

## ENGLISH: *BIRTHDAY LETTERS*

**To what extent has textual form shaped your understanding of conflicting perspectives? In your response, make detailed reference to your prescribed text and at least ONE other related text.**

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There are no facts, only interpretations. There can never be an objective actuality, concerning any particular event or situation. An individual's perspective is tainted by their own context, subjectivity and the benefit of hindsight. Therefore, the truth offered by an individual can only be considered a subjective perspective and each individual's recollection of the truth will differ. Chomsky wrote 'the dissemination of truth is often carefully selected to achieve personal goals' and this is a result of the influence of perspective on an individual and is evident in both everyday life and literature. A composer may use their text to promote their own values and opinions. Due to hindsight and perspective, a composer consciously re-evaluates their past and therefore portrays it, through their respective texts, in order to coincide with their present motives. Through a deliberate manipulation of their textual form and language features, texts inevitably display the dichotomy of conflicting perspectives. This is seen in Ted Hughes 'Birthday Letters', Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' and Christine Jeffs 'Sylvia' which demonstrate the extent to which textual form can be utilized by a composer to portray their own perspective. Through linguistic manipulation within their poetry, an understanding of conflicting perspectives can be derived.

There can never be a pure and simple truth, as an individual's own personal context will always influence their representation of a situation. In Ted Hughes 'Your Paris', conflicting perspectives are highly evident as a result of the differing historical and cultural contexts of the speaker, Ted Hughes and his new wife, Sylvia Plath. Hughes perspective on Paris is clouded by his English background and therefore his personal memories of Second World War. Hughes claims '*My Paris was not just German. The capital of the occupation and the old nightmare. I read each bullet scar in the Quai stonework with an eerie familiar feeling. The possessive pronoun of 'my' coupled with the dark, emotive imagery reflects his inability to separate Paris from its wartime occupation. This is juxtaposed with the superficial onomatopoeia when describing Plath's exaggerated and vociferous approval of Paris, shown in 'ecstasies that ricocheted off walls'*'. Hughes negative connotations and sensory imagery when describing 'his Paris' positions the audience to sympathize with his perspective and view Sylvia as being able to distance herself from the haunting past of Paris, due to her American heritage. This difference in background represents how context is an essential influence in the resulting conflicting perspectives between Hughes and Plath. Each individual's opinion on any situation is a direct result of their difference in context as this essentially shapes their values and perspective.

Conflicting perspectives can arise between the recounting of an event by a primary witness and an outsider due to their different experiences and interpretations. Christine Jeffs 2003 film, 'Sylvia' juxtaposes Hughes victimisation of himself throughout his marriage to Sylvia. Whilst in 'Your Paris', Hughes 'line, 'what walked beside me was flayed' depicts Sylvia as never being 'whole' and himself as simply becoming caught up in her 'practised lips' and gushing burbling's', Jeffs film illustrates Hughes' as a misogynist whose infidelity and selfishness was the direct cause of Plath's eventual demise. Jeffs utilises her textual form of a film to promote her perception of the Plath/ Hughes marriage. This is evident through Jeff's use of costuming, as Sylvia whom is originally always adorned in vibrant red clothing, begins to predominately wear drab, bland clothing as her relationship with Hughes intensifies. This is epitomised through the mis-en-scene of the 'Visitors' scene in which the low lighting, lack of non-diegetic sound and mundane setting of the kitchen is used by Jeffs to reflect the extent to which Hughes has forced Plath into this stereotypical domestic role, in order to ensure his success as he 'is the real poet in the house'. This suppressive behaviour of Hughes is reflected by Jeffs to be a result of his inability to emotionally cater for Plath's needs and this led to her instability and irrationality. The use of vibrant costuming, particularly the colour red is again utilised by Jeffs to further ensure the audience views Ted as a destructive force, as his trivial changing affections are symbolised by his lovers wearing of red clothing. Through the visual

advantage of her textual form, Christine Jeffs is able to ensure the audience sympathises with Sylvia and rejects the self-portrayal illustrated by Ted Hughes in 'Birthday Letters' to therefore support Jeffs own perspective which is shaped by hindsight and an outsiders interpretation of the events.

An individual's memory and hindsight will always hinder their ability to present an objective truth. This is exemplified in Ted Hughes 'Fulbright Scholars', where he employs linguistic techniques and his textual form to represent his own opinion. The poem begins with the use of question 'Where was it, in the strand?', and this, coupled with Hughes repetition of 'maybe' and incomplete sentences reflects that memory has hindered Hughes' ability to portray an objective and accurate truth. This conjecture within his text illustrates the influence of retrospection on a text. Hughes appears to be sure of certain negative aspects of Sylvia 'your exaggerated American grin', which represent her as being false, yet the credibility of these statements is lessened due to his hypothesizing in the first lines of the poem. It can therefore be evaluated that hindsight and memory has heavily impacted his depiction of events. Hughes low modality when considering 'maybe I noticed you' is juxtaposed in Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy' where high modality language and evocative imagery is used in 'the vampire who said he was you, and drank my blood for a year'. Conflicting perspectives are evident here as whilst Ted portrays an originally uninterested perspective towards Sylvia, her own memory has resulted in her constructing the idea that he sought after her, and later took from her ' [he]drank my blood for a year'. The memory of these two poets has hindered their portrayal of an objective, accurate truth, and therefore memory and hindsight can be seen to significantly impede the possibility of obtaining a pure and simple truth.

The truth can never be recounted accurately due to each individuals own subjectivity. A composer is able to utilise their textual form to represent their own perspective, influenced by their own personal bias. In Ted Hughes 'The Minotaur', the impact of subjectivity is displayed through his meticulously selected language techniques and textual form. Hughes uses one event to portray the dynamic of his entire relationship with Plath. Accusatory language in 'The mahogany table-top you smashed' and evocative language in 'demented by my being' is employed by Hughes to portray Sylvia as a selfish, and mentally unstable. The audience is positioned to see her anger as trivial 'by my being twenty minutes late'. Hughes distances himself from her in 'your marriage' and 'your children' epitomising his view that Sylvia was simply using him to fill her insatiable desire to reunite with her father 'brought you to the horned bellowing grave of your risen father'. The dark, demonic imagery of 'left your children echoing, like tunnels in a labyrinth' is manipulated to resonate with the audience and leave the impression of Sylvia as neglectful and predominately self-interested. Christine Jeffs own subjectivity lies in her position as an outsider to the actual events and this results in her depiction of Sylvia as the primary caregiver whilst Ted selfishly focusses on his work through Jeffs use of the incontrollable monotony of a child's crying combined with the close up shot of Sylvia warming milk on her wrist, representing the tedium of her position. Also directly contrasting Hughes perspective is Sylvia's portrayal of him in 'Daddy'. Through powerful, Nazi allusions 'a man in black with a Mein Kampf look' and the reference to Medieval torture devices 'and a love of the rack and the screw' presents the idea that Hughes enjoyed emotionally exploiting Sylvia and he was a destructive sadistic force within their marriage and therefore directly contributed to their separation. These two contrasting perspectives are a result of the subjectivity present in all individuals and each composer has utilised their textual form to ensure their perspective resonates with the audience.

The influence of context, retrospection and subjectivity make an objective truth unachievable. A text is the product of its composers own views and values and is manipulated to achieve personal motives. Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath both utilise their linguistic techniques and textual form to ensure their own perspective is highlighted, and this results in the dichotomy of perspectives evident in their texts.