: Emma Lazarus’s poem, ‘Give me your tired, you poor your huddled masses yearning to breathe free’ 1883/1903 + pages of Jesse James
1. **A scene of initiation**
* darkness vs. light, points out the metaphor between seeing and knowing.
* lexical field of seeing + pictorial elements, especially portraits : the immigrants, Otto Fuchs
* first experiences + gaining knowledge. ‘first time I heard…’, ‘I’d never looked before…’

Conclusion: a passage that tells us about the narrator’s need to be awakened as he proves inquisitive, possessed with spirit of taming the land. His story and the national History.

**Ma proposition**

**Introduction**

Almost an incipit, but not quite.

Jim Burden is being transported by train from Virginia to his Nebraskan grand-parents by Jake. The newly orphaned-boy does not control much of what is happening to him: passivity yet movement characterizes this passage, blindness yet vision as well, loss of a familial history yet finding of a new path: fate, blind luck, what would be would be. His world has become utterly unstable.

To what extent can you build yourself without stability?

1. **An orphan**
* young boy, unguided by parents, (left the world behind, their spirits too)
* passive little boy undergoing a most difficult time (losing his parents), signs of passivity in the passage abound: being carried somewhere without knowing more about it (train and wagon), turns into an animal (buffalo hide covers him up)
* has lost his bearings: he does not remember, see, know, understand the language people are speaking. >>utter darkness. Lost in a void. a helpless boy
1. **An American orphan**
* the journey and a sense of the country: a country in the making
* documenting the new period: immigration and the conquest of the west
* alone in the wilderness yet decides a path for himself in life: what would be would be. A self-made man in the making.
1. **A learned gifted orphan**
* Is Jim a reliable narrator? ‘ I do not remember’, 1 ‘couldn’t see’
* The narrator portrays his companion by using literary heroes types (the cowboy, Jesse James) impressing the young boy: Otto Fuchs as a larger than life character: sense of adventure, the period too.
* Older Jim tells his story and puts in literary references: Emma Lazarus’s Poem ‘huddled masses’ and Shakespeare *The Tempest*, in Cather’s text, ‘the material out of which countries are made on’, in Shakespeare’s play ‘such stuff as dreams are made on’ (Prospero, IV, 1, on the illusory nature of life)
* A Bildungsroman. a coming age novel: the metaphor of learning and telling through the mention of the lanterns.

Cl : a passage that shows something of American resilience

**Jack Kerouac *On The Road*, 1957**

**SEE**

Paratext

FICTION, prose, a novel.

Extract of Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road,* 1957

On foot and hitchhiking, a young man is travelling from the east to the west of the USA. After being let off in Des Moines, Iowa he spends the day sleeping in a hotel. He suddenly awakens. What has happened to him as he wakes up?

On the move he feels cheerful, though when no moving anymore, he goes through an existential experience.

Historical - cultural context

* The Beat Generation,
* End of the fifties, the 60s, Hippy movement, counter culture in the U.S.A.
* The hobbo character

First impressions: movement, going west, existential questions about his life, himself as a man

**THINK**

Which TOOLs apply to THIS text?

**Comparisons: Images and associations that expand reality of the protagonist**

Denver like the Promised Land3-4

stars? prairie and plains and vision of San Francisco? (all?) like jewels in the night 6 (reference unclear)

**Personifications : surroundings a pretext for the narrator to speak about him**

lonely brick walls 8

prairie brooding 8

sad sounds20

**Hypallages: confusion of sensations**

the smell of corn like dew in the night 9

fifteen strange seconds 21

**humans turning into machines :**

Off we roared 10

Driving ideas of this text

* Confused meanings of light and darkness
* VISIONS : of the protagonist: I could see Denver 3 … I could greater visons of San Francisco 5.
* SMOKE : sometimes signals something, allows the hero to see (10), sometimes the opposite : smoky scenes of the rail-yards 15-6
* Upside down order: wakes up at dawn 10, woke up as the sun was reddening 16 sleeps all day long 11-12, railyards: transportation west Central Pacific and Union Pacific ; gloomy hotel, the climax of his visions, his epiphany, is a ghost, a haunted body.
* Bible: Denver: the Promised Land 4-5
* Vulgarity / paganism: dirty remarks by my 14-5 / modern decay the beat yellow window shades pulled over the smoky scene of the railyards 15-16; cheap hotel room 18-19 cracked-high ceiling 20-1
* Story of westward expansion: old Plains, presence of Indians; French: Des Moines, Bible : Promised Land
* Loneliness: I was alone far from home 18, prairie 8
* estranged from himself: haunted with travel, 22 : I was somebody else **some** stranger, my life **: a** haunted life the life of **a** ghost.

>> use of indefinite articles and quantifiers >> the protagonist has lost his identity, is just a random person.

17 -8 I didn’t know who I was

21 I really didn’t know who I was

* CLIMAX of his life a distinct moment in my life 16-7 uniqueness of the moment, use of striking superlative: the strangest moments of all 17
* existential moment yet not worrying: I wasn’t scared 21-2

Author’s intentions

* hitting the road a story, a conquest of self-knowledge
* seeing &moving bring happiness, American history
* immobility clear visions, hidden meaning arise,
* light and darkness

**WONDER**

Importance of passage, aethetic ? thematic ?

quest for identity, signs, their reading, understanding

Intertextuality, Cultural references

The Bible

What deeper meaning can I put forward ?

The road as a place which allows a quest for identity

Oragnise your comments, find a leading question:

To what extent can the road reveal your inner self?

Une proposition de CORRECTION BAC 2022 LLCER *THE CALL OF THE ROAD*

To what extent is the road constitutive of or an obstacle to the building of the self ?

1. **MOVEMENT on the road : building Americanness**
* since the beginning of times American folks have hit the road : to conquer pioneers, citizens (the Beat Generation, *Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck), hobo characters ; the geography of the country extols the spirit of AMERICANNESS (B : was I happy)
* movement + hope: conquering the unknown looking for treasures, better lives, better futures, better conditions, to bring knowledge (*American Progress,* John Gast, 1872) : (A : historical event and the road)
* Building the American identity : brave dauntless PIONEERS YET hobo : photographer Lange humanizes the misfit

Transition: surprisingly enough, the road takes reality away from you, a movement towards abstraction and nothingness.

1. **The road or the derealisation of the self, losing oneself**
* America is more an idea than a reality (document A) YET in B the geography of the country becomes human: ‘lonely bricks’ and ‘brooding prairie’: personification conversely humans become machines: ‘off we roared ‘(non humans)
* the great divide: geographical and psychological: the *anticlimax* of the character ghost person, (a philosophical experiment - I am a NO-BODY, a ghost, an ontological void).
* The hobo: his movement is halted (vertical and horizontal lines) this goes against his essence: moving, seen yet not recognizable identifiable, shadows on his eyes, a type, not an individual.

T : The road acquires a mystic status that of a religion but a confused religion in which the code are reversed

1. **The road sending out confusing religious signs**
* Religious VOC : Denver as ‘the Promised Land’ - a sacred land, relation to
* On the road you are as a god (A): ‘you call the shots’: master of your fate YET the stars guide you (B) : celestial bodies to guide humans
* C: the photographer uses a low angle shot so as to magnify and praise (not the Lord but ) the wanderer in an immobile position which is against his essence, immobile like a statue, like an icon, a religious icon, pagan cross
* metaphor of the light visions: symbolism of the light (opposition day and night) A seeing through the night like the beacon on the hill
* HOWEVER in B: the characters sees thanks to the SMOKES of Denver; he sleeps during the day, see at night: INVERSION of codes, has visions in the night
* B: the word are carved in stone ( = Table of the law in the Bible) YET dirty and vile, shouldn’t be pronounced by anyone

**CONCLUSION**: To build yourself in the States, need to have your own vision and your own interpretation of life, movement. The road is perhaps the best place to realize who you are provided you have your personal reading of the signs.