

The act of literary representation in 'brooklyn'



The deliberate manipulation of textual form definitively reveals the significance of people's experiences of landscape in shaping individual identity and the values of social groups. Colm Toibin's novel *Brooklyn*, a unique blend of historical fiction and bildungsroman, utilizes characterization and narrative voice to emphasize the significance of changing landscapes for the migrant experience. Poetic voice and structure are vehicles in Oodgeroo Noonuccal's lyric poem 'Then and Now' which emphasize the importance of an Aboriginal persona's interactions with landscape in obscuring or shaping identity. Therefore a culmination of compositional choices concerning textual form emphasize the significance of people's interactions with landscapes in shaping identity and social values.

The purposeful construction of texts reveals the foundational role of an individual's interactions with real landscapes in shaping their identity. In *Brooklyn*, Toibin demonstrates the significant impact of shifting landscapes upon the protagonist's identity through corresponding shifts in characterization. The novel opens in Enniscorthy with Eilis "sitting at the window" as she "noticed her sister", the passive connotations associated with these verbs immediately introducing her acquiescent characterization. She aspires only to have "the same friends and neighbors, the same routines in the same streets." Her unchanging experience of Enniscorthy, exemplified by the repetition of "same", has a significantly stultifying effect upon her personal growth. Forced to interact with a new Liverpool landscape prior to her sea crossing, Eilis adopts "a tone used by a woman in full possession of herself." She acknowledges that this was "something she could not have done" in Enniscorthy, high modality emphasizing her

newfound recognition of Enniscorthy's rigid social structure as inconducive to her discovery of self. Eilis' characterization continues to evolve upon her assimilation into Brooklyn in Part Three. Toibin emphasizes that " she liked her room and her routine", the repetition of this possessive adjective highlighting her satisfaction with the sense of ownership and independence her environment facilitates. However Toibin demonstrates at the novel's conclusion that the primary significance of Eilis' transient experiences of landscape is the disconnectedness that comes to define her identity. Toibin concludes the novel with an image of Eilis looking out the window " as the train moved south" following her ambivalent choice to return to Brooklyn. This frame device marks a return to Eilis' initial characterization wherein she lacks the agency to engage meaningfully with either Enniscorthy or Brooklyn. Therefore Toibin uses characterization as a component of textual form to underscore the significance of shifting landscapes in impacting an individual's identity.

While Toibin exploits characterization as a primary component of the novel form, Noonuccal calls upon figurative language as a vehicle for emphasizing the destructive effect of engaging with the cityscape upon persona's Aboriginal identity. Her " dreams are shattered by rushing car/By grinding tram and hissing train", this sudden intrusion of a tricolon of vehicles emphasizing her hostile relationship with the urban landscape. Noonuccal incorporates direct speech to document the superficial remarks of an external observer regarding her assimilation into the cityscape, " Isn't she lucky to have a good job!" While the cityscape here is conceptualized as a place of economic opportunity, this exclamation emphasizes the irony that

the significance of her relocation is its damaging effect upon her sense of identity. The overwhelmingly detrimental impact of Noonuccal's engagement with the cityscape is evident in the closing lines of 'Then and Now'. She asserts that it was "better when I had only a dillybag. Better when I had nothing but happiness." Anaphora highlights the disintegration of Noonuccal's sense of self and personal happiness that underscores the significance of her experiences with the cityscape. Therefore elements of representation unique to the respective textual forms of Brooklyn and 'Then and Now' are powerful for conveying the significance of an individual's experience of real landscapes in shaping their identity.

By exploiting aspects of textual form, composers emphasize the importance of interactions with imagined and remembered landscapes in illuminating the link between the values of social groups and attributes of their prevailing landscape. Conveyed through Toibin's distinctive narrative voice, characters' interactions with America through imagination or memory are significant as they reveal the inextricable relationship between the nature of a landscape and the social values of its inhabitants. Prior to her emigration, Eilis perceives America as "so utterly foreign in its systems", but also with an "almost compensating glamour" and "element of romance". Toibin's free indirect narrative style demonstrates that Eilis' recognition of America as a young, progressive landscape is linked to the value American society attributes to external image, indicated by the splendid imagery. During their sea crossing, Eilis' roommate emphasizes physical appearance as important for gaining entry to "the land of the free and the brave." By alluding to the American national anthem through dialogue, another key aspect of narrative

voice, Georgina's recall of her own Brooklyn experience reveals the significance of external appearance for achieving advancement in American society. Toibin's use of free indirect discourse extends to Tony's imagined landscape of Long Island, as he tells Eilis that "the house would be theirs... they could plan it themselves." The dynamism of the New York landscape demonstrated through Tony's imagined interactions with an as yet undeveloped Long Island underscores the values of risk-taking and audacity esteemed by the American Dream. Experiencing an American beach through imagination, Jim remarks to Eilis that "you'd get every type of person there." Dialogue here reveals that the significance of his imagined experience of Brooklyn is the impression of America's cultural diversity and dynamism. Thus Toibin's manipulation of narrative voice as part of novel form emphasizes imagined and remembered experiences of landscape as significant in revealing the reciprocal relationship between landscape and the values of its inhabitants.

By re-experiencing the natural Australian landscape through memory, Noonuccal through poetic voice reinforces its significance in shaping the predominant values of the Aboriginal community. Noonuccal deliberately chooses first person narration in this dramatic monologue so that the Aboriginal experience of Australia's natural landscape is focused through a single perspective. Her firsthand observations also reflect the oral tradition of storytelling integral to Aboriginal tradition, Noonuccal's overarching use of poetic voice emphasizing the cultural values attached to landscape. Furthermore Noonuccal's use of diction deliberately recalls Aboriginal dialect. The persona remembers "corroboree" and the "didgeridoo", focusing on

the significant links to tradition and family represented by memories of the natural Australian landscape. The importance of this experience of landscape through memory is made further evident in Noonuccal's lamentation that there is "no more woomera, no more boomerang, no more playabout, no more the old ways." This tetracolon of Aboriginal cultural icons demonstrates that the destruction of the natural landscape corresponds with the loss of tradition. Therefore a composer's manipulation of narrative and poetic voice is a powerful vehicle for underscoring the significance of a social group's experience of a landscape through imagination and memory for revealing its prevailing social values and structures.

Ultimately, a culmination of compositional choices regarding textual form enables composers to convey the significance of people's interactions with landscapes both real and imagined in shaping identity and social values. The purposeful manipulation of novel and poetic form across Toibin's Brooklyn and Noonuccal's 'Then and Now' emphasizes the importance of such experiences between people and landscapes for their impact on an individual's character and societal values. Perhaps in using textual form as an artistic lens through which to explore the relationship between people and landscapes, these composers are encouraging audiences to evaluate the significance of their own experience of their prevailing environment.