

Last Exit to Brooklyn Study Guide

Last Exit to Brooklyn by Hubert Selby Jr.

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Contents

Last Exit to Brooklyn Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part One: Another Day Another Dollar.....	5
Part II: The Queen is Dead.....	7
Part III: And Baby Makes Three.....	9
Part IV: Tralala.....	11
Part V. The Strike.....	14
Coda.....	18
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	30
Quotes.....	33
Topics for Discussion.....	35



Plot Summary

Last Exit to Brooklyn is a 1956 novel written by Hubert Selby Junior. It is a series of loosely connected tales about the New York neighborhood of Brooklyn in the fifties, which at the time was renowned for its poverty, drugs, and violence.

The first story is called Another Day Another Dollar. It examines a bunch of unemployed men in their twenties who resort to casual violence to get away from the boredom of their lives. The second tale is called The Queen is Dead and it follows the transvestite Georgette and her unrequited love for the good-looking Vinnie. And Baby Makes Three is a relatively happy story about a couple who marry when the girl gets pregnant. In contrast, the story of Tralala is a tragic tale of a prostitute unable to feel love. The Strike is the novel's longest tale and follows the exploits of factory worker Harry Black. The final story is called Coda. It is a collection of vignettes all set in the same Brooklyn housing scheme.

In Another Day Another Dollar Freddie, Vince, Tony and Harry hang around in the Greek bar in Brooklyn. A sailor puts on a record they do not like so they wander outside, chatting about cars and girls. Soon the conversation degenerates into a violent game called Mum. Back in the bar and still looking for something to do, Freddie flirts with a prostitute called Rosie. He decides he wants nothing more to do with her, but she still follows him outside. When Freddie becomes aggressive towards her, some sailors approach him and his friends. Minutes later a fight breaks out. The boys beat up one sailor until he lies unconscious in pool of his own blood and vomit.

Georgette is a hip transvestite in love with a criminal called Vinnie. Vinnie enjoys Georgette's attentions, but cannot stop himself from treating her badly. In this story, he joins his friends in teasing Georgette by throwing a knife towards her until one sticks in her leg. Not wanting trouble from the police, Vinnie goes against Georgette's wishes to take her to hospital and sends her home in a taxi. Here Georgette has an argument with her brother who refuses to accept Georgette's way of life. When her mother falls asleep, Georgette goes to her friend's house for drink and drugs. Vinnie and his friends arrive and Georgette becomes increasingly obsessed with attracting his attention. She becomes so high that she manages to convince herself one of the other men is Vinnie and takes him to bed.

In And Baby Makes it Three, Tommy gets his girlfriend Suzy pregnant and decides to marry her. Though Suzy's father is initially unhappy with the arrangement, he soon realizes Tommy is a likeable boy with a job good enough to buy himself a motorbike. In particular, a boy called Spook often hangs around Tommy looking for him to take him for bike rides. Spook's goal in life is to get a bike for himself and he goes as far wearing a motorbike hat wherever he goes. On the day Tommy tells his friends he is getting married, Spook comes in to the bar with news that he has just bought his first bike. The wedding and christening celebrations are arranged for the next day. It is a lavish affair and continues through the night. As everyone starts to head home, Tommy promises to



take Spook for a ride. However, while Spook goes to fetch his hat, Tommy rides off with a girl called Roberta.

Tralala has been a prostitute since the age of 15 and unlike the other girls, she claims she is successful because she does not tease the men. Her most lucrative customers are sailors. Her ploy is to get them drunk before luring them outside and waiting for one of her friends to knock them out. While they are unconscious, they take any money or jewellery they find on their person. For the first time, Tralala decides to earn some money by herself by stealing money from her customer when he falls over drunk. However, the customer catches up with her and begs Tralala to give back his ID, otherwise, he says, he can't go home. Tralala and her friends violently beat him up. After the police arrest her friends, Tralala decides she is too good for hanging around Brooklyn and heads to Times Square where she meets an officer. The officer shows Tralala a great time and the only thing he asks Tralala to do is see him off at the port. Thinking he will pay her there, she happily goes along. All she receives from him is a love letter. For the next few days, Tralala goes on self-destructive binge that ends in a group of men raping her.

Harry works at a factory and lives in a loveless marriage with his wife Mary. His dull life completely changes when he becomes a central figure of a strike at his workplace. As one of the representatives, the union puts him in charge of the pickets and gives him his own office. It is not long before Harry realizes he can use the trade union funds for his own means, buying beer and sharing good times with some of the local boys. The local boys don't like him, but they see he is there to be used. It is in their company that Harry meets a transvestite. The transvestite arouses Harry's interest and he starts frequenting gay clubs. While splashing his money around in a transvestite bar called Mary's, Harry meets and falls in love with Regina. For a while, he lives a dream, living with her, and taking her out to fancy restaurants. It does not last long. When the strike ends and he no longer has union funds to spend, Regina walks away from him. A confused Harry, walks to the Greek bar where outside he meets a ten-year-old boy called Joey. He tries to have sex with Joey but Joey escapes and come back with some men from the nearby Greek bar. The men beat Harry to a pulp.

Coda examines the lives of various characters on a Brooklyn housing estate. Abraham has a Cadillac and fancies himself as a stud. He is obsessed with a light brown-skinned girl called Lucy. Although he gets her, he does it at the expense of his wife and children. Mike is unemployed and does little but sleep all day. In comparison, his wife Irene works six days a week. One day, she comes back from work in a happy mood to see her husband drinking with Sal. Her mood disappears when Mike orders her to cook steak and then leaves immediately after the meal. Ada is a Jewish woman who others on the estate mock. She spends all day thinking about her dead husband and son, hoping if she sits outside that someone will speak to her. Her sweet attitude seems at odds with the violence and nastiness that surrounds her.



Part One: Another Day Another Dollar.

Part One: Another Day Another Dollar. Summary

The novel opens up in a bar called Greeks in Brooklyn that is frequented by prostitutes and sailors. Unemployed hipsters such as Freddie, Vince, Tony, and Harry also hang out there. They hate the "square" records most of the sailors play, but enjoy the intense atmosphere, often hanging around to wait for something interesting to happen.

When a sailor puts on a Left Frizzel record on the jukebox, the boys wander outside, talking about cars, women, and clothes, occasionally adjusting their hair with their combs. Someone suggests a game of Mum and soon Vinnie is standing in the center of a circle with the others taking it in turn to punch him. The idea is that he has to catch the person who threw the last punch before the next person punches him. Harry takes his place, but he is so bad at the game he is soon on his knees, taking blow after blow. With Harry still on the floor, the boys decide to go back inside the bar.

The boys talk to the bar owner Alex. He is friendly with them but says they should get a job. The banter continues and they start questioning why Alex refuses to call them sir like he does when he talks to the sailors. Alex laughs off their suggestion. A prostitute called Rosie approaches Freddie. They occasionally sleep together, but today Freddie wants nothing to do with her. She asks him for half a buck and moves closer to him. He ignores her and follows his friends outside. She follows him.

Freddie and Rosie are having an argument as three sailors walk past. Seeing Freddie slap Rosie, they make a comment, which immediately attracts everyone's attention. Before long, Freddie's friends are out on the sidewalks, looking and waiting for a fight to begin. The sailors decide to run, but the boys jump into Freddie's car and chase one of them down. Circling the sailor, they take it turns to kick and punch him and until he is lying unconscious in his own blood and vomit. When they hear a police siren, they run away.

The police cut off the boys and order them out of the car. They obey, but immediately protest their innocence. Freddie says if the sailor isn't play-acting, he deserved it because he insulted his wife. Rosie steps forward to confirm Freddie's accusation. The Sailor's deny that such a woman could ever be insulted, but the crowd shout them down. The police order the sailors to go home. The boys go back to the bar.

Part One: Another Day Another Dollar. Analysis

Another Day Another Day begins with a quote from Ecclesiastes 3:19 stating, "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity." This passage gives the story its moral center.



The story examines senseless violence in the neighborhood of Brooklyn. All the hoodlums such as Vinnie and Sal are unemployed and looking for something to do. They talk about cars and women, but once the conversation runs out, it seems that the only way they can express themselves is through violence. When the sailors give them the opportunity to fight, they take it without hesitation. The following violence is so shocking you begin to view them, as the Bible passage states, as equal to any "beast."

The violence is made more shocking by Selby's writing. He writes the passage where the hipsters beat the sailor in a stream-of-consciousness style and using a sentence that is almost a page long. With little punctuation, the reader is inundated with a stream of breathlessly shocking images and the uncomfortable understanding that the men beating the sailor have no thought of ever stopping. In fact, the reader feels that if the police didn't come they would have continued beating him even after he is dead.

Aside from boredom, Selby suggests the violence happens in America because the country is split into too many factions and these factions have divided in to their own closed communities. In this case it is Brooklyn, a place so sordid that it attracts only the dregs of society. When outsiders come into the community, they make it clear that apart from their money they are not welcome. As the author states at the beginning, the hipsters view the sailors as rednecks and squares. In return, the sailors label the "Yankees" and "nigger-loving bastards." It seems everyone is putting their way of life above the others and for Selby this can only lead to tension and finally violence.



Part II: The Queen is Dead.

Part II: The Queen is Dead. Summary

Georgie sees herself as a hip queer as unlike most homosexuals, she does not hide her sexuality, wearing women's clothes and makeup, and acting how she pleases. However, her sexuality also causes her problems. She is obsessed with a man called Vinnie. Vinnie does not return her love, but instead teases her to the point of cruelty. Her brother is also a major obstacle in her life and she imagines that he will kill her if she keeps on taking drugs.

Vinnie has been a criminal since the age of 12 when he stole a hearse. He was so small at the time that the police thought the vehicle was driving by itself. When they hauled him in front of the judge, Vinnie was so innocent looking, the Judge could hardly keep a straight face. He told Vinnie never to do it again and Vinnie promised to behave. The next time Vinnie stole a car with some older boys. Again, the judge let him off after he promised the court he would change his ways. A few years later, he was in a correctional center and then at 16 he started his first stretch in prison. Vinnie came out of prison hardened and feeling like a real man.

Outside Greeks, Georgie tells Vinnie how much she needs him. Vinnie encourages her attention, but mostly teases her, calling her names such as sweetcakes. His friend Harry joins them outside, pulling out his pocketknife and throwing it towards Georgie. She lifts her hands to protect herself, but the knife misses, falling to the floor. Someone else picks up the knife and throws it again at Georgie. Again, it misses, but Georgie is becoming hysterical, begging Vinnie to make them stop. Finally, one throw is accurate, the knife sticking in Georgie's calf. The Benzedrine she has taken dampens her pain, but the sight of blood sends her into hysterics.

After the boys clean Georgie's wound with some iodine, they call her a taxi. George insists they take her to the hospital, but Vinnie tells she is going home because he does not want her to rat him out to the police. Georgie is getting hysterical. She tells Vinnie she can't go home because her brother is there and he hates her. She begs Vinnie to take her to the hospital. Vinnie says no and decides to take the taxi with her to make sure she goes all the way home.

At home, Georgie's mother comforts her while Georgie's brother screams and shouts. Georgie defends herself by calling her brother a queer. In response, Georgie's brother screams that she should be ashamed and questions how his mother could even go near such a thing. Georgie's mother insists Georgia is still her son and continues stroking his hair. Georgie waits restlessly for her mother to fall asleep before creeping out to Goldie's house in search for more drugs.

Goldie is with her other friends at her apartment. They are all drag queens and lament that they have no men to flirt with. They try to get over the lack of male presence by



taking Benzedrine, but it accentuates rather than takes away from their boredom and Georgie phones Greeks to invite Vinnie and the other boys over. Once she is off the phone she excites the girls by telling her how she defeated her brother and how much Vinnie looked after her.

Vinnie and his friends arrive at the party. They smoke pot and drink bouillon with Benzedrine. Everyone is enjoying themselves so much that when the owner of the apartment tells them they have to leave, the disappointment is felt all round. Fortunately, they are able to go to Miss. Tony's apartment.

At Tony's house, the group light candles, the softness of the flames lightening the mood and encouraging intimacy. Even straight men like Vinnie are seeing the transvestites in a more attractive light. Georgie tries to entice Vinnie to bed and is heartbroken when he eventually goes off with Camille. She tries to get over it with more drugs, but it just brings on hallucinations of colors of green, gold, and silver. In this mood, she allows Harry to come on to her, convincing herself he is Vinnie and that he is love with her.

Part II: The Queen is Dead. Analysis

The Queen is Dead begins with a quote from Genesis 1:27, "so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he him". This passage is the moral center of the story.

The story continues the idea from the previous story that despite the fact we are born the same, the human race isolates communities and in this case individuals. In fact, Georgie is perhaps the most tragic figure in the book as she seems to belong nowhere. Her homosexuality and the way she dresses isolate herself from the mainstream and she finds it difficult to communicate in anything other than a superficial way with her friends because in general she has had a better upbringing and education. At home, her brother hates her and her relationship with her mother is too dependent to be a positive one. She is very much on the outside of everything, resulting in an inner misery that expresses itself when she drinks and uses drugs.

Like many other characters in the book, Georgie is intent in compounding her misery by destroying anything thing that is good in her life. She becomes obsessed with Vinnie despite the fact he shows her no love back, she takes drugs even though it makes her feel worse, and instead of addressing her obvious loneliness, she isolates herself further away from both her friends and society. By the end of the story, she is alone, walking around New York City in a dazed state.



Part III: And Baby Makes Three.

Part III: And Baby Makes Three. Summary

Tommy is a quiet young man with a motorbike. He likes taking his girlfriend Suzy out on rides, but one day he gets her pregnant. Suzy's father, an alcoholic, does not notice his daughter is pregnant until she is in hospital. His initial anger subsides and before long, he is telling everyone about his grandson and arranging a big party.

Spook frequents Greeks where he often meets Tommy drinking coffee. Spook is obsessed with motorbikes and nothing gives him greater pleasure than when Tommy takes him out for a ride. Spook dreams of owning his own bike and is fond of telling the Greek regulars that they cannot understand what it is like to want something so much. The regulars constantly tease him, going as far as throwing the motorbike hat he wears around the bar and until Spook pleads with them to give it back. Often Spook wanders around the bike shops looking at the latest models and examining down to their shiny screws. People say Spook spends no money because his only concern in life is to save up for a motorbike.

Tommy comes into Greeks to tell his friends that he is getting married. At the same time, his future father-in-law rents a room for a wedding reception in Murphy's hall. Just as Alex the bartender is buying Tommy a drink, Spook enters the bar and announces he has bought a new motorbike. It is an old police bike, but he has worked on it, changing a few things and painting over the police signs. The others laugh. They tell him anyone can get a police bike and it likely won't last beyond a few months. Spook is so excited, he barely listens, proudly climbing onto his machine and riding away.

The party begins. There are fights, dances, drugs and drinks. A girl called Roberta makes the biggest impression, dancing with everyone and making jokes about how she would never get married because she knows how to use birth control. As the party becomes moves into the early morning, Suzy takes her baby and goes home. Tommy stays, but with the idea of going home early and helping his wife in the morning. He eventually offers Spook a ride on his bike, but while Spook goes to find his Helmut, Rose comes down with some friends and starts talking to Tommy. She convinces him to give her a ride and the two of them go off together. Everyone else stays until the next day.

Part III: And Baby Makes Three. Analysis

And Baby Makes it Three begins with a quote from Job 5:25, "Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth." This passage is the moral center of the story.

And Baby Makes Three is a more positive story, showing a genuine community spirit and self-confidence. It shows that while the people within Brooklyn find it difficult to accept outsiders, they rarely hurt their own. Yes, their lives are dysfunctional. For



example, Suzy gets pregnant out of wedlock, yet the father never thinks of throwing his daughter out of the house. Instead, he arranges a wedding and a Christening to occur on the same day.

The proceeding celebrations are joyous. There are the usual backbiting, drugs, and fighting, but in this story, Selby does not view it negatively, but puts it forward as an honored tradition. This is how they like to live and the occasion of Tommy and Suzy's wedding is celebration of their spirit.

Nevertheless, the story does not have the positive ending one expects. In fact, the author suggests that Tommy, despite being married that day is going home with another woman. The party itself was a temporary release from the boredom of their daily lives and the problems remain. For example while Spook finally has a motorbike, people, even Tommy, still treat him poorly and while Tommy is now married with children, he still gives in to peer pressure. Suzy now has the distraction and the security that comes from having a child, but one wonders how the child will grow up in such an environment.



Part IV: Tralala.

Part IV: Tralala. Summary

Ever since she was fifteen, Tralala has been sexually active, often taking men to the park for sex. She distinguishes herself from other girls because unlike them, she refuses to play games and is unfussy about the men that she sleeps with. For Tralala, sex is just sex.

Tralala starts to frequent the Greek Bar where along with her friends, she picks up sailors and robs them of their money. Their tactic is to promise the sailors sex before taking them around the corner where someone is waiting to knock them out with a brick. Eventually, Tralala decides she can earn more going out on her own. She meets a doggie in Greeks and begins talking to him. However, the doggie seems to like talking too much. The lack of action frustrates Tralala so much, she picks up an empty bottle and smashes it across his head. With the doggie sprawled unconscious on the bar, she steals his wallet.

Tralala is talking to Al and Tony outside Greeks, lying about how much she stole from the Doggie when the Doggie attacks her. Al and Tony pull him off and while they rough him up, Tralala spits and taunts at him. In tears, the doggie tells Tralala she can keep his money, he just needs his ID to get back on the navy base. If he doesn't get back he will miss his ride back home and he hasn't been home for three years. Eventually tiring of him, Tony and Al beat him up. Tralala finishes the job by kicking him in the face until his eyeballs bleed.

The next day, Tony and Al see a shopkeeper put his money into a tin and hide it under the counter. Looking like it could have been a substantial amount, they decide to go back to Greeks and work out a way to steal it.

Back at Greeks, Tony and Al share their plan with Tralala. While they break in to the man's shop, Tralala will keep an eye out for the police. Knowing she is set to earn a lot of money, Tralala agrees.

The plan works perfectly. When Tony and Al open the money, they find that instead of containing the few hundred dollars they expected, it actually has two thousand dollars. They tell Tralala they found only a few hundred dollars and though she is naturally suspicious, she asks for her share. The two men tell them they will give it to her later, but first they should retire to a room for the night.

The next day the police catch up with Tony and Al. They can hardly keep a straight face, telling the two men that they must be stupid because if there is one person you don't rob from it is a bookie. When the police mention the pair has stolen a couple of thousand, Tralala is furious. She shoots her mouth off until she realizes she is running risk of going to jail



Tralala picks up a man called Harry and they head for Time Square. Harry looks like he may have some money on him, but like her previous conquest, Tralala cannot stand him talking so much. He eventually gets so drunk, Tralala is able to attract the attentions of an officer at a nearby table. After brief chat, Tralala takes Harry's money and leaves with the richer officer type.

It turns out the officer is a sensitive man and it his sensitivity, he nearly wins Tralala over. He takes her back to his hotel, they make love, and in the morning and for the next few days, he buys her dresses and shows her the time of her life. The only thing he asks from her is to see him off from the port as if she is his girlfriend. Expecting a large sum of money, Tralala happily agrees to do whatever he wants.

At the port, the officer kisses her goodbye and gives Tralala an envelope. Ripping it open and expecting to find a cheque, she is furious it is just a note. She reads the first few lines of what is a love letter before ripping it up and throwing it into the gutter. Over the next few days, Tralala frequents Times Square, but suffers the indignity of no one taking notice of her even when she tries to stare them down. She becomes more forward with some of the richer officers, but though they are polite, nothing happens. After a week tour of the bars, she becomes so unhappy, she barely notices what she is doing and whom she is sleeping with.

Tralala goes to a bar called Willie's. At this point, she is close to hysterical. Seeing one of the prostitutes called Annie getting attention from some sailors she barges in, flaunting her breasts. Annie objects, but Tralala tries to lure the men to come with her by wandering around the room topless. The owner tells her to get out, but Tralala laughs and says if that is the case, why don't all the men come outside with her for some fun. Excited, all the men in the bar agree.

Outside, the men put Tralala in an old abandoned car and start to have sex with her. Before long, a crowd of men surround Tralala, all waiting their turn. At one point, they have to revive Tralala before continuing. Finally bored, they leave Tralala bruised, bleeding, and barely breathing.

Part IV: Tralala. Analysis

Tralala begins with a quote from Song of Solomon 3:2, 3, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye whom my soul loveth?" This passage is the moral center of the story.

Tralala's character introduces the theme of the dangers of repressing one's true feelings. She has obviously had a hard life, indicated by the fact she is now a prostitute unable to give a heart to anyone. As she says, to her, sex is just sex and no more. All that matters is money and in fact, her thoughts are so consumed with how she will earn the next buck there is little room for any feelings of love or empathy. For example, after



the sailor begs for his ID back because otherwise he will not be able to go home, she participates in beating him to a pulp, even kicking him in the face until his eye bleeds. Far from feeling any guilt, she then helps her acquaintances to steal from a baker's shop.

Yet as the story unfolds, one begins to understand that money and violence is just a way of Tralala repressing her real needs and thoughts. She expresses her needs through her actions. For example, she obviously craves male attention by the way she tries to take men away from other prostitutes, she expresses that she needs more from life by putting herself above the others in Brooklyn, and eventually looking for customers in Manhattan. It is in Manhattan that she finds someone that treats her like a lady, and for the first time makes her feel something. She tries to pretend she does not feel anything back, by thinking how much money he will pay her, but again her actions give her away. When he leaves for the war after three days, she goes on a self-destructive binge. It is at this point her actions become increasingly extreme, resulting in her offering her body to a crowd of men outside the Greek bar.



Part V. The Strike.

Part V. The Strike. Summary

Harry Black is watching his son in the bath. Intrigued by his body, he reaches over and plays with his son's penis. It is not until his wife Mary walks in, that he pulls away. Her presence angers Harry who silently calls her a ball breaker. Mary puts his bad mood down to the forthcoming strike at Harry's work. However in reality Harry cannot stand her. He hates her touching him and after they have sex that night, he cries himself to sleep before dreaming about Harpies attacking him.

Harry goes to work in a steel factory. His routine is simple. He works for half an hour at his lathe before doing his rounds as a union member, reminding people to pay their membership and telling them not to work too hard. The supervisors and management hate Harry, but they know they have to tread carefully with him or potentially face severe consequences. When Harry complains that a new worker has been put on a steel cutting job, despite the rules stating otherwise, he and a foreman are embroiled in a bitter argument. The worker tells Harry that he has enough experience to do the work and actually wants to do it, but Harry insists it is against the rules. The argument continues until the foreman insists they talk to the manager Mr. Harrington. Harrington hates Harry and as they talk, he thinks how he can use the strike to get him fired.

Harry attends a union meeting. The President of the union has a forceful presence and elicits many cheers from the men. He tells them they are aiming for a 30-hour week, a \$1 an hour raise and 12 days holiday. Harry also speaks, informing the men that during the strike they will receive a \$10 grocery bag every Saturday.

Harry's job during the strike is to operate the union shop and organize the pickets. He arrives at 8am, stamps the men's book and gives them signs. While the men go onto the pickets, Harry stays in the office answering calls and occasionally talking to some of the workers. The job makes Harry feel important and forget the troubles that plagued him at the beginning of the story. He is so confident that he decides to use the union money to buy some kegs of beer for himself and the men. When the kegs run out he buys some more.

After a busy day of sitting in the office and drinking, Harry goes across the road to the Greek bar. Here he meets Vinnie, Sal and Malfie. The three men have no time for someone like Harry who they think is strange, especially his laugh and crazy eyes. Nevertheless, when he invites them for beer in the union shop, they readily accept.

As the beers flow, Harry asks Vinnie, Sal, and Malfie about a transvestite he saw them with the previous day. He states he hates fairies but is intrigued why men like themselves would hang around with such people. Vinnie thinks there is more to what Harry is saying and deciding he is not a secure person begins to tease him. Harry responds by telling the men of the women he has slept with recently. More people come



into the union shop and Harry pours them more beer. They mostly ignore him, but he is happy to be in their company.

The workers are becoming less enthusiastic about the strike. Despite still having to picket most days, they are receiving no extra money. The police who were initially sympathetic to their cause are now becoming more aggressive. It all contributes to a bad atmosphere at home and in some cases, the men's wives have been forced to find job. It is while the men are in this mood that trucks arrive at the factory to pick up a delivery. The men are furious at the drivers and try everything in their power to stop them from crossing the picket line. However, as they throw stones and kick the vehicles the police move forward with their sticks, knocking them back. After months of boredom for both the police and the workers, they have finally something to fight about. Violence erupts. Finally, the police turn on fire hoses to push the men back.

The union president arrives at the union shop to talk to Harry and other members. While he is there Vinnie and Sal walk in looking for some free beer. Harry introduces them to the president and tells them they are just a couple of locals sympathetic to their cause. Seeing he can make some extra money, Vinnie offers his services to the President, telling him he knows the truck company that tried to cross the picket line. He says for the right price, him and his friends can stop them from ever trying such a stunt again. The president hires them for \$100.

Harry is enjoying the sight of the exploding trucks when Vinnie, Sal, and a transvestite called Ginger walk into the union shop. Ginger fascinates Harry and she is quickly manipulating him into using the union money to buy food and drink for a party.

As Harry gets drunker, he becomes increasingly attracted towards Ginger. Ginger finds Harry repulsive, but decides to have some fun, sitting on Harry's knee stroking his hair. Harry is aroused and responds to Ginger's advances, at times aimlessly groping her. When she gets bored, Ginger squeezes Harry's hand until she brings tears to his eyes. Ginger and the other leave while a very tired Harry sleeps under the office desk.

Harry starts to frequent a transvestite bar called Mary's. The first time he is there he sits by himself says nothing, but during his second visit, someone wolf whistling in his direction. Her name is Alberta and she invites Harry back to her apartment for sex.

Alberta finds Harry strange and unlike other men, she says she has no idea how to deal with him. However, that is the very thing that makes Harry intriguing. Harry responds to her attention by using money to take her out to the movies and buy her clothes. Meanwhile, Harry's wife is distraught. One day she questions where he has been and Harry punches her in the face.

As the summer ends, the cooler weather makes picketing more pleasant for the workers. Their mood is also lightened by the fact the union seem to be making progress in the negotiations. In fact, the management are willing to accept the union's terms on one condition; they allow them to sack Harry. The union members are furious that they



could suggest such a thing, but in private, they weigh up the positives and the negatives. Eventually they decide Harry is irreplaceable.

After a union meeting, Harry goes to a dragball where he meets a transvestite called Regina. Harry's inexperience excites Regina and the two start to spend all their time together, including Thanksgiving. For the first time in his life, Harry is happy.

The strike ends after the Christmas holidays and the men go back to work. Everyone is happy except for Harry. After months of free spending, he is back to poor wages and the daily grind. He explains his situation to Regina, but she does not want to listen, telling Harry to take her to a high-class restaurant and then to the movies. When Harry suggests they stay in she decides to go out on her own. Harry follows her to Marys, but she chooses to ignore him.

Harry goes back to work, but after a few hours, he decides he can't stand it anymore and walks out. Outside Greeks, he sees a ten year-old boy called Joey. He touches Joey's neck, smiling and Joey laughs so Harry leads him around the corner and pushes him against a wall. Unzipping Joey's pants he takes out Joey's penis and puts in his mouth. Joey starts to scream and Harry has no choice, but to let him go.

With Harry slumped on the floor outside Greeks, Joey returns with Sal and Vinnie, pointing to Harry and yelling he is the men who tried to suck him. Sal and Vinnie beat Harry until he is laying half-conscious in his own blood. They leave saying they have not had that much fun since beating up the doggie.

Part V. The Strike. Analysis

The Strike begins with a quote from Proverbs 24:30, 31, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall there of was broken down" This passage is the moral center of the story.

In this story Harry Black thinks he finds he finds a way out of his repressed life, but it proves a false dawn, or as the proverb says at the beginning a vineyard grown over with thorns. However, the wall has been broken down and though he cannot quite grasp onto the dream life he thought he had, he cannot put away the new feelings he had uncovered. By the end of the story, he tries to abuse a young boy. In this respect, it is appropriate that the people that inadvertently helped him find his true self, attack him. Though they do not seem to care that Harry has abused a child, they enjoy the fact they have another outsider or as they put it, "A freak to beat up," or someone that no one will care about.

One can see then why Harry had repressed his feelings for so long. He is truly a strange person and Selby suggests while Brooklyn is full of misfits, it only accepts difference on a superficial level. People like Vinnie and Georgie are only outsiders outside of Brooklyn. In Brooklyn, they fit right in as they are street-wise and hardened by years of observing and participating in violence. In many ways, they are conventional.

Harry is not and the fact he has always tried to hide his strangeness suggests that he has always been afraid of what would happen if he let himself go.



Coda.

Coda. Summary

Mike Kelly is in bed while his wife Irene runs around trying to get ready for work. She asks Mike to go out and buy some bread, but he refuses, telling her he needs to sleep. Angry, Irene storms out of the house.

Ada wakes up thinking what lovely weather it is outside. From her favourite window, she can see a factory and couple of empty parking lots. As she stares out onto the scene, she asks God what she has done wrong.

Vinnie and Mary married late in life and would probably still be single if they had not met. Now they have two children and keep up their neighbors with their constant arguing. Desperate for the toilet, Vinnie goes to the bathroom only to find it locked. He bangs on it incessantly, screaming at his wife to finish. Feeling he has no choice, Vinnie urinates out of the window and without realizing into a child's crib in the apartment below.

Lucy tries desperately to control her children, but everytime she turns her back they are making noise and playing games she feels are inappropriate. Finally, after one last stern word the children disappear and for the next half an hour are silent. A neighbor Lucy thinks highly of knocks on her door to say water is dripping into her apartment from Lucy's bathroom. Lucy enters the bathroom to find her children have flooded it.

Abraham thinks about a woman he met at Mel's with light dark skin. He is confident in his looks and positive the next time he goes to the club she will not be able to resist him. After making himself look good, Abraham goes into the kitchen to eat breakfast with his wife and kids.

Ada put her husband Hymie's pyjamas out ready for bed. Hymie died five years ago, but every day she still acts out the same routine as if he was still alive. Later Ada sits in the park watching the children play. She wants someone to talk to, but it seems like no one has the time. She thinks back to the time her husband used to take her to the beach and the fun she had with her son Ira who died in the Second World War.

The baby is crying, but still Mike sleeps, dreaming about a woman whose breasts he caught a sight of when she leaned out of a window opposite his apartment. Finally, he realizes if he does not get up to change the baby's nappy, it will continue crying. He hates changing nappies especially in the morning, but decides that as a reward he will buy himself some bottles of beer.

In the Laundromat, Lucy tells off her son for running around, but really she does not want him to play with the Hispanic boys. When she turns back to her machine, she sees she has put too much soap in and it is starting to bubble out of the door. Lucy knows she should call the supervisor, but she is too embarrassed. When someone else brings



it to the supervisor's attention, Lucy suddenly worries that everyone will think she is as bad as the Hispanics.

Abe drops his Cadillac at a garage and goes to the barbers. Here he tells everyone about his sex life and all the fights he has been in recently.

Lucy gets back from the supermarket to find her husband Louis home and studying for his exams. She tells Louis about how they should move and how earlier she had seen human faeces in the elevator. Louis says he thinks that it is the funniest thing he has heard for a long time and struggles to get the image out of his head. Lucy storms out.

Sal arrives at Mike's apartment for a drinking session and with the idea that later they go out and get some women. Meanwhile Irene is working at the supermarket. Usually she enjoys the work because it gets her out of the house and away from Mike, but Saturdays are always nightmarishly busy, leaving her more exhausted than if she stayed at home. Nevertheless, she walks home in a good mood. Her good mood continues even when she sees Sal drinking beer with Mike. However, when Mike orders her to buy and cook steak for him and Sal, she struggles to control her temper. Immediately after dinner, Mike and Sal leave to go to a bar.

Vinnie and Mary have a big argument over their son Joey. Vinnie wants to take Joey to the barbers to cut his hair, but Mary does not want anyone touching her son's beautiful blond locks. The pair fights it out for a while, but in the end, Vinnie drags Joey out of the house and to the barbers.

Abraham goes to Mel's club where he meets a girl called Lucy, the same girl he had been thinking about earlier. They go back to Lucy's apartment and make love all night. Meanwhile, Abraham's wife puts the kids to bed. She has not been out for months and wants nothing more than to get laid. As she watches TV, she starts to play with herself.

Mike comes home after an unsuccessful night looking for women. He pulls Irene to bed, desperate for sex, but unable to get an erection. Irene rolls over and falls asleep.

Coda. Analysis

Coda begins with a quote from Job 4: 19-21, "how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundations is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth? They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish forever without any regarding it. Doth not their excellency which is in them go away? They die, even without wisdom." This is the moral center of the story.

This story examines the vicious circle of life. Almost everyone seems bitter from how they have been treated in the past and they pass this bitterness onto loved ones and particularly their children. For example, when Abraham leaves his wife at home to meet another woman, she spends an unhappy time at home, thinking how she needs sex. Finally, she falls asleep. In the morning, she wakes up to her children screaming and immediately tells them to shut up. Abe come through the door hung over and he also



screams at his children. Later after Abe has punched his wife, their little daughter approaches the tearful Nancy in the bathroom. She tells her that Jesus loves them, but Nancy screams for her to get the hell away. It seems that in this environment there is no room for such innocence.

The only character still with some innocence intact is Adie and she is perhaps the most tragic character in this section. Her husband and son are dead and the only thing that keeps her going is the memories she has of them. In a way, it proves life could be better, if only they lived in better conditions. Some of the characters like Lucy seem to know they could have a better life, but Selby suggests that once in the housing scheme it is almost to escape and people decay. As the bible passage says at the beginning, "They are destroyed from morning to night". Irene for example, wakes up, prepares her children and her husband's day, works eight hours, comes home and cooks her family dinner before falling asleep. In the meantime, her husband does nothing.

One could say that the story focuses on male dominance in fifties American society. However one feels even the men are acting out a role that they feel they should perform rather than doing things they enjoy and that make them feel good. For example, Mike only tries to assert his authority on Irene because it is Irene and not himself who is supports the family. All Mike does is sleep and drink.



Characters

Harry.

Harry is the main character in the Strike, which is the longest story in the novel. He is married to a woman called Mary and works in a steel factory. Though the author describes him as one of the worst workers in the company, he holds a valuable position as a trade union steward, making it almost impossible for the management to sack him. Harry knows this and often leaves his work station to walk around and remind his fellow workers that their duty is towards the union and not the company.

Yet Harry is miserable. Not only does he hate having sex with his wife, he sees her only as someone there to prevent him becoming what he could be. At the beginning of the story, this person is unclear to him, but a strike at work shows a glimpse of a new and better life.

The strike starts at the beginning of a sweltering summer. The union give Harry the role of supervising the union shop and helping to organize the men in the morning when they arrive to take their place on the picket line. The position fills him with great pride and it is not long before he finds he can abuse it by using union funds to buy things like kegs of beer and a radio. As long as he provides a receipt, the union management seem to accept his excesses.

Harry is encouraged to abuse the system by a group of local boys, including Vinnie and Sal. They don't like Harry who with his strange laugh and scary eyes sends a shiver up their spines. However, they can see Harry is there is to be manipulated. As long as they pretend to be his friend, he will do whatever they ask.

Harry's friendship with these boys is the turning point in his life. They open his eyes to a whole new way of life and in particular New York's vibrant gay scene. Harry suddenly realizes what his life is missing and armed with union funds, he starts to frequent a transvestite bar called Mary's and sleep with transvestites. He often bores the company with his tales about the strike and what an important person he is, but the people he meets seem to genuinely like him. In response, he buys them all drinks and takes the ones he likes out shopping and to the cinema. Sometimes if they are only a few blocks from home, Harry will wave down a taxi.

Harry's main relationship in the story is with a transvestite called Regina. He dreams of a real relationship with her and for a while he lives his dream. It is only when the strike is drawing to a close and Harry can no longer afford taking her to extravagant restaurants that their relationship ends. Harry is distraught. He begs her to stay with him, but without the status Harry's money brought her, she sees him as nothing more than another desperate man.



Faced with having returning back to his old life and routine, Harry walks out of his first shift back at work and goes to the Greeks bar. Outside he meets a boy called, Joey and sexually assaults him. The boy escapes and returns with Vinnie and Sal. As he is lying in his own blood, Harry berates himself for being gay.

Georgina.

Georgina is a hip transvestite unafraid of showing the world that she is gay. Her life revolves around parties and drugs and if he stays out of prison long enough, Vinnie. Unfortunately, Vinnie does not love Georgina back, yet encourages her infatuation, to the point of cruelty, jokingly flirting with her and promising that one day, they will be together. Georgina is too in love to see through his facade and will often lie to both herself and her friends by saying how much Vinnie cares for her.

Georgina's main problem is her brother. He refuses to accept Georgina's life and when she returns to her house with an injured leg, the pair of them has a harrowing argument. In contrast, Georgina's mother has great sympathy for Georgina, stoking her hair as her other son rants and raves about Georgina being sick and perverted. In Georgina's mother's opinion, Georgina is still her son.

Like the other transvestites in the group, Georgina is obsessed with her status. After her mother falls asleep, Georgina leaves the house and goes to her friends. Here she tells them how she argued down her brother and that Vinnie visited her in hospital. Both lies, but she is delighted when she is announced Queen for the Day and the others hold a party in her honor. Soon Georgina is high on Benzedrine.

It is in this mood that she invites Vinnie and his friends to join them. On his arrival, she delights in being the center of attention reading Poe's Raven to the company and delightedly catching Vinnie looking awestruck at the poem's rhythm. It not only fills her with the power she craves, but as the straight men start to take some of the transvestites to bed, an almost unbearable expectation. This expectation turns into misery when she sees Vinnie going off with Camille. However, she calms herself down by pretending she did not really see it. Vinnie is still there and in fact, it is not Harry that she is caressing, but Vinnie.

The lie does not quite register and in the back in the mind, she knows she is with Harry. With this knowledge and dreaming of being with Vinnie, she leaves the party and walks hazily through the streets.

Vinnie.

Vinnie is a young hoodlum involved in three of the stories, Another Day, Another Dollar, The Queen is Dead and The Strike. He is never the main character of a story but his natural intelligence and manipulative nature often encourages strong reaction from the main protagonists.



In Another Day, Another Dollar Vinnie and his other unemployed friends hang out at the Greek bar, bantering with the barman and looking for fights. When a doggie insults them, they beat him unconscious.

This is basically Vinnie's life and the author expands on it further in the Queen is Dead. At the age of twelve, Vinnie started a life of crime, but because he always looked so innocent, he often got away with a warning. After spending time in a juvenile center he was put into prison at only 16 years of old and has been in and out of jail ever since. He has never learned from his mistakes and always returns to old way life as soon as he is released.

Vinnie is conscious of his looks and though he is straight, he gets off on a transvestite bestowing him with attention. However, this is where his manipulative ways are the most apparent because although he manages to draw Georgina to him, it is only because he wants to feel good about himself. Vinnie's manipulative nature is also apparent in the Strike. Here he manipulates Harry into using the union money to have a good time. Like Georgina before, Harry spirals out of control and ends up lying bloodied and unconscious in the gutter. Fittingly it is Vinnie and his friend Sal who beat him up.

Tralala.

Tralala has worked as a prostitute since the age of fifteen. She differentiates herself from the other girls by claiming that instead of playing games with the men, she gets right to business. Her biggest assets are her large breasts, which she flaunts shamelessly. Her attitude makes her unpopular with the other girls, but Tralala seems to care for no one, but herself. In fact, this perhaps is her main characteristic. She has an inability to feel and fall in love.

This inability is highlighted when she meets an officer at a restaurant at Times Square. Though she never directly admits it, the officer shows her the time of her life, for the first time making her feel like a person of substance. However, Tralala tries to distance herself from her real feelings, pretending all she wants is from him is money. When he just gives her a love letter inviting her to see him after the war, she tears it up and throws it in the gutter.

From this point, Tralala spirals into misery, seemingly trying to recreate the connection she felt for the officer by frequenting posh restaurants and bars. Though she finds some customers, people mostly ignore her and she has to return to her friends at another bar. Unable to express her misery, she invites a group of men out to have sex with her. Before long, other men have joined in. The story ends with Tralala lying unconscious in an abandoned car.

Spook.

Spook appears in the short story, and Baby Make it Three. He wants nothing more from life than a motorbike. He is so obsessed that he wanders everywhere wearing a



motorbike helmet and spends most of his time admiring the brand new bikes in motor bike shops. Finally, through saving his every penny, he manages to afford and do up and old police bike.

Tommy.

Tommy is a decent, popular and attractive young man who ends up having to marry his pregnant girlfriend Suzy. He represents the problems caused with young people having to jump into marriages with people they may have little in common with. At the end of the book, the author suggests there will be future problems when Suzy goes home early from the wedding banquet. Though Tommy thinks about going home to look after the child, he eventually leaves with a girl called Roberta.

Tony and Al.

Tony and Al appear in the Tralala story. They use Tralala to keep watch as they steal some money from a local shop. To their surprise, they manage to get \$2000. It is only the next day they realize their mistake. They have stolen from a bookie and as the police say that is like stealing from everybody.

Tralala's officer.

Selby does not give this character a name, but does say he is an officer in the navy. He meets Tralala at a restaurant in Times Square and proceeds to show her the time of her life. In fact, he himself is so taken with Tralala he writes her a love letter with his address at the bottom. He says should he survive the war, Tralala should come and visit him. His actions suggest a kind yet naive young man.

Sal.

Sal is Vinnie's friend. Unlike Vinnie he seems more than a follower than a leader. He appears in three stories, The Queen is Dead, Coda, and the Strike.

Mary.

Mary is Harry's wife. She is patient with Harry until he starts spending all his time away from home.

Suzy.

Suzy is the girl that Tommy gets pregnant. She is described as a large girl and at the party she does nothing more than shove sandwiches in her mouth.



Abe and Nancy.

Abe is a stud obsessed with his own image, buying himself a Cadillac car and spending most of his time either doing his hair or talking about his sex life with anyone that will listen. His attitude is in detriment to his family and particular his wife Nancy. Nancy craves attention and yet spends most of her time alone in the house. At the end of Coda, she starts directing her anger towards her children.

Ada.

Ada is an unhappy Jewish woman who almost everyone avoids because she rarely changes clothes or washes. She thinks about little else other than her dead husband and her dead son Ira, dearly wishing they were still with her.

Lucy and Louis.

Lucy is a neurotic who wants better for herself and her son. The Brooklyn estate is well beneath her and she hates seeing her son playing with what sees as the common Hispanic kids. Her loneliness is exaggerated by the fact she has no one she can talk to about her problems. Her husband Louis is one of the better men in the novel, but still provides her with little to help. Louis spends most of his studying to become a repairman and the only thing he seems to want from Lucy is sex.

Mike and Irene.

Mike is an employed bum, who when he is not sleeping, is drinking with his friends. It is his wife Irene that is the breadwinner, working six days a week and still coming home to cook and look after the children. Despite that Mike relies so much on his wife, he still likes to put up a show in front of his friends about who the boss is in his home.

Regina.

Regina is the transvestite that Harry falls in love with. When Harry runs out of money, she leaves him.



Objects/Places

Greeks

This is a bar in Brooklyn frequented by prostitutes, tranvestites, sailors and young hipsters.

Willie's

This is the bar in Brooklyn where Tralala is taken outside for group sex.

Brooklyn

This is the area in New York where most of the novel takes place.

Times Square

Tralala goes to Time Square in the hope she will find rich officers.

Spook's Police Bike

Spook buys an old police bike.

Miss Tony's House

Georgina and her friends go here after they are thrown out of Sheila's house.

Shelia's House

This is the place where Georgina and her friends initially hold their party.

Benzedrine

This is the drug of choice for most of the characters. It is purchased at normal drugstores.

Murphy's Hall

This is where Tommy and Suzy hold their wedding reception.



Mary's

This is a bar in Brooklyn frequented by tranvestites and transexuals. It is the place Harry meets Regina.

The Steel Factory

This is the place Harry works and organizes the pickets during the strikes.

The Brooklyn Housing Project

This is where Lucy struggles to bring her children up in the right way, Vinnie and Mary argue incessantly and Ada thinks about her dead husband.



Themes

Repressing One's Feelings

Throughout the book, Selby suggests that if people like Vinnie are not reacting against the restrictions placed on them by society, they are letting society repress them. This is particularly evident in the character of Harry Black. Harry has conformed to society's expectations by marrying, having a child, and working a 9 to 5 job in a factory. On the outside, he is your typical blue-collar heterosexual man, yet he holds a secret. Harry is a repressed homosexual and this knowledge causes him great misery. He tries to hide it by becoming an important trade union member and for a while it works. Yet in the end, it is this position and during a lengthy strike that allows him to experience the New York gay scene. However, when he loses his power and goes to his normal routine, his misery returns twofold. It is in this mood that he sexually abuses a young boy.

Tralala is another character who represses her feelings. The author suggests her true feelings in life are to find love, yet she refuses to admit it, instead becoming a prostitute and claiming that to her sex is just sex. When she finds someone that truly cares for her, she spirals into a self-destructive binge that ends in a group of locals gang raping her.

Society Isolating People

The novel has a range of colorful characters, intent on being different and it is because of them being different that society pushes them to the margins. In this case, it is Brooklyn. An industrial hellhole where the sailors come into port, cause trouble and sleep with the local girls. The author suggests that because of this the community see the locals that live there as the dregs of society, people that society does not want to have to deal with. For example as a child, Vinnie continuously gets away with breaking the law. When he and his friends brutally beat up a sailor, the police question them, but ultimately let them go without making an arrest. It seems they can do anything as long as they stay within the boundaries of Brooklyn. When someone like Tralala does go outside of Brooklyn, she is forced to look at herself and compare herself and her life to people who are richer and happier. It results in Tralala self-destructing.

Georgie is different from the other main characters in the fact she is the only one who openly chooses to isolate herself from society. Unlike the others, she is educated; she has a family and a family who can support her. The only difference is that she is a gay transvestite. In this respect, she symbolizes someone who has the ability to highlight the problems in society and even bring the different factions together. At one point, she reads Vinnie and his gang a passage from Poe's Raven poem, revelling that these uneducated hipster are listening and enjoying the words and rhythms of the work. However, the societal gap proves too much and the end suggests Georgie is more isolated than anyone else, stuck between conventional society and the hipster scene.



Lack of Love and Affection

A major theme in the novel is the lack of love and affection all the major characters seemed to have experienced. This theme is particularly evident in Coda where none of the female characters are experiencing a healthy sex life. In particular, Nancy masturbates while her husband Abe is sleeping with another woman. Mike also goes in search of female company while his wife Irene stays at home, frustrated her husband is not giving her the attention she needs. In comparison, one could claim the men in the story have healthy sex lives, yet in reality, their actions are too mixed with guilt and pure male bravado for it to affect their lives positively. The author highlights this at the end of the novel when Mike goes back home after a frustrating evening and tries to have sex with his wife. Unfortunately, he is unable to perform.

Selby suggests that the characters are following a pattern set by their parents. Their parents experienced no love and affection so they gave their children no affection. However, in the case of characters like Georgie some seem to lack a decent male role figure in their lives and hence either react negatively to other male characters, or in the case of Georgie's feeling for Vinnie, become obsessed. Other characters such Tralala treat both men and women with utter indifference.

The story Coda highlights how the characters pass their lack of affection onto their children. Mike struggles to get out of bed to change his son's nappy, Lucy refuses to allow her children to play with the Hispanics and Nancy screams at her child when she tries to comfort her and only because she is sexually frustrated. In addition, they are all being brought up in Brooklyn, on the same apartment block and are unlikely to see anything that highlights that their lives are dysfunctional, or at least not until it is too late for them to change. Inevitably, they will grow to become people like Vinnie, Tralala, Harry Black, and Georgie, respecting only violence, yet never really being able to express why they are so angry.

Style

Point of View

The author uses the third-person perspective, but generally from the perspective of individuals such as Tralala and Harry. From their perspective, the reader can see these characters have had a hard life and though they may not be likable where their behaviour is more condemning of society than it is of them as an individual. While the others characters manipulate and take advantage of their plights, their feelings towards people become increasing numb, until they can no longer hold back their true selves. If anything this is what the point of view of the stories communicates; a fractured society that isolates individuals and never lets them deal with their problems.

The author highlights this in the final story Coda where there are multiple points of views across households on the same estate and even within the same family. For example, Mike stays at home all day while his wife works before coming home to deal with the kids and cook the family supper. From Mike's point of view, he is the man and therefore his wife should do the household chores. Even having to change his child's nappy while his wife is at work is a slight on his manhood. From Irene's point of view, she is a woman and needs attention. When she gets home from a hard day's work, she is realistic enough to know she will have to prepare something for Mike and the kids, but she does expect some affection. Instead, Mike leaves for a night out with his friend Sal. Their separate points of view have gone so far in the opposite direction, you feel never they could find any equilibrium. If anything it seems will pass their bitterness onto their children.

Setting

The book's main setting is the New York suburb of Brooklyn. Unlike the Brooklyn of today, Selby represents the area as full of poor people and outsiders who resort to violence to alleviate boredom and misery. The smaller setting within Brooklyn, highlights the constant conflict the main characters have with themselves and the people who they feel are infringing on their space. For example, the novel starts in a bar called Greeks and describes how the group of locals are angry at the records the sailors play on the jukebox. They later get rid of the anger by beating one of the sailors unconscious.

In fact, all of the violence in the novel takes place outside and in spaces the author describes in hellish like terms. There are abandoned cars, ugly housing project buildings, empty lots and large factories that tower over everything and where everybody seems to work. In these terms, the interiors of apartments, bars and clubs provide a welcome relief, yet also escape from reality. Places like Mary's is full of transvestites, pharmacy's provide the drugs people use to get high, women are easily picked up at clubs such Mel's. It is when the characters walk outside and they are faced



with true life that bad things happen. A doggie is beaten unconscious outside Greeks and Tralala is gang raped in an abandoned car.

The settings represent one of the major themes in the novel, the vicious circle of life. Each character can experience temporary a reprieve from their daily lives, but they can truly escape the deep-seated problems caused by the environment they live in.

Language and Meaning

The language of Last Exit to Brooklyn is one of the most important elements of the novel. Selby has tried to recreate the language of the streets to make his representation of people there realistic and the violence and loneliness of the characters even more harrowing. Selby achieves this not only through recreating the language of what they say, but he also manages to capture the rhythm of their language as well. In fact, he never uses he or she said but instead relies on natural speech patterns to identify who is talking. It works perfectly and rarely is the reader confused. To add even more realism he writes much of the speech in dialect. For example, a character will say ya instead of yes and tellim instead of tell him. To indicate a character is shouting Selby uses capital letters.

The author writes some of the novel in a stream of consciousness style. This works to show how the characters lives and emotions spiral out of control. This is particularly in evidence in the opening story Another Day Another Dollar when some of the sentences are almost a page long. When the locals beat up a sailor the reader hardly has time catch breath as they are inundated with one image after the other, serving to recreate just how much he is suffering and how difficult it is for characters such as Vinnie to control themselves once they get going.

Structure

The novel is split into six parts, Another Day Another Dollar, The Queen is Dead, Baby Makes Three, Tralala, The Strike and Coda. Each story begins with a quote from the bible, which reinforces to the reader that far from being about gratuitous violence, the novel has a moral center. Each part can stand on its own as a short story, yet they are also loosely connected, with a character like Vinnie appearing in three stories and the Greeks bar appearing in all but one.

Another Day Another Dollar opens the book and is one of the shorter stories. It sets the tone of the novel with one of the most violent scenes in the book and introducing one of the major themes of a fractured society. For example, the younger generation are more interested in their image than how people think or feel. This isolates much of the population and causes a huge dislike of outsiders. For example, in this chapter the locals violently beat up a sailor.

The Queen is Dead shows what problems isolation can cause on a more personal level. Georgie is a transvestite, but away from her friends, she is an outcast. They only way

she can hide her misery is by acting in a superficial manner. However, this just represses her problems and by the end of the story, she is feeling worse than ever.

As the novel continues the reader can see just what not dealing with your problems can do to a person. Tralala desperately wants affection, but cannot get it. When she finally has a chance, she becomes so confused and angry she self-destructs, resulting in her getting gang raped. Similarly, Harry Black represses homosexuality for so long, that by the end of the novel, he is trying to persuade a young child to let him touch him.

The final story is a collection of vignettes, which highlights just how fractured the author thinks America is becoming. Everybody is living in their bubble and not addressing any of their problems. In the case of someone like Ada, she refuses to move away from the past, perhaps because her present is so awful. The author writes a collection of notes written by the authorities that show they have no real understand of the people in the housing estate. The author seems to be saying that the problem lies not with the individual, but instead a society that is isolating the individual.



Quotes

"Ah Alex. Don't talk to us like that. Ya make us feel bad. Yeah man. Ya hurt our feelings" (Part One, Another Day Another Dollar, pg. 6.)

"Georgette was a hip queer. She (he) didnt try to disguise or conceal it with marriage and mans talk" (Part Two, The Queen is Dead, pg. 15.)

"The door closed. A hundred times. Closed. Even as it swung open she heard it bang shut. Closed. Closed" (Part Two, The Queen is Dead, pg. 27.)

"They made a small pot of bouillon and danced around it dropping tablets in and chanting bennie in the bouillon, bennie in the bouillon, whirling away the fear and boredom, giggling, popping bennie, drinking gin, toasting Georgette: Long Live THE QUEEN" (Part Two, The Queen is Dead, pg. 34.)

"The guys were staring and Vinnie seemed so close she could feel the sweat on his face and even Lee was listening and watching her read and they all knew she was there; they all knew she was THE QUEEN" (Part Two, The Queen is Dead, pg. 55.)

"Christ! I gotta get a bike. Man, you don't know what it is ta want a bike" (Part Three, And Baby Makes Three, pg. 75.)

"They put out their cigarettes and for the rest of the night she didnt wonder how much money he had" (Part Four, Tralala, pg. 92.)

"Dear Tral: There are many things I would like to say and should have said, but - A letter. A goddamn LETTER. She ripped the envelope apart and turned the letter over a few times. Not a cent" (Part Four, Tralala, pg. 94.)

"When Harry shook her hand from his neck she felt disappointed for a second, but it passed. She understood. Harry was funny sometimes. Probably worrying about the job, what with the chance of there being a strike and everything. Thats probably what it was" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 108.)

"He quickly rolled off his wife and lay on his side, his back towards her, and gripped the pillow with his hand, almost tearing it, his face buried in it, almost crying; his stomach crawling with nausea; his disgust seeming to wrap around him as a snake slowly, methodically and painfully squeezing the life from him, but each time it reached the point where just the slightest more pressure would bring an end to everything" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 111.)

"Harry worked for 30 minutes or so each morning then turned of fhis lathe and made the rounds of the factory reminding those who were behind in their dues that they had to pay by a certain date; asking others why they hadn't been to the last union meeting; or simply telling others not to work so fast, it aint gonna get ya nothin" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 116.)



"Ginger leaned her face closer to Harrys, tenderly caressing his neck and she watched Harrys lips quiver, felt the trembling in his legs and saw his eyes unfocusing and rolling back. Ginger roared hysterically inside herself and leaned closer to Harry, smiling, until she could feel his slimy breath on her cheek, then jumped up and tapped him playfully on the nose" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 168.)

"The union and the management met regularly to arbitrate their dispute. Each side was more arrogant and noisy than usual... but the result of the meeting was the same as all the previous ones" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 172.)

"Actually they could tell the membership anything and it wouldnt be noticed if they told them just before that the company gave in and signed the new contract. Nobody would miss Harry" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 194.)

"The men roared, slapped each other and laughed as they lined up for their \$10 bag of groceries. There would be no trouble from them for a few weeks" (Part Five, The strike, pg. 199.)

"IF IT WASNT FOR YOU ITD BE DIFFERENT. ITS ALL YAFULT" (Part Five, The Strike, pg. 210.)



Topics for Discussion

What is the significance of the candle in the Queen is Dead story? How does the mood of the scene change when the characters light the candle?

Examine the language in the novel. How does Selby try to recreate the language of the Brooklyn streets? What difference does it make to the story that he uses the language and rhythms of local dialect?

How does lack of love effect Tralala's life? How does she react when people try to get close to her and why does she react in that way?

Why do so many characters find themselves in loveless marriages? How does these relationship affect their lives? How will their relationship affect their children's lives?

What was it like to live in a Brooklyn housing project in the 1950s? Why do you think the characters find themselves in such a depressing situation? How do the characters alleviate the boredom of living on the housing estate?

Discuss the treatment of women in the novel. How do the men treat women in the novel and what does it say about fifties society? How do the women react to how men treat them? Where do the students think Selby sympathies lie and how does he express his view point?

What meaning does it give the novel that Selby starts each chapter with a passage from the Bible? How does each Bible passage relate to each chapter?