



INTERPRETATION OF GEORGE SAUNDERS' SHORT STORIES

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Annotation:

The importance of understanding George Saunders' short stories is essential way of revealing the political system of America nowadays. If people are interested in modern reflection of American society they should dig in the Saunders' world with paying attention to the details that may be interpreted differently.

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Interpretation of the someone's work is the necessary part for understanding the plot for the reader. By the way, a reader can interpret each literary text according to his knowledge and experience. For one person it can be visible that the "green light" (Fransis Fitzgerald "The Great Gatsby") is the symbol of hope and simultaneously it is a motif in the text.

An American writer George Saunders wrote his story "Al Roosten"¹ in 2009. It means that it is post-modernistic short story with the use of minimalism inside it. It is known for its exploration of the human experience, moral complexity, and societal issues. Saunders' work often combines dark humor with deep empathy, and "Al Roosten" is no exception. The story focuses on the eponymous character, Al Roosten, a small-town antique store owner who participates in a local charity auction. Through Roosten's internal monologue and the events that unfold, Saunders delves into themes of envy, self-deception, and the human condition's inherent struggle for dignity and recognition. The protagonist, Al Roosten, is a complex character portrayed with Saunders' characteristic depth and nuance. Roosten owns a failing antique store and struggles with feelings of inferiority and jealousy,

¹ George Saunders. Tenth of December: A Collection of Short Stories- The USA: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014- p.91-108



especially towards a more successful fellow businessman, Larry Donfrey. Throughout the story, Roosten's internal monologue reveals his insecurities, self-deception, and the disparity between his self-perception and how others see him. This internal conflict drives the narrative and serves as a vehicle for Saunders to explore themes of self-worth, delusion, and the human desire for validation. From the beginning of the story, it is visible how the main character is not confident: *"Al Roosten stood waiting behind the paper screen. Was he nervous? Well, he was a little nervous. Although probably a lot less nervous than most people would be. Most people would probably be pissing themselves by now."* The monologue gives the evidence of how this personage can behave. He even compared himself with the handsome man: *"Larry Donfrey of Larry Donfrey Realty stood nearby in a swimsuit. Donfrey was a good guy. Good but flawed. Not that bright. Always tan. Was Donfrey attractive? Cute? Would the bidders consider Donfrey cuter than him, Al Roosten?"*. It means that there is a doubt about Al's appearance. Saunders underlined several themes in this story:

- *Envy and Comparison*- A central theme of "Al Roosten" is the toxic nature of envy and the constant comparison with others. Roosten's obsession with Larry Donfrey, a more successful business owner, serves as a catalyst for his downward spiral, highlighting how envy can distort self-perception and hinder personal growth;
- *Delusion and Reality*- The story explores the fine line between self-delusion and reality. Roosten's inability to see himself as he truly is serves as a barrier to his happiness and success, a theme that Saunders explores with both humor and sadness;
- *Search for Dignity*- Roosten's participation in the charity auction and his subsequent actions can be seen as a misguided attempt to assert his dignity and worth in the eyes of others. This search for recognition and respect is a poignant commentary on the universal desire for validation.

The story also touches upon the American Dream, but in a skewed, almost sarcastic manner. Roosten owns a failing antique store and envies Larry Donfrey, a more successful business owner. This envy is Saunders' way of exploring the darker sides of the American Dream — the jealousy, competitiveness, and the often-unattainable nature of such aspirations in modern society. *"Roosten was deaf to the charity in this. What a super level of whoops and cheers. He should do a flex. He would. He*



did. This caused an increase in the level of whoops and cheers, which, to his ear, were now at least equal in volume to Donfrey's whoops/cheers. Plus, Donfrey had been basically naked. Which meant that technically he'd beaten Donfrey, since Donfrey had needed to get naked just to manage a tie with him, Al Roosten."

The story likely delves into Roosten's internal monologue, using a poetic approach to explore his self-deceptions, insecurities, and rationalizations. This introspective narrative style can give readers a deep insight into Roosten's character. *"What was Donfrey saying? That he'd done badly? Had embarrassed himself? In front of the whole town? No way. He'd kicked butt. Was Donfrey on some other planet? On drugs? On drugs at an antidrug event? Had Donfrey just called him Ed?"* There are a lot of examples of rhetorical questions in the text.

There is the use of irony: *"The hatred of Larry Donfrey"*. Although Al hates Larry, and has done him wrong, he imagines about a friendship between them. Moreover, the author added simile: *"an overgroomed scarecrow"* - Donfrey's wife, at one time she was beautiful, but has passed and she is awful now.

Saunders employs a stream of consciousness style to delve into Roosten's thoughts and emotions. This narrative technique is evident in the protagonist's continuous, often disjointed inner monologue, which reveals his insecurities, prejudices, and delusions. Saunders frequently juxtaposes Roosten's grandiose self-image with his actual, rather pathetic reality. This contrast is especially evident in the runway scene, where Roosten imagines triumph but faces a humiliating reality. Saunders uses vivid imagery to enhance the narrative, such as the detailed description of the auction, the runway walks, and the contrasting lifestyles of Roosten and Donfrey *"Folks, we've arrived at our most important aspect," she said softly. "Which is our auction. Which is to be silent. Without you folks, you know what? LaffKidsOffCrack is just some guys with strong antidrug feelings, wearing weird clothes in their own homes. Write down your bid, someone will come around. Later, if you are the one who won, you'll be taken to lunch by your Celebrity who you bid for."*

Through "Al Roosten", Saunders critiques societal obsession with status, the superficiality of social judgments, and the internal conflicts that arise from discrepancies between one's self-image and public persona. He invites readers to



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reflect on the nature of self-worth, the impact of societal pressures, and the importance of empathy and self-acceptance.

Saunders' message appears to be a call for greater self-awareness and compassion, both for oneself and for others. He suggests that true contentment and self-worth come not from external validation but from an honest acceptance of oneself, flaws and all. In "Al Roosten", Saunders masterfully blends humor with poignant insights into the human condition, offering a story that is both entertaining and thought-provoking, urging readers to consider the deeper aspects of their own lives and the societal constructs that shape them.

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