

Reflection for Like Clockwork

Upon reflection, it is the unique understanding of monotony which provides appreciation of variety. Without this understanding, we are lost and directionless, while having only one direction – that which was chosen for us. Like Clockwork, an imaginative text, ponders existential thoughts of how individuals are swallowed up by the collective machine of life and the passing of time. It appropriates the idea of darkness to embody monotony, with the light embodying the “spice of life”. The text takes a mundane moment of a commute via metro, but fractures the experience into three perspectives, linked by the motif of a clock, constantly ticking, from the start of the workday to the end. In this sense the text itself pays homage to the idea that writing is a recursive process, requiring constant rumination and reflection to develop perspective. Ray Bradbury’s “The Pedestrian”, spoke to the importance of metaphor, juxtaposition, and lexical chain in creating this perspective. And the coda of the text? That in a fast-paced world, only those who view the situation from outside, from another perspective, can understand the monotony of a life devoid of reason.

The first perspective of the text utilises a contrast of dark and light, as well as a semantic field including “vile,” “twisting” and “writhing” to create an overwhelming atmosphere, leading the reader to an understanding of the chaos of the scene and providing a metaphor for the always-on, constantly moving attitude of a modern society. The motif of light is presented in the first perspective with a metaphor of every person holding a “torch”, alluding to the soul and religion. The torch represents what is being sequestered by this monotony - the human spirit of adventure.

The second perspective, written in the second person, chronicles the goings on in the mind of the nameless commuter. The second person perspective signifies the lack of agency which the commuter is afforded, reading almost as a set of instructions. This brings to mind the similar qualms of Bradbury’s nameless “Pedestrian”, not being able to live as they please, and instead having to bow to the whim of another entity. The elevator, described as a “metal sarcophagus” symbolises the inability for many to escape the manufactured busyness and sameness that permeates many aspects of life. The repetition of “foot one, foot two” exacerbates the monotony of the scene, creating an air of just that. The freedom of walking, one foot in front of the other, melting into the mindless march of the commuter invokes a similar vision to that of dark and light..

The third perspective is written in first person, as an anthropomorphised clock. The imagery of “my great hands” makes this known, while the ironic use of “like clockwork” both describes the actions of the people below and ties to the title of the piece. It is finally revealed at this point the reason for the timestamps spread throughout the piece, and the references to a great clock. The clock laments that the people below have not heeded its warning in the form of a constant ticking, wasting away the hours “across my face”. Time is always moving forward and carrying everyone along for the ride, only to finally be rescued at the end of the piece by the “chariot of light”, calling back to the beginning of the text and freeing the workers, only to be captured once again the next day.

In a way, life is a ticking time bomb. Like Clockwork seeks to uncover this truth and understand the meaning of monotony in the context of a work day. From the darkness, we must remember to find time to let our light shine.