
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 495

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PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Aufgabe 5 *

Characterise the attitude towards killing described in the novel using appropriate quotes from the text.

Model answer:

There are a number of passages in *Half Broke Horses* in which killing is the central theme, be it the killing of animals or of people.

The killing of animals

There are several events relating to the killing of animals. Adam Casey, for instance, kills a rattlesnake which has found its way into the hole in the ground in which the Caseys live with a single stab of the knife "right down behind that snake's head" (p. 21, l. 17). While Casey is trying to tend to the Casey Ranch, it is his neighbour, Old Man Pucket, who grabs a gun and shoots dead Casey's four Great Danes because he fears they might attack his herd of cattle. Interesting in this connection is the fact that Old Man Pucket is afraid. In the novel, it says that: „Dad told us Old Man Pucket had unapologetically admitted killing the Great Danes, claiming they were on his property chasing his cattle and he was afraid they were going to bring one down.“ (p. 64) Unlike when the reptile is killed, there is much agitation since the arbitrary killing of his dogs has caused a commercial loss for Casey (and not because the killing of his dogs would have been lamentable) which warrants a lawsuit (see p. 66/67). The animals are more or less seen as objects. Casey voices this attitude explicitly when he talks about the use of horses: "While Dad didn't blame horses for anything, he wasn't sentimental about them, either. If you can't stop a horse, sell him, Dad liked to say, and if you can't sell him, shoot him." (p. 40, ll. 12–14) And Lily, too, sees animals primarily as a means of making money: „Raise cattle for market, which means sending them off to be slaughtered. If that upsets you ... you're not cut out for ranch life.“ (p. 252, ll. 1–3)

Animals are seen as commodities

Rosemary's attitude towards animals

Rosemary's attitude departs from this. The right of animals to freedom and life is very important to her from a young age. To impress her parents she decides with a heavy heart to skin an ox – the worst job at the ranch. Rosemary has not become hardened and while she is skinning the ox that has just been killed, she cries: "As she drew the knife down, she started crying silently ..." (p. 253, ll. 4/5)

The senseless deaths of humans also form part of the narrative of *Half Broke Horses* despite their being portrayed retrospectively. This is particularly tangible with the deaths of Lot Smith and Robert Casey. Lot Smith, Jim Smith's father "was killed there by a Navajo – or by a rival Mormon, depending on which story you believed" (p. 128, ll. 1–3). The assassination of Robert Casey, who is shot in the middle of the street is narrated in a less cynical but nonetheless matter-of-fact way: "Robert Casey was shot down as he walked along the main street of Lincoln, New Mexico. One version of the story held that he and the man who killed him had disagreed over an eight-dollar debt." (p. 25, ll. 6–9) Although this crime is punished by law and the perpetrator is hanged, the reader of the novel is given the impression that such acts constitute the norm of everyday life in the countryside and that possession of a gun is a necessity, effectively a *sine qua non* for life in the provinces.

Present of a revolver to celebrate initiation into adulthood

This impression is further reinforced when Lily Casey Smith, on setting off on her ride from New Mexico to Arizona at the age of 15, is given a gun by her father. This appears to take the form of an initiation into adulthood. Lily is well aware of what it means to have a gun and uses it appropriately on her temporary travelling companion Priscilla Loosefoot when she tries to steal from her: "After a while we drifted off to sleep, but something woke me in the middle of the night, and I found Priscilla quietly going through my saddlebags. The pearl-handled revolver was in my boot. I pulled it out and held it up so Priscilla could see it in the moonlight." (p. 81, ll. 8–12) Later, she uses the gun to deter a lecherous drunk (p. 161) and in Main Street against the mormon man named Eli by whom she feels threatened: "He just stared at me, and I closed the door. The knocking started up again, slow and persistent. I went into the room where I slept and loaded my pearl-handled revolver. Uncle Eli was still knocking at the door. I opened it, and as I did, I swung the gun up and across so that by time he saw me, the gun was pointed dead at him." (p. 212, ll. 24–29) You get the

impression that a gun is a basic commodity which can be used almost just as you please. The adverb “almost” is used here as there is a restriction depending on the region. In an urban environment, the attitude towards guns and their use is different, as Casey Smith finds out in Phoenix when it becomes public knowledge that she has a small gun in her handbag (see p.281).

Killing as a reaction to fear

The motivation for purchasing small guns is typically fear and anticipation of a threatening situation: “... and the news was always filled with accounts of possible Trunk Murderess sightings, along with warnings to the citizenry to lock all doors and windows. So I kept my pearl-handled revolver under my bed. I also bought a little twenty-two pistol to carry in my purse”. (p. 276, ll. 1–5) Here, too, fear is used as a motive which is why one can assume a connection between an anticipated threatening situation and fear which ultimately legitimises the use of guns; even though it might end in the death of one of the rivals. At that time, people did not argue but resorted to the archaic means of death which is seen as a natural reaction by the characters of the book: “...disputes often led to brawls, lawsuits, and shootings” (p. 20, ll. 12/13).

Killing becomes a matter of course

Aufgabe 6 **

Analyse the description of the town and of the countryside in the novel. How are the urban spaces and countryside arranged? Support your argument with appropriate quotes from the text.

Model answer:

Chicago 1919

I’d like to look first of all at the description of the cities. In 1919 to escape the confinement of her parents’ farm, Lily Casey Smith goes to Chicago, where she lives until 1928. She describes her decision to go to Chicago of all places as follows: “I wanted to go where the opportunities were the greatest, where the future was unfolding right before your eyes. I wanted to go to the biggest, most boomingest city I could find.”¹ (p. 91, ll. 10–13) The new arrival finds the city unwelcoming: “When the train pulled into Chicago, I took down my little suitcase and walked through the station into the street. I’d been in crowds before – county fairs, livestock auctions – but I’d never seen such a mass of people, all moving together like a herd, jostling and elbowing, nor had my ears been assaulted by such a ferocious din, with cars honking, trolleys clanging, and hydraulic jackhammers blasting away.” (p. 92) She is also confused by the behaviour of its inhabitants: “The next day I started searching for a job. As I walked the streets, I found myself staring at people’s faces, thinking, So this is what city folk look like. It wasn’t so much their features that were different, it was their expressions. Their faces were shut off. Everyone made a point of ignoring everyone else. I was used to nodding when I caught a stranger’s eye, but here in Chicago they looked right through you, as if you weren’t there at all.” (p. 93, ll. 5–12)

City proves to be unwelcoming and confusing

The city expects adaptation

Furthermore, in the city different rules apply from those which Lily Casey Smith learnt while living in the provinces of Texas, making it particularly hard for her to find a job: “Finding work was considerably harder than I had expected. I had hoped to get a position as a governess or a tutor, but when I admitted that I didn’t even have an eighth-grade education, people looked at me like they were wondering why I was wasting their time, even after I told them about my teaching experience. ‘That may be fine for sobbusters,’ one woman said, ‘but it won’t do in Chicago.’” (p. 93, ll. 13–19) The city expects people to adapt, and once Casey Smith has done so (“...I made a point of keeping my mouth shut and my head down” p. 95, ll. 2/3), she can finally start to enjoy Chicago: “Busy as I was, and pretty exhausted most of the time, I loved Chicago. Women were marching for the right to vote, and I attended a couple of rallies with one of my roommates, Minnie Hanagan ... ” (p. 95, ll. 9–14)

The city symbolises failure and loneliness

In literature, the city not only symbolises joie de vivre, but also alienation and loneliness. The passage quoted above falls into the category of joie de vivre or enjoyment of life. The theme of loneliness is developed when Lily Casey Smith loses her friend through an accident and feels abandoned (see p.99). The city does not offer any comfort in this situation and is full of obscure individuals, amongst them Ted Conover, who Lily marries. In Chicago Lily completely and utterly fails in her ambitions and on leaving the city in 1928, she concludes bitterly: “... I had learned a lot – about myself and other people. Most of the lessons had been hard ones. [...] The train left from Union Station, a spanking-new building with marble floors and hundred-foot ceilings that framed white skylights. The mayor thought the new station showcased Chicago as a city of the future ... I had come to Chicago wanting a slice of that modernity, loving the city for it, but Chicago hadn’t loved me back.” (p. 111, ll. 16–27)

Phoenix 1945

Phoenix is portrayed in a similar way. Lily Casey Smith goes there in 1945 expecting a comfortable life. At first, she loves the city for its entertainment and shopping, as well as a range of other conveniences: “At first I thought Phoenix was terrific. Our house was near the center of town, and we could walk to stores and movie theaters. ... For the first time in our lives, we got a telephone, which meant people who wanted to

¹ In the early 1920s, Chicago was on its way to becoming a flourishing metropolis

get in touch with me didn't have to leave a message with the sheriff." (p. 273, ll. 1–11) However, then she is confronted with its drawbacks: "The traffic drove me crazy. Back in Yavapai County, you drove wherever you wanted at what ever speed you wanted, and left the road whenever you were so inclined. Here there were stoplights, cops with whistles, yellow lines, white lines, and all manner of signs ordering you to do this and forbidding you from doing that. Cars were supposed to mean freedom, but all these people stuck in traffic on one-way-streets ... might as well have been sitting in cages." (p. 274, ll. 5–14) The city is portrayed as a cage and compared to the wide open spaces of Yavapai County.

The countryside is compared to the Garden of Eden

The descriptions of Chicago and Phoenix stand in opposition to the countryside. An example of this can be found in the chapter *The Garden of Eden*, which is very revealing for two reasons. For one, the surroundings of Hilltop, which is a region in the Grand Canyon, are described here (see p. 256/257). And furthermore, this chapter refers to the founding myth of America.

While the descriptions of the towns are very meagre, here the descriptions of the first person narrator are full of detail and brim with enthusiasm, even referring to the geological details ("Walls of red Coconino sandstone and pink Kaibab limestone rose steeply on both sides of the river." p. 258, l. 273). "Mom, it's the garden of Eden ..." (p. 259; l. 19) Rosemary summarises her impressions. Thus, a new symbol emerges, the Garden of Eden is seen as "a symbol of a harmonious world order".² When you take into account these two opposing and different symbols used in literature, it becomes clear that in this novel, the urban space and the countryside are presented as being in opposition to each other. While the city is represented as "fake" (p. 273, l. 19) with its forced order and cramped conditions, the countryside is described as natural, open and vast.

Promised land

The term of "Garden of Eden" can also be interpreted in the context of the historical settlement of the USA which was initiated by the arrival of the "English Pilgrims" (p. 31) in Massachusetts in 1620. They compared their settlement of America to the entrance of the people of Israel into the promised land and thus created a myth of a new Garden of Eden far removed from the decadence and corruption of the European provenance. This myth is one of the myths relating to the founding of America.³

² Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole, p. 121.

³ To find out more on founding myths, see also chapter 3.7, interpretative approaches, *Half Broke Horses* as an American novel.