

SACE 2 - English Communications

Task 2 Novel: The *Divine Wind* By Gary Disher

Gary Disher's novel, *The Divine Wind*, is set in the typically Australian town of Broome, in the period prior to and during World War II (WWII). The central characters, Hart, Alice and Mitsy allow Disher to explore and establish themes regarding the numerous relationships in society. Friendship is the first type of relationship to be examined. Disher demonstrates that, as time goes on, the foundations upon which friendships are made do not always prove strong enough to last. Other types of relationships investigated are those relating to love. A central theme of the novel is that of prejudice, which is examined through the relationships between white Australian citizens and people of other ethnicities, primarily Aboriginal and Asian. The novel also delves into the theme of loyalty, which is best demonstrated through the period during WWII.

***'We often make friends for the weakest of reasons – proximity for example, or shared experience, or laziness or need.'*¹**

This quotation provides readers with an understanding of the beliefs Disher holds regarding the formation of friendships, as well as portraying the theme of changing friendships. The friendship of the characters Mitsy, Alice and Hart is formed at a young age, solely as a result of proximity and need. The reader sees the basis of this friendship alter as they become adults, and Disher shows the changing attitudes of each character. External issues such as race and loyalty to one's country are taken into consideration by each character, especially due to the looming war. Disher demonstrates his belief that as people mature, proximity and need are not reasons enough to sustain a friendship. The views expressed by others, (either by individuals or by society as a whole), can affect the way we think about a friend, leading to a changed or destroyed friendship. A reflection of everyday life can cause a breakdown. Classmates who in junior school once promised to be 'together forever' separate through changes in beliefs and values.

***'By the time I was fifteen, Ida had virtually stopped talking to my father.'*²** (A reflection made my Hart about his mother's broken relationship with his father.)

The Divine Wind describes love as a form of blindness, reflecting on different social backgrounds, which can lead to failed relationships. One example is Michael and Ida. They meet and fall in love, ignoring their different upbringings. Ida is formal and English, while Michael is easy-going and Australian. As the love felt between them wains, they begin to see

¹ Gary Disher, *The Divine Wind*, Griffin Press, Adelaide, 1998, 21.

² Disher, *Divine Wind*, 13.

the need for their own lifestyles and, consequently, they separate. A further example is the character of Alice. She does not reflect upon Hart's dislike of Carl Venning, who she is madly in love with. Instead she realises later, and of her own accord, that their difference in backgrounds and opinions are too far apart. As Alice has a great sense of self and always stands up for what she believes in, she ends their relationship. During the WWII era, society held a naïve view of love: feelings for another meant that you should be with them. Even today there is still a blindness involved in being in love. Too often, we see heartbroken young women who have misjudged a relationship, ignoring negative signs because they were too focussed on the 'here and now'. A lasting relationship is one formed over time, in which aspects of each other's lifestyles and ideas have to be accommodated.

'Oh, somewhere over in the east, shove 'em in with the Germans and the Italians I suppose.'³

This quotation reveals the prejudicial treatment of both the Aboriginal and Japanese people by the Australian authorities in the twentieth century. Disher accurately portrays how these attitudes were formed, especially as a result of the coming war. This prejudice was fostered by the indoctrination of white Australian people into the belief that these particular races were set to 'ruin' Australia. When WWII was declared and Japan became Australia's enemy, concerns that Japanese-Australians would turn against white Australians became widespread amongst society. In particular, the reader can see how Carl is convinced by the authorities: 'Your Abo is unreliable ... he'll collaborate. He'll guide the Japs through the bush'.⁴ This indoctrination led to fear amongst people towards racial minorities. Prejudice still occurs in society today. A typical example is the United States of America (USA) and its government's ploy to instil fear into the American population by promoting the misinformation that Iraq possessed 'weapons of mass destruction' in order to justify their invasion of the country. In a contemporary society that has at its disposal a vast amount of knowledge and the ability to communicate with ease, we should not be fearful of others.

'I hope your keeping an eye on those Japs you got at your house, sonny.'⁵

This was a comment made to Hart for keeping Mitsy and Sadoko in their house. Disher tries to portray his view that loyalty is a highly regarded quality. The prejudice against the Japanese and the Aboriginals that increased during the war revealed a loyalty within Hart and his father for their friends. Although there was speculation and name calling by the local Australians, the Penrose family were loyal to their friends. Disher reveals that regardless of whoever speaks negatively of those who are close to you, these comments should be

³ Disher, *Divine Wind*, 107.

⁴ Disher, *Divine Wind*, 76.

⁵ Disher, *Divine Wind*, 138.

ignored. It is more important that you maintain your beliefs in that person or people. The serious issue of loyalty can either strengthen a relationship or cause its demise. This is true on a small scale, within friendship groups, or to a larger extent, between countries. The 'Coalition of the Willing' allowed Iraq to be invaded at first but, as time has passed, it is the change in position of some countries as a result of a lack of loyalty that has weakened the position of the USA.

Relationships are the central issue explored by Disher in his novel the *Divine Wind*. This theme is examined through the issues of friendship, love, prejudice and loyalty. Loyalty can be either positive or detrimental to a relationship. Friendship is explained as fluid and able to change over time. Love is expressed as a form of blindness. Relationships between races sometimes demonstrate prejudice, which is caused by the views of authorities that instil fear of other races in the population.

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