
Research Conducted by Emma Murdock and Dr. Lori Burns

Abstract
Progressive Rock as a genre has always, since its inception in the late 1960s, been grounded in storytelling. Steven Wilson is highly regarded as a progressive rock artist, and he declares his own motivation to tell stories through music, word, and image. His most recent album, Hand. Cannot. Erase. (2015), is a multimedia music project that features music recordings, videos, narrative texts, artwork, photography, historical artifacts and social media. For this multimedia project, Wilson has built a story that features multiple levels of paratextual materials, but the individual media together comprise a hypertext.

A comprehensive understanding of the narrative is achieved through access to all media. To illustrate this album’s multimodality and intermedia, this research examines two significant songs on the album that communicate essential elements of the narrative.

Summary of the Narrative of Hand. Cannot. Erase
Influenced by documentary, Dreams of a Life:
• story of Joyce Carol Vincent, 38-year-old London woman who isolated herself before her mysterious death.
• body remained undiscovered for over 2 years.12

Hand. Cannot. Erase.:• 7 years of narration from a 30-year-old painter known only as “H.”
• H isolates herself and becomes increasingly reluctant to leave her apartment.
• spends her days recalling family memories and regretting past decisions, until her mysterious disappearance.

“Perfect Life”
• Lyrics from the point of view of a woman who has lost her sister many years ago.
• The sisters are very close until their sudden separation, which leaves them extremely far apart, at least mentally, from each other.
• Depicts how emotional ties between sisters cannot be broken, even upon separation.

• Video depicts a time when two teenage sisters have the “perfect life” together, until their separation, which leaves the younger sister disoriented and preoccupied by memories of her older sister.
• Narratives of memory and nostalgia prominent in Wilson’s earlier videos, such as those for Porcupine Tree songs “Lazarus” and “Time Flies,” as well as those for solo songs “The Raven That Refused To Sing” and “Drive Home.”

“Happy Returns/ Ascendant Here On…”
• H addresses brother after much time without contact.
• Her life has been troublesome since their last visit.
• H expresses how fast these years without seeing her brother have gone by.
• Lyrics depict how siblings can fall out of touch to the point of barely knowing each other once they lead lives outside their childhood home.
• These are the final lyrics on the album, and, as this final song has the same title as final words of the blog, corresponds to the end of the character's story.
• Leaves many questions. Although H is interested in disappearing, “I’ll finish this tomorrow” implies she plans to return to what she was doing tomorrow, not disappear.

• H refers directly to situation described in the lyrics in her “21 December 2014” blog post.
• H’s brother and his family still send H Christmas cards each year and invitations to visit.
• H recalls that she met her brother’s family for the first time 4 years ago and has not seen them since.
• H writes that her brother’s children were “too young to understand who (she) was” when she met them, so they likely do not remember her.
• The final blog post H writes only contains words “Happy Returns/ Ascendant Here On...” and photos of light.

References

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