

## English Coursework A2

The enticing themes of "human desires and dreams" in the city acts as a vessel for the American Dream, reinforcing its slow emergence into reality. This is demonstrated in both Toni Morrison's "Jazz" and Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge" by using the city as a focal place of "possibility, success and threat", contributing to the assertion and erosion of the American Dream. In this way, the American life can either be fulfilled by the prosperity and opportunities it brings or shattered by the falsity of its ethos. The protagonists in "Jazz" are Joe and Violet; both of whom have experienced the gradual transformation of the city, which has become the central point in the American society, and compels them into uncertainty. In "A View from the Bridge", Eddie plays the role as the Invidia; where in roman mythology suggests a sense of envy and jealousy. The emotional experience of the Invidia might also be passive; the odium that is incurred in others results the catastrophe experienced at the end of the pivotal scene. He refuses to let go of his niece Catherine of which he has incestuous desires for, and becomes the "animal" resulting him being alienated from American society. Evidently, the "human desires and dreams" within the city is asserted or obliterated through the collective society as a whole, where only the submissive characters are allowed to continue and live on. Yet, all these fundamental features that make the city are under pressure, threatening the stability of absolute awareness presented outside this ethos.

The Jazz Age began in the early 1920's and was a pivotal of profound social changes. This era was a defining moment as the people in those times had forsaken their previous traditional standards of living and searched for a new way of eloquence and insurgence. The rebellion of jazz music incorporates an element of "sin in syncopation"<sup>1</sup> which declares to pursue a since of evil influence. With its irregular off beat structure, it "almost forces dancers to use jerky half-steps, and invites immoral variations."<sup>2</sup> However it can be argued that "it is hard to define jazz, because it is neither a definite form nor a type of rhythm; it is rather a method employed by the interpreter in playing the dance or song."<sup>3</sup> It is the focalisation of this irregular beat which is emphasised that makes the jazz effect seem more alive and unambiguous. The syncopation reflects on the "call and answer" effect, where it can symbolise the echoing of the head singer and the interaction between different people playing different instruments. Jazz music reflects on the improvisations on basic tunes and chord patterns; its expressive and the black Americans use jazz music to lift their spirits up. Toni Morrison's perception of the jazz era is clearly evident as she illustrates her ideas by writing evocative to a jazz tune that evolves with improvisation and adheres to no set rules. Moreover, Morrison's idiom reflects the rhythm of the Harlem Renaissance with its jazz melody and innovations. Morrison cleverly mimics the idea of a piece of jazz music, and incorporates this theme into her writing by allowing the omniscient narrator to play the role of the main jazz

---

<sup>1</sup> "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" – Anne Shaw (Published in Ladies Home Journal, August 1921, pp 16-34)

<sup>2</sup> "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" – Anne Shaw (Published in Ladies Home Journal, August 1921, pp 16-34)

<sup>3</sup> "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" – Anne Shaw (Published in Ladies Home Journal, August 1921, pp 16-34)

background, and giving each other characters a solo part to play, allowing them to pitch themselves reflecting on their own attitudes towards jazz music. For example, Alice Manfred fears the music dropping “down to places below the sash and the buckled belts”<sup>4</sup> suggesting that she fears the uncertainty of moving from one city to the next; the tone echoes the minor chords played in a piece of jazz music, influencing the idea of anger and apprehension.

Miller's perception of the society and the city in the 1950's suggests historical context and is conveyed in ▲ View from the Bridge. Miller's image of the 1870s, 1890s, and the 1930s latches onto the ideas of Marx, anarchism, and socialism, which are all focused on solidarity and their collective power. By the 1950's the idea of propaganda emerges as working class people would be made to feel ashamed for their communist and socialist hypocrisy. This is shown in ▲ view from the Bridge where “their laughter arises as they see Rodolpho<sup>5</sup>” and remarking that he is “a regular slave<sup>6</sup>” relates to the idea of Marxism, where society within a city is split into two consolidating against the ▲merican Dream.

The city is ambiguous – it has great control and authority over its inhabitants, casting an unforeseeable spell upon them, changing them into “animals” or villains. It's constantly moulding and shaping their traits, making them spin “round and round about the city<sup>7</sup>”. “You can't get off the track a City lays for you. Whatever happens, whether you get rich or stay poor, ruin your health or live to old age, you always end up back where you started: hungry for the one thing everybody loses - young loving<sup>8</sup>”. This is shown in Violet's account, where her years of accumulated hardship finally catch up with her at the age of fifty-six. Moving into the city to escape her troublesome lifestyle was a way to move on; however when she grew older, she felt a desperation of something to love. Her strained relationship with Joe encounters a clash between love and the way the city stirs around them. It has total control over the individuals, making them “do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to<sup>9</sup>”. The city continues to influence and threatens the characters' insecurities with its violence, anger and absurdity. In “▲zz”, the image of the city is show to be superior, exaggerating that “they are not as new themselves: their stronger, riskier selves.<sup>10</sup>” Ironically, the self is once more sheltered and exposed. When Joe and Violet first arrive in the city, “and twenty years later when they and the City have grown up, they love that part of themselves so much they forget what loving other people was like.<sup>11</sup>” This suggests that the city offers possibilities and success, but they have to pay the price, and sacrifice some of their “human desires” to achieve it, which just goes to show that there is no complete satisfaction obtained in

---

<sup>4</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

613

<sup>5</sup> ▲ View from a Bridge – Page 38

<sup>6</sup> ▲ View from a Bridge – Page 37

<sup>7</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>8</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison (120)

<sup>9</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>10</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>11</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

this city. There is a sense of admiration to the great city as “they start to love is the way a person is in the City” and “how men accommodate themselves to tall buildings<sup>12</sup>”. In “~~Jazz~~”, Joe adapts to the city more easily than Violet; the idea of “way” does little to stimulate love and focuses on the idea of desire as he finds himself once again propelled by desire. “~~Jazz~~” gives an insight into black culture, and Joe’s admiration towards the city where the “black people running from want and violence<sup>13</sup>” and migrating to the city in desire to chase their “possibility” and “success”. Morrison makes it seem as if the narrator is simply watching the city shape Joe and Violet, and changing their true identity, to something false. The city is also influencing the omniscient narrator, as it constantly deludes our initial perception of Joe Trace; at first we see him as a murderer, but later Morrison illustrates Joe as one the most compassionate characters in the book. The narrator cleverly clouds our bad thoughts on Joe by showing a different dimension through Joe’s point of view, and exonerates him by portraying Dorcas as the main reason of the pain he undergoes. Similarly, in “~~A View from the Bridge~~”, the narrator deceives the reader by the gradual change of Eddie’s character; ~~Arthur Miller~~ maintains an innocent character for Eddie, and later changes his identity and turns him into an “animal”. Evidently, his character reaches to its climax where it leads to his own death which can be overlooked to many different perceptions. The voice of the narrator no longer pays attention to the City’s actual design. It becomes the louder voice of the City. Yet losing trail of identity and getting back on track again, it gets hard to locate, if not to reinstate: “It was loving the City that distracted me and gave me ideas. Made me think I could speak its loud voice and make that sound sound human. I missed the people altogether. <sup>14</sup>” This suggests that Joe was being alienated from the city as it threatens the character to lose his true identity and stability within the city.

The idea of Janus brings together the true identities of Joe and Eddie. Janus, a Roman God is created with half of his face in darkness, and the other in light. Darkness could symbolise the greed and desire of which both Joe and Eddie desired; similarly the light could represent the truth and reality of their identities and the city. Similarly, the idea of Janus can be applied to Violet’s split identity. ~~At~~ first, her character is symbolically dark natured, projecting all of her anger, sadness and frustration by slashing Dorcas’s face at her funeral. However her identity moves into the light, where later in the novel, she searches for peace and longs to heal herself and her marriage, by taking ownership of her happiness and refuses to be a victim. Violet’s character is an engineered example of “possibility, success and threat” where the city offers a second chance, an ~~American~~ Dream - an ~~American~~ life that can be fulfilled by the opportunities it brings. Violet’s turning point and realisation just goes to show that the city is not all bad.

By applying the concept of Janus into both contexts, I believe that Joe’s account had started off deficiently, where he immediately became the murderer, as he was “the

---

<sup>12</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>13</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison (33)

<sup>14</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison (220)

one who shot the girl.<sup>15</sup> However, the narrator skilfully eradicates the reader's bad perception of Joe, and counteracts them with other characters accounts, and we immediately start to sympathise for him, as we realise how much pain he has gone through. For example, Dorcas's aunt realised "that the man who killed her niece cried all day and for him and for Violet that is as bad as jail."<sup>16</sup> The aunt empathizes for Joe, as he is feels imprisoned and mourns all day at the dead girl that he once used to love. Controversially, Eddie's character is deceitful; his initial impression upon the audience is one of complete self-confidence and control with an aura of intellectual arrogance, as he is successfully able to manipulate the American society. Eddie's jealousy is his driven motivation, fuel and strength, and he allows this emotion to plot against those whom he hates.

The city ultimately serves as a setting to the development of Trace's new self as he is "caught midway between was and must be"<sup>17</sup>. However it can only provide a carefully conquered and redefined freedom. The city has been developed into both a friend and foe. In 1926, the black neighbourhood within Manhattan has become the capital of black America. Focusing on the American Dream, there is a feeling that it sways from reality for example a "city like this one makes me dream tall and feel in on things. Hep. It's the bright steel rocking above the shade below that does it"<sup>18</sup>. It is like building castles on clouds; the fact that there is no firm foundation and the whole dream itself could collapse at any time. Also, the comparison of "bright steel rocking above" and "the shade below" suggests the contrast of tall skyscrapers over shadowing the slums of America. It could also symbolise the direct discrepancies between the rich and the poor. The American Dream is an ethos; it claims to create life, "liberty and the pursuit of happiness"<sup>19</sup>. It is based on capitalism, where the extremity of society and hierarchy exists. "The American Dream is a concept that touches on the two fundamental pillars of United States prosperity – that liberty and freedom are regarded as sacred"<sup>20</sup> However, this statement is contradicted in "A View from a Bridge" – the reality and the dream in this context is non-existent. To the lower social class, the American Dream was a way of escaping poverty and freedom. Illegal immigrants such as Rodolpho and Marco came to America in hope to establish the American Dream:

"Me, I want to be an American. And then I want to go back to Italy when I am rich, and I will buy a motorcycle"<sup>21</sup>. Here is a classic example of an unadulterated American Dream, where it's believed that you can attain an American Dream easily, and can go back to your native land twice as rich. However, understanding the falsity of the Dream established, there is a clear awareness of the facade created by this icon. E.B White's

---

<sup>15</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>16</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison

<sup>17</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison (226)

<sup>18</sup> Jazz by Toni Morrison (7)

<sup>19</sup> American Dream Statement (In Congress, July 4, 1776)

<sup>20</sup> Wikepidea

~~Here is New York~~ explains the complexity of the city by approaching it simply, and the falseness in the American Dream, that "Although New York often imparts a feeling of great forlornness or forsakenness, it seldom seems dead or unresourceful.<sup>22</sup>" This suggests that the city has great authority over its society, influencing the people of an American Dream which does not exist, but at the same time it creates a sense of possibility, success and a desire for an opportunity. It enhances the unity of characters as seen with Marco and Rodolpho. They bring themselves together, and moreover, the city which played at ignoring them brought them together, to help each other.

The thought of the American Dream portrays a distorted image to the audience; our initial perceptions of the dream is one that brings individuals fame, money and success; however the reality that brings upon to Rodolpho and Marco is an example of the corrupt falsity in this ethos. Yet, there is a sign of hope "for human desires and dreams, a place of possibility and success" as Rodolpho say: "Once I am a citizen [...] I would start to be something wonderful here!"<sup>23</sup> "There is a sense of hope and desire, where its origins come from the ethos. Critics like Freud describes in his Psychoanalytical Theory that "dreams were symbolic and specific to the dreamer"<sup>24</sup>", suggesting that Rodolpho is already perceiving the American Dream and has become a victim of this tragic fate. Freud then goes on to explain the dreams that "Often, dreams give clues to unconscious conflicts, and for this reason, Freud referred to dreams as the "royal road to the Unconscious."<sup>25</sup>" This interpretation can be linked to the conflict between Rodolpho and Eddie, and the fact that there were disputes as a result of dreams. Alfieri states that "Eddie Carbone had never expected to have a destiny"<sup>26</sup>", however this can be contradicted, as it can be shown that he only thinks the best of Catherine's future, and gives up any real hope for himself. Also, in the dialogue between Eddie and Catherine, Eddie expresses that "I want you to be with a different kind ... don't go practically in the same kind of neighbourhood."<sup>27</sup> Again, this shows that Eddie isn't the true Invidia of the play, as he only dreams the best for his niece. It suggests that there may not be another opportunity for Eddie to live the ideal American lifestyle, and plays the role of the father by attempting to create the perfect fantasy for Catherine, in a city where such ethos exists. The reality of the American Dream is evident, yet Eddie believes that there is a chance of possibility and success established in the city.

~~Here is New York~~ might seem an ideal example of a novelistic attack on culture in America, representing the city, their experience and the environment extremely negatively. The first paragraph alone is an example of ethical clashes in those times. "These officials changed names they couldn't pronounce and tore people from their families, consigning to a return voyage old folks, people with bad eyes, riffraff and also those who looked insolent. The immigrants were reminded of home. They were despised by

---

<sup>22</sup> Here is New York, E. B White

<sup>23</sup> ▲ View from a Bridge (61)

<sup>24</sup> Psychoanalytical Theory Wikipedia

<sup>25</sup> Psychoanalytical Theory Wikipedia

<sup>26</sup> ▲ View from a Bridge

<sup>27</sup> ▲ View from a Bridge

the New Yorkers.<sup>28</sup> It just goes to show the negativity towards the immigrants migrating to America. Even in these circumstances, the immigrants found a way of surviving in times like this, where “they carved paving stones on the streets. They sang. They told jokes.”<sup>29</sup>

With regard to critic perspectives on the American Dream, such as Marxism, Psychoanalytical Theories and New Historicism I believe this to be fundamental as it develops a new dimension of a way of thinking and attain an insight of the critic's perceptions. Karl Marx expands on the idea of “alienation” within a society; the fact that there is civil conflict within America where “workers are forced to compete against other workers.”<sup>30</sup> “This alienation is encouraged by the capitalist because it keeps the workers from forming communities and taking collective action to bring about a fair system of production.”<sup>31</sup> Marxist theory shows that there is segregation in society, dividing “society into two parts, one of which is superior to society<sup>32</sup>”. The upper class controls the establishment of social values, and shows that there is a poor class trying to attain the American Dream but is clouded with false hope and face the reality of the cruelty within the society. In this context, Marco and Rodolpho are the victims of this ethos, and face the true reality within the American society.

Ultimately, the city is represented negatively; the warm welcoming figure of the Statue of Liberty is that, but a mere twist to the reality of the American Dream. The “human desires and dreams” in the city acts as a vessel for the American Dream, reinforcing its slow emergence into reality. By using the city as a focal place of “possibility, success and threat”, it contributes to the assertion and erosion of the American Dream. I believe that the transformation of the city moulds the characters of Joe and Violet; migrating to the city can be seen parallel to a prison-like existence in which they lose their identities to the city and the falseness of the American Dream. The image of Violet's birds is essential; it symbolises the migration and adapting to a new environment where essentially freedom is lost as a result of being lost in the city. Similarly, the establishment of Marco and Rodolpho's chance of a better life is swallowed up by the American Dream consequently creating conflict between two different societies and resulting to the death of Eddie. The city focuses on the human desires and dreams, a place of possibility, success and threat; however the falsity of the American Dream and all these fundamental features that make the city are under pressure, threatening the stability of absolute awareness presented outside this ethos.

---

<sup>28</sup> Ragtime

<sup>29</sup> Ragtime

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.lexycle.com/courses/WLIT1/marxcrit.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.lexycle.com/courses/WLIT1/marxcrit.html>

<sup>32</sup> ~~McA, 'theses on the ethics'~~