

Reflection Statement

On The Authority of Authors

"Writing gives you the illusion of control, and then you realise it's just an illusion..."

- David Sedaris

My Major Work, “*On The Authority of Authors*” is a short story inspired by Italo Calvino’s postmodernist masterpiece “*If on a winter’s night a traveller...¹*”, presenting an antithetical observation upon the nature of literature from the perspective of the authors who create great works, rather than the readers who interact with them. My purpose in constructing “*On the Authority of Authors*” was to compose a playful intellectual examination of the way in which authors interact with the literature they create through an accessible short story and an interrogation of postmodernist ideals within literature. In addition, I was intrigued by Wolfgang Iser’s theory of “the convergence of text and reader²” and the way in which the reader reveals a “multiplicity” of connections within the text.

My work could be published in “The Times Literary Supplement” as it is composed for a worldwide literary audience who will appreciate the litany of intertextual references. In addition, my work is very much in accordance with this publication’s guiding ethos concerning “...the importance of ideas, and the transformative power of art³”. I was intrigued by the idea of experimenting with the voices of different authors and attempting to characterise them through their writing styles. The intertextual homage to such authors culminates in the final section of my Major Work, “If on a summer’s morning...” an extended frame narrative written in Italo Calvino’s characteristic second person style, through which my core perspective concerning the nature of the relationship between author and work is finally exposed.

¹ CALVINO, I., & WEAVER, W. (1981). *If on a winter's night a traveler*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

² ISER, W. “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.” *New Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1972, pp. 279–299.

³ The TLS. (2019). *About the TLS – The TLS*. [online] Available at: <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/about-the-tls/> [Accessed 2 Jul. 2019].

The title "On The Authority of Authors" is a double entendre which reflects the intricate and uncertain nature of my writing. It refers to the collective noun for authors, an "authority", illustrating the enormous number of authors who attend the dinner party, as well as referring to my examination of authorial authority and intent, in conjunction with the relationship between such authority and literature.

My concept was further inspired by the poetry of WB Yeats in the Preliminary "Critical Study of Literature". In particular, the final stanza of his poem "Among School Children"⁴ became seminal in shaping the content of my major work:

"O body swayed to music, O brightening glance/How can we know, the dancer from the dance?"

Throughout the piece, I characterise the relationship between author and work as an intricate "dance", constructing a metaphorical motif that enhances the textual integrity of my writing as observed in the melancholy musing "You no longer have control of your dance partner, instead every single reader is permitted to experience the wondrous movement...". This sentiment reflects the thesis established by Iser which has shaped my writing and perspectives on the nature of literature. In addition, Yeats' lines appear as the epigraph for my work due to the extraordinary way in which they encapsulate the philosophical message of my composition concerning the intricate, interwoven relationship between author and literature, clearly illustrating the way in which my learning throughout Stage 6 English Advanced has shaped my Major Work.

Despite reading a wide and eclectic range of novels I was largely unfamiliar with my elected form of "short fiction". Therefore, I had to immerse myself within this genre, reading widely from

⁴ YEATS, W. B., & FINNERAN, R. J. (1989). The collected poems of W.B. Yeats. New York, Collier Books.

collections by Hemingway ('Hills like white elephants'⁵, 'A very short story'⁶, 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro'⁷) to Raymond Carver's "*What we talk about when we talk about love*"⁸ and "*Cathedral*"⁹. In addition, I engaged extensively with Kate Grenville's "*The Writing Book*"¹⁰, a "how to guide" which was particularly influential during my initial composition stages due to the way in which it informed me of how to actually begin the complex writing process. This research into form developed my understanding of the conventions of short stories such as portraying a narrow focus (a single dinner party), adhering to a restrictive time frame (in this case "the golden night") and understanding limitations of character development (portraying authors who audiences will already be familiar with due to their own intertextual knowledge and thus, not having to shape new characters within their perception of the work). Seeking a more stylistically appropriate way to split my work into sections other than the "chapters" so emblematic of novels, I was influenced by TS Eliot¹¹ and therefore separated the work into musical sections such as "Prelude" and "Movement one: Allegretto" hence, continuing the "dancer" motif and metaphor and conforming to the stylistic features of short stories. The titles of each "movement" reflect the events of the work through the lens of musical tempos. For example, the humorous nature of Italo Calvino's writing style and thus, personality within my work is represented through the title "Scherzo" or, "a musical joke" which adorns the movement in which he is introduced thus showcasing the intrinsic link between the content of the story and its form.

⁵ HEMINGWAY, E. (1927). *Men without women*

⁶ HEMINGWAY, E. (1925). *In Our Time*

⁷ HEMINGWAY, E. (1961). *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Short Stories*

⁸ CARVER, R. (2015). *What we talk about when we talk about love*. New York: Vintage.

⁹ CARVER, R. (2015). *Cathedral*. New York: Vintage.

¹⁰ GRENVILLE, K. (2014). *Writing Book*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

¹¹ ELIOT, TS. (1991). *Collected poems, 1909-1962*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Initially, I struggled to construct a plot and conceit through which my philosophical examination could be communicated. However, whilst simultaneously reading Woolf's "*Mrs Dalloway*¹²" and Shelley's "*Frankenstein*¹³" for my Advanced and Extension English courses I was inspired by the cataclysmic dinner party hosted by Clarissa and the circumstances under which "*Frankenstein*" was composed (a night of storytelling). From these two disparate sources came the core plot and narrative drive of my work "a gathering, a spectacular gathering (a gathering that any human lucky enough to have the honour to be invited to would be foolish not to attend" a concept which drove the remainder of my writing process. This concept was further cemented through my research into Judy Chicago's infamous, pioneering feminist artwork "*The Dinner Party*¹⁴". I sought to expand the scope of the examination initiated by Chicago from simply feminist observances on history to wider literary explorations.

An essential aspect of my work is the interaction between the "Authors" and the "Constructs". In shaping this interaction in an authentic way, I made sure that for each author I characterised I had read at least one of their texts in an effort to properly portray their voice within my own writing style. I conducted thorough experiments in my journal, writing page long fragments in the style of some of my favourite authors such as Tolstoy, Cervantes and Dickens in an effort to capture their distinct voice. This sense of voice is communicated through my portrayal of Oscar Wilde as "struggling to relate to Yeats' dilemmas on any level" in reference to Yeats' issues with feminine figures in his life, juxtaposed against Wildes' homosexual inclinations so profoundly communicated

¹² WOOLF, V. (2019). *Mrs Dalloway*. Penguin Books.

¹³SHELLEY M. (2016). *Frankenstein*. Vintage.

¹⁴CHICAGO, J. (1974). *The Dinner Party*. [Multimedia instillation] New York: Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

in his novella "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*"¹⁵ illustrating the way in which rigorous research and wide reading has shaped the authenticity of my writing.

During the drafting process, the density and redundancy that often occurred in my writing was revealed. George Orwell's essay "*Politics and the English Language*"¹⁶ in particular highlighted this issue within my work, encapsulated in his profound observation "the great enemy of clear language is insincerity". Thus, dense, repetitive and obnoxious sentences such as "The endless celestial expanse cycles over and over above the heads of The Constructs, a repetitive wheel whirling through the sky as the diners cycle one by one into the alcove" which appears in an early draft transformed into - "Stars wheel over head as one by one the hundreds of diners are discreetly called upon", a more concise, effective approach shaped by my ruthless editing process as well as my study in advanced English.

An initial critique of my setting was that the world I had constructed was too regular and understated for such an historical event. I reflected on this issue in the light of the Year 12 English Extension Module, "Literary Worlds" hence, my decision to emphasise the incredible experience undergone by the authors through the addition of an element of magical realism and mysticism within the overall post-modern style of my work. This is primarily manifested through setting in passages such as "The ethereal lights of the house emanate across the vastness of time and space". The adjective 'ethereal' creates a sense of wonder and magic whilst the reference to "time and space" constructs a distinct disconnect between our reality and the reality depicted. In an effort to ensure that this addition of magical realism would be authentic and successful I explored magical

¹⁵ WILDE, O. (2003). *The picture of Dorian Gray*. London ; New York, N.Y. :Penguin,

¹⁶ ORWELL, G. (1946). *Politics and the English Language*.

realist texts such as Bulgakov's "*The Master and Margarita*"¹⁷ and Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*"¹⁸. This research into style and form has shaped the way in which I have constructed my "literary world" to appear realistic yet unsettlingly extraordinary, enhancing the accessibility of my work and broadening its audience due to these fantastical elements.

A primary fear in composing my work was that it would appear self-inflated, impersonal and pretentious. In an effort to combat this, and in accordance with the postmodern content of my piece I included an element of self-reflexivity in the final moments of the story "We are just four personifications of literary constructs in the mind of a senior high school student... we don't need to know everything", highlighting the way in which content, form and research influenced the overall effect of my Major Work.

Ultimately, in reflecting upon the process of crafting my Extension Two Major Work I am met with an overwhelming sense of joy. This joy has permeated throughout every facet of the course from scribbling insane mind-maps in my journal to working closely with my mentor and meticulously combing through my writing. Perhaps most importantly, I feel as though through achieving my purpose and communicating my profound philosophical message, I have brought a sense of my own personal joy to my Major Work. Now all that is left is to "lose control" as Sedaris¹⁹ so eloquently states, and to finally relinquish the illusion.

¹⁷ BULGAKOV, M. and GLENNY, M. . *The master and Margarita*.

¹⁸ RUSHDIE, S. *Midnight's children*. London: Vintage.

¹⁹ SEDARIS, D. *Me talk pretty one day*.

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