

Reflection Statement

Extension Two English Major Work

“We’re just drops in the same ocean.”

Yassmin Abdel-Magied¹

Home is a word with implications far beyond its four letters. My aim in this work was to deconstruct the notion of home: to understand its bricks and mortar so that I might put it together again, building into carefully chosen words my awareness that belonging transcends the physical and is connected with the finding of self. Home is a fluid concept that is best understood when considered emotionally and relationally.

Journeying with its protagonists, Willow and Alba, *Ab(h)ide* presents the concept of belonging as a highly subjective experience, analysing the connection of place and identity by questioning human attachment to a physical space. Following my study of belonging in Preliminary English, I realised this concept to be personally significant and universally relevant.

*“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”*² The intention of my story is to challenge its readers by addressing the ubiquitous concept of belonging. I wrote this story for the home searchers, for those who aren’t quite sure where their heart is. I wrote this story to understand how a sense of place could be so pointedly individual and yet a timeless human need. More quietly, I wrote this story for the fourteen-year-old girl who had already lived in ten houses and couldn’t consider a single physical place to be her home. I wrote this story for catharsis.

¹ Y Abdel-Magied, *Yassmin’s Story: who do you think I am?*, Vintage Books, North Sydney, 2016, p. 5.

² B Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: Book One of the Stormlight Archive*, Tor Books, New York, 2010, Chapter 57.

The plans for *Ab(h)ide* have been printed in the back rooms of my heart for some time. They have been scribbled on and added to by months of pencil marks and years of memories. The prospect of fitting all this musing into 6000 words was daunting. Symbolism allowed me to express the thoughts that were too large to encapsulate in the boundaries of a word count.

The symbolic value of my title, *Ab(h)ide*, was inspired by Edson's *W;t*³ (Advanced English). The visual pun emphasises the title's double meaning. Just as the characters struggle to understand the concept of home, the title questions the relationship between hiding and abiding. The meaning is implied in the first lines⁴ of the first poem and resolved in its final additions⁵. This is indicative of Willow's journey - a searching for a place, finding and questioning it, and then resting there comfortably, no longer needing to hide. Its significance fluctuates with Alba and Willow's understanding. Willow questions, "*Was she hiding? Or was this rest?*"⁶, when she returns to "Here" (unnamed to encourage reader identification). Furthermore, the title links to the use of brackets throughout the story, as well as the pen scribbles on Willow's poetry, suggesting that the addition of the '(h)' was a realisation in hindsight. Thus '*Ab(h)ide*' encapsulates the personality of my short story - a double meaning, a second guessing and a direct reference to home.

³ M Edson, *W;t*, Nick Hern Books, London, 2000.

⁴ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 1: "*Not where you officially abide But, perhaps, the place you hide When everything seems so achingly Foreign*"

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 52: "*Don't knock (Just come inside) There's no lock (There's no reason to hide).*"

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 37.

Poetry is woven throughout my prose to question, anchor and unify. My personal poetic voice has been shaped by the work of some of my favourite poets. T. S. Eliot's influence is apparent in my lyrical prose:

*“Willow’s life could be measured⁷
in packing tape and summarised
in cardboard boxes.”⁸*

Much of my metre and form was derived from the poetry of Erin Hanson. Characterised by their simple rhyme scheme and motifs of the sea and stories, her short pieces particularly influenced my writing:

*“She smelled of books and stories,
Of all the words she’d lived within,
As though the ink had left the pages,
To find a new home in her skin.”⁹*

The content of this poem is relevant to Willow's journey as she reads to hide, not through fear but to find comfortable rest. Here, she finds her home. The typewriter font used for the poems implies they were written on Willow's typewriter. This carries emotional resonance as the typewriter was a sentimental gift from her father. (The pink ribbon motif is repeated for

⁷ T.S Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' from *Prufrock and Other Observations*, The Egotist Ltd., London, 1917, p. 8: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

⁸ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 14.

⁹ E Hanson, 'The Paperback Princess', Available from <https://thepoeticunderground.com>, [accessed 10 April 2017]

similar effect.) Margaret Atwood's poetry collection, *The Circle Game*,¹⁰ also influenced my style. I replicated its use of uneven line lengths to generate movement and also to create a visual onomatopoeia, as in *Goodbye*.¹¹

The homograph/homonym/synonym segments are Willow's musings and reflect her uncertainty - her ambivalence towards the meaning of home and where she might find it. These segments focus on the potential for multiple interpretations of home.

My poems serve a similar function to the letters in *Frankenstein*¹² (Extension 1 English), giving additional insights into the thoughts of the protagonists. Just as letters were relevant to Frankenstein's 19th century context, the sentimental, creative nature of the poems fit Willow's character. Furthermore, in the same way that we see Frankenstein's journey through Walton's lens, the poetry, though written by and for Willow, gives insight into Alba's story.¹³ As a record of thoughts from Willow's journal, they further serve as an anchor in the story. The structure of my narrative was also inspired by *Frankenstein*, starting in the present, reflecting on the past, and concluding in the present.

Jenn Bennett's novel, *Alex, Approximately*,¹⁴ which uses film quotes to introduce sections, inspired me to open Willow's chapters with storybook quotes, serving several purposes. Firstly, they suggest Willow's retreat to her childhood when she recalls feeling 'at home';

¹⁰ M Atwood, *The Circle Game*, House of Anansi, Toronto, 1969.

¹¹ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 24.

¹² M Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, Penguin Books, London, 1994.

¹³ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 44: "Willow had felt something as equally disjointing as it was comforting to hear that the words of her poetry, outpourings of her very heart, fitted into Alba's own story."

¹⁴ J Bennett, *Alex, Approximately*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2017.

secondly, they allude to reading as a form of escape; thirdly, they affirm that the search for home has universal relevance.

The story's setting is dynamic, as in Dominic Smith's *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*¹⁵ which similarly uses seasons and years as time indicators before each section. The season motif suggests the highs and lows of the protagonists' lives. Winter memories are subdued and quietly confused. Change occurs in autumn, and growth in spring. In summer the balance is restored. The seasons are referenced in the story's concluding quote, echoing the conclusion of *The Little House*.¹⁶

*“She could flourish in the sea, its
salt watering her beyond
springtime bloom.”¹⁷*

This line alludes to another motif: Willow's home, the ocean. Willow is comfortable living somewhere that is forever changing and unrestrained. She is used to its fluidity. In this way she is similar to Alba, who hates stagnancy. A sense of belonging is not found in rigid consistency.

Shakespeare's use of foils in *Hamlet* (Advanced English) influenced my development of parallel characters. Willow and Alba have lived contrasting stories, but they are united in their search for home. Both Willow and Alba have reciprocal parallels: the refugee represents

¹⁵ D Smith, *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*, Sarah Crichton Books, New York, 2016.

¹⁶ V. L Burton, *The Little House*, Faber, London, 1967, p. 39: “Once again she could watch Spring and Summer and Fall and Winter come and go”.

¹⁷ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 36.

the person Willow believes herself to be, and Old Mr Johnson is the person Alba fears being. The right alignment of these two stories emphasises their difference to Willow and Alba.

The destruction of Old Mr Johnson's house represents Alba's realisation that home isn't found in a physical space. It also reveals just how important the old house was to her. The "someone else's table" is a motif appearing at each of Alba's turning points to represent a shift in her sense of place - the description of her old house and its relation to Old Mr Johnson,¹⁸ the moving of house,¹⁹ and the resultant destructive effects of the cyclone.²⁰ This final reference is critical as it is acknowledged by Willow in her homograph.²¹ Though this is the end of part of Alba's past, Willow is there to mourn with her, indicative of their new-found sense of belonging through friendship. The cyclone in *Ab(h)ide* is the stimulus for Willow and Alba's conversations, and also the destruction of old life. Ironically, the girls contemplate home at the shelter, away from their houses.

Much of the vocabulary and scenery of this story contains fragments of my past. It was essential to create a strong sense of place in this piece, and I enjoyed recreating aspects of both cities and tiny towns where I have lived. From my experience in North Western Australia came the pindan motif, which is significant in the location of "Here" and associates Willow positively with the land. My establishment of scene in the first "Then" section²² portrayed Willow and Alba's childhood connections to place with an underlying tone of nostalgia and perhaps melancholia. This was inspired by Poe's words: "Beauty is the sole

¹⁸ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 27: "It was a peculiar thought, imagining strangers settling with their families around their dinner table in her dining room. She'd heard whispers of its first owner..."

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 33: "Watching them shift her dining table into someone's ute, something shifted inside Alba's heart."

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 48: "'It's someone else's table,' Alba said."

²¹ *Ab(h)ide*, p. 48: "Homophone: pane, pain, Peer inside the window, Look inside the glass, See between chairs And upside-down table, Remnants of the past."

²² *ibid.*, p. 12.

*legitimate province of the poem, melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all poetical tones.*²³

This, and other guidance from his *Philosophy of Composition*²⁴ aided me in my composition of lyrical prose.

Cecil Day Lewis suggested, “*We do not write in order to be understood, we write to understand.*”²⁵ Composed in my final year of school, this piece represents a culmination of years of learning and a quarter-lifetime of questioning. *Ab(h)ide* reminded me of my love of words and my adoration for them when they are strung together. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to tell it because I think that perhaps, somewhere along the way, it began to tell me. I say this from my heart, which now abides (and sometimes hides) in its recently renovated home inside my chest.

²³ E. A Poe, *The Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Together with his Essay on the Philosophy of Composition*, Educational Publishing Company, Boston, p. 118.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 113-131.

²⁵ C. D Lewis, *The poet's task : An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 1 June 1951*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 15.