

Teesside University
Masters of Creative Writing and Wellbeing

Core Skills and Techniques ELL4026-N.

Assessment

Creative Work and Manifesto

Hansen Yeong

Module Leader: Dr Jenna Clarke

Tutor: Louise Logan-Smith

Creative Work: Eighth Grade

I look at myself in the mirror. Is this going to be good enough for Jake? I take a deep breath and put on the platinum earrings. I conclude that this is the best I can do. My name could be Gorgeous, but the pounding heart keeps yearning for more that I can give. And I wonder if I know what that might be.

The suite looks nothing like that spartan hotel room twelve years ago. But the view from the balcony overlooking 37th street of New York City continues to be unmoved by time. I open the heavy door to the balcony that opens to the sky. Stepping out, the cool late summer winds swirl around, tugging at my gown. I adjust my bra strap mindlessly, before I gush to myself. Was that too crass? What would Jake think?

I look easterly towards the direction of Pennsylvania Station. I remember myself half-squatting by the railings on the balcony twelve years ago, mascara running down my face, crying too hard to even say his name, trying to catch a glimpse of him walking towards Pennsylvania station. All I had wanted was a night with him, but I had lost him forever, or so I thought.

I can never forget how we first met in eighth grade. He had walked right into me with the rest of the football team. I thought I had hit a wall and the farm model I was holding on was crushed. I fell back onto the floor crying. He apologised profusely and told me he will get my project fixed before my next class. I never thought he would come, but he did, and I could never then forget his dashing looks, butter-melting smile, and burgeoning heft from the football training. Other girls looked star-struck and at me in utter disbelief.

I never saw Jake in school again. I heard from friends in high school that Jake had skipped an important Math exam to fix the farm model for me. That must have affected his options for high school, and I can never forget him, no matter how many dates that came and went. He lives like the sweetest curse, the most wonderful torment so deep in my heart, in a place that I almost fear to tread.

It was twelve years ago when I ran into Jake again in this same building. I had begun travelling frequently to New York City for corporate meetings. On a usual evening, just as I was grabbing a late dinner at the diner, a man came over to my table, and with his dashing looks and butter-melting smile, called out my name, just like he did in eighth grade.

'Jake?' I stammered. It was so overwhelming that I could not remember what I said next. My expression must have been locked in a perverse mix of shock and utter happiness. I vaguely remember us talking about ourselves after eighth grade. He was now a purchaser with a major department store, and I was a project officer with a regional bank. I could not register what he was saying half the time. I was completely mesmerised by that smile, and the kindly demeanour that took me back to that day in eighth grade. Time was fast approaching midnight, and the diner was closing. As we were leaving the diner, I decided that I will do it.

'Would you like to have coffee in my room?' I asked.

Jake shrugged, 'Why not?' he casually answered, but he had to use the bathroom first. I could not believe it! I counted every single second while I was waiting, and every fibre in my body was yearning to be with him that night. But it was a different Jake that emerged from the bathroom. He was holding on to his phone, looking harassed.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'Look, I have to go,' he said. 'My daughter is sick, and I got to catch the last train to Newark airport at the Penn...'

A dreadful ringing in my ears turned the world silent. My memory becomes distorted again. I remember seeing him in a rush to the exit of the hotel, but I cannot remember how I returned to my room. When memory returned, I was on the balcony, half squatting by the railings, looking towards Pennsylvania Station, crying hard. It was my doing, I had thought. Jake had wanted to stay, but I

couldn't keep him. Jake would not need to be scrambling to the airport if it were me by his side. It could have been just us, with limitless possibilities, and nothing to lose.

That meeting twelve years ago ended so abruptly that we did not exchange contacts before he left. I was surprised to receive a LinkedIn message from him a week ago, asking if I could meet up for dinner. It has been twelve years since our last meeting and many things have changed. The hotel has since been taken over by a luxury brand and the diner is now a Michelin-star restaurant. What has not changed is how Jake continues to reside in that deepest corner of my heart. The desperation twelve years ago has receded into a latent throbbing whenever he emerges from my memory. I had suggested to meet at this hotel on 37th street again. Would he understand my intentions? Just then, the ringing of my mobile phone in the room interrupt my coy thoughts.

The time has come for us to meet. I took a deep breath and set off for the restaurant at the lobby.

'Jake!' I call out as I approach with a fabulous smile. He gets up from his seat with a shy smile. He is as handsome as ever, and his smile lights up his face with incredible boyishness. I see his hand extending for a shake. I hold his forearm instead and reach up to exchange kisses on the cheeks. Jake looks flattered and invites me to take a seat. I continue standing next to the seat, giving him a mischievous chortle. He laughingly come over to pull out the seat for me. I thanked him coyly, and in no time, we begin examining the menu like excited teens.

Food arrives briskly by the course, and we wow over each other's choices as if we have never seen restaurant food before. I playfully steal one of his scallops from his starter and he grab a shrimp from my plate in feigned annoyance. As we laugh and chat, it feels like being back in the eighth grade again. I feel his warmth and the throbbing joy of seeing him again. The laughter and exuberance seem out of place in the stoic and dignified restaurant. I am on top of the world, and I didn't care.

The main course arrives. Jake asks me to try the fish he ordered. He cuts a piece and place it on my plate while commenting that the lamb I ordered looks good. Having cut him a piece, I hold it up for

him instead of putting it on his plate. He looks amused. We exchange glances, and the laughter becomes muted. Time seems to stop for eternity. Without dropping his gaze at me, he eats gently from my fork. I smile demurely at him. There is a sense of bliss and a premonition that we will own the night. As dinner proceeds, our eighth-grade innocence mellows to a sensual and timeless utopia. I instinctively feel that he is ready for the night. Hold myself close to him, I gently brush some invisible dust off his shoulders. He turns to look at me. His face is mere inches away, and the yearning from that deepest corner of my heart intensifies in anticipation. Yet the call before dinner begins playing in my mind.

That caller was Mandy Locke, the corporate head of Human Resources of my bank. Jake has applied for a position, citing a recommendation from me. Mandy had called to ask if I knew Jake well. I replied truthfully that I have never worked with him, but I think he is a good father.

'Cindy, he indicated in his application that he is not married and has no children.' Mandy told me.

I am stunned. Nausea churns in my stomach. I closed my eyes to calm myself. I then took a deep breath and asked, 'Mandy, do you mean he is not married now?'

'Cindy, I know what you could be suggesting.' Mandy's replied calmly. 'We have "divorced" and "widowed" as other options.'

I could feel empathy in her voice, which made me indignant. Before I could respond, Mandy continued 'And Cindy, I think there is something else you should know.'

Her voice began to sound like distance ringing, like a never-ending alarm that cannot be muted:

'He has a reputation in banking, you know, for leeching around as a sidekick to a senior staff to extract benefits for himself...'

'No real talent and utterly self-centred but a tremendous smooth talker...'

'He talked about a close relationship with you...'

'You are in line for the promotion to Executive Vice President this year. Are you sure...?'

I swipe Mandy away from my mind. Jake and I move closer. Our lips are an inch away from each other, and I can feel his breath on my face. I can also hear echoes from our mindless chatter that begin rippling at that deepest corner of my heart:

'My daughter? Oh, my "daughter"! She's my boss daughter, really. I called her that because she is such a sweet little girl, and I was supporting my boss who had just gone through a divorce.'

'No, I scored an A for Math in eighth grade. Mrs Clarkson allowed me a second chance the next day after she knew I helped you fix the farm model. I had an extra night to revise, thanks to you. You are my lucky star, really.'

'Randy Portman? That bloke from eighth grade? I wouldn't mind meeting him again, but he is nowhere near the C suite like you and I.'

I pull back gently with a smile. 'I have a zoom meeting coming up in my room with my Asian office. Thanks for the treat,' I hear myself telling Jake. I wish him good luck for his job application, before turning away to make for the lift lobby. From the corner of my eye, I can see Jake clumsily rising from his seat, his face contorting in confusion. I hasten my pace and dash into an empty lift car.

Back on the balcony of my room, the view of New York city ascends to my senses seemingly for the very first time. It is almost too overwhelming to take it all in. I decide to call Mandy. San Francisco is three hours behind and I am sure she is still in office. The line connected and I speak as coolly as I can.

'Mandy, I do not support Jack Timmon's application. File that for me, will you?'

'Got it,' she said. She pauses for a moment before asking, 'Are you ok?'

'I am ok. Thanks for your call earlier, I will see you in office.'

'Right,' and she hangs up.

Looking westerly from the balcony, I can see the Chelsea Piers by the Hudson River. Evening activities are in full swing at the Piers and sightseeing ships come and go at a terrific rate. Lost in my thoughts with New York City for company, I can hear someone sobbing on the other end of the balcony. I turn to look, only to see myself, twelve years ago, sobbing, half-squatting on the floor, holding on to the railing, yearning desperately in the direction of Pennsylvania station.

She moves me to this very moment. 'He is not your world, he's not your life!' I yell silently at her, with tears rolling down my eyes.

Manifesto: I have something to say

There was a sound of flicker, and the stage lights were turned on. The red stage curtains parted, revealing two arm chairs in the centre and a rostrum by the side. Three persons walked onto the stage in a single file. First in line was a lady in a sleek, black gown. She was followed by another lady in a pantsuit, with a large-build man in a tweed jacket bringing up the rear. They turned to face the invisible audience with a smile.

The first lady began, 'Hi, my name is Cindy Adams.'

'I am Jake Timmons,' the man said.

The lady in pantsuit said, 'And I am Mandy Locke. We are the characters in the Eighth Grade that is written by Hansen. We are here to deliver his manifesto.'

Jake nodded. 'That's right. Hansen's manifesto is "I have something to say", and I will be talking about what that entails.'

Cindy added 'I will be providing some analysis on the manifesto from a critical perspective.'

'And I will be the moderator for today's session.' Mandy said brightly.

Jake didn't look happy, and demanded 'Why do we need a moderator? And why are you the moderator? You hardly appeared in the story!'

Cindy looked frustrated and hissed 'We need someone to keep track of the word count!'

'How many words are we down to?' Jake asked casually.

'Less than 800 at this point.' Mandy said pointedly.

The three of them looked at one another uncomfortably before rushing to take their positions on stage. Jake and Cindy took the seats while Mandy darted to the rostrum.

'Let's have Jake to present the manifesto.' Mandy announced with a nervous smile as she checked on the word count.

'Right,' Jake said and cleared his throat. He extracted some folded sheets of paper from his tweed, and began, 'The manifesto, 'I have something to say'', comprises of three parts: what to say, why there is something to say, and how to say. On that something that he wants to say, Hansen wants to uncover the imprints of urban life, presenting his emotive take of urban culture and emotions."

'Is this "uncovering" a result of some kind of investigation or self-experience¹?' Mandy asked.

Jake shuffled through the papers with a frown and replied, 'Self-experience, apparently.'

'Why you do think Hansen or any writer have something that they want to say, Cindy?'

'Why do I get the difficult questions?' Cindy asked.

'You are a Vice-President.' Jake quipped.

'Word count!' Mandy roared.

Cindy pursed her lips and began, 'Well, according to research, this could be due to reasons such as their personalities², factors that motivate them to write³, their emotional and mental state of being⁴, and life changing experiences.⁵'

'The urban was specially mentioned in the manifesto. What do you think of that?' Mandy asked.

¹ Burroway, Janet. *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, Third Edition. (New York, 2011, Longman), 2.

² Jane Purto, "The Personalities of Creative Writers" in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6-7.

³ Steven R Pritzker, David Jung McGarva. "Characteristics of Eminent Screenwriters: Who Are Those Guys?" in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

⁴ Samaneh Pourjalali, E. M Skrzynecky, James C Kaufman. "The Creative Writer, Dysphoric Rumination, and Locus of Control" in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

⁵ Anis Bawarshi, *Genre and The Invention Of The Writer*. (Utah: Utah University Press, 2003), 1-3.

'The socio-economic profile of a writer could have bearings on what they want to write⁶.' Cindy answered. 'I thought the urban theme stood out in the Eighth Grade.'

'Especially your time on the balcony of that hotel room,' Jake said.

'Exactly.' Cindy replied excitedly. 'Do you know that the room was inspired by a real hotel on 37th street?'

Jake made to reply but Mandy was bellowing again. 'Word count!'

Jake and Cindy looked at each other sheepishly as Mandy recollected herself forcefully and continued, 'Well, would Jake like to take us through the second part of the manifesto?'

Jake shuffled his papers mumbling 'Why he wants to say...'. He pulled out a sheet, and read 'He aspires to propagate values, ethics and righteousness. He believes in writing to advocate for social justice and fairness.' Jake raised his eyebrows as he said, 'Sounds rather austere.'

'Not when you look at the rather hidden and latent philosophies⁷,' Cindy explained. 'The storyline of Eighth Grade reveals the intricate interplay of what Jake was talking about. For example, I am a successful banker, but I had this almost unholy crush on Jake that didn't go anywhere. Jake is obviously a scumbag ('Hey.' Jake protested in the background) but can be genuinely charming.'

Mandy added 'I remembered Jake being confused when you left the restaurant suddenly, which doesn't make him so...'. She paused to find a right word.

'Malicious.' Cindy said.

'Exactly.' Mandy replied. Jake looked appeased if not rather pleased with himself.

'My obsession with Jake was presented in all its frivolity but also empathetically.' Cindy said. 'So, I would not say that Hansen's aspirations are austere.'

⁶ Pritzker and Mc Garva, "Characteristics" 67-69.

⁷ Purto, "The Personalities" 10.

'I would agree with that.' Mandy said. 'As the cold voice of reason and righteousness in the story...' she said pointedly to Jake, 'I was also clearly concerned for Cindy's well-being.' Jake gave a huff, which prompted Mandy to say, 'I am mindful of the word count, and I would like to move on to the last part of the manifesto. Jake, please.'

Jake promptly read 'On how to write about what he has to say, Hansen aspires to pursue a style of comedy and even slapstick as he believes that these are the evergreen to laughter and well-being.'

'There are studies that suggests comedy pursuits in writing are reflective of high ability in intelligence and self-reflection⁸, but also possibility of a contrast in their actual lives⁹.' Cindy said.

'You mean they could be sad and unhappy¹⁰ in their real life?' Jake asked.

'To be fair, many studies do not paint a pretty picture of creative writers in general.' Cindy explained. 'They could be depressed¹¹, suffering more mental¹² and mood disorders¹³, and more prone to suicide¹⁴. But not all writers are the same, obviously.¹⁵'

Jake began enthusiastically 'I am lucky I am just a character. Do you think...'

'Word count!' Mandy screeched. To the invisible audience, she said 'That is all the words we have. Please enjoy...'

Jake and Cindy rose from their seats and the three of them said in unison '...the Eighth Grade.'

⁸ Scott Barry Kaufman, Aaron Kozbelt, "The Tears of a Clown: Understanding Comedy Writers" in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 86-88.

⁹ Kaufman and Kozbelt. "The Tears of a Clown" 89-93.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Purto, "The Personalities" 15-16.

¹² Pourjalali, Skrzynecky, and Kaufman, "The Creative Writer" 24-25.

¹³ Adele Kohanyi, "The more I write, and the better I feel about myself": Mood Variability and Mood Regulation in Student Journalists and Creative Writers" in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41-42.

¹⁴ Pourjalali, Skrzynecky, and Kaufman, "The Creative Writer" 28-29.

¹⁵ Pritzker and Mc Garva, "The Characteristics" 63-66.

With that, stage curtains closed shut in a hurry.

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