

Reflection Statement

To me, literature must be memorable; because in some sense, the way the author presents it allows us to recall the things we already know and have experienced, but have not necessarily reflected on. It is at once Henry James' famous sense of the 'shock of recognition' – a reality that we immediately recognize as true to life – and Viktor Shklovsky's sense of 'defamiliarisation' that makes us see the familiar as though for the first time.

My title **Addiction-ary** refers to two of the main concepts behind this work. The first concept is about addictions – to physical things: alcohol, cigarettes; and then to more abstract concerns such as language, the ambiguity/untrustworthiness of memorial reconstruction, and the core nature of humanity. My work is about the central character's inability to move on from the past, how destructive it is to become attached to the things we love and want but can never have back. We see him struggle with the realisation of this until he expresses it and, consequently, can let it go. It is about language and its emotive, even cathartic, dimension. Crucially, as the second concept, it is also about dictionaries and definitions of "*words that do not exist*" but that should because they capture the nuances that we feel, but all too often cannot express because language seems too viscous and intractable to express the complexities of feelings.

My story is deliberately ambiguous, made so because I am a firm believer that audience and author are on equal footing and, hence, I do not underestimate their capacity to follow. Where I had initially intended my audience to be simply "*young adults*", my Extension One research into Life Writing, postmodernism and particularly, Roland Barthes, led me to develop and extend this. Barthes' concept of the 'scriptible' – or 'writerly' – text that enlists the reader as co-author rather than passive recipient, spoke to me strongly in his book **S/Z**¹ and influenced my textual choices. Indeed, his sense that a true reader is someone who reads a text again and

¹ Barthes, R. *S/Z An Essay*. Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, New York, United States of America, 1970.

again for the way it is told struck me as an apt definition of myself and, I hope, of my reader, as they engage with the structure, the texture of the language, and the ‘grain’ of the voice that, as he puts it, comprises true pleasure. I want my story to have gaps, and then for active readers to fill in those gaps themselves – to make it about them as much as I have made it about myself. I would like to see **Addiction-ary** featured in popular literary magazines such as McSweeney’s, or in Australian journals such as the Southerly, the Griffith Review, and Wet Ink. I intend to attract active, young readers like myself who appreciate short stories written in a manner that differs from the normative story-telling method.

My research for this project was one of the highlights of the experience, extending my sense of what it was possible to think and express. In terms of literary models, I derived inspiration from the writers of the Oulipo group, the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle. They included authors like Raymond Queneau, and Italo Calvino, whose collection of short stories **Marcovaldo**² was one I first came across in the Preliminary Advanced course. I was particularly intrigued by the anthology of theoretical and experimental fiction in Warren F. Motte, Jr’s anthology **Oulipo, A Primer of Potential Literature**³, which offered an overview of these post-structuralist writers who rejected Realism as purely conventional, using conventions we have been culturally encoded to mistake for reality. Instead, they utilised entirely arbitrary structures that seem absurd in order to expose the ideological and sociocultural assumptions that we usually accept. Texts such as Georges Perec’s **A Void**⁴ which does not use the letter ‘e’ and Raymond Queneau’s **Exercises in Style**⁵ which retells the same story 99 times all inspired my sense of experimentation using the short story form.

² Calvino, I. *Marcovaldo*. Translated by Harcourt Brace & Company and Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, United States of America, 1963.

³ Translated by Warren F. Motte, Jr. *Oulipo, A Primer of Potential Literature*, Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois, United States of America, 1986.

⁴ Perec, G. *A Void*. Translated by Gilbert Adair Harvill. Harper Collins Publisher, London, Great Britain, 1994.

⁵ Queneau, R. *Exercises in Style*. Translated by Barbara Wright, Webcom Limited, Canada, 1998.

Perhaps most crucially was the inspiration I drew from David Levithan's **The Lover's Dictionary**⁶ which used dictionary entries to relate the story of a relationship, and the online source, **The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows**⁷, run by Joe Koenig, utilising invented definitions for made-up words. Inspired to synthesis these approaches, I placed a dictionary definition at the top of each page of my story to show the difficulty of articulating that which cannot be directly expressed.

Additionally, to help me develop my own voice I read texts by 'poetic' prose stylists such as Richard Siken's **Crush**⁸, David Markson's **The Last Novel**⁹, and Shinji Moon's **The Anatomy of Being**¹⁰. Their writing styles paralleled mine, and I learned to nuance my observations with greater subtlety. To familiarize myself with the short story form, I read works like Raymond Carver's collection, **Where I'm Calling From**¹¹, and texts by Haruki Murakami and Dave Eggers. These authors helped me with my characterisation and especially, with how I could write about what it feels like, rather than what it is.

I discovered Lacan, among others, through my Extension One Life Writing study into Paul Auster's **The Invention of Solitude**¹², and very quickly became fascinated by both the book itself and the postmodern, theoretical dimension of literature, psychology and philosophy. This research allowed me to adopt Extension One Life Writing conventions with the likes of Lacanian, Derridean and Freudian theories. Roland Barthes, in **The Pleasure of the Text**¹³ for example, presented the concept of 'jouissance', or pure pleasure in language freed from the need to represent that I engage with in my definitions. Equally important to my theoretical

⁶ Levithan, D. *The Lover's Dictionary*, Farrar, Straus and Girous, United States of America, 2011.

⁷ Koenig, J. *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, Tumblr, (n.d.), <<http://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/>>.

⁸ Siken, R. *Crush*, Yale University, United States of America, 2005.

⁹ Markson, D. *The Last Novel*, Shoemaker & Hoard, United States of America, 2007.

¹⁰ Moon, S. *The Anatomy of Being*, self-published, United States of America, 2012.

¹¹ Carver, R. *Where I'm Calling From, Selected Stories*, Vintage Contemporaries, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York, United States of America, 1989.

¹² Auster, P. *The Invention of Solitude*, Faber and Faber, United States of America, 1982.

¹³ Barthes, R. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, New York, United States of America, 1975.

research was my grappling with the byzantine intricacies of Jacques Lacan's postmodern psychoanalytic theory: the fragmentary, intertextual self, and the sense that 'the specular *I* – the one we see in the mirror – becomes shaped by gender, class, and mass-media images 'into the social *I*'. This division produces an anxiety about the real self that is expressed as desire for a sense of completion that can never be fulfilled, and the sense of anxiety is embodied in the narrator of my story, who is constantly competing against an "emptiness" and a "loneliness" that keeps "flooding back".

Extending my initial objectives, which were to uncover lost beauty and produce "something that people remember", I view this work now as a more cathartic experience, deeply personal and archaeological, and created as much (if not more) for my benefit as for others'. For this end, I utilize fragmentation and bricolage to piece together short, vague excerpts into the mosaic of a larger narrative. Influenced by Auster's text, my protagonist is continually asking questions in attempt to assemble the detached fragments of his memories about another, much like Auster and his father, and I used my Major Work as a space where I could explore the aporias and absences and voids central to postmodernism. I use language as an artificial, ambiguous tissue rather than the over-emphatic language of other autobiographical authors; expressing uncertainty, "maybe" and "perhaps", to create a character who is essentially searching and excavating.

My two characters essentially represent two sides of the same self, with the friend embodying idealism, and the narrator a more cynical pragmatism. The friend represents the best aspects of traits we deem attractive: self-assured, confident, spontaneous, ambitious, good sense of humour. In many ways, he is meant to embody the version of ourselves we want to be. The narrator, on the hand, is the version that we are: often unsure, always experimenting, not as smooth or as confident as we would like to be, learning as we go, picking little mannerisms and things up from the people we love. The metaphor of having two sides of the same coin trails

throughout the entire work between friend and narrator, idealism and pragmatism, love and hate, strength and vulnerability, forgetting and remembering.

Each excerpt by itself is seemingly incomplete and vague because thoughts are always hazy around the edges, just as photographs turn yellow with age. Memories are vague, and so is life, and so are human beings. Nothing is complete and precise and solid, and I aim for my technical and language features to convey this.

My story is significantly based on personal insights about individuals, relationships, the wider world, and how we all interconnect and overlap with one another. Writing has always been a reflective, even archaeological process for me. This task has helped me come to terms with myself and has developed my capacity to write within set timeframes. Through personal observation and the material I have investigated, in excavating the extraordinary in ordinary moments and snapshots of life, I believe I have achieved the goals I had first set myself. In addition to this, I am happy with the way it has turned out.

Ultimately, to quote Markus Zusak: *“I have hated words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right.”*¹⁴ Most importantly to me as the author, above everything else, I only intend for my story to be enjoyable and whomever the reader, that they believe I have indeed done the words justice.

¹⁴ Zusak, M. *The Book Thief*, (1st ed.), Alfred A. Knopf, New York, United States of America, 2006.