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Creative Fiction Piece

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Grace Maier

English Honors Research Project

Dr. Julie Drew

4 May 2021

Summary and Proposal Revisions

Because I would like to publish my short story in the future I am choosing to provide a summary in place of the completed work here on idea exchange. My short story entitled “Good Intentions” came out to be a total of 25 double spaced pages and 7,270 words. The story follows the character of Emma Price, a 14-year-old girl who goes on an ill fated camping trip with her little sister, Jeanie, and estranged father, Greg, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Tensions rise between Emma and her father, as Greg’s infidelity to Emma’s mother is revealed. In the wake of a fight with Greg, Emma wakes up to find he and her sister gone without a trace. With their car and other belongings left behind, it’s as if they disappeared into thin air. Emma, left alone in the mountain forest with dangerous predators and no way of contacting Greg or the outside world, must rely on the help of a strange passerby, an old man named Solomon Gable. Solomon promises to take Emma to the forest’s ranger’s station so that they can help her find her father. But, after a wrong turn too many, Solomon insists that Emma spend the night at his camp, and she begins to suspect that he isn’t the good samaritan he seems. This story is a southern-gothic thriller that explores themes of domestic realism and leaves readers questioning the value of “Good Intentions.”

Due to Covid restrictions the presentation of my story in a public forum had to be eliminated from this project.

Self Analysis of Writing Process

When I first set out on writing this short story I was overwhelmed. At that point in time I had yet to write a short story for a grade, let alone one that was at least twenty pages in length. Perhaps the most difficult part of writing a story is figuring out what your story is. In my past experience with writing I think this is where I've gotten tripped up. I believed I had to know every detail about the beginning, middle, and end before even putting pen to paper and that thought alone overwhelmed me to a stop. Going into this short story I was armed with the phrase "start with a character and a situation." I learned this phrase in "Writers on Writing" taught by one of my project readers, Professor David Giffels, since it's the method by which Steven King starts his stories.

So, beginning with the character, I built Emma Price out of a lot of my own self consciousness. Even though I am no longer the painfully awkward and frustrated middle schooler I used to be, I know that version of myself very well and she still lives in parts of my brain and my writing. Emma, like myself, is a child of divorce and is scrambling to find ways to cope with the big emotions that accompany such a drastic change in a kid's life while working through the trauma that often leads to the breakdown of marriages in the first place. I am of the opinion that middle school is awful for ninety percent of people. Social Circles are something you suddenly have to contend with not to mention your body is committing mutiny against you in the form of acne and stretch marks and other horrors. And for Emma life is made even more complicated by the breakdown of her family.

While a lot of Emma's character is built off of my own experience, emotions, and insecurities as a fourteen year old, I made a conscious effort to separate her from myself by altering key elements of her life story. I did this because I don't know if I could put myself

through the situations I have to put Emma through in this story. It also allowed me to be more honest with her emotions toward the people in her life. I have my own narrative on my relationship with my family, sometimes with rose colored glasses. By making this Emma's story, I can explore wounds that belong to someone else through their eyes and raw emotions.

So, to further separate Emma from myself, I gave her a little sister, Jeanie, and shoved Emma into the role of an older sister. Age and birth order both have a lot to do with how children process the situations they are presented with. I had deep love and care for my brother growing up, but he was five years older than me and when it came to making decisions for the both of us, he was the one people looked to. As a little kid I was often resentful of this, but as I've aged I've come to appreciate what a burden that must've been on him. This added a layer of complexity to Emma's character, whereas one's natural instinct, especially as a teenager, is to preserve the self, Emma has taken on the role of surrogate parent to fill in the gaps, distracting her from processing her own emotions by often having to actively work to protect and preserve Jeanie's.

Emma's parents divorce is revealed to be the result of infidelity, another aspect of Emma's life that separates us greatly. Thinking back on myself as a fourteen year old, my perception of what was attractive was heavily influenced by what the men in my life seemed to gravitate towards or refer to as beautiful. For Emma, her father's infidelity was not only an attack on her mother and their family, but on her self confidence. Why did her father choose this woman over his wife and daughters? I described her father's mistress as being very different in appearance from Emma's mother, whom Emma is constantly being compared to, in order that she might wrestle with those feelings and insecurities. Would men cheat on her like her Father cheated on her Mother because she looks like her mom and not the mistress? Do her emotions and happiness not matter to men in the face of carnal temptation? Can she really trust anyone to

look out for her outside of their own happiness? It's below the surface but touched on in a way that helped me to shape Emma's insecurities and the anger she has towards her father for planting these seeds of doubt in her head and heart.

When I imagined the situation to place Emma in, I was inspired by a recurring nightmare I had as a child. In the dream I would wake up in my home only to find my whole family missing with no explanation as to where they went. Like Kevin McCallister in "Home Alone" but with a much darker tone. In Emma's case, she wakes up to find her family gone, abandoning her in the mountains to fend for herself against the elements, predators, and strangers. Adding in the tensions of her strained relationship with her father and her protective nature over her younger sister. The ideas of the tense and difficult situations she could find herself in thereafter, pushed by her motivation to find her family and return to safety, fueled the story from there.

In writing this story I found that the dialogue flowed naturally for me. I had a very easy time envisioning how these characters would interact with each other especially with the family dynamics at play. I was most challenged by the descriptions of setting and internal thoughts. As a reader, I tend to be overwhelmed when authors over describe the internal thoughts and emotions of their characters. Because of this I limited internal thoughts to Emma alone and aimed to show the emotions of other characters through body language, action, and tone. Even though the story was written in third person, which comes with the temptation of giving the audience a window into every character's individual thoughts, I wanted the audience to really be zeroed in on Emma as an individual. This begs the question then of why I didn't just write it in first person from her perspective? I played around with this idea at one point. I also played around with the idea of writing the story in first person from Jeanie's perspective, with a sort of Nick Carraway style observational look at Emma. But ultimately I wanted the story to be told from Emma's

perspective. With first person narration, especially when the narrator is a child, I think it is easy as an audience, and an author, to forget the youth of the character. Through third person limited, the audience never forgets how young and vulnerable Emma really is. She isn't super human like Percy Jackson or Max Ride, she isn't a hero. She is an average, physically and emotionally vulnerable fourteen year old, in desperate need of parental guidance being forced to fend for herself.

As previously stated I struggled a bit with describing the setting and really bringing it to life as a character on its own. Originally, the story was set in Estes Park, Colorado in the Rocky Mountain National Park. However, in revision discussions with my project sponsor, Dr. Drew, we discussed how the Blue Ridge Mountains might be a more proper setting for the story given my desire to work within the Southern Gothic genre. It was also suggested by Professor Giffels to look up pictures of the Blue Ridge Mountains to really get a feel for the scenery and to incorporate that into my story, to make the trees feel like an encroaching and threatening presence as well as to incorporate the sounds of the forest, growls of animals, whistling of the wind, etc. I think my favorite suggestion to work with the scenery and really give it life on the page and in the story is the incorporation of dead and decaying plants such as hollowed out tree branches full of insects and flies gathered around dead animal carcasses. This not only creates a sense of fear in the audience that forest is a place to be wary of but alludes to the moral decay of the characters; Emma for her violent actions against Solomon, Solomon for his potentially ill will toward Emma, and Greg for his infidelity to Emma's mother. All throughout the story the characters are wilting morally and the setting is able to adopt the attitude of the pages.

So why does everybody get punished? I admit, no character in this story walks away unharmed. Solomon and Jack are dead, Greg and Jeanie can be presumed to be dead or severely

injured, Emma is traumatized, and even Marsha will be left to deal with the grief. I'll start with Jack, because to me he plays a key role in the story. In highschool I took a film class in which we watched Wes Anderson's "Moonrise Kingdom". During the film's highest point of action, a dog is shot and killed. As an audience my fellow students and I were outraged. The dog didn't need to die! What did that do for the plot? Couldn't they have just left the dog out and spared us the pain? To which my teacher replied, "The dog needed to die to show that no one is safe, to make you believe that any of the other characters could die." Now, no other characters in the film did die, but she was correct. I was on the edge of my seat the whole rest of the time, believing that one of the main characters, all children, could die at any moment in the face of peril. Jack needed to die for the audience to feel the sinking dread of Jeanie's death without me confirming or denying that she was dead or alive. Jack needed to die so that the audience knew that I, as an author, was more than willing to kill or irreversibly harm the characters they were attached to, whether they deserved it or not. Pets have also always seemed symbolic of innocence to me, so the slaughtering of Jack represents Emma's innocence being slaughtered.

So, this brings us back to the question: why did I punish everyone? While I am the author, I have to admit, I don't think I did. I started with a character and a situation and went from there. The story took control. Sure, I could have chosen my own adventure, Emma could have survived in the woods for months by some miracle of chance and advanced resourcefulness. She could have trusted Solomon and he could have been a kind, gentle soul. Greg and Jeanie could have been abducted by space aliens and come back safe and sound. But none of that felt real to me, and for whatever reason, I wanted this story to be real, gruesomely, horrifyingly, real. And the horrifying, real truth is that sometimes everyone has good intentions and people still get irreparably hurt. This is why I love the title so much. I leave this story open to interpretation,

much is left ambiguous on purpose. If one wishes to view Greg as an unloving, uncaring father they may. They could argue that Solomon is a predator or Emma a violent angry teenager. However, I think that it is very possible to argue that each character has good intentions. It could be that Greg wanted to make amends and be an involved father, Emma wanted to protect herself and save her family, and Solomon really did just want to help Emma but the fallibility of humanity simply ruined all that.

I am really proud of this piece and what I accomplished here. When I set out to write a short story for my project I was afraid I would not be up to the task. I have pushed myself more than I ever have as a creative writer. I am sure when I look back I will always have things to nitpick with it, especially as I grow in the craft and become more experienced. But, this piece will always hold a special place for me.

Critical Analysis of Influences

_____ When “Good Intentions” was still unnamed and the plot was forming in my head there were two short stories I kept returning to for inspiration, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” by Joyce Carol Oates and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor. I first read both of these stories in highschool and remember being drawn to the artful way that ambiguity, domestic realism, and horror are woven together in each. I was moved by how the two stories pushed me to ask questions about myself, and the people around me, and to analyze characters through a complex lens beyond the dichotomy of “good and bad.” As a reader I have always been pulled to stories with unhappy endings and without any explicitly stated moral lesson because they force me to discover for myself what the meaning is, if there is any at all. To me, this mimics the exact way people react to real world tragedies. Both of these stories follow realistic and complex characters that meet disturbing fates leaving the audience shaken and looking for meaning and it was my goal to capture a similar feeling in “Good Intentions.”

While my story’s protagonist, Emma, differs greatly from Connie in “Where Are You Going Where Have You Been” they both are close in age at fourteen and fifteen respectively. I think this age is written about so often because it is one that, while experienced differently by everyone, comes with a unique set of challenges and emotions that are universal. Whereas one twenty-two year old might be married with multiple children and another twenty-two year old has never had a serious relationship, most fifteen year olds are in the same place as one another. They are still in school, contending with the social sphere, becoming sexually and bodily aware, and developing complex emotions about the behavior of the adults in their lives. Emma is written as reacting to all of these situations in a bit of a different way than Connie. However, they still share many similar preoccupations.

For one, both are highly concerned with their bodies and physical appearance. Oates' highlights an element of the feminine body image experience that I tried to incorporate into my work and that is the tendency for women and girls to compare themselves too or see themselves in the appearance of their mothers or maternal figures. Connie and Emma have wildly different perspectives on their body image with Connie feeling confident in her beauty and attractiveness and Emma having rather low self esteem in hers, but both girls draw a connection between their physical appearance and their mother's. Taking this a step further, both girls look to their appearance as a source or indicator of how they are being or will be treated. Connie knows her mother used to be pretty like her and believes that it is her mother's jealousy that causes her to be angry with her, "Her mother had been pretty once too, if you could believe those old snapshots in the album, but now her looks were gone and that was why she was always after Connie" (Oates). Whereas Emma views her lack of a boyfriend, and more subtly her father's betrayal of their family for his mistress, as connecting back to the appearance of her mother, "She was built like her mom. Heavy on the bottom and nearly flat as a board on top... It used to not bother her so much but after meeting *that woman* she started seeing herself differently" (Maier 4).

The placement of age and birth order within a story to reveal something about a character is another element of Oates' I tried to play with. Like Connie, Emma has a sister, but unlike Connie, she is significantly younger instead of significantly older, feeding into the attitudes that both have towards not only themselves but their families. It is clear in the story that a lot of the resentment that Connie holds towards her mother is based in the relationship that she has with her older sister, June, or perhaps more accurately her perception of her mother's relationship with June, "...Connie had to hear her praised all the time by her mother and her mother's sisters. June did this, June did that, she saved money and helped clean the house and cooked and Connie

couldn't do a thing..." (Oates). Of course June is more responsible, she is nine years older, but Connie sees herself as pigeonholed into the role of the rebellious and wanna-be grown up because of their mother's nit-picking and subsequently acts out of the role she feels placed in, even though she might like to be seen as sensible and responsible in her own right. It's also described how her own privileges seem to be based on whatever activities June engages in, "There was one good thing: June went places with girl friends of hers, girls who were just as plain and steady as she, and so when Connie wanted to do that her mother had no objections" (Oates).

I tried to implement this dynamic into my own writing but from the inverse experience. For example, a lot of Emma's resentment toward her father is based on his treatment of Jeanie. She is frustrated by the ways in which he caters to Jeanie's desires and wishes but simultaneously fails to look out for her physical and emotional safety and needs. I tried to show this throughout the story with scenes such as Emma accompanying Jeanie into a public bathroom because she is cognizant of how dangerous it is for her to go alone even though Greg is seemingly unaware. Also when she anxiously holds Jeanie back from the water because she could drown and Greg stands by, seeing no issue. These are moments in which Emma's resentment toward her father grows because the treatment of his sister is not only dangerous, but forces her into the role of anxious, co-parent rather than the care-free child she might like to be. It also creates a subtle tension between her and Jeanie, because Emma is having to play the part of bad-cop by putting Jeanie's safety above her desires. Greg only exacerbates this role by making light of Emma's concern's, telling her to "lighten up". Because of this Emma feels she can't be irresponsible or make mistakes, or she'd be a bad example to Jeanie and Greg would allow both of their safety's to fall through the cracks.

While the family tension in Oates' story is rooted primarily in the relationship between Connie and her mother and mine focuses on the tension between Emma and her Dad, there is a strong Father element to both stories. There is a moment in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" where Connie cites her father as a source of protection to the story's antagonist, Arnold Friend, "But my Daddy's coming back, he's coming back to get me" (Oates). Upon first read, I remember thinking this was odd as her father was barely mentioned in the story up until this moment, but upon closer inspection I realized that was the point.

Teenage years are a strange transition from childhood to adulthood, at this age teens want to act like adults and make decisions like them... on the surface that is. Subconsciously, they rely on parents to be present to set boundaries, to let them grow and be independent without straying too far and hurting themselves, and to protect them from things they might not realize are hurting them. Connie's father is absent. Sometimes he is present physically, but his emotional absence is clear, "Their father was away at work most of the time and when he came home he wanted supper and he read the newspaper at supper and after supper he went to bed. He didn't bother talking much to them..." (Oates). It is also described how Connie's mother criticizes her "around his bent head", he is aware of the issues between his wife and daughter but he chooses to ignore them. He willfully avoids having to engage with what is happening in his daughter's life, even if it is harming her, because it would distract from his own comfort. But just because Connie accommodates this discomfort and her desire for him isn't made known, doesn't mean she doesn't crave her father's guidance. Children need rules, boundaries, and parents to feel safe whether they realize it or not, which is why Connie's disdain for her family falls away in the presence of the threat that is Arnold Friend.

I wanted to include this element to my story. The innate desire children have to be watched over and guarded, even as teens. Emma's relationship with her father is more visible in my story. Greg is more engaged verbally and physically but the emotional and parental element to his interactions with her are still lacking. Greg's interactions with Emma and Jeanie appear to facilitate his own comfort, his own need to be validated as fun and exciting, which is why he is always trying to do what Jeanie wants and win over Emma. It seems like he could be trying to mend his relationship with his children because he wants to heal something in them, but at times it feels as though he really just wants to restore the image of himself as a "good dad." I felt it was important in his argument scene with Emma for him to assert to her that he is a good dad, rather than to acknowledge her criticism that his affair was a harmful and neglectful act not only as a spouse, but as a parent. It supports the idea that his actions do not stem from a genuine desire to be an active force of protection and guidance in his children's lives but instead to nurse his own ego. The primary difference between Emma and Connie's dads is that Connie's father feels comfortable going without the external validation of being dubbed a "good dad".

Regardless of their differences, and in spite of their similarities, both Connie and Emma call out for their dads when they are facing perceived danger alone, even though they have no prior experience to back up that their fathers would actually protect them. Connie still believes and clings to the hope that her distant father will come to save her and not leave her in the clutches of Arnold Friend. In Emma's case, Greg is sort of the reason she is even in her perilous situation with Solomon. Some could argue that her cry of "you were supposed to protect me" is just a declaration, an acknowledgement of Greg's failure, not a statement of surprise. However, I intentionally leave it open to interpretation that this is a genuine disappointment for Emma, that,

regardless of how many times her father has failed in the past to protect her from pain and danger, she held out genuine hope he would still come through.

The inspiration I found in Oates' work doesn't just stem from character dynamics. In reading "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been", I was drawn to the literary elements she uses to encapsulate the feelings one has in the moments surrounding a traumatic event. I actively tried to incorporate imagery and descriptive elements seen in her work into my own to so the reader can feel the terror of the moment and the shift in atmosphere as Emma's horror grows. One particular way Oates' shows the audience how sinister a force Arnold Friend is, is through Connie's changing perception of his appearance. Initially, when Connie sees Arnold, she thinks he is an attractive young man. She likes the way he dresses and views him as her usual "type". But the longer that Arnold Friend sits in Connie's driveway and tries to lure her into his car, the progressively more uncomfortable and grotesque he appears. She notices that his face is more like a mask than actual skin, how he walks like he is unsure of walking, and that he is much closer to thirty-two years old than the eighteen he claims to be. All of these changes in how she perceives his appearance grip the audience with confusion and fear for Connie. Is Arnold Friend even human? Could he be intoxicated? Will this make him violent towards Connie? If he's that old, is he a predator?

I tried to apply this technique of altered appearance to Solomon, specifically focusing on his eyes because as the saying goes, they're the windows to the soul. When Emma first encounters Solomon, she is seeing him from a distance and it's noted that his eyes look kind. It is these kind eyes that help give Emma the courage to go into the forest with him in the first place. However, when he and Emma's walk takes an aggressive turn his eyes begin to change. I describe them as being "sinister and unfamiliar. Solomon's pupils were blown so wide that his

eyes looked black, like the eyes of a shark smelling blood in the water” (Maier 23). I chose this description because it can take the reader’s mind to a few different places, potentially causing confusion, the greatest fuel for terror. On one hand, this description could be read as just a threatening presence, Solomon is the hunter and Emma is the prey. However, there is also the potential for this to be interpreted as an indication that Solomon is a drug user and is actually intoxicated in this scene. There are a few subtle hints that might be used to argue his drug use. Obviously, the blown pupils, but also his extensive knowledge of plants, his disrupted sense of time, yellowed teeth, and the fact that he reeks of smoke. There is the potential that both of these assumptions are true. And there is also the distinct possibility that none of them are and Emma’s fear and lack of trust fuels her perception of Solomon’s eyes. I wanted to make the reader afraid and confused by what they were seeing similar to how I felt reading “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”.

Another tactic Oates uses to solidify the trauma of a moment is the dissociation of a character. At the end of the story, Connie ends up leaving with Arnold Friend, but she feels as though she is watching herself leave rather than actually leaving. A lot of people cope with a traumatic situation by dissociating, that is, disconnecting from the situation. Sometimes this is described by trauma survivors as feeling like they are watching the trauma happen to somebody else, like in a movie. I brought this into my own work by having Emma dissociate as she is stabbing Solomon, “For a moment it was as if she had left her body and was watching someone else's arms plunge the blade into the old man” (Maier 25). This moment is intended to show the audience that, even though Solomon is the one being stabbed, Emma is a victim as well. She believes her actions against Solomon are necessary for her survival, but causing him harm so violently is traumatic for her. She is not a violent character, she is afraid.

“A Good Man is Hard to Find” held a lot more sway in influencing the location and plot of “Good Intentions” than “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”. Like “A Good Man is Hard to Find”, I wanted this story to fall within the vein of the Southern Gothic Genre, hence the ever-present angst, extreme violence, and general unsavory human behavior. But this also impacted the story's location. Originally, “Good Intentions” took place in Estes Park, Colorado, but it felt more fitting to the genre to relocate to Nantahala National Forest in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

One of the things I love about “A Good Man is Hard to Find” is that it takes place on a family road trip. This sort of movement throws you into the thick of what is best and worst about a group of characters. Road trips are inherently quite stressful, which is why they are generally performed by families or tight knit groups of friends. The car is a cramped space, and secondary locations are unpredictable, you have to love the people you're with enough to be willing to put up with their irritating habits in an unideal circumstance. The potential hazards of a road trip combined with the elevated comfort level between characters allows an audience to really get a good look at the underlying feelings and dynamics between characters.

In “A Good Man is Hard To Find” the road trip allows the perfect platform for us to get a good realistic view of the controlling and anxious grandmother, the bratty children, the poorly composed Bailey, and his meek, exhausted wife. What each character does to get on eachothers nerves is on full display from the beginning, there are few questions as to what tensions drive the conflicts between them. From the first line the audience is thrust into the dynamics of this family, “The grandmother didn’t want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in East Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey’s mind” (O’Connor 1). On

the first page, and without too much background, the audience sees that the grandmother and Bailey are in a power struggle and that this is common between them.

Similarly, in “Good Intentions” I wanted the audience to feel the tension between Greg, Marsha, and the girls without wasting time on exposition that distracts from the story's plot. While my introduction is a bit more dialogue heavy and in medias res than O’Connor’s story, it is clear to the audience from the get go that Greg and Marsha have tension between them and that, that tension trickles down to their children. O’Connor chooses to use the road trip as a catalyst for conflict by making the destination a point of dispute, I use it to highlight the conflicting parenting styles of Greg and Marsha and the wedge it drives between them.

O’Connor artfully utilizes foreshadowing from page one when she has the grandmother warning Bailey about the dangerous criminal “The Misfit” who is on the loose and headed to Florida. As the story unfolds, the family has a run in with the misfit and his lackeys who ultimately end up killing them. This foreshadowing of danger lingers in the mind of the audience and helps create tension, so that their fear can rise to a crescendo when the family actually comes face to face with the criminal that is now both infamous to the characters and to the audience.

I also foreshadow the horrifying turn of events my short story will take when Marsha suggests to Greg that Jeanie is very small and could easily be dragged away by a mountain predator. Just like O’Connor, who throughout the story peppers in small talk and information about the Misfit, I include sounds such as howling wolves and multiple characters referencing the dangerous animals that lurk in the forest to build tension. Ultimately, my ending is left ambiguous, with no particular person or thing assigned blame for Jack and possibly Greg and Jeanie’s deaths. However, I describe Jack’s body as looking mauled and Greg’s Jacket as

shredded so it could definitely be argued that Jack's demise is the work of a forest creature such as wolf, bobcat, or bear.

Following in the footsteps of both O'Connor and Oates, I chose to write my story from a third person limited perspective. For thriller and horror stories, third person limited works well because it allows the narrator to jump around as they need to tell the story and leaves room for ambiguity. In the case of both O'Connor and Oates their use of third person limited gives insight into the conflicts between the main characters and their families but also allows for "out of sight" or unknown terrors. O'Connor does this by not showing the audience what happens to Bailey and John Wesley, only implying their execution through the sound of a gunshot. As well as refusing to let us into the mind of the "The Misfit". And Oates does this by denying us a clear window into the internal thoughts and feelings of Arnold Friend. Similarly I am able to refuse my audience a clear picture of what happened to Jack, Jeanie and Greg as well close the door to Solomon's internal thoughts and intentions. There is comfort in understanding and in a story designed to make the audience uncomfortable and afraid, I followed Oates' and O'Connor's examples and denied them a clear and complete picture.

It was an enlightening experience getting to re-read these stories and analyze the work of these Joyce Carol Oates and Flannery O'Connor while writing "Good Intentions". There is a different sort of richness that comes from analyzing a piece of literature as a writer instead of a reader. I got to reminisce on the experience of first reading "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" and "A Good Man is Hard to Find" while also actively engaging with the craft and working my muscles as an author. And now I have written a piece that is uniquely my own that I am proud of, while also honoring my influences. Art is both born out of inspiration and gives birth to it. It has been a joy taking an active role in the cycle of literary creation.

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