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HPEN4009 Portfolio

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Close Read: "The Hiding Place" by Trezzo Azzopardi.

Within the following text, I will comment on the results of a close reading on a passage from Trezzo Azzopardi's 'The Hiding Place'. Published in 2000, the book is a historical fiction that follows a Maltese/Welsh family with 6 daughters living in 1960's Wales, with the narrator being the youngest member. The novel provides the reader with an extensive and emotional look at the themes of identity and family. As well as exploring the social inequalities of women and people of colour in that era of history. The passage that I will be reflecting upon starts on page 76 and continues until 79. Within it, the narrator, Dolores, reveals the events in which an older sister, Marina, was seemingly given away by her father whilst the family witnesses, powerless to intervene.

The first element that I will be remarking on will be language. Throughout the passage, Azzopardi uses rich and evocative language to create vivid scenes of traumatic events and haunting depictions of emotion. For example; "My mother's hands pressed flat on the pane, her mouth moving silently" allows the audience to see that Mary is visually upset and against what is happening, but unable to challenge the opinion of her husband. However, it could also be read as a representation of gender inequality in the 1960's. A portrayal of how women were visibly present, yet were not allowed to have a voice of their own. This is further corroborated with the inclusion of the other daughters in this scene and the way they are mentioned. "The faces of my sisters crowd the steamed-up glass like pale balloons. Fran and Celeste wave back; Rose is crying" not only further facilitates the somber emotions of the scene, but again positions the girls behind another invisible barrier, preventing them from action or argument. Rose's response mirrors that of her mother, upset and seemingly desperate for an alternative. Fran and

Celeste however, seem remorsefully accepting of it. This is used to imply how females could be aware of their sexist restrictions placed upon them by laws and regulations of the time, as well as how powerless they were to change them. There are also subtle inclusions of sensory detail, like “the smell is sharp, there’s a bird singing”. This helps the reader to view these events as if recounting a core memory. Although this example doesn’t help to explore any overall themes of the book, it does work perfectly to immerse the reader into a flashback that feels almost personal to them.

The next element observed will be structure. Within this passage, Azzopardi employs fragmented structure. This means the story is presented to the audience in a non-linear fashion, allowing for a fuller observation of the scene through the perspective of different characters. Using this style of structure enhances the sense of disorientation and instability, mirroring the emotional turmoil being experienced. The passage begins with a scene involving Joe Medora's car, then transitions to Mr. Jackson observing the events from his living room window, followed by the father's actions after Marina's departure, and finally to Dolores reflecting on her childhood memories. Each segment provides a snapshot of a particular moment or aspect of the story, gradually revealing more about the characters and their experiences. Additionally, the passage incorporates elements of stream-of-consciousness narration, particularly in Dolores' reflections on her childhood and her interactions with her mother. This stream-of-consciousness style adds depth to Dolores' character and allows the reader to glimpse her inner thoughts and emotions. Overall, the fragmented structure and stream-of-consciousness narration contribute to the complexity and richness of the text, inviting readers to piece together the various elements and interpretations of truth presented throughout the narrative.

The last element I will be studying from this passage is symbolism. This serves as a means for the author to subtly enrich the overarching themes and mood of the narrative and overall text. One example of this is the use of the broken door that lies abandoned in the back garden, to symbolise Frankie’s internal frustration and the breakdown of his family. Describing the back door lying flat on the ground, discarded and broken, serves as a physical manifestation of the erosion of trust and intimacy between Frankie and his family. As well as the quote of “like an entrance into Hell” vividly suggests the sense of chaos and

despair that a father would be feeling, having just given his daughter away to settle a dispute. Especially as the family have catholic values, so describing his mind as Hell would

Frankie's actions towards the door reflect the intensity of his emotions, and the desperation to command some control in the situation. As he works tirelessly with "the most terrible screeching noise", it shows a frantic attempt to take back the controlling position he previously held within the family. As well as how he's alienated himself so much from his family already that his attempts are seemingly lacklustre. There is also symbolism in the construction of the cage that Frankie builds from the door. It symbolises his attempt to regain control and create a sense of security in the face of loss and uncertainty. As the book is set within the 1960's, Frankie's role as the father of a catholic household would be socially and religiously set as the sole provider for the rest of the family.

In conclusion, Trezzo Azzopardi's 'The Hiding Place' masterfully employs language, structure, and symbolism to delve into the intricate themes of identity, family, and social inequalities in 1960s Wales. Through a close reading of the passage on pages 76 to 79, we see how Azzopardi uses rich, evocative language to depict the emotional trauma and gender dynamics of the era. The fragmented structure and stream-of-consciousness narration provide a multifaceted view of the events, enhancing the sense of disorientation and emotional turmoil experienced by the characters. Symbolism, particularly through the imagery of the broken door and the cage, further deepens the narrative, highlighting themes of control, frustration, and familial breakdown. Collectively, these elements invite readers to engage deeply with the characters' struggles and the societal constraints they navigate, offering a poignant reflection on the human condition and the complexities of familial bonds.

Word Count: 1031.

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Creative Response to 'The Hiding Place' by Trezzo Azzopardi.

Note for reader: this text is set a week before Mary's funeral.

As soon as the doors to the brightly lit establishment closed behind Frankie, he was soaked to the bone and cold. He stood there for a second, eyes closed and face pointing to the dark night sky. Come on, Frankie. Just wasn't your day today. That's all. He opened his eyes, unclenched his white-knuckled fists, and started down the road. The vividly lit space behind him continued to act as a lighthouse of despair and desperation as he walked into the quickly darkening night. Welcome to some, warning to others.

Frankie hadn't lived here for that long. The corners and crossroads weren't etched into the back of his mind yet. So as he walked, he'd occasionally glance behind him, hoping to notice some familiar vandalism or road signs to keep him on track. But most of the bay areas in Wales had a similar layout; Tiger Bay had prepared him for this in one way or another. It had definitely shown him what places in town not to frequent or become associated with. Coming to an intersection, Frankie was presented with one of those very places.

To the left, the high street was still relatively lit. Although there were six street lights that lined the pavement from start to finish, only two of them worked. The patchy light paired with the shutter-fronted shops gave the street an eerie ambiance, making it clear that this was not a place to linger after dark. Shadows danced between the buildings, and the occasional flicker of a light from an upper window hinted at the lives hidden within.

Choosing the right, Frankie started down the narrow, winding lane that seemed to coil back into the depths of the town. It was darker, but it felt safer. The buildings were closer together here, their walls whispering secrets and offering a sense of protection from the unpredictable night. He walked with purpose, his steps echoing softly against the cobblestones, each footfall a reminder of his isolation and determination.

As he continued, he passed a small, dimly lit pub. The muted sounds of laughter and clinking glasses spilled out into the street, mingling with the occasional notes of a melancholy tune from a worn-out piano. For a moment, Frankie considered going inside, finding solace in the anonymity of the

crowd. But he shook his head, knowing that such places held their own dangers and distractions. He couldn't afford either.

Further down, he spotted a familiar landmark—a weathered statue of a long-forgotten local hero, standing sentinel over a small square. He quickened his pace, eager to put the night's events behind him. The rain had slowed to a drizzle, and the cold air bit at his exposed skin, but he didn't care. He was almost there.

Crossing the square, Frankie came to the newsagents that stood on the corner of his street. Although the cold, wet metal shutter covered the door, the window remained clear, illuminated by three small and dwindling spotlights in the ceiling.

As Frankie approached the newsagents, he felt a knot form in his stomach, a premonition of the news that awaited him. With each step closer, the weight of guilt and regret grew heavier upon his shoulders. He tried to steel himself, to brace for what he was about to see, but nothing could prepare him for the stark reality staring back at him from the window.

"LOCAL WOMAN MARY HENDRY FOUND DEAD"

The words seemed to leap out at him, accusing and unforgiving. Frankie stood frozen, his heart sinking as he read the headline again and again. Mary. Sweet, kind Mary, who had offered him solace and friendship in the darkest of times, now reduced to a mere headline in a newspaper.

His mind raced, replaying moments shared with Mary—the laughter, the warmth, the unspoken bond that had formed between them. How had it all ended like this? He had promised himself that leaving Tiger Bay would keep her safe, yet here she was, another victim of the cruel hand fate had dealt them.

With a heavy heart, Frankie continued down his street, the rain now a steady drizzle that matched the tears in his eyes. Each step felt like a burden, a reminder of the choices he had made and the lives he had left behind. He couldn't shake the feeling of remorse, of wishing he had done more, had been there for Mary when she needed him most.

As Frankie reached his building, the familiar sense of dread settled in his chest. He paused at the door, steeling himself for what awaited inside. The creak of the door echoed through the dimly lit hallway, a sound that seemed to reverberate with his own internal turmoil.

The flat was dark and silent, save for the muffled sounds of the television playing in the next room. Frankie hung his soaked coat on the hook by the door, the fabric heavy with rain and regret. He moved through the small, cluttered space, his eyes adjusting to the gloom.

In the living room, his current wife, Ellen, sat on the worn couch, her eyes tired and hollow as she glanced up at him. Their children, two young boys, were sprawled on the floor, playing half-heartedly with a set of mismatched toys. The sight of them stirred something within Frankie, a mixture of anger and despair that he couldn't quite shake.

"Ellen," he said, his voice attempting to be firm but coming out rugged and spiteful. "What are you still doing up?"

She flinched at his tone, a familiar look of fear crossing her face. "I was just waiting for you," she replied softly, her eyes flicking nervously to the boys. "We didn't want to go to bed without saying goodnight." Frankie grunted in response, moving past them to the kitchen.

He poured himself a drink, the alcohol burning as it slid down his throat. The familiar numbness began to spread, dulling the edges of his guilt and frustration. Returning to the living room, he stood over the boys, his shadow casting a dark pall over their play. "It's late," he barked. "Time for bed."

The boys scrambled to their feet, their faces pale and tense. Ellen ushered them quickly towards their room, whispering soothing words that did little to ease the tension in the air. Frankie watched them go, his heart a heavy, bitter lump in his chest.

Once they were gone, he slumped into the armchair, staring blankly at the flickering television screen. The memories of Mary, of the life he had left behind, haunted him. He had promised himself things would be different this time, that he would be better. But here he was, repeating the same patterns, inflicting the same pain. Ellen returned, hovering nervously in the doorway.

"Do you need anything else?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. Frankie shook his head, not trusting himself to speak. He felt the weight of his failures pressing down on him, the realization that he had not changed, that he was trapped in a cycle of his own making.

As the night wore on, he remained in the chair, the drink untouched in his hand. The sounds of his family settling into an uneasy sleep filled the small flat, a stark reminder of the life he had built and the damage he continued to inflict. The headlines of Mary's death lingered in his mind, a grim testament to the consequences of his actions and the price of his inability to change.

In the cold, quiet darkness of the flat, Frankie faced the stark truth of his existence. The man he had become was no different from the one he had been, and the shadows of his past continued to haunt the present, a relentless reminder of the pain he could not escape.

Reflective Essay.

Upon starting this creative response to Azzopardi's "The Hiding Place", I set myself three objectives. To accurately recount events from the original text from a different perspective, as well as to create a perspective of a character to then change it drastically, and then finally, to refer to historical and cultural cues in order to make my writing more perceivable. Within the following essay, I will address how I attempt these aims as well as how effectively I was able to portray them.

The first aim that I set was to accurately recount some events from the original text in a different perspective. As I read "The Hiding Place", I was immediately interested in the portrayal of Frankie, a Maltese man who fails to secure a stable living or income for his family whilst he gambles away what little he does have. Within the text, there are many occasions where Frankie's thoughts and feelings are obscured by the way that Mary understands them and then relays these meanings to Dolores and the audience. An example of this is when Mary comments on Frankie deconstructing the abandoned door in the back garden, she says "It didn't occur to her then, or if it did she never let on, that he was doing something about us."

So this gave me a blank canva to decide how Frankie would react to this situation. As well as giving me the freedom to explore the next aim.

This was to attempt to change the audience's previous thoughts about a character, at the midpoint of my writing. What inspired this aim was Azzopardi's ability to lure the audience into a false sense of understanding, only to later reveal that the reality was entirely different. In my creative response, I attempted to employ a similar technique with the character of Frankie. Initially, I portrayed him in a somewhat sympathetic light, showing his struggles and moments of introspection as he navigates the rainy streets. By describing his feelings of remorse and his memories of Mary, I aimed to evoke empathy from the audience, suggesting that Frankie might be a man capable of change, haunted by his past but striving to do better. This aligns with my goal to recount events from a different perspective—Frankie's internal world, which is largely hidden in Azzopardi's narrative.

However, as the narrative progresses and Frankie returns home, the reality of his unchanged, abusive behavior is revealed. This twist aims to shatter the audience's initial perceptions and highlight the cyclical nature of his violence and failures. By doing so, I wanted to mirror Azzopardi's technique of shifting the audience's understanding and underscore the tragic inevitability of Frankie's character. The sudden reveal of his continued abuse towards his new family not only serves as a dramatic turning point but also reinforces the theme of inescapable patterns of behavior, a recurring motif in "The Hiding Place."

My final aim was to refer to historical and cultural cues to enhance the authenticity of the narrative. Setting my story in an unspecified bay area in Wales, similar to the Azzopardi's setting, I drew upon the cultural and geographical context of these communities. The description of the high street, the weathered statue, and the small pub are all intended to ground the narrative in a realistic setting that reflects the socio-economic conditions faced by many immigrant families during the time. These details aim to create a tangible sense of place and time, making the characters' struggles more relatable and comprehensible to the reader. But doing this to a limited degree to show how Frankie is also relatively detached from his surroundings, not wanting to find out who the statue in the square was, for example.

Reflecting on my writing, I believe I was able to meet my objectives to a varying extents. I accurately recounted some events from "The Hiding Place" from Frankie's perspective, shedding light on his internal conflicts. Although I did managed to pivot the perception of Frankie midway through the narrative, I don't think that I achieve any subtly prior to the perception pivot. Instead, it came across more abrupt. Lastly, the incorporation of historical and cultural details added depth and authenticity to the setting, enriching the overall narrative.

In conclusion, this creative response to Azzopardi's "The Hiding Place" allowed me to explore the intricacies of character development and narrative perspective. By aligning my objectives with the themes and techniques of the original text, I aimed to create a piece that not only reflects Azzopardi's literary style but also adds new dimensions to the understanding of Frankie's character.

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