

Reflection Statement
Cask Wine in Plastic Cups

Bibliotherapy, a contemporary practice using literature in the therapeutic treatment of illnesses, particularly psychological disorders, is the concept I have used to explore the debate between genre and literary fiction. I use it in order to investigate which can be classified 'better writing' and which has a more beneficial influence on readers' lives. My aim is to interrogate the way people view the significance and worth of texts based on their classification. As literary fiction is often more praised and valued, people find it more important. I am going against this way of thinking, offering the controversial opinion that genre fiction should be more appreciated as it offers an escape that has a more beneficial influence over readers, who need a break from reality. Therefore my purpose is to demonstrate that it should not be the grouping of literature that determines its value, but rather the individual's response to reading it, their enjoyment and what they take away from it, reflecting the primary focus of bibliotherapy - literature has the power to heal and transform. My piece is directed at a well-read audience who favour literary fiction. I believe that this audience would be found on the BBC internet podcast website. My aim, through the use of humour and parody is to bring light to the beneficial aspects of genre fiction, by satirising both genre and literary fiction conventions, making my audience laugh and reflect on their fixed opinions on literature.

From the outset of the course, I intended to do a comical, light-hearted piece that involved intertextual elements. Woody Allen became a main source of inspiration, as I tried to mirror his quirky style of comedy throughout my piece. His short stories *The Kuglemass Episode*¹ and *The Whore of Mensa*² were useful in exploring how to comically use intertextuality. This is strewn throughout my piece with literary allusions to Bret Easton Ellis's literary work *American Psycho*'s³ business card comparisons, ideas from Don De Lillo's writing, as well as using my Extension 1 English *Waiting for Godot*'s⁴ style to frame the opening of my major work with the literary characters. It is also seen in the bar scene, where each character we meet is one from an existing well known genre fiction novel; "The Bar" comes directly from *Gone Girl*⁵, Brett and Charlotte representing Scarlet O'Hara and Rhett Butler from *Gone with*

¹ The Kuglemass Episode, Woody Allan, 1977

² The Whore of Mensa, Woody Allan, 1974

³ American Psycho, Bret Easton Ellis, 1991

⁴ Waiting For Godot, Samuel Becket, 1853

⁵ Gone Girl, Gillian Flynn, 2012

*the Wind*⁶, the vampires in “booth 6” reflecting The Cullens from *Twilight*⁷ and Kallie the “dragon mother” referencing Daenerys Targeryen from *Game of Thrones*⁸. Allen’s film *Midnight in Paris*⁹, inspired me to use literature as the main theme for my work and *The Purple Rose of Cairo*¹⁰ encouraged me to create Norman’s unrealistic, peculiar adventure as he travels into the notepad meeting his creations. Another valuable source came from *Lost in Austen*¹¹, where Elizabeth Bennett switches places with modern day Amanda, an ardent Austen fan.

While researching famous authors and their work I learnt that many of the great, acclaimed literary authors including, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and F. Scott Fitzgerald were known as hard drinkers, so I made alcohol a motif in my piece. This motif is used to metaphorically highlight the elitism of the literary canon. This can be seen through the literary fiction characters sitting around trying to find the “ultimate truth” while drinking aged Scotch, and the genre fiction characters drinking cask wine and cheap beer having more light- hearted fun in “The Bar”. I have also alluded to this in the title of my piece.

This idea of ‘highbrow’ vs ‘low brow’ was found in John Dale’s article¹² who explores how “The only way a text can survive is through its interaction with a reader”. This concept can be seen in my work through Norman’s differing relationships with his literary and genre fiction characters. For the literary characters, I mock literary fiction’s dark themes and introspective nature by creating three parodied characters who present continual drama, agonising questions and are a constant struggle in Norman’s life. Each is very similar, commenting on how literary fiction often focusses on the human condition and explores the darker side of humanity. To make it more engaging I loosely allude to existing literary works through their names and their language: “Ray” mimicking Jay Gatsby, calling Norman “old fellow”; “Heath”, mirroring Heathcliff’s brooding anti-hero characteristics; and “Harald” mirroring the introspective, melancholy Hamlet questioning “Is it to live, or not to live? Is

⁶ Gone With the Wind, Margaret Mitchell, 1936

⁷ Twilight, Stephanie Myer, 2005

⁸ Game of thrones, George R. Martin, 1996

⁹ Midnight in Paris, Woody Allan, 2011

¹⁰ The Purple Rose of Cairo, Woody Allan, 1985

¹¹ Lost in Austen, ITV Network, 2011

¹² ‘Highbrow’ and ‘middlebrow’ are irrelevant when it comes to which writing survives, The Conversation, John Dale, 2015

that the question?” This is then compared to the genre fiction characters: “Ivy Underwood” acting as the crime fiction femme fatale, a seductive chain smoker; “Martin James” the “ordinary...geeky sidekick, who always finds himself in trouble” reminiscent of Arthur Dent¹³; and “Owen” the Western, outcast cowboy and brave hero. Similar to Daly, I critique the classification system which “implies an aesthetic pecking order, and is more often than not used in a derogatory way”. This is seen as the genre fiction characters offer Norman more enjoyment, happiness and fulfilment, while the literary fiction characters leave him feeling depressed and suicidal. This furthers John Dale’s point that although considered “low brow” texts, they are more beneficial for their readers as they don’t focus on the human condition, and deep pressing issues. Rather, they allow for an escape from these thoughts, distracting us from too much introspection.

In addition, Marian Diggs’ article¹⁴ and Ceridwen Dovey’s editorial¹⁵ regarding bibliotherapy, introduced a deeper meaning to my work, making it not only focus on the literary debate, but on the power and ability of literature to make us “happier” and “less stressed”, which I thought would make for a more interesting piece. From research in 2006 and 2009, it has been proven that the more fiction read, the more empathetic and perceptive to social situations we become. As Keith Oatley states, the right books “can improve social abilities, move us emotionally, and can prompt changes of selfhood”. This concept gradually became the overarching theme in my work, as the whole piece acts as a bibliotherapist’s “case study” exploring the effects of genre and literary fiction on the jaded author Norman Maurice. The way books affect our life and how they “can change our beliefs and correct bad habits” is explored through Norman’s transformation, from wanting to commit suicide while haunted by his literary fiction creations to enjoying life, once he has banished them to the attic - referencing *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha - and celebrates with his genre fiction characters who have given him a new lease on life. Other sources included Steven Petite¹⁶ who evaluates how neither category deserves the title of “better writing” unless the reader “reflects on the words after the last page is turned” making me strengthen the theme of the individual’s reading experience.

¹³ Hitchhikers Guide to the Glaxay, BBC radio, Douglas Adams, 1952

¹⁴ Bibliotherapy: A novel approach to healing, SBS, Mariam Diggs, 2016

¹⁵ Can Reading Make you Happier?, The New Yorker, Ceridwen Dovey, 2015

¹⁶ Literary Fiction Vs Genre Fiction, Huffington Post, Steven Petite, 2014

My interest in radio drama scripts derived from my Preliminary Advanced course studying and listening *Under Milk-Wood*¹⁷ and appropriation *Under Mulga-Wood*¹⁸, which inspired me to pursue this format. In order to understand radio dramas further, I listened to *War of the Worlds*¹⁹ for interesting structural ideas investigating how it engages its reader by using radio broadcasts within a radio play, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*²⁰ for understanding comedy, using its upbeat and quick witted humour as inspiration, and read *Artist descending a Staircase*²¹ which, due its innovative Chinese box structure and unusual artistic development made me pursue a fluid quest structure as I want my piece to be light hearted for casual listeners. As radio scripts rely primarily on dialogue *Writing for TV and Radio*²² aided me in developing my script. When writing dialogue, it advised that "everything in your script must be there to establish character and/or move the story along" making me reconsider and cut the opening of my piece involving an agent's phone call. I wanted to make my script flow conversationally, and learnt that you need to "mess up its hair", in that we don't speak in "complete and neatly constructed sentences" we "hesitate", we're "repetitive" and "are interrupted". In Graham Andrew's script writing guide²³, he emphasised the importance of creating an image for the reader using sound and music. This can be seen in my work, when establishing the atmosphere of the bar scene with "Jazz music playing, chattering and laughing, glasses clinking" occurring throughout the scene. In formatting my script, I followed Matt Carless scene style²⁴, informing me of how the script should look and how to insert directions and sound cues as well as numerous other guides for formatting and styles²⁵ of radio dramas.

My hope is that from a year's worth of challenging, but ultimately rewarding work and process, readers will reevaluate how they look and value literature. From my major work, I encourage readers to not be closed in by classifications, but find novels that give them enjoyment, satisfaction and happiness. I hope that although literary fiction is considered to

¹⁷ Under Milk-Wood, Dylan Thomas, 1972

¹⁸ Under Mulga-Wood, William Christie, 2003

¹⁹ War of The Worlds, Orson Wells, 1938

²⁰ Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams, 1978

²¹ Artist Descending a Staircase, Tom Stoppard, 1973

²² Writing For TV and Radio A Writer's and artist's companion, Sue Teddern and Nick Warburton, 2016

²³ You're On Air- A Guide to Writing, Preparing and Presenting Programs on Community Radio, Graham J. Andrews, 2004

²⁴ BBC Radio Format: Scene Style, Matt Carless, 2016

²⁵ HSC Extension 2 Script Writing Manual- Four basic radio types, Timothy Daley, 2006

have many beneficial qualities, people will come to value genre fiction in the same way. While it may be an easier and 'lighter' read, it can still heal and transform, as I have discovered from my research on Bibliotherapy. Overall, I want readers to understand the power of all literature.