

NOAH HOCH – “BUS WINDOW REVELATIONS”

Tree ... tree ... speed limit... tree ... Exit 46 next left... tree ... tree ... light pole ... tree ...

That’s pretty much how it goes on the bus rides to away games. I sit alone next to the window with my knees pressed up against the seat back in front of me. With one hand, I pick at the green duct tape that the bus driver used to cover the slice some delinquent cut into the strange material. With the other, I scroll through playlists on my iPod. Looking out the window, the trees just passing by, I can see the ghost of my face in the glass and I’m always reminded of those movies that begin with shots from inside a car, staring out at the fields of autumn trees, nature’s memorial to the wilderness that once existed where the roads are now. As the credits fade in and fade out on the screen, always avoiding the direct center, a comfortable song like Peter Gabriel’s “Solsbury Hill” just barely plays over the sound of tires on asphalt. For some reason, this is my favorite way for a movie to begin. I guess I like not knowing who the boy is in the car, but knowing that whoever he is, whatever he’s doing, he’s going somewhere.

I don’t sit alone because I’m a recluse. Quite the contrary, I thrive when I’m around other people, and my best friends are all on the team. But, the bus has become the only place where I don’t feel obligated to be working; it is a sanctuary for my thoughts, my imagination. In the passing fields my mind builds an entire metropolis and focuses in like a camera swooping down from a crane on a single boy, suitcase in hand, gawking at the intensity of a hundred-plus story steel mountain. It’s his first time in the city and ...

Tree. The stick structure derails my train of thought and I am hack on the bus. The interruption reminds me subtly that what I see through this transparent, glassed screen is only a figment. There is no reality out there in what I see ... at least not yet.

On the bus, over the chatter of my teammates, my thoughts and my ideas may be fleeting and incomplete but they’re enough to compel me to keep looking out the window. Someday, that’s what I’ll call my production studio: BUS WINDOW REVELATIONS. It will be a tribute to all those days where, past the water-splotted glass, I would see the two lovers finally reuniting, the once ambitious politician sitting at his desk crying tears of defeat, or the quiet resolve of an old man on his deathbed in the shadows of a mourning family. This is my imagination. This is my dream. This is who I am. I am reflected in the pane and I am reflected in movies behind it.

I like to think that I’m a lot like those movie beginnings. The credits roll like a silent “thank you” to all those who have put hard work into making me, but here the end of their work only becomes the beginning of my story. I’m that boy in the car. I don’t know what he’s doing, but I like that he’s going somewhere. And for now, on the bus, I’m content to stare out the window. iPod in hand, and let the revelations come with each passing tree.

COMMENTARY

Harvard received over 29,000 applications for the class of 2013, and this essay is a great example of how to make your application stand out from the roughly 28,999 others. The author takes bits and pieces common to most applications – sports team, busy schedule, grand ambition – but imbues them with an introspective and personal glow that lights up what’s behind his jam-packed resume and stellar GPA.

We open on the image of the author looking pensive by the window of a school bus, but quickly move into the realm of metaphor and fantasy as the objects outside the window become a backdrop to the author’s internal film screenings. The author treads lightly on the sports issue, giving us just enough for context but holding back so that it doesn’t distract from what the essay is really about: his love of him. Through the rest of the essay, we move with the author back and forth between fantasy and reality. The writer affords us rare insight into his personality through the vehicle of his personal imaginations and fantasies – these are the types of creative outlets that define the writer, an individual who shows that he is inspired by the possibilities of him and the even more infinite range of his own potential.

At a few points, this essay gets bogged down with excessive derail. Descriptions like “the green duct tape that the bus driver used to cover the slice some delinquent cut into the strange material” give us a nice visual setting for the rest of the essay, but they tell us nothing about the author himself. At its best, his candid writing conveys the applicant’s sincere dreams for the future: “I’m that boy in the car. I don’t know what he’s doing, but I like that he’s going somewhere.” All in all, this essay succeeds because it is a bus- window revelation of its own – of the boy behind the application.

--- Jillian Goodman