

Reflection Statement

“It is a serious thing just to be alive on this fresh morning in this broken world.” (Mary Oliver, 2013)

Capture is both an exploration of a single human relationship and an exploration of the impact of impermanence on the human psyche, which craves stability. The literary form and features of postmodernity, described as involving fragmentary sensations and eclectic nostalgia (Jean Baudrillard, 2000), appealed to me instantly as a way to effectively explore the complexities and contradictions of human relationships, as well as the relationship one has with oneself. As I developed my piece, I engaged more deeply with my ultimate purpose; to explore the complex facets of human nature and the individual's subsequent perceptions of the broader world as influenced by their interpersonal relationships. In doing this, I encourage my audience to consider their own circumstances within both their interpersonal relationships and as a member of a broader society.

My analysis of Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale*, in the Preliminary module 'Narratives That Shape Our World' was influential in my exploration of postmodern themes and narrative structural features such as temporal distortion, unreliable narrators and self-reflexivity. Using Atwood (1985) as an inspiration, the theme of memory became increasingly important with each new draft of my own piece. The unreliability of memory is used as a vessel to explore interaction with the world and with other people, including how memories themselves can be twisted and lost: "It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances" (Atwood, 1985, p.173). This postmodern concept is woven through the plot of my own major work as the facilitator of the protagonist's emotional journey and self-reflection, by enabling the non-linear timeline to be explored. Simultaneously, it introduces the idea that the narrator is unreliable in his recollections, adding to the sense of isolation from the world and reinforcing his attachment to an illusion of what it really is: "I still have the urge, even after all this time, to abnegate dignity for protection, to find her and crawl inside her ... I cannot seek refuge in anything anymore." This aspect of my major work

became increasingly important through each successive draft as I realised through my research that I wanted to increase the prevalence of more nuanced themes which engaged with the features of postmodernity, such as the construction and distortion of memory. In turn, I challenge my audience's own perceptions of their memories and how trustworthy they may be.

Similarly, in the 'Textual Conversations' module, John Keats' (2007) poetry frequently discusses the dichotomy between life and art, and the power of the imagination to construct an alternate world to escape the hardships associated with reality. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (2007), a woman and her lover are depicted on the urn; they will never kiss, as they are frozen in the clay, but their love will remain eternal – "do not grieve / she cannot fade". There is a distinction between the ideal nature of art and the fleeting nature of life. The fragmentary nature of this distinction is something which I have built upon in my own piece, enhancing the sense of temporal distortion but also enhancing the audience's understanding of the conceptual framework of the piece and characterisation of the protagonist, who believes, initially, that the nature of the human reality can be truthfully depicted in art because they are one in the same: "Each perfect photograph proving that the world is far more composed of beauty than it is of things that are crude, or ugly, or meaningless." I've attempted to explore the circumstances through which my protagonist ultimately comes to an inner sense of peace, despite realising the existence of such pain in the world: "People are still just people, and the world is still just the world. There is nothing grand or flawless in that".

To enhance my understanding of postmodern fiction, I consulted Haruki Murakami's (2014) *Men Without Women*, which was insightful in the developing of authentic characters as well as exemplifying ways to effectively construct short fiction in a postmodern style similar to Atwood's (1985). In his piece, Murakami (2014, p.227) jumps through time non-linearly to exemplify key moments in the protagonist's relationship: "I used to rub M's back with my palm, in time to the soft triple beat of Henry Mancini's version of 'Moon River'. *Waiting round the bend, my Huckleberry friend...*" I incorporated and built on this aspect in two key ways – in dividing my story into sections, and by separating it further with quotes which mimic the protagonist's emotional trajectory. The quotes were also chosen and revised in order to convey the tone I required for any given section; disconnected in the first, naïve in the second and third, concerned in the fourth, and lonely in the fifth. "*Dormir la lune dans un oeil et le soleil dans l'autre*" – ("to sleep with the

moon in one eye and the sun in the other”) for instance, represents a turning point in their relationship, and thereby in including this, a degree of depth and complexity was achieved in both form and concept.

Achieving the right tone for each section was an aspect of the composition process which involved many adjustments, such as changing the number of sections from three to five, as I gradually understood which events should be separated in this manner to more explicitly convey key themes.

Murakami’s (2014) choices in dialogue structure and in displaying the thoughts and feelings of his characters in unconventional ways led me to refine my research further. I consulted Jack Hart’s *Storycraft* (2011) to better understand the way that dialogue can be constructed to bring the audience closer to the emotions and events of the piece without directly describing the events unfolding. Hart’s (2011, p.131) comment that “internal monologue is inherently suspect” prompted me to experiment with blurring the lines between internal monologue and direct speech, namely in writing both in italics at carefully chosen moments (as in Murakami’s final piece in his 2014 oeuvre), adding to the sense of Ruth’s character as a construction in the protagonist’s mind, created for his purposes, rather than a separate individual: “I could imagine she’d say, *this is enough for me, and I’ll stay*, and she’d smile. I could imagine it, and since it existed in my mind, it could exist in reality.” As the narrative progresses and the protagonist feels increasingly distant from Ruth, dialogue and thought become increasingly fused through this use of italics to demonstrate visually the loss and loneliness the protagonist feels. Once fully developed in later drafts, this allowed me to achieve a greater degree of complexity in my characters, which encourages my audience to further understand the bleeding of my protagonist’s imagination into a more painful reality.

Authors like George Orwell (1936) frequently condense the key themes in their novels to more digestible comparisons with the use of symbolism. In my own piece, symbolism greatly assisted in creating subtlety and complexity, keeping the audience engaged in the key themes with a margin for their own interpretation. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Orwell, 1936), Orwell uses the symbol of the aspidistra plant to represent the traditional middle-class existence. Isaac’s story of the rabbit serves similar symbolic purposes in the narrative which deepen the audience’s understanding of the individual interactions by representing the characters in a simpler way – Ruth as a rabbit, symbolically trapped and misunderstood in her relationship: “Do you know what neglect and confinement does to an intelligent creature? *It destroys them.*” In consulting

previously mentioned texts, I was therefore able to develop the storyline significantly with a greater degree of nuance through the use of symbolism.

Refining my research further, I consulted the journal publication *Fiction in the Present Tense* by John Harvey (2006) which discusses the unique effects of present-tense narrative writing on the audience. Harvey discusses the notion of present tense as an “exploded reality” as opposed to the comfortable realities of the past tense. Using both present and past tense in my piece, I attempt to balance the attributes of both and emphasise not only the transformation of the protagonist but also establish what Harvey (2006, p.79) describes as an author “speaking more closely and urgently in (the audience’s) ear.” Therefore, as I continued to develop my own piece, I began to introduce present tense into past scenarios to offer a more immersive experience for my audience and emphasise the importance of key high-emotion events, such as when the protagonist is coming to an understanding of the reality of his relationship – “*Did you know that babies can die if they are not touched enough? Well, it’s not an exact analogy, says Isaac, but it still refers to the balancing of needs between the individual parties*”.

Overall, the process of constructing this composition has been deeply enriching and has helped me not only to explore the complex facets of human connection but also discover that through experimentation, and not becoming too attached to initial drafts, my writing can improve greatly. My major work is a product of extensive experimentation and revising which I believe has successfully satisfied my aim of exploring a relationship in a rapidly modernising world.

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