

Reflection Statement: “Singularity”

The principle purpose of my Major Work, “Singularity,” is to deconstruct the traditional bildungsroman in the science-fiction landscape. Through the integration of contemporary astrophysical hypothesis, on the fragmentary nature of time and the existence of a multiplicity of universes – commonly referred to as “the multiverse” – I confine the extended coming of age narrative to its foundations in the hero-protagonist’s traditional journey from childhood to maturity: the self-centred adolescent moving beyond the guidance of his mentor figure in preparation to assume an established duty, confronting tragedy or complication, to gain autonomy and awareness of self in the context of some critical duty to wider civilisation.

“Singularity” is a short story divided into ten distinct, cohesive Lessons, each resembling a [progressively more complex] scientific hypothesis, simulating childhood learning development. Impetus for the division of a cohesive narrative into segments stemmed from Ursula Le Guin’s short story anthology The Compass Rose, divided into directional segments, which centred a collective of narrative passages on a theme of discovery and hence deepened the reader’s comprehension of space, time and place.

I initially intended to explore the inevitability of change, with focus on imperial shift from Britain to post-War America. However, after reading Arthur C. Clarke’s short story “The Nine-Billion Names of God,” positioned successfully in an alternate universe, I decided to advance Child, rather than some earthly persona, as the protagonist.

After drafting several incarnations of “Singularity,” I viewed linear construction unsuitable for the tumultuous process of Child’s otherworldly bildungsroman. I expand upon the detached yet cohesive structure of science-fiction novel, 2121, in contrasting lyrical technique – mimicking an infant’s expressive, non-linear thought processes – and the fantasy

genre denoting the origins of Child's journey [Lessons One, Three and Four] with more concrete scientific fact in the latter three components, in representation of growth. My Major Work would therefore be best appreciated by an audience widely read within the genres of fantasy and science fiction bildungsroman, in possession of some grounding in scientific concept, who will recognise the translation and transformation of the traditional structure of genre.

Foundational knowledge of philosophy and paradigm garnered from the English Advanced and Extension One courses has impacted momentarily upon the creative process. My study of Miller's The Crucible in the English (Advanced) Belonging Area of Study, coupled with study of Hughes' "Birthday Letters" in Module C, heightened my awareness of how the acceptance of alternate perspectives is integral to the maturation process. Furthermore, the English Extension One module 'After the Bomb' has heavily influenced my construction of setting and form. Lyotard's hypothesising on the demise of metanarrative, coupled with Baudrillard's postulations on hyperreality,¹ prompted my consideration of how the fictional metanarrative – the notion of inevitable 'duty' as expressed in the journeys of protagonists as Lyra² – may couple with notions of recursive time to construct the hyperreal metanarrative. I have developed Child's world around the theorising of physicists Tegmark and Vilenkin³ as a 'bubble universe' of highly concentrated energy, and as influenced by mathematical physicist Roger Penrose's Cycles of Time⁴ and Einstein's seminal thesis, "Relativity:"⁵

[Extract from "The Fourth: Bubble Universe"]⁶

¹ The human consciousness, having forsaken its ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, experiences an enhanced copy or mimicry of earthly reality.

² Baxter, S & Pratchett, T 2012, *The Long Earth*, Doubleday, Great Britain.

³ Tegmark, M & Vilenkin, A 2011, 'The Case for Parallel Universes', *Scientific American*, 19 July, accessed 13 April 2014, <<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/multiverse-the-case-for-parallel-universe/>>.

⁴ Penrose, R 2010, *Cycles of Time*, The Bodley Head, London, Great Britain.

⁵ Einstein, A 1916, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, Great Britain.

⁶ "Singularity," p. 22.

“Where did Grandma come from?” he breathes. It was a question he had never asked before. “How was I born?”

“Grandma found you on the beach,” says Elizabeth, promptly.

“...Did her Grandfather find her on a beach?”

[Extract from “The Ninth: Event Horizon”]⁷

After a while -

he hasn't counted

counting the days depresses him -

he finds a little girl on the beach: too far from the Rift to be an alien, slipped through.

He smells lavender, and thinks she might be his: one of Grandma's many incarnations.

Child takes her home.'

Grandma, mentor-figure and predecessor of Child, is implicitly suggested to be the girl Child finds. My fragmented construction of time in Child's world as cyclic and endlessly repetitive, is designed to parody the inevitable and recursive nature of the bildungsroman journey from one generation to the next: evoked by the depressive impact, raised first by Grandma, then by the matured Child, of counting the monotonous, seemingly endless days of loneliness in fulfilment of the chaste hero's duty⁸.

Le Guin's science fiction text The Compass Rose primarily evoked my interest in the exploration of cyclic time in the short story format. Within her anthology, creative piece “The

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 40/41.

⁸ As examined by non-fiction text, “Young Adult Science Fiction” (1999, editor C.W. Sullivan III)

Pathways of Desire” examines a distant, simple planet constructed from the imagination of a human child, who hence became ‘God’ of this world:

“There is time. All the galaxies... The worlds are infinite, the cycles are endless...

Worlds without end.”⁹

Structurally, Le Guin’s work draws attention to notions of cyclic time and space through the exploration of multiple diverse landscapes and character narratives. I perceived through close analysis of “The Pathways of Desire” that such exploration could be effectively achieved through the short story medium, but may be further developed through singular focus on a specific narrator: Child, who essentially possesses the divine capacity to manipulate the space-time fabric of his world.

Similarly to how Le Guin draws focus to the fragmented nature of time within her narrative universe through attention to linguistics – how language may be crafted and developed through history, and how earthly language relates to alien in attempt to draw connection between earthly imagination and the possibilities of an infinite multiverse – “Singularity” employs the device of narrative refrain in linking initial lessons to final, and the physical motif of lavender as descriptor of the eyes and scent of Grandma and the young girl discovered by child, to evoke cyclic narrative structure.

Time within my Major Work is similarly portrayed through the motif of sand, in reference to the traditional English idiom, “the sands of time,” and to Le Guin’s “Some Approaches to the Problem of the Shortage of Time” wherein time may flow and trickle. As in an hourglass, the structure of time in Child’s universe is repetitive, as in an hourglass tilting from Grandma’s axis of control to Child’s.

A pioneering text in the field of astrophysics, Einstein’s *Relativity* further influenced my consideration of how space-time may be manipulated to construct the quintessential isolated

⁹ Le Guin, U 1982, *The Compass Rose*, Harper Collins, New York, United States of America.

bildungsroman: of Child's landscape as a singularity within a Black Hole, currently hypothesised amongst scientists to adjoin distinct universes and warp the gravitational fields therein. My exploration through fantastical imagery of a 'one-dimensional,' fabricated centre-point of the wider multiverse, the existence of Rifts between universes, and the duty of Child, is based upon such theoretical grounding, giving rise to the title of my work: "Singularity."

Experimentation with setting – initially, earth, followed by a fantasy environment which proved too detailed to incorporate into short story– directed focus towards the alternate universe: inspired by the otherworldly terrariums of Kim Stanley Robinson's 2312, miniature ecosystem parodies. I determined that, by divorcing setting from earthly contextual bias, the bildungsroman may be manipulated, compressed into the narrow time-frame provided by the short story format.

In further exploration of the fantasy landscape, I identified Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy as successfully depicting a multitude of universes, protagonist Lyra moving through the junctions between worlds due to the existence of 'Dust,' a common essence which unites Pullman's multiverse. I have translated 'Dust' to the primal 'energy' which Child must be taught to wield and control in order to close the Rifts between worlds.

Contrary to Lyra's bildungsroman, wherein her duty is to bridge the divides between universes, her support network spanning worlds as a result, the support network of Child is limited by the very nature of his duty: to isolate himself, in contradiction of the expansionist bildungsroman tradition I have perceived in the reading of traditional texts, such as Homer's Odyssey and contemporary works, such as Baxter and Pratchett's The Long Earth.

As such, I construct Child in parallel to Ted Hughes' anti-hero, Crow¹⁰, a deconstruction of religious maturation. I attempt to mimic Hughes' anguished tone in depicting Crow's

¹⁰ Hughes, T 1970, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, Faber & Faber, London, Great Britain. Within this suite, inspiration was drawn from "Crow and the Sea."

fumbling interactions with the natural world at the height of Child's calamity, upon Grandma's death: his first interaction with the inevitable passage of life, and pivotal moment of the hero's path.

[Extract from "The Seventh: Diffraction"]¹¹

'(Child) tries to scream, but his throat is clogged with dead words.

His lungs are not deep enough.'¹²

I have utilised Hughes' metaphor of water throughout my Major Work, an immense force of nature representative of the hero's seemingly insurmountable journey. My employment of metaphorical imagery was further influenced by the fragmented prose of Robinson in depicting the 'science fantasy' universe:

"But the sunwalkers know the time, so they wait and watch – until –

a flick of orange fire dolphins over the horizon."¹³

Such prose is employed to depict of Child's initial powerlessness, demonstrative of the rift between childhood ignorance and elusive enlightenment: "trick(ing) like water through the gaps"¹⁴ between his fingers.

I believe "Singularity" has thus succeeded in manipulating the scientific landscape in exploration of the bildungsroman genre. Despite difficulties faced throughout the creative process – with reference to purpose, setting and characterisation – my Extension Two journey has been ultimately rewarding.

¹¹ "Singularity," p.34.

¹² Hughes, T 1970, *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, Faber & Faber, London, Great Britain. "Crow and the Sea."

¹³ Robinson, KS 2012, 2312, *Orbit*, London, Great Britain.

¹⁴ "Singularity," p. 3.