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Integrative Seminar I

December 14, 2015

To originate the being of our group project, we first formed together based upon our 2D strengths, thus Stephanie, Lanie and I formed. We struggled creating a concept centralized around a person, place, or object based by New York City. We had a couple ideas swirling such as different singers from the steel jungle. But one that stuck was Great Gatsby. So to apply it to the assignment, we elaborated on the concept of how F. Scott Fitzgerald was inspired by New York City to write Great Gatsby in the roaring 20s. We started off slow since our proposal was responded late, so we didn't start our project and research immediately. Once we were finally approved, the first action was to split roles.

I stretched our over branching question into three sections, making it easier to specify the research. Firstly, is how Fitzgerald was inspired by locations in the surrounding area, more specifically New York City and Long Island. Secondly, was how he was influenced by the Hall-Mills murder case in New Brunswick, NJ based by a love affair turned deathly. And thirdly, how Fitzgerald wrote his infamous characters based off real people.

After long research diving online, I found enough information for a starting platform to begin our project. One of the earlier things I discovered was the Oheka castle.

This castle was one of the sceneries most commonly compared to with Gatsby's mansion and his magnificent parties. To our luck, they offered private tours, and would offer insight that Fitzgerald experienced first-hand. Instantly, we knew that this tour guide would have the credibility to serve as our first interview for the assignment. Although her tour on the Oheka Castle, was indeed fabulous and fascinating, she didn't have too much information. But, it was enough facts that were unknown to the World Wide Web. However, we still needed to dig more and find other experts.

As a group, we managed to huddle into the New York University Bobst Library to reveal more books. We were successful finding our books, however when we asked specialized librarians if they knew any professors specializing in American 20th century literature, we ran into a dead end. But once we knew what type of professor to look for, we expanded our search into other colleges such as Michigan State University, The New School, and Rutgers University.

In my personal, on the surface research, I simply used Wikipedia towards Great Gatsby. Finely printed, was the hinting that the murder of Gatsby was mirrored by the Hall-Mills case in New Jersey. I pursued this development to find a newly written book towards the connection of the two. Excitedly, I knew that the author, Sarah Churchwell would be the ideal expert to interview. However, with much publicity with her new book, she already did online interviews while multitasking her current job at the University of London. Oddly enough, she still didn't publicize herself with a website, but instead a twitter account. Through the University of London faculty list I was finally able to locate

her email address, but disappointingly did not receive a response. Meanwhile, in attempt to peel back the layers of the case alone, I came across a journal written by a Rutgers professor/dean. Her journal had a myriad of details that appeared to be overlooked or unknown to other sources written about the case. That was in due because of her physical connection to the Rutgers library, filled with first-hand sources since the university is placed in the same town as the crime. Instantly, I knew she would be a brilliant expert to debate about the similarity to our book. Thanks to Lanie's fiancé (alumn to Rutgers), we were able to confirm her email and patiently wait for her nervous response of "yes" to the interview.

Our interview went extremely well and felt casual, despite the dense subject. Mary refreshed the facts I had already known. Essentially, Reverend Edward Halls would have a secret love affair with the soprano Eleanor Mills. Both were married during this time in New Brunswick, NJ. Found dead by a crab tree in Lover's Lane, they would both be shot with surrounding letters and calling cards scattered around them. Yet, Mrs. Mills would also have a slit throat and cut out tongue. Still today, no one was charged of the crime because of poorly handled evidence, which was then destroyed and accompanied with weak testimonies. All researchers, then and now, assume it was the wealthy and unattractive Mrs. Frances Hall (the wife) and her brothers (most notably, Willie), but were acquitted in court thanks to their ability to hire decent lawyers.

However, Mary Hartman also highlighted a few details that caught my interest. One involved Louise Geist, a former maid of the Hall Family, who years later admitted,

“she knew Mr. Hall intended to elope with Mrs. Mills...” and earlier Mrs. Hall had interceded a call from Mrs. Mills that confirmed her speculations. Ironically, Rutgers University bought the house the Halls lived in and Mary had actually lived there for quite some time as the Dean for the women’s college. Naturally, Mary envisioned this scene taking place with the phone downstairs and the man’s study upstairs above it, and comprehended the easiness to pick up the phone without thought. But for the couple, that phone call would be the final string.

By the end of the interview, Mary and I felt like expert researches casually learning from each other, but both struggled to take a stance on how direct this case was involved with Great Gatsby like Sarah Churchwell, author of Carless People: Murder, Mayhem and The Invention of Great Gatsby, claimed to be. Adorably, Mary was inspired by my “recent interest” in this topic, and she is now intending to pursue more of this Hall-Mills case.

In combination of walking to the library and after the castle field trip, we agreed on the layout of our art pieces. We wanted to embrace our 2D strengths, while highlighting our specialties. Lanie’s would include her excellent photography, Stephanie’s would specialize in her illustrations and usage of markers, and mine would display my usage of watercolor and layering. Once inspiration struck on how to make all three cohesive, we agreed to culminate our pieces inside one book. Our book serves how the Great Gatsby comes to life through Fitzgerald’s words. More specifically focused to our question, our book serves into how Fitzgerald viewed his work. He no longer would

view his book word by word, but how each detail reminded him of his inspirations. Like a photograph, there was more to the story before and after. Essentially, that's what our goal of the book serves, it's to go beneath the surface of Fitzgerald's finished work and dig up his primal conceptualization.

My first piece, *Separation* culminates how love and death can separate two people. In addition, it displays through the watercolor and illustrations, how a love affair can ensue like the one in Great Gatsby that leads to a different life. I enjoy how the pages of hearts are what pull them farther apart, and thus correlate to the goal of the book smoothly. But mostly, I enjoy how the second page reveals the truth/end of the story. My second watercolor, *The Phone Call to Death*, was inspired by Mary's insight on the telephone. Mrs. Hall interceded a call for Mr. Hall from Mrs. Mills, therefore one end of the line would fall for love, while the other fell flat...line. I wanted it to seem like innocent love with the colors and calligraphy, but to turn reminiscent of a murder with blood scraped against the pages to create the ending text. This approach was done by using heavy water-concentrated paint to begin and ease the blending of darker colors, but used a dry brush to create the blood effect. My third and final piece, *Even Love, Even Death*, symmetrically portrays how the two stories of the Hall-Mills case and the Great Gatsby (respectively) are similar with the love affair turned deathly plot. This is portrayed through the dreamy watercolors, but juxtaposed by the blood splatters of acrylic paint and dark, funeral-esque flowers. Most favorable of the three, this piece truly captures the essence of Fitzgerald's inspiration for his end scene and it leaves that dark intimacy that is unveiled.

Overall, our group grew together in our art, communication, team-efforts, time-management, and most importantly, our friendships. In whole, we have two delightful experts with educational information, and one book filled with a multitude of art pieces that cultivate the story of Great Gatsby beneath the surface that essentially illuminates his inspiration from New York City and onto the pages.