

Reflection Statement

"The method of romantic realism is to make life more beautiful and interesting than it actually is, yet give it all the reality, and even a more convincing reality than that of our everyday existence." – Ayn Rand¹

My major work, *Nothing But Time*, provides an intimate and explorative narrative which aims to entertain, engage, and understand the issues confronting an individual in a post-World War II world. Themes of disillusionment, ambition, and paranoia so characteristic of this time in the USA are seen and confronted stylistically through tone, language, and form – the development of which has been a process involving extensive independent inspiration, research, and revision. In conceiving the major work's setting and main character, Danny, I was drawn to the idea of my grandfather's experiences during World War II. His qualifications as a mechanical engineer led to his appointment to the 3132nd Signal Service Company Special, a rather secretive tactical deception unit positioned on the Western Front and operating from 1944 until the end of the war. The history of this unit was intriguing, but it was only after considering how I could use language to explore both the events he would have experienced, as well as his thoughts, expressions, and opinions following it, that I came to understand how they may have had a lasting impact on his outlook in life. By setting *Nothing But Time* against the backdrop of New York during the 1950s, I was able to retain the language and genre of realism, whilst simultaneously altering the biographical and historic focus of the original idea to a concept, which, in time developed to become an intimate and direct exploration of character and ways of thinking given a unique perspective on conflict. This key point of development within the work, occurred following the Viva Voce assessment where I readily

¹ Rand A. *Letters Of Ayn Rand*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Dutton; 1995. – p. 242-243

began to integrate war as a purposeful theme rather than a focus, and had opportunities to subtly express themes of discontentment, recognition, and longing within characters' speech:

*"You will not be seen but you will be heard. There will be no state-honours or recognition in what you do. Your family will not know! Your friends will not know!"*²

The authenticity of the perspective character, Danny's voice was realised and developed amidst a process of research into form and concept – wherein a variety of reading materials led to a shifting, dynamic idea that has now produced a substantial product. The primary subject of research into form was Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*³ Which proved to be the predominant source of stylistic inspiration of slice of life writing as well as the use of minimalistic language, that which was brief yet not superficial, and found meaning through candour, in attempts explore the emotional state of characters:

*"A guy like that calling on you is liable to get flattened. Anyway usually it's all the same to me, I'm good with not having that sort of temperament."*⁴

Further reading into Richard Yates' *Collected Stories*⁵, provided inspiration for the language and tone through which the realistic 1950s setting could be created. In terms of overall textual integrity this added a layer of sophistication and engagement. The choice to portray memories and themes of war in a detached, postmodern, yet deeply 'conscious' manner within the work was inspired in-part by Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*⁶, which effectively shaped the

² Nothing But Time, 2016, pg. 10 p. 4

³ Carver R. *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please*. London: Vintage Classic; 2009.

⁴ Nothing But Time, 2016, pg. 4 p. 6

⁵ Yates R. *The Collected Stories Of Richard Yates*. New York: Henry Holt; 2001.

⁶ Pynchon T. *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Vintage Classic; 2013.

style of composition and redrafting of sections in *Chapter II*, wherein the tone of distressing memories is balanced with the colloquial register true to Danny's persona:

*“Discharge and install, the noise is gone but it ought to be there, a whirring, a spinning, the mechanical contactor can't relay, the noise is suddenly back, it's louder ... A tremor, a shock, not from the unit but within. No bodies or people but the noise ... hammering the cranium all the while with the reverberating capacitor at peak resistance ... A promising breeze and the air offers itself as I wipe away the sweat.”*⁷

Equally important, was the development of concepts during the process of composition was the result of independent investigation and research, specifically, the application of aspirational and ideal values of objectivism to the context of the 'soured American Dream' during the 1950s. This idea and perspective was inspired by both an analysis of *The Virtue of Selfishness*⁸ by Ayn Rand as well as a detailed reading of *New York in The 50s*⁹ by Dan Wakefield. The form of the work in portraying the uniqueness and diversity of the setting was achieved through further investigation into the vernacular language of the period – resulting in the need for a glossary at the beginning of the work. This effective association of concept and context with form and structure construed parts of the originality of the final product. Another key point of development and redrafting was the further research into form undertaken following the Report assessment. In further striving towards the purpose of constructing a complex character profile, a reading of *The Fiftieth Gate*¹⁰ by Mark Baker established tonal contrast. Baker's inspiration came in the form of the contrast created between the tone of epigraph statements at the

⁷ Nothing But Time, 2016, pg. 9 p. 1

⁸ Rand A *The Virtue of Selfishness*. New York: Signet; 1964.

⁹ Wakefield D. *New York In The Fifties*. New York: Greenpoint Press; 2012.

¹⁰ Baker M. *The Fiftieth Gate*. Sydney, NSW, Australia: Flamingo; 1997.

beginning of each chapter, which I consequently translated into my work as short poems to effectively provide an inner monologue as to Danny's emotions and inclinations.

"Where to now?

Something's been feeling wrong.

Take something, go lie down,

*It's been too damn long."*¹¹

By further blending notions of form, concept, voice, and context within the composition of the work, the Baker-inspired insertion of 1950s-era advertisements for household appliances alongside the aforementioned poems was intended to form an additional audience experience that was to provoke both intrigue, and make use of sensationalised language to contrast the comparatively realist tonality of Danny's addresses to the reader:

*"You can't possibly see the truth if your view is clouded by a thick cloud of smoke! 90% of doctors would recommend Viceroys for protection, 'It's toasted!'"*¹²

The development of the major work has also had various inspirational sources and relationships with current and earlier English Advanced and Extension 1 units of work. A personal preference for the form of literary short-story was gained through experience and exposure to a variety of textual forms in the *Art, Literature, and Poetry Throughout The Ages* unit undertaken during the Preliminary Advanced English course. A consequent desire to extend an interest into the form of short story nurtured the eventual choice of form. Additionally, the

¹¹ Nothing But Time, 2016, pg. 20 p. 7

¹² Nothing But Time, 2016, pg. 7 p. 2

study of Romanticism as part of *Module B: Texts and Ways Of Thinking* in the HSC English Extension 1 course compelled me to a consideration of how paradigms of that literary tradition could be interpreted in a more modernised sense within the work I was to create, leading to the eventual discovery and inspiration of the ‘aspirational’ paradigms of Romantic Realism. In aligning the nature of the composition with investigative and interpretational ideas: The use of the perspective character, Danny’s actions to affect a moralistic internal and external discovery within readers was the conception resulting from studying the HSC English Advanced *Area of Study: Discovery* module. In the finished product this is further extended by having the work essentially provide a moralistic realisation and insight into changing values within post-war New York, specifically the conflict of blind ambition and cynicism and disillusionment that characterised the time period, and how people may come to resolve this within themselves.

Nothing But Time would be especially engaging for audiences who grew up in the 1940s – 60s, as the settings would be relevant in addition to the post-war commentary and emerging countercultural ideas standing as engaging features and subtexts. Those of this vintage who have read my drafts are particularly taken with the realism evoked of the period and the sense of paranoia that permeates the work. American audiences, especially those from New York City would also find relevance and appeal in the work. Showing the work to peers, teachers, and mentors from several schools produced the suggestion that the work also holds an appeal to general audiences of literary fiction. Reflection on the informal tone of the story has led to the conclusion that the wider appeal of the work is likely the result of empathy and engagement with Danny’s honest disposition, cynicism, and direct ‘casual’ speech. *Slice Magazine* and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* are relevant avenues to pursue as to publication of the work given the coherent theme and ‘slice-of-life’ style of their regularly published content.

With *Nothing But Time*, my challenge was to consistently explore and examine the effect of variations of form, tone, and register on an audience – with both history and imagination as the devices through which a narrative may be told. The relationships of concept, structure, and technical language features and conventions within the work, especially with regard to apparent conflicts of Realism and Romanticism, and reconciling the two to compose in the aesthetic of ‘Romantic Realism’, has aided in the fulfilment of the purpose that was originally intended:

“Most of my stories, if not all of them, have some basis in real life. That's the kind of fiction I'm most interested in...I'm interested in stories that are grounded in the real world.” –

Raymond Carver¹³

¹³ Kellerman S. *For Raymond Carver, a Lifetime of Storytelling*, The New York Times, May 31st 1998, p. 15

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