The Visualisation of Clarice Lispector’s *Love* in Lim Hak Tai’s Eyes

My Original Artwork

Justification

Both Clarice Lispector’s *Love* and Lim Hak Tai’s *Riot* explore the tensions between the internal and external worlds of their respective protagonists. *Love*, a short story, follows a housewife who encounters a blind man and this creates an inner chaos that manifests into external disruption. *Riot* is a painting capturing the tumultuous atmosphere of two distinct riots
in 1950s Singapore. Lim constructs the artwork from a painter's perspective, visually capturing the internal emotions of being swept up in a riot. Inspired by these two works, I want to utilise the medium of a painting to visually portray the melding of inner and outer chaos in Lispector’s *Love*. I have chosen to do a painting as compared to other visual forms as I feel that paintings allow us to show the intangible and focus on key moments.

The tension between internal and external worlds is explored explicitly in *Love* as Ana, the main protagonist, has her world crumble after seeing a blind man. The seemingly trivial scene consumes and overwhelsms her with a new sense of compassion that it becomes almost nauseating. A series of events occur following the sighting of the blind man as, “the tram suddenly lurched throwing her unexpectedly backward, the heavy knit sack tumbled from her lap, crashed to the floor — Ana screamed” (Lispector 3). The successive use of verbs allow the reader to imagine the chaotic movement of the scene. Lispector also employs asyndeton to quicken the pace but this increasing tension is interrupted by the em dash, preceding the line “Ana screamed”. This pause in pace places emphasis on her scream, an inherent release of inner chaos building up in her. After this revelation, Ana’s world shifts and we see how her internal emotions have altered her perception of the external world. Ana reflects that “the mesh had lost its meaning” (Lispector 3). Previously, Ana would refer to her grocery bag as a “knit sack” but her choice of diction changes post-accident, now labelling it as “mesh”. This reiterates her point of having “lost its meaning” for it is now only just a bundle of yarn. This “mesh” is a motif of her life as a housewife. Upon seeing the blind man, she realises how much more there is in the world but is limited by her mundane, routine life of a housewife. Reducing the knit sack to a mesh is a manifestation of her realising how trivial her daily activities are in the grand scheme of the world.
On the other hand, *Riot* allows the viewer to physically be in the midst of a chaotic riot. Unlike the form of written word, the visuals of paintings immerse us in a scene and we are guided by how the images make us feel. Lim creates a chaotic atmosphere through the cluttered composition. Sharp, geometric lines construct the images of the people and their surroundings, each line and shape seemingly integrating with one another, making it nearly impossible to distinguish where one action starts and ends. The choice of using angular lines alongside the stark, bright reds and oranges in the figures creates a jarring image of aggression and violence. By filling the entire frame with the disorderly subject matter, the competing focal points make the artwork overwhelming for the viewer, mimicking the same feeling of witnessing a riot. One important thing to note is that Lim’s depiction of a riot is not a literal capture but a metaphorical manifestation of his perspective as a painter. The artwork, therefore, delves into the concept of metafiction as it is a painting about painting. This is something that I employed in my own artwork where I embedded the details of *Love* into the newspaper as well as embraced the quality of painting. Elements such as the disorientating sky seeping in coupled with the faceless figures embody the whole purpose of painting — to capture the intangible.

My artistic direction is, similar to *Riot*, to see Ana’s life through a painter’s perspective in order to show how her inner chaos infiltrates her external world. I chose to depict the tram scene as I think it marks the start of her derailment as mentioned in the second paragraph. Similar to *Riot*, I created a cluttered composition, bursting with faceless figures and an overflowing sky to create a suffocating atmosphere. Within this chaos, subtle leading lines, through the diagonals and organic, painterly brushstrokes guide the viewer to the knit sack. The figures follow Lim’s faceless figures in Riot as Ana would have been preoccupied with saving the knit sack that her surroundings reduced to impressions. The multitude of painterly blue lines that seep into the tram space represent the sky and metaphorically, the outside world
that Ana was detached from. Their dreamlike presence starts to surround Ana’s routine spaces, inviting her to embark on her ambitions. But this image is but a creation of her mind, Ana falls into delusion.

(814 words)

Works Cited