

ENGLISH: *BIRTHDAY LETTERS*

“More than anything else, conflicting perspectives are the result of bias or self-interest.”

Respond to this statement through analysis of the ways perspectives are represented in your prescribed text and at least ONE other related text of your own choosing.

The inherent subjectivity as well as the conscious agenda and purpose of composers in representation produces inevitably conflicting accounts of experience. Unique personal value sets inform the subconscious bias of composers and responders. Further, the composer's authorial credence, their unique self-assured righteousness, tends to dominate their portrayal of personalities. These competing motivations influence more than anything else, literary construction. An awareness and consideration of this bias and self-interest is thus critical for audiences, as complex perceptions of personalities are shaped not only by composers but by responder's also. Ted Hughes' confessional poems *Birthday Letters* act simultaneously as an emotional memoirs and act of public purgation. His poems 'Fulbright Scholars' and 'Your Paris' as well as Jenny Taylor's critical essay *The Problem with Plath* are a testament to the pre-eminence of bias and self-interest in representations of conflicting perspectives.

The inherent bias engendered by the sincere experience of emotional suffering manifests necessarily conflicting perspectives of personalities from innocence to experience. 'Fulbright Scholars' frames the disjunction between Hughes' idealistic and innocent perspective of Plath 'at twenty-five', and his antagonistic, abrasive view of his older self, as informed by his embittered, realist values. Hughes' sexualised fascination of Plath's 'Long hair, loose waves' illustrates through sensual, Romantic imagery his impressionable reception of her character. However as informed by his vilified bias, he perceives instead her 'Exaggerated American grin for the cameras, the judges, the strangers, the frighteners' this cynical listing reflective of how his emotional bias manifests his intrapersonal conflicting perspectives. Thus Hughes demonstrates how the dynamic nature of experience can form inherent emotional bias, conceding this through the episodic format of the poem, but also seeking vindication from his audience for his vilified persona.

The inherent subjectivity of the audience and composer is illustrated to predicate bias and self-interest according to Jenny Taylor's critical essay *The Problem with Plath*. The indulgent self-interest of responders in, 'The Plath Legend...The Plath Industry...The Plath Estate', Taylor remonstrates, asserting Plath's literary remains here become merely a 'contested site' for the responders' self-centred conjecture. The categorical tone illustrates how by commodifying Plath, we engender conflicting perspectives in our bid to portray 'exclusive' truths about Plath, from as Jacqueline Rose terms it, 'peeping through keyhole of the bedroom door'. Taylor ultimately illustrates these truths to become fundamentally personal, 'Hughes' "Your Story...Our Story" becomes "Our Story". Through re-appropriating Hughes' language and the collective pronoun Taylor asserts that our self-interest necessarily transforms meaning from representation to reception, creating uniquely subjective views that are necessarily conflicting. Finally Taylor argues that authorial credence, how 'The biographer artfully shapes a life and so guides a reading of that life' means personalities are inextricably linked with the composer's self-interest and bias. Her third person emotionally detached tone penetrates Hughes' potentially falsifying polemic agenda, calculated to position his audience. Thus Taylor illustrates the inherent bias and often indulgent self-interest of both composers and responders to cause conflicting perspectives.

Divergent cultural perspectives form the base of Hughes' "Your Paris" however it is his bias of jealousy and self-interest in mechanics of mythologising that ultimately govern the conflicting perspectives he represents. Hughes' remonstrative tone, 'Your Paris, I thought, was American' inaugurates the poem with a critique of her idealistic and fundamentally artistic personality. Further he argues, 'Your Paris was a desk in a pension' romantic imagery casting her naïve outlook. When he juxtaposes their perspectives, where he sees 'The Capital of Occupation and old nightmare', and she sees 'Apollinaire', we glean an insight into the resentment that may bias his older, sullied

perspective, for the superior literary talents and poetic mind of Plath. Further he represents Plath's 'lingo' as destabilising, paralleling imagery from "The Shot" of her 'ecstasies that ricocheted. Off the walls', antithesising this to his compassionate constancy as the loyal 'dog'. Thus Hughes attempts to evoke pathos for his earnest experience of suffering at the hands of this mythologised, erratic and indulgently artistic Plath, his vilified bias and polemic self-interest in re-balancing the power dynamic of their relationship the two-most significant features in shaping his representation of conflicting perspectives.

Ultimately the inescapable emotional bias of the composer and responder, as well as their self-interest in a personality, be it polemic or philanthropic, are clearly illustrated in Hughes', 'Fulbright Scholars' and 'Your Paris' as well as Taylors' The Problem with Plath to be the most significant cause of conflicting perspectives.