

Glenn by David Young

Reading Guide by Janet Somerville

Glenn Gould

MINI BIOGRAPHY (www.glenn Gould.com)

- born Sept. 25, 1932
- at 3 years old he could read notation and had absolute pitch
- at 5 years old he began composing
- Robert Fulford wrote that at 9 “*Glenn was isolated because he was working like hell to be a great man. He had a tremendous and loving affection for music... It was an utter, complete feeling. He knew who he was and where he was going.*”
- at 10 he began lessons at the Royal Conservatory of Music
- at 13 he passed the associate membership, signifying a professional level of achievement
- 1945: 1st public performance (“Boy, age 12, Shows Genius as Organist”)
- 1947: 1st public recital included Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt (“genius as profound as their own was at the keyboard”)
- January 11, 1955 New York debut
- June 1955: CBS studios recording of Bach’s Goldberg Variations
- 1957: European tour + 2 weeks in Soviet Union (1st Canadian to perform there)
- 1960: 1st appearance on American t.v. with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic
- April 10, 1964: last public appearance as a pianist
- 1981: re-recorded the Goldberg Variations
- 1982: formed a chamber orchestra in Toronto with himself as conductor
- October 4, 1982: died in Toronto after having suffered a stroke. He’s buried in Mt. Pleasant cemetery.

HIS IDEAS

- obsessed with technology and the ability to “take two” in studio recording

IDEA OF NORTH: embodies solitude, independence, courage, elusiveness, spirituality

Act One

Central conceit

We are inside Glenn Gould's head. Anything is possible. There can be time shifts for each character without warning.

The characters are symbolized by various stages in Gould's life:

- a) Prodigy
- b) Performer
- c) Perfectionist
- d) Puritan

The play is structured through the movements of Bach's THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS.

ARIA a.k.a. "the ground bass"

Two recordings made by GG.
1955 (Gould was 23)

1981 (Gould was 48)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• technical• trying to get the notes right• faster tempo	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• more emotional• mature• slower, more thoughtful• reverence for what comes between the notes• "architecture of silence"
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In the background Wagner's SIEGFRIED IDYLL plays. (It is the piece that Gould recorded with his chamber orchestra in 1982, the year of his death.)

There is a prologue of sorts with a collage of voices that reveal public perceptions about Gould:

- dunked his hands in really hot water
- hat scarf gloves
- quit performing
- child prodigy
- this special stool
- photographic memory
- total hypochondriac
- Fran's restaurant
- from the Beaches
- obsessed with technology

ARIA

- vocal collage of truth/rumours about Gould
- child prodigy, dunked his hands in scalding water, etc.

VARIATION 1: ECSTASY

defined as: “Standing apart from the self”
 “kind of sensual drunkenness”
 “ in maturity...a kind of inconsolable longing”

Historical context: BUSONI—great interpreter of Bach in 19th century (arrogance of the young Gould)

VARIATION 2: THE IVORY TOWER

-take two-ness

Prodigy: dominoes/ candy hearts

-deconstructing the structure of the Goldberg's (counting ARIA, 1, 2/ 1,2,3/ etc..)

-3=TRINITY (powerful number)

-labels: the Recluse
 the Neurotic Wreck
 the Stoic
 the Sexual Enigma
 the Vaudevillian

VARIATION 3: THE POLAR SEA VERSUS RED

canon: musical question and answer

mother as martyr

paradox: apparent contradiction: “frozen, yet brimming with life”

NB. Typical adolescent behaviour/bad report card/ sent to his room/ shouting notes from his bedroom (perfect pitch reinforced) Prodigy also eccentric: “The Daily Woof” “Das Wunder Kind is currently banished...forbidden to touch da piano”

“...an uncomfortable throne” TRANSITION to the next scene

VARIATION 4: CREATIVE DECEPTION

-biographer as forger: SPLICING (joining together)

-cultural allusions: a) Minnesota Fats (famous pool player)
b) Bellevue NYC mental hospital

25th

-“deep in the heart of Bach’s cathedral”

-“ Holy Trinity embedded in a sacred architecture”

-ecstasy: standing apart from self (cf: Variation 1)

∞ PERPETUITY: the end implies the beginning (Framing of ARIA)

VARIATION 5: FISH AND FISHERMAN

Prodigy: attempts to normalize childhood experiences with neighbour Mr. Ramsay

“I don’t want to fool the fish. I want to fool Mr. Ramsay.”

degree of separation: “inside Bach’s music so much of the time”
“I converse with the dead.”

appeal of the North

solitude

-silence of dead fish (note the diction ff to pp) juxtaposed with screaming

VARIATION 6: TURNING AWAY –from the ball; from his fear; from society; from school

The Game: word play/ baseball game of catch

“play ball” = metaphor for life

literal meaning: Prodigy has never played a game of catch

BRAVERY: 1) Ghandi (passive resistance to violence)
2) Prodigy catching a ball with bare hands
3) To quit school at Grade 11 (not keeping options open)

-reference to Leonard Bernstein (conductor of the NY Philharmonic) (**Play Youtube clip**)

VARIATION 7: TURNING TOWARD—the SELF
(comfortable in his own head)

paradox: freedom = solitary confinement

power of being alone “a statement of belief”

“strange beauty” CF: alludes to poem by W.B. Yeats “Easter 1916”
“ all is changed, changed utterly
a terrible beauty is born”

VARIATION 8: PURE RECOGNITION

(1) of his talent by Von Karajan and (2) that he had a choice to leave the performing stage

-listening vs watching

- reference to ECSTASY: “all of us soaring up and up and up”

- professional affirmation: better than Busoni (the great interpreter of Bach before Gould CF: Prodigy “I am Busoni”

VARIATION 9: THE ROAD TO MOSCOW

1957: Gould is 25 1st N.A. Musician to perform behind the Iron Curtain

-fear/fantasy

-crazy/annoying fan

PHILOSOPHY: “We invent what we need and call it truth.”

-reading KAFKA The Metamorphosis (Czech novelist, writes about “nightmarish reality”—obsessed with entrapment) appropriate because he was raised behind the Iron Curtain

VARIATION 10: PELTED WITH ROSES

Performer: totally in control of the moment relishing the power

Roses= symbol of adulation/ become a burden (cf: photo)

3 sounds: a) Glasgow football match (potential violence of a mob)
 b) Nuremburg Rally chants (evil potential)
 c) Arab women grieving at the Battle of Algiers (painfully sad)

VARIATION 11: CHASING THE CADENCE

danger of over-prescribed meds with contra-indication

-real/imaginary ailments (hypochondria)

-danger of self diagnosis

SIDE EFFECTS: e.g. hypertension, insomnia, impotence, psychosis

- final call: Valium! Valium! Valium. Valium. Valium. (sedative: calming to the point of limiting emotion)

** Is it better to feel something than to feel nothing?

VARIATION 12: THE TEL AVIV PIANO

-CREATIVE VISUALIZATION: thinks of the Chickering piano at the cottage on Lake Simcoe to replace the oinker of a “desert piano” in Israel

strategy: being inside the music while the vacuum cleaner is ON (COMPLETE ABSORPTION IN THE MOMENT)

“I can’t hear the music! Jessie! Turn the vacuum cleaner on!”

VARIATION 13: BLOODSPORT

piano harp: manifestation of Gould's fears on stage= oppressed/crushed by performing

bloodsport: critics enjoy the extremes: "tragedy that Mr. Gould's behaviour produced laughter"

fabricates excuses/ uses hyperbole

"a question of nerves"

"sub clinical polio"

Columbia capitalized on his eccentricities "another freak in the brothel of show business"

VARIATION 14: HE HURT ME

"pissing match" between Gould and Hubbert (piano tuner) who refused to tighten the action and then squeezed Gould's shoulder:

*NERVE DAMAGE

*CORTISONE SHOTS

*NEUROLOGIST AT JOHNS HOPKINS (6 mos. away from stage)

* SUED STEINWAY AND SONS on Dec6/60 for 300K and won

VARIATION 15: THIS IS WHERE I GET OFF

philosophy: "We die a little bit every second we're alive"

cf: T.S. Eliot : birth, copulation, death

Samuel Beckett: eat, f**k, die

-last public performance: April 10, 1964 (Wiltshire Ebell Theatre, L.A.)

analogy:

a) THE GAME: if you were a bird....

Prodigy: budgie

Performer: peregrine falcon

Perfectionist: bower bird

Puritan: dodo

b) FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT DEATH

Prodigy: Tell mother I loved her!

Performer: A blinding flash of glory! Perfect!

Perfectionist: My conscience is clear!

Puritan: Not Yet!

INTERVAL

VARIATION 16: THE FRENCH OVERTURE

- on video screens
- 3 documentaries Gould produced:
 - 1) Quiet in the Land
 - 2) The Idea of North
 - 3) The Latecomers

Act Two

VARIATION 17: THE SOUND OF MYSELF

- influenced by Kafka's idea that the artist must remove himself from the world
- playfulness: PRODIGY imagines what a novella about his life would be: *The Longing*

cf: Ecstasy as "inconsolable longing"

VARIATION 18: ACTUALITY VERSUS REALISM

- actuality: rush of PURE EVENT
- realism: artificial event infinitely manipulated by technology
- NYC: a "colossus"/ too intimidating

VARIATION 19: ACTION AT A DISTANCE

- reveres technology's potential
- allusion to GG's recording sent into space on a satellite as an example of human artistic achievement
- * ARCHITECTURE OF SILENCE: "Whispers from the deep place between the notes."

VARIATION 20: TEL AVIV: THE IDEAL PERFORMANCE

- creative visualization: imagine playing the ideal piano—family Chickering at the cottage in Uptergrove
- "the unheard music" through extraneous noise—radio playing, vacuum cleaner etc.
- lives increasingly inside his head
- ANALOGY: "I must go in like a horse with blinders" when playing Beethoven

VARIATION 21: THE CANADIAN UNCONSCIOUS

- interest in solitude and isolation
- vastness of Cdn. landscape is connected by technology
- ANALOGY: Russian doll approach to composition (narrative nesting within narrative)
- control of the medium: UNITY/COHESION/STRUCTURE
- Idea of North: national anthem/ chamber music for the Cdn unconscious/ even disasters are scripted

VARIATION 22: BEHAVIOUR AND BELIEF: A FUGUE STATE

- psychosomatic symptoms verging on hypochondria
- paradox of PLEASURE/PAIN “ecstatic release” French call it “the little death” aka orgasm
- “a rush of primitive carnal energy” in a fan letter (wants GG to go and live on her cattle ranch in Texas)
- “love affairs must be conducted in private”
- PURPOSE OF ART: a state of wonder and serenity

VARIATION 23: CONDUCTING THE SELF/SELF-CONDUCT

paradox: by making sounds I show people what I hear

solitude=conviviality

stewardship: musician at Juilliard (Stephen Price)

-interested in conducting + playing @ same time “a whole new way of seeing myself”

-fantasy of novel=scripting his novel cf: *The Longing*

VARIATION 24: THE CENTIPEDE

- 1) fire at Eaton Auditorium
- 2) Gould’s piano is dropped
- 3) disconnecting life support of Mrs. Gould

VARIATION 25: LOSS

“the tone of experience without the experience itself”

death of bird.....imagined death of Gould’s mother

VARIATION 26: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBTEXT

schizoid dilemma

Desperate need for love	Fear of commitment
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- neutralized neurosis by turning it into vaudeville (song and dance routine)
- hypochondria= Gould’s doubts about the validity of his existence

VARIATION 27: THE HOMECOMING

Gould = Deity to Stephen Price (student at Juilliard)—a god worth worshipping

MUSIC: pure speech for the inner ear

VARIATIONS 28-29: MR DEETH

paradox: freedom in control

“Be brave. Be joyfully who you are. Embrace the contradiction.”

VARIATION 30: THE QUOD LIBET

-after the stewardship of Stephen Price—there’s a resurrection of GG

- he decides he’s going to abandon recording and conduct and compose instead (working on a piece based on the Book of Revelation)

-“a revolution in my head”—he has a stroke

FINAL ARIA

-played at Gould’s funeral

- consider the development of Gould from Prodigy to Performer to Perfectionist to Puritan
- what are the common obsessions/preoccupations?
- consider the use of sound
- the idea of north
- the idea of solitude

Francois Girard (1963-)
Director

THIRTY-TWO SHORT FILMS ABOUT GLENN GOULD

“In 1993, Girard had his international breakthrough with *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, which he also co-wrote with Don McKellar. Its structure inspired by Gould's famous rendition of the "Goldberg Variations," the film was heralded as a visionary take on the life of the iconoclastic pianist that skillfully combined fact and fiction. It earned a score of Genies -- Canada's equivalent of the Oscar -- as well as particular acclaim for actor Colm Feore's title performance.”

~Rebecca Flint *All Movie Guide*

<http://www.musicolog.com/girard.asp>

A Film Review by James Berardinelli

Canadian musician and composer Glenn Gould was born in Toronto in 1932. By age three, his gifts were apparent, and he was performing professionally nine years later. Gould became one of the world's most renowned classical performers, making more than 60 recordings, as well as working in the fields of publishing, conducting, radio and television broadcasting, and scoring feature films. His version of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" is definitive, and was included as one of the samples of humanity's best on both Voyager spacecraft. Gould died of a stroke in 1982 at the age of 50.

Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould presents a unique, impressionistic look at the offbeat musician. Instead of giving a chronological view of Gould's life, writer/director Francois Girard has elected to present a variety of snapshots, including recreations of actual events (with Gould played brilliantly by Colm Feore) and interviews with real-life contemporaries and friends. Says Girard: "As Gould was such a complex character, the biggest problem was to find a way to look at his work and deal with his visions. The film is built of fragments, each one trying to capture an aspect of Gould. There is no way of putting Gould in one box. The film gives the viewer 32 impressions of him. I didn't want to reduce him to one dimension."

Give Girard credit for understanding his subject and the best method of portraying him. The character and personality of Glenn Gould come across brilliantly in this film. While nothing ninety-three minutes in length can hope to express all the facets of a man of Gould's depth, glimpses of elements lead to an understanding of the whole.

There are indeed 32 episodes, ranging in length from under one minute to just over six. Five of these are interviews, several have no dialogue, and three show Colm Feore's Gould wandering a winterscape. The most original two segments are "Gould Meets McLaren", which features animated spheres dancing to Gould's music, and "Pills", which contains closeups of all the various medicines resident in the musician's bathroom.

Some of the episodes are funny; some are poignant. In "Crossed Paths", Gould's friends recall his love of talking. One man remembers falling asleep while on the phone with Gould, then waking up hours later to find that the one-sided conversation was still in progress. "The Tip" recounts how Gould made a killing on the stock market by defying the advice of his broker. "Motel Wawa" presents Gould's views on the supernatural and the afterlife, which leads directly into "Forty-Nine", in which the musician expresses his fear of turning that age because the digits (four and nine) add up to thirteen.

Colm Feore captures Gould perfectly, bringing his energy and restlessness, as well as his quiet aloofness, to the screen. Because of the unusual nature of *Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*, it's easy to forget that we're watching an actor play Gould, not the man himself, and Feore does nothing to spoil the illusion.

In "Lake Simcoe", one of the movie's first segments, Gould states, "I'm fortunate to have been brought up in an environment where music was always present." The same can be said of *Thirty-Two Short Films*, where Gould's recordings form a backdrop to nearly every scene. This is a movie to be savored by those who are familiar with the work of Glenn Gould, and an opportunity for those who aren't to explore the essence of a rare musical genius. It's an eclectic film, and an astonishing portrait.

http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/t/thirty_two.html

Glenn

by David Young

/30 marks

Student aids: You may use the online copy of *Glenn* as well as your notes while you write this test. Please complete PART C directly on the test paper. Print a hard copy of PARTS A and B and staple it to this sheet.

Please respond in sentence form.

PART A: Interpreting passages (/10 marks : 2 marks each)

Explain how FIVE of the following quotations contribute to plot, character development, or themes/issues in the play.

- a) *...obsessed with technology...drove around all night...he took pills...Fran's restaurant...pretty sure he was...a recluse...gay?*
- b) *Aria, one. Two. One, two, three.*
- c) *...carried us deep inside Bach's cathedral. Now, with the 25th, we are granted a pause, an opportunity to cast our eyes up to the rose window and meditate upon the larger mysteries.*
- d) *I mentally transported myself to Lake Simcoe, sat down in our cottage at the stubby-legged Chickering and played the whole concert through in my head...I was absolutely free of commitment to that oinker of a piano!*
- e) *I believe a musical performance is not a contest but a love affair and that love affairs ought to be conducted in private. I believe that public performance is the last blood sport.*
- f) *The cardinal is on the kitchen table in a Birk's box. When dawn comes I'm going to bury him like an Egyptian pharaoh. In the meantime there is a grace note in this silence...I stand in the nave of Bach's cathedral. I listen.*
- g) *I have an enormous compulsion to gaze upon the Polar seas, Jessie. The wind has not touched another face. It is your wind. The day is your day.*
- h) *These are the happiest days of my life, Jessie! I have had a revolution in my head.*

PART B: Essay (/15 marks)

Your essay will be evaluated based on the appropriateness of the content (direct reference to events in the play), style (proper essay format; use of transition words/phrases) and adherence to spelling and grammar conventions.

In a well-organized essay provide a portrait of the stages of Glenn Gould's career as a gifted musician with an obsession with sound. Be sure to include specific reference to his early beginnings as a prodigy as well as his keen interest in technology. Show how sound drives his life. You could use David Young's character names to mark the passage of time: prodigy, performer, perfectionist, and puritan.

PART C: Caught Ya (/5 marks)

Please make corrections to the passage below. There are errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Each correction you make is worth ½ mark.

Gould's first piano teacher was his mother at an early age she realised that her son had perfect pitch. As a child Gould discovers the freedom in solitude. He loved to stay at the family cottage on Lake Simcoe and listened to the rythums of nature. Which later appealed to him with his idea of north, he made that into a radio documentary for CBC.

As an adult, Gould was the first North American artist to perform behind the iron curtin. He decided to quit the concert stage when he understood the creative potential of "take two-ness." as a result, he spent his early middle age in the recording studio taping and splicing the perfect takes. Affter Gould dies, NASA sends a recording of him playing Bach's "Goldberg variations" up into space on the Voyager it left our solar system in 1989.