

Introduction :



Introduction : Hemingway is a great figure of the « lost generation », like Fitzgerald, S. Anderson, G. Stein, S. Lewis... F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote " all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" to describe the feeling the young intellectuals had in this years. The writers of the " lost generation" added their own feelings of loss and failure to the previous tradition of realism. The short story The killers by Hemingway is representative of this realism and those feelings of loss and failure, because it seems that Summit (the town where the action takes place) and its inhabitants are part of a sterile and destructive world without any god or powers above. How and why is this short story representative of this " lost generation" ?

1) Realism : - The setting & the atmosphere : - the setting seems to be a commonplace : comparison with Ed. Hoppers's painting Nighthawks, representing a similar place - a very common lunch counter, in an American town, Summit - artificial atmosphere with " streetlight", " arc light" in the street ; the colours seem to be absent of the scene : this is a sort of black & white scene, with the darkness of the night and the artificial white light, the " black overcoat" and " the face was small and white"...)

- the town seems to be a dead town, with a great impression of loneliness - The mundanity: - everything is prosaic : for instance, the menu : « a roast pork tenderloin with applesauce and mashed potatoes » or « ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak" - the language is contaminated by this mundanity, it reflects the disenchantment of the world - The time : -the time is passing minute after minute without real action : " it's five o'clock ", " it was a quarter past six ", " it was twenty past six ", " at six fifty-five", " the hands of the clock marked seven o'clock and then five minutes past seven" -the rhythm of the story could be compared with the rhythm of blues music : it is very slow, without

any real action, filled by a pointless conversation - The violence in the contact between the characters : -violence is omnipresent, subjacent even in the dialogs between the characters: " what the hell do you put it on the card for", " oh, to hell with the clock", " you're a pretty bright boy, aren't you ? " and then " well, you're not"... -the cook and Nick are tied up : " I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent", the " killers" use arms " Al [...] with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun resting on the ledge"... II) An everyday tragedy : - An imposed behaviour : -every action is imposed by a sort of automatic reflex, for instance Ole Andreson is always on the run " I'm through with all that running around", the inhabitants of the city " all come here and eat the big dinner" everyday, Ole Andreson " comes here to eat every night [...] at six o'clock"... - the characters are locked in the routine - The passivity of the characters : -the characters are all passive : they do not react when the killers come in the restaurant, they accept to be tied up without any form of rebellion, at the end of the story, the cook says " I don't even listen to it" when Nick is telling George about his visit to Ole, George says " you better not think about it", Nick wants to " get out of this town" - Ole stay lying on his bed looking at the wall while he is sure to be killed, he does not react and just says " after a while I'll make up my mind to go out", when going out means to be killed - The characters are failures : -the killers are described only by there garments : " a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest", " they were dressed like twins", " both wear overcoats too tight for them", they are " about the same size"; it is as if all their nature could be locked in their appearance -Al is described with only two features : " his face was small and white and he had tight lips", max is not described -They are seen as a " vaudeville team", a sort of comic pair

(like Laurel & Hardy for instance), which is far away from the representation of killers, they are too much real that they seem unreal -Ole, who was a boxer, is now seen as " an awfully nice man", " he's just as gentle" says Mrs Bell : all the characters seems to be failures III) Adversity of the world : - The loneliness : - the town, Summit, is a sort of symbol of loneliness & despair - the death is omnipresent, even in a subjacent form : for the killers, the death of a man is just a simple action (detachment) : " what are you going to kill him for, then ? " and the answer " we're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend", " he never even seen us" - for Ole, life seems to be worse than death : he has no passion, he keeps looking the wall when Nick says he is going to be killed by two men (total failure to act) - The characters seem to be interchangeable : -as seen before, the characters seem to be interchangeable : they are devoid of personality, there is a play on resemblance / dissemblance (the 2 killers look alike even if they are different) -Ole does not look at Nick, but is always looking to the wall (it is as if Nick as lost his humanity for Ole) -Mrs Bell is confused with Mrs Hirsch... - A refuge in the language ? - in that story, it seems that language is only used as a refuge for the characters : they speak only to fill the time passing by (inanity of conversation), to forget the loneliness of the place.. -when Al says " shut up ! you talk to goddam much", Max answers " well, I got to keep bright boy amused" or " we have to keep amused, haven't we ? " : it is as if language was used only to fill a gap -the words are used two or three times : for instance, " well, good night", " I guess" or " it's a hell of a thing" and " it's an awful thing" (it is like a dialog of the deaf) - A disenchanted world : - the story stop short : there is no suspense, the killers have told George they were about to kill Ole, but they do not - the title " the killers" announced a

story of gangsters, of killers, but there is finally no murder, therefore the end of the story is quite " flat" - It is as if nothing could move the characters (Ole resolved to death, immutability of the characters...) - Summit and its inhabitants seem to be a sterile and destructive world deserted by God, accomplishing a destiny without any form of rebellion Conclusion : The short story The killers is quite representative of the writing of the " lost generation"; here, it seems that human beings have been abandoned by God, in an hostile world, where action is doomed to failure. Men are resolved to death, since they cannot do anything to change life. Ole Anderson, destined to death, keeps lying on his bed, unable of any action, saying " there ain't anything to do", and will surrender to his enemies : it is as if life were worse than death for him. Hemingway uses the realism to show how much life is insipid and bland for those men, and describes the " everyday tragedy" they live in and the adversity of the world.