

Alienation and the search for identity

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Modernist literature reached its peak between 1900 and 1920's. Alienation was one of its characteristic themes. Described as either the separation from the self or from the world, alienation, soon, will drive an individual to look for his/her niche in this world. The concept of alienation will be examined through the literary works of Frost, Hemingway, and Hurston. Robert Frost was known for his works depicting realities of rural life. This, he clearly portrayed in his poem *Out, Out*. The title was elicited from the end of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: *Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player.*

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing. We see here in *Macbeth* and in *Out, Out* the fragility and the seemingly insignificance of life. Life was taken and it was gone in the world. Frost used narrative to create a clear and objective picture of each event in *Out, Out*. This poem illustrates the difficulty of life in farmlands. The poem begins with the introduction of the snarling and rattling sound of the buzz saw. It implies the danger it can bring to anyone near it, most especially to the boy operating it.

The scene was described as beautiful and pleasing. From the yard was the view of five mountain ranges, each one behind the other. The family and the scene seemed to be the world in which the boy's life revolved around with. Nonetheless, the family was too busy to relish all these. Soon, the boy's sister was finished preparing supper. When she summoned everyone to eat, the boy lost attention of what he was doing and the saw accidentally cut through his hands. The boy knew too well that even though he was young, he was fulfilling an important role in the family.

He foresees a grave future if loses his hand and so he tells her sister to tell the doctor not to cut his hands out. It was seen that the boy was more concerned with his responsibility in the family than his self. If he loses his hand, he knows that he will be of great burden to his family. He will feel alienated from the family who does hard work every day. By the end of the poem, the boy dies after the removal of his hand and this served to be his escape from estrangement. His family, on the other hand, since they were alive, continued with their concerns.

Ernest Hemingway is known for his simple and short sentences bearing complex ideas. One of his classic short stories is Hills Like White Elephant whose main theme revolved around the conflict between the intentions of two people. The story occurred beside a train station in the Ebro River valley in Spain. Hemingway used the third person point of view limiting the readers to read the thoughts of the main characters. Through the exchange of words between the American and the woman named Jig, the readers will soon realize the issue that they were discussing.

Aside from the discussion, the use of symbolism enhanced the mood of the story and complemented the words spoken and feelings of the main characters, especially those of Jig. The story begins with the description of the scene: ‘.. there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Here, the opposing directions suggest that one is in the midst of perplexity and is needed to decide before long. Following this, the two main characters were introduced. Through their dialogue, it was implied that the characters were discussing about abortion.

The day grew hotter which indicated the pressure that builds within the characters. The narrator describes the observation of Jig: The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees. The natural imagery formed leads the readers to Jig's emotions. She sees her current state as the fertile field along the river.

On the other hand, in the shadow of the clouds across the field, she sees the despondency abortion will bring to her life. The American wants Jig to pursue abortion so that he can continue with his senseless life of drinking and relentless travelling. Jig, conversely, prefers to deviate from the usual and start settling down. Jig knows what she wants but feels having no sense of self-government. It is as if the American has the last say for whatever she does to her own body. Jig may have her reasons for these. The story concludes with the couple waiting for their train turning up in five minutes.

Zora Neale Hurston is a renowned anthropologist and writer of African-American Literature. Her short story *Sweat* is about a strong woman who has endured fifteen years of hardship from his husband Syke. The story is in narrative form and the use of the third person point of view just like the two other literary works mentioned above, created an impartial and rich picture of the scene and the characters. The use of symbolism and allusion provided added meaning to the dialogues. Delia Jones was described as a hardworking woman who worked all week to be able to earn a little.

She had been able to put up their house and provide for herself and her husband. She was the representation of goodness in the story while Syke, her husband was the image of evil. Syke was brutal to his wife; he wanted Delia dead so that he could remarry. The townspeople knew what Delia was going through but they remained indifferent. Nothing could help Delia but herself. Her unyielding faith in God had kept her moving on each day of her life. One day, Syke brought home a box containing a six-foot rattlesnake. Delia was furious. Her husband wanted to scare her to death; it pleased him when he sees her terrified.

One day the same snake will be the one to reap the life of Syke. Syke was drunk and did not know that the snake escaped from the box. He jumped to the bed where the snake was and it all happened. The snake bit him and then he died. Those fifteen years of marriage and suffering from Syke came to an end. After years of being separated from herself and the world, she was finally free. Free from brutality and distress; she was alive again. She can have what was left of herself and start a new life. Syke's death served as the solution to Delia's seclusion from herself and the world. The death of one brought back the life of the other.

In the works of Frost, Hemingway, and Hurston, the use of the narrative form and the third person point of view were observed as to have enhanced the ideas presented. Symbolism and the use of figures of speech paired with the dialogues between characters have enabled readers to see the thoughts of the protagonists. In these three literary works, alienation brought the same feelings to the person affected. Fear and wretchedness were felt by the boy

in *Out, Out;* by Jig in *Hills Like White Elephant*; and by Delia in *Sweat*. Their lives and decisions are influenced by the world that surrounds them.

Both the boy and Delia were able to escape alienation. It was through death that they were able to avoid the feeling of nothingness. In the case of Jig, Hemingway gave the reader the opportunity to conclude the story. Would death be the key for this one, too? References: Frost, Robert. 1916. . Hemingway, Ernest. " Hills Like White Elephants". 1927. May 31 2009. . Hurston, Zora Neale. " Sweat". 1926. .