

# **Reflection Statement**

*“He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.”*

- Lao Tzu (circa 500 BCE)

*“To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”*

- Socrates (470 - 399 BCE)

*“To know yourself, you must sacrifice the illusion that you already do.”*

- Vironika Tugaleva (author) (1988-)

The desire to ‘know thyself’ is not a temporary, isolated aberrance from the normal course of human history, but a constant fixture scattered across the ages. It is a yearning, not exclusive to the Chinese academic or the Ancient Greek philosopher; but one that is infused deep within the human condition: “It assumes the form of an intrinsic predisposition to explore the essence of our reality and investigate our nature, our place and our purpose.”<sup>1</sup>

My Major Work engages with this notion in a way that is two-fold. Firstly, it intends to explore and examine the very nature of the manifold *self* and “reveal, ignite and nurture the reader’s fundamental desire for introspection.”<sup>2</sup> Secondly, on a holistic level, the Work is a product of my own desire to explore the essence of my reality, nature and life purpose. In this way, my Major Work is a profoundly personal reflection on what I understand the *self* to be in our twenty-first century world.

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<sup>1</sup> Major Work p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Whilst on the journey to discover my own identity, the quest for an authentic sense of *self* has led me to appreciate an account of the *self* that has often been overlooked; namely, the manifold *self*. Recommended to me by my Italian father to assist my search for identity, Luigi Pirandello's 1926 novel *One, None and a Hundred Thousand*<sup>3</sup> explores the manifold *self* as a 'sickness' which permeates the ruminations of Vitangelo Moscarda; who, as the protagonist of the novel, miserably discovers "the innumerable, sovereign realities that are... [all] lodged within his 'one, poor mortified body.'"<sup>4</sup> Through its rich and masterful blend of philosophical ideas and narrative form, Pirandello's novel motivated me towards a path of rigorous philosophical research; inspiring an investigation into the theories contended by Plato and Rene Descartes. Particularly helpful during this stage of my investigation, was Charles Taylor's inquiry, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*,<sup>5</sup> which dissected each theory of the *self* and lucidly revealed David Hume's *Bundle Theory* - the first major theory on the manifold *self* in Western philosophy. Subsequently, the notion of the manifold *self* became the central preoccupation of my Work, and thus, my overarching thesis was developed: *How do literary composers explore and express the manifold self in their works?*

It is noted in my essay, that while the notion of the manifold *self* originated with Hume in the eighteenth century, it only became "a primary *topos* for modernism"<sup>6</sup> until the decade of the 1920s. With a desire to explore my thesis comparatively, I consequently made a deliberate choice to select the second text, namely, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography (Orlando)*,<sup>7</sup> from this historical period. As explained in my Major Work, through the "parodic nature of her

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<sup>3</sup> Pirandello, L., 1933. *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* [One, None and a Hundred Thousand] (S. Putnam, Trans.), 1st ed. USA: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Major Work p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, C., 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. 1st ed. USA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Dvergsdal, K.D., 2015. *Insisting on the Self: The Narration of Self as Problem and Premise in Three Novels by Virginia Woolf*. Master's thesis. Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo. (Major Work p. 3.)

<sup>7</sup> Woolf, V., 2004. *Orlando: A Biography*. 3rd ed. Great Britain: Vintage Books London.

quasi-biographical novel,”<sup>8</sup> Woolf’s *Orlando* offers authentic insights into the “relationship between self and narrative”<sup>9</sup>; but also accentuates the manifold *self* as a “fundamentally positive and natural repercussion of an individual’s development through life”<sup>10</sup> – an interpretation which is contrary to Pirandello’s ‘sickness.’ Consequently, by using the skills of comparative analysis developed in both the English Advanced and Extension I course – specifically *Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context*<sup>11</sup> in Advanced and *Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking, Elective I: After the Bomb*<sup>12</sup> in Extension I - I contrast two distinctive interpretations of the manifold *self* in my Work, and thus demonstrate how, depending on their personal and social contexts, composers can arrive at different conclusions in relation to the same idea. As such, inspired by my study of the different, literary responses to a post-WWII nuclear age in Extension I, my Work engages with the distinctive literary, reactions to humanity’s manifold nature, thus forming discernible links with the course: “While Woolf [...] accentuates the manifold self as a [...] natural repercussion of an individual’s development through life, Pirandello [...] distinctively illuminates how it can be an undesired feature of the human condition.”<sup>13</sup>

However, as my research progressed, I developed a passionate yearning to directly involve the contemporary, twenty-first century reader within the framework of my Major Work, in order to better “reveal, ignite and nurture the reader’s fundamental desire for introspection.”<sup>14</sup> Engaging with the principle of anti-mimesis, I therefore commenced an exploration into how the manifold *self* in *One, None and a Hundred Thousand* and *Orlando*, is reflected in a twenty-

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<sup>8</sup> Major Work p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Dvergsdal, *op. cit.*, p. 18. (Major Work p. 10.)

<sup>10</sup> Major Work p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> See 2018 Board of Studies NSW, Stage 6 English Syllabus (p. 47): “This module requires students to explore the... ways in which [context] influences aspects of texts.”

<sup>12</sup> See 2018 Board of Studies NSW, Stage 6 English Syllabus (p. 82): “This module requires students to explore the... ways in which [paradigms] have shaped and are reflected in literature.”

<sup>13</sup> Major Work p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

first century context; and subsequently discovered *One, None and a Hundred Thousand Profiles*<sup>15</sup> – a contemporary literary examination of Pirandello’s novel. In this paper, the authors “re-imagine” and “reframe” the novel’s notions of the *self* within a contemporary environment of social media, and argue for tangible correlations between the “offline world of Moscarda” with the “online world of the twenty-first century individual.”<sup>16</sup> Inspired by this dissertation, I further refined my Work’s purpose to also include a consideration of the enduring relevance of both Pirandello and Woolf’s compositions:

*How [do] Pirandello and Woolf’s distinctive perspectives of the manifold self... offer tangible links to the use of social media within a twenty-first century milieu?*<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, by considering the enduring relevance of *One, None and a Hundred Thousand* and *Orlando*, my Major Work forms discernible connections with the consideration of “enduring value” in *Module B: Critical Study of Texts* in the English Advanced course. However, by strengthening the reader’s connection with my Work, I also ensure the Work itself has an enduring value for its twenty-first century audience.

Furthermore, by exploring the contemporary significance of both texts, I naturally extend my Work’s readership beyond the philosophical and literary spheres, and allow for engagement with a wider, twenty-first century audience. Consequently, younger, postmodern audiences who share similar, cynical views towards coherent notions of the *self* as Pirandello and Woolf, would find my work appealing in its discussion of the manifold *self* through the lens of social networks. For instance, by considering how social networks allow individuals to “curate,

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<sup>15</sup> Pepe, A.P., Wolff, S.W., Van Godtsenhoven, K.V.G., 2011. *One, None and One Hundred Thousand Profiles: Re-imagining the Pirandellian Identity Dilemma in the Era of Online Social Networks*. *First Monday*, 17(4), pp. 1-18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Major Work, pp. 15, 5.

manipulate and manage an online ecosystem of identities,”<sup>18</sup> my Work explains how “social media provides the twenty-first century individual with an opportunity to adopt [either Pirandello or Woolf’s] approaches to the manifold self, in their contemporary, multi-field lives.”<sup>19</sup> As such, contemporary, Australian literary journals such as *Overland* and *The Lifted Brow* – which attempt to “foster new, original and progressive writing”<sup>20</sup> – would thus be suitable magazines for my Major Work. Challenging societal norms and values in a wide range of areas from popular culture to immigration and feminism, these journals are thus aligned with my Work’s progressive interpretation of literature and philosophical ideas and its attempt to challenge society’s ubiquitous understanding of the unified *self*.

With a revised thesis and a clear audience in mind, it was necessary to then deliberate the form and stylistic features by which my arguments could most effectively be presented. When writing my essay, I initially adhered to the formal conventions of the essay by employing a rigid, linear structure and a formal, academic tone. However, after reading Theodor Adorno’s *The Essay as Form* - which noted how the essay “instead of achieving something scientifically” must “reflect a childlike freedom” for it to be successful in achieving its purpose<sup>21</sup> - I decided to shift the rigidity of my Work towards a more fluid and cohesive mode of argumentation. For instance, in my Major Work, after analysing how Woolf accentuates Orlando’s ability to embrace multiple selves “through the simile of the car,” I propose how social media could “allow Orlando’s numerous selves to ‘exist in many worlds [and] play many roles at the same time.’”<sup>22</sup> By doing so, I am able to improve the links between the novels and the use of social networks, and therefore sustain closer engagement with my thesis and target audience.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Overland. 2018. About Overland. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://overland.org.au/about/>. [Accessed 20 August 2018].

<sup>21</sup> Adorno, T.W., “The Essay as Form,” in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Sherry Weber (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 152.

<sup>22</sup> K. Baym, N., 2015. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, p. 120. (Major Work p. 19.)

Furthermore, to underscore the pertinence of the manifold *self* to my reader, I made a deliberate, creative choice to reformulate the expository and objective prose of the traditional essay at certain points, by commencing and concluding with a “courteous warning” to the twenty-first century reader:

*This essay will seize the self from the clutches of your delusions... [it] will challenge your view of the self and reality...<sup>23</sup>*

The utilisation of the second person at these points in my Work, accentuates the universality of the manifold *self* to all readers, while offering an authentic means of conveying my overarching thesis and intentions of the Work. However, this stylistic feature also reflects academic Laura Rodriguez’s insightful literary criticism, “*A New Tradition*”: *Virginia Woolf and the Personal Essay*, which explains that by removing the “objectivity and order” of the formal, academic tone in the conventional essay – and adopting a more “fluid and flexible subjectivity” - the composer can “encompass the multiplicity of the human experience.”<sup>24</sup> As such, by liberating my Work from the formal and objective tone of the traditional essay at certain points, I am able to utilise a conversational tone to reflect “a more multiple and fluid conceptualisation”<sup>25</sup> of the *self*, and thus sustain deeper and more meaningful engagement with the central preoccupation of my Work.

Through extensive independent investigation into form, concept and language, enthused by my studies of the English Advanced and Extension I Courses, I have been able to compose a profoundly personal reflection on what I understand the *self* to be in our twenty-first century world. The journey of crafting my Major Work has broadened my understanding of the world

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<sup>23</sup> Major Work p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Rodriguez, L., 2001. "A NEW TRADITION": VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE PERSONAL ESSAY. *Atlantis*, 23(1), pp. 75-90.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

and reality, and has illuminated that despite our ostensibly singular and coherent physical actualities, humanity is ultimately manifold in nature.

While I can only hope that my Major Work has had a similar influence on its twenty-first century reader, I am certain that at the very least, it has offered a fresh and progressive perspective of *self* that challenges tradition and the monotony of the status quo.

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