

ENGLISH: *BIRTHDAY LETTERS*

Conflicting Perspectives Essay

Integral to conflicting perspectives is the composer's ability to depict diverging voices in the representation of an event, personality or situation, prompting the responder to form a subjective interpretation of the text's inherent meaning. In the anthology, *Birthday Letters*, Ted Hughes presents a retrospective evaluation of his turbulent relationship with his wife, expressing his condemnation of Plath's suicide through the confessional mode. In Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the chief as the narrator is largely defined by his perception of others and is on a trajectory of self-discovery through his evolving relationship with Mc Murphy. Doran perpetuates his own beliefs on the futility of the Iraq War in his feature article, *US Support for War Fades as Casualties Mount*, revealing the complexities of achieving a singular perspective on events. Ultimately, both composers employ a dominant narrative voice to expose the problematic nature of deriving a totalizing sense of meaning from any act of representation.

In the poem, *Your Paris*, Plath's romanticised and idealized perspective of Paris is undermined by Hughes' cynical, post-war account of the city, illustrating the challenge to derive meaning from their divided relationship. Hughes views Paris as "only just not German", informed by his experience as an Englishman in World War II. However, Plath views Paris as a romanticised "American" fantasy, perpetuated by Hughes' use of clichés and the "impressionist paintings" evocative of French society and culture. As the poem develops, her "lingo" is simply a mechanism to protect her from "spontaneous combustion", reinforcing Hughes' dominant perspective of Plath's destructiveness. However, the poem shifts as Hughes metaphorically becomes a "guide dog", thinking he is protecting her yet unsure what he is protecting her from. Although he believed that he was providing a sense of equilibrium to "correct your stumblings", through the confessional mode, Hughes' retrospective outlook conveys his culpability for his passive role in the relationship. Thus through the intersection of post-war European and American sensibilities, Hughes informs the responder of the emotional and political disjuncture's that underpin the text.

Moreover, in the final poem *Red*, Hughes' evolving perspective of Plath allows him to reconcile his self-interested purpose through symbolically focusing on Plath's internal conflict. This allows audiences to derive a more authoritative meaning as Hughes' anger at Plath's destructiveness changes to a conciliatory recognition of her positive attributes. Hughes' dominant portrayal of Plath's harmful nature is represented through the titular motif of "red", revealing his view of Plath as emotionally unstable. Hughes' combination of alliteration in "you revelled in red" illustrates Plath's perspective of red to be an optimistic attempt to overcome depression. Hughes' continued use of colour metaphor reveals the author's submerged representation of Plath's perspective, as the changed colour motif reflects the tonal shift from accusatory to melancholic. Despite his turbulent relationship, Hughes attempts to impose meaning upon the audience through vivid imagery suggesting "blue was better for you", personifying the colour as her "kindly spirit". Conflicting with Plath's view of red, Hughes' use of confessional poetry enables his catharsis, obscuring Plath's perspective by symbolising blue as the precious "jewel" which she lost.

In Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Mc Murphy's dominant perceptions of the institution overpower the perspectives of the participants, problematising our attempts to derive any singular meaning from the text. Through chief Bromden's reference of Mc Murphy as "no ordinary admission", the protagonist's revolt to the institutional control is almost instantaneous. Mc Murphy breaks down the monotony of the institution by giving the acutes impulse through gambling: "whenever I meet with a deck of cards, I lay my money down". Meddling with chance promotes the notion of a chaotic universe facilitating their perceptions of emancipation. However, Kesey highlights the submerged perspective through McMurphy's recognition that the acutes "haven't got the guts to just walk out", rejecting the notion of unbridled liberation. Moreover, Kesey portrays that the institution has developed the "acutes" perspective of the world seeing their structured existence as

comforting. Through McMurphy's realization, demonstrates the problematic nature of deriving a unified meaning through the conflicting identities of McMurphy and the patients.

Similarly in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey demonstrates that while the purported aims of the institution are to promote consistency, this therapy may be amplified too greatly to the point of supreme autocracy. While mental asylums propose to "fix up the mistakes made in the neighbourhoods", Kesey argues the submerged viewpoint that these values are exploited by the "Big Nurse" to control and manipulate her patients, impeding any sense of individuality. McMurphy's "hither to" existence conflicts with the ideals of the institution, and he is sentenced to electro shock therapy, destroying his capacity to derive meaning. Moreover, Billy is offered an opportunity by McMurphy to reclaim his identity by fulfilling his masculine agenda. While this impulse conflicts against the nurse's "therapeutic community", she becomes isolated from the asylum as her authority becomes vanquished. However, as Billy's dependence on the institution tragically results in his suicide, posing question towards the social implications of therapy and mental treatment in general.

Similarly to Hughes, Doran seeks to purport his belief in the futility of the Iraq War through his article, *US Support for War Fades as Casualties Mount*, while also demonstrating the difficulties of achieving a singular perspective on events. The American soldier's wife, Stephanie Richards, is presented as the dominant perspective but is also characterised as fallible as "she admits to having growing doubts" about the US success. Doran exploits Stephanie Richards' hesitancy to engage the audience and perpetuate his own self-interested purpose of questioning the validity of the war in Iraq. Moreover, the use of political figures, such as Donald Rumsfeld, demonstrates the broad array of perspectives upon the war, as he "denied that Iraq was becoming a quagmire". However, as the composer claims that "we have to support them", this demonstrates his incongruous perspective which limits a singular perspective on an event. Thus, Doran, as does Hughes', hinders attempts to derive a universal perspective on events, furthering his self-interested purpose of condemning the Iraq War.