

Reflection statement: *Lights, Passing*

“My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see.”¹

The essence of *Lights, Passing* lies within the influence of time on the individual and how this alters one’s perspective, with the purpose of enlightening my audience as to the paradigms by which we are shaped. The variety of issues encompassing *Lights, Passing*, accommodates for a vast audience, however due the overarching themes perhaps the most receptive audience will be those who feel somehow cheated by the movement of time. Alongside this, the philosophical, as opposed to structural, approach is further directed towards those with an interest in philosophy, particularly theories of relativism, and perhaps with an appreciation for the catalytic narrative.

Initially my investigation consisted entirely of examining a range of concepts, as I consider the evocation of thought and emotion crucial to art of any form. Thus my initial research was concerned with theories of relativism, which I stumbled across when exploring the literary theory of deconstructionism², focusing on the relativity of reality. This postmodernist idea that perception is personal has become the basis of my work. Early sophist Protagoras claimed:

“Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.”

¹ Conrad, J. *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* (1987)

² *Deconstructionism* was studied in the preliminary Extension one course through Bonnycastle, S. *In Search of Authority* (Second Edition), Broadview Press (1996)

Implying that to measure something is to ascribe a degree of value, Protagoras regarded value as dependant upon the observer, or relative to the observer.

Borne from this conceptual research was my choice of form, as I felt short stories allowed for more narrative freedom, whilst also enabling the alternate perspectives that have come to portray my concept. At this point, I commenced structural and stylistic investigation through David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*, which provided a solid knowledge of different styles and techniques, namely stream of consciousness, 'fancy prose', and his study of perspective. This investigation was accompanied by analysis of range of texts from authors such as Virginia Woolf, whose work *An Unwritten Novel* inspired the setting of *Lights, Passing*. Alongside this, I examined a selection of narratives from James Joyce, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Margaret Atwood, Edgar Allan Poe, and Donna Tartt, to name a few of the most influential authors, all of whom served to solidify my own writing style. More specifically, works of Joyce instigated my use of motifs, such as specific seasons, the watch, windows, the ruinous building, alongside the movement of the train itself, all of which aim to emphasise the perspective of the individual.

This investigation also increased my interest in the approach of interior monologue, and so I determined to write exclusively in first person as its imperfection and incompleteness³ allows for an emotive and often haunting depiction of life.

Following the submission of my intention statement, I realised that in order to crystallise my concept and determine a solid trajectory for the stories, a single

³ Maack, M. S. *Of Earth and Ecstasy*: Reflection statement.

overarching element through which the audience could examine the different perspectives of my characters was required; it was at this point that time became the central concern of *Lights, Passing*. I have always been fascinated by the movement of time and this became prominent in our study of *The Great Gatsby* in Advanced English. What fascinates me most is fluidity: how time comes and goes – wavelike, carrying relationships and events that leave us scathed and scarred. Yet it just keeps on going, indifferent. Following this revelation, the focus of my investigation progressed to characterisation, attempting to create multi-dimensional characters, still hoping to develop something resembling a plot. Producing three separate and distinctive voices, whilst avoiding overcompensation and clichés has been a dominant challenge throughout this course. Alongside this, I have wished to sway from the typical narrative wherein binary opposition is required to develop character as I believe this to be a facile option, depicting life inefficiently. Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History* was extremely influential in, not only the development of concept, but also characterisation. There is a beautiful passage in which she reflects upon the development of a character, an image I have adopted and maintained in considering how I portray the narrators:

“...the dark gaps between the street lamps begin to grow smaller and smaller, and farther apart, the first sign that one’s train is approaching familiar territory, and will soon be passing through the well-known, well-lighted streets of town...”⁴

This passage altered my view on each of my characters; I realised just how crucial it was to *know* them, inside out. Tartt’s writing also solidified my beliefs surrounding

⁴ Tartt, D. *The Secret History*, Penguin Books (1992)

perspective; whilst my narrators may be described as unreliable, or merely selective, if we rely on the post-modernist claim that reality is relative and perception personal, how can such a term describe an honest narrator? Through misconceptions and obvious imbalances, my characters explore these ideas: speaking subjectively and, in doing so, baring themselves. Also central to this piece of work is the anonymity of characters. The only named character is Eva – unscarred by time she is still entirely her own character, not yet eroded and smoothed into one of the masses.

Avoiding narrative resolution, my work portrays instead a slice of life, through interior monologue. I adore slice of life narrative; we, as readers, have a tendency to progress toward a resolution that we are often refused. I have aimed to consciously ask the reader to think, thus commenting on the fluid nature of reality that refutes a large portion of fiction, and incorporating the meta-fictional element of Virginia Woolf's writing that has so inspired this work. I wish for my audience to catch a glimpse into the characters' lives, as if they were glancing through the window of a train or walking through carriage 7, searching for a seat.

Finally, once I began the process of writing through the eyes of my characters, the plot began to gain shape and the stories, flesh. In Lodge's reflection of *narratology*, he explores the larger ideological structure of narratives, making the distinction between action and the catalytic material that characterises my stories. Through train's movement these characters' stories and relations with time are echoed, providing a subtle and atypical narrative trajectory. For example my first narrator, who lives almost exclusively in the past, obsessing over an unhealthy and failed relationship, is somewhat unreceptive to the external world. She has no concrete

notion of time and, unlike the other narrators, she has no specific reason to be on board the train as she has no destination, so she rides the same circuit around time and time again, hence the circular structure.

Alongside this, to provide a further sense of interconnectedness between the stories I have attempted to mimic the configuration of a train, shackling, through omniscient interjections and epigraphs, the stories to one another, whilst attempting to further the distinction between their commentaries on perspective and time. Ironically, this serves to alter the audience's perspective on the narrator's stance. This fluidity of point of view I must attribute to Sonya Hartnett, as she uses third person narration in segments similarly in novels *Of A Boy* and *The Silver Donkey*.

In evaluation, though my progress has been inconsistent, I hold pride in my diligence and, at times, regimented measures to pass through painstakingly slow and laborious sections of writing. The ideas have advanced slowly, gaining form with each task enforcing me to reflect, such as the Viva Voce, which was most eminent in that it required the vocalization of my ideas and, in doing so, develop some semblance of order. As a result of the scrutiny I understand this work will face, my writing style has felt restricted, altering my comfort and ultimately, my confidence, in the final product. As a result of this, I feel that the piece of work is more modest, or tentative than my typical style, however I am relatively satisfied, rebuking only my poor time management and perfectionism.

My only discontent is derived from the gulf between my aspirations and actuality, to quote Isaac Bashevis Singer:

“Every creator painfully experiences the chasm between his inner vision and its ultimate expression. The chasm is never completely bridged. We all have the conviction, perhaps illusory, that we have much more to say than appears on the paper.”