

## Reflection Statement

*“The landscape is thoroughly humanized. It is therefore imbued with... meaning, being the concrete expression of the states of mind, now and in the past, and just like a book or a parchment much written upon and written over, its interpretation awaits the discerning reader.” – Patrick O’Connor<sup>1</sup>*

Throughout the creation of my Major Work I was inspired by the critical essay *Negotiating the ‘Negative Capability’*<sup>2</sup> by Lynda Hawryluk and Leni Shilton and their exploration of the role of place in writing, especially the relationship between writer and reader that is created through the “glimpse” - the “evocation and echo” of place - through language. This concept inspired the creation of my short story, *The Last Welsh Winter*, in which I aspired to create a connection between writer and reader through an exploration of memory and place.

Throughout my Major Work I sought to create a lyrical portrait of my grandmother and her connection to the Welsh landscape, in order to illuminate the intermingling of place in memory and the ability of place to evoke emotional responses which bridge the gap between creation, writer and reader - “a place that has made a [writer] smile and pause or take a deep sigh is captured in language that evokes those feelings in the reader. It allows them that glimpse of the moment in the reading of the work.”<sup>3</sup>

Felicity Plunkett’s critical essay, *Hosts and Ghosts*<sup>4</sup> further developed my intention for my Major Work, through its examination of literature as a place in which both author and reader can inhabit and share experiences, forming inspiration for the climax of my Major Work, in which Grandma reads from *Under Milkwood*, “Her

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<sup>1</sup> Hawryluk, Lynda, and Leni Shilton. "Axon." *Negotiating 'negative Capability'* 24 July 2014. Web. 12 June 2015

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Plunkett, Felicity. "Axon." *Hosts and Ghosts*. 5 Jan. 2015. Web. 21 Feb. 2015.

voice is pastel purple across the black night air, spreading like a fog over the water” thus creating a moment which both character and reader experience together through literature. Hence, both *Hosts and Ghosts* and *Negotiating the 'Negative Capability'* led to my understanding of the relationship between composer and reader and the intimate emotional “symbiosis”<sup>5</sup> both experience through a piece. This relationship formed the driving force of *The Last Welsh Winter*.

As the main purpose throughout my Major Work was to explore the intricacies of human experience and the connection between character, reader and composer through an illustration of Welsh landscape, the target audience for my short story is primarily those who have a deep connection to Welsh culture. Thus my intention would be for it to be published as part of a bio-anthology with other Celtic authors. I developed this conception of audience and publication through an analysis of J. O Morgan’s *Natural Mechanical*<sup>6</sup> an anthology of poetry celebrating the life of Scottish-born Rocky, which is intertwined with images of rugged Scottish landscapes. Morgan’s work celebrates Celtic culture through memoir and thus explores a similar purpose to *The Last Welsh Winter*.

Additionally, through my studies of *Navigating the Global* in English Extension 1 - and related texts *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga and *Lost in Translation* by Sophia Coppola – I developed an understanding of the concept of place as a shaping force on identity. Through these texts, I developed my Major Work from a conception

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<sup>5</sup> Hawryluk, Lynda, and Leni Shilton. "Axon." *Negotiating 'negative Capability'* 24 July 2014. Web. 12 June 2015

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, J. O. *Natural Mechanical*. London: CB Editions, 2008. Print.

of cultural identity, to integrate the connection of author to reader, which Plunkett, Hawryluk and Shilton identify within their essays.

I began research for my Major Work, by collecting photographs of my grandmother as inspiration for a character, however the true conception of *The Last Welsh Winter* began with *Natural Mechanical* and was vastly separate from my grandmother's real life experiences. Similarly, through Elizabeth Barrett and Robin Ireland's *Gull View North*<sup>7</sup>, I developed my sense of lyricism and landscape, as their combined use of viola and poetry created a powerful sensual connection to the stony cliffs of Portland, which I aimed to develop in my short story. It also inspired my fascination with emotional-sensual experiences evoked through composition, which led ultimately to my continued use of sensual imagery throughout my piece "deserted dollhouses collapse into dust and we lay the photographs along the wooden beams. Through the holes in the roof tiles we can see the sun, the sky dampening in the dying light."

Both Barrett and Morgan inspired my initial choice of poetry as form for *The Last Welsh Winter*, which drove my research into the form and meter of poetry through Stephen Fry's, *The Ode Less Travelled*.<sup>8</sup> I began by writing short poems, which expressed moments in my grandmother's life, however I was inspired on an English Extension 2 day to the possibility of combining prose and poetry to create moments of concentrated poetry interwoven with narrative. However, I found this form challenging and withdrew poetry from the piece and instead combined the intense lyricism of poetry with a prose-style narrative, inspired by Dylan Thomas. Through

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<sup>7</sup> Barrett, Elizabeth. *A Dart of Green & Blue*. S.I.: Arc Publications, 2010. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Fry, Stephen. *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet within*. New York: Gotham, 2006. Print.

integrated short sentences and intense moments I reflected the concentrated essence of poetry into the form of a short story “Together, we watch the ceiling quiver with the weight of the sky, our backs flat-against the dust-mottled carpet, hips tangentially touching.”

Ultimately, the biggest shaping force on my work was Dylan Thomas’ *Under Milkwood* as his work inspired my tone and style of writing, as well as shaping my concept and purpose. Thomas’ crafting of place in the fictional seaside town of Llareggub, as well as his use of seaside imagery inspired me to integrate a similar connection to the seaside to create my sense of place within Penarth “The sea is alive. Frothy and churning. Calm and ferocious. Twisting stories beneath its surface, dragging words through its currents. A moody, magical, changeling.” His use of unusual adjectives and lists, also inspired my use of poetic prose within my Major Work, “Her voice lilting, ethereal, blackened and ageing.” I also drew inspiration from his structure, which informed the division of my piece into moments during a day; however this decision was also made to allow the reader to view these moments as contained experiences, rather than plot points in a narrative, and thus heighten a sense of time and place. I chose to include an extract of *Under Milkwood* in my work due to the strong connection to Wales it represented. I also felt *Under Milkwood* was symbolic of the connection the characters shared, encapsulating the relationship that each had developed. Hence including it would allow the audience to experience a connection that mirrored that of the characters, thus entering into a moment that would intensify the connection between character, reader and writer and evoke Hawryluk and Shilton’s “glimpse.”

Through the use of first person narration, I aimed to immerse the reader into the environment of the character and aspire to create a “glimpse” into a specific moment in time. Allowing the piece to take place in the broader environment of Wales, I captured specific locations within the town of Penarth, including places within the house, “Moments in this room pass like this, with seconds counted by Grandma’s breath, the sentences of a book, the quiet shuffle of paper,” along the seafront, “the sea tumbles below, gnawing at the eroded shore” and throughout town, “the grey sky leaking onto the road, the sentinel lamp at the top of the hill looking down on the park, which lies at the edge of the highstreet.”

I utilised the motif of winter to portray a representation of Wales synonymous with nature and weather. The symbol of winter allowed me to create a pervasive atmosphere to place, which permeated representations of the various different areas and created a connection between senses and place, as the sensual experience of winter was transferred to an understanding of place, “Above it the window looks out onto the street now draped in sepia, inside the warmth of the radiators has created its own light, the smell of cold seems to seep through the window. It is this dark, this cold that is Wales.”

In conclusion, the progress of *The Last Welsh Winter* has been challenging. To create a space in which both reader and audience can “inhabit”<sup>9</sup> has been intensely difficult and experimental at times. However my independent investigation allowed me to discover composers and theorists who motivated and inspired my Major Work, as their purpose in creation or analysis was driven by a similar aim to mine. Overall, the

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<sup>9</sup> Plunkett, Felicity. "Axon." *Hosts and Ghosts*. 5 Jan. 2015. Web. 21 Feb. 2015.

process has been a rewarding and intense progression, I feel ultimately, that *The Last Welsh Winter* is true to my conception of Penarth and allows the “glimpse” into a place that is both powerful and transcendent.