

EN278: Ends and Beginnings - Presentation Write-Up

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*A Reflection on the Delivery and Reception of my Presentation on  
Frederick Rolfe's *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole**

The title of my presentation, 'A Hunger Artist: Art, Language, and Suffering in Frederick Rolfe's *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*' delineates my talk's content, and whilst the reference to Franz Kafka might have seemed anachronistic and arbitrary, I feel that it gained resonance as my presentation progressed, because the class picked up on the 'modern' aspects of Rolfe's work. My concept for the presentation was to direct the seminar group in an interactive activity centred around close readings, in order to engage with my thesis: the textual intricacies of Rolfe's novel cumulatively contribute to a compelling (but paradoxical) examination of the relationship between nature and culture, ultimately pointing to the notion of suffering as a site for artistic production.

As the nexus between art and suffering had been explored elsewhere on the module, I tried to embed references to other texts and concepts on the course throughout in order to locate Rolfe's novel more securely with the concerns and themes of 'Ends and Beginnings'; for example, my PowerPoint<sup>1</sup> referred to the Michael Field Presentation from the previous week, in order to save time on explaining concepts such

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<sup>1</sup> Having a PowerPoint alongside the close reading activities may have created a confused structure; however, I am always in favour of visual aid during the presentation of new ideas and materials, as in a lecture.

as Aestheticism and synaesthesia, which had already been clearly captured by Victoria.<sup>2</sup> The combination of a 'hands-on' textual analysis, interspersed with my own insights, was designed in order to spark debate. I arranged for my close reading 'clusters' (A, B, and C) to reflect the way in which, I believe, Rolfe deliberately layered his images in a clever semantic pattern. I do feel however that the class may have benefitted from fewer quotations per cluster, as this may have better accommodated more scrupulous close reading. A comment from Amy encouraged me during the delivery of the presentation itself, because she remarked upon how the design of the presentation successfully uncovered the ways in which Rolfe played so masterfully with language. *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* presented me with many challenges because there are very few scholarly articles that accompany it, the exception being the Regenia Gagnier text (*The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society*), which tied in neatly with my comments on the financial scenes in the novel, and how these worked in conjunction with the creative facet to Zildo and Nicholas Crabbe's relationship. Furthermore, the lack of secondary resources allowed me to focus chiefly on textual analysis, which is where my passion for literature lies.

The group discussions during my presentation brought to life aspects of the novel that I had not previously considered; for example, Venice's spatial embodiment of the conflict between the man-made and the natural. Although I had discussed these themes at length, I hadn't thought about how lagoons/Venice encapsulated these concepts, and so the link between my aforesaid ideas and their relation to physical space was generated as a result of the collective class contribution. Likewise, some of

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<sup>2</sup> I was pleased with the overall structure of my presentation, because it made a change to the seminar dynamic.

the group's thoughts about the symbolic significance of the climactic narrative style (regarding the Freudian perversion theory) spurred ideas that could be harnessed in a future essay. Overall, I believe that my presentation provoked a highly important question that begs for intellectual inquiry: does Rolfe's text succeed as art by offering a new mode of textual interpretation that differs from the normative Bourgeois reading experience?

Word Count: 542