**February 17, 2015 Literary Essay James Watts**

**Paul’s Stupid Choice**

There is a fine line between mental illness and delinquent behavior. Although they both may appear to be the same on the surface, it is the root causes of the behaviors that make them different.

Author Willa Cather was born in 1873 in Virginia. She published Paul’s Case in 1905. Willa stood out from her peers. In a time when it was unusual for a woman to be a University graduate, a writer, a feminist, and a lesbian, Willa wrote and lived the way she felt. Her struggle of being misunderstood is apparent in the main character, Paul, as he too seems to be an outcast and to suffer from depression.

The title: Paul’s Case is a play on words in many ways. It one way, it could be referring to Paul as a patient (specifically a mental patient) as a psychologist might refer his patient as ‘a case’. But it is also a reference to a police case, as Paul has committed a crime and is, in the story, an active police file.

Paul is the main character in our story. He is a thin, disengaged teenager who has had difficulty with the teachers in his school. He loves his part-time job at Carnegie Hall in New York City. He is an usher and as such he gets to spend time in the posh atmosphere of the theatre and he is allowed to listen to the classical concerts, which he adores. His mother is dead. His relationship with his father is strained. The question that the author wants us to ask is, “Is Paul depressed, mentally ill, or is he just a bad kid? If he is depressed is it because of his mother’s death, is it because he is gay, or is it because of something else?”

After getting expelled from school, Paul makes the decision to steal the theatre’s bank deposit and run away to New York City where he stays at the Waldorf Hotel. There he lives an extravagant lifestyle and then jumps in front of a train. The story line is short but the author lingers over every detail. Everything from what Paul wears to the kind of wallpaper on the walls of his room room is explained vividly.

At worst Paul is a clinically depressed young man who feels trapped in a life that is colorless and empty. However, as we follow Paul through the story we can clearly see that he is a genius mastermind who can calculate, make plans, and who has an endgame well before he begins his journey towards death. *Paul is a selfish teenager who cannot think beyond his own needs and who has a total disregard for the feelings of those around him.* He could, at any point in the story, have chosen to get his life back on track. Instead he opts for the coward’s way out and faces his demise.

1- Hook 2- Author 3- Title

4- Main characters 5- A short summary 6- Thesis