Reflection Statement

The elusive concept of human consciousness: its definition and relationship with reality, has long been a topic of philosophical and scientific questioning with a distinctive lack of a singular understanding. Through my Major Work, "*A Letter to the Anonymous Author*", I aim to explore human consciousness and its various modes of expressions and interpretation. I have constructed this work as a narrative framed as a translation of a found text by a block-printer, who records his parallel experiences of enigmatic dreams and mechanical failures. It examines the limitations of language in representing consciousness by exploring its simultaneously symbiotic and parasitic relationship. By demonstrating their interactions, this work questions whether language acts as limiting structure from which consciousness cannot be fully expressed.

To enrich my understanding of the relationship between reality, consciousness and language, I investigated neurological and linguistic studies. I was particularly intrigued by Winawer's research on the influence of language on the perception of colour.[11] Further investigation led me to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which similarly states that words shape perception and experience.[12] This theory, when applied to the concept of consciousness, formed the theoretical basis of my narrative as I explore the limitations placed on consciousness by the language used to express it, echoing Wittgenstein's idea of "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world."[13] I have integrated this concept with a postmodernist perspective I

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[11] Winawer J., et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA, (2007). His experimental results show that speakers of languages that categorise blue in greater detail are more adept at recognising different shades.

[12] Whorf, B.L. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality. Selected Writings.* Ed.: J.B. Carroll. MIT, New York: J.Wilky/London: Chapinaon & Hall.

[13] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1961, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (trans.), New York: Humanities Press.

was exposed to through the Extension 1 course that "works against seeing language as a stable, closed system."[14] To express the unstable system of language resulting in a constructed and flawed representation of consciousness, I have constructed two alternative endings to the embedded narrative. Through presenting the "nonfiction"[15] as more ambiguous and the "fiction"[16] as a more conclusory with "no evidence of...issues in the printing,"[6] the fictional world constructed by language's influence on consciousness is expressed to be the familiar world we occupy, with the illusion of "no...issues." The revelation of the translator as the "sole author"[17] to shift the meaning of the narrative was influenced by Borges' construction of narratives wherein a key element is only disclosed at their conclusion, for example, in *The Garden of Forking Paths*.[18] This technique encourages a re-interpretation of the narrative, highlighting the multiplicity and instability of meaning expressed through language.

Postmodern influences on my work are also reflected in the form as my narrative is constructed as a "writerly text"[19] to invite readers to participate in experiencing the inadequacies of language and uncertain realities produced through their own "creation" of the text. The fragmentation of the embedded plot arc applies Fish's theory of "affective stylistics,"[20] generating confusion as readers attempt to derive a reasonable narrative. This is

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[14] Jan Rybicki, 2003, "Post-Structuralism", http://www.ap.krakow.pl/

[15] Major work, page 22, "Appendix A"

[16] Major work, page 23, "Appendix B"

[17] Major work, page 24

[18] Borge, 1941, *The Garden of Forking Paths,* Editorial Sur, Argentina

[19] Barthes, R (1975), *S/Z*, Hill and Wang

[20] Fish, Stanley. "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics." New Literary History, vol. 2, no. 1, 1970, pp. 123–162

used to reflect language's attempt to logicalise and categorise consciousness resulting in a distortion of reality and confusion due to its inadequacy.

The construction of a frame narrative through structuring it as a translation is used to "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[21] The translator's notes, when the text is suggested to be entirely the work of the translator, becomes a metafictive reference creating cognitive dissonance to communicate the "invented status" of reality.[22] The use of meta-fiction through the author who poses as the translator of a found text was inspired by the narrator in Coover's *The Magic Poker*[23] who poses as the author inventing himself as the character. In marking the translator's presence throughout the embedded narrative, footnotes further remind the readers to consider what is *"Lost in* [the] *Translation,"*[24] both literally and in the translation of thought into words.

To communicate the timeless nature of the interplay between language and consciousness, I have constructed my text to be a hybrid of the ancient, modern and postmodern in which the postmodern concepts and devices coalesce with fabulistic, surrealist and academic styles, recognisable to the informed, contemporary reader. Through incorporating the different literary styles, the paradigms associated with each style are embedded into this narrative. For example, the translator's introduction and notes are mostly constructed using an academic tone that utilises specific translational terminology, "semantic or communicative

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[21] Waugh, P, 1984, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, Routledge, UK

[22] Wolf, Werner (2009). *Metareference across Media. Theory and Case Studies*. Amsterdam - New York, NY: Rodopi. p. 31.

[23] Coover, R, 2014, *Pricksongs and Descants: Fictions*, Dzanc Books

[24] Merill, J, 1974, *Lost in Translation,* The New Yorker

translation,"[25] and the reference to Spivak[26] creates an authentic voice that readers are more inclined to trust than the obscure voice of the printer. This increases the disruptive effect of the final revelation of the translator's deceit. The reader's renewed understanding of the narrative further demonstrates the inability of language in encapsulating and communicating though as any disturbances or ambiguities create explosions of multiple meanings. To further develop the sense of timelessness, elements of classical philosophy are also metaphorically embedded, one example being Plutarch's "Ship of Theseus"[27] in "...one by one, thus all at once, the most incongruous was replaced…" [28]This also proposes the question that if a thought is, piece by piece, "translated" into language, is it still the same as the original?

In the "dream" sequences, I utilised fabulistic style to create a sense of disoriented detachment with the contemporary reader. Through studying Aesop's fables and *Panchatantra*,[29] I was able to emulate their style through using anthropomorphic animals such as "The cricket wanted to know what the tigers thought...donned the attire of a tiger.[30] I also found the communication of a singular, universal "truth" to be a commonality of fables, which I have artificially emulated through conclusive statements at the end of various dreams, "In truth? The sun had set"[31] and "for in truth tigers were solitary creatures"[14] However, I have constructed these statements to be deliberately ambiguous and somewhat

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[25] Major work, page 19

[26] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, literary theorist concerned with translation

[27] Plutarch, 1497,"Parallel Lives"

[28] Major work, page 8

[29] Indian fable dated around 300 BCE and most often attributed to Vishnu Sharma

[30] Major work, page 6

[31] Major work, page 4

illogical to subvert the established genre and contradict the idea of definite truth presented in traditional modes of storytelling, instead opening the narrative to the reader's interpretation and construction.

I was also strongly influenced by surrealism, my investigation into its ideas inspired the use of dreams as Breton states "the dream...used in solving the fundamental questions of life...the omnipotence of dreams."[32] Surrealism is also a conceptually appropriate style as it is a technique to reveal "the true functioning of thought"[17] by removing the ratiocination of language. This led to the extended metaphor of "dreams" as an imagined state of consciousness, a "wordless"[33] realm of "thought as thought...pure though"[34] that has yet to fully become a prisoner of language.

To explore the role of language in the self-awareness of identity, an essential element of consciousness[35], I referred to the work of a surrealist writer: Leonora Carrington. She often constructs hybrid figures in her characters to explore the multiplicity of identity such as the "hyena" and "girl" hybrid[36]. This inspired the shifts in the narrator's character from the human observer to an animal "And in that moment I was the cat"[37] and "...bird-shaped

[32] Breton, A , 1924, *The First Manifesto of Surrealism,* Paris

[33] Major work, page 4

[34] Major work, page 17

[35] Locke, J, 1975, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Peter Nidditch, ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975

[36] Carrington, Leonora. The House of Fear: Notes from Down Below. London: Virago, 1989

[37] Major work, page 3

gibbosity of my stomach"[38] to convey the instability of an identity constructed through the flawed medium of language as it fails to embody the full scope of a detached consciousness.

A major challenge when composing this work was its readability and the clarity of the ideas expressed due to the highly ambiguous and surrealist style of the dream sequences. Inspired by Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children",*[39] in which he parallels the creation of chutney to that of an independent India, I similarly decided to employ the mundane plot of the block-printer. This is also in part influenced by my studies in English Advanced Module and the use of conceit in the poetry of John Donne. The connection I draw between printing and the interplay between language and consciousness is constructed as a conceit. As Donne creates a link between the "body" and the "map"[40], I have done with human consciousness and the act of printing. It allowed for a more concrete, yet still metaphorical discussion of language and consciousness as the printing process becomes an extended metaphor for the system of language, with the mechanical issues reflecting the failed "copying" of thought into language. An example is "the ink itself erodes the vessel it is measured with...possibility of inaccuracies"[41] thereby the ink is symbolic of language, which "erodes" consciousness, "the vessel" that contains it, resulting in "inaccuracies" in communication. The insight revealed to the reader then illuminates their understanding of the dreams. The (cuttlefish's) ink, "singular" to the cuttlefish, shows language's ability to identify(the ink is a signifier of the cuttlefish) and to obstruct, "to disguise, to shield" the consciousness of its user.

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[38] Major work, page 8

[39] Rushdie, S, 1981, *Midnight's Children,* Jonathan Cape, UK

[40] John Donne, 1623/35, *Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness*

[41] Major work, page 9

The question of consciousness has been a universal concern tackled by many disciplines including neurosciences, philosophy, psychology and theoretical physics, therefore resulting in this narrative conceptually appealing to a diverse audience. However, readers should have an interest in linguistics as this work primarily explores consciousness through language. The intended audience of my work are readers of literary journals such as "The Offing", which "publishes work...experiments...pushes literary and artistic forms and conventions" and "insists on correspondence rather than closure."[42] This is a suitable platform for this work as its ambiguity provokes "correspondence rather than "closure" and the postmodernist devices employed aimed at a more niche audience who enjoy decoding and "creating" writerly texts.

Through an investigation into the relationship between consciousness and language, and the development of a hybrid style by referring to conceptually appropriate literary styles, I endeavoured to construct a narrative that examines the limitations of language in expressing consciousness. My Major Work is an open "letter" to the "anonymous authors" of the text: the readers and their consciousness. Alone, it serves as a blueprint for a narrative that can only be born through the participation of a reader.

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[42] The Offing editorial team

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