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Farewell to Manzanar
and Japanese-Americans
during the experience of
World War II

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Daniela Ciani

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Rosa Caroli

Graduand

Francesco Imovilli

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Abstract:

In this thesis I will analyze Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. She is a Japanese-American writer who, almost thirty years after having been released from an American detention Camp, wrote a reconstruction of the events related to the imprisonment she suffered. In this thesis, first I will describe the historical context in which the book is inscribed. Secondly, I will analyze the main events which influenced the life of the author. Then I will focus on the novel itself and the technical devices which influence the narration. In conclusion, the results of the thesis will present a variegated list of answers on literary, political and historical matters related to the Japanese-American community.

Introduction

“- *Who do you want to win this war?*
 - *When your mother and your father*
are having a fight, do you want them
to kill each other? Or do you just
want them to stop fighting?” (Houston, 64)¹

These are the words of Wakatsuki Ko, a Japanese-American father, who after having been separated from his family by the United States authorities was questioned about his loyalty to the U.S. government. The dramatic events which Japanese-Americans had to live could be summarized in these few lines.

During World War II, the Japanese-American minority group living in the United States was imprisoned in detention camps. The U.S. government was fearing a collaboration between the Japanese government and people with Japanese ancestry – who were counting 120,000 individuals. Although among them were also people who had emigrated from Japan to the United States, the great majority of the prisoners were second generation Japanese-Americans (*Nisei*) born in the U.S. and consequently American citizens.

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston was one of them. At the age of seven, together with her family, she was sent to the detention camp of Manzanar. There she grew up in an environment which distorted the perception of her identity as a Japanese-American citizen. As a consequence, her life was influenced by the imprisonment experience for a long time.

Almost thirty years after the releasement from the camp, she wrote a book titled *Farewell to Manzanar* together with her husband James D. Houston. The novel is the reconstruction of the events before, during and after the imprisonment she suffered with her family. Moreover, it is the account of her difficult path toward the discovery of her identity as a Japanese-American.

¹ From here on I will refer to *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston by omitting the author's name.

Her experience could be exemplary from different perspectives. However, the most interesting aspects which the novel underlines relate to the drama of the war and the discrimination which Japanese-Americans had to suffer.

The novel becomes then a starting point for a reflection on the base of an individual and collective experience. While on one hand the drama of the author highlights personal insights, on the other, her being part of a community moves the attention to collective responsibilities. In particular, the ones of the United States government, population and the ones of the Japanese-American community itself.

In this thesis, I will then analyze the book by Houston. I will divide my analysis into two parts. The first one will be rather descriptive.

First, I will describe the historical context in which the novel is inscribed. In particular, I will refer to the socio-political situation in the United States which brought the Japanese-American community to be imprisoned. I will use the work of several historians in order to describe rather than create debates. I will focus on the relationships between United States and Japan in the period before and during the World War, trying to understand the possible motivations which brought the United States government to undertake similar measures toward Japanese-Americans.

Secondly, I will analyze the main events which influenced the life of the author. I will describe her psychological evolution as a person and as a Japanese-American citizen. By knowing which events marked her life, it will be possible to have a confrontation between her life and the events told in the novel.

I will then focus on the novel itself. I will analyze the plot, in particular how it is divided and how its organization mirrors the personal identity evolution of the author herself. Then I will describe the characters. I will try to divide them into a system which could underline their different importance inside the narration. Then, at the end of the chapter I will focus on the technical devices which change the experience of the reader. I will describe how the use of different types of narrators, times and

settings changes the approach to trauma and its description. In their particular exploitation they generate different effects which differentiates the book in a peculiar way within its genre.

The genre itself will be my final concern of the chapter. I will try to collocate *Farewell to Manzanar* inside its own genre. Since it is both an autobiography and a novel, I will define it as an ‘autobiographical novel’ and I will explain what this last term means within the context of the book.

The second part of my work will deal with the possible different readings which can be conducted in the analysis of *Farewell to Manzanar*. I will take the model enounced by Roman Jakobson in its essay *Linguistic and Poetics* as an ideological map in order to orientate myself along the discussion.

Thanks to the work of literary and cultural scholars, I will approach the novel from several perspectives. It will be possible to see that each one of these enacts separated debates on different matters.

I shall also apply the work of Roland Barthes to analyze *Farewell to Manzanar*. In this way I will show how by removing the author from the analysis other aspects of the novel become the most important ones and enact particular reflections. In particular, it will be possible to see that by doing so the debate moves from the events which marked the author’s life to elements such as language. The latter reveals peculiar characteristics. The use of Japanese words and expressions enriches the experience of the reader. Moreover, this type of approach moves the attention to the reader him/herself, creating a rather personal reading of the novel.

I will then focus on the context. Starting from its display in *Farewell to Manzanar*, I will apply the work of different scholars in order to understand why the events connected to the Japanese-American communities happened in that particular way. I will use the work of Lisa Lowe, Benedict Anderson and Dick Hebdige in order to see the processes which involved different actors to have particular attitudes.

Both Japanese-Americans - as the ones who suffered the discrimination - and the United States population - as the one which perpetrated racism - share different responsibilities. Their actions are

in fact part of particular schemes. According to the approach taken it is possible to rebuild the conscious and unconscious processes which drove their actions.

Furthermore, I will focus on the author. By doing so, some elements of the novel will underline rather her psychological and personal issues. In order to enact the debate about her, I will use the work of psychoanalytical scholars. I will approach the novel by philtering the experience of the trauma Jeanne lived through the different explanations these scholars would possibly give. The result will provide answers on questions about the particular evolution of the events in the author's personal life. In particular, about the belatedness of the acknowledgement of the trauma and about the complicated relationship between Jeanne and her parents. The book in fact mirrors the feelings and the sensations which the author lived.

I will then analyze the value of *Farewell to Manzanar* by using essays by Stanley Fish and Barbara Hernestein Smith. According to Jakobson's model, there will then follow a section focusing on the text itself. By using the works of the scholars, I will try to reflect about where the limits of my analysis stand. Especially with Fish it will be possible to see that the concept of value comes to represent a totally subjective manner. In this regard then I will try to highlight in which kind of situation *Farewell to Manzanar* represents a valuable reading.

Moreover, by continuing in my approach about value I shall try to consider the novel collocation within its canon. The debate about this last matter will deal with the elements which could make the novel part of the canon and ensure its addition durable in time. Elements which relate to the reproduction of the novel, its economical value and the acknowledgment of its quality in the literary circles.

In conclusion, the results of the thesis will present a variegated list of issues on literary, political and historical matters related to the Japanese-American community. This work, through the example of *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston will furnish then an analysis of a personal drama which could be extended from the one to an entire community.

Finally, the aim of this thesis is to describe personal and collective processes. By doing so, and by trying to analyze the novel from different perspectives, this work will highlight responsibilities, faults and representations of a dramatic event which involved a large number of people. It will be possible to see how the trauma of one person could be representative of an entire group and how the power of only one literary work could enact a long series of debates about one tragic event.

1. *Farewell To Manzanar*: Historical Framing

Farewell to Manzanar is a novel written by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband James D. Huston. It is a reconstruction of Jeanne's and her family's memories of the years before, during and after the imprisonment in the detention camps suffered by the Japanese-American communities during World War II. During that time, the United States government decided this was a necessary measure in order to guarantee the protection of the country from Japan. However, although valued from a governmental commission, the measure was controversially motivated and represented only the spanning of a climax of hatred and racism inflicted to a well-defined part of the American population. The context which is here briefly presented is the frame of the book and it is worth further investigations in order to fully understand the impact that these facts had on the writing of the novel.

The tragedy of the detention of the Japanese-American population is one of the many tremendous parts of the World War II period. On every front - be it that of the Axis or that of the Allies – an incredible amount of brutalities was perpetrated. Among them, the most well known of are those which history and literature provided about the Holocaust, started by Nazis and conducted with the help of Italian Fascism. However, while between 1945 and 1946 in Nuremberg, a formal accusation and consequent punishment of the abovementioned crime has been conducted in a relatively fast process of trials, the ethnic based crimes suffered by Japanese-Americans and committed by the United States government did not receive any formal condemnation for a long time².

The late acknowledgement of guilt from the authorities is only the last part of a process of discrimination and racism that started decades before the burst of War War II. In fact, since the beginning, the political relationships between Japan and USA were characterized by different degrees of hostility.

² For further information about post World War Trials see Daniels.

At the start of their commercial and political tractates in the 1850s, Japan was emerging from a period of isolationism which had lasted more than two centuries and was called '*Sakoku*'. At the core of this foreign policy were severe restrictions to trade with foreign nations and the impossibility for Japanese people to leave the country. Whoever would oppose the laws deliberated by the government risked death penalty³.

Parallel to this fragment of Japanese history there is that of the United States. In that same period at mid-eighteenth century, the U. S. had developed from a young nation to an economy in fast expansion. With the desire to extend their commercial routes to the Pacific Coast, the government started to look westwards in search of economical partners.

Before 1866 the routes had been broadened in other parts of the Asian continent⁴, but it was only in that year that the United States, with a fleet of black war ships under the guidance of Commodore Matthew Perry, entered the coastal territory of Japan. After the threat of war, Japan decided to open trade with the Western World - a measure that caused different degrees of dissent in Japan and internationally.

The relationships actually brought economical advantages to both nations. In particular, Japan from being an extremely conservative nation lived an incredible boost of its economy and in few decades became a strong country, not only from an economic perspective, but also from a military one.

With the opening of the trades then, even the ban to emigration and circulation of people was soon to be lifted. Japanese people were finally allowed to make permanent moves to other countries. However, although some Japanese had already emigrated to the United States after the Civil War, it is only with the combination of the Japanese emigration permit, and another reason that I am about to explain, that the movement of people increased drastically.

³ For further information about Japanese history and the Meiji period see Caroli and Gatti.

⁴ Relations with China had started in 1944 for example. For further information see <https://history.state.gov/countries/china>

This latter concerned the Chinese immigration in United States – an event that later greatly influenced the one from Japan. Before the establishment of a Japanese community, the Chinese had appeared on the American scene. The American Western expansion and development had brought a high demand of cheap labor force for infrastructure works. The answer to this need first came from China, a country characterized by a high level of poverty. Since 1850 about two hundred-fifty-thousand Chinese had established themselves on the American soil with the aim of working and acquiring better opportunities for their future.

However, like past immigration processes had already demonstrated, the assimilation of different cultures in the USA society has never been an easy task⁵. In addition to the divergences in culture and customs, a series of racially connected discriminations raised.

With the arrival of a foreign labor force, which was much cheaper than the American one, a series of tensions raised in the years, with episodes of social disorder⁶. Consequently, several political leaders made of the ‘Chinese problem’ the main point of their political agenda, pushing for strict measures in order to contain Chinese immigration. As the demand of labor decreased, in 1882 the United States Congress promulgated the Chinese Exclusion Act, “which barred further immigration of Chinese laborers - but not all Chinese - for then years. This law was extended for ten more years in 1892 and was made permanent in 1902.” (Daniels, 7)

However, although the demand of labor force had actually decreased, the United States were still far from being in excess of that. To cope the lack of Chinese labor force then, a Japanese community established itself on the country. The combination of the permission to emigrate and the stop of the Chinese phenomenon on American soil boosted Japanese immigration in the country.

Nevertheless, as soon as the Japanese presence became substantial, the public opinion reaction followed a pattern similar to the previous one. As for the Chinese before, the Japanese were said to

⁵ For further information about immigration in the United States (among the rest, for example British, Irish and German ones) see Foner, Eric.

⁶ Several protests took place against Chinese-Americans in the country, many of which resulted in episodes of violence. For example, on October 24, 1871, a racially motivated riot occurred in Los Angeles. A mob of around 500 white men entered Chinatown to attack, rob, and murder Chinese residents of the city.

steal job opportunities to American citizens - a fact that enacted a series of fears in the population. The U.S. and Census Data though show that “ethnic Japanese never constituted as much as two-tenths of one percent (0.02%) of the total population or more than two and one-tenth percent (2.1%) of the California population.” (9) As Roger Daniels comments these data, then, “one finds difficult to see how Japanese-Americans could have seem a threat to the nation, but racial fears are more often based on fantasy than reality.” (8)

As with the precedent Chinese case then, Americans activated in order to have a measure that could stop immigration of Japanese labor force as well. However, while at the time China was a politically weak country, after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 Japan had become an economically and politically influent one. Therefore, an anti-Japanese legislation could have significantly damaged the United States and the political balance on the Pacific; the Congress then never seriously considered a Japanese Exclusion Act.

However, the constant raising of tension in these years pushed the United States government to reach a similar result in two steps which could partially calm the social dispute that had been created for a relatively brief lapse of time. The first one was the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907-08 - a series of notes exchanged between the Japanese and the United States government that ended in an agreement that partially resolved the controversies. On one side, Japan stopped issuing passports to people willing to go and work to the U.S., and on the other, the United States promised not to legislate against people of Japanese ancestry; family reunifications, proxy marriages and other forms of immigration were still allowed.

The deal could preserve a social order for a decade, but when the Japanese government after World War I started its politics of aggression in China and the Pacific, the United States took several measures that damaged the Japanese economy⁷. Japan answered in the same way and with the

⁷ For example in 1940 Japan invaded French Indochina in an effort to embargo all imports into China, including war supplies purchased from the U.S. This move prompted the United States to embargo all oil exports. For further examples see Foner, especially part 5.

exacerbation of the economic and political relationships between the two countries, public opinion followed the same trend of hatred as in pasts.

Following the economic and diplomatic crisis, the difficulties of the population unloaded on immigrants. In 1924, the United States then passed the general Immigration Act, setting immigration quotas for each type of ethnic group present in the country. However, while others were allowed to apply for citizenship, immigrants of Asian ancestry were excluded from this possibility. As a consequence, when the Immigration Act was amended by barring all aliens ineligible to citizenship Japanese-Americans were prevented to use their quotas.

This last measure definitely put an end to the Japanese immigration to the United States, although it did not calm down the social tension but only for a few years. Moreover, while the situation was not even resolved, the Japanese who had been living in the country for decades and had contributed to its welfare were excluded from a large range of rights tied to American citizenship⁹.

Therefore, when the escalation of tension with Japan reached its top and the news of Japanese cruelties in Manchuria reached the United States, the ideological issue of Japanese-Americans recreated its controversial condition. In California segregation of Japanese communities started being applied effectively and episodes of physical and psychological violence suffered by Japanese-Americans happened on daily base.

The situation drastically worsened when World War II burst out. On December 7th, 1941, the Japanese army attacked the American Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor – one of the greatest defeats suffered by the U.S. army. Although it is under debate that maybe this debacle could possibly have been avoided, the shock that it had on the American nation was undisputable¹⁰. The attack happened without any declaration of war and it was so violent that the day after the battle, in a speech addressed to the Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to it as “a date that will live in infamy.” (3)

⁸ For further information about economic relationships between United States and Japan before World War II see Foner.

⁹ For example, right to be politically represented, or the one to avoid unjustified exclusion from the country.

¹⁰ For further information about Pearl Harbour Attack see Foner.

With the war on going, propaganda against the enemy became even more aggressive. The first ones to suffer the consequences of this fact were the immigrants of German, Italian and Japanese ancestry. However, while:

“Many Americans viewed the war against Germany as an ideological struggle. Both sides saw the Pacific war as a race war. Japanese propaganda depicted Americans as a self-indulgent people contaminated by ethnic and racial diversity as opposed to the racially ‘pure’ Japanese. In the United States, long-standing prejudices and the shocking attack on Pearl Harbor combined produced an unprecedented hatred of Japan.” (Foner, 876)

Therefore, if Germany and Italy became an example of tyrannical rulers, the Japanese were seen as beasts, genetically violent and subhuman. At the time of the war then, although the great majority of Japanese-Americans were second-generation immigrants (*Nisei*) and consequentially American citizens, they nonetheless suffered the great wave of hatred because of their physical features. Moreover, while an effort was made by the government to include Italian and German-Americans in the army and make them appear as any other citizen, the United States “viewed every person of Japanese ethnicity as a potential spy.” (Foner, 877)

Caused by exaggerated fears about a possible Japanese invasion of the West Coast and pressures from white landowners who desired to obtain the land owned by Japanese-American farmers, on February 19, 1942, the military pressured President Roosevelt to issue the Executive Order 9066, which consisted in the relocation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast.

The authorities removed more than 110,000 men, women and children from their homes - nearly two-thirds Americans citizens - and organized them in camps in different parts of the United States. In here:

“Internees were subjected to a quasi-military discipline in the camps. Living in former horse stables, makeshift shacks, or barracks behind barbed wire fences, they were awakened for roll call at 6:45 each morning and ate their meals in giant mess halls. Armed guards patrolled the camps, and searchlights shone all night. Privacy was difficult to come by, and medical facilities were often nonexistent¹¹.” (Foner, 877)

¹¹ For further information about living conditions in detention camps for Japanese-Americans see Howard.

Following this measure courts refused to intervene while the Supreme Court in 1944, upheld the legality of the internment policy. Moreover, Japanese-Americans had to follow a loyalty program and at a later stage of the war many of them were even forced to fight in American ranks. People who refused were sent to prison for resisting draft.

The situation started changing only after about three years from the imprisonment, with the war toward the end, every person was released and the camps were completely dismantled. However, the effects that in past the propaganda and the racial attacks had on the Japanese-American community took time to fade away, and even more to be recognized as a tragedy and atrocious error committed by the Roosevelt administration.

Only later, in 1980 the Commission appointed by the U.S. Congress started an official investigation on the Executive Order 9066. The latter, one year after declared that though the order was motivated with military necessities “after careful investigations on both the West Coast and Hawaii, there was never a shred of evidence found of sabotage, subversive acts, spying, or fifth column activity on the part of the *Nisei* or long-time local residents.”(Daniels, 26) In 1988 then, the Congress provided 20,000\$ in compensation for each surviving victim and officially apologized for the interment, although legal battles and manifestations kept on following and from later on commemorations of the tragic event are still held every year¹².

¹² For further information about post World War II trials concerning Japanese-Americans see Daniels.

1.2. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

Biographical notes and evolution of the acknowledgment of the detention experience

Farewell to Manzanar is an autobiographical book. It is then intrinsically connected with the main events that left a mark in the lives of both Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband. In order to see how especially Jeanne's writing style was driven mostly by these facts, it is useful then to restrict the frame to a more individual context.

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston is the main author of *Farewell to Manzanar*. She was born on September 26, 1934, in Inglewood, California. She is the daughter of Wakatsuki Ko and Rigu Tsukai Wakatsuki, both first generation Japanese immigrants (*Issei*) to the United States. Her father moved to the United States already in the early 1910s, about twenty years before she was born, encouraged by the need to look for better job opportunities and by his sense of adventure. First son of a Japanese magistrate who had partially lost his wealth, after a first period in a military school Ko decided to move to Hawaii and then, thanks to better working chances, he settled in the mainland. After changing several jobs and having met Rigu Tsukai, he moved to Santa Cruz with her, and there they started a family together. Rigu gave birth to nine children – Jeanne was the youngest one of them.

Since the beginning of their life in the United States the family suffered that discriminatory attitude toward Japanese-Americans, which was widespread at the time. For example, Ko was prevented from getting jobs outside the range of manual labor because of his origins, and even in that case, he had to face continuous attacks from those who were saying he was stealing job opportunities from American citizens.

Therefore, Jeanne's growth was characterized by tragic events that shaped her for the rest of her life. Possibly the first real trauma she experienced was the effect that Pearl Harbor Attack of 1941 had on the American population. The beginning of the War brought an unprecedented wave of hatred toward Japanese-Americans and Jeanne's family lived the consequences of the event personally.

After Pearl Harbor the family had to face even more the discrimination in its regard, since the episodes of violence toward Japanese-Americans grew in number. Moreover, Jeanne's father, who

had become a fisherman, after having been accused of selling oil undercover to the Japanese government, was arrested and separated from the rest of the family.

As for Jeanne, although she was a second-generation Japanese-American (*Nisei*) who did not know but few words of Japanese, she was considered a 'Jap' as any other member of the community and was therefore discriminated in the same way only because of her physical appearances.

Therefore, when President Roosevelt signed the Order 9066 on February 1942, although she was an American citizen, she was deported together with her family to detention camps. Specifically, together with other 9000 people, the Wakatsuki family were sent to Manzanar – a camp situated in California Owen's Valley, a cold land at the feet of Sierra Nevada. The place was organized in lines of wooden shacks, where people lived in miserable conditions. Jeanne describes her living as following: "We woke up early, shivering and coated with dust that had blown up through the knotholes and in through the slits around the doorway. During the night Mama had unpacked all our clothes and heaped them on our bed for warmth. Now our cubicle looked as if a great laundry bag had exploded and then been sprayed with fine dust." (23)

However, although the camp was inhospitable, Japanese-Americans succeeded in making it almost an independent city with canteens and schools, where Jeanne could continue her studies. Nonetheless, her education in the camp presented controversial aspects that later deeply influenced her growth and process of acknowledgment of the trauma derived from the detention experience.

Jeanne lived the incongruences of the detention at full effect. She was American, but while she had been imprisoned because she was of Japanese ancestry, she was taught in school on how to be a proud American citizen. At the same time, she was immersed in those Japanese traditions her parents were passing her down. By being seven years old she was prevented from understanding what her identity consisted of and she was divided between sensations of guilt and pride. Jeanne had to face that same dilemma that many emigrants in the past also suffered – the question of what to be an American meant. In addition, she had to consider her parents' origin, at what extent she could be considered a Japanese and whether that fact could be considered a reason to be blamed for or not. A

clear example of this fact is described in the book, where episodes of ‘Japaneseness’ contrast some related to the guilt suffered because of her imprisonment:

“A young woman came in, a friend of Chizu’s, who lived across the way. [...] About the time I went to bed she and Papa began to sing songs in Japanese. [...] After a while Papa sang the first line of the Japanese national anthem, *Kimi ga yo*. Woody, Chizu, and Mama knew the tune, so they hummed along while Papa and the other woman sang the words. [...] It is really a poem, whose words go back to the ninth century [...] It is a patriotic song that can also be read as a proverb, as a personal credo for endurance. The stone can be the kingdom or it can be a man’s life. The moss is the greenery that, in time will spring even from a rock.” (89-91)

“From that day on, part of me yearned to be invisible. [...] Although, I couldn’t have defined it at the time, I felt that if attention were drawn to me, people would see what this girl had first responded to. They wouldn’t see me, they would see the slant-eyed face, the Oriental. This is what accounts, in part, for the entire evacuation. You cannot deport 110,000 people unless you have stopped seeing individuals. Of course, for such a thing to happen, *there has to be a kind of acquiescence on the part of the victims, some submerged belief that this treatment is deserved*, or at least allowable. It’s an attitude easy for nonwhites to acquire in America. I had inherited it. Manzanar had confirmed it.” (158-159) [italics added]

However, as it is possible to see in the last quote, the creation of an identity is a complex matter. It is shaped in relation with the surrounding community. Therefore, most of the time it transcends one’s personal judgment and it gets highly influenced by others. In the case of Jeanne, though she was feeling Japanese-American (an independent and relatively new identity), her judgment was deeply influenced by the American community that was perceiving her just as a ‘Jap’ – that is to say not just a Japanese, but rather an evil shade of a Japanese as the anti-Japanese propaganda professed.

Specifically, the idea of being Japanese just because of one’s physical appearances was counterbalanced by the one of being an American, which in the latter case meant being born in the United States and being Caucasian¹³. Jeanne strived in order to act as American as much as possible, but since the characteristics of what she wanted to be were purely racist, her attempt was consequently ruinous. After the experience in Manzanar, her peculiar behavior must be inscribed in this effort.

When in 1944 she was released together with her family and the last prisoners, the Wakatsuki family went back to California where they had once lived. There, Jeanne lived again that climate of

¹³ See also Foner and Hixon for further information about what being American meant during World War II time

discrimination in her regard. Although she had spent years in captivity unfairly, and had assisted to the dismantling of her family's social order and her rights were once more being violated repeatedly, Jeanne instead of blaming Caucasian Americans for their racism, chose to see it as "her fault, the result of her failings" (115). Moreover, she forced herself to hide her experience in Manzanar by refusing to interiorize what had happened there.

The refusal of the experience and moreover the justification of the racism she suffered is the involuntary concretization of the attempt to be part of that hegemonic culture that was refusing her. Jeanne at the time was ignoring what being a Japanese-American meant, she just wanted to be an American citizen like anyone else. A tendency started in the camp and continued even after the detention experience for long:

"In addition to the regular school sessions and the recreation program, classes of every kind were being offered all over the camp. [...] I practiced, joined the baton club at school. [...] I wonder, because of all the activities I tried out in camp, this was the one I stayed with, in fact returned to almost obsessively when I entered high school in southern California a few years later. By that time I was desperate to be 'accepted,' and baton twirling was one trick I could perform that was thoroughly, unmistakably American." (108-109)

Therefore, Jeanne lived the shaping of her identity both in and outside the camp without having a real control of it, and this also explains her reaction to the experience in the detention camp.

These issues related to her identity and the detention experience took years to resolve. Meanwhile, Jeanne kept on attending schools with Caucasian people, accomplishing good results both in her studies and in athletics, but still reacting to episodes of racism with the same self-blaming attitude.

Only in the last year of high-school she started to detour from the ideological position she had lived before. The episode that partially changed what being a Japanese-American meant to her, arrived with her election of the "Queen of the Ball" of her school. During this particular event, which the book also refers to, Jeanne underlined her Japanese traits in order to have her beauty stand out in front of other young men. That was a striking moment in her life, because with her victory followed "the acknowledgment of racism and the realization that she" was "not to blame for mainstream America's rejection of her" (Huang, 130). However, although her identity started to finally take shape

in a personal way and contrary to the hegemonic one, Manzanar was still hidden in a far drawer of her memory.

After graduation, she enrolled at San Jose State College to study sociology and journalism. There, she met James Houston and in 1957, once completed her university carrier, she married him.

James D. Houston¹⁴ is the second author of *Farewell to Manzanar*. He was born in San Francisco in 1933. At the time he met Jeanne, he was just a student of drama at Sant Jose State College but later, after an M.A. in American Studies at Stanford, he became a well-known writer of several books and professor of creative writing at Santa Cruz University of California. His professional career revealed to be fundamental in the writing of Jeanne's novel. His experience both as a writer and as a professor, provided the proper help for her first book both on the level of its quality and later success.

The book itself marked the end of the process of acknowledgment of the detention experience in Manzanar. The chance to tell how the events in the detention camp had taken place arrived rather unexpectedly when her nephew George – a *Sansei*¹⁵ born in Manzanar while Jeanne was just a kid - started asking questions about the camp that every member of the Wakatsuki family was refusing to answer.

Jeanne started talking to him about some events which had happened in Manzanar. Therefore, finally given a chance to talk about her captivity experience, she could unload the burden of the trauma and acknowledge its importance for herself and society.

Once told what happened with the nephew to her husband she was pushed by him to write the book *Farewell to Manzanar*, that was published in 1973 sanctioning the end of the internalization of her trauma.

The process lived by Jeanne and described above was common to many other Japanese-Americans. Only around 1970s a wave of *Nisei* writers started to publicly denounce their experiences

¹⁴ For a detailed biographic account of James D. Houston see Robinson.

¹⁵ Third generation Japanese-American

in detention camps¹⁶. Moreover, for many of them, the reasons to this type of reaction were the same. “Publicly, they kept silent for many years afterwards, for their experiences were too bitter to remember. At the time, many just wanted to forget and become part of the American society”. (Iwase, 8)

The reasons why the events that Jeanne and an entire community lived in the precise way described above are to be read according to the teachings of cultural scholars like Antonio Gramsci¹⁷ and Edward Said. Both of them refer to the concept of hegemony in order to explain several cultural processes¹⁸.

According to Gramsci, ‘hegemonic’ is a word that describes not only the dominance of a culture but also a certain degree of consent from the dominated side of the community; that gives to the most powerful one the right to lead. Gramsci describes it as follow: “The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.” (Gramsci, 1007)

A further reference to Gramsci’s ideas, particularly related to our text, are the studies of Edward Said. Said in his essay *Orientalism* not only describes the hegemony of Western culture over the Oriental one, but also underlines how the very concept of ‘Orient’ was created and made to endure by the western society in order to justify the domination of some cultures over others¹⁹.

¹⁶ For further information about *Nisei* writers see Iwase.

¹⁷ For further information about cultural hegemony and Gramsci reasoning see Gramsci, Antonio *The Formation of the Intellectuals*

¹⁸ Hegemony refers to a precise organization of communities. The latter are inscribed in society, and society is itself divided into two different parts. The first one is constituted by voluntary (or at least rational and noncoercive) affiliations like schools, families, and unions. The second one is composed by state institutions (the army, the police, the central bureaucracy), whose is one of direct domination. Culture has to be researched in the voluntary part of the society. Inside this part of society different ranges of ideas have to be found. Culture according to Gramsci is not more than a complex of ideas accepted with different degrees of consent. The most accepted ones, or those accepted by that part of society that detains the highest amount of power, create the culture that becomes ‘hegemonic’.

¹⁹ In particular, according to Said this process of ‘Orientalization’ started with the Colonization of Asian territories by England and France, that needed to shape that sense of superiority over Asian populations. The ideological creation of the ‘Orient’ then, allowed the domination of European cultures over other ones aiming to a degree of consent created by the most influential parts of French and English societies that spread the concept of Orient and tied to it exotic ideas of

From its creation, the concept of Orientalism evolved throughout time and adapted to different situations. With the changing of power balances among world leading nations, even the exploiters of the concept of Orientalism changed as well. Throughout the twentieth century it is clear how the hegemonic culture from being Eurocentric shifted and became American-centric²⁰. Together with this event one of the main users of the concept of Orientalism became the United States.

In the previous chapter it is possible to see the concretization of the concept expressed by Said. In the complicated relationships between USA and Japan, it is possible to see how the idea of the American man as superior to the Asian one was well accepted by the great majority of the population because boosted by war propaganda – a mere instrument of the hegemonic culture.

The process that the Japanese-American community and Jeanne went through then, are an example of how the theories of Gramsci and Said work. Moreover, it motivates that sense of guilt that unfairly Jeanne and the internees were feeling during and after detention. It is possible to attribute the whole process to the attempt to be part of the American hegemonic culture, because if excluded from it, people were considered inferior, not even human and responsible of an ideological guilt. Moreover, by being accepted by the great majority of the population, we can understand how this distorted view influenced Jeanne's identity.

Once Jeanne's acknowledgement process of the experienced ended, Jeanne continued working on making people aware of the issues related to the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans. After the publication of *Farewell to Manzanar* in 1974 Jeanne and her husband were asked to write the script for its adaptation into a movie directed by John Kory. The film itself received the nominations to two categories at the Primetime Emmy Awards and won a Humanitas Prize.

Furthermore, the couple decided to travel around United States and to five different Asian countries in order to present the movie in schools and having the chance to debate with younger generations about what had happen in Manzanar.

inferiority. In this way, these countries were able to unify their populations in order to pursuit their economic interests without worrying about discontent.

²⁰ For further information about American hegemonic culture see Nye.

Later on, while James wrote *Writing a Non-Fiction Novel about the Internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II*, Jeanne published another book titled *Beyond Manzanar: Views of Asian-American Womanhood* (1985) – a collection of essays about further reflections on her double cultural heritage.

In this last book, she explores for example the typical Japanese characteristics that she shares with her mother, like her precision for even the smallest things and that sense of pride which the Wakatsukis seem to have inherited from the time of samurai dynasties. Even more, she shows how those traits are counterbalanced by an unusual ‘Americaness’, which led her to marry a white American man.

In 1984, Jeanne wrote with Paul Hesler *Don't Cry, It's Only Thunder* – a book published by Doubleday about Mr. Hesler's three years as a soldier in Vietnam working in a makeshift orphanage for abandoned children of GI fathers and Vietnamese mothers.

In 1985, her last publication was the book called *Picture Brides*, a compiled history about the emigration of the so called ‘picture brides’ – Japanese women that between 1920 and 1925 moved to the United States in order to marry single Japanese men who came to America earlier and had only see them in photographs. The book follows two women in their journey and settlement into the West. Moreover, in the same year Jeanne won the Wonder Woman Foundation award in the category Woman Working Creatively.

She gave birth to three children: Joshua, Corinne and Gabrielle. At present, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston still lives in California, widowed from James D. Houston.

1.3: *Farewell to Manzanar*: An Autobiographical Novel?

1.3.1: The Plot

Farewell to Manzanar is a novel written by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston in co-authorship with James D. Houston and published in 1973. A common denominator in each chapter of the book is the relationship between the imprisonment in the detention camp of Manzanar and the effect this latter had in shaping Jeanne's identity.

The novel is structured in three parts, each one describing a different stage of the process of acknowledgment of the experience in the camp of Manzanar²¹.

The first part relates to the beginning of the experience. It starts with the reception of the news about the Pearl Harbour attack by the Wakatsuki family. Following the event, the deterioration of the situation for Japanese-Americans in the United States and consequently for Jeanne's family as well are presented through the eyes of the seven years old girl. The arrest of Wakatsuki Ko – the father – and the continuous relocations from house to house in several ghettos, force the rest of the family members to face a long series of hardships connected to racial discrimination - difficulties which the family reacts to with despair and sense of abandon.

“My mother began to weep. It seems now that she wept for days. She was a small, plump woman who laughed easily and cried easily, but I had never seen her cry like this. I couldn't understand it. I remember clinging to her legs, wondering why everyone was crying. This was the beginning of a terrible, frantic time for all my family. But I myself didn't cry about Papa, or have any inkling of what was wrenching Mama's heart, until the next time I saw him, almost a year later.” (9)

As it is possible to see from this quote, the use of her embodiment as a kid, allows the author to underline the sense of disorientation she really lived. Moreover, the confrontation between kid innocence and adults' violent world highlights the futility of the war and the viciousness that people sometimes are able to display.

²¹ For further information about this process see the previous section of the chapter

At the end of the second chapter the direct experience of the camp starts. The family deprived of the father is deported to Manzanar with other 10,000 people²². Here all members of the Wakatsuki family have to live in the same wood shack in deplorable conditions. Their accommodation is narrow, cold in the night and with sand seeping into the splits between the wooden boards. The only things given to each one of them is a mattress and a blanket. Toilets are insufficient for the whole amount of internees and food poisoning is very common.

Moreover, as soon as they arrive, the lack of an authoritarian figure as the one of Wakatsuki Ko and the impossibility to consume meals in the shacks due to lack of room, causes the destruction of the family unit from how it was before deportation. In chapter 3, Jeanne in order to describe this phenomenon declares: “My own family, after three years of mess hall living, collapsed as an integrated unit. Whatever dignity or feeling of filial strength we may have known before December 1941 was lost, and we did not recover it until many years after the war” (31).

Therefore, even later in the book, when Jeanne’s father reunites to the family, the situation does not improve. On the contrary, the separation from the family and the humiliation of the imprisonment drives Ko to alcoholism and abuses on Rigu – Jeanne’s mother. For the rest of the first part, the narration focuses largely on Ko’s contribution to the story. In these chapters, his past is narrated, from his birth in Japan to the arrival in the U.S. and the creation of his own life and family. It continues with his period of detention, from which he seems to suffer more than any other member of the family. Not only he is imprisoned like every other Japanese-American, but he also has to face the false accusations he receives from the other prisoners. The latter see him as a traitor, an informer of the U.S. government, enhancing his sense of humiliation. Furthermore, the lack of a job and of contribution to his family’s condition under any aspect depresses him even more.

“Men who cooperated with camp authorities in any way could be labelled *inu*, as well as those genuine informers inside the camp who relayed information to the War Department and to the FBI. For the women in the late-night latrine Papa was an *inu* because he had been released from Fort Lincoln earlier than most of the Issei men, many of whom had to remain up there separated from their families throughout the

²² Numbers according to the author, as it was possible to see in the previous section the population of the camp reaches such number only at its peak, which was around a year later

war. After investigating his record, the Justice Department found no reason to detain him any longer. But the rumour was that, as an interpreter, he had access to information from fellow Isseis that he later used to buy his release. This whispered charge, added to the shame of everything that had happened to him, was simply more than he could bear. He did not yet have the strength to resist it. He exiled himself, like a leper, and he drank.” (67)

The last chapter of the first part relates then to Woody’s enrolment in the army (he is the second older brother of Jeanne). The event provides one more element of the dismantling of the family and consequent pain for each other member. This latter fact is the end of the description of the traumas that Jeanne numbly lived.

This first part is rather passively lived by the characters. Jeanne reacts with disorientation and misunderstanding due to her child condition, while the other members of the family try to resist to the hardships they have to face. This way to react to the events is explicitly stated in the book and it is bonded to a cultural attitude of Japanese people: “These were mainly days of quiet, desperate waiting for what seemed to be inevitable. There is a phrase the Japanese use in such situations, when something difficult must be endured. You would hear the older heads, the Issei, telling others very quietly, ‘*Shikata ga nai*’ (It cannot be helped). ‘*Shikata ga nai*’ (It must be done). (16)

The second part of the novel follows a different attitudinal path from the first one. Although keeping on describing tragic moments of her life, the author writes in order to show her psychological evolution from passivity to acknowledgment of her experience.

The first chapters of this part keep on following an inclination towards a descriptive mode. They are mainly focused on Jeanne’s everyday life in the camp with school, sports club and the improvement of the life conditions thanks to the work of the Japanese-American community. However, they are only functional to the event that follows later – the realising of the detainees from Manzanar. They serve in fact as a contraposition between the paradoxical ‘normality’ achieved in the camp and the return to the climate of hatred and prejudice of the world outside it:

“In our family the response to this news was hardly joyful. For one thing we had no home to return to. Worse, the very thought of going back to the west coast filled us with dread. [...] Three years of wartime propaganda – racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate slogans, and frightmask posters – had turned Japanese face into

something despicable and grotesque. [...] Even I knew this, although it was not until many years later that I realized how bad things actually were.” (127)

After having shown the normality in Manzanar, the second part of the novel deals with all the stages of the author’s psychological growth. As it is possible to see the latter starts with continuous refusals.

The first of them relates to the world outside the camp:

“As the months at Manzanar turned to years, it became a world unto itself, with its own logic and familiar ways. In time, staying there seemed far simpler than moving once again to another, unknown place. It was as if the war were forgotten, our reason for being there forgotten. [...] In such a narrowed world in order to survive, you learn to contain your rage and your despair, and you try to re-create, as well as you can, your normality. [...] The fact that America had accused us, or excluded us, or imprisoned us, or whatever it might be called, did not change the kind of world we wanted.” (99-100)

As it possible to understand from this quote, Jeanne suffocates her feelings. She lives in a new world and she refuses to accept the one outside the camp. Manzanar is the only place she knows. The war and the treatment she received are only a pale memory.

However, once she is forced to live outside the camp again, instead of accepting the truth of her condition, she again decides to refuse it. The two worlds, the one represented by Manzanar and the one outside it are unable to coexist together. The experience of the camp is the one which becomes forgettable.

“In the months to come, because one did have to keep on walking, one desperately wanted to believe nothing had changed during those years of suspended animation. But of course, as we soon discovered, everything had.” (152)

“Suffice to say, I was the first member of our family to finish college and the first to marry out of my race. As my husband and I began to raise our family, and as I sought for ways to live agreeably in Anglo-American society, *my memories of Manzanar, for many years, lived far below the surface*. When we finally started to talk about making a trip to visit the ruins of the camp, something would inevitably get in the way of our plans. *Mainly my own doubts, my fears. I half-suspected that the place did not exist. [...] Sometimes I imagined I had made the whole thing up, dreamed it.* (186) [italics mine]

The first quote presented above underlines the hopes that the world outside the camp would accept the Wakatsuki family as nothing had happened. It is an attempt to put aside the experience of the detention since the return to the life outside the camp.

The second quote is quintessentially explanative of Jeanne's attitude to forget the world of Manzanar. The memory of the camp is compared to a dream experience as the result to forget whatever happened there. The refusal to accept truth is what characterizes the second part of the book.

Consequently, when the author moves to describe the difficult return to California, although she writes about the family economic and social problems, she mainly focuses on the reintegration of herself into society. The description of a series of situations follows: the return to school with Caucasians, the exclusion from the girl scouts because of her Japanese ancestry and the complicated nature of the friendships Jeanne acquires.

As already simply hinted at the previous section these events are lived by the protagonist with the denial of other people responsibilities and the refusal of the experience in Manzanar. Only at the end of the section, which finishes with her election to Queen of the School Ball, does the process of acknowledgment starts ending.

The third part of the book is the shortest one. However, although it consists only of one chapter it is maybe the most important. In there, an adult Jeanne decides to return with her family to Manzanar. Thanks to memories of the past blending with what she lives at present, the reader can understand a different dimension of the main character. The process of acknowledgment of her experience is indeed over. Jeanne is matured and has a precise idea about her identity – which was shaped by the traumas she had to live:

“Until this trip I had not been able to admit that my own life really began there. The times I thought I had dreamed it were one way of getting rid of it, part of wanting to lose it, part of what you might call a whole Manzanar mentality I had lived with for twenty-five years. Much more than a remembered place, it had become a state of mind. Now, having seen it, I no longer wanted to lose it or to have those years erased. Having found it, I could say what you can only say when you've truly come to know a place: Farewell. I had nearly outgrown the shame and the guilt and the sense of unworthiness. This visit, this pilgrimage, made comprehensible, finally, the traces that remained and would always remain, like a needle.” (195)

1.3.2: Characters system

In book commentaries, a special section is normally reserved to the explanation of characters and to the relationships which they build one with each other. Most of the time in order to refer to approach them in a profitable way, standard models are used in order to underline the peculiar characteristics of each one of them. However, *Farewell to Manzanar* is an autobiographical novel. For this reason, it appears difficult to apply standard models that can describe the characters and their relationships with each other. For example, characters might be divided as follow.

Normally, in the commentary of a book, primary characters are presented first. The narration mainly revolves around these figures. “A primary character is a protagonist, the person the book is about - or, to put it a different way, a character so necessary to the story that the story couldn't exist without her/him.” (Elliot, 1)

In a second phase, the secondary ones are introduced. The latter are still highly influential in the development of the plot, most of the time as helpers. “A secondary character has at least three and often four dimensions of existence but s/he is not the pivot or central mover around which the plot revolves although s/he is vital to the story” (Elliot,1)

Finally, there are background or minor characters. As the name suggests, the last ones scarcely influence the plot and then contribute mainly to the definition of the setting²³. This character “might be momentarily involved in the action, but then disappear. Still, his individuality will set a mood, add humour, make the milieu more interesting or complete”. (Card, 1)

Consequently, while for example in an adventure, fantasy or detective fiction novel, it is easy to isolate each character and attribute him/her a role, in the autobiographical novel this purpose becomes rather complicate. The reason is to be found in the structure of the plot. While in the abovementioned genres the aim in the plot is to pursue a direct result (for example, the discovery of a lost object, the defeat of a magical creature, the arrest of a murder, etc.) in autobiography there is

²³ For further information about traditional character systems see Bernardelli and Cesarani.

no such thing. The very act of writing represents, in fact, the main reason of interest of the book. Therefore, the characters do not respond to a system based on their actions in order to determinate their value inside the narration.

Most of the time, it is because the author of an autobiography selects different events in order to trace a broad description of his/her life and many times these events are not related one to each other. The only common thing they have is the involvement of the same person – the author him/herself.

However, although not as evident as in other books, *Farewell to Manzanar* has different aims than a traditional autobiography. As it was possible to see in the previous sections, each of the events selected by the author goes to trace a process of identity formation. Therefore, according to the degree of influence they have in the creation of the author identity, characters can be inscribed in a system similar to the traditional ones. The primary and secondary characters will be then the ones who influenced Jeanne the most in that sense. Some of them will influence Jeanne with their ‘Japanesness’ while others will do so in their American attitude. Each one of them will contribute in their own way to the formation of her identity. The more they have done so the more they will be important for the narration. Right after Jeanne who is the main character, the other primary ones will be the ones who shaped her way to sense herself the most.

As abovementioned, the main character of *Farewell to Manzanar* – Jeanne - is a seven years old *Nisei* little girl. The entire book revolves around her identity. She is divided between the idea of being American or Japanese. The experience at Manzanar camp, rather than being just a historical account is told as the main influential event in her growth and acquisition of certainties.

Following Jeanne, several secondary characters play important roles in the narration. The ones who influence her the most are the members of her family, whom she is most in contact with. Above all, her parents, both *Issei* Japanese-Americans, give her the roots on which to create her personal image. Both of them, with an identity deepened in the Japanese culture, provide her with a strong sense of attachment to it. However, since the United States setting pushes her far from her ancestry,

they even provide her first dilemma – questions related to her being Japanese, in a division between guilt and pride²⁴. Jeanne as ‘a Jap’:

“understands that her existence is nothing and she has been “invisible” for Caucasians. On the other hand, as an American, she wants to be visible and confirm and express her own identity [...] For second-generation Japanese-Americans like Jeanne, their acquired Japanese-ness becomes an obstacle to living as Americans. As their parents tried to fill in their lost space between two different cultural terrains, this is the price which they have to pay for their duality. (Tokuda,123)

Jeanne discusses how they are seen by American society:

I am suddenly aware of what being of Japanese ancestry was going to be like. I wouldn't be faced with physical attack, or with overt shows of hatred. Rather, I would be seen as someone foreign, or as someone other than American, or perhaps not be seen at all. I wondered why my citizenship had to be so loudly affirmed, and I couldn't imagine why affirming it would make any difference (158-161).

Wakatsuki Ko, her father, is a proud man who alternates a traditional Japanese mentality to a rather modern one. Although always stubborn and with a high sense of honour, in his own way he never hides the love for his family. However, during the narration, he goes through a process of transformation as well.

Once in the camp, life there mortifies him to the point of making him feel completely useless, leading him to a psychological break down that results in alcoholism and violence. For this reason, the influence he has in Jeanne's growth appears to be controversial. On one side, the love he displays seems to have a positive effect on his daughter, on the other, after having gone mad, the abuses on his family makes him unforgivable at the eyes of Jeanne.

“Mama began to weep, great silent tears, and Papa was now limping back and forth beside the bunk, like a caged animal, brandishing his long, polished North Dakota cane. ‘I'm going to kill you this time!’ [...] We had watched many scenes like this since his return, with Papa acting so crazy sometimes you could almost laugh at the samurai in him, trying to cow her with sheer noise and fierce display. But these were still unfamiliar visits from a demon we had never seen when we lived in Ocean Park. [...] He seemed to have reached some final limit. Inside my own helplessness I cowered, sure he was going to kill her or hurt her very badly, and the way Mama lay there I believed she was actually ready to be beaten to death. [...] That aching sadness did not go away. It something undefinable I'd already been living with for months, now enflamed by Papa's downfall. He kept pursuing oblivion through drink, he kept abusing Mama, and there seemed to be no way out of it anymore. You couldn't even run.” (68-71)

²⁴ See the previous section for further information about the author process of identity formation

This example shows an episode which left a scar in Jeanne, especially in the way her dad hurt her emotionally. While it is possible to see later in this analysis how the opinion Jeanne has of him does not seem to be completely negative.

This evolution of the character is evident throughout the narration. At the beginning of the book he is the patriarch of the family, the character who takes decisions – the leader. For example, this fact is noticeable in the behaviour of the family during the meals before the separation from Ko: “Dinners were always noisy, and they were always abundant with great pots of boiled rice, platters of home-grown vegetables, fish Papa caught. He would sit at the head of this table, with Mama next to him serving and the rest of us arranged around the edges according to age. [...] Papa gave the order to begin to eat.” (36)

At the arrival to Manzanar, Jeanne herself states the decline of her father: “It helps me understand how Papa’s life could end at a place like Manzanar. He didn’t die there, but things finished for him there, whereas for me it was like a birthplace.” (47)

While after the releasement his role in the family dynamics proves to be marginal. Once returned to California, Jeanne describes her family hierarchies as follow:

“And worst of all, I had lost respect for Papa. I never dared show this, but it was true. [...] His failures were sharpened, in an odd way, by Woody’s return. He came back from Japan with his mustache thicker and bearing a sword that had been in the family for 300 years – a gift from Aunt Toyo. [...] All of this delighted Papa, filled him with pride for his son who had returned a larger man, with a surer sense of himself and of where we all had come from. Yet while Woody grew, Papa seemed to shrink, losing potency. Their roles had been reversed. Before the war he had been the skipper. Now he depended more and more on Woody.” (164-166)

Although the decline of the father is displayed both from his personal perspective and in the relationship with other members of the family, Jeanne shows a double nature in his regards. If in the quotes presented above she seems to be critical, it is actually true that she can show affection toward her father:

“That’s how I remember him before he disappeared. He was not a great man. He wasn’t even a very successful man. He was a poser, a braggart, and a tyrant. But he had held onto his self-respect, he dreamed grand dreams, and he could work well at any task he turned his hand to. He could raise vegetables, sail a boat, plead a case in

small claims court, sing Japanese poems, make false teeth, carve a pig. Whatever he did had flourish.” (59)

In here, she shows the double nature of her reactions to his figure. Ko is a negative figure from many perspectives, but nonetheless a positive one for many others.

The second secondary character who influence Jeanne the most is Rigu Sukai Wakatsuki - Jeanne's mother. She is a sweet woman, caring for the members of her family. Furthermore, she greatly evaluates the senses of dignity and privacy. For this reason - as the example shows - she is the one who is mostly effected by deportation: “Inside it was like all the other latrines. [...] Down the center of the room twelve toilet bowls were arranged in six pairs, back to back, with no partitions. My mother was a very modest person, and this was going to be an agony for her, sitting down in public, among strangers.” (32)

Nonetheless, in critical moments she reveals a great strength that makes her become the main authoritarian figure in the family. When she comes to cover this role, she becomes the main source of influence for Jeanne, becoming an example for her in the most complicated situations to handle:

“In 1941, after Papa disappeared, she was marking time while we drifted, awaiting the inevitable. Now she knew the household income was going to be her responsibility for quite a while. Papa would never accept anything like a cannery job. And if he did, Mama's shame would be even greater than his. This would be a a sure sign that we had hit the bottom. So she went to work with as much pride as she could muster. Early each morning she would fix her hair, cover it with a flimsy net, put on a clean white cannery worker's dress, and stick a brightly coloured handkerchief in the lapel pocket. The car pool horn would honk, and she would rush out to join four other Japanese women.” (155)

Moreover, rather than being well-defined secondary characters, a series of background ones come in their totality to cover a fundamental role in the definition of Jeanne's identity. By counterbalancing the ‘Japaneseness’ given by her parents and family, all of those American Caucasian people who enter Jeanne's life seem to influence her at a great degree. Inside the camp, people apparently uninfluential like her school teacher, or the ones of cultural clubs, become the ones who drive her attempt to repudiate her roots in order to be part of the hegemonic culture. While outside the camp, after the imprisonment experience she lived, Caucasian schoolmates do the same. Often with the use of racism or discrimination, the latter at first keep on pushing her away from her real identity, while

at last with the same means, they make her acknowledge her Japanese-American independent dimension.

An example in this sense comes from Radine, a friend of Jeanne. She is a character who reveals to be quintessentially American, instigating for this reason her envy. At the same time, she does not influence the plot in a particular way. After the releasement from Manzanar, Radine is Jeanne's best friend for a long time. She has Jeanne's same humble background, with the only difference of being Caucasian and being therefore accepted by the rest of the people. For this reason, Jeanne grows influenced by her, as by any other normal white American girl. For example, Jeanne can enter the majorette team only after several problems. A fact that doesn't apply to Radine:

“After all, I *was* the first Oriental majorette they'd ever had. Even if my once enviable role now seemed vague second-rate, still I determined to try twice as hard to prove they'd made the right choice. This sort of treatment did not discourage me. I was used to it. I expected it, a condition of life. What demoralized me was watching Radine's success. We had shared everything, including all the values I'd learned from the world I wanted into, not only standards of achievement but ideas about how a girl should look and dress and talk and act, and ideas of male beauty. [...] What I wanted was the kind of acceptance that seemed to come so easily to Radine.” (171)

In this quote there is a pattern which become frequent in the narration - a series of undefined characters influences Jeanne's identity acquisition process. Radine is not the only one in this sense. Even more important are those people who discriminate her first. Radine comes to play only the exemplary role of what Jeanne wants to become. However, she's only but a random example of how this background characters work in *Farewell to Manzanar*.

These are people the reader does not come to know much about, since they appear for short episodes through the narration. However, it is the totality of them who come to play a major in the definition of Jeanne's identity.

Although presenting some exceptions then, the characters' system of *Farewell to Manzanar* follows a traditional pattern. Thanks to the form she writes her novel in, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston makes indeed rotate everything around one aspect – her identity. Consequently, according to who contributes to its evolution, the character system presents a series of primary and secondary characters.

1.3.3: The Narrator²⁵

Farwell to Manzanar presents three different types of narrator which influence the experience of the reader. The various uses of them create a sense of multiplicity, allowing who reads the novel to live the events connected to the detention from different perspectives. In particular, whether the narrator has more information about the narration than the reader or not, he/she assumes specific characteristics.

The first and main one is represented by an artificial Jeanne. A character/narrator which was created to resemble the author in a particular time of her life. Specifically, an adult Jeanne who looks back at her detention experience and recollects the memories she experienced as a kid. Jeanne demonstrates several times that she can cross the borders of time and space by referring to events which she could not have known about. However, since talking from a future perspective, the narrator in this case knows everything:

“On that first weekend in December there must have been twenty or twenty-five boats getting ready to leave. I had just turn seven. I remember it was Sunday because I was out of school, which meant I could go down to the wharf and watch”. (1)

“Papa himself knew it would only be a matter of time. They got him two weeks later, when we were staying overnight at Woody’s place, on Terminal Island.” (7)

This particular type of narrator is called omniscient because of his/her characteristic of knowing whatever happens in any place and time of the book; even before events actually take place. Moreover, he/she can display the ability of knowing the thoughts of every character of the story.

In particular, the analysis of the characters’ feelings told in first person assumes a great relevance in the development of the narration.

As it is possible to see from the examples above, several effects are recognizable on the reader. First, the use of the first person produces immediacy and connection with the protagonist:

²⁵ The theoretical concepts expressed in this sub-section and the following are the application of the ones illustrated in the book *Il Testo Narrativo: Istruzioni per la Lettura e L'Interpretazione* by Bernardelli and Cesarani

“Because the audience is given the experience of being “inside” the protagonist’s head, there is a direct link between protagonist and the audience. Emotions don’t become filtered through the distance of a third person narrator, instead the emotions happen in the moment, as the protagonist feels them. As the protagonist reveals her thoughts and fears to the reader an intimacy and connection is created. It is as if the protagonist is confiding in the reader, telling them their innermost secrets like they would a best friend. [...] It creates an immediate connection with the reader.” (Sundberg, 1)

When in the first example Jeanne tells us why she knows it was a Sunday, she adds indirectly some more information – emotions, feelings, impressions.

A third person narrator could have said: “It was a Sunday”. In that case we would have had just objective information. However, by saying “I remember it was Sunday because I was out of school, which meant I could go down to the wharf and watch”, we feel the excitement of a kid on a vacation day plus the information we could have known from an objective narrator.

In this way Jeanne is confiding to us what she is telling in the book. We have the privilege to know the information the narrator tells. Moreover, by creating this intimacy, Jeanne reaches another effect on the reader - she creates believability. Due to the connection established with the reader, there is an inherent believability which is created through the first person perspective. In a narration told in third person there is always a gap between narrator and reader. While the use of the first person: “Breaks down that barrier and the reader has a sense that they are getting a direct account of the events from a primary source. Readers have a tendency to give a first person voice more authority when they hear it.” (Sundberg, 2)

In an autobiographic book this type of narrator appears to be the most common. Nonetheless, in the case of *Farewell to Manzanar* two other different types of narrator appear.

In chapter seven *Fort Lincoln: An Interview*, the above mentioned narrator seems to disappear. In this chapter Wakatsuki Ko is interrogated by a US governmental officer. The reader assists to the scene without any intervention from the narrator. Moreover, the latter seems to leave all the explanations to dialogues; the objectivity of the scene results then unaltered. In short, the narrator seems to know as many things as the reader:

“*What is your name?*”

Your place of birth?

Ka-ke, a small town in Hiroshima-ken, on the island of Honshu. [...]

Who do you want to win this war? [...]

When your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?" (60-64)

This type of narrator is called external because of his/her characteristic of being separated from the events told in the story. It is the contrary of the omniscient one, since he/she does not know anything and he/she is deprived of the possibility to predict future events.

The reasons why the author decided to exploit this type of narrator in an autobiographical book could be several. First of all, the use of this expedient allows the author to present the drama of the Japanese-Americans imprisonment from another perspective. The latter appears to be less personal and more objective, enhancing then the believability. In the quote above, by taking a look at the interview to Wakatsuki Ko, we receive an insight even of his personal drama. After having read it, the reader senses that the personal problems experienced by Jeanne are not only her prerogative but rather the ones of a family and of an entire community.

In giving this other look at the events, the reader experiences one more effect – a pause. There is a break in the main events of the story with the addition of this episode. The third person exploited here: “Really helps the writer to get into the action. The third person creates more distance from the character and his/her thoughts. Therefore the writer can focus on the actions of the character. First person POV can become a bit of a ‘tell-fest’ (tell, tell, tell), but third person really puts the action back into the scenes.” (Sundberg, 2)

The last effect on the reader is the one of a break, but rather in a dynamic perspective. The reflections of the previous chapters leave room to a rather direct experience of the drama of the imprisonment. Without any intervention of the narrator, there are only the characters and the reader left to themselves.

The last type of narrator present in the book, appears in chapter eighteen *Ka-Ke, Near Hiroshima: April 1946*. In this part of the novel Woody, one of the older brothers of Jeanne, goes to

Japan due to his enrolment in the army. During his stay there, he meets Aunt Toyo – a relative from his father part of the family:

“She is Papa’s aunt. She must be eighty. He studies her face for some measure of how far her recollection can be trusted. He thinks of Granny, not yet this old, but blind, forgetful, full of needs that must be cared for and tales everyone half listens to. Toyo’s not at all like that. She has a monk’s tranquillity. Her eyes are still alert. Her face shows both the burden and the full understanding of all her eighty years or more.”
(143)

The events presented in the chapter are not told through the eyes of Jeanne, but rather from Woody’s perspective. The narrator tells the events still in third person. However, differently from chapter seven, the reader comes to know about Woody’s feelings and thoughts. By describing at least his point of view on the story, the narrator seems to know more than the reader.

A narrator whose characteristics are like the ones exposed above, by giving insights on the story from only one character perspective, is called internal.

The exploitation of this type of narrator expresses still some aims of the writer over the reader. As in the previous chapter, one of them is the creation of a break inside the narration. This fact is possible to see through the use of italic in both the occasions, which not only thematically but even visually create a sense of detachment from the main events.

However, whether in chapter seven the break was toward a rather dynamic mode, in this case the reflective attitude expressed in the majority of the narration is still on. The pause is then rather a change of perspective. The author in here wants to show “a situation through the eyes of an interesting or unique character.” (Wiehardt, 1) In particular, there is the intent to show the Japanese world through the eyes of a second-generation Japanese-American – Woody.

In this way, the narration results enriched by a unique perspective. The reader can experience the world counterpoised to the American one. However, it does so from the perspective of a character that is bond to both worlds like a neutral referee. The readers are pushed to express natural considerations – the war is suffered by both the opponents and most all of is futile.

As it is possible to understand then, the narration changes according to different events on the book. This way of telling the events is called ‘variable focalization’. By using this particular device, the

book results enriched by the point of view of different characters and the reader can live the experiences of the imprisonment from different perspectives.

1.3.4: Time of The Narration

In *Farewell to Manzanar*, time covers a crucial role in the narration. As it was possible to see in the previous section, the trauma derived from the detention takes time to be internalized by Jeanne. However, the way the reader experiences this event is derived from the use of time as it is exploited in the writing of the text.

As in any other novel, time in *Farewell to Manzanar* assumes multiple sides. It is in fact possible to trace different types of time in the narration. The first measure of time which a reader can conduct in *Farewell to Manzanar* covers the period that goes from twenty years before World War II to 1972. This is the actual lapse of time when the events take place, from the settlement of Wakatsuki Ko in the United States to the last visit which Jeanne pays to the ruins of the Manzanar camp.

The period that would be possible to measure in the real world is called 'historical time'. It is the actual extension and length of the events narrated. It could be meant as the reference to the time the reader is living in.

The second possible measure changes according to the types of narrator described above. As for the omniscient narrator embodied in the figure of Jeanne, she starts narrating the events some years after her last visit to Manzanar ruins. As for the external narrator, since he/she does not provide any information about him/herself, it is impossible to determine the time he/she is telling the events from. While in the case of the internal narrator of chapter eighteen, we understand that he is telling the events in April 1946 from the title of the chapter.

The measures enounced in the previous paragraph refer to the analysis of the so called 'narration time'. It is the time the narrators tell the events from. It is particularly important in the creation of different feelings in the reader, like disorientation and credibility of the events told.

Credibility is achieved in different ways according to time. In the case of the first narrator, by talking from a future perspective Jeanne assumes an authoritative figure. She invites us to believe what we are reading because she knows how the events ended. For example, when she says: "It helps me understand how Papa's life could end at a place like Manzanar. He didn't die there, but things

finished for him there, whereas for me it was like a birthplace.” (47) In this case, we believe Houston. We believe her dad psychologically died in Manzanar because she is revealing us a future only she can see.

Moreover, ‘narration time’ is shaped in particular ways in order to create disorientation. In the first section of the book we pass from omniscient narrator to an external one; from a narration in past tense to a one in present tense. This difference in time is lived by the reader as a break. The latter happens because we are thrown violently from a story experience to action.

At the end of chapter six the situation is described as follows: “He arrived from Long Beach, California, at the beginning of January, in a country where cattle often freeze to death, and he was of course a prisoner of war.” (59)

Then, there is a page break, a change of chapter and the situation is presented to us as follows: “‘What is your full name?’ ‘Wakatsuki Ko.’ ‘Your place of birth’ ‘Ka-ke, a small town in Hiroshima-ken, on the island of Honshu.’” (60)

There is a moment, between the two passages, when the reader ask him/herself what is happening. The answer arrives only after a while when there is the realization that the story is directly lived by him/herself by assisting to the dialogue. Nonetheless, the disorientation is successfully created with the right use of the ‘narration time’.

The third and last type of time in *Farewell to Manzanar* deals with the wide use that the author does of flash-forward and flashback. If we were tracing an ideological line that connects all of the events told in the book, we would see that it is not linear. This fact is due to the nature of the so called ‘story time’. *Farewell to Manzanar* is an example of what is called ‘syuzhet’ - a non-linear narration. This type of narration is counterbalanced by the ‘fabula’ – a linear one. It is particularly interesting to see the exploitation of the ‘story time’ in *Farewell to Manzanar* because by being an autobiography a rather linear disposition of the events could be expected.

However, Houston decided to tell several events without following a precise order. In this way, the experience of the trauma²⁶ is the main aspect underlined in the narration. With a not linear timeline the reader lives Jeanne's trauma with a sense of confusion and disorientation – an experience which relates to the one lived by the author.

With a linear format: “authors choose a beginning and end, and relate events within that span sequentially, as cause and effect dictate in real life. The author delivers story content that occurs outside the chosen time span as flashback, and reveals shorter material through memory or anecdote.” (Lyndemuth, 1)

Farewell to Manzanar is instead a continuous reference to memory material. Moreover, the latter is presented in an unprecise order. In this way, the author can exploit several advantages. The first one is that: “The writer can increase tension by presenting information out of cause-and-effect sequence. [...] In the linear story, authors build tension by assembling causes that point toward a disastrous effect. In the nonlinear, we dump the protagonist into disaster, and the causes are only relevant as they have something to do with his journey through chaos.” (Lyndemuth, 1)

In *Farewell to Manzanar* we assist exactly to this type of situation. The story begins with discrimination at full effect in Jeanne's life - there is Pearl Harbour and then the detention experience. For the rest of the book we assist to her emotional and psychological chaos, generated by those events happened at the beginning of the narration.

In this way, the author can exploit a second advantage. With a non-linear story: “authors can demonstrate a character's depth and create a compelling story question at the same time” (Lyndemuth, 1).

In *Farewell to Manzanar* we assist to all the different shades of Jeanne's personality and to all the evolutions of her identity. At the same time we ask ourselves ‘Why did everything go in this way?’.

²⁶ Trauma is a widespread theme in literature. For further information about how this topic is displayed in different literary works see Siewert, Stephanie, Mehnert

We ask ourselves the reasons of the hatred toward Japanese-Americans, we are put in front of the futility of the war and of the destruction and difficult re-assemblage of a human being personality. The non-linear narration contributes to the creation of these questions in the mind of the reader.

Time then is exploited in order to effect the reader in different ways. Each different type of time described above cover a precise role. The result is a variegated narration that underlines the main aspects of the narration.

1.3.5: The setting

A key aspect of *Farewell to Manzanar* is the relationship that the characters create with the surrounding setting. Specifically, some places ideologically and physically influence the life of whom crosses their borders.

The first two settings that work in this sense are the United States and Japan. Rather than physically, the two countries influence the main characters ideologically - especially Jeanne, who does not know whether she is Japanese or American.

According to the perceptions of the great majority of the American population, some specific ideas are associated with both of them. Japan during World War II is seen as the land of terror and injustice. On the other hand, the United States seem to embody the idea of freedom and democracy. To some extent Jeanne belongs to both of them and consequently she lives painfully the conflict that the two nations create. Even more, the confusion generated in her mind enhances once more that the ideas of equality linked to the United States proves fallacious.

With World War II, the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans was perpetrated by the United States government. Consequently, Jeanne experienced a sense of injustice that made her ideas waver between two different entities, both evil in their peculiar way.

However, finding herself into a physically and ideologically violent war in a crucial phase of her growth, created in her that need to know who the 'good guy' was. The response to this necessity did not arrive easily. By being deprived of the possibility to know what is evil and what is good, Jeanne found herself in a confusing situation which took years to resolve.

During that lapse of time, her identity creation process took place (as have already seen). However, it should be underlined that the latter started because Jeanne found herself living in a precise setting. For a long time, this surrounding pushed her in a direction stud of incongruent and confused ideas which kept influencing her greatly.

Inscribed in the conflict represented by the United States and Japan there is the place around which all of the events of the book revolve – the detention camp of Manzanar.

Manzanar camp is what influences Jeanne and the other characters of the book the most. Although it represents the highest point which the discrimination toward Japanese-Americans arrived, it is also a place characterized by multiples natures. According to the characters of the book, it does not represent only a place of discrimination and guilt, but paradoxically it becomes even a separate safe world.

As it was possible to see in section 1.2, on one hand, Jeanne and the other characters live Manzanar with a guilty attitude, as they believed they were responsible for something. For this reason, it is a place that they do not want to remember and they try to hide it in the most remote drawers of their memory. On the other hand, the detention camp comes to represent a separate world they cannot escape from, but which they are protected by.

This latter concept is clear when the family eventually has to leave the camp. Although the end of the war is getting close to an end, the climate of discrimination is not, and a return to the place they had lived in the past means a return to violence:

“In our family the response to this news was hardly joyful. For one thing we had no home to return to. Worse, the very thought of going back to the west filled us with dread. What will they think of us, those who sent us here? How will they look at us? Three years of wartime propaganda – racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate slogans, and fright-mask posters – had turned the Japanese face into something despicable and grotesque. Mama and Papa knew this. They had been reading the papers. Even I knew this, although it was not until many years later that I realized how bad things actually were.” (127)

Therefore, although they suffered the injustices and the despicable conditions inside the camp, at some extent the latter represented a protective world they had adapted to. Once this world was dismantled though, the acknowledgment that it had never existed followed. After a while Manzanar had become a safe bubble they were living in, but nevertheless it was an imprisonment camp. Once out of it, Jeanne and her family realized with time that a protecting world had never existed. It was rather a place of abuses. This fact enhanced the sensation of guilt they lived and strengthened their attempt to forget the experience. By thinking of Manzanar as a protective place, the family realized only later that they were contributing to the confirmation of the stereotypes in their regard.

In conclusion, settings reveal themselves to be fundamental in the understanding of the novel. A deeper investigation of all of their natures allows the reader to experience them as more than mere places where the characters of the book act into. In *Farewell to Manzanar*, as it was possible to see in this subsection, settings interact actively with who passes through them. They are the means which enact characters' feelings, starting all the psychological processes they live.

1.3.6: Genre and Mode

Farewell to Manzanar is a book which takes a great amount of information from the personal experiences of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her family. However, as above mentioned, while reading this work, one can notice a series of technical devices peculiar in an autobiography. I often referred to this book as an ‘autobiographical novel’. Nonetheless, according to Margaret Anne Doody a novel “is a long narrative, normally in prose, which describes fictional characters and events, usually in the form of a sequential story”(15). In this sense then, my definition could present a contradiction in terms. In this sub-section I explain why it is not the case.

Surely, among the several literary modes which a work can be part of, *Farewell to Manzanar* belongs to the realistic-mimetic one. As ‘mode’ it is possible to define those: “forme elementari dell’immaginario letterario (e quindi anche narrative), consistenti in un insieme di procedimenti formali e di aggregazioni tematiche, che si concretizzano nei vari generi e testi, dando loro una tonalità dominante o più tonalità dominanti”. (Bernardelli and Cesarani, 239)

By referring to this latter definition, thanks to the continuous references to the real life of the author and to the total lack of fantastic elements, *Farewell to Manzanar* is a book with a realistic mode.

However, although several realistic elements are presented, the genre of *Farewell to Manzanar* proves to be indeed that of the novel. The genre is the shape in which a narration is presented²⁷. The book in this case cannot be defined as a short story because of its length. Moreover, due to its psychological insights on the characters it cannot be associated with a historical book either. Furthermore, it does not respect the characteristics of poetry and novellas.

Farwell to Manzanar is a novel because it is written in prose and it has a book length²⁸. Moreover, it demonstrates its belonging to the genre in its specific way to tell historical events. In

²⁷ See *Il Testo Narrativo: Istruzioni per la Lettura e L’Interpretazione* by Bernardelli and Cesarani

²⁸ It is not the only reason why we can define the book in this sense. However, in here I am referring to the definition by Margaret Anne Dooty and I am trying to applying it with words very similar to the one she used.

fact, it does so by recreating that degree of fiction thanks to the psychological insights the author creates in writing the story.

Thus, now that its genre is verified, an explanation about how can it be classified as an autobiography must be processed. The most immediate definition of autobiography is given to us by the literary scholar Maria Anna Mariani, who defines autobiography as a literary work in which: “Una persona parla di sè (autos), racconta la propria vita (bios) usando il medium della scrittura (graphia)”. (9)

In this sense then, *Farewell to Manzanar* works as an autobiography in an exemplary way. In the book, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston talks about herself (autos), she tells her life events (bios) and she does so by writing a novel (graphia). For these reasons, there is no mistake in classifying the book as an autobiographical novel.

Specifically, this novel presents other peculiar aspects of a sub-genre – the American autobiography. *Farewell to Manzanar* refers to a specific socio-political context. Moreover, by illustrating the tragedy of Japanese-Americans during World War time, it challenges a series of democratic principles typically American; those ideas of equality and at the same time of melting pot which ideologically make the American citizen so peculiar and unique.

If taken into exam the main characteristic which Rachel McLennan attributes to an American autobiography, it is possible to understand why *Farewell to Manzanar* could be classified in this sense. The literary scholar explains that in American autobiography: “Another kind of promise – what Laurel Berlant calls America’s ‘national promise’ of the realization of ‘abstract principles of democratic nationality’ – is central to understanding American autobiography and ensures that many American autobiographies have political and ethical designs.” (8)

Farewell to Manzanar refers to them. Moreover, it pushes the reader to question them and to raise a political debate. Houston in fact openly made declarations about this point in the interview attached to the 2012 Ember edition of the book. When asked “What do you hope your experience will bring to children today and in future?”, Jeanne answered: “I hope it can help them to understand

that this country's high ideals, as expressed in the Constitution, can never be taken for granted, and to understand that, with the example of the interment behind us, such an abuse of civil rights, carried out along racial lines, should never be allowed to happen again." (7)

For all the reasons expressed above then, *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston can be defined as an autobiographical American novel.

2: Critical Approaches To *Farewell To Manzanar*

2.1. The Death Of The Author

Farewell to Manzanar is a book constituted by different elements which work synchronically together. In order to present the book in all of its parts it is useful to refer to the essay *Linguistics and Poetics* by Roman Jakobson.

The scholar analysed language and in doing so, he created a pattern which represents the main elements in communication. If we take *Farewell to Manzanar* as our study case, we can isolate those elements.

The novel can be seen as an attempt to communicate between two or more individuals. With this conception then the book itself is a ‘message’ which is delivered. The sender of this latter is nonetheless the writer herself, who is in this case represented by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston with the help of her husband James D. Houston. With this perspective then the couple take the name of ‘addresser’.

The work of the couple was meant to be read since the beginning. The communication needs then a receiver, someone who in this case reads the novel. Thus, the reader him/herself will be the so called ‘addressee’.

Moreover, the act of writing *Farewell to Manzanar* resulted in the publication of the book will be the ‘contact’ between the addresser and the addressee. While the ‘context’ in which the story is set is represented by the United States between 1920s and 1960s.

The last element which is possible to isolate by following Jakobson model is the ‘code’, or in other words, that set of rules which allows addresser and addressee to communicate effectively. In this case the English language covers this role.

Since all of these elements appear in *Farewell to Manzanar*, it is possible to state that the book represents a successful communication model. However, rather than being interested in this aspect, the applied Jakobson model helps us to understand which of these elements is the most important to focus on.

Although every element is associated with a specific function without which we would not be able to understand the message, Jakobson himself stated that the diversity among messages: “Lies not in a monopoly of some these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions.” (1148)

Therefore, after having isolated the elements which compose this type of communication, it is useful to see which one of them is at the top of the hierarchy and then characterizes this message (novel) in a peculiar way.

According to the approach taken in order to analyse the novel, it is possible to see how an ideological ranking could be drawn up in a different way. By applying the work of different scholars to *Farwell to Manzanar* the elements at the top of this hierarchy change according to the approach taken.

I want to start here by applying the essay *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes to *Farewell to Manzanar*. If we use his work in order to analyse the novel by Houston, the main elements underlined would be the ‘message’, the ‘code’ and the ‘addressee’. According to Barthes, the author and any information to him/her related should disappear because: “It is language which speaks, not the author”. (Barthes, 1325)

Let us take now *Farewell to Manzanar*. If we follow the instructions given by Barthes, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston should be reduced to a mere mediator between the story and the reader. The latter should be able to judge the story independently from the information he/she possesses about her. The hierarchy would present then *Farewell to Manzanar* (the message) and the English language (the code) to cover the main role and right after the reader (the addressee) following. The author should be totally put aside and the text should be evaluated with the exclusion of personal information to her related.

However, *Farewell to Manzanar* is an autobiographical novel. Information about Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston should enrich the text. What would be left if the book was read disregarding those facts connected to Houston’s personal life? Several things.

First let us focus on the ‘code’ – the English language. If we read *Farewell to Manzanar* by focusing on the language, we would notice several peculiar elements. As already said, the book is written in English. However, Japanese language undoubtedly influences the work.

Let us look at an example: “There is a phrase the Japanese use in such situations, when something difficult must be endured. You would hear the older heads, the Issei, telling others very quietly, ‘*Shikata ga nai*’ (It cannot be helped). ‘*Shikata ga nai*’ (It must be done).” (16)

In this case there is the explanation of an expression used by Japanese people. When this fact happens in the book, very often in the next pages the very same expression is repeated: “Like so many of the women there, Mama never did get used to the latrines. It was a humiliation she just learned to endure: *shikata ga nai*”. (33)

Thus, the very code of *Farewell to Manzanar* reproduces the mixed identity of a Japanese-American. Moreover, by first introducing some words and then by using them normally in the following pages, this identity is made comprehensible to the reader – likely someone without the same Japanese-American background.

This particular use of the language makes the reading experience of the trauma even more direct, because the latter is enriched by cultural elements which present different shades of meaning unlikely translatable.

It is especially the case when negative expressions are presented:

“The people around us were hardworking, boisterous, a little proud of their nickname, *yo-go-re*, which meant literally *uncouth one*, or roughneck, or dead-end kid. They not only spoke Japanese exclusively, they spoke a dialect peculiar to Kyushu, where their families had come from in Japan, a rough, fisherman’s language, full of oaths and insults. Instead of saying *ba-ka-ta-re*, a common insult meaning *stupid*, Terminal Islanders would say *ba-ka-ya-ro*, a coarser and exclusively masculine use of the word, which implies gross stupidity.” (12)

In here, the clarification of the Japanese expression is used in order to attach cultural meaning to malicious expressions. As readers, we will come to understand how bad this type of expressions will be when we will read it again. In case they had been written in English, we would have experienced

them in a rather common way. In Japanese, we can understand the feelings of whom is insulted by the use of these words.

However, not only the language or ‘code’ provides a useful insight on the novel. By keeping cancelling the presence of the author from the book, other meanings are enacted. Although I still believe that the knowledge of personal information about Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston enriches the experience of the reader, by taking a ‘Barthesian’ approach the experience becomes rather personal. It is the scholar itself who invites to undertake a reading of this type.

According to Barthes:

“Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.” (1325)

As the case of *Farewell to Manzanar*, for example we can bring together the Japanese and the American culture. However, as readers, we can even just create the meaning from our ideas about the text. As a consequence, one’s personal experience of the novel might change from the one of another person. Barthes gives us the power to recognize those elements which in our opinion are worth something.

Since individuals with a personal history are characterized by different elements, *Farewell to Manzanar* might prove to be a profitable reading because of different reasons, many of which likely not sharable by other people.

In my case, as student of American studies, right from the text I can recognize many of those elements which are inherited by classic literature. For example, I can recognize that research of American identity which J.Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote about in *Letters From an American Farmer*, particularly in letter III *What is an American?*

I read a fragment of *Farewell to Manzanar* and I see the same topics about citizenship as in Crèvecoeur: “The next wish of this traveller will be to know whence came all these people? they are

a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen.” (Crèvecoeur, 36)

Of course I insert them in a different context, but I see a sense of continuity with the past. A different approach to the same theme – citizenship and race. *Farewell to Manzanar* underlines the weakness of the thought ‘American citizenship is equal to democracy’ while Crèvecoeur defends it. Again, the two texts must be read with a consideration of their different contexts, but nonetheless the cohesion of the themes proves to me how the topic is still actual.

However, this could be only my ‘Barthesian’ approach because I read the text in this way. By doing so, I cancel the author and I link the novel to my personal experience. It is the text, with its characteristics the responsible of my considerations, not the author.

An approach of this type could underline then important aspects. Moreover, its most peculiar characteristic is its immediacy. An everyday reader, conscious of the type of reading which he/she is doing could find *Farewell to Manzanar* a book worth to be read without any further research on the topic because the text is the center of the attention.

In conclusion, by following the principles of the essay *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes, we can understand that the focal points of *Farewell to Manzanar* would be the language and the text. By doing so, the analysis proves to be profitable for the peculiarities in the exploitation of the language and on the personal insights which each reader could provide. Moreover, it proves to be a rather immediate means to analyse the novel by Houston.

2.2: Context

After having discussed the value of *Farewell to Manzanar* by cancelling the author, I will now apply the work of another scholar to the analysis of the book. If we consider again the model by Roman Jakobson, it will be possible to see how our attention will move from the ‘code’ and the ‘message’ to the ‘context’.

In particular, I will refer to the essay *Work, Immigration, Gender* by Lisa Lowe. The professor, expert of Asian-American studies, explains how to make an oppression testimony useful in order to change inequalities and specifically refers to the Asian-American context in which people were oppressed for long.

In her essay, Lowe starts from the testimony of Fu Lee, a Chinese-American woman, in order then to put it in relation to the social and working conditions of Asian-American women. In this way, the testimony can assume a new form so as to denounce the oppressive conditions in which these women are forced to work.

Farewell to Manzanar could be read in the same way. By focusing on the ‘referential’ function²⁹ which the novel enacts, it is possible to analyse the transgressive power of the novel.

“We can read literary texts like the novel not merely as the aesthetic framing of a ‘private’ transcendence, but as a form that may narrate the dissolution or impossibility of the ‘private’ domain in the context of the material conditions of work, geography, gender, and race. In this sense, cultural forms of many kinds are important media in the formation of oppositional narratives and crucial to the imagination and rearticulation of new forms of political subjectivity, collectivity, and practice.” (Lowe, 2522)

In this sense *Farewell to Manzanar* works in contrast to the U.S. narrative of ‘melting pot’. For long, in fact, America was considered by many a land in which different cultures could fuse together in order to generate a new citizen who had the best of each part of his ancestry. “The melting pot became the symbol of the liberal and radical vision of American society. In a sense, it was a political symbol

²⁹ In *Linguistics and Poetics*, according to Roman Jakobson a message has a ‘referential function’ when referring to the context in which it is enounced.

used to strengthen and legitimize the ideology of America as a land of opportunity where race, religion, and national origin should not be barriers to social mobility.” (Hirschman, 398)

Farewell to Manzanar proposes a different idea. It displays the un-concreteness of this idea and moreover it does so from an Asian-American perspective. Read in this way then, it respects perfectly the indications of Lisa Lowe.

At the time Jeanne grew up, the situation of Japanese-Americans, even *Nisei*, was totally different from being an ideal melting pot. “The Nisei aspired to white-collar occupations and ‘clean-work’, rather than the agricultural and produce work which they considered to be demanding. Unfortunately for the Nisei, they discovered as they grew up that the reality did not match the ideals they had been taught.” (Takahashi, 36)

Many of them persuaded higher education and completed college, but their life chances were circumscribed by the racial order.

“Because of the Depression and racial segregation in the labour market, the Nisei, like the Issei, resorted to farming and small business. [...] As World War II drew near, the Nisei dependence on the Issei economy had become much more pronounced. [...] We can estimate that most of these 50 percent of the working Nisei who were 14 years or older were economically dependent on the Issei. (Takahashi, 38)

Moreover, the problems of *Nisei* and Japanese-American in general were not circumscribed to the labour market only. Racial restrictions were present even in every day relationships. Japanese-Americans before the World War were segregated from the political and active part of the society.

“Although many Nisei associated with their white American peers in grade school, high school, and college, these relationships did not necessary lead to what sociologist call ‘structural integration’. Despite extensive contact with their white peers, Nisei often drifted towards their Nisei peers for fellowship and social activity.” (Takahashi, 42)

And the trend was very similar in the years during and after World War II.

“Adjusting to the myriad changes that had taken place while they were interned was certainly difficult and required considerable courage. [...] Their limited economic prospects were so closely tied to their racially subordinate position. [...] Most white Americans failed to distinguish between Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals and thus defined returning Issei, Nisei, Sansei as Japanese rather than fellow Americans.” (Takahashi, 113)

The situation described above is the one in which Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston grew up. *Farewell to Manzanar* could be read then as a testimony of these facts. With a knowledge of the context in which the book is inscribed it is possible to understand the political implications which the book tries to underline. The book can be seen then as an instrument of condemnation at the service of a specific ethnic and political group – the Japanese-Americans.

The political social situation described above is mirrored in the book, as it is possible to see in several passages. For example, in the narration of the story of Wakatsuki Ko and his struggle to an economic stability there is the reflection of the suffering of an entire minority group. The recourse to the manual job and the complete renounce to a rather intellectual one marks his story as well:

“For a couple of years he tried lumberjacking in Seattle. [...] He tried farming there too. The alien land laws prevented him from owning property, but he could lease the land, or make a tenancy deal and work it. A few years before I was born he had settled the family on a twenty-two-acre farm near Watsonville, California, raising apples, strawberries and a few vegetables crops. [...] But his luck didn’t hold. The well went dry. Thirty years after sailing away from a financial dead end and the remnants of a once-noble family in Japan, he found himself in the middle of America’s Depression and on the move again, with eight kids and a wife this time”. (55)

If put in relationship with the context he lived in, Wakatsuki Ko could serve as an example readers could identify themselves with. Moreover, this latter fact creates empathy and the latter serves as a terrain on which starting to create a political battle in order to change things. After having seen the contradictions between Houston narration and the Melting Pot tradition readers can acquire awareness of the country they live in.

There are many similar examples throughout the novel, if we analyse the following:

“At one point I thought I would like to join the Girl Scouts. A friend of mine belonged, that blond girl who had commented on my reading. [...] ‘Can I belong?’ I asked, then adding as an afterthought, as if to ease what I knew her answer would have to be, ‘You know, I’m Japanese.’ ‘Gee,’ she said, her friendly face suddenly a mask. ‘I don’t know. But we can sure find out. Mama’s the assistant troop leader.’ And then, the next day, ‘Gee, Jeannie, no. I’m *really* sorry.’” (161)

Instead of seeing the above mentioned labour situation Jere Takashi was talking about, we see the segregation of the Japanese-Americans from activities reserved only to whites. We can read about an

example, even if it is small, of a racial discrimination and we can see again how contradictions with traditional narratives of equalities are showed.

Even the difficult situation which Japanese-Americans had to face after the releasement from the detention camp is mirrored in *Farewell to Manzanar*:

“The stories, the murmurs, the headlines of the last few months had imprinted in my mind the word HATE. [...] It was a bleak and awful-sounding word, yet I had no idea at all what shape it might take if ever I confronted it. I saw it as a dark, amorphous, cloud that would descent from above and enclose us forever. As we entered Los Angeles, I sat huddled in the back seat, silent, fearing any word uttered might bring it to life.” (151)

“Mama’s first concern, meanwhile, as always, was how to keep money coming in. She had saved about \$500, but that wouldn’t last long. Soon after we settle into Cabrillo Homes, [...] she went back to the kind of job she’d had when we lived on Terminal Island. It meant much more to her now than it had before the war. [...] Now, she knew the household income was going to be her responsibility for quite a while. Papa would never accept anything like a cannery job. And if he did, Mama’s shame would be even greater than his, this would be a sure sign that we had hit rock bottom”. (155)

The family economic and social struggle in order to be back again to normal life is no less than one of the many similar stories which really took place in the period right after the releasement of Japanese-Americans. In this way, it becomes once more exemplary of a suffered situation that only one part of society had to live.

Moreover, it is not only a matter of accuracy of the events told in the book. By being a novel which talks about real problems, the book enacts different reactions than for example a historical book. With its insights on the characters’ feelings, emphatic ideas are enacted. As said for the case of Wakatsuki Ko’s story, those are at the base of the political action which could be undertaken in order to change things. If put in relationship with its context the novel could denounce even better than other instruments the oppression of a social group over another. If “Asian American cultural forms, containing a repertoire of counterhistory, memory, and resources for different narratives of new subjects and practices are a medium for critical historical interpretations” (Lowe, 2531), *Farewell to Manzanar* proves to fulfil its role perfectly.

In conclusion, reading *Farewell to Manzanar* in the way suggested by Lisa Lowe proves to be a profitable approach because it demonstrates the falseness of some of the conceptions connected

to the idea of the United States as a democratic land. First of all the idea of the nation as a Melting Pot and moreover the falseness of the latter theory if applied to the Asian-American community.

By putting the text in relation with its context it is possible to see how it is actually accurate in the description of real situations. Moreover, by being written in the form of the novel it is even more effective in creating an empathic response with the readers.

2.3: Its Imagined Community

In the previous section I analysed some aspects of the context in which *Farewell to Manzanar* is inscribed. According to the approach taken the referential function of the novel was the preponderant one. In this section I will continue the reflection about the context by referring to *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson. I will try an approach to the novel by Houston by applying the theories he expressed. It will be possible to see then that this type of approach diverges in part from the previous one due to the elements it focuses on. The context plays a major role also in Anderson's reflections. However, at the same time by applying those concepts to the analysis of *Farewell to Manzanar* other elements of Jakobson's model becomes very important.

As already said, *Farewell to Manzanar* is a book deeply imbued in a context of nationalism and racism. Nonetheless, the causes of the spreading of these concepts must still be further investigated. An answer to the climate of hatred and discrimination displayed in *Farewell to Manzanar* arrives from the work of the cultural scholar Benedict Anderson. Anderson analyses the political world in which we live. However, he defines a nation as a: "Imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (Anderson, 6)

He is particularly interested in what pushes human beings to die in conflicts like wars for an entity which is created only politically and which is consequently only an idea rather than a concrete being:

"I am driven to the conclusion that no 'scientific definition' of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists. [...] It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings." (Anderson, 7)

This conception is crucial in *Farewell to Manzanar*. In fact, if we take the U.S. as an imagined community we understand some of the causes which unconsciously triggered the climate of hatred toward Japanese-Americans.

In this regard, Vincent Leicht explains Anderson's thought properly:

“In some nations, strong patriotic feelings coexist with ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. No one essential characteristic can be identified that, if missing, makes nationhood impossible. Rather, under different historical, cultural, geographic circumstances, the shared feeling essential to nationhood can be constructed differently. Likewise, nations can manage to survive while also experiencing considerable racial, regional, religious, ethnic, and class animosities.” (Leicht, 1914)

Starting from Anderson’s thought, my idea is not only that the United States survived the inner conflict with Japanese-Americans, but also that the latter enforced the idea of an imagined nation in the great majority of the population. By discriminating racially and culturally Japanese-Americans, the other part of population enforced the ideas connected to their own nation.

In particular, the latter refer to some elements which the great majority of the population viewed as quintessentially American and which Japanese-Americans did not own. First of all, the physical differences played a major role. Who was deviating from the mainstream conception of American was seen as a problem and therefore excluded. As Anderson explains: “nation-ness is assimilated to skin color, gender, parentage and birth-era – all those things one can not help” (143).

This idea is mirrored in *Farewell to Manzanar* as well. Especially when after the imprisonment Jeanne returns to be part of the community which had excluded her before: “I wouldn’t be faced with physical attack, or with overt shows of hatred. Rather, I would be seen as someone foreign, or as someone other than American, or perhaps not be seen at all. [...] I felt that if attention were drawn to me, people would see what this girl had first responded to. They wouldn’t see me, they would see the slant-eyed face, the Oriental”. (158)

In this example it is possible to see how Jeanne is excluded from the community described by Anderson because she physically does not correspond ideally to the image of the American citizen. She is Asian, she is part of another conception of community – the Japanese one.

As it is possible to see then, this type of approach directly analyzes the context which it is applied to. However, indirectly if philtered through *Farewell to Manzanar* it unravels other insights on the author. Most of all, the latter becomes an example of an element in the imagined communities. Nonetheless, rather than just be exemplary, by focusing also on Jeanne, an approach like this helps to underline the peculiarities of the author.

It is the case of another element which does not allow Japanese-Americans to be conceived as part of the community - language. In this case I refer in particular to the English language. Language is maybe the most connecting element inside a community. "Nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language". (Anderson, 145)

Although a great number of Japanese-Americans were unable to speak proper English and therefore according to this theory they would be understandably excluded from the imagined community, this element does not apply to Jeanne.

As a *Nisei* not only Jeanne did understand and speak perfect English but the latter even represented the only language she could speak properly. In here then we assist to a contradiction about the author. In particular, she is excluded from the community even though she possesses a key element in order to be part of it. Therefore, it is possible to see that the community is formed once more on mere subjective ideas shared by the majority. It is not a matter of what reality truly is, but rather what the imagination of the great part of the community suggests to each member of it.

In order to explain this point in more detail, it is useful to take a look at this abstract from *Farewell to Manzanar*:

"When the sixth-grade teacher ushered me in, the other kids inspected me, but not unlike I myself would study a new arrival. She was a warm, benevolent woman who tried to make this first day as easy as possible. She gave me the morning to get the feel of the room. That afternoon, during a reading lesson, she finally asked me if I'd care to try a page out loud. I had not yet opened my mouth, except to smile. When I stood up, everyone turned to watch. Any kid entering a new class wants, first of all, to be liked. This was uppermost in my mind. I smiled wider, then began to read. I made no mistakes. When I finished, a pretty blond girl in front of me said, quite innocently, "Gee, I didn't know you could speak English. She was genuinely amazed. I was stunned. How could this have even been doubt?" (157)

In here, it is clear how the first element of exclusion (physical appearances) follows even the second one (language). Jeanne does not look like someone who would be able to know English. Consequently, she is excluded from the community even though she can indeed speak it fluently. This is because of illogical reasons based on imagination.

However, whether according to the majority of the community her physical appearances are enough in order not to associate her with the American community, on the other side, since "English,

like any other language, is always open to new speakers, listeners, and readers” (Anderson, 146), Jeanne, from her perspective perceives herself as part of it for the same reason. She feels herself as American because she knows one of those elements which normally are enough in order to belong to the imaged community.

Furthermore, she not only thinks of herself as American but the knowledge of part of the heritage she inherited from her parents makes her feel as part of both the Japanese and the American community.

“There is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests - above all in the form of poetry and songs. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody.” (Anderson, 145)

Concerning this matter, there is a moment in the novel, when the pride of Jeanne’s cultural roots is expressed at its maximum. It is a moment when the Wakatsuki family gathers and sings together the Japanese national anthem. In there, Jeanne fully expresses her way to be part of the Japanese imagined community:

“The national anthem, I later learned, is what he had sung every morning as a schoolboy in Japan. They still sing it there, the way American kids pledge allegiance to the flag. It is not a martial song, or a victory song, the way many national anthems are. It is really a poem, whose words go back to the ninth century; *Kimi ga yo wa chiyoni/yachiyoni sa-za-re i-shi no i-wa-o to/na-ri-te ko-ke no musu made*. May thy peaceful reign last long. / May it last for thousands of years, / Until this tiny stone will grow / Into a massive rock, and the moss / Will cover it deep and thick. It is a patriotic song that can also be read as a proverb, as a personal credo for endurance.” (90-91)

The inclusion in the novel itself plus the proud way to describe the characteristics of the anthem are the way in which Houston explains the reader that although American she cannot deny her family’s origins. In this way to present the matter of her ‘Japaneseness’ Houston at some extent is claiming her belonging both to the Japanese and to the American community.

However, through the element of language, she is excluded also from the Japanese community. Whether the knowledge of English was not enough in order to be part of the American community, the inability to speak Japanese is sufficient in order to exclude her from the Japanese

one. As above mentioned, Jeanne, except for few words or expressions which nonetheless are significant to her, does not know Japanese. In one passage of the book, this lack of knowledge is presented as an exclusion even from the other world she would naturally belong to:

“They would swagger and pick on outsiders and persecute anyone who didn’t speak as they did. That was what made my own time there so hateful. I had never spoken anything but English, and the other kids in the second grade despised me for it. They were tough and mean, like ghetto kids anywhere. Each day after school I dreaded their ambush. My brother Kiyo, three years older, would wait for me at the door, where we would decide whether to run straight home together, or split up, or try a new and unexpected route. None of these kids ever actually attacked. It was the threat that frightened us, their fearful looks, and the noises they would make, like miniature Samurai, in a language we couldn’t understand.” (12-13)

In here then, it is fully possible to see how in *Farewell to Manzanar* it is possible to trace the concretization of Anderson theories. The element which appears unique though, is the collocation which the author gives to herself among these two imagined communities. As a Japanese-American, Jeanne feels divided between two worlds, the American one and the Japanese one. She tries to find her way in one of the two communities rather than understand that she belongs to a community which is not quintessentially American nor Japanese. Her imagined community is rather one which is Japanese-American.

One more element which must be analyzed is how the diffusion of these ideas makes people perceive themselves as part of a particular community. In this sense, Anderson particularly pays attention to the role of the media in this sense. “Only when aided by print media,” he argues “can strangers imagine themselves as partaking simultaneously in the same set of unfolding events.” (Anderson, 41)

As already seen³⁰ media played a major role in the distorted depiction of the Japanese-American community. The racist image of them was spread by newspapers, movies and radios and resulted in a complete ideological exclusion of Japanese-Americans from the imaged American community.

³⁰ See section 1.2 of this work for further information about the role of the media in the representation of Japanese-Americans. Moreover, see Foner for the role of the media and of propaganda during World War II.

This tendency is once more mirrored in the novel in question: “Three years of wartime propaganda – racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate slogans, and fright-mask posters – had turned the Japanese face into something despicable and grotesque.” (127)

If we read this quote by keeping in mind Anderson’s thought, we understand the means through which it is possible to influence the image of a nation. In this case, the depiction made by Houston in *Farewell to Manzanar* highlights how the United States exclude from its community what is different, as far as it concerns at least Japanese-Americans.

Moreover, the power of the media in modeling imagination in a particular direction is underlined even more in another passage of the book: “The stories, the murmurs, the headlines of the last few months had imprinted in my mind the word HATE. I had heard my sisters say, ‘Why do they hate us?’ I had heard Mama say with lonesome resignation, ‘I don’t understand all this hate in the world.’” (151)

In here the media again model the perception toward an attitude of hate. They’re the means through which the opinion of the United States imagined community changes. Moreover, the quote underlines another aspect. The incorporation and the exclusion from communities happen with no objectivity. In the words of incomprehension of Jeanne’s mother lies the idea that communities and consequently nations are just abstract ideas to which human beings attribute specific senses. Why hate is directed toward a specific range of people cannot find a reason but in imagination.

This is why who is considered rightly part of a nation and who is not, changes with time. Perceptions change through time and with them even what is conceived as part of a nation. During World War II people with Japanese ancestry could not be considered as part of the United States nation. Nowadays, as a consequence of the several measures that have been taken in the revaluation of what happened in their regard suggest, they can.

An approach started from the work *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson proves to be profitable under many circumstances. Not only more aspects of the context in which *Farewell to*

Manzanar is inserted are investigated, but also personal insights on the author are displayed by the application of Anderson's ideas to the novel written by Houston.

2.4: The Assimilation Of Subculture

After having talked about the context in which *Farewell to Manzanar* is written and the reasons why the Japanese-American community was perceived by the rest of the population in a discriminating way, the last thing which should be analyzed in a context-oriented analysis is the final evolution of this perception – i.e. the reintegration and assimilation with the rest of the United States population.

In this last sub-section, which relates to the referential function, I will demonstrate how *Farewell to Manzanar* is again exemplary also in the explanation of the change of view toward the particular case of the Japanese-Americans. In fact, whether before, during and after World War II, the community was seen as a group of enemies and was discriminated, from one point on, as it was possible to see in section 1.1, its status was reevaluated, starting a long challenge in order to obtain social justice. However, how did this change happen and how does *Farewell to Manzanar* mirror this attitude?

In order to answer to these questions, it is useful to refer to the nature of the Japanese-American community, which in the behavior of its members resembles what could be defined as a ‘sub-culture’. By referring to the book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Dick Hebdige, subcultures are “subordinate groups who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons” (2).

Since the large majority of the Americans during World War II saw them as both public enemies and as inferior animals³¹, together, all the individuals of the Japanese-American community goes effectively to shape a sub-culture.

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston herself defends the independency of this sub-culture as a part of a wider one. She indirectly refers to it as her “Own belief and pride in the concept of ‘hybrid vigor’”. Moreover, she continues by explaining that: “One does not have to choose between one or the other race or culture but can live one’s life as a unique blend of both.” (9)

³¹ For further information about prejudices about Japanese-Americans see section 1.1 and Foner.

However, in their history, from one point on, sub-cultures are absorbed by the main culture. Although in their birth phase they are seen as something often negative under the perspectives of work, class, association-forms and in their refusal of mainstream attitudes, eventually they come to be assimilated as a different branch of the very same one³².

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston does indeed underline such issues also in *Farewell to Manzanar*. Throughout the narration, Japanese-Americans are treated as dangerous individuals and the final solution to deal with them becomes the choice to isolate them:

“This was the first time I had felt outright hostility from a Caucasian. Looking back, it is easy enough to explain. Public attitudes toward the Japanese in California were shifting rapidly. In the first few months of the Pacific War, America was on the run. Tolerance had turned to distrust and irrational fear. The hundred-year-old tradition of anti-Orientalism on the west coast soon resurfaced, more vicious than ever. Its result became clear about a month later, when we were told to make our third and final move.” (17)

However, being a threat is not the only thing which makes Japanese-Americans a sub-culture. As far as it concerns work and class, we have already seen how the book reflects the difficulties of Japanese-Americans in improving their social condition, and how those difficulties are the result of the negative conception Americans maintained in their regard, as explained in section 2.1.

Nonetheless, the novel provides even examples about the attitude of Japanese-Americans not to accept some of the behaviors normally associated to the United States culture. In this sense Wakatsuki Ko is still exemplary in his way to try to educate Jeanne:

“‘Don’t laugh! This is not funny. You become this kind of woman and what Japanese boy is going to marry you? Tell me that. You put on tight clothes and walk around like Jean Harlow and the *hakajin*³³ boys make you the queen. And pretty soon you end up marrying a *hakajin* boy...’ He broke off. He could think of no worse end result. [...] ‘Listen to me. It’s not too late for her to learn Japanese ways of movement. The Buddhist church in San Jose gives *odori*³⁴ class twice a week. Jeanne, I want you to phone the teacher and tell her you are going to start taking lessons. Mama has kimono you can wear. She can show you things too. She used to know all the dances.’” (176-177)

³² See Hebdige

³³ Caucasian

³⁴ Traditional Japanese dances

Wakatsuki Ko is extremely attached to his Japanese tradition. Moreover, not only does he not legitimate certain U.S. habits, but he also denounces the lack of morality in Jeanne when she exposes some parts of her body as the other girls do. With his particular behavior, Ko proves to be a possible exemplary individual of its subculture and he mirrors the attitudes of the group he belongs to. With this and similar displays, *Farewell to Manzanar* pictures Japanese-Americans as a sub-culture.

Furthermore, the book not only shows Japanese-Americans as a minority, but it also underlines how the latter are essentially reintegrated in the main culture. When the war is over and their reinsertion in society is effective, something unexpected happens. In the book, it is possible to notice that a certain degree of acceptability appears when Jeanne unexpectedly becomes ‘the carnival queen of the school’; an episode which not only marks a change in Jeanne identity but which is exemplary even for the ways through which a sub-culture can be incorporate into the main one:

“I knew I couldn’t beat the other contestants at their own game, that is, look like a bobbysoxer. Yet neither could I look too Japanese-y. I decided to go exotic, with a flower-print sarong, black hair loose and a hibiscus flower behind my ear. When I walked barefooted out onto the varnished gymnasium floor, between the filled bleachers, the howls and whistles from the boys were double what had greeted any of the other girls. It sounded like some winning basket had just been made in the game against our oldest rivals.” (173)

Jeanne underlines her exotic traits, she exploits her beauty in a way which proves to be successful among young Caucasian boys. This success is not casual. It represents the way a culture ideologically incorporates a subculture. Hebdige explains how a subculture from being a threat is incorporated ideologically into the main one:

“Two basic strategies has been evolved for dealing with this threat. First, the Other can trivialized, naturalized, domesticated. Here, the difference is simply denied (‘Otherness is reduced to sameness’). Alternatively, the Other can be transformed into meaningless exotica, a ‘pure object, a spectacle, a clown’. In this case, the difference is consigned to a place beyond analysis. Spectacular subcultures are continually defined in precisely these terms.” (Hebdige, 2486)

Jeanne in this episode of *Farewell to Manzanar* wins the contest. However, the ways she does that are curious. By winning it she is accepted by the others, but only because she is nothing more than a great show for them. The ways Caucasians see her, rather than being related to a real acknowledgment of her identity serve just to accept her ‘odd’ nature for their fun.

Nonetheless, in this way *Farewell to Manzanar* mirrors a change of attitude, which although not positive, traces the beginning of a long path of acceptance. Before, by being representations of “‘noise’ (as opposed to sound), as interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media”, Japanese-Americans had “the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy ‘out there’ but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation.” (Hebdige, 2481)

While after World War II they were incorporated in the main culture in the ways explained, by these means they became ‘controllable’ again and not a threat anymore at the eyes of the rest of the population. On the contrary, although the path undertaken had pushed toward a recognition of their status and of the crimes suffered by them, the loss of fear in their regard justified the fact that the rest of the population pictured them in ‘odd terms’.

At the same time, since they were not to be feared anymore, the lack of attention in their regard allowed them to improve their economic status and their life conditions. Japanese-Americans from one point on lived a drastic economic change, with the possibility for the new generations to abandon manual jobs and to take advantage of their education in order to reach better paid jobs. “Within a relatively short time, Japanese Americans, particularly Nisei, experienced a significant shift in their economic position. During the 1950s, they slowly left manual labor and petty entrepreneurship and found jobs in clerical and technical fields. By the 1960s, they were entering the professional ranks and finding economic opportunities that had been closed to them before the war.” (Takahashi, 113)

The allowed representation of them as exotic, although it was still discriminatory, in its own way permitted the change of their living conditions. Since the change of their status is positive in practical terms and negative on conceptual ones, it is hard to say whether their condition really improved or not.

However, what I wanted to underline in this section were the causes which brought to the change. A change which regardless of opinions indisputably happened as even *Farewell to Manzanar*

could be a representation of it. Moreover, those causes are to be researched in the conception of the Japanese-American community as a sub-culture. A conception which is displayed also in the novel by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston.

2.5: Psychoanalytical Hints

After the conclusions reached about context and language in the previous sections, by keeping on following the model by Roman Jakobson, it is possible to apply another type of approach. This time I will focus on an author oriented one. In particular I will try to answer to some questions about Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, as they emerge by reading the novel. Specifically, I will make use of different psychoanalytic theories. By reading *Farewell to Manzanar* there are two issues which are still fundamental in the full understanding of the book.

First, the particular experience of the trauma. In the previous chapter I described how the event of the detention influenced the shaping of Jeanne's identity. It had been possible to read especially how the trauma was fully understood and interiorized only years after the detention. However, the reasons why the events followed this particular type of development are still to be further investigated.

Second, the specific relationship between Jeanne and her parents is worth more detailed reflections. Among all, the complicated connection with her father raises a series of questions. The nature of their relationship has already been described (see section 1.3.2) but I had waited until here to explain the deep reasons who justified it.

For both the two issues it is in fact more than useful to exploit the instruments which psychoanalysis provides. In the first case, the way the trauma was lived by the author is directly mirrored in the book through the account of her experiences. The shape which the narrative developed in fact followed directly the life of the author. A psychoanalytical approach highlights the emotive function of the text first, giving then exhaustive answers on the belateness of the internalization of the trauma. Moreover, the insights about her complicated relationship with her parents is explained through the theory of the 'Oedipus complex' which Sigmund Freud first theorized, and then whose daughter Anna successively developed.

About the first matter Jeanne declared in the interview attached to his novel edition of 2007: "What began for me at Manzanar is not easy to summarize. It is really the subject of the book we

wrote. It has to do with the shaping of an inner psychology that for many years I did not see or understand, and finally was able to put behind me – hence the use of *farewell* in the title – and in the process gain another kind of strength and self-knowledge.” (8) As understandable from her words the comprehension of the trauma took long in order to become clear. Why is that?

A possible answer comes from psychoanalysis. In describing the process of identity acquisition after traumatic events, Antonia Mehnert illustrates that identity gets deformed and: “Coming along with deformation and also being a reason for it, are the often formerly experienced traumas. Generally defined as experiences of an overwhelming and catastrophic set of events, which in the actual moment of intrusion cannot be grappled with or understood, they repeatedly show different symptoms afterwards.”

The reason of the lateness of the internalization then is to be researched in the nature of the trauma itself. If the event is quintessentially traumatic, the stages which brings someone to its full realization will include even a lapse of time of incomprehension.

This nature of the trauma is reflected in the book itself, as we can see from this quote:

“Until this trip I had not been able to admit that my own life really began there. The times I thought I had dreamed it were one way of getting rid of it, part of wanting to lose it, part of what you might call a whole Manzanar mentality I had lived with for twenty-five years. Much more than a remembered place, it had become a state of mind. Now, having seen it, I no longer wanted to lose it or to have those years erased. Having found it, I could say what you can only say when you’ve truly come to know a place: Farewell.” (195)

In this passage, that state of mind which Jeanne refers to is part of the nature of the trauma itself. In particular, because of this reason, the experience of Manzanar is deeply rooted in the author’s life and explains the twenty-five-year gap in order to fully comprehend which role it covered in her life.

In studies of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has been pointed out that “symptoms also include feelings of detachment and social estrangement characterized by a markedly reduced ability to feel emotions”. (Mehnert, 43) Similarly Jeanne at one point loses interest in everything that surrounds her.

At one point of the book she does not enjoy anything of school life, which after the releasement from the camp represents her whole world. As a teenager, her friendships and her successes should be found in school, but nevertheless she loses any interest in it: “There I felt defeated. I watched Radine’s rise, and I knew I could never compete with that. Gradually I lost interest in school and began hanging around on the streets. I would probably have dropped out for good, but it was just about this time that Papa decided to go back into farming and finally moved us out of Cabrillo Homes.” (172)

This repression of the actual event of the imprisonment derives from the nature of trauma in the form of belatedness and in its shape to not know immediately what is happening. As Horvitz explains, “the breach in the mind – the conscious awareness of threat to life – is not caused by a pure quantity of stimulus, but by the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly,” (62) and this is why the trauma shows its symptoms later on. Moreover, this is the reason why trauma includes a paradox: “the experience of violent event does not coincide with ability to know it and thus the immediacy transforms into belatedness” (Horvitz, 64)

This is what happens in Jeanne’s mind as well. In addition, she experienced the trauma when she was just a kid. This fact enhanced her inability to know what was happening precisely when she was in the camp and what the imprisonment meant for her.

In this example, this tendency is clearly displayed:

“During the years in camp I had never really understood why we were there, nor had I questioned it much. I knew no one in my family had committed a crime. If I needed explanations at all, I conjured up vague notions about a *war* between America and Japan. But now I’d reached an age where certain childhood mysteries begin to make sense. This girl’s guileless remark came as an illumination, an instant knowledge that brought with it the first buds of true shame.” (158)

In here, Jeanne starts understanding the consequences of the imprisonment. Moreover, it starts comprehending the particular nature of the trauma itself. Surely, in the book we can find the theories above mentioned put into practice.

After having demonstrated then that the belatedness of the trauma was mirrored in the book and that the reasons for it are to be searched in the traumatic event nature itself, now I will focus on the particular relationship which Jeanne develops with her parents.

The author develops a peculiar relationship with her father especially. A bond which is divided between respect and hatred. At the same time the respect for her mother increases, making her the exemplary figure in Jeanne's personal growth. Why is it so? And how can we understand the causes of this complex relationship from the book?

The 'Oedipus complex' theory and its reflection on *Farewell to Manzanar* answers to these questions. Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* argued that "it is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father." (Freud, 816)

By considering that even if Jeanne is a girl this fact, "does not exclude the sexual drive for the mother" (Jung, 26), the hatred for the father expressed by Jeanne represents just the application of the Oedipus complex to the *Farewell to Manzanar* case³⁵.

However, actually the situation is more complicated than it seems. The above mentioned trauma experienced by Jeanne and shared by the whole Wakatsuki family affects the social balance in the family unit. As a consequence, the reasons of the complicated relationships with her parents are different.

Anna Freud³⁶ described the reaction of the kid toward the father as following:

"He hates him as a rival when his father acts the part of rightful owner of the mother, when he takes the mother away, goes out with her, treats her as his property, and insists upon sleeping with her by himself. But in all other respects the child loves and admires his father, relies on his help, believes in his strength and omnipotence and has no greater desire than to be like him in the future. Thus there arises in the boy the extraordinary problem, at first quite insoluble, that he loves and admires a person and at the same time hates him and wishes him dead." (Freud A., 33)

³⁵ Jung evolved Freud's thought with the creation of the so called 'Electra complex'. However, the facts related to Jeanne's case are common both to the Oedipus and Electra complex. Whether the child is a boy of a girl, the attachment to the mother remains undisputable for every psychoanalytical approach, so as the antagonism toward the father.

³⁶ From the theorization of the Oedipus complex by her father, Anna Freud developed the concept and created educational models which explain the behavior of the child in even more specific situations. Her studies complete the ones of Sigmund Freud and are rarely in contrast with them.

This type of relationship is mirrored in *Farewell to Manzanar*. Jeanne at first does not hate her father, her relationship with him has a double nature. She likes and dislike him according to the situation. On one hand, he is the head of the family, she responds and respects him. On the other, she seems indifferent to him as it is possible to see in a couple of passages:

“This was the beginning of a terrible, frantic time for all my family. But I myself didn’t cry about Papa, or have any inkling of what was wrenching Mama’s heart, until the next time I saw him, almost a year later. (9)

“In December of 1941 Papa’s disappearance didn’t bother me nearly as much as the world I soon found myself in.” (10)

Although we cannot talk about hatred, this antagonism against the figure of the father is the result of events which happened in Jeanne early life. Although at the time she experienced these sensations Jeanne was actually seven years old, what she discovers “are just the resultant phenomena of the earlier period of her life³⁷.” (Freud A., 34)

However, during the novel the relationship gets worse. From indifference or simple antagonism the hatred, disgust and the lack of respect toward the father get evident.

“Even more vulnerable, Papa began drinking heavily again. And I would watch it with sorrow and disgust, unable then to image what he was going through, too far into my own junior high school survival. I couldn’t understand why he was home all day, when Mama had to go out working. I was ashamed of him for that and, I a deeper way, for being what led to our imprisonment.” (Houston, 166)

The reason why the situation drastically changes in this way, is to be attributed to the trauma of the imprisonment just lived. I am not only referring to the one of Jeanne, but even to her father’s. In fact, following the trauma of the latter their relationship changes as explained above. Why?

The theories of Anna Freud which I applied here as she herself explains, are to be attributed to the ‘model family’. However, because of the imprisonment suffered, Jeanne’s family is totally smashed in pieces. The position of Jeanne as a child then in her growth worsens even more. Anna

³⁷ I am referring here to the first period of Jeanne’s life - between her birth and her fourth year. Anna Freud explains how the actions of a child in the age of kindergarten and primary school are the result of the earliest period of his/her life by referring to that particular age (0-4 years old).

Freud explains: “I wanted to put before you the difficult position of the child, with his conflicting emotions, even when his external conditions are worse and the family life more miserable, the conflict that is going on within the child is still more severe.” (36)

Jeanne grows up in an environment of imprisonment. Moreover, her father becomes an alcoholic and abuses of her mother. The very person who should be the model for her education proves then to be not able to cover his role. On the contrary, he becomes the reason to experience even more fear and detachment. Jeanne’s growth and the relationship with him cannot but be affected then by the psychological crisis her father goes through.

In the book all the psychological evolution of Jeanne is traced following the theories of psychoanalysis. Let us take this example of abuse:

“The night Mama and I came back from the latrine with this newest bit of gossip, he had been drinking the all day. At the first mention of what we’d overheard, he flew into rage. He began to curse her for listening to such lies, then he cursed her for leaving him alone and wanted to know where she had *really* gone. He cursed her for coming back and disturbing him, for not bringing him his food on time, for binging too much cabbage and not enough rice. He yelled and shook his fists and with his very threats forced her across the cluttered room until she collided with one of the steel bed frames and fell back onto a mattress. I had crawled under another bunk and huddled, too frightened to cry.” (68)

In here, Jeanne is frightened by whom should represent a rather protective model. Moreover, she is even more affected by Ko’s behavior because he attacks her mother - the other central figure for Jeanne’s education, and the one whom she is most attached to because of a natural bond. The behavior expressed here in the book perfectly matches with Anna Freud theories:

“Or let us take it that the father whom the boy regards as his example and in whose footsteps he seeks to follow is a drunkard, or insane, or a criminal. Then the effort to become like the father, which normally is one of the greatest help in education, leads to the direct ruin of the child.” (Freud A., 37)

The relationship between the two characters of Jeanne and Ko is then explained. On the one hand, Jeanne sees her father still as a model because of his relationship with her mother. He is the one who has the full control on the first person Jeanne truly loves and as a consequence, she tries to follow his footsteps in order to conquer the love of the mother.

However, on the other hand, to the already natural hatred that normally is associated with the figure of the father in every model situation, the drastic psychological breakdown Ko has, makes him unable to fulfill to the model role he should cover. As a consequence, once the imprisonment experience starts, Jeanne inclination propends drastically toward the hatred.

Moreover, lacking the example of her father, Jeanne starts fully relying on the one her mother provides. Once her mother becomes the one who provides the money to maintain the household, Jeanne loses all respect toward her dad.

Only too late their relationship recovers a bit. After Jeanne grew up and internalized her trauma and after having understood the one even her dad had to suffer, she threatens him again with a certain degree of respect.

In conclusion, a psychoanalytical approach mainly underlines insights on the author. Moreover, in this way, several problems related to the author and their mirroring on the book find a justification. First the belatedness of the display of the trauma finds its reason to exist in the nature of the trauma itself. Secondly, the complicated relationship which is created between Jeanne and her parents is explained thanks to a series of psychoanalytical theories. In particular, *Farewell to Manzanar* displays the full application of the ‘Oedipus Complex’, which is lived in a rather complicated way because of the environment she grew up in – the imprisonment in the camp.

2.6. Readers Response

After having approached the text from the point of view of the author, the last considerations left are the one related to its value. By referring again to Jacobson's model, the attention in the next two sections will focus on two elements in particular: the message and the addressee.

In this section I will focus mainly on the reception of the book. I will explain some possible reasons of the success of *Farewell to Manzanar* thanks to the help of the essay *Interpreting the Variorum* by Stanley Fish. In analyzing this relationship between the book and its audience, this type of approach will then focus mainly on the Poetic and Conative function of the text.

With over a million copies sold and a nomination as one of the hundred best nonfiction books according to the *San Francisco Chronicles*, *Farewell to Manzanar* became a must reading novel in the United States. In schools, a lot of teacher decided to adopt the text and insert it in their program. But how was this success possible?

In the previous pages, I tried to underline the main aspects which make this book peculiar and worth reading. However, if I apply a different approach to the novel, if I philter its reading through the work of Stanley Fish, my considerations could be seen from a different perspective. In his essay *Interpreting the Variorum*, Fish detaches any particular value from a text and moves the responsibilities of its quality to the reader. According to him, texts in any shapes are nothing but empty cases, it is the reader who attributes them value according to his/her feelings, experiences and studies. Successively, if the considerations are shared by a lot of people, the latter go to form communities which Fish refers to as 'Interpretative Communities':

"Interpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts³⁸, for constituting their proprieties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around". (Fish, 1990)

³⁸ As "writing texts" Fish means that in their way to attribute value to a book and by projecting their own sensations and considerations, rather than merely reading, readers rewrite the texts in their own mind, transforming themselves in true communities of writers. For example, in this moment by interpreting the essay by Fish himself and the book by Houston, I am rewriting the texts. For further information about *Interpreting the Variorum* see Fish.

Thus, by approaching critically *Farewell to Manzanar* and by attributing it a great value for all of the information expressed in the previous sections, I belong myself to that community who shares its particular value and acknowledges its quality.

An approach like the one I am conducting specifically underlines one aspect - subjectivity. Why is it worth to analyze *Farewell to Manzanar* now? Because a change of ideas corresponds to the passing of time and consequently of communities. In this way, we can understand that the particular value which *Farewell to Manzanar* holds is subjected to its readers. Moreover, the elements which the analysis underlines will reflect opinions on topics which are important at the present time.

Let us take some examples directly from the book:

“I felt that if attention were drawn to me, people would see what this girl had first responded to. They wouldn’t see me, they would see the slant-eyed face, the Oriental. This is what accounts, in part, for the entire evacuation. You cannot deport 110,000 people unless you have stopped seeing individuals. Of course, for such a thing to happen there has to be a kind of acquiescence on the part of the victims, some submerged belief that this treatment is deserved, or at least allowable. It’s an attitude easy for nonwhites to acquire in America. I had inherited it. Manzanar had confirmed it.” (159)

We have already seen how this passage underlines different aspects: responsibilities of the government, responsibilities of the majority of the population, author perception, particular insights on Jeanne’s identity and so on.

However, what I want to highlight here is that this is only one perspective. In particular, it is the perspective of the critical community of our time which is capable to grasp specific meanings according to the time which it is inserted in. Let us make an absurd hypothesis. Let us consider *Farewell to Manzanar* as written right after the end of the imprisonment experience by ignoring the impossibility of the fact. What would the average American, or book critics have thought of this passage?

Probably they would have underlined the foolishness of the critics regarding the government and the American population. It is likely that they would have seen a kind of guilt in the Japanese population. Even the personal insights on the author would have been received probably in a different way.

Moreover, the approach taken underlines another aspect; how does the critique regarding the book change according to the place the reader is from? It is likely that my approach as an Italian would be different from the one of an American, Japanese, or even Japanese-American, since the interests we have in the book differs not only from an individual perspective but even from a cultural one.

Again, let us analyze these examples:

“Gardens had sprung up everywhere, in the firebreaks, between the rows of barracks – rock gardens, vegetable gardens, cactus and flower gardens. People who lived in the Owens Valley during the war still remember the flowers and lush greenery they could see from the highway as they drove past the main gate.” (99)

“In addition to the regular school sessions and the recreation program, classes of every kind were being offered all over camp: singing, acting, trumpet playing, tap-dancing, plus traditional Japanese arts like needlework, judo, and kendo. The first class I attended was in baton twirling.” (108)

In both of them a certain degree of Japanese culture is embedded. In the first one, the particular relationship with nature that Japanese people have, recalls the idea of *mono no aware*³⁹ - a particular characteristic of Japanese literature and culture. In the second one a series of typical Japanese activities are enlisted. However, those are elements which culturally every reader experiences in a different way. As an Italian I do not have the same sensations that probably a Japanese person has, since in my culture a concept like *mono no aware* does not exist. I would feel probably less involved and I would direct my attention to some different characteristics of the passage.

Therefore, I can now answer to my first question about the success and quality of *Farewell to Manzanar*. The book had that response not for its characteristics but because we attributed to those characteristics a certain degree of value. Moreover, the people belonging to the community who judged first, had a cultural background in common and they were living in the same historical time. This underlines a particular aspect of this approach. Value is a concept constantly changing, what it is worth to be analyzed today could not be in some time. As a consequence, the idea expressed in this

³⁹ *Mono no aware* (物の哀れ) is an aesthetic Japanese term which expresses emotional strong participation toward the beauty of nature and human life, with a consequent nostalgic sensation linked to its incessant mutation. In every language the translation of this term is rather hard. For further information see Bienati, Boscaro.

analytical work are subordinated to the context in which I, as a reader first, live. The value attributed to *Farewell to Manzanar* and its success must always be linked to the context in which the novel was presented. Moreover, it will be just an idea of one community which could be just the larger or the most influential one.

“Interpretative communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another; this, while the alignments are not permanent, they are always there providing just enough stability for the interpretative battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled. The notion of interpretative communities thus stands between an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it. The ideal is of perfect agreement and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation.” (Fish, 1991)

In conclusion, one of the last ideas needed in order to complete the analysis of *Farewell to Manzanar* is related to the concept of interpretation. This work is just a mere interpretation of the novel written by Houston. The conclusion reached could seem banal but it assumes a particular importance at the moment the book response shapes particular events of the future.

When asked “What do you hope your experience will bring to children today and in the future? Do you think it will have more impact in the post 9/11 world than previously?” Houston answers:

“I hope it can help them to understand that this country’s high ideals, as expressed in the Constitution, can never be taken for granted, and to understand that, with the example of the internment behind us, such an abuse of civil rights, carried out along racial lines, should never be allowed to happen again. The events of 9/11 and its aftermath have given the internment new relevance, as a symbol and an early warning for what can happen when fear and wartime panic overrule common sense and out democratic traditions.” (7)

Houston here hopes in a change of mentality, in a future which does not replicate itself. By approaching a book which aspires to change ideas in people, acknowledging that nothing has to be taken for granted and which every approach to the book is at a certain degree subjective acquires a particular importance.

If the book has the power to change things through its interpretation, the results will be that the change is carried on by following the ideas only of a certain percentage of individuals. Subjectivities then change events. By considering the last ideas then, even if this approach underlines ‘only’ the subjectivity of every interpretation, it proves to be the most important one. *Farewell to*

Manzanar is a book which proves to be worth something only because there is a community which says so. With the change of the community, even the whole considerations proved before could prove to be false. For this reason, then, Fish's approach could be the most important and valuable one.

2.7. A Question of Canon

In the previous section, the importance of value was underlined for what it concerns a text or in general any work which could be defined as artistic. According to Roland Jakobson's model we were in the realm of the addressee and message itself. In this one, I will continue the discussion by referring to the same elements, but I will bring my reflections to the next step. From the concept of value, I will move on to the one of canon. Which are in fact the conditions to make a text become canonic? Is *Farewell to Manzanar* a canonic text or is there any possibility that will make it part of the canon?

In order to answer to this questions it is useful to refer to the essay *Contingencies of Value* by Barbara Herrnstein Smith. Her book comes as a direct consequence of the work by Fish. Smith debates on the value of an artistic work as well. However, while Fish sees the process of interpretation in large part as natural, since influenced by our background, in Smith's work individual interest plays a huge role in defining a work valuable. Nevertheless, even if the two writings seem to be in contrast I think they work in succession one to the other and I am about to explain why.

Smith theory of *Contingency of Value* goes beyond the more traditional axiological approach to a text and under a new perspective it examines the dynamics that bring a work to be evaluated in a determined way. In particular, Smith rejects the traditional conceptualization that states that some things please us naturally:

“All value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables or, to put this another way, the product of the dynamics, of a system, specifically *economic* system.” (Smith, 1798)

He then revises the strong traditional division between what is standardized as correct and what is at its opposite and comes to represent a defective taste. The author states that nothing is natural in the evaluation of the text and at some degree individuals will always act according to their personal economy or in other words: “the subject's needs, interests and resources” (Smith, 1798). In saying so,

Smith does not mean that individuals act always consciously according to their interests, but rather that even when they act unconsciously they follow some mechanisms according to their needs.

By applying this theorization to the case of *Farewell to Manzanar* then, it is possible to say that both Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston as author and the readers who appreciate the novel, gained something from it. The appreciation of the book either consciously or unconsciously gave them something.

In Jeanne's case, it was already explained how the book allowed her to fix her identity problems and helped her to fully understand what the imprisonment experienced represented in the history of her family: "What began for me at Manzanar is not easy to summarize. It is really the subject of the book we wrote. It has to do with the shaping of an inner psychology that for many years I did not see or understand, and finally was able to put behind me _ hence the use of *farewell* in the title – and in the process gain another kind of strength and self-knowledge." (8)

For the rest of the readers, the motivations clearly change according to each individual who recognized the book as valuable.

Furthermore, Smith then in order to explain how things work, introduces the concept of contingencies of value. Instead of having the traditional axiological conception of what is naturally valuable and what is defective, she divides the judgment community in a wider spectrum. In fact, individuals will then converge on some aspects and diverge on others. She then describes value as something:

"Radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables" (Smith, 1809)

The community will then agree on different things and disagree on others. In particular, convergence will happen when people interests, resources and needs vary individually across a narrow spectrum, are tractable to cultural channeling and they remain stable despite changes in circumstantial context. On the other hand, divergence will happen when those needs, interests and

resources vary in a wide spectrum, are resistant to cultural channeling and they are responsive to circumstantial context.

For *Farewell to Manzanar* is difficult to state which are the reasons who brought different individuals to share the value of the text. Many of them find the explanation of the worthiness of the reading in the characteristics the novel underlines. Specifically, the ones I have already explained in the previous sections. Surely, the context in which the novel is inscribed – the American one – acquires a specific value in bringing opinions in the same direction. People coming from there then, and sharing the same cultural background will more likely converge in finding *Farewell to Manzanar* valuable. It is not by chance that the book became a must reading novel in schools in the United States.

People coming from the same context shared the same needs. In particular, the one to know the truth about a particular historical event which happened in their country. An interest Houston and her husband seem to have answered in the right way and could have brought people to converge together in a positive evaluation of the novel:

“Our hope was to open a window onto an event in America’s history that had become almost invisible, a ‘secret’ kept for many years not only by the government, but also by those who were interned (myself included)” (6)

Both Smith and Fish refer to an individual background, but while Fish refers to that as one of the elements that influence our interpretative strategies, Smith sees it as something that particularly influences individuals in the understanding of what is valuable and what is not. The so-called interpretative communities of Fish are nothing more than communities where we assist to what Smith refers to as convergence. In fact it is possible to notice how the ideas of both scholars refer directly or indirectly to cultural background.

The two match one with the other. By summarizing this process it is possible to say that through process of converge and divergence the interpretative communities are created. However, Smith goes even beyond by saying that communities where there is convergence can be very

influential. If communities are powerful and wide enough, they in fact could apply their own interests in the shaping of the canon.

Canon in particular will come to be influenced in so far as the convergence toward a particular text will last for a considerably long lapse of time. In order that to happen, the work will have to be reproduced in several copies. In case this fact happens it is actually more likely for a text to be watched or read continuously through time:

“What is commonly referred to as ‘the test of time’ [...] is not, as the figure implies, an impersonal and impartial mechanism; for the cultural institutions through which it operates (schools, libraries, theaters, museums, publishing and printing houses, editorial boards, prize-awarding commissions, state censors, and so forth) are, of course, all managed by *persons* (who, by definition, are those with cultural power and commonly other forms of power as well); and, since the texts that are selected and preserved by ‘time’ will always tend to be those which ‘fit’ *their* characteristics needs, interests, resources, and purposes, that testing mechanism has its own built-in partialities accumulated in and thus *intensified* by time.” (Smith, 1816)

About this matter, *Farewell to Manzanar* seems to fit the characteristic above mentioned. The book is widely distributed in the United States and abroad, it is a mandatory reading in a great number of schools in the U.S., and has won several prizes awarded by the literary critique. Therefore, it can be stated that in the influential community the book has more than a possibility to favor its reproduction through time.

Moreover, the last matter is even encouraged by the highly remunerative perspective the book still represents for publisher and sellers. Indeed, the economic value of a literary work is an aspect which despite its value ensures its reproduction.

Nowadays, *Farewell to Manzanar* is still a best-seller. According to Amazon U.S. data, the book ranks in a good position in several categories. It is ranked as number two in the most sold ethnic biographies and memoirs, as number five in multicultural children books and eleventh in historical fictions narratives. And in the overall ranking of the most sold books at number 2,582. For being in a website which hosts hundred-thousands of titles and by having published over forty years ago, the novel can be still defined as valuable from an economic perspective.

Therefore, by having demonstrated its influence both from a critical and an economic perspective, *Farewell to Manzanar* had ensured its reprinting for quite a long time and seemed to have resisted to ‘the test of time’.

In conclusion, although the concept of value is subjective, *Farewell to Manzanar* seems to have proved to be valuable for the influential parts of the community. In this way, it is likely to have ensured its capability to be part of the literary canon.

Conclusions:

In this thesis I tried to analyze the book *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. The book is embedded in the context of World War II. In particular, it tells about the complicated situation which Japanese-Americans had to undergo during the war – a context of racism which brought them to be discriminated first and then unjustly imprisoned in detention camps.

Moreover, it is a work which describes the personal drama and effort to reach the sense of identity the author seeks in between two different backgrounds – the Japanese and the American one.

In this thesis I tried to underline the peculiarities of the novel. I described its characteristics and debated on the different approaches which underline particular aspects of the book.

I started with a historical description of the context. Specifically, from the difficult relationships between the United States population and the Asian immigrants – first the Chinese and then the Japanese. It was possible to see that the measures taken by the U.S. government were always only temporary and were aimed to a mere economical exploitation of Asian individuals. In fact, there was never a real attempt to create cohesion between the immigrants and the Caucasian population.

Furthermore, I described the complicated relationships with the Japanese government. As the economic and diplomatic relationships between the two countries worsened, also the conditions of Japanese-Americans followed a similar path. Especially there was a growth of physical and psychological attacks in their regard – mostly because of racist causes.

In the second section of the first chapter, I focused on the personal life of the author. Since the novel is autobiographical, the personal events which marked Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's life helped analyzing which parts were particularly important in the author's perspective.

I then continued my analysis by focusing on the description of the book itself. I first focused on the plot. In particular on its organization. It was in fact possible to see that the novel mirrors the evolution of Jeanne's identity as a Japanese-American citizen. Moreover, I described how this identity is strongly influenced by her imprisonment experience.

Second, I analyzed the main characters in the narration. According to those who influenced Jeanne's identity the most, I created a system on which to rely. This system underlines the most important characters. It describes their connections with the protagonist and the nature of these connections. In addition, it also furnishes a description of the background ones to show how even apparent unimportant figures play an important role in Jeanne's life and as a consequence in the narration.

I then focused on the devices which influence the reading experience. I started with the different types of narrators in the novel. The three different types involved the creation of different effects on the reader. In particular by passing from one to the other they disorient him/her and they change his/her perspective on the events told in the book.

A similar effect is created with the different use of time. The author continually changes it. She creates the necessary confusion in order to make the reader experience the dramatic events which changed Jeanne's life. In this way, the reader identifies him/herself with the author even more.

I then moved my analysis on the genre and mood in which *Farewell to Manzanar* is inscribed. I defined it as an 'autobiographical novel' and why it can be defined as such. Moreover, I described the book as peculiarly American, in its way of telling events in a counter traditional way.

In the second chapter of this thesis I then approached the book with debatable positions. I started this part of my analysis with the description of Jakobson's model and its application to *Farewell to Manzanar*. In this way, I underlined which elements my analysis would have focused on. In fact, I began every section with the use of the work of different scholars in order to create different critical approaches. I claim that each one of them completes the other.

I started with the essay *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes and I applied his concepts to the case of *Farewell to Manzanar*. I started with the hypothesis of taking the book without knowing anything about Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. I then demonstrated that an approach of this type underlines three main elements – the book itself, the language and the reader.

In particular, it was possible to see that language in *Farewell to Manzanar* relates not only to written and spoken English, but also to Japanese expressions which the author inherited from her parents. With the use of these particular words, the effect which the book creates is peculiar. Not only does it enrich the reader with new information, but it does so also by presenting particular shades of meaning inscribed in the Japanese language.

Moreover, it was possible to see how an approach starting from the work of Barthes creates a rather personal reading. By cancelling the author from the text, each person who approaches the book will pay attention to different matters. Each one will make the book its own one, deciding what it is important and what is not according to his/her own thought. The result of the reading will be even more immediate. The reader will judge on the base of what he/she is reading rather than researching through the use of external sources.

I then proceeded with an approach which underlined different characteristics of the context in which the novel is inscribed. First, thanks to the work by Lisa Lowe, I underlined the importance of narrative sources as means to counter represent history. From a perspective of this type, even a single work could make the difference in redefining the tradition of a particular country.

As far as U.S. history is concerned, *Farewell to Manzanar* underlines the fallacy of the myth of the Melting Pot. I proceeded to explain why it is so, by focusing in particular on the examples which the book provides in the understanding of the non-integration of Japanese-Americans in the United States. It was possible to see how theories about the melting pot does not match with the reality that the book describes.

In second place, I started from the work *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson in order to underline how the concept of nation is ideologically created and then why a certain group could be excluded from this conceptualization.

In particular, it was possible to see how nations are shaped on the basis of ideas rather than concrete things. In this way then, if individuals do not have certain characteristics they are excluded from the main group and they could also be persecuted.

Farewell to Manzanar mirrors this attitude. The episodes narrated in the book are the final representation of these processes, and vice versa these processes find their concretization in the work by Houston.

Moreover, I continued by explaining how the reintegration of the Japanese-Americans was made possible. In particular I referred to the work by Frederick Anderson in order to motivate the definition of the Japanese-American community as a subculture. By being a subculture it was possible to see why Japanese-Americans were seen as dangerous first and at a later stage why after the war they were reintegrated. The conclusions are to be researched in the nature of the subculture itself since subcultures are eventually reinserted in the main one as an exotic deviance.

This attitude is again mirrored in *Farewell to Manzanar* itself. Several passages in the book are the concretization of the theories explained by the scholars and prove how the novel could be a key-element in order to understand those processes.

Once I finished the analysis of the context and its representation in the book, I approached the novel by the point of view of the author. In particular, I used the work of several psychoanalytical scholars in order to highlight particular insights on Jeanne.

I matched the psychoanalytical theories with passages of the book in order to analyze the causes that brought to the belated manifestation of Jeanne's trauma. Moreover, I analyzed the complicated relationship with her parents.

Both the two issues respond to specific behavioral patterns. The belatedness of trauma is demonstrated by presenting the nature of a traumatic event. In particular, it is our mind which cannot respond promptly to events which we cannot elaborate immediately. Jeanne's imprisonment experience followed this process.

Moreover, the complicated relationship that Jeanne developed with her parents answers to specific characterization of the so called 'Oedipus complex'. With the explanation of this latter process, it is possible to understand the love/hate relationship with her father and the complete psychological dependence from her mother.

In the end I tried to test the limits of my analysis. I tried to filter the novel with the concept of value. In this way it was possible to see in which context and under which circumstances a work can be seen as valuable and whether *Farewell to Manzanar* respects certain standards or not.

Once verified it, I tried to collocate *Farewell to Manzanar* in relationship with canon. I described what and who shapes the canon and whether the novel has any possibilities to be part of it. In my opinion due to the critical response the novel received and even due to the high reproduction it had I argued why there is a high chance to see *Farewell to Manzanar* in future canons.

In conclusion, this thesis analyzed the traumatic account of one person – Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. Moreover, it demonstrated its collective importance from several perspectives. My aim was to describe why *Farewell to Manzanar* is a book with a high importance, especially in modern times where errors of the past are constantly reproduced. The way to stop certain processes is to be researched in their decrypting. Literature and in this case *Farewell to Manzanar* represents a key in order to do so.

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