

THESIS/DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Candidate: Melanie Sweeney

SSN/Student ID: 0222-222

Department: ENGLISH

Degree: MA

Proposed Topic: White on White: Collected Stories

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Thesis/Dissertation Committee Approval:

Printed Name

Signature

Dr. Paul Ruffin,

in writing about. Part of my experience as a writer is that I observe the world around me and attempt to portray it realistically and with an underlying message of truth about it. This curiosity and process of reflection is best communicated through a series of diverse stories, and I will attempt to tie these varied portrayals of life together through over-arching themes and common social contexts.

The central theme that connects these stories is isolation. Each main character, as well as some minor characters, is isolated either by choice or by circumstance, and dealing with that isolation — whether that means breaking free from it or accepting it — underlies each central story. In “The Year-Old Woman,” a 70-year-old woman finds herself isolated from her family for most of her life because she could not stop longing for her past. When she has the opportunity to live her lost life, she realizes what she has given up in her choice to isolate herself, and she has to confront that choice and its consequences in order to attempt a connection.

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In most of the stories, the isolation descends following some loss. Mary Louise spends her entire adult life nostalgic for her youthful accomplishments and possibilities, and then her husband dies. In “Christina and Haley,” two women become isolated during a shared sexual experience in which one fails to perform and the other is raped. In “The Year-Old Woman,” a 70-year-old woman finds herself isolated from her family for most of her life because she could not stop longing for her past. When she has the opportunity to live her lost life, she realizes what she has given up in her choice to isolate herself, and she has to confront that choice and its consequences in order to attempt a connection.

rich context to explore, even less clearly marginalized groups like the middle-class, white American have experienced (and continue to experience) jarring isolation as a result of lost ideals post-World War II. A breakdown of the nuclear family is one such lost ideal, which I and mother who longs for independence. I look at the behavior of young white girls today who are more and more caught up in emulating celebrities, whether as result of those changing family and American literature of this period is marked by characters who turn inward to retreat from a fast-changing world they feel out of touch with. Our society as a whole looks for distractions in technology to avoid facing the harsh realities of war, terrorism, an uncertain economy and more, placing them further out from community and our own humanity. The nostalgia of both my characters and myself in these stories is evident in the works of many of my influences. The following writers have shaped my work through their social context, subject matter, themes, and more, and I will discuss them further in my critical introduction: Sylvia Plath, Sandra Cisneros, J.D. Salinger, Jeffrey Eugenides, and nonfiction writers Mary Karr and Alissa Quart.

My clearest influence in both style and theme is Sylvia Plath. Her poetry and most notably from *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar* deal with isolation, mortality, loss, sexuality, identity, and growing up. Her narration in *The Bell Jar* offers a blend of short and complex sentences as well as an honest voice that presents serious matters of sexuality, identity, mortality, and more with tones alternately serious and lighthearted. Many of my first-person narrators take on a similar voice, offering a realistic balance of seriousness and sarcastic or jovial lightheartedness. I think this

reveals the obsessive human tendency to try to understand the world and our place in it. This
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Finally, Alissa Quarvøu *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* is a text that
analyzes the harmful effects of media and social pressures for young girls and teenagers to
perfect their bodies and objectify themselves. Although my main goals as a writer are to reveal
truths about the world and its people and to entertain my readers, I also have an interest in
expressing my opinion that young girls today are isolated by social and media pressures to
objectify themselves and mature too quickly. My concern that television, music, and movies
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story of literary focus, not simply a statement with the elements of a story forced onto it.

In addition to the above influences, my work shares similarities with many other post-
World War II writers who focused on isolation and nostalgia. My emphasis on realism rather
than on post-modern experimentation or on presenting mere chaos is central to my presentation
of true people and experiences in the world. My voice also has some similarities to that of Lorrie
Moore. Other writers whose work I plan to cite in the critical introduction include John Cheever,
Raymond Carver, ZZ Packer, and Mary Gaitskill, John Updike, and Joyce Carol Oates.

In addition to my fiction reading list, I will also read various essays on fiction and utilize
the Newton Gresham Library and InterLoan Services through Sam Houston State University to
develop my critical introduction, which will further explain the above discussion of themes,
influences, and aesthetic in *White on White*. c p f v j g eqnngv kqpøu eqppgev kqp vq qv jgt y qtmu qh
fiction.

