

The thin red line

Psychology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Essay on "The Red Line" by Charles Higson Society contains a vast majority of different types of people, and all of them look, act, and think differently. How we as individuals do these things, are greatly influenced by the people around us, as our differences makes us judge others. In creating our own identity, our reliance on others is consequently grand, which can be either a fine or a dreadful matter. For some, the prejudice in the perceptions of others can cause the truth to be exceedingly twisted. It can be disturbed to such a degree, that the image of others is completely opposite of how it is in reality.

This is what each character in Higson's short story The Red Line experiences. Higson questions and plays with the role identity have in our postmodern society by using irony in the characterization and by the use of a dynamic point of view. Berto and the nameless man each have contradictory personalities and looks. This is seen because the reader and the characters are introduced to different sides of the people in the story. As the reader gets a sense of the characters looks, personalities and thoughts, the persons in the story only get to see each other from the outside.

Denise's descriptions of the two men could not be more wrong, and therefore displays the contradictories perfectly. She sees the nameless man as someone innocent, child-like and defenseless, and she sees Berto as one who has "the look of a hunter. Cold, superior, in charge." [1] She thinks Berto will hurt her, but he is actually the one who assumes fondly of her and the nameless man in reality dislikes her. None of that is played out though as the characters do not interact with each other, as their narrow-mindedness stop them.

The characters are prejudiced towards each other, which prove to be wrong, making the situation ironic. Denise's thoughts of the two indicates the dramatic irony in the story, because we as readers know that Berto is the naive and innocent one, while the nameless man is the hunter, who kills Berto in the end. Berto sees the nameless man as someone harmless, but as he kills him, it creates situational irony. He had hoped that the man would have helped him find his way around London, and in a way he does, since Berto's blood trail reminds him that he needed to take the red line - It was not the preferable outcome Berto could have hoped for though, of course, as he dies. The nameless man deems very negative of the two, mostly Berto that is so contrary himself, both in appearance and personality. The nameless man considers Berto to be iniquitous, while we as readers know the opposite is true. He also supposes that Berto and Denise are "eyeing each other up across the aisle"[2], but none of the two has romantic interest in each other, and Denise even ends up running from the former.

The reader must question each character, based on their view on the others and how this changes their persona, and how each one of them is considered by our selves. The point of view shifts in a way that it both creates suspense, and plays with our impression of personality. With each chapter, titled by a train station name, we follow a different character's day. In Goodge Street, a chapter towards the end, the characters stories intertwine, but the shifting continues. The composition is therefore not linear, which is typical of postmodern literature, as it creates suspense.

There is dynamic and a sense of reflection in the story, which are also postmodern traits. Differing at all times, the point of view creates a sense

that nothing is settled, especially because of the conflicting information we obtain of the characters. We must therefore reconsider the story and the characters all the time, thus forcing us to reconsider the personas constantly. The role identity plays in the story is a reflection of how it functions in postmodern society. This is part of the author's intention, as Higson wants us to question what we see, as not everyone/everything is what it seems.

He also questions and makes us think about our own prejudices towards others, and how we view each other. He plays with the role appearance have in our society, and how important it can be. Berto gets murdered solely because of the way he looks. Higson also critiques the emphasis society puts on perception of others, as too much prejudice can kill the ingenuous and righteousness in life. The nameless man is also extremely narcissitic, as he "took to staying in, standing in front of the mirror for hours on end, shaving and looking at his reflection"[3], thus he is an archetype of someone in society Higson critiques.

Alas, appearance plays an incredibly important role, as Denise run away from Berto and the nameless man kills the latter because of it, even though we as readers know Berto is a respectable guy. The situation in the story is of course extreme, but Higson does this to get the point across more clearly and create irony. The contradictions are solar clear and the prejudices have serious consequences for the characters. It goes gravely wrong for the guy the reader sees as kind of a protagonist, and the characters see the antagonist as the innocent and harmless one.

We get different impressions of Denise, Berto and the nameless man based on their thoughts on each other and their life situation. These are obtained in a dynamic way, because the point of view shifts and the composition is not linear. Thus, we must reconsider the story at all times, and sense how we ourselves perceive each other. As Higson questions the concept of identity, he also makes us question ourselves, how we view others, and on what grounds we judge each other by. ----- [1] Higson, Charles. The Thin Red Line, p. 69 l. 4 [2] Ibid. p. 69, l. 25 [3] Ibid. p. 66, l. 30-31