

Elysium

Extension 2 English - Major Work (Poetry)

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"ELYSIUM [*ĭ-lĭzh'e-əm*], in Greek mythology, originally the joyful land
for departed heroes favoured by the gods.

Elysium was an area of eternal happiness for the virtuous dead.
Worry was unknown, and rose-tinted celestial light radiated perpetual day."

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12/11/2000

Remembrances

Frozen in time,
standing guard over the spoils
of their personal victory.
Uneasy as the hub of movement
and chaos and noise
derails from its ordinarily frenetic pace.

A child screams and shatters the peace,
but receives no reaction.
His mouth remains open
and face remains contorted
as the sound dissipates.

Absorbed by detached thoughts
of anger and uselessness,
fidgeting at their post, all stand
determined not to be distracted.

This moment reserved for reflection
on someone else's experience
draws to a close.
A communal sigh of relief is audible
as the loudspeaker authorises its end.

The collection of hands relax their grip,
and begin to push their shopping trolleys once more.

Forgotten are their plans for peace

and human decency

as they jostle against others

determined to be victorious -

determined to retrieve

tonight's

dinner.

22/11/00

Road to where?

From here, the line of moving traffic
snakes around monuments
of concrete, metal and mirrored glass;
tributes stand in homage
to disjointed planning and design.

Unaffected, this winding row
of separate lives creep towards
their shared and common destination.

The false sense of security
these private boxes can provide
allow rare insight into lives unknown.

A sideways glance -
 eyes like windmills
reach
 up,
 right,
and
 around.

The cyclic motion kept in time with
nondescript synthetic sounds,
emissions leaking only
on the inside
of each box.

A calculated casual blink
mid-circle
finds phosphorescent glowworms of
sugared pink and imitation sunlight
beyond the divisive panes.

As the foreground returns to view
trail lights, unexpected white,
squirm a curve through the dank air.
electric blue shadows their demise -
even the sky is wired.

Shining purposefully,
looming closer and closer,
growing in size and speed;
they meld with neon glare.

Spots of faded light,
translucent and barely visible,
mist over the scene
in groups
of three or four.

Dewy eyes cloud and
watch lights blur.

Once apart,
now united by the haze -
together
all continue on their way.

"These feelings of doom came only briefly as passing clouds block the sun."

29/11/00

slide

- i rise

above the bed of jagged rocks

- i want

to want to stop myself

from falling to the cold

and unforgiving platform below

- i watch

pools of silver foam cover

the smooth surface,

wiping it clean

- i smell

a fresh, biting gust of salt

dancing on my lips

- i imagine

aqueous hands

holding me back from the stone walls

- i sense

something complex, something more

- i step

back, the edge nothing now

but a memory

- i smile.

the waves wash out

and slide away.

"Walls soak up words, even emotions.
If you listen carefully enough, you can almost hear voices from the past."

21/12/2000

Breathe

Stifling walls rise around you
and echo the enclosing heat,
willing time to creep to a halt -
even the sound and movement of the wind
is rendered senseless here.

You notice the light of the sun,
the way it barely reaches the inside
yet manages to warm the walls.
The golden tone evens their surface,
their usual musty scent seems to have been dried away.

The air in here has changed.
Thick and sickly sweet,
it clambers to fill your throat and lungs.
You make no effort to resist it
and recline, accepting its restrictions.

Your gaze comes to rest on the only uneven wall.
The wind gently pushes and sways the curtain from side to side.
One section has been pulled, as if in a vacuum
onto the screen.
Through it you can just see outside.

A large gum tree hangs precariously close to powerlines.

The wind touches past both.

Leaves dance and dart between the cables

as you feel its breath enter the room,

and refreshingly cool your eyelids as they close.

5/01/01

12.46am

And there's an eerie quiet.

Deathly quiet.

And the sky is buzzing -

the anticipation of the first morning bird

to spread its wings

and slice cleanly through the untarnished sky

almost too impassioned to endure.

And the knowledge that this unusual hour

should be reserved exclusively

to be ignored

brings a certain intricacy to all inside it.

All so unique and so fleeting,

there's an urgency to catch it all -

etch it onto the hardest, enduring stone,

but as the night wears on

and its sedating effect closes in,

its all I can do to remember where I am.

"LETHE [*lĕ'thē*], in Greek mythology, river of forgetfulness in the underworld. Anyone who drank of its waters forgot his former existence. The dead drank from it before entering *Elysium* that they might forget all their troubles, and again upon leaving to be reincarnated. Lethe, as the personification of oblivion, was the daughter of Eris, personification of strife."

14/01/01

Lethe

I saw you first,
strolling aimlessly along the seashore.
You held a straw like strand of
parchment dry grass between your fingertips,
balancing it with your thumbs above
and index fingers beneath,
both pairs meeting in the middle.

You had no time for the ocean, had not come to see it
and did not acknowledge its presence.
Its importance to all who had ventured here to see it
was wasted on you.

The joggers - each on their own,
all using the unobtrusive rise and fall of the water
to organise their thoughts
and distract from the pain they must endure.

Couples wander along,
victims of their own dreams and future fantasies,
each deluded into believing
they see as one

the view they see is one and only theirs
and that this hidden jewel - so precious,
is kept under lock and key
for none but their eyes to pursue.

The pace of your step does not wane.
Your ignorance,
just like the row of firs who chose to grow along the hill
and shun the priceless view from the stacked match box units
decades before they were built,
is not deliberate or planned.

It's just that the ocean is so vast
and deep and wide
with arms that hug the contours of the earth
joining continents that are worlds apart
with fluidity and ease-
so abstract.

You prefer something closer,
something tangible,
something smaller
like a rubber ball clasped in the palms of your hands,
where you can feel the tyre-tread surface
which is no less detailed than swirls of ocean foam -
just smaller -
and fits comfortably into view
without causing your eyes to strain or head to swoon.

My attention is drawn back to the path I am on.
You have stopped moving,
square in the centre of the footpath,
and so have I. Your arms are bent
and the blade of grass rests in line with your elbows.
You make eye contact and do not blink once,
carefully raising the strand
to your neck,
then chest, then forehead,
all the while running your fingers to its ends.

In one move, you bow your head
and lightly tap the centre of the strand as if entering a duel,
but you are not seeking confrontation,
simply offering an acknowledgement and gratitude
for our common understanding.

Beads of water gather in your furrowed brow.
Sweat has combined with the light
rain that has begun to fall.
Droplets have also collected
in the lines around your neck,
reminding me of a lolly necklace,
bitter-sweet sherbet on fine elastic
that is ultimately going to fling back,
leaving a red and smarting impression -
the childish informality of this shared stream of thought
is only heightened.

You let the strand fall and resume your stroll.
I become aware that the joggers and the couples
may have misinterpreted our reflective moment
as a contemptuous show of disobedience
for the unspoken laws of the footpath.

The asphalt is spotted with rain
and fragrances the air with steamy forest scents,
but is still tacky underfoot.
As I take my first step away,
painfully perceiving the scrutiny of stranger's looks,
I check to make sure I have not been standing in gum.

Our moment is gone, snatched away
as swiftly as it began.

You disappear, lost forever,
with countless other moments past.
You are no longer the focus of my thoughts.

27/02/01

Claw

They claw,
animals seeking answers
deep below the surface.

At first,
the sun dried crust
replies only with pain -
grinding splinters embed themselves
between nail and skin.

This layer is soon
pushed aside.
The earth is moist and fertile,
a soothing relief; but with it brings
more questions than answers.

The sweet aroma
of the soil disappears as it
cakes into dry patches on their skin.
Knuckles contort and tendons race along
the backs of their hands,
straining to find a resolution.

Crumbling, sand pours into the hole
as fingers clutch
with an urgent and frantic desire
to survive.

Somewhere, the plug is pulled.
Nervous fingers shake violently.

All at once is nothing and all
combined -
swamp brown and black sludge
that spirals away.

16/04/01

5.43am

Light night.

Morning dark.

Sky glazed with a sheer film
of powder blue.

Crescent moon looms high above,
refusing to fade.

Constant hum of steel machinery,
watching,

while waking birds sound the arrival
of the morning sunrise.

I wait in expectation,

listen to stillness

now broken,

aware with the

promise

of a new day's dawn

29/04/01

Awaiting Reply

Postcards move to reach out and grasp
these floating apparitions.

A gesture here, a thought lost there,
placed together, made to fit.

Dear Reader, each begins,
a plea - to connect with each word,
to let the glossy upturned image fade away
and find the real vision.

Not one formulated of light or of colour,
but of experience;
a cautious declaration processed onto the page,
captured through the blink of an eye,
intertwined with senses, quashed by the passing of time.

Held close, each declaration is first combined
and then released.

Its fate, sealed with just one stamp, is decided,
and all that is left is to await
the return of a reply.

17/7/01

untitled

With a start, my body
jolts awake.
My stomach lurches
before recognising the familiar
lull of the travelling carriage.

The veil of lethargy
takes a moment to clear.
A primal sound imitates
the train's rhythmic movement.

aikée aikée aikée

I tilt my head.

It takes a second longer
to realise
the sound is not mechanical,
but human - writhing,
wriggling, barely contained within
his weary mother's grip
I find the source.

Contorting, with an attention
span that is impatient
and seems the product
of natural inquiry
but equally the desire
to push limits and find the line
where polite social manners
are disrupted by
continual and repetitive annoyance.

aiyoo aiyoo

Forming nonsensical sounds
just to feel their shape -
the way they begin deep in his throat,
stretch his tongue
into curving waves of muscle,
shake his lips
with a numbing vibration
and assault the ears of all around.

Instinctively, I shape my lips around the sound,
introduce facial expression into the equation,
arching eyebrows,
forehead lined,
and silently pass it back
across the carriage.

This movement has now sent
out a challenge.

He catches my gaze with an impish smirk,
planned, killing time,
allowing the sound to change direction,
to take a risk,
daring me to pick it up and throw it back.

kiyoo ki-ki kiayoo

The sound, exaggerated by his attempts
to stifle laughter, fills the carriage space.

I pick up the pace, find a rhythm,
let my fingers click a beat in time,
and turn his invention into a chirpy jingle.

With a quick strike of an imaginary hi-hat,
I put an end to our game,
form an equally ridiculous and drawn out yawn
that matches the situation perfectly
and pretend to fall asleep.

I open my right eye
to give him one last wink
and struggle to recall his initial sound,
the one that woke me
from my slumber.

It is futile.

Too many noises, too many interruptions
cloud my mind.

I turn again to sleep, in defeat,
and try to sink down into the
hard and shapeless chair.

The peace does not last for long.
I may have forgotten, but he has not.

I sigh at this second successive defeat.
The smirk comes to mind in a vivid flash
as he revels loudly in his triumph.

aikée aikée aikée

aikée aikée aikée...

"...Orbit around a sun that wasn't there."

11/8/01

indelible

Recline,
and watch the stars
twinkle a melody
across the sky.

Close eyes now,
concentrate, and
follow the feather-light
touch of fingertips
tracing imaginary designs
along skin.

Swirls of colour emerge
and bend into folds
like a silken artwork,
a masterpiece,
captured by the slightest
brush of air and left

to hover, float and sway

in time to the dim
flickers of moon and stars
that lead its dance.

Remember -

a time there never was -

when all else was lost

and no one shed a tear?

When all was nothing

but in this moment

here and now?

Free to stop, for once,

and let it all

glide by

on a stroke,

like paint work,

waiting

to be

washed away.

Reflection Statement:

My Major Work, 'Elysium', is a collection of poems that capture the detail of individual moments. The title is derived from Greek mythology, and connected closely to the poem 'Lethe'. I chose it as a replacement for a working title of 'Visions', although linked to my initial proposal and concept - to explore the reality of people's visions and how these vary from their perception, as well as a basis on what is seen as a creative inspiration and stimulus for material - no longer reflected the commonalities and links existent in the themes of each poem.

'Elysium' is a comment on the perfection and eternal happiness that is implicit in the poems and their associated scenarios. Although each moment appears to contain perfection, the meaning that the audience derives from their reading is as much based on what is left out of the description as on what is said. The image of Lethe, as the river of forgetfulness that the dead drank from before entering the heavenly state of Elysium, is based on the same premise. The dead could only reach perfection by removing all negative elements of their lives from memory, just as the poems build perfection in limited scenarios by using the concise form and structure of poetry to narrow their area of focus. This comparison represents the way the poetic form has been adapted to shape meaning and understanding within each poem and the body of work as a whole.

The comparison between the mythological concepts of Elysium and Lethe also presents two images that are recurrent in various poems. The first of these is the image of water, not only apparent in 'Lethe', but also in the extended metaphor built throughout 'slide', in the "*moist and fertile*" earth of 'Claw', and even implicit in the fluidity of form and structure that is achieved in 'Indelible'. Eyes - what they see and what they present to onlookers - are the second recurrent image. The definition of Elysium, derived from 'Encyclopaedia International' and included as an introduction

to the Major Work, describes it as a place where "*rose-tinted celestial light radiated perpetual day*" This immediately reminded me of the common expression, to view the world through rose-coloured glasses, and fitted the comment I wished to make regarding the perfection that is presented in each moment of each poem, as the moment is removed from the context of its wider situation.

The Major Work is aimed at a general audience interested in poetry, especially focusing on people between the ages of twelve to twenty-eight. I chose to target this audience for a variety of reasons. As my peer group, this audience will have a stronger connection with my writing than that developed by an older audience. Poetry is a highly personal and emotive medium, and I am acutely aware of how I have synthesised my recent personal observations and experiences into each poem. By writing poetry in general, I am provided with a means to explore my feelings and reactions to different situations and ideas. Writing for the Major Work, I had to further the process and consider how I was going to convey my feelings and reactions to the chosen audience. I did not want this to become overtly strained or obvious though, as the medium of presentation should not overshadow the importance and strength of the message contained within, so I instead attempted to make my emotional response an underlying message carried through each piece of writing. The purpose of the Major Work then became evident - to creatively and imaginatively share personal experiences and observations with an audience, and to be aware of the form, structure and presentation of each poem in order to ensure that these commonly shared experiences and observations were achieved

Developing each draft, I kept this in mind, tailoring the form of each poem, the imagery used and the language features and techniques present in each to suit. The Major Work, as a whole, aims to be accessible to this generalised audience, allowing them to identify with the themes and issues portrayed throughout. Although the poems are reliant on the creation of vivid and detailed imagery, the images

themselves are in touch with the audience. 'Lethe' realises this through metaphors that develop child-like images, including a "*rubber ball*" to illustrate how intricacy can be found everywhere in life, from the significant to the mundane; and a "*lolly necklace*", showing how events that appear innocent can actually harm. Other poems such as 'slide', manipulating the audience's perception of the ocean from a menacing vision to a peaceful and calm one; rely entirely on images derived from nature to convey their meaning.

The poems are shaped mainly by social, cultural and personal contexts. They explore the individual, their role in society and their interaction with others. As an emotive form of expression, they rely heavily on my own values, beliefs, perceptions and responses within situations. These psychological concepts are linked with the physical through the imagery of each poem. By linking personal motivations and the reactions they inspire to the sensory elements - especially what is seen, heard and touched - I have tried to describe each scenario to the extent that the audience will be able to share in the same image.

The language level of the poems remains predominantly colloquial, despite the use of formal language in order to develop individual images. Although all written as personal reflections, either of my own or of a central character; the use of subjective terms such as "*I*" and "*you*" has been avoided in 'Awaiting Reply' and 'Indelible'. This gives each poem and the situations presented within a sense of universal application, that hopefully transfers to the audience and their reaction to each poem. My research into language, conducted by reading the work of published contemporary poets and analysing the effectiveness of their particular techniques in forming meaning, revealed that I tended to identify readily with poems that did not include a personal address by the writer, either to themselves or to another person or character present in the scenario. In contrast, poems that clearly identified and realised the presence of the writer or of other characters did not encourage an instant

personal reaction, and instead relied on personal empathy, subconsciously formed with elements of the scenario presented.

In the first months of work on this collection of poetry, I spent time considering how I was going to present it visually. Initial ideas included the inclusion of photographic and artistic images and experiment with fonts and dividing titles, in the form of chapters. As the Major Work progressed and I reviewed the syllabus documents and became aware that the writing would be what received the markers attention, and I selected a simplistic approach to suit. I realised that any extra inclusions would have to be justified, and would need to contribute significantly to the meaning of the work, not just the visual appeal.

I chose to include quotations from various sources - encyclopaedias, novels and short stories - as introductions to some of the poems. These quotations were selected to divide the Major Work into sections. I could see a natural progression in the themes and perspectives presented through the poems, as I included them in the chronological order in which they were first drafted. I chose to include the dates which each poem was first started on as a way to explicitly present this sequence to the audience. I view the poems of the Major Work as a journal in themselves, as they are a record of my experiences and reactions to occurrences over the past ten months. Despite their focus on specific and limited moments, I am aware that they have also integrated my personal ideas and opinions on life in general into the presentation of these moments.

Writing the Major Work, and documenting it through the journal, has strengthened my knowledge and understanding of the composition process. I have been able to pinpoint my sources of inspiration. My content is inspired through experiences and people I encounter in everyday life, and also through issues that I encounter through other texts. I have realised that the seeking inspiration through a

generalised concept, such as the initial working title and thematic approach of 'Visions', works well to encourage a sustained creation of work as a writer. The form of my work is now better understood. It is dictated predominantly by the sound that each poem takes on, its rhythm and the aesthetics of each word and its placement; but also by the image I wish to convey, and the atmosphere in which it should be presented.

By documenting the Major Work's creation and regularly reviewing its direction through assessment, I have been able to learn about the processes of writing, as well as enjoying the production of the anthology itself. The knowledge learnt while preparing these poems will continue to have an influence on my writing long after the Major Work's submission.

Acknowledgements:

Page 2 - *from* 'Encyclopaedia International', Volume 6, (Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1973), p. 408.

Page 9 - Janet Frame, 'An Angel At My Table', (Paladin Grafton Books, Great Britain, 1987), p. 73.

Page 11 - Arlene J. Chai, 'Black Hearts', (Random House, Australia, 2000), p. 15.

Page 15 - *from* 'Encyclopaedia International', Volume 10, (Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1973), p. 487.

Page 28 - Jonathan Carroll, 'Tired Angel' *from* 'The Panic Hand', (HarperCollins Publishers, Great Britain, 1996), p. 178.



Dad - *In Loving Memory*