

ENGLISH: *BIRTHDAY LETTERS*

Explore how the poetry of Ted Hughes and ONE or more related texts represent conflicting perspectives in unique and evocative ways.

To what extent has textual form shaped your understanding of conflicting perspectives?

Through the unique and evocative representation of conflicting perspectives, composers explore the complexity of life and experience. Literary representation provides a medium for the negotiation of these opposing views in unique and evocative ways, creating a multi-dimensional prism of understanding for viewers. Poetic, filmic and critical textual forms address these competing subjectivities differently, and complement each other to both inform and challenge our perceptions of accounts of experience, and thus shape our understanding of conflicting perspectives. Unique representation is undergirded by the composers' values while and their underlying authorial purport portrays conflicting perspectives evocatively, manipulating and often subverting the views of the responder. Ted Hughes reflective and evaluative collection of poems *Birthday Letters* (1998) act simultaneously as a confessional memoir of unique personal experience and an evocative act of public purgation. His poems "Fulbright Scholars" and "Your Paris" as well as Jenny Taylor's critical essay *The Problem with Plath* (2000) and Alan Resnais' film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) are a testament to the unique and evocative representation of conflicting perspectives.

"Fulbright Scholars" frames Hughes' intrapersonal conflicting perspectives of Sylvia Plath through subjective memory, conveying his unique shifting values as a composer while evocatively challenging the audience perceptions about the relationship between the complexity of experience and literary representation. Hughes' dynamic perspectives of Plath are shaped by the necessarily selective and uncertain act of remembrance that serves to polarise his Romantic and innocent view in youth to the embittered and vilified view of the older Hughes. 'At 25' Hughes 'Noted your long hair, loose waves', sexualised imagery characterising his impressionable and lustful younger perspective. However, his further sexual metaphor, 'was it then I brought a peach' alludes to a laden image from Eliot's *Prufrock*, connoting not only his naïve sexual fascination but also simultaneously suggesting Plath's deceitfulness as the seductive temptress. He compounds this unique and subjective construction of Plath with the subtle reference to her 'luggage', evidence of his sustained resentment and sobering awareness to her idealistic façade, here evoking pathos from his audience as the innocent victim of Plath's complex and destructive personality, the Orphic poet. Hughes evocatively contrasts these two viewpoints through the poem's mediation through a 'photo', deconstructing Plath's public persona through reference to superficiality and objectivity. Hughes' asymmetric repetition, 'I remember that thought, not your face...Your Veronica Lake Bang, not what it hid' evocatively illustrates the dichotomy between the pacific veneer of Plath in the photo, and Hughes' sincerity of experience, inciting his audience to question and challenge often shallow and misleading historicised veneers that film accounts of experience. Hughes thus uniquely represents his conflicting perspectives of Plath through the juxtaposition of his personal values, whilst further evocatively critiquing the often superficial perspectives of responders in comparison to his sincerity of experience, the seemingly honest index of uncertainty that undergirds the low modality of the poem a method to seek validation from responders.

A relatively objective and neutral authorial stance for comment allows for the unique and evocative critiquing of conflicting perspectives as in Jenny Taylor's critical essay *The Problem With Plath*. Taylor categorically represents the conflicting perspectives of Hughes and Plath to provide a radically different insight about the subjectivity and authorial credence of conflicting perspectives, engaging in a dialogue with the audience. Her antithetical list of 'The mired boundary between life and art, subjectivity and objectivity, "Truth and fiction" uses analytical accumulation and coupling to portray the extent to which their perspectives are in tension. Taylor inaugurates the essay with a series of rhetorical questions, 'How did one's attitude towards Plath affect the shape of the narrative?' challenging responders to consider the inherent subjectivity of the composer and themselves.

This unique and evocative representation of conflicting perspectives as the direct result of competing subjectivities is furthered as Taylor asserts Hughes, “Your Story, My Story, becomes ‘Our Story’”. This appropriation of Hughes’ language in a categorical tone penetrates the inescapability of one’s subjectivity, thus evocatively representing conflicting perspectives. Further, through the use of the collective pronoun, Taylor suggests that meaning is transformed from representation to reception by the subjective filter of the responder. Taylor further questions, ‘In what ways did these biographies construct Plath?’ asserting that the conflicting ‘truths’ inherent in conflicting perspectives are merely ‘constructs’, portrayed according to agenda. Taylor culminates this view in, ‘The biographer artfully shapes a life and so guides a reading of that life’, representing conflicting perspectives evocatively as a direct manifestation of an author’s bias, calculated in representation to sway responders. The third-person, emotionally detached tone reflects her critical truth, that a composer’s authorial credence ultimately dominates their portrayal of an individual, citing Hughes’ polemic agenda to be potentially falsifying. Thus Taylor represents conflicting perspectives in a uniquely objective light, voicing criticism that is evocative and enlightening and ultimately meaning we cannot ignore the influence of our inherent subjectivity as responders to texts.

Divergent cultural subjectivities over the legacy of WW2 are anti-thesised in Hughes’ “Your Paris”, uniquely representing conflicting values through the poem’s monologue form and evocatively utilising the same mechanics of literary construction to position his audience’s response to their opposed personalities and views. Hughes inaugurates the poem with a remonstrative tone, ‘Your Paris, I thought, was American,’ criticising Plath’s indulgent, American innocence. Hughes further critiques Plath’s Romanticised, idealistic and fundamentally escapist paradigm, ‘Your Paris was a desk in a pension’, romantic imagery used to capture her artistic perception of the world around her. Hughes juxtaposes this to his sullied, realist views, as informed by his English restraint. His Paris was ‘The capital / of Occupation and old nightmare’, historical referencing Nazi occupation and the horrors of war he perceives. Where Plath sees ‘Apollinaire’, Hughes sees human suffering, uniquely representing their divergent cultural sensitivities through stream-of-consciousness-esque monologue, serving to differentiate Hughes’ portrayal through the honesty and emotional memory he accesses in the poetic form. Furthermore, Hughes’ evocatively voices censure over Plath’s repressive personality, her ‘lingo like an anaesthetic’, simile here used to implicitly construct Plath’s poetic instability, reminiscent of Plato’s warning about the dangers of poetry. Hughes simultaneously constructs himself as the loyal ‘dog’, symbolic of his role as the earnest protector and helper in the relationship, an evocative act of representation in response to the passionate convictions of feminist critics in the 60s and 70s. Hughes’ unique and evocative representation of polarised cultural paradigms and subversive literary construction challenge audiences’ to sympathise with his sullied suffering and vindicate Plath’s repressive escapism.

Alan Resnais pioneering ‘French New Wave’ cinema film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) utilises unprecedented unique forms of juxtaposition in combination with evocative confrontational cinematography to represent conflicting perspectives on personalities at Hiroshima after the bomb. The dualised unique narrative and documentary style portrays a symbolic love affair contextualised in the aftermath of nuclear devastation in Hiroshima, the ‘city of bones’. Repetitive, antithetical dialogue established the film in a tone of uncertainty, ‘I know everything...You know nothing’ evidencing paradoxical competing subjectivities that guide the film. The detached European values of the naïve, French ‘She’ character are juxtaposed to those of the sullied, victimised, Japanese ‘He’. Similar to the Plath-Hughes dynamic, ‘He’ denounces the claims of the ‘She’ character, the film’s mechanics of jump-cut editing and rabid juxtaposition evidence of Resnais authorial privileging of subjective memory, the audience never permitted entry into each frame for more than a couple of seconds, and thus dependent on the intensely subjective claims of the narrators. Resnais furthers this unique representation of conflicting value sets through, comparably to Hughes, asserting the limitations of objective representation, evocatively representing the sincerity of the ‘He’s’ experience against the objective reality of suffering at Hiroshima, the dichotomy between appearance and reality. His ironic claim that ‘The films were made as conscientiously as possible’ demonstrates the meta-textual self-consciousness of Resnais, who evocatively contrasts the superficial historicised veneer that often filmed Western records of the Hiroshima experience, to first-hand archival footage

of human degradation, using confrontational graphic imagery to subvert the hegemonic paradigms of his audience. Thus Resnais champions individual subjectivity and critiques the limitation of mediated literary representations of human suffering, utilising unique and evocative juxtaposition and a pre-occupation with memory to challenge his audience to consider the marginalised subjective perspective of individual suffering at Hiroshima.

Ultimately composers represent conflicting perspectives in unique and evocative ways to assert their values and authorial purport to audiences. Such unique and evocative acts of representation search to poetically, cinematically and critically penetrate and explore the complexity and subjectivity of experience, and thus present multi-dimensional insights about personalities and events. Hughes “Fulbright Scholars” and “Your Paris”, Jenny Taylor’s *The Problem with Plath*, and Alan Resnais *Hiroshima Mon Amour* predicate such unique and evocative representation of conflicting perspectives.