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**FREE OF INHIBITIONS AND FULL OF PLEASURE: THE IMAGE OF
EUROPE IN THE WORKS OF JAMES SALTER**

BEZ ZÁBRAN A PLNÁ ROZKOŠE: OBRAZ EVROPY V DÍLE JAMESE SALTERA

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 10. srpna 2015

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used in referencing the following works of James Salter throughout this thesis:

- (*ATI*) *All That Is*. London: Picador, 2013.
- (*BD*) *Burning the Days*. London: Picador, 2007.
- (*LY*) *Light Years*. London: Penguin, 2007.
- (*SF*) *Solo Faces*. London: Penguin, 2008.
- (*SP*) *A Sport and a Pastime*. London: Picador, 2007.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of the image of Europe in the novels of James Salter, namely *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), *Light Years* (1975), *Solo Faces* (1979) and *All That Is* (2013), while also taking into account Salter's memoir *Burning the Days* (1997). In Salter's fiction and non-fiction, Europe is presented as a place of freedom, culture, tradition, romance and possibilities, to which all of Salter's main characters – and Salter himself – are drawn at some stage in their lives, often at turning points. The journey to Europe serves various functions: it provides education and enables release from the domestic environment through a metaphorical conquest of the Continent. This thesis explores the motivations of Salter's characters for the journey, their expectations, as well as their actual experience, and the impact of their experience in Europe within the framework of the tradition of American writing in Europe, particularly modernism, with whose adherents Salter shares not only a similar notion of Europe, and particularly Paris as the cultural capital, but also a similar outlook on life, and a number of important themes and stylistic features. In positioning Salter as a belated modernist this thesis draws on Pascale Casanova's theory of the workings of the literary world expressed in her study *The World Republic of Letters*, as well as on the only substantial studies of Salter's work, *James Salter* by William Dowie and *Soldiers Once and Still: Ernest Hemingway, James Salter & Tim O'Brien* by Alex Vernon, who both cursorily connect Salter with the literary movement of modernism. This thesis strives to exemplify this connection both thematically, through the image of Europe and its function, biographically, by exploring the impact of expatriate life and the influence of the war on Salter and modernist novelists, e.g. Ernest Hemingway, and stylistically, through an analysis of the defining features of Salter's prose. In order to best exemplify the modernist connection, the latter part of this thesis focuses on the comparison of Salter with F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, demonstrating their similarities through close readings of the opening passages from *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises* set against Salter's *A Sport and a Pastime*, showcasing how Salter combines elements of the style of both writers. Salter's connection to Hemingway is paid particular attention as it encompasses the principal arguments made in this thesis in order to designate Salter as a belated modernist – both writers' style is guided by the modernist aesthetic, they share a similar view of Europe and the benefits of travel, and their war experience has left its mark on their prose. Yet while Salter shares a great deal with Hemingway, his writing has developed in its own direction and the modernist aesthetic does not render it antiquated, as this thesis, in its broader sense, seeks to show.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou obrazu Evropy v románech Jamese Saltera *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), *Light Years* (1975), *Solo Faces* (1979) a *All That Is* (2013), s přihlédnutím k Salterovým memoárům *Burning the Days* (1997). V Salterově beletrii i literatuře faktu je Evropa zobrazena jako místo plné svobody, kultury, tradic, milostných dobrodružství a možností, které v určité fázi života – často v jeho rozhodujících okamžicích – přitahuje všechny Salterovy hlavní postavy, i Saltera samotného. Cesta do Evropy poskytuje vzdělání a umožňuje oprostění se od domácího prostředí skrze metaforické dobytí Evropy. Tato práce zkoumá důvody, které vedou Salterovy postavy k jejich cestě a jejich očekávání, také vlastní zážitky postav na starém kontinentu a jejich dopad. Salterovo dílo je nahlíženo v kontextu tradice americké literatury v Evropě, zvláště pak modernismu, s jehož představiteli Salter sdílí nejen podobný pohled na Evropu, a zejména na Paříž jako kulturní centrum, ale také podobný životní postoj, jakož i několik důležitých motivů a stylistických znaků. V označování Saltera za opožděného modernistu čerpá tato práce z teorie Pascale Casanovové o fungování světa literatury vyjádřené v její studii *The World Republic of Letters*, a také z jediných zásadnějších studií Salterova díla, *James Salter* od William Dowieho a *Soldiers Once and Still: Ernest Hemingway, James Salter & Tim O'Brien* od Alexe Vernona, přičemž oba autoři zběžně spojují Saltera s modernistickým literárním směrem. Předkládaná práce si klade za cíl ilustrovat toto spojení jak tematicky, rozbořením obrazu Evropy a její funkce, tak biograficky, zkoumáním vlivu života v zahraničí a dopadu zkušeností z války na Saltera a modernistické spisovatele, například Ernesta Hemingwaye, a v neposlední řadě také stylisticky, skrze analýzu typických rysů Salterovy prózy. Za účelem co nejlépe dokázat Salterovu spojitost s modernisty se závěrečná část práce soustřeďuje na srovnání Saltera s F. Scottem Fitzgeraldem a Ernestem Hemingwayem, a názorně tak ilustruje společné znaky jejich tvorby podrobnou interpretací úvodních pasáží *Velkého Gastbyho* a *Fiesty* v porovnání se Salterovým románem *A Sport and a Pastime*, jež ukazuje, jak Salter kombinuje prvky stylu obou autorů. Podobnosti mezi Salterem a Hemingwayem jsou zkoumány detailně, jelikož zahrnují hlavní argument této práce, která vymezuje Saltera jako opožděného modernistu. Styl obou autorů se řídí modernistickou estetikou, oba zastávají podobný názor na Evropu a přínos cestování a jejich zkušenosti z války se podepsaly na jejich tvorbě. Navzdory tomu, že Salter sdílí s Hemingwayem mnohé, jeho tvorba se vyvinula svým vlastním směrem a její modernistické znaky ji nečiní zastaralou, jak se tato práce, v širším smyslu, snaží ukázat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are popular writers and there are writers who are still waiting to be discovered. However, sky-high sales are not a guarantee of good writing, just as the lack thereof does not mean the books are not worth reading. James Salter's novels are a testament to that. While none of Salter's books have been bestsellers, save for *All That Is* which appeared on *The Times* best-seller list for a week,¹ readers and critics alike have repeatedly praised his work, although academia has curiously neglected his achievements, evident in the fact that there are only two book-length critical studies of Salter's work and only a few critical essays in academic journals, compared to other writers of his generation like Richard Ford or Philip Roth. Over the course of his career Salter has earned the label of a "writer's writer"² because of the high praise he receives from other writers, or of "the most underrated underrated writer"³ for the lack of sales and academic interest. And these labels stick. Both have appeared in the majority of the obituaries and tributes published in response to Salter's passing in June 2015, and the *MSN* even lists the articles regarding the topic under the title "Writer's Writer' Dead at 90".⁴ Yet it would be a shame if these labels were to become Salter's only legacy.

Despite the lack of major public and critical attention, Salter's fiction and non-fiction works are remarkable for their distinctive writing style, Salter's ability to transfer to the page the chemistry of human relationships and emotions, and his gift for precise descriptions which capture the essence of people, atmosphere, and places. This thesis aims to prove Salter's relevance in the canon of modern American literature and outline his position in the literary space by concentrating on the theme of a European journey, which permeates all of his major novels and connects him to the tradition of American literature in Europe. In establishing his position within the literary space, however, one has to bear in mind that Salter's writing career spans from the 1950s up to 2015, a period wherein huge developments took place in literature, though Salter almost completely resisted them. Rather than having absorbed the developments of postmodern literature he appears to have been looking back – both thematically and formally – to modernism and its expatriate champions like Hemingway and

¹ See Helen T. Verongos, "James Salter, a 'Writer's Writer' Short on Sales but Long on Acclaim, Dies at 90," *The New York Times*, 19 June 2015, 1 Aug. 2015 <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/books/james-salter-a-writers-writer-short-on-sales-but-long-on-acclaim-dies-at-90.html?smid=pl-share&_r=0>.

² See for example Verongos.

³ James Wolcott, "Mixed Media: A Scorecard for the All-American Literary All-Star Game," *Vanity Fair* June 1985: 16.

⁴ "Writer's Writer' Dead at 90," *MSN*, 19 July 2015 <<http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/trending/writers-writer-dead-at-90/tt-AAAbT6oP?q=james%20salter%20death>>.

Pound – even though modernism was beginning to be dated even in the 1950s. That does not, however, make his writing dated, as it instead explores those aspects of human experience, consciousness, and emotions relevant in any period. There are also biographical similarities between Salter and the modernists. For Hemingway and Pound, as well as other modernist expatriates, mobility was instrumental for their artistic career, as much as it was for Salter, and it is reflected in their work. All of that connects Salter to the longstanding tradition of American literature in Europe.

Salter belongs to the line of American writers like Henry James or Ernest Hemingway who travelled to the Continent both for personal and artistic freedom and whose experience is mirrored in their work, where Europe frequently functions as the setting – a promised land opening a door to new experience and knowledge. While the tradition of American writing in and about Europe dates back to the 19th century, the Continent played a particularly crucial role for the modernist expatriates who relocated to Paris to pursue their art, as the City of Lights was then the artistic capital of the world. Salter assigns a similar role to Paris, and Europe in general, and it is the modernists that he is the closest to, both in terms of the role of Europe, as well as in his personal philosophy, and most importantly in his aesthetic and style, which is greatly influenced by the modernist greats.

In order to thoroughly explore Salter's treatment of the European journey along with the typical features of his writing, the first chapter will provide the background that will position Salter in the tradition of American writing in Europe and discuss the thematic and philosophical similarities between him and the modernists. Pascale Casanova's theory about the functioning of the literary space expressed in her study *The World Republic of Letters* will be utilised to justify the special position of Paris in the works and careers of these authors.

Based on this theoretical background, the second chapter will explore the image of Europe in Salter's novels – *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), *Light Years* (1975), *Solo Faces* (1979) and *All That Is* (2013) – where a journey to Europe functions as a place of release, education, and conquest, playing an instrumental role in the lives of the characters who are drawn to Europe by an inexplicably strong pull. The close readings in this chapter will not only further prove Salter's place within the aforementioned tradition of American literature about Europe, but also demonstrate Salter's modernist concerns and aesthetic, which will be explored in detail in the third chapter, which will pinpoint the defining features of Salter's style and further enforce his connection to modernism by comparing Salter's *A Sport and a Pastime*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Through close readings of these novels, with a particular focus on the image of Europe and its effect on

Salter's protagonists, as well as with attention to theoretical considerations of the importance of place in the production and interpretation of literature, this thesis will come to a great understanding of the various themes in Salter's fiction and his relevance as a contemporary American writer.

2. A DESIRE FOR FREEDOM AND FAME: THE TRADITION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE IN EUROPE AND JAMES SALTER'S PLACE IN THE LITERARY SPACE

For an American writer, James Salter puts a great deal of emphasis on Europe, setting a number of his novels and stories on the Continent and assigning the European journey a formative function. Since the emergence of distinctly American literature,¹ Americans travelling to Europe have been a frequent subject of American narratives which often attempted to define America in opposition to the Old World. Europe initially emerged out of the comparison perhaps unfavourably, but later came to represent the values America should have stood for. Salter's treatment of the theme of a formative journey to Europe as well as his reverence for the Old World as the mecca of the arts and liberty establishes a firm thematic connection with the generations of American writers who likewise turned to a representation of Europe in their writing, as well as the generations of American expatriate writers who have explored and contributed to this tradition. The thematic affinities of Salter's work with American literature in and about Europe are further strengthened by prominent similarities with the modernists, many of whom were expatriates in Europe. Although Anglophone modernism – a revolutionary literary movement of the beginning of the twentieth century which placed great emphasis on mobility and the possibilities it opened for the artist – was of course not represented by American expatriates only, as many prominent figures remained in America, the widespread expatriation of artists to Europe is a defining feature of the artistic movement, and one that is most relevant for the present discussion, as the connection between Salter and the modernist expatriates synthesises perfectly the thematic similarities in the treatment of Europe with the writers' personal experiences on the Continent, their disillusionment with American society, and the formal features of their writing, which were greatly influenced by the new developments in science and philosophy, as well as by other art forms.

An awareness of this connection between Salter and the modernists proves useful for the interpretation of Salter's novels and for the determination of Salter's place in the literary canon, which will be pursued by a careful examination of the existing tradition of American literature in Europe in this chapter, and of the themes and formal aspects of Salter's work in the following chapters. To establish Salter's place within the tradition of American literature

¹ The political emancipation from Britain can be seen as concurrent to the artistic emancipation, as the American War of Independence (1775-1783) is perceived as the period of "the first efforts to express American cultural identity" for example in Justin Quinn, ed. *Lectures on American Literature* (Prague: Karolinum, 2011) 23.

about Europe this chapter will give a brief overview of that tradition, introduce Salter's biographical and philosophical connection to the modernist expatriates, and explore the reasons for the significance of Europe, particularly Paris, in the writing of these authors as well as Salter's. After all, it was neither London nor New York, but Paris which held the central place in the genesis of Anglophone modernism.² Pascale Casanova's study *The World Republic of Letters* justifies the special position of the French capital in the world of the arts, while mapping out the international literary space. Her model will help to explain the significance of the City of Lights and the whole Continent in relation to Salter's novels as well as his position in the literary space. However, the tradition of Americans going to Europe emerged long before the modernist expatriates arrived in Paris and it is important to be aware of its genesis in order to establish Salter's place in the world of letters.

2. 1. Europe in American Literature

American writers have been setting out on journeys to Europe since the 19th century. James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and others went to the Continent to explore their roots; since the United States was a relatively new construct, they still felt a strong connection to Europe. Distinctly American literature was only beginning to develop, and many of the novels dealing with the Old World at that time were "decidedly pro-American tracts",³ as the critic Udo Natterman observes. He maintains that "American narratives about Europe were cultural expressions of nationalistic rivalries, literary exercises in justifying the existence of the young republic and in convincing audiences on both sides of the Atlantic of America's superiority".⁴ The differences between Europe and America were defined in terms of the old and the new, the traditional and the progressive, to claim the younger nation as the greater of the two. Europe's assets were also recognized, though they went hand in hand with its faults (which would only in a few decades come to be seen as positives): For many of these writers, "Europe represented a complex model of aesthetic refinement, beauty, and historical depth, decadence and moral doubt".⁵ In other words it represented the Old World which, although it was the historic "home country" of most Americans, had to give way to the New World, where decadence and loose European morals were looked down upon at that time when the Puritan heritage still prevailed.

² See Martin Hilský, *Modernisté* (Praha: Torst, 1995) 35.

³ Udo Natterman, "The Search for Legitimacy in Nathaniel Willis's *Paul Fane*," *American Writers in Europe: 1850 to the Present*, ed. Ferda Asya (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 13-30, 13.

⁴ Natterman, 13.

⁵ British Library, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and 'Our Old Home'," *Online Gallery: American Literature in Europe, 1850-1950*, 26 Sep. 2014 <<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/amliteuro/hawthorne.html>>.

Later in the 19th century, a European tour became an important feature of education for young Americans, and as such it figures prominently in American literature of the period.⁶ A prime example of this is Henry James – who unlike many of his pro-American contemporaries, was more sympathetic to the looser European values – and particularly his novel *The Ambassadors*, which captures the free spirit of Europe while exploring how formative the experience of European culture was to American visitors. The greatest influence of the European experience is apparent in Strether, the novel’s protagonist, who comes from the Puritan background of a small American town, and is gradually enchanted with the European values and way of life, and gains an entirely new cosmopolitan perspective on life. The visit to Europe as a formative experience expressed in 19th century literature is very similar to Salter’s treatment of the journey to Europe and its eye-opening impact on his characters, as will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, we shall confine our discussion to a general overview of the significance of Europe in American literature, and explore how Salter draws on this tradition.

The second great wave of American writers in Europe occurred after WWI. Though devastated by the war, the Continent still attracted artists. This was especially true of Paris, which was regarded as the centre of bohemian culture. Paris was central to the modernist movement as well, being the site of publication of pioneering works such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Perhaps as a result, artists from all creative fields gravitated towards Paris. Among the American writers living in Paris in the 1920s were Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound, the latter three belonging to what Stein labelled the Lost Generation, who were “driven abroad by their hatred of the materialistic American way of life, in their search for freedom, knowledge, old art and culture”.⁷ Although the theme of the European journey is not always central in the work of these writers, it is nonetheless there.⁸ However, in their rejection and disillusionment with America these writers did not renounce the country entirely, rather their experience offered them a new perspective from which to view their country of origin.

More American writers moved to Europe after WWII, with James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, William Burroughs, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Henry Miller (who had been there since the ‘30s), and many others, influenced by the horrific war, coming to find “dark inspiration in the surreal spectacle of the continent’s descent into

⁶ See British Library, “Henry James and Edith Wharton in Europe,” *Online Gallery: American Literature in Europe, 1850-1950*, 26 Sep. 2014 < <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/amliteuro/james.html>>.

⁷ Quinn 191.

⁸ See for example Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* or F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*.

chaos”.⁹ Many were also in search of publishers due to the censorship in the United States, as the post-war years, influenced by Cold War tensions between the USSR and the USA, were a time of great conservatism in politics, social conventions, as well as culture.¹⁰ Many more unconventional artists thus left America to look for freedom in Europe, which despite the destruction wreaked by the war – or perhaps exactly because of it – could still offer them that. By the end of the war Salter had just finished his army training, missing the fight by a few months, and was posted in the Pacific and later in the U.S., waiting until 1950 for his first trip to Europe and Paris.¹¹ The freedom and culture he later found in Europe would prove as formative to his tastes in literature as it had for the writers of the first half of the century. Salter had grown up reading the great modernist novels and poetry, which were very much influenced by European art, such as Impressionism and Symbolism, and philosophy, such as Nietzsche’s perspectivism. His own writing is in many ways a continuation of the modernist tradition. His reading experience together with his way of life in Europe lead to a close affinity between himself and the modernists, who combined the theme of Europe as a place of release and a cultural capital with particular stylistic features and values which Salter adopted.

2. 2. Salter and the Modernist Worldview

Salter’s style, the most obvious link between him and the modernists, will be explored in greater detail in the last chapter, which will exemplify Salter’s connection with modernism by comparing his writing with Ernest Hemingway’s. The present discussion shall focus on positioning Salter on the literary map in more general terms, and exploring the biographical and philosophical links between Salter and the modernist expatriates. Salter’s experiences in Europe and his conception of the Continent as a place of freedom, culture, romance, and possibilities, relate him closely to the modernists, who assigned these characteristics especially to Paris, and who thus further developed the tradition of American literature in Europe. Furthermore, Salter’s first-hand experience of war as a fighter pilot may have had a similar effect on him as on the members of the Lost Generation. The Korean War did not deprive Salter of his beliefs in honour and the possibility of achieving greatness in combat and even in death, as his early novels about fighter pilots – *Cassada* (originally *The Arm of Flesh*) and *The Hunters* – show. Yet these novels also show that these values are becoming antiquated in the modern world, as is demonstrated in the many opportunistic and selfish

⁹ British Library, “From the Great Depression to the Cold War,” *Online Gallery: American Literature in Europe, 1850-1950*, 26 Sep. 2014 < <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/amliteuro/depression.html>>.

¹⁰ See Quinn 239.

¹¹ William Dowie, *James Salter*, ed. Frank Day (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998) xix.

characters with no sense of honour whom Salter implicitly criticises, yet who are the ones who rise to fame, for example Pell in *The Hunters* or Major Dunning in *Cassada*.

Salter is no social critic, but a slight disillusionment with American society is apparent in *Light Years* which hints at the hypocrisy and limitations of American life, and also in the novel *A Sport and a Pastime*, which is most indebted to the Lost Generation, where France is the promised land of spiritual and sexual freedom, while the U.S. is the conservative country where one must fulfil the expectations of society. In this Salter resembles the American writers of the 1920s and 1930s who, as Donald Pizer observes for example about Gertrude Stein, “portray[ed] an America dominated by an ethos in which the principal commitments are to work, money, and self-discipline”.¹² It is exactly this world of work, money, and self-discipline that Dean in *A Sport and a Pastime* abandons for the world of sexual freedom France represents. It is as true of the fictitious characters as of the writers who created them, be it Hemingway or Stein, or Salter whose life lessons and wild love-affairs, which contributed to his personal as well as artistic maturation, took place in France, or other European countries.

Apart from similarities in lifestyle and the significance of Europe, both Salter and the modernists look for a means of stopping civilization’s downfall. The modernists believed in the redemptive quality of art as a preserve of life and culture amidst the decaying and ever-changing world, as for example Virginia Woolf implies in her novel *To the Lighthouse*: “nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint”¹³ – it is in writing and paintings that experience is preserved. Moreover, it allows the artist to create a unified whole out of the chaotic world, as Woolf observes: “It is only by putting it into words that I can make it whole (...), it gives me, perhaps, because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together.”¹⁴ The modernist belief in the redemptive power of art is in sharp contrast to the disillusionment of Salter’s postmodernist contemporaries: while the modernists tried to transcend the chaos and disorder of the modern world through art, the post-modernists accepted it.¹⁵ Salter’s treatment of art is similar in that he believes in its power to cultivate and educate people while preserving the precious moments of our lives as well as our values. His novels show an especially deep appreciation of literature, which has the ability to transform the lives of its readers, as in the following passage from *Light Years*:

¹² Donald Pizer, *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment: Modernism and Place* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996) 3.

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989) 179.

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (London: Grafton, 1989) 83-84.

¹⁵ See Hilský 248-249.

The book was in her lap; she had read no further. The power to change one's life comes from a paragraph, a lone remark. The lines that penetrate us are slender, like the flukes that live in river water and enter the bodies of swimmers. She was excited, filled with strength. The polished sentences had arrived, it seemed, like so many other things, at just the right time. How can we imagine what our lives should be without the illumination of the lives of others?¹⁶

The knowledge of other people's lives that one gains through literature is enriching and in Salter's view absolutely essential. Furthermore, art enables the preservation of the most important moments in life, because as Salter maintains: "Art, in a sense, is life brought to a standstill, rescued from time."¹⁷ As time passes, the artists disappear, but their works of art remain. Salter's opinion echoes that of Woolf expressed in the aforementioned quote from *To the Lighthouse*. Thus the artist preserves a piece of himself, and the future generations may find their own lives the richer for it. What Salter also finds enriching for the soul is a journey to Europe, which opened a door to new experiences for Salter as it did for other American artists in the past.

2.3. "An American Who Absorbed Europe"¹⁸: Salter's Relationship to France and the Continent

As has been previously established, like many of the American expatriate writers, James Salter both lived in Europe for extended periods of time and has written about Americans in Europe in his fiction, drawing heavily on the aforementioned tradition as well as his personal experience. This is clear even without knowledge of Salter's biography, as the novelist confirms that he writes largely from experience:

[M]ost great novels and stories come not from things that are entirely invented, but from perfect knowledge and close observation. To say they are made up is an injustice in describing them. I sometimes say that I don't make up anything – obviously that's not true. But I am usually uninterested in writers who say that everything comes out of the imagination. I would rather be in a room with someone who is telling me the story of his life, which may be exaggerated and even have lies in it, but I want to hear the true story, essentially.¹⁹

¹⁶ James Salter, *Light Years* (London: Penguin, 2007) 160; hereafter cited in the text as *LY*.

¹⁷ Salter, *Burning the Days* (London: Picador, 2007) 353; hereafter cited in the text as *BD*.

¹⁸ Alex Bilmes, "James Salter – the Greatest Writer You've Never Read," *Esquire*, 23 May 2013, 6 May 2014 <<http://www.esquire.co.uk/culture/features/3943/how-james-salter-freezes-time/>>.

¹⁹ James Salter, "The Art of Fiction No. 133," Interview with Edward Hirsch. *The Paris Review* No. 127 (Summer 1993), 5 May 2014 <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1930/the-art-of-fiction-no-133-james-salter>>.

Salter's novels indeed contain the story of his life – one that is tied to his experiences in Europe. Although he was an American, there are many aspects both of his aesthetics and his lifestyle that resemble European ways. Salter's fondness for Europe and especially for France in particular – like his belief that fiction starts with life – is not only self-evident in his writing, but also fully admitted by the novelist. A self-proclaimed Francophile, he lived in Europe as a soldier of the U.S. Army, and later as a writer on a number of occasions, his longest stay being for a year and a half in Magagnosc, a small village in the South of France. As with many Americans before him, living in Europe was for Salter a formative experience, despite the relatively short period of time he spent there – Salter says “the cities of Europe were [his] real manhood”²⁰ – which allowed him to explore the freedom, culture, and history of the place, and live by the somewhat looser European standards:

A part of one's never completed mosaic, in my case a crucial part, is found abroad. (...) Kant had four questions that he believed philosophy should answer: What can I know? What may I hope? What ought I to do? What is a man? All of these Europe helped to clarify. (...) The thing it finally gave me was education, not the lessons of school but something more elevated, a view of existence: how to have leisure, love, food, and conversation, how to look at nakedness, architecture, streets, all new and thinking to be thought of in a different way. In Europe the shadow of history suddenly falls upon you, and knowing none of it, you realize suddenly how small you are. (*BD*, 239-240)

Salter clearly places the utmost importance on his formative European experience. In his novels, characters ask the same questions in Europe. Thus he thematically resembles Henry James, who, as mentioned above, examined in fiction the differences between Europe and America, and emphasized the freedom and culture of Europe and the doors it opens for a perceptive American.

In an interview between Edward Hirsch and Salter published in *The Paris Review*, Hirsch asked Salter whether he belonged to those American writers who went to Europe and became more entrenched as Americans, like Hawthorne and Twain, or to those who became more European. Salter answered that he feels “completely American”, while at the same time “admir[ing] European ways”.²¹ In Salter's aforementioned assessment of Europe's influence on him he recognizes that in Europe he received an essential education in terms of worldview and he has certainly adopted some of the European, namely French, attitudes to these things in his life, which is apparent in his writing as well. In the recent James Salter obituary in *The*

²⁰ Salter, *The Paris Review*.

²¹ Salter, *The Paris Review*.

New Yorker Nick Paumgarten described Salter's work as "almost Continental"²² and he certainly did not mean only its setting.

Salter's deep appreciation of culture and art, love of food and dining (reflected also in his book *Life is Meals*) as well as his liberal conception of love, which would certainly be more acceptable in Europe than in post-war America, greatly resemble the French *savoir vivre*. His sensibility seems often very European as well. Moreover, his family has deep European roots, since it was only his grandparents who first moved to America – his father's family came from Poland, while his mother's family came from "somewhere between Frankfurt and Moscow".²³ Alex Bilmes aptly resolves this tension between the American and the European in Salter by concluding that Salter is "an American who absorbed Europe".²⁴ He absorbed it thoroughly, not only in terms of the way of life and the values, but especially in terms of the great European literary tradition. Salter's literary influences are largely European, be it the English like Ford Maddox Ford, or the Russians like Chekhov and Babel, and especially the French like Collette, Gide, Cocteau, Léautaud, all of whom Salter admits he admires.²⁵ It is indeed France with which Salter has the closest relationship, as it is a frequent setting of his novels and stories, as well as being important for the writer personally. Most of the aforementioned American expatriate writers, as well as expatriate writers of other nationalities, too accorded France and especially its capital, Paris, a special status. Paris was after all the site where authors found freedom from conservatism and censorship, as it was the place of publication of major experimental and controversial texts. Therefore it is necessary for our discussion to examine in more detail why Paris has been so significant to so many American writers, including Salter.

2. 4. Paris as the Capital City of Literature

Before we move to a more specific examination of Salter's novels in the following chapter, it will be useful to consider some of the theoretical aspects of Salter's conception of Europe. Whereas 19th century Americans visiting Europe were rather getting to know the Old World, 20th century expatriates through their experience in Europe, and particularly Paris, were trying to get to know America and enrich the American literary tradition, in which Paris played a vital role. Salter oscillates between both of these experiences. He, like other

²² Nick Paumgarten, "Postscript: James Salter, 1925-2015," *The New Yorker*, 21 June 2015, 2 July 2015 <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/postscript-james-salter-1925-2015>>.

²³ Dowie, *James Salter* 4.

²⁴ Bilmes, *Esquire*.

²⁵ Salter, *The Paris Review*.

Americans, is drawn to Paris, and the whole of France, at least in part, for the reasons Pascale Casanova puts forth in her study *The World Republic of Letters*, which argues that Paris has been since the 19th century the capital of the world republic of letters, because it is a space completely freed from political domination. Casanova asserts that the international literary space emerged in the sixteenth century “at the very moment when literature began to figure as a source of contention in Europe (...). Literary authority and recognition – and, as a result, national rivalries – came into existence with the formation and development of the first European states.”²⁶ Thus the formation of the world republic of letters was closely connected to politics and the formations of individual nations, which through the creation of a national literature and literary tradition would come to assert their independence and strive to assert their superiority over others (although this does not mean that political dominance automatically implies dominance in the literary space, and vice versa). According to Casanova, French literature was the first that divorced itself from politics by becoming the cradle of democracy with the French Revolution, and thus became the mecca of the arts:

Paris became the capital of the literary world, the city endowed with the greatest literary prestige on earth. (...) As the capital of France, Paris combined two apparently antithetical properties, in a curious way bringing together all the historical conceptions of freedom. On the one hand, it symbolized the Revolution, the overthrow of the monarchy, the invention of the rights of man – an image that was to earn France its great reputation for tolerance towards foreigners and as a land of asylum for political refugees. But it was also the capital of letters, the arts, luxurious living, and fashion. Paris was therefore at once the intellectual capital of the world, the arbiter of good taste, and (at least in the mythological account that later circulated throughout the entire world) the source of political democracy: an idealized city where artistic freedom could be proclaimed and lived.²⁷

Casanova asserts that due to its political freedom France is also “the least national of literary nations”.²⁸ This allows it to produce universal literature, while due to its cosmopolitan nature and openness to foreigners also to consecrate foreign writers, “denationalizing and departicularizing them”,²⁹ proclaiming them acceptable in other countries too. It is no wonder then that most of the artists who came to Europe gravitated towards Paris, “a universal homeland exempt from all professions of patriotism, a kingdom of literature set up in opposition to the ordinary laws of states, a transnational realm whose sole imperatives are

²⁶ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007) 11.

²⁷ Casanova 24.

²⁸ Casanova 87.

²⁹ Casanova 87.

those of art and literature: the universal republic of letters”.³⁰ As the New World once represented to all immigrants from Europe the land of freedom and new possibilities, Paris – especially in the late 19th and the 20th century – came to represent the same to the American expatriate artists.

This freedom from external influences and hidden agendas also meant that the French capital was the environment most open to experimentation and new developments. Casanova assigns to Paris the role of the Greenwich meridian of literature – a place from which the distance from the aesthetic centre is measured, determining how far behind Paris, and therefore the most recent and most modern developments in literature, a national literature or an individual writer finds itself or himself.³¹ Casanova points out that “the prime meridian determines the present of a literary creation, which is to say modernity. The aesthetic distance of a work or corpus of works from the center may thus be measured by their temporal remove from the canons that, at the precise moment of estimation, define the literary present.”³² Some of the most experimental novelists and poets indeed often first published in Paris, usually due to censorship in their own country, like Henry Miller or James Joyce. Seeking to revolutionise their national literature, they turned to Paris because, as Gertrude Stein aptly remarked, “Paris was where the 20th century was”.³³

Casanova emphasises that the traditions and literary heritage of a national and linguistic area form the basis of its literary capital in the world republic of letters, which operates similarly to the financial market on the basis of exchange of commodities, i.e. literary capital.³⁴ The literary tradition of France is very rich, while the American national literature is comparatively younger and lesser. Casanova argues that “the United States in the 1920s was literarily a dominated country that looked to Paris in order to try to accumulate resources it lacked”.³⁵ Expatriation, particularly for the 20th century American writers, offered not only access to the Greenwich meridian of literature, but a fresh perspective on America, whose national literature they were trying to modernise.

Salter’s recognition of the European, and especially the French literary tradition, may have helped him, along with his use of France as an important location in his writing, to earn respect on the French literary scene. As Bilmes asserts, “Salter is regarded as an *home sérieux* in France, where his writing has long been accorded a status that has until now eluded him at

³⁰ Casanova 29.

³¹ See Casanova 88.

³² Casanova 88.

³³ Gertrude Stein, *Paris, France* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940) 11.

³⁴ See Casanova 13, 34-39.

³⁵ Casanova 42.

home”.³⁶ In the United States, Salter has indeed been neglected by critics, and his novels have never achieved wide popularity, having sold only a few thousand copies each,³⁷ with the exception of *All That Is*. Although his novels have been translated into French and he enjoys a more prominent status in France than in America, he has not been consecrated in the capital of the “world republic of letters”³⁸ the way Hemingway or Faulkner were before him – he is still, as William Dowie puts it, “sitting in the anteroom of fame, patiently waiting to be called”.³⁹ The theory of success and failure in the world republic of letters is explored by Casanova in her study, where she identifies the principal conditions a writer must fulfil to have a chance at succeeding: they must have sufficient literary capital to draw on – either that of their own nation, or adopting the literary tradition of another language – and they must be up-to-date with or ahead of the Greenwich meridian of literature. Those who are ahead of the Greenwich meridian are usually marginalised authors who become exiles to seek autonomy:

The great literary revolutionaries – Kiš, Michaux, Beckett, and Joyce among them – find themselves so at odds with the norms of their native literary space, and by contrast, so at home with the norms current in the international space that they are able to make their way only outside their homeland.⁴⁰

Salter certainly fulfils the first condition, as he has the American literary capital to draw on, while also drawing on that of France. There is one crucial difference, however. Salter is not avant-garde in any sense. Rather than looking to postmodernism and beyond, he consistently drew from the modernist tradition.

Salter’s writing style and subject matter, along with his lifestyle and opinions firmly place him alongside the late 19th and early 20th century expatriates and the whole tradition of American literature in and about Europe, for whom Paris was a special place of absolute freedom and rich cultural heritage, which is accordingly reflected in Salter’s writing. In his novels especially, Europe is synonymous with sophistication, liberty, adventure, and the search for the true self. Casanova’s study thoroughly justifies the superior position of Paris which has, due to political and historical reasons, become the capital of the world republic of letters and thus indispensable in setting the trends as well as in discovering and consecrating innovative writers. While it may not be the case anymore, Salter looks back to the time when it was. Salter, however, has not been so innovative. While Salter’s novels do not exactly feel

³⁶ Bilmes, *Esquire*.

³⁷ See Dowie, *James Salter* xi.

³⁸ See Casanova.

³⁹ Dowie, *James Salter* xiii.

⁴⁰ Casanova 110.

dated, they have an aura of a different time about them, which is perhaps no surprise, considering the fact that Salter began writing in the 1950s and comes from a very different world than the one we inhabit now. His novels as well as his idea of what a writer should be are much closer to the modernist tradition than to the current postmodern and experimental writing. His refusal to adapt and surpass the contemporary literary innovations may be what alienates his work from a mass audience and universal acclaim.

In light of Casanova's theory then, Salter's not being up-to-date with the current fashions in literature and the Greenwich meridian may account for his lack of international success. At the same time, the fact that his writing is detached from contemporary events yet so closely connected with today's reality through the universal issues it explores – love, ambition, desire, death – may be exactly why many of the happy few who have discovered the novelist have developed a lifelong appreciation for his lyrical prose. While today he appears out of his time, Salter resembles the kind of writer that lived at the beginning of the 20th century – a cosmopolitan, an exile, an outsider who believes in the intrinsic value of art and is constantly in search of new experience and things worthy of reporting. In the contemporary world of literature, Salter indeed seems to be an outsider, but an outsider whose work, although divorced from major historical events and political conflicts (other than those of mid-century), enacts Salter's own view that "life passes into pages if it passes into anything".⁴¹

⁴¹ Salter, *The Paris Review*.

3. SATISFACTION OF ALL THE SENSES: EUROPE IN THE NOVELS OF JAMES SALTER

Europe has been portrayed countless times in American literature as a promised land, as the above examples from Henry James and Gertrude Stein show. Salter draws on this image in his presentation of Europe as a place of refined tastes, sensuous pleasures, and self-discovery, but enriches it with more complexity. France especially holds a special place in Salter's fiction as the ultimate destination, and Salter endows it with the qualities Casanova assigns to Paris – it is the cultural capital and the place of ultimate freedom – which in Salter's later novels holds for all of Europe. Similarly to writers who look for consecration in Paris, which has the power to accept or reject, Salter's characters look for consecration of their new life in Europe, to which they are drawn in crucial moments of their lives. Many of Salter's protagonists hold an idealised image of the Continent which is not, however, always fulfilled during their trip, upon which they all embark for varying reasons. The characters are largely defined by their relationship to the Continent and their aspirations and experience there. Therefore by examining the image of Europe in Salter's novels we reach a better understanding of the characters and their motivations, which truly surface only when their full potential is revealed in Europe, away from the mundane and even corrupt American society. This chapter will examine four novels – *A Sport and a Pastime*, *Light Years*, *Solo Faces*, and *All That Is* – and show the different ways Salter views Europe: as education, release, and conquest. These three themes will serve as the organising principle of this chapter, which will explore how each one is manifest in the novels.

Before delving into the analysis of each theme, let us briefly introduce the premise of each novel in question. In *A Sport and a Pastime* Dean, a Yale drop-out, drifts through Europe looking for a different kind of education than the one he received at university. In this novel Europe, namely provincial France, stands for an earthly paradise filled with romance, the carefree nature of youth, and an appreciation of the civilisation's rich history. Nedra Berland in *Light Years* thinks of Europe exactly as this earthly paradise, where she longs to escape from her American life impeded by conventions – when she finally goes to Europe with her husband Viri, the Continent conforms to her ideal, and it is during the trip that she reaches a life-changing decision. Rand in *Solo Faces* runs away to Europe from responsibility and his pathological fear of getting attached, but he also ventures there to challenge himself on the most difficult climbs in pursuit of glory. His idea of Europe is not connected with a luxurious life or cultural superiority, as it is with other characters, but rather with complete

freedom and an exploration of his own limits. In Salter's last novel, *All That Is*, Bowman goes to Europe for work for the first time, rather than because of his own decision, yet he still receives a form of education. Salter's Europe is not only a promised land, but also a place associated with education, a release from the pressures at home, and also with conquest.

The idea of conquest is prominent in all of Salter's novels through the theme of the exploration of the body merging with the exploration of the landscape, where through sexual conquest a place is also conquered. This allows Salter to foreground the overwhelmingly sensual nature of travel, while emphasising also the image of the earthly paradise which awards pleasures that cannot be found at home. Although the idealised image of Europe prevails, Salter does not hesitate to remind his readers at times that it is indeed an idealisation which does not always correspond to reality. Yet when one travels, one usually longs to escape the reality of everyday life, and that is what Dean, Nedra, Viri, Rand, and Bowman are looking for in their European adventures – they are all, on a more or less conscious level, fleeing from their problems and looking for the solution in Europe, be it a superior education, a release from the constraints of conservative society, or the conquest of a new territory, both in sexual and geographical terms. The characters usually find what they seek, at least for a while, yet none of them can stay and settle, because then Europe would lose its allure and the excitement and freshness it provides, as the idealisation would become reality. It is a reality which they would sooner or later feel the need to escape. This allows Salter to maintain the magical allure of Europe, the description of which is based on Salter's memories of his time there.

3. 1. The Relationship between Writer and Place

The Europe of Salter's novels is to a large extent based on his experience on the Continent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Salter associated his time in Europe with his coming of age as a man, because it was there that he learned to appreciate all the pleasures of life and art, and where he experienced his wild love affairs. *A Sport and a Pastime*, published in 1967 and relating the journey of Philip Dean and Anne-Marie Costallat, was born out of one such love affair. It is based on Salter's notes from his time in Chaumont, where he was stationed during the Berlin crisis in 1961. He fell in love with a French girl and they travelled the countryside together – an experience which he put down into a little notebook:

There were wonderful things in that book, things that I am unable to write or even imagine again. That they were wonderful was not my doing – I merely took the trouble to put them down. They were like the secret notebook of the

chasseur at Maxim's, without ego or discretion, and the novel woven around them (*A Sport and a Pastime*) owed them everything. (*BD*, 200)

Though the novel is not Salter's memoir, it is indebted to his romance, thus confirming Salter's approach to writing structured around the most significant moments, which holds for his other works as well – the Europe of his novels is based on the Europe he got to know.

However, the Europe of Salter's novels is ultimately more the novelist's creation than a real place. J. Gerald Kennedy in his study *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity* analyses the significance of place for the modernists and the impact of expatriation on the formation of identity. Kennedy identifies Paris as “a scene of metamorphosis”,¹ proposing that writers project their own anxieties and identity crises into the relationship with the space presented in their writing, which results in very different experiences for each writer. Thus a portrait of a place is a reflection of the writer's experience in that particular location: “[O]ne's sense of place is determined less by specific geographical features than by experiential associations. It also implies, however, that the assimilation of experience in the unconscious – the processing of everyday life – depends in some way upon these spatial and topical attachments.”² Therefore a sense of place is determined by our experience there, but that experience too is influenced by the location. This intricate relation poses difficulties in representing places in writing, as Kennedy notes:

One cannot compare an “actual” place with its literary representation, since there is literally no “place” apart from an interpreting consciousness. (...) the salient difference lies not in the relations between real and fictive environments but between textual scenes and the symbolic experiences of place which they inscribe.³

This seems to suggest that every piece of writing where the importance of place is pronounced should be interpreted as autobiography, yet Kennedy goes on to clarify that the relation is much more subtle: “[I]t seems more plausible to assume that a writer's fixation with place may signal the desire of autobiography: the longing to reconstruct – albeit in fictive terms – the relation between an authorial self and a world of located experience.”⁴ This applies as much to the modernists, as it does to Salter, whose preoccupation with place and the associated experience brings him closer to the modernist expatriates than his contemporaries. Kennedy observes that generally place has lost its significance in postmodern

¹ J. Gerald Kennedy, *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993) 4.

² Kennedy 7.

³ Kennedy 5.

⁴ Kennedy 23.

times because thanks to modern technology people can be transported to a place without physically being there. The result is a blurring of borders:

[T]he differences between one locale and another become increasingly indistinct. Technology has worked inexorably towards homogenization (...). In ways too numerous to specify, we have all depended on places – and the different opportunities which they represent – to nurture aspects of our human growth. (...) The inhuman landscape of postmodernism makes us all displaced persons by denying the grounding which would allow us to locate and define our lives.⁵

Although Salter's characters may appear displaced by their constant need to travel, they are very much attached to the places they visit and even more so to America, to which they always return. Both the modernists and Salter certainly associate human growth with the places they write about, because, like their characters, they defined them. Moreover, travel also provides education – an education different from the one received at school, but no less important.

3. 2. Europe as Education

For Salter, Europe represents the best educational institution available, one that equips its students with the knowledge of how to live a superior existence. This kind of education is what Dean of *A Sport and a Pastime* and also Nedra of *Light Years* are purposely seeking on their journey to Europe, while for the other characters the search is much less conscious. Dean travels to Europe because university cannot provide him with sufficient education, so he decides to look for a different kind of education found in life on the road. Dean detests the conventional life his father would have him live in America, the very emblem of such a life for Dean. He tells his sister Amy that “life is composed of certain basic elements (...) [and] there's the desire to find those elements somehow, to discover them”⁶, which is what he is trying to do in Europe:

‘[W]hy can't each of us, properly directed, build a life, I mean, a happy life? (...) Do you know what I mean?’

‘Of course, I do,’ she says. ‘If you could achieve that, you'd have everything.’

‘And without it you have...’ he shrugs, ‘a life.’

‘Like everybody's,’ he says.

‘I don't want that.’

‘Neither do I.’ (*SP*, 156)

⁵ Kennedy xii.

⁶ Salter, *A Sport and a Pastime*, (London: Picador, 2007)156; hereafter cited in the text as *SP*.

Dean's time with a French girl Anne-Marie, which revolves solely around the pleasures of the body divorced from reality, is anything but a life like everyone else's. Although the "basic elements" are not specified, Dean appears to have found them in the freedom of travel, and the sensual pleasures to be found in sex and in looking at architectural monuments, appreciating the achievements of ancient civilisations. Anne-Marie guides Dean through French life and the French countryside, instructing him in the French *savoir-vivre*, and thus facilitating his education, which is intimately tied with the theme of conquest, which will be addressed shortly. His decision to go back to the States has partly to do with running away from the commitment Anne-Marie desires, but it also indicates that his European education is complete. He experienced the life that revolves around sensual pleasure, but found this particular one cannot last, nor can he escape his American roots completely. Based on his acquired knowledge, he needs to build his own life modelled on his European one. Nedra in *Light Years* strives to do the same.

Nedra's idea of education is very similar to Dean's and even more specifically associated with Europe. Nedra's desire to go to Europe is pronounced from the beginning of the novel. Her American life, in fact, appears to be a rehearsal for the European life she wants. The house is filled with European things: French knives, cheeses, wine, a print of Chagall, Greek songs, Italian shampoos and editions of *Vogue*. "They lived a Russian life, a rich life" (*LY*, 69), the inconspicuous narrator observes. As if everything European were culturally superior, both Nedra and Viri are looking for the wisdom of European civilisations, first in biographies of the great artists. Nedra is fascinated with the lives of others, looking for an example to follow, like that of the dancer Darin Henze and his mistress: "Marina travelled for three years with Darin Henze when he was touring all over the world. It was a fantastic experience" (*LY*, 164). She wants the same experience, one that would provide her the required education: "What I mean by education,' Nedra said, 'is learning how to live and on what level. And you must learn that or everything else is useless'" (*LY*, 164). In her imitation of European life she is trying to learn how to live, but only her trip to Europe prompts her to pursue it.

In Nedra's pursuit of education, Europe satisfies all her expectations:

'You know, this has really been the most wonderful trip,' Nedra said. 'It's just the way I always knew it would be, I've loved every minute. Look at the river. Everything is perfect. And whatever we've seen, it's only been a glimpse. I mean, you realize that England has so much; endless riches. I love that feeling.' (...) 'It's like opening a door in your life.' (*LY*, 200)

The trip not only confirms the superiority of European life, but Nedra also learns what she must do to find happiness. The trip gives Nedra the courage to leave her husband, as it is in Europe, upon observing a married couple's routine, where the woman obviously desires more but remains complaisant to her husband, that she realises she does not want a quiet secure life with Viri: "[Nedra realised that] life demanded selfishness, isolation, and that even in another country a woman utterly unknown to her could confide this so clearly" (*LY*, 197). At the conclusion of their trip, Nedra informs Viri: 'I don't want to go back to our old life'" (*LY*, 199). She leaves Viri and returns to Europe. However, she does not quite fit in, drifting from place to place. Perhaps it is her age which prevents her from finding complete happiness there. One is reminded of Henry James' character of Strether in the *The Ambassadors*, who, although enamoured with Europe, returns to America because he feels too old to change his life completely. Nedra perhaps also feels too old to start a completely different life, yet her European experience does not leave her unchanged, as she has proved to herself that she can be independent, happy on her own, and still attract the attention of men. Although the ideal of European life she has nourished proves unrealistic, she comes to terms with it and finds happiness back in the States:

It was as if finally, after having passed through inferior stages, her life had found a form worthy of it. Artificiality was gone, together with foolish hopes and expectations. There were times when she was happier than she had ever been, and it seemed that this happiness was not bestowed on her but was something she had herself achieved, had searched for, not knowing its form, had given up everything lesser – even things that were irreplaceable – to gain. Her life was her own. It was no longer there to be taken by anyone. (*LY*, 261)

Nedra has succeeded in her quest; Europe gave her the education necessary to do so, nurturing her independence and ability to enjoy life to the fullest, and encouraging authenticity, the centuries of history providing a perspective. All of Salter's characters receive more or less a similar education, which is, as Rand in *Solo Faces* summarizes, that "what mattered was to be part of existence, not to possess it",⁷ which incidentally also seems to be the ultimate message Salter is trying to pass on to the reader in all of his novels. Rand's realisation is also connected with another image of Europe – as a release from conventions and from a society obsessed with possessions. Many of Salter's characters travel to free themselves from such constraints that restrict their lives in America, and they find the desired release in Europe.

⁷ Salter, *Solo Faces* (London: Penguin, 2008) 131; hereafter cited in the text as *SF*.

3.3. Europe as Release

While in the spirit of Henry James the journeys to Europe of Salter's characters have an educational aspect, they are also motivated by the character's need to escape the reality of their life which they feel trapped by, whether that be dependent on the constraints imposed by the American society, or the trappings of marriage or a relationship. Europe therefore comes to represent a place of release from those pressures, where conventions are let loose and the focus is on experience rather than possessions. Dean in *A Sport and a Pastime* seeks release from the pressures of his father to live a "normal" life, receive an Ivy League education the fruitlessness of which frustrates him, and possibly live a life of work and marriage – "the life we all agree is so greatly to be desired" (*SP*, 191), as the narrator ironically remarks about Anne-Marie's marriage at the conclusion of the novel. Rand's journey to Europe in *Solo Faces* is connected to his commitment issues, as he cannot settle with a woman for long, let alone a woman who also has a child, so he runs away from the responsibility that increases the longer he stays. Similarly, for Bowman in *All That Is* Europe represents a release from marriage and the daily routine of going to the office and the bar after work, although this need for release is for Bowman significantly less conscious than for Nedra in *Light Years*. All of Salter's characters long for more, and to achieve their goal they feel the need to leave their old life behind.

The need to escape the conservative society is especially pronounced in *Light Years*. Nedra talks of Europe all the time, asserting: "'I need the kind of life you can live there,' she said, 'free of inhibitions'" (*LY*, 112). What she means by inhibitions is the pretence: she and Viri are staging their perfectly blissful marriage, yet they are both secretly having love affairs, neither of them satisfied with their life. The same is also largely true of Bowman's marriage to a Southern aristocrat whom he passionately loves but in the end finds they have little in common. Europe in Nedra's mind, as well as in Rand's, Bowman's and Dean's, is the land of freedom; freedom from conservatism, pretence and ordinary life. The inhibitions Nedra talks of are mainly connected to sex and relationships, where the process of casting off inhibitions is mostly manifest in extramarital love affairs and open relationships abroad, which provide Dean, Rand, Nedra and Bowman with a release from the almost puritan morals of contemporary American society. This release is achieved primarily through sexual conquest by the male characters, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. For now we shall concentrate on other elements of American life which the characters find stifling.

Apart from fleeing the conservative society, trips to Europe for Salter's characters also provide a release from American society driven by commerce, which leaves little time to appreciate culture, fine food, and the rewards of travel. America's corruption is illustrated by Jivan, Nedra's Lebanese lover, who, following the same impulse as Nedra, went looking for a better life to America. What Europe means to Nedra, America means to Jivan: "[F]or me this is the land of marvels. Whatever there is in Europe, there's more here" (*LY*, 181). But he is adopting all the aspects of American life that are implicitly criticised throughout the novel: "He was devoted to those American emblems of drab middle class, shoes, pastel sweaters, knit ties. (...) His ambition was to be a man of property" (*LY*, 64). America has already corrupted him, shifting his focus from the immaterial pleasures of life like art, food, travel, and sex, to the material objects.

Salter makes no similar suggestion about Europe corrupting Nedra, Rand, Dean, or Bowman in the same way as America corrupted Jivan, maintaining Europe's image of an earthly paradise which emphasises the immaterial aspects of life. Nonetheless, what both Nedra's and Jivan's visions of a new life suggest is that what is foreign lures us in. It is not so much Europe itself, but the act of travel, the freshness of things, which people long to find, that facilitates the release. Yet Salter suggests that unlike in America it can still be found in Europe without corrupting the traveller. The absence of the perspective that travel provides proves even worse than Jivan's materialism. It is represented in *Light Years* by the self-absorption of Marcel-Maas, a painter and a friend of the Berlands, who is completely oblivious to anything but his art, treating his wife as a servant rather than a partner, and completely adverse to the idea of travel: "Travel is nonsense," he announced. "The only thing you see is what's already inside you" (*LY*, 56). His ignorance is representative of American society, which Salter's characters are looking for a release from – conservative and closed off to new experience, and which another friend of the Berlands in England compares to "the sun going out" (*LY*, 196). It is "acquisitive but insufficiently inquisitive",⁸ as Richard Ford aptly observes in his Introduction to the novel – the problem lies in the fact that Europe has a much richer history which gave it time to learn from its mistakes: "The flies – listen to this – the flies had been drowned in the wine, they were at the bottom of the bottle with a little sediment, the dirt that tells you things are real. That's what's missing in American life, the sediment" (*LY*, 209), says a man whom Nedra encounters in a bar in Davos. The awareness of the dirt and the failure of the past helps to ground one in the present and provide perspective which is missing from the lives of Americans driven by "utterly blind passions,

⁸ Richard Ford, "Introduction," *Light Years* vi.

the lack of moderation” (*LY*, 196). It is also this perspective that allows Europe to have a much more lenient approach to morals and conventions that are so strictly maintained in America, because the lessons of history made its people realise that inward happiness is much more important than the outward displays of it. Thus in its looser atmosphere Salter’s characters find the desired release. Consequently, all of Salter’s characters who find release in Europe also receive a lesson in the European way of life which heavily draws on the sediment. However, for the male characters of Salter’s novels release and education are not enough – to complete their European experience they need to feel the satisfaction of conquest.

3. 4. Europe as Conquest

As Samuel Hynes suggests, “Salter’s novels are about the male need to conquer”,⁹ and this conquest is invariably associated with Europe. As Hynes also rightly observes, the conquest is associated with men and men only – Nedra’s journey is about education and release from her marriage, but there is no trace of conquest in it, as opposed to all of the male protagonists. Apart from Rand, who travels to Europe to conquer the most challenging European peaks, other characters’ need to conquer is subconscious rather than the aim of the European expedition. Nevertheless, the conquest serves the same purpose: to affirm one’s manhood. What better way to go about it than to do something incredibly dangerous, like climbing a mountain alone, or seducing women. The sexual dimension is especially pronounced as Salter weaves it through all of his novels and it serves not only as a boost of the male ego, but also as a means of exploring and conquering the visited country. For the conquest to be successful though, the characters must find release from the conservative conventions at home. They do so, as is apparent in their attitudes towards sex and relationships.

Perhaps apart from *Light Years*, which is set mostly in America, there are remarkably few sex scenes in Salter’s novels set in America in comparison to the number of them taking place in Europe, which are also significantly more adventurous. This allows Salter to foreground the image of Europe as not only a spiritual but also a sensual paradise redolent of the decadent 1920s, the sexual freedom being a manifestation of the release from the conservative society at home. During Dean’s love affair with Anne-Marie in *A Sport and a Pastime* the lovers cast off all inhibition, as they lose themselves in various ways of love-making, including anal sex. Bowman in *All That Is*, who seduces the daughter of his former

⁹ Samuel Hynes, “A Teller of Tales Tells His Own,” *The New York Times*, 7 Sep. 1997, 5 Jun 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/07/reviews/970907.07hynest.html>>.

lover, has to take the girl to Paris to be able to carry out his revenge, making love to her and then abandoning her in a hotel room without money or a plane ticket home. As if he needed to rely on the looser moral atmosphere and the reputation of Paris to be able to justify his deed: “[T]he Paris of ordinary pleasures and the Paris of insolence, the Paris that takes for granted one knows something or that one knows nothing at all. The Paris he showed her was a city of sensual memories, glittering in the dark.”¹⁰ He certainly leaves her with sensual memories and a sense of uncertainty about not knowing anything at all, having destroyed the image of Paris as the city of love in the process. Similarly to Bowman, Rand of *Solo Faces* also sheds the last of his inhibitions in Europe. While in America he leaves his girlfriend with a son whom she had from a previous relationship, in Europe he has no trouble leaving a pregnant girlfriend. For him women are a means to an end, and his behaviour to them grows worse the longer he stays: “They were witnesses. (...) They were the bearers of his story, scattered throughout the world” (*SF*, 160). The freedom Rand looks for in Europe is absolute, as he refuses to rely on anyone other than himself, even climbing on his own. He embodies the selfish pursuit of happiness advocated by Nedra in its extremity. It is in Europe that Salter’s characters shed their moral and sexual restraints to attain absolute freedom, which eludes them at home. Having done so gives them the opportunity to truly get to know the country they are visiting – to conquer it.

Exploration of the female body equals the exploration of the new territory; the conquest of one facilitates the conquest of the other. The close connection between sex and the landscape is most prominent in *A Sport and a Pastime*. According to Salter, the novel presents the idea “of a life that combines sex and architecture. (...) It’s more or less a guide to what life might be, an ideal”.¹¹ Through the merger of sex and architecture Salter identifies the basic elements of existence Dean is searching for: the sensual pleasure to be had from both the exploration of the body and of the landscape and architecture – the body represents the immediate present, while the architecture entails also the past, the glorious achievements of previous generations. Where previously Dean has only been a mere traveller and observer, with Anne-Marie he becomes an explorer of an unconquered territory. It is only when Anne-Marie is conquered in every possible way that France yields to Dean. His conquest of Anne-Marie marks the completion of his education. Dean’s conquest of Anne-Marie gains mythical proportions as these explorations of her body mirror their explorations of the ancient towns and monumental cathedrals, the remnants of the great civilisation. The book is laced with

¹⁰ Salter, *All That Is* (London: Picador, 2013), 255; hereafter cited in the text as *ATI*.

¹¹ Salter, *The Paris Review*.

pieces of history of the towns the lovers visit, and the achievements of French kings, the glory of whose lives Dean is seeking, even surpassing in the eyes of the narrator:

[Nancy, the] capital of Lorraine. A model of eighteenth-century planning. Its harmonious squares, its elegant houses are so typically French an appropriate to so rich a region, but its glory it owes to a Pole, Stanislas Leszczynski, who was given the duchies of Lorraine and Bar by his son-in-law, Louis XV, and who ruled from Nancy which he devoted himself to embellishing. An ancient city. The old quarter has never been altered. A city of rich merchants, strategic key to the lands along the border. In front of its very walls... But how flat this all seems, how hopeless, like a cheap backdrop shaking as the actors walk. (*SP*, 72)

Even the “ancient city” is diminished in the face of the two lovers. Nancy is the birthplace of Anne-Marie, who is for Dean a “strategic key” to all of France. Like Stanislas Leszczynski, Dean is a foreign ruler who endeavours to “embellish” his newly acquired lands – Anne-Marie is the territory which Dean commands and embellishes with his expert touch. When she is conquered, France embraces him also: “The real France, he is thinking. The real France. He is lost in it, in the smell of the very sheets” (*SP*, 61). France and the female body become synonymous. Travel and sex merge. As Dowie observes, “nowhere has it been made clearer that travel is a sensuous experience – all sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and touches.”¹² Dowie also emphasises the importance of a personal and emotional connection when one travels: “Architecture, mountains, great rivers, and villages must have a scale, one that is emotional as well as historical and numerical.”¹³ Dean has just such a scale.

The concept of a life combining sex and architecture works so well because each element provides the scale for the other: the glory of lovemaking is measured against the glory of history, the first is immediate but fleeting, the second is durable and provides perspective. Wherever Dean and Anne-Marie make love, the place yields to Dean as complaisantly as Anne-Marie: “The city is his. No one in it is more powerful” (*SP*, 69). As they travel deeper and deeper into the countryside, their love-making becomes more and more adventurous too. When Dean penetrates Anne-Marie anally, their romance finds true fulfilment: “A feast of love is beginning. Everything that has gone before is only a sort of introduction. Now they are lovers. The first, wild courses are ended. They have founded their domain. A satanic happiness follows” (*SP*, 119). At this moment Dean figuratively becomes the king of France. All traces of ordinary life are gone, as the lovers succumb to their desire. Their lives revolve around it, they have the glory of the invincible. Their France is that of

¹² Dowie, *James Salter* 49.

¹³ Dowie, *James Salter* 47.

desire, love, satisfaction of all the senses, and glorious history which lends its glory to them. In all of Salter's novels this moment of conquest is the fulfilment of the European journey whereupon the education, release and conquest have been completed – the completion of the conquest is a symbolic graduation from the lessons in ideal life. Having graduated, the characters leave to apply their knowledge back home, striving to build a life modelled on those ideals.

While in *A Sport and a Pastime* the sex and architecture theme is the most prominent, it appears in all the subsequent novels as well. In *All That Is*, Bowman's first trip to Europe is, like Dean's, very much defined by his love affair, only now it is more explicitly stated what the conquest of both the woman and the city means to Bowman. As Enid, the woman he falls in love with, arrives to their date, "it seemed his manhood had suddenly caught up with him, as if it had been waiting somewhere in the wings" (*ATI*, 101). She makes him feel powerful, and again in discovering her body, he truly discovers the place, i.e. London: "He felt in possession of the city, not the Victorian city with its dark wood interiors and milky marble halls, the tall red buses that lurched by, endless windows and doors, but another city, visible yet unimagined" (*ATI*, 104). After they have made love, "England stood before him, naked in the darkness" (*ATI*, 105). Enid is the emblem of the "privileged, distant world" (*ATI*, 120) which he has conquered. Thanks to Enid he recognises that there is more to the city than meets the eye because thanks to the emotional scale their relationship provides him with he learns the true essence of the place. As he flies back to the States, he thinks of Enid as "a woman who had given him the feeling of utter supremacy. (...) He saw himself now to be another kind of man, the kind he had hoped, fully a man, used to the wonder" (*ATI*, 129). Although their relationship does not last, for Bowman it marks his ascent to manhood and again the completion of his European education. Combined with his success at work, he seems to embrace the pleasures of life he got the taste for in Europe: "It was a life superior to its tasks, with a view of history, architecture, and human behavior, including incandescent afternoons in Spain, the shutters closed, a blade of sun burning through the darkness" (*ATI*, 140). That indeed seems to be the life that is "so greatly to be desired" (*SP*, 191) by all of Salter's characters, rather than Anne-Marie's marriage.

In Rand's conquest of France in *Solo Faces* he proves that it is not necessary to be aware of the history of a place to truly learn the significance of the achievements of the local culture. He becomes aware of the remnants of this ancient civilisation indirectly with the help of a local woman, Catherine, whom he travels with. After their night together:

He began to actually see France, not just a mountain village filled with tourists, but the deep, invisible center which, if entered at all, becomes part of the blood. Of course he did not know the meaning of the many avenues Carnot or boulevards Jean Jaurés, the streets named Gambetta, Hugo, even Pasteur. The pageant of kings and republics was nothing to him, but the way in which a great civilization preserves itself, this was what he unknowingly saw. For France is conscious of its brilliance. To grasp it means to sit at its table, sleep beneath its roofs, marry its children. (*SF*, 102)

Rand is no intellectual who would be schooled in French history, but Salter implies that the knowledge of history is not as important, because the real achievement of this civilisation is palpable in the present moment, to be experienced with our senses. Catherine again personifies all of France, and this passage states even more forcefully than *A Sport and a Pastime* that through physically connecting with Catherine, Rand also establishes a connection with France which “becomes part of [his] blood”. Thus he literally absorbs the essence of French life.

Yet the sexual conquest is not Rand’s main objective – the conquest of the European mountains is. What he is looking for there is not only the unspoiled existence of being part of existence, and the confirmation of his manhood, but above all he seeks excitement and glory: “[H]e remembered past days, their glory. He remembered the thrill of height” (*SF*, 25). Unlike the other protagonists of the novels discussed above, Rand’s European adventure is a conscious pursuit of glory, reminiscent of the heroes of Salter’s early fighter pilot novels. He is jealous of Cabot and wants to surpass him as his ambition in life, as he later admits, is “making people envious” (*SF*, 170), which is what drives him forward on his solo climbs. The conquest of women is not enough for Rand, because that is a conquest only on a personal level and as such will not bring him fame the way climbing will. While his relationship to the media is rather negative at first, ultimately he wishes to inscribe his name into history, essentially seeking immortality by becoming a legendary climber – a status that needs to be confirmed by the media.

After a particularly challenging climb of the Dru with Cabot, Rand succeeds: “Glory fell on them lightly like the cool of the evening itself” (*SF*, 86). From then on, reporters trail his every move, people recognise him in the street, and although he pretends not to care, he is in his element: “A great, an indestructible happiness filled him. He had found his life. (...) He was like the sun, touching remote peaks, they awoke to his presence. (...) He saw an immortal image of himself high among the ridges – he was willing to die to achieve it” (*SF*, 89). Indeed, on his solo climbs he is almost courting death in order to achieve greatness. But fame corrupts him, and he leaves the mountains for Paris only to find that the attention of the

French capital may be short-lived: “He saw it clearly as, at a certain place in life one sees both the beginning and end: Paris had discarded him” (*SF*, 164). This ability of Paris to accept and subsequently reject corresponds to Casanova’s view of the French capital, and although she proves the city’s ability to consecrate artists, Salter shows that its power extends beyond the artistic realm. When Rand is rejected by Paris, the mountains reject him also, and he fails in his next climb, returning to the States afterwards. Perhaps he fails because he lost his integrity, as Andy Cave explores:

Maybe Rand’s failure on the mountain belies a deeper malaise. Is it the lack of authentic desire, a weakening of the spirit through involvement with the media, which has ultimately destroyed the courage and judgement necessary for such extreme undertakings? Perhaps tragically he has ignored his own dictum.¹⁴

Like other of Salter’s characters, Rand had his moment, but it could not last – he betrayed the pure existence he found in the mountains, thus betraying his own beliefs, and as such could hardly be accepted back.

Unlike Rand or Nedra, Viri in *Light Years* does not go to Europe with the specific aim of conquering something, as Nedra and Rand; he simply goes because without Nedra he feels lost. The conquest of a local woman is likewise instrumental for Viri’s trip after the divorce. He settles in Rome, with essentially nothing to do, having found no comfort there: “He was an exile in this country of waiters and lame serving girls. (...) He was lost in the cities of Europe” (*LY*, 270). It is not until he meets Lia, a secretary at the office of two architects he had corresponded with, that Europe accepts him. Like Dean, Viri needs a local woman to illuminate the explored territory. After they had made love “[t]he city opened like a garden, the streets received him and poured forth their names. He saw Rome like one of God’s angels, from above, from afar, its lights, its poorest rooms” (*LY*, 276). Once again, the place is embodied by the woman, and to get to know it, Viri needs to feel the physical presence of it on his own body. Like Dean, Bowman, or Rand, he is lost in Europe without a woman. There is something primitive, almost animalistic in the fact that men need to conquer something, and only then are they able to embrace it fully, to be embraced and consecrated. Nedra does not need the guidance of a lover or the success of conquest in order to be able to embrace Europe, learn her lesson, and return to America to apply what she has learned, and she is perhaps the most successful of all of Salter’s characters in that regard. However, the reason she goes back to America is that she does not feel like she quite fits in – a feeling the male characters experience at least fleetingly through sex. The absence of sex and therefore of the more

¹⁴ Andy Cave, “Introduction,” *Solo Faces* viii.

intimate emotional connection to the country which would accompany the geographical connection then could be seen as one of the reasons for Nedra's failure to build a life in Europe. However, another and perhaps more significant factor in all of the characters' failure to establish themselves in Europe is the consistent pull of the native environment which is difficult to escape.

What the conquest represents on a more general level is the search for the new frontier. Through the image of the European mountains in *Solo Faces* Salter returns to one of the most important American myths. Dowie in his assessment of the novel draws on Richard Poirier's study *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*, where Poirier asserts that writers from Emerson on heeded his advice to build their own world, which resulted in American literature being full of images of the frontier, which the writers created through their language, and which represented the writer's conflict with society.¹⁵ Dowie places Salter's novel in the Emersonian tradition, enacting the conflict between the individual and the environment:

Using the central metaphor of the mountain, Salter has created a personal, romantic vision that challenges the ordinary environment of the society in which it exists. He presents us with still another American West, another frontier. And another hero who, like those of Poirier's canon, acts as a surrogate for the author in the central transcendent experiences of the book despite his ultimate absorption into the mundane everyday world.¹⁶

Like American settlers before him, Rand sets out to the frontier with high hopes, and initially succeeds at his enterprise, but in the end succumbs to the forces of the environment and returns home. All of Salter's characters who explore Europe are essentially trying to conquer the new frontier. It is significant that that frontier no longer lies in America, where there is nowhere left to go, but in Europe, which now stands for the possibilities and freedom the American frontier used to stand for in Emerson's time. Salter thus elegantly connects the European and the American sensibilities permeating his prose, creating a picture of the disillusioned American society longing for the freedom of Europe. None of the characters, however, are quite able to succeed there. Salter implies that one cannot exchange one life for another so simply, as the force of the original environment is too strong to release its pull, but one can learn from the experience – if not how to lead a happy life, than at least how to accept one's limits and the transience of the ideal. A. R. Gurney observes that Salter writes mainly about “exiles, at home as well as abroad, people who seem cut off from their roots, their past

¹⁵ See Dowie, *James Salter* 79.

¹⁶ Dowie, *James Salter* 80.

and their cultural traditions”,¹⁷ and although his remark concerns Salter’s collection of short stories *Dusk and Other Stories*, it rings true for all of his fiction. These characters are torn between the two worlds – America and Europe – trying to reject the former and be accepted in the latter, yet they do not feel at home anywhere, Rand being perhaps the most extreme example of that. What they should aim for is some sort of compromise between the two – trying to transmit the ideal existence lived in Europe to America – which Nedra is perhaps the closest to achieving.

Salter’s Europe is the land of dreams, sensual pleasure, and independence, yet Salter’s portrayal of the continent encompasses not only the image of an earthly paradise, but also the image of the new frontier, where the American and the European values contend, and where the characters search for the key to a better life. In order to adopt a value system of their own Salter’s characters must experience Europe first-hand – taste it, touch it, smell it, feel it, and hear it – to be able to negotiate how to reach the compromise between the European ideal existence and their American life which they are unable to discard. Such a compromise can only be achieved by completing the three steps necessary to attain sufficient knowledge of the ideal existence: the release from American society, the education in the European *savoir vivre*, and the successful conquest of the new frontier, however fleeting, facilitating a complete immersion in local life. The release ensures that the distance provides a new perspective on life, the education ensures one knows how to live that life to the fullest, and the conquest provides a climax and a symbolic conclusion to the European experience. Europe is thus not the unfulfilled promised land which would disappoint the characters’ expectations – it does satisfy them – but it is a catalyst prompting them to change their lives in order to come closer to the ideal represented by Europe, providing them with the knowledge necessary to do so. For Salter, the European life combining sex and architecture is the ultimate ideal, yet as an ideal it is too distant from reality. By transmitting its essential principles to American life, the characters are equipped to build a life conforming to their own ideal formed during their journey through Europe. Europe ultimately stands for the missing sediment in American culture – by adopting it, Salter’s characters have the foundation that can be laid for their new lives. Whether they make use of them is, however, another matter.

¹⁷ A. R. Gurney, “Those Going Up and Those Going Down,” *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1988. 5 June 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/07/reviews/salter-dusk.html>>.

4. FITZGERALD, HEMINGWAY AND SALTER: SALTER AS A BELATED MODERNIST

If Salter is to be connected with any literary movement, both in terms of style and theme, it is modernism – as established in previous chapters – albeit flavoured with other influences. While the first chapter highlighted the biographical and thematic affinities between Salter and the modernists and the second chapter explored in detail the significance of the European setting in his fiction, this chapter shall attempt to pinpoint the trademarks of Salter’s style which is heavily influenced by modernism, especially by the emphasis on individual consciousness, the concept of relative time, and the influences of other art forms, specifically Impressionism, which permeated the pages of modernist novels. While these are the general tendencies identifiable in Salter’s style, his connection to modernism is best exemplified by comparing him to Ernest Hemingway, with whom he shares certain stylistic features, but also some biographical features, such as the expatriate life, and the war experience, which manifest in the work of both writers. In terms of style, the two novelists share the gift of relating events vividly in sparse prose, yet Salter’s style also exhibits a great degree of lyricism and descriptive language that is reminiscent of Fitzgerald. When one looks at their masterpieces – Salter’s *A Sport and a Pastime*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* – style proves to be not the only similarity, as there are also shared structural and thematic features, like unreliable narrators, a depiction of debauched nightlife, and a portrayal of Europe in the case of Hemingway. However, to simply categorise Salter as a modernist without exception would be reductive, as his work simultaneously refers backwards and forwards in literary history, namely to romanticism and postmodernism, which differentiates him from the aforementioned writers. Nevertheless, before we delve into the specificities of comparison, let us look at the more general modernist traits in Salter’s style.

4. 1. The Modernist Features of Salter’s Style

Salter’s last novel, *All That Is* (2013), has been referred to as “the last modernist novel”,¹ and it indeed has an aura of different period about it. The stylistic features of modernism apparent in Salter’s prose are the intense subjectivity, the concept of the relative passage of time, and fragmentation (although this is very subtle in Salter). These features were also adopted by postmodernism, but they were taken further than in modernism, often to

¹ Brian Gresko, “Dated on Arrival: James Salter’s ‘All That Is’,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 30 Apr. 2013, 10 Nov. 2014 <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/review/dated-on-arrival-james-salters-all-that-is>>.

the point of absurdity and chaos, where everything is relative, fragmented, and intertextual. Unlike in modernism, in postmodernism art is not seen as a redemptive means anymore, as there is no going back from the chaos. While modernism values and seeks beauty and salvation, postmodernism embraces ugliness and chaos. The difference is also apparent in the visual arts these writers were inspired by: while modernism looked to Impressionism, postmodernism drew on Surrealism and Dadaism.² An impressionist painting is composed of fragments, but if viewed from a distance, one sees a unified picture. The technique of Surrealist and Dadaist paintings, on the other hand, is not fragmented, but the world it pictures is chaotic, surreal, and viewed from multiple perspectives. Salter rejects chaos, his characters actively pursue the beautiful, and Salter underscores it with the beauty and elegance of his prose. Salter subscribes to modernist values, as discussed in the first chapter, and his prose at times resembles the impressionist brushstrokes, rendered in a subjective and timeless manner.

For Salter art is a means of preserving life despite the passage of time. To enhance this power of art, Salter's novels are strangely timeless, operating almost outside of historical time, as the time that governs them is measured in different units than ordinary time. His novels seem to enact Virginia Woolf's statement that "life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end".³ Salter's novels are not a sequence of linear events; rather they are structured around the most luminous events and memories of life, presenting a collage of fragments that together make up an impression rather than a coherent whole. Salter himself acknowledges his debt to Pound's *Cantos* and its similar structure around such luminous moments.⁴ Time in the world of Salter's writing is not historical, but intensely subjective and relative, thus following the modernist concept of time influenced by Nietzsche's perspectivism, Einstein's theory of relativity and Henry Bergson's notions of time as a continuous stream.⁵

The influence of other art forms, especially the visual arts and the cinema, on the narrative techniques of modernist writers is another characteristic of the revolutionary movement.⁶ For example Impressionism significantly influenced the early modernists like Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford⁷ and its impact may likewise be traced in Salter's prose.

² The characteristics of postmodernism based on Hilský 239-254.

³ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The University of Adelaide Library*, 25 Oct. 2014 <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/chapter13.html>>.

⁴ See Salter, *The Paris Review*.

⁵ See Hilský 21.

⁶ See Hilský 23, 47, 58-59.

⁷ Hilský 48.

His style has often been labelled impressionist⁸ not only because of the specific temporal dimension of his writing, but also for the deeply evocative passages of often asyndetically connected sentences that capture the colours, the atmosphere, and the sensuality of a moment. William Dowie notes that “the impressionist painters used vivid colours to capture the beauty of mundane events. Their unrealistic hues and selective brush strokes allow the viewer to see familiar objects in a different way.” He agrees with the assessment of Salter’s style as impressionist and asserts that he “creates a magical effect out of selected detail, cadence, and sound, conjuring up both the illusion of reality and its ultimately inexpressible beauty”.⁹ A passage that demonstrates Salter’s use of impressionism well is the opening of *Light Years*:

We dash the black river, its flats smooth as stone. Not a ship, not a dinghy, not one cry of white. The water lies broken, cracked from the wind. This great estuary is wide, endless. The river is brackish, blue with the cold. It passes beneath us blurring. The sea birds hang above it, they wheel, disappear. We flash the wide river, a dream of the past. The deeps fall behind, the bottom is paling the surface, we rush by the shallows, boats beached for winter, desolate piers. And on wings like the gulls, soar up, turn, look back. (*LY*, 3)

This opening tells the reader nothing about the historical time when the novel takes place or about the narrator and the story, but it skilfully paints a verbal picture of the atmosphere and the river, a central image of the whole novel, which is associated with the course of life and the passage of time. With his choice of language and images Salter creates an impression of constant movement, transience, and infiniteness. The simple asyndetically connected sentences, some even agrammatical fragments with no overt connection markers, resemble the dots of colour that constitute an impressionist painting. While this rich, suggestive language is typical for Salter, it is not his only mode, as his language can be very sparse as well – this dichotomy invites comparison with two modernist greats – the economical and direct Hemingway, and the tender and lyrical Fitzgerald.

4. 2. The Influence of Fitzgerald and Hemingway on Salter’s Prose

Salter’s writing has been compared to Hemingway’s more than to any other writer’s, mostly on account of the minimalist style. These comparisons, however, have not always been favourable. The reviewers of *Cassada*, an edited re-issue of Salter’s early military novel *The Arm of Flesh*, accused Salter of Hemingway parody: The reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* wrote

⁸ See for example: Jeffrey Meyers, "Salter's Gift," *Kenyon Review* 30.2 (2008): 92-111, 93.

⁹ William Dowie, “A Final Glory: The Novels of James Salter,” *College English* Vol. 50, No. 1 (Jan., 1988) 74-88: 84.

that “Salter’s subtle, understated prose has been justly praised, even if at times it hovers perilously close to Hemingway parody”,¹⁰ and the reviewer in the *Library Journal* wrote that “the prose style is generic Hemingway: short, declarative sentences laden with military jargon”.¹¹ While most of the quotations cited throughout this essay so far would disprove these evaluations, Salter’s style often indeed approximates Hemingway’s minimalism, although it surely is not an imitation.

Salter can write very sparsely, and frequently does so in introducing characters to capture their essence. His description of Nedra at the beginning of *Light Years* perfectly captures her character, which will be revealed over the course of the novel: “She is dressed in her oat-colored sweater, slim as a pike, her long hair fastened, the fire crackling. Her real concern is the heart of existence: meals, bed linen, clothing. The rest means nothing; it is managed somehow” (*LY*, 8). In three short, factual sentences Salter subtly reveals Nedra’s indulgent nature and fondness for luxury. Salter’s observations are not unlike Hemingway’s in introducing Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*, through the eyes of Jake, the narrator: “Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy’s. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey.”¹² Much like Salter, the language is simple and clear, although more conversational than Salter’s stylised prose, presented in short, syntactically simple sentences. In terms of content, Hemingway, however, only describes Brett’s physical appearance, although he reveals just as much as Salter about the essence of Brett, implying she is chic, confident, and masculine, not only in appearance.

At times Salter is even less direct, showing only the tip of the iceberg,¹³ to use Hemingway’s description of his own method, which Salter to a degree emulates. A classic example of Hemingway’s use of the iceberg method is his short story “Hills Like White Elephants”, where a man and a woman are having a vague conversation about an operation, which Hemingway never specifies, but it is implied to be an abortion. Salter rarely bases whole stories on what is omitted, but often saves the indirect approach to make his point, as with his short story “Am Strande von Tanger”, about an artist, his girlfriend, and her female friend and their day at the beach. At the end, the artist is looking at his partner, musing: “She

¹⁰ "CASSADA (Book Review)," *Publishers Weekly* 27 Nov. 2000: 52.

¹¹ Edward B. St. John, "Cassada (Book Review)," *Library Journal* 125.20 (2000): 192.

¹² Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2006) 30.

¹³ The iceberg theory is expressed for example in Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Arrow Books, 2004) 75: “You could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood.”

has small breasts and large nipples. Also, as she herself says, a rather large behind. Her father has three secretaries. Hamburg is close to the sea.”¹⁴ These simple, short, factual sentences confirm what is implied throughout the story – the artist’s affections have shifted away from his partner. The third sentence may in this context imply that it is acceptable for men to have more women, while the last and seemingly unconnected sentence gives a clear indication of who exactly has replaced his partner, as her friend is from Hamburg.

While Salter’s style is often sparse, it is not its only characteristic, as all of his novels, even the aforementioned *Cassada*, combine those minimalist sentences with long lyrical passages full of descriptive adjectives and words that Hemingway would deem unnecessary. Likely on account of such passages one reviewer of *Light Years* called the novel “overwritten, chichi and rather silly”,¹⁵ which certainly cannot be said about Hemingway, nor does it quite apply to Salter. Jeffrey Meyers reconciles this paradox by identifying Salter with yet another modernist: “[Salter’s] style, widely admired by other writers, combines Hemingway’s short, incisive yet metaphorical and richly suggestive sentences with Fitzgerald’s sensual, chromatic, and impressionistic nuances of mood and feeling.”¹⁶ Meyers’ assessment of Fitzgerald’s style encompasses the qualities of Salter’s prose which have been quoted here thus far, where the lyrical and impressionistic overweighs Hemingway’s minimalist influence, being more reminiscent of Fitzgerald’s sentences, which his readers underline in their copies, much as they underline many of Salter’s for their sheer linguistic beauty, like this sentence from *The Great Gatsby*: “For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened – then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk.”¹⁷ The attention to light, its personification in the simile comparing it to children, and the amount of adjectives and adverbs all contribute to Fitzgerald’s successful portrayal of the romantic atmosphere at dusk, described in such tender language. The fact that it is one long sentence, cadenced only with the use of various punctuation markers, which compel the reader to pause over the lingering images, helps to enact the light’s glow and its reluctant disappearance. The style thus enhances the content – the glittering words try to convey the glittering moment – which is also Salter’s objective. Nevertheless, Salter’s prose is neither an imitation of Fitzgerald, nor of Hemingway; it is a specific synthesis that is uniquely Salterian in the balance it creates between these two strategies. Let us compare the opening sentences

¹⁴ James Salter, “Am Strange von Tanger,” *Dusk and Other Stories* (New York: Modern Library, 2011) 16.

¹⁵ Robert Towers, “For Devotees of Scott Fitzgerald? Edward FitzGerald?” *The New York Times*, 27 July 1975, 5 June 2014 < <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/07/reviews/salter-years.html>>.

¹⁶ Meyers 92.

¹⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Collector’s Library, 2005) 20.

of *A Sport and a Pastime*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *The Great Gatsby* to further illustrate both the similarities and differences between the writers.

Hemingway plunges straight into the story and opens with a sketch of Robert Cohn, who is introduced by the narrator of the novel, and American expatriate journalist Jake Barnes:

Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton. There was a certain inner comfort in knowing he could knock down anybody who was snooty to him, although, being very shy and thoroughly nice boy, he never fought except in the gym.¹⁸

Hemingway's opening has high information density, as every sentence serves to convey as much about Cohn as possible, imparting the important information of him being a Jew, and a boxing champion, who nonetheless learned to box only to overcome his frustration at being an outsider, not to prove his masculinity in the ring. His fighting in the gym only will later on in the novel set him against the war veterans who fought real fights on the front, and his outsider status will be confirmed. In this way it anticipates the central conflict of pre-war values that Cohn retains, and the absence thereof in those who fought. Hemingway thus only reveals the tip of the iceberg, and while this conflict is detectable throughout the novel, it is never explicitly mentioned, nor is the war experience of the others openly discussed. The narrator directly addresses the reader in the second sentence, imparting his own thoughts, letting the reader know not only his stance towards Cohn but also hinting that the novel will be more about himself than Cohn. It is written in a very clear, straightforward style, laced with irony, with conventional syntax and punctuation, simple vocabulary and no surplus words.

F. Scott Fitzgerald is decidedly more vague in his opening of *The Great Gatsby*:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgements, a habit that has

¹⁸ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 11.

opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores.¹⁹

The opening chapter introduces the narrator, Nick Carraway, and serves to establish his position as a reliable narrator of Gatsby's story told in retrospect. The first few paragraphs, however, reveal nothing about the story that is to come, they are only a confession of the narrator. Relating his father's advice not to judge people should inspire the reader's trust in the narrator, whose name is yet to be revealed at this point. Despite the professed non-judgemental character, over the course of the novel Nick passes a lot of judgement about other characters and his narration is biased in favour of Gatsby. A hint of his dishonesty is present even here, as he talks about being "victim of not a few veteran bores". In terms of style, it is not Fitzgerald at his most impressionistic, which he reserves for details rather than the set-up of his novels and stories, but the difference from Hemingway is apparent. The tone is more formal, the sentences are longer, and the vocabulary more florid and Latinate, which makes it sound more glamorous than the opening of *The Sun Also Rises*, and perfectly fits with the opulent world Nick is about to plunge into. Nick's retelling of his father's advice is also very tender, almost sentimental, and this sentimentality permeates the whole novel as it nears its tragic end.

In contrast, Salter's opening is much less informative, far more atmospheric, and less mindful of the rules of grammar than the previous two:

September. It seems these luminous days will never end. The city, which was almost empty during August, now is filling up again. It is being replenished. The restaurants are all reopening, the shops. People are coming back from the country, the sea, from trips on the roads all jammed with cars. The station is very crowded. There are children, dogs, families with old pieces of luggage bound by straps. I make my way around them. It's like being in a tunnel. Finally I emerge onto the brilliance of the *quai*, beneath a roof of glass panes which seems to magnify the light. (*SP*, 9)

Salter starts with a one-word agrammatical sentence – minimalist enough – yet one which perfectly prepares the reader for the sentences to come with the associations of Indian summer which the name of this month evokes. With that single word Salter invokes not only that specific month, and the sunlit scenery, but also individual memories of the readers associated with that time, while describing the memory of the narrator. James Meek from *London Review of Books* praises Salter for his mastery of time:

There is a Salterian unit of time that partakes of a moment (when you live it, intensely), a season (it is that time of year), and eternity (there have been

¹⁹ Fitzgerald 7.

such seasons, and always will be). The particular instant of time emerges from the general mood of the season, its light and temperature and smells and colours.²⁰

Salter's opening is a testament to the novelist's particular use of time as discussed above. It works simultaneously on all three levels of time that Meek describes, providing a rich image – immediately recognisable yet unique and timeless. It is the record of a luminous moment in life, as if happening in the present, while also being extended into the past and the future into a kind of eternal time. Rather than conveying information crucial for the story to come, the first paragraph paints a verbal picture of the sunlit town which is waking from its summer slumber. The language is much more lyrical and metaphorical than Hemingway's, even Fitzgerald's, and the syntax unconventional, which is in keeping with its purpose: much like Fitzgerald's high register and sentimental anecdote, Salter's opening announces the tone of the novel which is concerned more with impressions and feelings than with telling a story. Salter's prose is also carefully paced, with the use of punctuation serving rhythm as much as syntax. The full stop after "September" makes one pause to linger over the association of images. The subsequent alteration of shorter and longer clauses and fragments enhances the image of the waking town and the passage through the train station, producing not only a verbal picture but also verbal music. Leo Robson described Salter's style as "grammar-defiant swooning"²¹ – and indeed, Salter's prose has the power to make the reader swoon from having all his senses attacked by so many sensory inputs.

While Hemingway's focus lies on the facts and the surface of things, leaving much of the interior life of the characters unexpressed and up to the reader to discern in the spirit of his iceberg theory, Salter often does the exact opposite, and his style accordingly reflects this, mirroring both Hemingway's distilled precise narration and Fitzgerald's lyricism and sensibility to detail. While the openings presented a scale, where Hemingway is the most minimalist yet also the most informative, Fitzgerald walks the middle ground, and Salter is the most atmospheric, it certainly does not mean that Hemingway never lingers over the surroundings, the atmosphere, or emotions; or that Salter and Fitzgerald avoid succinct expressions and omissions. It merely serves to illustrate that the openings anticipate what is more important to each writer for the purposes of the specific novel. The similarities between Salter, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, however, do not end with their writing style.

²⁰ James Meek, "Memories We Get to Keep," *London Review of Books* Vol. 35, No. 12, 20 June 2013, 5 June 2014 <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n12/james-mEEK/memories-we-get-to-keep>>.

²¹ Leo Robson, "Large Appetites," *New Statesman* 24 May, 2013: 47.

4.3. A Sport and a Pastime and its Modernist Predecessors

Salter's *A Sport and a Pastime* showcases not only the specific style flavoured with the Hemingway and Fitzgerald influence, but it also shares thematic and structural features with the modernist masterpieces – *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*. All three novels explore the post-war crisis of values of the modern world against the backdrop of a love triangle, and employ similarly the figure of the narrator. While comparisons with Hemingway are more frequent, Alex Vernon was the first to connect all three novels: “The novel’s sensibility anchors it to its modernist predecessors, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (...), and Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*.”²² Vernon is the only one to explore the Fitzgerald connection at some length, his main point being about the narrator:

The Great Gatsby and *A Sport and a Pastime* each feature a narrator who has travelled alone to discover himself anew, a narrator emotionally unable to have a romantic relationship, a narrator vicariously enjoying the romantic efforts of a recently made male acquaintance who, by the novel’s end, dies.²³

Moreover, Salter’s nameless narrator is just as voyeuristic, unreliable, and idolising of the main protagonist as Nick Carraway, and both their narrations serve to rescue the protagonists from time, painting a glamorous picture of the tragic hero who finds his death – which is foreshadowed throughout – at the end of both novels. There are more similarities; however, for the purposes of this paper, the connection with Hemingway is more immediately relevant due to the European setting of both novels and biographical similarities between the two novelists, which influenced their work.

The Hemingway influence has been discussed by both Vernon and Dowie. Vernon admits:

I cannot imagine Salter’s *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), a post-World War II romp through Paris and French villages narrated in sparse if descriptive prose by an emotionally impotent man witnessing the sexual liaisons of others, except in terms of literary descent from *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).²⁴

Similarly, Dowie observes that “it is Hemingway’s type of novel that Salter wrote when he penned his masterpiece, *A Sport and a Pastime*, for that book was made possible by *The Sun Also Rises*”.²⁵ The similarity of both novels undoubtedly owes much to the similarity of the circumstances which lead to their production: both novelists were coping with disillusionment

²² Alex Vernon, *Soldiers Once and Still: Ernest Hemingway, James Salter, and Tim O’Brien* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004) 117.

²³ Vernon 120.

²⁴ Vernon 23.

²⁵ Dowie, *James Salter* xv.

with society after the war, and both relied on their own experiences in Europe. The premise of both novels therefore is very much alike, yet the outward similarities are treated differently by each novelist, producing a different result. Apart from the similarities, this comparison will also show how Salter deviates from the modernist aesthetic towards romanticism and postmodernism.

As with *The Great Gatsby*, the most obvious parallel between the two novels is the figure of the narrator. The narrator of *A Sport and a Pastime* resembles Jake of *The Sun Also Rises* in only observing the relationships of others due to his own impotence, yet burning with desire. Whereas Jack is rendered impotent by a war injury, there is no such obvious reason for Salter's unnamed narrator's issues of this kind, which is why Vernon labels his impotence "emotional" rather than physical, because it stems from his own insecurities about his manhood, and as Vernon suggests, from his "extreme voyeurism".²⁶ Both men make up for the lack of sex in the same way. Jake admits: "I have a rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of my friends."²⁷ While Hemingway never records these fantasies on the page, Salter's novel is built around the narrator's fantasies of the sexual life of Dean and Anne-Marie, to the point of blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. Salter's narrator is a continuation of Hemingway's, a 1960s version of him, as Vernon confirms: "If Hemingway writing in the 1920s could only inform his readers of sexual trysts, Salter writing in the 1960s could describe physical encounters, including oral and anal sex."²⁸ To make this possible, yet still tasteful, the figure of the highly unreliable and self-referential narrator in *A Sport and a Pastime* is Salter's only approach to postmodernism.

The narrator on multiple occasions protests his own unreliability: "None of this is true. (...) I am only putting down things details which entered me, fragments that were able to part my flesh. It's a story of things that never existed although even the faintest doubt of that, the smallest possibility, plunges everything into darkness" (*SP*, 17); later on he admits: "I am not telling the truth about Dean, I am inventing him. I am creating him out of my own inadequacies" (*SP*, 85). As much as Dean is the narrator's idealization, he and his actions also feel incredibly real. The sex scenes are described so realistically, as if the narrator were in the same room as the lovers. Dowie observes that "the details (...) are too specific, too authentic to be diminished by the narrator's disclaimer. Moreover, the truth that the narrator is seeking is the truth of experience rather than the truth of a hidden camera."²⁹ Salter admits that the

²⁶ Vernon 117.

²⁷ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 21.

²⁸ Vernon 117.

²⁹ Dowie, *James Salter* 53.

narrator is only a device: “He’s like the figure in black that moves the furniture in a play, so to speak, essential, but not part of the action.”³⁰ He is indeed much less part of the action than Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*, who is the novel’s protagonist, while Salter’s narrator hides behind the photographer’s lens rather than posing as a subject, much like Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway. The use of this postmodern device does not make this a postmodern novel, however, as Vernon argues: “The fact that Salter’s narrator confesses his unreliability does not qualify the novel as post-modern. His fantasy life is realistically depicted.”³¹ The modernist aesthetic still outweighs the postmodernist technique.

Another obvious parallel may be drawn on the basis of the European setting. The previous chapter explored how Europe works as an escape in Salter’s novels, and it has the same function in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Europe for the Lost Generation was an escape from conservative America, and a place of sexual as well as spiritual freedom. It is based on Hemingway’s experience as much as Salter’s Europe is based on his own. Both novels are set mainly in France, the ultimate symbol of this freedom, yet its capital, Paris, is spiritually empty. In both novels Paris is populated almost exclusively by expatriates who keep to their enclosed community without getting to know the locals. Their existence seems devoid of purpose as they spent their time in Paris drinking and dancing at wild parties. Hemingway’s vision of Paris, which Pizer aptly labels a “spiritual wasteland”³² is particularly bleak, composed of would-be artists and socialites, unable to form emotional attachments, and engaging in meaningless sex instead. Many of the characters do not even like Paris, like the Jewish writer Cohn or Lady Brett Ashley, or the working girl, who thinks it’s “expensive and dirty”³³, and who doesn’t leave because there ““Isn’t anywhere else””³⁴ to go. Although Jake is able to enjoy Paris for what it is, maintaining it is “a good town”³⁵, the girl’s opinion echoes his own sentiment he shares with Cohn, who tries to persuade him to go to South America: “[G]oing to another country doesn’t make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another.”³⁶ The Parisian nightclubs provide temporary amusement, yet they are in no way the answer to personal problems.

Salter devotes considerably less space to the Parisian scenes, yet the wild parties and aimless party-goers could have been taken straight out of Hemingway’s novel, as they serve

³⁰ Salter, *The Art of Fiction*.

³¹ Vernon 117.

³² Pizer 80.

³³ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 26.

³⁴ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 23.

³⁵ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 19.

³⁶ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 19.

the same purpose of illustrating the spiritual poverty of the American crowd. Unlike in Hemingway, the group of characters occupying Paris in *A Sport and a Pastime* is not central to the plot – they only serve as a foil to the superior existence Dean aspires to and momentarily achieves with Anne-Marie. To a lesser extent than Hemingway, Salter brings attention to the aimlessness and idleness of the expatriates, although unlike Hemingway he does not concentrate on writers, although his characters do have artistic inclinations. Cristina, a friend of the narrator's and a would-be painter, observes about her painting class: "There's no one in the whole class who can paint. Alix could be a good painter, but she won't work. You have to be willing to give up everything" (*SP*, 77). With this statement she indicts not only her friend, but also herself, with the unwillingness to give up everything for her art, instead succumbing to the corrupting force of Parisian nightlife, like Cohn of *The Sun Also Rises*, whose writing is therefore jeopardized.

Both novels set the dirty and superficial Paris against the countryside – the French provinces in *A Sport and a Pastime*, and the Spanish mountains and the town of Pamplona in *The Sun Also Rises*. Where Paris serves as an escape from America, the countryside serves as an escape from Paris. In Salter, as explored in the previous chapter, the countryside attracts the narrator because of its authenticity and simplicity of French life away from the capital and the debauched expatriates, while for Dean and Anne-Marie it is paradise. They blend into the countryside, disappear in the villages and towns, and the glory of their love-affair equals that of history and the architectural monuments. While in Salter the countryside truly proves to be a solace, pure and unspoiled, this solace is only seeming and temporary in Hemingway.

Temporarily, Jake and his friend Bill return to a more elementary existence in the Spanish mountains, like Dean and the narrator in *A Sport and a Pastime*. Yet as they arrive in Pamplona, along with the Parisian crowd including Brett, their drunken nights and arguments resemble their life in Paris. The men fight each other, Jake breaks the rules of being an aficionado and helps Brett seduce Romero, with whom she eventually elopes, and Cohn's attachment to Brett is ridiculed, as he cannot understand that it meant nothing to her. Americans are seen as a corrupting force by the Spanish, as Montoya, who runs the hotel in Pamplona, expresses his reservations about Romero, the young bullfighter, meeting with the American ambassador: "He ought to stay with his own people. He shouldn't mix in that stuff."³⁷ But the life itself in Spain is not as corrupt as in France; it is the Americans who carry the corruption with them.

³⁷ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 176.

The trip to Spain only proves Jake's earlier remark to Cohn that going to another country does not change anything. There is no education to be had in Hemingway's Europe, unlike that of Salter's. Although *A Sport and a Pastime* does not have a happy ending either, the journey through France provides Dean with an education in showing him the way of life combining sex and architecture, helping him realise what he wants and does not want in life, and that he needs to face his problems at home to build the kind of life he wants. When the fiesta is finished, Jake is reluctant to go back to Paris, because "Paris would have meant more fiesta-ing. [He] was through with fiestas for a while".³⁸ Even Jake realises that Pamplona was only an extension of the Parisian life, and longs to escape it for a moment longer. Yet he cannot, as Brett summons him to her rescue. The novel's final image is their shared taxi ride, and Brett muses on how happy they could have been together, but Jake, the realist, responds: "Yes, (...) isn't it pretty to think so."³⁹ While in *A Sport and a Pastime* love and happiness seem possible even by the end of the novel, *The Sun Also Rises* has a much bleaker ending, keeping in with the disillusionment of the Lost Generation whose value system was shattered by WWI.

Salter is a romantic, as his novels show, but Hemingway is not, as his portrayal of the only romantic character Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* further proves. Jake proposes that Cohn's romantic notions of life come from reading W. H. Hudson's novel *The Purple Land*: "The Purple Land' is a very sinister book if read too late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described."⁴⁰ Yet the land in *The Sun Also Rises* is anything but romantic, so there is no place for Cohn's romanticism, which is ridiculed by the other characters, who find his values antiquated in the post-war world, having been part of the war themselves, unlike Cohn, who is therefore able to adhere to those values still. In Hemingway's world all values and hope have been renounced for cold pragmatism and pessimism: "Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth and knowing when you had it."⁴¹ There is no faith in humanity, as everything runs on this artificial principal of getting your money's worth. No wonder then that there are no genuine relationships in Hemingway's novel, only fleeting affairs or doomed ones.

Salter's romanticism and lyricism and Hemingway's cold realism and despair may be partially accounted for by the writers' war experience. Alex Vernon in his study *Soldiers*

³⁸ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 236.

³⁹ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 251.

⁴⁰ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 17.

⁴¹ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 152.

Once and Still: Ernest Hemingway, James Salter, and Tim O'Brien proposes a theory that rests on the different kinds of fighting the writers witnessed. During his experience in the First World War, Hemingway “not only witnessed the first modern war firsthand but also was severely wounded by artillery, modern war’s newly predominant technology.”⁴² The butchery he saw in the trenches had nothing to do with the heroic and often romanticised conception of one to one combat, and the mass destruction he saw must have had a profound effect on him and his values, because in the new world the old values could no longer apply. His *The Sun Also Rises* is perceived as the ultimate expression of the angst of The Lost Generation, distilling the feeling of meaninglessness of the post-war world. Salter’s war experience is very different from Hemingway’s in that he actively participated in the fighting but more importantly in that he did not fight on the ground, but soared the skies of Korea as a fighter pilot. Vernon argues that the lyricism of Salter’s writing and his “fundamental premodern romanticism”⁴³ owe much to his flying career, emphasising “how much different and how much more romantic is the pilot’s combat experience than the foot soldier’s, (...) Salter did not experience the gritty, chaotic, non-lyrical life of the infantryman, which arguably led Hemingway (...) toward [his] hard, spare, immediate language.”⁴⁴ Although Salter is reluctant to ascribe his romantic sensibility to flying, maintaining it has always been there,⁴⁵ Vernon makes a valid point about the romantic nature of flying. The pilots retain a certain elegance which is denied the foot soldiers, as they resemble more the knights and cavalry men, looking back to the old heroic code of honour, while fighting man to man, with the cockpit as their armour. As Vernon also points out, the pilot is at least seemingly a lot more in control of the situation: “The solo aspect of flying a fighter and the duelling nature of aerial combat conjoin to fuel the pilot’s romantic temperament and to create a fantasy of detachment and control. They also promote an aesthetic dimension to combat.”⁴⁶ Salter’s leaps of imagination of his lyrical passage are reminiscent of the leaps of the aircraft in the air, as are Salter’s luminous evocations of the scenery, as if viewed from the cockpit of his plane.

Although Vernon’s point of view is somewhat reductive in relying so heavily on the military careers of the respective authors, his insight is valuable, and it extends beyond the realm of style. Where *The Sun Also Rises* ends with a resigned recognition that there can be no happy ending for Jake and Brett, or anyone else, *A Sport and a Pastime*, as well as some of Salter’s other novels, may not have a happy ending either, yet there is always hope that it may

⁴² Vernon 22.

⁴³ Vernon 52.

⁴⁴ Vernon 91.

⁴⁵ See Vernon 89.

⁴⁶ Vernon 135.

happen, that the characters have learned enough on their journey through Europe to build a life that would incorporate the French *savoir vivre* into their American lives which they cannot leave behind completely. Although Dean's death implies that would have been impossible for him, the novel itself in no way dismisses the possibility of love and bliss the way Hemingway does. Hemingway's idealism was left in the trenches, while Salter never lost his in the skies above Korea. That is what allows Salter to write about love and glory without irony, as Vernon points out⁴⁷ – an increasingly rare occurrence since the advent of modernism – even the glory of fighting, like in *The Hunters*.

Salter himself felt attracted to war: “[T]he war itself was whispering an invitation: Meet me. Whatever we were, we felt inauthentic. You were not anything unless you had fought” (*BD*, 139). In his days at West Point he already romanticised war and even death. On hearing of the death of a fellow West Pointer who graduated two years before him, Salter meditates: “Death seemed the purest act. (...) That was death: to leave behind a photograph, a twenty-year-old wife, the story of how it happened. What more is there to wish than to be remembered? To go on living in the narrative of others” (*BD*, 71)? While he may not have longed for death, he longed for the glory death would guarantee him, for the authenticity it would bestow. Both Salter himself as well as his characters also long for life though, living in the moment in the spirit of Hemingway and the Lost Generation who could find no meaning in life beyond life itself, living it to the fullest, which manifested in the 1920s wild hedonistic parties and reliance on the individual,⁴⁸ to which the nightlife scenes in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby* are a great testament. Yet while Hemingway's characters see no meaning in death, Salter's view of life is more transcendental. The ongoing strive for glory and the omnipresence of death are pervasive themes in all of Salter's novels, not only the military ones. Dean's death is constantly being foreshadowed in *A Sport and a Pastime*, and by the time his actual death is reported he has already become the mythical figure “living in the narratives of others”, much like Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. Hemingway's novel too is permeated with the presence of death, be it in the subtle reminders of the horrors of war, or the bullfighters' flirtation with death, but if death indeed claims one, it does not seem to guarantee an ascension to mythical status. As Vernon notes, Salter subscribes to a similar belief in “grace under pressure” as the Hemingway code⁴⁹ – they both believe in heroism even if the effort is futile, but while for Hemingway the meaning lies only in the act of heroism itself, there being nothing after death, Salter believes in achieving even greater glory through

⁴⁷ See Vernon 106.

⁴⁸ See Vernon 106.

⁴⁹ See Vernon 110.

death, which is therefore not seen as the end but rather a prelude to a different kind of existence.

The trademark well-crafted sentences that form Salter's prose paint pictures with words in the minds of readers with skilled brushstrokes that on the one hand vividly capture the atmosphere with all its smells, tastes, sounds, and colours, and on the other hand also encompass the crucial information which move the plot forward or capture the essence of a character in a few words. Salter achieves this not by choosing between emulating Fitzgerald's lyricism for the former and Hemingway's minimalism for the latter; he has a style which, despite echoing the two great modernists, is uniquely his own, singular in its combination of lyrical flights of imagination and detached sparseness, employed according to what the story demands. The Hemingway connection, however, is the stronger of the two, enforced by the shared experience of war and extended stays in Europe. It is interesting to observe how differently the similar experiences influenced both writers – while Salter held onto his illusions, Hemingway discarded them, which is a significant difference which permeates their writing. The awareness of the connection to Hemingway is crucial for our understanding of Salter's place in the literary world, as the many similarities prove the accuracy of labelling Salter a belated modernist, while at the same time providing a reference point against which the romantic and postmodern features of his writing may be measured. In the end, however, it does not matter whether we label Salter a modernist, a romantic, or a postmodernist – the novelist never cared much for labels anyway – what matters is that through his sparkling prose the readers enter a world which, although divorced from current events, guided by Salter's time rather than the historical time, does not feel antiquated in the least as it explores issues relevant in any period.

5. CONCLUSION

Alex Vernon suggests that Salter is positioned “between worlds”,¹ summarising rather well the paradox of Salter’s writing which shows influence of literary currents ranging across more than a century of literary history. Although modernism is its most tangible influence, especially due to connections with Hemingway and Fitzgerald, Salter’s writing fits everywhere and nowhere, like the author himself, who is neither a detached realist nor a hopeless romantic, an expatriate nor a patriot adverse to travel, and neither is he completely American nor completely Europeanised. As this thesis set out to demonstrate, it is his European novels which illustrate not only Salter’s thematic and formal affinity with the modernists, but his worldview based on the life lessons he got in Europe and which the characters of his novels also receive.

However, Salter does not place Europe above America, he merely suggests that just as America used to be the promised land for the early immigrants (and still is for some), Europe has much to offer Americans as well. What he proposes is a kind of union of the two worlds, because an American who has immersed himself in the ancient cultures of Europe ideally comes back to America equipped with the knowledge of those basic elements of existence Dean talks about in *A Sport and a Pastime* and which could be summarised in Salter’s words from *Burning the Days* as “a life of freedom, style, and art, or the semblance of art” (*BD*, 286). In his memoir Salter assesses his European education and his love for France by addressing Paris:

I loved you very much. (...) A city which since Gothic times, as the poet says, has been ever increasing in deformity, and withal retaining more perfection than any other of its class. (...) You revealed a new world to me, something called the Old World: style, sensuality, and betrayal, in the end no one of them less precious than another. (*BD*, 322-323)

Salter’s fascination with Europe stems from its ability to preserve and value beauty even in the midst of destruction. Incidentally, this is the world that Salter’s novels also reveal, so that the reader may experience a part of its magic and Salter may thus salvage beauty from the destructive force of time and “from the great heap of days mak[e] something lasting” (*BD*, 195).

This magic, created by portraying the ideal life, full of pleasure, fine food, tailored clothes, beautiful architecture, and sex, presented in a prose that instantly elicits the desired images and emotions in the reader is Salter’s legacy which remains after his passing on 19

¹ Vernon, 108.

June 2015 at the age of 90. He did not leave behind great sweeping narratives; he was the master of the ordinary life, its details, and the little things that turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, and his narratives are centred around those details, the luminous moments that stand out. His fiction was often criticised for being elitist and presenting characters whose lives were too glamorous.² Indeed, the exciting journeys abroad and the wild nights out are reminiscent of the glamour of the Jazz Age, but none of the characters drown in money, nor are they spared sweeps of ill fortune, as Salter does not shy away from portraying the sombre parts of life, like death, illness and the subtle cruelties people inflict on each other. In her obituary of Salter Louisa Thomas expresses her view that this elitism is “irresponsible and easily dangerous”.³ She goes on, stating: “His books have no negotiation of principles, no critique, no awareness of history or politics. They can be selfish, deeply selfish. In place of grace, there is no sense of justice. There is only desire.”⁴ While Thomas is partly accurate in pointing out the vacuum in which Salter’s novels exist, it would be unjust to dismiss them for a lack of principles and judgement. Salter is a novelist, not a moralist or a social critic. His novels capture moments in life without inflicting judgement; that is the job of the reader.

Despite Thomas’ criticism of Salter’s work, the rest of her essay is overwhelmingly positive in its assessment of the novelist, much like the other obituaries and tributes Salter’s death elicited. While the critical attention paid to Salter’s work is rather scarce in comparison with his contemporaries, his final novel *All That Is* awoke a new wave of interest, giving rise to numerous profiles in magazines like *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*, a series of appreciation essays in *The Paris Review*, and many more reviews than his previous novels had earned. In reaction to Salter’s death two years after the publication of *All That Is* a number of obituaries and tributes to the novelist appeared in magazines and newspapers such as *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Grantland*, *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, and many others. Despite the fact that nearly all of the articles referring to Salter’s lack of sales and fame, and his status as a writer’s writer, they all firmly assert Salter’s relevance in contemporary American fiction. Nick Paumgarten, for example, awards *A Sport and a Pastime* and *Light Years* the title of “immortal novels”⁵ and the others are not far behind in their praise. These two novels (which Salter also singled out as the ones he would like to be remembered for in *The Paris Review* interview), along with Salter’s unique style and “his way of conveying the ecstasy and

² See for example Towers.

³ Louisa Thomas, “James Salter, 1925-2015,” *Grantland*, 22 June 2015, 2 July 2015 <<http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/james-salter-1925-2015/>>.

⁴ Thomas, “James Salter, 1925-2015”.

⁵ Paumgarten, “Postscript: James Salter, 1925-2015.”

transience of life”⁶ are what he will be best remembered by. In her tribute, Jane Vandenburg beautifully sums up the appeal of Salter’s work: “I think of a Salter story as being whispered in intimacy between the lips of one lover lying on the pillow only inches from the ear of another.”⁷ His stories and novels are gentle, intimate, and subtle – a contrast to our time where everything is loud, fast, and direct. With their strange timelessness and their spellbinding world of European adventures they provide a respite from the incessant noise and rush of our time, as they lovingly linger over the ordinary moments in life which Salter’s prose, resembling the painter’s brush, captures with vivid accuracy. Although they are only a whisper among many louder voices, their intimacy and subtlety only highlights their impact.

As his thesis has attempted to show, Salter is a truly cosmopolitan writer, not only in terms of geographical space, but also the literary space. Bearing Casanova’s theory of success and failure in mind, this lack of firm grounding both in a national literature and a contemporary revolutionary literary movement (postmodernism), and consequently the failure to keep up with the Greenwich meridian of literature may be seen as the cause of Salter’s failure to achieve widespread fame. However, as Salter grew disillusioned with the disillusionment of the modernists, so might this generation of readers and critics alike grow disillusioned with the fragmentation and chaos of the postmodernists, and Salter might yet reach popularity and shed the by now worn-out label writer’s writer. The increased interest in his work in recent years suggests that that label may not stick as firmly anymore as it used to. Perhaps the meridian is slowly shifting away from the postmodern nihilism, and Salter might yet become up to date.

⁶ Rupert Thomson, “My hero: James Salter by Rupert Thomson,” *The Guardian*, 27 June 2015, 2 July 2015 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/27/my-hero-james-salter-by-rupert-thomson>>.

⁷ Jane Vandenburg, “Just Terrific: A Remembrance of James Salter,” *The Huffington Post*, 24 June 2015, 2 July 2015 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jane-vandenburg/just-terrific-a-remembran_b_7641084.html>.

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