

Changing perspective in a changing world

By Dan Nguyen

As certain as the essence of existence, change is an omnipotent process that is often overlooked, but never preventable. The concept of changing perspective is explored in the texts *Humans in their Environment* by Flacco, *Feliks Skrzynecki* and *Kornelia Woluszczyk* by Peter Skrzynecki, *Homeland* by Anna Maria Dell'oso, and a *Leunig Cartoon* by Michael Leunig. Through the use of literary techniques including irony, symbolism, and hyperbole, all five texts demonstrate that a person's inability to change their perspective in a shifting world will result in failure to deal with tragedies in life.

The text *Humans in their Environment* by Flacco is a satirical article about an environmentalist who is accidentally killed when he chains himself to a tree protesting a logging operation. The composer uses the hyperbolic imagery of the protester being "turned into paper pulp" to introduce existential undertones—that life is an aberration, and we are all destined to be returned to the earth. Lives are transformed and are powerless against the forces of change—no matter how strongly we stand against them. The environmentalist's inability to cope with the materialistic change engulfing the world, and his protest against it has brought about his downfall, indeed his death. The hyperbole adds a degree of dark humour to the text, masking the serious subtext. The composer makes the connection that although change is inevitable, it is often executed in a manner which may be considered unacceptable or undesirable.

Feliks Skrzynecki is a poem in Peter Skrzynecki's "Migrant Chronicle". It is a poem dedicated to his father, encompassing his changing feelings towards his father. During his youth, Skrzynecki grows steadily away from his father, but as an adult he changes his perspective and world-view, showing admiration for his father's stoicism and overall contentment with a simple life.

Skrzynecki uses the metaphor of 'Hadrian's Wall' to show his gradual estrangement from his father and his Polish roots. He recalls pegging his tent "further and further south of Hadrian's wall". The metaphor shows Skrzynecki's difficulty in identifying with his heritage and the eventual "wall" that builds up between him and his father.

Further it is apparent in the tone of the poem that the concept of change, and how one's perspective can change over time is significant. The entire poem is concerned with recollecting and remembering Feliks' past life. As the composer matures, he begins to understand the differences between his father and himself. "Growing older, I... remember words... I inherited unknowingly". He regrets not having appreciated the Polish language when he was younger, and in hindsight realises that his perspective has been altered. He reflects that Feliks is "Happy as I have never been". By viewing his relationship with his father through a different perspective, the composer has managed to understand his father's mentality, and comprehend his simple and stoic outlook on life.

The poem *Kornelia Woluszczyk* by Peter Skrzynecki is a tribute to his mother, and recalls her difficulty in settling into a new environment after migrating to Australia. She feels a sense of detachment, in what otherwise should be a happy and rewarding period in her life. There is a marked difference in mood between *Kornelia Woluszczyk* and *Feliks Skrzynecki*. While the poet's father has embraced his new life, there is a strong sense that his mother has been defeated by it.

The poem opens with a description of her face which has been ravaged by "the darkness of storms". This metaphor suggests the extreme nature of the struggles, war and migration, which have left their mark - both physical and psychological. There is not the degree of intimacy the poet seems to share with his father. As she searches for her lost son, there is a palpable air of separation between Kornelia and Peter that cannot be healed.

The issue of suffering is carried through the poem. She remarks "how water destroys images that reflect eternity". The juxtaposition of the images of eternity against the erratic state of Kornelia's life highlights the significance of change in this poem. Kornelia is detached from the real world; since she lost her only child, her perception of life has been almost permanently altered. She concludes by saying that "Having only one child... is like having... one eye in your head". Kornelia can only see life from one angle, for it is as if she has only one eye; her perspective has been limited to a single view. By resisting changing her perspective on life, it seems life has defeated Kornelia.

Homeland is a short prose piece by Anna Maria Dell'oso. It recalls her changing attitudes toward her parents and their changing perspectives regarding their lives in Australia as well as their memories of Italy. Like Skrzynecki's *Migrant Chronicle*, *Homeland* deals with changing perspective as a result of migration.

The most striking feature in *Homeland* is the symbol of the key. At first, the key is used literally, as the key to her parents' house. It then evolves to represent the relationship and bond that should exist between a mother and her daughter. It is clear to the responder that the composer did not share this idyllic relationship with her mother. Shew writes: "[it was] the key I wanted, the key I never had". Throughout her youth and early adulthood, the composer never understood her mother's perspective and way of thinking. It is not until she herself becomes a mother, and develops a "key" with her child that she finally understands her mother's perspective.

There is a distinct similarity between the composer's baby's medical condition, conjunctivitis, and sticky-eye, the condition the composer's mother says the baby has. Further, the cures recommended are almost identical ("a few drops of breast-milk three times a day" and "antibiotic drops three times a day"). This technique of comparison seems to show the composer's greater understanding of her mother's wisdom, and her changing attitudes towards her mother. As the composer has become a mother herself, she has changed her perspective and outlook on life, and as a result, seems to have mended the bridge between her mother and herself.

The *Leunig cartoon* by Michael Leunig depicts the progress of a man as he makes the change from a rich and powerful businessman to a poor and unknown hermit.

Leunig uses irony in his text to convey not only the changing perspective of the man in the cartoon, but also to appeal to the responder to change their perspective on life. The man in the text begins as a rich and powerful plutocrat, and yet the image of him projects boredom and emptiness. He is gradually "promoted" to different positions, each of which is actually hierarchically socially "lower" than his original position. Yet, the man becomes gradually happier, and more fulfilled, hence the irony.

Like the other texts, the *Leunig cartoon* demonstrates the consequences of a character's decision to either adapt their perspective with the forces of change or oppose them. The *Leunig cartoon* is also specifically similar to *Humans in their Environment*, since it seems to question the link between material wealth and happiness.

Through the use of various stylistic features, including irony and symbolism, the composers of the above-mentioned texts have successfully conveyed the enduring concept that a person's inability to change their perspective will result in a failure to deal with life in a rapidly changing world.