

## **Reflection Statement**

*These Memories We Carry*

“The past beats inside me like a second heart.”

— John Banville, *The Sea*

I have always been deeply and passionately fascinated with the human personality, and all that it encompasses: our faults, our triumphs, our quirks and idiosyncrasies. This Major Work has been an opportunity to delve into the complexities of all of the components that make up our persona – both those which are desirable and those which are horrific – through the examination of a protagonist who is not a perfect, but rather whom is constantly at odds with the demons that permeate his past and present. My love for writing is largely based upon my appreciation of the author’s ability to realise truths about the human experience that resonate with the reader. As Stephen King says, “Fiction is the truth inside the lie.” What the writer draws from in their creative process, the reader must be able to receive with the clarity of recognition. This has been a huge influence in my writing, as – by presenting a portrait of humanity not in black and white, but painted with the shades of light and dark that colour our personalities – I hope to examine the nuances of the human psyche.

Due to the mesh of metaphysical standpoints imbued within my short story, I intend the readership of my short story to be actively interested in fields of philosophy or psychoanalysis, who might read journals such as “*Journal of Consciousness Studies*” for intellectual stimulation, searching for a postmodern solution to hampering spiritual questions into human purpose that, increasingly, are not afforded in religion – as the current saying goes, people who are “spiritual, but not religious”. I also hope, owing to the emotionally charged nature of the work, that my story could be eligible for publication in the Tupelo Press Writing Contest, which asks for submissions that convey penetrating insights into the human condition. I believe my story meets this criterion through its focus on the profound relationship between father and son, as well as the protagonist’s own journey of understanding as he comes to terms with experiences in his life that have shaped his character, and would like my story to be published one day.

I began my Major Work with the intention of exploring a post-death landscape, upon which I could compile a stratum of metaphysical ideals to propel my story. The malleability of such an abstract concept lent itself well to my purpose of posing insights into the human condition. Inevitably, I was confronted with the spiritual incoherence of modern man<sup>1</sup> in my research, as a result of pervading scientific and technological paradigms upon our society. Philosophical readings and commentaries warranted a balance between the reasoned mortality of nihilism and the disorientation of existentialism, which both imparted themselves to the journey of my main character, and my research into the role of Platonic Idealism in Romanticism from the Extension 1 course allowed me to develop a dialogue for the role of an afterlife in the fulfilment of my character. Plato's Idealism involves the existence of "perfect forms" that exist beyond the physical world<sup>2</sup>; I gleaned from this idea the concept of a realm that transcends worldly experiences, and stimulates a divine sense of closure and realisation.

However, as I progressed, I soon realised that the premise of a post-death landscape made it difficult to formulate a cohesive ending, making the story sound weakly resolved. I didn't believe the story could be resolved by sending my character into a heavenly afterlife. Inspired by Seamus Heaney's poem *Digging*<sup>3</sup> and Freud's theory on hypermnesia<sup>4</sup>, I used *revisited*

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<sup>1</sup> GLICKSBERG, CHARLES I. "The Literature of Existentialism." *Prairie Schooner* 22.3 (1948): 231-37. Web. Glicksberg describes the "impenetrable curtain of darkness" that has resulted from modern man's "utter loss of religious faith".

<sup>2</sup> Dunham, Jeremy, Grant Iain Hamilton, and Watson Sean. *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2011. Web.

<sup>3</sup> Heaney, Seamus. "Digging", *Death of a Naturalist* (1966)

<sup>4</sup> Jones, Ernest. "Freud's Theory of Dreams." *The American Journal of Psychology* 21.2 (1910): 283-308. Web. Hypermnesia is described as the clarity in the "appearance of forgotten experiences" from trauma.

*memory* as the fabric of my storyline, realising the Romantic idealism that accessed true understanding through imaginative processes. I have employed a nursing-home setting to invert the father-son relationship dynamics, and have ended the story with the realisation that Joseph is in a nursing-home himself, recalling memories of his life in the lead up to death, to emphasise the cyclical perpetuity of life.

My understanding of Freud's psychoanalytical studies, stemming from studies of T.S Eliot's poem *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*<sup>5</sup> in the Advanced English course, has been a source of inspiration, influencing me to examine the aftermath of trauma and the phenomena of repression, and the effect of this upon one's relationships and persona. Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*<sup>6</sup> and Ruth Clare's *Enemy*<sup>7</sup> greatly influenced my decision to study posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and warfare as a source of trauma, and to consider its effect upon familial bonds. Thus, the character of Joseph came to life: a Vietnam War veteran who suffers from severe PTSD, whose father was a prisoner-of-war in World War II. I did extensive research into the timelines and the transforming social and political consensuses on both wars<sup>8</sup>, but decided later in the process to exclude any directly overt details of this research in the narrative, as it merely sounded like I was rephrasing a history book in an attempt to show off my research efforts: "The Charlie Goldberg who didn't think twice about words like 'Sandakan Marches' and 'prisoner-of-war'"<sup>9</sup> was an unsuccessful excerpt from an early draft. Instead, I subtly interwove these details within the context of my narrative. My decision

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<sup>5</sup> Eliot, T. S., and Gerald Wilde. *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*. London: n.p., 1944. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Albom, Mitch (2003). *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Hyperion.

<sup>7</sup> Clare, Ruth (2016). *Enemy*. N.p.: Penguin. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando, Mike. *National Service Experience in Vietnam, 2A.O.D.* Vietnam War Commemoration, Dep. Veteran's Affairs: handwritten journals documenting the service of a conscripted soldier in Vietnam.

<sup>9</sup> *Own Major Work*

to illustrate Joseph's experiences with vignettes of a disorientated, omniscient observer is informed by the "shifting observer perspective"<sup>10</sup> theory, which suggests that PTSD-sufferers recall trauma from an spectator's point-of-view. I utilised the third person narrator and a non-linear timeframe to enhance Joseph's cognitive detachment.

I employ numerous motifs within my short story in order to effectively engage with a more meaningful manifestation of my characters, and to build layers of complexity and authenticity. A theme of silence – and the sense of belonging it heralds – is used to strengthen my characterisation of such a lonely, withdrawn main character, and to amplify the poignancy of his death as the silence returns, imbuing Joseph with a final sense of fulfilment and tranquility that evaded him in life. This is further reinforced through a symbolic recurring image of a passionfruit vine encasing a window overlooking the ocean and white sheets, suggesting nostalgia and reminiscence of youth that balance out the darker images as Joseph journeys into the deepest recesses of his memory.

Whilst I originally intended to only write in prose, I soon realised that the "simultaneity of spatial form"<sup>11</sup> (poetry) was necessary to frame the abstract basis of my story. This also stemmed from an appreciation of postmodernist literature, which reconciles our "conscious states"<sup>12</sup> through a subverted structural form. Despite early plans on anchoring the flashbacks

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<sup>10</sup> Kenny, Lucy M., Bryant Richard A., Silove Derrick, Creamer Mark, O'Donnell Meaghan, and McFarlane Alexander C. "Distant Memories: A Prospective Study of Vantage Point of Trauma Memories." *Psychological Science* 20.9 (2009): 1049-052. Web. Conducted experiments on 947 PTSD-sufferers over a 12-month period.

<sup>11</sup> Spanos, William V. "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination." *Boundary 2* 1.1 (1972): 147-68. Web.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

in a childhood home, the rigidity of the physical setting did not suit its surreal landscape. Instead, I have incorporated poetry as a framing device. Each poem is derived loosely from a colour, a decision prompted by the fact that I am a grapheme-colour synaesthete; I tend to find certain descriptions aesthetically pleasing because of the colours the letters conjure for me (for example, ‘h’ is pale pink, whilst ‘m’ is forest green). Eager to harness this opportunity to explore this in my Major Work, I read the work of acclaimed novelist and synaesthete, Vladimir Nabokov<sup>13</sup>. Nabokov’s synaesthesia permeates his use of metaphor, which contain “not only...originality, but also colour”<sup>14</sup>. Thus, I undertook to frame my short story with fragmented poems, with an underlying theme of colour throughout.

Ultimately, I hope my story pays homage to sensitive themes of war and loss with integrity, and simultaneously is able to provoke meaningful contemplation within you, the reader.

WORD COUNT: 1478

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<sup>13</sup> Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Lolita*. New York: Knopf, 1992. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Cytowic, Richard E., David Eagleman, and Dmitri Nabokov. *Wednesday Is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synesthesia*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009. Print.

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## **Reference Sheet**

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