



Love, Crimes and Death in Peter Swanson's *All the Beautiful Lies*

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Abstract

The exploration of *All the Beautiful Lies* enables us to discover that in this narrative, Peter Swanson portrays love mainly through Edith's relationship with Jake whose sexual urge derives from the initiation he receives in his teenage from an old woman called Emma Codd or Mrs. Codd. After killing his best friend Bill Ackerson in order to win the heart of the latter's widow, he becomes upset minded and starts killing all those who, he thinks, have suspicions on him for fear of being jailed by the police whose investigations on all the mourning events in the author's text remain a failure. It is only after confessing his crimes to Alice that his fellows are conscious of his culpability about the death of characters like Edith and Bill Ackerson, to quote only two. This is to say that if some characters are killed by Jake because of his jealousy, others, however, are victims of his fear to be jailed by the police. Such an account urges us to classify the author into the category of committed novelists, for he moralizes the reader by denouncing inhuman behaviors through fictitious characters.

Keywords: Characters, Love, Crimes, Death, Confession

Introduction

This article examines characters' love affairs, crimes and death in Peter Swanson's *All the Beautiful Lies*. The title of this novel indicates that the United States which is viewed as a democratic and peaceful nation has unfortunately become a land of hatred, violence and murders due to its inhabitants' wrongful attitude towards others. This means that peace it often promotes appears as a mere illusion, for this great nation is seen as a great purveyor of criminality. Published in 2018, *All the Beautiful Lies* tells the story of Harry Ackerson, a young male character who, on the eve of his college graduation, is called home by his stepmother Alice because of the unexpected death of Bill Ackerson, his biological father killed by Jake another male character in the author's narrative. Convinced that Harry has seen him watching Caitlin from the motel's windows, Jake confesses his crimes to Alice who ends up killing him for being the murderer of her mother and husband.

Our choice of *All the Beautiful Lies* for this exploration is mainly linked to Peter Swanson's denunciation of characters' love relationships which bring about their murders in the white man's world. For, in denouncing sexual betrayals and murders, he stands up as a committed writer who encourages true love, unity and peace among his peers. Joe Janel who first scrutinized it, argues that "*All the*

Beautiful Lies is a memorizing read narrated by Harry and Alice who has become motherless and spouseless because of Jake's criminality" ^[1]. For this reviewer, the form of violence that the reader finds in this narrative is the consequence of Jake's wrongful view over others. The crimes denounced by the author throughout his literary text urge us to concentrate on the answer to the following question: To what extent is *All the Beautiful Lies* the portrayal of characters' love affairs, crimes and death? We hypothesize that Peter Swanson's mention of Edith and Mrs. Codd's love adventures with Jake and the latter's criminal acts against his fellows, shows the romantic and tragic side of this novel.

Being conscious of the fact that the novel studied is linked not only to the realities of people in their respective societies and to the characters' wounds from their partners' betrayals, but also to other authors' writings, we find it necessary to resort to the sociological, the psychological and the textual approaches to conduct the above hypothesis. The sociological approach enables us to show how the author recreates the American society through his literary text, for according to Krutch, "*art is not created in a vacuum, it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community*" (Krutch, quoted by Wilbur Scott: 1962, 123) ^[12]. This means that the

sociological theory consists in understanding the characters' social milieu. Toni Morrison, for instance, argues that "if anything I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write is not about the village or the community or about you (the African Americans), then it is not about anything" (Morrison: 1984, 339) ^[11]. For Toni Morrison, what the reader finds in a novel is simply the depiction of a given society with its people. In other words, what is described in a given novel is naturally linked to the experience of people in the society in which they live, as stated by Foster in these terms:

In the novel, we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life. In this direction, fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence, and even if the novelist has not got it correctly, well he has tried" (Foster: 1962, 70) ^[6].

The psychological approach which is the application of Freudian theories to all the literary process from the mind of the writer and the motives of the characters he creates to the reactions of the reader, helps us illustrate not only the psychological pain characters feel when they are betrayed by their beloved partners, but also analyze the forms of relationships they have among them in the author's novel. For example, their insults, humiliations, jealousy and murders are illustrations of conflicts that may be analyzed through the use of this literary theory. For, according to Wilbur Scott, "psychology can be used to explain fictitious characters" (Scott: 1962, 72) ^[12].

The textual approach which refers to "the fact that all texts are made out of other texts" (Abbott: 2003, 94) ^[1], enables us to show the link that exists between *All the Beautiful Lies* and the other writers' literary texts. For, "there is intertextuality by the effective presence of a text in another" (Genette: 1982, 8) ^[7]. This means that the textual approach refers to the fact that there is the presence of other texts in a given work of literature, as Marc Eilgeldinger argues: "It is an exchange, a dialogue existing between two or several texts" (Eilgeldinger: 1987, 9) ^[4]. In almost the same way, Laurent Jenny refers to the term as "a work of transformation and assimilation of different texts" (Jenny: 1976, 26) ^[8]. These definitions throw light on the link which may exist between two or several texts. Our task all along this exploration is thus to evidence the link existing between Peter Swanson's *All the Beautiful Lies* and other writers' works.

Two main points are examined in this article. The first is characters' love affairs which give to the author's text the form of a nightmarish-romantic narrative because of their betrayals towards one another. The second refers to their committed crimes which result in the death of their peers.

1. Characters' love affairs

In *All the Beautiful Lies*, Peter Swanson accounts for the theme of love mainly through Edith and Mrs. Codd's relationship with Jake. He refers to the latter's source of sexual urge which, according to the narrator, derives from the initiation he received in his teenage from Mrs. Codd, an

old female character who is about fifty. The novel reads that Jake is from a very poor family. At school for example, his classmates often laugh at him because his father is unable to afford a television to make it possible for him to be up to date about daily information. This mockery pushes him to go to Mrs. Codd's domicile to watch television. Despite his father's opposition to this relationship which, he thinks, is abominable, because Mrs. Codd has the reputation of corrupting and seducing young boys, Jake ends up becoming her beloved partner regardless of his age: "Codd would want to have sex with him" (ABL, p. 240). Knowing nothing about sex, Jake considers a sexual act as a game which is often played by married individuals: "Jake new that married couple did it, and he heard stories about spin-the bottle game" (ABL, p. 240). The following passage, for example, gives details about the way Jake is taught how to start a sexual act with a partner by Mrs. Codd: "She (Emma Codd) as fully straddling him now, her stiff, satiny skirt bunched up around her waist, and Jake, heart tripping in his chest, promised her he would never tell another living soul" (ABL, pp. 242-43). What is worth mentioning is that, before teaching Jake, how to start a sexual act with her, Mrs. Codd has first prohibited him to tell anyone about their love relationship. According to her, it is one of the rules in such a "game":

Leave it up to me, Jake, she said. I teach you everything you need to know to be a man. Would you like that?

He nodded.

Okay. There's only one rule, though, and it's a big rule. You can't tell anyone about us. Anyone at all. That includes your friends at school, even if they're bragging about girls. It's not that I'm ashamed, or that you should be ashamed, it's just that some people would think it's wrong. Do you promise Jake? (ABL, p. 242).

Mrs. Codd is certainly conscious that the kind of love relationship she has with Jake is prohibited by the law. That is why she warns him not to say anything to their fellows. What the novelist shows, in fact, through Jake, the young boy and Mrs. Codd, the rich-old woman is recurrent in the United States. For, Jean Lawrence also evidences it when he writes: "Almost one third of women between ages 40 and 69 are dating younger men, defined as 10 or more years younger" ^[2]. This means that in *All the Beautiful Lies*, Jake is the representative of all those young American boys who are seduced by old American women. His love affair with Mrs. Codd is based on personal interests. For, while the latter is motivated by the desire to satisfy her libido, he is, however, attracted by her money. Unfortunately, after going to the University of Massachusetts for studies, Jake is shocked to learn about Mrs. Codd's death:

She died months ago. She had a cancer (...). Jake walked down to the shingled cottage. It hadn't snowed yet and there were damp, darkened leaves piled all across the yard. The windows were unlit. The cottage had probably been sold to people who wanted to use it only as a summer house (ABL, pp. 246-247).

As it can be seen, the moment of break-communication is therefore what urges Jake to come back to Menasset where

he hopes to meet his beloved-old sweetheart for financial interests. But after being aware of her death, he no longer comes back to this locality to visit his parents: "*The next day Jake returned to Amherst, knowing that he would never go back to Menasset. These parents weren't helping out with any of his college expenses, so there was no reason to ever see them again*" (ABL, p. 247). Jake's decision to no longer come back home after the death of a woman who used to satisfy his financial needs, may leave the reader with the impression that his friendship with people is mainly based on financial interests. For, one sees how he is ready to abandon his parents forever for the simple reason that they are poor.

The narrator relates that shortly after he leaves his hometown for Amherst where he is supposed to complete his studies, Jake who no longer thinks about his parents, moves to Maine to meet Edith, another female character with whom he gets married without questioning about her behaviors. Such a precipitation in love affairs recalls that of Bascombe and X in Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter* (1999) wherein both characters finish up falling in love with each other from the very first sight without taking into account what Jo-Ellan Dimitruis and Marck Mazzarella ask lovers to do before getting engaged: "*Observing people properly takes time. Most people simply don't take enough time to gather information and reflect upon it. Instead, they frequently make critical decisions about people in a hurry, as if life was a game show in which quick answers scored more point*" (Dimitruis and Mazzarella: 1998, 10) ^[3]. It is indeed because of this precipitation that their love affair ends up meeting an illusion, for X is later shocked to find out that her beloved partner is nothing else but a true womanizer: "*I am no longer married to X, for instance. The child we had when everything was starting has died*" (Ford: 1999, 3).

This precipitation which is far from being from Swanson and Ford's invention is also denounced by Bernhard Schlink's in *Flights of Love* wherein the reader sees how in "Sugar Peas", Thomas shows his deep love for Veronika without taking time to know her quite well: "*I have met a woman. I mean, I've fallen in love with a woman*" (Schlink: 2001, 151) ^[2]. It is indeed with regard to this kind of precipitation that in *All the Beautiful Lies*, Jake also falls in love with Edith, ignoring that she is a drunkard woman. This new love affair, far from being viewed as a trustful and fruitful one, is also called into question by some characters because of this female character's attitude. For, an interrogation like "*did Jake know what his new wife was really like*" (ABL, p. 36) may lead the reader to doubt about her capacity to satisfy her husband's needs within their home. What is worth knowing is that Edith is an intolerable woman who, instead of taking care of her husband and daughter, spends time in smoking and drinking too much alcohol, as evidenced in this passage:

One night, after Alice had finished her homework, she came out to the living room. Jake was watching hockey, and Edith was face down on the couch, a little pool of drool next to her mouth. "Gross", Alice said before she could stop herself. Jake laughed. "Your mother likes to drink", he said, as though that particular thought had just occurred to him.

Does it bother you?

"Not too much. People are who they are, don't you think?"

"I guess so" (ABL, pp.37-38).

The novel reveals that by dint of being in contact with Jake, Alice becomes more attracted by him. This attraction which is the consequence of her mother's incapacity to take care of her family, ends up leading her to start getting out with her stepfather while Edith is asleep: "What she really preferred was the company of Jake Richter, her stepfather. Edith's afternoon drinking had gotten worse, and, more often than not, she'd either forget to prepare dinner for her husband, or she was already passed out by the time she'd gotten home" (ABL, p. 43). The drawbacks of alcoholism that the author demonstrates here is far from being a mere fiction, but a social fact also observed in some actual couples. In the United States, for example, when people read about alcoholism destroying marriages, they often think of drunk men beating their wives and harassing their children. But there is a truth that seldom comes out, as illustrated below:

Women too fall for alcohol and they can be worse than men. In my case, my life seems to be a shattering everyday. Love, companionship and togetherness seem like hollow concepts of matrimony. The ordeal that has wrecked my life began some six years ago when my wife caught a fancy for alcohol. Initially, we would sit and enjoy our drinks and go off to sleep sloshed. But I never knew this drinking once in a while would become an everyday affair of her ^[3].

One understands that what Swanson develops in his work of fiction has a link with the real-life experience of some people in their respective societies. His mention of Edith's alcoholism is nothing else but a way for him to advise all married women not to get involved in alcoholism for fear of destroying their marriages. For, he means that the more they consider alcohol as a hobby, the less they take care of their homes appropriately. This marital irresponsibility is often viewed as one of the main causes of their husbands' crimes against them, as demonstrated in the section hereafter.

2. Characters' crimes and death

In *All the Beautiful Lies*, Jake who is portrayed as Edith's beloved partner is also known as a professional killer. His love relationship with Edith is said to be hypocritical, because he finally plans to kill her in order to remain with Alice, his wife's daughter:

As Edith became more and more addled from alcohol, and from the pills that Jake persuaded her, to take, Alice and he began to form a silent partnership, a family unit stronger than anything he'd felt before. It wasn't just lusting any more, it was love. And Jake now knew that his original plan, to seduce Alice while still married to Edith, was not enough. He wanted more than a cheap affair with his wife's daughter. He wanted to be together with her, in their own place, without Edith (ABL, p. 267).

The sentence "Edith became more and more addled from

alcohol" shows this female character's state of mind which, for her husband, becomes useless to him, and that the best thing to do is to get rid of her and remain with Alice. Being aware of Alice's lack of true love for Edith, he plans to kill the latter so as to enjoy the full fruition of love with her daughter: "Jake also knew that Alice did not love her own mother (...). Jake decided that Edith, half dead already, needed to die, and he wasn't willing to wait for nature to take its own course" (id.). What is special to know here is that Edith is herself the cause of what happens to her. Her alcohol addiction is the source of Jake's disinterest towards her. For, it is because of alcohol drink that she is unable to take care of her husband and watch over her daughter's behavior. Her uselessness before her spouse can be felt in his words "Edith, half dead already, needed to die". It is indeed because of this uselessness that during Alice's graduation dinner party, Jake's ambition to kill her finally comes true:

He killed his wife the night of Alice's graduation dinner party. Alice brought a friend, that leggy girl who was bound to end up as some rich man's mistress in some city far away from Maine (...). After the girls left, Jake made Edith a brandy and ginger ale heavily laced with crushed valium (...). When he was done with dishes, he came into the living room to find her sprawled on the couch, head tilted back passed out (ABL, pp. 267-268).

In portraying this criminal act, the author describes the United States not as a country where individuals' rights are respected, but as a country where crimes become a mode of life. This means that peace, justice and freedom that it often promotes, appear as mere slogans. For, one sees how Alice's mother is killed by a man that she used to consider as a true companion. What the reader needs to bear in mind is that except Jake himself, no one else knows the culprit of this mourning event. For, according to Alice, her mother's death is due to an overdose of alcohol drink:

They hadn't talked about Edith's death since the night it had happened. As soon as Alice, having watched her mother chucked to death, had turned to find Jake watching her, she'd immediately said " We need to call an ambulance", and Jake had gone to the wall phone and dialed 911 (ABL, p. 86).

The structure of *All the Beautiful Lies* is not linear, but episodic in a certain way. For, there are many flashbacks which render its understanding a bit difficult. Edith's death here is to some extent described as the consequence of her own wrongful behaviors as a married woman. Her alcoholism within her marital home is to be blamed, because she has never been able to take care of her home appropriately. Jake has certainly felt abandoned by his own wife who has been alcohol addicted. But what is worth mentioning is that although known as a drunkard woman, Edith's death is due to a crime planned by her husband whose desire is to have Alice for wife. The author's reference to her alcoholism is a way to let the reader discover its drawbacks in life, for one sees how it is taken as an alibi to hidden the culprit of such a criminal act. In writing such circumstances of Edith's death, the author also

calls into question some women's behaviors and advises them to change them once married.

The fact of killing his own spouse in order to have her daughter for a substitute wife is viewed not only as a cruel act condemned in most of the world societies, but also as a sexual betrayal against such a deceased partner who should normally deserve faithfulness from her husband. This sexual betrayal, far from being from the author's personal imagination, recalls that of a character named Bascombe who in the Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*, loses her sweetheart after being caught with several letters of love sent secretly to his girlfriends. This novel reveals that after sharing life together as a couple for so many years, X is no longer ready to support Bascombe's sexual behaviors. She finds it better to go abroad in order to restart her life as a single woman rather than being betrayed most of the time by a man who is never sexually satisfied. The remembrance of all acts of infidelity endured by her within her marital home makes her reject all his pleadings for reconciliation:

"X found the letters in a drawer of my office desk while looking for a sock full of silver dollars my mother had left me, and sat on the floor and read them, then handed them to me when I came in with a list of missing cameras, radios and fishing equipment. She asked if I had anything to say, and when I didn't, she went into the bedroom and began tearing apart her hope chest with a claw hammer and a crowbar. She tore it to bits, then took it to the fireplace and burned it while I stood outside in the yard mooning" (Ford: 1999, 15).

Through this passage, one sees how Bascombe is caught after betraying her wife by sending several letters of love to his girlfriends. Ford's mention of these letters is a way not only to inform the reader about one of the main causes of his characters' divorce, but more to condemn such an attitude of married men in love affairs. He certainly means that a married man should not have any love contact with another partner for fear to do harm to his spouse. When the narrator, for example, states that "she went into the bedroom and began tearing apart her hope chest with a claw hammer and a crowbar", he shows how shocked and difficult it is not only for X, but also for any woman on earth to support such a betrayal from her husband. The fact of not saying anything to his wife who needs some explanations attests of Bascombe's culpability. This culpability urges X to take a decision to put an end to their love affair forever. What the reader may find more shocking is that while in *The Sportswriter*, the protagonist is described as a simple womanizer who betrays his wife sexually without shortening her life, in *All the Beautiful Lies*, however, the author shows how Jake goes beyond such an inhuman attitude by killing his own wife mercilessly so as to have her daughter for a beloved partner. This demonstration may lead the reader to classify Ford and Swanson into the category of committed novelists, for one sees how they moralize men by denouncing their wrongs over women through fictitious characters.

In *All the Beautiful Lies*, the author introduces the reader to a great number of crimes committed by several characters. This means that apart from Alice's mother whose death is considered by some of her peers as the result of an overdose

of alcohol drink, there are other characters murdered in almost the same circumstances. One of these characters is Bill Ackerson whose death has shocked the majority of his counterparts. The narrator relates that Harry is informed of his father's death by his stepmother Alice who calls him early in the morning: "*Alice, his father's second wife called Harry early the previous morning to tell him that his father, Bill, was dead*" (ABL, p. 3). What is true is that Harry used to rely on Bill Ackerson for his success in life. His death is a great shock for him, because he no longer has a person capable of meeting his demands: "*How did he die? Harry asked. They won't rule anything out, but they seemed to think he slipped and fell and hit his head (...). The only person left in his life whom he truly loved was gone*" (ABL, pp. 5-6).

One understands that the first chapter of *All the Beautiful Lies* is full of Harry's memory of his father. He is not only shocked, but tormented by the fact that apart from Alice who tries to take care of him, his father has left him alone in the world where everything requires financial means. This young female character's participation in Harry's life is a way for her to make him forget about his deceased father. But being unconvinced of the circumstances of the latter's death, he asks the police to do an autopsy: "*Have the police told you anything more? They haven't, but they'll be doing a full autopsy. It seems strange that he would fall. Something else might have happened. He could have had a heart attack. Do you think so? It makes more sense to me than him suddenly slipping off the path*" (ABL, p. 25). The narrator relates that after the police's autopsy, Harry reaches the place where Bill Ackerson has fallen down and concludes that "*it wasn't a crime scene. It had been an accident. He took a break and sat on one of the wooden*" (ABL, p. 31). Perhaps, Harry comes to this conclusion to stop all suspicions which run over his stepmother about this tragic event: "*Maybe Harry was biased, but he would have said no if his mother had never died. But maybe his relationship with Alice had soured, or maybe Grace had thrown herself at his father, and he's simply been unable to resist. And if he had had an affair, what if Alice had found out about it?*" (ABL, p. 166).

Despite this conclusion, Harry's mind is still crammed with suspicions deriving from Alice's jealousy which, he thinks, may have led her to commit a crime against her own husband. On his own investigations, Harry enters his dead father's bookshop office and discovers books which attract his attention. After reading the first book entitled *After the Funeral* and the second *Funerals are Fatal*, he finally understands that his father has been a voracious reader of crime novels: "*Crime had been his father's favorite genre, both to read and collect*" (ABL, p. 116). It is worth recalling that when Harry engages himself in an investigation on his dead father's murderer, Jake who is, in fact, the perpetrator of all crimes in the author's novel is still unidentified as he changes his name into John Richard. While Harry is suspecting her stepmother of being the murderer of his father, Alice, too, has suspicions on Lou Callahan whose wife Annie Callahan has been hired by Bill Ackerson in his bookshops. After the death of the latter, Alice is told by John that the man who has killed her husband could probably be Lou Callahan, because he has been suspecting his wife to share intimate secrets with her Boss. It is exactly

from these trustless suspicions that derives the title *All the Beautiful Lies*.

As it can be seen, the publication of this novel has brought light on the notion of peace wrongly attributed to the United States. For, the perpetration of repeated crimes and the right to buy and carry a gun for one's protection is a clear indication that America is not a peaceful nation, but a jungle where citizens have to protect themselves by any means necessary in order to live long in it. Caitlin's mother who also looks at America as a dangerous nation, warns her daughter not to "*go out alone*" (ABL, p. 232) for fear of being killed by gangsters. The reading of Swanson's *All the Beautiful Lies* reveals in vivid details that Jake lives with the fear to be jailed or killed for being the murderer of his wife and best friend. It is indeed because of this fear that he ends up killing Caitlin who also had suspicions on him concerning the death of Bill Ackerson. This male character's crimes as described in the author's narrative recall those of a character named Schrade who is presented as the embodiment of cruel acts in David Lindsey's *The Color of Night* (1999): "*He (Schrade) murders his own sister Romy, pretending that she has stolen his money. Actually, the money he claims to be stolen by Romy is not his, for the latter argues that he robs it from his professional services*" (Matondo, N'zambi-Mikoulou et al. 2023, 528) [10].

The narrator argues that the crimes committed by characters in Kennewick village have urged the police to hold inquiries. These inquiries open with the search of Bill Ackerson's murderer. In fact, when the police reach Bill Ackerson's home, the first person they ask after is Alice in order to question her about the circumstances of her husband's death. Unfortunately, Alice is away, and the police just resolve to question Harry, as the detective introduces himself in these terms: "*I'm Travis Dixon with the Kennewick police Department, he said. I'm looking for Alice Ackerson. She is not in. Can I help you? " Uh- huh. Do you mind if I come in and ask you some questions? It pertains to your father's death*" (ABL, p. 78). One understands that it is because of some suspicions running over Alice that the police have decided to question her. They certainly think that being the victim's wife, she is the right person capable of telling them the truth linked to this mourning event. Then, after entering the house, Harry is informed that "*the police are presently treating what happened to his father as a suspicious death*" (ABL, p. 78). Knowing that Alice has been his wife, Harry, the police, and other characters consider her as the only suspected person on this murder, as confessed by a female character named Grace who has also been in love with him: "*I seduced your father. He was a married man. It's possible that I'm the reason he's dead*", (ABL, p. 200). For Grace, it is because of jealousy that Alice has killed her husband.

Despite the police's failed investigations, the burden of Jake's crimes is therefore what urges him to beg Alice for protection: "*Yes, you do. I'm old and I don't want to go prison. All you need to tell the mis that I invited you here, and when I attacked you, you defended yourself. You can tell them I'd stopped being able to sleep, and that I did all for you. Or just tell them you have no idea what went wrong with me*" (ABL, pp. 326-327). As it can be noticed, what Jake wants Alice to do is to save his life by lying to the

police so that they may find no reason to take him to jail. Unfortunately, Alice who considers him as a devil because of his abominable acts, finds it better to reject his pleadings and decides to kill him mercilessly: “*And suddenly she did want to kill Jake, not as a favor to him, but because she was angry*” (ABL, p. 328). This murder viewed as a revenge for the death of Bill Ackerson, intertwines with that of Schrade in *The Color of Nights*. In fact, after his wife’s assassination by this male character, Strand becomes psychologically heart wounded and decides to shoot him dead with the pistol given to him by Hodge, one of his best friends:

He approached Schrade coming out of the restaurant, jammed the pistol into his side, and fired, catching the slumping figure. He approached Schrade in the lobby of Claridge’s, jammed the pistol into his side, and fired, catching the slumping figure. He approached Schrade on the street, jammed the pistol into his side, and fired, catching the slumping figure (Lindsey: 1999, 410)^[9].

Through this passage, one understands that the United States is marked by violence originated from unfair reasons, for one sees how Strand, an American male character tries to shoot his own brother-in-law to avenge his deceased wife. The first killing attempt, as it can be seen, is a process which begins in “the restaurant”, “the lobby” and “the street” where he has attempted to persecute Schrade. Unfortunately, this attempt is a failure because of the latter’s carelessness which urges him to engage professional killers in his assassination: “*He (Strand) had known two professional hit men during his years in the intelligence business (...). The first had been trained to kill when he had served in Vietnam, and when he’d finished his second tour in Southeast Asia, his superior officer had recommended his services to the Metsada*” (Lindsey, *ibid.*, 423). One understands that some of the United States’ soldiers have been trained not only to defend their country in case of war, but also to encourage their counterparts’ cruel acts. For, Lindsey evidences it through Strand who, being unable to shoot Schrade dead, is helped by American professional killers. This act, although viewed as a revenge for his wife’s murder, should be condemned, because revenge does not belong to men but to God, the Almighty.

In the following passage, for example, one sees how the narrator in *All the Beautiful Lies* informs the reader about the circumstances of Jake’s assassination in these terms: “*She pushed the knife into his chest, where she thought his heart was, but the knife only went about an inch in, and Jake staggered backward a step (...). When she pulled the knife out, blood began to soak his shirt (...). Alice watched Jake, just to make sure he’d stopped breathing*” (ABL, pp. 329-330). Swanson’s mention of this tragic event is a way to tell the reader that justice is made on all crimes committed on earth. He certainly means that if men may escape from human justice, they end up facing that of God whose anger against Jake’s crimes has brought about the latter’s murder. It is only after this murder that some characters start talking about Jake’s behaviors in society: “*Jake Richter had lived for a number of years in the Fort Lauderdale area in Florida, where he’d been fired from a job at a beach resort because of inappropriate behavior. A picture emerged of a lifelong sexual predator*” (ABL, p. 339). The expression

“inappropriate behavior” attests of the negative side of this male character who used to appear as a kind and trustful person. This means that his smile, kindness and open heart were nothing else but ingredients which helped him mask his true nature.

Swanson’s efforts to account for the themes of characters’ crimes and death are also evident when he tells of Alice who is also suspected to have something to do with the death of Gina, another female character in *All the Beautiful Lies*: “*Alice had murdered her daughter, an erroneous claim she has apparently been making for years*” (*id.*). What makes Gina’s mother put the blame on Alice is the fact that before her daughter’s disappearance, she told her that she was going to Alice’s home. The narrator argues that when Alice abruptly meets Gina’s parents, she falls down, hitting her head on the ground, and losing her memory. Then, when she wakes up, she asks where they were, and Mrs. Bergeron says: “*This is right around where Gina drowned, more or less, Mrs. Bergeron said. I thought you’d remember it. I don’t, Alice said*” (ABL, p. 360). Mrs. Bergeron has an arm and handcuffs around her wrist and points the arm to Alice telling her that she could not hesitate to kill her, because she has “*already done it*” (ABL, p. 362). This means that Mrs. Bergeron, too, has already killed someone in her life. One may argue that her current experience here derives from what he did to his fellows in the past. Alice who cannot accept to die alone for a crime she has not really committed, jumps over her and both drown themselves in the sea:

Together, they went under the surface, holding on to each other, almost hugging, as they sank, but it was also unfair. She had never hurt anyone in her life. Her mother’s face flashed through her mind, not as she was toward. The end, but the way she once looked, and she scratchy sand and a swarm of scary gulls. Alice held on the air in the lungs as long as she could, the black water roaring in her ears. And when she could hold out non longer, she opened her mouth and tried to breath. It was seawater, cold and final, that filled her lungs (ABL, p. 364).

One sees here how Alice loses her life because of a crime she has not really committed. Her death evidenced through the sentence “hat filled her lung” attests of God’s justice with regard to the crime she committed when she killed Jake. This means that all criminal characters in Swanson’s novel are judged and condemned not by men, but by God, the Almighty. A reading of *All the Beautiful Lies* makes the reader discover that all characters who disappeared mysteriously are murdered by Jake. This means that if some characters are killed because of his hatred and jealousy, others, however, are killed because of his fear to be jailed by the police: “*He (Jake Richter) has been sexually assaulting Alice, and that he’d most likely killed Bill Ackerson out of some form of jealousy*” (ABL, p. 339). Actually, the death of Edith is justified by Jake’s desire to have Alice for wife. But knowing that she is Bill Ackerson’s sweetheart, he found it better to get rid of him by killing him, too. Then, when she finally discovered that he is the one who killed her mother and husband, she also found no alternative than killing him. It was indeed because of Alice’s refusal to get divorced in order to have Jake for husband that the latter became upset

mindful and planned a criminal act against Bill Ackerson: “*I would never get divorced, but I’m done with him*” (ABL, p. 301).

What the reader may find more shocking in *All the Beautiful Lies* is the way Bill Ackerson used to consider Jake, not only as simple worker in his bookshop, but as a best friend and brother. Being conscious of his miserable living conditions, Bill Ackerson found it better to hire him in his bookshop so as to help him have some financial means. The fear to be identified as the criminal of this businessman is therefore what pushed him to kill innocent characters. But by dint of talking with Alice who persuaded him to tell her everything he knew about all the murders described in the author’s novel, as she argues: “*Relax, Jake (...). Tell me everything you’ve done*” (ABL, p. 326), he ended up telling the truth to her. Through this character’s fate, the author reminds the reader that the salary of the sinner is nothing else but death, for after killing innocent peers, he is himself killed for his crimes committed.

Conclusion

At the term of this exploration, we have discovered that *All the Beautiful Lies* is about love, crimes and death. The author accounts for these themes mainly through one of his characters named Jake who, in need of having Alice for wife, finishes up killing her mother and husband. These murders finally lead him to kill other characters in order to hidden the truth about his cruel acts. It is only after the police’s failed investigation on all the murders portrayed in the author’s novel that Jake admits his crimes. For, he confesses to Alice that he has killed Edith, Bill Ackerson and many other characters. The main causes of these abominable acts, he argues, are his eagerness to have Alice for wife and his fear to be jailed by the police. Such a portrayal of characters’ social experience leads us to classify Peter Swanson into the category of committed writers, for he encourages love for one another by denouncing inhuman behaviors through fictitious characters.

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