WRIT 4250

Sample Exploratory/Focusing Paragraph for WAS

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The following is a sample “Exploratory/Focusing” paragraph for a Writing in Augmented Space Project.

Try to write such a paragraph that moves from the general to the specific and then back to general: from speculations about genre, place, ideas > to your original inspirations, some facts, possible views/gazes/objects, possible “layers": images, texts, parallels, metaphors  > to feelings, purpose.

**Borne Ceaselessly into the Past**

**(Working Title)**

I want to write a personal essay set in the Rose Garden on the lake shore of Duluth, exploring themes of American identity, change, self-creation, self mythologizing, and origins.  I was originally drawn to this idea by the location of the old National Guard Armory across the street from the Rose Garden, where Robert Zimmerman (a young Bob Dylan) saw Buddy Holly and other famous musicians perform in 1959. Holly died with others in a plane crash three days later.  This concert was one of the formative experiences that inspired Dylan to pursue a musical career that saw him invent and mythologize many identities and personas for himself.  I was struck by the parallels between that aspect of Dylan’s story and the character Jay Gatz from Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, who, in the novel from the 1920s, gets himself hired onboard a wealthy man's yacht in Duluth and sets sail to travel the world with a changed name and a new invented identity.  Gatsby later becomes rich and mysterious.  Both Dylan’s and Gatz/Gatsby’s stories happen to start here—at the Armory and the Duluth harbor entrance, within sight of each other from the Rose Garden—and both stories end in the East, with fame, riches, and "greatness" for both Dylan and Gatsby which entail an erasure of their pasts in Duluth (and the Upper Midwest) and the ordinary facts of where they were from and who they really were.  I could also look into the life of Leif Erikson, whose statue stands in the Rose Garden.  Maybe I could also make something of the fact that the Rose Garden itself is an invented disguise: it is a layer that sits on top of I-35 which runs underground.  I-35 is also built on top of Chester Creek, which empties into Lake Superior at the Rose Garden through a culvert.  The subterranean creek is like the real Zimmerman and the real Gatz: covered but still flowing, still in there, repressed but undeniable.  I want to argue that this myth of self-creation and self mythologizing through disguise, transformation, and denial of the past is a characteristic of the American identity and the American notion of individuality.  I want to leave the walker, looking east over the lake as if toward some young American's future, but aware of the fact that they must turn their backs on where (and who) they are, and with some sense that the past cannot be denied: as Fitzgerald writes at the end of The Great Gatsby: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past.”