

Epiphany of Life

Aaron J Clarke

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Prologue

Dear Reader,

My intentions as a writer are to stir your emotions. I don't want sympathy. I aim only to be understood, not to be categorized, and labeled by you the reader, or DSM IV – the holy book of psychiatry. The novel is disjointed, which is intentional on my part, to blur the line of what is real or imaginary. You will never quite know where you are in this novel.

Sincerely,

Adam Carlson

Chapter 1

Literature is one of my addictions. Like any drug, I need more when I go without for a few days. My cheeks become flushed and my voice sharp as glass. My tongue sweeps the sharp shards of wit. Time is waiting, like a panther in the inky blackness – when you least expect it, it has you in its jaws. I'm running late. No time to wait. I dress quickly and eat a bowl of weet-bix. I pop a pill. I'm now ready for the day.

The dawning of a new day and what does it have in store? I become weary of the mechanical juggernaut of moving cogs and hands of my watch, beating purely for the exactness of time; how can one define something so abstract? I open my mouth and begin reciting: *Time stands by. The shifting sands of eternity wait for no one. Time is an abstract three- dimensionality – measured uncertainly. Shifting sand – an ethereal thought and deed – born, then dies. Such is time, once here and next gone. Future beholds quantum change. For the past shall be. Like a falling star. When there is no star left – there shall be no future. And the past shall be remembered – alas the poor future. For the bloody worm of time have you for his bride. When consumed – there will be none of you. Sweet innocence – rotten by time’s unyielding pleasures. I do attest to time’s increment of change – it beats for you and me.*

I can’t stop myself from reciting poetry; the pill is starting to take effect. WOW WOW. As I stroll towards the English Department, an orchestra plays a symphony. Atoms of oxygen and nitrogen, invisible to the eye, stir into life upon the whim of high and low atmospheric pressure, dancing melodiously. I sense this dance of particles hitting one another. These atomic collisions animate the trees, leaves and everything. This mental dance plays in an unaccustomed manner; a manner that only I know. Oscillating sounds vibrate chaotically in my mental auditorium. Sparrows dart across the sky, like a barrage of arrowheads being fired from an ancient longbow. The branches of the Eucalyptus bow as if I were a dignitary – tossing the smallest of small flowers down upon me like a ticker-tape parade. Hibiscus radiates pink veins against bold reds. Parrots half-drunk on nectar, smash into the fly screen on the top floor of “B” block. Stunned for a moment they recover and fly towards the English Department. Are they omens of good or bad fortune?

The day has just begun like any other. The sun rises in the east. Yet there is a lingering uncertainty, the main uncertainty being my honors project. Will I be allowed to see the Holy Grail of literature?

Under the ruffled sounds of the rainbow parrots, I begin my oration, listing the reasons why I should be allowed to read Noelene Richards’ manuscript. The manuscript has been kept hidden away, locked in a safe under the supervision of the university librarian. Its existence was unknown until my lecturer, Professor Matheson, mentioned it to one of his colleagues at a Christmas party three years ago. The novel was regarded as sacrosanct. No one, but no one, had had a chance to look at the first page – except my lecturer. He loved that manuscript as if he had written it himself, and so understandably he guarded it like any precious object.

After three years, I need to break out from my self-imposed shell; I want to do something meaningful. And I want to make a name for myself in the eyes of my superiors. That’s my problem, I always need to be reassured. My ego needs massaging. If I wrote with gusto and passion... words flowing from my head onto the screen in an unadulterated stream of consciousness, I would expose

myself to the reader. Expose myself to an invisible silent audience. I wonder what the reader is thinking at this point. Are you happy or bored; do you want me to continue? So, why do I want to read Noelene Richards' manuscript? Because I believe it will reveal an alternate side of her. It will peel away the layers of her literary soul.

The marbled skies have now become silent. The world has become silent. Strange. Now, I'm one with life; instead of hating it and trying to destroy myself, I'm engaged in this twilight of imagination. Imagination is the mountain that a climber succeeds or fails to reach. I shall slowly reveal to you the many parts of myself that only I know. When I was naive, losing myself in the bliss of my first kiss. It wasn't the way I expected it to be. It was dull and boring, not at all romantic. Sex wasn't as I expected either. I had led a rather cloistered life, a shell waiting to be seeded, and no "pearl" was produced. I wanted so much to be a biochemist, yet after all these years of mediocrity in that field, I rediscover myself in the written word. Literature now fills the gaps of my soul. These are repaired with a simple story. Once I discovered Noelene Richards' writing, her simple string of syllables and consonants whose fluidity gave life to the page, I wanted to find out as much as possible about her. To excavate her work and mind is now my mission.

Groaning with anticipation like a pubescent pupil waiting for his next encounter, I bound up the stairwell towards my lecturer's office. I knock, then knock again. As I wait at the door for an answer, I ponder: What have I to say that hasn't already been said before? Will I be remembered when I'm dead? These are the questions I ask myself – while I wait in the corridor – trying to answer these unfathomable. I live in hope that my life will change for the better. I thought I knew where my life was going. My ambitions and plans lay before me like words on a page. A three-year science degree majoring in biochemistry, leading on to research in cancer and one day the Nobel Prize. Yet this wasn't to be. I abandoned these dreams. My illness scattered them, now they have been resurrected in literature. My ambitions grew anew. I began to read.... Rediscovering the classics of literature. I lived my life as if I was in a novel – traveling through time and space.

Chapter 2

I stare blank faced. As I stare at the computer screen, the weight of responsibility for the elucidation of Noelene Richards' manuscript etches its way into my psyche. Looking for inspiration isn't easy. Yet, as we grow ever closer to our "work", the sentences flow, gushing forth from that most elusive and private of constructs, the literary soul. No two "literary souls" are alike, no matter how much we want to write like Dickens. This is the main point that I would like to make. Much as I might want to write like Noelene Richards – I can't become her. Or could I? To write like another is one thing, but to become them! That's if I could get over the fact that she was a recluse and has been dead for over fifty years. As if an electric light bulb had just been turned on, my eyes widen with the thought of something so profoundly shocking. How would I carry it off? The tiny hair on the back of my neck stands taut waiting for further orders. My mind would be a clear slate to write upon – molding myself into her idioms and syntax such that no-one could tell what was her work and what was mine. That manuscript would enable me to achieve this.

Small droplets of sweat form on my temples as I search the shelves. She, like Virginia Woolf, is an avant-garde writer who wrote about feminism and its relationship with the modern world. Yet, despite her reputation as an essayist, her novel, *A Season of Reason*, has remained unloved and neglected.

A Season of Reason was never published. Why? As in any expedition, we need to do our homework, and sift through mountains of books. However, there are some problems, so I will list them: books on the library shelves are out of order, pages missing and the original manuscript almost unreadable.

My honors project is to write the rest of *A Season of Reason*, and make it into the novel, she intended it to be. But how do I know her intentions? I must become her, some way or another. I must learn the way she structures her sentences. But how? She didn't leave an outline of the events in the novel. The neon flickers, mosquitoes dance around the incandescent tube, still I see nothing but a pile of decaying books. I smell the perfume of paper slowly oxidizing, yellowing with age.

Eureka! The first few pages of the novel.

Yet, as I read them, the paragraphs become more disjointed, goes off on tangents, as if she were going crazy. How can I ever reconstruct this? What have I got myself into? Her handwriting flows like rivulets across a barren earth. After Virginia Woolf committed suicide, Noelene gave up writing and never published another book. Some see it as a sign of respect. There may be some truth to the tale. Carefully examining her biography, I open a page that shows her photograph. Her eyes beckon to me across time and space; blue pools of lucidity and willpower. I turn the page. Another picture. This time her eyes are indifferent to the world in which she once walked. A sense of apathy is present, the will to live is absent, and then I look at the date. It was the year Woolf died.