

A Reflection

Matthew Mansfield

College of Applied Science & Technology, University of Arizona

ENGV 306: Advanced Composition

Kyle DiRoberto, PhD

Dec. 8, 2020

A Reflection

Unconsciously, the idea of *reflection* carries an atmosphere of nostalgia. When first considering the term, one might visualize elderly men in rocking chairs contemplating the meaning of life. Regardless, there is something internal that helps us intuitively understand that reflecting embodies the past. In fact, *reflection* means the return of energy waves from a surface and is dependent upon the relationship between matter and energy (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Mathematically, this relationship between matter and energy is represented as $R + T = 1$, where R is the reflection coefficient (Fig. 1)

$$R = \frac{I_R}{I_I} = \left(\frac{E_{0R}}{E_{0I}} \right)^2 = \left(\frac{n_1 - n_2}{n_1 + n_2} \right)^2$$

Figure 1. Formula for reflection coefficient (Griffiths, 1981, p. 363)

and T is the transmission coefficient (Fig. 2).

$$T = \frac{I_T}{I_I} = \frac{\epsilon_2 V_2}{\epsilon_1 V_1} \left(\frac{E_{0T}}{E_{0I}} \right)^2 = \frac{n_2}{n_1} \left(\frac{2n_1}{n_1 + n_2} \right)^2$$

Figure 2. Formula for transmission coefficient (Griffiths, 1981, p. 363)

This formula works when initially transmitted energy (T) contacts matter. In other words, the energy that cannot be taken into the matter is rejected and the remainder of energy (R) is reflected back. When matter is selfish and absorbs more energy, the corresponding reflection becomes irregular and the reflection becomes distorted. In this way, artists act as mirrors by

developing the skill of observing life and clearly reflecting it back to us, in and through their medium of expression. When an artist is successful in reflecting an appropriate depiction of life, society rewards them with acceptance. Modern artists are adorned with such praise that it drives many to mirror world views without having one of their own, in an endless struggle of one-upmanship for the hope of celebrity-like acceptance. The result of this, suffering is the tool used in life to sand away the rough edges of our ego until we have become polished. The time it takes to heal from our suffering depends on how deep the sands of suffering rub. If erosion of the ego happens too quickly, a sense of injustice consumes us because losing a part of oneself unwillingly is painful. Nevertheless, it is through this process of loss that we become refined and reach maturation. For example, my parents were doomsday preppers in the 1980's who denied their children a public education in order to prepare for the end of days. As a result, I was removed from public school when I was in the third grade; and since that time, I have lived a life outside the box. In fact, most of my childhood was a life of homelessness, on the run from imaginary enemies that were created in the unstable minds of my parents. Regardless, after the world failed to end, I grew old enough to be legally responsible for myself, and life became more difficult. Much to my misfortune, I found myself uneducated and unable to compete in a capitalist society in which education was the reward for a better life; education was beyond the price I could afford. Mired in this endless cycle of having no money for education and no way to make more without education, I became angry and frustrated by the confines of society. In my 20's, I saved money from the low waged employment I could find to pay for adult literacy classes; I worked at least 120 hours a week, to support my endeavor, which made learning next to impossible. This hardship created a pattern of events which involved dropping out of school only to return again when I had saved enough money to pay for a semester of classes. The

expense of college tuition forced the process to consume time, which caused earlier credits earned to expire. These combined factors of unreasonable college tuition, expired credits, and minimum wage salaries culminated into a Chinese finger trap situation that I could not escape. It was then that I realized the pattern, college was not about “education” but about maintaining caste systems (Wilkerson, 2020).

I found unrest in the revelation that life is nothing more than a set of patterns; more importantly, I learned my meager position in society was far less than what I had hoped. Although society teaches that we are free to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; quite the opposite, societal institutions that operate healthcare discrimination, prison inadequacy, and education for profit are hypocritical examples maintained by the elite. These institutions embolden corruption, shame, and degradation. In fact, this pattern of corruption dovetails the model of ancient Rome when it was teetering on the edge of collapse (Murphy, 2008). Next, it reaffirmed, like the peons of ancient Rome, that I was meant to be treated harshly and held down because that was where I belonged in the Western model (Wilts, 2017). The recognition of this particular pattern generated hurt and required a great deal of time to personally resolve. Nevertheless, prior to recognizing this pattern, I had operated with the idea that my character could achieve incredible success. Furthermore, I believed that if I worked hard enough, my talents and efforts would be seen and appreciated by others. Existing in the “out” crowd produced a perpetual state of unrest because, no matter my efforts, I could never quite bring my hopes to fruition. I remained confused until I stopped to look closer.

While considering the hurt of the patterns of hypocrisy I had observed, I stumbled upon the answer to my unrest; the analogous depiction of our society found in Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (n.d.). In this story, a perfect city called

Omelas that is nirvana exists. However, this city tortures a child in the basement of a house. For the price of living in a perfect city is the knowledge that the pain inflicted upon a child is what enables the tranquil Shangri-la to exist. The moral dilemma of this tale lies in whether you would stay in Omelas, thus causing more pain on the child, or be one who would walk away. While pondering this short story, it dawned on me that I would never evolve from the basement of society because society needed me there for the whole system to work. It was understanding this key point that brought me comfort, because I knew that my suffering supported another's enjoyment. Instead of resentment, I felt an understanding of that relationship. As in the equation $R + T = 1$, it is my misery that defines someone's happiness; I am the contrast in the relationship. Therefore, they cannot be happy unless I am miserable. In the same way I concluded, although I could not control whether society kept me in the basement, I could control my thinking about it, thereby disabling society's ability to play the game of value contrasting.

This skewed viewpoint of life perpetuates the thinking that one child must live in the basement so the other child can live in comfort. My personal suffering has polished the mirror of my mind to witness the game that is at play: the comfortable among us have ingrained within our culture the idea that if one does not have a formal education, one is uneducated and is to be treated as such. Society has drawn a line that designates who is among the "in" crowd, while simultaneously designating an "out" crowd. No matter how hard some may try, the "in" crowd will forever be unattainable; elitism will prevail in a society that endorses the "in" crowd. On the other hand, I am grateful that the system into which I was born placed me in the "out" crowd and condemned me to a life of hardship. In my opinion, it has been through this journey of personal suffering that I have achieved wisdom. I have learned how to learn, how to reflect clearly; and most importantly, I have learned who I am and what I have to offer. Nevertheless, those outside

the basement dictate that I cannot define or place value on myself, just as I cannot graduate myself. Instead, someone else must declare that I have suffered enough as an outsider, *only* then may I be released from the basement. Consequently, as I play this educational game of repeating classes in a system exclusive of the poor common man I reflect upon this semester with a grateful heart, rooted in the understanding that I do not actually require more education, only patience.

References

- Flatter. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flatter>.
- Griffiths, D. J. (1981). *Introduction to Electrodynamics (2nd ed.)*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Honest. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/honest>.
- Le Guin, U. K. (n.d.). *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, from <https://sites.asiasociety.org/asia21summit/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/3.-Le-Guin-Ursula-The-Ones-Who-Walk-Away-From-Omelas.pdf>.
- Murphy, C. (2008). *Are we Rome?: The fall of an empire and the fate of America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Reflection. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reflection>.
- Wilts, A. (2017, June 22). *Trump says he doesn't want a 'poor person' to be in charge of US economy*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-poor-person-economy-commerce-secretary-rich-cabinet-appointments-a7803096.html>.
- Wilkerson, I. (2020, July 28). *America's 'untouchables': The silent power of the caste system*. Retrieved December 08, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/28/untouchables-caste-system-us-race-martin-luther-king-india>.