



Fast

Stephen F. Cea

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FAST is a modern interpretation of Faust, except that instead of the hoofed personification of evil, it is modern society itself that beguiles the protagonist. Not only is the title an allusion to Faust, but it also refers to the speed of horses which is a major aspect of the novel, and is a metaphor for the speed at which the modern world moves. It is this speed that often makes it difficult for a person to make proper cogent decisions. People react to their particular realities in a manner characterized by Sartre as Being-in-Itself because they don't have time to reflect on their decisions, instead of by Being-for-Itself which requires a conscious evaluation before making those determinations. FAST is narrated in the first person. It has to be in order to attain the level of introspection the author wanted to express to the reader. The prologue is an exposition on how the narrator views the modern world. While sitting in his prison cell contemplating life, he tells the reader that he is about to detail those prior events that led him astray for the purpose of teaching a life lesson. Those events span a forty year period starting with the narrator's early childhood, and it becomes evident that the novel is a "coming of age" piece in the German Bildungsroman tradition. The early chapters of the novel introduce and develop strong familial characters and relationships. The narrator's mother is an intelligent, strong-willed woman whose fortitude keeps the family a cohesive unit. The narrator's father is a physically powerful and violent ex-convict, yet his love for his family is so self-evident that the reader cannot help but like him. His fits of rage are tempered by his love and acts of kindness, such as his refusal to go hunting. The narrator's grandfather is a wise, self-taught character that becomes the moral touchstone for the novel. The narrator's uncle is his early nemesis. Early on, the story predominantly takes place in New York City, with the exception of a visit to the Lewisburg Penitentiary in the first chapter. As the story progresses, the family moves to central New Jersey, and the main character must adjust to suburban life. He adapts well, becoming a young lawyer and husband, but he cannot escape his past. He is seduced into an ongoing criminal enterprise involving the fixing of horse races that ultimately costs him his freedom and law license. From his prison cell the narrator completes his bitter journey. However, all is not lost. Upon his release, he meets with an old friend who convinces him that no matter how difficult and sad life can get, the awareness of existence alone outweighs any hardship. She explains that he needs to look at life differently. She tells him, "How you view the world, is how you see the world." In other words, your perception of the world affects how you conceive the world. In the final pages of the novel he is sitting on the Staten Island Ferry and is consoled by this notion. He looks at the Statue of Liberty, which he once described as expressionless, and now sees Lady Liberty as smiling at him. In effect, the story becomes a triumph of spirit.

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